

Educational Partnerships That Can Drive the Activation of Renewable Knowledge Process, Using the Public Libraries Infrastructure

Ioana Cornelia Cristina Crihană, The National Association of Public Librarians and Libraries in Romania, Romania

The Paris Conference on Education 2023
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The library environment in Romania is very fragmented, having neither the habit nor the culture of cooperation and partnerships. Driven by divergent interests, the library environment rarely interacts with other stakeholders for common goals, does not engage outside the narrow goals of micro-groups and does not actively participate in the development of the knowledge society. No matter how successful they are individually, libraries do not have enough vision and they lack the overall picture of how they can contribute to a better use of knowledge and to build a more efficient and impactful information literacy structure. The cultivation of information skills is one of the libraries major objectives, while representing the guarantee of sustainable and resilient efforts in terms of personal and professional development of individuals. Objectives: Our goal is to stimulate libraries as individual entities, but also the various consortia of public-private entities in the culture field to get involved as partnership brokers in information literacy to generate resilience skills that contribute to activating latent knowledge. Considered as actionable assets, renewable knowledge acts like a common base of intellectual acquisitions that are in the interest of heterogeneous library users' communities. This article aims to bring public libraries to the forefront as partners for renewable knowledge. After analyzing the partnership broker concept and the renewable knowledge significance, we will clarify how libraries can be encouraged to engage in cultivating educational partnerships with various public or private entities to contribute to activating renewable knowledge in libraries.

Keywords: Renewable Knowledge, Partnership Brokering, Library Ecosystems, Socio-Technical Theory, Qualitative Transformation of Communities

iafor

The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

This paper presents a new perspective on the civilizing function of libraries in partnership brokering (Crihană, 2014), arguing for an exploratory study to transform librarians into engaged and responsible curators of knowledge assets. Taking into account the socio-intellectual and professional profile of librarians, they are able to transform themselves into curators of knowledge and facilitators of proactive and responsible partnerships, libraries can effectively contribute to the sustainable development and education of communities.

According to the global trends and societal demands driven by technology, libraries have evolved into spaces of collective and shared knowledge, responding to the information and continuous development needs of users while facilitating the qualitative transformation of communities. In response to evolving global trends and the specific demands of a technology-based society, libraries have long been recognized as essential institutions in promoting the dissemination of knowledge and societal development. Starting from this premise, this article analyzes the role of libraries in partnership brokerage activities, underlining the essential importance of renewable knowledge in increasing the impact of libraries in the process of reconfiguration and valorization of pre-existing elements of knowledge, with the support of technology.

Literature review has demonstrated that libraries have undergone a significant transformation, expanding their role beyond traditional information repositories. In contemporary society, libraries are recognized as hubs of collective knowledge, addressing diverse user needs while actively contributing to the qualitative progress of communities. This shift in perception underscores the importance of fostering collaborative partnerships to maximize the potential of libraries as key agents of change.

Libraries have traditionally been seen as promoters of education, culture and the dissemination of knowledge. However, with the advancement of technology and its empowerment with the digital age, libraries have transcended their conventional roles and become dynamic centers of learning and continuous development. By embracing the civilizing function, libraries aim more than ever to empower individuals, promote a culture of sustainability and drive positive societal transformations.

Partnerships in Library Ecosystems

Libraries incorporate complex bases of knowledge, skills, access to the heterogeneous resources, etc. and allow users to explore new areas of knowledge in a collaborative, interaction-based manner. As a defining added value, libraries offer users the opportunity to practice and validate their own creative ideas, becoming part of the process of co-creating value.

Recognizing the ever-growing complexity of societal challenges, libraries are increasingly embracing the power of partnerships. Collaborative endeavors with various stakeholders, including governmental bodies, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and community groups, enable libraries to broaden their reach and impact. These partnerships provide valuable resources, expertise, and collaboration networks that enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of library initiatives.

