

Documentando la Historia Política Legislativa Chilena: Ciudadanía involucrada con sus raíces a través de Internet

English translation of the original paper: Documenting the Legislative Political History of Chile: Citizens engage with their roots through Internet

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Abstract:

The use of web platform and social media has an unexpected scope, since millions of users generate knowledge which is not available in libraries or web browsers, as there is information that refers exclusively to family stories or geographic areas far from the capital (in the context of each country), which is not shared because of private sphere or ignorance.

Since 2011, the Library of the National Congress of Chile has received biographical background, documents and pictures that users send by filling in an electronic form through the web section Documenting the Political History from the portal Legislative Political History (<http://historiapolitica.bcn.cl>), being a space to interact with relatives of former members of Congress (most of them from provinces and with local political leadership in the XIX and XX centuries), researchers, students, and others, who contribute to the reconstruction of unknown events in the history that provide the shaping of a political, parliamentary, and legislative identity about the Chilean society. Challenge to discuss is the corroboration of information that lands through these users.

Through this platform a link is attempted to generate with users who have exclusive information and get their confidence using a quick step that not only is carried out digitally, but also in others ways of communication according to their age group, by telephone or physical presence due to older adults.

Keywords: Oral history, Local history, Genealogy, Chilean history, Users engagement, Internet collaboration

Preliminary background

The use of global web platforms and social media has had an unsuspected impact. Millions of users generate knowledge that is not available in libraries or search engines, by contributing information derived from their family histories or from geographical areas far from the capital (as understood in the context of each country). This is not normally shared since it is unknown or derives from private life.

Within South America, and specifically the reality of Chile, the implementation of new information technology has not been delayed. Chile is a country with international links to economies at the very front of technology such as the United States, the European Union and the countries of the Asian Pacific Rim. The acquisition of cutting-edge technologies such as laptops, smartphones and tablets is possible for the vast majority of its people. Broadband Internet penetration has been rising since year 2000 and Wi-Fi connections are available across the country. Access is free in libraries, in public institutions, in certain public places and in the metro (subway).

If we look at figures for Internet penetration in South America, World Bank data puts Chile first, with the greatest number of user connections per hundred people: 72% in 2014. Chile is followed by Argentina (65%), Uruguay (61%) and Brazil (58%). Internationally, this indicator puts Chile on a level with Israel, Spain, Russia and Hong Kong.

As for speed and access, official figures from 2015 indicate that 64.2 out of every hundred people in Chile had Internet access. This is equivalent to 11.5 million persons. 77.8% of Internet access in Chile use mobile networks (3G / 4G) and of these 92.8% depend on smartphones. There are 24 million mobile devices in Chile (1.34 per capita) and 61% of the cell phones are smartphones.

This scenario of convergence and democratization of new information technologies, combined with the easy access to Internet in Chile, has led public institutions such as the Library of the National Congress make efforts to position itself, and to interact, on the web. That is where users seek and share information, making the web a free and open domain. Finally, the socio-political context of Chile must be added to the technological and communicational factor. Twenty-six years after the return of democracy, Chilean society has been through a process of restoration of democratic normality. The National Congress, as the legislative branch of government, plays a central role in this. It is here that parliamentarians do their legislative work. It is here they propose, discuss and approve the laws of the Republic. Any initiative that concerns this official body, like documenting the political history of legislation - should be done with the utmost care, protecting the political neutrality and following the protocols that must apply to an agency of the State of Chile.

Emergence of the idea

The digital section *Documenting the Political History* <http://historiapolitica.bcn.cl/documentando> - has its origin in the 2008 implementation of the Political Memory program Library of the National Congress of Chile, based on a request from the Honourable Library Committee (composed of the President of the Senate, the President of the Chamber of Deputies and the Director of the Library) to establish a repository of political memory and to make it available to the general public by free access

through the web. To realize this, a head of section and qualified personnel in the fields of history, political science, library science and journalism were recruited.

Additionally, during the years 2008 to 2010, the Library showed its commitment to the theme recommended by its superiors by including political memory / political history in its list of institutional goals and strategic axes. This is related to several factors:

- the advent of new information technology and its new possibilities of access
- the establishment of new civic links between the world of Congress and the general public (which has seen political power discredited due to the new demands from people who are much better informed than before)
- the new Chilean democratic scenario based on the free exercise of fundamental rights by the citizens of the 21st century

This requires a Legislative Power attentive to the demands of citizens and with the intention of strengthening, within its own possibilities and institutions, the elaboration of a Legislative Political History which could be described as "neutral" or "impartial". This would differ from the academic world, where researchers follow a specific line of thought and develop their themes based on hypotheses that often have an ideological foundation.

