"Mapping the habits of users and their use of spaces in university libraries: an experience of seating sweep"

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ABSTRACT

Since the paper of Given & Leckie (Libr. Infor. Sci. Res. 2003) about the use of ethnographic methods in libraries to define how students make use of their (!) spaces in libraries, few experiences have been published in Europe. A contact with a Canadian team having applied this kind of end-user survey to map the social activities in libraries (9th Northumbria Conf., May & Swabey 2011) was our starting point to experiment the “sweeping” method of analysis in the Library of science and technology (UCL). As a relocation project of our old library of the seventies has been planned into a new building for 2015, the survey was also an opportunity to rethink the spaces and the services of our library. What are the habits and the activities of our users, mainly digital natives? What is their use of the spaces? What are they doing with our reading tablets available? And when and how? The responses given by the survey will improve our efficiency to plan changes, to argument our discussion...

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Mapping the habits of users and their use of spaces in university libraries: an experience of seating sweep  
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This project will help objectify the debate on the real use of the spaces and services of the library. Facts and objective measurements will be provided to help decision-makers within a challenging two years relocation project.  

What are the habits and the activities of students? What is their use of the spaces?  
How are they working or studying? What is their need in equipments? Etc

On the basis of the Given & Leckie (1) and May & Swabey (2) studies on “sweeping the library”, we record (by observation) during a 30’ tour of our 6 floors library, for each user, three kinds of information. In order to avoid change of activity or behavior, during the observation, the survey is conducted by a young and discreet librarian.

Who is he/she?  
- Student/Staff, M/F  
- Information desk  
- Photocopying room  
- Reading tables in quiet zone  
- Armchairs  
- Room for groups  
- Individual rooms  
- Shelves

Where is he/she?  
- Studying alone with our books  
- Working in groups to a project  
- Using Facebook or social networks  
- Browsing in the library databases  
- Do nothing or speaking with friends  
- Using services of the main desk  
- Searching a book in the shelves  
- Making check in/check out of books  
- Sleeping

What is he/she doing?  
- Use of PC’s, tablets, laptop  
- Top 5 of activities

Survey from Sept. 2011 to June 2012  
10 weeks representative of the academic year  
4 times a week at different days and hours

After 8 months of survey, 1,847 observations have been recorded

Our goals

The methodology

Some of our results

Top 5 of activities

Use of spaces in library  
- Real use of the library and services: 34.47%  
- Social activities (working or not): 27.38%

Social behavior  
- Use of PC’s, tablets, laptop

(2) May, F. & Swabey, A. Libraries as learning spaces: exploring how students make use of the physical space in academic libraries. 9th Northumbria Conf. York 2011