

201 1412

[INFUBILA] 9253

"PROBLEMS AND PROGRESS OF LIBRARIANSHIP IN LATIN
AMERICA WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS TO MEXICO"



This presentation intends to give a general panorama of library and information activities in Latin American countries, with - special emphasis to Mexico. Although the presentation is based partly on the experience I had been the Secretary of the Latin American Commission of FID, other programs and activities going on at present in various countries, out of this sphere are also included.

After giving a general panorama, special emphasis is made to:

- 1) education, 2) bibliographic tools and publications, and -
- 3) national and regional integration.

PROGRESS AND PROBLEMS OF LIBRARIANSHIP -
IN LATIN AMERICA WITH EMPHASIS ON MEXICO

Almost a year ago, the American Library Association addressed me an invitation to give a lecture in some of the accredited American library schools as the "Carl H. Milan" lecturer. I was asked to talk about "Progress and problems of librarianship in Latin America with emphasis on Mexico".

Today, it is an honor for me to be here with you. Although not completely limited to that, my talk will be based mainly on information gathered during the four years that I was acting as secretary for the International Federation for Documentation - Latin American Commission, (FID/CLA).

Of course, in trying to cover other activities outside of the scope of this Latin American organization, the problem of being comprehensive arises immediately. It was not easy for me to make the decision on what to leave out of our scope today, since it would be quite difficult to try to cover the whole spectrum of what is being done in the time we have available. So you will not hear from me all that is there, but I do hope to be able to transmit to you the main activities that are being carried on in the field of librarianship in Latin America.

Being the Secretary of FID/CLA, I had the possibility of learning a lot, mostly through personal contacts with the 11 representatives of the countries affiliated to the International Federation for Documentation and also with many other colleagues. Should, among

the audience be persons who, for personal contacts or for research activities have additional information on what I will be dealing with, I will be grateful for their comments or questions. I am convinced that it is always through the continuous exchange of ideas even in an informal way, that the learning process is attained and becomes more meaningful. Let's make this occasion a very enriching one for all of us.

I decided to point out some of the most important facts worth mentioning in a session like this one, which show the development of our information services in Latin America.

I already mentioned the FID/CLA contacts as an important source for me to talk about this topic; in addition I must also mention at the very outset that many other important things are going on outside the sphere of this association.

In recent years the action of international organizations and associations such as UNESCO, FAO, OAS, and more recently, IDRC (International Development Research Center) or IFLA, (International Federation of Library Associations) are making themselves present in various ways in our countries. Undoubtedly, their economic support, along with their technical advice has been definitely a way to initiate important long lasting activities.

GENERAL PROGRAM

The stage of development of information and library services in Latin America, varies considerably from country to country. Some of them are well advanced; they have a large number of professional librarians and some important services have already been implemented in higher education, research or technological institutions; even in some cases automated services have already been initiated. There are other countries where the development is still very incipient, and almost nothing has been done to strengthen the infrastucture of library services. This means that the number of professionals is low, and the basic library services have not yet been developed.

For this reason it is almost impossible to make general statements about these services.

Libraries in Latin America have existed over centuries. The national Libraries of Peru, Mexico or Argentina are among the oldest in the Continent. Some of the collections of these libraries are unique. They have important historical material about the origin of these countries and their social, political and religious life are as well represented in their collections. But the organization and management of these libraries have in many instances suffered a great deal. Changes have occurred very often; for long periods, budgets have been limited, and there are few examples where libraries have been under the direction of persons without knowledge or interest in libraries. The lack of good management is the reason for not having in most cases statistical data about these services: they have been irregularly gathered and sometimes even lost.

Another important aspect to be mentioned here, is the fact that in most countries there is a lack of a library systems.

There are indeed public, school, university or special libraries, but only in a few instances a coordination of these services is performed by a national organization.

