

Situation of the Science Libraries in Argentine

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Introduction

The purpose of this work is to introduce the present-day situation of the Libraries of Science in the Argentine Republic, emphasising on there possibilities of access to information.

The first division that we can do in this area is: special libraries and academic libraries. This is our starting point.

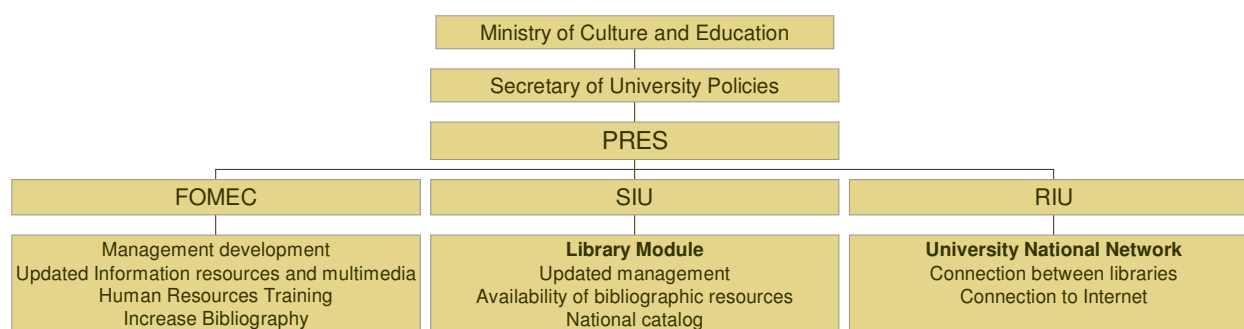
We also point out the Programs or Projects originated in the Ministry of Culture and Education that directly affect the present situation of academic libraries, like the University Interconnection Network (RIU), the Fund for the Improvement of the University Quality (FOMECE), and the University Information System (SIU). This projects depend on the Program for the Reformation of Higher Education (PRES). And another initiative is CONEAU – National Commission of Evaluation and University Accreditation. This Commission has a research project about self-evaluation process in Argentinian academic libraries and the creation of locals performance indicators.

On the other hand special libraries in general depend from government institutions like information Centers for CONICET, Atomic Energy Commission (this was for a long time one of the best Science libraries in Argentine,) INTI, INTA, etc.

We focalize on academic libraries and there interaction with special libraries on there possibilities of access to information. In the last years in Argentine, the state focused on academic libraries in particular.

Initiatives related to the improvement of academic libraries

Program for the Reformation of Higher Education - PRES



Fund for the Improvement of University Quality - FOMECE

The Fund for the Improvement of University Quality is the key instrument of the Program for the Reformation of Higher Education (PRES).

“Shortly after the constitution of the Secretary of University Policies, in 1993, there were established the basis for the later Program for the Reformation of Higher Education, of which the FOMECE is a key instrument. The elaborated strategy worked out for the development of the University system can be summarized: (i) the evaluation of the University quality, (ii) the elaboration of plans, programs and projects for the it improvement, and (iii) the specific financing for the concretion of these projects.¹”

¹ Infomec 2(3)1997 p.3

The FOMEC is a contestable project fund, to be evaluated and by this way is possible to obtain the necessary economical funding for the concretion of changes tending towards the improvement of the Quality in the Higher Education. The Secretary of University Policies establishes a link with the University and this allows the presentation, approval and evaluation of the projects, in both the financial and academic aspects.

The economical resources destined for this program and financed by the World Bank and the National Treasury.

In the context of the improvement of the higher education, the FOMEC became in one of the financing sources for the development of the university libraries, in the last four years.

This far, five calls for the presentation of projects involving the improvement of higher education have been done. We must emphasize on the presentation of projects for the fifth Call, that have pointed out their interest on the area of Training of Human Resources for Libraries.

The projects approved in the five calls were under execution. These projects must be concluded in five years (first call), four years (second call) and three years (third call). Recently (two weeks ago) this program was suspended by the government and the universities claimed to the Ministry.

University Information System – Library Module - SiU

The library module, was created with the purpose of linking academic libraries and doing a quantity and quality improvement of their services with the automatization.

This module has the following goals:

- 1- The creation and maintenance of permanent information system about the present situation and the evolution of Argentine academic libraries.
- 2- The sistematization of existing technological ofert in the world in integrated library systems, comparative analysis of technical characteristics and their applications in Latin American and world academic libraries.
- 3- Technical assistance to universities in automatization process.

