PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND MODERNITY IN COLOMBIA: MULTIPLE CULTURES, MULTIPLE REALITIES

Diana Carolina Martínez Santos

Bibliotecóloga

Plan Nacional de Lectura y Bibliotecas

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to present the draft study on the use that communities give to public libraries in the municipal department of Nariño, implemented by the National Plan for Reading and Libraries in 2003.

This study is interested in the understanding of the relationship that is generated in that department among libraries, understood as modern structures, and rural and urban communities, thereby determining their role as modernizing agents.

INTRODUCTION

In 2003 the National Government of Colombia set up the National Plan for Reading and Libraries (hereafter PNLB), as one component of the National Development Plan called "Towards a Communal State."

The fundamental aim of the PNLB is "to improve standards of reading and strengthen the services provided by public libraries in Colombia, this way it is expected to make easier the access, in an equitable way, for all rural and urban communities to information, knowledge and entertainment through books, developing the principles of

the National Government democratic security proposal. Thus, it aspires to contribute to the individual development of citizens as much as to the social communities development, creating, strengthening and spreading a culture of reading. This will become a daily practice for the citizens to integrate it in their life as a learning, information, education and entertainment resource, attending the principle of fairness and recognising it's social value. "(Ministry of Culture, 2003, p. 16)

From this perspective the PNLB expects to contribute to the strengthening of social capital and social cohesion of the Colombian people, consolidating participation spaces, setting up new networks of social fabric that strengthen human capital, thereby contributing to the formation of citizens who can exercise their political and social rights, forming reader communities with critical attitudes to face information and knowledge.

There is evident a responsibility in the formation of citizenship, a commitment for the promotion of intercultural dialogue and promotion of cultural diversity, an awareness of local heritage and support for the construction of their own cultural identities, the duty of the literacy, all of these, among others, specified as the same purposes of public libraries in general.

We start noting that the structure of libraries can clearly be placed as a modern structure. As stated in its own guidelines: "The mastery of reading is an essential tool of the modern world. The development of a knowledge-based society means that most of the people have an advanced level of reading. "(Ministry of Culture, 2003, p.3). Is in this way that the rationality, that characterizes modernity, begins to unveil it self in the claims of the PNLB and in the very essence of libraries.

With the launch of PNLB in 2003, the existing public libraries have been strengthened, and have been created new libraries, assuming the goal that every municipality of Colombia has a municipal library. Accordingly, Nariño was one of the departments in the first phase of this plan, in 2003, it received a full endowment. In 2002 it has been recorded the existence of 27 public libraries in this department, and with the implementation of the plan now are 64 libraries located in the municipality and 3 more in the "corregimientos", inspections and indigenous reservations, for a total of 67 public libraries, not counting the city of Pasto, covering all 64 municipalities in the department. The analysis of libraries in this region of the country becomes a particular case, due to the fact that Nariño is simultaneously a local authority in the Andean territory, a

borderline, a coastal and also is near to the Amazon basin. In the same line, Nariño is divided in five sub-regions: south, north, west, centre and sub-Pacific, within which one they can be identify changes not only ecoambientales but also cultural, social, economic and political. Far from imagine that this department is uniform, is a multicultural and heterogeneous territory. According to information from the Census of 2005, Nariño has a total of 1,498,234 inhabitants, of which the indigenous population is 10.76%, the 18.82% are Afro-Colombians and the 0.01% is recognized as Rom population (people wandering). Although this numbers could show a low percentage first is necessary to clarify that the indigenous population is made up of 6 different communities (Awa, Emberá, EPERARA Siapidara, Inga, Kofán, Pastos) located in 60 guards approximately, in 17 municipalities wich occupies 297,710 hectares (Corponariño, 2002, annexes), ie. the 26% of the department. In the second place, as Afro-Colombian population are recognized 361 black communities, that occupy 739,648 hectares (Corponariño, 2002, annexes), representative numbers for the department. Furthermore, although the Rom population is the least significant, this is clearly located in a Kumpania in the municipality of Ipiales.

Now then, the geographical characteristics of Nariño have determined it's strategic status for illegal armed groups and for the emergence of illicit crops, because of it's way out of the Pacific Ocean and the border area it has been configured as a corridor for these players and an output for drugs. So the presence of armed groups has undermined the law and order situation. According to the peace observatory of the vice-presidency, only 5 municipalities of the whole department doesn't have any activity in the armed conflict.

Because of the particularity of this department, the purposes and assumptions of what libraries are and should be could take certain changes or new meanings, from the type of users, who also are affected by their lifestyles and material, cultural and political conditions. It means that this libraries acquire new roles, thus setting new social relations between them and the community.

So, it becomes necessary to understand which is the result of the use of this libraries, including to determine if they are really agents for modernizing the municipalities. That is, if they are fulfilling the role of modernization that is derived from the principles enshrined in the PNLB.

