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Tromsø and Documentation Studies: 20 Years Young (Editorial)

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Do you remember the year 1989? What do you remember best about it? For many, the dismantling of the Berlin wall might come to mind, or one might recall that this was the year the Internet as we know it came into existence. But it was also the year that Norway created its legal deposit act, *The Norwegian Act of Legal Deposit of Generally Available Documents* of 9 June 1989, which came into effect on 1 July 1990. This act stated that “[a]ll material published in Norway must be legally deposited with the National Library of Norway. This applies regardless of the format of publication, as the law is media-neutral.”¹ As such, the law read that not only paper-based or printed documents were to be collected, but also photographs, films, broadcasted material, and digital publications—both offline and online. While this event may not have been world news, as the crumbling Berlin wall was, the act set in motion some very significant steps in Norway and ultimately led to the newly-resurrected, documentation studies.

At about the same time in 1989, a committee was working on a proposal for a new educational program for librarians in Northern Norway.² Eventually, this proposal led to the establishment of Documentation Studies at the University of Tromsø where the first students started in January 1996. The decision was to opt for *documentation*, instead of *information*, thus inviting a much broader perspective than traditional Library and Information science programs were focusing on at that time. In subsequent years many claimed that Documentation Studies was an old-fashioned name, but as Niels W. Lund has argued again and again (Lund, 2010), quite the opposite is actually the case: the notion of document and documentation broadens the perspectives and invites students to study all kinds of documents:

The choice of the name Documentation studies was not based on a paradigmatic critique of Library and Information Science, but on a much more pragmatic and general political interest in relation to the establishment of a National Library in Norway in 1989 and the closely related launching of a very broadly defined act of legal deposit in Norway [...]. Albeit unaware of the Otletian utopia of one large collection of all kinds of documents, the Norwegian act of legal deposit made the Otletian ideal explicit and challenged the Norwegian Library

¹ <http://www.nb.no/English/About-us/Legal-Deposit>

² Utdanning for informasjonssamfunnet. Innstilling om bibliotek- og arkivfag fra samarbeidsutvalg mellom Universitetet i Tromsø og Høgskolestyret i Troms avgitt til Universitetet i Tromsø og Høgskolestyret i Troms februar 1989

system in two fundamental ways, regarding open and free access and preservation (Lund, 2006, p. 12).

These challenges became the core of the newly established program for Documentation Studies, to study any documents, fixed or fluid, regardless of medium.

In 2006, the Document Academy (DOCAM) celebrated the 10-year anniversary of Documentation Studies with the publication of an anthology called *A Document (Re)turn. Contributions from a Research Field in Transition*. In addition to the anniversary, the book had additional content; included were many papers that had been presented at previous Document Academy annual meetings, arranged annually since 2003 at the School of Information at the UC Berkeley. In the preface of this anthology, the editors stated that they were “convinced that with the advent of new media of communication, research from the vantage point of a generalized concept of the document becomes more and more relevant and indeed more fruitful” (Skare et.al. 2006).

After several years at UC Berkeley, the Document Academy conferences started to travel around, first inside the United States, later on to Canada, Sweden, Norway, and Australia. In 2014 the Academy started to document its activities by publishing the Proceedings of/from the Document Academy as an open access journal. The third volume of the proceedings, the one you are reading now, is a special peer-reviewed issue in celebration of the 20-year anniversary of Documentation Studies at Tromsø (re-named in 2013, Media- and Documentation Studies). The journal serves as a record of the Document Academy, our annual conference, as well as the scholarship of our growing family of documentalists. For this issue, we asked authors to reflect on the renewed and global interest in the theory and practice of the document concept, and discuss recent developments inside and outside the field, including discussions about developments that have influenced several disciplines during the last two decades, such as digitization and the material turn. While the topics in this issue may seem very different, at their heart, they all deal with questions about documents and documentation, issues that are of interest on a global scale. You will also notice that the authors in this issue (and indeed, of many DOCAM activities) are from all over the world, spanning from France to Norway to Australia and North America, coming from different disciplines such as Library and Information Studies, Museum Studies, Anthropology, Literary Studies etc.

In this special issue, we are also fortunate to have contributions from many of the original members of the Document Academy. Niels W. Lund starts us out by telling the story of the first year of “the experiment” at Tromsø, the dokvit program, giving us a window into the details of the teaching, reading lists, and

the diverse students projects. Also contributing are Michael Buckland, Ron Day, and Brian O'Connor, some of the founders who helped rejuvenate the concepts of document and documentation by publishing articles such as, "What is a 'document'?" (Buckland, 1997) and translating French texts, making names like Paul Otlet and Suzanne Briet familiar to an Anglo-American audience. Amongst these giants are other strong document scholars who carrying on the document tradition with new generations of scholars and students in their teaching and academic writings.

We would like to thank all of the authors for their contributions to this special issue and ask you to join us as we celebrate the continued success of Document Academy and the study of documents and documentation across this world.

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