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## The inclusion of the Libraries of Barcelona in the cultural 'map', or how to turn a need into a virtue.

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A few days after receiving the invitation to present the Libraries of Barcelona in this forum, the result was published of a survey carried out annually by the City Council of Barcelona to rate the degree of satisfaction of the citizens with regard to the public services provided by the municipality: the public libraries took the top spot in the survey, being the most highly rated service by the citizens of Barcelona.

Objectively this is good news, but it is even more so if you take into account the situation of the public libraries of the city just 15 years ago.

So as to be able to understand what has happened in the last 15 years, it is necessary to know briefly their history, for without knowing it, it is difficult to understand how a major cosmopolitan city, capital of a culture with a thousand year tradition, with the capacity of organising the successful Olympic Games of 1992, to quote a reference that gave the city international recognition, still in that year didn't have a plan for its system of public libraries, and moreover to attend a population of more than 1,600,000 inhabitants there was only 6,650 m<sup>2</sup> of public library spaces, divided between 15 facilities (in some cases small libraries of less than 200 m<sup>2</sup>).

Barcelona, as well as being one of the most important cities in Spain, is the capital of Catalonia, a culture with more than one thousand years of history. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century Catalonia suffered distinct moments of suppression of its civil and political rights, and after a long dictatorship between 1939 and 1975, in 1977 it was recognized as a Historic Autonomous Community and since 1980 it has had its own parliament and government: the Generalitat.

I do not want to go into too much detail in terms of this historical explanation, but it is important to know some of these facts so as to be able to understand that the political vicissitudes that the Catalan government underwent have a lot to do with the development of the library system of Catalonia and especially Barcelona, and

also to be able to understand the legal and administrative framework. In this sense I should also add that the whole of the Spanish territory is organised in provinces, run by the *Diputaciones Provinciales* (the Provincial Councils), a body made up of political representatives from the municipal councillors of the territory. Barcelona is capital of the province with the same name.

Before the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939, in Catalonia the first *Xarxa del servei de biblioteques populars* (Network of the service of popular libraries) had been created in 1915, and in 1918 the first public libraries were inaugurated, the tenure of which being the main organisation for savings with social aims in Catalonia, *la Caixa de Pensions*. In 1934 the law of Libraries, archives, museums and historical, artistic and scientific heritage was approved, and in this same year, Barcelona inaugurated the first public library of the city, the *Pere Vila Library*, joined in 1935 by the *Ignasi Iglésias Library*, and then joining the network of the Popular Library for Women, founded in 1909 by Francesca Bonnemaison.

The years of the dictatorship represented a major step backwards in nearly all the aspects of Spanish social and cultural life, especially in the world of libraries. The libraries languished until they practically disappeared from the political discourse between 1939 and 1975.

During the 40s the *Diputació* and the City Council of Barcelona signed an agreement that stated the will to sustain the Public Library Project, but the lack of consensus and political will led to a situation in which during 28 years, between 1939 and 1967 just one new library was inaugurated, and over the next 22 years, from 1967 to the year of the first democratic councils, there were only six more. Therefore, in 1979, the year in which the first democratic municipal elections took place, Barcelona had a total of 10 public libraries.

It should be highlighted that the about the only positive element was the persevering attitude of the librarians that in these dark years, within the sphere of the *Diputació*, they didn't stop working to maintain the quality of the scarce services that were available to the users.

Already in 1979, the first democratic councils of the city put the emphasis on other cultural projects such as the renovation of the museums, which took most of their attention, or the creation of civic centres as facilities that responded to the most pertinent social and vindicated demands of those first years of the transition: the promotion of participative cultural dynamics. In this way, the first cultural plan of the first democratic City Council of Barcelona was called "From the Liceu to the seminar", which aimed to renew a very disarticulated and old neighbourhood of the centre of the city, the Raval, adopting culture as a central element of this renovation. It is during these years when the Contemporary Culture Centre (CCCB) was configured in a theoretical way, and also what was later to become the Museum of Contemporary Art (MACBA), as well as some faculties of the University which until then had been located in the outskirts.

