

Changing Role of Public Libraries as Community Center

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ABSTRACT: *A library is a collection of sources of information and similar resources, made accessible to a defined community for reference or borrowing. It provides physical or digital access to material, and may be a physical building or room, or a virtual space, or both. A public library provides services to the general public. Many public libraries also serve as community organizations that provide free services and events to the public, such as reading groups and toddler story time. For many communities, the library is a source of connection to a vast world, obtainable knowledge and understanding, and entertainment. Public library services play a major role in fighting rising illiteracy rates among youths. Public libraries are protected and funded by the public they serve. Community centres or community centers are public locations where members of a community tend to gather for group activities, social support, public information, and other purposes. They may sometimes be open for the whole community or for a specialized group within the greater community. This paper deals with the role of public libraries as a community center.*

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1. Introduction

When a community has a library, it somehow seems as if the community has achieved legitimacy, is solid, sure. As a governmental agency, the library reflects the organization of which it is a part-it holds the documents of the government, makes them available to the public, and it reflects that government in its interface with the community it serves. It also reflects the governmental concern for society being involved in, and responsive to, various social needs. The library is often one of the largest of the civic buildings. It is prominent in its location and in its fine architecture which represents the town. Andrew Carnegie, in his designs for public libraries, acknowledged the majesty of the library building. This same look of substance, with a much different design, is being carried on in the new libraries of today. Libraries connect people with information, are vital to democracy and transform communities. Led and staffed by entrepreneurial thinkers, many libraries have reaffirmed their civic mission and even redefined their role in their community. They are not only relevant to their community; they are central players in engaging the public in civic discourse, weaving organizations and resources together, bridging divisions, and developing the capacity for their communities to solve problems. These libraries are places where people learn about complex public issues and practice deliberative democracy. By listening deeply to the concerns of people in their community library, staffs are actively developing strategies to help the community work together.

2. Social role of the Library

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. Still, societies can support this development, e.g. by offering access to cultural and knowledge treasures.

2.1. Libraries support the literacy of the homeless

The free-flowing nature of the library also allowed for parents to actively participate in their children's reading. Noting the lack of literacy programs available for children at the shelter and in the community, one mother talked about the public library as being the place she could take her children to support their literacy development... Library attendance served as a springboard for parents to communicate messages about the expectations that they had for their children as readers. As institutions, libraries supported literacy events that tie to the larger cultural practices of coming together as part of a community.

2.2. The library facility as a gathering place has value

This includes the phenomenon known as the "living room" experience, meeting and conference room's available, all-inclusive, safe and friendly environment, and a unique forum for social networking, book clubs and reading groups.

2.3. Public library Stakeholders

Stakeholders, inside and outside the library represent library users with children or grandchildren; employees from the community at large, who check out materials for use at their workplace, as well as job seekers; library users who contact public library reference libraries for information; and technology users with a need for Internet access.

2.4. Public libraries provide valuable meeting spaces

The role of the library as a community gathering place was stressed repeatedly at focus group sessions. Whether discussing concerts, classes, and other events, book clubs and other social groups, or simply a forum where people could come and sit, talk, and read, quite a few people expressed their appreciation that libraries stand alone in many communities as a gathering place. Although many towns also have community centers and parks, Wisconsin winters render such options unavailable a significant amount of the time. Many interviewees place a great deal of importance on the value of a comfortable public library facility where they can gather, especially as opportunities for social interaction have decreased in the wake of more people seeking out services online.

2.5. Public libraries support personal productivity and cultural engagement

Directly related to the issue of citizens and their personal productivity is the survey finding that for almost half of patrons, the prime reason for visiting the central library was to look for information on a subject. Interviews with patrons revealed an extremely wide array of reasons as to why information was being sought. While some reasons had to do with paid employment (looking up information directly related to their work), in many cases the information sought related to other areas of life involving serious projects and pursuits that could not be characterized as merely recreational, including projects having to do with theater set design, a photographic exhibition, research for a film, small business development, and writing a screenplay, to name a few. These examples emphasize that the construction of public culture is a complex, ongoing process in which individuals are engaged in often surprising ways. Thus, the author suggests that the search for relevant information and its subsequent use in productive activity may be an integral characteristic of the construction of contemporary public culture in the emergent twenty-first century. If this is true, the central library is then a key site of both cultural consumption and production and a facilitator of civil society in a way that other public places are not.

