Looking into the Crystal Ball: The MF Norwegian School of Theology Library Ten Years from Now [1]

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With this presentation, we would like to try out the gentle art of divination.

"The purpose of the library is not to lend paper books. If that were the case, libraries would end up on the scrap heap of history, like Kodak who thought that their business idea was to sell analogue film, while in reality, it was to help people record and save important moments in life—what used to be called 'Kodak moments'. The purpose of libraries is to enable people to find the information they need in ways that suit each one and that are effective for society. Therefore, today libraries are more important than ever. Through millennia libraries have demonstrated their ability to adapt to technological change. So also today."[2]

MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society

The MF Library is a theological library, but first and foremost a HE library, and as such we need to take into consideration all the rules and regulations that apply to this sector. As our institution is broadening its scope, now providing both teachers' education as well as studies in social sciences, the development of the library's collections are also subject to change.

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[1] This article is based on a presentation given at the BETH conference 2023.
[2] Lars Egeland, former Library Director, Oslo Metropolitan University (Egeland 2021)

The library staff consists of 5 permanent full-time positions, with one position dedicated to the historical archives that MF is hosting.[3]

We are currently using ALMA and Primo as our library catalogue system, managing users, interlibrary lending, and access to digital resources. The reading list system, Leganto, is integrated with ALMA, providing a one-stop shop for most of our users. Each semester we publish approximately 80 courses in Leganto, and after having used this for one full year now, we hope that this will henceforth be perceived as a timesaver and quality-enhancer for both our students and faculty.

MF Students

95% of our primary patrons are students. All new students get an introduction to the library at the start of their studies, and we also provide classes in information literacy to both Bachelor's and Master's students. In 2021 MF established a writing centre staffed by Master's students. It is physically situated in the library and administratively is organised by and sits under the chief librarian. An associate professor is responsible for the training of the writing consultants.

The Library as a Social Space?

The Library today provides a handful of computer workstations, some spaces for small groups and individual seating (but no designated group study rooms), and a quiet reading room filled with study carrels. The library is also home to an event area, 'The Third Space', as well as the MF Writing Centre 'Babel's Table'.

But the library space is crowded. It is filled up with bookshelves and book collections that are not in high demand, and there is little space for the students to 'hang out'. Thus, it is not very attractive as a study space for the majority of our students.

MF Faculty

The Library offers different types of services to the academic staff: inter-library loans, purchasing necessary materials, assistance with course lists, and more

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[3] The library is also home to our institution's historical archive, as well as quite a few private archives of importance to Norwegian church history and MF.

more recently, assistance with everything related to open science. The library is responsible for the institution's research registration. We also administer the university's open access repository, MF Open, where journal articles from our faculty, as well as MF's own journals, and student theses, are archived. The Library also administers the institution's APC agreements.[4]

Being a small, specialised university, and with researchers highly specialised within very different research areas, the question is this: How can we as a library offer good enough services to all of them, given our both financially and staff-wise limited resources?

The illustration below shows an overview of ongoing research projects at MF:

[4] APC = Article Processing Charges. In this model the author (or their surrogate) pays the publisher a fee to get their article published open access.

Analysing the Surrounding (Trying to Look into the Crystal Ball)

Detail of Christ as Salvator Mundi. (Attributed to) Leonardo da Vinci. C. 1499-1510. Oil on walnut panel. Public Domain.

PEST - Identifying 'Big Picture' Possibilities and Treats

With a PEST analysis (looking at Political, Economic, Social, and Technological developments) we try to identify opportunities for growth and development in facilities and services to support the library and its users. We also try to see if there are any threats that should be considered.

So, who are the agents? What are their interests?

Looking at the socio-economic forces there are some strong forces at work:

- With the commercialisation and streamlining of education (BA, MA, PhD), it is now possible to study and earn a degree at top-range universities all over the world.
- The market for international students is shrinking; as of autumn 2023, the Norwegian government will charge tuition fees for international students (that is, students from outside the EU/EEC area).

