

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS OF CHILE : A HANDS-ON MODERNIZATION EXPERIENCE*

By Marialyse Delano S.

Abstract: The Chilean Library of Congress has recently finished the first stage of a major modernization project, redesigning services and information products, incorporating technologies on a massive scale, upgrading collections, training people, changing the organizational structure, management techniques and physical space. As a result of this major turmoil the Library today is a successful one-stop information shop, but at the same time has to deal with resistance to change. The paper describes the Library's experience, major successes and problems encountered. It will be of particular interest to those institutions rethinking their services and business planning to adapt to changes in technology, management, human resources and user demand, as well as reflecting globalization and information as a strategic resource for development.

Introduction

Latin America has been experiencing major, region wide changes during the last decade: development, drugs, debt, democracy and corruption have been the main issues. Information Technology has dramatically changed both the structure and fabric of knowledge generation and transfer, impacting society's perception of such fundamental issues. Information and communication technologies have made the workplace smaller and more complex, generating tensions in the work environment between pragmatic acceptance of change and traditional work practices.

Economic integration through NAFTA, Mercosur and Apec regional treaties, encompassing the USA, the southern cone of Latin America and the Pacific Rim countries, are redefining the relationships within the region. The library and information environment is facing new challenges, new demands and the appearance of new competitors; countries are striving for the modernization of the State apparatus, repositioning and converting government organizations to meet these challenges.

Parliaments, political activities and representation are in a critical situation. Parliaments are considered expensive, and unable to solve problems with

* Paper presented at the 64th IFLA General Conference August 16 - August 21, 1998, in Amsterdam

legislation. At best, they are seen as slow to react and as neither reflecting the changing times and the present pace of major competitive activities, nor acting on predominant concerns such as environmental issues. Yet parliaments within emerging democracies are recognized as a necessary evil, fundamental for democratic processes, better than a dictatorship, but not intrinsically good. Governments are reacting to this perception. There is a major tendency towards the modernization of parliaments and their information provision services, using technology to monitor constituency concerns, looking for more transparency in political action and promoting a clearer understanding of political issues.

The Chilean Library of Congress has just finished a major modernization project, with World Bank funds, aiming at a profound cultural change in the use of information and knowledge for laws and law-making. The project was multi-layered, including people, organizational structure, information resources, databases, products and services. The Library now offers a wide range of products and services not only within Congress walls but over the Internet, incorporating indexed access to the information offered. It has grasped the opportunities offered by the widespread use of technologies beyond a gradual automation of traditional library processes.

The Bolivian, the Peruvian and the Argentinean Libraries of Parliament are initiating their own modernization projects, ranging from traditional automation of library collections to top of the line technologies. These projects are being initiated in the Parliamentary Libraries because they are recognized as the major information and knowledge providers for Congress, possessing the necessary technical skills, and being apolitical. Democracy in the region is still a fragile infant, and one way to strengthen democratic efforts is by supporting the decision-making capabilities of national or regional parliaments. This has been widely recognized and international funds made available for several modernization projects. However, some countries like Paraguay do not have a workable parliamentary library to support parliamentary decision making.

National and Parliamentary Libraries in Latin America have carved themselves a niche within the cultural environment of their countries. In some cases they have been a leverage for change and growth within their countries, like Venezuela or Chile; in other cases they have maintained services and limited growth during troubled times; in still others libraries are trying hard to achieve a minimum level of quality services and activities. Some countries are in grave danger of losing their own artistic and intellectual production, while others are having to hold on very fast to their achievements.

Six years ago we presented a paper at the Cuba IFLA General Conference, describing our modernization project, with its major components, strengths, weaknesses and expected outcomes. After this period of time, we can describe our experience, the objectives that were met, the objectives that changed during the time of realization of the project, and the aspects we could not modify as rapidly as we wanted to.

Modernization Project: The Concept

The modernization project of the Chilean Library of Congress was conceptualized as a concrete effort to incorporate social intelligence within the Institution. This was considered to be the organized capability to identify and solve internal and external problems in a rapidly changing world by effectively exploiting information resources. The aim was to offer a wide-ranging view of legislative developments, with tailored and ever more profound levels of information, implemented as a one-stop-information-shop.

The World Bank, the main financial source, was interested in contributing to the project, particularly in enhancing decision-making capabilities for a newly revived Congress, after 17 years of the Pinochet regime. The point of departure was to extend technologies and information resources, creating a knowledge-based, multiple source, structured and unstructured, formally and informally networked, information environment. It considered the integration of information technologies with information and knowledge, analytic and management capabilities.

