Dynamic Library Services during Extreme Events: the case of the 2010 Earthquake and Tsunami in Chile

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Abstract:

Extreme events include natural and man-made emergencies, disasters, and catastrophes of exceptional and unthinkable magnitude, which surpass the capacity of local government to effectively respond. Libraries can play important roles in preventing and responding to disasters of emergency situations ranging from ICT-related services, a social public space, and trained librarians who are engaged with their communities. Despite their valuable role they are seldom considered instrumental in national emergency plains. For this paper, we studied the roles the Chilean libraries played after 2010 earthquake and tsunami. We traveled to Chile in February 2011, one year after the disaster and conducted interviews and focus groups with librarians, users, non-governmental organizations with library and internet focus, as well as local and national government officials to better understand the roles the libraries played. Based on the data analysis, we have developed recommendations for re-thinking library response during extreme event scenarios through training and effective use of ICTs and planning and preparedness. We conclude libraries should be information's first responders.

Libraries have long provided access to necessary information for their communities and as technologies have grown and morphed, libraries have reinvented themselves to stay current and relevant. "As new technologies were introduced they embraced them, expanding the library's realm to include information in the latest formats and using them to promote library usage" (Preer 2006, p. 494). After the devastating 8.8 earthquake and subsequent tsunami, different initiatives were implemented, driven by the need to provide communication access to the citizens of affected areas, giving them the opportunity to receive critical information in the aftermath of the disaster and enabling them to communicate with friends and family. These initiatives were implemented through different Public

Internet Access Points (PIAPs) including libraries, telecenters, and mobile laboratories and emerged organically from the efforts of different actors ranging from the private sector, the government, to non-governmental organizations linked to citizen movements.

Libraries have the opportunity to provide valuable services during the times when communities most need them. Unfortunately in many countries, libraries and other information venues are not considered part of the emergency response infrastructure and are therefore not funded to participate during disasters. "In the US, new federal policy mandates conformance to personnel and procedural response system that relies on a command-and-control model, where a designated authority controls personnel and resources in a hierarchical reporting structure for the purposes of executing a mission." (Palen & Liu, 2007, p. 728). In order for their response to be effective, governments must recognize libraries and telecenters as critical to disaster response and incorporate them into disaster and emergency plans. Libraries and librarians in Chile played profound roles in the response and the recovery of their local communities. This paper documents the libraries' response and makes a case of why libraries should be considered critical infrastructure during extreme events allowing them to participate in planning for disasters at a governmental level.

Biographies:

- Maria Garrido: I am a researcher at the Technology & Social Change Group at the University of Washington Information School. My research explores how people in communities facing social and economic challenges use information and communication technologies to promote social and economic development and advance social change. I study technology appropriation in the context of social movements and in international migration.
- Beth Joy Patin was the head librarian at Holy Cross School for Boys in 2005, three months before the school was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. Through grants she acquired from the Department of Education, the Louisiana Library Association and the Laura Bush Foundation for America's Libraries, Patin was able to design and rebuild the library and collection. April 2007 Patin was a finalist in the Laura Bush Foundation for American's Libraries *Gulf Coast School Library Recovery Initiative* and hosted the grant ceremony on Holy Cross's Lower 9th Ward Campus. In 2009, she was named an Emerging Leader for the *American Library Association* and received a scholarship from the *American Association of School Librarians* to travel to both the Mid-Winter and Annual ALA conferences. In September 2009, Beth began studying crisis informatics at the iSchool at the University of Washington supported by the Washington Doctorial Initiative Fellowship and the *Nancy Gershenfeld Scholarship.* Her research focuses on the information needs during crisis and the roles libraries can play during emergencies and disasters.