

Participation of the population with migratory background through publicity service and space design

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Abstract:

What is an intercultural library? How does it work, why is it created, and by who? This paper seeks to give an overview first of the dense intercultural library network in Switzerland. Then it will talk about the ways an intercultural library can work with the different identities of its users, how this identity affects the participation of the users – how to make them participate especially and how they feel the most welcomed in the library by talking about space design.

Keywords: Intercultural, library, migration, publicity, space design.

Why does Switzerland have such an important network of intercultural libraries? In the early 1980s and 1990s most of the intercultural libraries have been created by a group of people – parents or teachers – with the wish to have books in their mother tongue and to exchange books and experiences with one another. They wanted to create places that go beyond the classic library activities by recognizing the multitude of local languages – by then importantly shaped by immigration – and their importance and thus creating bridges between the culture of origin and local culture, between generations, between the school and the family – so that local and foreign cultures could get to know each other and benefit from each other. Intercultural libraries are most of the time more „a place to live“ based on the identity of their users. The identity of our target group is also the most important factor in adjusting our activities, such as the here presented publicity strategies and space design. We might divert from certain library standards so that our public does actively participate and can identify themselves within the libraries. Our target group is very heterogeneous with all ages and social groups and origins represented. Their needs are as diverse as they are, which is why we adapted our services to them. Even when these libraries are nowadays led in a professional way – like a public library – the grassroots movement is thus still perceptible in the way they work.

Currently Interbiblio¹, which is the umbrella organisation of this network, has 21 library members in 3 linguistic regions. Interbiblio itself is working bilingual – German and French – and sometimes trilingual – using Italian for communication with the Italian part of Switzerland.

Intercultural libraries in Switzerland have more languages available than most public libraries in Switzerland (more than 100, even 200 languages instead of the 12 languages usually available). The multilingual staff of the libraries is composed primarily by migrants and the loan of books and different projects are supported by volunteers. These projects, for children, young adults and adults are a very important part of the work. Furthermore, the collaboration with social institutions is well established. Intercultural libraries are used to collaborate with those institutions because they work with the same target groups. Intercultural libraries as public places are like „crossroads“ which assemble and distribute information and host projects from these institutions. Interbiblio is supported by the federal authority to encourage those intercultural libraries to exchange their experiences and projects, to exchange books and special knowledge how to acquire media in certain languages. Interbiblio is also promoting formation of their staff.

At last, Interbiblio is representing the intercultural libraries at the networks of public libraries, national institutions for reading promotion and at different federal authorities.

Which measures of publicity can reach a wide audience?

Can we speak of the „library 2.0“? What is important nowadays? To be connected. Not only for the sedentarized population but also for the migrant one. Staying connected is important in different measures, such as with integration and family ties. What is important to say is that this structures our library communication.

We still use traditional communication, such as printed flyers, emails, newspaper articles etc. but in a lesser number. And even that communication needs to go, as our activities, beyond the walls: we need to go towards our public so that they come to the library.

This „targeting“ our public is also what we try to accomplish via social media. We can attract groups by targeting them directly via social media publicity services, connect with „groups“ and even write posts in different languages easily. We can also address a younger public by using different applications. It is important to get in contact with people directly by conducting projects beyond library walls. We cooperate as much as we can with local institutions in order to target a renewing public as well.

What influence exist in terms of perception of the offer and of participation?

Space design has an influence on the feeling of belonging to this space or of being excluded from this space. As you can see, the identity and belonging aspect is also very present here. There are different elements with which you can affect this resentment.

The perception of the library from outside is playing an important role. How a library is presenting itself: as a very designed building in a rich quarter, or as a room in a familiar context, a context which is known about the members of the target group?

Even inside the library, certain elements can contribute to the feeling of belonging and the wish of participating: By visualizing languages and scripts, by introducing contributions of

users , and by giving opportunities to occupy the space according to specific needs. Those „specific needs“ answer to the identity and belonging aspect we have mentioned earlier. Our services are adapted to the heterogeneity of our public.

¹INTERBIBLIO : Network of Intercultural Libraries Switzerland and the libraries themselves

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References

All information can be found on: www.interbiblio.ch