

Abstract: This literary review was written with the intent of exposing what is cataloguing ethics and how it should influence the cataloguer's work. What do cataloguers understand by cataloguing ethics, what codes of ethics exist now and how they came into existence. It goes into ethical problems and proposed solutions as well as world differences in information accessibility and cataloguing standards, with a focus on what is the Portuguese reality in terms of cataloguing codes of ethics.

Keywords: Cataloguing ethics; Codes of ethics; Practical ethics examples; Portuguese cataloguing code of ethics.

Resumo: Esta revisão de literatura foi escrita com o intuito de expor o que é a ética da catalogação e como ela deve influenciar o trabalho do catalogador. O que os catalogadores entendem por ética da catalogação, quais códigos de ética existem agora e como eles surgiram. Aborda os problemas éticos e as soluções propostas, bem como as diferenças mundiais no acesso à informação e nos padrões de catalogação, com enfoque no que é a realidade portuguesa em termos de códigos deontológicos de catalogação.

Palavras-chave: Ética da catalogação; Códigos de ética; Exemplos práticos de ética; Código português de ética da catalogação.

Introduction

Although having risen in interest in the last decades, cataloguing ethics is a topic whose exploration is overdue. The first general cataloguing ethics code didn't come into existence until January 2021, made by the Cataloguing Ethics Steering Committee (CESC). Until then, cataloguers faced with ethical conundrums would have to guide themselves through the American Librarians Association (ALA) Code of Ethics and some others, which are more general and are not specific to the cataloguer's function.

This literary review explores definitions of cataloguing ethics, compares different Codes of Ethics in the information science field, putting into evidence ethical problems faced by cataloguers and how they affect the usability of information systems, as well as proposed solutions. Its aim is to explore the questions: What are today's cataloguing ethical problems and what solutions have been found? In what context do these problems arise and what prospects do we have for the future? Is it possible to catalogue without bias? With these objectives in mind there have been compiled some articles with the intent to compare and contrast their findings.

Research methods and criteria for choosing articles

The methodology used for this article was the standard for a literary review. First the informational needs and the search terms were defined through putting into evidence the objective of the research: cataloguing ethics, cataloguing ethical codes and information ethics issues. Since this topic is important for the contemporary cataloguer, the time of publication was set to be preferably from this century. In regards to the research on Portuguese codes of ethics for cataloguers there was a preference for resources whose authors were Portuguese, from a Portuguese institution or work in Portugal.

The resources found were a compilation of codes of ethics, organisations, articles and a presentation. All had in common the topics of ethics and information. The majority of them focused on the central theme; and two or three, even though they were not focused on the subject, they were an extension of it, were pertinent by putting today's society dilemmas into account.

Ethics – cataloguing ethics

Ethics, or moral philosophy, is “the discipline concerned with what is morally good and bad and morally right and wrong. The term is also applied to any system or theory of moral values or principles” (SINGER, 2021). This is a concept that extends to almost everything in life, and as such it subdivides into different fields of study. Applied ethics being one of those fields – focused on the solution of dilemmas – in which professional ethics falls into (or deontology, from the Greek “the science of duty”).

Cataloguing ethics is both part of a professional ethics discussion (“rules of acceptable conduct that members of a given profession are expected to follow”), as well as a subdivision of information ethics. Therefore, it is “both theoretical and practical as it provides guidance regarding acceptable thoughts and behaviours within a particular context” (SNOW and SHOEMAKER, 2020).

Having framed cataloguing ethics in its field of knowledge, the next questions in order would be to find out what it means and what it is. To do that, first a little summary of what cataloguing is: what's the purpose of it, who does it, with what means and where. By combining these two definitions it will be more clear what is ethically expected of a cataloguer.

