TRANSPARENCY: A PRINCIPLE FORWORK WITH INFORMATION IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN
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INTRODUCTION

Approaches to librarianship have changed dramatically during the 1990s and the early years of the twenty first century. Ten or fifteen years ago it would have been possible to suggest that three main approaches to librarianship could be distinguished. The first, which will not concern us here, was the enduring preoccupation with the protection and preservation of collections that is so appropriate in relation to archival and historic libraries, but so inhibiting of progress when applied to most other types of library. The second approach was dominant in the USA, Britain and a number of other countries that shared their professional approach. This approach was user-centred, accepting that what the user demanded was precisely what the library should seek to provide. It was a stance of ethical and aesthetic neutrality in which the librarian sought to respond to demand, even if the content of what was demanded might be politically or morally questionable, or if the literary quality of the material was obviously poor. This approach was often uncomfortable for librarians, but most adopted it loyally, even if it meant a conflict with their own personal and professional values. The third approach was that which dominated in the socialist countries where the library was seen as an important agent of social change and development. The library in Soviet Russia was credited with a substantial contribution to the alphabetisation of the masses. Libraries were sited where people lived, worked and played so that positive messages, produced by state publishing and vetted by a system of censorship, could always be available for the improvement of the people.

Collapse of the dominant philosophies

For different reasons, confidence in the dominant philosophies in both the West and the Socialist countries collapsed during the 1990s. First, the ending of the Soviet political system took with it the libraries and library philosophy that had been interlocked with that system. Since then observers of librarianship in the former socialist countries have been aware of a vigorous process of the exploration and rediscovery of professional values. This has not been easy, as it has been accompanied by a struggle to finance libraries that were left without obvious resources to replace the support offered by an all-embracing political system. At almost precisely the same time confidence in the ethically neutral provision of information by libraries in the West was draining away. The most obvious reason for this was Internet content. The library became a provider of public Internet access and therefore not merely a collection of books and other documents. When users could obtain access to anything that information providers chose to make available via the Internet, librarians were forced to face up to the implications of their services. They found that pornography, extreme political content, information on drugs, explosives, and unreliable health products was available at the click of a mouse in their libraries. This worried many of them greatly and a debate over filtering and blocking Internet content has raged ever since. Whether this is actually a debate about censorship or selection of library materials is not entirely obvious. What is obvious is that the old certainties, built up over most of the twentieth century, required serious questioning. The events of September 11th 2001 in the USA confirmed the suspicion that information was not always neutral or benign and that information could not necessarily be provided to everyone without thought or question.

Principles for librarianship?

Where then does that leave librarianship at the beginning of the twenty first century? One answer is that amongst the confusion some principles do endure and new interpretations of the role of the library can be identified to replace those that have suffered damage. The principles that survive best are probably some simple precepts set out by the Indian librarian S.R. Ranganathan in the 1920s . His Five Laws of Library Science have a clarity and relevance that seems to defy time. As he originally stated them they read:

- Books are for use;
- Every book its reader;
- Every reader his book;
- Save the time of the reader;
- Library is a growing organism.

By substituting the word 'information' for 'book' and 'library' we obtain a clear affirmation that the librarian works with information for a purpose, that purpose is matching users with information, that the devising of systems to facilitate that is the task of the professional, and that the recognition of growth and change in information is a necessary basis for effective information work. All of this is reassuring at a time when reassurance is necessary, but it fails to provide answers to the question 'Exactly why should libraries, and librarians exist and why should they follow Ranganathan's laws?'

A response that springs to the lips of many librarians is that libraries contribute to national social and economic development. Librarians and advocates of libraries in the developing world have alleged this in report after report, publication after publication, and speech after speech, for decades. During all of that time this argument has singularly failed to persuade politicians to fund libraries better and it has not convinced potential users that libraries are the answer to the practical problems of their lives. Whilst it is obvious that a nation with good libraries is better equipped to develop and compete in the world, it is also clear that apart from specialised research and educational libraries, the contribution of libraries is long term, extremely hard to quantify, and probably much smaller than alternative investments that a government might make. It is much more convincing to suggest that libraries of almost all types contribute best to the personal development of the individual. Individuals enriched by their access to good libraries might well be more effective contributors to the economic success of their national, but they might just as easily be contented, better people, but not especially successful in worldly matters. This is good, but it may well look like a luxury that cannot easily be justified politically.

