

Final Submitted version 24-07-08

# Joint policies for public quality

## The common challenge for public libraries and the press to recuperate their positions

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**CATEGORY: Viewpoint paper**

### **Abstract**

#### *Purpose*

The vision set out in this paper is that the demise of quality in the press due to short-sighted financial practises and the decline of the public library are both effects of the tide of electronicfication of information and knowledge. However, this new force can be re-formed and used as a reinforcement of the democratic roots of society by integrating the public library as a centre of certified and validated culture and information and as the new public function of civil journalism.

#### *Design*

This paper starts with a description of developments in the library world in which we take the Dutch case as a typical example. Subsequently, we discuss the decline of the quality newspaper, its societal rôle and its increasing dependency on stock market value. Hereafter, we turn back to the central rôle of the civic stakeholders and the crucial position free quality information has for a democratic society.

#### *Findings*

Our analysis clearly shows that both institutions, the library and the press, face the same injuries as a result of the rapid changes due to the electronic revolution in the media. However, going back to the societal functions of these institutions, the new media can also be used as an engine for change and for development of a novel integration of quality information creation and storage.

#### *What is original in this paper?*

This paper defends the need for a concerted and conscious policy to turn the public library into a workspace for civil journalism and a centre not only of high culture, social cohesion and a quality information repository, but also as an integrated public space for democratic self-publishing and news reporting.

**Key words:** library strategy, civil journalism, information quality, media education

### **1-Introduction**

In The Guardian, Alan Rushbridger (Rushbridger, 2007) compared the future of newspapers to climate change. Five years ago, many climatologists were sceptical as to whether climate change was a real and serious issue. Today, most scientists agree that global warming is a fact of life. At present, in the world of newspapers, almost everyone agrees that the traditional, particularly quality newspapers are facing huge problems. The blog 'Print is dead' (Print is dead, 2007) chose a fitting title for Rushbridger's article: *Print is*

*dead: an inconvenient truth.* Another traditional icon of the information society, the public library, is facing similar problems to the newspaper industry. The information function, the core business of the library, is under threat. People tend to use search engines at home, instead of visiting and accessing the (virtual) public library and ask for professional advice. It is important to note that these search engines are more and more driven by commercial interests than by a genuine concern of quality information. Ranking algorithms are rather beauty contests than quality stamps. Even worse, clever editing of HTML pages can influence the search engine's results.

Searching is most of the time an activity where linguistic proximity determines the ranking of the search, results rather than contextual relevance and meaning. Due to the increasing use of web-based information and gaming, the library is facing a decline in loans and tries to compensate this by increasing its role as social space. More and more we see the public library teaming up with other social, welfare or public institutions including restaurants and public service counters.

Another trend is that (local) governments are more and more legally obliged to offer all their information on-line in easy-to-use web environments. Unfortunately not always is the public library seen as the natural intermediate between the completeness of official information and the citizen in despair, whose question is not phrased in the right administrative language to obtain a useful and relevant answer.

At the press, we see understandable publishers' concerns about the decline in print runs. In the United States and Europe, the world of the press faces a real crisis, and the battle to survive is a race against the clock. Newspapers, especially the quality press, will only survive if they can persuade the young generation to read them on the Web. Failure to do this will signal their demise (changing newsroom, 2008).

We will discuss the tensions in this field by addressing the mutual relationships between the stock-market-driven economic business model and the traditional characteristics of quality journalism as well as the cultural changes in consuming news stories and analyses in print and on the web.

The key question is: how these two societal tendencies will affect the quality of information consumed by the public and hence the public quality of discourse?

This paper aims to address both issues by asking whether quality is really under siege and to what extent can the new, convergent media improve the quality of the information society by fostering the interaction of the roles of journalists and librarians. In the new world of journalism and librarianship, both will prove their roles and functions by engagement, enrichment, empowerment and entertainment for both readers and library users.

## **2- Libraries**

Public libraries' existence is based on the traditional functions of storing, indexing and having available all kinds of information sources and literature that could serve a local or more general public in their appetite for pertinent knowledge, leisure and entertainment. Recently, The Social and Cultural Planning Office of the Netherlands (SCP, 2008) published an important trend report: *The future of the Dutch Public Library: ten years on* (Huysmans, 2008). This report starts with the five core functions of the public library: knowledge & information, development & education, arts & culture, reading & literature, and meeting & debate, and subsequently lists nine normative principles for the well-functioning of the public library. These principles are based on the cultural normative values of modern society: Freedom, Equality, Social Cohesion and Quality. These can be made operational in nine operational principles for the well-functioning of the public library:

- accessibility, availability;
- diversity, multiformity;
- independence, objectivity;
- solidarity, social inclusion;
- social control, integration;

- maintenance of the symbolic environment;
- reliability, precision;
- professionalism, expertise;
- topicality, innovation.

