Vanishing identities, saving information
Or, how libraries can recover indigenous languages through oral tradition

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Abstract

The paper briefly analyses the role that libraries may fulfill within societies where oral tradition is still the main mean of knowledge transmission, and where languages are seriously endangered. The author provides a complete set of concepts about the nature of oral tradition and the current situation of languages. Afterwards, he provides his own experience on development of library services in Latin American indigenous communities, in order to illustrate how libraries may evolve and be adapted in order to meet particular needs of disadvantaged patrons.

Mother languages, motherless speakers…

> "A language is not the words: it is many things, it is the life itself".
> *Graffiti* in the National University of Cordoba (Argentina)

According to latest predictions by international cultural organizations such as UNESCO, throughout the current century 80 % of the languages in the world can disappear, since the strength of dominant languages might dissolved them into foam as do waves breaking on the beach. Right now, only 4 % of the languages are used by 96 % of the world population; 50 % of the world languages are in danger of extinction; and 90 % of the world's languages are not represented on the Internet[1]. Translating percentages into numbers, the menace can be made even clearer: more than 6000 languages and dialects are at risk of being squashed and substituted with 15 or 20 ones which, due to their diffusion and categorization either as "nationals" or "internationals", have become the codes massively and preferentially used[2].

The language, the specific way in which a person speaks, exceeds the limits of a simple and mere communication system: on one side, it links the person with an ethnic group, with a history, with a set of traditions, with a land or a religious belief. On the other, it has *connotative tints* that show, in a unique form, how people feel and see the world in any particular culture. Its correct use –even thorough and meticulous- allows the miracle of *oral tradition*, a means of transmission and education that has succeeded in making millennial traditions continue to exist and be passed down from generation to generation.

It is clear that the use of the own language is very important when transmitting the features of any culture, even more if we are talking of societies which do not have writing skills.

According to Whorf[3], the human being organizes the world and its parts in tiny pieces to which s/he assigned a meaning that is codified through the language structure. That way, the language becomes one of the most important means of symbolizing reality, a prerequisite for the existence of any culture. The way each one uses the linguistic symbols strongly influences her/his process of forming an idea of the world to such an extent that, according to Beals[4], "it can be said that peoples with different languages live in different worlds".

The linguistic diversity of humankind expresses, in a mosaic of countless tiles, thousands of forms to shape an idea, thousands of sounds employed when symbolizing emotions or dreams, thousands of grammar structures created in order to materialize a hope. It is a true human miracle, and its existence is an indicator of the "good cultural health" in the world: it indicates to which degree each linguistic group –no matter how small it is- has succeeded in maintaining its independence, protecting and perpetuating its particular fragment of plurality, without being absorbed by dominant currents,

The above mentioned predictions point out a worrying situation. Linguistic diversity is mainly threatened by the "unifying secular tendency, on the part of the majority of the States, to reduce diversity and favor negative and adverse attitudes towards cultural plurality and linguistic pluralism"[5]. This means that many human phenomena (either linguistic or socio-cultural) are being literally rubbed off, dived in the silence by national governments that seek to homogenize their societies and remove the track left by particularities. It also means that the cultural independence of many groups is being broken and subjugated, and thousands of individuals, by using less and less their language, are losing the use of their culture, their memories and their stories as well, and they stop to understand reality the way they have understood it up to that moment…

In fact, to eliminate a language, to erase it from our memory is a kind of memoricide[6], and, as such, it should be considered a crime against humankind[7]. For without language –and, what is more, without the tool which allow us to express and make use of our own culture and memory- peoples stop to be peoples, individuals lose their identity and, without it is neither possible to make any sense of the present not to design the paths toward the future[8].

If we think of the whole group of endangered languages, those facing more possibilities of disappearing are the ones labeled as "minority languages". In general they are the *mother languages* of particular groups which have none or unequal ranking compared with majority languages. Quoting Ramon i Mimó (*op.cit.*):

> "Minority languages are better defined considering social rights [of their speakers] than the size of the linguistic group, however, from a linguistic point of view, they are open to cover a wide range of possible situations: varieties, dialects, pre-standardized languages, standardized and cultured ones."