When talking about libraries and problems in library or information services in our countries we cannot, in most cases, identify one sole problem. That is to say, there is usually a chain of them which make us very often think that we are in a vicious circle: our services have suffered from a lack of economic support; this is indeed, a reason for having limited collections, and personnel without a good basic or professional preparation. In many countries there is no recognition granted by the authorities of a given institution or in a more general way, of a country, to these services, and as a consequence, very seldom one would find well trained users in library and information services.

Such picture might sound to you unrealistic or exaggerated since the picture of librarianship in the USA is very far from the one I have just describe, despite the continuous problems you undoubtedly are faced with over here.

But if it is true that problems cannot be hidden, my purpose is to convey to you the image of Latin America in a very positive way. We do have problems, but we are most enthusiastically working. We do have a great challenge and we are convinced that it is through devotion and interest to and for our work, that we will solve them. There are already some important results to talk about.

Being aware that many topics could be presented here, I decided to -
concentrate on 3 aspects:

1. Education, 2. bibliographic tools and publications and 3. national
and regional cooperation.

EDUCATION

I decided to start by mentioning in some detail the educational problem. Through my experience in the National Council for Science and Technology (CONACYT) as the head of the Professional Development Department for more than 3 years, and closely linked to this activity since I joined this organization 6 years ago, I am convinced that there is a direct relationship between services offered by libraries, the economic resources allocated to them and the personnel. It is one of them that one could find the potential to change the picture and the image of what these services have been in our countries.

If it is true that for many decades libraries have been a reservoir of interesting and valuable material, it is also true that the image the general public has, is mostly associated with places where old material is kept and where the person responsible for it does not have or does not need any specific preparation. It is undoubtedly that although this image is somehow exaggerated, libraries have not had a direct influence in the socio-economic development of a country; they have not shown the potential to influence and to assist educational or research activities. The role that libraries must play and the image they should convey depends largely on the human beings that run them.

Library education in Latin America has been offered since many years ago. It started by short training courses in the second decade of this century and as time passed by, education at the professional and post graduate levels have been established, according to the needs of different countries.

Some of them are not yet in a position to hire professionals in this field. Whereas there are countries where the stage of development of libraries is well advanced and their impact is already felt in its respective environment, such as Argentina, Brazil or Chile, there are others which are still behind.

I will mention some of the recent activities that have taken place in this special area at a regional level.

Probably the first thing worth mentioning here is the existence of the Inter American School of Librarianship to which the Organization of American States, has been offering support. Although for many reasons is far from being considered "the library school for Latin American countries," in addition to its regular programs, it has systematically offered, for many years short courses of about 4 to 6 months on various topics, such as school and university libraries, automation and administration. In August 1972 a Latin American Seminar on Education for Information Scientists took place in Mexico City. In May 1974 there was a Consulting meeting for the preparation of librarians, sponsored by the Organization of American States in Medellin, Colombia. The objective of this meeting was to analyze the problems of library education in Latin America and to present possible ways of solving it. The solutions proposed were the implementation of a masters program, a research program through which one could analyze the problems of Latin American libraries and information services. The need for reinforcing library publications was also considered in this meeting. Last year, in September 1976, a UNESCO/FID Seminar, sponsored by CONACYT and the National University of Mexico dealt with several problems of library and information specialists, as well as users. In November 1976 a Latin American Seminar of Library school Directors

took place in Bogota, Colombia. This seminar was sponsored by UNESCO and a local organization, ICFES. At this seminar there were representatives from various countries who presented a report about the stage of development of library education in their respective places of origin as well as plans that were going on or would be implemented in -- the near future.

After mentioning these activities one could definitely indicate that -- most countries realize the importance of setting up formal programs -- according to their needs. It might be the case that for some of them basic training could be enough for the starting medium term. If this -- were the case one could venture that if no professional education is -- needed, the development of library services would always remain at a -- medium stage. I am convinced that the quality of services depends -- heavily on the persons offering them, and it is difficult to expect -- high quality library services with persons who have solely received a -- technical preparation.

