

SPECIALIZED LIBRARIES AND THEIR ROLE IN THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONTEXT OF LATIN AMERICA*

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Abstract: This paper will emphasize that any kind of library can be considered a social instrument in as much as it supports the documentary service needs of societies, thus contributing to their cultural enrichment and amusement. These aspects can be linked to the economic and social conditions of every country.

Nevertheless, the sectors in which the role that the specialized libraries have and should have developed the greatest depth is in scientific, humanistic and social research, since their academic products can influence the economic, social and political aspects of societies. The explanation of the above is sustained in the subjects considered in this document and are as follows: the library and society, an overview of Latin American society and its libraries, specialized libraries in Latin America, and specialized libraries and their incidence in the economic and social context of Latin America.

In the form of a case study, relevant data related with the specialized libraries of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) will be examined.

Introduction

In the past, the library was a symbol of tradition that remained in the bosom of an instructed minority. In later times, however, the evolution of libraries oriented them to form part of the economic, political and social development of each region.

History is made by the society of a people, and the library in general has had a primary role in the creation of the thesis and theories of history, as well as in forms of government which through the years have remained shaped in agreements, books, and letters. Today we can consult these documents in libraries.

The selection, systematization and retrieval of documents, basic activities of libraries, are tasks that support the educational and scientific research systems in an important way. These aspects are perhaps what convert libraries into the common denominator of all disciplines.

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To be able to explain the role of specialized libraries in a social and economic context, we will first refer to the context that the library has in relation with society. Later we will address the subject of Latin American society and its libraries, and finally we will discuss the subject of specialized libraries in Latin America. As a case study, relevant information will be presented on the systems of scientific, humanistic and social research that is conducted in the National Autonomous University of Mexico and of its specialized libraries. Its role in the economic and social context of Latin America will be discussed. One of the conclusions refers to the possibility of undertaking studies related to specialized libraries and its projection of services in research and diverse areas of knowledge.

The library and society

Since its earliest beginnings, the library has been considered a social instrument. For example, the clay tablets and waxed wood of Mari, the Royal Library and Assurbanipal, the papyrus rolls of Egypt and the codices of Pergamo were organized and preserved because these societies needed to allocate and register information for the maintenance of the state, the conservation and communication of religious beliefs, the practice of commerce, education and the transmission of culture to new generations, among other functions.

A society stagnates if it is not prepared for the reception and generation of new knowledge. „A society is a duality of action and thought, tied by a system of communications which is, in turn, a duality of mechanisms and messages“ (1), that is, that which is transmitted and the ways of its transmission. In a given society of culture, libraries, of any kind, constitute documentary instruments which make possible the development of networks. The purpose of those networks is to be integrated into the total system of social communication.

When considering that libraries have as part of their principle objectives the purpose of organizing and disseminating printed knowledge in any kind of medium, with the intention of affecting the generation of new knowledge, their role will have repercussions in the economic and social context of any country. From the above, any explanation of libraries and society should consider the „*social epistemology, or study of social knowledge*, which has particular importance because it is located in the point where registered knowledge is found, and social action, and in relation to this, Kenneth Boulding has named the transcription (written or not) of culture and the impact that this transcription produces in the image (book).“ (2)

This transcription, and in turn, communication, forms an open system which changes when the functions and necessities of the individual are modified, and as

a consequence, those of society. Thus the library, more than a link in the communication chain, is as a system a fundamental part of the total process of knowledge, or of the situation of knowing within a determined time.

The... multiple cultures and ethnicities that interact daily in social, political, economic and political processes, independently of the level of development reached, are producers of information of the accepted ideology and religion, whether original or recycled. And subsets of this population also will be creators of knowledge and promoters of ideas that will provoke agreements and disagreements. (3)

Overview of Latin American society and its libraries

Latin America has its own physiognomy. There are differences in each countries in terms of details, but essential characteristic features exist such as the geographic scenery and historical, social, economic, political, and cultural reasons.

In this respect, Oscar Alvarez indicates that in recent years, Latin America has faced many changes that have included „the group of economic and social structure, the work and valorization processes, relationships between classes, the structure and relationship between these classes, the links between the state and the economy, the relationships among Latin American countries, and the links in the region.“ (4)

In the field of Library Science, Estela Morales states that:

Library Science is developed in each country, acquiring its own specific characteristics. However, independently of the level of development of each nation ... there are phenomena, problems, situations and solutions which are common to those of other nations and more so, when they present similarities in cultural, linguistic, historical and social aspects. (5).

