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Chapter 10

The Library of the Future: Patrons' View of the Library

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Introduction

Libraries, both public and academic, have changed with the times and the needs of the diverse populations that they serve. The collection of the Royal Library of Alexandria or Ancient Library of Alexandria in Alexandria, Egypt, founded in 228 BC in Alexandria, Egypt, consisted of 700,000 scrolls. (FindingDulcinea 2011) Over the intervening years, ever since the time of the invention of the printing press and movable type by Johannes Gutenberg in 1439, millions of books have been produced, and a multitude of libraries have been constructed worldwide to contain them. Today, library collections often consist of cutting-edge technology with vast collections of both online and offline resources. The library is no longer just a place for books. In fact, rapid advances in technology are transforming libraries into the electronic information centers of our communities.

A library, be it public or academic, is a collection of sources of information and similar resources, made accessible to a defined community for reference or borrowing. (Merriam-Webster 2015) It provides physical or digital access to material and may be a physical building or room, or a virtual space, or both. (Wikipedia 2015)

A collection of library resources can be in a "variety of formats … (1) organized by information professionals or other experts, who (2) provide convenient physical, digital, bibliographic, or intellectual access and (3) offer targeted services and programs (4) with the mission of educating, informing, or entertaining a variety of audiences (5) and the goal of stimulating individual learning and advancing society as a whole."(Eberhart 2013)

Patrons' View of the Library of the Future

What do patrons want to see in their library of the future? Perhaps they don't even want to see a library, just the results that they are looking for delivered to their mobile devices. Or, in a visionary mode, maybe they would really like to have data delivered straight to their brain cells. Or perhaps they have become tired of looking down at their own computers and scanning for results but prefer to sit in a comfortable chair in a stately room, with the availability of experts nearby to help them search and find precisely what they need, while being surrounded by other patrons who are also interested in discovering specific new information. The library of the future as envisioned by current library patrons can assume many different iterations, encompassing both concrete (bricks and mortar) and more intangible (electronic) formats. And, of course, an essential consideration when envisioning the library of the future depends on which patrons are being considered: Serious biomedical researchers? Public school children? Their parents? Adult learners? Adults seeking employment? Teen-agers seeking entertainment? There are as many different types of patrons as there are types of individuals with their own specific interests; thus, one size or shape of library most definitely does not fit all.

Public Libraries

Turning to the important topic of public libraries, in a blog by "Blatant Berry" entitled "The Library future resides in users' perception," John N. Berry quotes Wayne A.Wiegand thus: "The history of the public library in America has just been rewritten, and the result provides crucial new tools to help guarantee its future. This new history comes from Wayne A.Wiegand's book *Part of Our Lives: A People's History of the American Public Librar*y.(Wiegand 2015) Wiegand looks at that chronicle through the eyes of users. The evidence he found proved that despite our belief that the public library was defined by library leaders, it was really created, shaped, and given its purpose and mission by its patrons. They demanded services, collections, and the kind of place they wanted and needed. In an article in *Library Quarterly* (*LQ*), Wiegand asserts that Americans have loved their public libraries for three reasons: 'for the useful information they made accessible, for the public space they provided, and for the reading materials they circulated that helped users make sense of the world around them.' *Part of Our Lives* sees the 'library as place…the power of commonplace reading to transform lives.

The library community consistently encouraged its users to adhere to the moral authority of learned professions,' asserts Wiegand. 'But users had other ideas. Because they did not have to use public libraries, users automatically applied pressures public library managers could not ignore. By force of demand--vox populi--users insisted that their public libraries acquire particular kinds of stories. As a result, they effectively shaped the library into a popular place that addressed their literary tastes.'" In *LQ*, Wiegand goes on to describe the changes demanded of those institutions and the multiplicity of roles that patrons would like the library of the future to fulfill. (Berry 2015) (Wiegand 2015)

In 2013, the Pew Research Center issued a Report summarizing a number of surveys and results of focus groups consulted in order to establish the important factors that users appreciate right now and would very much like to continue to see in libraries in the future. This Report is a wonderfully rich resource for the library of the future because it is carefully done, very detailed, including statistics, and because a variety of opinions are included. The Report concludes that person-to-person assistance of librarians, when needed, is very important as are the following: borrowing books; free access to the Internet and to computers; quiet study spaces for adults and children; increasing availability of e-books; programs and classes for children and teens; research resources such as free databases; jobs, employment, and career resources; free events and activities such as classes and cultural events for people of all ages; free public meeting spaces; public priorities for libraries; closer coordination with schools locally to provide more resources for students; free literary programs for very young children preparing for school; completely separate spaces for different services; more comfortable spaces for reading, working and relaxing; a broader selection of e-books; more interactive learning experiences similar to those in museums; helping users digitize historical personal material; moving library services online so that remote use can be available; making more services automated; moving some print books and stacks out of public locations to free up more space; plus a broad spectrum of possible new services.

