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Resource Centres Promoting Information Access, Activism and People's Knowledge

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Resource Centres Promoting Information Access, Activism and People's Knowledge

Catherine J. Irving

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Amidst the jargon of the knowledge economy and information highway, libraries—the very institutions that specialize in information access and literacy—are struggling to stay afloat, faced with cutbacks from administrations that no longer see libraries as vital components of a democratic society. Community resource centres struggle to be recognized for their contribution to development practice, and to be integrated into project funding models. Yet, there are numerous examples of creative and inspiring initiatives that demonstrate what can be achieved through well-resourced and involved organizations. This paper reports on the results of a research study examining the evolving role of libraries and resource centres supporting community development and civic participation—both the challenges faced, and the opportunities for re-engagement. Analysis of current literature is interwoven with the insights of development practitioners attending Coady programs. The study is structured on three themes: Information literacy; documenting people's knowledge; and library space.

Background & Research Framework

In 1997, Sue Adams, former librarian of the Coady International Institute, was invited to attend CONFINTEA V in Hamburg. An outcome of that conference was the creation of the ALADIN Network (Adult Learning Documentation and Information Network). Lisa Krolak at UNESCO's Institute for Lifelong Learning in Hamburg, also a founding member, continues to coordinate this network. With the financial support of UNESCO, Sue Adams and Elaine MacLean led the design and delivery of a Certificate in Managing NGO Resource Centres in 2001 and 2003. I assisted with content, facilitation and the creation of a companion website providing links to information available to assist small organizations wishing to start or sustain a resource centre.

The certificate program grew out of short workshops held with Coady participants throughout the 1990s. Sue and Elaine later contributed to the creation of a series of Training of Trainer guides for ALADIN, to assist organizations to offer training locally. Over the past decade I have spoken often with Coady participants seeking assistance to develop their own resource centres and have introduced them to Lisa and the ALADIN network. We have also continued to maintain the webpage on the Marie Michael Library website. However the design and content have not been updated substantially to reflect the changing information landscape. That said, I believe the underlying philosophy behind the program that existed 15 years ago still holds true. There is an important role for a program like this with the level of criticality and potential of citizen participation that is central to the Coady approach. The opportunity provided by the Innovations program provided the space to embark on this much needed update.

Context

In the literature, libraries engaged in communities typically refer to public libraries, institutions that are supported by government funding to provide services to the general population at no cost. "Community libraries" (Shrestha & Krolak, 2016) typically refer to local-level facilities that have formed where no public library service exists. Similarly, resource centres may be independent or linked to a development organization (NGO) with a focus on their local communities offering services ranging from library collections to documentation and training. "Community resource centres and community learning centres in many countries serve as focal points for popular education, community involvement and valuing local knowledge" (Adams, et al., 2002, p. 27).

Despite such recognition of the role of libraries and resource centres in adult learning and community development, there is still a sizeable gap between the sectors of library science, adult education, and development practice. The literature that does exist is typically written by and for professionals in large, academic libraries or funded public library systems, which is not always useful in the community development context, nor does it necessarily have the creativity and adaptability to engage dynamically at the local level.

The role of information in development practice has been a recurring theme this century and has been variously framed with buzzwords and acronyms such as K4D (knowledge for development), A2K (access to knowledge), knowledge translation or mobilization, etc. The discussion since has broadened to champion *Beyond Access* (2018) by emphasizing how people make use of information and how access can be facilitated. Theorists in social and information sciences are providing critiques that raise concerns on power and control over information. Lor and Britz (2010) emphasize people's participation and librarians' roles "as facilitators in human knowledge construction" (p. 664). One participant at a *Guardian News* hosted e-discussion on *Beyond Access*, scoffed at the question, "What is the role of information and knowledge in development?" since flipping the question to ask, "How do we do development without knowledge?" shows that all development involves someone's knowledge. The key issue is whose knowledge we are talking about—and who is involved in the process of gathering and utilizing information that further expands people's ability to be active and critical in a process to develop their own knowledge. The buzz in the development sector now is on the potential of "Big Data" (World Bank, 2014), but issues remain regarding the ability of people to gain access to the data, and to analyse and make use of it for their own development goals.

IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations) has an advocacy branch (FAIFE) that promotes the roles of libraries in supporting citizen engagement through ensuring freedom of access to information and campaigning against censorship and state surveillance. Their *Internet Manifesto* acknowledges that information is now available to remote communities but those communities need support in accessing and making use of it. IFLA's *Trend Report* (IFLA, 2013) describes the "information chain" when discussing the opportunities for libraries to assist people to create and share information. Increased transparency and openness of public information has the potential to increase civic participation. This access also requires the role of organizations and facilitators to assist people navigating these information chains.

Inclusive education requires inclusive information access. Examples abound of systematized exclusion, such as Smythe's (2016) research demonstrating the practices of exclusion

evidenced in government websites. Optimistic descriptions of open government and citizen participation are undermined by bureaucratic literacies that obfuscate information. Literacy instruction must constantly evolve to support learners to navigate convoluted information systems. Crowther and Mackie's (2015) study of citizens' information seeking patterns during the Scottish independence referendum note the importance of internet sources to assist in political decision-making and democratic participation. Add to this the high profile news stories of state-level propaganda, spin, news media manipulation, or surveillance of people's online activities. Such examples point to what Jordan (2015) describes as "political antagonism of information" (p. 143). In efforts to promote a citizen-led approach that integrates people's knowledge and interests, where do NGOs and community resource centres fit in this context? There is an important role for adult educators here.

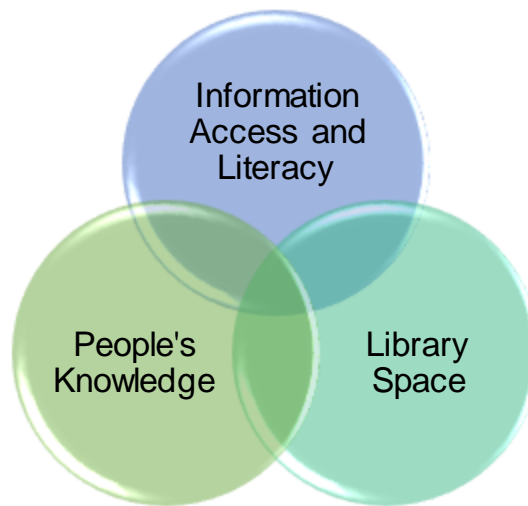
Acknowledgement of the dearth of library-focused research in the field of adult education has been cited over the years, though there are signs of renewed interest. Researchers in the mainstream library science literature still tend to focus on more instrumental forms of training and instruction than a deeper exploration or contribution to an understanding of their work as educators. Sanford & Clover's (2016) research on adult learning in public libraries, note the reticence among library staff they interviewed to describe their work clearly as adult education. That said, there are certainly areas of librarianship have embraced the educational role of library work, particularly those grounded in critical and feminist theories (see Accardi, Drabinski & Kumbier, 2010) and those working in social justice environments (Adams, et al., 2002). The contributions of critical, feminist and post-structural social theories have helped deepen the understanding of the political power of information, and the roles and responsibilities of librarians working in the "information ecosystem" (Gustafson, 2017). Librarians have long advocated for freedom of access to information and pushed back against censorship. Outsiders to the field may be amused to hear of "anarchist librarians" or "radical reference" but such terms reflect a renewed interest in making visible the political nature of information, illuminating librarians' activism in social justice work, and how they are supporting people's empowerment goals.

Framing the Study

Current literature in critical library studies is explored to survey the changing trends in information access, knowledge management, and documentation with an emphasis on social justice. While the focus of this study is on the role of libraries in community contexts, research regarding academic and special libraries can also be instructive since staff in such institutions are also dealing with issues of evolving roles to keep pace with technological and social changes. The literature review is complemented with first-hand perspectives of development practitioners from the Global South. This research is qualitative and inductive to gather ideas practices and issues facing development practitioners in their community work. Following research ethics approval, group discussions were conducted with participants attending the Coady Diploma Program and Global Change Leaders Program, 2016-2018 to gather their experiences and ideas regarding access to information in supporting learning and work. Unlike a focus group approach that typically uses a sample of strangers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), group discussion (Wadsworth, 2011) is intended to build upon the collective sharing of experiences among participants with shared interests, so that the discussion is potentially useful to them as well as for the researcher's goals (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011). By the time the participants were invited to the group discussions, they were familiar with facilitated discussions and the group learning process using adult learning methods. A webinar was held in December, 2018 to share results with any participants who were interested.

