

Denmark s National Library of Education: Growth and choices between media[©]

Jakob Andersen, Deputy Director
jak@dpb.dlh.dk

Abstract

Two sets of problems are discussed: Why have the activities of the library been growing so fast the last few years? Three factors are considered, the most interesting being the changes in the study patterns of educational students.

Next, the choices and priorities educational libraries face in times of great strides in the technological development are described. The conclusion is that straight choices are never good enough; to strive for balance is strictly necessary.

In this paper, two sets of problems will be considered. The first may or may not be special for the situation in Denmark: I shall attempt to explain why the use of the National Library of Education has been growing so fast. The second is, I think, a lot more universal: How should an educational library respond to the challenges that the wonderful world of information technology pose?

But I am afraid that I shall have to bore you with a few facts about the library first, just to give you the setting in which we operate.

The National Library of Education is actually the result of a merger of two libraries: The original National Library of Education, started in 1887 as a school museum, and the original library of The Royal Danish School of Educational Studies, started in 1895. The two libraries were formally and organizationally merged in 1990, but only physically merged in 1995 after the old gymnasiums of the school had been rebuilt for library purposes.

The merged library has around a million volumes, 4,500 serial titles and some 500,000 microfiche - mostly ERIC-reports. Around 85,000 of the volumes are children s literature of all kinds, both Danish and foreign. The rest is a collection in most subjects, since we have to cover all the subjects of the schools up to the 12th year, but of course the fields of education, educational systems and developmental psychology are covered a lot more intensively than the school

subjects. We also have a large collection of educational aids - most of it in Danish, but the major other European languages are represented too.

We tend to take our role as *national* library very seriously. We are part of the School of Educational Studies but as you will see, our customer base is much broader, if I may use such a crassly commercial phrase. We are truly open to the public - anybody at all may use the materials at the library, and anyone with an address in Denmark and over 18 will be issued a borrower s ticket - no other questions asked.

