SCOLMA: The UK Libraries and Archives Group on Africa

50th ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE

Dis/connects:
African Studies in the Digital Age

Oxford, 25–26 June 2012

CALL FOR PAPERS

The digital revolution is profoundly affecting African studies. New digital resources are making available large areas of content, as well as greatly improving access to bibliographies. In Africa, governments and NGOs are publishing online, some publishers are moving to print on demand and e-books, and international academic journals are increasingly becoming available in university and national libraries.

Yet the story, as is well-known, is far from straightforward or unproblematic. This conference will mark the 50th anniversary of the founding of SCOLMA by taking a critical look at the field of African studies and how it is changing. In particular, although there has been much discussion of new digital resources and what their creators plan to do, we have a limited understanding of their impact on their users and on knowledge production in general. For example, what are the implications for historical research of the availability of digitised sources, and of the choices made in their selection? How do social science researchers work in a field in which much, but not everything, is now available online? Are e-journals – or indeed mobile phones – beginning to change the research process in Africa? And, more generally, how have broader historical and political developments changed African studies and librarianship over the last half-century?

We welcome papers on these themes across the humanities, arts, social sciences and sciences. Papers may deal with digital content, whether digitised or born-digital, of any kind, e.g. archives and manuscripts; audio-visual material; maps; newspapers; books, journals and theses; photographs, prints, drawings and paintings; ephemera; statistical databases; and social media.

The conference will bring together academics and other researchers with librarians and archivists. We aim thus to have a productive exchange of expertise, experience and analysis on the question of knowledge production in African studies.

Themes may include, but are not limited to:

• How scholars, researchers, librarians and archivists use digitised resources.
• How African studies is changing, and the place of the digital revolution in these changes.
• Access to, selection of, and training in the use of digital resources in the library context. Are resources under-used?
• To pay or not to pay? How easy is it for researchers to find subscription e-resources? And for libraries to fund them? What is the balance of free and charged resources in the research process? How well do the models for making e-resources available in Africa work?
• How well does user consultation work?
• Access to the technology that underpins e-resources.
• Digital scholarship: are scholars in African studies using digital collections to generate new intellectual products?
• The impact of mobile phone technology on African studies.
• How patchy is the creation of digital resources, and what – and who – is being left behind?
• Language in Africa and new technology.

One-page abstracts of papers on these themes are warmly welcomed. If you would like to give a paper, please send your abstract to

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THE DEADLINE FOR ABSTRACTS IS 31 OCTOBER 2011.

Papers in French are welcome if a summary is provided in English.