The purpose of this paper is to suggest that there is another rationale that adds something of a fresh dimension to discussions of why we have libraries. This is the suggestion that the library and other information institutions can directly contribute towards creating a strong civil society, in which the democratic process can thrive. The guiding principle behind this can be described as transparency. In what follows the term will be explained and its significance for information work drawn out.

TRANSPARENCY

Defining transparency

Transparency is a term that is comparatively little used by the information professions themselves and yet it encapsulates a great deal of the rationale behind the provision of good information systems, be they libraries, archives, databases, or reporting and monitoring systems. The term is used in conjunction with a range of related and complementary terms such as scrutiny, accountability, audit, disclosure, and it has considerable elements in common with freedom of access to information. Statements on transparency frequently start by citing the same Article 19 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights that can be seen as the basic rationale behind the activities of the information professions.

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

This same formulation is vital for a range of human rights NGOs; it underpins the work of investigative journalists and broadcasters; writers and publishers associations justify the work of

their members in its light; and it also has implications for the accountants and economic regulators who seek to induce the business world to operate in a climate of financial transparency. What transparency (and Article 19) means in terms of a establishing a polity in which corruption will not thrive tends to take a number of specific forms. The following will be briefly outlined here as an introduction to some of the main elements of public transparency:

- Open government and public scrutiny;
- Freedom of information laws;
- Protection of public interest disclosure;
- Financial accountability and auditing;
- Investigative journalism;
- Publishing of research findings;
- Civil sector campaigning.

Open government and freedom of information

Probably the best starting point is the concept of open government and public scrutiny. It is rooted in an elected legislature, distinct from the executive arm and supported by an independent and impartial judiciary. Parliamentary scrutiny of the executive through the opportunity to question and debate the decisions of ministers in the legislative chamber, and a system of non-partisan specialist review committees are essential. However, open government goes much further than this. In a system of open government the meetings of not merely the legislature, but the committees that work of specific issues are open to the public. Government financial accounting is full and promptly delivered. Planning documentations, and minutes of decisions are all open to public inspection and consultative forums are called as a matter of course whenever appropriate. A system of ombudsmen permits the citizen to follow up cases of maladministration. The same systems and standards are also applied to the workings of local government, and privatised government agencies. Taken together, these can be seen as aspects of a total national integrity system. (Pope, 2000) Yet open government, as can be seen from this, is much more a culture than it is a system. It calls for politicians and officials who will accept the disciplines that it requires rather than seeking to evade or delay. It also relates very closely to other sources of transparency.

The cornerstone of open government is freedom of information legislation. In Sweden there has been a law in force since 1766 granting free access to all official documentation. These rights go far beyond what is offered by the freedom of information legislation of most other countries. In fact the European Commission recently accused Sweden of infringements of Community Law because Commission documents regarded as confidential were released to enquirers under their law. (Campaign, 1996) However, the best-known freedom of information is probably the US law of 1966 that has been used to expose political scandals, throw light on the administrative process, and also provide corporations with valuable business intelligence held in government files. Freedom of information laws cut against both the secretiveness of those in power and the laxity of record keeping in official bodies. The UK Freedom of Information Act 2000 does not come into force until January 2005 because the process of bringing record keeping and pro-active disclosure up to standards capable of providing the information that enquirers might require was considered so big a task that implementation could only follow a lengthy delay. The current state of right to information legislation throughout the world varies greatly, as a survey of the legislation worldwide reveals (Mendel, 2003). Where they do exist, these laws contribute a central structure for the operation of transparency. Yet they are far from guaranteeing it unaided, and what is more, they are frequently hampered by over generous exemptions allowing administrators and politicians to avoid inconvenient revelations. Daruwala (2003) illustrates aspects of the way that these laws are implemented in practice in the (British) Commonwealth countries, and the difficulties involved do emerge from this.

