

2005

## Sea Change for academic libraries and an Australia-Maldives partnership project

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This book chapter was originally published as: Gross, J. (2006) "Sea Change" for academic libraries and an Australia-Maldives partnership project. In *Diaspora: the Australasian Experience* 497-508 Vanden Driesen, C. & Crane, R. New Delhi: [Prestige Books](#).

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## **“Sea Change” for Academic Libraries and an Australia-Maldives Partnership Project**

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**T**his discussion will focus on current debates in the discipline of Library and Information Science but will still relate to the conference themes of “Diaspora- Displacement, Dispossession and Sea Change,” I intend to explore not a diaspora of people, but of bodies of knowledges which have been transformed in the digital environment. The impact of information and communication technologies on academic libraries recently has resulted in a veritable “sea-change.” I will contextualize these developments partly also within post-colonial issues related to the issue of local digital content and the hegemony of global publishing. This latter force can be viewed as a neocolonialism, affecting all those whose scholarly pursuits depend upon accessing local published sources in their discipline.

My current position is Faculty Librarian for Edith Cowan University’s (ECU) Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences. This faculty encompasses many subject areas across the disciplines of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences. This gives me a perspective on some of the debates on scholarly publishing in the humanities and social sciences, which will inform this paper.

In addition, in my role at the University’s Library I am participating in a World Bank funded partnership between Edith Cowan University in Western Australia and the Maldives College of Higher Education. From this, I have gained a perspective on the “sea change” also taking place in libraries, and the particular challenges it precipitates, in a developing country in the South Asia region, and I draw relevant points of comparison and

contrast to the Australian situation. My paper draws on practical experiences from this academic partnership between two institutions from quite different countries in the region.

In the pre-digital age libraries have had a dual nature serving both as repositories of bodies of knowledges and as physical spaces. As physical spaces libraries can have great symbolic and cultural significance to the nation. As such they can become rallying points or even targets in times of national crises. We have seen this in 1992 in the burning of the National Library in Sarajevo and more recently with the destruction of collections in Iraq's National Library in Baghdad in 2003.

Australian academic libraries have buildings of significance and also rich print collections reflecting the nation's identity and cultural diversity. These collections support Australian and international scholarship and research in all disciplines, including Australian Studies.

How are these collections acquired? The activity of professional librarians as organisers and collectors of knowledge is something that goes on behind the scenes to a certain extent, and academics may not be aware of economic forces at work there. Foucault's ideas of Knowledge/Power can be linked to the knowledge acquisition work of librarians. His acknowledgement of the connections between Knowledge and Power and its linkage to systems of social control makes it clear that decisions about what library materials are purchased can have long term significance for researchers (Hannabuss 1996). These ideas will be explored in this paper.

With the advent of information and communication technologies, Australian academic libraries have been transformed to embrace the concept of the digital library and the delivery of services and resources in the online environment. The new information technologies offer the promise of providing scholars with access to a previously unimagined wealth of library collections worldwide. For academic libraries in emerging economies, the new information technologies can also offer the promise of "leapfrogging" into the Information Age, so that local scholarship can develop and thrive but special strategies are required. The

World Bank's 1998 Report entitled *Knowledge for Development*, outlines strategies to narrow the "knowledge gap" between developed and developing countries (World Bank 1998). With the new opportunities come challenges which could disadvantage libraries in developed and developing nations alike.

I will discuss trends in academic libraries in Australia before turning my attention to the particular case of an academic library in the South Asian nation of the Maldives Republic. Firstly a description of the digital library and how that differs from the traditional or pre-digital library would be in order. Currently Australian academic libraries contain both print and digital collections. The totally digital library is still a long way off, particularly in disciplines such as the Humanities and Social Sciences, where access to historical print texts can be critical. For this reason, Australian university libraries will retain a custodial role in relation to the nation's print collections well into the future.

The drive in Australian universities to build digital library collections has intensified within the last decade as Australia participates in the global education marketplace and library collections are required to support "flexible online delivery." In fact Australian academic libraries have been quicker to embrace electronic publishing and network access than many libraries in North America and Europe (Shipp 2000).