For the purpose of this review, I am focusing on three spheres of activity: Information literacy; documenting people's knowledge; and library space. I have selected these spheres as they address the activities of library workers, the collections they curate for people, and the physical space of libraries and resource centres embedded in the communities in which they serve.

Figure 1: Themes for this study



Information Access & Literacy

Information literacy, broadly, describes the skill development process to enable people to find and use the information they need. However, as explained earlier access to information alone is insufficient to foster engaged, active citizenship, and there is a growing awareness of the importance of examining the sources of information and issues of power in knowledge creation and dissemination. Issues that are driving the critical analysis of information literacy include:

- Perceptible resurgence in propaganda and spin
- Restrictions or financial barriers against access to relevant information
- Oceans of data and documents available online that are hard to navigate

Sharing the theoretical framing of critical social science and critical pedagogy, critical information literacy (see Elmborg, 2006) engages in critiques of mainstream knowledge production and provision, looking at power and control over information. Elmborg notes there is not universal agreement on the definition of information literacy which is problematic, thus, Elmborg finds Freire's critical pedagogy helpful :

Is the library a passive information bank where students and faculty make knowledge deposits and withdrawals, or is it a place where students actively engage existing knowledge and shape it to their own current and future uses? And what is the librarian's role as an educator in this process? (p. 193)

As the last question shows, the concept has meaning not only for the participant, but also for the librarian in terms of gaining the skill and confidence as a teacher to help develop the information literacy skills in others. Riedler and Eryaman (2010) draw upon critical and post-structural theories to examine the inherently political nature of librarianship that confronts the traditional "positivist" notions of librarians as unbiased providers of information and promotes their potential to participate more fully in collective learning and community building.

Gustafson (2017) describes the importance of understanding the "information life cycle from creation to consumption" (p. 1) in which people gain an understanding of the myriad contexts (political, historical, social, etc.) that affect the creation of information and the ways people understand and use it—as well as researchers' own participation in creation through a hierarchical scholarly publishing framework. While Gustafson is describing a university setting, the concept is useful to adapt to other organizational settings, particularly in contexts where people do not necessarily see their work directly in terms of knowledge creation and sharing.

Lankes (2016) summarizes the long history of librarianship, and the commitment to learning and sharing information that has defined the profession for generations, as well as the efforts of librarians to advocate for free and equitable access to information. Trosow (2014) also notes the concern expressed by librarians over the growing "commodification" (p. 17) of information and influence of market forces. In response, there is a determination to defend "the notion of information as a public good" (p. 17) and resist attempts of "enclosure" (p. 22). I want to reiterate this point as a reminder that librarians have not only worked directly with people to provide instruction and access to information, many also advocate in the policy sphere to protect people's information rights, such as challenging restrictive copyright legislation. Trosow argues for the importance of political-economic analyses regarding information and libraries, and expresses concern when library advocacy efforts remain restricted to "the

particular narrow issue at hand” (p. 21). I would suggest that the narrowing focus may be also be a symptom of low staffing levels and competing demands that remove people from the very aspects of the work of librarianship that drew them to the profession in the first place.

Assumptions that information literacy is primarily a matter of helping people learn to become comfortable with new technology is also a limiting factor. Eubanks (2011) describes her efforts to create computer training for women which faltered until she began to understand the women’s lives and daily interactions with technology. The women may have worked in tedious data entry jobs, or had faced the scrutiny of a computer in a government office which appeared to make all the decisions as they tried to register for financial assistance. The women’s aversion to the technology was not a result of ignorance, but of direct, unjust experiences. For those of us working in libraries who find increasing amounts of our time on computer training and technical support, being aware of the people’s contexts and priorities is important to ensure relevant support rather than replicating instructional methods that, in turn, replicate subordination. Torrell (2010) describes a collaboration between instructors and librarians using “contact zone pedagogy” that helps students expose the power inequalities and potential manipulation of information as they go through numerous steps in a research task.

