

Opportunity for all: Three Social Inclusion Experiences in Peru's Public Libraries

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Abstract

Report of programs taking place in some Peruvian public libraries in the last ten years. Despite their deficiencies, these libraries have been able to contribute to the education and improvement of the quality of life of their communities, thus becoming valuable instruments of social inclusion. For their activities, they had the support of private organizations and some NGO.

This paper determines the link between the public library and social inclusion, based on literature review, direct observation, and interviews with the persons in charge of three cases that deserve to be highlighted. They are: the Miraflores municipal public library, which offers a variety of services for all the community; the CEDRO libraries, particularly those in high risk zones; and, Yauya's municipal public library, which offers services for the education in rural areas.

The conclusions reflect on the need to raise the awareness of the authorities related to the importance of public libraries for fostering social inclusion. It is expected that recent and important government regulations related to public libraries, books and reading will be acted upon by the various stakeholders.

Keywords: Public libraries; Peru; Social inclusion.

Introduction

When discussing public library and social inclusion from our perspective, we are referring to two linked concepts. A definition of social inclusion indicates that it is a “proceso que asegura que aquellos en riesgo de pobreza y exclusión social, tengan las oportunidades y recursos necesarios para participar completamente en la vida económica, social y cultural disfrutando un nivel de vida y bienestar que se considere normal en la sociedad en la que ellos viven” (Milcher e Ivanov, 2008). Another definition maintains that social inclusion is “la situación que asegura que todos los ciudadanos sin excepción, puedan ejercer sus derechos, aprovechar sus habilidades y tomar ventaja de las oportunidades que encuentran en su medio” (MIDIS, 2014).¹

The relationship with the concept of public library can be found, among other aspects, in that the library is an inclusive institution, because its activities are destined to favor all citizens without distinctions of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, etc., as it is clearly indicated in the Unesco Manifiesto (1994). And it continues saying that “Specific services and materials must be provided for those who cannot, for whatever reason, use the regular services and materials, for example linguistic minorities, people with disabilities or people in hospital or prison”.

In contrast with social inclusion, we find that the term social exclusion is currently being widely used. Castells (2001) indicates that this is a process which prevents individuals to have access to positions that would allow their independent survival. The public library is precisely the one that can contribute to revert the situation, offering to citizens the space and opportunities for access to information and knowledge which will allow them to assert their identity, build citizenship, improve their quality of life and achieve life-long learning. Jaramillo (2010) conceives the public library as an institution for promoting social processes, such as participation for more democratic decision making. Among the inclusive activities that public libraries can offer, Civallero (2011) suggests, among others, provision of health information (sexually transmitted diseases, teen pregnancy, drug use, etc.), legal clinics, support to continuing education, new recreation forms.

Yet, the situation of many public libraries in the Latin American countries is well known, due to lack of library professionals, minimum budgets, inadequate equipment, and most important, lack of effective public policies which can ensure a library development oriented to democratizing the access to information and knowledge, and to favor social inclusion. And Revesz (2001) affirms “Frente a realizaciones prestigiosas en grandes metrópolis, existen amplias áreas de nuestro subcontinente en que las bibliotecas públicas no lograron involucrar

¹ Process that ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion have the necessary opportunities and resources to participate fully in the economic, social and cultural life, enjoying a standard of living and welfare which is considered average in the society in which they live (Milcher e Ivanov, 2008).

Situation that guarantees that all citizens without exception can exercise their rights, make use of their capabilities and benefit of the opportunities provided by their environment (MIDIS, 2014).

a la comunidad local como una fuerza movilizadora consistente. Si bien pueden ser copadas por escolares y estudiantes, la casa del libro no se ha transformado en la casa de los lectores”.²

The Peruvian case confirms what has been said, as most public libraries face such serious problems that their presence is not meaningful for the citizens. This is why we present three experiences of public libraries which have successful activities of social inclusion in their communities. Each of them has particular characteristics in terms of financing, staffing, activities, clients served, among others; nonetheless they show that it is possible to transform difficulties into challenges, which then can be faced successfully.

For this document, we have reviewed bibliographic and documentary sources, printed and electronic, and we conducted in-depth interviews with the persons in charge of the three selected libraries.

The Public Library in Peru

In recent years there have been theses, articles and other works about public libraries in Peru (Castro, 2002; Alejos, 2003; Prieto, 2010) which refer to its origin, development, regulations and situation. The same topic is frequently presented in seminars and national congresses, highlighting its important role, but at the same time, the little interest of successive governments which seem not to be aware of it as a social asset. It is worth mentioning that, according to official statistics, out of the 1838 municipalities in the whole country, only 837 have a library (INEI, 2014), even though they are mandatory according to the Municipalities Law No. 27972.

