LIBRARIES AS CULTURAL HERITAGE INSTITUTIONS: ISSUES FOR LIBRARIANS

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Abstract

This paper examines libraries as cultural heritage institutions and the roles of librarians as managers of cultural resources in contemporary time. It discusses the nature of cultural heritage resources and the concept of cultural heritage institutions. It also explains the roles of libraries as cultural heritage institutions and presents the public libraries and museums as partners for collaboration in the management of cultural resources. It further highlights the challenges facing the management of cultural resources in cultural heritage institutions which include the fact that cultural resources involve rich and highly heterogeneous collections that are challenging to achieve and convey to the general public; the issue of digitization, technical, financial and organizational obstacles; continuous destruction of cultural resources through vandalism, exportation of cultural resources, looting etc. Finally, some of the strategies for promoting the management of cultural resources in cultural heritage institutions include need to digitize materials as quickly as possible; identifying and prioritizing local resources that are unique, making their collections accessible, and digital technologies such as Portals, Blogs, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube etc should be used in cultural heritage institutions for easy access and effective utilisation of cultural resources.

Key Words: Cultural Heritage Institutions, Public Libraries, Museums, Library Management, Cultural Resources

Introduction

Culture is a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life. Rouhi (2017) avers that culture is that complete whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Heritage on the other hand, is property, something that is inherited from the past and transferred from previous to present generations. According to Onyima,(2016), heritage refers to the riches of extinct and extant societies which are of historic, educational, recreational, and economic importance, preserved and handed over from one generation to another. In other words, heritage is a reality, a significant endowment emanating from man and nature, a

possession of the community and a rich inheritance that may be passed on, which invites our recognition and participation.

Cultural heritage institutions contain unique resources of cultural values relating to the people's identity. These institutions include libraries, museums, art galleries, archives and so on. Libraries are good examples of cultural heritage institutions with particular reference to the public libraries. Defining cultural heritage institutions, Zaid, Abiode and Olatise (2012) observed that heritage institutions in Nigeria are institutions responsible for the preservation of the country's heritage materials. These institutions hold disparate collection in a variety of media presenting a vast body of knowledge accumulated over the institutions' history and the mission of these institutions is to make their collections accessible to intended users.

The public task of cultural heritage institutions covers in addition to other issues the management, preservation and provision of cultural resources to the communities involved. While this is a significant and special task of cultural heritage institutions such as libraries, museums, archives, art galleries, etc providing the general public, access to cultural resources cannot be over looked. It is through the effective utilisation of these resources that people come to realize who they are, acknowledge their past and establish foundation for their future. To be effective, Saur (2001) observed that the public libraries requires experienced, flexible and well trained managers and staff able to use a range of management techniques to achieve organizational goals. Cultural heritage institutions are obliged to promote the preservation and maintenance of cultural resources of all communities and have specific duties in the management of these resources for their effective utilization. These institutions address the fundamental aspects of cultural resources which directly aimed at the protection and promotion of real social-cultural and economic values of these resources as well as increased visibility of their values to the users.

Above all, cultural heritage institutions ensure the regular up keep of cultural resources so as to guard against and harmonize changes which are brought about by social, economic and environmental processes. It is the duty of these institutions to see to the safety of the entire objects and monuments of cultural significance to the communities using various management principles to enhance their effective utilization. Although these institutions have as their main objectives, the preservation and management of cultural resources, they have not been able to do much in the effective management of these resources using ICT innovations especially in developing nations. Cultural resources are supposed to be among the priority sectors of the government and should be the pillars for sustainable development. However, this is hardly the case in developing nations due to the poor management and consequently poor utilization of these resources in cultural heritage institutions. Despite these essential roles, cultural resources are not effectively utilised as those in developed nations.

