

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE LIBRARIES SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT ON LIBRARIES POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

Paul Kaegbein, Wao Wang

Research in the field of library science is characterized today by the fact that it has to do with big and complex entities. This situation can be found also in many other areas in which one has to deal with human organizations. Solving those problems is facilitated by the theory of systems introduced into many disciplines and looking at social phenomena as systems.

The concept of systems theory as an instrumental research method analyzes the topics investigated under aspects of their inner structure and of their relations to their environment. The method aims to reconstruct the topic as a system. If one states: "Something is a system", this means only that it will be analyzed as a system within its environment according to a certain method. The sociological discipline has developed various methods to deal with system theory from which the functional-structural concept developed by Luhmann can be treated as the most apt one for investigating libraries as social systems.

All social systems can be analyzed only in view of society which is an expression for the totality of social connections, processes, communications and so on. Our society is characterized through a great number of complex and goal-oriented social systems which have been developed through differentiations within society. We can distinguish between segmental and functional differentiations. The segmental differentiation exists where social systems with same functions are separated. The functions differentiation is characterized by a situation in which separated social systems are directed towards the fulfillment of specific tasks. In this context, segmental differentiations played a major role in primitive societies whereas the functional dif-

differentiations have a key position in modern society due to the concept of dividing of labor. Thus, libraries as social systems are the product of the functional differentiations of society.

An analysis of libraries under aspects of system theory has to start regarding the fact of the differentiation between system and environment. Libraries can not be looked at as closed systems with only internal structures but only in relation to their respective environments. They do not exist in a social, ideologic, economic or cultural vacuum but always as subsystems within a system as a whole. "For a given system, the environment is the set of all objects, a change in whose attributes affects the system and also those objects whose attributes are changed by the behaviour of the system."(1)

In principle, one can define environment as the whole universum of a system. But in reality only a fixed number of relevant factors of the environment are identifiable. Namely those which have a significant impact on the system or which are influenced significantly by the system. Thus, we understand the library's environment as all those phenomena outside the librarian's area of work which are relevant for the library, insofar as they influence the whole library's area or some part of it as well as they become influenced by activities of the library.

The theoretical basis of this concept, to distinguish the library from its environment, is taken out of the organization analysis oriented towards system theory. Luhmann says: "Environment is a system-relevant topic. Each system takes only itself out of its environment. Therefore is the environment different for each system." (2) If one argues that a comprehensive system exists around the library it is evident that the library always is a subsystem within its environment. The unity of the library's environment is more complex than the library system as such. Therefore the forming or the differentiation of a system always is the result of the reduction of the environment's complexity. There is a fundamental argument in system theory that a system always has to be distinguishable very clearly from its environment by fixing its borders and its inner structure.

Thus, library environment is to be narrowed regarding only such factors which are outside of the library. The borders of a social system can be fixed by the intentions of social interactions. This means that

the borderlines of social systems are not physical ones. (3) As far as libraries are concerned, their borderlines can not be defined by the walls of the library or by the fence of the place in which a library is situated. Libraries as social systems are symbolic identifiable systems. This means that their borders have to be identified according to their activities, intentions, aims and so on.

To understand this, the model of the cybernetic scheme of regulated circles may help. In this scheme the activity of a system and the influence of its environment is interpreted as a kind of intervention mechanism. Between system and environment take place input-output processes which are connected in such a way that the system receives information about the environment which enables it, if necessary, to modify its services. Libraries as differentiated social systems keep, in spite of their differentiation, functional interdependence to other social systems. They depend on elements outside of themselves in order to exist and to function because they are not in a situation to get out of themselves everything which they need to fulfill their tasks. Libraries do not need from outside only means, preconditions and accepted ways to reach their goals; also their tasks and functions are socially bound. On the other side, libraries are directed to outside with their services offered to the systems of their environment. Therefore, they are in a continuous exchange relationship with their social environment. In this sense libraries as social systems are open systems. That means that they are following the changing environment and that they also change their structures without dissolving themselves or losing their identity. "The consequence of the systems philosophical approach is that libraries should never be considered as ends in themselves, but as open systems in constant interrelations with their environments. The objectives of the library are the objectives of the community it serves, which is itself part of a still larger community, whether it be a town, a professional body, an industrial firm; all of these are integral parts of their national and international systems." (4)

The present society can exist only through its differentiation into a lot of heterogeneous organizations which compose all together a unity. They are connected to each other in a manifold way. The or-

ganized society is not thinkable without such interorganizational relations on various levels. Libraries are developed as many other social systems through processes of functional differentiation within the society. They and also many other organizations are dependent on each other as far as goods, services, information and decisions are concerned due to the fact of labor differentiation. (5) As far as the analysis of those relations is concerned one can introduce here the concept of the "organization set". The library is the focal organization in this set and the other organizations within it are those which expect certain activities from it. These are concretized as input relations, output relations, regulated connections, cooperative connections and so on.

