# The Web Versus Digital Libraries: Time to Revisit This Once Hot Topic

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## Panel Description

At the end of last century (Internet time elapses much quicker than normal time, and it already looks like a long time ago), the "information explosion" on the Web on one side, and the flourishing of research activities on digital library technologies on the other, spurred heated discussions about the future of traditional libraries. The view of one camp was that since "all" the information was available on-line, the use of smart search engines and clever software tools would allow Digital Libraries to provide all the information (and the services) needed by an information seeker. The view of the other camp was that the value of information was not just in its sheer quantity, but was rather in the organization and the quality of the information made available, and that could never be done by "programs".

Ten years (or so) later, with the continuous increase of the information available on the Web and the advances in search engine technologies, an even more radical question could be raised, questioning the need of libraries at all, whether digital or not. More and more it appears that when there is an information need, everybody (including scholars) is "googling" on the net to find the desired information. During these years however, digital library technologies have supported the transition of libraries from traditional to digital, and those technologies are today mature enough to support not only the availability of the library content on-line, but also the provision of advanced services for library users.

For example, the ideas fostered by the Open Archives Initiative are changing the way in which research in many disciplines is being done (e.g. physics, computer science, medicine), by making available in a timely fashion "all" the results in a field and tools for collaborative work. In a different area, cultural heritage and humanities, the recent Europeana effort is bringing on-line a well structured corpus of information that (with today's technology) could never be assembled just by "googling" over the net. The main objective of Europeana is

to make Europe's cultural heritage fully interoperable and accessible through a truly multilingual service. By 2010 Europeana will give everybody direct access to well over 6 million digital sounds, pictures, books, archival records and films. Those examples support the argument that the more (unstructured) information is available on the net, the more there is the need of a (digital) library to provide some structure and some quality control on a specific subset of the information universe. The question whether the Web will be the ultimate, all-encompassing digital library seems to be still open.

The objective of the panel is to trigger a discussion to understand whether in the end all the information needs of an "IT Society" (research, education, entertainment, business, etc) will be provided by this huge heap of information called the Web, or rather, for all those activities that require organized and controlled information, the actual institutions (notably libraries, archives and museums) will continue to have a significant role, augmented by the opportunities offered by digital library technologies and by the availability of "unlimited" information from the Web.