Cataloguing

The Cataloguing Ethics Steering Committee, on its 2021 *Cataloguing Code of Ethics*, uses the term *cataloguer* “as shorthand for referring to anyone involved in cataloguing and metadata work”, but a more complete definition of cataloguer could be the one made by the ALA Task Force on Core Competencies: “the ability to organise collections of informational materials in order that desired items can be retrieved quickly and easily is the librarian's unique competency. Well-organised collections are the foundation of all library service” (2004). This notion is backed by many other authors like Janet Swan Hill who states that “bibliographic control is at the heart of librarianship [...] it forms the core of our discipline”

(2004:12); or Michael Gorman who says that cataloguing is “the intellectual foundation of librarianship” (2002:11).

Cataloguers as professionals have a very particular set of skills, and historically have been lumped together with other professions under the umbrella term *librarianship*, but “their special skills and knowledge sets them apart from the profession of librarianship in general” (BAIR, 2005:3). Santamauro and Adams go further, arguing that “while cataloguers’ judgement is often assumed to be common sense, it is actually the result of cataloguing culture, hands-on experience, and education” (2006). And even as librarians, cataloguers are part of a service profession and so “it follows that the professional librarian is guided by a high sense of ethical obligation” (FERRIS, 2008:173).

This set of particular skills serves the practitioners in their job, but what are their objectives? Back in 1876, on his book *Rules for a dictionary catalog*, Charles Ammi Cutter defined the catalogues’ purpose in three basic functions, which have been evolving but still remain essentially the same: to allow the library user to identify a known work, to discover an unknown work on a certain topic, and to select a particular manifestation of a work from among a number of manifestations held by a library; later, *the Functional Requirement for Bibliographic Records* (FRBR) added a fourth function: to allow an information seeker to find out where to obtain a copy of the work; and a fifth one was added by IFLA, in its *Statement of International Cataloguing Principles* (2016) which is to allow navigation and relation between resources and authority records. Ferris proposes an additional core professional commitment: “the promotion and preservation of the integrity of the catalogue” (2008:178).

Bearing this in mind, it starts to be clearer why cataloguers should have a code of ethics of their own to help with ethical dilemmas that arise in the practice of their job, and why cataloguing ethics is its own field, with its own discussion groups and particular problems which will be discussed later on this paper.

Cataloguers’ understanding of cataloguing ethics

Snow and Shoemaker in *Defining Cataloguing Ethics: practitioner perspectives* (2020), dive into the question: what understanding do cataloguers have of their profession’s ethical problems. The goal was to understand what the practitioners of cataloguing understood from the concept of cataloguing ethics in order to come up with an intentional definition (as opposed to an extensional one, based on practical examples).

In order to do that the authors organised an open-answer online questionnaire for professionals whose job description included cataloguing. These professionals would have to have worked with MARC21, AACR2 or RDA, and either LC or Dewey classification. It was open for answers for one month and received 823 responses of which 234 were eliminated for not being complete.

Of the 598 complete questionnaires, 520 were from USA based on practitioners while approximately 50 were from other English speaking countries. Of those professionals, 328 were academic librarians, 170 were public librarians, 46 were school librarians and 44 were special librarians. The question being posed was: “What do you think “cataloguing ethics”

means? In other words, how do you define “cataloguing ethics”? 30 people did not answer the question.

After a first analysis, the authors decided to group the answers into categories defined by a concept and a small sentence to help the classification. One answer could fit into more than one category. In total there were 10 categories: principles, justice, bias, standards, questioning standards, accurate representation, access, making cataloguing decisions, don’t know, and others. The results went as follows.

The majority of the answers were extensional definitions. The most frequently mentioned topic was *Access* (180 mentions); closely followed by *Bias* (172 mentions), which was also the category which most frequently would mention more than one category (129 in 172 mentioned another category in their answers). *Accurate representation* came in third (152 mentions), *Justice* in fourth (102 mentions), after that *Principles* (55 mentions), *Standards* (47 mentions), and *Questioning standards* (33 mentions). These last two are closely related since the first advocates for the need to follow recognized cataloguing standards in order to catalogue ethically while the second expresses the need for cataloguers to question, and perhaps not follow standards they perceive to be unethical, as well as being proactive in requesting changes to standards. Lastly, 96 answers fell into the category of *others*, which contains subcategories that were mentioned less than 10 times.

