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# ELPUB in time of pandemic

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- 1 Knowing that we can not follow our plans becomes the new normal. For the last two years, UCL Qatar was working on the plan to bring the vibrant international conference on electronic publishing ELPUB to Doha. The main motivation for this was the desire to strengthen the local engagement with the range of topics which this conference promotes, and to allow a face to face meeting of the West and the East in the Middle East.
- 2 It was not meant to be.
- 3 After the COVID-19 outbreak started, numerous conferences had been cancelled or postponed for a year ahead. UCL Qatar as a host was not able to postpone because this is the last year of its operation in Doha. And with over 60 papers submitted for review, the steering committee of the conference felt that so much effort had been already invested that it would be a loss for the international community not to come with an alternative which would allow debating. Even more so for two particular reasons: first, the research on electronic publishing loses its currency quickly because this is a very dynamic domain. And second, everything digital became even more important with the lockdowns around the world and even if this was not foreseen when authors from all over the world submitted their paper proposals, the debate on the challenges and opportunities around the lockdown expanded gradually.
- 4 Only weeks after the lockdowns started in many countries around the world, searching for "special issue" + covid + "call for papers" on google on 16 April 2020 returns over 85.000 results. Our collection of papers is on electronic publishing and look at the speed of issuing calls for new scientific communications around this topic of global societal value! A number of academics quickly added to their research agendas the exploration of the implications of COVID-19 pandemic on various aspects of the information professions and scholarly communications. One inspirational example is the recent article by Dr. Marc Koscieljew (2020) where he explored the early responses to the pandemic of the major library associations around the globes analyzing what themes they share and where their priorities differ. Marc Koscieljew analysed the statements related to COVID-19 of the American Library Association (ALA), the Association for

Library and Information Science Education (ALISE), the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA), and the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), all issued around mid-March 2020. He is arguing that “...there is broad thematic convergence in these responses to COVID-19. Altogether, there are ten main themes identified within these statements. Either shared by all, some, or appearing in only a couple, these themes are:

- Support for/solidarity with libraries
- Information provision
- Maintaining services
- Digital migration of services
- Workplace arrangements/concerns
- Contextual contingencies of libraries (diversity of kinds, circumstances, challenges)
- Health concerns and proper/good hygiene
- Countering dis/misinformation
- External collaborations with public health agencies
- Partnerships with industry including publishers”

- 5 It is still early to know which of these themes will become dominant for the information services of today and tomorrow. What is already emerging is the additional effort to move services into the digital domain, and to increase the engagement of patrons with the digital collections.
- 6 The electronic publishing conference is, without a doubt, a relevant forum exploring for decades the topics around digital services in libraries and the shifts in the scientific communication domain. The twenty papers which made it to the final conference programme which are included in these open-access proceedings explore a wide range of aspects with plenty of those totally relevant to the growing emphasis on all things digital in our lives of social distancing. But the lessons of this time are not only relevant during lockdown. They stress the existing systems and force the quest for new ways – to work, to support learning, creativity, sharing and enjoyment. From this point of view now, days before our experimental event, we feel that our decision to reshape the conference was the right one.
- 7 The decision to move forward with an online event was easy. The challenging question was what electronic delivery to offer to the presenters – and the audience. We decided to innovate with a hybrid solution where our keynotes will be prerecorded (to avoid any technological mishaps – with the intensive online teaching taking place these days there is an emerging bandwidth competition!). The conference was always very mindful about involving the Global South in the ongoing debates and solutions which require plenty of video streaming did not feel right. Hence the adventure of exploring how we can condense our messages to an audience in a series of tweets.
- 8 There are plenty of anecdotes and stories, making the point that writing short is a bigger challenge than writing lengthy texts. Before Tweeter was around, one could hear the argument that writing behind a standing desk helps to keep matters up to a point. Can we look at Tweeter as a useful tool in developing more skills in building succinct and clear arguments?
- 9 We have an excellent opportunity to explore – and learn from each other. We can dive not only into the intricacies of compact and clear communication but also into several topics which seemed to serve as an attraction point for the submission to ElPub in this

year. The main theme of the conference is the future(s) of digital publishing. And as it seems, the future of choice of the ElPub community is not only related to replace older solutions with new ones but to rethink the practice of the past.

- 10 Some time ago, Jon Tennant, who tragically left us a few days ago, was arguing that the issue of scholarly communication is that it recreated an old model using new tools. In these times, when 'the online' dominates not only the scientific communication but is becoming ubiquitous. How our better understanding of the past will bring a future of innovation? How to support those cultures who are not attractive for business investments in spreading digital content in languages spoken by communities negligible in terms of market size? How to prioritise what we offer to the users in the digital domain? How to grow and sustain open science? And is there OA in the oasis? Many topics, voices and even some local flavour in the silicon delivery of an online event.
- 11 We also want to express our gratitude to all the authors who bravely stepped into this new format, to all the members of the programme and organizing committees, and to our already traditional partner, OpenEdition. Their commitment and role in the open science landscape and their engagement with the most sensitive topics around openness and accessibility are outstanding.
- 12 **#make\_ElPub\_viral** and follow the discussions on **#elpub2020!**

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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