

## THE LIBRARY'S ADDED VALUE

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KEYWORDS: Libraries. Social profit. Public mediation. Communication processes.

ABSTRACT: The idea of a library's added value is the unique social profit of a library's activity. It is a profit unknown by any other kind of organization or institution. It is generated by the professional activity of the staff and the intentional preparation of library processes. The main expression of this value is mediation within public communication, which takes place principally within the library. The structuralization of the offer is straightforward: arrangement, selection and weeding of the stock, knowledge and all subjects of any communication transmissions, all of which are subsequently conveyed to the public. These transmissions are based both on the library's own collection and on the collections of other libraries, with the productive addition of the electronic network's offer. The library's tender, as one unit, is predestinated for the actual public and proffered in a suitable context. It is promoted and made free to all library users. The library is also a regulator of most communication processes, and it also generates its own in-house information. What is more, the library prepares its own program of various ventures and entertainments for the public, in the facilitation of forms of public communication, assistance to all kinds of formal education, or as an aid to the cultural and social environment. All this, in sum, represents the library's added value, and seems to be a good justification for the social usefulness of a library as a public institution.

I acknowledge the fact that proper terminology distinguishes the term “value added”, which has been used in reference to economics and economic practice. In fact, VAT is a tax on the “value added”. However, as Dariusz Grygowski has recently pointed out (Grygowski, 2001, p. 184), some scholars have begun to associate it also with library practice (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2004, p. 245).

Nevertheless, I would contend that when applying the term to librarianship, one has to narrow its meaning by redefining it in order to suggest alternate denotations. What is noteworthy is the fact that the original meaning assumes that value added is countable and expressible in monetary terms (zlotys, dollars, euro), whereas in library practice such calculability or fiscal estimation cannot be countenanced.

## PRELIMINARY NOTES

In general, what is understood by value added is every increase in value earned through work with respect to the original value and the total cost incurred. Such an increase is calculable and appraisable in the domain of economics, manufacturing, commerce or services. Seldom is it possible to evaluate value added outside of these fields.

Invariably, value added always stems from work and creative thought. It also constitutes a contribution to the value, be it measurable or not, which can be attributed to the final result of a human action. That is why it can be associated with the broad definition of a library's activity.

In the realm of library science, value added shall be understood as a way of organizing the communicative mediation, which results in an otherwise unattainable change of social mindset. Thus, it consists in a rise in social awareness value, possible **exclusively** thanks to library usage.

Undoubtedly, this increase is by no means calculable due to the size, dynamics and incalculability of the very input, as well as a general inability to single out the areas of total value generated **solely** by libraries. However, what can be comparable (although not at all calculable) are the forms of library mediation or ways of managing library mediation, as they can be contrasted with all other forms of mediation in communication. Nevertheless, these are not the final outcomes.

This is what constitutes the core of all difficulties with measuring library processes and their outcomes. Then again, it is untrue to say that what is incalculable means invaluable. On the contrary, the incalculable added value is the fundamental feature of librarianship which defines its meaning and makes it worthy of discussion.

There are two major sources generating the added value in librarianship, namely the staff, librarians and information specialists, and all the processes enriching the inventory and facilitating the services. Above all, it is the staff that adds the value by gathering the resources and information, configuring and reconfiguring them, as well as processing, completing, transforming, using and promoting their content. The addition of value also takes place whenever

a service is delivered in a suitable manner. The better the quality of service, then the greater the value added.

Among other factors directly generating value added are knowledge and skills of librarians, their intellectual virtues, creativity and reliability (Bakken, 1998, p. 82; Gorman, 2003a, p. 28; Grygrowski, 2001, p. 184). When combined with specific resources and service conditions with regards to the recipient, these factors build a setting which is impossible to be found anywhere else but in a library.

