Influence of the collegiate bodies in public polices for the legislation of state and municipal libraries network: Chihuahua, Mexico case

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Abstract

Presents the experience in Mexico about the formal integration of the collegiate bodies for the development of the academic production, focused specially in the developed labor in the area of library and information sciences trough actions that allowed an influence in academic manners in general and in particular way in the development of management processes in public polices which contributed to the defining of precise legislations that protect the obligatory budget disposition for public and state libraries networks.

Introduction

Public universities in Mexico have been established as a way of organization for the development of academic works so that full time professors-researchers will group together according to disciplinary affinity, in a way that throughout this mechanism they can develop a bigger productivity and social influence in professional areas.

The conformation of these collegiate bodies (officially named academic bodies), is a voluntary action that has to begin with the official recognition of its existence throughout a record and having an economic repercussion on the members’ incomes, but only if their production (represented in the research, publications and influence on social and public
projects, only to mention the main ones) is important to the professional, institutional and social development.

In the specific case of library and information sciences, it is important to mention that in Mexico there are only six educational options and one of them (undergraduate and graduate level) is established in the Autonomous University of Chihuahua (Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua), this being the only option for the northwest part of the country, counting with four academic bodies, from which only one covers the discipline of library science.

As a result of the insufficient presence of library studies development in the country and in this particular region, the Library and Information Science Academic Body has been noticed because of its influence in several institutional and social fields, especially in those that are characterized by the impact or effect in the proposal of different guidelines for the library studies and informational services integration, and also on the development of human capital for the discipline at all levels (from empirical, technical and professional education).

The proposal that we want to share is the one considered in this paper, in which we present the experience of the Library and Information Science Academic Body from the Autonomous University of Chihuahua (Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua) in the process of the development of the Chihuahua State Libraries Law, in which through its collegiate insertion, proposed the establishment of mandatory lines included in the state and municipal budgets intended to the strengthening of the Library State Network, with this some of the mandatory financial resources are managed in a legal way and in case that they are not assigned every year, this lack of fulfillment can be publicly denounced. It is considered that the management of Library studies budgets is achieved through the development of strategies that apparently result, in an immediate intangible way, but its repercussion will be higher than any other direct and long term activity.

In order to understand the experimented process by the Academic Body in Library and Information Science until becoming an influence in the decision of public polices, first implies the description in the form of how is the legal integration as a body to obtain formal recognition and authenticity; later the demand is to describe the development of multiple academic activities that let the position as a productive teamwork, believable in their actions and seriousness in the productive capacity as a collegiate body.

It is why that the global structure of this work, explains in first term those Mexican national conceptions in the way the government recognizes the collegiate work, indicating the different characteristics and conditions of the academic bodies; in second place, it will cover previews experiences in academic projects that particularly benefited the Autonomous University of Chihuahua (Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua) as institution and the librarians guild in general; and third the contribution in public policies through the creation of formal legislations that influence in society using the knowledge and methodologies of the library studies and informational science.
Definition of the Collegiate Bodies in Mexico

It has been affirmed that one of the characteristics of Mexican is to have an ingenious capacity of work, especially when this is develop in an individual way. This situation had provoked that the actions of the people linked to the fields of teaching in universities, considering that it was an activity that took them to identify a low production given the separated efforts that in occasions happened as a repetitive actions in different contexts.

A concrete action to encourage cooperative and collaborative work of professors and researchers in public universities, was the creation in the 90’s of the Teacher Improvement Program (PROMEP), dependent department of the Ministry of Public Education (México), which through it was proposed the grouping of professors and researchers to develop a collective work and as a consequence achieve better and bigger contributions, as the scientific production was low in the country and it did not have a strong record of such behavior because it did not exist evidences of collective and individual control.

With the emersion of PROMEP, is proposed that every work referring to the academic production can be registered as an individual form (in order to keep a record of the behavior every teacher and researcher) and in a collective form (letting the group record of academic production). Therefore, a product can be registered in the files of every teachers-researcher and/or in the production curriculum of the disciplinary group that it belongs, which had to be recognized by the educational authorities.

