

Who is Everyone?

Hidden Barriers to Information Provision for a Certain Clientele. Considerations of a New Information Policy to a Local Base on the Background of German and International Experiences

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Abstract

Hidden access to information caused by lacking technological skills, language barriers, insufficient information literacy and last not least by problems of the copyright laws are known and frequently discussed by international and national professionals.- Barriers to certain groups of clientele however are only sometimes getting into the focus of library policy as the opening discussion of *cultural diversity* is indicating. However barriers for information e.g. to smaller enterprises are still a problem especially on the background of the economical and social landscape, which is characterized by deep changes subsequently leading to even increasing information needs: Countries in Central and Eastern Europe have to build up a new economical structure with private smaller enterprises especially for the local and increasingly for the international market. Women are obtaining leading positions in smaller enterprises offering sometimes the only chance to work and develop new ideas in their own professional field when having a family. The lack on non partisan information for these clientele on the one side and their growing political as well economical power on the other side have to be taken into a much broader and more sufficient consideration by libraries and their information work as it is exercised today.

Introduction

The slogan of this BOBCATSSS conference is politically as well as professionally well chosen. The demand of information supply by providing access should be the strategic guideline for all professional work in the given field.

Although before asking *who is everyone* let me communicate some ideas about the different forms of access. If we define access in connection with everyone we meet barriers of access inflicted by other parties and institutions to this our professional goal of information provision for everyone. But are libraries and information providing institutions themselves really providing the kind of access permitting the overall use of the information provision? Political, economical problems as well certain structure of administration may shape barriers to information access and quite frequently they are set up by libraries themselves.¹ Short and shrinking opening hours, lacking book drops for the possibility of returning material, clumsy administration procedures, lacking support staff for the use of the information and checking out system in libraries, rising fees² and last not least lacking information skills, the information literacy³ – to name only some obstacles which are preventing access generally.

If you cast a more closely look at the different clientele of libraries the situation is even aggravating, although technological means have opened more possibilities for access which

were not envisaged only some years ago: blind and partially sighted people are only now fighting for their rights of information access for everyone,⁴ which is guaranteed to them by the law. Migrants and non German speaking people form a much bigger part of the population as can be seen as library visitors. Problems of information provision for them are not only topics of conferences⁵ but increasingly the awareness of politicians and decision makers is arising. In the present discussion which reveals a big lag compared with the awareness in other European countries⁶ the big difference amidst migrants is often neglected. Migrants with high intellectual calibre are prevented from access by lacking knowledge of language and administrative procedure but their attitude to using information and literature differs greatly from those parts of migrant groups who are library and learning distant. Another group are the elderly who might even change from library visitors to persons avoiding the library now due to feeling uncomfortably with the electronic catalogue and other digital devices. I want to draw your attention to the observations of Paul Ulrich (cited in footnote i) during his long service at the now called Central Library of Berlin. He concludes that so called modern library service is very often aimed at making librarians superfluous.

This short introductory overview shall only rise your awareness how many people are prevented from access to information which is important for their lives in every respect, as well professionally, culturally and for them as social beings. Hidden access to information caused by lacking technological skills, language barriers and insufficient information literacy of different social strata present a big political and social problem.

Are information needs of medium and small enterprises served ?

But let us turn to a special group of patrons which being not served may demonstrate all shapes of the problem. Furthermore political difficulties as well for the development of a country may subsequently arise.

During the last years with the arrival of private enterprises nearly in whole Europe new economical structures had to be established. It is overlooked quite frequently that the backbone of this national economic recovery are not big corporations which quite often work on an international base but private smaller enterprises. It is generally known but often overlooked that unemployment can be best avoided by these small enterprises. During a conference with smaller and medium enterprises two years ago an owner of such enterprises told us, that he used his life insurance in order to keep the employees and carry them over difficult times. You may find this kind of relationship in Germany, France and Japan, even today. Countries as Germany and Japan have shown during the last decades that these enterprises serve as a backbone of economical success. It was a topic of discussion with a Slovenian colleague that the feature of small enterprises in this country which did not disappear during the Communist regime⁷ helped building up a new economical structure. We do not know for sure if this is correct but it is feasible.⁸ Smaller enterprises are building up the local and with increasing success will enter the international market. Poland e. g. shows the biggest success in this market sector and one of the big economical hopes in the future ties with Germany lies in an increasing German and Polish co-operation of small enterprises.⁹ That will even help to build up trust between the new countries in the labour market, which up today shows no European restrictions for Polish workers in Germany.