Libraries always belong to a greater community, be it a city, a research institution, an economic or industrial enterprise or a country. All libraries are at the end integral parts of a national and international library system. Thus, one can regard libraries from two aspects as Foskett did. (6) On the one hand, a library is, like other social organizations, an entity which is composed out of the relations of its various parts and activities to each other. On the other hand, the library as a system is inbound into reciprocal relationships to other systems within a whole system. The successful functioning of a library is dependent on the correct management of these interactions between the various relations. Therefore the library should create, through selective activity, an environment and maximize its own inner potential for this environment which means that the library has to provide it with the best services.

These services belong almost exclusively to the communication sector of our daily life. Social communication is a fundamental process because it enables information. "Information is data which reduce uncertainty." (7) They are social phenomena and have decisive importance for society because people can only put his or her behaviour in connection with the social context through the reduction of uncertainty. Information as reduction of uncertainty is dependent from communication in the sense of transfer of data, facts, developments or meanings from their author, the communicator, to the recipient. In modern society, the processes of communication are more

and more organized, especially at the social level. An information system can be interpreted as a system which serves for organizing communication processes in such a way that a certain circle of recipients can be informed in an optimal way. (8) Libraries as specific information systems are providing interactions between people by means of literature in its widest sense. (9)

In our modern society which is characterized through a great number of people and complex social relations, the communication has to surpass a number of difficulties in order to transfer information. The problem lies especially in the increasing amount of information. Therefore it is necessary to include into an indirect communication process a lot of transfer-oriented institutions to which also libraries belong. To explain it with a model: A circle of authors of publications is confronted with a circle of users in between which exist libraries and other information systems. "To make publications available is of course the normal business of publishers and booksellers the world over. [But:] Libraries have always complemented and supported the activities of the book trade by making their publications more widely available and by supplying items that are no longer commercially obtainable." (10) Thus, the totality of libraries as a channel system is a necessary part of social communication. But the library is in the information circle not in the first case recipient but mainly a transmitter of information to its users. These are the active participants in the communication process. "Every recipient of information will judge it in terms of an existing background of knowledge which may or may not be adequate to contain new data." (11) The library user as a recipient of information becomes a communicator when distributing again through new publications the information received and used. Thus a lot of communication chains and nets surrounding a library are formed. (12) By regulating the "information flood", libraries as information systems enable, besides many other institutions, the social communication. In contrary to other information systems, they have specific characteristics which are immanent to their system and which can be explained as follows:

1. Libraries participate in the communication process first of all with literature in the widest sense including besides the print media,

also certain new media like disks, films, CD-ROM and so on. Insofar, they are distinguished from other information systems as, for instance, museums, archives, radio and television.

2. Libraries differ from many other informational institutions especially through their conservation function. They "are the prime source of knowledge from which decisions can be reached which develop our society. Libraries are our corporate social mind." (13)

3. The combination of individually existing print media with the conservation function of the libraries enables them to fill the information deficit which other systems of communication have in totality or in parts. All systems which are depending from the time at which they transmit their information can not reproduce it again at any time wanted by a recipient. Thus, library materials can reach the user also in form of time shifting.

4. In contrary to other mass media, libraries generally do not send their information directly to private recipients in their homes. On the other hand, they offer information from all human areas of knowledge but often only to a small number of interested recipients. The understanding of contents of print media requires often a higher ability by the recipient than when consuming information transmitted by radio and television.

5. The system of mass media do not have only an informational character but also influences the recipient. Libraries which have to select information out of the vast offer of publications form nevertheless as a whole worldwide community a comprehensive reservoir of literature and information to which everybody should have unrestricted access.