To fully leverage the potential of partnerships, librarians play a critical role as sustainable partnership brokers. Librarians must adopt an engaged and responsible approach in curating knowledge assets, ensuring continuous renewal, and fostering collaboration with diverse stakeholders. Equipped with the necessary skills and expertise, librarians act as facilitators, connecting different actors, and orchestrating joint initiatives for the benefit of sustainable and educated communities.

The introduction into the collective mind of the concept of Partnership Broker and the multiple roles it plays, depending on the stage a partnership goes through, is intended to lead to the creation of a coalition of partners for community cohesion, which will help both libraries, NGOs and business entities active at the community level to realize their role as a socio-economic catalyst because they will become centers of influence, learning and development of public-private partnerships.

This paper aims to demonstrate, based on the case study of the project **SHIFT: Metamorphosis of cultural Heritage Into augmented hypermedia assets For enhanced accessibility and inclusion** - a European research and innovation initiative funded under the Horizon 2021-2027 program that aims to bring the values of cultural heritage closer to the public - that supporting multifunctional partnerships is essential for the sustainable development of the ecosystem of library services and implicitly of the community through partnerships of knowledge, to support users of library services to evolve by activating renewable knowledge resources.

Renewable Knowledge (RK) defines knowledge assets as a renewable resource (Baarbé, et al., Myronenko, 2016); (Baarbé & de Beer, 2017). A renewable resource is that type of resource that, although it supports the influence of environmental interactions, can be used, recombined and reused with new meanings and in different applying manners. Therefore, as a renewable collective asset. (Brown and Duguid, 1998), knowledge has a hierarchical structure consisting of: data, information, knowledge and wisdom. (Matei and Matei, 2011).

This paper initiates a preliminary analysis on the dynamics of creating and storing Renewable Knowledge in libraries. The main focus is on understanding, recombining, reinterpreting and operationalizing private Renewable Knowledge as a universal public good that generates transformative creativity, co-creation and transformative learning. The current research represents a first attempt to probe the way in which basic knowledge becomes Renewable Knowledge and the manner in which public libraries can play an essential role in this process.

SHIFT – A Case Study for Actioning RK in Libraries

The main defining factor for Renewable Knowledge is the reusable nature of knowledge in general which, by reshaping or putting in a new learning paradigm, generates new cognitive content, enriched both as information and as interpretation. This paper intends to refine the research by developing a set of particular tools for defining and putting into practice the concept of Renewable Knowledge in the current work of cultural operators, using SHIFT project as a relevant case study on the dynamics of Renewable Knowledge in libraries.

Renewable Knowledge is generally perceived as the sum of all collections, information, and knowledge developed and managed by libraries and ensuring easy community access to them, either face to face or through technology and communication channels, based on technology. In the SHIFT project case, libraries are invited to contribute their own knowledge

resources (photo collections, books, short movies, digital stories, art objects, etc.) to train AI algorithms for the optimization of these cultural resources in terms of content appealing, accessibility, inclusion and monetary opportunities.

A New Paradigm for Supporting Renewable Knowledge

According to the current trends and the specific requirements of society based on technology, libraries today are spaces designed to meet the information and continuous development needs of users and contribute to the qualitative transformation of society. As alternative spaces for lifelong learning, libraries provide an organized framework for study and experimentation for quality personal and professional training, critically contributing to increasing the quality of life.

The unprecedented expansion of web-based knowledge and the the exponential expansion of data volumes, combined with solid techniques of investigation and statistical analysis of data, have led to a huge potential for change in all aspects of life, leading to appearance of new categories of library services. Amid of the successive financial crises, the emergence of modern technologies, internationalization and globalization, libraries have become increasingly aware that it is necessary to identify innovative ways to survive and achieve strategic goals and their community, educational and civilizing mission.

Libraries offer to their users a large series of technology-based services (in the aim of exploration, testing & validation). Libraries are able to become trend setters for ordinary users by promoting the benefits of technology on a large scale. Libraries are spaces for collaborative learning, where users are encouraged to innovate, co-create and become more responsible in terms of resilience skills and actionable knowledge.