Adding value occurs through a set of various library **processes**, not necessarily limited to services. These processes include gathering, archiving, cataloguing, classifying and organizing the resources and information background. Also: facilitating access to various contents, as well as providing, completing, using and promoting them. In addition, other processes can be enumerated, namely user communication training and the animation of the public space so as to facilitate local networking (Edwards, 2002, p. 152; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2004, p. 245). This is an enhanced and strategic vision of library mediation in public communication, which is unique in the sense that it is free of charge.

## STRUCTURALIZATION OF THE OFFER

An essential and extremely important contribution of librarianship to the public communication involves organizing the vast and dynamic supply of communication. What brings order to such an environment is systematization, i.e. grouping, mutually relativizing and evaluating the transmitted messages.

## SELECTION

In public communication the supply of messages is not only enormous, but also continuous. Previous messages overlap with current ones, and indeed often occur simultaneously. The two major organizing factors, namely the type of medium and chronology, that is the dates of entering the transmission, do not have the capacity to fully manage the chaos. Libraries do not acquire all of this incoming data. In fact, instead of acquiring it automatically, they select the resources and contents according to their own criteria. Thus, some messages are qualified to enter the library mediation, whereas others are rejected (Akilina, 1996, p. 97; Atton, 1996, pp. 91, 107; Latham, 2003, p. 14). This is where libraries in an exclusive sense – create add value for their users.

The same applies to Internet resources, which, on the whole, add up to communication junk. A library, while providing access to the online content selects the data and adjusts the selection criteria to the actual or assumed expectations of the users (Latham, 2003, p. 7; Owens, 2002, p. 12).

It is the selection which constitutes the basis for the remediation, i.e. digitalization of certain printed materials. Thanks to libraries, such resources gain an additional mode of circulation.

The publications selected by libraries are certainly more widely available and those filtered out are greatly disadvantaged. One form of **selection**, which contributes to the quality in the library supply, is removing materials and contents from the library stock and mediation. Through the choosing of items to be removed, the library self-modifies its offer.

There is also a method applicable mostly to Internet resources and publications, i.e. **filtration**, which consists in blocking content unsuitable for public dissemination. This is also a form of adding value by the library, as it affects the communication supply – although at times criticized and associated with censorship, – it is much more often accepted. In the public libraries of the USA filtration is a common practice (Estabrooke & Lankner, 2003, p. 257).

#### EVALUATION AND ARCHIVIZATION

Along with selection comes the order imposed by **evaluation** according to the content and application value. The items are evaluated against a certain model and other items. What follows are decisions concerning the inclusion or exclusion of items on the basis of the evaluation.

Due to the successive supply of new messages, the process is continuous, which requires changes in evaluation criteria. Such changes result in the need to make new decisions regarding the items to be removed: those to be entered into transmission and those to be archived. Consequently, thanks to libraries, a new value is added to an already existing one.

The above is applicable also to communication supply on the Internet, where the speed of the addition is much more valued than its quality. What is transmitted is only the latest version of the message, which implies the temporal character of such an addition (Adamiec, 2004, p. 110; Tennant, 2003, p. 41). That is why it is necessary to evaluate the supply (Latham, 2003, p. 18) and the archivization of the messages according to their content value rather than the date of their transmission.

#### THE COLLECTION

The collection has always been the main library value, defining its purposes. It comprises a set of resources, selected and configured in a unique way. The materials, arranged according to a systematic pattern, form a structure, which in itself generates an added value which does not exist in any other environment.

It is up to each library to determine which items will belong to its collection, therefore individual institutions implement their own acquisition policies. However, such policies are frequently misunderstood due to a misconception of the term “books”, which tends to be interpreted by an analogy to dry goods. It is also the library who transforms simple data and separate items into resources (Bagrova, 1999, p. 7; Latham, 2003, p. 15), which represents another example of added value.

