MEXICO’S NATIONAL PROGRAM OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES†

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Summary

The first stage of Mexico’s National Program of Public Libraries intends to reach the goal of having a public library working in every State capital city by December 1984.

These libraries will be the central point which will coordinate the opening and operation of the libraries within each State. This way, by December 1986, it is expected that every municipality larger than 30,000 inhabitants has its own public library; by 1988 every municipality in the Country will count with some kind of library service.

All this will be achieved if the State governments and municipalities come to an agreement with the Secretary of Public Education (SEP) about the assignment of available public space and the payment of the libraries’ personnel.

On its side the SEP will assume the training of such personnel, the provision of properly classified and catalogued collections and the introduction of operational techniques that will allow the integration of the already existing libraries as well as the new created ones to the National Program of Public Libraries.

National Program of Public Libraries

According to the oral tradition of the ancient Mayan indians,


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the creators and makers of the world met in the center of the indian universe: Tzakol and Bitol, Alom and Cajolóm, Tepeu and Gukumatz. They could be heard talking among themselves with deep concern:

"The men of corn are in danger of disappearing from the face of the Earth. What can we do to help them? They find themselves in big despair. It has not rained in some places and the crops have already been lost, while it has rained so much in other parts that the floods are drowning them. Those who have gathered at the ceremonial centers grab from the hands of each other the jade jewels and the rich feathers of the wild turkey".

After long meditations they concluded that those who were facing the problems, ignored the fact that men from other times and other places had already gone through similar situations and that they had overcome them with great success. But these men had long ago been gone without leaving any trace, so their experience could no longer be used.

So they decided to send out their messengers Hunahpú and Ixbalanqué the first true men, whom after living for some time among us proceeded to teach their brothers to engrave in the stones, that never wear out, all the things that took place. And it was in this way that the Race of Corn, our race, could survive taking advantage of the experience of older generations who had engraved all their knowledge on the ever lasting written memory.

For our ancestors these first documents were of stone and later of tree bark or deer skin. For us, they are the books: carriers of the written word.

Education provides us with the key to the benefits of culture transmitted through writing. We call this key, reading; capability achieved by all mexican children today. But teaching to read and write is not enough when in search of the qualitative changes the Country requires inside its social, economical and political struc-
tutes. It is not enough to teach the citizen to read; it is necessary to make a bigger effort and give him books to read.

The possibility to read has grown more distant from most of our countrymen due to the effect of the crisis which has raised the price of books, and whenever the access to reading is limited, there is a risk of a cultural recession.

President Miguel de la Madrid has entrusted Mr. Jesús Reyes Heroles, the Secretary of Public Education the formulation of concrete programs to face the effects of the present economical situation in the field of culture.

Within this frame of reference the government proceeded to design and start a program, according to our reality to establish public libraries in order to provide mexicans in all the Country with free access to formative, informative and recreational reading.

By means of this strategy the National Program of Public Libraries was created with the aim of establishing coordinated library services nation wide to guarantee free access to reading.

Contribution of The States and The Municipalities

To achieve this contribution:

The Secretary started a program with the objective of coordinating all the individual efforts: public libraries which are presently run by the government of the states, municipalities and SEP dependencies, in order to achieve the establishment of a general system with regulations that will rule the descentralized operation of these services.

The proposition of the program is to create libraries wherever they are needed, to take advantage of already existing ones and to articulate them into a system which allows libraries to give their services in an appropriate manner.

The development of library services has been traditionally looked from a material point of view. As a consequence, disproportionate and luxurious spaces have proliferated and have
not fulfilled their objectives.

Essentially the social function of a library resides in the quality and organization of the services it provides.

The National Program of Public Libraries, answers the deepest federalist spirit, since its conception is based in the respect to the bibliographical heritage of the States and considers their contribution in the Program operation.

Among other action the Plan contemplates:

The proposal to the governments of the States of the establishment and operation of a central State public library which will coordinate the services within the State. On a second stage, the establishment of public libraries in the most important municipalities of the State and the coordinated operation of those already existing. The third stage contemplates the establishment and incorporation to the Program of libraries in small municipalities coordinated by the public library of the most important city of the nearby zone.

The fourth stage will deal with the creation of mobile libraries to serve scattered and small communities.

The Program hopes to offer the users the following services: circulation, inter-library loans, attention to students and activities to encourage the habit of reading, to generate and guide the demand of books. The Program will carry out different activities such as reading workshops with everyday problem applications, literary meetings and the reading of books for children.

The public libraries collections will include mainly national editions of SEP on mexican subjects as well as world subjects, and of mexican editors whose production meets the cultural and educational needs of the Country.

The programming, establishment and starting of the system in every State will be independent but subjected to the creation of the required libraries in every one of the planned stages in order to take advantage as soon as possible of the technical infrastructure which will enable for a fast integration of the different units
into a system or network.

The Secretary of Public Education’s Contribution

The SEP will be responsible of:

– Planning, programming, organizing, supervising, coordinating, promoting and evaluating the National Program of Public Libraries.
– Providing the libraries at no charge with the collections that meet the interests and needs of the different users who live in the municipalities.
– Offering the collections already prepared and catalogued, ready to offer the service.
– Training permanently the staff in charge of the services inside all the Program’s libraries.
– Carrying out research programs to encourage the use of library services and the habit of reading, keeping in sight the different needs which are the result of the diversity of the ethnical, cultural, social and educational background of the users.
– Collecting the international experience concerning the different programs to coordinate services and investigate about encouraging the habit of reading.

The establishment of the National Program of Public Libraries involves a considerable effort from the Secretary of Education as well as the challenge of a big campaign of personnel training. Nevertheless this program will only be accomplished with the enthusiastic cooperation between the State governments and municipalities.

We are convinced that the sum of the Federal, State and Municipal resources will make possible the establishment of this cultural service to complement the educational effort.
Goals

If we find the proper answer to the spirit of the Program:

By December 1984:
– The capital cities of the States will count with a central public library.

By December 1986:
– Municipalities larger than 30,000 inhabitants will have an incorporated public library service.

By December 1988:
– All 2,377 municipalities in the Country will have access to public library services of different kinds.

An Ambitious But Feasible Program

The creation of the National Program of Public Libraries involves an extraordinary effort on the side of the government of President Miguel de la Madrid to move forward to the democratization of culture.

It constitutes a feasible program considering the present conditions of the country since it is not based on the building of luxurious spaces but on the provision of adequate services. Besides it does not suppose an unilateral will but an objective distribution of the jobs and the responsibilities among the Federation, the States and the Municipalities.

On the other hand the Public Library will grow by being linked to the daily life of the community it serves, attending the specific cultural needs of each place.

The benefits offered by a standardized interconnected an decentralized library system, will satisfy national and regional problems inside the cultural scope.

Public libraries will be helpful for adult education programs, reduction of functional illiteracy, encouragement of educational
activities of youngsters who are not able to continue in school, access of women to cultural goods, approaching of the majorities to the universal heritage of knowledge, encouraging the capacity of self employment and improvement in the quality of life of every reader.