

The Library Through the Eyes of a Researcher

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Libraries as Drivers for Change

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1. Introduction

- Researcher (40 years) vs Dean (2 years)
- Evolution of Research and its Implication for libraries/librarians for 40 years
- What to expect as an ideal library for a researcher in the (near) future
- Background: Chemistry —→ some examples from the field
- Some prejudice in favour of the hard sciences?
- Experience with needs of Humanities (President of the Library Commission of the VUB)

2. The Ideal Library

Education and Research are intimately coupled in a University

2.1 Research Library

- Further diverting from the library for undergraduate and graduate students in its “physical aspect”
- Sciences
 - research library dominated by electronic journals and databases
 - books (printed/e-books)
 - no longer an external part of the lab (as it was 40 years ago) for consulting journals, databases (Chemical Abstracts)
 - desktop library in the lab, in the office, at home
 - science is no longer created in the library but scientists use the library resources even more frequently in view of publication speed and online access

- knowledge is gathered not produced in the library
- books are partially losing their status except for monographs and handbooks; multi-author volumes, Advances ...
Annual reports ... are getting more and more replaced by (invited) reviews in high impact journals (added value for the author, price: reluctant contributors)

- Humanities
 - still higher attendance of the library; more books with lasting relevance, special collections, archives
 - still more important physical place for books
 - nevertheless: electronic journals/databases witnessing increasing impact (cf. VUB Initiative)

2.2 Library as a teaching instrument (undergraduate, graduate levels)

- although lots of material is electronically accessible, **the library gradually evolving in a learning center**, is still and even more than some years ago, a working place
- social contact: group work
- social pressure: preparation of exams



? **Transformation of (parts of) physical space of traditional library into learning center**

- appropriate paper/digital collection of books, data bases for undergraduate/graduate level
- appropriate environment for collaborative learning

? Appropriateness of this approach for humanities, often with much higher number of students and higher needs for books

3. The ideal research library?

- Evolution sketched above at first sight positive for every researcher

Electronic gate $\xrightarrow{\text{dream}}$ equal access to same resources for any researcher

- But, library/librarians are tightened by publishers, and by the culture of publishing (academics/ decision makers)
 - astonishing and permanent increase in
 - number of publications
 - number of journals
 - economic reasons (publishers)
 - academic reasons (publication culture, decision makers)

↓ **THE FACTS**

An Example

- **Chemical Abstracts**: # abstracts in 1967: 240.000 → Total Abstracts to Date 3.950.000
2007: 1.100.00 → Total Abstracts to Date 26.000.000
└─ Present day Chemical Literature
take 3-4 pp/paper
↓
➤ **100.000.000** pages!
(underlimit cf books)
- **The Journal of the American Chemical Society**
pages in 1972: 9286
pages in 2011: 21028
- **The Journal of Physical Chemistry**
pages in 1972: 4039: 80 pages a week
pages in 2011: 58607: 1200 pages a week

