Library Education

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Library Education – Bracing for the Future?

<https://doi.org/10.1515/bfp-2020-0002>

Abstract: Over the last three decades, the societal changes caused by digitization have been monumental and libraries in many countries are among the institutions that were affected from the beginning. In this changing landscape of globally and rapidly evolving information technologies and upcoming social media with an abundance of readily and easily available information and data. This buffet is delivered through increasingly developed broad band networks, soon via 5G, so with the intense fight for attention by all information providers and mediators, it is no wonder that many libraries have engaged in change processes that are profoundly transforming library services, programs, organization, spatial layout, and the job content of library staff. A general movement away from libraries as transactional, book-and-collection focused institutions towards relational user and community focused organizations has been evident in this period. Not all libraries have taken a proactive stance to the change; a more reactive and reluctant approach to the societal and technological changes is not entirely uncommon, still, no library has been unaffected by the development. And the societal changes are continuing relentlessly as are the persistent speculations in and outside the library sector about the future of libraries. These societal changes and the transformation in library practices raise the question whether these changes are duly reflected in the library and information science education. This article examines the processes that have led to this ongoing transformation and discusses the choices we as library professionals are facing.

Keywords: Community engagement; library activism; public participation; co-creation; library education; information science education

Bibliotheksausbildung – Wird die Zukunft empfangen?

Zusammenfassung: Die Digitalisierung hat in den letzten 30 Jahren einen enormen gesellschaftlichen Wandel mit sich gebracht, der auch die Bibliotheken in vielen Ländern stark beeinflusste. In dieser globalen, sich schnell verändernden Welt mit den neuesten Informationstechnologien,

mit neu entstandenen sozialen Netzwerken, der Fülle an leicht zugänglichen Informationen und Daten, die bald durch das neue Breitbandnetz 5G fließen wird, sowie durch den Aufmerksamkeitskampf aller Anbieter und Mediatoren, ist es nicht verwunderlich, dass Bibliotheken In-Change-Prozesse initiiert haben, die einen enormen Effekt auf den Service, das Programm, die Organisation und die Stellenbeschreibungen des Personals haben. Eine generelle Hinwendung von einer Bibliothek des Buches und der Sammlungen hin zum Nutzer und zur Gemeinschaft ist in dieser Zeit beobachtet worden. Jedoch nicht alle Bibliotheken haben diese Initiative ergriffen; einige Einrichtungen agieren dahingehend noch zögerlich und abwartend, auch wenn alle von den neuesten Entwicklungen beeinflusst sind. Diese gesellschaftlichen Entwicklungen und Transformationen im Bibliotheksbetrieb werfen wiederum die Frage auf, ob diese Veränderungen sich noch rechtzeitig in Bibliotheken und in den Bibliothekswissenschaften und deren Ausbildung widerspiegeln.

Schlüsselwörter: Kommunales Engagement; Bibliotheksaktivismus; öffentliche Teilhabe; Co-Creation; Ausbildung in den Informationswissenschaften

1 Changes in libraries

The first and second wave of digital development (library automation systems and www, Google coming into existence in 1998, Facebook in 2004, smart phones in 2008), had tremendous influence on the libraries in Denmark and in most other Western countries. In Aarhus, where I was City Librarian from the mid-1990s until recently, we were early adopters; creating the first website of any public institution, we started several internet-based services and subject websites, we participated in the consortia for digital cooperation between libraries that were popping up everywhere, a bit later we introduced first generation self-service automates, and we developed the first sorting robot with a private company in 2002. The library sector in Denmark made one of the very first major internet based order and delivery services of any sector in 2001, bibliotek.dk, where a library patron can search and order a book or an item from any public or research library and pick it up at the preferred

