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The Documentation Centre of the Catalan Data Protection Authority: implementing information policies to obtain a successful library service

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the management of the Documentation Centre of the Catalan Data Protection Authority since its creation in 2004 until date. It describes the information policies followed to obtain a successful library service within the organisation.

The main topics are the origin of the Documentation Centre, its definition and type, the problem of giving it a name, mission and functions, collection management, services, users, how to communicate, communication tools, strengthening actions and conclusions.

Introduction: brief approach to data protection, the Catalan Data Protection Authority and the Documentation Centre

Personal Data Protection is a fundamental right protected by the Council of Europe (European Convention on Human Rights, 1950), the European Union (Directives 95/46/EC, 2002/58/EC, 2006/24/EC), Spanish Constitution (1978) and Catalan Statute of Autonomy (1979, amended 2006).

The Catalan Data Protection Authority (APDCAT)¹ was created in 2002, and its Statute regulated in 2003². It is an autonomous and independent authority whose competences in the public sector data are registration, control, inspection, sanction and resolution, and also the adoption of proposals and instructions³.

I was contracted by the APDCAT in 2004 to create and manage a library service. I am the only librarian and provide services directly to the 35 people working in the organisation.

The collection is composed of 1000 titles, including monographs, serials, data bases, etc. It is part of the University Union Catalogue of Catalonia⁴.

The origin of the library

Considering the origins of the library, we must go to the origins of the APDCAT. It was a function mentioned in the APDCAT Statute: *to constitute and bring up-to-date a collection of documents in regard to personal data protection*. This was a good beginning but I thought that this function of the organisation should not be the mission of the future library.

I searched for more objectives or functions in the Statute that could be related to a library, and I found one more: *to provide information on the rights of persons in regard to the processing of personal data*. This could be taken into consideration as a goal for the library⁵, and helped avoid the notion of the library as a collection.

On the other hand, it was important to mention the applicable law: Act 4/1993 of the Library System of Catalonia. According to that, this may be a special library integrated within the System, having public access with some restrictions⁶.

What is the library?

A library is not just a collection of physical documents, not even a collection of resources of any type, nor a physical space. I wanted to use a proper definition: *a unit of information resources and services*. The meaning of this was not very easy to understand at the very beginning, but *information, resources* and *services* helped trying to explain that there may be something more complex and dynamic than just a collection. As Maria Goeckeritz wrote in the Recommendations for government libraries (IFLA 2007, p. 41), *it is important for library governing authorities, users, and staff to realize that the library is more than just books –it can be and is a full information service*.

¹ <http://www.apd.cat>

² See bibliographical references for Catalan Data Protection Authority.

³ For more information, see "The role of the Catalan Data Protection Authority in the control of Catalonian public sector data" (2006), <http://www.apd.cat/media/332.pdf>, p. 273-292.

⁴ http://ccuc.cbuc.cat/*eng

⁵ As explained further on, it was useful to specify the kind of users of the DC.

⁶ <http://www.gencat.net/eadop/imatges/1727/93082139.pdf>

What kind of library?

When you say *library*, some may think about a public library (a library for the public) the most popular and recurrent type. Thus it was important to clarify that this will be a library for the APDCAT – that is public-funded, but not principally for the public.

Public access may be permitted but restricted, as said before when quoting Act 4/1993.

According to Sanjay K. Bihani (IFLA 2008, p. 8), its type will be libraries of Government Agencies, Organisations or Projects (inside Libraries of the Executive). A definition is given: *These libraries work mainly to meet the needs of the decision makers, administrators and other employees of the government agency. These agencies are government-funded and usually autonomous but come under the control of government or a specific department or ministry.*

This explanation would fit the APDCAT case, but, as said before, it is an independent authority and thus does not come under any government control. This independence also includes the management of an own budget.

The problem of the name

The first name given was just *Library*, indeed a good word to define a unit of information resources and services.

Nevertheless, I felt that this term might make staff think about a public one and a collection of books, and I suggested the name of *Library – Documentation Centre*, just to say that the collection was not only made up of publications (books, journals, etc.).

In the end, my line managers decided to delete the word *library*, thus leaving *Documentation Centre* (DC), which is the current name. It is more modern, business and company like, and it seems to contemplate a wider range of resources type.

Mission and functions

In the beginning, the only duty to fulfil was *to constitute and bring up-to-date a collection of documents in regard to personal data protection*. It was very important to clarify that we needed to do more than this. By constituting and updating a collection you don't have a library nor a mission for a library.

Finally, the established mission was *to serve information needs of the APDCAT and its staff*. How to do it? By accomplishing some functions that had to be clearly expressed:

- Collection development and management.
Acquisition and lending are not the only tasks here. Selection, cataloguing, indexing, classification, organisation, preservation, evaluation, weeding, promotion and budget control are important activities too.

