Documenting Activities in Libraries: Designing Services to Link Collections with Activities

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Abstract: Today libraries are offering an increasing number of activities and events, that are producing knowledge. The PLACED project focuses on the development of a prototype facilitating the use of this knowledge. Through a methodology based on participatory design concepts, the team seeks to define functionalities for new *place-centric* digital services. Assuming that this methodology, which is focused on the analysis of needs and preferences, would benefit from being completed by a study of the roles played by the actors involved (librarians, invited speakers and the participating public), we conducted a series of participatory observations structured on the basis of E. Goffman's methodology. This article presents the results of this study in terms of defining requirements, and analyzes the contribution brought by taking into account the self-presentation and theatrical performances of librarians when it comes to design.

1. Introduction

Today, libraries aspire to think of themselves as "vibrant hubs", open to the city, and in a dynamic relationship with the urban fabric, its inhabitants, its organization, and its events. Perhaps most of all, libraries tend to model themselves as engines driving the renewal of social ties that have been somewhat shaken in recent times. In this context, public libraries have enthusiastically engaged in the development of an increasingly rich program of cultural or educational activities and events, especially with regard to quantity. While these programs are legitimate, both in their efforts to ensure the visibility of the role of libraries and promote a diversity of access to knowledge and among library patrons, nevertheless the time that librarians dedicate to organize these events requires us to question the value of these activities.

The PLACED (Place- and activity-centric digital library services) research project[1] is a European research project between 4 universities: ENSSIB and Université Lyon 1 (FR), Chalmers University of Technology (SE) and Aarhus University (DK), and three libraries: the Lyon Municipal Library (FR), the Lundby Library (SE) and the Aarhus Library (DK), and one industrial partner: RISE Interactive (SE). The project explore the possibility of developing digital tools that capture the information produced during library activities, and make this knowledge accessible, for example through building new services related to the collections. The PLACED team is working on one prototype, PARTICIPATE[2], which is an activity management tool that facilitates audiences participation in library activities). The tool, which is accessible on computers, tablets and smartphones, allows for the production, documentation and archiving of the knowledge accumulated during an activity. The prototype aims to offer features to accommodate the different types of users; especially library patrons, guests and library professionals. The prototypes are being developed with a participatory design approach, characterized by phases of ethnography, ideation, design, implementation, iteration, etc., involving the users for which the tool is intended.

Still, this approach does not incorporate all the possible facets of these situations. Each type of user (librarians, invited speakers and the participating public) plays a "role" in the "show" that is performed during the activity, and these roles represent a set of values, positions and questions that they have to act out in front of spectators (Goffman, 1973). In this article, we study these "performed" representations can bring to a collaborative platform. In particular, it aims to complete the specification of useful features in the PLACED project.

To explore this hypothesis, we conducted an ethnographic study of the activities in one of the partner municipal libraries, the municipal library of Lyon (France). The Public Library System of Lyon is a network of 16 libraries and 1 library bus. It provides more than

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[1] The work of the PLACED group is visible at the following address: http://placedproject.eu/

[2] See Gröschel et al, 2018, for more information on an early version of the prototype.

780,000 documents in direct access (more than 3 million stored in silos) as well as a digital library, and offers more almost 4000 activities per year. From November 2017 to January 2018, we conducted 12 participant observations, supplemented by semi-structured interviews. These observations allowed us to highlight two main roles played by librarians during these public activities. The first role is related to organizing activities, and the second role to librarian resource management. Studying the way these roles are presented to the public makes it possible to discuss the following features: identification, moderation, and document management. Each of these features are challenged by the roles played by librarians in terms of legitimacy, authority, prescription and experience.

At the end of this study, several proposals for specifications concerning features are defined, all of which take into account both what librarians demonstrate, and what we think they could embody for the library while working towards this vibrant hub.

2. Literature Review

The use of ethnography in Library and Information Science (LIS) is not new, but there has been renewed interest since the early 2010s. While a large number of articles are interested in this methodology, it is mostly in the context of academic libraries (Asher and Miller, 2017, Bryoni 2016), rather than in the context of municipal libraries. B. Caraco reminds us that in France, the low recourse to ethnography can be partly explained by the predominance of sociological methods, especially by the Bibliothèque publique d'information (Bpi) (Caraco, 2013).

