Cultural entrepreneurship in libraries

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this research is to show how librarians today need to be cultural entrepreneurs in order to create and maintain thriving libraries in the Internet age.

Design/methodology/approach – The “creative class” theory developed by Richard Florida (2002) has been widely and rapidly embraced by many policy makers around the world.

Findings – Cultural entrepreneurship in libraries is in line with a new and dominant trend seen in many countries in which cities promote themselves as centres of creativity. It is creativity, not the traditional values of trading in goods and services, that is now seen to be the force behind economic growth, especially in metropolitan areas. Growth is mainly determined by the ability to attract creative people, develop a creative atmosphere and build creative clusters.

Practical implications – This creativity development and the interest of local authorities in the creative industry are both opportunities for librarians to promote their libraries and demonstrate their ability to act as cultural entrepreneurs.

Originality/value – What are possible successful strategies for libraries and which competences do librarians need to be successful cultural entrepreneurs?

Keywords Libraries, Entrepreneurs, Librarians, Competences

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Libraries are operating in a rapidly changing environment. Technological innovation, changes in cultural participation and media consumption, new social and cultural agendas of (local) governments are a few challenges for the library managers of today. Some aspects of this changing environment are unexpectingly rapid and forcing managers to reconsider their traditional core business. Some changes in the Netherlands and other countries and how libraries cope with these changes will be discussed.

The changing role of libraries

A recent study showed increased participation of the Dutch population in many forms of cultural activity from 1999-2003, especially in the more popular areas such as pop concerts (+10 per cent), musicals (+46 per cent), dance and film, but also radio and TV programmes about art. The more traditional forms of cultural activity, such as theatre, classical music (−9 per cent), opera (−15 per cent) and cabaret, lost ground, except ballet (+15 per cent). There was also increased interest in cultural heritage, such as historic buildings (+7 per cent) and archives (+40 per cent), but the use of libraries showed the opposite trend: 7 per cent fewer books were lent out and even the use of computers in libraries fell between 1999 and 2003 by 19 per cent (Huysmans et al., 2005, p. 14-15). The borrowing of library books per user fell to an even greater extent between 1995 and 1999 (−12 per cent); in less than ten years a decrease of 20 per cent (Van den Broek et al., 2005, pP. 63-64).
In all population groups, the reading of books, newspapers and magazines has decreased. This decline is especially dramatic in the case of teenagers: roughly 50 per cent fewer teenagers read a book weekly, and fewer read newspapers and magazines, although the decline in this sector is less marked. (Huysmans et al., 2004; Rapportage, 2003). The role of libraries in providing information will be marginalised if the latest research in the Netherlands is to be believed. A survey commissioned by a large educational publisher in April 2006 showed that 90 per cent of high school students used the Internet as the only source for writing assignments and only 4 per cent also used sources obtained from the public library. Fast and easy were the most important criteria, and the reliability of the information seems to be of lesser concern (80 per cent did not check the information most of the time). According to this research, the monopoly of Google in finding information is a fact: its market share is 97 per cent! (Internet, 2006).

It seems that the Internet is winning the long-term battle with the library for consumers of information. The shift in media use in the Netherlands and the degree of penetration of computers with Internet access at home and schools are definitely major causes of this trend. The main library systems are gradually offering a variety of virtual library services in order to meet the changing demands of their users and have enjoyed some success in retaining their customers, but this has not fully reclaimed lost ground. The negative trend in library use in the Netherlands combined with the government’s austere monetary policies and its requirement that libraries be more market oriented and less dependent on traditional subsidies from local and national government has increased the need for change in library policy.

A new cultural policy
Municipalities desire thriving cultural centres in their cities and communities, and are demanding sound business plans from libraries and other cultural organizations. Librarians today need to be cultural entrepreneurs in order to create and maintain thriving libraries in the Internet age.