Women in the economical field

During the last years however a very surprising development has started. Women are increasingly taking part and playing an important role in this emerging economical structure with new marketing ideas starting their own business, often from their homes. Examples from

Italy to the developing countries reveal small success stories and we all know the friendly man from Pakistan who won the Nobel Prize giving smaller credits to women to build up their own little enterprises. He always stresses the fact that these small investments were paid back in due time, exceptions for this statement which happened very rarely were often caused by a badly behaving husband. This small credit system was very often more successful than international aid programs. If you turn to some countries in Africa the same picture of local trade is carried out by women which is securing the survival for whole and often big families.

The situation in Germany Examples of Information Provision .

But we do not need to travel this far. The social structure of smaller enterprises was carrying the main burden for employment and economical success in Germany. This structure is still alive but yet often being neglected e.g. by taxation legislation and employment laws during the last years. However some years ago, the personal structure of these enterprises showed a chief and a management behind the scene carried out quite often by the wife of the owner. This has changed since the last years. Increasingly the women themselves are becoming their own boss. The information needs of these new social stratum is big, since background and tradition especially in Germany where women were often prevented from becoming professionals in the past do not serve as background for this new work and role. But the situation is changing dramatically.¹⁰ Subsequently new groups and institutions have been born to cover these information needs: Let us turn to short examples in Germany first:

1. *Die Unternehmerfrauen im Handwerk (Females in artisan enterprises)*. In June 2007 a workshop took place, titled "Wer schreibt, der bleibt" (one who writes may remain) and showed the urgent need of the women present in this workshop for legal information and instruction. This was provided by a female lawyer and promoted by the insurance company IDUNA. You may guess why the insurance company was promoting this workshop. There is no objection to this kind of information but at least you may doubt if it is non partisan. None of the women present, independent clever professionals, knew libraries or had even considered to turn to a library for information.
2. *Unternehmerfrauen im Mittelstand – ein starkes Stück Europa (females in medium enterprises a powerful Europe)* a conference which took place June 22, 2006 at Recklinghausen being organised by FEM¹¹ (Organisation of women of medium enterprises). I could not participate but I wonder if information services of libraries were even mentioned.
3. A very courageous example are the meetings of the commission *Unternehmerfrauen im Mittelstand*, organised by Marie Luise Dött,¹² member of the Bundestag (Parliament in Germany), which are organised regularly in spring and autumn. The program october 2007 contained:
 - the updateness of Christian economic policy,
 - the economic position of women in an ageing society,
 - the use of corporate intelligence,
 - the regularity in economical structure.

Due to the experiences during this workshops in the last years and due to the requests of discussion of participants of this workshop the number of papers have decreased to gain time for communication of the participants themselves and with the politicians being involved and believe me, the women are not timid, they "nehmen kein Blatt vor den Mund" as it is said in Germany. That means they are up to the point, never timid, and sometimes not even polite. These women are very honest, outspoken and absolutely keen to get as much out of this weekend for their work, their life and the future planning. The most positive feature is their attitude as citizens of this country , which accompanies their critics. But needless to repeat

here again the same picture – libraries and information provision are not known and not used, they are even not being taken into consideration. What a different world when you enter the Business Library of New York, part of the New York Public Library.¹³ This library has engaged a whole circle of advisors for economic newcomers and I had the privilege to talk to one of them.¹⁴ He told me, that if a smart gentleman with a briefcase and elegantly dressed enters his booth he sometimes has his doubts if his consultancy will lead to business success. But he has made the best experiences with women since in most cases they are very able to learn. He considers this as the most important asset for a final success. He mentioned only one case when he consulted a woman, not to open her own business, not due to her age, she was 74, nor her being a black woman he considers these not as serious obstacles, but she could not write and had a retired husband,. So they agreed that she is better off with a job. The Business Library in New York offers a whole range of business information services and possibilities for education. It offers access in all possibilities and formats. It is heavily funded not only by the city, but also by the state and by private enterprises. The past president Clinton celebrated a big dinner there for fundraising purposes. The library is the place for access to information in all formats. It takes the slogan providing access to everyone seriously.