Some of the more visionary services, according to the same Pew Report, include: a cell phone application (app) that allows one to access and use library services from one's phone and see what programs the library offers; library kiosks located throughout the community where people can check out books, movies, or music without having to go to the library itself; a cell phone app that helps users locate material within the library by guiding them with a global

positioning system (GPS); a digital media lab where one could create and upload new digital content, such as movies or the user's own e-books; and classes on how to download library e-books and other digital content to handheld devices. For instance, the Report reveals: "Overall, 63% of respondents say they would be likely to use a cell phone app that would allow them to access and use library services from their phone; some 35% say they would be 'very likely' to use such an app, including 45% of smartphone owners and 41% of tablet owners." (Zickuhr, Rainie, and Purcell 2013)

In a keynote presentation at a library conference, Lee Rainie, Director of the *Internet & American Life Project* of the Pew Research Center, addressed the Project's new research about characteristics of patrons, both those who are library users and those who do not ordinarily frequent libraries--who they are and what they need in the way of information and the means to achieve it. He mentioned, among other goals, the necessity for libraries to foster closer ties with the local school systems, providing courses for adult individuals to improve their technical skills as well as offering English as a foreign language, and also filling in the gaps in credentialing competency by providing lifelong learning opportunities. (Rainie 2013)

Sophisticated library patrons are looking for speed, currency, efficiency and integrated systems in the future. As stated by a Swets Company director of business development: "End users want their content on every possible device and they want a unified discovery solution so that they can have that content on their fingertips." (van Ette 2013) However, it should also be kept in mind that while some individuals yearn for such forward-looking techniques and devices, there are others who, because of a variety of concerns--whether they be budgetary or space restrictions, technology concerns, or liability issues, reject these very same ideas.

The digital gap between the generations is a major factor in different levels of patron preferences for the future. Whereas this division will undoubtedly be much less pronounced in years to come, *The New York Times,* on October 23, 2015, published an article under "Health" entitled "To Reach Seniors, Tech Start-Ups Must First Relate to Them." The author calls these efforts to reach older people "silvertech." She goes on to say: "During this interim period--with rafts of supposedly transformative gizmos, most doomed like many new products to fail--I suspect older people and their caregivers will continue to find it difficult to distinguish useful technology from that which simply produces frustration."(Span 2015)

For advanced researchers in the humanities, biomedical and exact sciences, ease of use and efficient incorporation of data are paramount. Often, these experts must rely on library vendors' products to provide simple but efficient workflows. These users want currency and flexibility, especially in the structure of such databases, since they may want to use the information for a variety of purposes. Therefore, suppliers must understand library users' needs and evolve their services to match them. (Harris 2013)

Another realm in which the public is demanding more and more of libraries is that they should become an entity that provides a multitude of physical items in addition to intellectual information. Public libraries, among other functions, now lend prints, microscopes, tools, umbrellas, games, fishing poles, museum passes, musical instruments, winter sports equipment, seeds, a book club in a box, and even pet companions. In one visionary library, one can actually check out people. "The "Human Library" originated in Denmark in the year 2000 as part of a youth organization called "Stop the Violence." The idea is straightforward: Library guests can choose which volunteer they would like to "check out" based on titles the human books assign themselves. Past titles have included "Olympic Athlete," "Biking Agoraphobic," "Fat Woman,"

and "A Questioning Christian." Visitors then sit down with their "books" for half an hour or so to listen to them share their personal stories. (Debczak 2015) (Ji-yeon and Soo-hyun 2015) (Soniak 2015)

Academic, Hospital, and Consumer Health Libraries

In an article published in *The Journal of the Medical Library Association*, Tammy Brawn writes about the wishes of her patrons in an attempt to meet their information needs. She focuses specifically on consumer health libraries. Her list includes: "information on disease conditions; information on navigating the health care (provider) systems; miscellaneous, nonmedical, ready reference information including travel directions, yellow pages access, etc; a quiet place to escape; printed material to share with a patient and the rest of the family; computer access for email or research; information about medical tests; and recommendations and evaluations of doctors (something a librarian cannot ethically answer)

Most lacking currently are the following factors, all of which could be incorporated into the library of the future:

- focus on health promotion and wellness information; follow up and evaluation as to how the information impacted a health behavior or treatment decision

- knowledge of where the library is located and that it is available for their use; comprehension of what the doctor or nurse told them

- understanding of basic human anatomy and medical terminology."(Brawn 2005)

In summary, what consumer health library patrons prefer, according to this author, would be access to free brochures of health information that they can quickly grab and take with them.

