Collaboration, Interactivity, Knowledge Sharing. The Habits of Libraries’ Heart as Bridge for Sustainable Development in Society

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1. Abstract:

The paper will focus on Library Services’ mission in providing state-of-the-art information, communication and IT services for research and knowledge sharing for the enforcement of the libraries’ social vision. The paper attempts to identify strategic issues for libraries wishing to pursue a more active policy with regard to the changes affecting librarian system due to the increased use of information and communication technologies. Libraries can play a critical role in political reconfiguration of their nation by building the types of skills and competencies that will empower individuals and thereby contribute to shaping an information culture that meets the needs of the time. We can identify two major areas in which libraries can develop strategies to enhance services for their patrons. Following domains are discussed: collaborative design and the relation between physical and virtual learning environments. Next, possible implications for library staff regarding the changes are discussed. Libraries need to raise awareness of their role as implementers of national collaborative frameworks, as protagonists in the driving of the “social and cultural car” enabling individuals to acquire the types of skills and competencies that translate into various spheres of individuals' lives, including their participation in political, economic and civic life. A strategy is launching in order to bridge the digital gap, achieve a Smart, Successful Society and collaboration and innovation is key to this.

2. Introduction

2.1 The role of libraries in modern society

The information society development demands to re-define the position and objectives of all the institutions which work with information, knowledge, and culture. The situation is
changing. Libraries have been identified as one of the key elements for open access to information, which is crucial to democratic information society development.

We are forced to re-evaluate the social role of libraries, an underestimated role for years, I must confess at least in Greece. Libraries are not only memory institutions, libraries are especially important now when the whole idea of education is stressing more and more independent learning and acting. All citizens must be able to find and use information. First, the general development of the information society is pushing to the recreation of all the institutions which work with information, data, and knowledge - indirectly also with culture. No other institution, than libraries, carries out this long-term, systematic work. To some extent, culture makes its influence felt more indirectly than knowledge, but it is impossible to imagine how people's creative powers could be fully activated without the impact of culture, which extends into the depths of the mind. Culture has an important and unique role in mobilizing resources of human beings.

The challenge to modern societies is that the basic resource, knowledge, is developing from information in very individual, capricious and unpredictable process. It cannot be commanded. This can even be translated into economic language: to get out the best from the human resources, this resource must be fed up with rich and various cultural and information contents!

2.2 New lines in the EU - and in the United States

In accordance with these, there are new political lines in the European Union: The Maastricht Treaty in 1992 launched the cultural aspects. The Amsterdam Treaty in 1997 declared citizenship as an important theme. A significant part of this are granting information skills and access to information to every European. In addition to this, the global
future strategies need to meet the democratic aspects of the information society development. One of the crucial points is again general access to information. Libraries, especially public libraries, are a good tool in all of these new areas. A recently published report from a European research finds that minorities, low-income persons, the less educated, and children of single parent households, particularly when they reside in rural areas or central cities, are risk groups. The report calls for public policies and private initiatives to expand affordable access to critical information resources. But it also shows, that libraries and community centres really can diminish the information gap between haves and not-haves. The 2008 data from the U.S. demonstrates very clearly that community access centres, primarily public libraries, are particularly well used by those groups who lack access at home or at work: e.g. unemployed groups used Internet in libraries three times as often as an average citizen.

Earlier actions in EU like library programs, for example, Caledoskope, Ariane and Raphael, under the 3rd and 4th Framework have been strongly concentrated in IT and have had a clear impact in the European library co-operation and development creating common standards and working methods

Decisions of the EC(European Commission) concerning library policy were calling the member states to following actions:

- Libraries must be taken in account in national and EU information society strategies and in the respective budgets.
- Libraries need more resources for acquiring expensive books.
- The Green Paper on libraries by the Commission must be completed.
The users position must be taken in account in the copyright directive process, the balance must be maintained - this was politically the most important decision in short run.

Also support to libraries was demanded from the 5th Framework program of research and development, e.g. for networking, drafting standards, preserving, and transferring information and free of charge use of public libraries, in the spirit of the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto was demanded.

3. Traditions and new forms of work in the same house

Culture has a special role in building up the modern society and in mobilizing the capacity of its members. The significance of reading is only growing in future. Demands to enlarge and deepen literacy skills get greater and greater. Literacy has a special role in guaranteeing the basic citizen competence to everybody. It is in general interests of the society to offer possibilities to all people for maintaining and developing their literacy. The role of technology is really crucial in this point.