Some of the main objectives of the project were:

- To help the Congress to accomplish its mission by providing information and knowledge needs related to legislative work (legislative, representative and fiscal duties); to inform and contribute to public opinion; to have a modern, effective and efficient management.
- To enhance the institution's public image and presence nationally and internationally;
- To provide flexible access to information considering geographic dispersion and the national and international context in which information is provided and disseminated.

Services and Products

The Chilean Library of Congress today provides services from two major locations: in Santiago where the Congress sat before 1973, (85 employees), and

Valparaíso, the port city where Congress has been located since 1990, (60 employees). The shift in physical location has brought about major changes in services and organizational structure. It has also resulted in increasingly heavy reliance on technologies not only because of major global changes, but because of the distance between the two cities.

The most important change has been the revolution in services provided. Whereas we were a mainly traditional library, waiting for the user to generate demands for services and products, we are now proactively offering our services to parliamentarians and users in general over the Congressional Intranet and over the Internet. The Chilean Library of Congress could be described as the coalescence of several libraries embraced by a single mission and common objectives.

One library is the traditional, upholstered, book and paper based library, with classical services such as reference, loans, bibliographies, searches and other services provided in an electronic, networked environment. Thus, we buy books, catalogue them (Marc, AACR-2) with rigorous authority control, and provide access and lending services. The system includes collection development, (acquisitions) management and multiple transactions, such as loans, reports and statistics. So, a part of the modernization project acknowledges the value of a traditional library and was aimed at providing more and better of the same.

Another, superimposed library is the electronic one, in which we provide electronic access to collections and extensive, full text databases, (our own and external), CD-ROMs, and the Internet, thus providing very rich informational resources. From our point of view, the electronic library is at the service of its users, the country, the region, and even the world, turned outwards through electronic media, such as the WWW, providing remote access to our own or external databases. The main difference is the attitude that permeates our services. They are no longer local, or passive, but pro-active, with an outreach concept; towards the user and not from the user, with rapid turnaround capabilities.

The third library is the virtual one, in which we are striving to enrich, and in some cases substitute, physical access to our building, providing value-added services and products over our Intranet. This third library provides a major change for the user; designing and providing highly specialized services and value-added products specially geared to the legislative process. The virtual library is being built slowly, and aims at providing more and more direct information and knowledge, less referential information; partly substituting the traditional library and building upon it at the same time. The library of the future

is an attitude, a concept based upon the capability of being open to opportunities and turning into an outreaching enterprise.

The Library provides three levels of information services and products:

- The first level responds to inquiries that are answered with little or no previous elaboration, such as factual data, photocopies of an article, lending and quick reference services.
- The second level responds to questions that need further analysis. The user usually receives a dossier of information on a given subject, which integrates data, legislative information, press clippings, serials and book chapter photocopies, simple bibliographies, biographies and other ancillary information. The user receives comprehensive "as-is" information.
- The third level involves in-depth research, providing the user with a paper responding to the inquiry on pre-agreed parameters including subject, breadth and scope.

The main services and products that we offer within an electronic and virtual environment are:

- Access to on-line, full text legislation in force (more than 37,000 laws, resolutions, decrees, etc.), both in original and modified versions. The user can search, down-load, print or reformat for e-mail, or for her or his own office needs.
- Access to a bibliographic database holding more than 80,000 titles, that can be turned into bibliographies, loans, requests over E-mail, down-loaded or printed. It is a traditional (Marc format, AACR-2), integrated system that includes cataloguing, collection development, authority control, loans, etc.
- Access to data bases directly relevant to the legislative process, such as History of the Law, parliamentary records or parliamentary work and Bill tracking.
- Special on-line products for parliament: On-line, full-text dossiers, research studies, names and CVs of parliamentarians, legislative commissions' information, relevant press information as scanned images;
- weekly press bulletin which underlines main issues and news as appearing in newspapers and weekly magazines.

All of these in-house Library-generated databases are updated daily. They require expensive, intellectual, multidisciplinary work, from sections such as our Parliamentary Research Group. We are also striving for a future integration of searches, so every database is using the same controlled vocabulary in the relevant bibliographic areas or fields for efficient retrieval of information.

The Library of Congress also provides services such as press clippings (on-going manual archive since 1948), research and reference on demand by a multidisciplinary team; publications, and others. For example, each month every parliamentarian receives a dossier with his or her own clippings, their activities, views and comments in the printed press.

