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Networking – Shared Memory (1)

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Networking: Shared Memory - The Need of Modern Societies for Information and Formation

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Societies are becoming more complex and more diverse day by day. The complex composition of modern communities poses some demands for information that has to do with cultural and historical background of people forming part of the community. In some countries (for example in the Caribbean) there are Creole societies formed in the colonial past by compulsory or free migration. In the developed countries the traditional homogeneous society is nowadays rapidly changing because of migration especially for economical reasons. People from the developing countries are migrating to the economically stronger ones in the hope for better chances for their children in the future. The constant movement of people from the less developed to the industrialized part of the world not only to work but also to reunite families' leads to the creation of large segments in the community. Some will in the long run integrate with the majority in society and some will form isolated ethnic minority groups but one thing is sure; they will keep on maintaining and cherishing their own cultural values and will keep on searching for their roots. People will always want to know where they came from in order to form their identity. We need to cope with the new demands of the changing modern societies.

Diversity is the term used to better describe our modern societies. They have two shortcomings that are relevant to mention here:

- 1) Denial of the multiculturalism
- 2) Democratic principles are lacking in practice

Ad 1 The denial manifests itself in the fact that the community as a whole is not taking notice of the common needs of the diverse minority groups forming part of the community. One example is the need of individuals to form valuable members of the community and not to be denoted and treated as strange minority group members. The groups in society are not only ignorant of their own situation but also of the situation of other groups. They do not know why their own group is forming part of the community and at the same time they do not understand why other groups are also forming part of the community. This ignorance results in intolerance and discrimination. There is lack of formation and information. For example the history of slavery and its consequences the legacy of slavery is still being marginally treated in the school curriculum in the Netherlands and the Netherlands Antilles. It is not being treated as part of the nation's history. It does not explain the role in the past of each segment that nowadays is forming part of the community. This knowledge is essential to be able to understand the existence of the multicultural society and to accept that each group forms an integral part of the community with equal rights.

Ad 2 Each member of the community needs to have equal chances to develop him or herself to become a valuable member of society and to make use of his or her democratic rights. But this is possible only if the community offers the opportunity to each individual to do so. Availability of information is important for a person to participate optimally in all the possibilities that society offers. Still there exists inequality based on group membership. Information that is being disseminated does not reach all groups, sometimes it is incorrect, biased or there is no information at all available for certain groups. Consequently some groups in the community are not able to reach their utmost in society due to lack of information and formation. Young people are very vulnerable because they do not know their heritage and cannot express themselves properly and this can cause behavioral psychological problems. This can manifest itself sometimes by the use of violence and even result in crime, but there is a solution.

The United Nations conference in Durban, South Africa 2001 recognized the value of human diversity. In the action program is stated amongst others that all people and individuals form one unique and rich human family in diversity that contributes to the progress of civilization and that all cultures are common heritage of humanity as a whole. The preservation and promotion of tolerance and respect for diversity will produce more open societies where diversity can be expressed, tolerated and embraced. It is important that we realize that we have to accept diversity. We have to attend to the needs of the modern societies. It is a fact and if we do not do this in time we will have to deal sooner or later with the consequences; racial discrimination, intolerance, violation of human rights and democratic principles.

Dissemination of information that does justice to humanity is important for the formation of each individual in society and help to unite people and create the above mentioned concept of one human family based on equality, dignity and solidarity. Therefore in our modern societies we need to:

1. Use modern techniques for dissemination of the correct information
2. Educate people at each level about history and human rights.

Ad 1. International communication can conduce to cultural exchange and promotion of cultural diversity. The use of modern technology increases the possibilities for international communication. Communication media can contribute to create more awareness by representing the multicultural society. Archives must prepare themselves to use modern technology for the dissemination of information to reach and serve the public beyond their own borders.

- For the underdeveloped countries it is difficult to keep up with the technological advancements and this can conduce to more underdevelopment, marginality, poverty, social exclusion, economic inequality and eventually to migration. Therefore it is also important to ensure that the underdeveloped countries also benefit of globalization. This can be done amongst others by international cooperation to promote equality in opportunity for commercial economic growth.

Ad 2. One of the essential things a person wants to learn about its past is who he is and where he comes from in order to be able to understand his place in the modern community. It is therefore important to teach the fact and reality of history of mankind since ancient times until recent history. We have to know about the suffering of millions of men, women and children, caused by slavery, apartheid, colonialism, holocaust and genocide. We have to understand that socio-economic structures and cultural practices of the past have resulted in the present situation and see to it that this never occurs again. It is important not to neglect or hide the past anymore but to say the truth about it in order to reconcile and also to try to find ways to express this reconciliation for example by honoring the memories of the victims of the human tragedies with monuments and institutes to pursue the knowledge of history. Education at each level (especially of children and the youth) on human rights and education to recognize and to respect cultural diversity is important to change attitudes and behavior based on racism, racial discrimination and will promote tolerance and respect for the diversity in society. Education is a determining factor to promote, spread and protect human values of justice and equality. As keepers of sources of history we can contribute to diminish the shortcomings in our respective societies and contribute to their improvement. Our task as archivists is not only to preserve our historical sources but to promote our historical knowledge. We cannot just be keepers of the information and expect people to come to us to learn about their history by themselves. We must reach out to them. Archives must be preserved and made accessible for public use. We also have to teach people to preserve and respect our sources of history as part of our cultural heritage and protect them from being destroyed. We as archivists must promote the use of archives with outreach program activities for the general public while taking care that the cultural diversity is represented in these programs. The archives must cooperate with all groups in our community.

