

An Imaginaire

Makerspaces as Radical Change in the Library Faith

SHANNON CRAWFORD BARNISKIS, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MILWAUKEE

BACKGROUND

Library Faith as Imaginaire

Dewey introduced the concept of “library faith,” a belief that libraries could positively impact society. In the early years of public libraries, this library faith “consisted in a belief in the value of the printed word, especially of the book, the reading of which is held to be good in itself or from its reading flows that which is good” (Leigh, 1950, p. 12).

The library faith acts as an imaginaire (Flichy, 2007), a collective vision about a socio-technical system, which is necessary to its implementation and continuation. A library faith imaginaire maintains that public libraries can beneficially impact society through the provision of publicly funded services. How libraries may benefit society changes over the years, and with new social goals, values and technologies.

Dresang’s (2013) radical change theory is a new imaginaire, in which connectivity, interactivity, and access act as modes of transmission for this new type of library service: makerspaces and other library creative places.

THE METHOD

Discourse Analysis

The call for library makerspaces reflects an imaginaire operating in a technological mode, often for instrumental goals of economic development. According to a discourse analysis of 14 librarian interviews and analysis of 16 books and articles on library makerspaces, this is a shift in how library services are presented and understood, which align with Dresang’s radical change theory.

LIBRARY FAITH IMAGINAIRES

Main Instrumental Goals

Civic behavior
Acculturation
Education
Economic development
Community resilience
Democracy

Main Instrumental Modes

Reading and books
Rules of conduct
Spatial arrangements
Professional skills & principles
Literacies
Social interactions
Technology

What is Missing?

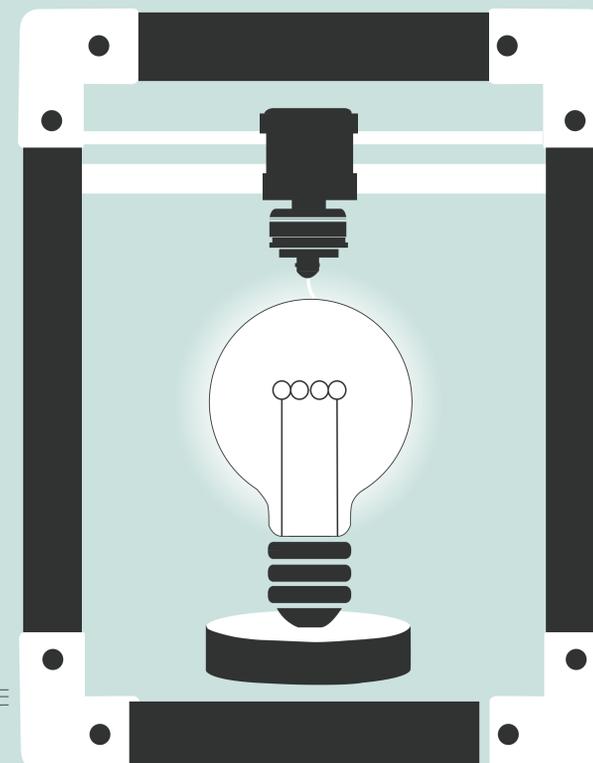
Shared governance
Convivial power relations (Illich, 1973)

A RADICAL CHANGE?

Connectivity, Interactivity, and Access

In this instantiation of the library faith, makerspaces benefit society by providing access to tools for people to self-train in economically-desirable skills. This understanding of the faith re-centers public library services in a neoliberal culture of innovation, which advocates individualist entrepreneurialism and creativity as instrumental for economic stability.

It also grounds library services in a radical change of connectivity, interactivity and access to tools and skills. However, it misses key components of authentically interactive or connective services, in which users initiate and have power over the tools, goals, and modes of use of these spaces. A truly radical change would involve convivial distributions of power among library users and institutional actors.



Further
Information

Contact me: crawfo55@uwm.edu
shannonbarniskis.com



References

- Dresang, E. T. (2013). Digital age libraries and youth: Learning labs, literacy, leaders, radical resources. In J. Beheshti & A. Large (Eds.), *The information behavior of a new generation: Children and teens in the 21st century* (pp. 93-116). Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.
- Flichy, P. (2007). *The internet imaginaire*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Illich, I. (1973). *Tools for conviviality*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Leigh, R. D. (1950). *The Public Library in the United States; The General Report of the Public Library Inquiry*. New York: Columbia University Press.