Time-biased knowledge practices in cultural heritage institutions

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Introduction

The increasing discussion on sustainable development goals challenges us to review all areas of our society and its activities critically. Many accounts agree that the three pillars of sustainability are environmental, economic, and social (Purvis et al., 2019). Among others, institutions hosting cultural heritage (CH), here specifically archives and libraries, have begun to comply with: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations, 1987). In the context of CH, there are concerns about maintaining the diversity of cultures. This has encouraged arguments for including cultural sustainability as the fourth pillar of sustainability (Barthel-Bouchier, 2016).

Sustainable solutions are fundamentally related to time, as *sustainable* means "to cause or allow something to continue for a period of time"[1]. Organizations should be well equipped to orient their activities towards this new temporal goal because time and timing have been the focus of managerial interest for decades. Nevertheless, vague concepts of time and overlapping temporal structures characterize the organizational discourses and knowledge management practices (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002).

This presentation elaborates on the diverse approaches to time in CH institutions. Drawing from literature, we focus on temporal orientations of practices that deal with organizational knowledge, i.e., knowledge created and used within and for an organization (c.f., Ichijo & Nonaka, 2007). As an instrument of study, we utilize the notion of time-related bias by Harold Innis (1991). Innis has argued that the interaction between media form and social reality creates biases, which strongly affect society's cultural orientation and values (Innis, 1991). We transfer the idea of time-bias to the domain of our interest and ask: *What kinds of temporal orientations, or biases, can be detected in CH institutions' knowledge practices?* The outcome of these elaborations will inform the conceptual and epistemological foundations of our research about cultural sustainability in CH institutions.

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[1]   https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/sustainable

Temporal orientation of knowledge practices in cultural heritage institutions

From the societal point of view, archives and libraries that host CH take care of the indispensable knowledge resources and the shared memory of humankind (Ovenden, 2020). On the level of CH institutions, the concept refers to tangible or intangible artefacts and related work. For archivists and librarians, CH is a target for collecting, managing and disseminating activities (Tuomi-Nikula et al., 2013).

Social theories of practice explain how our everyday activities emerge, exist, and die. The currently dominant understanding emphasizes social practices' dynamic, local and intrapersonal nature (Shove et al., 2012; Whitworth et al., 2016). Avoiding too intensive generalizations, we can still recognize core knowledge practices in CH institutions: curation of collections and information management.

The primary time orientation of CH collections' curation is to the *past*. Archivists and librarians work to acquire, preserve and, occasionally, abandon materials that record history, i.e., knowledge of bygone times. The purpose of storing and using CH is to inform the present and future. Still, the preserving ethos in hosting institutions can be described as "passion for the past". (E.g., Ovenden, 2020; Tuomi-Nikula et al., 2013.)

For millennia, archivists and librarians have improved their practices of information management. They catalogue and index the knowledge resources in their care, and produce descriptive metadata, classifications, and thesauri for making information accessible. The dominant temporal focus of these activities is on the *present*. (E.g., Cook, 1997; Ovenden, 2020.)

During the past decades, the customer-centric and value-measuring paradigm has turned the temporal orientation of information management towards *the near future*. The transition to digital technology and, recently, to algorithm-powered information management, also in the context of CH, has been motivated by the expectations of efficiency and speed. Archives and libraries nowadays strive for excellence in their knowledge ecosystems. Thus, the ethos of competition and value-creation through constant change has penetrated the CH institutions. (E.g., Cook, 1997; Gasparini & Kautonen, 2022; Grosch, 2020.)

Time-biased organizational knowledge practices

The aspirations of sustainability are oriented towards *the distant future*. Understanding the expectations of several generations ahead may be impossible, but some needs and issues can be anticipated by evaluating the validity of previous decisions in today's context. When CH institutions' history has been reviewed, their knowledge practices have been considered unacceptable from today's perspective. For example, the traces of colonialism in archives and their cataloguing have been seen as processes of oppression and exclusion (Hupaniittu & Peltonen, 2021).

The inspection of CH institutions' knowledge practices indicates time-biases that originate from the different temporal perspectives and the ethos of activities. The work of archivists and librarians may appear as a confusing mix of orientation to the past, the aspiration for greater speed of daily activities, and anticipation of unknown future needs. These biases of time are surely impossible to avoid. However, following Innis's arguments, we can increase our understanding of its power by "attempting to appraise the character of the time concept" (Innis, 1991, 62).

In conclusion, we argue that there is a need for a new sense of time in cultural heritage institutions. This sense acknowledges the coexistence of different temporalities and the biased time in organizational knowledge practices.

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