Public interest disclosure

The courage of individuals who are prepared to reveal information that they may be contracted or otherwise obliged to keep confidential is an indispensable complement to formal structures for freedom of information. These are the so-called whistleblowers (Calland and Dehn, 2004). Just one recent example from the many available is that of Katharine Gun, a translator at the British GCHQ security centre. At the beginning of 2003 she revealed a plan by US National Security Agency officials to involve Britain in using surveillance devices against diplomats of various countries who could influence United Nations Security Council decisions on the invasion of Iraq. (Burkeman and Norton-Taylor, 2004) She was charged with infringing the UK Official Secrets Act and it was not until a year later that the case against her was dropped. In fact British law does contain one of the world's stronger measures to protect the disclosure of confidential information in the broader public interest. This is the Public Interest Disclosure Act of 1998, but it does not apply to prosecutions under the Officials Secrets Act. Despite this, Katherine Gun's defence that her conscience required her to make the revelation was entirely in the spirit of this Act, and the dropping of the case implicitly recognised the justice of this claim. Thus in an indirect way the case shows the significance of public interest disclosure legislation.

Financial transparency

From another direction, transparent financial reporting is also essential. The whole business structure that depends on limited liability companies trades the protection of the personal finances of investors in a company, on the one hand, for full, prompt and accurate public accounting, on the other. A series of recent scandals, of which the name Enron has become emblematic, shows the extent to which this system struggles to deliver. (Johnson, 2004) Governments likewise have an obligation to both their international creditors and their own citizens to present accurate and honest budget information. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has laid down principles of government fiscal transparency that include: full and timely information on past, current and projected fiscal activity; the policy objectives of the budget and their policy basis; classification of budget data to permit analysis; and the subjecting of fiscal information to independent public scrutiny. (Alt, 2002) The role of good record-keeping in both business and public financial accountability is also apparent. A recent report of a Zimbabwean Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee gallantly drew attention to the way in which poor accounting and data capture contributes to the inability of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development to manage public finances. The subtext of this was, of course, the way in which this facilitated corruption and the misappropriation of funds. (Tsiko, 2004)

Investigative journalism

A free and independent press is essential as a means of bringing to public notice what is revealed by these and other mechanisms. Investigative journalism feeds on what is revealed by open government and laws that facilitate access to information, but ideally it takes matters a step further. (Waisbord, 2001) There is generally an element of detective work when journalists seek to reveal wrongdoing that affects the public interest and methods that in themselves are ethically questionable (deceptive interviewing techniques or the used of concealed recorders and cameras) are often used. Unfortunately press pursuit of sleaze, defined as 'The way some politicians have used their power to feed their private desires for money or sexual satisfaction' (Basten, 2000) has reached frenzied levels in some countries. This threatens to undermine the press's important contribution to transparency, as influential sectors of public opinion begin to perceive this as edging over into abuse of legitimate personal privacy, particularly when it involves those outside political life. (Travis, 2004) The concentration of press ownership to a small number of owners (most notoriously Silvio Berlusconi, the prime minister of Italy) also raises doubts about press impartiality. Despite this, the press remains a crucial instrument of transparency.

Publishing scientific, technical and medical research

Transparency in scientific, technical medical research requires a strong peer review system that drives publication of academic and professional journals and books of high quality. It also demands ways of making sure that peer-reviewed information is available to the public. This is an acknowledged role of the library. Yet the library can, and should, do more than this in the interests of transparency. Governments and corporations sponsor research and they often reveal a strong desire for findings that support a political programme or do not damage the marketing of some profitable product or service. Research can be suppressed and excluded from the peer review system and peer review itself can sometimes involve the marginalisation or exclusion of carefully researched and well argued, but unorthodox work. There is, unfortunately, ample evidence that the exclusion of unorthodox views does frequently occur within the peer review system. This is perhaps not too surprising in the case of medical research, or research on controversial products like tobacco or pharmaceuticals, but it can occur even in areas like art history, as described by Moran ( ). The role of the library is surely to accommodate the unorthodox, alongside the approved version of things. An encouraging story is that of librarians in the USA who successfully campaigned for the publication of Michael Moore's erratic but effective attack on American political life, Stupid White Men (Moore, 2000). The librarians who ensured that this book appeared in booksellers and on library shelves were clearly acting in the service of a generous interpretation of the transparency principle.

