Community, Cooperation and Public Libraries: The Need of Bonding for Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

Inter-organizational cooperation represents a process in which organisations believe in interdependence and pool resources in the interest of obtaining common benefits that each partner could not secure independently. This paper is an attempt to understand and evaluate the bonding of community, cooperation, and public libraries for sustainable development. The types of cooperation and community information services (CIS) have been traced by briefly presenting the theoretical aspect of community. Elements of cooperation for sustainability have also been presented. The paper also provides insight on factors affecting cooperation, the public library's cooperation with other organizations, etc.

Keywords: *Community; Public Library; Community Information Services; Cooperation; Elements of Cooperation; Factors Affecting Cooperation; Public Library's Cooperation.*

Introduction

Libraries have been collaborating with the community for a very long time. Shared goals, mutual trust, and a common vision served as the foundation for the collaboration. But, it wasn't simple or efficient to cooperate in delivering information resources. Modern communication advancements enable and promote collaboration between libraries and other information-providing organisations in the community, resulting in an expansion of the library's offerings. Resources for giving information were not quick and efficient. The expansion of the library's services is facilitated and encouraged by current advancements in communication between libraries and other information-providing organisations in the community. Because they have similar goals and objectives for promoting social well-being, community members, libraries, and information-providing organisations become linked in cooperative relationships. As a result, a public library tends to enrich people's lives by providing them with access to the concepts, knowledge, and amusement that can be found in books as well as a range of other resources. The technology of today is being fully utilised by public libraries to collect, organise, store, and disseminate any type of information needed by the community they serve.

In the modern, fast-developing world headed by advancement in information and communication technology (ICT) and with a tremendous explosion of information, one of the agencies to make people aware of the progress in the world is the public library. UNESCO,

in its mission, stated that the public library should ensure access for citizens to all sorts of community information. It also stresses that the public library is the local centre of information, making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. By doing so, the public library needs various information sources and resources. The varied demands from the user side are continuously increasing, especially concerning the lower socio-economic groups, the disadvantaged, or people with information on a specific problem. It is rare to find a public library that has all of the necessary facilities to meet all of the community's information needs. This forces the public library to enter into cooperation with other information-providing organisations in the community.

Community Information Services

Both sociologists and others have provided ambiguous definitions of the term "community." There are two ways that scholars have characterised communities: first, the "organic" idea highlighted a sense of belonging, strong relationships, and shared interests as the main qualities of communities. The "ecological" conception of community, which emphasises the territorial or spatial nature, is another. We term that common life a community whenever the members of any group, little or large, live together in such a way that they share, not this or that special interest, but the essential condition of a common life (MacIver & Page, 1949).

MacIver and Page have listed two bases of community;

> I) Locality (Geographical, linguistic, dress, food habits, etc.)
>
> II) Community Sentiments (thinking, thought, ideologies, common causes of activities, etc.) (Gisbert, 1965).

Information is vital for the development of any society. It has become a basic need of human in all walks of life. Information needed to cope with crisis situations in the lives of an individual and their community is referred to as "community information. It can enable individuals and groups to make informed decisions about themselves and the communities in which they live and participate more effectively in the democratic process. The Library Association's Working Party on CIS provided a comprehensive definition of Community Information Services (CIS). It defines "community information services" as those which assist individuals and groups with daily problem solving and with participation in the democratic process. The services concentrate on the needs of those who do not have ready access to other sources of assistance on the most important problems that people have to face, problems to do with their homes, their jobs, and their rights" (Library Association, 1980).

Allen Bunch, who was the first to attempt to unify the concept of CIS, claims that it has two aspects: one is concerned with the nature of the information provided, i.e., information in the community to assist people with solving daily problems or improving the quality of their lives; the other is concerned with the nature of the clientele served, i.e., those who are disadvantaged because they do not have access to, or are unable to obtain, unrestricted access to, information (Bunch, 1982).

Public libraries, which are tasked with the fundamental duty of disseminating information, can offer community information services both directly and in collaboration with other information-giving organisations such as government departments, non-governmental organisations, trustees, voluntary bodies, clubs, charitable organisations, etc. With the aim of identifying the real information needs of the community and reaching the underserved, public libraries offer direct community information services to the general public through outreach activities or programmes that are run in addition to or in substitute of regular library services. Information services are also offered by corporate sectors as part of "Corporate Social Responsibility" programmes, demonstrating their commitment to society. The current state of affairs makes it necessary for every public library, particularly those in rural and suburban areas, to establish and maintain spontaneous partnerships with local residents and other organisations that provide information in order to meet the information needs of the community through their Community Information Service programmes.