As far as academic libraries are concerned, both students and faculty may need quiet space for study as well as larger spaces for collaborative efforts; they require that data retrieved from online resources be downloadable across a broad spectrum of mobile devices; they may opt for instant printouts of needed articles or book chapters; plus, they are eager to avail themselves of the online version of informational lectures.

In view of the downsizing and closing of libraries and the reduction of library budgets, probably conditions that will only intensify in the future, and because of the rapidly changing technological landscape, a book by John Palfrey entitled *BiblioTech: Why Libraries Matter More Than Ever in the Age of Google*, sheds considerable light on the universality of patron needs both now and in the future. The author acknowledges that while Google is now everybody's easy access to our quest to find immediate answers to questions, both broad and narrow, not every former library role should be usurped by such resources as Google and other corporate services. The basic question remains: Can patrons trust for-profit companies to be fair and impartial in providing essential information? Palfrey responds: "Libraries can offer important alternatives to the services provided by the corporate sector, which will always have incentives to offer biased, limited and costly access to knowledge." He maintains that librarians will have to be trustworthy stewards, rather than mere collectors and archivists of information. (Palfrey 2015)

Videos are an important component of classroom learning because students in higher education are now oriented to learning by this mechanism and because their professors use this method liberally; however, only 32% of students look to a library website for their educational

video viewing, according to a report in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Most students, it must be admitted, prefer YouTube. This statistic may be misleading, however, because as a comment following this article pointed out: "While only 32% said they searched the library website for video, another 43% said they link to video through their courseware site. I would think that many faculty who do use library streaming video services for feature and educational film, are creating links to the library content for the students. If that's the case, then it may be that as many as 75% of students are using video provided by the library--and students may not even be aware the streaming video is acquired by the library. But it was surprising to read that more college students go to the public library for video than their own college library. That may be for personal recreational viewing, because the public library may have a somewhat better feature film selection." (Fabris 2015)

An extremely important function of the library of the future as far as its patrons are concerned is focusing on the adult learner. As Helene E. Gold states in an article published in *Libraries and the Academy* entitled "Engaging the Adult Learner: Creating Effective Library Instruction:" "Adult learners have unique developmental and social characteristics as compared to their traditional counterparts in higher education." Gold believes that because of differences in technological literacy, past life experiences and current life responsibilities, the adult learner requires special pedagogical design and delivery of content, not only in the classroom but also in the library; she thinks that traditional instruction modules are often not particularly effective when delivered to the adult learner. (Gold 2005)

In *Lifelong Education for Adults: An International Handbook*, the authors note that "the high costs of formal education, the need for adults to retrain and adapt to change, and the emphasis on lifelong learning have resulted in alternative and more flexible learning systems.

New teaching methods in secondary schools have trained people in independent study skills. All learning resource centres, often integrated with libraries, are under great pressure. College libraries are asked to allow adult independent learners access to their collections. Public libraries are expected to support broadcast learning. Professional training for librarians incorporates 'user needs' in general and sometimes the needs of adult learners in particular." The authors go on to emphasize that adult learners also need encouragement, clarification, motivation, and review. (Allred 1989)

Because an important objective for academic libraries is assisting adult students in furthering their educational goals and advancing their careers, such an activity, which serves as a model has been instituted by the College of New Rochelle, in New York. The program in question is MURAL, which stands for "Mentoring, Undergraduate Research, and Augmented Libraries." This initiative, "which is focused on moving full-time adult learners in the College's School of New Resources through college in four years or less with a Bachelor of Arts degree in the Liberal Arts...will create a network of support through an enhanced research-rich core course each semester, enhanced mentoring, and the creation of a library learning commons. Included in this multifaceted approach are these key elements:

- A librarian will be embedded in each research core course to assist students in an outside class in completing their "Life Arts Projects" (focused on real-world research experiences) each semester.

- The College of New Rochelle is establishing a peer-reviewed journal, *Serviam*, in which students can publish their research, along with an institutional repository for completed projects and faculty research.

- Students who publish their research will receive an additional college credit at no cost to them, and students who publish six of their eight "Life Arts Projects" could graduate a semester early." Thus, MURAL has as its goal to change academic culture through a library-driven impetus, enriching concomitant library activities and collaborating with faculty by providing all necessary assistance to adult students so that they can achieve professional positions through learning real-world skills."(Cook 2015)

An important and controversial, if not actually contentious, issue is what the format will be for conveying literary content in the future. Will paper books still be available for library patrons? Will they continue to be an alternative to the growing popularity and pervasiveness of e-books and similar online media? Do any patrons still crave actual books? There have been numerous and varied opinion pieces written on this topic. The online journal *Slate* published an article whose title tells a story in itself: "Will Paper Books Exist in the Future? Yes, but They'll Look Different." The conclusion is: "Luddites can take comfort in the persistence of vinyl records, postcards, and photographic film. The paper book will likewise survive, but its place in the culture will change significantly. As it loses its traditional value as an efficient vessel for text, the paper book's other qualities—from its role in literary history to its inimitable design possibilities to its potential for physical beauty—will take on more importance. The future is yet to be written, but a few possibilities for the fate of the paper book are already on display on bookshelves near you." (Argresta 2012)