- Planning, management and evaluation of information services and systems pertinent to the APDCAT needs and functions.
The DC will have systems (intranet, OPAC, databases, etc.) and may provide services (lending, IL, reference, TOCs, etc.) which should be not only managed, but planned and evaluated.
- Providing access to information.
The DC should not only have the information or reveal where may be found, but give access to it. For instance, answering documentation petitions, creating new content alerts, etc.
- Evaluation of user needs and satisfaction. User education.
The DC will not exist just to be. The whole service should be focused on serving users. Thus, it is essential to know what they need, expect and get, as well as giving them a proper training on running and exploiting information systems, resources and services.

Collection management

There was a little confusion about what the collection really was.

The first thing to do was distinguish between the library collection and the personal collections.

Sometimes they could give personal documentation to the library just to keep it. In this case it was necessary to point out that gifts could only be accepted when they are relevant for the collection, and when they become part of it, will not be returned. They will be treated as property of APDCAT from then on.

Another difficult issue was receiving petitions for new acquisitions when they were expecting to use them personally. Information and documentation resources owned by the organisation could not be treated as personal property. Nevertheless, sometimes users need to have manuals, law codes, etc., at their work places to consult quite often. In these cases it makes no sense lending materials and recalling them to be placed back in the library. The solution was to make permanent deposits: materials are catalogued, are part of the collection and property of the organisation, but are placed at the users work places primarily for their use.

The second thing was to indicate that the collection was mainly composed of non-administrative documentation, thus excluding archive documents⁷. Some administrative documents may be included when having relevant content similar to a publication, but it was important to maintain files apart.

⁷ Archive was created 2007, after the Documentation Centre.

Not every material may be suitable to be part of the collection. When talking about physical documentation, it is not a matter of selection and quality only, it is also a matter of space.

Space is finite, and in this case, very little. What is more, the collection is dynamic: some items enter, others go out. Thus, I could justify my not hurrying to fill all the shelves at the very beginning.

Another topic that I wanted to introduce was the evaluation of subscriptions.

It may happen in some libraries or institutions that they subscribe a serial, database, etc. once, and never think of it again. Economic cost is doubly high: the price itself, and its permanence on the annual budget.

Communication here is important because these subscriptions may continue for years, just because users do not say if they are useful and consulted or not, and librarians do not ask.

The way to avoid this was evaluating before renewing. It could be done just by asking main users or activating an opinion forum.

Services

It was very important to establish that the DC should receive, manage, conserve, provide access to information and distribute documentation, thus avoiding some individualised actions.

For instance, in the beginning some people used to receive journals directly at their work place and then give them to the library quite a long time afterwards, when the contents were not current anymore. This had to be changed. Journals must be checked in at the DC and after that, brought to a specific person. Nevertheless, I try to avoid this kind of customized circulation of documents. It may be useful for the staff to receive, read and pass them to other colleague or to the library, but this means less visits to the DC (and less possibilities to discover other information) and less control over the collection. I only permit it in certain cases where just one or two people are interested. For other cases, I prefer to create alerts and TOCs to inform about what is new, and wait for their visits or documentation petitions.

This can be conflictive because sometimes it is difficult to find an equilibrium between serving specific users without prejudicing the whole.

Other problematic issue was that some people used data bases or electronic resources without the knowledge of the rest of their colleagues.

If the resource is fee-based, it is clear that DC should manage it. Even when it is single-user access, its existence should be known.

If the resource is free access, the user should communicate it to the DC in order to put it in the collection and make it visible through the information systems (OPAC, intranet, etc.).

This was difficult at the beginning, too. Some felt like they could not act at an individual level, but in the end, they realised that sharing is better because their range of types and number of information resources became wider.

It is said that a library room may not be used for meeting or speeches, because this fact may decrease access for consultation. The problem comes when there is a lack of space and it is a special library inside an organisation. As both aspects are true in our case, it is difficult to avoid these acts.

The way to show that the room should be used only for the library was to express that, although the room is not always occupied for reading, users need to have access at any time - at least for picking up or bringing back items, because they consult documents mainly at their personal work spaces. If they find the library occupied many times, the document tend to be held longer, the DC resources used less, and distrust in the library service may grow.

Another topic that contributed to the difficulty of finding a balance between serving users individually and serving them as a whole, was to regulate, control and recall loans.

Users tend to hold documents for very long, as they feel that they could be useful for all that time. The way to avoid this was to introduce the culture of consulting or borrowing and returning: documents should circulate within the organisation without sticking at certain points. Users will discover that there are enough copies and they are correctly located in the DC.