The Development during the last 20 years – a short overview

The German examples mentioned above touch a known problem. Different from the Anglo-Saxon countries as Great Britain, United States and Canada the information service for smaller and medium enterprises was not a feature of German information provision. Most of the professionals did regard this service not as their duty. Due to the traditional attitude of libraries as being engaged more in the education and the field of humanistic sciences as in the information field added to neglecting this service and this clientele¹⁵, although German British Co-operation during the eighties wanted to bridge this gap.¹⁶ Although it was attempted to carry these ideas to the countries of Middle and Eastern Europe it did not really prevail. I presume this has very much to do with the past economical and even more so with the political structure, since democracies are more directed to the well being of the people and therefore economical success is a most important feature. These structures are of long duration. Some libraries however jumped at this idea and were successful in introducing first steps in the so-called market economy¹⁷, in this first place public libraries¹⁸ Years ago TFPL¹⁹, London stopped to organise the annual European Business Information Conferences which also had the countries in East and Middle Europe in view²⁰. But TFPL is planning to continue with this tradition in the next year²¹ which would be very welcome since it serves as an overview not only about trends in information services but also in changes in the economic field.

Conclusion

Why did I choose this certain clientele to point out some of the difficulties involved in the use of the slogan of providing access to information of everyone. It is a difficult motto for contemporary professional work since providing access will not mean to select, to distribute and to make available information material in different formats. Information needs differ widely and the difference will grow constantly. More information providers are entering the place and catering to those who are in need for information, for examples the women whom I have used as an example because they can be gained as customers. The field is becoming more competitive. Insurance companies, lawyers, institutions consulting agencies they will all cater for easing access to information and serving the whole range of necessary information provision, either for a certain prize or for winning customers for their non information services. Although I do not doubt that they will provide good services but I rather doubt, if they really provide access to information in the whole range and impartial ones. There are

today big possibility of libraries, but they must catch them and this will oblige change. This demands change in information provision and new strategies. As you all know economics and the economic development of a country has reached a high priority in the political scene. Libraries should get involved in information services and that means also going out the regular and leave the traditional walls of a library and meet the people at their working place.²² On places where they are and where they are looking for information and communication.

To serve the motto of this symposium which is the mission of all information work in libraries we have the change our strategies and our ways of procedure. Allow me to conclude with my personal opinion: we have in the first place to change the structure of staff management: we need new posts, we need diversity management, we need development officers for participating in international and European projects and above all we need information officers of high calibre motivated and of high professional knowledge.

Notes

- ¹ See the contribution of Ulrich, P. S.: The library as a public place. He describes the numerous barriers which librarians and libraries erect to prevent access of information, reaching from catalogue rules to discouraging personal interactions between knowledgeable staff and users, generally by making the use of the library as difficult as possible, in: *Die Bibliothek als Öffentlicher Ort und Öffentlicher Raum = The Library as a Public Place and Public Space*. Ed. by P. S. Ulrich, Berlin 2007, pp. 167-181, English and German.
- ² If fees are rising libraries are competing with book stores and information providers, e.g. when e.g. a book which can be purchased via Amazon.com or Jokers and others for a reasonable or even better price, than the cost involved in an interlibrary loan transaction. Therefore libraries in USA have installed a publishing on demand system to replace expensive loan service.
- ³ *Medienkompetenz = Information Literacy*. Wie lehrt und lernt man Medienkompetenz / How to learn and to teach Information Literacy ? Ed. by E. Simon. Berlin 2003, 98 p.
- ⁴ Menxel, F. van: *Die Versorgung der Blinden und hochgradig Sehbehinderter mit Literatur und gedruckter Information in Deutschland*: ein Situationsbericht und eine problematische Zukunftsvision. September 2007, publishing in progress.
- ⁵ Interkulturelle Bibliotheksarbeit. Konzepte, Erfahrungen. Perspektiven. Internationale Fachtagungen am 25. April 2007 im Weiterbildungszentrum der Freien Universität Berlin in Zusammenarbeit mit der Expertengruppe Interkulturelle Bibliotheksarbeit des Deutschen Bibliotheksverbandes, see <http://www.west-ost-informationstransfer.de>; Kaiser, W.: *Vielfalt an Bibliotheken: Migranten und sozial Benachteiligte als Kunden und Teilhaber von Informationsdiensten (Diversity Management)*; Printing in progress; Kaden, B. & Kindling, M.: *Zugang für Alle*, Berlin 2007. 273 p.
- ⁶ One of the most important piece of research to the problem is done by Sauermann, K.: *Impulse aus dem Ausland für die multikulturelle Bibliotheksarbeit in der BRD. Darstellung und Erprobung ausgewählter Konzepte*. Diplomarbeit Stuttgart 2005; not yet published.
- ⁷ Small enterprises up to 10 employees were permitted to work on a private base in Slovenia.
- ⁸ During discussion with Mr. Ivan Kanic Director of the Economic Library Univerza v Ljubljani Ekomomska Fakulteta (CEK).
- ⁹ In 2005 a conference to this topic was organised at Slubice (near Frankfurt/Oder, Germany). The proceedings of this conference were just published: *Informations-*