The higher education landscape has changed significantly during the last decades. Politicians today think differently about what higher education should be, about the purpose of higher education, and about what skills should be taught. We have moved away from the Humboldt idea of the university as a place for Bildung, and it is becoming more like a school providing the subjects and skills necessary for

different professions. The citizens (they are paying the bill, after all) want more 'bang for their buck'. The walls of the ivory tower are coming down. The official policies and trends in Norway since the mid-1990s have been towards fewer but larger HE institutions.

The ways we learn are changing. And there are demographic changes. We live longer, and the population is aging. Adults who already have a professional career need more tailored shorter courses and education to update their knowledge. Then there is also the need for distance learning.
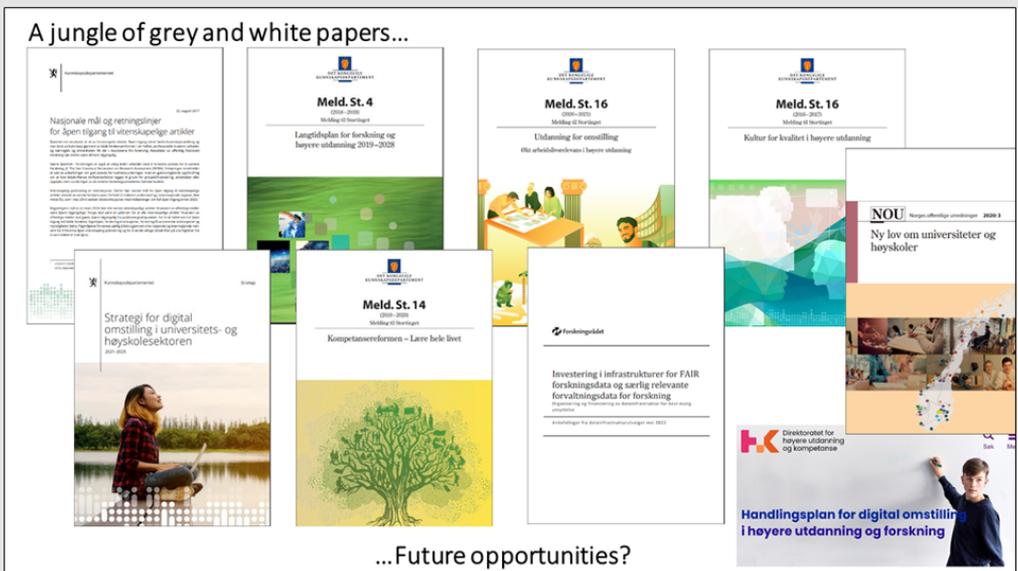

Some examples of relevant grey and white papers that also affect the libraries' work and focus.