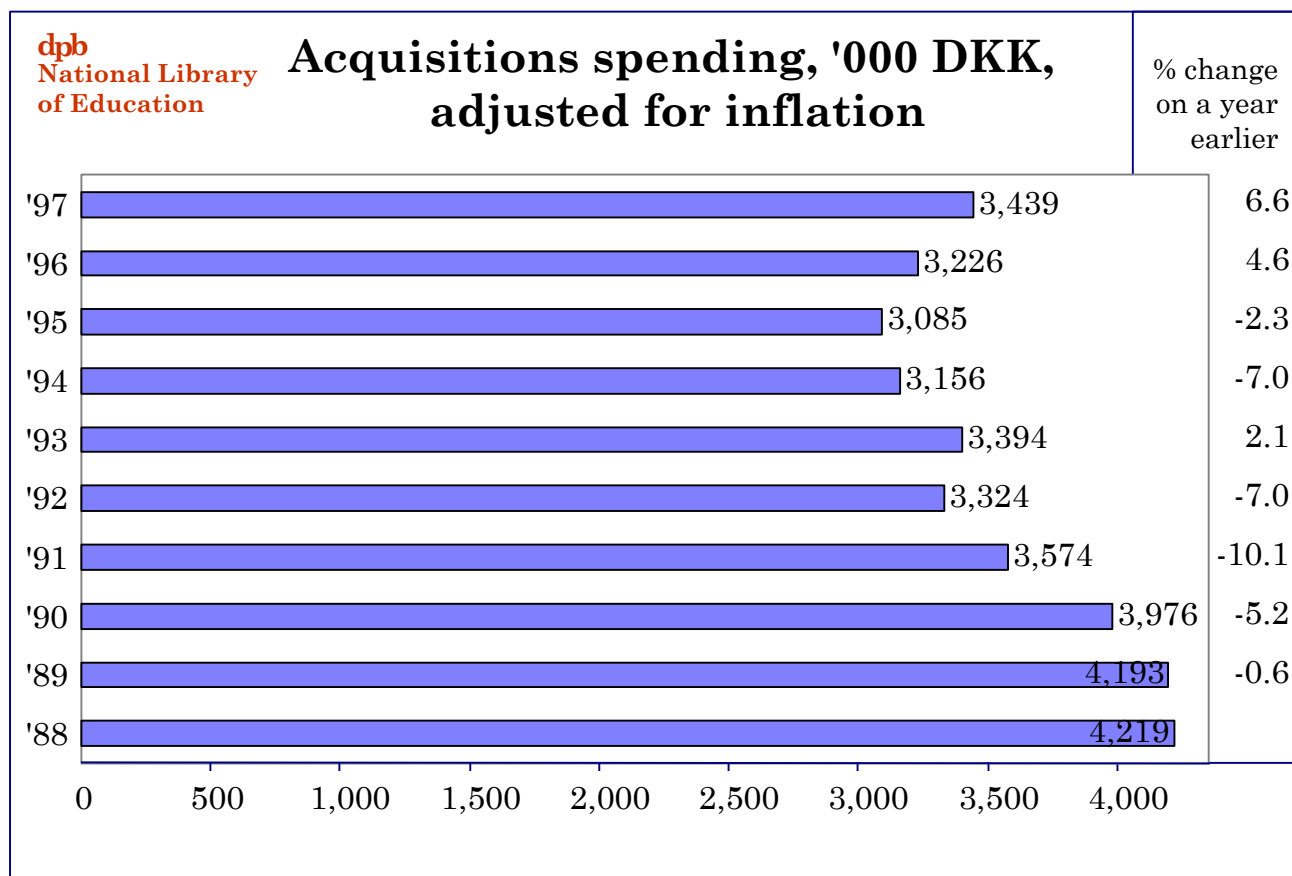
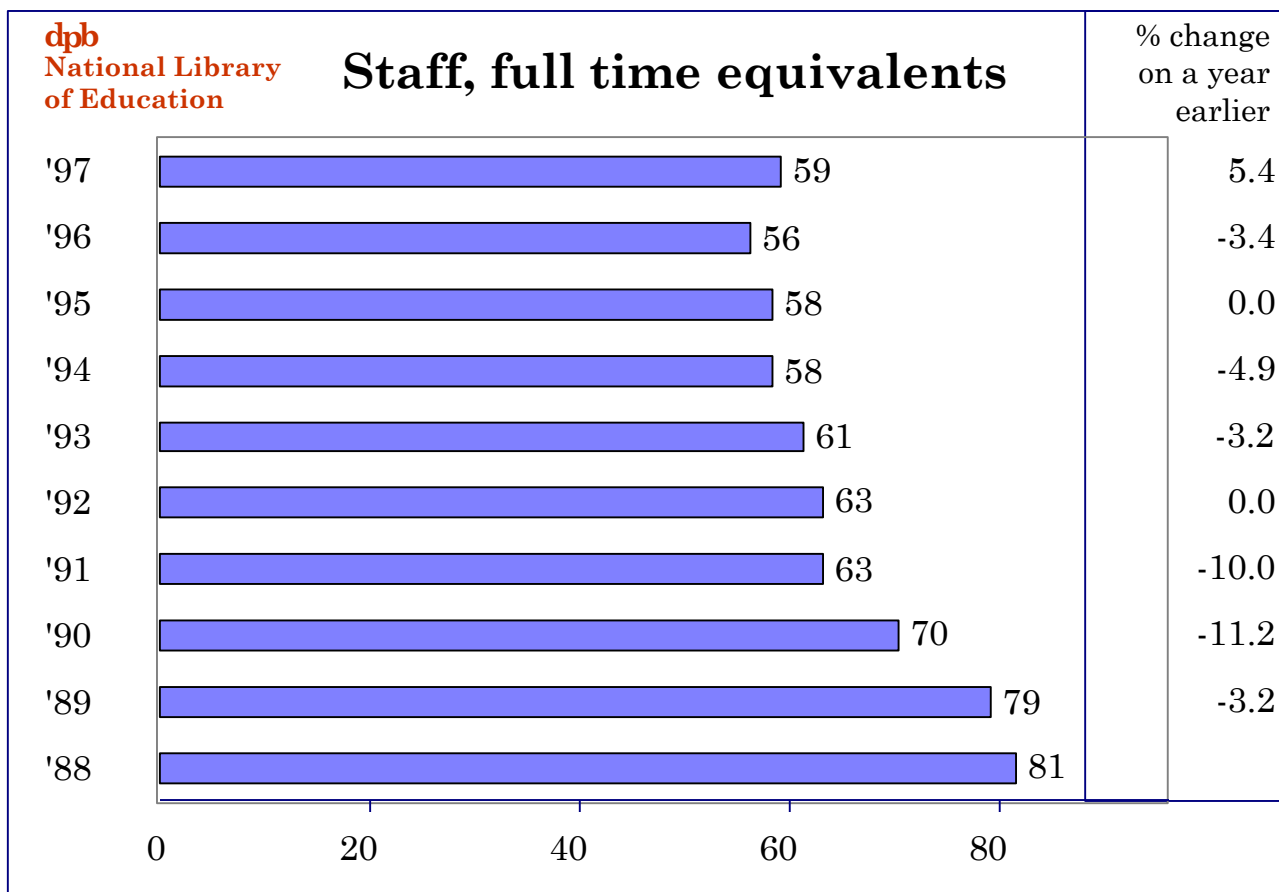
The library is regionalized in that we have the main office - and main collections - in Copenhagen, and smaller regional branch offices, each having 20-30.000 volumes - two in northern Jutland, one in the central part, two in southern Jutland, one in Funen, and one in the south of Zealand. This means that very few Danes are more than 75 km from our nearest branch. It also means that we are open 292.5 hours a week if you accumulate all the branches. This is very unusual in Denmark, and quite expensive to maintain.