In addition, the use of ethnographic methods in LIS, especially in American studies in academic libraries, focuses on the study of users, their relation to spaces and services, their way of learning in general, and their use of information (Bryoni, 2011, Caraco, 2013). Rarer and less visible are the ethnographic studies that study librarians. It is true that ethnography is often used in LIS to work on the development of services with a problem-solving objective such as "How to make a service useful and usable by users". Asher and Miller's guide proposes a method in several stages, including one dedicated to "presenting the results and driving change" (Asher, Miller, 2017, p. 40). In addition to the fact that the role of librarians in the development of these services is not taken into account, Caraco also notes that this research, as interesting as it is, rarely offers real problem-solving solutions (Caraco, 2013), aside from their consideration as a joint effort between the librarian and the ethnographer.

The PLACED project partly solves these two aporias, first, by looking at all future users, that is, users from the external public and librarians, and by associating ethnography and design centric type participatory research. The complementarity between UX and

ethnography is increasingly obvious[3]: in 2000, Crabtree already spoke of "Design aided by ethnography" (Crabtree, 2000), and the Anthrolib map, which was originally a mapping of ethnographic projects in academic libraries, is now a mapping of UX projects. For B. Caraco, ethnography brings a long-term vision that UX does not have, that is to say one that is less dedicated to problem solving and more geared towards constructing a narrative. The PLACED project through the combination of several approaches, those of the library professionals and those of the researchers in information science, library science and human-computer interaction, all of which are mobilized both in the method of research and in the creation of the prototype, succeeds to run a research with a complementarity between quantitative and qualitative methods, and between inductive and deductive methods. This complementarity is one of the requirements for the ethnographic method to be successfully used in problem solving (Dent, 2011, Asher and Miller, 2017).

3. Methodology

In "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life", (Goffman, 1973), Goffman uses the theatrical metaphor to reveal, in the interactions between the actors of a situation, the roles played and personified by the different characters with regard to representation. Following this metaphor, we will try to see the set pieces built by the librarians in the activities, the masks they wear, and the roles they play. We will rely on the 3 fields indicated by Goffman: the study of the actors and their personal facade (attitudes, objects, speeches), the stage (including the scenery), and the backstage (when the mask presented to the public falls).

To this end, we conducted 12 observational studies between November 2017 and January 2018, in two libraries in the Lyon network: the central library (La Part Dieu) and the library of the 6th arrondissement, a branch of that network. We chose different types of activities: trainings, debates, exhibitions, meetings, workshops, and so on. Activities were selected from the magazine *Topo*, which listed the activities available in the online agenda of the Lyon municipal library and the online agenda dedicated to "digital" workshops (training). All activities were related to cultural events or training. Some were open, but required registration, and generally had a small audience, others were open without registration. Among the chosen activities, only one was a youth activity. We also made sure to select activities taking place on different days and times: morning, noon, afternoon and

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[3] This question was also studied in the early 90's with some papers as *Ethnography and Design* by Grudin and Grinter. in 1995 or *Faltering from ethnography to design*, by Hugues et al. in 1992.

evening, and weekdays, Wednesdays and Saturdays. By doing so, we hoped to consider different types of audiences and interactions into the study.

We chose to make participatory observations, thus taking an active part in the ongoing activity, as would other participants. The observation protocol was specified by one French and one Swedish researcher who participated in the project, to ensure the replicability of the observation in both countries. The observations analyzed here were conducted by the French authors of this article. We noted the location of the activity in relation to the spaces of the library, the layout of the places, and the objects present and used. We also noted the reactions associated with each element; astonishment, preconceptions, prejudices, etc., as well as our own actions and reactions during the activities. We kept a collective notebook for our observations, which served as support for this work. And finally we run some semi-structured interviews with librarians involved in the activities and events observed.

4. Results

We were able to identify two main roles played by librarians in these public activity situations; first, a role centered on organization of activities and events, and second, a role centered on management of documentary resources.

The first role observed is that of the *organization specialist*. This role is linked to the mission of the organization, and the logistics of the activity in particular. We find that librarians tend to hide behind this mission and remain largely distant from the activity. Moreover, their role is to represent the library and to facilitate the experience and well-being of the public, as would a librarian-butler. This role is characterized by an absence of speaking during the activity, speech remaining circumscribed to the functions of reception: offering coffee, saying a word of welcome, and a word of conclusion. The rest of the time, these librarians are discreet; motionless and silent, and often staying at the back of the room. They intervene only to pick up the microphone when the debate becomes agitated or drifts, but often after a long wait, they leave the public and guests the opportunity to regulate the debate by themselves. They offer to the public a rather complex representation, which is that of both presence and silence, where the indispensability of the most important actors should not be perceptible. There is no doubt that on the one hand, this positioning makes it more difficult to understand what the librarian's profession might be, and on the other hand, it expresses a number of complex aspects related to the way the librarian plays their role.