In the 80s, 4 new libraries were set up, but they were facilities that didn't respond to the minimum demands of a library at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The 90s arrived with the municipal libraries strongly questioned: their social function wasn't very clear, their timetable which was adapted to the bureaucratic model didn't match the demands of the population. Their precarious equipment, the unjustified heterogeneity of the characteristics of each library, their irregular introduction in the territory, and especially, the doubts around the pertinence of a classical library model for facing the challenges of the information society, and its main risk, the digital gap, led to facilitating some voices that proposed strategies more oriented towards promoting individual connectivity and renouncing the so-called "nineteenth century" libraries. The proposals for developing a library system were included in the programmes, but they were not in the front line of the political decisions.

The Area of Culture of the City Council carried out a preliminary study in which the need for urgent action in the network of libraries was presented, which led to the writing of a first Libraries Plan in 1990 produced by the municipal technical staff in collaboration with the librarians of the city. The Plan was never approved. It should be mentioned that the existing agreement in that moment between the *Diputació* and the City Council included a divided structure of staff in the libraries. In such a way that the library staff were contracted by the *Diputació* and the technical staff were contracted by the City Council. This duality produced many dysfunctions in the management of the public libraries network.

Once again, between 1991-1995, the Area of Culture of the City Council, during the period in which the councillor was Mr Oriol Bohigas, revised the situation of the libraries of the city and evaluated the costs of the action in a planning document in which the need to create a central managing body was proposed, of the type that existed in that moment with the museums. The proposal failed, and was never carried out.

In a parallel way, on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1993, the Parliament of Catalonia approved a new libraries law that specified clearly the responsibility and competences of each of the administrations. According to this law, the ownership of the libraries corresponded to the town and city councils, the support for the services of a library system corresponded to the *Diputació*, and the Generalitat de Catalunya had the obligation for the technical and economic support for the construction of libraries and the library collections, on the one hand, and to elaborate and maintain the Catalan map of the library system, on the other.

In 1996, the Institute of Culture of Barcelona was created, assuming all the competences of the City Council in terms of culture. The management of this new organism perceived from the outset as a basic priority the inclusion once again of libraries on the political agenda, recuperating in this way the confidence in their function as a basic cultural instrument of social cohesion.

The phenomenon of the transformation of modern cities from the industrial to the service sector set forward a possible hypothesis that placed culture as an instrument for the regeneration and construction of the new Barcelona.

The strategy was therefore one that led to understanding that a city of knowledge was incomprehensible without a strong network of libraries. The libraries should

be situated in the centre of the debate for the future of the city. The idea should be overcome of the library as an element of the past and a new model should be proposed of a library which is useful for the new social demands.

Within the new social context in which information, the logic between the local and global world, the risk of dualisation of the society between those who have access and those who don't have access to information, and the basic urban role of the library as a place for meeting and cohesion, don't stop being arguments for believing that the library plays a central role in this city of cultural and knowledge services.

Without this perception it would have been impossible to advance towards the application of any programme of restructuring of the library system.

It was thus decided to set in motion the elaboration of a Libraries Plan that would describe the new functions of the library, the necessary resources, that would analyse the European models and that would make a possible proposal for the city of Barcelona.

Value was given to the need for the plan to be closely linked to the districts of the city (the city is divided into 10 districts), to whom in 1985 the management of libraries had been transferred, and their involvement in the writing of the plan was requested. Its viability was considered to be essential so as to get political support which would allow its approval and subsequent implementation.

The Libraries Plan of Barcelona had to cover, in a specific way, the territory and define the processes and sequences of work for the configuration of the library system of Barcelona from 1998 to 2010.

The aims of the plan were to unify the information of the existing libraries, to establish the deficits according to the parameters that the city could assume, to propose a model of cultural facility with an ideal management plan and renew the system for dividing up the competences and responsibilities between the different administrations. At the same time it would take as a model different networks of interest that could be applied to a setting such as ours. Specifically the Nordic model, the English model, and even the Australian model.