The education of primary school teachers (grades 0-10) and certain educational social workers takes place in special colleges which have never been affiliated to the universities. The only way for school teachers to receive further education has until recently been to go to the School of Educational Studies, the school that we are part of.

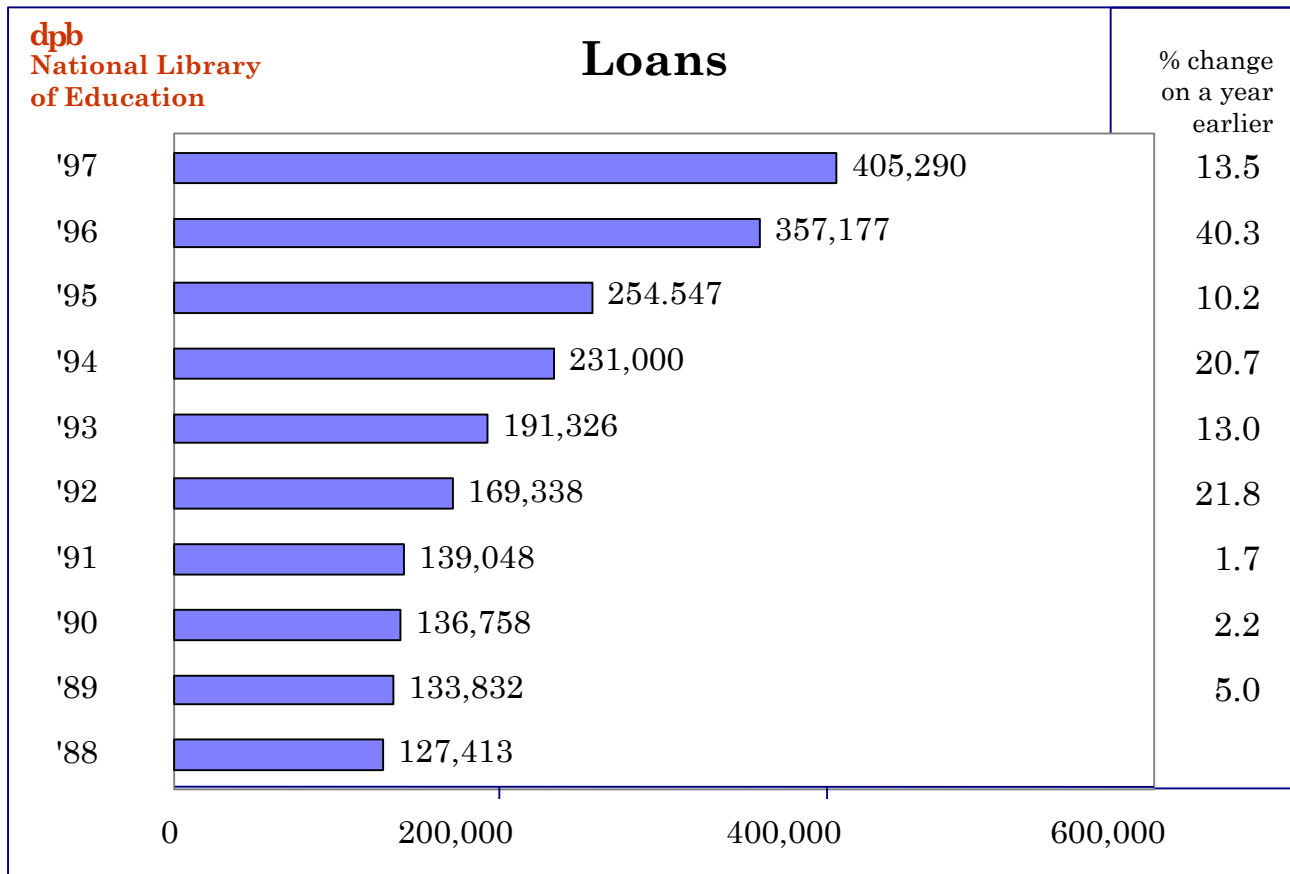
Now that, very briefly, is the setting. I shall now turn to the development of the library the last ten years.

The acquisitions spending was on an acceptable level until the merger; since then it has fallen for most years, if one adjusts for inflation. (One million DKK corresponds, roughly, to 150,000 US\$). The last two years it has risen again, to some degree. This has to do with the budgeting method, which in our case is very dependent on the amount of loans.

