

The Role of Libraries and Librarians in Today's Information Society

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After many years, it is a great pleasure for me to be in Athens once again and to have the opportunity to meet with you. I am grateful to Mary Tseroni, who first contacted me last winter about the possibility of my returning to Athens to share ideas and experiences with Greek colleagues. I also am pleased to share the podium with Susan Aramayo, with whom I share a valued friendship from our days together in the Library of Congress. As young as we still are, Susan and I go back a long way in sharing the joys and the frustrations – or what I prefer to think of as the challenges – of our honorable and rewarding profession.

There are several people who have made today's event possible, and, in particular, I would like to thank Helen Margiou, the Cultural Attaché of the American Embassy, and the members of the Board of the Greek Librarians' Association for supporting my participation in it. I also would especially like to thank Vassilis Tsiboukis, Co-director of the U.S. Information Resource Center in Athens, for all of his time and effort in arranging today's program as well as my visits yesterday to the libraries of the National Technical University of Athens and the Athens University of Economics and Business.

Overview of Presentation

The topic of my presentation, *The Role of Libraries and Librarians in Today's Information Society*, is a very timely one, to say the least. It also is a multi-faceted one, and we could spend several days discussing it. In the time we have together this morning, I will confine my formal remarks to conveying some personal experiences and ideas, which I hope will lead to a stimulating exchange following my talk.

Since I am an active member of the Turkish Librarians' Association, I will take this opportunity to be a liaison to the Greek Librarians' Association and give you a brief profile of the current library scene in Turkey, the role of the Turkish Librarians' Association (known by its Turkish acronym as TKD), and two areas of dynamic cooperation between Greek and Turkish librarians in which I am personally involved.

As the director of a university library, caught up these days in the throes of grappling with electronic resource management issues, I also want to share with you what I see as the challenges facing librarians in today's global information society, with particular emphasis on three aspects: defining "modern librarianship" at

this early stage of the 3rd Millennium, upgrading standards of librarianship, and continuing education for librarians.

Profile of Turkey's Library Scene

When I first assumed my job at Koç University Library in October 1995, nearly every conversation I had with my Turkish colleagues revolved around the problems libraries in Turkey were facing. The issues may be familiar to all of you as well. Libraries are under-funded; many are in serious disrepair; and most lack necessary technical infrastructure, as well as human and material resources, to provide the services our users desire. Needless to say, many librarians feel little appreciated and, indeed, they are very much underpaid.

You can imagine the quandary I found myself in, having a contract that obliged me to create a digital library yet facing the reality in 1995 of such frequent power failure that we were without electricity an average of 4 out of every 8 hours of operation. Due to the power outages, the campus network or individual PCs crashed fairly often – usually when one was right in the middle of a very useful data search. Of course, users would blame the Library and take their frustrations out on the librarians, even though we, like our users, were victims of the situation, though we contributed to the problem – in our zeal to be "modern librarians" – by creating a higher level of expectation than we were able to fulfill at that time.

Another problem I faced was hiring librarians having adequate technical and English language skills. Because English is the medium of instruction at Koç University, fluency in English is required for all library positions. However, Turkish is the medium of instruction in the library schools, and at that time none of the three library schools was equipped with computer laboratories. So, education in library automation consisted of reading books and listening to lectures about how computers

were being used in U.S. and European libraries.

Having painted a rather bleak picture of the scene in my library just 7 years ago, I hasten to tell you the good news that it is very different today! Before the onset of the current economic crisis in Turkey, the government invested heavily in the late 1990's in energy production and telecommunications. As a result, power outages now are no more common than in New York or Los Angeles, and access to the Internet is not only reliable but also very fast. At Koç University, a private institution supported by the educational foundation of a major Turkish corporation, \$175 million was invested in the IT infrastructure for our new campus, and we enjoy direct access to a global satellite.

The Library is now equipped with 72 PCs, 30 of which are for staff and 42 are for patron use. The Library subscribed to 32 online databases this year, through which faculty and students have access to 7,418 electronic journals and a broad array of e-reference tools. Last month we dismantled our cd-rom network and archived our cd-rom databases. This month we will make our first investment in e-books, and we will add several more online databases in January 2003. And I am pleased to say that, as good as things are nowadays in Koç University Library and as proud as I am of our accomplishments in such a short time, our Library is not unique among Turkish university libraries. There are several more in a similar shape, including a number of State university libraries as well as most of the private ones chartered during the past 5-10 years.

