

Making knowledge / Connecting people

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Abstract:

In my presentation of today I follow the main line and structure of my book.

- *I will tell something about my vision how to deal with the main stakeholders for public libraries: the local / regional governments.*
- *Then I present the philosophical fundamentals I have used before working out a strategic programme for the library.*
- *In the next part I will tell something about liberty and freedom and the connection of these themes with the library*
- *I tell you something about my view how the library and the librarian can translate the fundamentals into a programme.*
- *I will end with some thoughts about some conditions how to organize the library also in relation with its surrounding.*

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Start with Why!

The last years more and more the perishable date of the public library is object of discussion. Local authorities solve their own information problems with online solutions and with internal networks. In their observation the information world has become digital, so the key function of the library is gone. My observation is that we library managers are too passive in this discussion.

Too often we forget to start with the question: what is the intrinsic added value of our great function? The discussion with our stakeholder mostly start with the financial perspectives and problems and also ends with it. With the assignment that the library must develop more and more as a cultural ‘business company’.

When we try to relocate this discussion into the direction of the intrinsic added value we must try to realise another relation between government and library.

In my view the last decades this relation is dominated by distrust. Our society needs measurable goals, results we can translate in data. We recognise the concept of philosopher Thomas Hobbes in this line. The bad wolf. We need to render an account and report to our governments, very often very detailed.

Against this principle of distrust, I place the important idea of Aristotle, the notion of friendship. His definition of friendship is: *wish each other the good things, knowing this with the orientation of the useful, agreeable and / or the good.*

Reduce the orientation on rules, rendering accounts etc. Rely on the mutual basic ideas of getting your shared small world a little better than it was.

So, relations are dominated more by power than by strength, more by distrust than by trust. Move from the Hobbes-distrust-attitude towards the Aristotle-trust-attitude.

Meanwhile, be effective and efficient, but don't hesitate to dream your dreams, to spend sometimes your day by 'doing nothing'.

Now we go on building the fundamentals for that intrinsic discussion.

Perhaps you are already familiar with the concept of 'The Golden Circle' Of Simon Sinek. He worked it out in his book "Start with why" and a famous TEDtalk. As I told in my view the first question of Sinek "Why are we here?" rarely is on the agenda of the meetings between library managers and the local / regional authority. We have to take on this Why – question. It is my deepest conviction that we need to answer this question in collaboration with our stakeholders. Don't start the discussion with the money-issue and performance indicators. Start the discussion with the main social, cultural and educational problems our local society is confronted with and what the library can do about it.

To quote Gillian Tett in the Financial Times:

"What really matters now ... are non-quantitative issues, such as political values, social cohesion and civic society".

Capabilities

Looking at a concept that can help us finding our fundamentals I discovered the model of Capabilities and the sustainable goals of the United Nations. The concept of capabilities is explained by two famous philosophers, Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum.

At this moment the success of a national / regional society is mostly based on 'economic' facts and figures, based on growth. Sen and Nussbaum developed a concept of creating capabilities, the chances and opportunities for every individual. The starting point for this concept is "human dignity". The more active and pragmatic realisation of a capability is the functioning. The quality of a society can be derived from these capabilities and realised functioning's.

Capabilities for libraries

Nussbaum and Sen developed 10 capabilities. The relevant capabilities for libraries are:

- **Sense, imagination and thought:** able to make full use of the senses to experience, think, reason, imagine and create;
- **Emotion:** able to experience attachment to people, things and experiences and to express feelings of love, longing, grieving and justifiable anger;
- **Practical reasoning:** able to conceive of the good life and to engage in critical reflection;
- **Play:** ability to laugh and enjoy recreational and playful activity
- **Environmental control:** Able to engage with the processes and choices that effect our political and material lives, including of political participation.

The capabilities as we mentioned are relevant for people in two ways: the playing one (the homo ludens) and the learning one.

Saint Exupery

Related to this I like to quote my favourite French writer Antoine de Saint Exupery:

“If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work and give orders.

Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea”.

How to deal with this all?

- Authorities have to make choices, must develop a vision and create a more open climate;
- The library must translate that vision into a fitting programme in cooperation with the local government and customers;
- The realisation of this all is very much depending on the local situation and the wishes of the people you serve.

Sustainable goals United Nations

The second fundament I use finding the answer of the why-question concerns the sustainable goals of the United Nations as established in September last year. From the 17 goals I selected two of them as relevant for the public library:

- 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all;
To be more specific: By 2030 ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy;
- 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels;
more specific: ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms.

Making knowledge and connections

Looking at our world I think we don't live in an era of change but more in a changing of era's. With this in mind we must think deeply about our position as library and librarian.

How to translate this all into a Library programme? I summarised it in the title of my book *'Making Knowledge & Connections'*. In Dutch language the first part "making knowledge" does also mean "get acquainted with".

New engagement

How to develop a new engagement for the library? For the Dutch surrounding I used the national legislation, laws etc. and the vision of thought leaders like David Lankes, David Weinberger and Charles Leadbeater.

I also use a lot of other 'sources of inspiration'.

"Culture ignites" Theaster Gates said during a TEDtalk. His talk was about building and connecting people and societies. He talked about using cultural and other public organisations and how unmissable they are in getting things done and to reach connection.

I work out my vision on three levels: for national institutions, local implementations and the librarian.

Chakrabarti and Doctorow

In the new engagement nationwide I look at two lines, inspired by Shami Chakrabarti and Cory Doctorow.

Shami Chakrabarty wrote a famous book: 'On Liberty'. She pleads for the development and improvement of values like equality, dignity, fairness and most important: empathy.

It's all about these values the library works for. It is not that you must relate it in a direct way with your activities. It is about giving the opportunity, about facilitating people to obtain the stories of another one, to learn to "*yearn for the vast and endless sea*".

As a library and librarian we stand for free information, no authorities looking what our information needs are, even in the difficult period we are living in now. We must realise a good balance between copyright and the right of free information. The library and the librarian need to support the solidarity, and the connecting of people. Based on this position we must consider the Chakrabarti values: equality, dignity, justice and empathy. And we must also fight against the obstacles and the dangers which can damage these fundamentals.

A library only can function with all their opportunities when they work with a proper assignment, a proper budget. Only in a country where democratic values are respected, the library can take its important position. And the other way: a democratic society is in danger when institutions like schools, libraries, theatres, museums are not facilitated on a suitable level. Without the good functioning of these institutions a society loses their social platform, their moral compass.

A famous example how things can work out is demonstrated in the movie 'Das Leben des Anderen'. A great movie about life in formal Eastern Germany.

Cory Doctorow wrote a book: 'Information doesn't want to be free' and his added phrase: 'but people do'.

Doctorow worked out three 'laws of Doctorow'. Two of his laws are relevant to quote in this presentation:

1. Anytime someone puts a lock on something that belongs to you and won't give you the key, it's not there for your benefit.
3. Information doesn't want to be free.

Doctorow's book has some very interesting introductions. One of them is written by Amanda Palmer a former street musician. She wrote: *"As long as people make art and content, and other people want art and content, the marketplace will adjust to create paths to connect and support each other"*.

In the process from creator (in our world mostly a writer) to user (reader), Libraries must look more after the interest of the creator and user. Now in the process the library is more and more focused on its own position as distributor.

We observe that governments protect intermediaries like publishers. They facilitate them with laws to use locks, locks between the creator and the user. In our digital world distributors get all kinds of opportunities to organize obstacles.

As library world we must go for an open path between creator and user that has as less locks as possible.

Social domain

We see that the library is moving on into the direction of a more social library equal to the educational and cultural library. In the social domain the library is involved in:

- Basic skills (reading, calculating, using computers etc.);
- Supporting places of refugees;
- Developing (digital) language houses;
- Supporting the digital government
- Community building and open platforms.

