The Role of the Libraries in the Information Society

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Abstract

After the transition to the information society, our world is in a fast and massive transformation in social, cultural, political and economical terms. This transformation process affects almost all organizational structures. One of the structures that is affected of this process is the library with its culturally and socially organizational characteristics as they collect, preserve and serve the information; spot the information as the focus and eventually aim to meet the information needs of the society. The aim of this study is to examine the information society fact as well as determining the effects of the transition to the information society on the libraries and to give information of the status of the libraries in the information society.

Key Words: Knoledge Society, Library, Life Long Learning

1. Introduction

When the history of the human kind is investigated, the social transformation could be observed as from the agricultural society to industrial society and then to information society. Information is the foundation of power and efficiency since the early days of the humanity in every aspect. However, information has never been as important and prior as the current information society period. When the dynamics of the information society is rapid change, information has absolute and exclusive value if compared to the previous periods in this changing atmosphere. The increasing information volume along with the instant pace of the information flow has consequently brought a rapid change as well. Many institutions have been affected from this rapid transformation and had to keep up with the experienced change and even role themselves as the pioneers. In this sense, the transformation period to the information society has subsequently affected the libraries whose basic function is to meet the information need and give information service to their societies. It is an indispensible need for the libraries to renovate themselves and undertake newer responsibilities in this dynamic process.

Libraries are one of the leading educational institutions which present the knowledge and materials to the people according to their needs. Except for the formal educational services at schools, libraries function as to support individual learning efforts at independent library halls and virtual platforms. Hence, the libraries have an important and unique role in

the education of the society. Specifically, libraries are one of the important axes of the transformation to the information society. Because, in order to actualize the person centered learning paradigm, the individuals should go to the libraries on their own will and/or by not even going to the libraries, they should make individual researches via the enabled virtual services of the libraries. This individuality emphasis derives from the information society concept which is the centre of the power and represented by the knowledge which is the output of the human mind along with the people having this knowledge. In a society where the information and information economy takes the lead, individuals should also access to the information, generate, update and use it in addition to the need of developing lifelong learning abilities via information literacy skills. That is why the libraries have an important place in the information society as the libraries are the institutions where in the information is gathered, compiled and distributed. Libraries have a vital role with their mentioned features and should raise the individuals that the information society needs (Yilmaz and et al, 2001).

2. Information Society

In today's information society, there is a transformation to a production form which is based on the computers and information technologies from the industrial production form of the old times' industrial society. Information society, unlike the production factors of the industrial society, indicates a new social structure that is shaped on the foundations of the information factor and the information and communication technologies contribute as the driving force. The main features of this formation of society described as the "third way" by Toffler are the information centered and patented technological production as well as the utilization of the produced information in every field of the economy (Bayram, 2010).

Expressed with the concepts as the Post Industrial Society (Daniel Bell), Information Society (Y. Masuda), Megatrends (Patrico Aburdane), Technotronic Era (Zbigniev Brzezinski) and Post Modern Period and Information Economy (Erkan, 1993), information society expresses a society formation in which the information flows in a rapid pace at a global scale in every aspect of life and the trained individuals make a difference; that is ruled by the concepts as flexibility, diversity, creativity and innovation and a network comprised of sophisticated influences (Gultan, 2003). In other words, information society *"is a society formation which uses the computer and tools depending on the computer and where the individual and mass media communication reaches the beyond of the borders, basic economic activities are formed on the knowledge, the service that brings the producer and the consumer together is the information services, human capital gains prominence, the education is boundless, every type of information resource and centre is important and the international organizations are formed to control and dominate the information"* (Rukanci and Anameric, 2004).

In the information society, knowledge influences all segments of the society via technology. The use of the new management and automation techniques is a feature of this era. Information society emerges in this regard. In the upcoming future, societies to achieve their aims and citizens to create newer opportunities for the communities and organizations are going to use the information technologies. In this setting, some of the features of the

information are as follows: a massive growth and activity, globalization and speed, specialization and multi discipline, economical value and social division. Change in the status of the information is another characteristic of the information society. People know that when the information is assessed as a good or item, it is a source of the profit and a tool for decision taking with controlling. The need of the information abilities for the development of lifelong learning is the reason behind the emergence of information literacy (Barber, Pisano, D'Alessandro, Romagnoli, Parsiale, De Pedro and Gregui, 2006: 1, 2).

There are many different perspectives and approaches in the literature about the main features of the information society. Rukanci and Anameric (2004) arrange the features of the information society in their study where they took the substantial resources as their references as:

- The emerge of the information sector with the development of information intensive production,
- The establishment of information networks, databanks and communication networks for faster access to the knowledge that everybody needs and has a right to reach,
- The change in the problems of humanity. Unemployment and dictatorship concerns in the financial regime of the industrial society changed for the anxieties about the future, privacy violation and not reaching the pace of the change in the information society,
- The substitution of muscle and machine power for the intellectual and mental capacity,
- Formation of the demographic structure in the information society where the qualified and well educated individuals take the priority,
- Prominence of the continuing education,
- Continuance of the new information production and, consequently, much more and quality publications,
- Broaden of the globalization as the time and space limitations no longer exist in communication and information access (Rukanci and Anameric, 2004).

