Open Access to Cultural Heritage in Latin America

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Abstract:

Access to information and knowledge in Latin America has been marked by the information culture existing in the region. Libraries were initially considered as places catering exclusively to intellectuals. Due to the lack of school libraries, public libraries became increasingly school oriented, functioning solely as repositories of information/knowledge (books), and providing a single service (reading). Information as a concept and a science emerged in the seventies with the onset of the first graduate study programs, and the term information science was no longer considered from only a traditional librarianship perspective. Interaction between libraries and communities was difficult, and the great number of illiterates and the lack of a general readership made the most widely circulating information oral, not bibliographic. Oral information generates misinformation, and allows information to be manipulated. Several generations have been deprived of the opportunity of producing information, since the prevailing process mostly favored dependence on information, with impact indicators showing very few critical readers in the region, few researchers, corroborated by the low number of patents produced in the region. Another problem is librarian education, which favor the paradigm of preserving collections rather than the paradigm of dissemination and the development of general readership. In general terms, comprehensive documentary heritage of Latin American countries may be found more at Library of Congress in Washington than in the national libraries. The technological revolution presents a new opportunity for the preservation of memory, the development of general readership, and for the consolidation and an information policy. However, libraries must undergo a process of innovation in order to create the appropriate conditions to meet users needs, through methodologies of information literacy, information mediation, and informational competence. Libraries must be regarded by the community as centers of excellence of digital inclusion that foster social inclusion. The inclusion process of the libraries in the region remains precarious, providing only educational literacy, with serious text interpretation problems being widespread. It is in this type of inclusion

process that cognitive exclusion develops, with the community lacking the intellectual capital needed to accompany developments in information and knowledge. There is an imposing need to no longer consider research as the copying dictionary and encyclopedia knowledge, and to promote the true inclusion of underprivileged communities to promote access and understanding in the information and knowledge society.
Keywords*: Cultural Heritage, Open Access, Latin America, Library, Information Society.*

INTRODUCTION

Access to information and knowledge in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean has been part of the rise, growth and fall of governments in the region. Understanding the history of a country or group of countries should include the examination of the information and knowledge access models that have been adopted by their governors. The sharing of power is intrinsically related to the sharing of information and knowledge.

Since the Spanish and Portuguese colonial period, the culture of information has undergone an unequal consolidation process, with the scientific production of the region always subject to the approval of major research centers in Europe and North America. It was only in the last decade of the 20th century that new information publication and dissemination standards begin to appear, ushering in an emblematic information and knowledge access model in Latin American countries.

This was a period in which the first regional indexing databases, libraries, and digital repositories arose, and open technology began to be used as a way of breaking away from the prevailing validation model of scientific knowledge produced in the region. The Open Access Movement, that promoted the adoption of new open source information technologies, helped consolidate indicators such as Latindex Redalyc, the SciELO database, and the use of tools such as DSpace and the Open Journal Systems towards the dissemination and improvement of Latin American scientific publications.

Technological growth brings social and economic benefits, especially in the development of countries. Universal open access to information in general, and to

cultural production in particular, allows the pursuit and implementation of strategies that enable those countries to tackle some of their current social problems.

The open access initiative in Latin America, its implications, and the resulting paradigmatic change in the availability of and access to information are all seen as part of a single, cumulative process. This initiative consists of technology transfer, cooperation, and access to knowledge which, until very recently, had been limited to very few communities. The contextualizing of the technological infra-structure stresses the wide scope of these services and their impact on the entire region.

LIBRARIES AND THE ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Would it be feasible for all libraries established in Latin American countries to count on technology that provides equal access to Internet-accessible cultural heritage information resources? If so, at what cost? What would be the resulting personal and societal benefits from that service? Specifically, could said technology help create more political engagement, as well as enlighten democracy in order to aid the development of new information resources in Latin America? The implementation of technology to provide universal access to Internet-based cultural information resources requires public debates concerning the feasibility, desirability, and implications of such services.

In Latin America, due to the lack of school libraries, public libraries became increasingly school oriented, functioning solely as repositories of information/knowledge (books), and providing a single service (reading). For the last two centuries this was the prevailing model in the region's major cities. Currently, there is the urgent need to promote an innovation process to adequately meet the needs of users, through information literacy, information mediation, and informational competence methodologies.

Libraries must be regarded by the community as centers of excellence of digital inclusion that foster social inclusion. The inclusion process of libraries in the region remains precarious, providing only educational literacy, with serious text interpretation problems being widespread. It is through this type of inclusion process

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that cognitive exclusion develops, with the community lacking the intellectual capital needed to accompany developments in information and knowledge.

Libraries struggle with the high costs of materials and cuts in their budgets. But this reality is changing as a result of the electronic information that is now available thanks to the new free access information resources.

Open access archives or repositories can be accessed free of charge and without any type of restriction. Open archives or repositories employ open technology and can be accessed through a variety of service providers, both within and outside a given country.

The open access movement is creating possibilities of providing equal access to knowledge to all countries, regardless of economic status. A larger digital divide based on economic means may be created. The ability for anyone to provide access, free of charge, to much of the open access information available online seems an impossible task. There are hundreds of organizations and libraries creating large comprehensive digital collections and making them available via the Web.

