

Type of Contribution: PAPER

Addressing the professional identity of librarians through Castell's theory of a Network Society: An exploratory case study of Serbian Librarians

Amanda Harrison (University of Central Missouri, USA)

Keywords: professional identity, global network society, Serbian librarianship, librarian roles

Introduction

In an era of technological, political, and economic change Castells' theoretical framework of the Network Society offers suggestions for how libraries and librarians are interacting globally. This theory outlines the ways in which the globalization of economies, technologies and communications acts upon the formation of identity, including professional identity.¹ Library science has a strong foundation of values but even so it is not immune to the technological, economic, and political changes happening around the world². Librarians perceive these changes globally, and report that they are communicating and collaborating at global levels which impacts their local practice. This case study considers the professional identity of Serbian librarians and how they perceive their professional roles and activities through their interactions within a global network. Serbia provides one example of a country in which, "Libraries contribute to the building of personal and collective identities by preserving and passing on past, present, and future experiences and notions; on the other, librarianship itself faces the challenge to define its own professional identity during a time of turbulent technological and social change."³

Theoretical Framework

This study is viewed through Castells' network society theory in which the movement of information and technology facilitates and drives structural change and social movements

¹ Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Vol. II). (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010a).

² Michael Gorman, *Our Enduring Values: Revisited*. (Chicago, IL: American Library Association, 2015), 3.

³ Gordana Stokić Simončić and Željko Vučković, "Searching for a Lost Identity: Serbian Librarianship at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century." *Library Trends* 63, no. 2 (2014): 285, <https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2014.0028>

without resorting to structural determinism.⁴ Castells describes the network society as one that is influenced by “the globalization of economy, technology, and communication.”⁵ One key feature of the network society is the movement of information as it is processed and organized through society via technologies thus influencing changes in the librarian’s self-identified role within this society.⁶ Furthermore, identity building in an information society means negotiating local norms and changing global narratives. No longer are identities, professional or otherwise, limited to the space of place.⁷

Research Questions

How do Serbian librarians self-report their involvement within the global network society and the impact this has on their practice of librarianship?

How do they describe their interactions with the global network society?

What can the library profession learn about a global network society from Serbian librarians?

Methodology

This exploratory study followed a case study approach to explore in-depth the global network activities of practicing librarians. The informant pool for this study was librarians from Serbia, four males and nine females, with between five to 20 years of experience of working in libraries. Seven of the informants had a university degree in another field and entered librarianship through an alternative route. Six of the informants received either a bachelor’s degree or master’s degree in Library and Information Science. Informants practiced librarianship in the city of Belgrade and surrounding suburbs and in Novi Sad, Serbia. Their past and current positions comprised a wide range of librarian roles including, special collections, American Corners directors and librarians, public librarians, children’s librarians, foreign language librarians, academic librarians, library managers, library clerk positions, catalogers, school librarians, and archivists.

Research Results

Interview informants shared about their education, their employment, their views of Serbian librarianship and the future of the profession. Their interviews naturally organized into several themes including globalization, university education; continued education; librarian roles;

⁴ Manuel Castells, *The Network Society: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2004).

⁵ Manuel Castells, *The Network Society: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2004), 384.

⁶ Joacim Hansson, *Libraries and Identity: The Role of Institutional Self-Image and Identity in the Emergence of New Types of Libraries*.

⁷ Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity*.

professional organizations; librarian traits, and Serbian Librarianship. Within these themes several trends emerged including the ways in which librarians communicated and collaborated in a local, regional, and global manner. Their communication and collaboration ranged from the informal to more structured, formal arrangements. In many cases these relationships were facilitated by digital technologies; past connections; and connections made at professional conferences.

Discussion

Serbian librarians on the whole report many ways in which they are involved in a global network society. In many ways they interact within Castells' five information characteristics of a network society and they work in the library both from the space of place to a space of flows. Their networks span both their local connections and their global ones and they rely both on personal networks and online ones. They report ways in which these networks help define their professional identity which suggest connections to either the legitimizing identity; resistance identity; or the project identity theory base.

Informants suggested several ways in which Serbian librarians may define their roles and professional goals through education, mentorship programs, government mandates, and participation in professional organizations and professional conferences. In addition, their particular job role and previously established collaborations, from local to global, were important in helping define role expectations.

The global network society provides a powerful tool for enhancing the networking capabilities of librarians and offers ways to provide increasing information access to patrons. Librarians cannot ignore the influence of the social, political, and economic developments in their country and in their region. Finally, they play an increasingly important role in teaching patrons how to live and view themselves globally.