During 1996-1997 the methodology for the elaboration of the plan was established that included a first phase of internal work and a subsequent validation with the sector. The work process was intense and participative.

A working commission was created, led by the Institute of Culture of Barcelona, with the participation of the districts of Barcelona and the *Diputació*. Various working sessions were called in which distinct experts were invited, chosen according to the theme of the agenda.

Eight initial meetings were held which ended with the production of the conclusions in seven agreed documents based around: a framework of competences, human resources, possible library models, the renovation of the

infrastructures, a plan for library growth, the role of new technologies, and a new management model for the library facilities.

This initial working commission was conceived in a reduced format so as to ensure effectiveness and left for a later stage the contrasting of the first document with the various collectives related to libraries.

Based on these seven documents corresponding to the different themes dealt with, an initial round of working consultations was begun with the ten districts of the city with the aim of involving the agents and gaining a more direct knowledge about the real needs and possibilities of each area of the city.

Subsequently a second line of work was begun: the relation with the Savings Banks who in that moment had 2 parallel networks functioning. The phenomenon of the decline of the library network of the Savings Banks was inversely proportional to the preparation of the renovation of the public libraries under municipal competence. Faced with this reality, the will was to start a working process for the integration of some of these charitable libraries from the financial entities into the central network of the municipal libraries.

It should be pointed out that the document that makes up the Libraries Plan, was agreed not only by the working commissions, but was also discussed by two more groups: the professional librarians of the city and the College of Librarians of Catalonia.

And, finally, a working commission was created within the Strategic Plan of the Culture Sector that was also being written in that moment, a fact that allowed the validation of the text with the rest of the representatives: Universities, private entities, foundations, etc. Opening up this debate to the rest of the agents from the civil society led to a very satisfactory final result.

Finally, the plenary of the City Council of Barcelona of 22nd May 1998 unanimously approved *The Libraries Plan of Barcelona 1998-2010. Libraries of the 21st century: from information to knowledge*. The fact that the political parties from the opposition also ratified the Plan, has allowed its implementation to be carried out without slowing down the process, or being questioned by changes in political strategy.

At that time the network had 18 libraries which occupied an area of 11,000 m<sup>2</sup>.

The Libraries Plan 1998-2010 reflected the political will to overcome this endemic deficit by proposing a ten-year working plan.

The Plan, still in force, summed up the fundamental elements, both in terms of the preceding situation (description of the system of public libraries of the city and distribution of the competences), as well as with regard to the basic features: objectives, legal and competence framework, library standards to be achieved, keys for the new model of a public library system (concept, functions, services, type, infrastructure and facilities, timetable, staffing, etc.), planning of implementation of the stages, and plan for the necessary investments.

Once the deficits were analysed as well as the fields in which it was necessary to act as a priority:

- Tenure and Planning: establishment of a unique network and planning of infrastructural growth of the different types of library (district or neighbourhood main libraries).
- Functions, services: defining a model of contents and where they would be contained.
- Facilities and infrastructures: matching standards and extension of information technologies.
- Human resources: definition of profiles, establishment of staff and training and refresher courses.
- Profile of the users: market studies and approach to "non-users".
- Management: creation of a management organ and establishment of a forum of coordination between networks ("Public reading" commission)

The Libraries Plan structure and mission and the aims of the new centres, in a strategic sense, should be:

- To reinvent the strategic position of the public libraries based on the premise that they should adapt to the new times as guides and perceivers in the search for, and comprehension of, data, information, images, icons and symbols.
- To recognise in time the changes in the needs and expectations of the real and potential users.
- To enter the knowledge economy both at a local and international level, understanding it as an economic activity based around knowledge that the art, culture and education sectors generate. In recent times, these sectors have undergone an important growth in employment.
- To understand the cultural market and define the participation that the libraries should have within this cultural offer.