At times, some of this literature to set up an oppositional scenario of traditional versus critical environments, (traditional=passive; critical=active) but I would argue that the divide is not so clear. Even the standard library practice of the “reference interview” can be framed as a dialogic process of engaging a person into discussion and questioning to learn more about what it is they are really looking for and what their goals are. Several cases describe the use of methods adopted from critical and feminist pedagogy for group learning settings, and may play with standard library instructional methods for one-to-one reference assistance.

As Hoyer and MacDonald (2014) explain, the term *source authority* refers to the knowledge that the information being used is reliable, and varies according to sector and use. The authors note that in some areas of the social services grey literature is very important, but it can be

hard for the reader to determine the credibility of a small NGO's good research paper, and a more formal looking document that may come from a biased source. "In the social services sector, determining source authority comes not through traditional processes of looking at the type of publication or its origin but through interaction with the community of the authors and publishers, and knowledge of which authors and publishers are producing the most relevant and reliable information" (p. 32).

Battista (2012) also argues that it is a critical skill of citizens to be able to seek and assess information to participate in society. Challenges to this ability come from western education systems that are increasingly skewed to treat education as job training and not citizen training, and by the vast amount of information from various forms that is now available. The academic emphasis on databases and peer-reviewed journals leads instruction to focus on search skills and sources of information that are only relevant to a university context that people will not have access to when they graduate. Battista pushes back by emphasizing the importance of integrating social media in library instruction since that is where people are already and it allows for more creativity for people to curate their own information sources. For example, people can add current news feeds that are more up to date than published academic literature. However, this raises the concerns some have of social media companies whose algorithms may promote some perspectives at the expense of others.

In numerous countries, there are growing critiques that state-level investments in higher education often do not extend to adequate funding of libraries to provide adequate information access. As Karaganis (2018) explains: "We are in the midst of a massive expansion of higher education systems in middle- and low-income countries. We are also in a period of broad retreat of the state from responsibility for funding and managing that expansion" (p. 5). Karaganis' collection of cases on "shadow libraries" document the creative (often illegal) solutions students and faculty are compelled to devise to circumvent the barriers faced from high costs and copyright laws in order to obtain the literature they need to pursue their academic work.

At the community level, the frustration of poorly resourced education systems is echoed by Coady participants who see the results of low scholastic achievement levels in children's education compounded by poor access to current and relevant reading materials. More than one person cynically commented on the "showcase libraries" whose purpose was to show visitors that they had a library, but made little effort to maintain the collections or develop programs to promote reading.

"Knowledge translation" is a term commonly heard in academic and policy-level arenas describing the process of making information more easily understandable in the general population. Numerous Coady participants described their roles as information mediators—translating policy documents to local languages or summarizing material in forms that are simpler to understand. They see the importance of their roles in critical information literacy, to be aware of bias in popular media or government agendas. One person described how their organization makes a point of selecting information that was valuable that people may not normally seek out. That information would be summarized and shared using newsletters, digests, news clips, etc. The issue of freedom of information policies also came up, with participants noting the need to raise more awareness on the procedures to help people and organizations make use of the information rights they possess with regards to public data.

Much of this information sharing is happening through informal channels and networks, when people with shared interests get to know each other through events such as workshops or regional conferences. Participants spoke of developing their knowledge of individuals in their "friendly association" of CSOs and networks who are reliable sources of information. In turn, people in the community come to see them in the same light, asking them personally for help in finding information through their networks or access to larger regional or academic libraries.

"Reading Culture"

A recurring theme throughout all the group discussions with Coady participants was the issue of promoting a "reading culture" in their societies. One person spoke of the consciousness raising moment of a trip to a major European city, taking note of people everywhere reading

newspapers and books, and thinking, “this is what a reading culture looks like.” Participants spoke of the challenge of encouraging people to read in contexts of low literacy. A key issue relates to limited educational opportunities beyond the primary level, partly exacerbated by the MDG focus on primary education that left programs for older children and adults underfunded. As for library collections, Coady participants reported that promoting reading culture was further challenged by shortages of access to affordable reading materials and information in local languages, collections that were poorly maintained and outdated, and limited access to material for people with disabilities.

