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# Libraries in the Globalisation Era

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#### **Abstract**

The danger of globalization is that, nowadays, with the expansion of human activities beyond physical limits and the expansion of legislative spheres of influence, at global level, a certain decline of democratic values was reached. The globalization offers a picture dominated by multinational corporations, global financial markets, many NGOs and others, which, by their nature, exceed state borders, but, often, also the legislative or moral limits. In the light of globalization, the danger of turning the public institutions into commercial entities, by transforming them into simple structures dependent on economic markets and by altering the relations between the institution and the user, is greater. There is a certain imbalance between western and eastern European markets and that is also to be felt in this kind of future competitive cultural climates, if we let our public institutions be governed by marketing strategy and financial targets. From this point of view, the cultural diversity, the chance of growth and development even for small and financially weak communities and the freedom of expression are put at risk, if the public cultural institutions copy the business and entrepreneurship models and accept to subordinate their activity and existential concepts to marketing practices and financial interests, dictated by the competitive market. Like Western libraries, the Romanian ones have gone through many changes, which occurred with the development of information technology and the increase in volume of electronic information and they tend to a librarian global context, defeating the physical barriers by interconnection in the online environment.

### **Rezumat**

Pericolul globalizării rezidă din faptul că, odată cu extinderea domeniilor activităților umane dincolo de limitele fizice, dar mai ales legislative, ale statelor-națiuni, s-a ajuns și la un oarecare declin al valorilor democratice și chiar la periclitarea independenței statale. Peisajul Globalizării este dominat de corporațiile multinaționale, de piețele financiare globale, de organizații nonguvernamentale și altele asemenea, care, prin natura lor, depășesc granițele statale, dar de multe ori și pe cele legislative sau morale. În lumina globalizării, pericolul acesta al comercializării instituțiilor publice, prin transformarea acestora în structuri dependente de piețele economice și prin alterarea relațiilor dintre instituție și utilizator, este și mai mare. Părerea noastră este că neputința instituțiilor noastre culturale va fi din ce în ce mai mare, pe măsură ce acestea se vor complace situației concurențiale dictate de strategii de marketing și targeturi financiare globale. În acest sens, diversitatea culturală, șansa creșterii și dezvoltării chiar și a comunităților mici și slabe din punct de vedere financiar, precum și libertatea de exprimare sunt puse în pericol în situația în

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care instituțiile culturale publice se mulează pe modelele antreprenoriale și acceptă să-și subordoneze activitatea și principiile existențiale conceptelor și practicilor de marketing și ale intereselor financiare, dictate de piața concurențială. La fel ca bibliotecile occidentale, bibliotecile românești au trecut prin numeroase schimbări, survenite odată cu dezvoltarea tehnologiei informației și creșterea volumului de informație în format electronic, iar odată cu depășirea barierelor fizice prin interconectarea bibliotecilor în mediul on-line se tinde și la noi la un context bibliotecar global.

**Keywords:** globalisation, commercialization, adaptation, virtual libraries, information science, cultural values

# 1. The Libraries and the "Democratic Public Sphere"

Librarians and libraries are those who, through continuous work and dedication, make possible the existence of the ideal of democratic public sphere. Only by organizing orderly and rational these values and these cultural products of humanity, through rigorous cataloging, there is hope for survival of this ideal, which continuously supports the idea of democratic legitimacy. German theorist Jürgen Habermas speaks in his writings about the importance of libraries and of librarians work in the evolutionary process of democracy over time. According to him, only by preserving different "voices", perspectives and opinions, in other words by keeping information in its diversity, sometimes contradictory, the true means of building democracy are kept. [1] Libraries must fight to eliminate censorship and discrimination of any kind.

Habermas speaks about the fundamental link that exists between us as social, human beings, between our beliefs and the idea of democracy and the need to support it and cultivate it. Developing the "democratic public sphere", outlining the context and ambience that is conducive to the development of democracy, it has led to an intense activity of foundation of many public cultural institutions in the nineteenth century.

However, today there is a growing problem in "democratic public sphere", namely the corruption – which manifests in communication processes and all media easily, due to monopolization of information resources by multinational conglomerates, both in the online environment, and in the printed publications and press.

