Libraries and Public Perception

Descrizione

The point of view of the author is to consider how libraries are perceived by national communities, on the background of the economic crisis of the latest year and the internet and social media penetration, in order to point out the gap between scientific analysis and general perception.
There are several methods to measure the value and impact of libraries. The first chapter of the book deals with clarity. In fact, the author explains the methods for measuring the socio-economic impact of libraries, such as the balanced scorecard, social impact assessment (social impact audits), consumer surplus evaluation, contingent evaluation, cost-benefit analysis and ROI (Return On Investment).
Despite of the traditional methods to measure the value of libraries, Galluzzi chooses an alternative tool: the analysis of the press with a point of view outside the specialized literature concerning libraries and approaching newspapers.

In particular she analyzed the recently evolution of newspapers soon after the launch of internet and 2.0 newspaper’s websites. We know how all the newspapers make their selection nowadays, starting from the national and international press agencies, while deciding whether to publish or not a news also depending on the nature of the newspaper itself.
This phenomenon, called newsmaking, led newspapers to reinforce their aptitude to comment, go-in-dept and explain the stories more than the news.

In this context, the author’s choice among the different methodologies, is the analysis of the news published in newspapers from 2008 (the starting year of the economic crisis) until 2012 in France, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom. For each country the author chose two newspapers of national importance, with the highest circulation and representative of different political positions: Le Monde and Le Figaro in France, Il Corriere della Sera and La Repubblica in Italy, El Pais and El Mundo in Spain, The Guardian and The Times in Unite Kingdom.
It is interesting and functional that this research covered both a quantitative and

qualitative analysis of data. Firstly the author showed clearly, also with the help of charts, which types of libraries the newspapers' articles talk about, and secondly which topics are debated in the articles, highlighting the differences and pointing out the specificities of each countriy.
For all the newspapers the number of articles concerning "politics-strategy-management" is higher; moreover there are some differences between the newspapers of each country; for example the italian La Repubblica shows a slightly higher percentage of articles on the topic "library closures/budget cuts" , while Corriere della Sera shows a slightly higher percentage on "politics/strategy/management".

France stands out from other European countries with a significant percentage of articles on the theme of digitization (corresponding roughly to the opening of Europeana, the contents of which are significantly increased by the Bibliothèque Nationale).
The theme "new libraries / new buildings" declined after 2011 during the most acute period of the crisis.
The data analysis showed some main trends, such as a prevalence of public and national libraries in the debate and the effect of economic crisis, which is evident in the rise of topics like "library closures" or "budget cuts". In the text all of these trends are discussed and illustrated in a very convincing and accurate way, with a reference to the national events of the four countries under analysis.

But in the end what is the perception of the library? There are some aspects of the library that are perceived as irreplaceable: in a phase where the use of digital is the standard, library is perceived as the place that can make all its heritage available to all: a perspective, the author argues, rather because traditional "digital library" is something more than just digitizing paper assets (which according to the newspaper remains the "brand" main library). Despite of the competitive advantage that could come to the libraries from being positioned within the market of knowledge, newspapers continue to consider the library as a "physical" closed place, with its building and spaces.

With the economic crisis also the idea of Anglo-Saxon origin of the library as part of the welfare is being challenged, and the library is perceived as an indispensable institution, whose positive externalities are uncertain and immediately evident in relation to the health or safety social.
Galluzzi suggests to fill the gap between what the library could offer to society today and the perception that the press offers to libraries by investing in marketing and communication.

Libraries and Public Perception
A comparative analysis of the European press
Anna Galluzzi
Chandos Publishing, 2014

Campi meta