Campaigning for transparency

The last element we will discuss here is the role of campaigning civil society organisations. In a sobering warning, Johnston (1997, p.82) points out that:

Transparent procedures mean little if there is no external monitoring: corrupt states abound in inspectors, commissions of enquiry, and record keeping requirements that create and conceal corruption rather than reveal it, because no one outside the state can demand a meaningful accounting. Without a strong civil society to energise them, even a full set of formally democratic institutions will not produce accountable, responsive government.

The point is well made. All of the elements outlined above, and all the others that would be discussed in a fuller discussion of transparency, are vulnerable and in need of the support that a whole integrity system can offer. The whistleblower, the most vulnerable of all, needs the press to report the wrongdoing that is exposed, civil society organisations to provide shelter, legal advice, moral support and logistical backup, laws that recognise the concept of the public interest, responsive institutions and all the paraphernalia of open government to justify disclosure. International and national NGOs are often the moving force behind changes in the system and instigators or supporters of challenges to hindrances to the democratic process and corruption of all types in high places or low. Civil society organisations are a natural ally of the library and librarians can not only benefit from their campaigning, but also contribute to it to very good effect.

TRANSPARENCY AND LIBRARIES

When we look at libraries as contributors to transparency, the picture is confused. At the higher levels of professional debate there is a strong commitment to access principles that definitely give libraries a place in the spectrum of transparency activity. The Universal Availability of Publications programme (UAP), which is promoted jointly by UNESCO and IFLA, as part of UNESCO's PGI (Programme Generale d'Information) is a clear indication of this. UAP has as its objective the widest possible availability of published material wherever and whenever people need it and in the format they need it. It now defines published materials not only as printed materials, but includes the semi-published grey literature, audio-visual materials and material in electronic (digital or analogue) form. The UAP Project Office, at the British Library, Document

Supply Centre, works towards this objective in two kinds of way. One of these involves positive action, such as promoting the publication of new material or the retention of last copies of older material. The second involves seeking to remove barriers to access. There was at one time a move within the sponsoring organizations to subsume UAP within a wider UAI (Universal Access to Information) programme. Although this was not adopted, the world has moved on, and library involvement with the Internet has effectively changed UAP into UAI.

Resisting censorship

At the heart of this is resistance to censorship. This has almost become more difficult since monolithic state censorship apparatus has been dismantled in most of the countries where it was strongly established. What has moved in to take its place is a range of restrictive activity operating through state ownership and regulation of media, or monopoly commercial ownership of media. The strong enforcement of defamation, confidentiality and official secrecy laws is used to support this. Insidious use of filtering and blocking of Internet tends to close off other avenues to transparency. States also pass laws against terrorism that incidentally increase their powers to monitor the use of information and communication technology by the citizen. Librarians face this directly when such laws are used (as is the USA PATRIOT Act) to demand details of users' information access, with an ostensible view to identifying possible terrorist action in preparation. Resistance to censorship is something that must take place at all of these and other layers if the librarian is to provide transparent access to information.

Making librarianship more effective

A second requirement is the acquisition and promotion of documentation that allows the citizen insights into the processes of government, administration, business and research. In the past this chiefly affected stock selection, obliging librarians to develop selection policies that provided a carefully chosen and representative sampling of all the material published or otherwise made available. To support this libraries provided a wealth of bibliographical information about the publications that they did not stock. Then, as far as they were able, they offered interlibrary loan and document delivery facilities to give the user access to documents from outside their own stocks. Nowadays they offer electronic access to resources for which they obtain licenses, and the very much larger, but less reliable, quantity of information networked via the Internet. The elevation of transparency to the status of a guiding principle requires purposeful work by librarians to assure access to the information that will support the development of good citizenship.