Rather than complaining about how social media is reducing people’s attention span or skewing perceptions, a number of participants described initiatives where they are now creatively making use of the platform to engage people through simple messages and videos to attract people to the information they have to share. Others shared initiatives designed to extend learning opportunities beyond primary education to include older youth and adults such as community radio book narrations, reading clubs that use local news stories, or children’s reading clubs that try to attract parents as well, to provide an opening for adult literacy as well.

DIY Access

The rapid development of accessible technology is providing real opportunities for practitioners on the ground to develop services where none currently exist and to extend access to populations currently excluded. Do-it-yourself (DIY) technology tools are giving new meaning to “appropriate technology” by experimenting with small scale solutions. In Canada, the National Network for Equitable Library Service is working to raise awareness and reduce barriers to information access for people with disabilities (Iseli-Otto, 2017). The availability of accessible technology is increasing, and while costs are decreasing, there are still barriers for service providers with very limited access to funding. Available tools include apps for mp3 players that convert text to audio, portable Braille readers that can be connected to computers, and assistive devices to help people who are hard of hearing (see: librarytoolshed.ca). LibraryBox (librarybox.us) has developed an open source tool using

modest electronic tools and coding that allows people to create a portable document storage device that enables groups to connect using wifi on their phones to download information from the device. On the LibraryBox website users describe practical field examples such as sharing medical information in remote clinics, or playing educational videos for passengers on buses. Computer storage companies also provide portable hard drive storage devices called personal clouds that do not require internet access. They range widely in price and availability.

Staying Current

A major concern expressed by Coady participants was the challenge of accessing current information. This resulted in challenges in responding to development funding opportunities, project proposal writing, creating policy briefs, etc. Individuals would pay for access to current journal articles if they had the money to do so. A strategy adopted by several participants is to subscribe to trustworthy listservs to get recommendations on useful research and documents. This requires some effort to find out the best lists for practical information. There was little patience for organizations that used their communication channels only to promote themselves and push out public relations material.

Library associations are keen advocates of the Open Access movement that is striving to promote the free access of research findings. Sue Adams (2006) hosted an online discussion on this topic with development practitioners. However, more than a decade on, many researchers working in academic contexts still are compelled to submit their research to journals according to the publication's ranking or status rather than the access policies due to expectations in their profession. This was an issue that emerged at a recent public engagement conference at Memorial University of Newfoundland. One focus of the conference was community-university research, but a number of participants described challenges in translating research results to platforms that are freely accessible. More academics are becoming aware of the need to ensure there are freely accessible forms of their research findings for the general public, but there is still much work to be done in this area.

People's Knowledge: Documentation and Preservation

As people develop the critical skills to evaluate other sources of information, they may also begin identifying their potential roles as content creators to ensure their community's knowledge is preserved. Preserving the institutional knowledge of civil society organizations is also a topic of concern. Libraries are increasingly aware of their role in fostering collections and providing access to information that promotes the diversity of their communities, through initiatives bringing sexual diversity to light (Silva Alentejo, 2014), integrating indigenous knowledges (Kelly, 2010), or supporting political education and participation of previously excluded groups (Badawi, 2007). Local organizations have an important role as information hubs for regional development activity, particularly with the opportunities of internet access. Earlier discussions of the "digital divide" have evolved to the call for "digital inclusion" which considers the learning and engagement required for people to use information in their own knowledge creation—the issues run deeper than mere access to the technology. It cannot be forgotten that very real barriers to access remain, particularly in rural areas. As information mediators, Coady participants also see how important it is to find ways to ensure their own research and data reach the hands of policymakers and national and international agencies. Criticisms of bias or missing data of local situations heighten this awareness. One participant expressed frustration in trying to obtain statistics from a government department, only to be told that the government relied on that person's organization to provide the statistics. The onus was on the organization to try to find ways to conduct the research itself, with limited financial and staffing resources. Coady participants also note the frustration of duplication of research, missing data, as well as sharing suspicions of state-run archives, and concern that community-level knowledge is not adequately documented or preserved.