However, the notion of collection can be extended to the selected electronic resources, available online. The library selects only such resources which can be deemed useful for the users. The institution makes the resources available and organizes their structure, also supplementing its own resources (Latham, 2003, p. 7; Sowards, 2000, p. 142). Readers

do not need to be concerned with ownership issues pertaining to library, stores and available materials as from their point of view all that matters is the opportunity to make use of the resources. Thus, the collection can also be extended to the collections owned by other libraries, to which the library grants the access for its users (Frolov, 2002, p. 41). This kind of service radically enriches the library's own collection.

Since electronic materials are still not considered to be publications (Kasperkiewicz, 2004, p. 159) and the complete digitalization of communication seems illusory (Apostle & Raymond, 1997, p. 18) this sort of a mega collection may prove solid and truly unique.

As a result, the collection is diversified, as well as multi-semiotic, and forms a gateway library. The collection consists of the library's collection and the resources housed in other places, as well as subscribed or free electronic materials (Gorman, 2003a, p. 8; Rusbridge & Royen, 2002, p. 123). There is no other mega collection of this sort.

#### ADDRESS

What remains a valid point is that such a collection is not merely a system of haphazard elements, but its structure is appropriately addressed to specific library users: the users of **this** library. The old idea of accumulating resources that would meet the needs of everyone seems now obsolete. The dominant contemporary practice rests upon the recognition of the actual and current expectations of the existing audience and the anticipation of future expectations, which determine the configuration of the mega collection (Dillon, 2002, p. 124; Shuman, 1997, p. XXV). This is what constitutes the theoretical guidelines followed by modern libraries with a degree of divergence.

Consequently, such a great deal of specificity, i.e. addressing the resources to the specific community of users is another crucial element of added value, which relates exclusively to one community and can be attributed to a **specific library**.

#### MEDIATION

The mediation between communicative resources, including electronic data (Bagrova, 1999, p. 147), and the users is also added value in character and constitutes the main objective of the library. The core of the mediation is to inform the users about the offer in a way that allows them to make use of the resources, as well as – to transmit the contents. The information concerning the supply of messages is also available outside the library, yet it is never as universal, exhaustive and tailored to the needs of a specific audience, a fact which points to the areas that contribute to the library's added value.

#### ARRANGING THE NOTIFICATIONS

Commercial and functional communicative information hinge upon fixed search patterns. They are governed predominantly by chronology, whereas the shift between searching for

information and delivering it through a medium is sometimes inefficient. In contrast, the method of grouping and classification of materials employed by libraries is always multithreaded, flexible and easily adapts to the recipients' expectations.

Only in the library is information about resources accompanied by the information concerning their location (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2004, p. 239). There is no other environment which would provide integrated knowledge of both electronic and printed resources (Tennant, 2003, p. 44). With regards to such knowledge, the library is an unmatched source of information and truly brings order to the chaos.

What is especially worthy of note is the fact that the information apparatus, which has developed over the centuries and has been enriched with electronic information, enables one to encompass the communication supply in a convenient and useful way. There are some deficiencies in systematization pertaining to online content, which in itself is subjected to constant changes, however they are negligible to an extent that does not reduce the value of library notifications.

#### ADJUSTMENT AND PROMOTION

Next to the structure and the constant improvement of the library information tools, an equally significant manifestation of library practice is the ability to use it skillfully, i.e. by recognizing the needs of the recipients and the communication supply in order to adjust the offer to individual expectations (Block, 2003b, p. 851; Dillon, 2002, pp. 126, 128; Roy, 2002, p. 217). The scope of the communication supply mediated by the library is nowadays vaster than ever and comprises collections owned by other libraries coupled with the electronic offer published on the Internet. What is noteworthy, libraries are seeing a very far-reaching adjustment of notifications about the supply, i.e. modifying the content and supporting the search for materials. These are the activities performed only by the library on a large scale and with the advanced level of individualization. As such, this is another example of added value that makes it especially useful for society.

