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Strategies in action: working at a small but great library community (EN)
Estrategias en acción: trabajar en una pequeña gran comunidad bibliotecaria (ES)

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Meeting:

95 — *Strategies for library associations: include new professionals now!* — Management of Library Associations with the New Professionals Special Interest Group

Abstract (EN)

Library communities follow their own strategies to develop resources and serve their patrons' needs, and in doing so, they establish a sense of uniqueness and a specific identity. The day-to-day activities library organizations and library members undertake —in pursuing cooperative projects, in continuing their learning and teaching processes, and even in performing their traditional reference services— go beyond the boundaries of the library itself, beyond books and products, and rather pertain to the realm of unique, inspiring, surprising and empowering social bonds. Nothing but these bonds is what has sustained the profession of librarianship for decades, as it is practiced and understood by different communities around the world.

Communication strategies are required to interweave this fabric so that nothing is missed out, and everyone has its share. The purpose of this presentation is to showcase some inclusive experiences within libraries and librarians' associations in Argentina. Specifically we would like to present some meaningful practices which involve the participation of new and established professionals, librarians and non-librarians, and people with different abilities, all of them working together in an unconventional, enthusiastic manner to serve the information needs of their community.

Resumen (ES)

Las comunidades bibliotecarias tienen sus propias estrategias para desarrollar recursos y satisfacer las necesidades de sus usuarios, y al hacerlo, adquieren un sentido de identidad único y específico. Las actividades cotidianas efectuadas por las

organizaciones de bibliotecarios y sus miembros —al desarrollar proyectos cooperativos, al iniciar procesos continuos de enseñanza-aprendizaje, e incluso al ofrecer los servicios tradicionales de referencia— trascienden los límites de la propia biblioteca, de los libros y los productos, y se acercan más propiamente al ámbito de lazos sociales únicos, inspiradores, sorprendentes y revitalizantes. Es la constitución y mantenimiento de estos lazos, y no otra cosa, lo que ha sostenido la profesión por décadas, tal y como se la practica y se la entiende en diferentes comunidades en todo el mundo.

Se requieren estrategias de comunicación para tejer el entramado de modo que nada quede fuera del hilván, y todos tengan su parte en la trama. El propósito de esta presentación es mostrar algunas experiencias de inclusión en bibliotecas y asociaciones de bibliotecarios en Argentina. Específicamente, queremos presentar algunas prácticas significativas que involucran la participación de nuevos profesionales y profesionales con trayectoria, bibliotecarios y no bibliotecarios, personas con diferentes capacidades, todos trabajando juntos de manera no convencional y entusiasta para satisfacer las necesidades de información de la comunidad.

During a recent gathering of librarians in Buenos Aires, a referent of Argentine librarianship of the sixtieth off-the-record said: "I don't belong in here". The allusion referred to the transformation in meetings during the last five decades. Fifty years of perceptions while pursuing a professional career in commitment to an area of human knowledge, to which he has devoted technical expertise, time and valuable efforts. The comment could have passed unobserved, but that indifference would have kept silent a fundamental voice: the voice of a member of a generation who struggled for meaningful changes: the generation that triggered the creation of librarians' association and their net, among other fundamental achievements from which librarian's local community still draws nourishment. A generation that feel does not belong to the professional activities, and the society.

What can be done with this valuable comment? How can the perplexity and frustration be canalized when feeling we don't belong, we don't merge and integrate with others? If this identity does not flow spontaneously, it has to be facilitated. How can we trace back the image stored in the memory of times, recover it —though by fragments—, with human eagerness and *pathos*, and the librarian's instinct of diving head first into documentary sources? How can we systematize and communicate the findings referred to past meetings and gatherings, its common practices, regulations and programs? We have the collection of journals published by the librarians' association, recently digitized by a group of professionals[1] as a contribution to the history of Argentine librarianship, in homage to its makers. How can we strengthen ourselves in our capacity of shedding light on less visited sources, paths and backgrounds? How can we reaffirm our commitment to the discipline and to future librarians without recovering the voice of past colleagues, voices that bear witness to a way of making librarianship? We feel we have to refer to them, carry forward their voice, and tell what happened, projecting the future with the same vigorous energy with which cooperative activities burst into the profession at the time of the first meetings.