To help organizations understand the sources and uses of information in their development practice, turning Gustafson's (2017) concept of an "information ecosystem" into a knowledge-plotting exercise can provide useful insights. For example, thinking of the different agencies or sectors that communities interact with, can then start the process of identifying what types of information are created and shared in each sector (Figure 2). When I asked Coady participants

to plot out an information ecosystem for their work on gender justice, many creative layers of information sources emerged, as well as discussions (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Imagining an information ecosystem

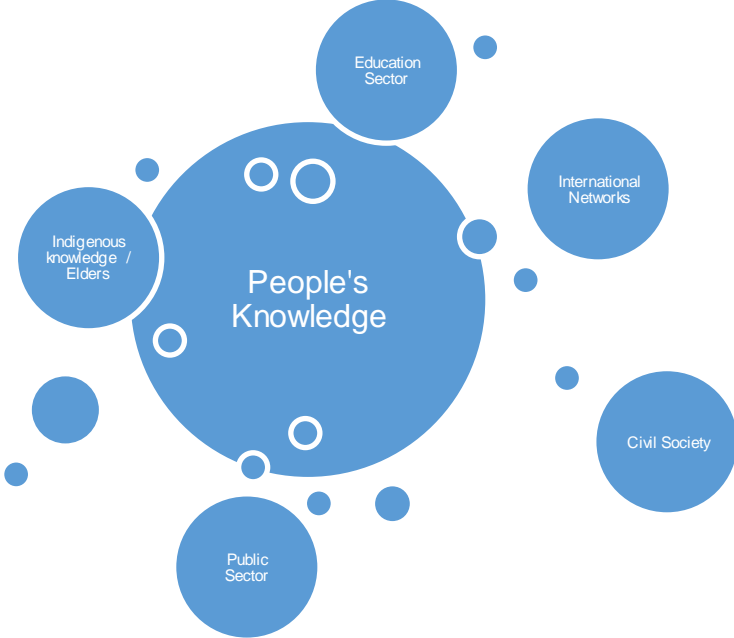


Figure 3: Coady participants in the 2017 Gender Justice, Citizenship and Community Development course share their information ecosystem for women's empowerment



The actual work of documenting these forms of local-level knowledge can be explored through two main activities: community-based research and records management.

Community-Based Research

Research can be a scary term for practitioners as it evokes concerns of validity, rigour, and high degrees of expertise. In addition to my responsibilities managing Coady's Marie Michael Library, for over a decade I have also facilitated the research course as part of the Coady Diploma program, though I see teaching research as an integral part of my library work—to demystify the research process for practitioners. Stoecker (2012) explains that people often do not recognize their processes of inquiry as research. The Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA, 2013) describes the situation:

The cult of expertise, supported by institutions of research, over the years has neglected the actors in the situation as sources of knowledge, as well as its legitimate owners. Consequently, the experiential and intuitive insights of popular knowledge have been devalued (p. 24-25).

PRIA has been at the forefront of participatory research training to develop people's skills for grassroots inquiry. SEWA Academy, too, has worked to demystify the research process by providing simple tools and training programs to develop the research capacity of SEWA members. Coady participants are aware of the local research capacity that is lost when organizations rely on external consultants who are contracted to conduct research in their localities. As one frustrated participant explained, "When the consultant leaves, so does the knowledge".

Participedia provides an interesting model of local-level case study development and sharing, as Coady colleague Julien Landry (2018) has documented in the practitioner-led case studies of participatory democratic engagement by Coady graduates. These case studies are published on an open, online platform (participedia.net). The methodology of case study writing, testing and sharing among graduates, including a "write shop" process is an initiative that could be

easily adapted for resource centres to document their own work, as well as the interesting initiatives going on in their communities and circles of practice.

In South Africa, CDRA (Community Development Resource Association) also provides a useful template to assist people to follow an action research cycle in case study writing. CDRA is a founding partner in the Barefoot Collective which has produced a series of publications, *The Barefoot Guides*, using write shop methods.