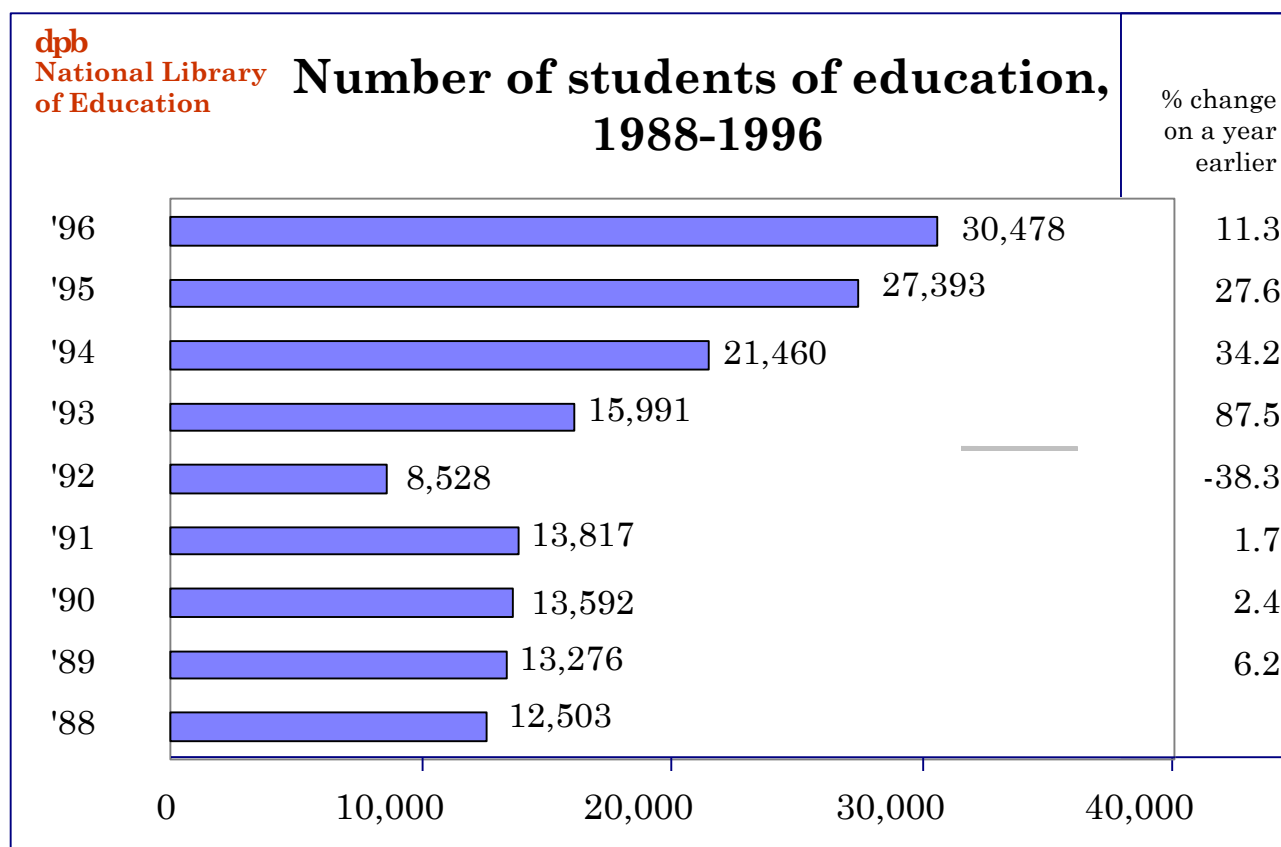
The number of staff shows the same tendency: Rather high until the merger in 90, falling or standing still until two years ago, and then rising a bit again.



Loans are a very different matter. Before and during the merger, they rose, but very slowly. Not until 92 did something happen, and since then the growth has been very nearly explosive, with the year after the physical merger as the absolute largest growth - probably the largest we ll ever see, unless conditions change very radically.



The number of students of educational matters (the same school teachers and social workers I mentioned earlier) also grew very slowly from 88 to 91. For technical reasons - changes in the curriculum and organization of the social worker education - it actually fell quite dramatically in 92, but since then it has more than doubled from the level in 91. The reason I concentrate on these students, instead of the students of the School of Educational Studies is, firstly, that the number of students at the school has changed very little in the period, and secondly, that basic educational students account for some 70% of our customers - and our loans. This proportion is still going up - not because the students and faculty at the school use us less but because the other people use us more.



To sum up this jungle of numbers here are the over-all changes from 88 to 96/97. Acquisitions and staff fell, staff a lot more than acquisitions. As opposed to this, loans and the number of students have risen - loans far more than students. The 218% can be compared to the growth of 123% which the 12 largest research libraries (our library included) have experienced in loans in the same period.

And what are the reasons for the rapid growth in loans, then? There are several, and their relative weight is not easy to estimate.

First, there is no doubt that the physical merger into new, well-equipped premises is a factor. Otherwise the rise of 40.3% in one year cannot be explained.

The second factor is, of course, the rise in the number of students.

