

TITLE:

We are now all librarians

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ABSTRACT

When communication was constrained by distance, people with information needs had strong limitations reaching others that could satisfy that. Libraries emerged as important tools to intermediate that, with new concepts: information was expected to be recorded and disseminated in published books or articles aggregated in journals, and libraries served as brokers to help search and access to those objects. Also new concepts were developed for that: abstracting, cataloguing, indexing, selective dissemination, etc. Meanwhile, two major revolutions are forcing us to rethink all that: the emerging of the “information society”, which is breaking distances, and a new paradigm of “doing science and technology”.

Our actual level of technical and scientific knowledge of the world relies on an increasing large number of scientists and technical professionals increasingly more and more specialized in narrower subjects. This forced us to realize that the best ontological principle to map our knowledge is not the traditional tree-view, with a limited number of well defined subject areas and well defined interfaces among them, but it is in fact a web of possible connections of an increasing large number of subject areas of all the sizes. The traditional techniques of abstracting, cataloguing and indexing are not enough anymore to support the processes of communication for the increasing number of “knowledge workers” involved in this complex “web of knowledge”.

On the other hand, all the point of the “information society” is in fact to easy the access to information and the communication among people, so each one can satisfy its own information needs itself. And the tools for that have been developed: on-line digital libraries and institutional repositories; search engines; thematic portals; wikis, blogs; mailing lists; etc. And the “semantic web” is arriving on the top of all that! All professionals are now expected to be skilled on using these tools, so in some sense we can claim that we all are now librarians!

But should that mean we don’t need librarians anymore? In my opinion, for the traditional tasks I believe we don’t need them, indeed! But meanwhile other needs have emerged, in science and technology. For example, we have now the movement for the institutional repositories, also extended to data curation (implying a mix of skills of librarianship and archival science, by the way...). That is a new world! Let us talk about that?