On the other hand, in America for instance, in a relatively hostile and very competitive environment, libraries policy has changed, targeting a strong economic vision and the idea of profitability. The example of other institutions and their practices of entrepreneurial vision changed the libraries, directing them toward a new economy and a so called information capitalism. [2] That is how it came to changing roles: the former *users* of libraries have become the new *customers*, and the libraries have adopted specific marketing practices. This new approach also gives birth to a certain competition between libraries themselves and between libraries and bookstores, which "fight" for attracting customers.

This dominance of the economic dimension over all the other, including the cultural ones, is criticized by some for a long time in America and it seems that is becoming a problem on the European continent, as well. Management theorist Henry Mintzberg reveals the seriousness of this issue, the dominance of economic sphere over all other spheres of public activity, such as health care, social services, education, environmental protection and scientific research; he says in an article from '96 that "we are intoxicated with the triumph of capitalism over communism and, in consequence, irresponsibly, we took and imported, on a large scale, the business models and principles into public institutions". [3]

The functioning of public institutions based on businesses and enterprises principles which involve, among other things, a proper and objective measure of performance. But, as Mintzberg highlights, not all public activities can be precisely and mathematically measured. What objective criteria could determine whether or not a teacher is a good teacher, or a librarian is a god librarian? Mintzberg believes that this dependence on business and marketing practices increase the gap between modern society and democratic ideal.

So there is this tendency to encourage libraries to increasingly focus on getting private funds, sponsorships, raise taxes and develop their economic activities, in order to cover their financial needs and to be less dependent on public funds. It is a double-edged question, because, on the one hand, these private financing can be beneficial and may liberate the library of political influence, through budgetary funds, but on the other hand, there is the risk of transforming it in a less public and less accessible institution, a more selective and a more expensive one.

This idea of perceiving the relation between user and library as one between a client and a system of services push the institution toward an entrepreneurial model, as we discussed earlier. This relationship client-library automatically implies a relationship like request-offer specific to financial markets of any kind. So the customer's need should entail a more prompt response by the bidder, in this case the library, which should satisfy its demand as well and as fast as possible. The instant access to information through a somehow automated response is not an educational model and has no connection with learning or research processes. What is lost in such a relationship, among others? It is lost the educational dimension, but also the leverage or the instrument used for stimulating the democratic public sphere, based on concepts as diversity, communication, argumentation, multiculturalism, etc.

John Buschman sees in this process of reconceptualization of libraries a degradation and a demolition of the fundamental principles of these institutions. In the process, in which is expected a return on investment from those served by the libraries, the social and the democratic functions of libraries are changing; the libraries, spaces of research, thinking and reading are turning into some spaces that pragmatically represent the social capital of the community. [2]

This trend of transforming public institutions in entrepreneurial organizations seriously affects their image. It has come to the serious situation in which public institutions are discredited because the fundamental concept under which they work: their public character. The word "public", associated to schools, kindergartens, libraries or other institutions, came to have negative connotations, a fashionable idea being that in the private sector things are done better and the quality standards are much higher. [4]

In conclusion, it is important for libraries to structure their services and their collections around the public interest and around cultural, social and democratic values and not around the economic interests of the institution. Buschman urges libraries to distance themselves as much as possible by a democracy of consumers, in which the only voters are those who can afford this privilege. The free deliberation and the informed communication remain the essence of education and democracy. [4]

## 2. Libraries in the Globalisation Era

As globalization has no clear, unique and generally accepted definition, further on, when we will refer to it, we will be talking specifically about its economic and cultural dimensions. The globalization describes a multi-causal process, reflecting the implications and repercussions that various actions and trends from one part of the globe could have in a completely different part.

Very often, the term globalization is used when talking about the changes in society and in the world economy, along with the intensification of international trade and also with the increased cultural exchanges.

The danger of globalization lies, among others, in the fact that, along with the expansion of human activity areas beyond physical limits, but especially beyond the legislative limits of the nation-states, it also began a certain decline in what concerns the democratic values, endangering even the independence of the states. Globalization landscape is dominated by multinational corporations, by the global financial markets, or the NGOs, which, by their nature, go beyond state borders, but, often, also beyond legal or moral limits.