This is why the new Law No. 30034, Law of the National System of Libraries (SNB) is of particular importance. Approved in 2013, it includes all public libraries: regional, provincial, district and of small populated centers. The System promotes “el funcionamiento de bibliotecas organizadas en todo el territorio nacional y la optimización del uso de sus servicios y recursos bibliográficos, dentro de la política pública de inclusión social, de construcción de la ciudadanía y de desarrollo humano” (art.2).³ We can see the concept of social inclusion as a framework to this law.

One of the main limitations of the Peruvian public libraries is the lack of professional staff⁴ (around fifteen in the whole country). It is therefore important that the new law mandates in its art. 7 the opening of technological institutes of librarianship and information sciences, responsible for providing enough numbers of high level technicians to take charge of public libraries nationwide. The law regulation, signed in September 2014 gives additional details on

² Facing prestigious achievements in big cities, we find large areas of our subcontinent in which public libraries have not been able to turn the local community in a consistent driving force. Even if it is full of school students, the book house has not become a house of readers

³ Availability of organized libraries in the whole country and the optimization of the use of its services and bibliographic resources, within a public policy of social inclusion, building of citizenship and human development

⁴ Very few municipalities offer attractive positions for librarians, so the majority of their libraries only have support staff trained at a basic level by the National Library or other organizations.

the creation and maintenance of the libraries, standards, coordinating regional centers and the higher education technological institutes for library technicians.

Another important measure to boost the development of public libraries for social inclusion is the “Plan de Incentivos a la Mejora de la Gestión y Modernización Municipal” (Incentive Plan for Management Improvement and Municipal Modernization) which determines goals to be achieved by the municipal governments. The guide to Goal 27 (Ministerio de Cultura, 2015), recently published, mandates the development of a Municipal Plan of the Book and Reading 2016-2021, in 40 main cities of the country. It is expected that the achievement of this goal by each district will contribute to promote reading habits, turning it in a “reading district”, as well as improving the human development and the quality of life index of its citizens. The government will give an economic bonus to those who present the plan by the deadline. These two pieces of legislation (SNB and Goal 27) should result in the future improvement of the level of services in Peruvian public libraries.

Social inclusion activities in Peruvian public libraries: last decade (2005-2015)

It is usual to find in public libraries the traditional services such as reading rooms and reference; lending, and children’s activities. Some of them, as well as other non-municipal libraries (in parishes, community center, NGO, etc.) have provided interesting activities and projects of social inclusion during the last decade.

As the organization responsible for public libraries in the country, the National Library (BNP) in partnership with *Beyond Access*⁵ and the NGO CEDRO, created in 2012 the project “Semillas para el Desarrollo / Bibliotecas para el Desarrollo” (Seeds for Development/ Libraries for Development). Beyond Access had previously contacted the Peruvian College of Librarians and visited public libraries in Lima and Piura, as well as governmental organizations with social programs, such as ONGEI and PCM. Beyond Access support started in 2014 with three pilot libraries: (1) Trujillo provincial Library, (2) Yauya district libraries and (3) Pucallpa municipal library. The aim was to strengthen their technological capabilities in order for them to provide better services to the citizens, support the development of the country with ICT, create awareness in the authorities and enhance their role as agents of economic and social development. (Beyond Access, 2014)

The main achievement to 2015 is that the pilot libraries have received computers, licensed software and staff training, achieving a 36% increase in user attendance. Additionally, Beyond Access, ONGEI and the USA Embassy provided information literacy and innovating services training to staff in the pilot libraries, the BNP, and 28 other libraries in the country, reaching a total of 155 individuals. Also, about 150 users received training in e-government services. (Beyond Access, 2015 a, b).

⁵ Beyond Access is an international initiative formed by IREX, EIFL, IFLA, Makaia, Development Agency, among others, with the support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. It has projects around the world; in Latin America: México, Central America, Venezuela, Colombia, Brazil, Argentina and Peru.