For the collective registration of the academic production was conformed the Academic Body, which is defined as “set of professors-researchers that share one or more study lines, whose objectives and goals are intended to the generation and/or application of new knowledge. Also, for the high degree of specialization that together accomplish in teaching achieving good quality education. The academic bodies support the institution academic functions and contribute to integrate the superior educational system of the country” (SEP, PROMEP, 2009a).

In the proposing of working together was necessary to give importance to the academic bodies as such, because its members would be responsible to conduct the academic way of the institution they belong to. The collegiate characteristics of the academic work and the necessary link between the generation and the application of the knowledge outside the institution, requires that all the professors that not function as isolated individuals neither as undifferentiated mass. Therefore, to properly perform its functions, the full time professors gather in academic bodies that let them reflect and act with efficiency and intellectual rigor.

Then, the importance of the academic bodies generally lies in the following aspects, because (UACJ, 2009):

1. They are the prime mover of the institutional development.

2. Ensure the fulfillment of the institutional objectives both educational and generation and the application of knowledge.
3. Enrich the institutional academic life with individual and collective experience.

4. Provide an academic environment of great intellectual richness.

5. Contribute to the institutional prestige.

The advantages of belonging to an academic body can be identified in some supports that can transcend the structures and individuals, seeking to benefit present and future work groups. For example, the possibility to count or participate as guest professors, groups and facilities can be better utilized and the contacts with other similar academic bodies will be more constant and abundant.

Other aspects that the Mexican authorities proposed with the integration of academic bodies, apart from the collective academic manifestations, are the possibility of professors can participate in congresses, debates, seminars, etc., develop publications as articles, chapters of books and books, enforce the establishment of collaboration networks of local level, national and international that allow the institutional mobility promotion and any other successful alternative for the generation and knowledge application.

In order to present in a more explicit way the general characteristics of the academic bodies, these are included in a punctual way in Table 1. Characteristics of the academic bodies, through which are resume several aspects mentioned before and other more significantly distinctive.

Table 1. Characteristics of the academic bodies

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<td>1.</td>
<td>Full-time professor’s groups (consisting for two members until a number that facilitate collaborative work) that share academic objectives in one or more generation lines and knowledge application.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Establish an institutional link inwards and outwards with different social sectors (educational, business, etc.)</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Participate in teaching, investigation and knowledge management of one or more generation lines and knowledge application.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>The assignment of the professor is free and voluntary. Allows its assignment to work with its academic body and with others.</td>
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Once registered the academic body in the authorities and considering the members’ characteristics (academic degrees, experience, production level, etc.), receive an evaluation level, which defines the consolidation degree that it observes, able through the collaborative
work change the condition by the work evolution of the same body. The consolidation degrees and its main features of academic production are (SEP, PROMEP, 2009a):

1. Academic bodies in Integration Process. This are the collegiate bodies that have identify its members, which not all of them have the doctorate degree or the recognition from the PROMEP because their academic production is low (mainly in publication development), have identify generation lines and knowledge application they which to respond, begin establishing relationships with other national bodies with foreign ones, to mention the main ones.

2. Academic Bodies in consolidation. Observes this level when half of its members have a doctorate degree with a high recognition given by the PROMEP, at least less than a third part counts with experience in teaching and formation of human resources, a majority actively participate in sharing networks with their pairs in the country and overseas, with the benefits by the generation and knowledge application, as well as with agencies and institutions and count with part of the basic platform necessary for its work and have identify its requirements to complete it.

3. Consolidated Academic Bodies. A consolidated academic body is characterized by the following attributes of its members: all of them have a doctorate degree with recognition for its academic production from the PROMEP, they participate together in generation lines or knowledge application well defined, the majority counts with experience in teaching and formation of human resources, at least one of them is a national or international academic leader in their field (the academic leadership is manifested, among others, by the capacity to integrate investigation groups, form high level independent academics and influence with its vision in the development of their field of interest, all this in the national and international level), also they participate actively in sharing networks with their pairs in the country and overseas, with the benefits by the generation and knowledge application, as well as with agencies and institutions and count with the basic platform necessary for its work, that is to say: laboratories, libraries, major equipment, workshops, etc.

A formal academic body is identified by the following elements: have a proper name, identification of its members and leader (coordinator), definition of the generation lines and knowledge application and the consolidation level and stage.