PEST - Identifying 'Big Picture' Possibilities and Treats

So, what does the future hold for the MF Library? Where will we be 10 years from now? We have tried to pinpoint some possibilities and threats. Let's take you through a brief SWOT analysis:
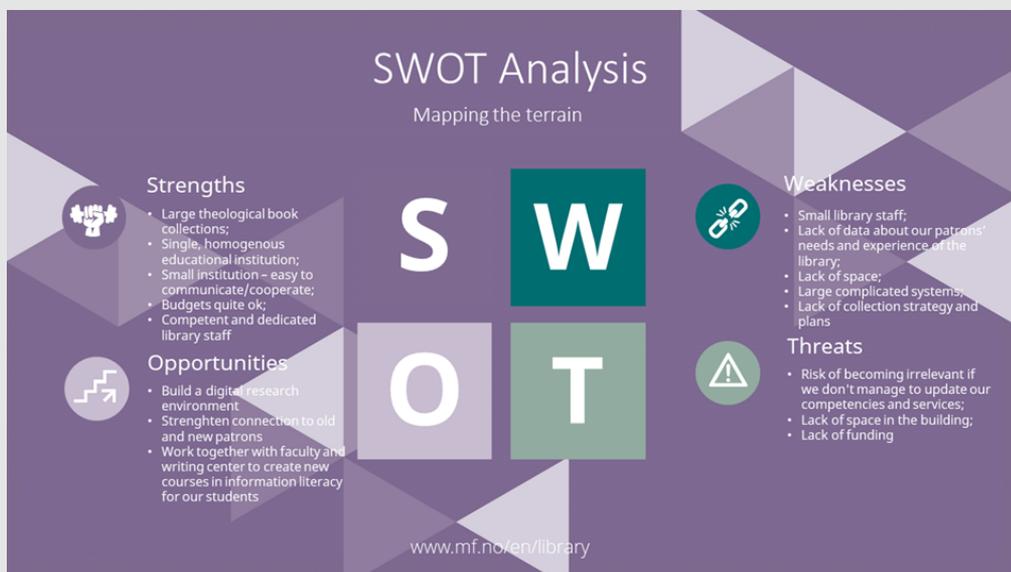
The size of the library staff is the number one challenge. Our library uses the same advanced systems as other HE libraries, but where many university libraries have individual teams for different functions (ILL, licenses, etc.), we need to be able to provide the same services from within the same (quite small) staff. Everyone needs to know a bit about everything.

And what about our library as a theological library? Until quite recently our focus was on theology as our primary patrons were studying the theological discipline. Our collections were within the fields of humanistic subjects in general, and theology more specifically. The last decade or so the social sciences have made an entry into the school, and thus had a huge impact on the library collections.

As the sector is moving from paying for journal subscriptions to article processing charges (APCs), this must also affect the library's budget and its collection policy. Two-thirds of the library's budget is normally spent on journal subscriptions and licenses. In the future, these funds will be moved to pay for publishing instead of reading. It cannot be the library's responsibility, mandate, or area of expertise, to decide where or what our scholars should publish. As a direct consequence of this, the Library has recently been moved from the Director's area of responsibility to sitting under the Pro-Rector for Research in our organisational chart.

The number of visitors to the library is also decreasing: we need to bring our students back in.

Where and How Can We Cooperate?

Within our own institution, we need to cooperate with our teachers to strengthen the students' information literacy competencies, for instance through embedded librarianship.

External cooperation:

UHR-Library (a national strategic unit of Universities Norway) works strategically and coordinates works on behalf of libraries in our sector. Two important topics they are published reports on lately are document delivery to patrons outside of their own institution (ILL) (2021) and shared publishing services for the HE sector (2021). We participate in their network and exchange ideas and experiences with our Norwegian colleagues here.

Our national FTRB network could be put to better use. Now we have an annual two-day meeting and some e-mail exchanges during the year. For instance, we could arrange joint webinars, or work together on different projects. It could also be fruitful to cooperate on joint purchases of literature within specific topics, and subject areas. We would also welcome working closer together with our Swedish and Finnish colleagues, and with all European colleagues in the BETH network.

The current Norwegian national library strategy (2020-2023) issued by the Ministry of Culture together with the Ministry of Education and Research, aims to bridge the gap between public libraries, school libraries, and HE libraries, and to 'merge' them together in a more seamless network. In the strategy, it is written how HE libraries need to function as knowledge centres for the entire population. The government emphasises how important it is to life-long learning and the need for updating professional skills. Through our national library network, we already work closely together with inter-library loans (ILLs), but this strategy also opens us up to new ways of thinking about future collaboration.

The Times They are a-Changing

Things are moving quickly nowadays. We see:

- Changes in the ways patrons seek information (well, this is not exactly new, but): Google, Amazon...
- Changes in expectations: What do our patrons expect from the Library?

