

The future of libraries in a digital era. Social innovations, networks and policies in France and Quebec Province (Canada).

Christine LIEFOOGHE

Senior Lecturer in economic geography, University of Lille

Univ. Lille, UR 4477 - TVES - Territoires Villes Environnement et Sociétés, F-59000 Lille, France

Mail : christine.liefooghe@univ-lille.fr

S-Session S03 Digital Geographies: Spacelessness, or New Mode of Space-Making and Space Relations

Extended Abstract

Objectives and discussion

The paper deals with a preliminary study in the framework of a European research program called Horizon Europe LibrarIN (2023-2026). LibrarIN focuses on the future of libraries in the digital age. Magazines and books are increasingly accessible online. Social networks are a growing source of (fake) information and digital platforms offer a large access to TV films or TV series. Libraries in cities or in the rural areas have to adapt their offer to survive in the digital era. Is it possible for librarians to be useful for the society, citizens and marginalized people ? What types of innovations are necessary to create new services online and to attract users in the libraries in their «physical» dimension? Considering public budget restrictions, what innovations are necessary from a managerial point of view? What skills and competencies are necessary for librarians to adapt their role to the new demand such as digital training, (social) entrepreneurship, inclusive services (for poor people, migrants, elderly people, children and so on), transition to a new social and ecological economy ? The LibrarIN research program is focused on value-creation and innovation in academic or community libraries at the digital era. The paper presented at the ERSA congress addresses the emergence of social innovations (new demand of the people) linked to technological innovations (digital tools) in a geographical perspective (metropolitan or non-metropolitan area).

Methods and Data

Based on a literature review realized by colleagues of the project, the paper presents the first conclusions of a preliminary study in public libraries in two countries : France and Canada (Montreal and the Quebec province only). French professional literature dedicated to librarians often cites examples of innovations experimented in Montreal (Quebec) such as Fab Labs, Living Labs, services for entrepreneurship or to disadvantaged people, in particular migrants from different countries. So we made some qualitative interviews and visits (may, september 2023) in the «Great library of Montreal» and in some community libraries in the districts of Montreal. On the other side, we realized an exploration of different cases in France (october 2023-january 2024) in collaboration with students of the Lille institute of geography, urbanism and planning. Librarians were interviewed in Paris, three metropolises and in medium and little cities of non-metropolitan areas.

The aim of this exploratory stage of the research was to analyze :

- 1) the new services offered by the libraries in the digital technologies (servitization, digital training, online services);
- 2) the new services imagined to answer new social demands (to find a job, to create an entreprise, to find social aids, to fill in administrative files, for example) or to propose new cultural services (musical instruments, video games, makerspaces, and so on);
- 3) the transformation of physical spaces inside the libraries to become attractive «third places»;
- 4) managerial innovations and new training for librarians in order to propose high quality services in a framework of restricted budgets;
- 5) the role of networking with other libraries and other stakeholders to create the new offer.

Qualitative data will be presented to compare different types of libraries considering the case studies in different geographical contexts. The aim is to analyse the tensions between some concepts: (digital or physical) proximity, networking, (traditional or innovative) public policies, innovation and value co-creation.

Theoretical framework, results and conclusion

Digital technologies outside the public sector are changing citizens' expectations of libraries' ability to deliver high-value digital services. Libraries can no longer afford to separate efficiency and effectiveness from other objectives in the governance and management of digital services. LibrarIN project investigates value co-creation by focusing on three public-service-related co-creation areas of public libraries transformation: digital transformation of public libraries, including open platforms, big data, data-driven decision making, free and open-source software technologies and digital service delivery; social entrepreneurship, public-private networks and social innovation in public libraries; and living labs. Analysis of best practices and evidence from selected case studies will be critically analyzed in a comparative research design in order to derive policy recommendations for value co-creation of public libraries transformation.

LibrarIN project focuses on the emergent concept of digital transformation in the public sector and the integration of value co-creation approaches in the public administration literature. In the public libraries sector, digital transformation highlights the change from designing public service delivery following the internal administrative logic to designing digital innovations from a user-centric perspective, putting the internal and external users at the centre of the design process.

The objectives of the case study in France and Quebec are: (1) Identify the reasons why public libraries are investing in digital transformation activities, their goals and drivers for digital transformation in the public libraries, their changing internal mindset and culture toward a human-centred logic that moves the users into the centre of the design process, as well as the expected outcomes of this digital transformation process. (2) Identify the methods that public library managers are adapting from other public services or sectors that are contributing to internal and external public value creation. (3) Compare these two international cases of digital transformation describing the relationships with their stakeholders to change routines and policies.

Based on the analysis of 12 interviews realized in May and September 2023 in Montreal (Canada) and about 10 interviews in France (between October 2023 and January 2024), we analyze some (potential) innovations adopted (or not) in public libraries such as Makerspaces, new digital services, servitization (automation), on the one side, and, on the other side, co-creation of services with users, the spatial reorganization of libraries, or the transformation of libraries in new third places open and attractive for all types of users. We also analyze the geographical location of these libraries

considering the need of a greater proximity to inhabitants in comparison with the other aim to create digital proximity through online services. The last interesting question is about the role of networking, either between libraries (shared digital services or platforms) in order to improve their offer, or with stakeholders in the city or the region to co-create new social services.

Some references

Cao, G., Liang, M. and Li, X. (2018), "How to make the library smart? The conceptualization of the smart library", *The Electronic Library*, Vol. 36 No. 5, pp. 811-825.

Fletcher C. (2020) A case for scholarly making in the library: Makerspaces, innovation labs, and the evolution of scholarly communications, *College & Undergraduate Libraries*, 27:2-4, 339-353.

Hansen, A. Vorre, Fuglsang, L., Liefoghe, C., Rubalcaba, L., Gago, D., Mergel I., Haug N., Røhnebæk M. T., Mureddu F. (2021). Living Labs for Public Sector Innovation: insights from a European case study. *Technology Innovation Management Review*, Vol. 11(9/10): p. 47-58.

Leebaw, D., & Tomlinson, C. (2020). What Do You Get When You Mix Libraries and Entrepreneurship? The Case of an Innovation Hub at a Large Research Library. *Library Leadership & Management*, 34(4).

Liefoghe C. (2018). Les tiers-lieux à l'ère du numérique : diffusion spatiale d'une utopie socio-économique, *Géographie, Économie, Société*, 20(1), p. 33-61.

Liefoghe C. (2023). Coworking, third places and local development, in F. Gallouj, C. Gallouj, M-C. Monnoyer, L. Rubalcaba (ed.), *Elgar Encyclopedia of Services*, Cheltenham/UK-Northampton/USA, Edward Elgar Publishing, p. 518-521.

Ministère de la Culture, Direction générale des médias et des industries culturelles. (2016). *Enquête sur les Publics et les usages des bibliothèques municipales en 2016*

Orsenna Erik, Corbin Noël (2018). *Voyage au pays des bibliothèques. Lire aujourd'hui, lire demain*, Rapport pour le Ministère de la culture, n°2017-35, février.

Roche, F. & Saby, F. (2014, juin). Perspectives pour l'évolution du métier de bibliothécaire : une identité professionnelle questionnée. *BBF.ENSSIB.fr*.

Schopfel, J., Roche, J. and Hubert, G. (2015), "Co-working and innovation: new concepts for academic libraries and learning centres", *New Library World*, Vol. 116 No. 1/2, pp. 67-78.