The remaining responses either did not know the answer to the question (5 instances), or stated they did not know how to define or understand the meaning of cataloguing ethics (27 instances). Although this is not a significant number of instances, 41 practitioners stated either that cataloguing ethics is simply making decisions or that they do not know what cataloguing ethics means. It’s extrapolated then that the cataloguing community is not monolithic in their views that ethical issues in cataloguing even exist.

It’s noted that many answers provided align well with the principles included in the ALA Code of Ethics, while there were also surfaced issues that go beyond what is found in the ALA code.

Through this questionnaire the authors expose the five primary values that emerged:

- Accessibility of resources and metadata
- Awareness of personal, institutional and standard bias
- Inclusive metadata actions
- Accurate representation of resources and agents
- Adhering to standards while interrogating their usefulness

It is concluded that the study in question put into evidence the need to define cataloguing ethics in such a way to facilitate the conversation among cataloguers and researchers regarding these topics. There is a need to explore the boundaries of what is considered an ethical issue in cataloguing.

The Problems of the current Codes of Ethics

It has been largely discussed how the Codes of Ethics in the information field are not adequate for specific cataloguer's work, sometimes even too vague for librarians in general, even though that is their focus. Koehler and Pemberton in *A Search for core values: towards a model Code of Ethics for information professionals* (2000), have compiled, studied and compared 37 information associations' ethical codes, from all over the world, and have reached the following conclusions:

- Most information associations have not developed codes of ethics (of the identified fifty-seven general national organisations and an additional 210 sub-national ones 73% reported they hadn't published a code).
- If there was a past where ethic codes were not needed by information professionals, they do need one now in a more intricate present and future.
- The principles most of these codes have in common are: “(1) concern with the rights and privileges of patrons or clients, (2) selection issues, (3) access issues, (4) professional practices and relationships, (5) responsibilities to employers, and (6) social and legal responsibilities”.
- Lastly, there are five groups of people who should be part of the discussion of information ethics in general: users, employers, practitioners, the community and society in general.

Similar results came from the analysis Anna M. Ferris does from various codes of ethics in *The Ethics and integrity of cataloguing* (2008), such as: the already mentioned ALA Code of Ethics, considered by many the standard code in librarianship, both because of having been one of the first to be published in the librarian's work field, in 1939, and because of the size of this association and the influence it has; the Society of American Archivists (SAA), the Association of Independent Information Professionals (AIIP), etc. She states that “the guidelines offered by these organisations are remarkably similar” and lists seven principles they have in common, which are close to the ones listed by Koehler and Pemberton, albeit the associations Ferris used were more scattered within the information field.

An important thing she notes is that it isn't possible to predict all potential ethical conflicts. Furthermore, an ethical code is a guide, and in the information professions practitioners aren't obligated to follow them, it is up to the individual to choose to do so. While this may justify the vagueness of these code's statements, it doesn't help the practitioner who is in an ethically ambiguous situation to solve their quandary.

Comparing Sheila Bair's Code of Ethics and the latest released Code of Ethics from the Cataloguing Ethics Steering Committee

Shay Beezley (2020) did a presentation for the OK-ACRL Annual Conference, in 2020, exposing cataloguing ethical problems and comparing drafts for cataloguing ethical codes. She expresses the importance of discussing these topics in order to evolve inside the field. One way she points out that is effective in helping the dialogue is codifying cataloguing

ethics, specifically. The presenter lists as reasons: the fact that the ALA Code of Ethics is too generalised (a common theme throughout the articles analysed), the need to confront our classification system (which have been proved to be anglo-centric biased), and to challenge the idea of the library as a neutral entity.

She first analyses Sheila Bair's "beginning step towards a code of ethics for cataloguing" (2005), which was constituted by 10 general statements. The author breaks down each statement bringing into evidence the core value in each one of them and concludes that: it doesn't read so much as a code of ethics but more as a summary of various tasks cataloguers carry out; although it mentions moral values such as "fair" and "justice" it doesn't offer guiding principles; and it is too idealistic not factoring in different constraints libraries may have such as budget or staff.