The Libraries Plan of Barcelona 1998-2010 proposes and describes the following objectives:

- To renew the libraries service
- To define the libraries model that responds to current needs
- To establish a management model of the library facilities that ensures the quality of the services offered.
- To adapt the existing structure to the pre-established standards of the public library system.
- To establish a growth plan for the political mandates 95-99, 99-03 and 03-07
- To coordinate the institutions involved in the system of public libraries of the city.
- To propose an inter-institutional management model to ensure the functioning of the Public Libraries Network.

I won't go into detail here about the theory of the Plan in terms of libraries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Among you here are professionals who are far more highly qualified and that have reflected and theorised on this topic, and my aim here is to describe the process followed by the city of Barcelona in the moment of incorporating the libraries on its cultural map. .

I would like to highlight four of the aspects in which the Plan aims to advance, and which have been those that have allowed cohesion, vitality and a new life for the libraries. :

- Firstly, as a priority, it proposed the coordination of the institutions by means of an inter-institutional management organism that ensures the functioning of the urban network of public libraries: a management organism between the *Diputació de Barcelona* (The Provincial Council), the City Council of Barcelona and the Libraries Consortium of Barcelona.
- To work mainly in the infrastructural development of the network, without leaving aside the improvement of the existing services, nor the technological adaptation, nor the setting in motion of new services, above all those related to IT literacy and digital access.
- The need to create an organism of coordination and assessment in the city in terms of libraries and "Public Reading". On 12<sup>th</sup> April 1999 the Commission for "Public Reading" (to analyze the state of the library system) was created (as foreseen in the Law for Libraries 1993), a point of meeting and debate about the different library systems of the city. The different networks of schools, universities and specialized libraries took part in this debate. The "Public Reading" Commission aimed to be a new meeting point which served to boost and transmit information, and above all, make transparent to society the role of the libraries in the knowledge society. This "Public Reading" Commission was assumed by the City Council of Barcelona with the conviction that it was a good tool for permanent revision and action with regard to the the library system. Currently various working groups have been constituted around topics such as "Libraries and Education, "Libraries and Territory"- and "Libraries and Social Cohesion".
- To promote the construction of a provincial library of Barcelona that until now has not existed with its own premises, but has been located within the university library of Barcelona. In this sense the process has suffered a number of delays, given that the building initially foreseen as the venue turned out to have important underground archaeological remains and it was decided to maintain these and created a museum, thus forcing the need to look for another site that is now agreed on and assumed by the different administrations with competences for setting it up. The library will act as an urban headquarters for the network of municipal libraries, a centre which will articulate with all the libraries in the municipal libraries network.

Immediately after the approval of the Plan work was begun on one of the fundamental objectives: to write and approve the statutes of the future Libraries Consortium of Barcelona. For its approval a strategic Plan 2001-2003 was elaborated that highlighted the main elements for its creation and included the following aspects:

- the benefits that the Consortium could pass on to the parts involved: the users, city and administrations;
- the legal framework;
- the organic regime that should be presided over;

- the distribution of the competences between the administrations involved;
- its organisational structure and
- the basic objectives for the period.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> January 2001 the Consortium was constituted, charged with the development of the Libraries Plan of Barcelona and the management and coordination of the municipal libraries of the city.

The reason for the choice of the formula of a Consortium responded to the reality of shared competences between the different public administrations, and followed the organisational model foreseen by the local laws in force. On the one hand the municipal libraries are of municipal ownership and receive support services from the *Diputació de Barcelona* (The Provincial Council). And on the other hand, the future provincial library will be constructed by the Ministry of Education and Culture (of the Spanish government) and managed by the *Generalitat de Catalunya* (the autonomous government).

This model of consortium boosts the policies of agreement and promotes the agreement between the different parties that intervene in the fulfilment of a common aim, which is a key element in the new models of public management that are committed to modernisation.

The agreement applied to the network of libraries of the city of Barcelona, present a full range of advantages, given that they allow:

- The improvement of the quality of the services offered to the public users and of the libraries that make up the network as a whole.
- The participation of the different agents (public and private), the generation of agreements and the optimization of resources.
- The articulation of a city network within the framework of the provincial network.
- A greater extension of the diffusion and impact of the communication campaigns linked to the services provided by the overall network of libraries.

