Dispositifs info-communicationnels: questions de médiations documentaires

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This collective work aims to contribute towards defining the notion of a device applied to documentation, situating it once again in a communication context. Viviane Couzinnet, information and communication sciences teacher at Paul Sabatier University (Toulouse, France), who directed the research, explains this posture in relation to the French context, where information science and communication science coexist in the institutional and scientific planes. Here it is a case of giving the device concept its informational dimension, which is often forgotten in French research, limited to the communication dimension.

The works presented were performed over the course of a seminar that began in 2003, as part of the MICS (Mediations, information, specialized communication), at LERASS (social sciences study and research laboratory), at Toulouse University.

Going back to the etymology of the word and relating it to documental activity, it is possible to complete the initial definition, contextualizing it. When considering the works by Jean Meyriat, about the exactness of meaning to be attributed to the word “information”, it is possible to associate it to “knowledge” and, especially, to “transmitted knowledge”. It is this insertion into a cognitive process that creates the link between information and communication. The device is, therefore, a mediating material object. From that point, the line joining info and communication becomes...
deliberate by the authors, to mark the form of their approach to the phenomena they study.

All six chapters refer to the nature and functioning of the devices in the place and manner that they reach the objectives given them. The environment, whether human, economic, social, political, institutional or cultural, does indeed exert a strong influence on their functioning and also on their evolution. The revelation of visible and subjacent potentials makes it possible to understand what is expected of the technique, as the device lies within the domain of an organizational logic that belongs to the technique of the work it depends on, its norms and skills, as well as the habitus of its authors. The device is also a set of social relations, in which skill complementarity operates. Information association supposes actor interaction through techniques and material objects. It being a case of information dissemination, the observed physical objects are databases, magazines, sets of documents or organisms belonging to a specific sphere or knowledge or a certain activity.

Based on the distinction between primary info-communication device, secondary info-communication device and the hybridizing forms that exist between the two, the work concentrates on the supports that give direct access to the content and the supports that act as intermediaries between the users and the document, as well as the databases, for example. Studies performed in the contexts of teaching, science dissemination and the cultural domain, in six different themes, contribute to form the notion of “info-communication device” as the central object of document information.

The first part is dedicated to teaching devices within the domain of national education and the ministry of agriculture. In the teaching sector, first of all, Patrick Fraysse, based on the network notion, studies the info-communication device named by the SCEREN-CNDP (culture, editing, national education resource services – national center for pedagogical documentation). Thus, he is able to construct a general portrait of pedagogical documentation in France. The successes and limitations of the role of producer, mediator and prescriber of tools, documentation and resources attributed to SCEREN are then substituted in a general context of reflection about teachers’ information practices and the position given to documentalist teachers, as each French school establishment has a documentation and information center managed by a teacher specially recruited to fulfill that mission. On the agriculture ministry side, Isabelle Fabre and Cécile Gardiès, by observing the organization of documentary space and a social and technical network built on shared labor, show how info-communication devices may prove the need for actors to deepen their knowledge. Beyond the initial economic and organizational aims, harmonizing practices and creating a collective dynamic reveal the importance of the ability to question the existing system and consider the user, using scientific bases as support. Thus, deep down, in the teaching context, the device’s cognitive intention is duplicated, for it is pressured to have actors for implementation who have broken sufficiently with documental techniques to plan and take on the necessary adaptations but who are also able to understand its singular practices. The support of information and communication science knowledge seems, therefore, indispensable.

Within the scope of agricultural teaching, Isabelle Fabre and Cécile Gardiès, teachers and researchers at the Toulouse national agronomy college, point out that info-communication devices have led to the magisterial dissemination of knowledge. Initially conceived as primary devices, charged with generating a mass of documents to serve as teaching support, they have developed very quickly into secondary devices, which provide forms of information, documentary mediations, which in themselves are factors and supports in the access to knowledge. They are situated, therefore, in a global cognitive environment and they have become spaces for the appearance of knowledge mediations. This movement from primary device to secondary device materialized due to the availability of specialized personnel, the structure of documentary space and the organization of documentary treatment into a network.

Documental space, as a knowledge organization device, is also an interface between information and the user, but it doesn’t seem to always be at the heart of professionals’ concerns, unlike what occurs with users, whose representations of it are rich, but little used as preparation for forming or apprehending the devices.