In library work new technologies offer new possibilities to raise service level, too. Good examples can already now be found all over the world, mainly of course in those countries where Internet is used largely. Some models: Library catalogues are available via Internet, the patron can check her/his loaning data from Internet, and even renew the loans a country/area wide information service via Internet and e-mail; there are versions for link libraries or virtual libraries, where libraries collect and describe high-level link-ups discussion lists of librarians, where they can share their professional skills and knowledge, even take part in developing the library policy of the country/area. In case you got reach in Internet, the resources your library can offer to the patrons are suddenly multiplied. All of once we
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have exactly the same resource as British Library or the Library of Congress. And this advantage is mainly social.

In the complicated modern society libraries have many kinds of answers to many demands of the society, as well as those of the citizens. They have potential means to serve both the information society development and their traditional humanistic tasks. Maybe information technology will even make it easier to combine these elements in future than in the past! The challenge to modern societies is that the basic resource, knowledge, is developing from information in very individual, capricious and unpredictable process. It cannot be commanded.

4. The Situation in Greece

4.1. The Framework for the National Policy:

Greek Minister’s counselor underlined that “Greece’s sustainable development may well be based on the basic principles of development in the Information Society of Europe—freedom, equality, fraternity, unity and sustainability.” However, it is still more common for these policies to be developed in isolation from each other. By influencing policy dialogues and change, the researchers who engage in such endeavours will not only be known to be at the forefront of the information revolution, but also at the forefront of a truly sustainable future.

How to built this future?

a. Educate the Next Generation with 21st Century Knowledge and Skills, create the most knowledgeable and skilled workers.

b. Reform public libraries to distribute a complete and competitive, open to the society knowledge.
c. Invest in innovative strategies to support pathways in libraries’ promising reforms, and in facilities modernization.

d. Design upper-class online courses for virtual library environments with freely available resources in order to extend learning opportunities for all the people regardless their religion, sex, nationality according to the IFLA’s Statement on Libraries and Sustainable Development.

Meeting in Glasgow on 24 August 2002 on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of its formation, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)

- Declares that all human beings have the fundamental right to an environment adequate for their health and well-being.
- Acknowledges the importance of a commitment to sustainable development to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future.
- Asserts that library and information services promote sustainable development by ensuring freedom of access to information.

The collections and services of libraries and related agencies, such as museums and archives, are important components of social and institutional memory. They are both physical places of intellectual work and highly symbolic places. They represent national and cultural identity and aspirations. They are venues for individualized access to educational and cultural resources. They are also part of an infrastructural continuum for disseminating information, forming opinion, and providing literate recreation. At one end of the infrastructural continuum lie telecommunications, mass media, and more recently the Internet and the World Wide Web. Libraries have traditionally been situated at the other end of this continuum as places of access to the historical diversity of opinion represented in cumulating
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collections of printed materials, though in the digital era they are clearly moving to a more central position on this continuum. IFLA therefore calls upon library and information services and their staff to uphold and promote the principles of sustainable development.

New Social Policy Platform:

- As the economic crisis is a spreading threat, libraries are far from exempt from the consequences of the current global economic crisis. New collaborations need to be strategic and market sensitive. The international library and information community forms a network that connects developing and developed countries, supports the development of library and information services worldwide, and ensures these services respect equity, the general quality of life for all people and the natural environment.

- Library and information professionals provide access to information, ideas and works of imagination in various formats, supporting personal development of all age groups and active participation in society and decision-making processes.

- Library and information services help people improve educational and social skills, indispensable in an information society and for sustained participation in democracy. Libraries further reading habits, information literacy and promote education, public awareness and training.

- Library and information services contribute to the development and maintenance of intellectual freedom and help safeguard basic democratic values and universal civil rights. They respect the identity, independent choice, decision-making and privacy of their users without discrimination.
• To this end, library and information services acquire, preserve and make available to all users without discrimination the widest variety of materials, reflecting the plurality and cultural diversity of society and the richness of our environments. Through their network of services, physical and virtual under the factor of collaboration and interactivity, libraries even in the nowadays dull financial landscape, work together even they are miles away one to the other providing to people research and innovation resources in order to advance sustainable development and the welfare of peoples worldwide.

• The meaning of sustainable development builds new forms, new kinds, new possibilities of cooperation in the digital space.

• The importance of libraries as supporters of education on all levels is growing due to new ways of learning, in which access to and gathering of information is an integrated part of the process. Greece is in front of a great reconstruction: the new digital school where libraries with their online resources are not only precious partners but protagonists in the educational procedure. Especially taking into account that competence is needed at a still broader level and adult independent learners are growing in number all over the country.