- Changes in ways of studying (lifelong learning)
- Changes in the ways research is being done (more cooperation and interdisciplinary work)
- Changes in the ways researchers publish
- Changes in the Library's framework conditions
- Digital educational resources (DLR vs. OER)
- From building collections (buying books) to short term loans (STLs) and patron/demand driven acquisition (PDA/DDA)
- Digital resources (licensing terms) challenge the ILL tradition, and thus also one of the major ideas in the library sector—that resources are to be shared freely, to the benefit of the patron. The licensing terms of the large publishers prohibits ILLs of digital books.

Some of the systems and resources the library manages and administers.

What Needs to Change?

What are the demands on the future libraries and library staff? What skills do we as librarians need? What services should we provide? For several years now statistics have shown that perhaps we do not deliver the right services. The focus

has shifted. The number of physical book loans is decreasing, and the same goes for the number of visitors. It is high time to move away from the book museum/book storage idea towards a more open space and to offer a variety of (new) services to our patrons. Perhaps we should look to the public library sector. According to the revised Public Libraries Act of Norway that came into force in 2014 public libraries shall:

"…promote the spread of information, education and other cultural activities through active dissemination and by making books and other media available for the free use of all the inhabitants of Norway. Public libraries are to be an independent meeting place and arena for public discussions and debates."[5]

We as a library need to think more about how to use our resources more effectively.

We need to:

- Learn how to work more strategically
- Revise and update our collection policy (both acquisition and weeding)
- Evaluate and make better use of our resources based on the available data
- Make better use of the library space
- Grow the librarians' skills to meet today's and tomorrow's needs

Collection Policy: Weeding and Acquisition

Printed book collections take up space. And space costs. When it boils down to numbers and limited resources, our usage statistics clearly indicate that we need to evaluate and change the way we think about our physical collections:

Weeding: 77255 out of 103514 physical items have not been borrowed inthe last seven years, and 12158 items have been checked out once. That points to 89413 titles (or 86% of the collections) not being relevant. We also pulled some circulation statistics for 2021 from our database, looking at the years 2019, 2020,

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[5] Translation found on the IFLA Library Buildings & Equipment Section Blog (Somby 2017).

2021. Less than 20% of the books purchased during these three years were borrowed. 292 of these 3589 titles were on the students' reading lists. As in other HE libraries, the number of physical book loans continues to decrease year by year.

But when it comes to such library collections: How do you weed? Are they to be weeded? Are there any alternatives?

We as a library need to think more about how to use our resources more effectively.

Acquisition: With 80% of the books purchased during the period 2019-2021 not being borrowed in 2021, it is clear that something must change. The time and money spent on acquisitions could (and should) be put to better use. There is no subject librarian in our staff, and the library does not have a committee with faculty members taking an active part in the development of the library collections.

New Trends and New Skills for Academic Librarians

We as librarians need to future-proof our skills. In addition to our traditional competencies within cataloguing, classifying, metadata, and digital literacy, we need to:

- Learn how to work more strategically
- Develop our didactic competencies
- Develop our expertise to support research in a digital world, and digital information management
- Collaborate within and outside of the institution (developing our networking skills)
- Learn how to market our content and services better
- Learn how to host and manage events
- Be able to influence and negotiate within the institution

The Future MF Library

Expectations and New Services

Let us begin with some of the expectations on the future MF library:

- Less physical, more digital services
- Services and patrons in focus
- Make our services visible and accessible
- Lifelong learning
- Digital transformation
- Data-driven service development
- Open science
- Pedagogical innovation
- Economy and financial models
- Competition
- Virtual research environment
- Create a stimulating learning environment for our students
- Academic publishing (open access, open science)
- Curate historical archives (digitization, cultural heritage)
- Curate/host events
- Provide services to new student groups, and external user groups

With these expectations of the Norwegian HE library in the future, new tasks must follow suit. But which ones? One thing is certain: The Library needs to seize the moment and take the space. We must make our competencies and contributions visible. The library and the educational landscape are changing very quickly, and there is a wide array of new services we should develop. The future is bright, but it is work-intensive.

