Preface

Publishing a book on the topic of ‘e-Discovery and e-Info’, mostly based on input from authors from the ‘South’ (the developing countries, 7 of them from both Southern Asia and Africa represented in this book) is not an obvious idea. In fact, according to an older but therefore also much wiser colleague of mine, “it is not a good idea at all: the topic is too young, too much dynamic and lacks maturity for such endeavor”. And yet, dear reader, here is the book in front of you, and we still hope it contains interesting and relevant material for a variety of students and other readers.

The ‘seed’ as a matter of fact was indeed already put in the soil when the idea for this book was first discussed: with the support of the Flemish (northern Belgium region) Interuniversity Council’s International Cooperation administration (VLIR/UOS) a 2-weeks workshop was organized at my university on the topics of e-Discovery and e-Literacy, inviting alumni of an ‘International Training Programme’ which we have run over many years now along with librarians from partner universities to attend. Therefore, we think it appropriate to start the book with a full report on that workshop, also as it introduces the readers to the many aspects of the topic of e-Discovery, mainly in the context of developing countries’ libraries, by sharing the experiences, problems and solutions. By including this chapter (by M. Goovaerts et al.) into the book we hope the reader feels better prepared for further reading as if s/he had participated somehow into the workshop itself.

Once the scene is set by this first general-introductory chapter, the book continues along the following basic logics: elaborating the basic concept and importance of e-Discovery with a very concrete illustration in her own institution (Dhamdhere), followed by a more skeptical chapter testing the concept and practice of e-Discovery by one of our own colleagues (De Keyser). Related more specific but concepts essential to e-Discovery like ‘library portals’, ‘responsive websites’ and ‘federated search’ are discussed subsequently (by resp. Mane et al., Fagbohun et al.). In a more fundamental way libraries need to become more ‘agile’, a concept elaborated on in another chapter (Mastek) and applied to the concept of libraries itself, in order to render e-Discovery as a ‘normal’ task for such modern libraries. Becoming agile requires being familiar with all types of electronic information and file formats, also reviewed in this chapter.

The book then moves on to some chapters discussing real-world experiences in implementing e-Discovery tools in various countries: Ethiopia (Natarajan), Bangladesh (Rahman and Shoeb), India (Yuvaraj) and Zimbabwe (Bhebhe and Ngwenya), and their resp. institutions, gradually also shifting focus and reporting more on the user’s experiences and evaluation. Evaluation of e-Discovery tools would remain incomplete without having measuring standards and tools available to measure the usage of e-Info, so a chapter specifically deals with the metrics-tools (Nazir).

The next few chapters in the book deal with some rather specific aspects of e-Discovery, like the technology of Google for support of local e-Discovery tools (Agrawal) and in the case of the earlier Dhamdhere chapter a concrete implementation in an Indian institute) and the links of e-Discovery with e-learning (Thanuskodi).
The remaining chapters expand the concept of e-Discovery – as we deliberately wanted to keep it quite wide and open – by incorporating services like ‘digital libraries’ and ‘repositories’: if e-Discovery is about helping users to find any kind of electronic information, also the locally produced e-Info should be taken into account. Such locally produced information comes mainly in two formulas: digital libraries often try to preserve documents giving testimony of ‘cultural heritage’ and repositories organize and avail documents, either of scientific research or administrative nature, by authors from the own environment. Ignoring these types of information, as often done in the concept of e-Discovery – which then is actually referring to ‘web-scale’ e-Discovery as explained in one of the chapters – in our view would be a mistake. Digital libraries are discussed in two chapters (Iroaganachi and Kasemshap & Rajabhat) while the management challenges of institutional repositories specifically in developing countries are described by Idiegbeyan-ose and his colleagues from Nigeria.

The last chapter – a contribution by myself – eventually shows how libraries can also try to combine the different formats of e-Discovery: federated search, portal, digital library and repository, even if they have very limited financial and technical resources as is still often the reality in the South. Here, as maintained with repeated attention given to both commercial and non-commercial tools in many other chapters mentioning e.g. VuFind for e-Discovery and DSpace for repositories, the concept and possibilities of ‘Open Source’ solutions are presented as a possible alternative.

So, in view of the skepticism on whether the topic of e-Discovery itself has sufficient maturity esp. in the context of developing countries, publishing this book already was an experiment from its conception. But also during the actual production of the book, guided by the rather strict instructions and procedures of the publisher in order to secure quality in contents and presentation, challenges were experienced. The book is a kind of ‘WYSIWYG’ but with a small additional note: ‘what you see is what you [can] get’ if one simply invites authors, in a very open call for contributions mainly directed to Southern academia, on such new topic in Library and Information Science. In this sense the book is an honest account of the status of expertise and experiences with the topic in the Southern libraries, however cautiously put into perspective to some advanced practices in developed libraries from Belgium. Clearly Southern authors in LIS still mostly (have to) rely on the meanwhile large body of publications on the theme, turning many chapters to predominantly literature overviews – with hundreds of publications cited - exploring the concepts and emphasizing, with unavoidably quite some overlap, the high relevance of the topic and pleas to try to implement the available ideas and – both commercially and free – tools or systems. But also clearly Southern librarians now are fully aware of the need to change the nature of their jobs by including services like e-Discovery, in order to remain relevant as libraries, based on the ironic but hilarious statement adopted from literature: “a month in the laboratory can save you an hour in the library.”

Thus, the relevance of this book in our view is mostly as a testimony of the actual awareness and expertise on the topic of e-Discovery with the colleagues in Southern libraries. Having given them a forum, along with some guidance, to publish internationally in itself is also an important aspect of the book. Inviting more publications from the South and encouraging their authors to publish, in other words: integrating research and academic writing from the South into the international literature, even if some flexibility and ‘academic tolerance’ is needed sometimes, is the only albeit long way to go.

We therefore thank the publisher to have endured with us (and our stubbornness) and supported this type of book publication. We nevertheless believe students and practitioners in Library and Information Science will find a lot of useful information in this book, since not many initiatives, bringing together the different perspectives on e-Discovery with emphasis on the Southern one, have been taken or published on as of now. Not only a huge amount of literature has been covered but also some real concrete products
and experiences with them have been reported on. The field consists, probably also typical for a young scene, of quite a lot of products, software and previously unknown acronyms; all of them have found somehow a place in this book, while accepting that the more important ones will trickle down when the scene matures. Where overlapping exists, as is inevitable with a publication of individual chapters (a ‘reader’), my personal opinion is to see it as a good Scotch whisky: real amateurs won’t mind having another one (and another one) and certainly not if discovering that other countries are also trying to improve on their own distilleries – as they are indeed. So: cheers!

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