



## **FOREWORD**

Information means power; economic power as well as social, political, and human. This great power has always been seized by a few and it is not often shared.

Since the beginning of time, information has made it possible to understand the pace of nature and to make the most of its resources. It was at the time when the land gave birth to a lot crops, when the rivers where tamed and their flow was controlled, when stone and adobe were used as building materials to erect walls, pyramids and ziggurats, when we learnt how to treat some diseases and how to shape iron and glass into tools and weapons, that information was consciously kept safe by privileged minorities: shamans, leaders, and craft masters.

As cities developed and the basic framework of society got increasingly complex, writing arose as a useful tool for organising work, dealing with surpluses, and accumulating wealth. And it is more than likely that writing was also used to preserve a developing social pyramid for the centuries to come. The esteemed scribes managed available human and material resources (for the benefit of the richest people's financial arks), wrote stories (according to the winners' point of view), publicly and officially told people about the importance of castes in charge, expressed admiration for heroes, praised official Gods and put down Heaven and Earth rules, i.e. the patterns of behaviour expected in real life as well as in the one after death.

Writing made it possible to preserve learned knowledge for posterity, but at the same time, it also built one of the most devastating barriers for human beings to

overcome: illiteracy.

Oral tradition continued to exist (and still does nowadays); however, most relevant information and strategic knowledge were hidden under the mysterious layer of written symbols. As a consequence, knowing how to write and manage and organise information resulted in having power. Until printing systems were born, information was recorded in strips made from agave fibres as Aztec by Mayan priests, European monasteries made codices of papyrus, in Islamic and Jewish manuscripts, in bamboo tablets from south eastern Asia or in Chinese bands of silk. The rest continued through talk, passed down from generation to generation. However, the most valuable oral knowledge still remained in the hands of some privileged individuals.

This state of knowledge made possible the improvement of navigation techniques and the development of a modern medicine that resulted in new horizons being discovered inwards and outwards; it also played a leading role in developing many different devices and machines in order to improve industry and agriculture, allowing economic development and growth to take place. However, more efficient weapons were created at the same time. Everything positive has a negative side and no exception should be applied to knowledge.

The invention of printing press set knowledge free. The growing number of books reached thousands of hands making it possible that the pleasure of reading and the opportunity to write increased at the same time. Reading should have meant to be able to explain and apprehend new ideas, to have the right and the freedom and to make use of both, to break chains, to loosen gags... But still relevant information was not made available for the majority; it remained in a few educated hands: scientists, philosophers,

and aristocrats.

Hourglasses slowly and inexorably let go down the sands of history. The world has been the impassive (though injured) witness that has seen social and industrial revolutions, nonsense wars, astonishing discoveries, hunger and death, diseases and plagues, the mushroom cloud of atomic bomb and demonstrations supporting peace, defeated monsters and ghosts to be hunted. In some way or another, information has played a crucial role in history's development and in all cases this knowledge has always belonged to very few people who have organised life to suit themselves. Progress, development, "First World", wealth, health, safety, education, happiness and growth have only benefited a small minority: the majority of people continued to be on the other side of the information, literacy and knowledge divide, hardly maintaining their identities and cultures, struggling to survive in a world that let them behind, and at the very bottom of the organization.

At present time, information has become a consumer good, the imaginary line around which the current "Knowledge Society" turns. Digital revolution and telecommunication technologies improvement permit recovering, storing and managing knowledge, allow being fast, directly and constantly connected with very distant places and it also give us the chance to carry a library in our pockets in a simple plastic sheet. However, in spite of those many discoveries, findings and new open doors, the particular way of doing things and organizing theories and ideas continues to be the same and unfortunately very little has changed. There are still well informed and misinformed people and a widening gap between rich and poor. There are still whole peoples condemned to a life of ignorance and silence. And there are a shameful number of people

who do not know yet how to read or write. Only actors and labels have changed.

