

Is the library redundant in today's world?

By Ng Zheng Jie, Glenn (15S43)

Since antiquity, libraries have always been heralded as the symbols of academia and learning, which in turn brought humans out of the Dark Ages, into civilisation and enlightenment. However, with the paradigm shift in the way we preserve and contain our knowledge, many begin to question the library's relevance in modern society, where everything is becoming digitised. Despite this shift in preference from physical to digitised media, I still believe libraries are integral to the functioning of modern society, where they not only form a cornerstone to literacy today, but also evolve to the needs of modernity.

Detractors of this argument believe that libraries are redundant in today's world, as they believe that libraries as physical spaces in cities and economic hubs are draining on local resources. To maintain such infrastructure, in this age when things are constantly evolving, is extremely difficult. Bulky print media is less favoured over storing data in the cloud. As such, to still have a physical building for these resources is simply inefficient and redundant.

As much as the opposing argument holds truth, it is far too myopic to solely consider libraries as economic burdens. Detractors, as such, fail to see the evolution that libraries have also undergone alongside society. Libraries no longer just serve as repositories for books; they have also become modernised and ready to meet the needs of modern citizens. For example, in Singapore, the National Library Board (NLB) has been introducing new means by which patrons can access resources. The introduction of the e-Resources service allows patrons to access online encyclopaedias, microfilm newspapers or even music scores, right in the comfort of their homes. Furthermore, with the march of the Maker Movement, there has been an increasing popularity amongst budding engineers to start makerspaces, a place where they can access novel technologies such as 3D printing and laser cutting in order to prototype their ideas. In Singapore's Jurong Regional Library, the NLB has set up such a space for these interest groups, demonstrating the library's capacity to evolve alongside society. Hence, libraries are no longer just seen as economic burdens on modern society, but rather as dynamic institutions of learning that grow with time.

Furthermore, libraries still play a key role in modern society, as they are a key facet to literacy in the modern world. As much as society is moving toward the fields of science and engineering, there still exists the need for literacy. Libraries serve this need as their resources help individuals learn to read not only on a page, but also in pictures and images to aid with their visual literacy. This is particularly important for the impoverished societies in our modern world, which still require the basic skills of literacy to advance in education, as it harnesses the ability to lift them out of poverty. For example, in Curitiba, Brazil, there are libraries located all around the city. These libraries are widely accessible to the children in the area, where they can not only read the books inside, but also stay within the library, providing them a safe place to learn if their homes are uncondusive. Hence, it can be seen that libraries still hold an important purpose in today's society, where it is a crucial mechanism that builds literacy: a skill so intertwined with the economy and society. It can be said that without libraries, there might be more illiterate individuals.

Lastly, libraries are still important in today's world, as they are a means through which we can preserve past knowledge and traditions with the resources they hold. Despite our growth as a globalised world and our attempts at breaking national boundaries, we still draw our identities from tradition and history, which the library serves to preserve and protect. These sources of our history

lie safely within the walls of the libraries, ready for anyone to access and learn. For example, to preserve old recounts of history like oral recounts of the Japanese occupation or the written archives of Singapore's growth as a nation, the National Heritage Board has partnered with NLB to come up with exhibitions and accessible resources, to allow the public contact with history and culture. Take, for instance, the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. in the United States. It is the largest library in the world, holding over 2 thousand different manuscripts, texts, films and even music scores, dating back to America's independence. These archives, although inaccessible to the public, serve as a physical source of history that is key to the American identity. Thus, it can be seen that libraries still hold a special significance in today's society, in aiding efforts to preserve tradition, history and culture which would otherwise be lost to the corrosive action of time.

In a nutshell, libraries are still relevant in today's world, and should not be obsolete. They continually evolve to meet the needs of modern society, while still serving their roles as pillars of literacy and as preservers of knowledge and culture. Hence, it is still too early to pull the plug on libraries.

Comments:

You know, Glenn, every paragraph really was a gem, but there were only 4 of them! And the first was extremely brief! And you didn't address the reality of the digital age which you alluded to in the intro. No enough balance. Loads of potential base! Just peak at the right time!