

Interview | Wolfram Horstmann, CEO of FIZ Karlsruhe

“Libraries Are the Temple of Truth in the Age of AI”

Librarians must be equipped to critically assess information in the AI era... Global knowledge openness remains a key social challenge

On May 12–13, the National Library of Korea hosted an international academic symposium titled *“Open Metadata: Libraries & Open Science”*, commemorating the library’s 80th anniversary. Metadata refers to bibliographic and structural information about literature or digital resources. Open metadata aims for interoperability and accessibility, while open science promotes sharing and collaboration across the entire research process.

The symposium provided a platform for libraries and research institutions at home and abroad to discuss practical strategies for collaboration in the context of open science. The event was held in conjunction with the OMLOS (Open Metadata: Libraries & Open Science) initiative led by Stanford University, which fosters international dialogue on the role of libraries in realizing open science.

On May 13, we met with Dr. Wolfram Horstmann, keynote speaker at the symposium and CEO of Germany’s FIZ Karlsruhe – Leibniz Institute for Information Infrastructure, to discuss the role of libraries and librarians in the AI age and the future of knowledge sharing.

● Why has society become more confused despite the abundance of news, social media, and now AI?

We live in a universe of information. In the digital age, we can access information anytime through our smartphones—but the environment has become increasingly noisy. Compared to 100 years ago, our brains must now process a vastly greater volume of information. And the quality of that information has also declined. In the past, if you wanted to learn about tigers, you would find a book. Now, a search yields not just information about tigers but also advertisements for tiger plush toys. The information landscape has grown more subjective.

AI has dramatically increased the volume of information. But much of the information generated by AI is produced in industrial or commercial contexts. So the challenge now is how to evaluate this information. AI can contribute to society, but it also brings real risks.

● Why are libraries more important than ever?

Libraries are institutions that manage knowledge and make it accessible to the public. Today’s information environment is chaotic, subjective, and easily manipulated. In such times, we need a “Temple of Truth”—a place that provides reliable, verifiable information.

Libraries help establish a foundation of trust in society. They can also act as platforms to help citizens understand and appropriately use AI.

● **Can humans still be the main agents of knowledge in the AI age?**

Although we refer to AI as artificial intelligence, it is more accurately an artificial system for producing information. But information and knowledge are not the same. Information enters the brain through our senses and is processed into knowledge. Our task as humans is to interpret and evaluate that information. Since AI can generate confusion and even danger, our ability to interpret and critically assess information is more important than ever.

● **What role should librarians play in the AI era?**

Librarians have traditionally collected, organized, and curated knowledge. Many of these tasks can now be supported by AI. But in this era, we need institutions that can critically assess information—and trained librarians who can evaluate both traditional and AI-generated content.

For example, the Tripitaka Koreana represents centuries of Korean knowledge and culture and has been preserved as woodblock prints. If we were to create a 21st-century equivalent, we must think carefully about how we record today's knowledge so that future generations—100 years from now—can understand our culture. This is the work that librarians can do: selecting and organizing AI-generated information in meaningful ways for future reference.

● **What is “open knowledge infrastructure”?**

Open knowledge infrastructure is a visionary goal—perhaps even a dream—but one we must pursue. As AI and other technologies introduce greater risks and uncertainties, humanity needs shared guiding principles.

Libraries are institutions rooted in collaboration and coexistence, not competition. They are neutral spaces, free from political or economic interests, and they exist across cultures. Based on this, libraries are well-positioned to lead the development of a globally open knowledge infrastructure.

Historically, libraries served local communities as places to read and search for information. Now, powered by digital networks, they have the potential to create worldwide systems of knowledge.

● Are there realworld examples of open knowledge infrastructure?

The open access movement—making scientific publications freely available—began about 25 years ago. Initially, the percentage of open access articles was close to zero. Today, many papers are published as open access. It's been a slow but steady progression.

The movement toward open knowledge is a political and social challenge as much as a technical one. Public understanding and agreement on the need for openness must be built over time.

Germany is currently building a National Research Data Infrastructure (NFDI) that integrates information from 27 disciplines, including history, medicine, mathematics, materials science, and physics. The goal is to open and interconnect research data. The government has allocated a large budget over a 10-year plan starting in 2020. Similar efforts are emerging in other countries as well.

Open knowledge infrastructure will be essential—not only now but even more so in the future. It may become more important than railroads, parks, or schools. Building this infrastructure is a grand challenge, but one humanity must embrace with collective effort.

Hyunkyung Song

Journalist at Naeil Newspaper

funnysong@naeil.com