In this respect, and using the principle of historical neutrality when interviewing former parliamentarians, we have for instance been able to address the transformations that occurred in the administrations of presidents Eduardo Frei Montalva (1964-1970) and Salvador Allende Gossens (1970-1973), which subsequently triggered the institutional collapse in Chile. After the coup, the National Congress remained closed for 17 years, until it reopened in 1990 with the return of democracy. People expected that many years would pass before these issues could be addressed without taking sides. But today Congress assumes that these topics can be treated in a professional way.

Later, in 2010, the section for Legislative Political History (Unidad de Historia Política Legislativa) began to develop the Legislative Political History portal (Portal HPL). It was made available on the web in July 2011, when the National Congress celebrated its bicentennial. The Portal initially consisted of 11 sections, where the highlights were interviews with former parliamentarians, the collection of political pamphlets, and the section on legislative history. To achieve this result a multidisciplinary team composed of professionals from various fields: computer engineers, information architects, librarians, web designers, historians and journalists worked for months.

The main focus of the section Documentando la Historia Política Legislativa is to promote one of the basic principles of Web 2.0: the sharing of knowledge. Since this is an institutional site representing the National Congress of Chile, it was thought that only internal sources of official information would be used. But in the discussions about the portal the need to link up with the general public became apparent. This encouraged collaboration such as the donation of relevant documents under a Creative Commons licence. To implement this, a form was developed where users should enter the following data (**see image 1**):

- Name
- Surname
- Email
- Subject

- Comments (max 300 characters)
- Attach File / Attach another file
- Accepting the donations policy (which authorize the Library of National Congress of Chile to publish the materials received under a Creative Commons license). Yes/No.

An item on donations policy was also included, but has not been utilized till now.



Image 1: Documentando la Historia Política Legislativa

Donations as workflow

This section of the HPL portal has allowed us to work with biographical background information, including documents and photographs sent by users who have completed an electronic form. It has become a space for interaction with relatives of former congressmen (mainly from the provinces, and local political leaders in the nineteenth and twentieth century), and with researchers, students and others. Their contributions allow the reconstruction of undocumented events in our history, which assists in tracing the political, parliamentary and legislative identity of Chilean society.

From July 2011 we began to systematize information of Documenting the Political History of Chile. By December 31, 2015 we had received 263 documents (photographs and archive files), through a total of 202 donations (see **table N° 1**). Many of these correspond to portraits, family photos, birth certificates, photos of diplomas, electoral propaganda, etc.

Donations	E-mail	Attachments
2011	19	51
2012	29	39
2013	63	82
2014	55	49
2015	36	42
Total	202	263

Table N°1

We receive contributions in excellent condition and quality, but also material of lesser quality, either through low resolution, poor photo shots or lack of source information. When these problems occur, we confirm receipt of the contribution and ask the user to send the item once again, explaining that the materials are important in documenting the political history of the country, but that we must follow a protocol for its later publication.

Mostly users send their donation once again, which indicates that there is no disrespect vis-a-vis the user when we explain politely how relevant their contributions are.

Contributions by users go through the following path (via web form):

1. Reception of an email with the required information, plus any documents attached, at the headquarters of the Legislative Political History Unit.
2. The email is forwarded to the administrator in charge of Documenting Political History.
3. We send an email to the donor confirming receipt of the donation - with appreciation. When the veracity of the comments added is uncertain, we ask for the user's family relationship with the parliamentarian as well as the source of the data.
4. If a new communication with the user occurs, step 3 is repeated.
5. Data and attachments are saved in a folder with the name of the parliamentarian, along with a copy of the email.
6. Information about the donation is entered in a standardized Excel table. This is later sent to personnel specialized in repositories.

We have also set a maximum response time of 48 working hours after receiving donations, in line with protocols established for other processes within the Library and in concordance with ISO-9001. In general, the response time never exceeds 24 hours. In the case of portraits of parliamentarians who lack a picture in his or her biographical sketch, these are added at once, with immediate notice to the user, who always appreciates the rapid response. This is a principle that has given us users who regularly make new contributions, because they know that their donations are rapidly taken in account.

In other cases, users do not send an attachment, but their comments help us clarify dates of birth or death of parliamentarians, the names of parents and the places of birth and death as well as incorrect pictures or errors. Some have been perpetuated for years in the literature that genealogists or renowned historians work with. Mistakes are still present. This is where ordinary citizens become important. In Chile a total of 3,961 persons have sat in Congress through the nearly 205 years the legislative body has existed.

Internal and external visualization

The welcome given to the section Documentando la Historia Política Legislativa from 2011 to 2014, and the interest in strengthening it and making it more visible on the part of the Political History Unit, caused several measures to support the donations to be taken in 2015, both internally and externally. They had different results, without necessarily increasing the number of donations during that year. The measures implied, however, a strengthening and consolidation of the section.

1st. Development of a goal associated with the donations at the level of the Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional.