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library, a service functioning well and still developing. Web-based subject portals were organized and operated in cooperation between libraries, e.g. Literatursiden.dk, a website designated contemporary Danish fiction literature, Biblioteksvagten.dk, an on-line cooperative reference service, and eReolen.dk, an eBook and eAudiobook service run on an open source platform built by the libraries; all became common services during the last decade. Nearly all libraries participated in content creation and financing and the services have functioned well. Browsers and search engines have influenced the traditional library work in dramatic ways, there is rarely a reference department in a Danish public library nowadays as this specialized service has merged with adult departments a long time ago. Purchase of books and media licenses normally done by individual librarians at individual libraries are now outsourced in consortia. A few librarians are buying after EU-tender on behalf of 20 or more libraries, according to media profiles set up by the individual libraries. Classification and cataloging of media were centralized many years ago and is mainly done by the company DBC, owned by the Association of Danish Municipalities. This company also produces the National Bibliography and the annotations of media for library use plus monitors the development of linked data and RDA formats, thus relieving the individual libraries of an enormous amount of work. Similarly, the Danish Digital Library serves all 98 municipal library systems, providing a digital infrastructure created in Open Source that allows libraries to work together in a digital environment. This infrastructure makes it possible to share and cooperate on a scale that was unthinkable 20 years ago, e.g. a shared metadata repository and a shared content management system including all library automation functionalities with adaptable user interface allowing the individual library to customize its own appearance and content, while still reaping the benefits of the co-work, IT architecture, and infrastructure.

2 Changes in staff composition

The waves of change have significantly altered the vocational composition of the public library workplace. The situation in the 1960s and 1970s saw a growth in the number of libraries and in library usage in Denmark, resulting in an increasing number of non-librarian office workers doing the more trivial work, leaving the specialized and high-status work to the librarians. Not disregarding the important maintenance work of caretakers, janitors, cleaners, and drivers, the core library work was done by two professional categories: office workers (some had a

vocational education, others not) and librarians with a professional degree.

With the automatization and digitization of the 1980s and 1990s, combined with public sector cutbacks in Denmark, the office workers' job positions were targeted. This was an obvious consequence of automatization affecting directly work tasks previously done by humans, and many positions were closed, mainly through natural departure but also by lay-offs. The structural and geographical changes in the distribution of library service points were significant. From a situation in the late 1970s with more than 1,200 service points to now a little over 400 is a rather dramatic change, although most of the closed service points were small branch libraries. This decline in numbers is not only due to digitization, as depopulation of rural Denmark caused by big scale industrialization of the agricultural sector and a municipal reformation reducing the number of municipalities from 275 to 98 also played a role. On the other hand, the movement of people to the cities resulted in consolidation of the larger urban libraries and new services and programs that required new categories of staff to enter into more specialized positions. School teachers, IT-professionals, journalists, social workers as well as a variety of university graduates with degrees from anthropology, psychology, human/computer interaction, languages, etc. have joined the libraries, adding to the variety, competences, and skill sets of library staff.

3 Other change factors

There are other important factors than just digitization and tech development influencing the environment and the situation of libraries. Globalization is one, and wars and intolerable living conditions have resulted in refugees and immigrants from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds with different needs and desires, hopes and aspirations, constituting new target groups for library activities in most of the Western World. Furthermore, increasing inequality in income and wealth distribution is causing ruptures in the social fabric, diminishing the traditional middle-class, and growing a "precariat" of people in temporary jobs, living in relative poverty under conditions without predictability or security affecting their psychological and material welfare. An almost overwhelming factor that we are all subject to is the consequences of the climate changes resulting from human activity. But change lies not only in "objective" factors like digitization or climate change, change is also spurred by the intersubjective ideas, stories, and institutions that we as humans imagine, create and believe in. Therefore, the very idea that libraries

as institutions need to change has a self-promoting effect, spurring an urge in libraries to develop and experiment.

Whether one or another of these factors is more impactful on library practice is a matter of debate, but they surely all affect how libraries can and should operate. Thus, the old business model of the library of the industrial society should change. The dependency on physical artifacts like books as the primary information carriers and optimizing workflow concerning collections and circulation is hardly a viable solution for keeping libraries relevant in the longer perspective.