One of the latest trends in cities is to merge libraries with other cultural organizations to create new cultural centres, such as combining libraries with theatres, archives, museums or centres for art education. This has been initiated by a reorganization in which a cultural entrepreneur, often without a library background, is put in charge of the new centre. Dutch examples are:

• Apeldoorn (160,000 inhabitants), museum, public library and archives in a new cultural centre and a new management (www.coda-apeldoorn.nl);
• Delft (97,000 inhabitants), art centre, music centre and public library in a new centre (building in progress) and also with a new management team (www.dok.info); and
• Heerlen (93,000 inhabitants), movie theatre, music school, architectural centre, museum for modern art and the public library in a renovated architectural masterpiece (Glass Palace) near the German and Belgian border (www.glaspaleis.nl).

Another trend is new cultural centres working closely with neighbouring public libraries to offer a wide range of cultural activities. New library buildings are being created (for example, a spectacular new Central Library in Amsterdam will be opening its doors in the Summer of 2007) or refurbished (the Central Library of Rotterdam) so they will offer a wider variety of library and cultural activities.
Cultural entrepreneurship in libraries is in line with a new and dominant trend in many countries in which cities promote themselves as centres of creativity. It is creativity, not the traditional trading in goods and services, that is now seen to be the force behind economic growth, especially in urban areas. Growth is mainly determined by the ability to attract creative people, develop a creative atmosphere and build creative clusters.

The creative industry and libraries

The interest in the creative industry started in the UK and the USA. In both countries, the relationship between creativity, culture and urban economic development was a subject of research of the past decade. The interest of policy makers and researchers in the economic impact and importance of creativity has been widely and rapidly embraced by many around the world since the publication of Richard Florida’s (2002) book “The Rise of the Creative Class”. As in other countries, the creative industry in the Netherlands has been studied intensively (e.g. Kloosterman, 2002, 2004; Manshanden et al., 2004; Raspe and Segeren, 2004; Rutten et al., 2004; Van Aalst et al., 2005; Stam, 2005). This trend, and local authority interest in the creative industry, are both opportunities for librarians to promote their libraries and demonstrate their ability to act as cultural entrepreneurs and provide new services which target new user groups and reclaim lost ones.

Definitions

The creative industry has been defined in several ways. Raspe and Segeren (2004) and Stam (2005) provide a useful overview of these definitions. Scott (1997) uses a broad definition, including the clothing, shoe, furniture, toys and games and sports industries, media (publishing, printing, broadcasting, film) and architects. The guru of the creative industry, Richard Florida (2002), developed the creative class theory and he also uses a broad definition. He includes R&D, high-tech and knowledge intensive professions within his definition. This is the link between creativity and the knowledge-based economy (Florida, 2002, p. 328). Creativity is the source of competitive advantage. Florida developed the creative capital theory whose central theme is regional growth originates from the so-called three Ts of economic development: talent, technology and tolerance.

Florida distinguishes two creative groups: the super creative core and creative professionals. The first group is highly concentrated in the creative process. The super creative core creates “new forms or designs that are readily transferable and widely useful, such as designing a product that can be widely made, sold and used, coming up with a theorem or strategy that can be applied in many cases, or composing music that can be performed again and again” (Florida, 2002, p. 69). According to Florida, librarians belong to the super creative core. Table I provides examples of the two creative groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super creative core</th>
<th>Creative professionals</th>
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<tr>
<td>High tech and mathematical occupations</td>
<td>Management occupations</td>
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<td>Architecture and engineering occupations</td>
<td>Business and financial occupations</td>
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<td>Life, physical and social occupations</td>
<td>Legal occupations</td>
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<td>Education, training and library occupations</td>
<td>Health care and technical occupations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arts, design, entertainment, sports and media occupations *</td>
<td>High-end sales and sales management</td>
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Table I.
The super creative core and creative professionals

Note: *Occupations in art, design and partly entertainment are the so-called bohemians in Florida’s theory of the creative class (sculptors, photographers, conductors etc.).

Source: Florida, 2002, p. 328
Kloosterman (2004, p. 246) uses a much narrower definition: publishing, architects, advertising, film and video production, the performing arts, journalism, libraries and museums. If the narrow definition of Kloosterman is applied, 3 per cent of industries can be categorised as creative, but using the broad definition of Florida, this group expands by a factor of 10 to 30 per cent (Stam, 2005). In his most recent book Florida (2005) uses two definitions: in the broader one he includes also technicians, in the narrower one he excludes them.

