

Users as the base for the development of library collections: the public library

Information needs are the central element of library science theory, because the activities of the library and information are underpinned by satisfying the needs of the persons who, for example, go to the public library and whom we commonly call users.

According to Rendón Rojas,¹ in the information-support media-user-document-information unit relationship, the information user's needs drive the librarianship activities of the information unit to develop collection. Determining and satisfying these information needs may be deemed one of the basic purposes of information units, whether they be the public library, newspaper archive, documentation center, information center, etc. Therefore, the need for information consists of the insufficiency or lack of knowledge with regard to some objects or parts of objects, phenomena or events that, in order to be addressed, requires additional knowledge.²

- 1 Miguel Ángel Rendón Rojas, *Bases teóricas y filosóficas de la bibliotecología* (México: UNAM, Centro Universitario de Investigaciones Bibliotecológicas, 1997), 123.
- 2 The concept of information needs is treated in Juan José Calva González, *Las necesidades de información. Teoría y métodos* (México: UNAM, 2001), 76.

In this light, one should keep in mind that information is generated by humans and is recorded to a support for the purpose of subsequent use by others. People need to have certain information and knowledge for orientation in the world and to act in accord with their surroundings. The human mind has developed to adapt to the environment and transform it. This is the intrinsic feature of human beings. Among other means, information and knowledge are attained through the auspices of the work of libraries.³

The lack of information or knowledge of a given object, phenomenon or event produces internal dissatisfaction and the information need to more completely understand the object, phenomenon or event. We may well assert that information needs are phenomena that arise repeatedly and without end in our current society, organizations and individuals

Communities or subjects are links to functions and members of society. We see this in commerce, doctors, hospitals, lawyers, law firms, teachers and students, schools, workers, factories, housewives, homes, accountants, accounting firms, etc. The diverse social sectors are associated with public libraries in that members of society need to be informed in order to ensure progress. In this light, information is a key factor for a citizens and the country's efforts to attain social, economic and political objectives.⁴ The persons who comprise these social sectors require informational support from the public library in order to perform their activities. In order to achieve this objective, Mexico has established the National Network of Public Libraries. Every library should be properly apprised of the information needs of its respective community.

3 Rendón Rojas, Bases teóricas..., 40.

4 Elsa Barberena, Las necesidades de información en el área científica (México, n. d.), 6.

Interestingly, the literature on information needs of social sectors surrounding public libraries are quite scarce, suggesting that just what these needs are and how they can be met are still relevant questions.⁵ As such, more research on public libraries and the information needs of social sectors is required in Mexico and other countries.

The emergence and manifestation of the information needs of diverse social sectors can be influenced by several factors, including:

- The place where they live
- The objectives, functions and role they have within their social sector
- The area of activity (commerce, health, hacienda, etc.)
- Topic of interest at the time (influenza, elections, earthquakes, climate, drug trafficking, security, etc.)
- Supports for performing daily activities
- Knowledge and experience in the topic area (accounting, medicine, sales, etc.)
- Experience in the use they of information resources (public library, Internet, etc.)
- Use of resources and sources to obtain the information they need, and access to diverse information units.

It is necessary to identify the information needs of community served by the public library. This can be achieved by developing a complete profile of the community. The identification of information exists in three modalities: 1) about an author (e.g. Carlos Fuentes); 2) about a social problem (e.g. public safety) and 3) about a concrete topic (e.g. treatment of influenza).

5 Pablo Velásquez, *Las necesidades de los usuarios de la información agrícola en América Latina* (Buenos Aires: 1972), 5.

These three modalities may exist simultaneously in the information needs of the user of the public library.

When the public library has a working profile of its user community, it can determine its information needs and take appropriate action to develop collections of books, magazines, journals, documents, etc. This observation is in line with Negrete, who asserted: “[...] the development collections has as its objective the construction of a collection of documental materials whose contents effectively respond to the information needs of the community.”⁶

In sum, research on the information needs of a given social sector served by a library and the development of its collection can be based on following factors:

- Diverse social sectors have information needs, which are manifested through an informational search behavior performed to meet such needs.
- The emergence of information needs of communities are influenced by diverse internal and external factors, which have great mobility.
- Over time, new information needs arise as a result of further inquiry into previously satisfied needs or from completely new impetuses.
- The person comprising the diverse social sectors may present three types of information needs simultaneously.
- The public library must identify the information needs of its community through diverse methods and use the results to guide development of collections.
- The information needs within the information-user-support media relationship are the foundation for developing collections. This means that

6 María del Carmen Negrete Gutiérrez, *La selección de materiales en el desarrollo de colecciones* (México: UNAM, Centro Universitario de Investigación Bibliotecológica, 1997), 23.

information units shall have the information recorded in some kind of electronic or hard copy document.

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