

Building spaces for citizen participation and collaboration. Library and information services.

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Abstract: The concept of Open Government is supported on three foundations: Transparency, Collaboration, and Participation. Libraries are democratic spaces that encourage social cohesion and guarantee equal opportunities for information access. Despite the implications of the digital communication era, the construction of libraries is still underway. Also and to a greater extent, their design incorporates spaces that lead to social interaction and freedom of expression among their communities. This becomes relevant for academic libraries since they have an impact on training critical citizens who are also committed with their environment. This investigation employs a mixed research methodology describing the situation of academic library buildings in Mexico, with an emphasis on collaborative work spaces in the libraries of the Autonomous University of San Luis Potosí.

Keywords: Open Government; Libraries – Buildings; Evaluation of Libraries; Library Services; Libraries - UASLP

1. Introduction

In 1947, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), a Federal Law, is published in the United States of America, opening a new panorama for information policies worldwide. A decade later, in 1957, the concept of Open Government appeared. It was attributed to Wallace Parks' article called: "The Open Government principle: Applying the right to now under the constitution". (Jiménez, 2013)

Open Government may be defined as "the politics doctrine establishing that the activity of the government and the state administration should be open at all levels for the efficient scrutiny of the public and of their supervision." (Guardián

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Orta, 2010, p. 76), A constant dialogue with citizens is essential to achieve this purpose, their thoughts and petitions must be heard. The creation and improvement of public services must be encouraged, since it would reinforce transparency and accountability. (Calderón and Lorenzo, 2010:11)

The concept of Open Government is based on three foundations: transparency, collaboration, and participation. These factors will help to establish a group of actions and measures that, promoted by the citizens, will change government decisions. The increase of available information on government activities will make the latter possible. Considering the three foundations, this document will focus on participation, which supports the citizens' right to get actively involved on the generation of public policies, keeping in mind the additional benefit for the administration since it may incorporate citizens' knowledge and experience.

Dialogue, discussion, and work should be the basis for society and government to use and develop ICTs, obtain accountability, and search for beneficial government actions. Also, government commitments and public consultation should be identified and independently evaluated. The aim is that governments are compelled to adopt principles that encourage a worldwide culture of Open Government, where citizens have a greater empowerment and participation in decision-making.

2. Open Government, democracy and libraries

Information and knowledge are basic goods for the economic, social, educational, and scientific development. Therefore, they are considered a right and a social asset by contributing to diminish social inequalities and favor the construction of a fairer, more sustainable and inclusive society. In Mexico, 46.2% of the population is poor and 38.5% do not complete basic education (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía). These figures increase the problems of inequality, social security and exclusion, mainly among young people. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development situates Mexico at the third place in the percentage of young people who do not study nor work, only below Turkey and Israel. (Instituto Nacional de Educación de Adultos)

The transition to a knowledge society and an Open Government that promotes citizens' participation and collaboration requires policies and actions that reinforce the coordination of several social and productive divisions with educational and scientific processes. Equipment and infrastructure for education, information, and technology, where innovation is established as an action strategy, must also be developed to support, integrate and advance a human capital quality.

Therefore, government, educational and research institutions are responsible for the creation of true learning environments with dignified education spaces and access to new information and communication technologies, considering also

socially excluded regions and specific characteristics (cultural and climatic) of every state in the country.

Clearly, today's formal education systems alone do not cover all training functions, nor they provide every ability required by the productive and social system claimed by current society. Thus, libraries prove their social, educational and cultural pertinence by holding and making available to the public the knowledge originated through several generations, plural ideological expressions, and diverse information in general. All this presented in a compiled, organized and assessed manner. In this setting, libraries become study and research centers, places to access information, and alternative spaces for coexistence and socio-cultural expression.

With the actions aforementioned, libraries contribute to social, educational and research advances of the countries. So it is essential for them to have quality information services and technologies, as well as sufficient, adequate and flexible spaces in response to new sociocultural demands. Moreover, these actions should be taken to shape a critical and informed citizenship.

According to the numbers from the last diagnosis performed in the country, construction of university libraries has increased. In the year 2010, 957 libraries were underway with 58% being adapted buildings and 42% new buildings. (Vázquez Martínez, 2015)

3. Evaluation of library spaces

There is no complete or available information in Mexico about the characteristics of library spaces, its use, basic spatial features –dimensions and materials -, or about the hygiene and safety regulations they must fulfill.

In view of this situation, in 2011, a research group was integrated with Library Science professionals and architects from 2 Mexican universities, Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí and Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán. The aim was to analyze the architectonic characteristics of university library spaces, space use, and impact on information services. The group defined the following as its main objectives:

- Establish a forum of institutional and disciplinary collaboration to design, build, remodel and evaluate spaces in libraries, archives and information units in general.
- Analyze the main challenges faced by libraries, archives and information units in general in the evaluation and use of their spaces.
- Identify problems and challenges in the assessment and criteria to determine the relevance and functionality of their spaces.