The size of the creative industries
Florida estimates that nearly 40 million Americans (30 per cent of the workforce) are currently employed in the creative sector, an increase of 100 per cent compared to the 1980s. There are more creative workers than blue collar workers in the USA today. According to Florida, this trend is the same in most other developed countries (Florida, 2005, pp. 28-9). The creative sector is the growth engine of the USA economy.

The United Nations estimates that the creative industries grow by 10 per cent a year, more than twice the rate of the world economy as a whole. The OECD member countries show a yearly creative industry growth rate of between 5 per cent and 20 per cent (Leadbeater, 2004, p. 13).

In the Netherlands, employment in the creative industries increased more than 5 per cent between 1996 and 2002, compared with 3 per cent for the whole economy. The sector employed 3.2 per cent of the total workforce in 2001 (based on the narrow definition of Kloosterman) generating added value to the Dutch economy of approximately €8.4 billion (for example, the added value of the Dutch chemical industry is comparable to that of the creative industries). This share is increasing fast: between 1996 and 2002, employment growth in the creative industries in Amsterdam was almost 10 per cent (Rutten et al., 2004, pp. 40, 48).

The Greater Amsterdam area is responsible for a quarter of all employment in the creative industries (Stam, 2005, p. 12). This is modest compared to the UK, where London and the South East account for almost half the employment in British creative industries (Leadbeater, 2004, p. 40). In the Netherlands, depending on which definition is used, approximately 20 per cent (Marlet and Van Woerkens, 2004, p. 281) to 30 per cent (Florida, 2005) of the total workforce belongs to the creative class. According to Florida’s global creative class index (Florida, 2005, p. 278), it encompasses 30 per cent of the workforce (excluding technicians), giving it a respectable world fourth place behind Ireland, Belgium and Australia. The global creativity index, in which the three Ts (talent, technology and tolerance) are incorporated, is one of the outcomes of Florida’s research. The Nordic countries score very high on this index: Sweden (1), Finland (3), Denmark (6) and Norway (9) (Florida, 2005, pp. 275-7).

A current European research project (Cardiff University, Copenhagen Business School, Freiburg Technical University, Lund University, University of Oslo, University of Tampere and Utrecht University) about the creative industry and its size will produce comparative data for Europe in the next few years (Van Aalst et al., 2005, p. 2).

Indirect effects
Another important aspect of the creative industries is their indirect effect such as design within the more traditional economic sectors and the transformation of innovative technology into useful products and services. A creative and tolerant climate is also an important factor in attracting new commerce and talented, especially young, people. The Creative Class has certain characteristics:
... it is highly mobile; it makes clear lifestyle choices and is attracted to cities which are culturally, ethnically and socially diverse and tolerant of difference; it is attracted to cities where other creative people are gathered and where there is a wide range of informal cultural and social networks and leisure facilities. People no longer move to where the work is: companies now relocate to be near the people they need. The people they need are the creative people (Florida, 2002).

In this respect the Amsterdam Public Library chose the right location for its new central library. It will be at a strategic location between the inner city and the waterfront IJ area at the creative and cultural heart of Amsterdam. This area consists of high-quality modern architecture in the form of shops, offices, dwellings, the new Academy of Music and the new Central Library plus an international hotel and congress centre (ODE, 2005).

Libraries, creativity and cultural entrepreneurship

As key members of the creative class, librarians need to be more market oriented and operate as cultural entrepreneurs in order to be successful in the long run in the cultural sector. In addition to Florida, two other Americans, Pine and Gilmore, played an important part in improving understanding of the relationship between culture and the today’s economy. They published a book about the experience economy in 1999. The basic principle of the experience economy is that consumers base their brand loyalty not on the reliability of the service but rather on the experience they have with the brand. This experience is the key added value in service provision. When libraries design and deliver experience, it is important to theme this experience and ensure all five senses are engaged. Figure 1 shows the four basic experiences as described by Pine and Gilmore (1999, pp. 29-38).