The third factor is the one I find the most interesting by far. It has to do with the way the educational system is changing in Denmark. I don't know if this is characteristic of comparable educations in other countries, but in Denmark, all the three and four year colleges (called higher education of middle length in Denmark) are changing - they are being academized. Where just a few years ago the students were asked to read a few set textbooks, were given photocopied

compendia - all students of the same subject the same - and given almost exclusively classroom instruction, the situation has now changed radically. Students are expected to work together in groups and to prepare project reports - most of the time on their own. They are also expected to find the literature they need themselves - and there, of course, we are at the crux of the matter from a library point of view. The college libraries are rather poor, both in the sense that their collections are rather small, and in the sense that their appropriations are small - a typical teacher training college with 1000 students to cater for uses maybe 150-200.000 DKK (20-30.000 US\$) a year on materials.

This means that the students have to go elsewhere. Some of their needs are filled by the public libraries. The titles that public libraries order as ILLs from us are also clear pointers to their end-users often being educational students. When their needs are a bit more specialized in our fields, or they need guidance, or they have to find older material (many reports have to have an historical dimension) they have nowhere to turn but to us.

Not that we mind. As I have mentioned, our appropriations are heavily dependent on the number of loans, so the more the merrier, so to speak.

And how do we cope, then? It certainly has not been easy. With a falling number of staff members, and a rising number of users it was clear that something rather radical had to be done.

The solutions have been manifold, but a common characteristic is that they usually include some aspect of information technology. To release man-hours for instruction and guidance of users, we had to reduce the numbers of hours used in processing materials. We are fortunate in that we use the Danish version of the Dewey Decimal Classification as shelf marks and classification, just as the public libraries do. That made it realistic for us to process almost all Danish material by downloading and using records made by the Danish Library Centre, almost sight unseen. This saved a number of hours. We have hopes of streamlining this even more by sending minimal order-records to the Library Centre database and having them up-dated and returned to our own system automatically.

Another initiative in the same vein, which will start to come into effect this fall, is the outsourcing of serials acquisitions, including the creation of acquisitions data and transfer of these and of invoice data via the net or by other electronic means. This has the consequence that thousands of yearly invoices which had to be handled individually will be reduced to just four or six a year. In the process of outsourcing we also found out that large amounts of time were spent on treating individual serial issues further, for example by photocopying the tables-of-contents. One of the vendors we found has the service of sending tables-of-contents by e-mail directly to faculty members. The service is even

rather inexpensive, especially when compared to our own copying and distribution of the copies.

Another way of coping with the rising number of users and falling number of staff has been attempts to instruct users in the arcana of the OPAC in groups rather than singly. This has made us invest heavily in PCs for our classroom, the idea being that users should be as self-sufficient as possible.

Unfortunately, not many of the 70% of users who have no connection to the school come to us in groups, which made it necessary to try to make a better interface to the catalogue than the - by now traditional - text- and CCL-based. Our web-interface to the catalogue isn't yet fast enough but it's getting there. We have also invested in the Danish serials article database, which covers most Danish serials and some parts of the newspapers, and we use exactly the same interface to that base as to our own. Two years ago, we bought the ERIC and PsycINFO databases and we have placed them on an ERL-server. This made it possible to create an interface to these bases which is very close to the other interfaces. It has involved translating the interface and the help text into Danish, since a large majority of our users, though willing to read articles in English, much prefer their search interfaces in their mother tongue. This is probably also true of users in other countries. All in all we aim to make it possible to use our resources as easily as possible, and at the same time reduce the time necessary to instruct the individual users.

We take some pride in our web-pages. They are built with that fact in mind that the majority of our users - students at small colleges, school teachers, and social workers - have access to the net only with rather slow connections. That means that extravagant graphic presentations, Java code, sound bites and the like all are banished; well-checked quality is the watch-word.