Beezley (2020) later compares and explores the second draft of the CESC, which was available for comment at the time but has in the meanwhile released its final version. Her conclusions are: this one is more broad and addresses concerns and principles we've seen in cataloguing history; there is focus on responsibility such as acknowledging bias and striving to overcome it; it has into account that not all cataloguing departments are created equal.

This last Cataloguing Code of Ethics is available on the Committee's website, where they also state their mission, which includes a commitment to make this code a "dynamic document embodying the collective experiences and wisdom of our community of practise and will consist of a framework, with guidance and examples of best practice, which can be shared across the cataloguing community" (CATALOGUING..., 2021).

Types of ethical problems in cataloguing

There have been raised various kinds of ethical issues in the literature. Clare Beghtol (2008) compares consensual (mainly discussed by Bade, 2002) and non-consensual ethical problems (mainly discussed by Brubaker, 2002). By their own nature, these different types of problems will have their own type of solutions.

The consensual ones are mostly related to how misinformation can make its way into the catalogues and authority records. Some examples would be: misinterpretation of cataloguing rules, linguistic errors, wrong MARC coding, etc. Bade said regarding mistakes in coding: "they can seriously disrupt a user's ability to find and interpret bibliographic information" (2002) and, because of that, the cataloguer's skill, knowledge, and accuracy become an ethical issue. Bade adds to this notion by blaming this on hiring practices as well, which have become less thorough through time, mostly because of economic issues, turning less qualified people into amateur cataloguers for a smaller wage. Ways to combat this would be to advocate for the cataloguers' profession, to encourage practitioners to keep learning throughout their careers and to seek assistance from other bibliographers, faculty and librarians when having difficulties with specific topics. Sheila Intner (1993:5), on the same note, has questioned the ethics of "doing minimal level cataloguing for some materials knowing access to them will be impaired or incomplete". She frames cataloguing ethics in terms of institutional responsibilities: if the library does, or does not, meet the user's needs, rather than a reflection of the cataloguer's beliefs and actions. She advocates for practitioners to make "principled standards in favour of good decisions that promote good

service when it is in your power to make them”, instead of letting the administrators do it for them.

Non-consensual ethical problems would be the ones for which an ethical response may be hard to achieve. These are the types of problems that are difficult to address in professional and cataloguing codes because they are ambiguous or cause uncertainty in the practitioner. Quandaries like these are more problematic, since different people may answer differently to them causing the catalogues to be incoherent, and so clear ethical policies on these types of problems are a necessity for the professional.

Bair (2005:8), in her article, explores Moor’s ideas regarding ambiguous ethical problems: he believes that by using the two-step approach of deliberation and selection one can make better decisions regarding non-consensual problems. First one has to adopt an impartial point of view, as best as possible, in order to determine if a policy does not cause “any unnecessary harms to individuals and groups”; then, by ranking ethical policies regarding benefits and (justifiable) harms, one comes to the last stage of deliberation. By making sure to “weigh carefully between the good consequences” and “distinguish between disagreements about facts and disagreements about principles and values” a decision should be made (TAVANI, 2004). A way to safeguard the coherence of the catalogue, on future decisions, is to record each step of the way for reference.

Exposing bias in cataloguers’ work and tools worldwide

An Overview of information ethics issues in a world-wide context, by Elizabeth A. Buchanan (1999), exposes an array of problems the contemporary world faces, specifically in information related mediums, which have been growing at an unprecedented speed. The information age and its supposed benefits are put under a magnifying glass that reveals the unethical bases on which it has been constructed.

The starting question is: “as information professionals, what are our ethical obligations in this world-wide context?”. It is known that one of the main responsibilities for information professionals is to provide free and open access information, but there are many circumstances which are hindering this goal. How can information access be democratized?

There are a series of characteristics attributed to the information society that are only felt by the richest half of the globe. A divide Buchanan (1999:193) does geographically, talking about the north and the south. While the north feels a “growing reliance on computer technologies, a large knowledge-sector workforce, a growing division labour, [...] and the consideration of information as a commodity”, the south is stuck in a cycle of poverty and still trying to manage aftermath from colonialism, which moved on to other form - “the continual neglect of developing nations as *potential* information suppliers smacks of imperialism and colonialism, while it continues to deny any economic power or autonomy to the developing nations”.