As we saw in the previous chapter, this danger of commercialization of public institutions, by making them dependent on economic markets and by altering the relations between the institution and the user, is even greater in the light of globalization. Our opinion is that the helplessness of our cultural institutions, in direct competition with more developed ones in other countries will increase as they will accept the competitive situation dictated by marketing strategies and overall financial targets. There is this truth according to which, in a free market and a competitive business environment, will resist the one who has the largest financial resources and who succeeds, by any means, to impose and to capture customers. In this sense, cultural diversity, the chance of growth and development even for small and financially weak communities is endangered. The freedom of expression (through lack of the necessary means of expression) is also put at risk if public institutions (and we mean especially the cultural ones) fit the business models and accept to subordinate their activity and their existential concepts and principles to practices of marketing and financial interests, dictated by the competitive market.

Another sensible problem is that of the computerization of library and its translation to the online environment, as virtual libraries and library networks. It is true that centralizing the information makes it more accessible and allows simultaneous access to multiple information spheres, from different locations and areas. But on the other hand, one can't ignore that it also expose, somehow, the local libraries to the competitive environment of globalization. The XXI century man's pragmatism, a man always oriented towards streamlining its activities and towards getting the maximum effect with minimum means, eventually threatens the *marketability* of particular information or local cultural resources, part of a less desired market segment or even less publicized or promoted.

The problem is that, as explained in the preceding section, one can't quantify as easy an educational or cultural activity, as a commercial product can be quantified. And then, because of these quantifications, done by the user, the local cultural products might suffer and no longer find the *buyer* and slowly be taken off the market. The unification of cultural and informational resources should be made carefully, because there is a risk of cultural uniformity. We do not say that the idea of virtual library is bad and can't be well implemented, but we want to point out the existence of this danger, derived from those of globalization in general and we want to emphasize that it's very important to be taken into account in defining future strategies for the development of these networks of online libraries.

The specialists in Librarianship and Information Sciences in our country also emphasize the importance of adaptation of libraries and information systems to the new climate of globalization. For example, dr. Octavia-Luciana Porumbeanu talkes in an article about the libraries which should adapt and develop in order to face competition. She points out the importance of education and continuous perfection of libraries staff, also in terms of acquiring new skills and qualifications compatible to today's reality. [5]

The same as Western libraries, the Romanian ones have gone through many changes in response to the development of information technology and to the increasing volume of information in electronic format, being part today of a global librarian context. [5]

We were talking earlier about the threats of globalization in terms of mission and transformations of libraries as public institutions. Tomas Eloy Martinez says, in 2004, at an IFLA Congress: "The book resists, but the market advances like a horde. (...)The battles in times of globalization are no longer fought to conquer new readers or to create them, but to prevent the market from uneducating them, and to prevent readers from giving up the habit of regarding the book as way of looking at themselves too. Globalization, together with oceans of information to process and books to read, has engendered, at the same time, abysses of inequality which before had been impossible to imagine, because what is globalized is the market, not people." [6]

## 3. The interior design in libraries

## 3.1 The library and the architect

Librarians and architects should work together to establish appropriate strategies to improve the functionality and the comfort of the interior spaces of the library. In reality, often, this is not the case and a poor communication, a lack of organization and structuring of priorities of each party involved in the design of libraries are causes to conflicting situations between architects and librarians or libraries managers.

Jeannette Woodward<sup>1</sup> outlines some of the problems that occur when the architects will and the librarians will are not the same. According to her, architects seem not to be aware of the overabundance of personal computers, duplicators, printers, devices for reading micro-films and other technological objects that fill the contemporary libraries space, not paying enough attention for projecting proper spaces for them. She also criticizes the immense central lobbies, developed on several levels, which, along with a bad design of climate control system, make variations of temperature in different spaces of the library and thus create an unpleasant and uncomfortable general ambiance. [7]

It is important that the discussions about the design theme to be focus on the needs and requirements of librarians and architects should try to resolve them as accurate as possible. Architecture must respond to these needs, best known by librarians, who are, in a way, the everyday users of all spaces of the library. The opinions of the users are also very important, but their needs and requirements can be very well represented and transmitted by librarians, through studies, surveys and statistics performed annually. Also, the users use only a certain part of the library, the public part so to say, while librarians, of course, do have access throughout the entire building and know best the way the building should work.