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[1] Apella, Viviana; Díaz, Cristina; Pardeilhan, María Clara; Peláez, Marcelo (CDI-MECON: 2012).

At that time, speakers' presentations, conferences and workshops had a set agenda that did not overlook the possibility of a meeting at the hotel café, a dinner, or other social gatherings. We did not forget to plan common meals, establish some platform for informal interchange, produce a common document, develop recommendations and guidelines, and subscribe them collectively. The tempo we impose upon the meetings today is that of haste. We have confined social networking activities solely to the sphere of the Internet, and when we are face-to-face in a same room the only format in which we feel comfortable is the formal or academic, or the institutional, where we participate as students or teachers, employers or employees. What would we have done if this had happened to us in the beginnings?

If this had happened to us in the beginnings, we would have resorted to other disciplines, telling them: 'We don't know what to do'. And they would have replied: 'Do something, hand out pieces of papers, whatever, but *do something*'. Something to get out from ourselves, and *be* in others.

Yet, does this actually happen? Are we capable of doing, being, sharing in creative environments, with individual freedom? To do so, we have to do away with the excess baggage. And go out with nothing but our clothes on.

Shall we avoid social gatherings, unless we serve as public officials or hold an academic honor because time is money? Shall we refuse to join professional associations until new authorities are elected and policies are changed, yet in the meantime we challenge current procedures without contributing to its improvement? Shall we practice the profession, produce knowledge and learn completely on our own? We may, but the cost is high and what is lost is too valuable for the individual, whose support, identity and self-consciousness derives from their everyday practice in a community.

There are practices that entail values. These practices are based upon a set of shared knowledge that enables people to use and exploit existing resources. The will to appreciate the possibilities of this use and exploitation leads to a sensibility regarding the artifacts and procedures employed to satisfy people's needs. This sensibility affects the ways we communicate, inform and shape values, and guarantees the creation of local knowledge in an increasingly open context of access. In heterogeneous communities, these activities turn into important integration strategies.

Some time ago in a local discussion forum motivation was said to be a prerequisite to transformation. Curiosity, eagerness to understand, learn and discover needs to be cultivated so that we learn to learn. This means an assessment of the complete system (institutions, actors, contents, methodology), and the inclusion of information and communication technologies.

International organization (UNESCO, ILO, OECD), and regional and national institutions with a share on education and professional training activities, warn about the skills needed to respond efficiently to the demands of society.

In 2005 UNESCO claimed for an ethics of freedom and responsibility, based on the shared exploitation of knowledge through the existence of networks.

In Argentina, in the late eighties, new styles of learning were adopted to train professionals who were committed to excellence, quality, productivity and integral human development.

As a result, training and on-going improvement opportunities increased specially in the public sector. At that time, the challenge was the adoption of information technologies (IT) for libraries automatization. After the fax, there came the e-mail; current use of the Internet emerged later, and with it, communication technologies began to dominate the scene. The skills required in libraries changed. Training needs detection, skills demand identification and the way librarians are taught in the workplace were topics of discussion in forums and communities.

A periodical assessment of available skills helps to visualize its maintenance, and in the short and medium term, attain the required new ones to undertake future objectives and goals. In the public sector, this skill assessment is performed at different levels, spheres and times, and different actors are involved: information units' managers, directors of personnel, in-company training authorities, and other relevant professional and referents of the academic field.

In response to the demands of society, the Argentine public sector modernizes. The Public Administration National Institute (INAP) in Argentina is the supreme body in charge of the training of public sector employees. It is committed to the training of citizens so that demands are satisfied. With a group of specialists devoted to the observation and assessment of new worldwide methodologies to be applied in the workspace, it facilitates innovation integrating theoretical and practical aspects so that this knowledge, which is not taught at university, can be transferred.

Training is recognized and supported by the institution, and is considered essential for attaining the mission and function of each government department. Learning processes are accompanied, and this leads to the consolidation of organizations that adapt to change and grow, create knowledge and put it into motion with innovation.

Training activities are adequate to the interests and needs of the recipients; they are negotiated in forums, and are contextualized and trainee-centered. This implies an anticipation of expected results, as well as the fulfillment of other formal requirements: training activities have regulatory legitimacy, allow process and result assessment, and follow technical standards.