Conclusion

The global network society has created change in the areas of technology, politics, and economics around the world. These changes have influenced how institutions relate to each other, how individuals relate to one another, and the way that people relate to institutions.⁸ For many people, access to information has changed dramatically. The network society has also changed the field of librarianship, suggesting different ways of managing information, different

⁸ Manuel Castells, *The Network Society*.

service models, and changes in the way individuals access services.⁹ In particular, the way librarians communicate with other librarians has changed as access to librarians around the world has increased. Librarians no longer are limited to merely local views of their role as information gatekeepers, but instead have begun incorporating changes in their own professional identity through networks, both in-person and online. These librarians integrate the information they learned from their professional education, their professional organizations, professional networks, and online. They negotiate the needs of their patrons, directives from directors, and initiatives from the government.¹⁰ They work through challenges related to lack of funding, a hiring freeze, and staying ahead of technology. While they are operating in this network society, they also have not abandoned the traditional values of librarian service, education, and preservation of the culture.

REFERENCES

- Castells, Manuel. *The Network Society: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2004.
- Castells, Manuel. *The Power of Identity* (Vol. II). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010a.
- Castells, Manuel. *The Rise of the Network Society* (Vol. I). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010b.
- Cveljo, Katherine. "Libraries and Education for Librarianship in Yugoslavia: A Bibliographic Overview." *International Library Review*, 9, (1977): 319–350.
- Gorman, Michael. *Our Enduring Values: Revisited*. Chicago, IL: American Library Association, 2015.
- Hansson, Joacim. *Libraries and Identity: The Role of Institutional Self-Image and Identity in the Emergence of New Types of Libraries*. Cambridge, UK: Chandos Publishing, 2010.
- Hicks, Deborah. "The Construction of Librarians' Professional Identities: A Discourse Analysis/La Construction de L'identité Professionnelle Du Bibliothécaire: Une Analyse de Discours." *Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science* 38, no. 4 (2014): 251–270.

⁹ Joacim Hansson, *Libraries and Identity: The Role of Institutional Self-Image and Identity in the Emergence of New Types of Libraries*.

¹⁰ Aleksandra Vraneš, Herbert Achleitner, Alexander Dimchev, Jadranka Lasich-Lazick and Ljiljana Markovich, "The information society: Barriers to the free access to information," In *European curriculum reflections on library and information science education*. edited by Leif Kajberg and Leif Lørring, 101–118. (Copenhagen, Denmark: The Royal School of Library and Information Science, 2005), 101.

- Injac, Vesna. "The National Library of Serbia: Past, Present and Future." *Alexandria* 21, no. 3 (2011): 1-14.
- Kožul, Dejan. "Serbia." In *Media literacy and education needs of journalists and the public in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia*, pp. 55–62. Bucharest, Romania: South-East European Partnership for Media Development. 2017.
- Matica Srpska Library. "About us: Historical review." 2015. <http://www.bms.ns.ac.rs/bmseng101a.htm>
- Stokić Simončić, Gordana, and Vučković, Željko. "Searching for a Lost Identity: Serbian Librarianship at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century." *Library Trends* 63, no. 2 (2014): 284–298. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2014.0028>
- Trajković, Borjanka, and Dunić, Dragana Litrièin. "Libraries, Schools, and Modern Age." *Human: Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies* 6, no. 1 (2016): 105–108.
- University Library "Svetozar Markovic." "About us: History." Accessed June 3rd, 2018, from <http://www.unilib.rs/o-nama/istorijat/>
- Vraneš, Aleksandra. "The Role of University Education in Enabling Free Access to Information." *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 48, no. 2 (2007): 139–153.
- Vraneš, Aleksandra. "From the History of the Library and Information Science Department of the Faculty of Philology of the University of Belgrade." *INFOtheca-Journal of Informatics & Librarianship* 9 no. 1–2 (2008), 5a–9a.
- Vraneš, Aleksandra, Herbert Achleitner, Alexander Dimchev, Jadranka Lasich-Lazick and Ljiljana Markovich. "The information society: Barriers to the free access to information." In *European curriculum reflections on library and information science education*. edited by Leif Kajberg and Leif Lørring, 101–118. Copenhagen, Denmark: The Royal School of Library and Information Science, 2005.
- Wildemuth, Barbara. *Applications of Social Research Methods to Questions in Information and Library Science*. Westport, CN: Libraries Unlimited, 2009.
- Yin, Robert. *Case Study Research Design and Methods*. 5th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014.