It is therefore important that the interior spaces will subordinate to functionality and sacrifice, if necessary, the vision or the conceptual view of the architect, in favor to the vision of the librarian, who is focused on the effective functioning of library and user satisfaction. Also, Miss Woodward says that is very important to have an individualized architectural design, perfectly adapted to each library, because the particular rigors of each institution dictate a particular functional scheme and require personalized architectural image.

Jeannette Woodward highlights some of the imperatives in designing library spaces: "users will enter the building through one door and all the other doors will be escape doors, in emergency situations; the security system of the collection materials has alarm devices at each exit doors,

emergency or not; the amount of space that should be reserved for storing books and other visual materials with free access to shelf space and the amount of space dedicated to terminals, the point accesses to the database; the library should be a place of study, in which silence and sound insulation is essential." [7]

This communication problem is actually with double meaning, since it seems that the architects also have their discontents. Architect Wendell Wickerham, member of the architectural office Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott is frustrated that architects lose contact with both library staff, and the activities carried out there, once they have accomplished their mission and completed the process of designing and building the library. He believes it's important that librarians and library managers continue to inform the architects about all the problems and successes of their project, once they begin to use the new buildings and that they should try to understand and appreciate the values and the ideas of architects as long as they, in their implementation, do not adversely affect the operation of the library. [8]

#### 3.2 Design trends

Because today, the libraries host a variety of activities, one of the main challenges in designing and planning the interior spaces of libraries is to keep a balance between several functions and needs, often in opposition. Some examples of such contradictory needs that Sam Demas and Jeffrey A. Scherer signal, would be: quiet versus noise, isolation versus interaction, conservation / preservation versus food and drink, order versus disorder, durability versus comfort, security versus openness or limited hours versus-hour. [9]

The functional design of interior spaces must constantly respond to the particular needs of the local community. For example, in a Public Library in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota, it was arranged a so-called "gossip corner", as the community expressed the desire to have a specially arranged space where citizens can meet informally and can have open discussions, so a similar space as functionality to the ancient Greek Agora. Or, another example, in Carmel, Indiana, the Carmel Caly Public Library offered a computer-free zone to its public, a space intended only for reading, quietly, as the community wanted. [9]

However, the direct implications of the technological development, which bring new needs of space configuration, must be considered. The newly created so called "stations" for consultation of digital information, namely computers with internet access and electronic data bases, seem to occupy more space than the consultation of printed books seats. According to PLA (Public Library Association) for a consultation of printed books the need of space is about 1.8 square meters, while a computer station occupies about 4.2 square meters. [10] Access to information in electronic format, catalogs and electronic chips and internet is required in an open, contemporary library. So the space requirements of contemporary library grow because of these issues.

This space also increases due to the diversification of library functions nowadays. The library is perceived by the eyes of the community as a PLACE - as a meeting place, a place for socializing, sharing ideas, like a special place in the city, recognizable and with strong identity, a place where diverse activities can be performed, from exhibitions and book launches, to workshops for children or language courses. A municipal library can't be conceived today without a special hall dedicated to conferences, or without an exhibition space, most often flexible, coupled with a foyer and a cafébar.

There is also the problem of measuring this need, specifically, in a certain case. For this, the PLA<sup>2</sup> provides annual statistics and standards. There are also made some assessments in terms of estimated increase of collections, the number of future readers and predictions about technological

development and the possibility of starting new programs at the institution. The spatial conception of a library should pay a special attention to the problem of natural and artificial lighting, acoustics and spatial flexibility - for possible refurbishments or functional zoning changes.

The volume orientation, if rectangular, is best to follow the E-V direction, as light the Eastern light in the morning and the Western light in the evening are harder to control than the northern or southern ones, which follow symmetrical arcs throughout the day. In temperate climates it is preferable to create some sunscreens for the southern facades, which should control the light in the warmer months of the year.

The libraries need differentiated lighting for each functional area, for open shelves areas, for stations study, for computer stations or for conference spaces. Direct sunlight can disturb through the reflections that appear on computer screens or can actually harm and endanger the integrity of books. Large open spaces can be illuminated with artificial light and, indirectly, by the reflection of sunlight on the white ceiling surfaces; there can also be study lamps for classical posts, which have the quality to create an intimate, quiet, conducive ambiance for reading. [10]

Libraries are often illuminated by top, the zenithal light being beneficial by increasing the surface that can be dedicated to study stations. For natural illumination of too deep spaces are recommended the atriums as a solution. Today the use of natural light is also a priority due to a policy of saving electricity.