Records Management: The Information Lifecycle

Records management can sound like an administrative chore of filing organizational documents. Thinking of records management in terms of an information lifecycle within that ecosystem (Gustafson, 2017) may help practitioners be more aware of the knowledge contained in these documents, and what should be shared more widely than their immediate purpose, and what should be preserved in the longer term.

Social movements need information for evidence and mobilization but an incredible amount of information and knowledge is also generated as a result of their activities. Resource and documentation centres have a key role to play in curating knowledges that have been marginalized by the mainstream (see Claeys, 2013). Moran (2014) in describing the work of anarchist libraries, uses the term “infoshop” noting that anarchists have for a long time placed emphasis on the collection and sharing of literature: “Anarchists, by definition suspicious of the state and its institutions, have also wanted to protect their own historical writings and culture” (Moran, p. 175). She adds a quote that acknowledges that most of these collections that reside with activists within the movement “remain in the hands of the producing communities, preserved by the people who participated in the very struggles that are being documented” (Hoyt, 2012, p. 32 in Moran p. 175). Moran describes “independent community archives” which are often a local response to a failure of mainstream organizations to include those groups, much like the anarchist groups did. They are not “vanity projects, nor as alternatives to active struggle, but rather as acts of resistance, consciously made” (p. 176). Yet, their insistence on independence opens them to problems of organization and sustainability both financially and

in terms of preservation of the material, relying on a few dedicated souls. Some anarchist libraries become affiliated with a university to support them.

Anasi, Ibegwam & Oyediran-Tidings (2013) describe efforts to preserve what they describe as Nigerian “women’s cultural heritage” in academic libraries. Evidence of this heritage typically does not reside in mainstream textual form and is often overlooked for its social and cultural value. The authors identify numerous forms of information that are being preserved including photos, paintings, sculpture, craftwork, music, etc. While these efforts are lauded, the authors note challenges that academic libraries face such as staff awareness and skills, climatic factors, and adequate infrastructure. If state-supported institutions like academic libraries face such challenges, so too do community-based organizations.

Library Spaces – and Linkages

Public libraries in particular have long recognized their role in communities for providing a free, safe space for all, including vulnerable and marginalized populations. Riedler and Eryaman (2010) note the shift to a transformative community-based library requires a rethinking of the space, and for the “barriers that exist for underrepresented groups, including the digital divide, social and political exclusion from political participation and individual, institutional and structural inequalities of allocation and distribution of public resources” (p. 93).

Coady participants spoke of having their own “mini-libraries” to inform their work but recognized there is little sharing of these collections with colleagues. Several participants commented that they were not really aware of the information that was out there until they came to Coady and began to realize how they are missing out. They described the challenge of having to respond to current donor thinking without access to the current information that is informing that thinking. They spoke of the frustration of not having access to reliable research due to cost of materials, subscriptions or technological barriers, as noted earlier. Their experience with both the Marie Michael Library and People’s Place (Antigonish’s public library)

was an eye opener for several participants—what a library or resource centre could be, as it disrupts old notions of library as a rule-laden, exclusive place focused on collections rather than as an active learning hub. One participant eagerly described the potential and value of developing a NGO collection shared by organizations that could be housed by a larger, well-financed library.

In response to protests in the United States in recent years, the role of preserving open, public spaces has become more visible and politicized. Lankes (2016) refers to *sanctuary spaces* when describing protests in cities that erupted into riots, where the nearby public libraries resolutely remained open to provide safe spaces for the local population. Other libraries have been reassuring undocumented migrants and refugees that the library is a safe space for them to visit. Unfortunately, a number of Coady participants from countries experiencing political unrest or repression justifiably note suspicion of state-run institutions. In these cases, community-based civil society organizations provide an alternative space for people to gain access to information and share learning. Some women participants spoke of gender discrimination in their communities where men would tell the women they are not welcome in the library. Providing library spaces that are safe and welcoming for women in this context is vital, for example Nepal's community libraries (Shrestha and Krolak, 2015). This issue also relates back to information literacy and access and how people find information they can trust.