2.6. The library as safe, important, and central public space

It seems clear that the central library is, indeed, central to the life activities of large numbers of people, is an important space in which public culture is constructed and lived, and thus has a deep sense of place attachment for its users. The central library attracts all ages and linguistic groups, has a well-educated clientele, and is regarded as a safe and appropriate destination for women, children, and men.

As gateways to knowledge and culture, libraries play a fundamental role in society. The resources and services they offer create opportunities for learning, support literacy and education, and help shape the new ideas and perspectives that are central to a creative and innovative society. Public library is a non-profit library, which is maintained for public use and funded by the government or the public sources. Unlike other libraries, public library satisfies general public information needs by providing all

kinds of knowledge and information available to all segments of the community regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, economic and employment status. It may also provide other services to their communities such as, storytelling for children, after-school programs, language learning, seminars, workshops and other community services.

3. Role of public library in community development

3.1. Public library and Education

One of the public libraries' significant and fundamental roles is education. Public libraries provide books and other materials for people to read and use. These materials are educational and lead to self-improvement and develop basic literacy skills. Public Libraries have always been seen as an educational resource for all people. The educative role of public libraries has expanded to include supporting both formal and informal education.

3.2. Public library and literacy

Literacy is the ability to read and write. In libraries culture, this concept is expanded to include the knowledge or education in one or several fields required to develop individual and communities' skills. Learning today is not a luxury limited only to selected group, but it is essential for survival. Expansion of literacy needs reading and writing material. The public library is the local center for providing a wealth of information through learning facilities and materials to support literacy to the general public. Literacy is also achieved by providing literacy programs and activities for different groups and ages. Public libraries continue to play a major role in fostering literacy in communities and societies, particularly among those groups of the populations that need special assistance in developing literacy skills, such as preschool and elementary school children.

3.3. Public library and Non-formal Education

Non-formal education is an unsystematic form of learning and educational activity that occurs outside of traditional organization or institution. Unlike the formal education, non-formal education is non-structured educational system. Examples of non-formal education include after-school programs, community-based organizations, museums, libraries, or at home. The aims of both formal and non-formal education are similar but they are different in approach. Both learning focus on gaining knowledge and skills however, the way of gaining learning is different. Non-formal educational practices are reinforced due to the challenges of modern information society. Abraham (2010) describes the public library as "welfare center, which provides useful services to the community by fostering education, promoting culture, recreation and dissemination of information to all sections of the society". He looked at the public libraries as the most appropriate centers through which non-formal education can be achieved. He found that some public libraries in rural areas in India (Kerala) play an important role in supporting non-formal education by organizing night schools, constructive discussions, seminars and symposia to fight illiteracy and proliferation reading habit.

3.4. Public library and Lifelong learning

Lifelong learning is the process of continuous and ongoing learning throughout person life in order to enhance continuous development and improvement of the individual's knowledge and skills. Lifelong learning cannot be achieved without literacy because reading and writing is essential for learning. Library and society are inter-linked and inter-dependent with each others. Society without libraries has no significance, and libraries without society have no origin. To serve as a vehicle of social progress, the library plays a vital role:

To assemble, organize, preserve, socialize, and serve all expressed thought embodied as manuscripts, books, periodicals, their constituents documents, however minute, and every other similar document produced as a means for communication; and by this means;

- Help in the transmission of knowledge of the earlier generations to the later ones; and by this mean;
- To help in accumulation and further building up of knowledge from generation to generation; and in a similar way;
- To help in the contemporary development of knowledge, by the unintended and purposeless repetition of effort and the consequent wastage in the research potential of humanity; and further
- To conserve the research time of humanity by the separation of literature search from positive search; and also

- To help in the perpetual self-education of one and all;
- To collect together all available recorded information particularly in the form of reference books, and to socialize and serve freely all such information to each according to his needs at the moment; and by all such mean

4. Conclusion

Libraries are not just about what we have for people, but what we do for and with people. ,” libraries have been effective at helping people learn how to use new technologies. We have to work to change the perception that ‘libraries are just quiet places to do research, find a book, and read’ to ‘libraries are centers of their communities: places to learn, create and share, with the help of library staff and the resources they provide.

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