

Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE)
Faculty of Humanities

Ph.D. Theses

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**Anthropological aspects of library in special consideration its
information mediation role with symbols impregnated**

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Introduction

Getting information means a great deal more than practically getting to know something. The aim in general is to exceed something and lastly to survive, to beat mental death. *This is exactly where the importance of an information mediator librarian's meaningful act lies.*

In a library, information convertible to knowledge, works of art transformed into unique meanings are received through a combination of conditions. The library is an *institution of mediation*. Besides the space, tools and professional protocol of mediation as factors needed for renewal, there is the permanent framework, the relation of obtaining – providing information. The basic principle that *the library is a scene where one person gets into contact with another* cannot be obscured by the ever changing forms of power status quo, special and background knowledge or intellectual deficiencies, scales of values or cultural determinations.

Structure and issues of the thesis

The introductory chapter marks the limits of the essay, outlines the objectives, sets up hypotheses, states the applied methods and gives an overview of the literature of the topic. The second chapter discusses certain anthropological aspects with awareness that this view permeates the whole of the work. In Chapter Three, we shall chart how we think about the library by defining its concept, analysing similes and caricatures. In the fourth chapter the symbolic contents of librarian students' library-imagery will be tested. The fifth chapter will tour the referential and signal relations of the library. In order to research the interactions of information mediation, Chapter Six will, among others, analyse case studies. The *main range of issues* of the thesis is the *anthropological* aspects of the library. The anthropological aspect, as a favoured one, is a tool to discuss our subject the library as a socio-cultural world taking particular definitions as our starting point. As a *secondary set of issues*, we shall examine the *referential and signal relations*. We consider examination through reflexions, the recognition of communication procedures important, which is why the *symbolic content of the dialogic relations* of the library will be added as a *further set of secondary issues*. The primary field of our research is provided by the public libraries in today's Hungary.

Objectives

1. The outlines of a new aspect: In the thesis we an attempt is made by the outlines of a new aspect to synthesize the relation of man and library from the aspect of two main points of approach: symbols and human relations. 2. It is our goal that beyond the linguistic sign substitute as a symbol, the manifestation of the symbol-using (symbolic) way of communication should also be tackled. 3. Analysing the symbolic dimensions of the information mediation process since search strategies and information management strategies are discussed by reference books in details neglecting however the process of understanding and interpretation. 4. This essay hopes to contribute to the reinforcement of the concept that symbolisation connects librarians and library users. I offer support for the self-identification of the “unnamed masters” of information mediation and encouragement for the expansion of the validity of function definitions by elucidating that their activity is more than transaction.

Applied quantitative methods

Questionnaire, literature resources, charting the library image of other texts e.g. caricatures. Collection of library-related similes and symbols.

In our questionnaire survey, which formulates 21 questions to research the symbolic reading of the library, 508 Hungarian librarian majors (first-years and seniors) were interviewed. The typical components of the library concept were inquired by *random choice oral interviews*. 100 persons were approached by *random walking* to ask about institutions representing the library concept. 218 *caricatures were analysed* in order to literally gain a picture as to how library interactions are mapped in this genre. *By the analysis of over 800 similes* we wished to present that the similes of the library are not simply linguistic texts but the phenomena of the system based on elements of status and qualification.

Applied qualitative methods

Blend-in unobtrusive observation and *participant observation* as part of the everyday routine. Both observations are analytical. In an *experiment* three persons were asked to perform the sign reading of the same library. By the *case descriptions and analyses* of information mediation we aimed to present interrelations and characteristics as well as recording facts related to the contact system of the operation and the librarian-user. We

made *deep interviews* with two reader service librarians. On course of the background studies, a *hypothesis discovery interview* was carried out based on a reply given to a question of the questionnaire.

Presenting the results

Every chapter of this thesis proves that the library is human-centred. It is a contact institution existing in contacts: library, librarian, library user create each other.

Data of information mediation and history may gain new meanings by examining the human factor shared the examination of the library from the interpretation- and present-centred aspect.

This work presents that the operation of the library is a cultural text that heralds not only its instrumental and pragmatic activity but also the symbolic one. The libraries create and reflect meanings. The library addresses the society as well as its actual users with direct methods as well as signals, symbols.

Examining the signal reading of the library we got the result that the better one knows the signals a library sends about itself the more pronounced those received from man, those hiding in contacts will be.

Searching for the operation situations of the library – along objectives and hypotheses – we arrived at the conclusion that they also display the nature of society and life in the community. Our work is a supplement for a further-thinkable set of ideas where a parallel can be drawn between the role the library is ready to play in society and the role symbols play in our thinking.

The evaluation of the hypotheses and the formation of the theses

1. The library is a tool for the interpretation of man

Examining the conceptual structures, meanings, value references and events of information mediation of the library, we experienced that it is impossible to write about the library leaving man or society out of consideration. We can state that data on the library are actually about human events. Any aspect of the library (history, task, operation, form of existence) gives a report on man.

Our work proves that the library is an interpretable signal about man. The library is the context out of which man is readable.

Thesis

The library serves cultural anthropology with a rich research field. Our statement is that every library, from a certain aspect, is a map of man's world. Writing about the library is an abstraction to examine man in real. Interpreting human activities and thoughts linked to the library on the other hand is the only possible way to understand the essence and the operation of the library. By showing the variedness hidden in the library, we add shades to the basic meaning of human existence.

The *key symbol* of the library is not knowledge, information, the book, preservation but man.