6. Libraries, in connection and cooperation with subject information systems like databases provide also structured information about texts conserved in their collections. The preparation of bibliographies, current awareness services, SDI services and so on has become one of the very important activities of libraries in the information field. (14)

Out of the various systems which constitute the macroenvironment (15) of library the following shall be presented more in detail: The educational system, the science and research system, the eco-

conomic system and the political-administrative system. Among them, a very important part is played by the educational system. "Education is a process of communication. The printed book is a medium for the communication of thoughts [and] ideas..." (16) Also the educational system is a functionally separated part of the social system which is planned and organized especially according to the needs of society. During the long process of development of educational institutions, their patrons added to them also libraries in order to facilitate teaching. Earlier examples can be seen in the libraries of the schools in medieval monasteries or in those of the university faculties. At the time being, a very differentiated system of educational institutions exists to which the respective libraries have to contribute: the elementary education, primary and secondary schools, universities and other professionally-oriented institutions and the broad area of continuing education. According to the different levels of the education process, libraries have to follow various kinds of information. But a very important aspect is that they should serve teachers and pupils or students likewise and provide suitable means of information to them. This includes research materials in universities where research is an important base for lecturing as well as practice-oriented materials in other educational institutions.

Library policy in this area is not only influenced by the rules of education set forth by the patrons or the teachers, for instance regarding certain textbooks and other informational materials, but also by the varying number of students in different disciplines. Libraries have to be aware that a good result in all educational means is dependent to a great extent on the availability of books to the students at the time when they need information contained in them. It is therefore the task of the librarian to inform the library's patrons if the financial means they provide for the library become inadequate to the needs of the users. Future librarians should be trained how to convince their patrons best for the benefit of their library. But it is also part of the library policy to manage the deficit of financial means through organizational activities – and these are not restricted to libraries belonging to educational institutions but are significant for librarian's work in general.

The science and research system as another sector of the library's environment is, according to Kuhn, characterized by a development of new insights and research results which takes place not continuously. Kuhn looks upon the research development as an irregular process resulting from so-called research revolutions. He distinguishes periods of normal research from those of crisis and revolution. The periods first mentioned are those in which research is relying on one or more scientific results which are considered by the scientific community for a certain time as the basis for its future work. (14) Those paradigmata, in combination with the developed means of communication, professional journals and professional federations, enabled step by step what we call today professional communication. In this connection, Kuhn's theory of paradigmata offers another perspective also for libraries. He regards the function of standard publications in the various disciplines as well as of textbooks under the aspect of transferring paradigmata to the next generation of scientific communities in which libraries have to play an important role. But also their function of conserving publications which contain new paradigmata enables the progress of research because it often takes a longer time before the scientific community becomes aware of them and acknowledges research results as new paradigmata. Such a change of paradigmata is possible only after a new theory which Kuhn calls an anomaly to the already acknowledged paradigmata has been considered to be an anomaly by comparing it with the standards so far. The libraries with their enormous reservoir of publications facilitate this process at the end of which new research results are acknowledged. Consequently a part of the earlier published findings are out of date and the libraries have to acquire continuously new research literature in order to keep pace with the development of knowledge. Moreover, this revolution in the research process is accompanied by more precision and specialization in the respective discipline which influence again the activities of libraries not only in acquisition but also in classification of this literature and in the field of secondary publications, bibliographies, abstract journals and others. The exchange of information with research nature has become one of the fundamental activities of scientists in which libraries as information systems play a significant role. Under this aspect it is un-

derstandable that the scientific community is always requesting the adaptation of library services to its needs. This includes also modern methods of information distribution via computer-aided information networks based on the international data bases.

The economic system is that part of society which is specialized in the production and distribution of goods and services. Libraries are included in this system as far as they are dependent not only from delivery of items of information, books, periodicals and technical equipment. Also the structure of economy at the social level in general is decisive for the development of libraries which are financed through public means. In this connection, the government is in the role of a gate which gets by taxes the resources needed and distributes them to the various institutions for which it is regarded to be patron. The economic system is responsible for paying taxes and contributes in this way indirectly to the libraries which are financed directly by the political system. Therefore the existence and development of libraries can not be seen separately from the general economic conditions of a country. There are known a lot of cases in which libraries suffer under the difficult economic situation of society and the bad financial structure of the government.