International Collaboration

The International Council on Archives has dealt with the role of the archivist to comply with the modern demand for information and with human rights and archives (CITRA Marseille 2002 and Cape Town 2003). International collaboration is the ideal platform for creating a model of cooperation directed on making archives accessible to people worldwide in order to cope with the demand of the diversity. Now it is up to us to find ways for cooperation between archival institutions to protect archives and to make them accessible for information and exchange. To meet with the demand for information of several groups in society we must become aware that;

- archivists not only are keepers but now play an important part in the gathering of information needed;
- sources in our repositories are not for local use only, we not only preserve but also prepare the information they contained for exchange with other colleagues;
- active acquiring of information from sources in other countries is needed;
- active acquiring of additional information from other sources is needed; (audiovisual material, historical objects from museum and oral history);
- an outreach program of activities need to be developed for several groups in the community.

At the same time one will become aware that it is a huge problem how to address this demand. The only way is through international cooperation. The question is how to start?

Shared memory

We as archivists are the keepers of what we call the shared memory. We have to start with making accessible sources of common interest for a large group of people. The interrelation between people and countries has created common experiences, a common past which undoubtedly is reflected in sources that were and still are being created in all parts of the world. There is a memory that must be shared by a large group of people. We have to find out which are the countries, institutions and peoples with a common history that were or are involved with the creation of common sources. We must find a way to obtain the information in the common sources so that we can make it available for the benefit for all those involved and serve the needs of the diversified modern society for formation and information.

In order to do so we need to create and develop a concept for dealing with common past and common sources. Then we have to develop this concept in a concrete program of activities and to find the international partners to be involved. The proposal is for the term “Shared Memory” to be developed in a concept for international collaboration for exchanging of information in common sources.

Definition

We have to define what ICA members understand by the concept Shared Memory. There are several sources and subjects that can fit in this concept. It is important that ICA members have the opportunity to amply discuss and define the concept as it can become an ICA policy for the stimulation of collaboration between members’ countries, regions, institutions, international organizations, such as IFLA and ICCROM in order to promote the development and preservation of archives worldwide. Once we agree upon the definition of Shared Memory, ICA will have to determine which sources and subject fit in this definition. If one assumes that Shared Memory has to do with cooperation for accessibility and use of archives we will also have to deal with questions such as:

- Legislation; are archives open for public use?
- Preservation; what is the state of preservation?
- Training; is there a qualified staff to make the material accessible?

Objectives

Shared Memory will strengthen worldwide collaboration by:

1. Creating, promoting and coaching of a program of activities according to the agreed definition which will result in the development and preservation of archives.
2. Collaboration with the International Organizations, ICCROM and IFLA to assist/participate in this program.
3. Collaboration between ICA sections, Committees and Branches to work out these programs, to participate and assist in the implementation.
4. Make ICA more visible to governments. Working according to a set program of cooperation will help the respective governments to see what the role of ICA is for the benefit of its membership and will be likely to give more contribution.
5. Involvement/Activate members: to participate in a set framework, where each partner will benefit by acquiring concrete tangible products and results.
6. Increasing awareness on the preservation and accessibility.

ICA’s role in practice

ICA is the platform where members will become more involved when they become aware that their countries respective archives are not only important sources for their nation but also for others, the whole region or other part of the world and that in a form of cooperation and collaboration something really is being done not only for their preservation, but also to make the sources accessible. ICA can create a framework to make collaboration more concrete with visible and tangible result for each participant. Branches will have an active role in this as they have the direct contact with the membership to acquire the information needed to prepare the program.

It is for the Commission for Program Management (CPM) to work very close with the regional branches and sections to:

- Establish which sources and subjects can be categorized as Shared Memory according to ICA definition.
- Prioritization of the outcome and make a choice accordingly.
- Set up programs of activities for cooperation for some years (Partners involved will have projects and activities according to this program in order to reach the set goals but it does not mean that other activities will have no attention or will be neglected).

- Involve international organizations ICCROM/IFLA and ICA committees and sections in the implementation of the program e.g. with training, seminars, studies etc.
- Finding funds using this program by partners.
- Restructure FIDA, which will help the members with finding funds.
- Monitoring the implementation of the programs, evaluation and adaptation if necessary.

To conclude:

Most countries in the world are composed of diversified groups of people. Acknowledgement by society of the presence of all these groups of people is a problem because of the lack of information and formation in general about the past and culture of each group that forms part of the society. Problems such as racial discrimination can occur because of the lack of awareness about cultural diversity and knowledge of history. We must start with school education but also at other levels educate people to recognize cultural diversity by dissemination of information. Archives can play an important role in the diversified society as disseminators of information, only if we take action. The ICA is the ideal platform to organize a program of exchange between institutions and other international organizations dedicated to the dissemination of information and preservation of the cultural heritage. The modern technology offers us unlimited opportunity to acquire and exchange information, but we have to set priorities and keep in mind the economically less developed countries. Defining the concept “Shared Memory” is the first step for such a program.

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