4.2. Statistics

The 3rd research made on behalf of The Greek Book Center on November and December 2010 showed the following results:

• The majority of readers in Greece are women

• They strongly prefer novels as well as books on the subjects of psychology and religion
● 9,4% of women read more than 10 books a year
● 6,8% of men read more than 10 books a year

men prefer history, social science, ancient Greek literature, philosophy, political science, physics and travel books.

● In comparison with two previous similar researches (1999 and 2004) there is an increase up to 10% of the people who read more than 10 books per year – the number reach the 800.000 people.

● 60% of the whole population read at least 1 book.

● The book readers like to participate in cultural events, go to art exhibitions, go to the cinema and/or to the theater. They would like a better level of library services to order to visit more the libraries. They watch tv rarely and not in every day basis.

● Crucial factors for reading are: the level of education, the urban or not environment and the economic crisis.

● The people who are forced to do 2 or even 3 jobs in order to earn their living, coming up to the 40,6% of the Greek population, do not read even 1 book during the one year time.

The National Statistics Authority collected the following elements:

● Mobile telephone subscriptions reached 17 millions – equivalent to double the population of Greece
● 20% of the young children (7-12 years old) have cell phones
● 91% of the adults (18-70 years old) use mobile phones
● 39% of academic libraries currently offer a mobile-friendly library website, and slightly fewer (36%) offer a mobile-friendly catalogue
• People have access to the web catalogues of the libraries but poor online help as the only service is: Ask a Librarian via email.

• 55% of academic libraries and 24% of public libraries currently offer some type of mobile services to their customers.

• Although overall sales of mobile handsets is in decline, the market share of smartphones is still on the rise.

• 1.1 million smart phone ‘units’ were sold in 2009 in Greece

• reader interest in e-books has skyrocketed

• Beyond the friendliness of user interfaces, the availability of a variety of applications is the key factor attracting consumer interest to smart phone products.

• step foot into the mobile environment

• new mobile services are on the horizon

• mobile layout of the library’s website

• mobile catalogue interface—the “ability to access databases” via mobile devices as the next highest priority

• mobile-friendly OPACs and e-resources, and fully optimised patron account features

• Many library budgets are simply stretched too thin already because of the economic crisis in the country

• limited staff time

• 20% of libraries in Greece have a web presence

• All libraries wish to
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—provide a mobile-optimised version of their website
—create an entry point for libraries to continue to explore and expand mobile library services as technology advances and librarians gain valuable expertise in this area

4.3 Implementing a New Smart Social Policy in Libraries – Main Vision - Crucial Decisions –

Steps

Main Principal

Libraries have a continuing role as physical entities, but they are also key links in the information chain in support of educational, cultural, technical, scientific and economic developments. In the information society they have a crucial role as gateways to the information resources on the global superhighways. Our societies are dependent on democratic access to information, and as citizen we should have access to our cultural heritage. Likewise our ability to run a stable economy is dependent on our access to information.(EBLIDA)

Steps

- Deliver enhanced user services
- Establish and strengthen library’s mobile presence educate staff,
- Build local expertise
- Promote discussion by offering training sessions and professional development options
- Promise to evolve information technologies in a national designed mobile library environment
This vision reflects the commitment to the value, integrity, and diversity of knowledge. In order to put it into practice, it’s necessary to:

✓ Encourage collaboration
✓ Integrate and augment interaction
✓ Bridge the gap between the information rich and poor as widening of this gap is a major threat to society in the near future
✓ Manage mobile technology as an investment
✓ Rethink historic assumptions
✓ Embed policies in strategies
✓ Enhance what is distinctive
✓ Focus on the user
✓ Move the library user to the centre of library planning and service delivery.
✓ Plan facilities that are flexible, that reflect an understanding of user needs, and that are technology rich.
✓ Recruit, train, and effectively utilize library personnel in a flexible manner that acknowledges both the changing nature of our work and the demands of our users.
✓ Marry the physical and the digital environment with a social receipt which requires the respect in the free access for all the members of the society.
✓ Create new knowledge meeting places for the population in a smart and attractive way

What might be the hallmarks of a Social Smart Library?
1. SSL libraries budget, select, acquire, catalog and circulate as many or more materials in non-print formats as they do traditional print materials.

2. SSL libraries stock without prejudice age-appropriate graphic and audio-book novels and nonfiction for both informational and recreational use. A new library concept is evolving taking into account the intermingling and integration of the physical and the virtual role of most types of libraries. New kinds of meeting places, such as virtual environments, and a new kind of cultural centre are developing, in which librarians are pro-active mediators of information.

