What do you think of when you hear the term “digital library”? Perhaps terms like: institutional repositories, digital objects, collections, standards, preservation, e-theses and even “databases” (such as PubMed) might pop into your head, but what about social inclusion and equity, taxonomy, cloud computing, data policies, semantic access and digital curation? This text explores a number of these new and evolving concepts that are arising as the field of digital libraries changes and grows.

This book is an edited text comprising fifteen chapters on varied topics related to information retrieval, access and digital libraries contributed by a broad range of international authors. Chowdhury and Foo, editors and authors of four of the chapters, are well versed in these areas of research. They are prolific authors in the field of digital libraries and information retrieval with hundreds of books, chapters and articles to their credit. Chapters can stand on their own as individual readings; however, the editors’ inclusion of their own introductory and concluding chapters gives a sense of cohesiveness to the book.

Chapters 2 through 4 work well together by providing myriad examples from digital libraries such as Europeana, the Edmonton Public Library, and the National Science Digital Library to illustrate design and architecture, uses of metadata and crowdsourced data, inclusion of social media applications, and user interfaces and access. From a Canadian point of view, it is odd that Chowdhury and Foo in Chapter 4 on information access, p. 57, note that the ACM Digital Library has the useful feature of automatically recognizing a subscribing institution and not requiring a personal user login. This type of access (automatic detection and authentication by subscriber IP range) has long been the standard at Canadian universities. One other small criticism is that, as with any printed book addressing areas of rapid change, screen captures of websites, which can add visual appeal, are subject to iterative change and become inaccurate and irrelevant very quickly.

Chapters 5 through 8 are the most captivating, covering collaborative search and retrieval, the social element and social inclusiveness of collections, and user interactions. These chapters emphasize the importance of librarians and human interaction, both directly with patrons using the digital libraries as well as from the perspective of how to embed features that are conscious of social inclusion/exclusion into collections.
Chapters 9 and 10 focus on electronic publishing and open access. Chapter 11 was by far the most specific and technical covering the topic of taxonomy and the integration of subject categories across repositories. Chapter 12 succinctly summarizes usability studies and Chapter 13 reviews issues pertaining to intellectual property and copyright. Copyright is tricky in that it is not directly applicable to all countries because of its jurisdictional nature. However, from a Canadian perspective, the idea of a copyright exchange system seemed similar in concept to the controversial “Access Copyright” collective in Canada and thus may not be the panacea that the authors hope. Chapter 14 discusses preservation tools and issues, and the final chapter, written by the editors, highlights what has been covered and notes a few future trends.

A clear strength of the book, as noted by Christine Borgman in the foreword, is the extensive number of references and cross-references in each of the chapters. There seems to be a fair bit of self-citation, but, as mentioned previously, the editors/authors are prolific in this field. The number of references does mean that this book will endure and will be particularly valuable to library school students, or new scholars or librarians responsible for scholarly communication or digital collections. Another topic worthy of note is how various authors throughout the book highlight issues regarding environmental and economic ramifications of digital libraries, something not normally mentioned in texts of this nature. One such example is the potential reduction of energy/electricity as we move to cloud computing.

Overall, this text is a valuable addition to the literature on digital libraries and is most relevant for library schools and librarians, faculty or staff (academic, special or public) working in the areas of systems and/or digital collections.

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