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National Libraries in the Digital Age : Leadership and Collaborations

Strategies and Cooperation

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The traditional strength of a national is the continuity and depth of its collections. In the digital age collections must be analysed on basis of their originality and core values. Strategies must be made up for optimal collecting, preserving and access to analogue as well as digitized and digital born materials.

As digitization of all collections is not possible in the next years to come, a selection must be made with starting-point in an analysis of the needs, demands and strengths of the collections and the purpose of digitization. Different strategies are necessary.

Collecting and giving access to digital born materials mostly means that an old legal deposit law must be revised. This revision doesn't solve all problems concerning copyright. Special initiatives and contacts with publishers and copyright owners must be taken.

Leading a national library in the digital age means that you have to find ways to bridge the threatening gap between traditional qualifications and new skills. Digitization is a process, including different steps. All professionals involved must have respect for each others skills, share a professional language, have knowledge of the process as a whole and be aware of the goal.

National libraries in the digital age need cooperation with old and new partners, especially with the research community, other memory institutions, publishers and copyright owners. Collaboration with other memory institutions can be strategic in spheres as metadata, authority control, copyright issues and long term preservation. However, it's important to be aware of differences in traditions and cultures. Prejudices can seriously threaten the possibilities for a stable and longterm cooperation.

Maybe the most important thing with cooperation between national libraries and other memory institutions is a question of culture policy, not of education. When users no longer have to come to the physical place in order to study physical items, national libraries and archives maybe, like museums, must offer added values like exhibitions, programs, debates etc.

Today world economy also compels cooperation between national libraries and commercial institutions. Being sponsored by a company doesn't mean that libraries must give up their identity as knowledge institutions. Books and texts have their special identity and "pictures" are not only pictures but also images, which can tell something important about our history and our attitudes.