

# Some Thoughts on Information Science: A Vision from Brazil

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We are seeing considerable advances in the processes of communicating information in all its forms. As a consequence, these historical and technological transformations reflect, in a specific way, in the field of informational activities. They carry with them threats and doubts and the need to redesign characteristics of our undertakings in many different areas of human knowledge and human activities.

Information science has been characterized by the diversity of its approaches, seeking to define its essence through different studies and theories. In these studies different authors have presented numerous concepts based on their particular visions. Each of them adopts a distinct way of observing and explaining reality. Some emphasize the communicational aspects of information science, while others highlight its social function, and still others point out its strong connection to information technologies with their focus on innovation and continuous change. This close intimacy with technology has been subverting fundamental concepts of the area, while, at the same time, amplifying the field by posing new research problems. Today, information science maintains a balance among the communication, technological and social approaches.

The intense use of digital technologies has introduced uncertainties not only about the future of information science as a field of knowledge but also as a working area for different professionals. Advances in any area of

knowledge occur on the borders of each discipline, in the confluence with other sciences. These intersections with other areas are only possible through joint research, which are already occurring in information science, since activities of organization, analysis and availability of information increasingly are considered the work of interdisciplinary teams. However, in these partnerships, the role of the information scientist is still tenuous.

Information science in Brazil has come a long way since the opening of the first M.Sc. course at IBICT – the Brazilian Institute of Information Science and Technology – in 1970. It developed in close concert with library science. Such a partnership between information science and library science still exists in Brazil, even though it is sometimes not an easy one. The decades of the 1970s and 1980s saw the founding of other Ph.D. and M.Sc programs and courses in information science, as well as the beginnings of scientific journals in the field. These activities lead to the creation in 1989 of ANCIB – Brazilian Association of Information Science. ANCIB can be considered a landmark in the scientific establishment of information science as an independent area in Brazil. But if we compare its development to that of other areas such as computer science, information science in our country still lags other fields.

Currently, information science in Brazil has strengthened its interdisciplinary relationships with areas such as communication, linguistics, psychology and information

technology. Even if we have in our information science Ph.D. and M.Sc. programs an increasing number of professors of various areas of knowledge (library science, engineering, linguistics, history, administration and informatics, among others) multidisciplinary research is still wanting. But an interdisciplinary approach is necessary if we are to develop models, redefine concepts and create new approaches that incorporate cultural, historical and social aspects to face problems caused by the new roles of knowledge in today's society. Only then, will information science be fulfilling its mission.

We are currently experiencing a new stage of development, where information exchange by digital networks is permitting the emergence of a new paradigm – the paradigm of cooperative sharing of knowledge. Knowledge transmission to those who need it is a social responsibility.

However, in what measure does information science participate in this exchange? How can our science, which deals with information use, transform the individual and the society?

A field can be built only if it understands the specifics of the processes that cross its path. The information society manifests itself by means of contradictions and conflicts. The continuous production of information and the accumulation of knowledge contribute to the strengthening of policies of concentration and exclusion. However, the information partnership also contributes to the appearance of intellectual technologies that transform cognitive capabilities. So, the sharing of wisdom and knowledge is a reality of the informational society. Understanding the

complexity of the information society demands a plural approach through interdisciplinary studies which will only be possible in Brazil if Brazilian information scientists join researchers with other areas of knowledge.

In a world of social, economic and political differences, the simple possibility of access to information does not imply its effective use in a way that can be transformed into knowledge. More than that, it is necessary that the individual who receives it be able to process it and transform it to his benefit and to the benefit of society. One of the fundamental roles of information science is surely to contribute to information and knowledge sharing and toward the reduction of digital exclusion.

In order to intervene in social life and to encourage development, information must be accepted, assimilated and transformed. But this is not an easy task, since the reality in which we have to intervene is diversified, multifaceted and dynamic. So an efficient and specific information transfer depends on the suitability of that information to the conditions and the reality of the receiver. Considering the social disparities in the Brazilian population, one of the missions of information scientists in our country, therefore, is the effective socialization of knowledge, which can be fulfilled through actions of information literacy development.

In this sense, through the idea of socialization of knowledge, it seems to us that the mission of information science is fulfilled. By active participation in an information society, abilities are exchanged in a way that diminishes the information gap and contributes to a fairer world. ■