At the same time, the documentary network that connects all documentation centers on a national level is a rich mesh of connections, a place of social relations, of creation of values and norms that contribute towards the sharing of a common culture for the implementation of communication codes. If each documentation center is a specific info-communication device, placing them in a national network constitutes an overlapping of devices, like the agricultural education info-communication device. The two authors believe that the device’s formation can be enriched by considering users’ representations and
opening a documental mediation that can integrate
the totality of elements which make up the info-
communication device in its complexity.

That is how studying the info-
communication device aimed at teaching, at the
national ministry of education or the agriculture
ministry, allows the proposition of defining
elements so as to reach an understanding that
connects information and communication into a
specific social, technical and human organization.
The cognitive ambition announced and revealed
here, while it creates a knowledge-sharing ideal,
also allows the construction of a sense of new forms
of collective organization.

The second part of the work is dedicated
to the field of scientific research in Spain (chapter
3) and France (chapter 4). The devices are seen
by Francine Zafrilla-Pavan, Viviane Couzinet and
Josiane Senié-Demeurisse as means for knowledge
dissemination, contributing to facilitate access to
works in a given discipline and helping to bring it
recognition. In the analyzed ground, the Spanish
Centro de información y de documentación científica
(CINDOC) and its French equivalent, the Institute
for Scientific and Technical Information (INIST),
the National Center for Scientific Research’s
(CNRS) documentation center, it can be seen that,
despite sociopolitical contexts of different origins,
there are similarities in the trajectory.

Basing themselves on the position attributed
to information science, the authors emphasize the
challenges for this discipline. Expectations diverge,
while in both of the organizations observed it is
the end-activity’s supporting discipline. The weak
consideration it receives in the French context is
an obstacle for its development, while in Spain it
is the professional aspects that are privileged. In
this part of the work, decomposing the primary
and secondary devices at the service of science and
industry as an important economic challenge, it
is the subjacent institutional dimension included
in the notion of info-communication device that
becomes evident.

The third part centers on the cultural
field. Caroline Courbières chose architecture as
the observation ground (chapter 5). She situates
herself at the point where the public space
(urbanization policy, art sector) and private space
meet. The authors have different professions and
depend on innumerable institutional organs. The
architectural sector is a very structured field, on the
professional level (architects’ council), education
level (national architecture schools) and research
level (laboratories) and is supported by strictly
governmental organs (architecture and heritage
board, for example) which limit it. These different
structures are inter-related on various planes, so
as to form veritable networks. The author sets
out to show how architectural generation work is
fundamentally linked to the information aspect,
underlying the importance of increasingly complex
and heterogeneous devices that facilitate actor
cooperation, usually organized into networks. On
the other hand, the necessary relations maintained
between profession, research and education, as well
as the different professional organisms connected
to architecture, characterize the complex information
system of art rules that govern this profession.
Studying the architectural sector’s informational
specificity shows the economic challenges linked to
the professional’s documental duty.

In the art education sector, Gérard
Régimbeau, professor of information and
communication science at the national school
of information science and libraries, draws up
an inventory that gathers actions, supports,
 Exhibitions, documentation centers, museums,
galleries and association, organized in favor
of sustaining and disseminating contemporary visual
arts in Toulouse (chapter 6). This way, he can draw
a general picture of art studies. Centering on the
Fine Arts School and its document and library
service leads him to discuss what is known as
“general culture”, currently existing in education.
The author substitutes the documentalist’s role
in the scope of an info-communication device
where documentation and pedagogy are closely
linked. Thus, the pedagogic dimension reinforces
the cognitive dimension of the notion of info-
communication device revealed in the agricultural
teaching context.

This study of the notion of devices based
on information and communication sciences allows
centralization on the mediation process, which
aims to facilitate access to a document in a given
context. The re-introduction of its informational
and, therefore, cognitive function in information-
documentation sciences, as Jean Meyriat has
highlighted, leads to the consideration of the
device notion as central to the discipline. The
authors gathered in this work show that this notion
is complex and cannot be limited to its technical
aspects. While we can lament that the connection
with the system notion has not been revealed, we
can also emphasize that the research works shown
here highlights the importance of the place that
this notion should occupy in university education
in information science and in the dissemination of
research.