Libraries – Oriented Towards Cultivating Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

Cultivating multi-stakeholder partnerships is essential for the sustainable development of the library service ecosystem, the emancipation of the community through knowledge partnerships and, implicitly, for the sustainable and resilient evolution of library services by activating Renewable Knowledge resources.

- Libraries – innovation-oriented institutions
- Librarians - involved and responsible curators of knowledge assets, aggregators of renewable knowledge and brokers of sustainable partnerships for educated communities
- Libraries – actors of a common reform process in supporting the user community to have optimal access to modern services
- Libraries are able to have a huge contribution to the sustainable progress of society
- Libraries are capable to integrate modern, technology-based services in order to encourage the innovation and co-creation
- Libraries could manage a complex process of developing collective knowledge, by creating new levers to support and cultivate renewable knowledge partnerships

This paper shares the ongoing research within the SHIFT project, with the aim of providing solutions for the creation and consolidation of knowledge partnerships in supporting technological progress in the field of Cultural Heritage (CH).

The development of SHIFT tools is based on the collaboration between the communities of stakeholders represented in the project, mobilized by libraries and museums, CH institutions and professionals in the field of heritage conservation and leading software developers in their fields, involved in the design of advanced technological solutions.

The SHIFT project proposes modern ways of making CH elements accessible through reinterpretation, updating translations, animation, other multi-sensory techniques, through which users will become part of the process of understanding and interpreting CH assets.

SHIFT – A Partnership Including a Mix of Entities

Public libraries are increasingly assimilated with institutions of knowledge that connect communities, especially through the nature of the relationships they cultivate with their users. The SHIFT project brings together in a powerful consortium the most diverse institutions of knowledge, namely libraries, museums, associations and foundations in the field of heritage and ethics, universities, SMEs, software integrators, etc.

The SHIFT project aims to enrich the experience of interacting with cultural assets through visual, auditory, and sensory modalities, such as using haptics. It will develop tools and methodologies to enable contemporary description of cultural assets through language evolution models. It will leverage on the advances of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) technologies to improve CH access to European citizens experiencing sensory impairment.

The SHIFT project aims to apply in libraries and museums the latest innovations in fields such as: artificial intelligence, machine learning, multimodal data processing, digital content transformation methodologies, semantic representation, linguistic analysis of historical records and the use of haptic interfaces to communicate effectively the new experiences of all citizens (including people with disabilities).

SHIFT – The Bet With Technology

SHIFT partners aim to stimulate libraries as individual entities, but also the various consortia of public-private entities in the culture field to get involved as partnership brokers in introducing technology in cultural environment to generate resilience skills that contribute to activating latent and pre-existing knowledge. They intend to bring public libraries to the forefront as partners for renewable knowledge. As native partnership brokers at the community level, libraries are able to engage in cultivating educational partnerships with various public or private entities.

The need to renew the knowledge commons aligns perfectly with the socio-technical perspective and agenda. The socio-technical theory (Mumford, 2020) recognizes the interconnectedness of technical and social components in any workplace, emphasizing that both subsystems must be considered equally for optimal system performance. With the rise of the digital revolution, the integration of the socio-technical approach becomes even more critical in navigating uncertain transitions and addressing problematic interfaces with the system's environment.

Integrating socio-technical principles into the development of knowledge commons enables a better understanding of how human, social, and organizational factors influence the technical

systems and working methods employed. This humanization of processes leads to more fluid and reliable work systems, where the technical subsystem involves tools and processes for creating products and services, while the social subsystem relates people to the technical system and to each other.

The commons theory, with its focus on shared governance of resources and knowledge, provides a valuable framework for the permanent renewal of knowledge in a rapidly changing digital age. Elinor Ostrom's work on commons governance demonstrates that communities can successfully manage resource systems without relying solely on the state or market institutions. In the context of knowledge, this approach becomes essential for ensuring democratic access to information and respecting property rights policies.