As most libraries open to the public, we have a few problems with the young nerds, as we call them. Twelve-to-twenty-year-olds, mostly males, have been flocking to the library to use our PCs with net connections, blocking out the more timid, somewhat older and usually female users. We try to prohibit chatting and e-mailing in general, not least the ludicrous sight of two young people sitting back-to-back chatting via some remote site while also shouting joyously at each other and disturbing everybody else.

In the not so far future, two projects will be realized. The first is the retroconversion of the records which until now can only be found in our card catalogues. About 400,000 volumes are so far only recorded there and can't be found in the OPAC. The plan is to use the opportunity to amalgamate the two old main collections at the same time, something that had been planned at the time of the merger, but which was prevented by the cut-backs in staff at the time. Right now the situation is not very user-friendly: Duplicates can easily be

found in different parts of the library, leading to confusing situations for both staff and users.

The other, less ambitious but still quite labour intensive plan is to digitize all the legal matter that has governed primary education in Denmark since 1814. In that year it was first enacted that all Danish children must receive instruction in the basic skills of reading, writing, arithmetic, and Lutheran Christianity. Since then, numerous reforms have been introduced, and the collected Acts of Parliament, commission reports, white papers, blue books, instructions from the Department of Education and the like are estimated to consist of 15-20.000 pages. All these we plan to digitize, probably as graphical documents rather than text, since the material doesn't really lend itself to full text searching. Instead, we plan to index the material, hopefully in a user-friendly way, making it accessible to students, who very often ask questions to do with these matters. At present the material is not indexed very well, and a lot of users lose their way in the maze that it presents.

There are, of course, a great many resources already available on the net. We have created links on our web-pages to those that we find it likely that our users would be interested in. However, this does not mean that we embrace the naïve idea that everything will be accessible via the net in the foreseeable future. In our library, and together with other libraries, we have a great many terabytes of information and knowledge, and even some scraps of wisdom, which will never, ever become available on the net.

We also have the feeling that the speed of digitization of for example serials is much over-hyped, at least in our field. Last time we looked - this spring, as a matter of fact - only 3-5% of the serials we use most often were available in full text. This does not mean that we have stopped watching the market, but we feel that the critical mass of full text serials on the net in our fields will be some time coming.

So what we have to do with is the hybrid library. There is no question that some of the new media are increasing in importance, but that doesn't mean that interest in the printed media is falling. A wise man from the Library of Congress put it quite well a number of years ago: No medium ever disappears, he said. It is not the whole truth: There aren't very many wax cylinders around anymore, for example. And I have a gut-feeling that there won't be very many commercial CD-ROMs around either, in a few years. But that books as a medium are dying is a gross, and to my mind, rather ridiculous misstatement.

No, the challenge we are facing is not the transition to electronic media exclusively, but rather the balancing of efforts in all the different media, including media yet to come. If we give top priority to the needs of the users, we have to think of substance rather than form. Most users couldn't care less than for the form: They look for the informational value.

The choices were made even more pressing when, last year, the three government departments to which the 12 largest research libraries belong, the Departments of Culture, Education, and Research, decided to appropriate 200 mio. DKK (about 30 mio. US\$) over five years to construct the Electronic Research Library of Denmark. I don't know about other countries, but it is a unique situation in Danish history that three departments have co-ordinated their efforts so closely. The libraries themselves will supply an estimated further 200 mio. DKK. The idea is that all the largest (and later a great many other) OPACs should be searchable together via Z39.50. This, combined with other projects - some of which are very interesting - would make use of the net - from people's homes as well as from their offices - even more popular than it is already. We of course take part in these developments and hope to have some of our own projects at least partly paid for by the umbrella project.

However, these projects (by themselves much to be applauded) only underline the need to balance the efforts - whatever projects we become part of, they will cost man-hours, but since our users quite evidently have not stopped using the printed media there is also an ever-growing need for guidance. It's a juggling act between the different media, and this year's best solution probably won't be next year's. The next few years will show if we can keep a reasonable balance, beneficial to our users; unfortunately we work in a circus without safety nets.