4 Agency and activism

A wave of social agency, a calling for community commitment, is sweeping through the discourse and practices of public libraries and other public institutions in USA, where I'm currently a professor at the iSchool of the University of Washington. This trend is driven by different factors, one being a general perception of growing economic and social disparities, a partly failing social/economic system, creating a larger distance between social layers, separating and alienating individuals, increasing a disconnect between citizens and civic institutions, and degrading social interaction and civic discussions. There are similar discrepancies in several European countries, spurred by the same sentiments, albeit not always quite that articulate, sometimes politically expressed in violence, e.g. as in the clashes between the Yellow Vests and police in France. A maybe less visible, but equally interesting factor bringing about a milder and more constructive form of societal activism, stems from an increased understanding of citizens as competent actors who must have a say in planning projects, political affairs and innovation processes in hyper complex modern democracies. The reason is not only because it is fair and just that people should have a say but because decision makers have realized that citizens are experts in their own lives and thereby able to inform, add insights to and qualify decision-making processes.

Practices in libraries aiming at mitigating, alleviating, and counteracting the negative spiral of disconnection and mistrust through programming and services are spreading and becoming more common, informed by insights from social sector research. Concepts like community engagement, community building, civic participation, social capital, archival activism, and public involvement are spreading in the library sector through articles and conference papers and there seems to be a sense of "newness", even excitement and energy connected to the very idea of community engagement.

When I discuss the mission and purpose of the public library with library professionals and students, I claim that we have to be able to answer this question that stakeholders, politicians, funders, and citizens are in their right to ask: "To which problems in society is the library the answer?" The traditional answers I get have been revolving around promoting literacy and reading capacity, organizing human cultural production, giving access to information in various formats, providing access to contemporary fiction, to history, and to cultural heritage, supplying safe and accommodating study and learning spaces; all good and valid answers. I have also, though not as often, heard answers like building social capital, creating citizenship, mitigating consequences of poverty, helping refugees and immigrants to settle, fighting racism and social injustice, adding to economic growth, alleviating hardship for historically oppressed minorities, fostering societal coherence, bridging disparities, and building identity and belonging. Still, all of the above are correct answers to the question – or they could be – far from all libraries and librarians are embracing the social agency aspects of the library role and there are certainly risks connected to it. One is that funders might be put off by seeing the library step out of its traditionally discrete and non-offending position as "neutral" and decide to cool funding. Although the idea of neutrality is constantly unveiled as an illusion, some still maintain the broken concept. Another risk is that libraries could slowly grow into a role as "first responders" for any kind of social problem in areas where social infrastructure and publicly funded social work is deteriorating, a very difficult role that few libraries are equipped for and even fewer have the funds to really undertake.

Whether a reluctance in some libraries to take on a more activist and social constructivist role is due to a passive and traditionalistic view on the library mission or based on a strategic risk assessment, I think there is no way of getting around a more proactive approach to societal development if libraries and librarians are to remain relevant for their communities.

5 Community engagement

David Lankes, an esteemed library evangelist and scholar, has put it eloquently: "The mission of librarians is to improve society through facilitating knowledge creation in their communities".¹ His definition unveils an activist perspective and two properties of this definition are impor-

¹ Lankes (2011).