The setting up of the Libraries Consortium of Barcelona also ensures a unified management that leads to a series of benefits for the different agents:

For the public users:

- The improvement in the quality of the services provided and the definition of commitments in terms of service provision. Common standards can be established (service quality), common aims can be proposed (efficacy), and a better optimisation and distribution of the resources can be carried out (efficiency). With regard to the provision of services: tailor-made attention, agility in provision, availability of collections, accessibility to installations, flexible management of the overall resources, information for users, attention for specific groups, etc.
- Boosting new services. The establishment of homogeneous management guidelines scaled to the city favours the simplification of processes and the possibility of dedicating an important part of the resources and efforts to promoting new initiatives and services adapted to the needs of each territory.

- The possibility of building a unique documentary collection for the city. Each library has a basic common collection, which is supplied by the *Diputació* de Barcelona in monthly packs, and of a collection that each centre builds, rooted in the territory, which includes everything from local collections to specialisations, and for which the municipality is charged for (with a cost division in a proportion of 60-40% for each administration). In this way each of the district libraries and some of the neighbourhood ones, have specialized part of their collection based on this logic of a unique collection available throughout the city by means of inter-library loans: the choice of topics has been made, taking into account the characteristics of the surrounding area (for example, a neighbourhood library close to one of the rivers that borders the city has specialised in *River Cultures*, while a library located in a neighbourhood with a strong tradition of groups of amateur theatre has specialized in theatre, to give just two examples of the 22 specialisations that exist).

For the city:

- The combination of the beginning of globalism with specificity. A logic of libraries service is established that at the same time takes into account the global needs (city) and the specific needs (districts and neighbourhoods). It allows the combining of city actions with adaptations to the territory.
- The establishment of quality standards. The network is consolidated with basic homogeneous standards in the provision of the service.
- The establishment of agreements between different sectors and citizen agents. The city programming and planning favours the establishment of agreements of promotion, sponsorship, and intervention of different sectors (public and private) and agents (administrations, entities, companies, social agents, etc.) that intervene in the life of the city: from the schools to the theatres, the museums, the auditoriums, the publishers, the bookshops, the traditional cultural entities, the entities that represent the cultures present in Barcelona through immigration, participation in literary festivals, theatre, music, etc.
- The contribution of added value to the city projects. The joint contribution of experiences and resources in different types of initiatives which are proposed at a general city level optimize efforts and signify the obtaining of multiplying benefits for integral projects promoted by the City Council.
- The improvement of the management and boosting of territorial activities. The fact of operating with a scaled management, favours a more efficient and flexible coordination of the resources between the City Council and its districts and the *Diputació*. This fact allows the application of resources according to the needs detected in each place and at each moment and to focus on the design and promotion of specific programmes adapted to the reality and demands of the territory.
- The creation of a referential model. The bases are fixed to foster a model for the running, management and service of the libraries that places Barcelona as a reference in the sector.

For the administration: for the City Council and its districts and for the *Diputació*:

- The improvement of the service and the improvement of the management. The running of the municipal network of libraries by means of the Consortium,

a management body explicitly defined by the Municipal Charter of Barcelona, allows a greater standardization and improvement of the services. The existence of a common reference framework, clear and homogenous, benefits the staff who work in the libraries as a whole, given that it establishes management guidelines that facilitate, promote and enrich their development as professionals.

- The adaptation of the competences of the professional profiles in the workplace. A greater adaptation is facilitated of the workers to the requirements and characteristics.
- The improvement of the image of the libraries as a whole. The fact of acting by means of an identity and homogenous guidelines, allows the possibility of offering an image which interacts with the citizenship.
- The optimisation of the communication. The effectiveness of the communication actions related to the activities of the different networks is increased.
- The achievement of greater efficiency and better results. With an organisational structure that leads, coordinates and optimises.
- The promotion of the principle of proximity in the provision of the service without losing the advantages of belonging to a provincial network.
- The supra-municipal character of the support. The functioning on a provincial scale readjusts and allows focusing on a better and more balanced way the application of the resources and efforts, reinforcing the role of the *Diputació* as a supra-municipal organism.