“Knowledge Society” has created new focus of richness as well as of poverty, it has made new divides and differences to appear, and it has invented contemporary forms of social exclusion and illiteracy. A very important part of the world still remains under the shadow of social development and progress whereas the most influential ones - no matter what they say - continue to control the rest, holding in their hands the enormous power of information while multinational corporations have put a price on the most valuable knowledge (medicine, biology, engineering, agriculture, genetics, computing, and telecommunication) swelling its savings accounts.

Only those who can pay for it will be able to have access to information. Authors’ rights under iron-restricted conditions make it very difficult to have access to the arts and literatures. Nowadays, culture is a privilege of the very few who can pay for it and its free distribution has become almost illegal. Accessible knowledge on the Internet - plenty in quantity and varied in quality - can only be reached by those who have technological capacity and necessary training. Information power is still in the hands of very few. But extremely powerful people and the machinery of this system have created a sophisticated chain of subtle links that make it difficult break it. Poor societies are left behind and their disadvantaged people continue living in misery in our world, among us, with us, and because of us.

The librarian has seen this long process happen since the first symbols were inscribed in clay tablets or parchments. Through centuries the library role has changed to adapt itself quickly to the new demands of its users: from merely storing documents to be a nest of controversial intellectuals, a place of refuge for works of classical literature in

dark times, showcase for priceless treasures, basic knowledge source, development support and memory manager. Many librarians have worked as accomplices to the powerful. But many others have fought for literacy teaching and knowledge diffusion, campaigned for free expression, struggled for free access to information, and promoted equality and solidarity.

The librarian has not always been conscious of all the power that rested in their hands, nor of the huge responsibility for making fair use of it. Immersed in his/her traditional activities of preservation and organisation, maybe confused with vertiginous changes that have taken place in recent times, the librarian does not seem to notice the important part they might play in the present society. He/she should guarantee liberties and human rights such as education, information access, free expression, identity, work. He/she should provide practical tools so users can solve themselves health problems, prevent violence, addictions, nutritional deficiencies. The librarian should wipe out illiteracy, revitalize oral traditions, spread ancient and almost forgotten knowledge, and recover endangered languages... He/she should fight against racism and discrimination, teach tolerance and respect and facilitate integration in multicultural societies. The librarian should give voice to ever-silent ones, encourage those who failed to reach their goal, and extend his/her hand towards the weakest ones. He/she should demonstrate age, gender, religion, and race equality among all people. The librarian should spread solidarity and brotherhood, tell the story of those who were defeated, express admiration for every little example of our wonderful human diversity and bring back seemingly insignificant memories that turn to be invaluable as time passes. He/she should promote free democratic and socially egalitarian access to information by liberating us from any

restraints on its flow due to commercial chains. The librarian should try to achieve the praiseworthy purpose of - at one time in life- power not longer being in the hands of the minority. He/she should be able to achieve some sort of equilibrium by demolishing certain walls and building new bridges. The librarian should try people look at each other's eyes on an equal footing. The librarian should do it not because it is a good idea but because this *is* the idea.

This Guide clearly demonstrates that many librarians are aware of the power they have and their responsibility of fairly using it. They have already assumed an active, creative, imaginative, consistent, and supportive role in their job and, consequently, in our society. Toni Samek's work also gives evidence of many librarians waking up from a hundred-year-old dream and being able to knock out their library's walls, open the bookcases, and allow books to reach every corner of their communities. Her work tells us about those librarians who dare to shout and dream at the same time that they recognise the painful reality that surrounds them. These professionals are always trying to find solutions for users' needs and interests by working next to them. They, as the author proves, have to be organised, have to investigate, propose, design, plan, and discuss. Many of them demonstrate, protest, show their disagreement and turn their place of work and their life into true trenches, fighting for their ideals of peace, justice, freedom, equality, and hope. This Guide demonstrates that utopia is still alive. And provided that it exists, there will be always good reasons for going on and giving our best.

As a librarian and also as an anarchist, I believe and desire that the words and the information that my friend and colleague, Toni Samek, sets free and spreads in these pages will manage to blow open locked doors, melt the chains from thousands of minds,

and push many to undertake the battle that does not need gunfire to be fought: the battle for freedom.

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