

On Change in Libraries in the Globalization Era

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Abstract

The article approaches the theme of libraries - organizations that passed through many transformations over the centuries - in the context of changes generated by globalization and continuous development of information and communication technologies and underlines the fact that in these conditions libraries must reform their management, adapt permanently the services and products they provide to their users in order to maintain and strengthen an important position on the information delivery and knowledge transfer market.

Keywords: *Libraries, Change, Globalization, Knowledge Transfer*

The changes generated by the last wave of globalization put the libraries, together with other types of organizations and with society as a whole, in front of some challenges to which they had to react, to answer in a way or another. An essential element of globalization, a phenomenon that should be seen as part of a sustainable development, is education - a prerequisite for social, economic and politic development. But in order to achieve a sustainable education it is necessary an extension of international partnerships and programs, the competence centres networking, an intensification of the research for improving the education quality. The research results should also be accessible for a larger public and it must be developed a better strategy for knowledge communication. In this area libraries can play a decisive role.

Libraries are among the oldest socio-cultural institutions, with an important role in the evolution of human civilization through the functions they accomplish: custodial, educational, aesthetic and informational. They are part of all systems in society and along the centuries they proved to be partners of change, entering new paradigms many times and passing through a lot of development stages which led to the strengthening of the position they have in society.

Today the libraries don't represent anymore just some structures for the conservation and utilization of human creation, they are structures of relation with their users, open, flexible structures. A series of modifications in the organization of their functions and services come from the fact that they stopped a long time ago to be the only important source of information. Thus, they found themselves in the situation of having to deal with the competition generated by the appearance of other organizations specialized in the information transfer. In order to maintain their position on this market, libraries had and have to improve permanently the offer of services and products which they provide for their users, to strengthen their role of information provider which they have in society.

A main problem in connection with change is the one concerning its rhythm and quantity. In order to be successful, change needs interaction at the human factor level and co-ordination at the technological factor level. (Stueart & Moran, 1998). In libraries it is necessary a competent, modern management for dealing with the forces of change. These organizations must function well and efficiently, no matter which are the conditions, they have to provide quality products and services for their users. And it can be noted that along the different stages they passed through in their evolution, libraries have adopted and adapted many elements and principles of management from the business area, industry area etc. Now we can speak of a maturation of the management conception in the area of these organizations involved in the information transfer and it is obvious that in the activities of these structures it is applied the whole variety of managerial concepts that exist: scientific management, human relations management, quantitative management, quality management.

To stimulate and to facilitate change in libraries means to accept new ideas and concepts, to get new qualifications and competences, to give up obsolete techniques and models and to modify the traditional behaviour patterns. R. Stueart and B. Moran (1998) perceive the library as an open system which, receiving information from the outside transforms it and makes it available for the social environment in which it functions. The two specialists consider that the library has at its disposal a series of subsystems

(social subsystem, psiko-social subsystems, structural subsystem, and technical subsystem) which react to the change cycle. In libraries, the most important emphasis in connection with change should be put at the level of the communication, participation and learning processes because in this way it can be created a permanent culture of innovation in these organizations. (Pugh, 2000)

Globalization, with all the significant and rapid changes which it generated in the economic and social environment, the information and communication technologies and the global access to information, the more and more competitive environment, the increase in the electronic information volume, all these had and still have a profound impact on libraries, on the specialists in these structures and on their education and training. The new technologies have helped eliminate the geographical barriers and create a global library context, a networked society. They have contributed to the transition from a traditional library to a modern, electronic one. The libraries offer at present a much larger range of services and products, they make available for their users new tools for information and learning. The methods for service delivery have also changed, evolving along with society which gets away from the patterns of formal communication based almost exclusively on paper and goes more and more towards the electronic information and communication (Sacchanand, 2000).