While interpreting the concept of library and approaching it through simile, transmitted concepts appear, but we presume that the simile contents of graduating librarian students are determined by shades originating from the knowledge of web-and web2 technologies.

The hypothesis failed confirmation. Compared with the expected result, there was no characteristic difference among the simile of fresh librarian students, retired librarians and persons with other professions. Summarized: the simile patterns are interchangeable. The explanation of this is seen in the fact that though those making the comparisons are connected to the library with different activity and strategies, their samples are taken from culturally limited ideals, transmitted concepts and thus their readings show similarities. That is to say, the library is at least as much of an idea as an active practice. This is proved by transmitted concepts readable from questionnaires, caricatures and role interpretations. The leading simile of the library majors (an island of peace) refers to the fact that symbols rooted in the past are readily called up to interpret a concept. However, it is exactly the unjustifiedness of the hypothesis that confirmed that the aspect that the library is at least as active a practice as a notion is equally valid. In other words, the hypothesis failed because the new knowledge elements to be brought by the library majors are not yet connected with the practice. The work experiences and role interpretations of the everyday cannot be evaded. According to our conclusion, the effect of the social, cultural transmission is definitely powerful, see the formula "community resources" characteristic of the simile

pattern of the English speaking cultures, but it is also worth pointing out that *in the librarian training more attention should be paid to the development of the image of the library, the librarian, the founding of librarianship as an identity*. So that students, besides simile elements rooted in the past, can also find a firm grip in the image of a library changed by digital culture.

Thesis

A seemingly unlimited number of interpretable facts can be listed about the library but even the devices most creative and carrying the most personal meanings stem from the same basic concept, the system of social aspects connected to the library. He who wants to identify the library individually must first accept the symbolic concept, the archetype of the library transmitted in society.

3. We wish to support our view that behind the set of signals used by the library, more is hidden than the practice of operation. Any sign of the profession can be seen as an operation-oriented limited code or a barely limited form of communication. The signals of the library are methods of expression towards society, about itself.

When the set of symbols of the library was discussed, they always showed more than mere codes of operation practice. The signs connected to the activity fields of the everydays at the same time just as the message created for the communicating community, the user community was discovered in them. The signs of the library are signals of use but even more so the tools for the acquisition of communication between library and man. The examination of library readings validated the idea following from our hypothesis that the signs of the library are understood by those who strive to understand its characteristics and those who, moving about in the medium of signs, do not only approach signs from the end result, do not only read the messages of the library in reverse order, but who see signs as pre-written replies.

Thesis

The set of signs used by the library simplifies messages, contacts into codes, while, at the same time, the codes and signs offer contacts between man and library.

4. The examination of information mediation provides a useful field so that the interpretative (symbolic) anthropological nature of the library can be seized in its activity.

Analyses of case descriptions proved that with the sentence requesting information mediation, a process commences mixed with a number of everyday routine activities, but the end result, the passing of the information is also a symbolic message. It says that the library and the librarian are ready to be addressed and ready to reply. The information mediation mediates reports about what it means to be a library user, a librarian, how the parties can arrive at an understanding, a co-operation in the meantime. The library interactions invisibly include the society's aspect about information, the importance of its acquisition, the resources of the library, the authorizedness and authority of the librarian, the judgement of their competence. The same way about the defencelessness, the client position of the party asking for information. When someone receives library information mediation, their discourse and series of activities will be realised embedded in this context and these relations will appear symbolically.

Two, originally non-hypothesised results were born from the interpretative anthropological approach:

- By research of role-identifications and role-comparisons we offer a network of interpretations where each element presents an identical interpretation.**

When we asked the librarians to describe their information mediator role and compare it to other roles, the elements offered a clear reading of the shared framework of interpretation as well as the similar interpretation of those in comparison. The related statements of the thesis assemble into the following sub-thesis:

Role definitions and role comparisons are not only a series of lists but they create a interpretative network. Each element is connected to the others. The same interpretation is presented by e.g. the role of “assistance” and the related activity of “customer service” or “passing the search technique” and the profession of a “pedagogue”.

- The librarian is an interpreting translator and mediator of the set of documents/sources and information.**

The method (possibility, dialogue) of information mediation expresses the relation among individuals and presents the concepts, symbols which help make this relation interpretable. It is proven that the librarian gives a service as an *understanding interpreter, interpreting translator*. The information mediation always includes “the other” and the librarian’s interpretative activity serves also the involvement of the library user.

Thesis

Interpreting the intent, aim, decisions, activities and behaviours of the information mediating process, we form the nature of the library. Symbolically, the existence, status, contacts, acceptance and characteristics are displayed during information mediation.

Summary

The library’s right for existence is so established, its system so indispensable, its operation so evident that the anatomy of the individual types, the pragmatics of its tools, the widening of its public, the expressions of its style have failed to change its meaning for four and a half thousand years. The word library denotes a formation one essential purpose of which is to provide access to information, which activity is a process determined by human relations. The human relations of the library are not only narrative, anecdotic elements. They create a system. The included functions, attitudes, services and forms of behaviour realise such integration, where systematic operation (collection building, systematisation, exploration, service) is impossible without the consideration of the complexity of relations of the human factors and this operation. Use is a creative, constructive factor of operation. Librarianship receives meaning through the relation with library users, the library is born together with its users. The library evolved from the demand of collecting, protection, its essence, however, is a dialogue with those attending it.

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