

# About the future of libraries

Wolfram Neubauer

*ETH Libraries, Zürich, Switzerland*

Figure 1 shows a simplified picture of the information infrastructure of my library. It is by no means something special: I suppose any university library, or at least many of them can show similar pictures. What is special is that 80% of it did not exist 10 years ago. What the library usually is identified with is this little part in the lower left side of the chart: the catalogue, representing mainly the printed collections of the library. Do not think these are outdated, now or soon. But indeed, the usage of the printed collection is changing, if not decreasing so much. And however printed books are still published as manifold as ever before, it is clear that in science the role of print is fading.

So what did libraries do? They developed digital libraries in which they make available vast amounts of primary and secondary information – an average university library nowadays offers its patrons hundreds of databases and thousands of electronic journals, e-books being on their way up. Library users now have easier access to more information than ever before.

Libraries have been developing, and still are developing tools to use that information in teaching and research. In Amsterdam we built a connection between the contents of the library and the virtual learning environment, to help students getting easy access to the contents they need.

Today we are building a tool for e-readers, to help teachers to facilitate their students with electronic information, even if that information is not yet electronically available. Maybe you think that all content is coming available in Open Access and that you do not need a library to get it. Well, Open Access still has a long way to go, but even in an OA paradise libraries will continue to organise, to connect, to disclose information, and to facilitate and to accommodate information users. And, for the time being, to integrate electronic and not electronic sources in one information environment.

Moreover and maybe even more important, libraries have become centres of production of digital information themselves. Look at the right side of the figure: you find there a long list of products in which the library is involved as a producer. If there are so many Institutional Repositories nowadays, and if they slowly begin to be successful, it is because of the libraries that have built them and that organise the workflows to deposit research outputs of their universities in their institutional research archives. Sometimes we do this with a University Press as partner.

In Amsterdam we developed a production pattern for e-dissertations together with Amsterdam University Press that can deliver print versions of any dissertation on a Printing on Demand basis anywhere in the world. Together with AUP we produce dictionaries, journals, e-books. As a library we make available image databases from our special collections. As a nation wide consortium we developed DARE, the Dutch Academic research REpositories. Today we work on so-called collaboratories to support research (SHARE) and we are developing production tools for so-called enriched or enhanced publications. At many universities the library is made responsible for the registration of research outputs of the university, because they know better than anyone else how to handle metadata.

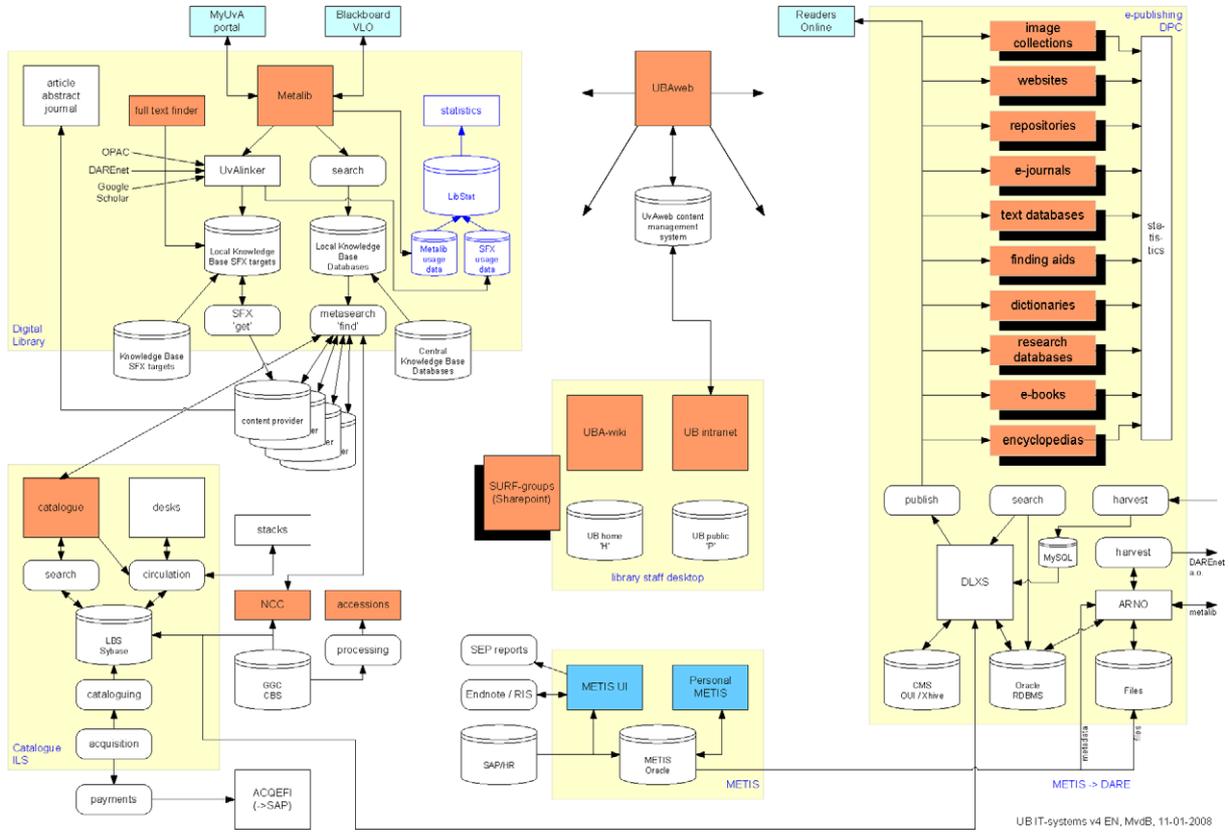


Fig. 1. Information infrastructure university library, University of Amsterdam.

So far from becoming obsolete, libraries are becoming ever more important partners for research and teaching. We are not going to be swallowed by Open Access: we are swallowing Open Access ourselves!!