For more than two centuries the National Congress has been a fundamental pillar in the history of Chile. Therefore an invitation was extended to collaborate in the construction of its own history. The BCN proposed as one of its tasks to recover, preserve, organize, update and disseminate the political and legislative patrimony so that parliamentarians, the political world and the general public know and understand its meaning from a historical perspective.

2nd. Creation of a Parliamentary Collection:

This measure proposed the establishment of a special collection, within the system of BCN repositories: one that was clearly constituted by donations from users. Thus, innovations in our HPL portal, with their respective descriptions, could easily be used.

3rd Dissemination in mass media:

In launching the campaign it was preferred to do it internally on the website of the Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile (<http://www.bcn.cl/noticias/donaciones-bcn>), from where the news were spread through the BCN social networks. Afterwards an email was sent to the main communication media both in Santiago of Chile and in other Chilean regions. This was presented in the most important national newspaper, which highlighted the initiative in an article on May 31, 2015, with the title "Legislative history is revitalized by collecting old documents" [Historia Legislativa chilena “revive” gracias a colección de antiguos documentos].



Image 2: El Mercurio, Body D 9, May 31 2015



Image 3: BCN web portal of Chile

The role of communication manager

One of the risks that occur with the use of Internet and the effort to build relationships through new technologies is to lose sight of who the users are and how one should work and interact with them. This could be called the problem of "technological depersonalization". In the same vein, one of the keys to the success of *Documentando la Historia Política*

Legislativa [Documenting the Legislative Political History] has been to understand and to take into account that donors, in many cases, are close relatives of former politicians. The files they attach are not random photographs or simple documents, but photographs and objects that have survived the years; changes of homes, cities and countries; war and exile; the ravages of weather and the natural catastrophes so typical of Chile.

One should never forget that through the electronic platform we are trying to build a link with users that guard exclusive information. Hence it is vital to gain their loyalty through rapid management, which is not restricted to digital tools. Sometimes it is necessary to integrate other communication channels that correspond to their age group, such as telephone or face-to-face, especially with older adults. We must also keep in mind that among the users there are people with disabilities. Having inclusive sites is part of 21st century communication.

In this sense, the Library of Congress of Chile has incorporated inclusion into its vision and values as an organization. Another concept relating to Chile, but which is surely embedded in the reality of other countries as well, is the idea of "territoriality / nationality". The process of documentation solidifies and sets precedents for the construction of national identity. Through the contributions of each user the small elements that ultimately form the story as a whole can be unravelled. Many of the stories about parliamentarians did not take place exclusively within the walls of National Congress; they also occurred in the districts they represented, like cities that did not have much to do with the metropolis. Many followed cultural and social patterns that seemed alien to the ordinary citizen. They could be linked to the world of mining, or of farming, or of industry, depending on their location in the north, the centre or the south of Chile.

To work with these materials from local oral history and genealogy, especially in the Latin American context, it is imperative for the information manager to master relevant knowledge about the migratory waves through the centuries following the Spanish conquest of America. Chile today is a mix of the heritage of its original inhabitants, the Mapuches, coupled with migratory currents from Spain, Germany, England, Italy, Portugal, Palestine and Croatia. This also affects the formation of the National Congress.

Finally, a great challenge that needs to be discussed is the corroboration of the information provided by these users. This is because the information often cannot be easily verified, requiring a decision to trust the donor, something that is risky and that later on may create unpleasant situations for lack of rigor.

Conclusions

The popularization of technological devices coupled with the expansion of the Internet in Chile, which has a leading position in South America, has created an suitable environment to develop one of the main characteristics of Web 2.0: the sharing of knowledge.

The section *Documentando la Historia Política Legislativa* of the HPL portal of the Library of the National Congress of Chile is therefore positioned in a favorable technological environment. It is also placed in a social and political scene that allows it to encourage and meet the demands of citizens who have greater access to information and who make greater demands on those with political power. Also, *Documentando la Historia Política Legislativa*

is part of a methodology that seeks to be neutral, since it is a public institution, where all political ideologies converge.

In the other hand, our five years of experience have enabled this section to generate a clear description of the process and its workflow. Priority is given to rapid responses, so as to generate empathy with them, as the information delivered is not available in libraries or search engines, but comes from inside the families.

One of the findings we want to highlight was the foresight that allowed *Documentando la Historia Política Legislativa* to move to another level to offer wide dissemination, internally and externally, in national media as well as in those of the Library of National Congress. Finally, one of the key successes of the project has been to understand that donors are mostly relatives of former congressmen and that the files we receive have survived the years; changes of homes, cities and countries; war and exile; the ravages of weather and the natural catastrophes so typical of Chile. Additionally, the manager should consider the elements "territoriality / nationality" and the waves of migration throughout Chilean history so as to fully understand the different components that constitute the political history of this country.

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Translated by Tord Høivik, Norway (July 2016).