Some said globalization threatens the nature of book because this phenomenon stimulates economy and production, but not the imagination and the freedom to create. "The book resists, but the market advances like a horde. (...) The battles in times of globalization are no longer fought to conquer new readers or to create them, but to prevent the market from uneducating them, and to prevent readers from giving up the habit of regarding the book as way of looking at themselves too". (Martínez, 2004, p.4-5)

Along with a large quantity of information and books, globalization generated also a large inequality, increased the poverty and the dependence of the less developed countries. Many people don't have access to education, can't afford to buy books, and so much the less have access to electronic information. Many people can't read and can't write. But on a long term, they hope that such aspects will be remediated and more and more people will have access to book, which even today, in a globalized universe, it remains an unique tool of understanding, communication, knowledge, freedom and faith which triumphed over the centuries despite the difficulties and threats to which the written word was subdued, no matter in which form it is (manuscript, printed document or electronic document),

it represents the humankind memory and will continue to be for a long time the focus of the library activities, despite the changes that will occur. (Martínez, 2004)

In a globalization era, these structures have understood that they need re-evaluations and transformations at the level of all their activities, that it is necessary to get a new position for them in society, to rethink and develop continuously the role and the function of their information specialists. The libraries need a corporate culture open for change, a culture in which learning and creativity are valued and getting new abilities and knowledge is a permanent process.

The libraries of the present time are different from those in the past and certainly they will pass through many other transformations in the future too. It is a sure thing that in order to be able to cope with the continuous change and meet the more specific requirements of the information users they must adapt permanently to the conditions on the information transfer market and become more and more competitive. The management of these structures need a completely different approach characterized by elements like flexibility, teamwork and continuous learning.

Along with the coming of the information society, libraries have become more and more dependent on technology. The extended access to information, the growing speed in getting the information, the increased complexity of the information retrieval and analysis process, the progress of the network technologies are just a few of the elements that led to the modification of the environment in which librarians work. The new electronic networked environment has affected profoundly the information world and had a major impact on the role of the professionals in this field. Trying to respond as well as possible to the changing environment, some libraries have entered the competition for information delivery to the business area, to the industry and administration area, working in partnerships with other agencies from the public or private sector, others have lost the monopoly on the public information delivery, and those in the academic area have become just a part of the network through which the users satisfy their information needs etc. "All of these matters eventually coalesce into a single issue: access to information. Technology has improved the potential for access, but at the same time it has also provided the means for restricting it. The restrictions can be determined by technical skills, technological infrastructure, political decisions and financial capacity". (Feather, 2004, p. 107)

As organizations that contribute massively to the innovation process, to the generation of new knowledge by processing, organizing and disseminating information, the libraries are a major component of the knowledge industry. On the global knowledge market they represent an important segment in the knowledge sources sector and can act in order to reduce the inequality between countries, having in view that this is emphasized by the capacity of access to knowledge and by the capacity of exploiting it. The libraries can act in order to reconfigure the knowledge, in order to extend and study it thoroughly.

Dealing for centuries with the information acquisition, organization and storing, libraries can extend at present their role in the knowledge transfer process, they can strengthen their position on the knowledge market and can contribute in a significant way to the building of a functional knowledge society. Their privileged position comes from the fact that they have the capacity to generate knowledge and to disseminate it, stimulating at the same time the capacity of society in general to absorb and use it. Therefore, the investment in these structures means investment in the knowledge production and its efficient use, and implicitly in building a strong knowledge economy.

Having a vast experience in meeting the user information needs by permanently adapting over time its information products and by involving the users and collaborating with them in many activities, libraries can easily find their place in the new service-based and client-oriented economy.

The abilities which the librarians have in extracting, organizing, filtering and disseminating knowledge, their experience in the activity of user training recommend them as key actors in the current knowledge based society. They can use their training, knowledge and abilities for acting as knowledge managers. The knowledge society offers for this professional category and in fact for the whole library and information science field an important opportunity for development.

In the future, despite the major transformations which doubtlessly libraries will pass through, they will continue to exist, to respond to the information needs of their users, to assist them in the process of information seeking and retrieval, in short to exert their role of intermediary between the information resource universe and the user community. But they will not limit their activities to this role, they will extend their actions by getting more and more actively involved in the effective knowledge research and development, in the knowledge bases construction and in the knowledge transfer.

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