Users

Once it was defined that the library service is focused mainly on the staff, I found some basis for considering external users too. As said before, there is one APDCAT function that may be taken into account (*to provide information on the rights of persons in regard to the processing of personal data*) and a special libraries definition given by the Catalan law (*they are part of the Library System of Catalonia and give access to the public with some restrictions*).

I had to speak to my line managers in order to define what kind of external users may come and what services they may receive.

The decision was that they are the employees of the public administration, people attached to universities, and the general public when doing research in the data protection field. They can consult most of the resources and be attended, but no reproduction and lending are provide to them.

How to communicate

A person in charge of a library may have line managers that have to approve their administration. It happens most of all in special libraries, like this one, when they belong to the main organisation and depend on its guidelines and instructions.

It is very important to establish a good communication channel. This will be the most valuable tool to achieve the following purpose: walking together along the same path towards understanding and success. You must let them know what

the library can do for the organisation, and show that you understand the organisation's needs.

They should not give you a definitive order without listening to you first, and you should not make decisions without their knowledge.

Communication has to flow not only between the DC and line managers, but also between the DC and the users (APDCAT staff). Managers decide, the DC proposes and informs, and users express their needs and receive information, products and services.

The relationship with users could have been difficult in some cases, as explained until now, but are a key to the management of a special library. According to Nancy Bolt (IFLA 2008, p. 13), *building alliances with core users is therefore critical to success and indeed the survival of the library.*

I have been always looking to reach a point between, in one hand, being diligent and helpful, and in the other, being strong enough in my position. Heeding one user should not mean giving them an advantage over the others nor breaking the concept of the library being a collective service.

Another important concept has been to be proactive, not just reactive. If you wait for the users to come, perhaps you are participating in a slow communication channel. You have to go to them and be insistent, but not tiresome.

One more concept that I always take into account is to evaluate myself and think about what I could do better. I should consider that I could be wrong. If something is not working, perhaps it is not only someone else's fault, it could be mine as well.

This reasoning may be useful to improve your relationship skills and to have a wider perspective of problems.

And finally, never give up! Difficulties are always superable.

Communication tools

I found that some types of communication tools were required: regulation documents, annual reports, presentations and personal attention.

Regulation documents are necessary to assure that agreements are established to have a clear basis to begin working from. Thus, I worked with senior managers and wrote together a Regulation for the DC (including definition, mission, functions, collection development, cataloguing, cooperation, users, services and rules) and a Guide of intellectual property uses (which is necessary to know what to do in every situation).

Under its statute, APDCAT is obliged to publish its annual report. A little part is reserved for the DC, so I have to write it every year. Its aim is not quite the same as interior documents, but they are still valid to define the development of the library.

Nancy Bolt also wrote for the Recommendations (IFLA 2008, p. 17) that *Government staff must come to know what kind of information is available in the library and how to access it. Librarians should offer to make relevant presentations at meetings in the Department and never miss an opportunity to promote library services.*

I feel that these opportunities are very important, too. Thus, collective presentations are given twice a year.

I have always looked for a suitable date: not a Monday, not a Friday, not just when we come back from holidays or are about to leave, not on certain dates when everybody is very busy, and considering new systems or services introduced that may be important to explain.

One hour has been considered for a maximum duration. I cannot expect a person to listen to me for longer. Then it becomes tiresome and useless.

I have always tried not to give magisterial nor dogmatic speeches. What is more, I prefer avoiding presentations on screen and instead making live demonstrations using systems, resources or services, thus promoting interaction and feedback – asking for participation, answering questions, etc. I had some problems with that hour when answering questions, because they consume much time and I had to end sessions without explaining all I wanted. The solution for this was to accept questions just at the end, and only when they are to everybody's interest.

Personal attention and support have always been given when required. These are the chances that individual users have to ask their personal questions and receive help for their special needs.

These interviews have been necessary to complete the collective presentations.

Strengthening actions

Apart from information policies, some other actions have been taken in order to strengthen the DC position and bring support to breaking down barriers.

One of these strengthening actions has been supporting other APDCAT departments, mostly Communication (content management on the intranet and website, electronic newsletters, etc.), Archive (participating in its creation, collaborating with documents management, etc.) and IT (acting as a bridge between users' needs of information and technological platforms and sources, such as helping organizing knowledge and constructing information architecture for systems like the intranet and the website).

Other valuable action has been prioritizing personal attention to any other task. Demands have been attended to in a very short term, and the DC have always tried to save users' time when searching for and accessing information.

Conclusions

On one hand, these efforts caused the rise in the effectiveness and efficiency of library services. On the other hand, successful communication has brought products and services nearer to users.

All this has made the DC reliable and useful for users and for senior managers, and has guaranteed the continuity of communication within the organisation.

If you can create an environment of trust, agreement will come. And this is how it worked for us.

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