The first diagnosis was made in 1997, there are 337 academic libraries (included faculty and institutes) in Argentina, a 70% has Internet connection, and a 20% of their collections is charged in their data base.

A Pilot Group to work in automatization of libraries, it was conformed in 1998. These are the priorities of this group: (1) search for an integrated library systems that can overcome the limitations of Microsis Systems(DOS), (2) the formation of Data Base Unificated, (3) human resources training.

The point 2, is directed to help the cooperation between libraries and librarians. Today 15 national universities are participating to DBU and it has 200000 bibliographic register (MARC format reduced), you can see in <http://www.siu.edu.ar/sistemas/busqueda.html> Is in progress at the moment. A Foundation investment money to make a conversion of DBU in OCLC for full register in MARC format, this part of the project is in progress at the moment.

Project of University Interconnection Network (RIU)

In 1994 the Secretary of University Policies of the Ministry of Education impelled the creation of an information network, in order to facilitate the interconnectivity of libraries, public universities and research centres.

The National Universities, in a total number of 36, along with Inter-University National Council and the Secretary of University Policies, are interconnected through their respective hosts.

These liaisons (located in Buenos Aires, La Plata, Córdoba and Mendoza) and the equipment used by them are what is denominated the "backbone" of the RIU.

The RIU will be responsible for the network until the gateway of the nodes, but will have no influence on what may happen "indoor" the node. Each node will be responsible for it content and will distribute information according with their policies and own priorities.

The purpose of the RIU is to reach the highest possible number of final users, including professors, researchers and students.

Regarding final users, the challenges are two: to inform to the potential user about the utility of the network and to train them for its use. The Universities will be responsible for the training of the final users².

This is a invaluable tool for the communication between the different information units of the National University System. This program is already finished.

Academic Libraries Diagnosis in 1994 by Mr. Luis Herrera

² RIU - UBA.AR Boletin Nro. 2, 1995

Insufficient equipment

- Most of the libraries, despite having out-of-date equipment, have started the automation of their catalogues, as well as the different services that they offer (lending, OPAC, acquisitions, statistics, etc.). This demonstrates that the efforts are aimed mostly to the information processing, but not to the attention of the users.

Insufficient bibliography

- Lack of continuity in the purchase of periodical publications collections. This is a very acute problem in the Argentine Libraries. Some of the causes are: the financing for these purchases are obtained from public funds, so the acquisition depends on the oscillations of them (budget cuts, inflation, etc.) and generally the libraries are the first victims chosen to settle debts. Other important problem is that the cost of scientific and technical publications increases periodically.
- Regarding the book stock, the University libraries with a bigger development are inserted in those Universities with an important academic tradition (UBA, UNC, UNLP).
- Most of the Main Libraries of the Universities must attend the requirements of several degrees, from the science and technology area as well as from the humanities, so it is impossible to cover the bibliography of all areas of knowledge.

Inadequate building

Some times very small and in general prepared for closed shelves (not open shelves)

Low level of training

- Scarce human resources, with a low level of training.

No planning

- For example: There is not a compiled Collective Catalogue, libraries of the different campuses of the same University are not aware of the complete book stock of the University.

The goals of FOMEC library module are:

- Management development
- Updated information resources and multimedia
- Human resources training
- Increase of library holdings

The management of FOMEC program from 1995 to 2.000

- There were 5 Calls (this work includes the first 4)
- 96 library projects were presented
- 50 library projects were approved
 - 37 which are focused on science collection libraries.
- Libraries from 33 of 36 National Universities were improved.
 - These 33 have science schools