As a consequence, it has been identified four variables which allow us to see the concrete reality of the department: 1) ethnicity, 2) economic development, 3) public order and 4) cultural organizations. This variables will help to explore the different uses that communities make of libraries.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES AS SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

During the recent decades the libraries, for our case the public libraries, have been undergoing major changes, visible in it's own conception. Theoretically, in the manifesto of UNESCO/IFLA (IFLA/UNESCO, 1994) these institutions take on commitments that go beyond their purely educational purposes. The contemporary public library is situated as a social institution that has to support democratic processes from free access to information, education and culture. It makes possible to defined them also as institutions aimed at strengthening the "democratization of culture". Similarly, ando for the Latin American case, in 1985 was signed the declaration of Caracas (Agudo, 2001, p.22), which establish four sets of functions: 1) information, 2) of education support, 3) of social advancement and 4) of reading promotion. For all of this is necessary to contrast these functions and purposes with the reality of libraries.

Even though the essence of these manifestos is universal, they have clearly passed this global nature, and have reached to be instituted as the first source of the design of libraries in local and regional environments. Colombia is not the exception in this point.

Public libraries in Colombia, have been evolving in it's functionality and importance not only for local communities but also to the nation, a clear example of it is the including the libraries in national policies with the National Plan for Reading and Libraries-PNLB-(Ministry of culture, 2006).

Facing such recognition and incursion as a social and political institutions, it is necessary to understand what it's true scope, enabling an adequate conception of libraries for the Colombian case.

The Information sciences, conceptually, are part of the social sciences, yet it's practice has been on the sidelines of the conditions and the social and political problems in which it is registered. That is why projects and research that can be build from this

perspective should try to generate transformation processes on this new concept of libraries from the social sphere.

Thus, analyze them from sociology, allows to understand the libraries as institutions embedded in societies, understood them as structures that could facilitate social integration, enhancing access to certain basic rights such as education, information and culture.

The libraries in the democratic transformations plays an important role as affirmed by Bourdieu "must do everything to cover the gap between the marginal institutions of permanent education or cultural diffusion (houses of culture, cultural encouragement, etc..) and the school." (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 138-139). It is possible to include libraries in this conception of marginal institutions of education and spread of culture, bearing in mind that precisely their value has to do with promoting reading practices, to be consider as spaces for socio cultural encouragement, it's value has also to do with the option they offer of a space of self-education or training of individuals, and is in that way that we are speaking as Bourdieu called them as companies that represent an opportunity to break the mechanisms of domination.

Ensuring the access to information and establishing themselves as a gathering spaces that generate social development, become some of the characteristics that libraries must assume and with this the formation of active individuals in society, citizens who are capable to identify their own needs of information with an analytical basis and criticism on this, enabling them to access to the rest of the world and transform their own realities.

LIBRARIES AND MODERNITY

The analysis of libraries in the framework of this project refers to it's conceptualization as modernizing agents, according to the new ideas about their roles in society. From this perspective we understand libraries inside the concept of modernization wich, according to Weber, implies a social state in which rationality prevails (Weber, 1999, p.6-22). This rationality is presuppose in the case of libraries because of their own objectives, in wich the libraries are conceived as necessary institutions for the so-called society of knowledge, this is a society that is rational.

This step by the so-called modernity, according to Weber, implies the transition from a traditional society, based on values, dominated by personal relationships, in to a modern society, in which relations are impersonal and institutional. In other words this is the transition from community to society (Weber, 1997, p.306). Community understood as Tonnies says "the perfect unity of the human will considering it as a primitive or natural state that conserves despite the empirical separation and through it, developing in various ways depending on the necessary subject and given among conditionated different individuals" (Tonnies, 1947, p.25). And society, made up of men who "peacefully coexist, but are not essentially united but essentially separated, and while in the community remain united despite all separations, in the society remain separated despite all the unions" (Tonnies, 1947, p.65). Is in this way that libraries understood as modern structures, helps to generate new kinds of relationships between people mediated by the institution, creating new dynamics that are conducted, ideally, to promote community development. However, if we understand libraries in this way it should be asked the question about what actually can libraries generate in traditional communities and how could they reaffirm the modernization process in modern societies.

Furthermore, it is crucial the consideration of the use that communities make of libraries, in order to observe the changes in it's structure by the activity of users. According to Weber, use means "the probability of a regularity in conduct, and as long as this probability, within a circle of men, is given only by the exercise of fact" (Weber, 1997, p. 23) these regularities of fact are defined as "a repeated action by the same agents or extended to many others" (Weber, 1997, p. 23). Thus, the use of the libraries would be determined by regularities of fact that would define how the library is understood by the community and what they do in it regularly. This way, it is possible to know the significance and differences of libraries according special contexts in which they are registered.