National programme

Working on a national programme for libraries in my view we must work on:

- An action programme based on key functions of the library (learn, inform, read, meet);
- Facilitate innovation projects;
- Marketing campaigns;
- A focus on vulnerable groups;
- Facilitating and supporting local projects like 'library at school' and 'digital language houses';
- The position in a chain of partners working on the developing of 21st Century Skills.

Brand

Corrado asked me to spend a few words about the national positioning and branding programme in the Netherlands.

In 2009 the Dutch Public Library Association started together with a lot of local libraries with a new logo and brand positioning. Following this national positioning this year we started with a campaign. "The library enriches you"

The library enriches you!

In this line you see three important notions: The library / enriches / you'. They have their own values:

- The library as a knowledge and study centre, as a meeting place;
- The library in an active role to inspire, to advice, to facilitate;
- The library to support you to be more informed, social, smarter, prepared etc.

4 Spaces

Now I go on with the implementation for local libraries based on all the philosophical and institutional fundaments. For this I use two existing models.

The Scandinavian model of four spaces. These spaces are the learning, meeting, performative and inspiration space. We see that the library becomes an education library, a third place, a makerspace and an experience library. On Internet you can find more information about this very interesting concept.

ALA Model

A few years ago the American Library Association (ALA) published a report in which they worked out a model to make strategic choices. They used four distinct dimensions each encompassing a continuum of possibilities lying between two extremes.

- A physical versus Digital Library
- A focus on the individual versus the community
- A collection based library versus a creative library
- A portal versus an archive

As local library you can choose your position in these fields depending on how your local situation is.

Regional examples

After these two models now it is the moment to present a few examples in my own region:

- The library at school programme is developed on a national level, supported on a regional level and implemented on a local level in the schools themselves. Goal is to meet children where they are, at school, and to support schools in their work of stimulating children to read, to use information on a suitable way. The program contains a lot of modules, for instance, a digital portal, a collection, a monitoring system, a read and mediaplan etc.

The local library offers this concept to the local schools. The program is very successful. In five years ..% of the Dutch schools participate in the project.

- Lend a Frisian, in line with the so called human librarian. All inhabitants of Friesland are capable to make and share their own individual knowledge, in a physical and online surrounding. The project is part of Leeuwarden, cultural capital city of 2018. The central theme of Leeuwarden Cultural capital 2018 is 'Open community'.
- 'Frysklab', the first mobile makerspace in a library context.

The new librarian

You can say, it is about vision, about money, about concepts etc., etc. Basic condition to achieve progress is that we have competent librarians to make things worked out, to serve, to make.

We go on from a national and local scale to the 'new librarian'. This new librarian

- is not waiting;
- is the new 'homo Universalis'
- is the connector in a local society
- claims space to go out of his comfort zone
- has a lot of the 21st century skills.

Conditions

I end with some remarks about how to come where I think we need to go to. Which conditions do we take on to achieve a stronger relevant position in a better world?

1. First I want to advice you as a library manager to go for agreements with local authorities based on relevance and added value. Go for shared values, for working on solutions that is very close to the problems your local government is dealing with.
2. My second recommendation is to look for new leadership skills. I mention entrepreneurship, encouraging failure, innovationpower and focus on facilitating, inspiring and encouraging your staff more than managing and controlling your staff.
3. This staff works more with skills like customer orientation, being online, cooperative, innovative, having a learning attitude.
4. The fourth and last recommendation is about fitting in how organizations are working nowadays. I see that we live more and more in a network oriented society. Also organizations themselves become more and more networks and less hierarchic oriented organizations.

I hope in the near future we reach a stronger relevancy of the library and the librarian. I have tried to find a conceptual answer translating it into a practical programme for the library and the librarian.

Let us be there for people in our own villages, cities and countries who have less chances to build up a good life, who has less opportunities to become that homo ludens or the participating citizen. When we succeed in building a new relation with our governments,

when we succeed in developing a sustainable vision for the future with good equipped staff, I am convinced the sustainability of the library will be secured for the coming decades.