From an economic perspective, Latin American countries are considered developing countries. This is reflected in their diverse kinds of libraries. Nevertheless, despite the economic crisis and the social problems Latin American nations currently face, the processes of modernization and renovation are reflected in diverse activities, among them in their libraries.

Unequal development exists among libraries in Latin American countries. It is possible to find libraries that are completely automated and others in which the card catalogue represents the most sophisticated medium of control and the only way to access the documentary reserves. The countries that have most modernized

their libraries are Argentina, Brazil, Columbia, Costa Rica, Mexico and Venezuela.

Concerning the development of diverse kinds of libraries, it is the national and specialized libraries that have achieved the greatest development in terms of budgets, organization, reserves and services. It is important to highlight that it is in this kind of library where library technology advances are used with the greatest frequency. The generation of local networks, their connection with national and international networks, as well as the Internet and electronic support of diverse kinds, is seen frequently in national, specialized and university libraries.

Some relevant examples of this kind of library are National Network of University Libraries (RENBU) in Argentina, and the Colombian Institute for the Promotion of Higher Education (ICFES). In Mexico, although there is not a national coordination of university libraries, the General Directory of the National Autonomous University of Mexico Libraries, with its 164 departmental libraries, among which are 59 specialized libraries, is a representative Mexican example due to its national influence and to the fact that it has extended to other countries in Latin America.

Concerning public libraries that are also turning to development of networks, Rosa Maria Fernandez points out the following: „Public libraries have experienced different destinies in Latin American countries. While Colombia, Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Cuba, among others, have developed efficient public library systems, others have not achieved good service in their public libraries.“ (6)

It may be pointed out that school libraries are those that have been least developed.

Specialized libraries in Latin America

The functions, objectives and administration of specialized libraries have been fully discussed in diverse national and international forums. This has also been a topic of interest for various studies, which have analyzed the theoretical foundations, among other aspects, and the environments in which specialized libraries are generated and developed.

Specialized libraries in Latin America respond to the following UNESCO definition:

Those libraries that depend on another association, official service, department, research center, erudite society, professional association, museum or business ... or any organism, and whose resources belong primarily to a particular branch, for example, natural sciences, social sciences, history, etc. (7)

In the Latin American context and in relation with these types of libraries, Penna in 1960 remarked, „the most remarkable development reached by the libraries of Latin America were made by the specialized libraries. By virtue of the necessities of research in all fields, especially those in the technical and science, these libraries have multiplied. They possess adequate resources and many of them have proved to be well-organized and efficacious.“ (8)

Nevertheless, studies about specialized libraries in the Latin American regions concerning societal and economic dimensions are scarce. These kinds of studies are necessary to explain the current role of the specialized library, and to base perspectives in the social and economic environments at the local, national, regional and global levels.

Studies of this kind provide perspectives on the function of the specialized library in society, and can predict the documentary services that are required in the development of humanistic, social and scientific research. These studies consider, among other means, the diverse uses of information technology.

It is important to consider in plans for specialized libraries the ways of managing research developed in the diverse areas of knowledge related by thematic profiles. It is understood that the function of documentary services must necessarily affect the result of the research and this will in turn affect the political, social, and economic environments of the different cultures.

However, work of this nature requires permanent research concerning the situation and social planning of specialized libraries of the Latin American region, which presently are few and/or out of date. The lack of reliable and up-to-date statistics is common in Latin America. This information is very useful for the realization of studies like the proposal by IFLA concerning libraries, societies and economies.

Concerning statistics about specialized libraries, the UNESCO annual statistical report of 1989, consulted among other sources, indicates that information on this kind of library was compiled between 1984 and 1987 and for various reasons the updating of this information was suspended. This was confirmed by the UNESCO statistical report of 1993. Regardless, for the purposes of this paper, they are a representative example, since it is possible that a greater number of specialized libraries exist in the region than those listed.

