

National Library of Iran as a Platform for Community Dialogue: An Analysis of an Experience

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Abstract:

This paper reports an initiative by the National Library of Iran to make the library as a platform for intellectual elite to establish a dialogue on a wide range of cultural issues. Prominent authors, specialists from different fields come to the venue to discuss matters of interest. The initiative is a step toward the concept of library as a place. The programs include scientific, cultural, political, social discussions that organized in theorizing framework, free dialogue with presence of proponents and opponents as the roundtable meetings.

Keywords: National Library of Iran

Introduction

According to the statute of the National Library of Iran (NLI), this library has not only the main function of acquiring, processing, organizing, preserving, storing and disseminating the intellectual products of Iran, but also the important function of "taking the required measures and making decisions for the accuracy, ease and speed of research in all fields in order to promote national culture and carry out relevant studies".

In recent years, this library has tried to achieve this goal by:

- Allocating the venue called *Andeshgah-e Farhangi*
- Organizing training courses
- Providing right places for exhibitions, seminars and festivals

Attempts have been made in all these programs, particularly *Andeshgah-e Farhangi*, to pave the way for the cooperation of all classes and have the greatest cooperation with the scientific and professional associations as NGOs.

The objectives of this paper are defined as follows:

The first, to report an initiative by the National Library of Iran to make the library as a platform for intellectual elite to establish a dialogue on a wide range of cultural issues. Prominent authors, specialists from different fields come to the venue to discuss matters of interest. The initiative is a step toward the concept of library as a place. The programs include scientific, cultural, political, social discussions that organized in theorizing framework, free dialogue with presence of proponents and opponents as the roundtable meetings. Over the past five years, since the establishment of the venue, dozens of such events have attracted hundreds of audiences. For example, *Early marriage in children* with presence of eight specialists in law, sociology, medicine and parliamentary, *Women in Kurd culture*, *Henry Corbin's thought*, *Mawlānā's thought*. The second, to assess & analysis the initiative from the time of establishment to now.

Authors of the paper introduce a successful experience in creating the space for dialogue in National Library of Iran called *Andeshgah-e Farhangi*. *Andeshgah-e Farhangi* is beyond a space and is moving to a platform for users.

1-Andeshgah-e Farhangi

To fulfill its tasks, the NLI had to establish an organization which could pave the way for the exchange of thoughts. To this aim, it set up *Andeshgah-e Farhangi* in 2014.

Andeshgah-e Farhangi is a centre providing an appropriate space where thinkers in various fields of science, particularly the humanities, get together to exchange their ideas (the NLI as the second home of thinkers and intellectuals). The activities of this centre include the following:

- Systematic identification of the most important questions and hypotheses included in the works of thinkers of humanities and providing the required conditions and facilities for critical discussions about them,
- Providing an opportunity for writers, authors, translators, editors, publishers, librarians, archivists, document researchers, codicologists, scientific associations etc. to exchange thoughts and share their experiences and new findings, and
- Creating an interaction between society and scientific and civil organizations and associations.



Figure1- *Andeshgah-e Farhangi*

Three working groups were organized to achieve the above goals:

i. Working Group for Thinkers' Discussion and Interaction

This working group has the following functions:

- ✓ Providing an opportunity for intellectuals, thinkers and theorists of different fields of study, particularly the humanities including: philosophy, sociology, history, civilization, economics, politics, psychology, etc. to get together and exchange their ideas (National Library as the second home of thinkers and intellectuals and a place for the getting together of intellectual elites)
- ✓ Systematic identification of the questions and hypotheses raised in the thinkers' works and providing the required conditions for the exchange, critique, and interaction of ideas, thoughts and views to examine intellectual records and establish the Museum of Thought,
- ✓ Publishing and presenting the reviews and critiques of intellectual records as books, bulletins, newsletters etc., and
- ✓ Creating an appropriate opportunity for young researchers and talents to get together and present their works.

ii. Library and Information science and Diplomats Working Group

- ✓ Evaluating the role of books and libraries in the socio-economic development of Iranian society with the help of relevant experts,
- ✓ Examining and providing digital libraries and discussing future technological developments in the area of books with the help of relevant experts,
- ✓ Discussing the past, present and future developments of publication in Iran,

- ✓ Discussing the development of interdisciplinary fields of library and information science
- ✓ Discussing the global perspective of books and the future developments of the NLI using global and IFLA experiences,
- ✓ Discussing the heritage features of Persian manuscripts,
- ✓ Unveiling, reviewing and critiquing books,
- ✓ Discussing and examining archival and diplomatic trainings in the Higher Education System,
- ✓ Discussing the creation of a centralized archive in Iran,
- ✓ Examining the opportunities of new technologies and social developments in digital archives,
- ✓ Examining the role of documents in the socio-economic development of Iran, and
- ✓ Discussing public awareness of the documentary heritage.

iii. C. Scientific Working Group of Iranology and Islamology

- ✓ Discussing the status of Iranology and Islamology in Iran and the world,
- ✓ A periodic program for the recognition of contemporary Islamologists and Iranologists,
- ✓ Examining various aspects of Iranology and Islamology regarding national identity in the Persian language and Iranian tribes, critiquing archaism and fundamentalism, and raising civilization issues,
- ✓ Using documents and studies for more detailed introduction of ethnicities, religions and regions of Iran

Andeshgah-e Farhangi is required to present its activities as lectures, book unveiling and critique, seminars and meetings, scientific and research workshops, documentary films, review and critique, and commemorations.

