

# THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

By Yolanda Ricardo

**Abstract:** Library and research: this correlation turned into a system in Cuba, implies an important aspect for the development of social science libraries. If this correlation is highly worthy for the rest of the sciences as a main mean that helps avoid the stagnation in the process of knowledge and in the scientific search, then, for the social sciences, it is a vital requirement in the progressive self-development these sciences demand. Special research is carried out in most of the Cuban libraries which have important social science book stock and which may be special in these fields or not. Therefore, the social science documental stock is increasingly enriched by the regular entry of reports of results of the scientific research, term papers, university works among others. This supports the progressive deepening and self-development of each single science.

Cuban social science special libraries systematically work on saving and preserving the documental heritage, even having material difficulties. They carry out a careful selecting policy to increase the special book stock which finds support not only on the analysis of the public's applications but also on the prospects of self-development of the science as much, closely related to the programmed researches, and they regularly carry out the review of the most current information of the special science to spread it selectively, international. This daily feedbacks the knowledge system of the science and favours the chances to develop this field of thought and its social influence in a future time.

Coming mainly from the great trends of Humanism thoughts, the current social sciences reward the endless stock of information and knowledge that meant the Western Renaissance, as well as, the wish of knowing typical of the Encyclopedism subsequent to the Renaissance and of the emergence of the most diverse scientific fields of study of the modern times and of the most recent contemporaneous discoveries. If the work of humanist scholars and experts has been fairly considered to play an important role, it is likewise important to highlight the fact that significant documental stock was stored in the great centers

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of the Latin, Islamic and Eastern cultures and in numerous Christian monasteries, abbeys and convents of the supposed obscure Middle Age.

Since then, great impulses for the development of knowledge were concentrated in specific centers of knowledge which are, nowadays, worthy sources of the most prestigious libraries of the world.

Historically, there has been an special emphasis on Humanities which have been enriched by the contributions of the different sciences until turning, though in a different way, into the current sciences which comprise a very diverse spectrum where sciences like Philosophy, History, Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, Linguistics, Economics and Literary sciences among others are included.

A remarkable effort to store documents was carried out by the Economic Societies of Friends of the Country that were created and developed by two great Spaniard cultural groups - the Basque and the one coming from Madrid - and under the auspices of King Charles III's well-read policy, favoured the chances to found similar societies in America among the New World born inhabitants, societies which were interested in the self-development of knowledge and of the local economy.

Stimulated by this policy, academies, scientific and cultural institutions and libraries emerged. This is the case of the most ancient Cuban library founded in 1793 under the government of Don Luis de Las Casas. This 200 year old library has its current seat in the Research Center of Literature and Linguistics in Cuba.

Library and research: This correlation turned into a system in Cuba, implies an important aspect for the development of social science libraries. If this correlation is highly worthy for the rest of the sciences as a main mean that helps to avoid the stagnation in the process of knowledge and in the scientific search, then, for the social sciences, it is a vital requirement in the progressive self-development these sciences demand. Special research is carried out in most of the Cuban libraries which have important social science book stocks and which may be special in these fields of study or not. Therefore, the social science documental stock is increasingly enriched by the regular entry of reports or results of the scientific research, term papers, university works among others. This supports the progressive deepening and self-development of each single science. For instance, this is the case of the José Martí National Library (JMNL), of the Science and Technique National Library (STNL) and of the Havana University Library (HUL). The JMNL whose documental stock and methodological work are extended all over the country, has research priorities concerning Cuban themes - specially those regarding the correlation between reading and the library and heritage stock - and promotes special informative publications of first importance like the General

Index of Publications. The 23% of the STNL stock is devoted to the social sciences and this library is organizing the joint catalog of these disciplines; fact that would ease the general reference of their subjects. Finally, the HUL which looks after a network of special libraries, has the 77,62% of its non-serial collection devoted to the social sciences addressed to the library service and backing up the research.

These libraries daily work on saving, preserving and making public the national documental heritage. They do not ignore that if there have been lots of talks about library environment, even about the ideal but unachievable surroundings expressed by Duncan Cameron (Museum News, (46) 9: 17-22) in 1968 - who foresaw elaborated installations free of any living creature - this does not stop being a permanent goal though in reasonable ways and periods of time. The ideal relative temperature and humidity, between 15,6<sup>o</sup> C and 26,7<sup>o</sup> C (the former) and between 50 and 60, (the latter), are not achieved yet either totally or at large scale but they are taken into account for future projects in restricted areas and in areas of prior importance when the material conditions allow it. The same happens with the plaguicides: experiments with nitrogen carried out by the California Getty Institute are known but they are still just expectations. Anyway, a sustainable effort has been expanded in different directions like for instance:

- the good use of natural environmental conditions with an emphasis on a proper storage.
- the stocktaking of documental heritage.
- the prior selection of documents for their save.

Without taking into account saving, just preserving century old documental heritage is a task of giants because of the work magnitude as well as the large amount of resources this task demands. That is why there is an urgent need to improve the hygienic and organizing devices in each Cuban library; an effort which is regularly carried out aiming being better day by day,

There is a great variety of informative services in libraries of social science research special centers, though unequally developed. The main services are the following:

Document Loan:

inner loan in reading rooms

outer loan (researchers and special institutions)

interlibrary loan

**Reference:**

special advisory service, requests applied beforehand through different communicating ways.

**Selective Dissemination of Information:**

the daily and current display of the new documents of the book stock to the public.

**Table of Contents:**

daily divulgation of special magazine indexes.

