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Apart from the question how long libraries will still give access to paper books, and apart from the question whether we are talking about the future of *institutions* or *functions*, the ‘United in diversity panel’ was a panel on a mission: to discover what a diverse range of institutions can learn from the others with regard to the future of their public task. For libraries, archives and the media have a lot in common with regard to their functions and could therefore cooperate in finding a way forward. The panel initiated a dialogue between speakers from scholarly and professional backgrounds, who reflected on the position of public service broadcasting, libraries, the press and audiovisual archives in the networked public information environment: how should the institutions adapt?

*“Free jazz”*

To address this question, we should first understand *what* should be adapted. In other words, what is the traditional role of the institutions? In general, it was stated that public service institutions arose in a time of information scarcity, with the aim of providing access to information for all. Of course, this regarded analog or print information; now, entire collections are digitized.

So what are the opportunities and challenges for the public mission of the institutions in the digital era? How can they ensure that users profit from the public mission? As was observed, the current climate is not one of information scarcity, but of information abundance and attention scarcity. It was acknowledged that access is democratized, yet digital disruption and the rise of new platforms challenge institutions. In a time when everyone does everything in their own time, questions arise as to the role of digitization for the audience (on demand services), the role of each institution in the new individualized environment, the definition and legitimacy of the public mission and the spending of public money.

*From content to context*

One of the conclusions of the panel was that the public mission is still valid: institutional appearance may alter, but the functions and values (such as reliability, accessibility and multiformity) remain important. The focus may however shift from physical to online availability, and mission statements may change from involving institutions in the traditional sense towards facilitating an active audience.

Other general observations include the following.

- It is one thing for institutions to formulate and comply with a mission, another thing is supportive policy. And that is where problems arise, for example with regard to copyright law and online availability, which is difficult under the current legal framework. As intellectual property regimes are expanding, professional associations should take position on topics such as open access and copyright reform.

- As to policy, it was suggested that governments should assess where market failures arise and step in if necessary. Also, it was argued that disproportionate legal barriers to new services should be avoided, for example in the context of media and national competition laws.

- As to the public mission, simply offering content was regarded as no longer sufficient – users must be made aware of the offer while on the one hand avoiding paternalism and on the other hand actively trying to reach the audience with new offers. And then there is the guiding function: how far should institutions go there? This role becomes more important in the information abundance. A related issue is how to safeguard the *quality* of information in the digital domain. The institutions can also offer added value by providing context to the content, something users can contribute to themselves by interactively adding metadata. The traditional role of institutions then evolves into a ‘community approach’ and the consumption of materials will lead to value creation. Another suggestion regarded re-bundling or ‘blendling’, that is, aggregate content from different sources, to reach a new public.

- Furthermore, it was stressed that libraries, archives and newspapers should build alliances to strengthen cohesion and pluralism. Media and information literacy is an area where collaboration is already visible (in the Netherlands). It was observed that a range of literacies is needed, including civic literacy. On the one hand online services enhance diversification; on the other hand, pre-selection, filter bubbles and personal targeting increase the need for media and information literacy. Should we *assist* algorithms in the choices of what is relevant for us?

In any case, libraries, archives and the media must be aware of the transition they are in. The discussions illustrate that the institutions indeed are involved in digitization initiatives, while also rethinking their public missions. So: mission accomplished? To be continued...