The Library's Role within the Legislative Process

The reinstallation of Congress, after 17 years of the Junta regime, meant reconsidering the way representatives worked, particularly regarding information, as multiple source, multi-level information consumers, who need value-added products tailored to their individual needs. The parliamentarian does not have time to search or browse through tons of potentially useful information, nor can he or she deal with massive secondary information products: their needs are unique and urgent as the champion of a bill or law.

One of the most difficult endeavors during these years has been to promote recognition of, and demand among parliamentarians, for the sophisticated services and products provided by the Library, which are an asset to them in their roles as representatives and legislators and in their fiscal duties. The process has been slow, involving years of public relations work, lobbying for the library, and striving to improve communications between parliamentarians, their staff and the library.

Technology has been helpful; we have provided unusual services beyond traditional user training, that expand the Library's relevance. We personally teach users how to interrogate our databases from their offices, provide manuals, train secretaries, and trouble-shoot network or computer glitches beyond the call of service. We also offer group training sessions for parliamentarians, their staff, the political committees and legislative commissions.

For the first time, in March 1998, we conducted a well planned public-relations campaign for newly elected Representatives and Senators. The campaign included hand-outs, a video of the Library, user manuals, training offers, and personal contact with each individual office. As the Members have become acquainted with our services, and as younger people are elected to Congress, they have exponentially incremented the demand for services, products, and Intranet searches, and are beginning to more fully exploit the potential of the Library.

As part of the modernization project, we were successful in expanding the area of influence and general recognition of the Library's role within the Legislative process. We have made a significant impact with increased service, product

demand, assistance requirements, and participation in orientation work-shops for new parliamentarians and their staff.

How we got here

The first stage of the modernization project, with World Bank funds, included the following aspects, in which technology was one of the main concerns. Technology as an instrument not only changes the way things are done, providing for more of the same, but also changes outlook, demands, expectations and results.

- Collection upgrading
- Strategic planning, training and consultancy
- Organizational Structure
- New bibliographic system
- New legislative system
- New legislative process system
- Equipping Library Staff, reading areas and reference services with PCs
- Networks and communications
- Consolidation of Valparaíso Library and redesigning Santiago, as a corollary.
- Training staff in computer use, processing, analytical information services and products, management, strategic planning processes, human relations and others.

The projects were executed by public tender for systems, including training activities within the academic environment, looking for turn-key solutions, and outsourcing, thus avoiding impact on operational budgets and keeping down the number of library staff.

During the implementation of the original project, the widespread availability of the Internet and the emerging alternative of Intranet connectivity and access generated an enormous upheaval. Thus, we found ourselves in a very unstable technological environment which offered new and as yet unconsolidated opportunities, and new relationships with parliamentarians based upon technologies and project shifts geared beyond the Library walls. The Library embraced Internet and Intranet facilities to extend information resources, and to become part of the information world in this new marketplace. As to community work, during 1998, as a result of major educational modernization projects, all schools will have a technological platform with which to access the Internet, and will work within a shared and networked environment, with access to Library of Congress products especially designed for outreach purposes.

Caveats

The major difficulties in implementing the project so far, have been people, technological glitches and management issues. A number of library staff have been resistant to change, even though they have been assisted by comprehensive training programs. Maybe the changes were too sweeping, including not only technologies, but organizational structure and relocation to new headquarters in Valparaíso. We initiated the project with a participative outlook, but discussions were endless and we were always encountering problems and coming into cul-de-sacs - not advancing fast enough towards the implementation of the projects. We then chose to close the debate so as to move on, and were criticized for not being participative enough. We had difficulties finding a middle ground, under the pressure of contractual timetables.

While some staff had difficulties with modernization activities and new technologies, others became champions of change. Some staff rejected, quite understandably, the Library Headquarters in Valparaíso: others embraced the opportunity to change cities. The new, functional, organizational structure generated some insecurities, with a degree of reluctance in accepting centralized processing and decentralized services. However, to counteract these disappointments, the users appreciated the benefits of these changes soon enough, having their requirements satisfied from a one-stop-information-shop library.

Technological glitches were also a major problem - not one of the new systems is fully consolidated and reliable. We have worked with major international and renowned hardware, communications, network and software providers, and have the ambivalent feeling that technological change and competitiveness is such that systems are offered in the market when they are still in their infancy and not completely tried and tested. When the core of our business and services relies on technology in a similar way to banks and financial operations, technology should be glitch-free, but we do not have the means to carry out in-house development or testing such as the financial world does. This fragility can be observed library-wide, and is an opinion shared with most colleagues, although not openly or frequently acknowledged. Systems and network administration have become complex operations with too many elements in play, resulting in rising operational costs beyond previous plans and estimates.