**Previous Experiences in Management from Collegiate Bodies**

The Autonomous University of Chihuahua (Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua) currently counts with 82 academic bodies (amount that varies depending on different forms of restructuring, grouping for new creation and regrouping by merger or separation), covering all full-time professors and varying the levels of consolidation, being the most predominant in integration process (SEP, PROMEP, 2009b).

One of these academic bodies is the Library Studies and Information Science integrated for four members (one with a Masters degree, two Doctorate Degree candidates and one Doctorate Degree), who by their actual characteristics are found “in training” level of
the academic body, on its way of becoming “in consolidation” level given the proximity of obtaining higher academic degrees from its members and the current academic production.

The principal actions developed in different times and circumstances by the Library Studies and Information Science Academic Body, which led it to be recognized as a collegiate body formally constructed (created in 2005) and recognized by the academic and social environment, can be appreciated in the following list of activities, in which is included a brief description of the distinctive characteristics of each of the most outstanding actions.

1. Transborder Library Forum. Event held in 2005 with the slogan of “Information without frontiers” gathered 250 information professionals from Mexico, United States and Canada, countries that belong to the trade bloc that belong to the Free Trade Agreement in North America. The experiences of such event were written in a book that collected the major topics (Tarango, Ascencio y Murguia, 2006).

2. Curriculum redesign of the Information Science Undergraduate Program. Since this program had a curricular plan with approach to communication, which generated a series of confusions in respect to the professional and occupational approach of the degree, it was detailed a thoroughly curricular redesign, achieving the integration of a graduate profile and subjects related with the degree (Tarango and Lau, 2003; UACH, 2007).

3. Course and Specialty in Library and Information Science. In order to train and professionalize the library staff of the Autonomous University of Chihuahua (Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua) and from the Chihuahua State, Mexico, it was designed a course (for the no professional or technical staff) and a specialty in library studies (for the staff with a bachelors degree different from the degree but with experience in the field). The course had three editions and the specialty one, influencing in the formation of 60 persons approximately.

4. Information Resources Management Association (ASAR). It is a civil association that group people from the Chihuahua State, Mexico, related with activities of documental information. It consists of several committees and groups of interests. It is an entity that contributes to the development of the staff that works in different information units. Its members belong to business, cultural, higher education (public and private) and government sectors, mainly. The affiliates are persons from empiric formation until doctorate degree (ASAR, 2002). The active participation in this professional association allowed that the academic body influenced in the realization of several professional formation events, development of divulgation newsletters, development of library encounters in a state level, etc.

5. 39th Mexican Library Science Proceedings. It was achieved to be the main place of the most important library event in Mexico in May of 2008, which gathered 600 Library Studies and Information Science Mexican professionals and foreign, it counted with an Exhibition Fair of providers and resources of information services (43 participating companies) and a student forum.
6. Increase in the Academic Production. The collegiate work of the Academic Body favored the generation of several publications like articles in magazines, book’s chapters, congress participations, surpassing the work expectations of individuals developed before. Such conditions allowed that the four members of the Academic Body could achieve the quality recognition given by the PROMEP.

7. Research Projects Development and Knowledge Application. Under the sponsorship of the Autonomous University of Chihuahua (Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua) and with the participation of students of the Information Science Undergraduate Program were developed several processing projects of specialized libraries, historical and news files, study projects of users and community, training needs assessments, etc., same that enriched the production of the Academic Body as the students involve

8. Library and Information Science Master’s Degree. In 2005 it was approved, with the support of federal funds, the development of a program in the Master in Library Studies and Information Science, which objective was professionalize the library staff of the Autonomous University of Chihuahua (UACH, SUBA, 2004). In this project it was involved the Library and Information Science Academic Body in its planning and in its execution, achieving graduate 15 information professionals, who were already active inside the institution but lacked an academic degree related with the master. Given the success of the program mentioned before, it was decided to invite again the Academic Body and perform a curricular reform and offer this master to the public in general, which starts in August of 2009 under the coordination and teaching of the own members of the academic body. (Tarango, Ascencio, Murguia y Romo, 2008).