Cultural heritage institutions do not seem to provide available resources on culture to the users' satisfaction as a result of their poor management attitudes. Today, it is essential to know and understand better the richness and uses of cultural resources because if the management of these resources for their effective utilisation in cultural heritage institutions is not properly examined and promoted, it may stand as a barrier in academic research, national and sustainable development and the values of these institutions may also be highly jeopardized. Consequently, people may be denied links to their historical past and identity and cultural heritage institutions may not make any impact on the country's social-cultural and economic sustainable development. Following this development therefore, libraries and librarians should re-examine and execute their roles as cultural heritage institutions in the management of cultural resources and their impact on the effective utilisation of these resources in these institutions.

Types and Nature of Cultural Heritage Institutions and Resources

Cultural heritage institutions are important bearers and vehicles of knowledge. According to Barillet, Joffroy and Longuet (2006), cultural heritage institution is any permanent establishment instituted with the general interest of the public for the purpose of preserving, studying and enhancing cultural property and making it accessible to the public and which is licensed or approved by the competent public authorities of each state. Cultural heritage institutions represent a specific type of cultural creation and are managed in a particular style. The collection in these institutions is seen as unique, distinct and authentic.

Zaid, Abiode and Olatise (2012) noted that these cultural heritage institutions were the manifestations of Nigerian cultural heritage as they perfectly sum up the desire to preserve the legacy handed down to the present (and even future) generation by their ancestors, as well as the wish to maintain not just a lifeless ensemble of collection as are other kinds of cultural heritage such as historical buildings and archaeological diggings and so on. In Horvat (2012), cultural heritage institutions are libraries, archives, museums and similar institutions which posses the material on various media inherited from our predecessors and supposed to be kept and handed over to the next generation. This material according to Horvat is referred to as cultural heritage, but it should be kept in mind that it is only a part of the total cultural heritage. Cultural heritage institutions are sometimes also called memory institutions. This is because the material they hold and make available to the public is part of the memory of the mankind.

Zaid and Abioye (2010) emphasized that heritage institutions by virtue of their mandate, acquire, organize and make collections available to the patrons whose interest they are set up to serve. The collections or holdings of these institutions differ in significant respect as do their core missions as well as their responsibilities and there is also a remarkable difference in the way they organize and facilitate access to their collections. Zaid and Abioye noted that National heritage institutions such the National Library, the National Archives and the

National Museums are the forefront in the preservation of heritage materials in Nigeria. The national library's collections essentially comprise published materials in printed or electronic form. The national archives' core responsibility is the preservation of public records, whether on paper or any other medium. The national museums are responsible for collecting, preserving and exhibiting artifacts illustrating the nation's history and culture. Essentially, its role is to coordinate the collection and preservation of movable and non-movable items of cultural heritage including historical sites and monuments. In International Council of Museums (2010), museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits material evidence of the people and environment for the purpose of study, education and enjoyment. According to Okpoko (2011), museums are institutions for research, teaching, exhibition and conservation in one or more fields of human activity. It is an institution that collects, studies, exhibits and conserves objects for cultural and educational purposes. Jokilehto (2005) added that museum means any permanent establishment instituted in the general interest for the purpose of preserving, studying, enhancing by various means and, in particular, exhibiting to the public for its delectation and instruction, groups of objects and specimens of cultural value, artistic, historical, scientific and technological collections, botanical and zoological gardens and aquariums. These institutions differ in their approaches to acquisition, documentation, processing and facilitating access due largely to the nature of the materials collected and the practices of their professions. Librarians, archivists and museum curators all have their own professional philosophy, practices, standards and ethics.

Also, cultural heritage institutions represent a meeting place for culture and science, technology and creativity, to experience the new smart cultural services for the education system and also new forms of ebooks (Carmine, 2012). Such institutions are also deeply

involved in understanding and developing innovative models of learning, especially those solutions which update the teaching of history (intended in any sense; the social, economic and political point of view). Cultural heritage institutions have a role to play in developing and sustaining cultural, social, educational and economic well-being of the people by supporting the cultural identity of the communities. The primary objectives of cultural heritage institutions are to promote opportunities for everyone to experience culture, participate in educational programmes in addition to developing their creative skills (Rouhi 2017). Other goals of these institutions include promoting dynamic cultural heritage resources that are preserved, utilized and developed; promoting the utilisation of cultural resources; supporting international and intercultural exchange and cooperation in the cultural sphere and paying particular attention to the rights of children and young people to culture (Rouhi 2017). Because of the availability of cultural resources in cultural heritage institutions, most of these institutions are used as learning places. These involve supporting lifelong learning and community development through the provision of cultural resources; become partners in a variety of cultural and economic initiatives, enable universal access to information, preserve cultural heritage materials, reach new customers and improve core services.