As, specifically, the last four of the features above indicate, research and development is of great importance in the information society. In this context, in order to produce and develop the information which is a key production factor and a strategic resource, education should be considered primarily as it is an investment component for science, technology and labor force. Beyond the older times when its role was to convey attitude, value and data to the societies which were not as open to the others and the communication and interaction were less as well as the main purpose was not to present original ideas then the previous generations, education in an information society should launch to raise generations with the ability of developing new ideas and concepts. This requires the individual in the education process to adapt himself/herself to the shifting conditions, forecast the future comprehensively, to have a critical point of view for his/her actions and to be competent enough for building new relations (Aykaç, Gunaydin and Yilmaz, 2011). Major aim of the education in the information society is to socialize the individual and adapt him/her into the fast changing world. Because the typical feature of

the information society is the rapid change. Initial target of the education in the information society is "to teach learning". Learning individuals are going to lead to the learning community. Individuals are going to produce new information when needed with their current information. This is the way to the catch up the era.

With the changing understanding in the transformation to the information society process, schools are now institutions working full time, having a part in the production of the knowledge and visited by the adults as well. Yet, the role of the school in education is reduced. Nowadays, the education is not limited to the schools and the space element has relatively been changed with e – education applications (distance learning, virtual education). The enlightenment process is not limited to the school but has broadened to cover all the life of the individual in the information society. When the education finishes after the students complete the limited school period in the industrial society; there is no such thing as completed education in the information society. There may even be a need for the well educated to go to the school in today's society. Lifelong learning is one the remarkable features of the education system in the information society (Aktan, 2007).

Librarians could be one of the leading actors of the lifelong learning process. Lifelong learning process could enable people to gain information, get acquainted with the subjects related to the information and use these subjects of information for their own benefits. Individuals facing an intensive learning and information pile should develop an understanding to use them for their sakes. Public libraries could enable the individuals to use different information technologies and be competent at reaching the tools and educational cases in order to find the information by using different channels. However, in order to be more efficient, public libraries need to have accessibility facilities and connections with other educational institutions thus a learning centers network could be built (Bryson, 2001).

The alteration in the education concept and the prevalence of the lifelong learning term which was once particular to the information society, libraries have become equipped facilities where the information is produced and consumed, socialization process takes place with the education of the individuals and their embracement of the socio-cultural elements, individual's education period is supported and sustained and also intellectual and scholastic services are served authentically (Cihangir, 2010). On the other hand, libraries have defined new roles to themselves in the new education paradigm and lifelong learning approaches. Playing important roles from the production to the consumption period of the information, the library is the output of the information society and one of the institutions that present the input which feeds the information society at the same time (Yilmaz, 2010).

Information literacy is another concept about the lifelong learning as the information literate individuals are able to reach the data they need in the lifelong learning process easily. 1989 Report of the American Library Association emphasizes the importance of the information literacy for the individual and social development and remarks that, "To be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed

and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information" (ALA, 1989). An information literate individual has effective researching, managing and applying skills of the information for many reasons (Magnigbeto, 2010: 146).

3. Libraries in the Information Society

The path to the information society is of possessing the knowledge, producing it and using its power. In today's information age, societies unable to reach, use and take the advantages of the information are obliged to standards of the industrial and even the agricultural societies. In the information age, a country has power at the extent of the information that it produces and uses as well as the technology and innovation that it develops. Developed countries of the information society period secure the happiness and wealth of their citizens by using the power of information as well as the opportunities of their information and communication technologies in the countries' e – strategies and politics at the national level. When the "power" was possessed by the ones having the machinery and labor force in the agricultural and industrial communities, the "power" in the information society is of the ones using the mind (Tonta, 1999). The libraries are cultural and social institutions having the catalyst effect in the transformation to the information society as they are collect, preserve, serve the information, aim to meet the information needs of the society and focus the information (Yilmaz, 2010). They are one of the institutions which contribute to the upbringing of the qualified people whom could lift the public to the information society level.

Access to the cumulated recorded data is enabled via libraries. In an environment where the intellectual projects are recorded in touchable forms, the librarians are responsible for the definition and formation of the recorded data. Private communication, corporation records and the other unpublished documents are generally their owners' private properties. They can only be the part of the information pile of the public after published or evaluated by the librarians due to their potential research values (Neavill, 1984: 81).

With the transformation to the information society process, conventional libraries and other information centers shifted for something different than the institutions which used to preserve the books and other documents and serve them (Karakas, 1996). Today, libraries are stated as one of the places where the lifelong learning abilities could be developed. Children and school libraries along with the public libraries as well as the librarians are the leading institutions and persons that are to acquaint the community with these abilities (Ersoy and Yilmaz, 2009).