There are two important points to raise. First, this butler function reflects the strong desire of librarians to ensure that the public has an enjoyable experience. Everything happens as if intervening only in case of a drift, the role of colleagues as extras, who come by during the activities to check that everything is fine, are signs of the feeling of a certain apprehension towards cultural action. There might be several causes for this: either the speech of the librarians themselves is feared, or the presence of an active public is felt as a danger, or, finally, it is a first experience of this type of activity (for example for the workshop on critical thinking) and the librarians are worried about the failure of the form. However, this desire and these concerns have an impact on the functionalities that a service like PARTICIPATE can offer. Indeed, in such a case, the experience offered to the public should not only be pleasant, but also productive of knowledge, therefore amplifying the risk of conflict due to the encouragement of free speech.

The other important point to raise is that in this butler function, librarians are withdrawing from an expression of their own expertise. Thus, they present themselves by their first and last names, without specifying their functions in the library or their statutes, or even the domain in which they are specialists, all elements which would explain not only their presence in the activity, but which would also clarify the very choice of the activity. In other words, librarians refuse to play the role of the expert. Their representation aims to leave knowledge to experts, and fight against a general representation of the public, which is that librarians are on the side of legitimate knowledge. This representation has an impact on PARTICIPATE's functionalities in two ways: first, because by refusing a role of prescriber, librarians position themselves as organizers and not as participants in the activity; second, because they do not accept their own statutes, they also give no justification for a role of moderation which is at the same time called for by their own concerns. In other words, the role played by librarians calls for reflection on both the identification of librarians and the mechanisms of resource mediation, between moderation and prescription.

The second role we have seen is that of the resource specialist. It is a role close to the traditional tasks of the librarian, which integrates the collections within the activities. The librarians intervene to indicate, in the activity or in addition to the activity, the resources of the library that are related to the subject. Surprisingly, these lists are always offered as bonuses to the activity, and not as part of the activity itself. Thus, the table with a selection of documents is presented quickly at the end of the activity, but without presenting its contents. The bibliography of a workshop is offered at the very last moment, by asking each participant to give their e-mail address, or sometimes, the leaflet containing the bibliography was forgotten during the presentation, and the librarian had to run to their office to get it. In other words, the representation of the role of the librarian given to the

audience does not highlight their most obvious skills, but rather as complements to the activity.

Here again, we find that librarians refuse to play the role of the expert. Content is not presented or commented on, and the librarians do not emphasize the things that would qualify them to exercise this expertise in their presentation. In rare cases, where librarians provide the essential content of the activity, they forget the library: its collections, organization, and spaces. The role of expert, which could be defended, is not taken on at all. This authority of knowledge is rejected by librarians, who do not want to be seen by the participants as experts or prescribers. However, as we have seen, a service like PARTICIPATE change these lines of expertise, and necessarily questions both the refusal to present oneself as an expert, and the function of prescription.

In addition, this second role questions another point: that of temporality. During the activities observed, everything happened as if the activities were not an opportunity to present the diversity of collections and resources available, even though these activities also promoted a diversification of access to knowledge and a diversification of audiences. We do not analyze this as a problem of access, but of the perception of knowledge over time. This is all the more obvious when the librarian is a resource specialist, and they do not take on the role of curator of the resource at hand: the activity itself. They do not assume the role of witness, which could constitute a transmissible account of the lived experience (photos, notes, archive of productions, etc.). While librarians took photos during several events, they were simply kept for internal use. This lack of diffusion suggests that something is lacking when it comes to the lived experience as a shared moment. While, as we saw with the previous role, there is a will to make the participants have good experiences, there is no effort to try to preserve that memory: neither as a memorial tool, nor as a tool for reaching out the public. A service like PARTICIPATE thus makes sense, since it offers functionalities to facilitate the preservation and redistribution of the experience.

Thus, these roles and elements highlight three points of discussion around the functionalities of a digital organization and participatory activities management service: first, the matter of *identification*, in particular that of librarians caught in contradictory desires of legitimacy and authority; second, the question of *moderation*, particularly what it implies to embody the role of prescriber of knowledge or of uses; and finally, the matter of *documentation*, between facilitation of the experience and conservation of its traces.