The many people and organizations that are pursuing this goal are aware of the number of issues involved, as well as the emerging potential from developing countries to develop and to promote greater information exchange among all countries. To support these efforts, however, ongoing initiatives and funding are needed to find ways of creating the infrastructure needed to support open access to information. This will take a joint commitment by governments, education and research institutions, as well as private organizations to provide funding and to increase awareness regarding the open access movement and open access resources.

Among the pressing issues that need to be addressed are the way new library policies are established, the social implications of providing equal access to information, and choices institutions face regarding technical procedures involved in implementing and supporting their infrastructures. Democratic access to information generates more egalitarian, constructive, and meaningful dialog among individuals

and groups, one of the necessary conditions for ordinary people to engage fully in the political process. It also makes them attach lasting value to their cultural heritage, thus strengthening the very fabric of their society.

While the Internet and the novel types of communication and information technology have been providing the technological means to improve society, the fast pace in which new technology is introduced and employed has rendered more dynamic systems for scientific communication. Not only in terms of informal communication which adopts technological advances readily and homogeneously, which has been well documented, but also in the more formal means of communications which are more significantly affected by discipline and geographical differences.

Users of open archive repositories can exchange critical views openly and without document-size or time constraints. The problems concerning the distribution of formal channels are solved and access to information is made free. Because open archives are self-publishing in nature, they all require institutional endorsement. Users acknowledge the existence of the material that has been stored, assess it, and establish the connection between the piece of information they need and the one they wish to make available.

Although all the procedures outlined above are considered indispensable, several other factors are decisive for the success of the open access initiatives in Latin American countries.

In 2000, the Brazilian Information Society Project (SocInfo) urged the participation of all libraries to reduce the increasing gap that exists in the degree of accessibility to informational content (Takahashi, 2000). Implementation of such a policy is beginning to unfold and some strategies have been considered.

The goal of providing open access to information through Brazilian libraries has two main objectives: 1) to provide interconnectivity between distinct library systems, and 2) to provide widespread accessibility to individuals through local libraries. Connectivity among libraries appears to be taking place thanks to the creation of university digital library projects. Accessibility of individuals through library servers is

hampered by inadequate educational backgrounds and the lack of familiarity with network information services.

A characteristic of dependent countries is that they do not preserve the heritage literature they produce. As provided for by the UNESCO Charter on the preservation of the digital heritage of 2004, research groups and / or academics in universities, libraries, archives and museums have expanded the debate on digital heritage preservation, security and access policies.

OPEN ACCESS IN THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

The information society may be understood as one in which the information regime characterizes and conditions all the other economic, social and cultural regimes of communities and the State. In these societies, information policies not only consider that the excluded suffer from exclusion, but the socially included as well.

In addition to the digital divide debate, another issue currently being discussed is the division of economies according to their capacity to generate, assimilate and disseminate knowledge (Pinon, 2005).

An efficient preservation policy should be integrated with the community and involve education on all levels, raising the awareness of children, youth and adults regarding the need to preserve the cultural heritage that has been handed down to us by our ancestors since the first ages of humankind.

Preservation policy is a type of higher level action, which includes the development and implementation of plans, programs and projects to preserve collections. It has objectives, limits and guidelines aimed at obtaining these results. It defines global, systematic and continuous guidelines to be achieved, which are considered the lines of institutional work. It is associated with the open access policy adopted by the institution.

An example of a policy proposal for the preservation of heritage and free access is the IBICT Draft Law No. 1120 of 2007 that expresses the importance of building institutional repositories for the safeguarding of the intellectual production of Brazilian higher learning institutes. Article 1 of said law states that:

> "Public higher learning institutions, as well as public research centers, are required to build institutional repositories, in which the complete content of the published scientific and technical production of their students shall be deposited, with the respective graduation level, enrolled in undergraduate, specialization, master's, doctorate, post-doctoral or similar programs, as well as the scientific production of the undergraduate and graduate faculty, and all publicly financed technical-scientific research produced by its researchers and faculty, to be made freely accessible on the world wide web."

Proposals such as the above, aiming at preserving digital content, currently comprise the priorities of all institutions that have a heritage mission, and are part of the work plans of international cultural organizations such as UNESCO, and international professional associations such as ~~the~~ ICA and IFLA.

The best way to preserve cultural heritage is by promoting the respect and interest of the general public in ensuring the protection of culture testimony, thus allowing full exercise of citizenship. Heritage education is a process that leads people to understand the world in which they live, raising their self-esteem, and the subsequent valuing of their culture.

The right to memory is guaranteed when the community becomes aware of its fundamental role as guardian of its own assets, thereby preventing the degradation and destruction of the environment, and cultural heritage and objects, through preventive safeguarding action.

ACCESS TO CULTURAL HERITAGE

The establishment of a heritage necessarily involves a process of "patrimonialization" (Micoud, 2005) which considers that an asset be considered patrimony based on historical, social, cultural, ethical, economic or entitlement criteria, attributing a value representative of a given human group and their collective memory, whose safeguarding, even when symbolic, promotes the preservation and access for future generations.