Management issues have also been a potential for trouble, as the resources, staff and multiple locations have made the Library into an increasingly complex institution from a management point of view. Most middle managers of the Library, even though receiving expensive and holistic training, have not become proactive, effective, and efficient enough to sustain this prolonged modernization

effort. There is a duality between modernization changes, and fear of them, and it can be extremely difficult to change mind-sets.

The Future

Our plan to modernize the Library had many experimental features, involving a degree of trial and error. We did not have all the answers, or fully structured outlooks, so as to preserve the flexibility to adapt and grow according to the vortex of changes experienced each day. Some products and services will continue, while others will shift as they are superseded by better or differently focused ones. We have realized that the life cycle of some is very short, technologies change more rapidly than we can, the information environment will not become stable in the future, and change is the only permanent aspect we can rely upon.

The Library is continually considering the next steps to develop, monitoring emerging technologies, listening to user demands, and watching where our competitors are going. Some of the clear-cut projects we are initiating are:

- Automated press information system, presently in the feasibility study and pilot project phase.
- Integration of research trans-databases, based upon the concept of integrated information services.
- Niche products such as full sets of specialized information, designed specifically for legislative commissions. For example, the Commission on Environment will have, on-line a unique information package made up of: Legislation on the subject; Press information; Members of commissions; Foreign law; Major of specialists in the world and in Chile; Bibliographies; Periodical articles; Standing on the subject political parties, Political party information.
- Outreach information and services, for which the Library has a unique opportunity, such as civic education to children (Proyecto enlaces).
- Cooperation with other Parliamentary Libraries, database access, exchange programs, training programs.

But, the most important is an attitude to embrace change, and to exploit technological opportunities that could emerge. Other challenges include more work with Congress people to evaluate impact of library services, and more focused products geared to particular needs. We have made the initial effort to catapult the Library into the 21st. Century while at the same time preserving the link with Alexandria and Babylon which is and will always be relevant. In libraries, changes have always been cumulative, complementing previous formats,

services and traditions. The Alexandria library had a list of materials within each repository room, striving to hold all of the world's knowledge in its walls ; Otlet and LaFontaine integrated the list and considered this a major universal scale of organizing knowledge, therefore centralizing control and access. We can now have a universal library with both access and availability, superimposing the world's knowledge, and reinforcing the role of information brokers and organizers in an ever expanding world.

Bibliography

CEPAL/CLADES (1995) Comision Economica para America Latina y el Caribe; Centro Latinoamericano de Documentacion Economica y Social. Los sistemas de informacion y el desafio de los cambios globales. Informacion y Desarrollo 7. Santiago: Clades.

Cronin, Blaise (1996) Information and market integration in Latin America. In: Blaise Cronin, (ed). Information, Development and Social Intelligence. UK: Taylor Graham, pp. 191-201.

Delano, Marialyse (1996) A socially intelligent Congress. In: Blaise Cronin, (ed.). Information, Development and Social Intelligence. UK: Taylor Graham. pp. 182-190.

Delano, Marialyse (1999) Library and information: Latin America. In: Maurice Line, (ed.). Librarianship and Information Work World Wide, 1999 .UK: Bowker Saur.

Feliu, Ximena and Delano, Marialyse (1994) User oriented services: a feedback strategy for gaining understanding and support for the Parliamentary Library. Paper presented at the meeting: 60th IFLA General Conference - Cuba, 1994.

Feliu, Ximena and Delano, Marialyse (1993) Rethinking a Library: Knowledge for legislators and the Library of Congress of Chile. Paper presented at the meeting: 59th IFLA General Conference - Barcelona, 1993.

Gazitua, Jose Miguel (1997) Gestores de informacion y el entorno: algunas referencias para la navegacion. In: Informacion y Desarrollo (8), feb. 1997, pp. 29-44.

Vigier, Pierre (1997) Sistemas de informacion y gestion de gobierno: enfoques, experiencias, restricciones y posibilidades. (Paper presented at the meeting: Reunion de expertos sobre tendencias y desafios de la gestion de la informacion y las tecnologias de la informacion en America Latina y el Caribe, Santiago de Chile, November 26-28)

Vitro, Robert A. (1997) *Americas 21: creando el futuro hoy*. (Paper presented at the meeting: Reunion de expertos sobre tendencias y desafios de la gestion de la informacion y las tecnologias de la informacion en America Latina y el Caribe, Santiago de Chile, November 26-28)

Marialyse Delano S.
Information Resources Production
Chilean Library of Congress
Huerfanos 1117
Santiago
Chile
asesrben@congreso.cl