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Prison Libraries in Italy

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Abstract

Barlotti is the director of the "Libraries Conquer Communities" project. The aim of this project is to promote social and cultural inclusiveness among all citizen, including those inside prison communities.

The author describes how a formal cooperation agreement was achieved in 1995 between three prison libraries within the territory of Romagna (Ravenna, Forlì, Rimini) and the Ministry of Law and Justice, the regional Istituto Beni Culturali, and the Province of Ravenna.

The main objectives of the cooperation agreement was 1) to establish a line of communication between the prison libraries and the library network on the outside; 2) to provide the same level and quality of service to the prison libraries as provided in the free community; and 3) and to heighten the awareness in the outside community of the reading and library needs of incarcerated offenders.

The author discusses the similarities between the prison libraries and libraries in the free community in relationship to service roles, library materials, programs, and technology. She shows how the prisoners contribute to the selection of materials and the building of the collections, including foreign language materials. Further, she points to the extent to which the collections of both Italian and foreign language have grown over the last few years along with the increased use of the libraries.

The author goes on to explain how the three prison libraries obtain library materials, both through donations from publishers, other libraries, and private citizens, as well through regular funding from the Ministry of Justice.

The presentation also includes information about prison library staff, composed of Justice Ministry employees, volunteers, and librarians from other libraries.

LIBRARIES IN PRISON

Observations

1. Legal requirements and regulations.

- 1.1 Current prison regulations
- 1.2 Requirements for prison treatment programs and prison organization
- 1.3 Regional laws regarding libraries, archives, and museums.

2. References

- 2.1 IFLA *Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners* (1995)
- 2.2 UNESCO *Public Library Manifesto* (1995)
- 2.3 Italian associations
 - 2.3.1 National Association of Librarians *Fuori di sé*, BFdS, 1995, (information, books, newspapers, and bibliotherapy) in untraditional places for people of different nationalities and backgrounds: prisoners, the elderly, and the frail
 - 2.3.2 Year 2001: *Associazione Biblioteche Carcerarie (ABC)*-Italian Association of Prison Libraries.

3. Libraries and cultural events.

The current situation of Italian prisons shows a multifaceted picture in regards to the various activities and services guaranteed for prisoners. As a whole, however, they have become fairly comprehensive, particularly within the last three years.

4. Implementation of new information services and re-evaluation and revision of existing services

4.1 Libraries

Few libraries currently exist, but the need for cultural activities is increasing among prisoners. Reading and writing can be seen as ways to break through the confinement of prison life and as activities that contribute to a person's mental health. This fact is clearly stated in the **IFLA Guidelines** and the **UNESCO Public Library Manifesto**:

The Role of public libraries

The following key task , regarding information, tuition and culture should be at the centre of the services offered by a public library.

Freedom, wellbeing , the improvement of society and of individuals are fundamental values. They can be reached only through the democratic actions of well informed citizens who play an active role in society.

This is based on satisfactory schooling and tuition and on the free access to information and culture.

Public libraries are a local and accessible means to knowledge ; an essential element for long term knowledge, to develop freedom of choice and to promote culture from the individual up to bigger social groups.

This document declares the faith of UNESCO in public libraries as a vital force for tuition, culture and information and as an indispensable means in promoting peace and spiritual wellbeing of mankind.

Therefore UNESCO encourages governments nationally and locally to promote public libraries and sustain their development.

Public libraries.

- 1. Should help develop and strengthen the love for reading from a tender age.*
- 2. Should sustain individual education and auto-tuition as well as formal instruction at all levels.*
- 3. Offer opportunities for personal creative development.*
- 4. Stimulate the minds and creativity of the young.*
- 5. Promote the knowledge of our past cultural history, appreciation of art and comprehension of new inventions and scientific innovations.*
- 6. Give voice to all branches of art.*
- 7. Develop and promote dialogue between cultures protecting their diversity.*
- 8. Preserve oral tradition.*
- 9. Guarantee access to all citizens to all type of information.*
- 10. Give information to local associations and groups of interest.*
- 11. Help in the use of technological information as for the use of computers.*
- 12. Promote and if necessary implement reading-writing activities and programs for all age groups.*

4.2. Archiving centre and information services

4.2.1. Activities

Grouping, classification, and processing of documents, legal documents, and school/academic textbooks on prisons and persons related to such functions (ie. government agencies, volunteers, associations, schools...).

4.3 Emilia Romagna. Information and bibliotherapy

4.3.1. Voluntary work in prison (1992)

Prison volunteer work by M. Angela Barlotti of the Association **Biblioteche fuori di se**, which included reading and writing activities/programs for prisoners.

4.3.2. Library Service by the Province of Ravenna.

In accordance with the UNESCO *Public Library Manifesto* and the IFLA *Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners*, Barlotti proposed and carried out an agreement with the province of Ravenna/Minister of Law and Justice that would establish libraries in prisons. In the Region of Emilia Romagna, the Institute of Culture and the Province of Forli later joined the project.

Extracts from the agreement:

Prison order (law n. 354 26/07/1995 and later versions)

Art. 1Treatment and rehabilitation.....