In her article, Buchanan (1999) goes into how Masmoudi, Smith and Morehouse have questioned the ethics of the supposed free flow of information. By admitting that information is power, we also admit the power in its circulation, which is clearly unequal around the world. “We (third world researchers) don’t get as many citations, because the journal is not well known because it is not in the international indexes...” (Benítez em

GIBBS, 1995:94). And so the power remains in the hands of those who possess the information, and the social fragmentation this causes only gets more evident throughout the years.

In *The New world information order*, Masmoudi (1979) cites seven forms of existing inequities in the world. This was in 1979 but no one would know it, hadn't it been said:

- A flagrant quantitative imbalance between North and South;
- An inequality in information resources;
- A *de facto* hegemony and a will to dominate;
- A lack of information on developing countries;
- Survival of the colonial era;
- An alienating influence in the economic, social, and cultural spheres;
- Messages ill-suited to the areas in which they are being disseminated.

This is reflected in the work and principally in the tools the cataloguer uses to practise their job. Menou has noted “the relevance of the world’s store of information for the less developed countries is questionable in terms of content, organisations, and presentation.” (1983); more specifically, Dick and Burger (1998) comment, referring to bias, on how the “equity in subject access requires examining moral questions of social justice and sensitivity to issues of race, gender, and culture relating onto retrieval tools, or bibliographic instruments [...] There is [...] a more insidious form of inscribed power [that is] global or international in scope and influence, and is exercised less visibly, even unconsciously through dominant mechanisms, practices, and languages that underpin, in this case, the construction and maintenance of tools for subject access. In other words, library catalogues, indexes, databases, subject headings lists and classification schemes are hardly value neutral”.

This same problem has more recently been in the spotlight through the work of various researchers and practitioners like Olson (2000, 2001) and Olson and Schlegl (2001). But Sanford Berman made large breakthroughs in the topic of connotated phrases and words used in subject heading by publishing, *Prejudices and antipathies: a tract on the Library of Congress Subject Headings concerning people* (1971), where he lists a series of 225 changes to be made for the subject headings, and suggests alternatives. Of these only 37% were changed as he suggested.

Four decades ago, Smith (1980) had already declared how information layed in the heart of the world economy. The migration from the physical transference of information to the digital has only sped up and potentiated the privatisation of information, turning it into a saleable good, and moving it from the hands of the general population into the hands of capitalist driven corporations. This changes the goal of information access since it is now a privilege available for those who can pay, furthering us away from democratising information.

From this imperialistic mindset comes the presumption that every country would benefit from the same information infrastructures that are predominant in the north. On this regard Buchanan (1999:199) says “Information providers hold great power and ethical responsibility, they must preserve cultural values and specificity, while offering the best services to those in need”.

The author concludes the article by expressing Masmoudi’s demands for a reevaluation to the inequitable conditions reviews, and a call for the democratisation of information. She warns against a colonialist approach to information, which will set the world further apart, and urges caution to protect social microcosms around the world through the preservation of cultural uniqueness by giving independence, freedom of choice and freedom of access to the regions around the world.

Cataloguing ethical problems - examples

Westernisation of names: it is usual for author’s names who are written in non-Roman characters to be Romanized, as well as the westernisation of names institutionalised by the AACR2R. Olson (2002) notes: “we impose some of our structure for names onto names from other cultures”. And gives the example of the AACR2R rule 22.4B2: “if the first element is a surname, follow it by a comma”, which she calls “culturally inappropriate” since this indicates an inverted form that doesn’t apply to all names, like East Asian ones. There is now a solution to this by using Unicode and the Virtual International Authority File, which preserves the “cultural, national and regional perspectives of individual users worldwide and will also present the authority information consistently and efficiently” (OLSON, 2002).