5. Discussion

The identity of the librarian underlines two concepts that are widely challenged in libraries, that of authority and that of legitimacy. The matter of the legitimacy of librarians is considered here in the sense of their ability to position themselves as transmitters of information to the public, whether in the form of recommendations for content, or direct and individual contributions to exchanges or discussions. Legitimacy can be understood, as Anne-Marie Bertrand (Bertrand, 1995) did in her analysis of the 1995 study on professional legitimacy in libraries, in the following terms: "The legitimacy of the librarian is (...) their knowledge of documentary tools and their mastery of methodology." With the development of activities, librarians face a two-fold challenge regarding the visibility of this legitimacy. On the one hand, while acquisitions require them to mobilize disciplinary knowledge, during the activities, the recognition of these skills is only granted to the expert guest. That which holds up the librarian's traditional legitimacy is erased in a situation that only shows the "organizational" skills of the librarian. Even if the activity is organized only by mobilizing the librarian's knowledge, this knowledge is invisible. On the other hand, the librarian is not used to exercising legitimacy in an interactive context. While it is invisible in the time of acquisition, during the activities it must be built in a relation between the individual librarian, whose legitimacy with regard to competence does not seem to be invoked, the invited expert, who is portrayed as obviously legitimate, and the participants, whose legitimacy is more or less recognized depending on the form of the activities. Therefore, the problem in terms of identification is a serious one. On the one hand, librarians do not see themselves as legitimate when it comes to having their knowledge recognized; on the other hand, the activity makes sense only because of the legitimacy of librarians. This brings us back to the matter of authority that is based on recognized knowledge, or has been guaranteed by the institution. The librarian's authority, or "bibliographic authority" to use the expression of Robert Damien (Damien 2006), refers to the public perception of the librarian as being vested with an authority that confers on them the right to select and organize the proposed resources in the library. Editorial resources, such as activities, are validated by the librarian's authority. It is "authoritative" in the sense that it defines a differentiation between "in" the library and "out" of the library. This exercise of authority is based on both their status and their bibliographic competence. They are the "organizer" of the library's offerings, and as such define its modalities. When offering these activities, the librarian is confronted with their exercise of authority in a different way. The activity deployed in libraries is not validated by an actor, in the chain of cultural industries. Therefore, they cannot refer to the activity as they would a book or a magazine. They must accept their responsibility for the content and organization of the activity, and thus have their own authority recognized both for their knowledge as a specific individual exercising the profession of librarian, and for their general status as librarian, as well as the skills that are associated with this status. To integrate these contradictions, our

prototype should provide for the possibility of changes on the authentication functionality. This should give librarians the opportunity to create profiles that integrate and display their names and functions, with the opportunity to highlight the elements in their profile related to their activity within the library (training, passions or interests, experiences...). This would make it possible to display an authority that may be confronted with other authorities: those of the expert or participants. On the other hand, the authentication functionality should allow the librarian to appear only under a general title in the library, to represent not an individual authority, but an institutional authority shared by all the librarian agents. This choice would allow them to display the identity with which they wish to act according to whether they propose resources (mediation) or modify contributions (moderation) in the tool.

Our second element to be discussed is the matter of moderation, which is related to the prescriptive function of municipal libraries. In France, moderation cannot be understood without reference to the Lumières and the French Revolution. It is then a matter for the libraries of indicating the works allowing the individuals to be informed citizens who are able to take part in the Republic, in particular and mainly by the exercise of the vote (Kupiec, 1989). This emancipating role is built at the same time as that of the school, and therefore has an educational and magistral dimension. Librarians do not tire from exercising it, especially as the public becomes increasingly important in the structure of the library and the definition of its services. Prescription continues to be challenged today. In 2015, following the attacks in January in France, the question arose of what French libraries should do. David Lankes replied that in 2001, at the height of the post-9/11 crisis, American librarians were proposing lists of books to assist the public in understanding the event. In 2014, during times of crisis such as the Ferguson riots, librarians accompanied their public, not with document selections, but through taking stances by opening the school library, for example, despite the recommendations of the mayor of Ferguson not to do so. (Lankes, 2015). Similarly, R. Bats shows that in 2015, French libraries considered presentation tables as ultimately unhelpful reactions to crisis, and quickly sought new proposals to participate in the general discussion around *vivre ensemble* (living together[4]), proposals that have often taken the form of participatory practices offered to the public

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[4] The "Vivre Ensemble" is a French expression used in political discourses to express the possibility to live all together with our differences. It was used in the 70ies in a report asked by the President V. Giscard d'Estaing, a report focused on the direct democracy and local democracy. It was used by journalist, politicians, and everybody in 2015 to express after a year of attacks from ISIS and of large flux of refugees to express the ideal aim of France to stay united in the difficulties and through the differences.

