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A New Hybrid Reality for Libraries

Pin Pin YEO

Singapore Management University, ppyeo@smu.edu.sg

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A new hybrid reality for libraries

Thursday, 22 August 2013 — Yeo Pin Pin

During yesterday's Plenary Session, Parag Khanna explored the different trends that have brought us to what he terms the "Hybrid Age", which is ultimately a confluence of previous ages: the Information Age, Industrial Age, Agrarian Age, Stone Age. Widely varying technologies are merging and humans are merging with technology. As technology becomes ubiquitous, it is also becoming more intelligent, integrated and social.

In response to the increasing demand in the field of education and new technologies—as well as a growing concern with high costs—the entire the entire field is changing. Some universities have responded by putting their courses online with the capacity to have thousands of students enrolled in one course. Similarly, the publishing industry is facing greater competition and a cost. Khanna gave the example of the Penguin and Random House merger and their intention to offer less expensive textbooks as their value proposition. Some publishers are selling their content in smaller bundles to reduce end user cost.

All these changes impact libraries and their services. Libraries can help people upgrade existing skills, develop new ones, network with others, and re-focus their lives to fit into the just-in-time economy. Khanna referred to David Weinberger's book "Too big to know", where he talked about the changes faced by knowledge institutions. Knowledge institutions, which of course include libraries, need to participate in the greater knowledge network in order to change, contribute, organize, and better manage the flow of information and knowledge.

Khanna reiterated that the Hybrid Age is digital, global, and as well as social. Libraries continue to play an important role in this because they are uniquely positioned: they are a blend of technology, material culture, as well as virtual and physical space—all converging in a public sphere.

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