9. Trejo Foster Foundation Institute. This event is very important, especially for the Border States with the United States such as Chihuahua, since it is a congress that discusses influence strategies of Library Studies in favor of migrants’ Mexican people in the United States. This event will be in 2011 therefore work is in the process of planning activities.

10. Academic Bodies in Library and Information Science Network (CA-BCI). In order to expand the horizons of production of the Library and Information Science Academic Body, this network was integrated, which has an objective of gathering other specialist in the area of Library Studies and Information in order to develop a joint production. At this point it has involved five national institutions and three international ones.

11. Library State Law of Chihuahua State, Mexico. It is possible to observe that in the previous proposals the academic body’s contribution was focused on the own affiliation institution or to a specific environment of the Library Studies exercise, however, an important step was taken in the expansion of the influence radius when the involvement in defining the librarian state law is achieve, which is the subject that it is next explain as the major experience significant to the society in general.

Influencing Public Policy Network for Librarian Law

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Chihuahua State represents the first legislation antecedent in favor of libraries, which is demonstrated through the General Law System of Public Information and Documentation of the State of Chihuahua, published in the official state newspaper number 59 in July 19th of 1997 (State Government of Chihuahua, 1997). Over time and with social, political and economical changes that this involves, this law lost importance in making it inconsistent with the reality of the libraries in the state. Mainly because in this law it is not so clear, or in some cases, some elements like these are omitted:

2. Not specify the duties to be observed in the performance of statewide networks of libraries and their coordination.
3. Not specify the responsibility of the three government levels (municipal, state and federal) at least not in a clear and accurate way.
4. Not provides the professional staff of the libraries of the state network.

These elements make clear the necessity to count with a Librarian State Law that can gather and coordinate actions and resources between different government levels (municipal, state and federal). The drawbacks that are generated with these conditions are very marked in not making responsible, in a direct way, the authorities. For that reason the state public libraries are abandoned, because the responsibility is diffused among those who should be responsible of sustaining them. For that reason it is urgent to present a measure that compromise the governments in a clear and accurate manner with respect to libraries, mainly in economic resources, being this manner a way of derive solutions to the rest of the problems.

The creation of these types of initiatives may seem to arise as an accident, but it is founded in the constant activity of the Library Studies and Information Science Academic Body, who through their interference in the First State Libraries Encounter, taking place in the VI Stare Book Fair of 2005. This encounter has as main objective generate a debate, analysis and experience exchange space about challenges and prospective that libraries face in Chihuahua State, in order to propose actions that promote and enforce the libraries’ processes.

One of the proposed actions in the Encounter was the need to legislate in favor of the libraries of the entity, with the recommendation of involve professionals in the area and avoid a inconsistent initiative with the librarian work. This approach was taken by the state legislature authorities, who had participated in this event sending lawmakers to discuss on the legislative frame of the libraries and alternative solutions. It is interesting to indicate that the participants send by the authorities to participate in this Encounter belonged to the Libraries’ Committee, Editorial Matters and Information from the Chihuahua State Congress, that work on the concerns with a view of finding the solutions.

As background, we know that the Chihuahua State Congress, a legislative official member, created the Library, Informatics and Editorial Matters committee at the beginning of 2006 and started the project of the initiative of the Library State Law. To do so, it tried to approach the linked institutions with Library and Information Science Educational Program, also identified those experienced professionals in the area to be considered as participants in such project.
The identification of institutions was made by Chihuahua Cultural Institute (Instituto Chihuahuense de la Cultura or ICHICULT), the Information Resources Management Association (Asociación de Administradores de Recursos Informativos or ASAR) and the Autonomous University of Chihuahua (Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua or UACH), specifically the Information Science School. It is important to point out that in these three institutions the common characteristic was the lack of information professionals, but the collegiate participation of the academic body mentioned before whom also were founders and active members of the professional association ASAR previously mentioned.