Another problem that somehow is affecting the quality and quantity -- of persons entering the profession in our countries is the image of -- the librarian. How to recruit candidates into a field that for such a long time has offered a very poor and weak image? How to convince -- them that there is a whole spectrum of activities that is waiting for them to be changed? How to make them understand that we are in a -- vicious circle which, if it is to be broken, demands aggressive -- action? How, just to pose one more question, we can convince them -- that this field is one of the most interesting, that great challenges are ahead and that they will be assuming the responsibility of -- becoming the leaders of the information work in their respective Latin American countries?

Just to indicate one more point in this area, I will mention the existence of the Latin American Association of Library and Information - - Science Schools (ALEBCI). This association was founded in 1970.

Although its actions have not been very strong so far and it has not - - reached all countries, it has slowly proved to be a good way to gather library school directors and professors.

Since November 1976 the presidency and technical secretary of ALEBCI - is in Colombia.

The International Federation for Documentation has formed many committees, which respond to their main programs, one of them being the ET Committee, which stands for Education and Training. Being these - activities of outmost importance, as already stated, it was considered important that FID/CLA should form a committee, which would give - - - attention to these matters. The committee, as such, was not created - within FID/CLA taking into consideration that ALEBCI was already in - existence and that it could perfectly perform the role of being the - forum for Latin America library educational problems.

If we have posed some questions on how to recruit good professionals - and how to convince them of the challenging activities ahead of them, we also have to consider the best alternatives to prepare them.

Regional cooperation, either through regional organizations or associations, or through other means will hopefully lead us to the preparation of standard curricula at a technical as well as at a professional level. At this moment there is a wide variety of programs. It is also important to rely on regional cooperation for preparation of teachers. In this case one could mention a masters program for library professors that will be implemented in Brazil and for which OAS scholarships - -

Other programs that can be dealt with at the regional level are exchange of professors; continuing education programs, methodological -- evaluation of schools; joint research projects.

I would like now to refer to what has been done in Mexico in this -- field. There are 3 schools in the country which offer regular programs. Two of them are located in Mexico City: the National School of Librarians and Archivists, which depends from the Ministry of Education, and the College of Librarians at the National University. In -- the federal states the only school offering this type of program is -- the Autonomus University of Guadalajara in that city. In addition to these regular programs there are other activities that have been -- undertaken in order to increase the number of professionals and paraprofessionals we do need for our library services. A special effort has had to be made since no education at any level has sistematically been offerred in the country.

Worth mentioning is the Intensive Technical Course which was initiated in September 1973 at the National School of Librarians with CONACYT -- support. The main objective of this course is to train persons research in the very basic activities carried out in their libraries, -- such as technical processes and public services.

The total length of the course amounts to 700 hours, plus around 170 of English language. So far 230 persons have completed at least one part of the program or the first semester.

On the other hand CONACYT has also been supporting the development -- of a master's program that will be initiated at the University of -- Guanajuato. The curriculum was worked out with the participation -- of the staff from the Graduate School of Librarianship at the Univer

sity of Denver. Although the project is not yet completed, our intention is to start it next September.

This program has also received the support of the Organization of American States.

In view of the great need of professionals with this level of preparation in my country, CONACYT has offered about 55 scholarships to interested candidates in this area. They have attended schools at Texas, Denver, Syracuse and Case Western.

At this moment, August 1978, there is all evidence that the program will be started in January 1979.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC TOOLS AND PUBLICATIONS

In those countries affiliated to FID/CLA there has been, for the last years, a constant interest in publishing various bibliographic works. In most of them there are now union lists of serials, in some cases -- those union lists are worked out by disciplines; there are directories of libraries and special information centers, thesauri, bibliographies, either national or by discipline or both.

Concerning union catalogs, Brazil for instance, developed a program -- that was used by Colombia. Mexico published a second edition of its -- union catalog in 1976 and is now on the process of compiling the first supplement to this edition. Also, some countries Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, that I know of, have already appointed an organization to act as the ISDS center.