In terms of acoustic comfort in a library, on the one hand we speak of a problem generated by the dispersed computer stations in reading areas, and, on the other hand there is a problem caused by intense interactions and discussions between users themselves or between users and the staff, which gives guidance and explanations. That does not mean there are no more places for studying in quiet, but the meeting areas, the hallways, the foyers are all quite noisy. We must not forget the computers, the printers, the copiers, which all generate background noise. Therefore, some communities may have some preferences related to personal habits and pleasures of their members and may ask particular designing of spaces. It is not always easy to find these preferences because, often, the community is not asked or she does not make its preferences known. In conclusion, it is very important to have a good communication between all parties involved in the design of a library: users, librarians and architects.

The acoustical problems in libraries were discussed in a program of ALA (American Library Association) in 1998, entitled "Not Just Shhh Anymore: Improving Library Acoustics." Jack Wrightson, a specialist in acoustics, scores three categories of acoustic problems: 1 - intrusive noise, the one appeared in the vicinity of a meeting or a conference room, 2 – the noise reverberated in certain spatial configurations (the case of vaulted ceilings, for example) and 3 - the lack of dialogue intimacy, especially in the nearby staff positions. The first problem would be solved by logical grouping of noisy functions, such as conference rooms, meeting rooms and rooms for other collective activities. For solving the reverberations issue, the design stage is crucial and the use of soundproofing construction materials (like PVC based flooring, on a sound absorbing layer) and the designing of glazed openings are the best ways to prevent these reverberations. [11]

We could say that the new technologies have a strong impact on libraries in three ways: through information systems for information accessibility, through organizing and cataloging systems and through the electronic format information itself (audio, video, text, etc.).

The electronic catalogs entail, on the one hand, the need for more storage space for terminals and, on the other hand, the need of a smaller number of personnel in the Cataloging Sector. The electronic information, accessible in modern libraries today, is likely to be accessed tomorrow directly via the internet at home, transforming the future library into a more and more virtual one.

And now we will go through some of the various special spaces dedicated to specific activities in libraries, trying to point out the key elements in solving the indoor design and the architectural image.

#### 3.2.1 The spaces for study and reading

The study can be made in private or collectively. Today is a challenge that the designer/architect to be sufficiently skillful to keep a good proportion and arrangement of these different areas of study – the individual and the collective ones, providing continuous flexibility, in order to adapt to the changing needs of the community.

In the case of university libraries, many students prefer to use them for study, because it offers them the right ambience and the working atmosphere that stimulates their work. But this can also be the case of public libraries, where individuals can go to train and benefit from the same ambiance and assistance from qualified personnel. Often, different themed courses, organized by libraries, with the collaboration of specialists and teachers to instruct the course participants, are also an attraction for members of smaller communities.

The furnishing of these spaces can be done in a classic manner, using the typical position of study sat down at the table, where one can write, read or use the laptop or the tablet, or it can be done in a more confortable manner. Thus, the use of armchairs and sofas, the small coffee tables will give a more relaxed position. This comfortable way of using the new technology may be preferred by some, depending on the activity that they carry on.

## 3.2.2 Group workspaces

These shared workspaces are generally completely or partially isolated from the rest of the workstations in the library, both to protect the others from the implicit teamwork noise and to provide the group with the right framework for conversations and debates. These spaces are often used for lectures or for "after school" activities which the library program may provide.

We could also include in this category the so called meeting rooms, which are designed to accommodate the assembly of relatively small groups of 5-10 people and for which there seems to be an increasingly demand. These rooms can also be rented from the library by groups of individuals who want to keep private sessions (like firms, NGOs or various associations) or can be offered to use, free of charge, for holding public or private meetings. However, nowadays the libraries can't manage without these extra spaces, these kinds of activities slowly eclipsing the specific, traditional ones.

## 3.2.3 The conference rooms

Depending on the nature and size of the community the library serves, these conference rooms will be designed as independent spaces or will be overlaid to group working spaces, earlier mentioned.

For a small community, a working group room or the union of two such spaces, through the use of movable walls and lightweight materials, could be the solution for holding conferences, lectures and other such activities. However, for larger communities, like a small or medium-sized city, the library should have a conference room with a few dozen seats, maybe up to 100-150. Often, the solution is again a union of several small of spaces, using mobile wall systems, which either fold or slide and allow new spatial configurations.