Now let me tell you a BIG secret – the secret of our success: after spending decades talking about library cooperation but engaging in little more than the traditional practice of interlibrary lending, Turkish university librarians have succeeded in launching sustainable cooperative endeavors with one another, which just a few years ago seemed like daydreams! In particular, the shared investment in electronic

resources has enabled all of us to provide more to our users, in spite of the fact that we all are facing budgetary constraints under the current economic conditions.

The Role of TKD

While the Turkish Librarians' Association, or TKD, has no direct role in the affairs of ANKOS (Anatolian University Library Consortium), the leadership of TKD is predominantly from the university library group, and many of TKD's activities – particularly its educational seminars and publications – support the aims of ANKOS by fostering communication, promoting cooperation, and providing opportunities to demonstrate online resources and train librarians in using them. I should also mention that we have another professional library association in Turkey – UNAK (the University and Research Librarians' Association), which undertakes similar activities specifically geared to university librarians and hosted by university libraries in different parts of the country during the course of the year.

TKD, however, has a larger role to play, as it has branches in communities all over the country, and its members include librarians working in all types of libraries. While there is a central structure and national officers, which are elected at the Association's biennial general conferences, the members of each branch elect their own officers and pay their annual dues to the branch, which then organizes the activities to be undertaken by and for the members of the respective community.

Unfortunately, at this point I must say that the scene in most other types of libraries in Turkey is not quite so rosy as it is in the majority of university libraries. There are exceptions, of course. A number of special libraries are functioning in a dynamic way. On the other hand, very few schools have libraries at all, and the majority of public libraries do not have the

budgets, facilities, and resources that the university libraries do. And, indeed, librarians working in public libraries are paid on a lower pay scale than the university librarians, let alone special librarians who enjoy the highest pay scale as employees of commercial enterprises or foreign governments.

However, there is again good news about public libraries, by virtue of an initiative taken by TKD to secure a grant from the European Union for a public library modernization project, known as the PULMAN Project. Once TKD secured the EU grant and was incorporated into the project – along with other EU candidate countries, the government of Turkey added its support by allocating funds for the renovation of three public libraries – one in Ankara, one in Istanbul, and one in Izmir – that will be the model libraries for this project.

While TKD works hard to try to make a qualitative difference in matters of concern to the library community, it faces an uphill struggle. For example, with Istanbul being the largest city in the country and having the most universities and libraries of all kinds, the largest branch of TKD, likewise, is the Istanbul Branch. Yet it has no building in which to conduct its business or hold meetings of its members; no funds to staff an office; and most of its publications are proceedings of seminars and symposia that are supported by funding from foreign organizations. Because the current President of the Istanbul Branch is one of my assistant directors, our Library currently serves as the Branch's center of activity, hosting seminars and conferences, storing and distributing its publications, and providing manpower for accomplishing various tasks. In short, there is considerable disparity in the way TKD functions, compared with such counterparts as ALA.

Nonetheless, we continue to press forward and try our best to be catalysts for innovative change in all libraries. To that end, in Istanbul, we have formed an Innovative Library Initiatives

Promotion Group (the ILIPG) to help promote the cause of libraries and librarians among policy makers at the local and national levels, including elected officials and administrators of government agencies.

Cooperation between Greek and Turkish Librarians

Here in Greece, the university libraries have had a similar experience in building a consortium for the shared investment in electronic resources. And, in fact, the Turkish university librarians participating in ANKOS have benefited from your experience in establishing HEAL-Link, which was well underway a year or two before ANKOS was. We were very pleased when Claudine Xenidou-Dervos, a member of HEAL-Link's Steering Committee from Aristotle University, accepted an invitation to speak at a seminar in Ankara in May 2000. At that time, we were in the midst of trying to formulate a coherent plan for our consortium. The information and insights Claudine shared with us were so useful that we invited her back for our first annual ANKOS conference in May 2001, in which 150 librarians from all over Turkey and several EU countries participated.

When Claudine gave her first talk about HEAL-Link, there were just nine Turkish university libraries that were members of the fledgling ANKOS. By the time she returned the next Spring, there were 32 ANKOS libraries. This year, we have 58 member libraries, and we hope in the coming year to have all 72 Turkish university libraries participating in ANKOS contracts. On Claudine's initiative, another important cooperative effort was launched this year to bring the consortia of Southern Europe together in what we are calling SELL, the Southern European Libraries Link, encompassing the consortia of Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Turkey. Also, this year... in fact, this week, Claudine is hosting the e-ICOLC Conference, which several Turkish librarians will be attending. So, she has

served as the architect, if you will, of a very strong bridge between the Greek and Turkish university library communities.