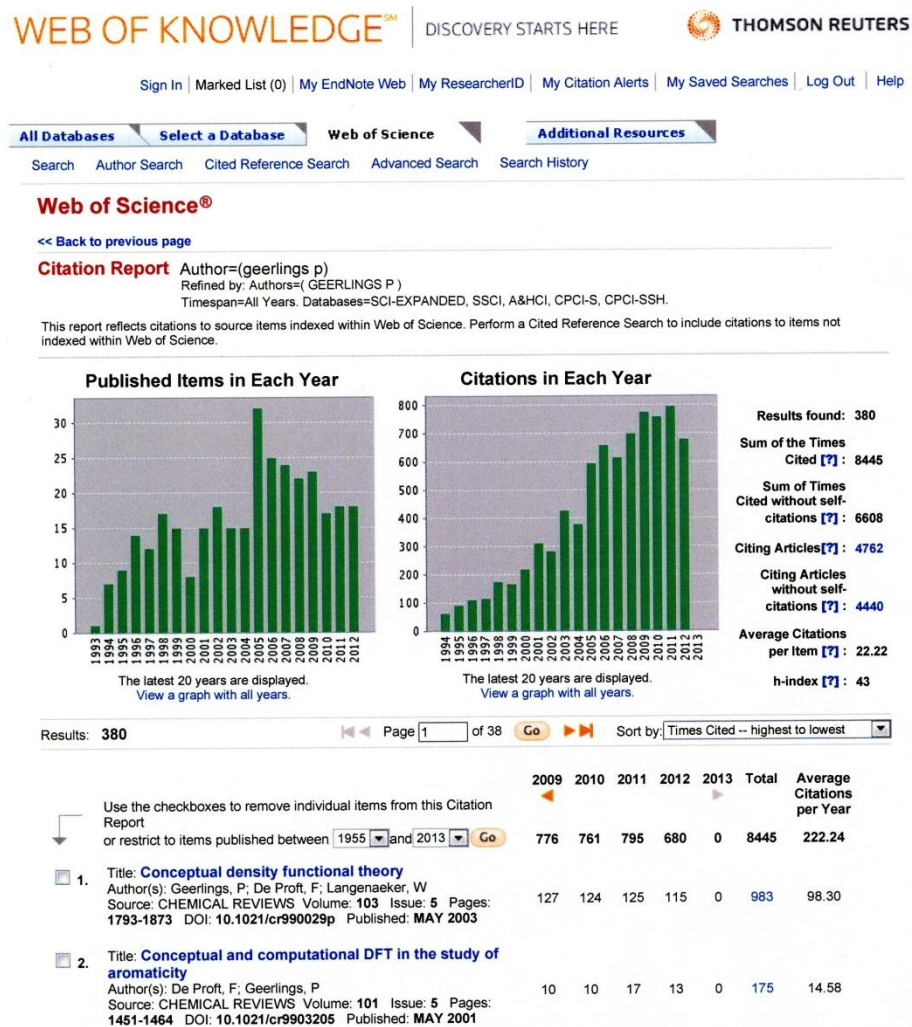
How to cope with this?

- efficient, accessible **databases** to master this information explosion (ISI, SCOPUS ,)
but
 - who still reads the papers?
 - who still has the time to write a decent peer review?
- **decrease the increase: quality vs quantity** —→ persistent importance
of peer review: unreviewed posting of paper is no option (?)
- **stop the growth of number of journals**
- **attenuate the publication pressure**

change in policy of decision makers at any level:

number of publication and citation scores as a key ingredient for measuring/judging output and impact of individual researchers, research groups, faculties, ...

- get rid of this one shot appreciation of a scientific career



- “Faute de mieux” **keep the peer review process** and honour it
- **Monopoly of Commercial Databases**
 - implicit danger of monopoly
eg. Criteria for incorporating a journal into the database
 - what if Thomson Reuters (ISI) goes bankrupt?



Is it not time for a **non-commercial, eg European (EU) initiative** not to let the main instrument for research government in the hands of a commercial firm

? Time for an EU initiative to create an instrument governed by peers

Do we need a new system for researchers and libraries?

- Researchers**
- publish not peer reviewed papers?
—→ even higher, uncontrolled information flow
 - open access (peer reviewed): presently financially unattainable for many groups

- Libraries**
- **alliances**

{	regional (cf ELEKTRON Initiative in Flanders)
	national
	International ??? <u>UNICA</u> initiative
 - role of politicians/ rectors helped by librarians ...
 - **create equal (digital) opportunities for information for each researcher**
 - educate (younger) researches in retrieving information



Library as an education center for researchers in a LLL context

What with the **library as an environment to inspire for creativity**, a sacred place as I remember it from my youth and as I saw it back at previous UNICA conferences



**Prunksaal
Austrian National
Library
Vienna**

These icons of our culture may not disappear. They can be **retrieved** in a modern form

A Learning and Library Center has still a meaning as physical space

- make it the center of the Campus
- give it an outstanding Architecture (DELFT)



- give it an optimized infrastructure and use of space
- attract the younger generation by the most advanced electronic tools



Create an environment that inspires for creativity and promotes social contact among researches, **create a forum for intellectual and social contacts.**

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Chemical Abstracts

Help Desk