The Library Space
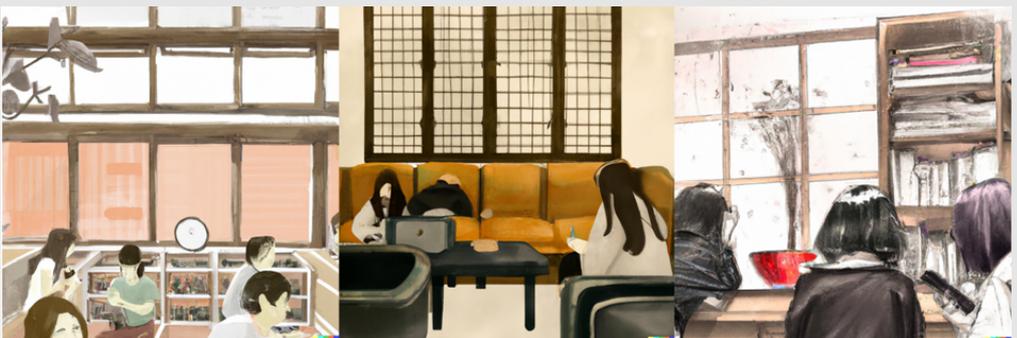
Image created using labs.openai.com (DALLE) asking for "students cozy hangout in the library with sofas and deep armchairs japanese painting style".

Beginning with the library space: We want to bring in the students. The library room should be their home on campus, a warm, welcoming space. A place where they can study, but also relax – perhaps even take a nap on the sofa now and then? We want sofas, coffee tables, and places where you can hide away, but also do group work. And what about providing a maker space, a place to be creative? We need to dive into the field of user design: How do our students perceive the library? What do they want and need?

The MF Library has just embarked on a 3-year project preparing for access to the library outside ordinary opening hours. During these unstaffed hours, the library will be self-service only, and registered patrons will be able to access it with their library card, check out books, and use the facilities.

We aim for fewer books and fewer shelves. Our library space today is crowded with (little used) books, and not very attractive. We need to open up and make room for our students and the interested public – to be a vital hub. The MF library should host relevant events on a regular basis: Book talks, research talks, concerts, poetry readings, and small exhibitions. The Norwegian national library strategy 2020-2023 states: "It is a goal that the premises of research libraries be used to strengthen the dissemination activities (e.g. through events, exhibitions, and similar) where this is possible".[7] Here we have a lot to learn from the public libraries.

Reference desk, goodbye. The reference desk is not a particularly well-suited place for helping with complex research questions. There are other and better ways of doing this. Patrons can always book an appointment with a librarian, chat, make a phone call, or send an e-mail. In addition, we need to develop LibGuides, nano tutorials, and FAQs so that patrons can easily find answers to their questions when searching for information. This will also accommodate our patrons working remotely, and make our resources more accessible to a general audience. We will install a self-service lending/returning machine for our printed materials. This will also free a substantial amount of time for the librarians that can be better used on developing new emerging services.

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[6] *Demokrati og dannelse: Nasjonal bibliotekstrategi* 2020-2023 2019, 21

The reference desk area can then be reshaped to accommodate other services our students need: the student reception could move in; our designated exhibition space can be better used. Perhaps we could have a small coffee bar here? It would all fit in well with the other student services in our story: student chaplains, student IT support, our writing centre, and the Student Council offices. Perhaps this is where we could set up a maker space?

The Collections

We are preparing for some radical changes in our acquisition routines: instead of our old focus on active purchases and collection building, we will move toward STL and PDA/DDA solutions. We are changing our book-buying policies, moving substantial sums from our budgets to these solutions. This new way of providing literature for our patrons (what they request, when they need it) will be a huge time-saving measurement for the library. In most cases, our patrons will not need the help of a librarian to access materials (only if there are technical problems, or if the physical book is stored in our stacks).