In addition, the library not only adapts its offer to expectations, but it also operates in a creative way as it mediates according to its own agenda. This means that it promotes selected media in accordance with a self-defined idea of usefulness. Such a promotion discounts other media and, at the same time, allows the library to promote itself its accompanying services (Dillon, 2002, p. 119; Fichter, 2003, p. 123; Roy, 2002, p. 230; Walter, 2001, p. 112), which proves successful thanks to the low degree of formality and diverse channels of exerting impact, especially individual relations and direct communication (Nęcki, 2003, pp. 11, 13).

In this way, both the library and its staff create new forums of public communication, which is, in turn, value added (Grygowski, 2001, p. 184) and a distinctive feature of the library. It is also a feature co-determining the library's role in the public communication, and there is no premise that would suggest otherwise.

## THE OFFER

Clearly, the library as an institution was established in order to make the public communication offer available for society. It is not the sole institution fulfilling this objective, yet it stands out considerably among other establishments thanks to the scope and manner of providing the service of mediation in public communication. This difference constitutes one of the major added values as generated by the library.

## LENDING

The libraries that form a cooperative network can provide wider access to communication materials and directly transmitted contents than other institutions would. Moreover, the access granted by the library is relatively easy and free of charge. The lack of any direct fees makes libraries institutions of wide outreach.

When compared to traditional practices, the current offer has been recently enriched and diversified. Organizing and providing access to resources nowadays applies not only to one or more libraries, but also to the devices which enable users to participate in public communication via electronic media (Akilina, 1996, p. 96; Gorman, 2003a, p. 31).

It is important to remember that not everyone possesses such devices at home and some people need assistance when it comes to searching for the data they need. Currently, the multi-semiotic and multi-media aspects of the library offer are growing in significance. The offer is consolidated, which meets the social expectations directed at either printed resources or online content (Bagrova, 1999, p. 146; Block, 2003a, p. 5, 2003b, p. 78). The library offers an extensive range of resources and looks to raise awareness concerning their complexity, and, over time facilitates the transmission of materials and their admission at no cost. Once again, we have a clear example of added value.

## PROCESSING THE CONTENTS

The library's added value also takes the form of librarian participation in its regulation of the processing and acquisition of contents by users, which accompanies the provision of services in the library. It can be assumed that most of these services are not affected by the said regulation yet there are processes that come with recommendation, correction or verification on the part of the librarian aimed at modifying user interpretation. Such feedback occurs in the case of the transmission of both printed materials and online contents (Block, 2003c, p. 86; Chu, 2003, pp. 2-3; Gordon, 2003, p. 3; Grygowski, 2001, pp. 153, 188). The necessity and utility of such regulation stems from the possible alternative interpretations of a message. However, the regulation is by no means uniform in character.

When the library supplements the reception of information it should facilitate the narrowing of the content so that the meaning becomes disambiguated; provided, of course, that this

is possible. Whereas in the process of interpreting the texts, which do not fulfill the informational function, i.e. partially-open texts, the regulation should be limited to suggesting the most suitable ways of analyzing the content without concertizing. The rule is that each recipient individually processes and completes the transmitted message, which can be only hinted at by the librarian, who cannot impose any interpretation (Ecco, 1994, pp. 5, 75; Elkin et al., 2003, pp. 36-39; Rosner, 1992, p. 243).

This regulatory task is not easy to carry out in the case of texts other than informative ones. Certainly, it is considered necessary due to recurrent misinterpretations. Thus, whenever introduced, the regulation proves invaluable.

The same regulation is going to be needed on a more regular basis when the new form of literary communication designed for the electronic means of communication, namely the so-called Liternet, has become more widespread. The Liternet is based on an interactive convention, which requires the activity on the part of the recipients, who can enjoy a great deal of freedom of interpretation (Adamiec, 2004, p. 177; Chymkowski, 2002, p. 86; Eco, 1994, p. 177; Kluszczyński, 2001, p. 96).