Dealing with this type of publications, there is a committee of union catalogs within FID/CLA, with the main objective of promoting these -- basic works in our countries. CONACYT in Mexico has for the moment -- the presidency of the committee.

As far as bibliographies is concerned, I would like to mention the -- special ones that have recently been compiled by CONACYT. The purpose of them is to serve as a guide for selection of bibliographic material in university libraries. Not all the fields are yet covered and the updating is slow, but they have proved to be an effective -- guide for librarians and professors, mostly in the institutions of -- higher education where basic bibliographic tools are scarce.

This idea of bibliographies in various fields as a service for selection was considered by the Organization of American States. It was -- contemplated as the LILIBU project (Lista de Libros para Bibliotecas

Universitarias). Many difficulties have arisen and this project has not yet been carried over.

Interesting to mention also is the number of periodical publications in the area of librarianship. Checking in the 16th edition of - Ulrich, out of 32 Latin American publications in this field, only 3 of them appear in international indexes and abstracts, such as Library and Information Science Abstracts, Bulletin Signalétique, or Information Science Abstracts.

Under this topic, I would also like to mention, finally the existence of current awareness services. As an example I mention ALERTA put out by the Humanistic and Scientific Information Center located at the National University of Mexico. There is also another similar publication which covers the social sciences area called CLASE, put out by the same center. Finally, it will be interesting to mention that the OAS is giving support to the preparation of the second edition of the list of library headings put out by this organization in 1967. The project will be undertaken by Colombia.

NATIONAL AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION

At the outset of this talk I mentioned that there was a generalized -- lack of a national library and information system, although some incipient efforts to solve the problem are being carried on.

There are countries such as Chile, or Argentina for instance, where several actions are already under way in order to integrate information subsystems in different fields, under the coordination of a national body. In Colombia, to mention another example, important efforts have been made, for instance in the sector of university, special and public libraries.

In Mexico, the National Council for Science and Technology (CONACYT) -- created by law in December of 1970, has among its various objectives -- the establishment of a "national scientific information service." Derived from this objective many actions have been undertaken in order -- to strengthen the library services infrastructure. Also it is important to mention the works that have been done to set up an agricultural and industrial information subsystems.

Allow me to give you some details in this case, as an example of how -- activities like these are worked out in our countries. In Mexico for -- instance, in the case of agricultural information subsystem, there has been for some months much participation among members from some of the leading institutions in the agricultural sector. A working document -- has already been proposed and discussed and priority actions have been defined. Among these, one could mention the need for training people for agricultural libraries, either from research centers or from -- institutions of higher education. A special course will start this -- month for some 30 people. They have also considered the need for --

developing bibliographical tools through which special resources -- will be made known and available. At the regional level in this -- field special reference must be made to the Interamerican Association of Agricultural Librarians and Documentalists (AIBDA) which has been playing an important role in the field. Among other activities -- they do publish a regular bulletin and have been holding regional -- congresses every 2 years. The 5th. one will take place in April -- 1978 in San José, Costa Rica. The general theme that will be considered is "Dynamics of the preparation of human resources for information". Also in this field there is the Interamerican Center of -- Agricultural Information (CIDIA) located at the Interamerican Institute of Agriculture Sciences, which recently moved from Turribalba -- to San José in Costa Rica. This center has played a very important role in the area of agricultural information. They are the recipients of agricultural information from various countries, have set an information system known as AGRINTER. There are already around 20 -- countries participating in it with obvious benefits.

In the industrial sector, a special reference must be made to Technical Information (INFOTEC). This group was originally one of the departments of the Direction of Information and Documentation within CONACYT. In 1975 it was created as an independent group and has had a leading role on information services for industry in Mexico. Its objective is to provide a very direct technical assistance to industries of many types, offering them the precise and complete information required by them. As indicated, its role is already felt in -- other Latin American countries. Other services like this one provided by INFOTEC have been established in the chemical, and metallurgical fields.