To conclude I would just like to add some figure that help to confirm the degree of implementation of the Libraries Plan approved in 1998 and evaluate the opportunity of working based on this model of agreement and concentration of management has signified.

The Plan foresaw 37 actions in the infrastructure of the network: 21 newly formed facilities, and the enlargement or complete move of 16 of those existing, which meant the practical renovation of the whole network, which in that moment counted on 18 libraries.

Currently we have 32 libraries (16 new centres have been inaugurated and 7 of the existing ones have either moved or been rehabilitated). Over the next two years 7 inaugurations of new facilities are foreseen, most of which are already under construction.

During 2007 work was done on updating the map approved in 1998, fixing 2020 as the horizon, taking into account the growth of the city over the last ten years. Some of the areas of growth were not foreseen at that moment, and with this revision, service will be provided in a more balanced way throughout the territory, reaching 47 libraries. With this the growth in terms of the number of libraries will be able to be completed, given that this latest forecast covers all the territory of the municipality.

In terms of square metres, the Plan started with the 11,000 available in that moment, foreseeing two possible situations: one of minimums, and the other optimum. Currently with 43.600 m<sup>2</sup> available we have surpassed the minimum

situation by 26%, and even with 7 centres still to be inaugurated, we already have reached 89% of the optimum situation.

In terms of the collection we have surpassed the final number of volumes foreseen in the Plan, multiplying by 3.5 the documents available in 1998: we have gone from 434,780 to 1,528,187. In this sense it is important to highlight the basic collections of audio and video initially inexistent and now available in all the libraries of the network.

Another of the important chapters in the improvement of accessibility has been the extension of the opening times of the libraries. Also here in the Plan we envisaged possible scenarios, the minimum and the optimum. And also in this case we have surpassed the minimum scenario by 7% and fulfilled 80% of the optimum situation foreseen for 2010, currently opening a total of 1,414 hours a week for all of the 32 libraries (an average of 44 hours per week, ranging from 33 in some neighbourhood libraries to 66 in one of the district libraries).

In terms of the number of registrations, since 2001 there has been an increase of 200% in the number of people with a library card for the Libraries of Barcelona. At the end of 2007 there were 578,000 people with a card. A card that aims to be a cultural card, given that, with the card, and thanks to agreements with various cultural agents of the city, as well as all the services offered by the library, it allows access to advantages in the purchasing of tickets to the theatre, museums, or when buying books, CDs etc. in bookshops, and other cultural centres of the city.

The response to these and many other improvements that I am unable to mention here in detail, has been really positive: since 1998 the number of visits received by the libraries has multiplied by 3.7, reaching 5,172,642 in 2007, and surpassing the number foreseen in the Plan for 2010 of reaching 5 million.

Also in terms of the loans of documents, these have multiplied by 5.1, reaching 3,905,107 loaned documents last year. This increase, higher even than the number of visits, confirms that the work being carried out on the renovation of the collections is along the right lines.

None of this would have been possible to achieve, however, without the necessary investment by the administrations responsible: beyond the declarations of intent, of the agreements and the political consensus, the economic contribution was necessary that allowed in just 12 years the solving of lacks accumulated over one hundred years.

Since 1996 the City Council of Barcelona has contributed in the form of investments €67,671,406 (\$104,773,307 - USD), and in the period 2000-2007 the accumulated running costs have been €99,884,121 (\$154,682,238 - USD), assuming the proportion of 60% for the City Council of Barcelona and 40% the *Diputació de Barcelona*.

As I said at the beginning of this short report about the evolution of the public libraries of Barcelona, to have managed to occupy the first place in the rating by

the citizens with regard to the municipal services, is more than good news. And I am sure that you will understand that for all of us involved in the daily work of improving the public libraries of the city, it is the best news you can receive.