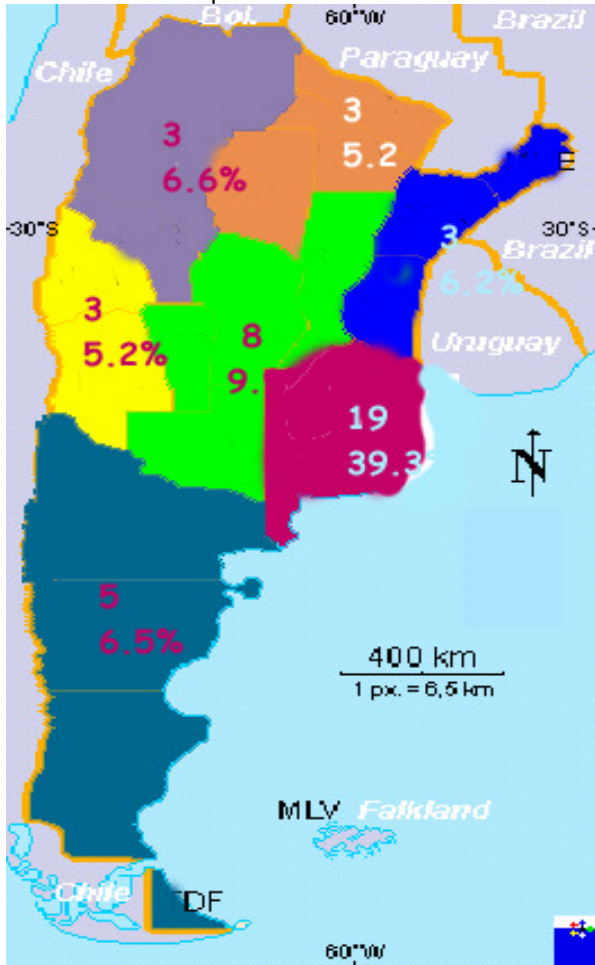
Regional Distribution of library projects and funds

For a better analysis, I divided the Libraries by geographic zones. In each zone I mention the number of approved projects and percentage of the total investment in Libraries. The criterion for the division was the following : the Province of Buenos Aires is alone because there are 13 Universities in this province, and the rest of the country was divided in the following way : Centre, Litoral, Noroeste (North-west), Cuyo, Nordeste (North-east) and South. The Universities corresponding to each zone are mentioned below, except the National Technological University, it is separated because it has many locations around the country.

REGION	AMOUNT	PERCENTAGE
BUENOS AIRES	8523776	39,3%
CENTRE	3696807	17%
CUYO	813570	3,2%
LITORAL	1543654	7,1%
NORTH-EAST	1096991	5%
NORTH-WEST	1484413	6,8%
SOUTH	1236492	5,6%

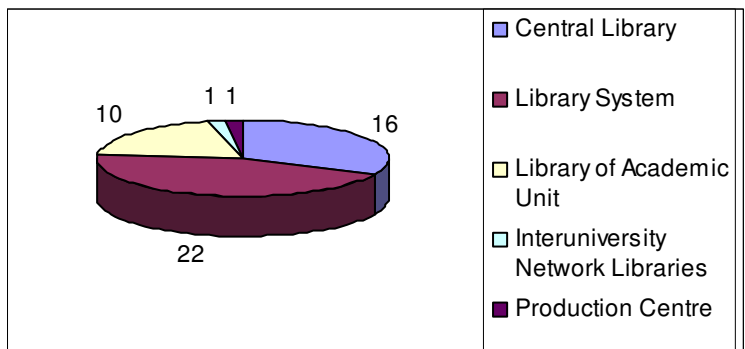
COUNTRY	3426250	15,7%
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Distribution in Map



Total amount investment is 30.000.000: 60% in Bibliography, 35 % equipment (like PC, printers, software, TV, video and other equipments) and 5 % in training in different ways (grants of fellowships for librarians, workshops or assistanship or visiting libraries outside to Argentina, professors that teach courses to the staff of the library).

Distribution of projects by library systems and information units



Radical change in Academic Libraries

They are cover essential technologies and infrastructures. The following changes were obtained:

- Communications and networks - RIU
- Equipment - FOMECA
- Bibliography - FOMECA
- Buildings re-design - FOMECA
- Integration Resources - RIU and FOMECA
- But we're still lacking local performance indicators for objective measurement. It is under development.

The present situation of Special Libraries

- They have special programs for different libraries (For example ARCAL for Nuclear libraries), but no general program for special libraries like FOMECA is for academic libraries.
- There isn't diagnosis about the present situation of this kind of libraries.
- It has different subjects networks to share information.(RRIAN)
- They have human resources training procedures most of the time. (change with the size of the library)
- The salary of their librarians is better than that of the librarians of academic libraries.
- Sustained budgets (with decrease in some periods or cuts in economical crisis) to buy journals collections, if compared with academic libraries.
- These libraries are stronger in journal collections than in books collections. (depend on size)
- They are higher in level of automatization (bibliographic control and OPAC by web) than academic libraries.