## 3.2.4 Technology-free zones

Although the general tendency is to fill the libraries with technological devices, from computers and terminals for catalogs, printers and scanners of all kinds, there is this tendency to respond to users requests to have free-technology zones, where the buzz of electronic equipment is no longer heard and the atmosphere of study and reading is the same as before the technological era.

Almost without exception a technological innovation brings, on the one hand, certain benefits and, on the other, some disadvantages, which then begin to bother us and to be more intrusive, until we need to look for solutions and try to neutralize these negative effects. The paradox is that, generally, the solution is a new technological innovation and the cycle repeats, thus entering into a sort of a vicious circle of technologies.

Therefore, some architects and designers have found the solution for libraries, a return to a pleasant, well-known ambiance, well experienced over time, by designing these isolated spaces, generally closed, having a good sound insulation, where are not present any technological instruments and where the act of reading is not disturbed by any noises.

## 3.2.5 Archives and Special Collections

In general, one or more libraries have special collections, related to the local history and local values. These collections, having as subject an important local family, arts, industries, local food, or men of culture and artists which the community respects and honors, are, in fact, some niche collections, which often have a special space for their exposure, for a better visibility and accessibility.

These exhibition spaces for the special collections can take the form of some rooms or only some shelves and showcases, properly arranged and marked.

### 3.2.6 "What's new" sections

There is a trend with these sections in which librarians make recommendations about the latest publications or the most wanted titles. "What's new" is a practice borrowed from the marketing techniques, used by bookstores for example, meant to attract and target a certain category of readers.

Our opinion is that the socio-cultural implications these practices could have them, by urging readers toward certain types of readings, are too deep and sensitive and shouldn't be used without consulting sociologists and psychologists specialists. There is also the risk of marketing the library and the risk to form questionable cultural trends and tastes.

#### 3.3 The ambience

Until the middle of the twentieth century, the libraries, in the western world, were conceived and designed as a whole, architects and designers paying close attention to all the details and considering architecture at least as important as users and books, in other words "the casing" as important as the content. The spaces for reading, the large halls were designed as to transmit the function through their image and to highlight the important role they have in the preservation and promotion of knowledge and culture. A very eloquent example of the American people would be the so called "Rose Reading Room", in the New York public library, which reflects very well the grandeur and the civic virtues.

Today, it is a mission to give libraries a warm image, more comfort and, at the same time, to impregnate them with a dose of "local air", or local specificity and contextuality. Libraries identity is to be defined more and more by local conditions and by highlighting the local community's cultural treasures. This can often be attained by using local materials, specific to a geographical area or a settlement, by thinking the spaces in a particular manner, focused on user's preferences, and by thinking of strategies oriented on local needs.

Sam Demas and Jeffrey A. Scherer say that to library is not so important the amount as the quality of space. A quality space, capable of transmitting the *genius loci* and that is tributary to local history, can compensate quantitative shortcomings and bring a unique contribution to the power of community. [9]

# 4. Conclusions - Contextual libraries – adapted libraries

The architecture of libraries not always relies on an iconic image and do not always adopt the international style, lacking in identity and contextuality. Further, we will briefly introduce two examples of contextualist architecture, place anchored and related to interpretations, which, by design are meant to keep a memory of the place and to highlight a specific identity.

Especially for small town libraries, it is very important the local community to identify with their image and appropriate the spaces they use. There are contextualist adaptations of libraries that give rise to special architecture programs, which are shaped around the specific needs of a community and around a particular place. We should think the "place" here in the broad sense that includes defining a geographic area, with certain specific characteristics. We will see, in the following examples, that this contextualist approach may be the result of interrelation with a broader or a narrower context, so may respond to constraints and shaping forces of a place (geographic area, city) or a geometrical space (meaning a specific type of building or edifice).

#### 5. Notes

- 1. Jeannette Woodward is the Director of Wind River Library. After a career in academic libraries, most recently as the Deputy Director of David Adamany at Wayne State University Library, she began a second career in public libraries serving as a director of the System Fremont County Library, in the foothills of Wind River of Wyoming. She holds a master's degree in information and library sciences at Rutgers University, and doctoral studies at the University of Texas, Austin.
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