From the general point of view, such interpretational attitudes are somewhat rare. For this reason the librarian's intervention and regulation may prove decisive for the social reception or rejection of this new form of literary transmission. This is one more way of perceiving and assessing the library's added value.

#### THE ADDED CONTENT

However, the library's areas of activity do not cover exclusively the distribution of the already existing materials, or the transmission of already formulated contents. The institution not only regulates the way in which the messages are interpreted, but it has also become a transmitter of certain contents by issuing commentaries or appendices to the transmitted content, or by communicating the content composed by the library (or, to be specific, the librarians) (Alstad & Curry, 2003, p. 12; Block, 2003b, p. 76; Gordon, 2003, p. 3).

In the process of providing informational services, librarians often do more than just refer to specific resources or databases and mediate. They look to their own knowledge, consciousness and experience in order to give advice, inform and explain various issues. For this reason many large libraries hire specialized librarians. Their expertise and experience frequently become the source of commentaries supplementing the transmitted materials and contents. There is also the library practice of producing informative (or non-informative) materials, including databases, in the library's own name and constitutes the most tangible evidence of added value to the communication messages generated by both the library and librarians.

#### OTHER LIBRARY ACTIVITIES

Another crucial area of library practice are additional activities which differ in their scope, depending on the type of library. Sometimes they are not immediately related to the main occupational tasks, but rather loosely or closely attached, as the case may be. They can be regarded as contributing to the library's added value.

#### COMMUNITY-BASED PROJECTS

Through the provision of services, the library has become a place of gathering for those members of a community who choose to use it. This is an opportunity for the library to engage in a spontaneous or intentional exchange of opinions on any subject. There are not too many places that would offer a similar environment for interaction (Alstad & Curry, 2003, p. 13; Gorman, 2003a, p. 69), which amounts to an exceptional type of added value, usually attributed to public libraries and, less often, academic libraries (campus libraries) or school libraries. This value inspires various communal and teamwork-based undertakings, which typically involve reciprocal communication. Such activities are organized by libraries or as a grass-root initiative with a library's minimal support, or indeed permission.

The possible repertoire is vast, ranging from exhibitions, lectures and meetings to clubs, special interest groups and – highly creative – and varied public discussions (Alstad & Curry, 2003, p. 15; Elkin et al., 2003, pp. 40-42, 61-77). No matter the form, all these activities focus upon the transmission of some kind of content and the exchange of opinions, more or less pertaining to the resources available in a library and, at times, completely unrelated to the basic mediatory objectives of the institution. With such activities the most important value added is the **mutual contact** between members of a community, and the prevention of alienation and exclusion.

The same value is generated by integrating **ideas of localism and regionalism** that stimulate a sense of community and manifest themselves in the librarianship through the **concept of a local and regional information system** (*New library...*, 1997, p.13). Messages concerning a local or regional community are transmitted via different channels. What actually constitutes the value added is the integrated, merged concept of an information system gradually implemented in the librarianship, especially in public libraries with regards to the social-territorial environment. However, this value added less often considers academic libraries (in relation to the academic community) and very rarely school libraries (in relation to the school environment).

Something which may contribute to the idea of filling the local space with an integrating library project is the Internet, namely a means of online communication which involves dialogs such as blogs, chats etc. From an individual and private perspective, they only imitate social interaction and function as surrogates for real relationships (Mandel, 2003, p. 111). The library can alter this situation by creating **real teams** operating in the blogosphere, which may facilitate an exchange of opinions via the Internet. Aside from virtual relations, real direct relationships may be developed. As for the essence of discussion in the blogosphere, it resides in the equality of all opinions and is never disrupted by way of library mediation.

Sometimes there may arise the need for moderation on the part of one or more libraries (Cywińska-Milonas, 2002, pp. 99-100; Fichter, 2003, pp. 121-122; Marecki, 2002, pp. 5, 15). If such a moderation takes place, it is an obvious act of adding value to the form, which is valueless without the said library's contribution.