**Bibliographical Elaboration:**

it is generally carried out depending on the author and theme application for an specific research or other searches.

**Indexation:**

Index elaboration which satisfies specific applications.

**Bibliographical Search and Delivery:**

it includes the most diverse applications of the public which have to do with special objectives of institutional researches, and in some cases, of particular research.

**Photography and Document Reproduction:**

according to the available library resources, it is carried out with paper, micro-cards, microfilms or by automatized means but the paper is the most usually used by means of photocopies.

**Scientific-Technical Translations:**

carried out in the economic branch, in three languages: English, Russian and German, the translation service is offered mainly by the Information Center of the Planning Central Council (JUCEPLAN).

**Promotion of Scientific-Technical Information:**

tough poor, this promotion has been carried out by different special libraries. The History Institute, the Literature and Linguistics Institute (ILL) as well as JUCEPLAN systematically work on the documental displays.

**Technical and Scientific-Methodological Assistance:**

the development of other libraries in the country and abroad (JUCEPLAN, ILL) has been supported by means of post-graduate courses and of advisory services.

**Systematic Review of the Most Current Information of the Special Science:**

this is an scarcely spread experience but the prospects are to extend it.

Generally, some institutions have achieved certain developing levels in the service area. This is the case of the History Institute which has been applying a work organizing policy that at the same time has allowed it to combine the library work and records with the laboratory of documental saving and of paper and microcard reproduction. It counts on automatized processing of databases and prepares the future automation of its library stock. Besides, it has been supporting the informative search for the elaboration of a work of national importance: the *History of Cuba*. The Information Center of JUCEPLAN has advanced in the processing of databases and in the methodological advisory service to other national institutions. The library of the Science Organizing and History Center, heir of the stock of the first Science Academy in the country, is applying the automation and has offered information to carry out a multilateral study of Fidel Casto's thoughts mainly from a scientific point of view. The Center of Studies about Martí also offers automatized services and an informative back up for the critical edition of José Martí's *Full Works*. The Literature and Linguistics Institute works combining the processing over half a million of documents with the documental heritage restoration and paves the way for a more frequent use of the electronic mail and for a future automation and at the same time gives professional advice in the country and abroad. On the other hand, the informative platform was insured to elaborate and conclude decisive research works of the Cuban culture: *the Cuban Literature Dictionary*, *the Cuban Literature History* and *the Cuban Phraseology Dictionary*. The research of other works of first importance like the *Cuban Dictionary of Contemporary Authors*, *the Dialect Atlas of Cuba*, *the Dictionary of Cubanisms* and *the Search of Cultural Identity in Latin America*, is also backed up. The HUL offers different services like the scientific video, processed information of the press, technical norms, vertical files among others.

This is the perfect chance to mention the role of two associations as organizers in the whole country, associations which have to do with informative services: the Scientific Center of Humanities and the Cooperating Committee for economic information (COSDE). The former comprises a group of institutions to look after in advance an universal problem: the Cuban heritage saving and preservation. It works on this line to create a program of informative services and a social science special reference division. Concerning COSDE which groups 20 institutions related to the social sciences, it has, as a main objective, the combination of the work in the economic branch with the advisory service of the Science Academy of Cuba to insure that researches of prior importance in the country are supplied with the necessary information. One of its main contributions has been the database processing of the joint catalog for economic type information in the whole country.

A current problem to face by experts and executives of the social science libraries field is the insertion of this kind of institution in the economic prospects. We depart from the fact that public special libraries are financed by a stable budget that supports microcards, personnel, equipment, services and resources to reproduce information. There is a widespread comment which expresses the urgent need to carry out a permanent self-assessment of the service efficiency which can be measured by means of the production cost of the resources and of the time invested in each informative service and of its precision and rigor: essential elements to evaluate the profitability of these institutions and the prospects of economic compensation. Unluckily, there are not even reliable indicators to analyze, within the service cost, the special work which goes along with it, or to measure the cultural and bibliographical worth of each processed document offered.

Anyway, some specialists agree with the need of economic assessment of the informative services; fact that would result not only in a compensation to the institution expenditures and in a possible introduction of a new technology and of new services but also in the increase of the social and scientific prestige of the work carrying out. Broadly speaking, two first measures are suggested:

- the improvement of the work organizing systems which may include the introduction of economic controls.
- the study of the experiences of the different countries to assess institutional price policies which can be applied to the special services.

## Conclusions

1) Cuban social science special libraries systematically work on saving and preserving the documental heritage, even having material difficulties. They carry out a careful selecting policy to increase the special book stock which finds support not only on the analysis of the public's applications but also on the prospects of self-development of the science as such, closely related to the programmed researches, and they regularly carry out the review of the most current information of the special science to spread it selectively, later. This daily feedbacks the knowledge system of the science and favours the chances to develop this field of thought and its social influence in a future.

2) Departing from this analysis, a debate will be carried out in the IFLA workshop concerning the experience of other libraries in the world, specially in the Third World and in Latin America, in order to interchange points of view that stimulate the progressive development of the social sciences and of the libraries

encharged of the divulgation and introduction of its results in the prospects of the development.

#### **Aspects to assess in the suggestions**

- 1) Divulgation of knowledge: how and what for.
- 2) Promotion of activities which favour self-development.
- 3) Program of sustainable development.
- 4) Program of technological appliance.
- 5) Economic strategy.

#### **Debating issues**

- 1) Self-development processes of social science libraries: technical and economic aspects.
- 2) Program of sustainable development.
- 3) Economic assessment of the scientific-technical services.

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