A practical example of this taking place would be assuming that using “God” as a subject heading to refer to the Christianity’s version of God, or assuming the gender of a profession subject heading according to society’s norms (astronauts and female astronauts, or contraception and male contraception). The latter would be solved either by always specifying gender, or only specifying gender where it is relevant to the content; the former has a similar solution: always specify the religion unless the work is about God in general.

Shortage of trained professionals: though already mentioned, it is worth being a little more specific on why this has ethical implications on the cataloguers’ work. The vision of a globally collective catalogue with the objective of economising each library’s work through the sharing of specialised cataloguing has been facing serious issues regarding the quality of the records. Along the years there has been a shortage of librarians with the needed expertise and linguistic knowledge to properly catalogue. This has led to the work being done by anyone. That work will then be shared worldwide for other untrained people to use, who in turn lack the capacity to properly examine the record which will go on to the catalogues. Intner (1993:8) urges cataloguers to “lobby hard for pre-job education for copy cataloguers as well as in-service training and staff development opportunities”, as a way to prevent and keep educating practitioners across their career. The focus on continuity of education is also important, since the cataloguing world is facing rapid changes and advances in technology which must be addressed by the professionals, who must be kept up to date.

Biased tools - LC Subject Headings: to be more specific in what the work of Sanford Berman achieved, by analysing Steven A. Knowlton's *Three decades since prejudice and antipathies: a study of changes in the Library of Congress Subject Headings* (2009), there can be seen a clear picture of the bias ingrained in the cataloguer's tools, and how that changed through the voicing of these concerns, by the information professionals.

On Table 1, there are 6 examples of subject headings related to different topics, in order to give a general notion of how the bias was represented. Berman's book (1971) identified in total 225 possible changes of which, in 2005, when Knowlton's article (2009:128) was published, around 63% of Berman's criticised headings had been changed in some way, most of them reflecting Berman's suggestions. Knowlton concludes that most of the heading that weren't changed "show some patterns of thought that persist in the Library of Congress – for example, many subject headings pertaining to the Christian religion remain un glossed", but nonetheless, "it appears that bias in subject headings, while a continuing source of concern, has been addressed in a serious manner by the compilers of LCSH. [...] Concentrated attention to the issue of bias in LCSH has borne fruit in the three decades since the publication of P&A, and the library community can point to these precedents as hopeful milestones in the continuing effort to provide equal access to all users". It is important to note, though, that it still is a USA centric tool, and might not be the most appropriate to use everywhere, at least without some kind of cultural, geographical and historical adaptations.

Table 1 – Examples of changes in the LCSH

Item #	Item - as it was in LCSH	Berman's suggested change	Effective change by LC	Date of change
I:33	Religious education	Religious education (Christian)	Christian education (Religious education retained as a broader heading)	1975
I:15	God	God (Christianity)	no change	
I:38	Muslims as scientists	Scientists, Muslim	Muslim Scientists UF Scientists, Muslim	1988
II:16	The West	The West (U.S.)	West (U.S.)	1982
IV:5	Homosexuality	Delete xx Sexual perversion	Cross-reference eliminated	
IV:10	Divorce xx Women – social and moral questions	Either delete Women–Social and moral conditions as xx under Divorce or add Men–Social and moral conditions	No Women cross-references at all	

Fonte: adapted from Knowlton, 2009.

Non-consensual practical example: there was a specific situation exposed in Ferris' article from 2008, referring to Fay Zipkowitz's (1996) fictional case study: "a copy cataloguer is resistant to cataloguing works that she finds objectionable: [...] a book claiming that the Holocaust never happened; and a book by a TV evangelist who claims that AIDS can be transmitted through the mail. She proposes to the Head of Cataloguing that she alter each catalogue record to indicate that the content is not authentic or is the product of warped minds. The Head [...] finds that the catalogue records are usable LC-copy [...] and reminds the copy cataloguer that the library's policies are to accept the catalogue record unless there are serious errors. They [...] are to let the reader decide what is true or not true" Ferris

(2008:176) argues that this example reminds cataloguers that they have an ethical obligation to serve the needs of others and remain neutral, and they have other ethical obligations like intellectual freedom, professional neutrality and diversity of opinion, that cataloguers must respect. The question left is: isn't there also an ethical duty to not spread misinformation? Can this be considered a "difference of opinion"? Would a tone neutral warning go against these ethical obligations listed by Ferris?