The notion of patrimony was again the focus of attention after the 1972 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage. The aim was to ensure the safeguarding and preservation of humanity's tangible goods, fundamental for the maintenance of the historical development of humankind and its heritage.

As of said meeting, several movements began to gain momentum in favor of the preservation of human memory. Also, certain measures were taken towards heritage valuing, most of which related to investment in education, awareness raising, and the development of public policies aimed at promoting participation of society in the process.

But it was in 1989, during the 25th Session of the General Conference of UNESCO, that traditional and popular culture became a concern of the heritage aspect, as provided for by the text of the Recommendation on Safeguarding Traditional and Popular Culture. The notion of cultural heritage was highlighted in UNESCO's recommendations, and strengthened in the following decade. Safeguarding was considered indispensable, ushering in a new form of global heritage, or the development of human cultural production represented by a wide variety of formats and representations.

In 2003, UNESCO enacted the Charter on the Preservation of Digital Heritage, as part of its Memory of the World. It expressed the global concern with the preservation of the documents produced exclusively in electronic format, a new public good defined as "resources of human knowledge or expression created digitally or

converted from their original analog form". It is a heritage that exists in any language, any part of the world, and in any area of human knowledge.

The importance of digital heritage lies in the opportunities offered by access and shared knowledge, as well as the forms of preservation and generation of social issues, such as the digital inclusion of any social group. The possible universality of digital assets, from an access perspective, depends on the diffusion of a globalized culture and the technological inclusion of its informational mechanisms.

Also, for UNESCO, language constitutes an essential part of cultural heritage. In this regard, all policies that seek to build a digital heritage should rely on technologies to promote cultural and linguistic access, aiming to reduce social differences and ensure the dissemination of knowledge in a global manner.

This new proposal for access to cultural heritage has been discussed at international events and in official documents around the world. These include:

- The Budapest Initiative for Open Access, held in February 2002;
- The UNESCO Charter on the preservation of digital heritage of 2003;
- The Bethesda Statement on free access for editing, in June 2003;
- Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Hard Sciences, Life Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences, in October 2003;
- IFLA Statement on free access to scientific literature and research papers, in December 2003.

In general, the organizations involved in these policies aimed at safeguarding access to digital heritage agree on the common concern of allowing access to what is considered a common good of humanity. New access policies are being created and adopted to ensure the necessary resources for the development of digital heritage preservation strategies in each nation.

In summary, the technological revolution represents a new opportunity for the preservation of memory, for the development of a readership, and the consolidation of an information policy. The preservation of historical, artistic and cultural heritage is

necessary because this is the living testimony of the cultural heritage of past generations that plays an essential role in the present by being projected into the future, transmitting to future generations the references of a unique time and space that will never be re-lived, but re-visited, creating an awareness of the inter-communicability of history.

By understanding social, artistic and cultural memory we are able to perceive and control the process of evolution to which a people's knowledge and know-how is inevitably exposed. Preserving national heritage is a duty of the State and a right of the community that assumes the commitment of preserving the memory of national cultural facts and values.

The access to cultural heritage should be promoted by the governments of Latin American countries because their citizens have the right to information and knowledge, and through these they exercise their freedom of expression and choose the type of intellectual property declaration that best suits them.

LIBRARIANS AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

There was great difficulty in the interaction between the library and the community, due to the large number of illiterates and the lack of a readership that made word of mouth information, and not bibliographic information, that which circulated more widely.

Oral information generates misinformation, and allows information to be manipulated. Several generations have been deprived of the opportunity of producing information, since the prevailing process mostly favored dependence on information, with impact indicators showing very few critical readers in the region, few researchers, corroborated by the low number of patents produced in the region.

In *The language of the new media*, Manovich (2000, p. 217) emphasizes the link between information and new technology. "For better or for worse, access to information has become a key activity of the computing era." However, this does not

mean that there was no manipulation of information before the emergence of new media, but it is through it that access could be enhanced and improved.

Effective access to information is affected by the problem of librarian education, which favors the paradigm of preserving collections, rather than the paradigm of diffusion and readership building.

The preservation of cultural heritage is a mission that librarians, archivists and museum technicians share and, as is known, has been strongly emphasized in the 5th and 6th Framework Programmes of the European Union. The traditional goal of preserving paper materials has been exposed to this process that involves a wide range of different media, each with its own problems. As electronic or digital heritage gains importance, there is the risk of losing, on daily basis, significant amounts of documental material potentially relevant to our history.

CONCLUSION

The context of access to information in Latin America has always had a component of dependence. This has also affected the consolidation of information studies, as reflected by the academic structuring of the area, and by public citizen's rights policies in each country.

Although libraries in Latin America have assimilated their role as disseminators of information, the generation of information services was not initially aimed at attending the majority of the population. Just as the training of facilitators, such access was not based on social inclusion.

Cultural heritage can be studied as the product of material relations, which assumes different definitions depending on the respective historical context. Likewise, access to cultural heritage has been determined by the motivations the international community has expressed regarding its concerns with cultural heritage in the countries of the region.

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