Emergence of the public library as a modern institution

Public libraries began to take shape in Colombia since 1774 with the opening of the National Library, formed by the books of the Society of Jesus that was expelled. Its emergence responded to the proposal to form a public university, so it was necessary to put the books available to the society. But it was, as Melo said, in the year 1930 the most active moment in the library with Luis Lopez de Mesa, who gave to the library a

central role in the cultural policies of the country, being one of the institutions responsible for spread the Liberal ideological project (Melo, 2001, p.107). That is why it's relationship with politics begins to be evident. Similarly, it is important to emphasize that by becoming the institution that embodied with strength the project of liberalism, led to it's setup as a modern institution. So during this decade, under the direction of Daniel Samper Ortega (1931-1938), a selection of basic titles was made and then in 1941 the first project of configure the first national network of libraries was consolidated, that network was known as "village libraries". Until the coming to power of the conservative party, "many, as Laureano Gómez saw in these libraries and in their books, corruption instruments for the country people and tools to snatch the conducting of the minds of the people to the Priests" (Melo, 2001, p.108). What is clear is that Colombian libraries have had serious approaches to national policies, either as instruments of support or just as suspicious institutions for a national project. Thus, it's development was conditionated to the political situation, the National Front, perhaps, also determined somehow their weak and sporadic development.

The first public libraries in the country, in addition to the National Library, which until 1980 served the role of a public library, that can be mention are: The public library of Medellín, created by the department in 1870, later, in the twentieth century the Library of the Centennial in Cali and the public library in Villavicencio. But it was perhaps one of the most important advances, in the field of policies of development of these institutions, the ordinance of 1921, established by de department of Antioquia that in all municipalities of over 100,000 inhabitants should be a public library (Melo, 2001, p.108).

As Melo highlights, there are three important events in the consolidation of libraries with clear modernizing structures, during the second half of the twentieth century: first, the opening of the Public Library Piloto of Medellin for Latin America, in 1954, as a programme of UNESCO. Its design, objectives and services represented for fully the international policies of public libraries in the modern world. Second, the opening in 1957, of the Interamerican school of Librarianship, located in Medellín, with the support of the OEA, that has the purpose to professionalize the library practice in Colombia.
The historic formation of libraries until this point, clearly shows the influence of modernity in these institutions through international policies that additionally shaped the public libraries and the library practice in the country. And thirdly, the opening in 1958,

of the Luis Ángel Arango Library, designed to satisfy the demands of specialized information.

In addition, it's appropriate to mention the creation in 1998 of The Capital Network of Public Libraries - Biblored, in Bogotá, made up of three major libraries located in strategic sectors of the city, they are: the Virgilio Barco Library, the Tunal Park abd Public Library and the Tintal Park and Public Library. Also count with six local and ten neighbourhood libraries which were part of former Metropolitan Library System Simba. Considered among the most modern public libraries in the country, because it's physical structure and in the services they provide, in addition, we have now the Park Libraries in the city of Medellín.

Among all these important ongoing efforts to strengthen libraries is the PNLB (Ministry of Culture, 2003), aimed at reinforcing components of strengthening social capital of the state project, creating conditions for greater equity and social cohesion between populations.

The fundamental objective of the plan is to promote reading by improving access and stimulating the interest of the Colombian population towards the books and other media of knowledge communication.

The formulation of this national policy was conceived attending to international policies of education as the "World Declaration on Education for All", that recognizes that reading and writing, along with oral expression, numeracy and problem solving are essential tools for the full development of human beings (1990). Similarly it is based on the "Manifesto of UNESCO in favour of Public Libraries", which indicates the importance that countries adopt "a clear policy, which defines objectives, priorities and services in relation to the needs of the local community "(UNESCO, 1994).

NARIÑO MULTICULTURAL DEPARTMENT

The department of Nariño is divided in two natural regions, the Pacific and the Andean region, each one determined by different aspects in its physical and human geography, the degree of unity shared by it's topology allow populations to establish a series of social, political, economic and cultural links thath has been consolidating historically and that make the regions recognize themselves as particular regions. Nariño also can be divided in five sub-regions, their conformation responds to geographical factors,

each has cultural, ethnic and socio - policies characteristics. The sub-regions are understand as "a social and cultural identity that creates and develops ties of belonging and solidarity being different from other communities with whom they live in the state, a process that is the product of the social construction that involves the active participation of the population. "(Corponariño, 2002).