Arising from the need to acquire or guarantee access to material for effective participation by citizens is the requirement to make access easy and effective. Librarians take a great deal of pride in their cataloguing, classification and indexing as means of providing access to the content of their collections. Yet they often say that they are frustrated that not enough members of the public use their lovingly created finding aids. Is it that cataloguing data baffles them with its detail and layout? Many people are happier browsing library shelves than using a catalogue, but even then they are often frustrated when titles on related topics are separated by the classification scheme. Clear simple access mechanisms and assistance in using them have always been a requirement of good librarianship, and they remain high priorities in the context of transparency. The Internet, accessed with the assistance of search engines, seems to empower the information seeker it is important to point out that it also lures the information user into a confusing and often unreliable environment. If the public are sometimes baffled and exasperated by the way libraries are organized, they are often over-confident in their use of Internet. Assisting the development of users' information literacy then becomes a significant role of the librarian. Users who can find what the library holds, access electronic resources, but most important of all, understand and interpret what they find, are not a threat to the existence of the librarian, but allies and collaborators.

Engaging with transparency in society

Lastly in this short exposition of the implications of transparency for librarianship, there is engagement with the other manifestations of transparency; freedom of information laws in particular. At first sight, freedom of information laws may seem entirely a concern of the public authorities (government departments, official agencies and para-statals, local government, etc.) that such laws oblige to divulge documentation, and the records managers that they employ. For the resourceful enquirer this is probably true. Persistent and well-prepared approaches can use freedom of information provisions and other aspects of open government to reveal crucial information, even in countries that have only provided these facilities to please international opinion. For the average citizen, the transparency offered by government is an illusion, unless they have capable allies. The library is the ideal ally, with its trained staff and its access to published and semi-published information. Where to apply for documents under freedom of information laws, precisely what to apply for, how to structure enquiries: all of these are precisely the type of matters with which librarians can help. This is, however, a comparatively narrow vision of what the library can achieve by making transparency a guiding principle. The library can be an active agent for the freeing of information from restrictions and its dissemination to potential users. Active, positive librarianship serving a wide user community is invariably a engine for the promotion of higher levels of transparency in society.

CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, the librarian may feel comparatively powerless when faced with a set of requirements such as these. Yet an individual librarian is not entirely alone when seeking to work for transparency. IFLA, when it set up its Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) programme in 1997, intended to provide help and guidance. FAIFE has a good record in each of the three approaches (advocacy, education and intervention) that it has used to further its aims. A word or two about each of them will have to suffice.

- Advocacy mainly takes the form of policy statements for IFLA and the latest in the series is the IFLA Internet Manifesto (IFLA 2002) It was adopted by IFLA Council in August 2002 and focuses on free and equal access to online information. It has been translated into 14 languages, and the intention is to follow it up with IFLA/UNESCO guidelines on freedom of access to the Internet. A start was made on these at a workshop in Kampala, Uganda, in July 2004 and the intention is to complete them in 2005.

- Education activities begin with a series of publications: the World Reports. These are intended to provide up to date coverage of the state of affairs regarding libraries and freedom of access to information worldwide. The series includes of two types of publication, the IFLA/FAIFE World Report - published bi-annually, and the IFLA/FAIFE Theme Report, published in the alternate years. Presentations at suitable conferences are also an important part of the education activities, for instance a paper given by the author about FAIFE principles at BOBCATSSS, the main European student conference (Sturges, 2005).

- Intervention means response to alleged incidents of the violation of freedom of access in relation to libraries. Over the years, FAIFE has responded to nearly 40 incidents and violations, undertaken missions to Kosovo and Cuba, and is preparing a mission to Israel and Palestine intended to take place in 2005. Intervention is probably the most difficult and demanding thing that FAIFE does, but it illustrates the point that action is needed as well as words.

The library is not an institution that exists in isolation from others and the librarian needs to work in a harmonious alliance with other professionals, records managers and archivists, journalists, authors, publishers, accountants, public officials and civil society campaigners towards common goals. Transparency is just such a goal. Socially effective librarianship, based on the principle of

transparency, can transform the day to day activity of the librarian and make the library an even more valued institution than it is at present.

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