3. SSL libraries can play a role in the ongoing efforts to revitalize the concept of citizenship.

4. SSL libraries are storing and maintaining huge parts of the cultural heritage, and they promote books and reading. To improve this role a better framework for cooperation than the one we see today is needed aiming at both instruction and recreation.

5. SSL libraries provide resources for patrons to create visual and auditory materials and promote the demonstration of learning and research through original video, audio and graphics production - and physical spaces for the presentation of these creations.

6. SSL libraries can handle all kinds of information whatever the medium or form of publication may be. Libraries are becoming increasingly interdependent. The overall global policy in this field should be to support their cooperation and development. teach the critical evaluation of print and non-print information.
7. SSL library programs teach the skills necessary to produce effective communication in all formats.

8. SSL library programs accept and promote the use of non-print resources as sources for research and problem-based assignments,

9. SSL focus on the continuous training needs of the librarians themselves and on their role in guiding users in handling equipment and accessing information.

10. SSL libraries remain necessary components in the information chain and vital parts of our cultural life workig for the benefit all citizens.

11. SSL libraries have the ability to enable worldwide access to a never-ending supply of distributed information which is constantly and conveniently available and updateable. Online Sources, Portal Sites all these in a Virtual Learning Environment can provide guaranteed document authenticity to the patrons, avoiding the dangers from the uncontrolled storm of web sites.

5. Challenges

Libraries and librarians cannot ignore the society of which they are a part - and are charged with supporting. Society, economy and culture determines active, interactive and collaborative library programs.

A new collaborative schedule that will:

- Offer the opportunity to modernize library services so that libraries are better able to meet the changes in distance learning matters.
- Meet the users’ expectations of how information technology will help them find information in a range of issues, especially, in education mainly characterized as student-centered / independent/ distance learning.
• Libraries and information centers are viewed as an important component of this massive educational effort.

• Continue to improve evaluation, research, and dissemination of library-based literacy efforts by libraries and other literacy providers especially in the poorer countries.

• Redirect administrative responsibility for provision of real and accurate knowledge and not only “flat” information in matters of common interest.

• Interdependency of libraries cannot mean self-reliance. The modern demands formulate sharing not only of resources but also of functions and roles inside a well-organized framework respecting the particularities.

Collaborative library habits in action:

• encourage cooperation

• the more participants involved, the better to achieve efficiency

• IT enable archival information to be accessed anywhere anytime by anyone

• aim to make materials available in digital format

• to provide cooperative acquisition and sharing of expensive online databases and unified digitization resources

• provide image data of official documents of relationship between countries, especially the neighbors

• make libraries champions of privacy, literacy, independent thinking, and most of all reading.

• libraries continue to be sanctuaries of learning

• libraries have a special role to play in our knowledge economy
• libraries are an open door to a social big human world

• libraries a safe place for children

• Shared resources, as well as shared responsibilities, can lead to reduced costs and positive outcomes

• Develop specific and targeted strategies for broadband deployment based upon community needs; balance marketplace demands with the “public interest, convenience and necessity”;

• Promote and articulate the important role libraries serve in literacy efforts

• Serve as guardians for the public in assuring access to the most trusted, unbiased information that can use to help people find jobs,

• Support education and lifelong learning, provide access to information and telecommunications services, empower families, and enable civic engagement as well as promote literacy and connect communities.

• Should be a place where parents and children come to read together and learn together

Proposals

1. Integrate services around the virtual reference desk including union catalogue.

2. All cultural developments take place through cultural exchanges and interactions.

3. Contribution to create new social spaces for educational feedback and learning interactivity.

4. Promotion for the co-existence of different patrons according to many factors, such as age, nationality, scientific subjects, geography and language.

5. Compilation of retrospective bibliography
6. Coordination with UNESCO and transmission of a translated data for inclusion in Index Translatiorum.

7. Coordination with national bibliographic centers of other countries and exchange of bibliographic data and national bibliographies on reciprocal basis.

8. Meeting the Frontiers within the pale of the world community.

9. Libraries, especially Greek Libraries will have to change their roles from “gatekeepers” to “gateways” of knowledge and in that they should be performing such tasks as information mapping, information audits, training in information literacy, information of best practices / competencies and helping its users to navigate through the world of information more meaningfully.