The horizontal axis shows the level of participation and the vertical axis the involvement of the customer in the experience: from passive watcher at the top to active physical or virtual participant at the bottom end of the vertical axis. The richest experiences are those offerings that combine all four.

For example, McDonald’s serves more than a meal. It will host your child’s birthday party, complete with a party meal, present and amusements. Walt Disney’s Disney Parks is the recognised expert in offering experiences. The workers are called actors, the visitors are the guests and the theme park becomes the stage. The next development is to transform customer behaviour permanently by transforming the temporary experience into a permanent one (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, pp. 171-6).

Figure 1.

The experience realms

Source: Pine and Gilmore (1999, p. 30)
The trend in many libraries and other cultural institutions today is to create experiences based on the ideas of Pine and Gilmore. An example of a project, which was nominated for the Architect Lensvelt Interior Design Prize in 2005, was an exhibition staged in the National Library of the Netherlands combining items of wonderful historical interest from the collections of the National Library and the National Archives. “The designers created a stimulating and inviting display. Visitors were lured into the darkened exhibition space by mysterious blue lighting effects. Once inside, their attention is engaged by rare books and documents on show behind glass and an associated display enabling them to leaf through the works on show in digital form. In addition, pictures projected onto one entire wall give a light-hearted impression of the archives, the library and the treasures they house” (Wonderkamers, 2005).

Experiences
The four basic types of experiences applied to libraries can be described as follows (adapted from Boom et al., 2002, p. 58-59):

(1) **Entertainment:**
- fiction and poetry reading;
- coffee corner (e.g. a Starbucks café);
- music centre;
- games;
- acting stage;
- movie theatre;
- a stage for the celebration of the culture of minority groups (the library as a stage for festivities and religious and secular rituals); and
- children’s birthday parties.

(2) **Educational experiences:**
- language courses for new immigrants;
- computer and Internet courses;
- literacy courses;
- information corners for special interest groups such as immigrants, youth, senior citizens;
- courses for children of first generation immigrants to learn the native language of their parents;
- virtual literary walk; and
- e-learning packages.

(3) **Escapist experiences:**
- a virtual reality experience in which the guest is completely immersed and actively involved in shaping the experience;
- an atmosphere amenable to creating new ideas; and
- a place for inspiration and reflection.

(4) **Aesthetic experiences:**
- “look and feel” of the virtual library; and
- design and location of the library.
A few international examples of cultural entrepreneurship in libraries operating in the ‘experience economy’ follow. They demonstrate the international impact of the ideas put forward by Pine and Gilmore on the cultural industries whose principles are included in the majority of current marketing text books.

Smallingerland (www.bibliotheek-drachten.nl). As early as 2001, Smallingerland Public Library, a public library in the north of the Netherlands was inspired by the ideas of Pine and Gilmore (1999). The main goal of the library board was to create a stimulating and dynamic library setting. They developed the concept of the ‘beleefbibliotheek’\(^\text{\textregistered}\), enabling library users to participate and experience a wide variety of cultural activities (A new concept, 2003). The library created four environments each with their own colour:

1. Yellow for “Indoors”, an informal and homely atmosphere (home and living, childcare, health, food and drink);
2. Red for Culture, an artistic and creative environment (arts, culture, beliefs, fashion);
3. Blue for Work, a high-tech office environment (work, law and computers); and

These atmospheres also offer space for personal experiences.

Cerritos (www.ci.cerritos.ca.us/). In March 2002, the new Cerritos Library in California presented an innovative model for library service, one that focuses on creating a dynamic learning experience for the user. The result of their efforts was partly inspired by Pine and Gilmore (1999). Cerrito wants to create a positive experience, emotional as well as intellectual, for library users. An example is the creation of their own comic book, the Time Team (http://timeteam.ci.cerritos.ca.us/). For the near future, Cerritos plans “a learning environment where people can be inspired to explore and make their dreams come true”. It will include holographic and CAVE technology to deepen the experiences and broadening the horizons of library users (LJ, 2006).