Part of this work also involves breaking down barriers and stereotypes of information work. Community or academic partners express appreciation for the skill of information workers and surprise that they didn't really think of their role before. Information people speak of their growing intentional political acts and critique of rules and processes that are typically described as being neutral, which are in fact deeply embedded in cultural practices that privilege certain ways of know over other ways. Lankes (2016) describes "community reference" and "community collections" as strategies for library workers to take more active roles in local organizations, bringing their listening and questioning skills to projects.

In 2017, the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA) released 10 recommendations for libraries in Canada to respond to the call initiated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's 94 Calls to Action to start healing the wounds of the legacy of abuses against Indigenous peoples. The CFLA looked at the calls to see where libraries could play a role, and identified 10 key areas. The recommendations include issues of literacy, knowledge curation, and physical space that represents Indigenous worldviews.

Discussion and Next Steps

While the findings of this study have been divided into three main themes, it is clear from the observations of Coady participants that integration of activities, partnerships and networking are essential across the spectrum. Libraries and resource centres should be thought of being closely linked to development practice, not as separate or isolated entities. Yet, where resource centres are struggling to survive, this is exactly what is happening. Challenges with staffing, funding, and maintaining relevance occur when the resource centres are not involved in funding agreements, project planning, and organizational administration.

As noted in the introduction, this study was motivated, in part, to see what has changed in the past fifteen years since the last resource centres certificate was held. While the technology has changed dramatically over this time, the discussions with Coady participants highlight that technology reflects human issues and conditions, and that these issues continue to be much the same as they were in the past:

- Access to reliable and current information is critical to development practice
- Access is hampered by government departments with poorly maintained information portals, lack of awareness of who maintains what information, costs for internet access or journal subscriptions, lack of local or plain language translations, lack of “reading culture”, or suspicion of the credibility of sources

- The physical space of a resource centre is an idea that is valued, but financial barriers to creation and sustainability persist, and resource centre support tends not to be integrated in project funding
- Marginalized populations (gender, income or education level, regional isolation, disability, minority language, ethnicity, etc.) continue to be underrepresented
- Creation of locally relevant research is vital, but undermined by the “cult of expertise”, competing academic and community priorities, and dismissing of local people’s ability to be researchers.

Staff training in the practical activities of resource centre development and management are important, but not sufficient. This research study is also informing my own work in providing training in research methods and supporting the research activities of others. The innovative programs offered by organizations that embody the spirit of critical information literacy and people’s knowledge (participatory, community-led) in practice require a lot of consultation and hard work. The time and effort of participatory development have been discussed at length within adult education and community practice. This is a space where adult educators and community development workers can contribute to the analysis and guidance on partnerships in co-learning and collaborative knowledge creation with library workers. This is of critical importance for the research community as well, since the pressures of time and resources are often cited as reasons that expert researchers shy away from participatory processes. Coady graduates possess tremendous skill sets and expertise in community learning and mobilization that can contribute to changing the power dynamics of knowledge creation.

Sharing success stories and strategies for sustainability provide the greatest inspiration to organizations struggling to find solutions to their information and development practice priorities. Networks that link people are vital. The examples described in the group discussions repeatedly commented on informal networks and associations that people built through their development work were very important to their information gathering work. The ALADIN

Network was established to support this very type of engagement and co-learning amongst organizations involved in adult education.

Strategies for renewed library and resource centre creation and participation include:

- Improved networking with development partners
- Awareness raising of the many sources of local knowledge that could be mobilized
- Valuing resource centres as integral parts of development programming, research and documentation within organizations
- Strengthened roles of resource centres for human rights and gender justice
- Strengthened roles of resource centres as hubs for supporting grassroots research
- Intentional project design and funding that fully involves resource centres as partners
- Continued development of research methods and processes appropriate to the requirements of community practitioners.

This paper highlights the key points that Coady graduates have identified that pose a challenge for information access and resource centre sustainability. It also highlights initiatives that demonstrate collaboration, engagement and creativity. A companion website is under development that will feature examples of strategies and tools to assist development practitioners strengthen their knowledge gathering and sharing skills within their organizations and with community partners.

Author's note:

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