
Introduction

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Welcome to *Library Trends*' first bilingual Spanish-English issue and the first devoted to work in Cuba. This experiment in academic publishing recognizes that new ways of thinking about research communication are in order.

The first point to make is that our subject in this issue, libraries and information systems of the Republic of Cuba, stands on one of the remarkable human feats of the twentieth century. This was the 1961 literacy campaign. Even while some counterrevolutionary holdouts were still shooting in the mountains, 100,000 high school students (and one as young as nine) signed up as literacy campaigners in response to the call from Fidel Castro. They devoted months to teaching people to read and write, while also helping with farm work and otherwise supporting the lives of the learners' families who hosted them. With schools closed for the campaign, another 100,000 teachers pitched in as well, not to mention the volunteers' families and many others. In that one year, a total of 707,212 people learned to read—roughly ten percent of the population. Each of them sent Fidel Castro the evidence—a handwritten thank-you letter—and the letters are bound and archived at the Museum of Literacy in Havana (UNESCO, Lorenzetto and Key, 1965; Williams and Samuel 2016).

No other literacy effort has been as sudden, as sweeping, or as successful. It transformed the new readers, the young teachers, and Cuba's political culture. It informed the Brazilian educational theorist who in turn influenced so many across the Western Hemisphere, Paulo Friere. It continues to engender similar campaigns across the world. And in Cuba it was followed by the "Battle for the 6th Grade" and eventually the establishment of articulated school and university systems across the island, a pub-

lishing industry, and with all that, networks of public, academic, school, and special libraries.

Several publications in Cuba are dedicated to the topics of librarianship and information sciences and an important part of the national scientific production in these fields. These include *Revista de la Biblioteca Nacional "José Martí"* (Journal of the Jose Marti National Library), *Revista Ciencias de la Información* (Journal of Information Sciences, accessible at <https://www.redalyc.org/revista.oa?id=1814>), *ALCANCE: la Revista Cubana de Información y Comunicación* (Cuban Journal of Information and Communication, accessible at <http://www.alcance.uh.cu>), and *Revista Cubana de Información en Ciencias de la Salud* (Cuban Journal of Information in Health Science, originally identified as ACIMED, available at <http://www.acimed.sld.cu>).

While library and information science rode this tremendous educational wave, Cuba began to build its educational and professional infrastructure for the field in the 1930s, with its library association formally structured in 1980-81. Today formal campus-based programs are complemented by extension-type programs across the island. Undergraduate, certificate, and postgraduate qualifications can be earned at more than one university. Unlike in the US, students can also train specifically for the position of researcher on a library staff (Bella 2003). Two professional organizations are active: ASCUBI (Asociación Cubana de Bibliotecarios, or Association of Cuban Librarians) and SOCICT (Sociedad Cubana de Ciencias de la Información, or Cuban Society for Information Sciences).

Second, this issue of *Library Trends* acknowledges that even though for many it is a lingua franca, the English language is not and cannot be the sole language of science and scholarship. English is the first language of just 5 percent of humanity, Spanish of 6 percent. (Including native speakers and all others, English is spoken by 15 percent of humanity, the same as Chinese; Spanish is at 7 percent). When languages of very small and disempowered populations cease to be spoken, we know that knowledge is lost. All our languages are vehicles for our cultures, from which solutions emerge, and we need all of them. Humanity continues to suffer greatly from the egocentrism of diffusionist ideology, the idea that the entire world must rely on the centers of power and wealth for knowledge and sustainability. Since all human beings have equal capabilities, in fact the opposite is true (Blaut 1993). Based in the United States, which has for nearly two hundred years practiced the Monroe Doctrine (defining Latin America as its de facto possession), *Library Trends* must lead in learning and sharing what people are doing and creating across this region. The key here is respect for human agency: people doing and writing for themselves.

Third, and connected, this volume speaks to Cuba. It says that there must be more studies of Cuba in the world's scholarly literature, in Span-

ish, English, and other languages as well. Cuban knowledge and experience has tremendous and unique value. We urge the world's editors and publishers to do like *Library Trends* and help with this task, and we urge Cubans to study and write about what they know.

Fourth, while the world is not flat, it is certainly interconnected. The common digital infrastructure of our societies and the magnitude of shared social problems dictate that we find those connections and understand them. For instance, early Cuban library development relied on professional education in the United States. It adopted the Dewey Decimal System. For several decades, in large part due to the United States imposing an economic blockade on Cuba, Soviet library science was influential in Cuba. But the economic and social reality of our proximity (the famed ninety miles) suggests that our fates are linked. Adopting the approach of the world history scholars, retelling our stories so as to rethink them as one larger story, is on the agenda. In this volume, we in North America can read several stories from Cuba.¹

Fifth, with global approaches to research comes the question of global research standards. Library and information science has long felt a tension with regard to methods. Library professionals have long been engaged in research, whether they are in tenure track positions in the US academy or researchers working in Cuban public libraries. But as library schools were staffed by faculty with PhDs, and research became the driver for promotion and tenure, university-based research, with its more complex and often expensive methods, gained the upper hand. Research questions began to diverge between the professionals and the scholars. To generalize, one set of questions entailed what is happening in libraries and what works in libraries to improve services, while the other set is more theory driven, more technology driven. Some of this is visible in this issue, and we continue to need bridges between the two. Is there a way for academics' research skills and foci to complement rather than ignore the professional literature? What do we draw on for teaching materials? Has academic research become too complicated to carry out or too obfuscating? Is that another way that the "center" engineers a devaluation of the "periphery"?

