

Cultural Tourism and Libraries: New Learning Needs For Information Professionals In India

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Abstract

This paper concerns the study of the possible relationships among culture, learning, tourism and ICTs. The main aim of the research paper was to identify learning needs of information professionals expressed by key informants and by librarians interviewed. The objectives were to survey the interest of librarians in cultural tourism, to assess main factors affecting development of cultural tourism projects in libraries and to outline potentials for cultural heritage. The literature review considers the impact of recent economic and social changes in the field of education focusing on the concept of LLL. In order to achieve the democratic goals of an inclusive society, libraries, museums and archives have to pay attention to their public and to the different needs of their users. Similarly tourism, according to European recommendations and to visitors' recent habits, asks for new strategies. The growing sector of cultural tourism takes advantage of ICTs and reveals great potential in economic and educational fields.

1. Introduction

This paper examines the topic of cultural tourism applied to libraries and is based on an interdisciplinary approach and on the comparison of different points of views. The aim of this research study was to understand if cultural tourism can develop interesting library services in a Lifelong Learning (LLL) strategy.

1.1 Cultural tourism

According to Lisbon Strategy, “the shift to a digital, knowledge-based economy, prompted by new goods and services, will be a powerful engine for growth, competitiveness and jobs. In addition, it will be capable of improving citizens' quality of life” (European Council 2000). Afterwards, into the same overall strategy, European Union recognizes the potential of tourism.

“Globalization, demographic changes and the evolution in transport are decisive factors in driving the rapid growth of this industry. With its variety of attractions and quality of its tourism services Europe is the world leading tourist destination.” (European Commission 2006a, p. 2)

Besides the economic level, the Commission considers a renewed European tourism policy promoting social cohesion and environmental objectives, through sustainable tourism-related projects, with the purpose.

“to enhance cultural and natural heritage, develop accessibility and mobility related infrastructure and to promote ICT, innovative SME's, business networks and clusters, higher value added services, joint cross-border tourism strategies and inter-regional exchange of experience.” (European Commission 2006a, p.6)

1.2 Information networks and cultural heritage

Some years ago the European Council (2001), in the resolution on e-learning, stressed that digitalization and standardization can facilitate the access to the cultural heritage of libraries, museums and archives, in the educational perspective. More recently European Commission declares that technologies can favour the contribution to LLL and to a democratic knowledge society together with the growth of other sectors.

“Information and Communication technologies (ICTs) can do a great deal for Europe's cultural richness, both in terms of conservation and of circulation of art works for learning leisure, tourism and economic development.” (European Commission 2006 b).

In order to recognize the potential of cultural heritage and to add value to it for tourist aims, Chetta (2003) suggests some ideas, such as the professional development of tourist trader,

through marketing actions at international level and the full exploitation of technology to promote and to supply services. Among the expected results in the tourist sector in the medium term, Chetta (2003) lists:

- integrated access to online services and resources of museums, archeological sites, archives and libraries for tourist purposes;
- growth of tourist employees' competences thanks to e-learning;
- development and differentiation of tourist offers through the promotion of small institutions and places;

2. Methodology

After focusing main issues of the literature review, information professionals' opinions and policy makers' strategies are examined through a qualitative research. The case study takes advantage of Italian key informants' opinions with specific experience in the field of cultural tourism projects applied to libraries. In the meantime, in order to assess the interest of librarians in cultural tourism (if they perceive it an opportunity for LLL and for libraries) and in order to identify which are the major problems in developing this kind of projects, it was selected a group of Italian librarians of the Province of Modena to conduct focus groups.

The specific objectives were:

- to improve cooperation and integration between tourist and cultural sectors, different cultural institutions and between private and public sector;
- to make assessment information professionals' learning needs (concerning cultural tourism);

3. Convergence among libraries, archives and museums

All respondents, independently from their professional experiences, agree about the necessity of a stronger collaboration among different cultural institutions. An interviewed expresses his idea of integration:

“A good cultural policy has to be devoted to develop the integration of cultural proposals. Especially weak cultural institutions shall take advantage of this strategy. The first aim is

to bring some cultural institutions nearer to the town. Unfortunately some cultural institutions, even though preserve outstanding heritage, are very distant from their territory. I observe that this problem is particularly evident in national institutions, for a wide range of causes: the idea of preservation prevails on exploitation; institutions have short autonomy and managers' lack of enterprise. Instead, thanks to large opening hours, exhibitions and initiatives, LAMs could become popular, and if all cultural institutions are active for citizens, at the end they are also attractive for tourists."

One key informant, explaining the possible integration among LAMs, explains the interesting concept of "district of knowledge":

"The concept of "district of knowledge" is more widespread than "cultural district" because it includes the economic dimension and the community, with the aim to access, produces and distributes knowledge. The "district of knowledge" is dedicated to an expert user, aware of sophisticated technology. The web can offer multiple accesses. If a scholar or a curious citizen is interested to a topic, he can be interested to cross information about that theme from archives, libraries and museums. This is a modern concept of information system that includes lists, data, imagines, records.