An important difference between print and digital collections is the issue of "ownership versus access." Formerly, when a library purchased a book it owned the book until it fell apart or was lost. Now when libraries purchase digital resources they are purchasing access rights. That access is controlled by a commercial license. This has led to what Alex Byrne describes as the "commodification of scholarly literature" (Byrne 2003). There are many issues connected to that important difference such as control and integrity of data, archiving and continuity of data, and cost of supply. A few of these I will go into here. I believe along with Byrne and other Library and Information Science researchers and practitioners that librarians have ceded some control for collection development to publishers and global publishing. Library acquisition decisions that were made on the basis

of cost and institution profile in the past are now more complex and inseparable from the economics of global publishing. That thinking informs my presentation. I will explore what this means in terms of availability of Australian content.

Two questions should be posed which relate to the availability of content generally. Firstly, What digital resources are available and secondly, how does the academic library acquire digital resources? To answer the first question: What digital resources are available? Growth in available digital resources occurred initially in the sciences, however the humanities and social sciences are quickly catching up. Huge international retrospective digitisation projects in the humanities are underway. Examples include JSTOR, a journals archive including some titles dating back to 19th century. Another example is the Digital Vault, a Bell and Howell project to digitise research collections currently held on microfiche in American libraries.

In the dynamic world of commercial scholarly digital publishing some key players are dominant. U.S. and European based companies that provide most databases to libraries are: *Proquest/Bell and Howell*, *EBSCO Information Services*, *Elsevier*, *Thomson ISI*, and *Ovid Technologies*. Commercial scholarly digital resources are strongly marketed to libraries. They largely come from global publishing houses. Databases may be sold as a whole package, such as *Proquest 5000*. Electronic journals are frequently "bundled" or packaged as a suite of e-journals – some the library may wish to subscribe to, and some new titles the publisher includes. Very few electronic journal or book titles are made available to libraries as single titles. Payment is in foreign currency (US dollar, Euro, or UK pound). Houghton has highlighted the economic issues for academic libraries and that explored the new business models which are evolving in scholarly digital publishing Houghton (2000).

To answer the second question: how does the academic library acquire digital resources? How can academic libraries take advantage of this wealth of materials, these vast databases and digital vaults, and ensure that local scholarship interests are met? First I will briefly describe how Australian academic libraries

currently acquire digital resources. On its own, no library could afford to acquire many of the digital resources. In Australia in the mid 1990s it was seen that the only way our academic libraries could participate in building digital collections was by forming purchasing consortia.

The Council of Australian University Librarians, known as CAUL, is a body that represents the interests of Australian University libraries. CAUL has a diverse role, including acting as a broker and negotiator between university libraries and commercial publishers. Consortium based purchasing has given Australian academic libraries some muscle with which to negotiate prices, and has therefore, made global digital products affordable for Australian academic libraries.

Another aspect of the change from "ownership" to "access" in the digital paradigm, is the effect on resource sharing. Libraries have a strong tradition of resource sharing whereby, for little cost to scholars, materials can be sourced from library collections worldwide. Now licenses to digital collections mostly preclude making the resource available on inter library loan. This means that an electronic journal cannot be made available to another library in the same way a print journal can. Since many libraries are cancelling print subscriptions to pay for the electronic subscription, fewer print titles will be available for resource sharing. Any researcher who has used inter library lending services, can attest to the value of library resource sharing. Diminution of resources available for sharing will impact on scholarship and research in the long term.

I will now examine what resources are available to Australian students and look at how much is local Australian content. (Anecdotal evidence suggests that at Edith Cowan University students have difficulty sourcing Australian content and are likely to back their research with US data.) How much of Australian academic library budgets is spent on Australian content? CAUL statistics gathered between from 1986-1998, show that Australian academic libraries spend 80-90% of acquisitions budgets on overseas publications, sourced primarily from the USA and Europe. (CAUL 2000). This is despite the fact that (as

Bryne has pointed out) Australian scholars produce 2% of the world's scholarly literature. This is not to say that Australian libraries should source predominantly local content. Clearly international publishing makes Australian research more widely available. Australian academics are generally more highly rewarded for international, rather than local publishing. Therefore the library must acquire both the international and the local content.