(Bats, 2018). This shift from prescription to participation is also quite visible in the third place library model, which aims to make the librarian the organizer of the knowledge shared by the public, rather than the prescriber of a collection (Servet, 2010). This trend is further confirmed by the organization of a conference in April 2018 by the ABF (Association of French Librarians) titled "Collections: Between Prescription and Co-construction", which opened with a speech about welcome services, rather than one about collections (ABF Center, 2018). Librarians are therefore eager to take part in a movement of emancipation through knowledge, and to not only have a prescribing role. This drift should enlighten us on the form to give to the functionalities around moderation in PARTICIPATE. It is a matter of not making the collection the center of the lived experience during the activity, and directing it in the most natural way possible, and perhaps as invisible as possible, towards the catalogue. This could be achieved by making a participatory prescription possible, giving all participants the freedom to be prescriptive too. Prescription could thus become the promotion of knowledge for all actors in the activity. This approach would allow the librarian to play a role in selecting and organizing different resources in relation to their library expertise, and on the basis of the authority it confers on them, without this authority appearing to be superior to that of the other participants. The prototype should integrate a suggestion/moderation function, which makes it possible to distinguish between the contributions of the library and those of the public, without prioritizing either.

Finally, our last point of discussion concerns the documentation of activities. The semi-structured interviews highlighted the fact that the librarians did not have the time to document activities, and had not planned their organization in a way that integrated documentation. Documentation, when carried out, is usually intended for internal use, or for use by the professional environment, at the level of the community of professionals, with the aim of reporting an experiment in terms of service to the public or in terms of internal organization. While the development of communication within libraries has led librarians to subscribe to a social media approach, keeping some traces of activities to share them, procedures for the exploitation of traces of previous activities with the aim of promoting or informing the public about an event remain marginal. Moreover, shared traces are usually produced by the library and not by users, and they are not shared anywhere else aside from on social networks. They are not usually broadcast in the physical space of the library[5]. However, not working on providing access to these traces means establishing a hierarchy of knowledge materialized by the traces within the library, depending on who

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[5] By exemple, the Dokk1 library in Aarhus, Denmark displays all the Instagram's posts, tagged "Dokk1", on a screen at the entrance of the library.

produced them (the library or the participants), and on their places of diffusion (on social networks or in the physical library). Regrettably, the traces of the activities are not legitimized as a new source of knowledge or a new path of access to knowledge. Without the conservation or promotion of the multiple traces of activities, the role played by users in the construction of emancipatory knowledge is diminished. However, this role is a driving force in building a common experience, a community that the library could help to maintain. The lack of visibility of these traces in physical spaces, and in particular in relation to collections, shows that librarians do not consider the experience of the activity as having value for the library beyond the experienced moment itself. This implies that only one who acts can really measure the usefulness of the lived experience. To see without doing would then be useless. However, one could argue, as Jacques Rancière did (Rancière, 2008) that even the inactive spectator lives a sensible experience[6], which does not necessarily need mediation or explanation. Emancipation can be built in a time-scale that is that of the spectator, and not that of the actor or organizer. Hence the importance of being able to diffuse variations on the same theme, so that different spectators can find several ways to approach the experience. Marcello Vitali-Rosati, through the project "Épuiser la transcanadienne" (Vitali-Rosati, SD), invites us to rethink public spaces in light of the variety of traces that digital technology has made possible. Moreover, it renews an approach to the notion of authority on the web, which would offer librarians the opportunity to build their project of emancipation not only around an institutional legitimacy, but around a legitimacy acquired by the capacity to offer a multiplicity of access to the same body of knowledge, to raise questions, and to spark public debate.

While there is a real stake in defining the public space that is the library, it is nonetheless true that for now, it is unclear how to best treat the traces of the activities generated in this space. A digital service like PARTICIPATE should facilitate the collection, recognition and promotion of the various traces and their sources (i.e. the library, users and partners). PARTICIPATE should offer a functionality allowing for the editorial processing of these traces, using them to build a dialogue between different points of view on the same event, and an emancipatory debate between so-called legitimate collections and layman knowledge. This type of functionality involves being able to capture users' production in various formats, and would consider the legal constraints of image and broadcasting rights.

6. Conclusions

We want to conclude with the idea that the ethnographic method provides important elements for understanding work situations, and for imagining a prototype based on the

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[6] Here, 'sensible' refers to what is apprehended by the senses.

elements that have been observed and analyzed. The first prototype in the PLACED project, PARTICIPATE, can thus benefit from a double approach: that of the participatory design approach, which allows the librarians to take part in the ideation and iteration processes, and that of the ethnographic method, which encourages researchers to go beyond the statements and representations of the librarians. The combination of the two makes it possible to identify and integrate the desires and needs of the library professionals, and makes it possible to design functions that enable them, in the long term, to realize their aspirations for the evolution of practices or of roles to embody in front of their audiences.

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