Some data from the UNESCO report, updated with the World Guide to the Library and other documentary sources from the database INFOBILA (Latin American Bibliographic Information), are the following:

Table for specialized libraries in some areas in Latin America

Country	No. of libraries	Volumes (in thousands)
<i>Argentina</i>	93	3,867,297
<i>Barbados</i>	1	-----
<i>Belice</i>	1	116,000,000
<i>Bermuda</i>	1	20,000,00
<i>Bolivia</i>	6	2,470,000
<i>Brazil</i>	1,494	12,854,000
<i>Chile</i>	27	6,252,000
<i>Colombia</i>	39	1,155,000
<i>Costa Rica</i>	9	411,000
<i>Cuba</i>	29	687,465
<i>Ecuador</i>	7	844,000
<i>El Salvador</i>	11	82,900
<i>Grenada</i>	1	3,000
<i>Guatemala</i>	6	273,000
<i>Guyana</i>	32	102,000
<i>Haiti</i>	4	75,200
<i>Honduras</i>	2	55,00
<i>Jamaica</i>	3	44,500
<i>Mexico</i>	180	4,300,00
<i>Nicaragua</i>	3	43,000
<i>Panama</i>	6	39,500
<i>Paraguay</i>	3	50,000
<i>Peru</i>	32	848,000
<i>Puerto Rico</i>	6	166,000
<i>St. Pierre</i>	1	10,000
<i>Trinidad and Tobago</i>	3	109,600
<i>Uruguay</i>	29	1,379,000

Sources: Annual Statistical Report 1989. Francia: Unesco, 1989. p. 7.1-7-7.
World Guide To Libraries. München: K.G. Saur, 1995. Pag. Varía.

Based on the above chart it can be inferred that Latin American society is aware of the importance of both documentary services as well as specialized libraries directed to research in diverse areas of knowledge. It may be observed that Brazil (1,494), Mexico (180), and Argentina (93) are those that have the greatest number of specialized libraries. Other countries report a small number of them, due to their size, their social and economic situation or because their specialized libraries are not interested in answering the questionnaires sent to them by UNESCO and other organizations that publish statistical information.

Other relevant data related to specialized libraries in Latin America are the following: During the seventies and eighties, various regional organisms of the United Nations and of the OEA strongly supported the promotion of information networks in science and technology. One of the objectives proposed was to secure bibliographic control of what was produced in and about Latin America, some of the relevant themes to consider being those oriented to the social and economic development of Latin America. Some of these networks are AGRINTER, BIREME, REPIDISCA, DOCPAL, INFOPLAN, PLACIEX, CLAS, and RIALIDE.

The Latin American Council of the Social Sciences (CLACSO), has much participation through specialized libraries or centers of documentation belonging to its Latin American members. Some of the specialized topics that orient the formation of the collections of these libraries are: social movements, politics, population, urbanization, economics, rural development, work, education, communication and society.

Over time, various specialized libraries have been incorporated into large information systems, a representative example being Bibliodata (Calco) in Brazil which functions as a center of bibliographic information and a collective national catalogue of monographic materials. Currently, Bibliodata has a network with 111 libraries of different types: 64 universities, 5 schools, 3 public, 1 national, and 38 specialized libraries.

It is also important to point out that in Latin America the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL) has played an important role concerning libraries and information services. An important feature of its work, representing the influence it now has in South America and some Central American countries, is the use of the software MICROISIS and the bibliographic format generated by CEPAL. These are tools that various specialized libraries in the Latin American region are using to develop their bibliographic databases.

Laura Hurtado has pointed out in relation to the generation of specialized bibliographic databases in social sciences.

The organization of this kind of database helped many of the document centers to make a qualitative jump in the organization and processing of information, resulting in an optimization of internal service by making extensive services available to questioners and the local community of users ... „considering that the process of automation of documents began around 1987“, in less than five years it already had a broad and diverse universe. Of the 37 NGOs selected, 25 have automated bases that have less than 10,000 bibliographic records. Eight centers, as well, have bases 11,000 and 20,000 bibliographic records respectively, and the 4 remaining offer more than 20,000 automated references each. Despite the fact that the majority of the bases are relatively small (less than 10,000 records) in total, they have great potential for processed bibliographic information in social sciences and development issues Among these topics are social sciences, woman, health, education, food and agriculture, to mention a few. (9)

On the other hand, it is important to point out that the growth of specialized libraries in the last years, particularly in the private sector, has generated a demand for librarians, which in turn has permitted new opportunities for employment. Together with the creation of documentary services, this will have repercussions in the economic and social conditions of the region.