Cultural resources are used to enable these institutions strengthen their public relevance through their effective services in meeting the needs of larger and more diverse cross-section of users. At the same time, visitors who go through a collection or an exhibition may experience some individual and informal learning. Most of these resources are also used as teaching and curriculum resources in cultural heritage institutions. Learning around cultural objects could be an effective way to provide education to the people who do not have easy access to the written word or do not speak the dominant language and in this way promote opportunities for the effective utilisation of these cultural resources.

To Bishoff and Allen (2004), most cultural heritage institutions are mission-driven; their primary purpose is to support and promote the public good. It is in this way that they distinguish themselves from profit organizations, for which creating stakeholder values, measured in terms of profit, is a primary goal. They noted that each cultural heritage institution should be mindful of developing business- planning activities within the context of its mission, goals, audiences, and public- good programs. Without such a plan, no cultural heritage institution can be sustainable, no matter how compelling its mission or treasured its collections. They further buttressed that a cultural heritage organization typically supports a range of core services, both as reference service in a library or collection services in museums, none of which is self-supporting through generation of revenue directly applied to the costs of the activity. At this point in time, services related to digital assets are not generally considered to be core services. Eventually, however, visitors and users will probably expect that technology-based access to content be a core service.

Cultural heritage institutions contain numerous resources ranging from works of sculpture, such as statute, stone, wood, sand art etc, works of artistic craftsmanship (painting, sculpture, drawing), audio-visual resources, collections of eminent scholars of national interest and value, slides, objects of cultural values and so on. Also included are the intangible elements which represent the culture of every community and are expressed in a variety of actions such as rituals, music and chanting, incantations or by a rich oral tradition. These resources do not consist only of the elements that could reap economic benefits but are particularly regarded as collective properties of culture to which all members of the community have the right to access and utilise.

Cultural heritage therefore would concern all the different aspects of culture traditionally handed over from generation to generation (Jokilehto, 2005). The perception of cultural

heritage varies from country to country depending on the individual's country's interpretation. Cultural heritage is an expression and creativity of life realities developed over the years from past to present generations. This treasure of unique artistic, aesthetic, historical and traditional characteristics values is illustrated by the rich diversity of architectural, archaeological, tangible and intangible heritage as well as rich cultural landscape. In United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2009), cultural heritage are the legacy of physical artifacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations.

There are objects and elements of cultural significance that qualifies cultural heritage as cultural resources. Ruthven and Chowdhury (2015) are of the view that cultural resources are the value people have given to items and places through their association with those items and places. Cultural resources shall be taken to mean items which are the expression and testimony of human creation and of the evolution of nature which, in the opinion of the competent bodies in individual states, are or may be, of historical, artistic, scientific or technical value and interest, including items in the following categories; zoological, botanical and geological specimen; archaeological objects; objects and documentation of ethmological interest; works of fine art and of the applied arts; literary, musical, photographic and cinematographic works; archives and documents (Jokilehto, 2005).

According to Cane and Conagham (2009), cultural resources are commonly divided into two categories. Tangible cultural heritage resources that are materials and can be movable objects such as paintings, antiquities or artifacts, sculpture, drawings, works of art, immovable objects etc. On the other hand, another form of cultural resources exists which arouses the interest of the international community and these are intangible cultural heritage resources. The intangible cultural resources consists of the elements which represent the culture of every community, which are expressed in a variety of actions, manner of speaking and thinking, the

symbolic repetition of historical facts and by the setting of ethical or moral rules. Their forms of expression include initiation rites, incantation, rituals, life-cycle celebrations, dance, stories, music, oral tradition etc and should be carefully managed and preserved, for it is even more vulnerable than the tangible (material) cultural resources, as it is in danger of disappearing with its traditional custodians. Tangible and intangible cultural resources are however closely related. All intangible aspects such as knowledge systems, the principles of action or the values and beliefs of man, cannot be considered as cultural resources if they cannot be shared, and given a sensible form in words, objects, gestures, representations and even behaviours. On the other hand, tangible cultural resources reach their full significance when they refer to the knowledge and values that constitute their essence, and give meaning to their production.