In these training activities, the process of learning entails the construction of knowledge in contexts of a social practice that contributes to the creation of partnerships and self-directed research.

Knowledge emerges as the result of a *collaborative learning*. Skills are developed through different processes of social involvement, in which interchange among people with common interests and shared practices is promoted.

Such learning processes contribute to the empowerment of *communities of practice* (CP), many of them with a long background in the public sector. A CP functions as a volunteering entity in the context of institutions that support its activities. It produces its own self-directed practices around leaders that act as motivating members.

Training activities deepen contextual learning within communities of practice, encouraging theory analysis and case studies. As a final assignment, trainers ask participants to develop a project or submit a proposal of improvement. Web-based activities and the use of technological tools help build a new attitude towards work, reducing the level of resistance and opening up paths that will gradually lead to a more "Open government".

E-learning is a powerful tool to align communities of practice, create and manage knowledge, and this in turn enables the integration of professionals from different fields, people with different abilities, and of new and established professionals, that work in the organization and beyond.

Without replacing face-to-face meetings, these virtual platforms enable the recognition, mobilization and recording of existing knowledge, available in the community of practice, which is harder to appreciate in everyday tasks and assignments. As a result, we work while we learn, and learn while we work. Work experience becomes a sphere for learning that adds value to everyday chores, increasing the benefits for the organization and its members.

Associations can nourish from these experiences, fostering cooperative contexts for their activities, integrating newer and older members through information, communication and training.

Knowledge transfer, assimilation and socialization stimulate a vital dynamic of work that reaffirms the presence of the library in the community. Information resources thus turn into relevant, useful knowledge.

The achievements and accomplished goals draw an itinerary, a path along which experiences are shared, skills are developed, and a professional identity is built up. Activities promote synergies within multidisciplinary groups, strengthen interpersonal relations in cooperative networks within the frontiers of the library and beyond, and surpass formal spheres of interaction.

Various professionals work for the CDI-MECON: LIS professionals, psychologists, journalists, computing scientists, public administrators, lawyers, social communicators, designers, photographers, architects, accountants, translators. The CDI-MECON develops information products and services on economy, legislation and official architecture. This includes the design and implementation of projects performed by specialized members of the organization who work in cooperative networks, responding to information demands or anticipating them with products that add value to the collections. The CDI-MECON is also part of national libraries' networks, promoting the sharing of experiences, knowledge and resources.

From experience, the CDI-MECON considers that working in networks constitutes a resource that is more valuable than the source of knowledge itself. Communication strategies ensure the mediation between sources of information and specific situations and contexts, so that knowledge reaches those who are capable of attending demands with relevant and innovative answers.

In 1989, the CDI-MECON leaded, together with other librarians and professionals who were interested in sharing information, the creation of UNIRED (Information Network on Social Sciences and Humanities), http://www.unired.org.ar/. With over twenty years of experience, UNIRED offers different web-based open products (among others: 4P-Ar database, with the indexing data from several Argentine serials and journals on social sciences, and Bicentennial database, with the consolidation and merger of 40 public and private institutions' catalogues), and counts on many learning milestones. A significant milestone occurred in 1997, with the launch of *Reseña de unidades de información 1997*, a publication that collects the antecedents of creation and management of ninety-seven institutions.

The exercise of writing the roots of each library, when few institutions from the country had print of digital media to make themselves known, was a valuable contribution to deeper studies on institutional genealogy of Argentine libraries.

Practices that derive from experience in collaborative projects can be transferred, communicated, applied and valued by the LIS community of the region and the world. They entail strategies that foster cultural values, shape identities, and are applied to accomplish objectives and goals significant to the community in an open context of cultural interchange.

Things flow, as the ancient Greeks claimed with the memorable thesis of *pantha rei* (πάντα ρεῖ). There is a dynamic progression of forces; new spaces emerge out of old ones, sustained by a hidden harmony. This perception exists throughout the whole human existence, since its recorded origins. To claim that, in the early 21st century, the only predictable thing is change, is to suffer from oblivion. We are, once and again, experiencing this "identity in process". When we feel we do not belong to it, this is probably because the fire of transformation does not appeal to us, and for that same it is necessary that we get involved and be challenged by any means imaginable. And to respond with the highest authenticity, total strength and creative freedom.

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