The other major area where Turkish librarians are taking good benefit from our Greek colleagues is the PULMAN Project. We were very happy when Ioannis Trohopoulos, Director of the Veria Central Public Library in Thessaloniki, accepted our invitation to speak at the International Congress on EU Guidelines for Innovative Library Services, which my library hosted during Turkey's National Library Week in March of this year. The Veria Central Public Library was part of the first phase of the PULMAN Project, and Ioannis's presentation about his experience in the project was of great interest to the 125 Turkish librarians who attended the Congress. Ioannis returned in mid-June to participate in the PULMAN Project kick-off meeting that was again hosted by my Library, and he will be coming again to speak at our PULMAN National Workshop in November. So, Ioannis also has become a dynamic partner and is making a notable contribution to strengthening cooperation between Greek and Turkish librarians working for the benefit of the public library sector.

We also had the pleasure of having Alexandra Papazoglou, Director of Libraries at the Hellenic American Educational Foundation, as a speaker in our National Library Week program this year. Alexandra gave a paper on "New Information Services in the Libraries of the European Union" for a panel discussion of public librarians on the "European Union and Libraries."

Challenges Facing Librarians in the Global Information Society

Now let me spend a few minutes highlighting what I see as the challenges facing librarians in today's global information society. The first one is that when I leave home any morning of the week, I have no idea what new infor-

mation, resource, or technology is going to appear on my horizon that day. Things in our profession are just changing so rapidly – literally from day to day – that one can define modern librarians as players in a continuously running guessing game.

I can well remember my earlier days in the Library of Congress where we prided ourselves on long-established traditions of service with well-defined rules for performing various tasks. We spent not simply hours but days and weeks pondering over the words and the punctuation that comprised the successive versions of the Anglo-American Cataloging Rules.

To give a personal example of how quickly one must be ready to adapt to change, in a paper I presented at Istanbul University in May 2000, I stated that while I could see myself using a palm reader to enjoy reading an e-book while on the beach near my permanent home in Florida, I could not see electronic books catching on with the users in my university library. It just did not seem possible that people would spend hours in front of a computer screen of any size reading through hundreds of pages of text and not being able to simply download and printout the whole thing. Yet, just two years later, my library is buying e-books this year.

In short, today things do not last long enough to become "traditions;" the "rules" keep changing; and one would be daft to spend hours, let alone days and weeks, trying to define a new rule. As any of my staff will quickly tell you, the keywords in librarianship today are "dynamism," "innovation," and "flexibility;" and job performance standards relating both to personnel and operations are necessarily geared – at least in my library – to demonstration of success in these terms.

Another challenge facing librarians today is defining ourselves in ways with which we are comfortable and yet ways that convey to our users and our superiors that we are not dinosaurs. Instead of spending days and weeks deliberating over rules, we spend weeks and

months and countless library meetings pondering over what to call ourselves. It seems that gone are the days when we took pride in the title of "librarian." Instead, we speak of information centers and the people who work in them as being "information managers." In university and company libraries, one increasingly hears the term "knowledge manager," and many staff in today's libraries have the title of electronic resource specialist, instead of librarian.

No matter what the vogue of the day may be, I personally remain proud to serve my fellow human beings as a librarian. After all, the very first library was an "information center" for the users of that day, and the person who worked in it was both an information manager and a knowledge manager. And I think it has remained so ever since then, in spite of the fact that the form of the materials collected by librarians through the millennia has changed many times.

What needs to change today is not the title by which we would like to be identified, or any of the variations we want to call our institutions. Rather, it is our opinion of ourselves and our attitude towards our profession that need to change, first of all. Secondly, the way in which we package and market ourselves, as well as our resources and services, must be dynamic. We need always to be pro-active winners of the game, not passive whiners observing the game. We need not fear the future of "cyber-space;" rather, we need to place ourselves in the vanguard of change and lead the way for our users to be successful cyber-space voyagers. Because the truth is that the more information that is out there in the global information marketplace, the more our users need to be able to rely on our skills and experience as information and knowledge managers. So, to my way of thinking, this is the primary challenge confronting us at this early stage in the 3rd Millennium.

Closely related to this is another significant challenge – upgrading the standards of librarianship. Library schools cannot, or at least do not

quickly enough, keep pace with the changes the working librarian has to contend with. So students coming out of the library schools are not prepared to cope with them. Not only a higher level of technical skills training is needed but a different paradigm for thinking one's way through one's job needs to be inculcated during the students' experience in library school. Most importantly, the curriculum needs to be entirely revamped. Too many lectures deal with theory rather than reality, and too much emphasis is still given to traditional methodologies. For example, every library school in Turkey teaches the students to catalog materials in the Dewey and LC classification schemes in accordance with MARC standards; but none of them yet offer courses for credit in metadata or creating Web pages and portals.