On the other side, one can not neglect that libraries are an important factor which serves, as we have seen, education as well as scientific research which again are fundamental factors for the economic development of a country. Therefore the services of libraries in the areas mentioned have also economic relevance. They contribute to the raising of standard for professional jobs on various levels and play a considerable role in the information transfer between scientific research and industrial production. Professional information has already been regarded as the number one of raw materials in the future. (18) It consists, on the one hand, of technological information, on the other hand, of economic information which have to be matched in the economic process to ensure best results. This is a field in which a lot of initiatives for libraries can be found, especially for the big area of special libraries connected to specific disciplines and belonging to various kinds of patrons.

Libraries are not only a product of the general social process but also an active factor in it. In connection to the political-administrative

system they have two specific political functions: to contribute to the development of political consciousness of the people and to fulfill, at least in part, certain task for the governmental institutions. If one accepts that the provision of society with information is, at the end, a task of socio-political nature, so follows from this the duty for the political-administrative system to ensure the preconditions for the libraries to fulfill these tasks. As far as their existence as such is concerned, libraries are again dependent on the political-administrative system. They are objects of political decisions and development but, to a certain extent, can also influence them.

The reasons for this complex situation lie in the circumstance that libraries offer services for fulfillment of collective information needs. This task belongs in the society of today to the activities of administration as an integral part of the government or the political-administrative system. There is no alternative to this because institutions belonging to the private sector are not in the situation to offer these services without financial losses. Moreover, other important tasks of libraries, for instance conservation of national literature, has to be done continuously and can not be transferred to private enterprises.

Thus, the political-administrative system has responsibility for libraries at two levels: at the political level to ensure the financial and material existence of libraries and to provide them with the juridical framework for their services by acquiring political consensus; at the administrative level to transfer the political decisions into routine work. This structure results in the fact that libraries themselves can take decisions in library policy only within the frame given by the political-administrative system. Modern system theory underlines that social systems are oriented not only to their aims and goals but also to their continuity. This is also the case for libraries which have to solve the problem of fulfillment of their services as well as that of conservation of their collections. From this raises the question of strategies to influence the political-administrative system for the benefit of libraries.

One can assume that this system belonging to the environment of libraries is as such not in the situation to handle such a complex system as libraries constitute. Therefore the existence of library bodies

with consultative status at governmental entities and of library associations which can articulate the needs of libraries (and of librarians of course) can be regarded as very helpful. This is especially important under the aspect that libraries can contribute to the political process in a country. Political decisions always are decisions of will and value and should therefore rely on comprehensive informations. With the emerging complexity of contemporary society and so also the governmental tasks, the necessity grows for all political and administrative levels to fulfill them only on the base of analyses of the given situation what again is only possible via the respective information. Here lies an important responsibility especially for administrative, governmental and parliamentary libraries; but also individual experts in the various fields of social life should be in the situation to advice decision makers on the basis of their own experience which again depends also on information provided at least by libraries.

All these aspects show that time is over in which libraries had only to collect materials and to wait for users coming. If the slogan of the "information society" is understood correctly, this society has to become an "informed society" in which libraries have to play an important but, first of all, an active role in collecting, managing and providing information to everybody who is in need of.

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SOCIALINĖS APLINKOS ĮTAKA BIBLIOTEKŲ POLITIKAI IR VALDYMUI

Re z i u m ė

Sistemų teorijos taikymas bibliotekininkystėje leidžia analizuoti biblioteką kaip atvirą sistemą. Ji suprantama kaip bendros socialinės sistemos elementas. Pirmojoje dalyje rodoma, kad bibliotekų kaip organizuotų informacijos sistemų, tenkinančių įvairių socialinių grupių informacinius poreikius, struktūra keičiasi priklausomai nuo tos aplinkos pokyčių. Antrojoje dalyje vertinama įvairių bibliotekos aplinkos elementų įtaka. Tai švietimo sistema, mokslo ir tyrimų sistema, politinė ir administracinė sistema. Straipsnyje parodyta kaip biblioteka turi organizuoti ir keisti savo veiklą bei valdymo principus, kokios problemos gali atsirasti ryšium su skirtingais socialinio proceso prioritetais. Autoriai analizuoja bibliotekų aplinkos organizavimo metodus ir modelius, duoda pavyzdžių iš įvairių bibliotekos veiklos sferų.