Literature Review

The available literature showed that public libraries approached the goal of fostering community from various angles, but all agreed that the public library must participate in fostering community and must publicise its activities. According to Sarah Ann Long, ALA President in 1999, libraries were in a good position to significantly contribute to addressing community issues since they are already naturally positioned to serve as community gathering places that encourage debate and collaboration. If the library approaches its outreach and library service initiatives holistically and comprehensively, it can help a community's development efforts (Hillenbrand, 2005). The community must be connected to public libraries, and Partnerships and collaborations in public library communities provide examples of how public libraries can work with other local organisations to develop initiatives, programming, and funding in order to create connection with their communities (Uthmann, 2013). A public library's reputation and borrowing rates can be improved by working with school libraries, hence it is recommended that this collaboration begin on a small scale and be expanded once there is a solid understanding on both sides (Ke & Wen, 2012). One of the main beliefs of public libraries is to promote a sense of community and connection among the people they serve. Collaboration is a practical strategy to unite community members and combine the talents of those who might not otherwise have the opportunity to work together. Collaborations benefit both the collaborators and the library, but they also help to connect people and strengthen the community (Crevasse & Stockdale, 2019). Furthermore, a substantial body of research has demonstrated that community members do have needs and that they require information services for day-to-day living. This research has also described general community information services provided by public libraries in developing countries (Stilwell, 1989; Alemna, 1995; Pettigrew *et al.,* 2002; Mukhopadhyay, 2004; Mahmood, 2005; Satpathy, 2006; Goulding, 2009).

Cooperation

Inter-organizational cooperation creates new value to accomplish a goal or mission of an organization. It brings everlasting relationships, mutual trust, mobilises resources, information flow, and other activities among participating organizations. It has been recognised as an important element in the success of any kind of community information service. Cooperation can be divided into two types: structured and unstructured cooperation. Structured cooperation is based on business activities that typically provide monetary benefits to participating parties. It is characterised by a formal relationship with written agreements and contractual rights. In almost all vertical cooperation relationships, the cooperation appears structured in nature. However, the structured approach is also used in horizontal cooperation, but in fewer cases. Because of its formality, structured cooperation occurs both at a local and a wider level. Communication will typically be formal based on the business activities between participants. Personal relationships are important in developing cooperation, but they are not seen as a prerequisite for its establishment. While unstructured cooperation occurs in horizontal and cross-sectoral cooperation relationships. The communication could be either very lively or relatively casual, but it is typically very informal. The role of personal relationships is very important and highlighted. The unstructured cooperation model is usually successful among local or regional participants.

Cooperation is constantly fostered as a valued activity for library professionals. The elements of cooperation for the sustainability of public library services may be summarised as follows:

Collective Vision

All the stakeholders share a common and recurrent idea known as a collective or shared vision. The reasons why each of the stakeholders "joined together" was to better serve the community by pooling resources and efforts to deliver better information services. Invite possible partners to participate first. By starting with no preconceived conceptions of a goal and establishing goals jointly, it is possible to create a shared vision. The vision statement was created by the entire planning team. The approach begins with discussions at meetings to determine the challenges local residents encounter in receiving information and to produce potential solutions to those challenges. The meeting's aims and objectives for providing services are clearly stated, with particular attention paid to deadlines, resource sharing, and implementation strategies for service delivery programmes. Through collaboration across organisations, the program's goals are produced. Open dialogue and trust are the foundations for shared visions. A community need led to the creation of shared vision, which is crucial to the programmes' success.

Reciprocal Trust

Reciprocal or mutual trust is focused on conditions leading to personal feelings of trust. Collective vision builds trust. A different thing that builds trust is the type of relationship

enjoyed. This was significant for all participants and contributed to a lasting trusting relationship. Existing actor relationships influence inter-organizational cooperation. Social capital, i.e., the development of bonding, trust, and norms of reciprocity, facilitates cooperation. The desire to establish trust, commitment, engender norms of reciprocity, and encourage future interaction is a significant factor in initiating and maintaining collective action. So bonding social capital, which exhibits strong ties, is important to facilitate and sustain interaction.