Also, trying strengthen actions in this sector, a plan has been presented to and approved by UNDP through which funds will be made available for starting the coordination of various technological centers located in different cities of the country.

Whereas in the case of the agricultural subsystem it will be formed by libraries which at least count with basic services, the so called industrial subsystem is starting from newly created centers where the information units, with very few exceptions have to be seriously reinforced. At the regional level the existence of the information for industry committee within FID/CLA must be mentioned. It was created in the FID/CLA General Assembly held in Bogotá, Colombia in 1973, in order to promote and look for regional cooperation in this area. They have already had 3 regional meetings (1975, 76 and 77). In parallel to the FID World Congress held last year in Mexico, some of the members of this committee got together in order to further analyze the present situation of information services to industry and define future actions.

In that meeting there was also the participation of members from the Denver Research Institute interested in working with Latin American Countries in this area.

Although a special emphasis has been placed on these national and regional subsystems, they are not the only areas covered. Important improvements are taking place in the fields of medical and social sciences, to mention only 2 more.

Integration at a national level comes from other activities such as for instance, standarization.

The Pan American Commission of Technical Standards (COPANT) -
settled in this decade a Committee to study and work out standards
for information activities. Colombia has been very active in this
field and its standards are available to anybody that requests - -
them.

Mexico has also been working on the development of what has been -
called the MARCAL format, a Spanish version of the MARC format
hopefully will be used by Latin American countries.

This format will definitely be of a great assistance to the technical
processes of bibliographic material.

With the support of CONACYT and the OAS, in October 1976 a meeting
was held in Mexico City with representatives from various Latin -
American countries in order to analyze the possibilities of using
this format. This meeting is known by the acronym ATRIBAL (Transfere
ncia de Información Bibliográfica en América Latina).

In order to facilitate the use of MARCAL a document has been worked
out and is being distributed to libraries.

With CONACYT support the Institute of Bibliographic Research - -
translated into Spanish Chapter VI of the Anglo American Catalo-
guing Rules. Chapter XII of the AACR will also be translated - -
within the next few months.* Closely linked to the MARCAL program,
I will also mention another project undertaken by CONACYT which -
is known as the " Automated network of libraries ". Its original

* This chapter has been published and can be acquired from the
Instituto de Investigaciones Bibliográficas, UNAM.

objective was to integrate an automated union catalog. In the pilot phase, the holdings of nine libraries were introduced into -- the data bank. Around 90,000 items were coded out of which about half of them can be retrieved on line. Through this project there is also the possibility of searching by subject and as a by product to reproduce library cards. Originally CONACYT devoted much time to standarize the bibliographical information coded. The MARCAL - format will be much valuable to this project. From now on, interested libraries will introduced their bibliographical information to the data bank, only if they have properly followed the MARCAL - standards.

I would like to make under this topic a bried reference to nation and regional congresses as a means for attaining integration. -- This is a very effective and no less informal way to reach this -- goal. It is in this respect that library associations play an - important role, although their structure and activity differs again from country to country, I could say that probably the national congresses celebrated under the patronage of the associations of countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile and Mexico, can be cited among the ones that are offering to librarians and other professionals engaged in library and information activities an interesting opportunity to promote these activities and analyze common problems, at the same time that are more definitely influen- cing their environment.

Aside from national congresses there have also been regional ones. FID/CLA has organized Regional Congresses which have dealt with various topics of interest to persons closely linked with libraries.

Outside the scope of FID/CLA, a Latin American Library Congress was held in Buenos Aires, Argentina in August 1974. As far as I know of, there is not yet in perspective a similar congress on the same lines, but the interest for organizing more on this type was clearly stated at the end of that Congress.

I really hope that this presentation will contribute to give you a better idea of what is happening in our countries, of the problems we are facing and of the profound drive and dedication we have to solve them. It is a personal and professional commitment of the ones who are meeting this challenge.