#### THE EDUCATIONAL BASE

What I consider to be a separate added value in the library's activity is the **notion of the library's educational base**. It comprises much more than the mere support for scholarly education through the operation of school libraries and public libraries or academic libraries which is assigned as a basic duty to these institutions (Gorman, 2003a, p. 76; 2003b, p. 160; Heery & Morgan, 1996, p. 6; Love, 2002, pp. 151-152). It is a separate undertaking, developed on the basis of the regular practice and extension of service, and the exploration of new perspectives. Moreover, it can be associated with perennialism and the ideas of lifelong learning as well as individual development, as opposed to actual practice or education policies. This concept presumes the creation of an appropriately configured **system** of support for education through the activity of all libraries in all possible areas, albeit there is still some way to go (Gutek, 2003, pp. 288, 290; Matlina, 1998, p. 46; *New Library...*, 1997, p. 6). Having said that, the existence of an idea which determines the guidelines for further assumptions and new practices should be acknowledged and commended. Indeed, owing to this particular idea, the liberalization of barriers hindering the usage of libraries for educational purposes and the strategy of interlibrary loans have been made possible. This concept has inspired new plans for the development of electronic services, which actually locate the entire educational support within libraries. It is also a blueprint for the plan of deploying e-learning infrastructure in these institutions (Grygowski, 2001, p. 152; Heery & Morgan, 1996, p. 98). The social value added of this concept is thus undeniable.

#### USER COMMUNICATION TRAINING

Within the set of values added by the library, for the time being more postulated than implemented, there is also the issue of user communication training, which is nothing else but preparing people for the usage of transmitted messages and the reception of what they convey on multiple levels of proficiency: technical, intellectual and strategic. This concerns mostly the reception of printed and electronic materials.

Even though the role of the library is purely supplementary when compared to the knowledge acquired at school or through self-study, this role is still very important. Given that common literary and interpretative skills are at a low level, every attempt at ameliorating the situation represents a step in the right direction.

The offer of some libraries, mainly school libraries or public ones for children, includes projects focused on mastering or correcting the skills of reading (to a technical level of proficiency). The target objectives of such programmes are the development of fluency and

arriving at a speed-reading rate which surpasses the speed of individual speech. This task is actually being carried out by some libraries, although not at a widespread level.

What is a common practice in some countries is for public and school libraries to carry out basic computer training and Internet orientation (Estabrooke & Lankner, 2003, p. 258; Gorman, 2003a, p. 77; 2003b, p. 162; *New Libraries...*, 1997, p. 15; Walter, 2001, p. 79). The need for such training stems from the recognition of the fact that only some people can afford personal electronic devices, therefore those who either cannot or who are unable to master such skills at home or school.

Sadly, on the higher, intellectual level of communicative skills, the influence exerted by libraries is not so prominent.

As for written communication, the main goal of the library is to help to distinguish between literary and nonliterary messages, which is possible from the very beginning of literacy as the ability to distinguish reality from fiction starts at six years of age (Kołodziejczyk, 2003, p. 43). Another objective is to work out the metaphorical interpretation of literature and the selective or active approach to nonliterary texts. In online communication the main postulate is to present the methods of searching for information in varied configurations and arrangements, yet always in relation to the individual knowledge of the users (Block, 2003b, p. 2; Elkin et al., 2003, pp. 34-39; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2004, p. 258).

Training on a strategic level takes place in academic libraries and covers the introduction to the electronic information background within the domain of a given major. It focuses upon the identification of appropriate electronic databases and websites. This approach is principally practiced by libraries (Gorman, 2003b, p. 162; Heery & Morgan, 1996, p. 12; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2004, p. 270). Despite the fact that this sort of training is mechanical to a large extent, the necessary specialized knowledge can be continuously updated.

Finally, it remains to say that the general dimension of the library's added value is vast and extremely important as it offers a range of benefits to society and provides an undoubted rationale for the library's continued existence.

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