Diversity Management as a Key Challenge to the Library in the Multicultural Society

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ABSTRACT

Libraries are strongly concerned with intercultural issues. They can play an active role as a social meeting place. Multifaceted activities and services provide groups of different ethnical backgrounds with possibilities to enjoy their cultural heritage as well as to cultivate their mother-tongue. Libraries facilitate learning the language of the new country and thus gaining access to the new society and participation in its cultural live.

The challenge is how to create and promote library services caring for the special needs described above.

For this reason, a student-initiated anthology was published as the latest part of a book series realized at the Institute of Library and Information Science at Humboldt University, Berlin. "Bridges for Babylon" offers different approaches to the subject of the intercultural library.

On this basement diversity management seems to be the key to successful multicultural library work. Only a general intercultural sensitivity throughout the library staff and a self-evident handling of the given diversity enable further activities.

KEYWORDS: Diversity management, multicultural library work, cultural diversity.

1. INTRODUCTION – MULTICULTURALISM, A HIGHLY TOPICAL ISSUE

Currently a lot of international organisations are engaged in topics like multiculturality, diversity and internationality. The European Union designated 2008 as the "Year of Intercultural dialogue". According to the rising number of languages, ethnic and cultural backgrounds represented on the continent, intercultural dialogue has "an increasingly important role to play in fostering European identity and citizenship". In addition, the United Nations proclaimed 2008 as the "International Year of Languages".

In August 2006 the Governing Board of IFLA already has approved the IFLA Multicultural Library Manifesto, which in April 2008 was endorsed by the Intergovernmental Council for UNESCO's Information for All Programme.

"Cultural diversity or multiculturalism is the foundation of our collective strength in our local communities and in our global society" (IFLA, 2006).

All these examples show very clear that nowadays multicultural matters play an essential role in our globalized society.

Especially libraries are strongly concerned with intercultural issues. They can play an active role as a social meeting place.

2. A BOOK PROJECT – GAINING ACCESS TO THE TOPIC

The challenge is how to create and promote library services caring for the special needs described above. For this reason, a student-initiated anthology was published

as the latest part of a book series (Hauke, 2008).

Since 2002 the Berlin School of Library and Information Science has been offering undergraduate students a seminar on the aspect: "Turning an idea into a book". This hands-on seminar introduces students to real-world book publication from the submission of an idea to the final hardcover product. In the process students learn how to edit and prepare submitted articles for publication, how to secure financing and how to find a publisher. The participants learn about the basic aspects of publishing project management.

The goal of the seminar is to produce a comprehensive, exhaustive volume on a subject relevant to library and information science.

Against this background and as an active contribution to the „Year of Intercultural Dialogue" the originated publication „Bridges for Babylon" presents strategies and projects to cope with the cultural gap. It provides support to the library work with groups of different ethnical background throughout German public libraries.

Building-up on the gained experiences the main goal of this paper is to give an approach to multicultural library work in the context of diversity management after giving separate introductions in both topics.

3. CROSS-CULTURAL LIBRARY WORK

Like in many other countries throughout Europe the ongoing demographical change is also becoming an urgent matter affecting the German population. The most significant criteria of this process are declining birth-rates and an increasing life expectancy. "Besides seniors, migrants and Germans with migrational background are forming the biggest part of our human population, which is ethnical not satisfyingly included in our society so far." (Granato, 2003, p.10)

According to the German Federal Statistical Office 15.3 million foreigners and persons with migrational background are living in Germany. This number comes up to approximately one-fifth of the 82,7 million German population (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2006, p.5f).

In this context libraries are in demand - they should play an active role as a social meeting place. Multifaceted activities and services provide groups of different ethnical backgrounds with possibilities to enjoy their cultural heritage as well as to cultivate their mother-tongue. Libraries facilitate learning the language of the new country and thus gaining access to the new society and participation in its cultural live.

In the following three different perspectives on current activities of German public libraries are discussed:

3.1 SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

First of all it seems indispensable to involve library staff in the cross-cultural process. They are the ones who get in direct touch with all customers during their daily work and especially by providing projects of different kinds to the users of various cultural backgrounds. If the main ideas of multicultural library services aren't reflected enough throughout the staff members, their activities will be likely unavailing. Therefore only a general intercultural sensitivity and a self-evident handling of the given diversity enable further exercise.