Social Issues:

- Staff-Staff collaborations

Despite the stereotypes, librarians are not solitary types. Just as other workers do, they interact with colleagues to get their work done. These interactions can be both formalised, where a complex task is broken down and tackled by a number of people with varying levels and different kinds of expertise, and also informal, where a problem arises and people creatively use their colleagues as resources to help them work around the problem and come up with innovative solutions. Frequently, ethnographic studies have revealed the creativity and flexibility with which people deal with exceptions to the normal flow of work. A powerful and effective way of acquiring skills is by working alongside more experienced colleagues. Staff-staff collaboration can be learning-oriented as well as work-oriented. This is known as the socio-technical design challenge. It involves determining what should be built...
not merely by reference to what is technically possible, but what would be useful to the organisation and acceptable to the organisation. Collaborative work is necessarily social. Thus a system that flouts social rules, norms or customs, even if it does useful things, may fail to be used. The key to selecting, or developing, successful collaborative systems appears to involve an understanding of what is currently done, and designing systems that not only can mesh with that way of working, but can adapt gracefully as people change their way of working over time. Libraries need to go out of their professional circle and convert the libraries in real socio cultural spaces. Culture means above all education and not just information.

The Importance of Digital Reference in Supporting Critical Thinking in Distance Education:

The past few years radical improvements have been made in educational technology and distance education has taken up a lot of space, creating online classes, setting up virtual study groups and generally doing more or less anything we have experienced in traditional classrooms. Today there is a big question on how tools, like the videoconferencing, that allow us hold classes online, are really easily adaptable for one-on-one reference use where you could have many people in line and it would be difficult to figure out who came next. Librarians providing e-reference and e-learning are teaching more and their patrons are demanding more instruction from their questions. Librarians role as instructors promises only to get bigger not only because the electronic environment continues to expand, but mostly because of the mission and the leading role the libraries have to carry out, as interactive and dynamic information metaphors, as cultural mediators at the partner libraries.
6. Necessities

- A Virtual Smart Social library and their utmost representatives, the librarians, should contribute to the development of a unified policy in the field of a well organized educational framework where technology enhance services so that libraries reach new patrons, streamline and broaden their roles, promote themselves as knowledge providers and work innovatively focusing on accessibility, interoperability, interactivity, value and effectiveness.

- Examining existing indexes and the special requirements in distributed environments with heterogeneous collections of information resources, we motivated the introduction of an additional, intermediate layer populated by so-called index elements.

- A library is concerned the “temple of learning” where intellectuals and commoners come to quench their thirst for knowledge. Political, economic and social circumstances create, shape and develop libraries. Among libraries we can find diversity and difference. But the ideas of interactivity and collaboration puts the most developed in the art of stimulating popular participation and democracy.

- Technology gives the means to create a common knowledge path and librarians have their own specific role, not only as massage carriers, but as social co-workers swimming in the same waters of the Big Global Sea! Economic recession, high oil prices and rising unemployment make many Greeks and not only, reconsider their purchasing choices. This is where libraries come in. Libraries are the repository of our history and culture.

- The library's mission continues to be to support the rights of all people, including our most recent immigrants, to have free access to that collective body of information. Libraries must remain responsive to all members of the community, not only to those
who know about and use their services, but also to the many newcomers who may not yet understand the tradition of a free public library. By maintaining the value of libraries as the cornerstone of free access to information, we continue to fulfill our cultural and historical mission. We expand our base of support for the library as a responsive and vital institution for every member of the community.

7. Conclusions

Now is the time to get back to basics—basic values, not basic services. Whereas every organization has its own values, all librarians share a common value set, the one that consists of offering authoritative, appropriate, authenticated information that meets the specific needs of users. State of affairs today mandates that libraries get back to working together to achieve the greater collective good. Collaboration and interactivity are good library habits of utmost importance building the Bridge for Sustainable Development in Society. Public libraries can become social centers for the dissemination of knowledge. The library is a knowledge center whose success is tied to the success of their economy. The infrastructure of knowledge economy includes those public and private organizations whose role is the creation and dissemination of knowledge, taken for granted that the ability to create, access, and use technology has become fundamental to competition and survival, and intellect is the new capital. Countries, for example Greece, are investing in research and innovation and especially in libraries to revitalize their economies, are following established principles in forming strategies and making decisions related to short and long-term budget planning. A common principle is to advance and maintain the Library’s quality, competitiveness, and momentum through prudent investments in its education, research and public mission. In a difficult economy making the right strategic choices for libraries...
becomes even more essential. Governments, like Greek government are investing in innovation because value is derived from innovation, it is a path to overcome the economic crisis.

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