The content of this issue reflects not only this methodology split but a focus on both the social and the technical aspects of libraries. In the United States, this social-technical duality becomes even more dramatic as data scientists cohabit schools alongside library scholars, and by the larger debates over whether society will be managed as a data problem (big data championed by government and corporations) or as an opportunity for human agency. It may be that Cuba, with its democratic culture dating back to the literacy campaign, offers some solutions that celebrate the persistence of human agency as well as the creativity of the world's programmers.

In this issue, María del Carmen González Rivero and Sonia Santana Ar-

royo explain how by directly serving ordinary people and not just health professionals, the National Medical Library improves health indicators with information literacy programs and services delivered to local communities. Maricela Corvo de Armas documents the experience of a provincial library in implementing programs for the Third Age—seniors—and thereby improving their health. Alina Ruiz Jhones and Julio Vidal Larramendi reflect on their experience and analysis of one university's efforts to informatize, that is to say, reorganize its academic and administrative processes around information technologies, offering a set of recommendations to resolve sticking points.

Yohannis Marti-Lahera and Mirelys Puerta-Díaz examine the institutional repositories across Cuba's higher education institutions to identify challenges and breakthroughs. Pedro Urrea González recounts the actual experience of transforming three paper-based Cuban library catalogs into linked open data, offering a creative and economical approach to a challenge faced by many unique library collections. Ramón A. Manso Rodríguez and Anier Caso Barreto present a way to reimagine and repurpose a provincial library's floor plan into a "LibraryPark" that favors citizen empowerment and community development. And Kate Williams-McWorter and Abdul Alkalimat tell the story of how Cuba's participation in international library work helped move forward not just Cuban but also global librarianship, often overcoming hostility and resistance.

Finally, some additional background on Cuba is in order with regard to cultural policy, medicine, and computing. Some years after the literacy campaign, Cuba began to implement a policy of Ten Cultural Institutions. With support from the national government, each of 169 municipalities set out to build its own bookstore, library, drama troupe, community chorus, band, museum, movie house, art gallery, handicraft shop, and cultural center. The library thus grew up alongside other locally driven institutions. This compares to how Andrew Carnegie and the club women of the United States led in building public libraries across the United States, without quite the coordination of parallel social construction of complementary institutions.

On the heels of the 1959 exodus of doctors, who were not very numerous in the first place, Cuba constructed a novel prevention-and-primary-care-driven health system. Doctors and nurses located themselves in every neighborhood. Biotechnology became a focus. Medical education opened to students from across the hemisphere. And international medical aid became a central strategy for Cuba's foreign relations. A spirit of investment, innovation, and sharing suffuses the health-care sector, and it has influenced the rest of Cuban society in many ways.

For instance, it has contributed to Cuba's deliberate advances with digital technologies. Infomed, created in 1992, became a nationwide health-information network because it understood very early the potentialities of

the internet for cooperation and multisectoral integration combined with the potentialities of the Cuban health system that had achieved global coverage for all its citizens. A particular achievement in the digital realm has been the Joven Clubs de Computación (JCC), or youth computer clubs. These were first established by the Young Communist League in 1987 to help every corner of the country gain computer knowledge and practice. They grew into a neighborhood-based network larger than the public libraries. A person of any age could use the JCC to learn or play with computers, programming, and later the internet. (The next look at Cuba's community/technology/information must tell the story and lay out the findings of these thirty-plus years of hard work helping ordinary people achieve digital literacy. A comparison could be usefully made with the 1961 literacy campaign.) Cuba's digital advances rest also on the 2002 founding of the University of Informatics Sciences (Universidad de Ciencias Informáticas, or UCI) in Havana, which focused solely on programming and other aspects of digital society with students from every municipality of Cuba.

The proximity of Cuba and the United States means that in the long run we can only collaborate. The alternative does not make sense for Cuba or the United States. In order to understand our common problems and how to solve them, science and learning with respect to information and technology can and must reach across borders that have become fraught and politically electrified.

NOTE

1. We follow one other journal that carried out a similar effort, *World Libraries*, which devoted its volume 13 numbers 1 and 2 (2003) to issues of Cuban librarianship (<http://worldlibraries.dom.edu/index.php/worldlib/issue/view/14>).

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