However, the age of digitalization also brings its challenges, particularly in balancing common knowledge and knowledge shared within specific groups. The critical imperative lies in formalizing and regulating protocols for using common goods and sharing knowledge in communication systems, ensuring that heritage of knowledge is preserved while enabling widespread access.

Organizations, recognizing the importance of knowledge development for maintaining a competitive advantage, have designed open and innovative organizational structures. Nonetheless, the ever-changing nature of knowledge requires constant updates and renewal. By combining material, human, and symbolic resources, organizations can enhance the renewal of knowledge between product and process developments, ensuring they stay relevant and adaptive in the face of evolving technologies and societal needs.

Renewing the knowledge commons aligns seamlessly with the socio-technical perspective and agenda. The integration of socio-technical principles into the management and development of shared knowledge ensures a holistic approach, where both technical and social components are considered, leading to more robust and adaptable systems. By adopting the principles of commons governance, organizations can foster a democratic and inclusive approach to knowledge sharing while respecting property rights and fostering innovation. In the digital age, where knowledge is rapidly evolving, the need for continuous renewal becomes even more critical, and the socio-technical perspective offers valuable insights and strategies to achieve this goal effectively.

Conclusion

As libraries continue to evolve and adapt to the changing needs of society, their civilizing function becomes increasingly relevant. By embracing innovative partnerships and empowering librarians as sustainable partnership brokers, libraries can effectively address the demands of the digital age, nurture knowledge assets, and contribute significantly to the qualitative transformation of communities. This article calls for further exploratory research to delve into the transformative potential of partnerships in enhancing the civilizing function of libraries for a sustainable and educated future.

As the main partnership broker at the community level, the library is responsible for initiating and cultivating partnerships that connect people, ideas and innovation. The library's mission is to demonstrate that its role is no longer just to offer books or IT services, but to fully contribute to the emancipation and fundamental civilization of communities. The cultivation of digital skills, the introduction of modern technology in current activities and the

valorisation of pre-existing and renewed cultural portfolios represent major objectives of libraries, at the same time offering the guarantee of sustainable personal and professional development of individuals and organizations.

To meet the need for continuous knowledge renewal, organizations have embraced innovative and open organizational structures. However, some structures may still be inadequate or ineffective. Recognizing the importance of maintaining a competitive advantage, organizations have realized the effectiveness of investing in a cohesive knowledge development process. This involves establishing a harmonious relationship between process design, product development and the skills, values and knowledge base of human actors. As knowledge is not universally available asset and requires periodic updating, the combination of material, human and symbolic resources has been shown to enhance knowledge renewal between product and process development.

In conclusion, the renewal of common knowledge is closely related to the socio-technical perspective and agenda. The integration of socio-technical principles in the management and development of shared knowledge ensures a holistic approach where technical and social components are considered equally. This results in more resilient and adaptable systems. By embracing the principles of shared governance, organizations can encourage the democratic and inclusive sharing of knowledge while respecting property rights and encouraging innovation. In the digital era, characterized by a rapid evolution of knowledge, the need for continuous renewal is paramount, and the socio-technical perspective offers valuable insights and strategies to achieve this effectively.

References

- Baarbé, J., de Beer, J. (2017). A data commons for food security. Proceedings of the 2017 IASC Conference Open AIR, Working Paper No.7/17, pg. 38, 2017.
- Crihană, I. (2014). <https://partnershipbrokers.org/w/journal/brokering-long-term-partnerships-a-cross-border-approach-based-on-a-romanian-experience/>
- Matei, A. I., Matei, L. (2011). Knowledge marketing and development in the new knowledge-based economy. In 10th International Congress of the International Association on Public and Nonprofit Marketing, 2011, April.
- Mumford, E. (2000). A Socio-Technical Approach to Systems Design, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/PL00010345>
- Myronenko, V. Premises and features of building elements of artificial intellect in systems of on-line control over agrarian and industrial complex. UDC 681.785.55:681.3.07, 2016.
- Ostrom, E. (1990). Governing the Commons The evolution of institutions for collective action, published by The Press Syndicate of The University of Cambridge, The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom.