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The Public Library: Environment for the Formulation of Risk Indicators in the Information Society

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Abstract

The beginning of this third millennium faces us to a set of changes that are the culminating point of processes generated from the second half of the 20th century and that they are directly linked to the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The Information Society, through the Internet, is encouraging the globalization and simultaneously promoting social paradigmatic changes such as the sustainable development and the risk society that are slowly being outlined as an alternative, feasible, and necessary change. The indicators of management of risks are considered strategic for their application to the evaluation, control and adjustments of the process of sustainability prompted in the world environment, in which the Public Libraries become laboratories of multicultural measurement of the Information Society. With this communication we intend to contribute to the formulation of new indicators, inside the environment of the Public Libraries, to characterize and measure the risks that exist in regions and countries, so much inside as out of the Information Society. Our proposal will be directed to two basic standpoints: (a) from a perspective of systems, that will advance the need to undertake new methodologies of work, that include the levels of uncertainty in which at present the company of risk is proclaimed and decisions made; and (b) by means of a holistic, interactive, participatory perspective, and flexible, just as it is being achieved in the management of environmental risk. These approaches will investigate themselves in the framework of the instruments of strategic social management, such as the indicators proposed in the Manual of Lisbon for the Information Society, and then formulated inside the management of risks proposed by Ulrich Beck.

1 Introduction

The beginning of this third millennium faces us to a set of changes that are the culminating point of processes generated from the second half of the 20th century and that they are directly linked to the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The Information Society, through the Internet, is encouraging the globalization and also promoting social paradigmatic changes such as the sustainable development and the risk society that are slowly being outlined as an alternative, feasible, and necessary change.
Two are the main aims of this work: firstly, the role the Public Library (PL) must carry out as a democratic institution that allows the access to the information in all its forms, spaces and times, in the Information Society (IS) and secondly, the definition of the conceptual bases and the methodological contributions for the proposal to formulate Indicators of Management of Risks caused by the IS.

2 The Concept of Risk Society

The risk society is a modern concept, Beck (1998) claims that it is somewhat new in the history of the humanity, and implies today the apparition of different social conflicts presented in other historic moments. Thus, according to Beck (1998) with the rise of the risk society, the conflicts on the distribution of the “wrongs” are superimposed to the conflicts on the distribution of the “goods” (income, work, social security) that constituted the basic conflict of the industrial society and they were tried to be solved in the prominent institutions. These conflicts on the distribution of the wrongs can be interpreted as conflicts on the distributive responsibility. They arise around the distribution, prevention, control and recognition of the risks that accompany to the production of goods.

The idea of “risk society”, according to the German Ulrich Beck (1998, 2002), has to deal with the fact that in the modernity the risks have grown in magnitude, have been globalized and are more difficult to calculate, to manage and avoid. For this reason, modernity turns into reflective and critical modernity with the progress, which becomes more problematic when producing goods with some negative consequences. About the concept of “risk society”, Gandásegui (2000) explains that the central element of the presentation of Beck (1998) is exactly the concept of “reflective modernity” and that this notion implies that modernity introduces a critic of its own processes of modernization: whereas modernity was seen itself like a supplier of indefinite progress and well-being without limit, at the present time, (post) modernity is producing many risks or negative experiences that threaten the daily life of people (environmental deterioration, unemployment, diseases). The main institutions of (post) modernity - government, industry and science - are identified as the organizations responsible for the production of these risks.

Nowadays, we lived in a society of high risk: the present technology has created new forms of risk and imposes a danger qualitatively different from the one in the past. According to Beck, we even directed ourselves towards a new society in which the axis that it structures our industrial society is not any more the distribution of goods but of the wrongs. In fact, it is not the distribution of the wealth, but rather the distribution of the risk which mobilizes to numerous social groups today (the fight against the nuclear energy, the toxic remainders, huge public works, nourishing additives or transgenic foods). We talk about “risk society”, trying to gather that characteristic that the risk receives in our present “informed” world.

In the United Nations Program for the Development (UNPD) it appears an advance related to its International Strategy for the Reduction of Disasters (ISRD). As it is established
in the World-wide Report of the UNPD (2004), on the risks reduction of disasters (see picture 1): on the first column it is admitted that the disasters limit the human development regarding economic and social aspects. On one hand, the human development could be understood as a process by means of which the opportunities for the individuals are extended and these can be: a long and healthful life, access to the education, teachers standard of life, political freedom, guarantee of the human rights and the respect to himself or herself (United Nations Program for the Development UNPD, 1990). On the other hand, those people in favour of the vulnerability, the development can cause as much risks of disasters as to reduce their risks.

\textit{Cuadro 1 Disaster-Development}


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic Development</th>
<th>Social Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The disasters limit the development</td>
<td>Destruction of fixed assets. Loss of productive capacity, access to the market and material goods. Damages to the transport infrastructure, communications or energy. Deterioration of life means, savings and physical capital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The development causes risks of disaster</td>
<td>Practices of unsustainable development that enrich to some to expenses of the work or the unhealthy living conditions of other, or of the deterioration of the environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The development reduces the risk of disaster</td>
<td>Access to drinking water, food, safe dwelling and elimination of remainders, enlarging the adaptation capacity of the people. Commerce and technology can reduce the poverty. Investments in financial mechanisms and social security that can protect against the vulnerability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decisions in matter of development that generate cultural norms that promote the social isolation or the political exclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promotion of the social cohesion, recognition of the people or the social groups excluded (as the women) and opportunities of greater participation in the adoption of decisions. Better access to the education and the sanitary services, that increase the capacity of adaptation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the phase of speech on the society of global risk it can be accepted that the threats generated by the industrial technological development – measured according to the existing institutional criteria – they are neither calculable nor controlable. An authentically global challenge arises here, from which it can be 'shaped' new critical global conflicts and even wars, but also supranational institutions of cooperation, regulation of the conflicts and construction of consensus. In this sense, we admit that the distribution of goods and afflictions have to be equitable. We cannot permit the goods going to the first world and the afflictions for the second one, this policy would take us to the conflicts mentioned before.
3 The Information Society as Risk Society. The Need of Control Mechanisms

The IS could be characterized, according to Fritz Machlup (1933), as the number of jobs that are based on the manipulation and management of information which is greater than the ones related to some type of physical effort. Therefore, the product is the information. From the perspective of the contemporary globalized economy, the IS grants to the information and communication technologies (ICT), the power to become the new motors of development and progress. In the development of the IS it has been observed the following: a) the privatization of the industries of the telecommunications; b) the deregulation of the telecommunications market; and c) the search of the global access to the ICT. Many critics have indicated that the term “Information Society” is not but an updated version of the cultural imperialism exerted from the rich countries towards the poor ones, specially because plans of technological dependence are favoured.

Those who are in favour of the IS claim that the incorporation of the ICT in all the productive processes, they certainly facilitate the insertion to the global markets, where the intense competence obliges to reduce costs and to adjust of almost immediate way to the changing conditions of the market. In any case, even optimists are shown with regard to the “Information Society”, they admit that the digital gap is one of the main obstacles in this model of development. To large characteristics, this phenomenon refers to all those sectors that remain for very diverse reasons, in the margin of the benefits and associated advantages to the ICT.

The IS is not limited to the Internet, although this has played a very important role as a mean that facilitates the access and exchange of information and data. The Wikipedia is an excellent example of the results of the development of this type of societies. The weblogs have recently been considered as tools that encourage the creation, reproduction and manipulation of information and knowledge. According to the statement of principles of the summit of the IS carried out in Geneva, Switzerland in 2003, the IS should be centered in the person, integrative and oriented towards the development, in which all they can create, to consult, to utilize and to share the information and the knowledge, so that the people, the communities and the towns can fully employ its possibilities in the promotion of its sustainable development and in the improvement of their quality of life, on the base of the purposes and principles of the Letter of the United Nations.

As main characteristics of the IS we would be able to emphasize:

- Multifocal, facilitates that all people with access to the network become focus of opinion and of influence.
- Terciarization, 50% of the workers of the advanced companies corresponds to the tertiary sector, and inside this group the workers dedicated to products and services linked to the information, they represent greater proportion than those of other professions.
• Automation, understood as the intensive use of the ICTs.
• Globalization, understood as vague borders, the world already does not have limits defined by governments.
• Complexity, as capacity to produce, to create, to modify and to consume simultaneously inside the network interacting.
• TeleLIFE, understood as the possibility by which everything can be done at a distance: health, education, sex, banking, leisure, economy, democracy.

As all nonfinished transitions, the IS generates restlessness and loss of the future vision. To reconstruct this vision and to find new alternatives which they make the life sustainable, mainly of those who have been marginalized of the IS, should constitute a commitment assumed by political authorities and above all by the professionals of the information. In this context, the professionals of the information, we are called to have an proactive position that allows us to insert ourselves in new spaces and to create mechanisms of control. The PL configures itself as a privileged observatory of the IS and of the inherent risks. The question, now, is to consider what the PL needs and what new competences librarians need to acquire in order to give answer to the challenges we have mentioned. In relation to this, we consider:

• The PLs and institutions of information will be transformed to support with new and better services the so much, educational process in classical educational institutions as in those organizations that assume the training and the postgraduate qualification.
• The PLs and the programs of informational literacy will be inserted in digital atmospheres as they are the virtual systems of access to the information and the education (e-learning).
• The professional of the information will need know-how on theory of the learning and pedagogical methods, as well as abilities and teaching experience to be able to design programs for training users and also effective programs of informational literacy.

4 The Public Library as a Key Institution in the Information Society

We consider that the PL, as an encouraging factor of the public reading, is one of the institutions that can help us to advance towards the information society and the knowledge. According to the paradigm of the human development, that advocates the United Nations Program for the Development (UNPD) , the goal of the development is not expressed exclusively by the economic growth. This is considered a mean but not the end of the development which has to do with the existence of opportunities for all, an extensive life expectancy, better quality of life, freedom -, access to the education, the culture and other fields that allow them to fulfil their total personal accomplishment.

(UNPD, 2004).

We also consider that the human development must be sustainable concerning the conservation of the natural resources for the next generation and the social sustainable
development understanding this as the capacity to assure that the achievements of the present development are consolidated in order to avoid backward movements. The public libraries are conceptually oriented to serve the societies through the democratization of the information, the access to the knowledge, the information without discrimination because of sex, ideology, or any other social and human difference. It also allows the access to culture and leisure, and to the Permanent Education (literacy, self-learning). Therefore, the PL becomes an invigorating space of the information society and also a space of promotion in the equality of opportunities and social integration. Besides, the PL fosters the public reading and it generates 'info- included' readers.

With this objective, the PL should open at present two large branches. First, the PL as an encouraging institution of public reading. Second, the PL as regulator of the IS, understood as those control mechanisms that generate capacity to measure the inherent risks of this society.

4.1 Information society promotion: public reading

At the present moment of permanent change is quite common to hear that public reading is more needed in order to generate a critical citizen with capacity for generating knowledge. Some specialists stated that the IS was going to be a more democratic company of integration, cooperation and social synergy, in which the resources would be shared, dedicated to the welfare and in which the dominant tendency would be to put an end to the social inequalities. Nevertheless, with the beginning of the new century, what we can observe in general is a dominant society where those who concentrate the resources are the ones who have the power and they accentuate the process of inequality. Generally the people who conform the groups of inequality belong to low social, educational, economic levels, etc., and they are not informed, these people are called the "info-excluded" (Contreras, 2004). It is a fact that the access to the information, constitutional right in the democratic societies, can be measured through the PL that is the only institution capable of guarantee the democratic fulfillment of this right, the same as the hospitals to the health.

The PL would configure itself as one of the basic pillars to agree with the IS and the knowledge society, putting in practice the following functions:

- Groups and collectives socialization
- Access to the information
- Access to the education and informational literacy
- Top-level cooperation

4.2 Information society observatory: innovative propositions

The PL from the perspective of "risk society" (Luhmann, 1998) becomes a perfect observatory for the IS. It will allow us to detect what social sectors are included ("info-included") or excluded ("info-excluded"). The disinformation means the lack of information, but also it can mean the "informational consumption", the incorrect information, the manipulation of the information, all of this takes to the formation of a society incapable to
discern, to criticize and, consequently, to make favourable decisions for its own development.

On this point, we wonder what sense the PL has to become an IS observatory. The sense here is to create a platform to collect data, to process them, to produce information on the IS in order to be able to propose guidelines to follow its development and also to know the radiograph of the current situation for defining the risks.

We consider that, due to the social development in which we are immersed, the PL must assume new functions and tasks to complement the ones mentioned in the previous section. Some of our proposals are the following:

- Diffusing institution of the information produced by the different groups of users.
- Emitting institution of the cultural objects that take place because of the different groups of users.
- Cooperation of second level.

5 The Public Library as Environment for Formulation of Risk Indicators. Proposals.

In general terms, it is denominated indicator an empirical observation that synthesizes aspects of a phenomenon which are considered important for one or more analytical and practical intentions. Although, the term indicator can allude to any observable characteristic of a phenomenon, it is usually applied to those that are susceptible of numerical expression (CEPAL 2001). The indicators are criteria used to value, to analyze and to evaluate the behaviour of variables, that is to say, the characteristics, components, factors and elements taken into account for study reasons, planning and making decisions from these. Also they differ from a list of data processed statistically, since the indicators are statistics specifically directed towards a policy that shows the success of the results of the same one, reason why they are defined in advance (Tosics, 2002).

An indicator is more than a statistic. It is a variable which dependig on the value assumed at certain moment. It unfolds meanings which are not immediately apparent, and that the users will decode further than what they directly show, because there is a cultural constructor and of social meaning that is associated to it (Tao, 2001). The construction of social indicators implies to translate the abstract dimensions or concepts on the social reality to measures and classifications by using a process resulting in the imputation of a category or amount to each unit of observation (SIISE, 2000).

Assuming the definitions we have just brought forward on what an indicator is, understood as a measurement of facts, we contribute a first proposal of feasible indicators to measure both the IS and its underlying risks:

5.1 Indicators of application in the determined geographic scope: countries, regions, cities, etc.

Indicator 1. Level of development of the IS in a country.

- Definition: measures the IS degree of development of a country.
• **Indicator calculation**: % of workers related to information - % workers related to physical efforts=

• **Interpretation**: the positive values correspond to countries that are in the IS, the more positive value the more has been advanced in the IS. Values 0 mean we have just reached the IS, that is to say, the threshold of the IS. The negative values correspond to countries that have not reached the IS, the more negative it is the value the more far are from the IS.

• **Improvement**: increasing the number of workers related to the information. If the number of workers related to the physical effort diminishes, the indicator must improve.

**Indicator 2.** Collectives and social groups included / excluded from the IS.

• **Definition**: tries to know what groups or collectives are included in or excluded from the IS

• **Indicator calculation**: localisation of the collectives that make use of the PL and the groups that do not.

• **Interpretation**: the collectives that do not make use of the PL are the groups of potential risk to be excluded from the IS.

• **Improvement**: increasing the number of users of the PL the number of excluded people diminishes.

**Indicator 3.** Informational literacy.

• **Definition**: capability for the information handling.

• **Indicator calculation**: is necessary that an international organisation defines a standard of informational literacy.

• **Interpretation**: results of the standard application.

• **Improvement**: with programs ‘CMI’ (Capability for the Information Handling)

**Indicator 4.** Indicator of degree of public reading.

• **Definition**: % of the population declares to have read making use of materials provided by the public administrations.

• **Indicator calculation**: survey made by the Institute of Statistic of the country among people who declare to have taken public reading and those who have not.

• **Interpretation**: we think that this indicator would correlate with the degree of development of the IS. To more public reading more human capital (HC) of a country, region, city, etc.

• **Improvement**: increase in the number of public libraries (PL).

5.2 **Indicators of application in Public Libraries**

**Indicator 5.** Uses of the library per capita.

• **Definition**: virtual and physical uses per capita that a library has.
• **Indicator calculation**: total number of uses divided by the population of the library. (N0. of uses / population).

• **Interpretation**: the more uses per capita the more population IS, better prepared for the changes and the adaptation, more human capital, more sustainable societies.

• **Improvement**: increasing the virtual and physical services of the public library

**Indicator 6**. Indicator of cultural production of the different groups -users of the library.

• **Definition**: capacity the library has to issue and spread the information produced by its groups-users (blogs, ipopd, cms...)

• **Indicator calculation**: number of cultural objects produced divided by the population of the library (N0. cultural objects / population)

• **Interpretation**: the more objects produced per capita the more issuing wealth of the library with a more active population IS, updated, ready for the changes and the adaptation, more human capital, more sustainable societies.

• **Improvement**: increasing the production of cultural objects.

**Indicator 7**. Indicator of degree of primary and secondary cooperation.

• **Definition**: capacity the library has in order to interact with other libraries and with the users community (shared collections, ask the library, interlibrary lending, virtual collection, more accesses). It is considered of first level when it is related to the physical interaction, and of second level when it is related to the virtual interactivity.

• **Indicator calculation**: number of cooperation programs a library has divided by the library staff (N0. programs / staff).

• **Interpretation**: cooperation increases the information services of the library. The more cooperation the less risks.

• **Improvement**: increasing the production of cultural objects.

**6 Final Considerations**

We are convinced that the public library is an ideal sensor to know the degree of information society in different geographic scopes in the earth planet. With this work we have assumed and tried to prove that risks not always have to assume themselves as disasters, but that the risk observed, studied and analyzed it becomes innovation redefining itself as motor for the social development. In this sense, we have ourselves bold to propose a series of indicators that open interesting lines of work. We are conscious that the public library is in "an initial phase of its development" in the new information society. The current public library is open to thousands of possibilities to introduce new services, new tools, new capabilities of its professionals, new functions and tasks, the only thing we need is to know how to recognize
them and to create them. We have sufficient budget, sufficient technology, but we lack of imagination.

References