The initial and concrete proposal of the Library and Information Sciences Academic Body was to integrate the theory-legal frame. To do so, it gathered and analyzed several documents in which some stand out:


With this material as theory and legal frame, with the mistakes and omissions found in the General System Law of Documentation and Public Information of the State of Chihuahua, with the proposal presented in the Libraries State Meetings, and with the insertion of the collegiate bodies in the committee, several sessions were held in which it was discussed, argued and justified different opinions that opened to the creation of the First State Law of Libraries of Chihuahua. These sessions began on March of 2005 and ended on June 13th of 2006 in the presence of the State Congress who approved in an ordinary session the creation of the law, as a legal instrument that regulate the library organization and consultation centers, in the view of the actions and decisions to help citizenship in general. The new law has 18 articles grouped in three chapters denominated: General Provisions, Public Libraries State Network and Libraries State System respectively (Gobierno del Estado de Chihuahua, 2006).

About the management of budgets, one of the main objectives of this law is to join and express actions and resources between the different levels of the Federation Government, state and municipality. As a summary, the intention is that none of the governments back off from their budget responsibilities, which are now mandatory by law. Without a doubt, this is a fundamental start for the library studies development in the state, because it was always limited for the insufficient and sometimes inexistent assigned budgets. The centers that belong to the Libraries State Law have elements in their favor; they are allowed to question the budgets that are good and according to the necessities of the communities of users that they serve and for the society in general.
On the other hand, the insertion of the collegiate bodies in the area in this type of initiatives is fundamental, because they assure the congruence in the problems marked as shortcomings and necessities according to the solutions presented with successful possibilities to be solved.

The justification made by the Library Studies and Information Sciences Academic Body, was sustained in several motives or conditions that favored its approval, considering the following aspects such as legal and social (Ascencio, Tarango, Murguia, 2008):

1. The article number 3 of the Politic Constitution clearly establishes the obligation of the State – Federation, States and Municipalities – to promote the conditions to exercise the liberty and equality rights for Mexicans can be real and effective; remove the obstacles that prevent or impede its fulfillment and facilitate everybody’s participation in a cultural life.

2. The individual and collective approach into an open and plural culture that increases the condition to facilitate the access to the most representative records of the human, able to influence in equal conditions in the personal decision making of individual, professional and social reaching.

3. It is difficult to proclaim a true equality if the information sources needed are not available for its study, permanent education and personal decision making of individual, professional and social reaching, as it is demanded by the modern societies, since we are before a true information revolution that impact in the way of live, learn and work of people and in the way governments interact with the civil society.

4. The fundamental change of our century can be summarized as the transition from and industrial society to a society based on information, becoming a powerful tool – if not more- for the political, economical and social development.

5. Nowadays there is true information revolution that exponentially multiplies, therefore, claims from governments a timely and efficient action with legal tools that help its processing in creating the best condition for its usage and purpose.

6. In this context the role of libraries occupies a prominent place, because these should be taken into account, even, as a collective space for information access, they should have bridges between the users, establish as a place for the cultural development, social coexistence, debate, respect and knowledge. Its particular characteristics make possible the construction of open scenarios that has to do a lot with the conformation of new citizens.

In Mexico, the General Librarian Law was published on January 21st of 1988 giving way to the approval of state law in several states of the country, but this did not happen in Chihuahua State, because up to this day there is not a normative body in the matter, so in a tangential and sporadically way the subject was regulated, as it was through the General Law System of Public Information and Documentation of the State of Chihuahua (1997), that in some of its articles some aspects were covered like libraries references as documental unities (article no. 3 VI fraction), ”Integrate, coordinate, manage and operate the National Network of Public Libraries and monitor its proper functioning” (article no. 32A XIII fraction), “As a
Central Public Library to participate in the planning, development and expansion of public libraries of the Entity” (article no. 32, XIV fraction). It is important to indicate that by some structural changes of the State government in 2002, such articles were removed, presenting the problem that there is no legal instrument that narrow the mechanisms needed to substantiate the existence and operation of public libraries with regard to the state and municipalities.

A Librarian State Law is urgent the joint actions and resources between the different government levels; reinforce the Library Studies programs with a high level of reliable information, with a wide diffusion between its inhabitants, through a State Libraries Network that serve as a link between the federal, State and municipal governments; coordinate the elements that integrate it and establish the participatory mechanisms to plan its expansion. The lack of this legal resource has led to, in some cases, the installation of libraries in small places, with a lack of furniture, and mainly, without being manifest the inescapable obligation to update the bibliographic, creating with this, serious deficiencies in the provision of services, when the less lost of bibliographic and historical records are of great importance.