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

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Fig. 1: Illustration by permission of IAP2 Federation

tant: The facilitator role and the proximity to the local community. So, what does it imply for a library worker to be a facilitator? Connecting and communicating, trusting the creativity and ingenuity of people, understanding the dynamics and power of groups and teams are intrinsic to the role of a facilitator. The ability to listen openly and actively is a must and patience, respect for individuals and their viewpoints as well as high tolerance for ambiguity are also part of the characteristics and skills of a facilitator.²

There are different interpretations of the concept of community engagement in different professional communities. In planning and city governance practice, engagement is focused on enhancing the quality of decision-making by understanding the complexities of intervention in the physical environment and adding community voices to the political/expert deliberation, recognizing that community members are valuable sources of knowledge. In the business and commercial sector community engagement is more likely to be interpreted as a set of practices influencing the relations between a business company and the surrounding community/the potential customers/the market, measured through the “brand value” of the business, and ultimately affecting the potential earnings of the company. As for the library sector, it seems that the general

understanding of community engagement is relatively broad, encompassing a wide range of programs and outreach activities as well as some of the traditional services as stated by the American Library Association: “Community engagement is the process of working collaboratively with community members — be they library customers, residents, faculty, students or partner organizations— to address issues for the betterment of the community”.³ In the recent discourse in the US library sector, however, the concept of community engagement is increasingly linked to a core set of values of social equity, racial justice, inclusion and diversity — acknowledging historically underrepresented and underserved populations and communities, e.g. people of color, indigenous groups, LGBTQ+.

A commonly used model (fig. 1) can illustrate different levels of engagement. Moving from an “us to them” informational communication on the left side over more interactive positions to a fully facilitating role on the right side, this model provides a continuum for public libraries to contemplate when assessing the community engagement value of services, programming, and outreach activities.

All libraries have experience in informing and most also in consulting the general public through feedback such as surveys and interviews on services and programs.

² Kaner et al. (2007).

³ ALA Libraries Transforming Communities Toolkit (2019).

Involvement occurs through interactive processes where community members are engaged collaboration is often conducted through partnerships on, e.g. service production and programs with associations, organizations and individuals, and empowerment in the model occurs when the final decision-making is handed over to the public. This last step rarely occurs to its fullest extent in any library as the power of curation and choice is often formally and legally placed in the hands of the library but there have been attempts in e.g. Canadian libraries⁴ to implement a community-led model. There is no doubt that the general movement is toward a much more interactive and collaborative position, understanding the needs and assets, the strengths and weaknesses, and working closely with the community being served.

The emphasis on community engagement in libraries has led to a focus on collective action, libraries working together with other agencies and institutions on common societal issues and challenges to have the most impact.

Is community engagement a new practice in libraries? Yes, in the sense that a clearer understanding of what the concept means, that it is something beyond the old concept of outreach, is spreading in the sector, and yes, as far as specific values such as social justice, diversity, and equity are intentionally being applied to the practices, and certainly yes, when it comes to transferring power of decision-making to the community. Still, some of the practices common to libraries for decades fits neatly into the continuum of community engagement. For some time, literature and documentation about the libraries' roles and practices in this field have existed, indicating that libraries probably are among the best suited public institutions for engaging the community.

Civic engagement aiming at fostering citizenship and public debate seems more prevailing in North European libraries, in recent years enhanced by mission statements in library legislation in Norway, Finland, and The Netherlands, explicitly obliging libraries to initiate democratic discourse and debate. In Denmark, this movement is partly spurred by close cooperation, sometimes merger, between libraries and citizens services, the one-stop-shops for public services. In the US library sector as in the UK, community engagement generally seems to revolve more on issues of social and racial equity, diversity, and inclusion than is the case in Scandinavian libraries, undoubtedly due to the deeper, more difficult, and very visible societal challenges in these countries.

6 Library staff and education

Library staffing has evolved from almost exclusively employing librarians and office workers to incorporating people with broader and more diverse educational backgrounds and skillsets in Europe. This has not happened to the same degree in USA where the librarian is still holding the fort, supported by office workers and volunteers. The Library and Information Science education is sustained by the American Library Association (ALA) through a systematic accreditation of the Master of Library and Information Science education on the 51 iSchools in a meticulous and scrutinizing process, making sure that the curriculum for librarianship is valid and up to date. This accreditation is securing that the librarian education has a high standard and it also means that library workers with an MLIS education will be in the top tier of library systems. CEO's, city librarians, and leaders of huge public library systems in major cities or county systems in USA all have a MLIS degree. In Denmark, it is becoming rare that the top leader of larger library systems are librarians, they will often come from other academic disciplines with leadership practice in other sectors and have supplementary leadership education.