We will still purchase physical items when needed, such as materials on our students' reading lists. This new policy will also (hopefully) dramatically reduce our dependence on inter-library loans, a service that is both expensive and time-consuming.

This shift in acquisition and collection policies will also make it possible to rethink the use of the library's physical premises as mentioned above. The Norwegian Act on Public Libraries of 1985 went through a major revision in 2013. A public library must now also be "an independent meeting place and venue for public conversation and debate". This puts new demands on the interior design plans for the library room, and it also puts the printed collections under pressure. The Norwegian National library strategy 2020-2023 emphasises that HE libraries must follow suit: "In addition to serving researchers and students, academic and research libraries help to fulfill the universities' and university colleges' statutory mission to disseminate information to the general public," and how these libraries should "utilise the new opportunities and tools to reach out to society in general. Academic and research libraries should be 'knowledge centres' for the entire population".[7]

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[7] *Demokrati og dannelse: Nasjonal bibliotekstrategi* 2020-2023 2019, 21

New Services, New Patron Groups?

According to the updated Act relating to universities and university colleges § 1-3 letter d, universities and university colleges shall "contribute to lifelong learning and provide continuing education and training".[8]

So, following up on the signals from the government, and from our own institution: what new patrons should we provide services to? On what level? And what are their needs?

There are several different user groups to consider: employees of the Church of Norway, students in joint programmes with other institutions, students studying remotely, and the general interested public. What services do these user groups need? As a library, we should provide new and old patrons with online tools to help them discover our resources and services. We need to find ways to inform about and facilitate usage. With the emergence of open science and open access, the library can of course mediate open access resources. We can also make our tutorials available to everyone online. And we can open our physical space up with programmes as mentioned above. We will also continue to be an active partner in the national and international inter-library loan system, as far as possible.

However with more and more resources being purchased in digital form, or giving access to our main patrons via STL, the restrictions put on us by the publishers prohibit sharing with external users. This is a problem that has to be addressed higher up in the system, by Sikt (the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research) together with UHR-Library (the National Strategic Unit of Universities Norway).

We will also work on curating our special collections of archival materials, digitising and exhibiting them online to a broader audience.

Teaching Support

In cooperation with our writing centre, the library will continue to build our teaching resources when it comes to topics such as academic integrity, information literacy, and plagiarism, and provide support for the teachers in preparing their

[8] *Universitets- og høyskoleloven 2005.*

reading lists and digital course packs (compendia) for the students. We also see that there is a need for strengthening the library's teaching programme in accordance with the information literacy framework for higher education.

Research Support

Image created using labs.openai.com (DALLE) asking for "theological educational library as a virtual research environment"

Together with our institution's IT department and the Division of Academic Affairs, the library should play a key role in building a strong virtual research environment for our researchers and postgraduate students.

Expert knowledge is needed to support our researchers within all areas of open science: licenses and immaterial rights, APC agreements, digitisation, Plan S, transformative agreements, and the emerging question about institutional right retention strategies. Open access costs are high, and we see a shift in spending from journal subscriptions to paying article processing charges. Partially, as a result of this, the library now sits within the Division of Academic Affairs. And with these new areas come new tasks for the library: data stewardship, interoperable metadata, the FAIR principles.

Then there is the question of publishing services: MF publishes three journals, two of which are peer-reviewed (Norwegian Journal of Missiology and Nordic Journal of Practical Theology), both using the OJS platform, and a trade journal, Luthersk Kirketidende (the Lutheran Church Journal), with 16 issues a year. Will the Library assist in some ways here? As of today, we help out with questions about funding, DOIs, criteria for being a true OA-journal, how to be registered in different databases and collections, and so on.

These are just some of our thoughts and divinations about the future MF-Library. Who knows what the future will hold? The only thing certain is that we will face big changes. By trying to envision some of them, perhaps we will be better prepared. And if we do not embrace change, then what?

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