A list of other services oriented towards social inclusion is presented here. The three selected experiences are presented next:

- Informational and digital literacy for senior citizens: district libraries of Santiago de Surco and San Borja (in Lima).
- Adult literacy, informational literacy, support for employment: Piura municipal library, *Jatun Nani* program for construction workers “Aprendiendo en la obra”
- Reading services for the blind: San Borja municipal library (books in Braille and the JAWS software) and the library of Piura.
- Support for after school work: in very populated districts of Lima such as Villa El Salvador and Comas and also in San Borja.
- Promotion of reading comprehension: Villa El Salvador community libraries network, winner of the “Integración 2007” prize. (RPP Noticias, 2011); IIAP in Iquitos reading, poetry and short stories contests and “Semana del Libro Verde” (Week of the green book) promoting environmental conservation
- Citizens participation and advocacy with authorities: the Apurímac library system (80 libraries).
- Preservation of local heritage (immaterial and bibliographic): Huamachuco libraries (La Libertad) with support of notable intellectuals.
- Environmental education and local validation: CREA created by SERPAR in Lima; and IIAP in Iquitos, the “biblio-malocas” (along the Amazon river).
- Reading and entertaining services for children (reading in the park, playing rooms, etc.), CREA and IIAP.
- Reference and training in the use of databases: binational Centers as Peruvian North American Cultural Institute, Alliance Française, Goethe Institute, Peruvian-Japanese Association, etc.

Presentation of the experiences:

Experience No. 1: Municipal Library of Miraflores district (Lima)



Miraflores is a traditional and historic Lima district created in 1857, with numerous touristic attractions and beaches, and a current population of about 85000 inhabitants⁶. The library, created in 1955, has a main location and two branches: one in Santa Cruz area and the children's library in *Reducto* park. It has four professional librarians and about 10 assistants, considering volunteers and LIS students.

The library offers a variety of services for population of all ages and social conditions, particularly in non-traditional places such as parks, beaches, churches, homes, work areas. For example, since 2011 there are information and recreational literature services for adults and children on the beaches (3500 books loaned in summer, from December to March). Since 2012 it is possible to borrow on Sunday books, newspapers, videos and magazines for children and adults in two churches. There is daily reading for children, and materials for parents in the Kennedy park (in the district center). For young people, there is literature, comics, music, videos and other. And public schools in the district are visited once a week (about 500 books are borrowed every year).

A very important service is *Casero del Libro* in the open markets of Santa Cruz and La Unión, where merchants are offered every week pleasure reading, textbooks and self-learning books to improve their business (nearly 1200 users per year). In 2007 this program obtained the third place in the IFLA Marketing competition. Another program worth mentioning is the service to mothers in the social program *Vaso de Leche*. To them the library provides books and videos on child rearing, health services and pleasure reading (about 350 annual loans).

Senior citizens with reduced mobility are visited once a week in their homes or shelters. They can borrow books or audiovisual materials or ask to be read to them. They can also receive special materials for blind or visually impaired persons. Since 2009, persons visiting parks or attending workshops in the *Casa del Adulto Mayor* receive books and magazines appropriate to their age, specially selected to help their memory and manual dexterity (about 1500 annual loans).

Additionally, the library co-organizes the annual *Feria del Libro*, providing reading activity in a children's reading room. They also participate annually with reading service during *La noche blanca*, when businesses and cultural organizations remain open the whole night. (Prieto, 2015).

The activities reviewed here show that Miraflores library is active in promoting the equalitarian participation of citizens and cares for the development of its community.

Experience No. 2: CEDRO's libraries and tele-centers in the VRAEM

⁶ Official population data from INEI. <https://www.inei.gob.pe>



CEDRO is a NGO which provides education and information to persons of all ages, with the purpose of preventing or reducing drugs usage, violence and activities that place health in danger. Their documentation center supports and promotes programs addressed to adolescents, young adults and authorities in vulnerable areas. It coordinates regularly with the communities the offering of programs such as reading workshops, cultural events, workshops for prevention of risk behaviors, and similar. Since 2001 they have implemented, country-wide, 60 libraries (five of them in tele-centers of digital information), where they offer reading spaces for the personal development of the members of the community. (Obrenovich, 2014)

Going into the jungle, between the departments of Ayacucho and Cusco, there is an area called VRAEM (Valley of Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro rivers). This area is plagued with drug trafficking and terrorism, with a population of more than 200.000, of which 52% suffer poverty and 21.1.% illiteracy. Since 2009, CEDRO has centered its activities in eight of the districts in this area, building or improving their 20 libraries (35% of CEDRO libraries). This has been achieved with the participation of local authorities, community leaders, media and other available social programs. Library committees have been created to plan community work activities, cultural events and library services. Municipal governments provide the building and basic services, internet, a local facilitator and transportation. CEDRO finances technicians' visits, collections, computers, games and educational material. Local governments are currently paying for library staff which has already been trained in library management and reading promotion. Each library has reached about 1500 annual consultations. Besides, as members of the Beyond Access project, they have received e-government service training and additional elements for digital integration.