Role of Libraries As Cultural Heritage Institutions

Cultural heritage institutions carefully choose objects of value and interest to some intended audience. These institutions preserve or stabilize these objects, arrange them, curate them, and present them to the public in reading rooms, galleries, and travelling exhibitions, as well as through various forms of surrogacy such as photographs and microfilms. Bishoff and Allen (2004) noted that libraries, museums, archives and historical societies – often referred to collectively cultural heritage institutions – have amassed physical artifacts and information recorded on physical for the purpose of providing long term access to them. According to these researchers, the role that collections-based institutions have played over time is providing access to information, sites for cultural enrichment, and forums for civic engagement are deemed to be absolutely critical to society. The value of these institutions is so high in the public mind that most libraries and museums are able to rely on various forms of subsidy, from both the private and public sectors, to ensure continuity of mission and service.

The public libraries exist in different societies of differing cultures and are seen as the local gateway to knowledge (International Federation of Library Association and Institutions, 1994). According to Saur (2001), public library is an organisation established, supported and funded by the community, either through local, regional or national government or through some other form of community organisation. It provides access to knowledge, information and works of the imagination through a range of resources and services and is equally available to all members of the community regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, economic and employment status and educational attainment. Saur is of the view that the primary objectives of public libraries are to provide information resources and services in a variety of media to meet the information needs of individuals and groups, for education and personal development including recreation and leisure. They have an important role in the management of cultural resources for effective utilisation and strategically assist the communities they serve by providing a focus for cultural and artistic development in the communities and assist in shaping and supporting the cultural identity of the communities. These are achievable by working in partnership with appropriate local and regional organizations, by providing space for cultural activity, organizing cultural programmes and by ensuring that cultural interests are represented in the library's materials. Where the oral tradition is an important method of communication, the public libraries should promote its continuation and development. Public libraries and museums are similar in their roles in the management of cultural resources for effective utilisation.

Public libraries, museums and other cultural heritage institutions are often natural partners for collaboration and cooperation in their services to the communities. They all support and enhance lifelong learning opportunities, preserve community cultural resources, protect and provide access to information resources. These cultural heritage institutions belong at the very

heart of people's lives, contributing to their enjoyment and inspiration, cultural values, learning, economic prosperity as well as social equality.

Challenges Facing the Management of Cultural Resources in Libraries

- **Bulky size of cultural resources:** Cultural resources involve rich and highly heterogeneous collections that are challenging to achieve and convey to the general public (Clough, Goodale, Hall & Stevenson, 2015). The size and lack of organization of these collections can be overwhelming for many users, who are provided with little or no guidance about how to utilise them. Presently, there is an urgent need for cultural heritage institutions to adapt to the changes in the society and provide for the new and changed needs of their users.

- **Technical and financial cost of digitization:** Today, cultural heritage institutions are confronted with the issue of digitization. The European Union new action plan entitled Digital Agenda for Europe envisages that all services now available to citizens should become accessible on the internet by 2020 (Horvat, 2012). This also means that cultural heritage institutions such as libraries, museums, archives etc should make the material they hold accessible on the internet too. Cultural heritage institutions will undoubtedly evolve their thinking about the strategic value of digital asset-related services and will be more likely to include these products and services among their core services.

- **Continuous destruction of cultural resources**: Cultural heritage institutions witness continuous destruction of cultural resources through vandalism, exportation of cultural resources, looting, trafficking, civilization, developmental projects, religious dogmatism and natural disaster such as fire, wind, rain etc (Onyima, 2016 p.273). The reason behind this is the uncontrolled economic development that results from the over exploitation of cultural resources, the over production of goods and chaotic

urbanization that are taking place nowadays in addition to the loss of objects due to plunder linked to a growing international black market and simplified by access to modern communication devices such as the cellular phone.

