CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF A GLOBAL CONTEXT

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Abstract: At present, we have moved from „a world dominated by cultural isolation in a world where intercultural factors dominate, from an era characterized by cultural autonomy of traditional isolated groups to an era of generalized interrelations and communication"[1]. Our time has the great historical privilege of moving from a world of isolated civilizations, based to some extent on different spaces and times, to a single world, which is characterized by the same space (world market) and the same time (synchronicity of all events). The positive meaning of globalization is that of progress. Accordingly, among many other aspects of globalization, there is an increase in the role of modern information and communication means used in large structures of information and documentation. The major difference between industrial and information age is that in the new economy the information consumers are also its producers, and mediators of information need to be aware who their „customers" are. Particular attention should be paid to the concept of information goods, these being considered the products and services that can be distributed in digital form, such as a book, a movie or a phone conversation.

Keywords: globalization, documentation and information services, information resources.

Concepts and related terms

Globalization has been described as a central driving force behind the social, political and economic changes that are reshaping society and the world order.[1] The effects of this movement extend across the social domains and influence the popular culture and the exchange of information. [2] The effects of the gathering momentum of globalization can be felt across areas of the social domain including the environment, popular culture and the migration of peoples and communication.

Technological innovation has accompanied, and been integral to changes in global concepts, and the transformation it has effected is

[1] Held David; McGrew; Anthony Goldblatt. *Global Transformations: politics, economics and culture*. Oxford: Polity Press, 1999, p.23.
[2] Ibidem, p.76.

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fundamental to the management and exchange of information. The interconnectedness that has resulted, and an accompanying sense of constant and rapid change, is particularly characteristic of the workplace of the librarian and knowledge manager. Thus taken in its broader sociological context, globalization can be seen as a source of energy for re-thinking many of the professional assumptions we make in the library/information work environment. At the level of the library user group, the cultural changes it has brought about call for a review of assumptions relating to issues such as cross-cultural communication, patterns of information-seeking and approaches to learning.

The internationalization of education is one positive example of globalization stimulating nations to interact and to enrich each other with fresh cultural insights and exchanges. These remarkable changes in communication and innovative developments in the transfer of information can be easily linked in pragmatic library terms not only to the quantity of information available, the development of technology, and the impact of the Web and the Internet, but also account for the changing profile of the library user group.

As library and information professionals become more conscious of their role in providing a link between the information-seeker in an increasingly global social context and global information resources, a deeper understanding of the cultural changes in the library user group can lead to library services that are more effective and realistically more client-focused.

The increased mobility of people from one region of the world to another has resulted in a culturally diverse client group that represents a range of library experiences and expectations. This is so across the library sector and perceptions of professional status vary with the expectations of a fluid library client group currently in a period of dynamic change. The relationship between these theories and information-seeking is an area that invites further research.

Also, learning backgrounds and different approaches to education are a significant factor in the effectiveness of reference services in an environment that is becoming more culturally diverse. These differences are reflected in the information-seeking behavior of library and information client groups in corporate, public and as well as in academic library contexts.

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Differences in learning approaches, and variations in information-seeking patterns that arise from these, are closely related to the dimensions of culture. Diverse approaches to teaching and learning and differences in educational backgrounds influence the interaction that takes place in reference interviews across the library sector, but are particularly apparent in the Higher Education Sector.

Perceptions of the role of the librarian have been found to vary according to the client's previous education experiences[3] and these perceptions are manifest in diverse attitudes to self-directed information-seeking and cross-disciplined research. The perceived role of the librarian is to facilitate their search for a synthesis of the knowledge.

Knowledge of differences in learning traditions can thus be an effective aid to identifying the expectations of the user and linking them with those of the librarian. It is helpful in formulating the scope of the librarian's role, and helpful in explaining the reticence of some clients to initiate their own information search.

Communication has a dual dynamic, and the librarian as well as the client has a part in the success or failure in communicating a reference transaction. In a context of cultural diversity, there are differences in communication patterns between sub-groups within the library user group, as well as between librarians themselves. In an age of extensive use of digital media, coupled with the assurance of ongoing and substantial dependence on analogue material, the challenges of cross-cultural communication extend across both the spoken and written word.[4] The key to effective cross-cultural communication is knowledge. First, it is essential that people understand the potential problems of cross-cultural communication, and makes a conscious effort to overcome these problems. Second, it is important to assume that one's efforts will not always be successful, and adjust one's behavior appropriately. There are particular demands to be articulate and precise when communicating effectively via electronic means. Elements of cross-cultural communication influence reference transactions whether they take place in a local multi-cultural context or as part of an international transaction. Oral communication has its

[3] Carolyn McSwine. Academic Library Needs of International Students from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds in Australia. In: *The Australian Library Journal,2004, no 3*, p. 197-217.
[4] Cross-cultural communication [on line]. Available at: http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/treatment/xcolcomm.htm

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own set of challenges whether the transaction is face-to-face, by telephone, or some other form of telecommunication.

While in pragmatic terms it is not possible to map every response or pattern in a cross-cultural setting, it is possible to "build the skills to interpret, evaluate and develop effective communication strategies" and to develop signals and codes used by a culturally diverse library users.

Responding to the differential needs of the library user in a climate of global change and cultural diversity, requires new skills and heightened sensitivity from the reference librarian. It also demands from the library manager new strategies for developing these skill-sets in the library staff.

By being pro-active in identifying and implementing research initiatives, by designing staff development programs with cultural awareness as their focus, and by investing funds and human resources in library education and information literacy programs specifically designed to address differential needs relating to cultural backgrounds, the library profession can add an important dimension to its research base and its literature. This forum and the theme of this conference are constructive steps towards this goal.

In conclusion must be created an awareness of the implications globalization for the information workplace, to identify cultural issues, influences and circumstances relating to the library user group, to add a further dimension to the understanding of cultural diversity issues and their effect on professional practice in the library, especially in relation to reference work and to indicate some ways in which libraries can and have responded positively and creatively to the cultural complexity of the library user group.

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