There is a direct link between the information society and the libraries contextually as the main feature of the information society is information and the libraries are the places where the information is collected, kept and served. Library services have an important role for both economic and social development of a country. Libraries are one of the

cornerstones of the information society as they include and convey the gradually cumulated knowledge of a society (Yilmaz and Aydin, 2011).

Features of the information society with the libraries' perspective could be expressed as (Bryson, 2001):

- Distance and residence are not obstacles for economic development, social relations, learning, work performance and full participation to the society (infrastructure and access),
- Data is progressively open for public access and people have the ability to get wiser decisions about every aspect of life (people and lifelong learning),
- Knowledge as culture makes new ways of thinking, connections and abstract thoughts possible (culture and ideas creation),
- Innovation leads to better ideas in terms of the development of intellectual and social wealth, hence wealth and social wellness could be created (innovation, intellectual and social wealth),
- Personal, social and institutional re-investments to information and related technologies lead to the continuing refreshment of information (refreshment of information and re-investment).

In IFLA report, the points in which the relation between the information society and libraries become clear could be summarized as: (Yilmaz, 2010):

- Libraries are existing networks and primary source for the information society.
- Libraries are close to the information user and they are easily accessed in most parts of the world.
- Libraries are expert institutions at the evaluation of the content of data sources.
- Everybody should be information and communication technologies literate in order to use the facilities of the information society. Libraries are of higher importance especially when it comes to upskill uneducated and unemployed people. In other words, libraries are local education and training facilities which also organize special training programs for information and communication technology usage skills.
- Libraries are also supportive institutions as being a part of information and communication technologies like distance learning.
- Libraries also undertake pilot project functions aiming at designing network based ICTs that may also be connected with education – research institutions.
- Libraries could also take part in developing positive internet usage models. What is more, libraries offer web based different and wide material variety.

- Libraries take place as main internet access points of local communities in actualizing national, regional and local information society policies.

Information and communication technologies are another element affecting the libraries in the information society. ICTs have never affected the libraries, information centers and their service as today's information society. Important developments occurred with the entrance of ICT into libraries are as follows (Yilmaz and Aydin, 2011):

- In the libraries and information centers, data could be found electronically as much as published materials. Accordingly, library as an institution has lost its physical importance when information service concept has gained a new significance. Traditional broad organizational structures to those which are flexible, relatively small but large in terms of service scales and having wider access points.
- By giving optional data services via online catalogues, online scanning, electronic publishing and similar facilities, data supply and demand elements are closely connected.
- Information cycling by computer and communication technologies are regarded instead of roaming the users or the documents and reached until the tables of users. However, to achieve this, the user should have some competences and there could be some financial expenses apart from the payments about information.

In today's environment of networks, people demand new technologies for the reconsideration of information and intellectual exchange. Digital libraries increasingly act as a significant channel in terms for reaching to substantially wider data sources and service sets in addition to create new opportunities for collecting larger data from various sources, organize them and access to these data capacities. With the help of digital library systems, users could move between the sources and create connections for various information problems by searching (Feng, Jeusfeld and Hoppenbrouwers, 2005: 97, 98).

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

Libraries are one of the institutions affected by the change in the information society process. The education function structure of libraries which are conducted as an extension to the formal education should be extensively reviewed. In the frame of new approaches like information literacy and lifelong learning, some structural and functional alternations are inevitable at the libraries. Consequently, information society represents a fast change and transformation. In order to adapt to the ongoing process, libraries should be restructured according to today's needs.

Here are some suggestions about the qualifications that the libraries should have in the information society:

- Knowledge is an authentic wealth and primary source of abundance in the information society. From this point of view, it is inevitable for libraries to undertake new and challenging responsibilities in the information society.
- Libraries should have intensive technological installations in the information society in order to gain functionality. Libraries should have advanced technology and more professional service.
- In an environment where the information society prioritizes the democracy, libraries, as a learning institution, should have a democratic participation feature about their self-decisions. Parallel to this feature, libraries of the information society should include much more diversity and always accord themselves with the environment via their flexibility feature.
- After the decrease in the centrist policies, in the information society, libraries should have a formation that renew itself, open to change and offer alternative services with social and cultural activities in addition to the educational missions.
- Libraries should also offer wider services by cooperating with companies, advisory corporations, governmental offices and voluntary agencies. Libraries in the information society need to be more sophisticated.
- Based on lifelong learning, libraries of the information society should be institutions following organizational, cultural and scientific developments, valuing human resources and helping the individuals to improve themselves.
- Libraries of the information society are responsible for offering universal information service, enhancing scientific, artistic and social activities and being a learning institution as well. Because libraries should be in constant contact and cooperation with the community, universe, governments and business world in today's information society.

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