These functions and principles are clearly independent of the medium, be it print or electronic. The report provides an excellent overview of demographic, social, societal, and technical trends as well as an in-depth review of the trends in the public use of the library and the changes in media usage. All known trends such as a decline of membership, a lack of users of the age group between high school and retirement, the explosion of the use of internet sources and the decline of loans are well documented. An interesting and in some way soothing observation for book lovers is that people do buy more books and do get more books as a present.

Huysmans & Hillebrink (Huysmans, 2008) suggest that libraries have put new policies in place to counteract the effects of the decline in users and circulation. Unfortunately, the suggestions for new policies are all in the direction of a better adaptation to the decline of the traditional functions, whilst the knowledge & information function is not taken as a central issue. By doing so, it looks as if the information overload provided by commercial parties is taken as a given and that this piece of the cake is simply accepted as being stolen.

Indeed, today's libraries fulfil roles in the local community far beyond the traditional functions. Many libraries are nowadays vibrant centres of entertainment, cultural performances, lectures, etc. This is often the start of cultural entrepreneurship and the *Experience Library*. Entertainment, educational – escapist – and aesthetic experiences are becoming an essential part of the modern library (Nijboer, 2006). The new central library of Amsterdam is a showcase for this trend. Its spectacular building, with a large restaurant, facing the central IJ waterway of Amsterdam has already achieved much acclaim. It resulted in a sharp increase in library visitors. With its superior infrastructure, restaurant and on-line facilities, it attracts more than five thousand visitors/day in its first year, and is already a popular place for meeting one another or doing one's school homework.

The tension, in such modern public libraries, is obvious, between using the internet infrastructure to just get information and knowledge directly from outside sources and the use of the local library portal as preferred and superior gateway. Without a dedicated policy to fulfil the curator's role, the public library might develop into a vibrant community centre, therewith strengthening its function as a social meeting place, but might lose its function as preferred knowledge and information provider.

## 2.1- Problems

Public libraries in many countries face a series of problems. One of the conclusions of a British House of Commons' Culture, Media and Sport Committee stipulates in a parliamentary document about the public libraries (UK, 2005): *"We regard the overall picture to be one of decline – both in provision and usage – especially in the provision of books which many see as a library's key function. It is difficult to argue that the library service is simply responding to reduced demand from the community when: overall expenditure is rising in real terms". "We believe that a situation in which core performance indicators, and gross throughput, is falling—but overall costs are rising—signals a service in distress"* (p.14). These notions dovetail with the above-mentioned Dutch report. The question is how to reposition the public library in the world of information overload. In particular, because on the one hand we see fairly competent and correct information and knowledge sources which are free, such as the amazing Wikipedia, on the other hand, many certified electronic sources are very expensive and the licences often stipulate a limited use confined to the library building. This last feature emphasizes the fact that in an electronic environment, a loan is something which does not exist as it once did, electronically read material cannot be given back. This crucial fact is one reason why the functions of the modern library tend to gravitate to services within the building.

Hence, the more social interactive core functions: development & education, arts and culture, reading & literature, and meeting & debate, are served better in the 'new social and cultural agenda' of many local governments. Currently, libraries undertake activities, which were in the past considered by many as a non-playing field. A better analysis resulting in a grounded consensus between the local government and

the library about the necessary tasks and boundaries of the library as an institution is needed. Evidently, libraries are no longer just about books and information; they are not even mainly about books and information. A whole new set of performance indicators is necessary to judge their contribution to society.

## 2.2- Information sources and the library

The information function of the library is under attack by the *googleization* of society. The threat of marginalising the library's role in providing information is conceivable. In 2006, research in the Netherlands showed that only a small percentage of high school students still use library (e-)resources. Guess what: the rest used exclusively the Internet for their assignments. Fast and easy were the most important criteria, whilst the reliability of the information seems to be of a lesser concern (Internet 2006). In all age categories, internet use is still on the increase, in particular the older generation is catching up (Internetconsumptie, 2007). Internet is winning the long-term battle with the library as information provider in all age categories. Young people acknowledge that the library offers a vast amount of reliable information for school assignments, about health, history and literature. However, the majority of young people do not mention the library as their first resource for seeking information. Almost 70% are of the opinion that Internet provides more [quality] information than the library. Only 4% have a different view (Stalpers, 2007). These findings are not typically for the Low Countries. In 2005, Harris Interactive conducted a large survey on behalf of OCLC in six English-speaking countries about people's information-seeking behaviours, how familiar people are with the variety of e-resources libraries provide for their users, and how libraries fit into the lives of the respondents (Perceptions, 2005). Some of the main conclusions on information consumers' perceptions and habits are:

- Respondents use search engines to begin an information search (84%). Only 1% start an information search on a library website.
- Quality and quantity of information are top determinants of a satisfactory information search.
- The two most important criteria to evaluate electronic resources are: information is valuable and information is available for free. Speed is number three on the list, but has less impact.
- Respondents do not trust purchased information more than free information. They have a high expectation of free information.
- Search engines are rated higher than librarians.
- Library users like to self-serve. Most respondents do not seek assistance when using library resources. (Huysmans, 2006) stress the invisibility of the library on the Internet. The notion that in the long run, the ranking of the library will decrease when people are looking for information is clearly an understatement. One of the main conclusions of the OCLC report was that libraries and librarians appeared to be increasingly less visible to today's information consumers (Perceptions, 2005). The younger generation replace the library and the encyclopaedia for internet resources: "*The library is located at best on the edge of their cognitive information map*" (Wubs, 2006).

It will be difficult to persuade young people to become loyal library users. The image of the library in the Internet era is a serious problem. Young people consider the library as traditional, old-fashioned with a dull atmosphere. Even young people who love books find the library dull (30%) or old-fashioned (40%) (Stalpers, 2007).

Last year, a mystery guest visited the four largest libraries in the Netherlands and wasn't exactly impressed by the service provided to the important and difficult target group of young people. Her conclusion was that young people really have to love reading and be prepared to face all kinds of hurdles in order to find the right books, music and e-resources. Resources are available, but logistically, a lot has to be improved in these libraries to make it attractive for young people (Graaff, 2007). The role of the library for the 50+ segment seemed to be relatively satisfactory until recently. However, their needs have and will change in the coming years.

The above clearly indicates that the real problem is that the role of the library as a simple serving-hatch is surpassed by readily available information sources via the home computer. However, the function of the library -in principle- is an emancipatory one in which not the sheer flow of information is the issue but the careful curation of that stream and the contextual indexing and storing for well-defined client groups. In fact, with the emergence of electronic information streams, we have seen a failing attempt to stay on top

of all that, instead of a more restrained attitude of a superior curatorship. The last sentence is in no way a critique of the heroic work of many a librarian. It is the lesson learned that curbing a flood demands, to allow a typical Dutch metaphor, “well-thought off canalling” and other flow control works

### 2.3- Strategies for the library

Briefly, we see two opposing strategies for the library in fulfilling its functions

A) The first strategy is to accept defeat and marginalisation of the information function and as a consequence, put more resources in the other core functions, which, at present, are valued more highly by many stakeholders.

In this scenario, it's an illusion that we can beat Google and other search engines in their own field, in spite of the fact that many librarians want people to start searching at library websites, because that is where the “good” information is. At present, we see big investments in creating new information services, where cost effectiveness is questionable, if users are not indeed turning to the (e-)resources of the library; which they usually will not do. A library can also be more than a centre for quality information. The library's social and cultural agenda offers a lot of new opportunities for entrepreneurial librarians and so let us pursue this route! In other words, we leave many information streams to other parties. The above-mentioned report *The future of the Dutch public library: ten years on* (Huysmans, 2008) tends towards this position.

B) The second strategy is a long-term strategy towards media education, media literacy, and digital citizenship in which the library will play a key role. In the long run, this strategy will hopefully be successful in combatting the demise of information quality and maintain the position of the library as a primary resource for quality knowledge & information. New opportunities and coalitions are possible with the (local) press (see further below) and (local) governmental agencies.

It will not be easy to achieve such a goal. Many people, young and old, think that they are information savvy and are impressed by the sheer volume of found information. Even worse, a considerable number of educators are of the opinion that they are media literate themselves, often being not aware at all of the many gaps in their media literacy competences. In many cases the educators have no clue themselves as to what criteria to use in evaluating search results, selection, and use of information by students (Dirkx, 2006). As long as educators do not have the essential skills, who is to blame for the media illiteracy and the information quality of assignments of students?

In all types of schools in many countries, information specialists and library staff put a lot of effort into courses on media literacy and media education. Not only media literacy, but also more and more emphasis is put on competencies to select and evaluate information (sources). How effective these courses are is not always clear yet (Dirkx, 2006). In some countries, e.g., the U.K. the USA and Australia, it is an integral part of the curriculum. Qualified specialists also teach it. In the Netherlands, as in many other countries, unfortunately it is not an integrated part of the curriculum (Opre, 2007). For the last couple of years, media literacy and media education is increasingly a priority for the Dutch government. Developing media literacy programmes, coaching students (and educators!) and cooperation practice in schools, universities, community centres, etc., are necessary. Successful programmes will have a positive effect on the information function of the (digital) library. The Dutch cabinet is now taking a strong initiative “media wisdom” (Mediawijsheid, 2008). This is based on a 2005 report of the Raad voor Cultuur (Netherlands Council for Culture) (RvC, 2005). This term must be understood as “*all knowledge and skills as well as the mentality. People need to participate consciously, critically and actively in the world of today and tomorrow, in which media play a decisive leading role*”. In a recent letter of the minister of Education, Culture and Science and the Minister of Youth and Family to the parliament (Plasterk, 2008), an extensive programme is announced to teach, in particular the youth, the ability for critical assessment and use of on-line sources. It goes without saying that a fair share of the reasoning pertains to the issues

of violence and sexualisation. This initiative clearly puts the quality of knowledge & information at the centre of a societal and political discussion.

This dovetails with an extensive advisory report to the government by the Raad voor Cultuur (Netherlands Council for Culture) in June 2007, entitled: Advise Agenda Culture-Policy and Cultural Basic Infrastructure: Innovate and Participate! (RvC, 2007) .

This report refers to the ongoing media wisdom discussion and has as guiding principle: cultural citizenship. In that light, the role of libraries is discussed. It acknowledges that: *"the Internet as the primary source for almost any kind of information has affected the raison d'être of public libraries"*.

In the chapter on libraries, after discussing the fragmentation of the traditional library organisations, the split between public and university libraries, the copyright issue, etc., a firm conclusion is made that the library continues to play an essential role as public gateway to knowledge. It goes without saying that in order to fulfil this function seriously, infra-structural and administrative measures have to be taken. For our purpose, it is sufficient to stress that this report concludes that the public library must join in with the complex development in digital government information systems, and the knowledge economy. The council also stresses *"that everything which comes into being in a digital environment and is financed by public funds, in the broadest sense, must be and remain publicly available and accessible"*. This logically leads to the conclusion that one of the main services of the public library will become the centre and keeper of all civil information issued by all levels of public administrations.

This line of reasoning is extended in a May 19th, 2008 advice to the minister on the above-mentioned SCP report ((RvC, 2008). The need for a national programme and standardisation of electronic library and holding systems is stressed. The main functions, also explicitly named by the minister; information, education and reading, are taken as a basis for the proposals on library development programmes. This direction brings us immediately to the second pillar of our vision, the role of the press in civil society.

### 3- The Press

In general terms, the world of newspapers is facing the same huge problems as the public library in its role as prime source of reliable information. As Russel Baker (Baker, 2007) observed: *'Its advertising and circulation are being drained away by the Internet, and its owners seem stricken by a failure of the entrepreneurial imagination needed to prosper in the electronic age'*. Surveys show the facts that more and more young people get their news from television and computers and breed a melancholic sense that the press is yesteryear's thing, a horse-drawn buggy on an eight-lane interstate.

Eric Alterman (Alterman,2008) quotes the media entrepreneur Alan Mutter revealing that in the past three years, independent publicly traded newspapers have lost 42% of their market value. He continues with the conclusion that: *"Few corporations have been punished on Wall Street the way those who dare to invest in the newspaper business have. The McClatchy Company, which was the only company to bid on the Knight Ridder chain when, in 2005, it was put on the auction block, has surrendered more than 80% of its stock value since making the \$6.5-billion purchase. Lee Enterprises' stock is down by three-quarters since it bought out the Pulitzer chain, the same year. America's most prized journalistic possessions are suddenly looking like corporate millstones. Rather than compete in an era of merciless transformation, the families that owned the Los Angeles Times and the Wall Street Journal sold off the majority of their holdings"*.

Baker mentions a 2006 lecture by John S. Carroll, ex-editor in chief of the LA Times: *'In this "post-corporate phase of ownership"*. We have seen a narrowing of the purpose of the newspaper in the eyes of its owner. Under the old local owners, a newspaper's capacity for making money was only part of its value. Today it is everything. *"Gone is the notion that a newspaper should lead, that it has an obligation to the community, that it is beholden to the public...."*

Alterman (Alterman, 2008) continues with: *"Newspapers have created Web sites that benefit from the growth of online advertising, but the sums are not nearly enough to replace the loss in revenue from circulation and print ads. Most managers in the industry have reacted to the collapse of their business model with a spiral of budget cuts, bureau closings, buyouts, layoffs, and reductions in page size and column inches"*.

So, is 'blogging' the journalism of the future? The number of blogs worldwide is growing by leaps and bounds. Didn't Matt Drudge have the scoop that a British prince was in active combat in Afghanistan? Everybody is one's own journalist, but that is an illusion. As popular as blogging is today, most blogs don't have anyone reading them, said Derek Gordon, vice president for marketing for the San Francisco-based Technorati, in an interview with the *Chicago Tribune* (Reardon, 2007). Gordon reports that of the 109.2 million blogs his Internet search engine tracks, over more than 99% get no hits at all in the course of a year. On top of that, there is a quality problem with most of the blogs that do get hits, even the popular ones. In the Netherlands for instance, some newsblogs explicitly do not consider themselves as following the traditional standards and codes of journalism. According to Alterman, reviewing the successful American Internet News site Huffington Post : *"Occasionally, these comments present original perspectives and arguments, but many resemble the graffiti on a bathroom wall", "The notion that the Huffington Post is somehow going to compete with, much less displace, the best traditional newspapers is arguable on other grounds as well. The site's original-reporting resources are minuscule. The site has no regular sports or book coverage, and its entertainment section is a trashy grab bag of unverified Internet gossip"*.

In this ongoing debate Philip Meyer (Meyer, 2004) presented two future scenarios for the press:

A) The present owners squeeze the goose to maintain profitability today without worrying about the long term.

B) The present owners – or their successors – will accept the realities of the new competition and invest in product improvements that fully exploit the power of print and make newspaper companies major players in an information marketplace that includes electronic delivery.

Embracing civil journalism as a (certainly not the) way to help perform scenario B is an option in bringing back the press to the community, a community where the public is not primarily a consumer, but a civilian (Lewis, 2005).

In our view, civil journalism is more than news blogging or non-professional reporting. The civil journalist focusses on subjects such as: security, health, education, regional economy and environmental issues. His sources can often be found in semi-official and informal circles, including whistleblowers, which are thoroughly checked, in order to be sure that we don't deal with spiteful ex-employees or other revengeful individuals. As a professional, the civil journalist is committed and maybe even driven, but always analytical and with a high esteem for double-checked facts. The civil journalist is geared to consequences of political decisions and solutions for outstanding problems. He or she is more focussed on new points of view than reiterating existing opinions -- the societal impact is leading

The public of civil journalism is, in our view, a 'light' community (Duyvendak, 2004). Hence, not a community like the socio-political blocks, called "Zuilen"(pillars)" (protestant, catholic, liberal, social-democratic) in Dutch, which structured Dutch society until some forty years ago.

Within light communities, people have the freedom of choice to join and always have the possibility to leave. Such communities offer not only more breathing space than political or religious blocks, but transcend the present dichotomy between hyper-individualism and community dependent bounds. Communities based on civil journalism are far from being ephemeral. It is not about one moment of attention before the next mouse click, but about social groups dealing with news and public issues, based on computer assisted logistics, resources and communication.

Bowman and Willis (Bowman, 2003) state clearly: *"The act of a citizen, or group of citizens, paying an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information. The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires"*. We consider democracy as a culture, not just a system of free elections. A democracy needs democrats, i.e., democratically participating civilians.

From the end of the 80's, newspapers in the United States have had a growing number of experiments with civil journalism (Rosen 1996, 1999, Glasser, 1999; Heider 2005; Poindexter, 2006; Haas, 2007)), on local, regional, as well as national scales. Newspapers in the Netherlands and other European countries conducted more or less the same experiments. Unfortunately, the results are sometimes alarming. There exists no best practice. The only – relative – successes depend on exclusive local, regional and national circumstances.

But there is yet another, even more, alarming pattern. Rather promising initiatives were prematurely aborted by the financial management because they did not bring in the cash fast enough. Also, by cutting on investments in newsrooms, some initiatives simply failed for lack of personnel. The quality of the participation was a huge problem (the same as the blogs). Badly written, uninteresting babble and – most important – no real news!

Civil journalism, as it seems, can be of some success on local or regional scales, when papers learn from the mistakes of their predecessors. In summer 2007, the Minneapolis StarTribune, campaigned to improve the water quality in Minnesota, The Land of 10,000 Lakes. The paper informed the public systematically how they could measure the quality, and how they could start legal procedures against companies or (local) governments.

StarTribune empathically joined the traditions of fishing and hunting in the lakes. The paper did not use the methods or discourse of the so-called bunny huggers (though it used their experience). Of course, they used Internet as an interactive communication tool with their readers. The sales of StarTribune rose (slightly) and some legal procedures were started, a clear example of the four functions that determine civil journalism: agenda-setting, alternative framing, activating, accountability

But – as above – you have to invest in journalists, in research, in interviews with local committees and with experts. You have to maintain the continuity of a campaign, to maintain the quality.

Randy Furst, reporter at the StarTribune and a member of the Guild Representative Assembly in the Twin Cities (Furst, 2008) states: “ *Today, more than ever, readers in most parts of the country who want a decent picture of the nation and world must buy national papers or scour news websites. In many cities, local news coverage has been compromised by smaller papers, shrinking news space and staff reductions. Quality investigative journalism is harder to find, and is likely to become more scarce, as media barons slice the 'fat' from their news budgets*”. He concludes with: “*By putting the squeeze on hometown newspapers, corporate conglomerates are depriving local communities of the kind of news communities need to make informed decisions*”.

## **Conclusion**

We sketched above the heavy blows people encounter regarding two of our most cherished institutions dealing in quality information. Both face the attack not from competition between peers, but from a novel phenomenon: the total mix-up of unfiltered information, news, opinions, gossip, and simply everything that once it has been written remains as a possible result emerging from a query. On top of that, much of the serious quality information is more and more behind the bars of copyright and can only be reached through license agreements, which most individual citizens do not have. On the web, the aging of information does not exist as it does on paper. Every stupidity or misinformation simply remains for ever. People cannot see the difference between quality, value and defunct information anymore. We cannot blame the public; they have no tradition or training of finding out for themselves what is correct and what is incorrect in news or other information. Both institutions face the same problem; why not fight the same enemy together?

Enter the public library. The library, and her (inter)national network and licenses, might become the perfect institution to enhance the quality of civil journalism. Because of the local (or sometimes regional) information infrastructures, in which the public library participate, it is a natural source for local civil journalism. The library has information professionals who can assist a journalist in every step of his research. Not only to find facts, laws, but also academic experts in the field of his investigation. A lot of local media depend on freelancers or even volunteers (Moenikes 2001) who are not even backed by a newsroom. For them, the services and facilities of a library seem even more useful.

A shift in thinking has to be made, in which we position the public library, including its new societal roles, right in the middle of civil journalism. The public library might become an extension of the newsroom in

which serious people join forces in helping the press in its metamorphosis from a bastion of unchallenged prestige towards a mixture of professional and civic information based on grounded and certified information and news.

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### **Autobiographical notes**

*August Hans den Boef is lecturer on journalism at MIM. He also conducts a PhD study on the role of electronic means in the future of news journalism. His publishing career began in 1979, mostly about literature and art. Gradually his interest broadened to the role of religion in modern Dutch politics and media, about which he published two books (2003 and 2008)*

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*Joost Kircz started studying chemistry and finished in molecular physics. His quest for more knowledge drove him into science publishing, which allowed him to peek into even a wider range of subjects. For more than a decade he was publisher for the internationally renowned North-Holland Physics programme of Elsevier Science. Unable to clean his desk, he became interested in electronic storage and publishing of information. As from 1987 he is engaged in research in that field and as from 1992 he is also visiting scientist at the University of Amsterdam. Curiosity drove him out of international management tasks in order to start his own publishing research company in 1998. As from 2006 he is part-time professor electronic publishing at MIM. For more information please also visit [www.kra.nl](http://www.kra.nl).*