- bedürfnisse in der Deutsch Polnischen Zusammenarbeit: Wirtschaft – Recht – Bildung – Kultur*. Berlin 2007. 340 p. Polish and German.
- ¹⁰ Die Zukunft ist weiblich, in: kultur.macht.europa, <http://www.kultur-macht-europa.eu/47-.html>?
- ¹¹ Address: FEM Rue Jacques de Lalaing 4, B 1040 Brüssel, <http://www.fem-online.eu>.
- ¹² <http://www.marie-luise-doett.de>.
- ¹³ McDonough, K.: Die New York Public Library/Science Industry and Business Library (SIBL) : die Bibliothek für Wissenschaft, Industrie und Ökonomie, in: *Informationsbedürfnisse in der Deutsch Polnischen Zusammenarbeit: Wirtschaft – Recht – Bildung – Kultur*. Berlin 2007, pp. 88-101 (German), pp. 252- 266 (Polish)
- ¹⁴ He had been also an advisor to Romania and we had a long chat about our experiences in this country.
- ¹⁵ Economical information and research was often neglected by general libraries and restricted to special or technical libraries. If you look at the development of economical information exemplified at the life span of 70 years of the periodical *Ekonomiski Pregled* you may notice a comparable struggle in Croatia, see: Kunstek, D.: Wirtschaftliche Informationen in Koratien : 70 Jahre *Ekonomski Pregled*, Vortrag gehalten während der ABDOS Konferenz in Wien, 2007, Publishing in progress.
- ¹⁶ *Library Services to Industry = Informationen für Handel und Industrie* : proceedings of an Anglo German Conference, Cologne/Köln 13-16 April 1988. London 1988, 148 p. – Informationsdienste für Handel und Industrie. workshop Hatfield 1989, 272 p.; and the *Economics of Library and Information services* : an Anglo German Perspective, London 1991, VII, 317 p.
- ¹⁷ I will never forget a visit to a Chinese public library in 1994, where an exhibition in the library was introducing into branding by showing the different outfits and covers of the same product. The exhibition was very much visited.
- ¹⁸ Simon, E.: Biblioteki publiczne w Niemczech- ich pozycja i rola- usługi i zalozenia na przyszlosc, in *Polksi Zwiasek Bibliotek* (2001) 99-107.
- ¹⁹ <http://www.tfpl.com>.
- ²⁰ In 1995 TFPL organised its 5th international conference on European business information at Budapest. During a session dedicated to discussions with Hungarian colleagues it was even at this time obvious that a great deal of international and European funding were used for the public sector, probably for securing employment. See proceedings of this conference published by TFPL London 1995, 210 p.
- ²¹ EBIC, The European international business conference is planned to take place at Berlin, October1-3, 2008
- ²² Wilson, M. & Tehrani, F.: Cybespace and Marketplace : Library Message beyond the Border/..., in: *Die Bibliothek als Öffentlicher Ort = The Library as a Public Place and Public Space*. Berlin 2007, pp. 25-47/117-137, German and English.