Distinctive Goals

Each organisation will have special resources that are available for the community. Collaboration demands the dedication of organisations and their leaders. Instead of just joining forces, two or more organisations develop a new set of shared objectives. A unique purpose or set of objectives for the project to be carried out is consistently identified by several studies for successful cooperation. They should be distinct from the goals and objectives that contributing agencies, organisations, or people have previously identified. The participants should "come together" to create a clear objective statement for the programme in order to deliver excellent community information services. Each participant should have their own specific goals. To successfully cooperate and collaborate is the partnership venture's one-of-a-kind and distinctive goal.

Cooperation is more likely to be successful if the participants perceive that the attainment of expected benefits is not in the whole. It provides justification for interaction and an incentive for future work. The anticipation of benefit reduces ambiguity and the apparent risks of investing in a cooperative relationship. The participants therefore feel that they have gained something from collective action, even if these benefits are different to those originally envisaged by the initiatives.

Factors Affecting Cooperation

There may not have been enough time set up for planning by the partners concerned, which results in a lack of resources and other inputs. Obstacles include a lack of time and time management techniques. The open lines of communication and follow-up with all parties engaged prompted a second worry. The lack of time by one or more participants within the partnership was a recurring theme in comments relating to open communication. A lack of ongoing motivation was also mentioned, which would indicate that partners are more likely to remain enthusiastic and committed when they are fully and regularly informed of all the specifics of the programmes. Informal communication that serves as a reminder of the parties' shared objectives may be enough to keep partners motivated to continue contributing to the enterprise. Informal communication that serves as a reminder of the parties' shared objectives may be enough to keep partners motivated to continue contributing to the enterprise.

Public library's Cooperation with Organizations

In general, informal, unstructured, typically local-level cooperation is likely to be prominent in establishing and maintaining the public library's cooperation with other agencies in providing community information services. Usually, the cooperation is mutual adjustment or voluntary in nature. With its CIS program, the primary objective of a public library is to cater to the information needs of its users. For example, information on occupation, employment, health, transport, consumer problems, entertainment, housing, banking system, education, governmental agencies, legal information, etc. should be included under CIS, which will help to increase the quality of life. So, to provide comprehensive community information services, a public library should enter into cooperation with other agencies. To achieve the goal, the library should prepare and maintain a detailed list or directory of all information-providing agencies, including their area of operations, locations, activities, person in charge, addresses, branches, contact numbers, publications available, and so on.

The next step is to establish cooperation, which is characterised by a dialogue with the organizations. Sometimes the dialogue calls for an agreement, usually in written form, indicating the willingness to share resources, information, expertise, etc. The public library, collaborating with these governmental and non-governmental agencies, can perform services such as collecting and sharing resources; expertise sharing; referral service; practical help; advice; advocacy; community education; follow-up service; escort services etc. The library should maintain constant interaction with the personnel of these organizations. The direct linkage with these agencies or groups helps the library to provide effective community information services to the public.

Conclusion

Sharing resources and responsibilities can result in lower costs and successful outcomes for a cooperative project. This can result in libraries offering more services and becoming more well-known in the neighbourhood. No one organisation or institution can own all the information required by our society due to the growth of digital information. We also need to ensure that everyone, including those with impairments, those living in rural or isolated areas, and those who are economically disadvantaged, has full access. Young people have the chance to explore a diversity of resources, skills, and viewpoints thanks to the friendly cooperation. Also, community-based programmes introduce a variety of viewpoints that can improve the standard of the collection in public libraries and draw more people to them.

In the modern world, there are numerous online information services that have had a significant and long-lasting impact on the legacy of human knowledge. Where there is a public repository and portal for disseminating knowledge, the new notion of online information service and virtual information service appears. It describes a network of knowledge, human intermediation, and resources offered to users in an online setting. Social networking platforms are quickly overtaking email and phone as the most efficient means of exchanging information. Today, almost every information service provider has a

presence online on sites like Flickr, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, and MySpace, among others.

The new forms of communication have emerged as a result of the rapid advancements in information technology, which have also changed the ways in which information was previously handled, stored, and transmitted. The traditional approach to delivering information services will continue, but it will need to be modified. A well-managed type of collaboration with other information-providing organisations in the community will undoubtedly strengthen the public library's social sustainability.

Acknowledgment:

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