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# Let's Work Together: Towards an Active and Innovating Role of the Theological Libraries

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## **Helsinki University Library (HULib) in the Kaisa House**

Kaisa House has been HULib's central library for humanities, theology, and social sciences since 2012. It was a Herculean labour to bring 19 different libraries, both great and small, under the same roof.

In the beginning, the printed collections were still in the middle, and each collection had its area of the building.

But over time, the printed collections are gradually shrinking, and e-collections are growing. In fact, we no longer truly have any of our own new collections, as we rent most of our materials (package deals with annual payments).

Before the COVID pandemic, some seven thousand clients visited Kaisa House every day. Now the number is only about 3,800. Students and other library users are now more used to working from home, and with growing inflation, the price of transport has increased, meaning fewer people are making the journey to use the library in person.

## **HULib Serves Staff and Students**

In 2012, we chose a model to help us best serve, and keep in touch with, staff and students. Essentially, our number one priority is to help our scholars, staff, and students, and we are always looking for ways to improve in this regard.

We serve our clients in research data management, self-archiving (green Open Access), providing options for OA publishing, and so on. We have developed our search tools and efficiently informed our clients about new acquisitions and services and so on.

We consistently receive good ratings from our clients, but we cannot always be sure whether they really have time to follow our updates and know all that we are offering. It is difficult to reach them. They have their own routines and ways of searching for information, and often think there is nothing new to learn. The services we offer – so they say – are ‘good for students’, but by implication perhaps not so useful for staff.

## **We Need More Interaction**

The problem with our chosen service model is the lack of interaction. I think that a big university library should take a more active role in the development of information policies and research practices within that institution. I think that scholars should bear more responsibility for, and know more about, Open Access, particularly by self-archiving and actively using Sherpa Romeo. It is hard to see this as something separate from their portfolio and everyday scholarly work. The library should have the mandate to teach scholars about these issues at an early stage, and have this be part of their compulsory education. It does appear that we are moving in this direction, in terms of new scholars just beginning their careers, but those who did not start out with this mindset are perhaps not using our services to the maximum possible level.

## **This is Your Future Too**

I hope I am not right about this, because small is beautiful. I love printed books and small libraries. However I do wonder if, in the future, small and medium-sized theology libraries will be integrated into big university libraries, and individual seminary libraries will be drawn together into larger libraries to lower costs and provide better digital services.

I have some questions we here in BETH have already thought about. In the future we will all have to think about them in the wider context:

- How can we make the library space (more) attractive for clients?
- How should we promote knowledge of digital resources among scholars and students?
- How must Open Access and digitisation be promoted?

There are other questions I am sure BETH's members are discussing even now.

## **The Challenge Is Both Local and Global**

We are the mediators between the information itself and anyone actually (or potentially) interested in that information. Information is local and global and so is everybody interested in all this information. Thus, we are local and global too – connecting people and information.

## **An Example of How to Work Together Globally**

Helsinki University Library Critical Editions (HULCE) is a simple and practical way to create and publish an open and linked digital critical edition. HULCE promotes local and global digital humanities, interaction and cooperation between scholars, libraries, and digitizing institutions, and interest in ancient authors, old books, and manuscripts. Our pilot is a critical edition of Polycarp's letter to the Philippians: [https://libraryguides.helsinki.fi/hulce\\_epistula\\_polycarpi](https://libraryguides.helsinki.fi/hulce_epistula_polycarpi). When browsing the tabs, you will find an interactive and intensive environment to read this interesting early Christian document and the tools and ideas. HULCE makes it possible to study a classical document over the centuries, from the earliest manuscripts to the latest editions and studies, all in one interlinked space, accessible wherever you are in the world and whoever you are. This is how we might work together, and secure the future of theological libraries.