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Book Review

Global information inequalities: Bridging the information gap. Deborah H. Charbonneau (Ed). Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2008. Chandos House, 5 & 6 Steadys Lane, Stanton Harcourt, Oxford, OX295RL, UK, 2007, XXII, 210 p., Paperback, ISBN 1-84334-361-4 £39.95; Hardback, ISBN 1-84334-362-2 £59.95.

Digital divide has been one of the most important issues being discussed among information professionals all over the world during the past decade. Traditionally, political systems, public and private sectors, governmental budgets, educational systems and human resources have had many differences in various territories and this reality has led to an imbalance in the level of access different people have to information sources. Recently, this situation has been affected in different ways by technological waves. The invention of the Internet and the Web, specifically, created both opportunities and threats in terms of people's access to information. Although information poor and information rich could be found in all countries, the majority of information poor are in developing countries and information inequalities is a more serious problem in these countries due to several political, economic, educational and cultural factors.

The book *Global Information Inequalities: Bridging the information gap* tries to have an overview on this problem from the developing countries' perspective. Just for this reason, contributions have been prepared by eighteen authors form Argentina, Canada, Chile, China, Iceland, Malaysia, Peru, South Africa, Tanzania, USA, and Zambia. As stated in the introduction "the contributions in this book help to illustrate that unequal access to information is rooted in historical, institutional, economic, cultural, and social conditions that are ever-changing and dynamic". To analyze and highlight these barriers, Deborah H. Charbonneau as the editor has tried to plan the work in four sections as follows:

1. Information mobilization: social and economic development;
2. Information empowerment: equitable access and civic engagement;
3. Social inclusion: inclusive library services for those with sensory and learning disabilities; and
4. Information divides: challenges and opportunities for a global information literacy

In the first section, four chapters have been located. Focusing on information access, chapters one to four try to shed light on the problem of access to information from developing countries' point of view. The first chapter entitled *Sustainable access: an international perspective* shows human immigration form the ancient times to an era of digital information and the lessons learned from this movement. Concentrating on this historical navigation, it concludes that there are many different opportunities for library supporters who embrace the value of universal access to get involved. The second chapter *Developing a model for library resource sharing in China's rural communities* starts with a description about the China's rural states and continues with the important role of school libraries for making the information freely accessible for citizens of these territories, i.e. farmers. It has also emphasized the supposed role of the satellite in facilitating such

process. It ends with this reasoning that since the immigration from villages to cities and challenges it has brought is being emerged, our efforts on training users and providing the requested information on time should be continued till the immigration stopped or even reversed. Doing the project in support of information technology has also been recommended. The third chapter *Braving rapids and winding timber-tracks: towards equitable access to information for libraries in Sarawak* concerns with the important role of the instruction provided by libraries as information literacy skills. The experience of making the people literate at the Sarawak done by mobile libraries has been reported in this chapter. The chapter states that as the World Wide Web is making access to the information easier and more comfortable, providing information literacy programs should be continued having attention to the use of information technology in instructional plans and the different languages spoken in Sarawak. The last chapter of this section *Community resource centers in Mtwara, Lindi and Ruvuma regions in Tanzania: an evaluation of their development needs, usefulness, and the way forward* summarizes the findings of a comparative study done in three different regions of the Tanzania in order to justify the instruction provided based on different information needs of the people living in Mtwara, Lindi and Ruvuma. The main aim of this report is paying attention to regional factors affecting the life style of peoples. In Tanzania for example, there are many people living with AIDS and hence, public health issues and improving health awareness of the community members have been noticed as targets of the program.

The second section focuses on efforts to create equitable access and encourage civic engagement. *Is there a moon in the United States*? … as the first chapter of this section highlights the efforts of an active team in Peru that tries to make accessible the information to the people regarding their medical and veterinary needs. As the last chapter of the first section, this chapter also tries to emphasize domestic attributes in overwhelming information barriers. The difference between these two reports is that in Tanzania an unnatural issue namely AIDS has created specific medical information needs; while in Peru natural specifications of the Amazon forests has established situation in which medical treatment and hence medical information are going to be compulsory. The sixth chapter *Libraries and citizen participation in Chile: I have the right to know* opens a new discussion in this volume that is related to the democracy and the role libraries can play in improving social awareness. The chapter enumerates efforts of the Chilean Library of Congress to promote citizen participation and to facilitate the exchange of information between citizens and legislators. The main strength of this chapter is it's emphasizing on new evidences of information technologies like blogs. The seventh chapter *Equity and access: is countrywide access to databases an option?* continues the approach adopted in chapter six. Focusing on databases in specific, author looks at the right of access to the content provided by electronic databases as an important element of national information policy in Iceland. There has been a consortium through which database services have been prepared around the country. The chapter finals the discussion that having access from home is the main advantage of database agreements under an information policy, a comprehensive one.

Section three looks at the issue of disability among users. *Working together to provide an inclusive library service: a Canadian model and Copyright: are people with sensory disabilities getting a fair deal?* address limitations of people having lingual, physical and legal disabilities in Canada and South Africa. Minorities and those that can't have access to the information because of copyright laws have been discussed in chapters eight and nine. The section concludes that the aforementioned challenges in access are increased for disable persons as new technologies emerge more and more. Therefore, libraries should develop their subscriptions and agreements and at the same time their public services and training programs.

Opportunities and challenges of the provision have been discussed in the final section. *Bookmobiles: providing equitable service to all* introduces changes in bookmobile services and new experiments in USA. In chapter ten, introducing a few examples of bookmobile services to the reader community of the current work is intended. *When the knowledge ditch is dug our own hands* as chapter eleven reviews the problem of divide in South America. The chapter concludes that information professionals have a social role to play in a society in which the information is being emerged in various manifestations. In chapter twelve entitled *MedlinePlus Go Local: connecting at-risk populations with health care services*, MedlinePlus and Go Local projects are introduced in brief. Medically uninsured, immigrants and non-English speakers as at-risk populations are noticed because of an information gap between them and the rest of the society. The chapter ends with this statement that in the USA some of residents face economic, geographic, cultural and language barriers when accessing health care services. The problem is doubled when the resident intends to solve his/her problem using the Internet. MedlinePlus tries to minimize the crisis. To simplify the process, librarians as information intermediaries have responsibility for managing the information seeking behavior. The final chapter *Barriers to free and equal access to information* highlights political, economic and cultural barriers in accessing the information in Zambia. It concludes that there is relationship between access to information and the degree of democratization. But, in view of the fact that the whole world is trying to work towards the freedom libraries should try to disappear these barriers.

The work as I studied is one of the bests on this topic. Advantages of this edited book are as follows:

- Sections and chapters have been well arranged. Logical continuity and interconnection are shown among various parts of the book.
- Collects opinions of persons from different countries and hence reflects the problem of information inequality justly, even in a developed country like the USA.
- Other strength of this work is that authors are mainly librarians. For this reason, the humanistic and the service-oriented viewpoint of information professionals are emphasized throughout the book.
- Introduces many different opportunities for library supporters who embrace the value of universal access to get involved in disappearing barriers.
- Encourages using information and communication technologies like the Internet, databases, blogs, satellites, and so on.
- Pays attention to regional factors affecting the life style of people such as the territory and the different languages spoken.
- Emphasizes the important role of libraries in subscriptions and agreements and at the same time pays attention their public services and training programs as new technologies emerged on the Web.
- Introduces good examples of services like bookmobiles.

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