Looking at how the education structure has evolved in Denmark, I graduated in 1977 in the first cohort of librarians from the then new Aalborg-branch of the Copenhagen based Library School. At that time, the institution only educated librarians intended to work in either public or academic libraries. Later, the library school became more oriented towards research, the emerging information market, and the private and corporate sector. A change of name to "The Academy of Information Science" (Det Informationsvidenskabelige Akademi) in 2010 underlined this development. In 2013, the institution merged with Copenhagen University and a new name change in 2017 to "Institute for Information Studies" emphasized the status as a department of the university. Most recently (in 2019) the institute merged into a larger entity, the Department of Communication. After a receding number of applicants for the librarian education over the last decades, the Aalborg-branch of the Danish Library School finally closed in 2018, reflecting to a certain degree the number of public libraries that have cut positions over the last three decades. The content of library education is similarly undergoing quite radical changes as more emphasis has been placed on the information science component in the education, data architecture, human/computer interaction, digital development, and on modern cultural formats. Other university educations that come close to the librarian roles as mediator and promotor of cultural content have emerged, and

⁴ Community-Led Libraries Toolkit (2008).

libraries and other cultural institutions are recruiting from those educations as well. The Netherlands has taken this development even further, as there no longer seems to be a specific and dedicated librarian education at universities or iSchools. Whether or not that absence will have a negative long-term effect on the in many ways great Dutch public libraries remains to be seen.

7 The future of library education

There will be differences in practices and visions for libraries and the educational needs of the institutions reflecting the diversity of societies, cultures and local communities. There will be multiple paths for libraries to follow in the endeavor to stay relevant for the community they are serving, but there's not much doubt in my mind that the citizen oriented participative and collaborative community engagement has come to stay. As for the education, I do believe that the tradition of Library and Information Science, emphasizing a user-focused mindset, civil liberties and data privacy are strong values to build upon. Librarianship should distinguish itself from computer science, not by ignoring the power of data or the importance of data-driven evidence, but by building on a humanistic approach and acknowledging that the idea that data can solve all society's problems is absurd, that there's more to it than mere reductionistic thinking in bits, bytes, and algorithms; namely bridging humanities and data science. Librarianship should raise the ethical and moral questions, asking not only what data can be used for, but ask what data should be used for, in order not to be harmful to individuals or society as a whole. Librarianship should call attention to the contents of our common beliefs and imaginary stories, promoting a critical view not only of fake news and false "facts", but also of seemingly "neutral" algorithms that hold just as many human assumptions, world views, priorities, and biases as any other human tale, fictional or not. After all, a traditional western-centric world view seems not to be enough to solve societal and environmental challenges in all communities, hence understanding of and appreciation for different knowledge systems deriving from other cultures should be part of curricula.

The skillsets of professional library workers will have to encompass the ability to work with partners⁵ and volunteers, to co-create and co-design the practices, programs, and services that will evolve. Therefore, design thinking

theories and practices⁶ have to be part of the curriculum, as do community engagement theories from the social sciences. Few institutions are better suited than public libraries to be facilitators of informed community engagement processes, as they are both in practice and culture reflecting values of inclusion, social and racial justice, equity, appreciation of human dignity, free access to information, intellectual freedom and democracy with no commercial interests or moral or political bias. Librarianship is about individuals and communities seeking out and acting upon information, thus creating knowledge. Today, the need of educational support for these values and activities is obvious and the curricula of iSchools and other educational institutions should reflect this development.

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⁵ Overgaard and Staunsager (2012).

⁶ Design Thinking for Libraries (2015).