

Editorial

Since the beginning of the year 2020, the world has experienced one of the largest global crises in decades, due to the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. Crises can be widespread and caused by natural disasters such as earthquakes or hurricanes, or wars or terror attacks, as well as a rapid spread of pathogens threatening our health. They can also be more personal, such as a diagnosis of a severe illness.

Whether global, local, or personal, our information behaviour is due to be affected by the crisis in question. A typical reaction is an increased need for information and more active information seeking behaviour, as well as a versatile use of channels and sources of information that help us cope with the new and threatening situation. This is not necessarily the case, however, as avoidance of information might occur, as well, especially if the crisis is prolonged and the receiver of information starts to experience information overload or fatigue.

In addition, the either deliberate or unintentional spread of rumours and misinformation, and the flood of information during a disease outbreak, also called an infodemic, has become an issue today when internet access is more widespread than ever allowing for information to spread more rapidly, and social media evermore outplay the role of traditional media. This can cause uncertainty and harmful health behaviours, as well as undermine public health responses, which in turn can intensify or prolong outbreaks or pandemics.

Because of the rapid spread of the new coronavirus, many countries locked down large parts of their societies starting from the spring of 2020, and various institutions were on short notice forced to introduce alternative forms of service. For example, libraries saw the dawn of new or more active distance services and a rapidly growing demand for e-books. The lockdowns also resulted in an unanticipated “digital leap”, as many people around the world needed to convert to distance work and education, as well as to socialising on distance, which also led to unprecedented skills in mastering the use of digital tools.

The far-reaching changes on both societal and individual level that crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic cause, provide numerous opportunities for research within the field of Library and Information Studies. This was pointed out already at an early stage of the pandemic, in an opinion paper published online in the *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology (JASIST)* in mid-March 2020 (Xie et al., 2020). Library-oriented researchers acted fast, and several

presentations touched upon Covid-19 and libraries already at the international conference *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries*, held virtually at the end of May 2020 (Katsirikou, 2020). The at the time newly established *Nordic Journal of Library and Information Studies (NJLIS)*, on its part, decided to publish a theme issue and called for papers on empirical, theoretical and/or historical perspectives related to information in times of crises and pandemics.

Today, more than one year into the still ongoing pandemic, and with experience of a second and in some countries even a third wave caused by increased numbers of confirmed cases, there is an abundance of research presenting various angles of this crisis, also covering the provision, dissemination and use of information. The current theme issue of *NJLIS* does its part by publishing three papers, which provide a flashback to what is now known as the first wave of Covid-19. Today, in June 2021, when many countries start to gradually open up their societies as a result of extensive vaccination coverage, and others need to lock down (again) because of serious outbreaks caused by more easily transmitted variants of the virus, these provide an insight into the situation in spring 2020, when this crisis was brand new to all of us.

Two of the scientific articles in our theme issue are about Norwegian libraries' situation during the period of lockdown starting in March 2020, whereas the third is about young people's information behaviour related to Covid-19 in Finland and the US during March to June the same year. The paper *Folkebibliotekets digitale tilbud under koronakrisen – en case studie fra Tromsø bibliotek og byarkiv* by Roswitha Skare examines the situation for the public library in Tromsø and the increased role of digital resources during the time the physical library was closed. The second paper is called *Samfunnsoppdrag under press: Erfaringer og vurderinger i norske bibliotek under Covid-19* and is written by Sunniva Evjen, Terje Colbjørnsen, Idunn Bøyum, Kim Tallerås and Heidi Kristin Olsen. Based on surveys with library workers in different types of libraries it examines how Covid-19 has influenced the social missions of Norwegian libraries and emphasizes the role of crisis management. The third paper, *Dealing with the COVID-19 infodemic: Understanding young people's emotions and coping mechanisms in Finland and the United States*, written by Muhaimin Karim, Rajesh Singh and Gunilla Widén, is an exploratory study with the aim to understand information experiences, emotional reactions, and coping mechanisms of young adults in two different populations during the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown.

We hope that these three studies can further stimulate research on this topic. Their findings highlight the value of this theme issue, and the articles with their reference lists provide an extensive resource to further inspire other authors to contribute to this theme in the future. Best practices and lessons learned from the closing of physical libraries, or changes in the information behaviour when a crisis is no longer new, could be the focus of such studies. In addition, papers on any other aspects related to this theme not yet covered by the current studies would be warmly welcomed to our journal!

This issue, furthermore, contains two book reviews of recently published edited works. Herbjørn Andresen has reviewed *Uncertain archives. Critical keywords for big data*, edited by Nanna Bonde Thylstrup, Daniela Agostinho, Annie Ring, Catherine D'Ignazio and Kristin Veel, whereas Samuel Edquist has written a review of a piece of work that is topical as seen in relation to the two scholarly papers in this issue on libraries in times of lockdown, that is, *Libraries, archives and museums as democratic spaces in a digital age*, edited by Ragnar Audunson, Herbjørn Andresen, Cicilie Fagerlid, Erik Henningsen, Hans-Christoph Hobohm, Henrik Jochumsen, Håkon Larsen, and Tonje Vold.

We would like to express our gratitude to all authors who submitted their manuscripts and to the reviewers who contributed with their thorough reviews and constructive suggestions. We also want to express our deepest gratitude to Dr. Fredrik Hanell, editor-in-chief of the *Nordic Journal of Library*

and *Information Studies* for facilitating this theme issue on research on information in times of crises and pandemics.

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Guest editors

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