- **Poor inventory of cultural resources:** Many cultural heritage institutions have not yet taken stock of the existence and potentials offered by cultural resources. There is a need to establish a list of available cultural heritage resources. The identification and inventorying of resources is a first and fundamental step for the management of cultural resources in any standard cultural heritage institution.

- **Lack of interest in the World Heritage Convention by cultural heritage institutions**: Very few of cultural heritage institutions are aware of the World Heritage Convention and issues related to the management and utilisation of cultural resources are perceived with little interest in the national budget. A particular challenge for cultural heritage institutions remains the inter-institutional coordination and the management of social economic and cultural development with a focus on cultural resources development.

- **Inability of the government to recognize the role of cultural heritage institutions in sustainable development:** Lack of adequate recognition of the unique values and roles of cultural heritage institutions in sustainability development. Cultural sustainability has become a growing priority within sustainable development agendas, and is now often depicted as a fourth pillar, equal to social, economic, and environmental concerns (Loach, Rowley & Griffiths, 2016). These named scholars noted that one of the primary aims of museums and libraries is to hold cultural assets in trust for their communities, yet a series of challenges in recent years have put the long-term survival of these institutions at risk, with implications for the sustainability of the cultural assets within their care. It is this lack of adequate recognition of the

unique values and roles of cultural heritage institutions in sustainability development that brought about the poor management and consequently the poor utilisation of these priceless and invaluable resources of inestimable value.

Strategies for Promoting the Management of Cultural Resources in Libraries

- The interest of cultural heritage institutions should be included in the national budget for sustainable development. It is vital to have adequate funding in cultural heritage institutions. Without sufficient financial provision in the long term, it is impossible to create conditions for providing efficient services in any cultural organization.

- In Sula (2015), cultural heritage institutions should do everything they can to digitize materials as quickly as possible. These efforts make collections available to a much broader range of users.

- Cultural heritage institutions should be able to identify and prioritize local resources that are unique (Anderson, 2013) or they may want to attend to the needs of their immediate users, recognizing that this might be a smaller base than potential online users.

- In addition to making their collections accessible, cultural heritage institutions should also facilitate the process of citing those materials by providing suggestions with each item or collection in a variety of popular citation styles. Making citation easier will ensure that more collections are cited, increasing the visibility and impact measures for those collections.

- Digital technologies such as Portals, Blogs, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube etc should be used in cultural heritage institutions for easy and effective utilisation of cultural resources. These social media help the institutions improve their operational service delivery and provide efficient services to the users by maximizing effective utilisation

of cultural resources. Cultural heritage institutions that maintain websites interact more with the whole world and are networked not just within a geographical area.

- Cultural heritage institutions should look for partnerships on the web to expand resources, pool collective knowledge, share common history and the high cost of digitisation. Some of the examples of these digital partnership include the World Digital Library, Library and Archives in Canada, IMLS (Institute of Museums and Library Service) etc. These partnerships should enable free, online, multilingual access to significant primary materials from cultures globally.

- The identification and inventorying of cultural heritage is a first and fundamental step for gaining a general idea of the richness and diversity of the cultural heritage in a given city or territory (Craterre, 2006). He noted that a comprehensive inventory of cultural heritage should encompass all types of heritage whether movable or immovable, tangible or intangible.

Conclusion

The management of cultural resources is intended to encourage the creation of new digital resources, improve its accessibility and usability, and promote a systematic approach to the holdings of cultural heritage institutions. Libraries as cultural heritage institutions should offer search and access to all types of collections of digitized cultural resources in museums, libraries and archives all over the world. Cultural heritage institutions are expected to adopt the basic principles of management in their operational services and should ensure that all cultural heritage digitization related activities are prioritized by project forecasts and a robust guideline; developing new principles to draw attention to cultural heritage resources in cultural heritage institutions in order to maximize their effective utilization.

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