In particular, one key informant points out:

"The role of libraries is huge. First of all, in order to draw these ancient cultural routes, libraries have to build an accurate bibliography, with the aim to discover the authentic and historical route and the links with current interests and life styles. Another fundamental role of libraries is related to knowledge management activity into the concept of digital library. Into a general inadequacy, I think that professional category of librarians is the less unprepared and potentially more suited to be trained in this kind of activities. Into a new scenario, however, participation shall not be voluntary but structured, thanks to an academic environment, where well defined programmes can develop necessary professionalisms, abandoning approximation derived by volunteerism or by personal attitudes and experiences."

Generally, libraries are not considered the objective of cultural tourism, while

“the real objective is putting together different worlds. Comparing librarians to other LAM professionals, I believe that librarians could carry out this work schedule better than others”.

3.1 Skills development and training

The case study, through the literature review and the data collection methods, collected a large amount of information about professionals' learning needs, according with one of the purposes of this research: to assess if information professionals have specific learning needs concerning cultural tourism and to identify them. This assessment revealed that professional development is a crucial factor to develop cultural tourism in library field.

But before focusing on particular skills, it could be useful a reflection upon librarians' professional training, with the help of a key informant:

“Generally in Indian librarians' lack of professional vocation. Some years ago they did not graduate in librarianship, nowadays the degree concern history and literature more than technical skills. In conclusion Universities prepare librarians unable to face library management. On the contrary, as also economists stress, library services are for users.”

The results suggest that, according to respondents' perceptions, librarians need to develop their skills:

“Good librarians need flexibility, versatility, eventually and work experiences in different fields. Perhaps the secret consists of a contamination between professions and knowledge. Especially in project working, we need people with different skills, able to compare and synthesize different points of views (as archivists, librarians and IT experts for digitalization projects).”

Otherwise specific learning needs emerge, as:

- communication competencies,
- marketing tools (to measure services and users and their needs or satisfaction),
- project management,
- planning tools,

- the capacity to manage the change,
- human resources management,
- financial resources management,
- group working skills and also the competence to work in group with other services (as archives and museums);

3.2 Institutional barriers

The research demonstrated that, as asked in a research question, cultural tourism is interesting for libraries and vice versa. Secondly, outcomes identified strategies and advices to develop cultural tourism in library field.

The main problem is to transform the theoretical approach to cultural tourism into an effective practice. First of all, ideological and theoretical sides need to be reinforced. Until cultural tourism is an empty box, it will be difficult to attract attentions, interests, ideas and funds to specific projects. A clearer definition of cultural tourism, of applications to librarianship and of advantages for stakeholders, professionals and users, is the basis for a future development.

Another difficulty of these strategies is their intrasectoral aspect, related to different disciplines, professionals and habits.

As revealed by key informants, it seems that there are ideological resistances and institutional obstacles. Furthermore, as stated by information professionals, it is also a problem of cultural habit. In fact this is a consequence of the intellectual role of librarians that refuses culture turned into a spectacle. Only thanks to a new concept of cultural tourism, the distance between libraries and tourism should be overcome. First of all cultural tourism asks for a collaboration between the separated worlds of culture and economy. If LAMs, as institutions of memory, can cooperate to improve conservation and evaluation of cultural heritage, otherwise, it is necessary setting convenient policies for investments and better coordination, to guarantee adequate services to citizens and easy access to information, culture and knowledge. In order to build new partnerships, cultural sector cannot forget private sector. Nowadays public financial resources are not enough for LAMs. Among the weaknesses emerged into this case study, emerged the necessity, especially for information professionals, to clarify the role of private sector. Before

building possible alliances, LAM professionals need to be able to attract attention of other sectors.

4. Conclusions

First of all, it is important to recall that the theme of cultural tourism represents a new topic in the current debate of librarianship and it is often considered difficult and far also by experienced librarians. In this case, while key informants interviewed generally believed that cultural tourism can improve library services, on the contrary, information professionals, especially at the beginning of focus groups, revealed a low interest in cultural tourism (as in the digital sector too). If not all information professionals interviewed seem interested in LLL strategies, all recognize the potentials of a convergence among LAMs. Theoretically this convergence is not clear but librarians are sure that can help end users. All professionals interviewed are really users oriented and this is a positive premise for this sector.

While key informants insist on the difficulty of inter-sectoral collaboration; during focus groups, information professionals largely insist on the inaptitude to communicate effectively. They enlarge the concept to marketing and management, revealing strong critical thinking into this sector. Before citing inter-sectoral barriers, they cite the problem of communication, that involve all library activities: from reference service to partnerships. They seem convinced that interpersonal skills and good communication can go on institutional barriers. The same professionals expressed a great attitude towards partnerships and a cross-domain approach. This positive approach could be applied to cultural tourism projects too. The problem seems to be a lack of knowledge and training that needs a special reinforcement because these professionals show the best aptitudes for group working, for learning and for professional improvement. In fact they ask to improve communication competencies, marketing and planning tools, project, human resources and financial management and, finally, specific group working skills.

In conclusion, even though a key informant declared that cultural tourism need curiosity and risk, while Italian librarians are too old to get all these risks, information professionals interviewed admitted they are not skilful enough to manage cultural tourism projects but, in parallel, they revealed a great attitude to professional development.

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