It is appropriate to analyze the orientation of the world today towards the use of information, as it appears that humanity is turning toward a greater dependence on the use of information. This dependency obliges professionals in administration and information management to change their ways of working, as well as their capacity to generate, analyze, collect, distribute and exchange information, since the opportunity and relevance of all this can have repercussions on diverse aspects of society.

The idea of an information society and new industrial revolution has been accepted. Many countries are reoriented their strategies on these new bases, and some authors has proposed the idea of a post-industrial society, based fundamentally on the service sector, in particular that of information. The concrete effects of this are beginning to be detected in some developed countries, as much in their Gross Domestic Product as in the production of jobs dedicated to this activity. For example, in the United States, nearly 50% of the economically active population works in activities related in some way with the management of information. (10)

The specialized libraries of the National Autonomous University of Mexico: a case study

With the purpose of providing other elements of information, it is pertinent to examine some data related with the scientific, humanistic and social research which is conducted in the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), as well as information related to its specialized libraries. The reason for this is based in the fact that the UNAM constitutes a representative phenomenon in Mexico and in Latin America because of the importance which it gives to research in the diverse areas of knowledge and to the support of its specialized libraries.

The UNAM created the Coordination of the Humanities and the Coordination of Scientific Research with the purpose of planning and promoting scientific and humanistic research. They were created by directors and advisors to academic representatives from the institutes and research centers. The Coordination of the Humanities is formed by nine institutes, seven centers, three directors offices, and five university programs. The Coordination of Scientific Investigation coordinates fifteen institutes, eight centers, and four university research programs. In 1994 the following investigation projects were registered.

Table
Research Projects*

Areas	No. of projects
Exact and natural sciences	1620
Agriculture and livestock technologies and sciences	114
Engineering science and technology	309
Medical sciences and technology	922
Humanities and social sciences	1134
<i>Total</i>	4099

* Agenda Estadística De La Unam 1994 (Información recuperada a través de Internet).

Concerning the number of specialized libraries, reserves and budget, the following data noted:

Table specialized libraries of the National Autonomous University of Mexico Scientific Research

Institutions	Libraries	Volumes	Budget*
Ecology Center	1	2,120	
Cich	1	14,065	
Instruments Center	1	26,181	
Center of Nitrogen Fixation Research	1	1,593	39,080
Center for Technological Innovation	1	4,819	
University Center of Science Communication	1	5,368	
Technical Council of Scientific Research	4	5,815	
Institute of Astronomy	2	17,495	56,540
Institute of Biology	4	22,084	179,334
Institute of Ocean Studies and Limnology	3	6,436	
Institute of Nuclear Sciences	1	6,531	94,694
Institute of Physics	3	2,217	213,611
Institute of Cellular Physiology	1	5,091	
Institute of Geophysics	1	10,286	101,534
Institute of Geography	1	16,185	69,081
Institute of Geology	2	26,967	93,536
Institute of Engineering	1	7,230	
Institute of Biomedical Research	1	24,238	226,740
<i>limas</i>	1	19,063	124,92
Institute of Materials Research	2	9,000	13,634
Institute of Mathematics	1	28,181	103,492
Institute of Chemistry	1	9,533	231,413

Sources: Universidad Nacional Autónoma De México. Agenda Estadística 1994
 En Internet
 Op Cit. UNAM-1994 : presupuesto. México : Consejo Universitario. Pag.
 Varia

* Presupuesto en Dólares. Tipo de cambio 7.04

Research in the humanities

Institutions	Libraries	Volumes	Budget*
CCYDEL	1	20,360	20,035
Center for University Studies	1	10,360	
Center for Interdisciplinary Research in the Humanities	2	8,246	
CISAN	1	4,295	
Regional Center for Multidisciplinary Research	1	82,72	
CUIB	1	7,402	
Institute of Research in Anthropology	1	57,570	129,436
Institute of Economic Research	1	19,282	36,181
Institute of Research in Aesthetics	1	28,775	83,074
Institute of Philological Research	1	125,590	38,189
Institute of Research in Philosophy	1	30,788	18,848
Institute of Historical Research	1	31,067	57,256
Institute of Juridical Research	2	120,716	145,925
Institute of Social Research	1	31,612	64,129

Sources: Universidad Nacional Autónoma De México. Agenda Estadística 1994
Op Cit. UNAM-1994;presupuesto. México: Consejo Universitario.
Pag. Varia

* Presupuesto en Dólares. Tipo de cambio 7.04

The cooperation of the University with Latin America, in terms of research support, can be seen through the participation in 1994 of 103 visiting researchers from various Latin American countries; at the same time, the UNAM sent 16 researchers to diverse Latin American organisms.

