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## **REDARTE-SP: integrating efforts and resources of art libraries and information services in the city of São Paulo, Brazil in order to improve quality in services and access**

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*(REDARTE-SP: Integrating efforts and resources of art libraries and information services in the city of São Paulo, Brazil in order to improve quality in services and access)*

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### *Abstract:*

*Presents an overview of art information services in the city of Sao Paulo, Brazil, including libraries, archives, documentation sections in art museums and cultural centres, and points out the role of REDARTE-SP in this context. REDARTE-SP, a network of art libraries and information services in that city, was created in 1998, with the purpose of being a place for discussion of theoretical, technical and organizational issues facing art information services and for the formulation of collaborative projects. The group believes that the exchange of ideas, the discussion of successful practices and the development of shared projects empowers the art information professionals, contributes to improve quality of art information services and products, provides better use of the available resources, and widens the circle of users.*

#### 1. Context

REDARTE/SP is an art information network service placed in São Paulo. It is made of both cultural and educational equipments – libraries, documentation centres, research, archives, museum sectors, etc. – and also by virtual information spaces or projects entailed to public or private institutions.

To know São Paulo's complexity is essential for a reflexion about the function of the professionals of art information and the area's institutions.

São Paulo, which this year completed 450 years of its foundation is with its 10,6 million inhabitants the biggest Brazilian and South American city, also being considered the fourth biggest urban agglomerated in the world - its metropolitan area has ca. 18 million people. It is an important economical centre with a high concentration of financial institutions and companies, providing mainly services. It has a broad and varied network of tourism and event organizations, with around 12,5 thousand restaurants, 15 thousand bars, hundreds of nightclubs, show rooms and large hotels (it also has the 3<sup>rd</sup> biggest helicopter fleet in the world!).

With a lively cultural life, it has approximately 300 cinemas, 100 theatres, 70 museums, 40 cultural centres, besides exhibition buildings and art galleries<sup>1</sup>. There are many art schools, free courses and workshops, the majority of which has a large demand. Itinerant exhibitions, music festivals, cinema, video, theatre and dance performances are very frequent and usually attract a large audience. Fairs, seminars and congresses in the cultural areas are also offered with a large participation and are generally very successful within the public.

Despite its economical strength, São Paulo presents very big inequalities and social exclusions, which are made evident when income, work, health, education and housing indicators are analysed, especially in the suburban areas.

When it comes to education, even though the city concentrates many students – more than 2 million students registered in primary and secondary school and ca. 400.000 enrolled in universities – it still shows high rates of illiteracy (4.6% SEADE Foundation, 2001) and school giving up. It is still struggling for better education quality and facilities.

The complex social network makes working in cultural institutions very difficult, mainly in libraries and information centres, due to the different profiles of users served by these services. The present politics stresses the organization of events and shows rather than proper development and adequate maintenance of cultural spaces and services, as well as providing sufficient means for the preservation and dinamization of the collections and information resources.

The high rates of social exclusion concur with those of cultural exclusion that are also related to the high rates of violence, which are always increasing. The absence of efficient state politics, which should be mainly focused on trying to solve these structural backgrounds by promoting culture, contribute to perpetuate this problem. These politics would require a decentralized cultural action, which would guarantee the access to the production and the consumption of cultural initiatives and to information on art in the suburban areas where communitarian cultural movements have developed some action.

In this way, the work with information on art constitutes an enormous challenge, in the way that next to the work devoted to specialized public, it can contribute to the aesthetical artistic education of the less favoured and to the development of their sensibility and taste, as well as to stimulate the artistic production and the artistic education of the public. Especially to children and teenagers, unemployed and elder people (whose development rate has increased each year) and to the population with low income in general, the cultural inclusion is a way to strengthen their self-esteem and citizenship values.

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<sup>1</sup> These data not accurate because up to now there has not been a systematic research on cultural indicators for Brazil

The social functions that the art information services can carry out in São Paulo city are countless. These services also provide information to different specialized users - researchers and professionals that work directly with arts – as well as to the public in general interested in improving their knowledge on art.

Although we have not made an exhaustive survey on information services of São Paulo, we estimate that it reaches more than 50 institutions. One of the relevant features of those services is made of its heterogeneity, concerning both the relation to the organizations that it keep them running and its purposes, as well as the broad variety of subjects they deal with and the information resources offered. Besides, those services have users with different profiles – reflecting the city social morphology - and show various stages of development: the most simple systems of information work together with the most sophisticated, of complex management and high costs of running.

## 2- History

### 2.1 – The 70's

The REDARTE/SP was formed in July 1998, but the first cooperation projects began in the 70's. It cannot be stated that they were group projects, as they generally involved library teams of two institutions, being the main ones, in that period, the library of the Communication and Arts School of the University of São Paulo, the Lasar Segall Museum Library and the Brazilian Cinemateca Documentation Department - all these organizations belonged to the State. Projects developed within civil society organizations, like the Contemporary Brazilian Music Society and the Infanto-Juvenil Theatre of the Paulista Association, among others, also took place in that period and contributed to the development of activities concerning specialized documentation. The projects that were applied contributed to qualify libraries work and tasks and to develop their collections as well as to improve professional skills of the specialized librarians.