In Australian academic libraries where Australian content is available, it is often expensive due to economies of scale. For example the major Australian social science and humanities database, *APAIS Full Text*, is priced for Edith Cowan University at A\$ 50,000 and contains just 230 full text Australian journals. By contrast the US based *Proquest 5000*, a multidisciplinary full text database published internationally by Bell and Howell, costs ECU A\$ 80,000 and provides 3,430 full text journal titles. With this example a comparison of the average journals costs from these two databases shows that ECU pays an average price of A\$ 23 per title per annum for an online US journal and A\$ 217 for the Australian titles. Clearly U.S. and European publishers content is dominant and cheaper. Most Australian bibliographic databases have some form of government or institutional support. ECU library is typical in that a very small percentage of databases acquired are Australian.

In the disciplines of Australian Studies and Australian literature, some important resources exist. There is the long established humanities and social science index, *APAIS* (Australian Public Affairs Information System) which indexes most of the established Australian literary journals. Also there's *Austlit*, the Australian Literature Gateway which has the mission "to enhance and support research and learning in Australian literature." Both are now available in digital format by subscription. Still far more local Australian research should be available to scholars and this is only just starting to occur.

The solution to the dearth of Australian content and the dominance of global publishers may come from another direc-

tion: from so called "Open Access Initiative." (CAUL website <http://www.caul.edu.au/>).

For the last decade a growing crisis in scholarly publishing has been recognised particularly in the sciences. Moves to address this crisis came from the sciences where commercial publishing costs have displayed rapid increases. As a result, international initiatives to counter this crisis have resulted. Foremost of these is: *the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition, known as SPARC: This is an alliance of universities, research libraries, and organizations built as a response to market dysfunctions in the scholarly communication system which have reduced dissemination of scholarship and have had a negative effect on libraries. It aims to serve academic needs through creating systems that expand information dissemination and use in a networked digital environment.*

Open Access support is now embraced by peak bodies such as the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the World Summit on the Information society (WSIS), universities and research funding organisations (CAUL website <http://www.caul.edu.au/>) The Australian Vice Chancellors Committee (AVCC) is a signatory to the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) which is dedicated to promoting free and open access to scholarly research and education. (BOAI <http://www.soros.org/openaccess/>)

In Australia the Coalition for Innovation in Scholarly Communication (CISC) held a workshop in 1999 which provided a focus point for Australian responses to the scholarly communication crisis. CAUL provided submissions to government. Seed funding has been forthcoming from DEST (Australia's Department of Education, Science and Training). As a result, some Australian universities are now providing institutionally backed and freely available Eprint repositories, containing peer-reviewed published articles, conference or research papers. Examples of these include the Australian National University's E-Press, Curtin University's Espace @ Curtin, Monash University's ePress and other discipline specific repositories.

The Australian Research Information Infrastructure Committee commissioned by the Australian Government is supporting a number of projects to make Australian scholarship available via electronic networks (ARIIC website <http://www.dest.gov.au/highered/research/ariic.htm>)

Some such projects are:

- The Australian Digital Theses Program whereby participating universities make student dissertations freely available.
- The ARROW Project based at Monash University (Australian Research Repositories Online to the World)

All of this relates to providing Australian content in an increasingly complex digital environment. See *Appendix 1* for a list of some Australian databases and Electronic repositories which provide resources in Australian Studies and Australian Literature.

I will now turn my attention to the relevance of Australian developments to an academic library in the Maldives.

### Maldivian Context

The World Bank funded project involving the Maldives College of Higher Education (MCHE) and Edith Cowan University is charged with providing advice and support to the former institution from the latter for library development over a two-year period. Details of the strategies adopted are discussed in a recent *Library Review* (Gross and Riyaz 2004).

For academic libraries in a developing country such as the Maldives, the promise to leapfrog into the Information Age throws up huge challenges such as the dependence on telecommunications infrastructure, increasing costs, a dearth of local content; the dominance of global publishing, lack of skills and training.