Point 6: A rehabilitative treatment program for prisoners must be implemented, which guarantees contact with the outside world and facilitates the prisoner's return to society

Art. 17....The outside community should be involved in the rehabilitation.....

Point 1: The rehabilitation into the community must also include the participation of private citizens, institutions, and public and private associations and agencies

Art. 19.....Tuition

Access to library books is highly recommended, with a broad choice of reading materials.

Also emphasized are the following objectives:

- to provide for cultural development of the individual through access to knowledge, information, communication
- to integrate prison libraries with ones in the outside community
- to train prisoners to documentary work so as to facilitate rehabilitation
- to improve the knowledge of prisoners
- to train prisoners and tutors in professional library work
- to provide the tutors working as librarians with the means to obtain needed information from outside sources
- to promote forms of book exchanges between public and prison libraries
- to promote cultural events inside the prison.

The Ministry of Law and Justice will:

- develop policies and procedures for the operation of prison libraries
- promote access to and use of library materials
- guarantee continuity of prison library services through the establishment of a person in charge of prison administration
- increase library collections and provide the necessary technology to ensure an effective service
- connect prison libraries with the national public library system
- establish a collaborative relationship between outside organizations and prisons in order to promote joint cultural events.

4.3 Italy. August 2003

Current situation:

...from diamonds nothing is born.....from filth are born flowers.....

Fabrizio de Andre'

4.3.1. Associations

ABC Italian Association of Prison Libraries

4.3.1.1 City prison committee

Includes various bodies (schools, local government, public and private agencies) that provide funding for prisons and jails.

4.3.2. Objectives

We have now achieved the objectives stated in the cooperative agreement between the public administrative agencies, the prisons, and the Ministry of Justice.

4.3.3. Libraries

New situation in Italian cities as various books have been discarded that were no longer used or desired.

4.3.4. Librarians

- a) Volunteers from outside public and private agencies
- b) Special courses have been implemented in Ravenna and Forlì for both Italian and foreign prisoners
- c) Tutors and police officers working in prison.

4.3.5. Books

- a) Frequent updating of reading materials
- b) Italian and foreign language publications
- c) No censorship performed outside routine checks.

4.3.6. Users

- a) Foreign and Italian, the former population increasing rapidly
 - b) Police officers working in prison.
- 4.3.7. Book Exchanges**
Exchanges between prison and public libraries facilitated by volunteers.
- 4.3.8. Culture**
- a) Acquisition of books in original languages and creation of multicultural collections with the creation of a new position as “cultural mediator” inside the library workforce.
- 4.3.9. Education and technical training**
Special collections devoted to school books (standard public school subjects) with texts in both Italian and foreign languages.
- 4.3.10. Catalogues**
- a) Written and online catalogues
 - b) Published by local editors (Ravenna)
 - c) Online
 - In Ravenna from 2001 access to national cooperative catalogue SeBiNa
 - In Rome a local area network (LAN) of prison libraries
 - d) Bibliographic records in multiple languages, including non-Roman characters.
- 4.3.11. Internet**
Use of Internet in the prison libraries of Forli and Rimini.
- 4.3.12. Training programs**
Aimed at prisoners, tutors and police officers working in prison, in order to prepare them to become library technicians (cataloguing according to standard ISBD, RICA, Dewey rules).
- 4.3.13. Librarians-prisoners-jobs**
- a) Work grants for prisoners which allow access to outside libraries
 - b) Work grants within the prison for Italian prisoners
 - c) Work grants within prison for foreign prisoners.
- 4.3.14. Publications**
- a) Books written by prisoners
 - b) Texts created in reading, writing and poetry workshops, organized by the libraries
 - c) Newspapers.
- 4.3.15. Library Networks**
- a) Integration of prison libraries with the outside library network
 - b) Inclusion of Prison libraries in the “Carta delle Biblioteche”
 - c) Higher profile and publicity for prison library work
 - d) Access to web pages with information about prison libraries.
- 4.3.16. Library Activities**
- a) Meetings with authors, journalists and representatives from Italian and foreign social and cultural institutions
 - a) Reading and poetry workshops.
- 4.3.17. Bibliotherapy**
- b) Sessions conducted by experts in bibliotherapy
 - c) Book discussions conducted by librarians and prisoners.
- 4.3.18. Journalism**
- a) Publication of a prison newspaper
 - b) Meetings with television and newspaper journalists.
- 4.3.19. Publishers**

- a) Meetings with publishers
- b) Gifts from them for free publishing of articles written by prisoners, catalogues, and materials about local cultural events.

4.3.20. **Documents**

In the province of Ravenna special “Fuori di se” collections are available, with free consultation for tutors and librarians working in prison.

4.3.21. **Multicultural services**

Materials about various cultures such as textbooks, dictionaries and religious books in various languages.

4.3.22. **Statistics**

Produced by circulation and acquisition staff. These figures show an increase in circulations and the acquisitions of new materials during the last few years.

Future

I propose a worldwide “Library in Prison Day” -- the first of which to be celebrated in Ravenna.

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