In that period, such words like micro informatics and internet were not known or used and Art Libraries were nor automated, the access to the information on library collections and to published work was very difficult, relying on phone calls and visits of users to the libraries.

On the one hand that state of the art made it very difficult to data surveying, on the other hand it formed a challenge to the librarians that studied access improvement. From the projects carried out in this period, resulted publications like the Brazilian Dramatic Art Bibliography, the Guide to the Brazilian Chorals and the Brazilian Composers Catalogues, to name a few.

### 2.2 – The 80's

The first study on the art information services of the São Paulo City was developed in 1985 and was updated in 1988. This diagnosis, that involved eighteen institutions of the city, identified in the whole of those libraries, the following points in common with each other:

- a) Inexistent guidelines for collection development – there were no integrated policies that defined each information service mission;
- b) Disperse and outdated collections – seen as a whole, the available collections in the city's art libraries seemed very rich and varied but when examined one by one, what was found was old, outdated, fragmented, uncharacterized and not representative collections;

- c) Lack of rationalization of technical procedures;
- d) Need for work modernization, by adopting the new professional profiles and by using information technologies;
- e) Insufficient human resources.

All these features interact with each other as, besides the lack of financial resources for collection proper development, the difficulty of access to the documents was increased by the large number of non processed books and by inefficient technical treatment.

There was not a quality control for information processing due to the structural lack of human resources, to the absence of software for information management, to the lack of cooperative work as well as to inadequate library management education programs and insufficient rules and guidelines for information processing work, like thesauri and controlled vocabularies in Portuguese language for different subjects. This state of the art contributed to render the development of adequate strategies for technical processing of information very difficult and to block information access..

The access to audiovisual documents and to the diverse information media that formed the collections of art libraries was rendered more difficult because of the need for sound and controlled technical processing as well as for good schemes of storage. These matters were strictly linked to skilled human resources and financial, physical and material resources that would convey adequate conditions for collection storage.

Besides this, some information services were highly dependant on the state institutions they worked for and their collections and activities were integrated in the projects carried out by those institutions. Other libraries on the opposite were disconnected to the objectives of the institutions that ruled them: the collections were not focused on the institution activity, the services provided had nothing to do with the needs of the institution, they offered inadequate service hours and for these reasons, their users, when there were users, did not work within the organization and were external to its activity did not belonged to its functional board.

Therefore, these information services formed isolated spaces for information retrieval within the institutions they were integrated in and, for this reason, they could easily be considered as needless, unnecessary.

The study on the art information services of São Paulo city also concluded that art librarians, unlike colleagues who worked in other areas of service were not organized in interlibrary working groups to discuss common issues and to look for integrated solutions for the matters aroused. These librarians worked mainly individually, isolated and did not meet colleagues from other institutions, and had not a sound knowledge of their collections and products.

With this situation it is easy to imagine the hard work involved in looking for a specific information or a specific document. To search information resources implied to know for instance if a book belonged to any information service of São Paulo and was dependant on having been processed and included in the library catalogue on having been disseminated, available for loan and easily accessible. Sometimes this search for information had no results because collections had not been well processed and registered.

There were a large number of potential users of art information services - students, professors, teachers, researchers, cultural agents, professionals of each branch of the arts and other people without any art training – meaning, there was a potentially broad range of demand for art information services. However, the majority of the libraries were under used.

In the 70's and 80's some institutions developed quality services but their efforts were not enough to change the scenery of art information and documentation services in São Paulo city.

For that reason, in 1988 a program for creating an automated information network was presented to the Itaú Cultural Institute (ICI). The aim of this network was to provide information and documentation access in the various art domains that existed in the libraries integrating the network. For the subject retrieval, a group of librarians and other specialists created The Controlled Terminology on Art, a pioneer initiative in Brazil, a country where almost nothing had been done in this area up till then.

### 2.3 – the 90's

There were no big changes for art information services in the 90's if compared to the previous decade. Yet, many institutions were developed, started offering automated services and improved the services provided. They also had now the means for developing cooperation, which was a very important issue to the quality of service in the area.

Some libraries were involved in creating joint initiatives to form a common basis for technical procedures and created The Controlled Vocabulary for Cinema and The Controlled Vocabulary for Scenic Arts that were later merged in The Controlled Vocabulary for the Performing Arts. This terminology was a very important tool to ensure coherence in indexing documents on these subjects.

However there was still much to be done: to increase benefits was needed in what concerns collections, services and products quality and quantity and to improve information services for different and more diversified user profiles.

Libraries, archives and documentation services were very disconnected to everyday activity of art professionals exception made for researchers, art historians and art critics who by the specificity of their professions must incessantly search for information resources and documents. Most of the information of art libraries, of documentation centres and of archives was under used because it was not processed and made visible for the user.