For this situation in the CENTRE, METROPOLITAN and BUENOS AIRES zones are concentrated some of the most important special and academic libraries of this area. In Buenos Aires, for example the Library of the Campomar Foundation, the Library of the National Institute of Industrial Technology, the Library of the Institute of Theoretical and Applied Research in Physical Chemistry, the ones of the Chemical Engineering Pilot Plant in Bahía Blanca, the National Research Centre in Santa Fe, and the the Library of The National Atomic Energy Commission, many of them have some locations outside of Buenos Aires.

For a long time, all these centres have helped to compensate for some deficiencies of the academic libraries. These organisms belong to Universities, to the Government or directly to the National Council of Science and Technology Research.

Common problems academic and special libraries

- There is no information policy.

The information Policy in Argentina has been for a long time a subject that has not been faced with the seriousness and correspondent political decision needed ; an infinity of problems were priority for the politicians compared to this one. The science and technology area has been a little more lucky than other branches of knowledge, but formally it has not achieved yet the formation of an information system.

Since 1952 to 1992, infinity of attempts were made in order to accomplish this objective, with no positive results³.

In 1992, the Guidelines for the National System of Scientific and Technological Information were elaborated. In this document a historical account on the subject is made, along with a diagnosis of the situation at the moment, the objectives of the System, strategies for its development, etc.

³ Lineamientos para el sistema nacional de información científica y tecnológica. Buenos Aires, CAYCIT/CONICET, 1992.

The conclusion was the following : “the overview of the services shows that in Argentina a system of scientific and technological information is running, although it is not institutionalised. None the less, this system is suffering problems that affect the transference of information to the scientific and technical community⁴”

- There is need of cooperative working culture.
 - Parallel work. Ex. Data base unificated from SIU and National University Collective book catalogue .
- Impossibility to exchange information
 - Most libraries don't use MARC format.
 - Libraries use different formats.
- Low level of automatization compared with other countries of South America (like Brazil or Chile).
 - Don't use integrated library systems due to problems with budget and maintainance.
 - Data base management system mostly used in Argentina is Microisis (free distribution)
- Lack of International standards adoption (Z39.50, MARC, UNICODE, Dublin Core)
- Institutional responsibility
 - Libraries are low in hierarchical position inside the main Institution: As Mr. Herrera says⁵: “The identified problems have basically institutional roots. The lack of generalised progress in the academic Libraries reveal signs of indifference and neglect by those persons who are in decision-making positions.”
- Shortage of information management professionals
- Need to enhance users' awareness of the importance of Library Services

At the moment in Argentina librarians from special and academic libraries are meeting with the final goal of forming a Consortium in Science & Technology information and preparing a document, these are some points in the discussion (2 academic and 3 special libraries).

C COOPERATIVE WORK SCIENCE LIBRARIES

- Integration of the national collections.
- Rationalization and redistribution of national information resources.
- Complete collection holdings.
- Virtual collections. (JSTOR, PROLA)
- Sharing resources with other consortiums like for example Web of Science.
- Study groups for new technologies and new ways to obtain documents.

⁴ Op.cit. p.28

⁵ Herrera , Luis. op.cit. p.4

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Comparative situation of science academic and special libraries

	Academic libraries	Special libraries
Support Programs (direct)	FOMECC SIU	ARCAL (
Support Programs (indirect)	RIU	
History of the budget	<p>Scarce and discontinuous Scarce unsustained budget. Budget cuts are frequent. Special funding is attained through special projects, this is only a partial solution since continuity is lacking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous budget with changes (economical crisis) • Lack of continuity in the purchase of periodical publications collections. This is a very acute problem in the Argentine Libraries. Some of the causes are: the financing for these purchases are obtained from public funds, so the acquisition depends on the oscillations of them (budget cuts, inflation, etc.) and generally the libraries are the first victims chosen to settle debts. Other important problem is that the cost of scientific and technical publications increases periodically.
Cooperation: Sharing resources	Every institution has Internet connection	
	University Interconnection network and particular university network.	Particular subject network (RRIAN, UNIREC)
Collections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Big collections focalize on journals and books. Regarding the book stock, the University libraries with a major development are inserted in Universities with an important academic tradition (UBA, UNC, UNLP). 	Big collections focalize on journals, depending on the size of the library.
Automatization	Most of them are automatized in the 90's	Most of them automatized in the 80's
Development	They don't have development tradition	Development tradition (at present is cut for the decrease of the budget)
Present situation	Sustained changes are going on. The general situation is much better than the past. But with the suspension of FOMECC, these libraries have problems.	Present situation is worse than the past, because the budget was decreased.
Initiatives	Consortium in Science and technology information	