Jonathan Gunson, in an item in *Bestseller Labs* entitled "Will Printed Books Disappear? Stephen King on the Future of the Traditional Paper Book" reports that Stephen King in an interview stated that there will be no more novels in paper format for patrons to borrow in the future library but that these works will be replaced by e-books. However, Tim Waterstone, the

founder of a chain of bookstores in the United Kingdom, writes: "The product is so strong, the interest in reading is so deeply rooted in the culture and human soul of this country that it is immovable. The traditional, physical book is hanging on. I'm absolutely sure we will be here in 40 years' time."(Gunson 2014)

A compromise position about types of format available for patrons in the future is espoused by the author of "Why the Smart Reading Device in the Future May Be Paper," an article that appeared in *Wired.* Whereas some researchers have found that reading via paper format differs from reading the same content on a screen, other experts hold opposing opinions. The article states: "Rakefet Ackerman at the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology has found that students reading on paper and screen may think differently about their own learning processes. When reading on paper, Ackerman's students seemed to have a better sense of their own understanding. When reading on screen, they thought they absorbed information readily, but tests showed otherwise. Screens seemed to foster overconfidence. With practice, this could be corrected, said Ackerman, but 'the natural learning process on paper is more thorough than on screen.' A study by psychologist Sara Margolin of Brockport University found no difference in reading comprehension in students reading paper, computer screens and e-readers. 'It's really a matter of personal preference,' said Margolin." (Keim 2014)

Another important aspect of the future reading format not to be overlooked is the impact on education and socioeconomic status of generations of children being exposed to books. An extensive research study by Mariah Evans et al. was published in the journal *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* and described thus: 'The study by Evans and her colleagues at Nevada, UCLA and Australian National University is one of the largest and most comprehensive studies ever conducted on what influences the level of education a child will attain. The

researchers were struck by the strong effect having books in the home had on children's educational attainment even above and beyond such factors as education level of the parents, the country's GDP, the father's occupation or the political system of the country."(Evans et al. 2010) (Wharton 2010)

An article in *The New York Times* reports a counter-intuitive initiative about patron preference and the physical and psychological comfort of books. Libraries containing books are being installed in guests' rooms in a number of hotels. For example: "The St. Regis New York has digitally remastered 58 titles from the original collection of its founder, John Jacob Astor IV, which have been housed behind glass at the hotel for over a century. They are available to guests on a Kindle encased in a custom-made Thornwillow Press leather-bound cover and include such titles as *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* and *Oliver Twist*. 'These libraries help guests make meaningful connections with their hotel, said Bobby Zur, who owns Travel Artistry, a consultancy in Franklin Lakes, N.J. 'Books in your room are a counterrevolution to technology overload and are almost comforting for guests', he said, 'They also give properties a unique identity.'"(Vora 2015)

James Gleick in an article called "What Libraries Can (Still Do)," published in The *New York Review of Books*, states: "The library has no future as yet another Internet node, but neither will it relax into retirement as an antiquarian warehouse. Until our digital souls depart our bodies for good and float away into the cloud, we retain part citizenship in the physical world, where we still need books, microfilm, diaries and letters, maps and manuscripts, and the experts who know how to find, organize, and share them." He concludes in his article: "A transition to the digital can't mean shrugging off the worldly embodiments of knowledge, delicate manuscripts and fading photographs and old-fashioned books of paper and glue. To treat those as quaint objects

of nostalgia is the technocrats' folly. The masters of Internet commerce—Google, Facebook, Amazon, Apple—sometimes talk as though they're building a new society, where knowledge is light-speed and fungible, but a marketplace is not a society."(Gleick 2015)

Neil Gaiman, a dedicated educator and lover of books in a lecture given for The Reading Agency, an annual series serving as a platform for leading writers and thinkers to share original, challenging ideas about reading and libraries, which was delivered on Monday October 14, 2013, at the Barbican in London, emphasizes the value of reading in engaging the imagination as well as the continuation of libraries that are the storehouses of books and information, by listing the obligations that the present citizens have for the future of the world. He says that among other obligations to our children and to the adults that they will become: "We have an obligation to support libraries. To use libraries, to encourage others to use libraries, to protest the closure of libraries. If you do not value libraries then you do not value information or culture or wisdom. You are silencing the voices of the past and you are damaging the future."(Gaiman 2013a,b)

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