This situation was more accurate namely in what concerns visual arts. A case study was carried out between 1995 and 1997 and formed the grounds for a PhD dissertation presented to the University of São Paulo, giving rise to REDARTE/SP.

### 3- REDARTE/SP activity

The situation of art information services of São Paulo city demanded the definition of a global strategy for the libraries and art documentation services that, starting from the creation of an articulated network, would favour the emerging of cooperative projects that would make it possible to profit from the resources. These resources shared or integrated would enable the development of actions related to art documentation and on art as well as the communication between those network members, connecting them with other systems and networks or with other databases, following the international tendency of scale winnings in terms of information work.

That was the initial purpose of REDARTE/SP which strength relies, above all, on the existence of a common board of management and for that, requests that the divisions that gather the information services by kind or resources source have to be minimized, as by gathering them, they put them apart. On the other hand, a program with such scope and aims could not involve, naturally, just the art librarian, but all the professionals acting in the art information field as well as specialists. It became necessary to develop a communication strategy that minimized the existent barriers

between the various professionals responsible for the information services and the collections – museologists, archivists, librarians – and the researchers and specialists.

As for the art information public, it is very broad and diverse, but it is necessary to develop studies that contribute to define the importance of the library and the documentation centres in its professional activity, and to identify the libraries, as well as the information resources they use; it is important to know in which way users access structured information services and information technologies, besides collecting suggestions about art documentation and the role that libraries and art information services should perform today, in our society.

We should also concern ourselves with the “non-users”, the potential users of artistic documentation, giving priority to the professionals that do not attend the information services.

Meanwhile the non specialized public cannot be forgotten – students, professors, researchers, cultural agents or anyone interested in the art fields – who also constitutes a broad range for potential demand.

To increase the public interested in art information, is also a way of bringing new publics to the arts, of increasing art understanding, of stimulating creation, artistic activity and research, of providing perception for art fruition. To educate the art admirer is to provide elements to the individual so he can appropriate himself of the cultural goods, in an attempt to oppose difficulties in art understanding imposed by the deficient education and by social origins. That appropriation begins by mastering the code. And that can be learned. The artistic information has a role to perform in the development of the individual artistic competence and in the formation of the public to the arts. The institutions that take care of art information and documentation should also assume that role.

Considering that the financial resources are always insufficient – and almost inexistent in economic crisis times – one cannot disseminate resources and strength promoting unfeasible, inadequate or worthless projects or projects that isolated, even if they have quality, can never fulfill the needs of the public, so becoming inefficacious.

The REDARTE/SP intends to act by means of inter-institutional projects that convey integrated information management and that, at the same time, fulfill institution priorities and aims and the needs within art information, in the city’s scope, thus avoiding resources dispersion, collection fragmentation and service repetition, promoting the circulation and wide dissemination of art information, specially about brazilian art.

Presently, REDARTE/SP is focused on a communication strategy. It has developed a communication project, which includes the creation of an internet site – a brazilian art orientated one – a folder and a guide of the libraries and information; services of São Paulo. Presently, REDARTE/SP is engaged in getting sponsorship for making this project a reality.

At the same time REDARTE/SP is stating its own actuation policy, which defines its focus and priorities. This policy should also consider the project contextualization and the strengths of present participants. The process of choosing the focus of REDARTE/SP is developed from the different axis next specified and allows the articulation among the following vectors:

- a) The artistic language or means of expression – Scenic Arts/Scenography, Fine Arts, Cinema, Photography, Music, etc.
- b) The type of document – printed material, audiovisual, digital, etc.

- c) The processes used for information and collection management – acquisition, preserving techniques, documentation and information dissemination
- d) Products – information sources on brazilian art, such as bibliographies, motion pictures collections, discographies, inventories of special archives, etc.

The decision on the focus for the coming year actions for REDARTE/SP shall give priority to plan group actions but REDARTE/SP success relies above all on the commitment of information professionals in working without individual or corporative restrictions as well as in recognizing the importance of the work carried out.

The possibilities for work on art information services in Brazil are very broad, a country where there is still much to be done. The art information services network in São Paulo should give rise to – like the work developed in Rio de Janeiro since 1995 – an improved information organization and management as well as a better access to information. It should also meet the needs of the users who shall look more and more for information on art as far as the services improve the quality of the work involved in processing documentation and in the processes of information circulation and dissemination.

It is also believed that REDARTE/SP, whilst favouring information and experience exchanges between different kinds of professionals within the arts favours their knowledge improvement and contributes to the creation of leaderships in the sector. By sharing opinions these leaders may help to change the art information and documentation services scenery in São Paulo, articulating their actions to the arts and cultural agents, thus helping to decrease cultural exclusion in the city.

Finally, the visibility that the network work of REDARTE/SP can have will certainly contribute to gain credibility both for the supporting organizations and for the public.

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