These issues are not unique to the Maldives and they have sometimes been described as the "digital divide." This divide is the perceived gap between digital "haves" and "have-nots." For MCHE to build a fully digital library, a host of issues relating to providing access to content need to be considered.

In the Maldivian context the challenges are increased. It is not my purpose to explore the subject of the digital divide in depth, however I will explore how relevant content is sourced to support local scholars. The issue of local content is totally different in the Maldives. Here the concern is not so much how to source local content, but how to provide affordable and relevant content from any academic source.

In the Maldives a language barrier to accessing content is not an issue. English language proficiency is high among scholars at MCHE, as English is the language of Education in this island nation. However the subscription cost for digital databases is prohibitive. Furthermore the requirement to pay in foreign currency adds to the burden. As yet no local purchasing consortia have yet been established, nor are likely in the near future. The best prospect is to either access commercial databases via special deals, or to access the freely available materials, such as those in open access Eprint repositories.

Major publishers such as Elsevier, Blackwells, and Academic Press now recognise that they have a role to play in bridging the information divide between the developed and the developing world. Initiatives, particularly in the sciences and health are delivering academic content free of charge to libraries and researchers in the developing world. (Gross and Riyaz 2004: 220-27). This may surprise since these are the same commercial publishers contributing to what Byrne describes as the "commodification of scholarly literature." (Byrne 2003: 6-10). Could it be that they are buying future customer loyalty in the developing world?

### Open Access and Free Digital Resources

There is now a wealth of globally available free resources that can be exploited in an environment that is content-poor and where funding is tight. The more scholarly resources have appeared thanks to the worldwide support for open access initiatives to address the scholarly communication crisis.

Gobinda Chowdhury's article "*Digital libraries, People Knowledge and Technology*" describes a number of "subject

gateways, digital reference services, free access to e-journals and e-books in many areas, e-print archives and free digital libraries" which are freely available to developing libraries. (2002: 379-91).

### Conclusion

The number and range of digital repositories and archives are growing rapidly. These encouraging developments can provide affordable digital resources to scholars in the Maldives, provided that the IT infrastructure, skills and training issues can be addressed.

A "sea change" is happening for libraries in the digital environment and scholars in all disciplines are the beneficiaries. The Maldives-Australian partnership is aiming to transform the respective academic libraries though a diaspora of ideas in this information rich new world.

### Appendix 1

#### Internet Sources for Australian Studies and Australian Literature

##### APAIS (Australian Public Affairs Information Service) and APA Full Text

(available by subscription)

The electronic version of the long established Australian humanities and social sciences database. Many Australian literature journals are indexed by APAIS. Full text is available for recent years of some journal titles via APA-Full Text.

##### Austlit

(available by subscription)

*Indexes books, journals and online resources dealing with Australian creative and critical writing. Covers more than 60,000 authors from 1788 to the present and is updated continuously. It is providing an increasing amount of full text.*

##### The Guide to Australian Literary Manuscripts

Inventories of more than 85 manuscript collections in six major Australian libraries. It covers more than 65 Australian authors.

<http://findaid.library.uwa.edu.au/>

#### The National Library. Australian Literature on the Internet

<http://www.nla.gov.au/oz/litsites.html>

#### Ozlit

Guide to Australian Literature on the Internet. Includes the searchable Books and Writers Database

<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~ozlit/>

#### SETIS

University of Sydney. The Scholarly Electronic Text and Image Service (SETIS)

A full text collection of 19th and early 20th century Australian literary texts

<http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/oztexts/ozlit.html>

#### Some Australian Research Repositories—Multidisciplinary

The Australian Research Information Infrastructure Committee (ARIIC) is supporting a number of projects to make Australian scholarship available via electronic networks <http://www.dest.gov.au/highered/research/ariic.htm>

The Australian Digital Theses Program makes Australian student dissertations freely available. <http://adt.caul.edu.au/>

The ARROW Project through Monash University (Australian Research Repositories Online to the World) <http://www.arrow.edu.au>

Australian National University's E-Press <http://epress.anu.edu.au/>

Curtin University Space @ Curtin <http://espace.lis.curtin.edu.au/>

Monash University's ePress <http://www.epress.monash.edu.au>

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