Methodology

The authors of the paper analysed the all of *Andeshgah-e Farhangi* events with analytical survey method. They considered two approaches in the analysing: 1) the presentation form of event 2) the content of event.

Findings

Table 1 - The number of titles and meetings held in *Andeshgah-e Farhangi*

| Year | Meeting (title) | Meeting (number) |
|-------|-----------------|------------------|
| 1393 | 82 | 156 |
| 1394 | 124 | 341 |
| 1395 | 100 | 322 |
| 1396 | 66 | 334 |
| 1397 | 55 | 429 |
| Total | 427 | 1582 |

Table 1 presents the titles and meetings held in *Andeshgah-e Farhangi* by year. The important point is that attempts have been made in recent years to reduce the number of titles and increase the number of meetings to enhance their quality.

Table 2. Events of Andeshgah-e Farhangi in terms of the presentation form by year

| Presentation form | 1393 | 1394 | 1395 | 1396 | 1397 | Total (number) | Total (percent) |
|-----------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|----------------|-----------------|
| Lectures | 1 | 82 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 83 | 5.25 |
| Book unveiling and critique | 29 | 32 | 39 | 23 | 6 | 129 | 8.15 |
| Seminars/ meetings | 116 | 150 | 241 | 274 | 423 | 1204 | 76.11 |
| Scientific and research workshops | 7 | 72 | 39 | 26 | 0 | 144 | 9.10 |
| Films, review and critique | 0 | 2 | 2 | 10 | 0 | 14 | 0.88 |
| commemorations | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 8 | 0.51 |
| Total | 156 | 341 | 322 | 334 | 429 | 1582 | 100 |

These data show that the events were presented most frequently as seminars and meetings and least frequently as commemorations. Lectures were not given only in 2015. The lowest diversity in the presentation form belonged to 2018.

Table 3 - Categorization of Andeshgah-e Farhangi Events

| Catagories | 1393 | 1394 | 1395 | 1396 | 1397 | Total (number) | Total (percent) |
|--------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|----------------|-----------------|
| Language and literature | 51 | 129 | 101 | 149 | 142 | 572 | 33.18 |
| Iranology and Islamology | 24 | 59 | 64 | 89 | 80 | 316 | 18.33 |

| | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|-------|
| History | 26 | 9 | 27 | 3 | 2 | 67 | 3.89 |
| Sociology | 4 | 14 | 3 | 14 | 33 | 68 | 3.94 |
| and Library Information Science | 4 | 6 | 16 | 1 | 16 | 43 | 2.49 |
| Philosophy Ethics& | 32 | 63 | 52 | 42 | 103 | 292 | 16.94 |
| Women | 6 | 13 | 16 | 11 | 7 | 53 | 3.07 |
| Family | 3 | 11 | 1 | 13 | 15 | 43 | 2.49 |
| Applied Science | 1 | 1 | 16 | 2 | 2 | 22 | 1.28 |
| Phycology | 1 | 40 | 10 | 12 | 36 | 99 | 5.74 |
| Politics | 6 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 20 | 1.16 |
| Art | 1 | 24 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 34 | 1.97 |
| Culture | 2 | 11 | 28 | 1 | 0 | 42 | 2.44 |
| Education | 4 | 2 | 7 | 15 | 12 | 40 | 2.32 |
| Theological Sciences | 1 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 5 | 13 | 0.75 |
| Total | 166 | 388 | 347 | 363 | 460 | 1724 | 100 |

In general, the most and least frequent categories were related to “language and Literature” and “Theological Sciences”.

2- Training courses

Table 4- NLI training courses (2017-2018)

| Title | Number of courses | Number of trainees | Trained man-hours |
|---|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Specialized courses in Library and Information Science, Archival Science (in person) | 93 | 1473 | 56441 |
| Specialized courses in Library and Information Science, Archival Science (electronic) | 23 | 1741 | 64616 |
| General courses (distance education) | 36 | 5402 | 25218 |
| General and specialized workshops | 169 | 587 | 51639 |
| Courses held for experts outside the NLI | 15 | 251 | 5482 |
| Total | 336 | 9454 | 185396 |

This table presents information about the training courses held in the organization during two years.

Table 5- Number of meetings, workshops and exhibitions organized in provincial centres

| Meetings | Workshops | Exhibitions | Total |
|----------|-----------|-------------|-------|
| 182 | 64 | 239 | 485 |

This table presents the meetings, workshops and in-person/virtual exhibitions held in 12 provincial centres.

3- Exhibitions, seminars and Festivals

Four conference halls are used in two main buildings of the organization for congresses, conferences, book unveiling, screening, celebrations, festivals, and commemorations. 95 meetings were organized in these halls, for example, *A Synergy Meeting with Publishers and Translators*; *A Conference of Advocates of Manuscripts* and *4th National Congress of Information Science Professionals*.



Figure 2- the biggest hall conference of NLI

Conclusion

This theme demonstrates how a national library in Asia and Oceania has created a trusted place and a platform to take part users in a conversation or discussion. *Andeshgah-e farhangi* has held almost 1600 meeting up to now that users attend effectively and interestingly. Some of programs are in line with increasing life skills and improving life style. The results show that the Library, Information and Diplomatics Working Group makes more efforts. Results of this paper may use in other libraries in Asia and Oceania region in regard to cultural commonalities as a pattern.

References

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