- Present practical experiences related to quantitative and qualitative evaluation of spaces in libraries, archives and information units in general.
- This forum found that the main problems affecting the construction, renovation, and use of library spaces are related to:
- Nonexistent or not updated information about the basic elements to consider in the evaluation, planning, design, construction, and suitability of library spaces, or the methodological process to implement those.
- Considering a single building with multiple capacities, without thinking about the characteristics of the natural and sociocultural environment, or the particular demands of information and services.
- Limited and inadequate guidelines about current quality criteria employed in environmental, construction and safety certification processes.
- In Mexico, nonexistent feedback process based on past experiences in the evaluation of building use, design and construction, or in the implementation of library services.
- Nonexistent civic and service prospects in the interests of reaching goals and an adequate development in the future.

Based on these meetings, results include four investigation seminars in Mexico, two roundtable discussions, three books published, articles accepted in peer-reviewed journals, and the incorporation of undergraduate and graduate students working in their theses.

4. Methodology proposal for the evaluation of library spaces

A hypothesis indicates that to get into a knowledge society, academic libraries, which provide quality information and knowledge, should innovate its original conception in both, the building that accommodates the activities for information transmission and the way or techniques in which these are performed. So, the creation of criteria, guidelines and regulations should be based on architectural and Library Science analysis and review, before and after practical experiences, and on a methodology considering qualitative and quantitative factors, as well as user and location characteristics.

Our research group established the following as general objectives of the project:

1. Propose a theoretical and methodological reference to review the evaluation, design, construction and use processes of academic library buildings.
2. Analyze guidelines and basic recommendations for the evaluation, planning, design, construction, general space use, and implementation of services in academic libraries to produce an innovative, sustainable and inclusive effect on the quality of information transmission processes, considering as well particular environmental and sociocultural characteristics of the country.

To achieve these objectives, our research group established, among others, the guiding document, general lines of investigation related to several objects of the study and analysis methods, the proposal and delimitation of the sample by climate region and vocation (public library, university library), specific document research (dependent on the region, user, typology and services), the generation of particular references, field research, instrument application (quantitative and qualitative), information processing, a discussion previous to results, an individual analysis, as well as a review and comparison of the object of the study.

To elaborate a measuring tool, we are evaluating original construction plans with AutoCAD software, defining quantitative criteria based on collection analysis, and comparing guidelines for building domestic and international libraries.

For the qualitative evaluation, a questionnaire is under develop based on a post occupation evaluation (POE) – also known as post-inauguration evaluation -. The final product would become a basic resource for projects since it comes from the knowledge and analysis of the building's own life, actual service implementation, and daily users during many functioning times, beyond the conditions - implicit and explicit – imposed by recommendations or guidelines.

To achieve the proposed objectives, the research group established the libraries built intentionally as such in the last 5 years in the Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí (UASLP) as the first location for the instrument application. This institution was created in 1623, with the establishment of the Colegio de la Compañía de Jesús (School of the Compañía de Jesús). On January 10, 1923, the autonomous university was officially founded. Nowadays, the university has 176 education programs for Bachelor's Degree and Postgraduates with a population of 28,376 students.

The Library System (SISBIB-UASLP) has 21 information units which cover the information needs of its users with a traditional print collection, databases, digital information resources, and user-training activities. It should be

mentioned that services offered by the SISBIB-UASLP are certified under the international ISO 9001:2008 standard.

UASLP libraries are transforming their space conception by integrating components that allow the expansion of the range of services offered to facilitate information access and use. Modifications include the adaptation of rooms and even whole floors to get an exclusive access to digital materials, other spaces promote informal reading or collaborative learning such as discussions and idea exposure, other spaces were kept for cultural expressions of the users.

5. Conclusions

Libraries change and transform according to society needs. Currently, technological advances, education tendencies and social needs brought about by citizen participation demand modifications in the conception of library construction and its use, including for example, space adaptations for collaborative learning known as Learning Commons.

The concept of a library building centered in collections yields to diversified services and uses. Traditional reading and academic activities incorporate current forms of expression of younger academics, who claim a diversified use of spaces where users become central characters in their knowledge construction and are responsible for their behavior.

Creating spaces that support creativity and innovation is a challenge to be considered by library professionals offering information services. However, it requires other specialists such as architects, anthropologists, and psychologists, among others, who based on their area of expertise may provide elements to build or adapt the spaces that the current environment demands.

Without a doubt, building spaces which motivate collaborative participation, free discussion, and idea exposure, contributes to prepare critical, informed, and responsible citizens, who will consequently demand an Open Government and encourage democracy nationwide.

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