

Book Review: Exploring Digital Libraries: Foundations, Practice, Prospects

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London: Facet Publishing 2014.

ISBN 978-1-85604-820-0

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The digital library emerged in the 1990s and changed the way we think about information. Twenty-five years on, the concept of networked information is both fairly new and firmly bedded in. The aim of this book is to shed light on the current stage in the development of libraries - a multidisciplinary digital library in the context of the social web.

The field of digital librarianship has produced a large body of research literature and practice, which the author summarises in her work. This is evident in the references section, which is over 50 pages long despite the fact that it contains only references to works cited in the book. But the book is more than a record of the evolution of digital libraries. It looks towards the future and the intended audience is the generation that will carry forward the evolution of the digital library.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part explores the foundations and practice of digital libraries. The author places the beginning of digital libraries in 1991 but acknowledges that digital information has emerged as a result of the revolution of computing and telecommunications in the 1960s. The first ten years of digital libraries (1991 to 2001) were characterised by the changes in scholarly communication, the beginnings of open access and digitisation. The following ten years (2002 to 2012) were defined by challenges accompanying the digital library evolution. Some of the more important ones were interoperability, as more and more content moved online, and engagement with communities. Intellectual property rights have been, and still are, a challenge to digital libraries as many countries' legal frameworks are well behind the digital developments.

Digital libraries and the development of the web are explored in the context of collection building. The book charts the evolution of the traditional library based around collections residing in fixed locations, with librarians serving members of the public by providing access to collections. Not surprisingly, early digital repositories were modelled on traditional libraries. Digital repositories continue to grow and change, particularly in the light of the open access movement, development of new systems and software and the semantic web. It is good to see an acknowledgement that many digital libraries are in fact hybrid libraries containing a mixture of digital, digitised and non-digital content.

The second part of the book focuses on the social and community roles of digital libraries. The author says this function of digital libraries has been considerably less researched and attempts to stimulate discussion about digital libraries' contribution to democratic

society. The book examines the roles and social value of digital libraries and explores the factors behind the success or otherwise of digital libraries in their communities. It delves into the positive influence that open access can have on scholarship as well as the social value of digital libraries. Finally, it scrutinises the way the digital libraries respond to and engage with the social web. The nature of the social web is perceived as fast changing and chaotic which makes it difficult for digital libraries to utilise social platforms. The objective is to make digital collections easy to find and use while competing for the attention of online users. Some of the approaches to achieve this may be to facilitate mobile access to digital libraries, utilise semantic web, linked data and crowdsourcing.

It is an interesting book bringing together many topics with which LIS professionals are likely to be familiar. It will appeal to students, researchers and professionals keen to further their professional development. It is, however, primarily a scholarly work, which may have limited application in the busy practitioners' work life.