In terms of job standards, most professional library posts in Turkey still only require a bachelor's degree in library science. To the best of my knowledge, my library is the only one in which a master's degree is required for promotion beyond the entry level. The master's degree may be in library and information science; any related discipline such as business administration, computer science, or public relations; or any of the 14 subject areas in which Koç University awards degrees. In my view, this requirement is critical for two reasons. First, at least in the university environment, it raises the professional image of librarians among faculty members and university administrators, as well as students. Second, it broadens the mindset of the practicing librarian, because it is only at the master's level and above that coursework requires students to delve into the professional literature and develop their own ideas. This stimulates creativity, which leads to innovative approaches to work and the dynamic delivery of user services.

Another critical job standard today in libraries all over the world is proficiency in English. I say that not simply because, as an Ameri-

can, I am a native speaker of English. I say it because it is a reality that English has become the language of communication in the IT industry that so directly impacts our work; in the international publishing world and, particularly, in accessing electronic resources on the Internet; and in exchanging ideas at international library meetings and symposia. As everyone who has attended an IFLA or LIBER meeting but does not speak French, German, Spanish or Russian knows, English has become the common language in our profession, as in so many others. Therefore, English is a prerequisite for the librarian in today's information society.

The role of libraries today is also significantly different than it was even a decade ago. Libraries have always been centers for lifelong learning, a concept very much in vogue nowadays. However, in the past libraries did not necessarily function as, nor were they seen to be, the skills training centers they have become. The user interfaces of computer systems and the World Wide Web are constantly changing, as are the form and content of materials in this "digital" age. The basic terminology and the "alphabet soup" of acronyms, which the laypersons using our libraries and we ourselves must know, change constantly; and new online products are introduced from week to week.

Given these realities, my staff and I necessarily devote a substantial amount of our time and resources to library instruction for faculty and students as well as ourselves. We endeavor to be an active partner with the library schools in Turkey to help convey to the students the excitement of our profession, which cannot be as easily conveyed in the classroom. We also offer opportunities for colleagues in other libraries and library school students to spend time in our library on training attachments, and we actively engage in staff exchanges with libraries outside of Turkey. Through these activities we are able to realize tangible, dynamic cooperation that is so vital to all of us in the global information world.

For our profession to remain relevant, when our users are able to access information from any Internet Café or home or office PC, librarians must focus on their users more than ever before. In every good library – public, school, special, or university – quality user service remains the "bottom line." Thus, it is the standard of service that must drive the standards for all other operations and, particularly, for personnel recruitment, performance evaluation, and career development. In this context, continuing education for librarians is more critical than ever before.

There are many forms of continuing education. I have already mentioned staff exchanges as one type. Workshops on various topics, convened by library associations, comprise another. Evening classes at library schools, taught by practicing librarians teamed with the library school faculty, are also useful. None are yet offered in Turkey; but this is one area that I personally am pursuing with the heads of the library schools.

What my staff find most valuable are online courses, in which they can participate at the time of their own choosing and at their own learning rate. Because most of these courses are offered by library organizations in the U.S. and northern Europe, proficiency in English is required. They are also a bit costly. For both reasons, very few Turkish librarians are able to enrol in them. Consequently, one element in my library's strategic plan is to develop and provide online courses in Turkish at nominal cost. I hope we will be able to offer the first such course early next year.

To sum up what I have tried to convey, I believe that our profession is as relevant today as it was on that day long ago when the first library opened its doors to share its books with those who wanted to read them. In fact, with each new wave of information overload that swamps everyone who "clicks online," our unique role as information providers and knowledge managers is more critical than ever

before. It is for us to rise to the challenge of continual change and confidently keep ourselves placed at the forefront of the information marketplace.

On a final note, when Vassilis conveyed to me the various topics GLA Board members were interested in having me address, he added that for his part my talking about managing an electronic library sounded very challenging, and he wondered if I could incorporate all of the ideas we had discussed into a general portrait of the skilled and successful librarian... or what he called a "kind of list of do's and don'ts for the modern librarian." I hope I have succeeded in painting the portrait of the skilled and successful librarian in today's information society; but just to be sure I got my message across, I will leave you with my list of do's and don'ts, as Vassilis requested.

List of Do's & Don'ts for the "Digital-Age" Librarian

- | DO: | Don't: |
|------------------|----------------------|
| • Be dynamic | • be passive |
| • Be flexible | • be rigid |
| • Be innovative | • be reactive |
| • Be a leader | • be an observer |
| • Be a winner | • be a whiner |
| • Delegate | • dominate |
| • Welcome change | • cling to tradition |

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*H Jane Ann Lindley είναι διευθύντρια της
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