3.2 INTERCULTURAL PROJECT WORK

"According to several statistics 50% of the German population under 40 years and more than 60% of all children and teenagers in urban areas will have a migrational background in 2010. For this reason it will be obligatory for libraries to provide multicultural services." (Hauke, 2008, p.177)

But the time to get active is now. Libraries have to change and adapt themselves to the various needs of the developing population. Being social places with established structures they should play an important role in migrational work. However it would be insufficient to only care for immigrants. The additional part of intercultural library work attends to the natives. They have to be sensitized to foreign cultures for being able to open up their minds as well as to pave the way to intercultural tolerance and awareness.

Libraries should commit to their educational mission, although the topic has not found its way into the German law so far.

3.3 NETWORKING

Cross-cultural work also means cooperation. Due to their multifaceted activities, public libraries can create empowering networks in their local communities by cooperating with:

- educational institutions,
- welfare institutions,
- voluntary associations,
- housing associations,
- economy and
- politics.

This kind of networking avoids double-work and at the same time opens the libraries' rich knowledge and ICT infrastructure to the work of the participating institutions. In times of decreasing budgets and an immense pressure this scenario also holds the unique chance to reestablish the library as an institution, especially in front of local politicians.

4. DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

Diversity management, a concept that originated in the

American Civil Rights movement, is gradually taking root in Europe (Luedicke et al.). "Diversity Management" is a management tool to take advantage of the resource "diversity". The strategy is to promote the awareness, acknowledgement and implementation of diversity in institutions. Human beings are different in age, social and national background, gender, sexual orientation, physical and mental ability as well as religious belief. Diversity also embraces the range of individual skills, educational qualifications, work experience and background, languages and other relevant attributes and experiences which differentiate individuals(Iber; Virtbauer, 2007). Cox defines diversity management as „planning and implementing organizational systems and practices to manage people so that the potential advantages of diversity are maximized while its potential disadvantages are minimized."(Cox, 1993, p.11)

To explain "diversity" more graphically and comprehensible, and also to pinpoint potential discrimination, various "dimensions of diversity" have been developed. These dimensions display "subcategories of diversity":
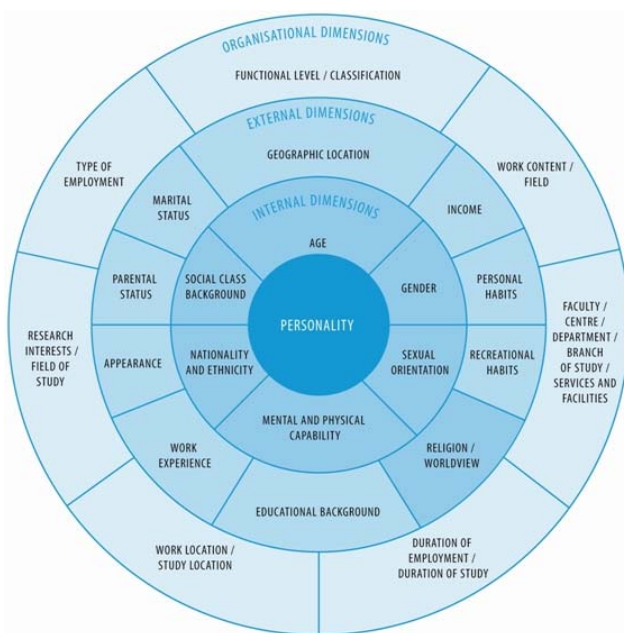

Figure 1: Dimensions of diversity (Gardenswartz, 2002)

Accordingly the main categories which comprise diversity are as follows (Luedicke et al.):

- Gender
- Nationality and Ethnicity
- Social Class Background
- Sexual Orientation
- Age
- Mental and Physical Capability

- Religion / Worldview

As the paper spotlights the intercultural issues of library work, the category "Nationality and Ethnicity" is of special interest for the further explanations. The purpose of Diversity Management in this particular context is to get the positive potential of diversity and transform this potential into a reality. The benefit of that includes (Palamara, 2008):

- increased ability to attract and retain skilled employees
- responsive service provision
- higher staff morale
- enhanced community relations
- positive communication and relationships
- improved team functioning and performance
- creativity and innovation
- improved staff health and well being
- enhanced equality of opportunity

Diversity and its potential is a new way for libraries to encourage staff members and use their potential for new target groups.

5. MANAGE DIVERSITY: HOW TO DO CROSS-CULTURAL LIBRARY WORK

The following passage deals with examples of cross-cultural library work who all make use of the positive influence of cultural diversity. The three main fields as introduced above will now be reused.