It is required to legally base the State and municipally functions in relation with the public libraries to assure its maintenance, upgrading and modernization, the structure of the organisms that are in charge to fulfill its objectives, the authorities of the different government levels that develop and supervise its function, plan the systematization of a strong and well consolidated structure, that allowing a better utilization of the informative resources.

The next initiative pretends bridging the gap that in this subject exists in the libraries of Chihuahua State. For this, this project contains 3 chapters that regulate the issues of greatest importance:

1. In chapter 1: General dispositions, the law objectives and nature are determined, defines the glossary that is used, outstanding the public library one that integrates the following elements: every institution with a upper body of 1,000 titles, catalogs and classifications, constituted with bibliographic, audio and audiovisual materials and other media information and that counts with personal media and materials necessary to satisfy the study, information necessities and cultural access that every person has without any type of discrimination.

Also, the obligations corresponded to the State and municipalities are established, within the outstanding ones, is assign in the income law a budget item for the accomplishment of the objectives of this law. In other hand, the State and the municipalities should designate resources with the objective of give the importance that correspond to libraries to designate adequate materials and human resources, with sufficient furniture and equipment, taking care of the workers profile, their update and training. One of the purposes is to avoid the lack of attention in every administration change.

2. In chapter 2: From the State Libraries Network, its objectives are stated, which creates the Network Coordination and specifies its faculties. Its constitution is more than justified if we consider that it currently integrates 155 established public libraries in the 67 municipalities, having attended in the last year 1,176,432 users (State Government of Chihuahua, 2006).
A highlight aspect is the one related to the character determination of the state central library, which will represent the model that should be followed for those that in the future will integrate the network, participating also in the planning, development and expansion of the public libraries in Chihuahua State.

It is of great importance the creation of the National Network of Public Libraries, as a consultative body, integrated of a total of eleven representatives who will nominate its chairman.

3. In chapter 3: The State Libraries System has as purpose to gather the state and municipal efforts to achieve the coordination inside the public sector and the voluntary participation of the social and private sectors, establishing such responsibility to the Chihuahua Cultural Institute (ICHICULT). It will specify the actions that have to be realized and the procedure for the incorporation of libraries to the system, which integrates all kinds of libraries (classroom, school, universities, specialized, etc.) which allows an efficient and effective control of the actions that will be develop in this library matters.

Conclusions

The insertion of collegiate bodies in the urge to create legislations related with libraries is without doubt, a way to reinforce the librarian work in Chihuahua State. Also, a valuable aspect is the transcendence that was achieved in the approval of a law, such as the proper budget management for the public libraries function as individuals and as part of a network, the recognition of the collegiate bodies’ work and the capacity demonstrated in the developed work through the relationship between institution linkage and collaboration.

In accordance to the real condition of public libraries in Mexico, the budget management is a very important aspect, as well as being one of the objectives that are achieve through this law, allows joint actions and resources between the different government levels (municipal, state and federal). As a summary, the intention is that any government will remove its budgetary responsibilities, which now by law, are obligated. This without doubt, is a fundamental principle in the librarian development in the entity, because it was always limited by the insufficient and sometimes inexistent assigned budgets. Nowadays, the information centers within the National Network of Libraries have elements in their favor, as this law allows them to manage worth budgets in accordance with the needs of user communities and society they serve.

In the other hand, the insertion of collegiate bodies in the area, in these types of initiatives is fundamental, because it guarantees the congruence between the planed problems as lacks and necessities, with respect in presented solutions with potentially successful possibilities. It is necessary to raise awareness with regard to decision making, where it should reward the idea that the construction of the solution, the experts should participate actively in the area, because they have the knowledge, experience and skills.

Finally, another aspect beyond the exercise in the creation of this law is the linking and collaboration between institutions. There were several the institutions and organizations that were involved to achieve this project. The interaction that causes the relationship...
between institution linkages, promotes scenery that encourages collaboration, taking the relationships to another level with a greater chance of success. In this case, it is important to mention the involvement of civil society institutions, government sectors (executive and legislative) and from the superior educational institutions that have educational programs and professional staff linked to Library Studies and Information Science discipline.

**Referencias**