Researchers at the UNAM „dedicate their efforts to the creation and deepening of scientific knowledge, to the training of new and better generations of professionals and to the dissemination of the vast scientific task ...“ (11)

All this creation of knowledge is supported by 164 libraries of the centers, institutes and professional schools, which generally have at least one library. Currently these 164 information centers house 1,298,389 titles and 4,132,286 volumes of documents, some of which are products of research carried out in the University, while others are acquired through purchases made nationally or in other countries for the support of scientific research.

Likewise, documentary support to research is provided by the LIBRUNAM system generated by the General Direction of Libraries Office, through which one has access to the 4,132,286 volumes via the Internet.

As a result of the above, it is possible to point out that the UNAM, presently a central part of the National Research System and which conducts more than 60% of the humanistic, social and scientific research in Mexico, dedicates an important part of its budget to research and development to enrich its specialized libraries.

The academic products of research, translated in the development of professional patterns and in the generation of knowledge, necessarily have economic, political and social repercussions in Mexico. Results of research carried out at the UNAM affect, among other sectors, the government, due to the fact that they can influence the creation of economic models, community development, educational models, and stock market predictions. etc.

Specialized libraries and their role in the economic and social context of Latin America

Generally, specialized libraries in Latin America possess a wealth of specialized documents in the various branches of knowledge. Their contribution to research and scientific development is confirmed in the generation of knowledge which is realized in diverse print and electronic media. These media, in turn, are consulted in order to obtain new contributions to scientific knowledge.

Ricardo Gutierrez points out, „The library only can be socially useful if its operations derive and are harmonized with the understanding of how knowledge is engendered and flows through the means of communication of a social and intellectual organism which is in constant evolution; and it is this changing social structure that greatly determines how knowledge is translated into action.“ (12)

One of the characteristics of a specialized library is that it is usually part of an institution, educational or government organism, or the private sector. As a result, „they are considered as cultural units that collaborate in the education of man, and the society they serve, which finds itself committed to search to know more in order to inform others of new ideas or more profound approaches on current topics, with

the purpose of raising the consciousness of colleagues and whole communities to provoke profound changes and social transformations.” (13)

The specialized library accomplishes this, when, on the one hand, the community it serves provides the materials needed for its investigations, and on the other, when the user, primarily constituted of specialized researchers in the specific area of knowledge, produces books, magazines and articles, among other things as result of their research. It is then that the specialized library fulfills its social and economic function, and simultaneously the new knowledge is disseminated within the community and towards other communities.

Like any other institution, the library, through the centuries, has responded to social needs, and in its changes has produced alterations and modifications under the impact of social change.

The industrial and technological revolution has had an effect on the creation of specialized libraries in the present century, in order to satisfy a great variety of research necessities, through the services provided by these information centers.

Conclusions

To be informed of our reality in terms of libraries in Latin America is a basic professional obligation. Nevertheless, the lack of information, particularly of statistical character, makes regional studies on this subject difficult.

Although it has been said that there is an awareness of the importance of specialized libraries as documentary support for research, the lack of information and related statistical data makes difficult the work that considers Latin America in a global perspective. Nevertheless, the compilation of information derived from representative Latin American institutions or national studies can contribute important data for wider studies.

The contributions of specialized libraries to research in diverse areas of knowledge and society will only be reflected in a thorough way, if emphasis is put on development and studies that allow us to confirm or infer these contributions.

It is necessary that associations of specialized libraries support studies that reveal their situation and identify the requirements for training and continual education require of administrators of this kind of library. Concerning this point, The Special Library Association, in a recent study, emphasized training focused on the use of new technologies.

Some agencies have shown interest in development of studies related to specialized libraries in Mexico, some aspects of which are the following: planning

of the specialized libraries of Mexico regarding specialized documentary services like the Selective Dissemination of Information (DSI), and contributions of specialized libraries to research and to Mexican society.

The studies described here consider the short term and could be addressed in the different Latin American regions. They are concrete proposals to the IFLA and in particular to its Latin American and Caribbean section.

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