5.1 SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

„I'm wondering how many languages are spoken by the staff of my library…" - This could be a possible starting-point for a library to get a first impression of cultural diversity throughout the staff members. To go further into this question and to explore the full range of abilities evaluative methods are the most common way. Once these hidden skills are fully revealed they can be used effectively to support multicultural activities. The employees for example are able to introduce their language skills into their project work with immigrants or to benefit from their knowledge of other cultures. By any means these valuable resources should be taken into account and, moreover, they should be fostered at every opportunity. Best-practice would be the filling of a vacancy. Then the library can from the very beginning of drawing the job posting search for special intercultural skills to enrich the stuffing team.

Last year the library "Büchereien Wien", Austria started to evaluate language skills of their staff members. The result of the evaluation shows that more than twelve

different languages are spoken. In addition to current languages like English, Spanish, French and Italian a few of them are able to speak Russian, Greek, Dutch, Portuguese, Swedish, Czech, Turkish and some more. Based on that knowledge some staff members could be offered to do further duties, for example in lectureship or workshops.

5.2 NETWORKING

When it comes to co-operational relations between the library and official authorities or foreign institutions, previous multicultural knowledge is always of avail. In the case of getting in touch with representatives of a foreign organization for example, it might be of advantage to communicate in their mother-tongue rather than to speak English. In doing so, insinuations, subtexts as well as special terminology can be used much more sophisticated. Anyhow the atmosphere of the conversation will be influenced favorably. Furthermore, being familiar with cultural peculiarities prevents from dropping a cultural clanger.

One successful example for networking is "The Gellerup Model". Over many years, Gellerup Library has built a network of cooperation partners. Some of these partners came from the public administration, others from housing associations, the networks they maintain and local groupings.

"The Gellerup Model" is a managerial team consisting of managers and leaders from the municipal social and employment administration, the police, schools, clubs, library, the day centre for the elderly etc. in the Gellerup area. It is presently responsible for the correlation between the municipal efforts for the citizens in the area and is also responsible for developing cross-disciplinary efforts. The primary tasks are coordination of solutions for joint tasks, development of contingency plans through allocation of resources on all levels and to ensure consensus on exact shared demands on behaviour. Other tasks include public participation in initiating activities that support and coach the citizens and which create opportunities for active citizenship and counteract discrimination.

The efforts of libraries in the field of multicultural activities are often limited by a lack of communicational structures and channels to share the gained experiences. Since mid of 2008 the German library web portal "KNB-Portal" (KNB = library competence network) has launched a special sub website which covers multicultural library work in all its particulars (Osterode, 2008). Joining this forum the user can, amongst others, gain insights into definitions, various best practises, literature reviews, further trainings or just get a general idea what multicultural library work is about. This example shows very well that cooperation is not just taking place between libraries and other institutions. The importance of sharing experience and building networks

inside the profession should not be underestimated as well. The website serves as a communication tool for the participating libraries and at the same time it constitutes a model to pick up for other groups of interest.

5.3 INTERCULTURAL PROJECT WORK

These days, public libraries already offer a broad variety of creative projects.

Libraries recognize the benefit from cross-cultural projects for their staff members, to reach a new target group and to create opportunities for connecting people with (people from) different cultures. Even with adequate resources and systems a library cannot function properly without trained library staff. By involving staff in this kind of projects, they have the possibility to get in touch with parts of different cultures.

Another important advantage is to have the chance to encounter with migrants and people with migrational background, for example at special guided library-tours. Readings held by authors with different backgrounds allow an active exchange between cultures as the audience is invited to ask and discuss.

Concerning the fostering of cross-cultural reading literacy German public libraries have established various projects so far: "Media boxes" for children containing multilingual children's books and

Through this all participants will primarily experience tolerance and a deeper multicultural understanding.

6. GLOBAL EXCHANGE

Thinking internationally also means thinking interculturally. Leaving behind national borders, one can gain various experiences and thus develop a global understanding on what cross-culturality implies today. Cultural and linguistic diversity are the common heritage of humankind and should be cherished and preserved for the benefit of all. For this reason, libraries should reflect, support and promote cultural and linguistic diversity on international, national, and local levels.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper intends to provide an opportunity for young professionals, students and library members to create awareness in- and outside the library profession on this cutting-edge topic. In many communities a lot of multicultural people have never set a foot in libraries. They need help from the librarians to step in. The text serves as a basis to develop concepts and best practices of multicultural library work to all librarians concerned with these issues.

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