As already mentioned, for this work have been proposed four variables of analysis: ethnic, cultural institutions, economic development and public policy. In the following lines each will be developed:

Ethnic belonging

The Nariño department is visibly multiethnic and for the study of libraries located in towns with a high percentage of ethnicity it becomes necessary to determine how they configured such "ethnic identities", understood as "a set of internalized and value cultural repertories relatively stabilized, through which the social actors are recognized by each other, demarcate their borders and are distinguished from other players within an area historical and social specifically structured" (Gimenez, 2002). This variable is obviously represents the traditional society, although, as affirmed by Weber, ethnic groups are not synonymous with community, they are a factor that allows the process of communization. According to Weber the ethnic groups are "those human groups based on similarity of the external habit and customs, or both at the same time, or in resources of colonization and migration, subjective harbour a belief in a common origin, so that the belief is important for the expansion of communities "(Weber, 1997, p.318).

Cultural institutions

We understand this variable as all those cultural institutions that have been developed in the municipalities, as determined by multiple factors like could be the historical tradition of the population, public investment in culture, tourism, and of course ethnicity, among others. We refer specifically to the category of Post - commercial institutions of Raymond Williams (1997, p.51), that consider in this category the modern institutions but doesn't fall directly into the business market.

Williams identifies three types of institutions that could provide important elements for it's characterization in the municipalities to be study: the modern and intermediate

institutions of patronage, in which can be located foundations, NGOs, etc., and the government institution.

Economic development

In this variable is taken into account: agriculture, industry, commerce and services, levels of literacy, school attendance, urban-rural composition, public services and roads of access and communication. As well as Arndt says, the economic development not only consider the dimensions purely commercial or productive, since 1965 has been given new meanings to social order. Thus, the economic development is one of the main indicators that make possible to determine the level of modernization of a society (Ardnt, 1992, p.116).

Public Order

Law and order, or public order, is defined as "the use of the authority and the capacity of the armed forces to strike a legitimate balance between the government and society, the collective and individual, the rights and interests in a full show of offense" (Lint, 2005).

This is how public order policy has to do with the presence of illegal armed groups: Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), National Liberation Army (ELN) and United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) and the actions of control of the National Government.

All these elements and variables have been taken into account in the design of this study, in an attempt to understand the place of libraries in heterogeneous communities, the research findings will show the reality of libraries, it's scope in social processes and the relevance of these institutions in the appropriation of culture.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bourdieu, Pierre. El Campo Político. La paz: Plural, 2001.
- Conferencia Mundial sobre Educación para Todos, 1990, "Declaración Mundial sobre Educación para Todos", en http://www.oei.es/efa2000jomtien.htm.
- Corponariño. Plan de desarrollo ambiental 2002 -2012. Corponariño: Pasto, 2002

- Cortes Castillo, Fabio Alberto. Cultura de la responsabilidad social: estrategia para prevenir la transmisión del VIH. San Juan de Pasto: Instituto Departamental de Salud de Nariño, Instituto Colombiano de Antropología, 1997.

- DANE. Colombia una Nación multicultural, su diversidad étnica . Bogotá: Dane, 2006

- Declaración de Caracas sobre la biblioteca pública como factor de desarrollo e instrumento de cambio en América Latina y el Caribe. En: Bibliotecas públicas y escolares. Bogotá: Fundalectura, 2001

- De Lint, Willem. Publico order policing: A tough act to follow. En: International Journal of the sociology of law. 33 (2005): 179-199

- Didier Álvarez Zapata. Ciudadanía y Lectura: retos y perspectivas para la biblioteca pública en América latina. Ponencia presentada en Primer coloquio Colombo – Francés de bibliotecas públicas: Biblioteca y Sociedad. Embajada de Francia, Ministerio de Cultura, Biblioteca Nacional: Abril, 2004

- IFLA, UNESCO. Manifiesto de la IFLA/UNESCO sobre la biblioteca pública, 1994 En: http://www.ifla.org/VII/s8/unesco/span.htm consultado el 31 de mayo de 2006

- Melo, Jorge Orlando. Las bibliotecas públicas colombianas: ideales, realidades y desafíos. En: Bibliotecas públicas y escolares. Bogotá: Fundalectura, 2001.

- Ministerio de Cultura. Colombia. DNP. Documento Conpes 3222: Lineamientos del Plan Nacional de Lectura y Bibliotecas. Bogotá: Ministerio de Cultura, 2003

- Rodriguez Acevedo, María Consuelo. Centros rurales sostenibles de información: una estrategia de desarrollo rural desde la investigación en bibliotecología. En: Revista interamericana de bibliotecología Vol.23 No.2

- Ministerio de Cultura. Senderos.. En: http://www.senderos.gov.co/plan/Articulos/76/Default.aspx consultado [29 de noviembre de 2006]

- Tonnies, Ferdinand. Comunidad y sociedad. Buenos Aires: Losada, 1947.

- Weber, Max. Economía y sociedad. Santafé de Bogotá D. C.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1997.

- Weber, Max. La ética protestante y el espíritu del capitalismo. Barcelona: Península, 1999.