CEDRO's intervention in this region has allowed the VRAEM libraries to fight social exclusion and be able to offer their communities the possibility of cultural and social integration within a multicultural model (populations speaking native languages and Quechua), thus promoting the preservation of their oral tradition.

Experience No. 3: Biblioteca distrital de YAUYA



Yauya is a district in the province of Fitzcarrald, Ancash, situated at 3250 msnm⁷ with nearly 5500 inhabitants. Since October 2005, the Asociación Cultural y Educativa “Jatun Nani” (“wide road”) started the project “Atrapando el mundo en palabras” (Capturing the world in words), celebrating the district’s 100 years. Poverty and low educational level urgently required a library to help change the situation. This project started with the support of Oberle Peru and librarianship students from the PUCP. A professional librarian worked there between 2006 and 2008; now there is a teacher in charge of the library.

Work was initiated with the mothers, motivating them to read and support their children’s learning; next came the publication of graded readers for children and support for working mothers; later, teachers and other adults (shopkeepers and peasants) were included. “Reading corners” (Yachaqkukunapa) were created in the rural areas, and a virtual classroom was offered with support of the Ministry of Education. In 2014 the libraries were transferred to the Municipality; 23 schools, each with pedagogical staff, were receiving service. Two teams for local surveillance were formed, one for the municipal library and the other for the Yachaqkukunapa. They supervise and make sure that all agreements are acted upon and that the libraries continue working (Pasco y Polo, 2015).

Now they have about 400 users every month. Services offered are:

1. User education and reading activities for adults and children, expanded with a virtual classroom for teachers.
2. Travelling knapsack for rural primary schools.
3. Travelling bag for mothers and their kindergarten children (received the “Viva Lectura” prize in 2010).
4. Pedagogy consultancy for teachers, with the support of university teachers via workshops or blogs where they can exchange experiences.
5. Cultural interchange between rural and urban students who create and share short stories in Spanish and Quechua.
6. Dissemination and publications: they have a Web page, Facebook, blog and institutional video in YouTube.

⁷ msnm=Meters above sea level

With the Beyond Access project, and starting in 2014, there has been training for one representative of each school, and advocacy workshops for local authorities, and e-government services for urban and rural authorities and secondary students (Asociación Jatun Nani, 2015).

Jatun Nani has shown that activities like the ones just mentioned, are incentives for the commitment and participation of the citizens, and create important opportunities for social inclusion and improvement of the community's living standards.

Conclusions

Some Peruvian public libraries, with the support of their communities, private organizations and NGOs, have put in place a series of activities that promote social inclusion and engage citizens' participation in their communities. These activities demonstrate that public libraries have a great potential for contributing to the education, the entertainment and the improvement of the quality of life of the population.

Yet, despite the existence of important legislation, Peruvian public libraries objectives are not being attained, because, besides well-known deficiencies, they do not have priority in municipal policies or community development. Another significant problem is the scarcity of professional librarians in those libraries, barely 15 in the whole country. This situation results in slow progress and bad decision making. The activities presented here are successful mainly because of the work of committed librarians.

Advocacy with authorities and fulfilment and sustainability of plans into the future (rather than abandoning them when authorities change), are immediate steps that must be promoted by the Librarian profession and the decision makers (BNP, CBP, among others). We have now the new law for the National System of Libraries with a renewed focus; and also regulations that mandate municipalities to prepare and put in place a Municipal Plan of the book and reading 2016-2021. These two documents raise expectations and are a contribution to the development of libraries, books and reading, hence, social inclusion. It is expected that their legal enforcement will also create job opportunities for professional librarians and will promote the training of technicians in the specially created institutes.

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Anexo: LISTA DE SIGLAS

BNP	Biblioteca Nacional del Perú
CBP	Colegio de Bibliotecólogos del Perú
CEDRO	Centro de Información y Educación para la Prevención del Abuso de Drogas
CREA	Centros de Cultura, Recreación y Educación Ambiental (SERPAR)
EIFL	Electronic Information for Libraries
IIAP	Instituto de Investigación de la Amazonía Peruana.
IFLA	International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
INEI	Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática
IREX	International Research and Exchange, Washington
MIDIS	Ministerio de Desarrollo e Inclusión Social
MML	Municipalidad Metropolitana de Lima
ONGEI	Oficina Nacional de Gobierno Electrónico
PUCP	Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú
PCM	Presidencia del Consejo de Ministros
SERPAR	Servicio de Parques de Lima de la Municipalidad Metropolitana de Lima
SNB	Sistema Nacional de Bibliotecas, de la Biblioteca Nacional del Perú.
VRAEM	Valle del Río Apurímac-Ene-Mantaro