Singapore (www.nlb.gov.sg/CPMS.portal). In the late 1990s, the Singapore National Library Board (NLB) received EUR 500 m from the government for a programme to ‘re-invent’ its libraries. Its main objective was to meet the changing interests of library users in a more customer-oriented way. To attract a younger audience back to the library, the NLB introduced lifestyle libraries. Many of these re-invented public libraries are located in shopping centres and feature cafés and occasionally offer live music. They also integrated technological innovations to make services more convenient and accessible in new or renovated buildings with attractive interior design. Librarians from all over the world have visited Singapore in recent years to see the new libraries for themselves, which have become places where Singaporean listen to lunchtime performances, have a drink or take a break from shopping. As NLB Chief Executive Christopher Chia says, “It is, once again, cool to be seen in a library” (Re-inventing, 2003).

Aarhus (www.aakb.dk). This year, the Central Library of Aarhus installed the first interactive children’s library prototype. The first prototype is named “Story Surfer” and is an interactive floor and table and a book browser for children. The goals of the project are: “to develop prototypes of new IT services and physical installations embedded in the physical spaces of the library that challenge, support and promote curiosity in kids play and learning activities” (Interactive Spaces, 2006). Children’s
needs, culture and cultural experiences are central elements in the development of interactivity in children’s libraries. An international conference on the children’s interactive library was held in Airbus 4-6 May 2006 (www.aakb.dk/sw83733.asp).

Successful strategies

Location and strategic alliances
The competition caused by the wide range of cultural offerings in the bigger cities in the Netherlands has stimulated providers of cultural experiences to be innovative. Modern consumers want to enjoy all their leisure time (that is, have their multi-sense experiences) in city centres, preferably under one roof. This means that libraries also need to locate at the (creative and cultural) heart of cities, and need to enter into strategic alliances with other cultural providers in order to meet these consumer needs and also reduce costs, especially high rents. The activity-based subsidies provided by national and local government has also forced cultural partners to cooperate and build strategic alliances in order to maintain the level of subsidies. This is likely to be the most successful strategy that libraries can pursue.

Refurbishing libraries
The dynamics of the experience economy clearly demonstrates that libraries also need to engage consumers to participate actively or passively in its services. In the same way that companies attract their clients, libraries should welcome and involve their existing and potential customers as guests. This can be done by creating added value to all library services. The experience created by this added value should appeal to all target groups. Management should assess their needs and determine how services can be made client oriented, just in time and, if possible, on demand. Management should invest in refurbishing libraries into open-structured, multi-functional places where all members of the multi-cultural society feel welcome and can communicate with each other and participate in cultural events.

eCulture participation
The high accessibility to the Internet in the Netherlands should encourage libraries to cooperate with strategic partners in the cultural industries, especially the museums, and the music and movie industries. In the first quarter of 2005, 78 per cent of Dutch households had Internet access and 54 per cent had broadband connections. Three quarters of individuals used the Internet at least once a week (students 97 per cent) (Ottens, 2006). Libraries should consider providing portals for e-culture experiences and facilitate participation in the virtual worlds such as gaming and virtual communities.

Personal skills
Librarians need to communicate with and listen to existing and potential target groups, partners in creative industries and strategic players, such as local and national government. This should focus on listening closely to target group need and interests.

People appreciate initiatives that recognise and meet their needs, so being able to act pro-actively is a crucial skill that leads to successful library services.

Being able to network and build strategic alliances is essential to establish libraries at the right location.

The decreasing brand loyalty of consumers and the existence of the “experience economy” demonstrate the need to develop economic skills to focus on service
provision in engaging people in library services. Activity-based budgeting as the basis for subsidy from local government requires greater cost awareness from library staff.

Libraries and librarians are facing many challenges and need to rapidly change to meet the needs of today’s consumers to avoid being marginalized. A new breed of librarians possessing a new range of skills could meet these challenges successfully. The popularity of post-graduate courses in cultural entrepreneurship in libraries in the Netherlands (Nijboer and Rijnierse, 2005) in recent years is a positive sign that they want to create successful libraries and definitely not bury their heads in sand when pursued by the googlization of society.

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Further reading


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