Proposed solutions

Beghtol (2008) closes her article by sharing a tool for ethical decision-making: the Ethics Toolkit website, which is no longer available, but there was a description of the process on the article. It is a six-step process to help the practitioner question its specific problem. The process consists of identifying the problem using PLUS (meaning Policies, Legal, Universal and Self; each of these words/filters come with a question to help evaluate the problem, the alternatives and the final decision), defining alternatives, evaluating each alternative using PLUS, making the decision, implementing it, and lastly evaluating the decision using PLUS. The author further proposes the record of these decision-making processes in a "decision file" in order to ensure that similar decisions are made in the future, using the same guidelines.

Regarding the evolution and migration of bibliocentric codes, like ISBD and AACR2, to a digital environment: cataloguing communities have been developing new descriptive cataloguing codes such as *Resource Description and Access* (RDA). Coyle and Hillman (2007) comment: "The library's signature service, its catalog, uses rules for cataloguing that are remnants of a long departed technology: the card catalog" but find that the RDA is not forward thinking enough, keeping us in the 20th century when we should be thinking more ahead. They add: "a more radical change is required that will contribute to the library of the future, re-imagined and integrated with the chosen workflow of its users". Is it not part of the cataloguer's ethical responsibility to provide access through technological evolution in order to better serve the user?

Codes of Ethics for Portuguese cataloguers

In Portugal, the Code of Ethics in use is shared by three organizations: the APDIS (Associação Portuguesa de Documentação e Informação na Saúde - Portuguese Association of Health Documentation and Information); the BAD (Associação Portuguesa de Bibliotecários, Arquivistas e Documentalistas - Portuguese Association of Librarians, Archivists and Documentalists); and the INCITE (Associação Portuguesa para o Desenvolvimento da Informação Científica e Técnica - Portuguese Association for the Development of Scientific and Technical Information).

Created by the Comissão de Ética para os Profissionais da Informação em Portugal (Ethics Committee for Portuguese Information Professionals), it was put in used, for all three associations, in 1999, and as most of the world, it doesn't have a focus on the cataloguer's work.

This Code of Ethics is based on the Declaration of Human Rights, and its main objectives are: to be a tool for clarification and help when an ethical decision is needed by the Portuguese information professionals, to give users of the Portuguese information services (libraries, archives, information services) the confidence that the professionals respect their rights; to present society the commitment that Portuguese information professionals assume towards the ethical values that guide their professional activity; and to help the professional integration of new members, succinctly expressing the values of the profession. The BAD website also lists a bibliography regarding professional ethics.

The specific ethical guidelines are in accordance with what we see in the majority of the rest of the world: vague guidelines for information professionals in general, with no specification in profession (and no reference to cataloguers at all).

Conclusion

In order to better understanding what kind of ethical implications the Information Science field carries, this paper started by questioning this notion: are there ethical problems when cataloguing? The first attempt to answer this was very simplistic: how could there be? we are transferring another person's words into a form, essentially. The literature demystifies this understanding.

The cataloguer's job requires choice making; it is a cog, a part, of an institutionalised machine that aims to preserve and give communities access to information; it is made by humans for humans; and so it is natural that it is subjective and biased practice. Acknowledging that is the first step to ethical cataloguing.

The second step would be understanding how these factors influence our work and the retrieval of information for the user, and try to find solutions and de-institutionalize practices which can jeopardise the evolution the world has been making towards a more inclusive, fair and egalitarian society (and cataloguing).

Taking into account today's paradigm, which in itself will have its own bias, there are no perfect solutions, but to give in to the imperialistic wants of companies and capitalist driven organisations will further separate people based on unfair contingents like money and geography.

What was found regarding Portugal's code of ethics for cataloguers was not surprising, as the rest of the text proves, but I hope this can spark some interest in cataloguers, not just in Portugal, to move towards a code of ethics of their own, or at least start a conversation about it.

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