The omens are even worse for those segments of society considered minorities. They are, in general, groups that, for several reasons –race, ethnic affiliation, beliefs or culture- do not take part in the social life of a country or a region in the same conditions as do the rest (majority) of the society. Their particularities turn them "different", and they are treated as such. They have to bear the pressing force of the dominant culture that either struggles to eliminate those differences by assimilating and including them (what implies the negation and removal of their particular features), or to condemn them, by discriminating and excluding what differs.

Among the numerous minority groups of the planet, indigenous peoples[9] stand out as having one of the richest cultural heritages as well as one of the most precarious –and always threatened- socio-economic situations.

The old owners of the words

> "I want my children to feel as the real owners of the language. As it is said sometimes: 'they are the owners of the land'… And why not of the language? Why not of culture?".
> Orlando Morales, *Qom*[10] man.

The estimated number of aboriginal people in the world at present ranges from 300 to 370 millions[11]. Exact figures are not available, since there are not reliable data that can confirm them. They populate over 70 countries of the five continents, from Arctic to Amazon River, and from Sahara Dessert to Australia. More than 150 million live in Asia, in countries such as Bangladesh, Myanmar, China, India, Indonesia and Japan.

According to estimates made by different sources[12] [13] [14], in Latin America would be more than 400 First Nations nowadays, which would represent between 40 and 50 million people, that is, over a 10 % of the total population in this region. Del Popolo and Oyarce[15], analyzing the Latin-American censual outcomes in 2000, state that Bolivia is the country with the largest proportion of native population (66 %); Brazil, on the opposite side, only has 0,4 %. Taking into account total demographic volumes, the indigenous populations' leading countries would be Mexico, Bolivia and Guatemala.

These aboriginal groups are the ones that, through the last centuries, have been supporting the strongest acculturative pressure on the part of dominant societies, either through official policies (education, information), or religious campaigns and daily social practices (exclusion, discrimination, racism). Although in many countries (especially in Latin-America) they constitute clear demographic majorities, they continue to be situated in disadvantaged positions, suffering from critical deficiencies (education, information, training, employment and basic resources) and the serious problems that they cause (health, malnutrition, violence, unemployment, illiteracy, addictions…). They are the ones that poverty is addressed to, and their welfare –defended by most basic human rights and concrete (inter)national laws- is never taken into consideration nor thought about when the different governments make their political decisions. They become the easily forgotten, the forever excluded, people without future who have chosen not to remember a painful past and therefore do not manage to understand their shameful present (*cf.* IWGIA[16] as well as the valuable sources provided by indigenous rights' organizations all around the world).

Still there are too many genocide / ethnocide cases. Still there are persecutions, censorship, prohibitions and defamation[17]. Their languages –valuable intangible cultural heritage of humankind- are in danger of disappearing, if we consider as certain the studies elaborated by different NGOs and UNESCO. From the XVI century, the violent contact with western culture has caused the extinction of hundreds of aboriginal languages, and a high proportion of the ones that will disappear through the present century belong to the same category. In the particular context of Latin America, the whole number of native languages are considered minority, since they are not at the same level as the languages "of prestige" or dominant[18], such as Spanish and Portuguese[19]. Generally speaking, they are thought about as "inferior" because they are not written languages. However, as Hoebel[20] points out:

"Writing systems are inventions that go back to relatively recent times (Bronze and Iron Ages). Languages had existed long before. Neither should we think that if one of this does not have a writing system it is slovenly or vicious. On the contrary, the not written language is the one that faithfully preserves oral tradition, the one that puts emphasis in correction and accuracy of speaking".

On the same subject, Rada[21] writes down:

"People who did not come in a literacy world … were considered as a backward segment of humankind. Indigenous populations of the Americas, Africa or Australia were regarded as uncivilized. Our libraries did not collect their knowledge because it was not written. Since it was not written, it had no value; since it was not in the books, it was not reliable. That way we have lost much of the accumulated knowledge of the humankind majority".

Presently, ongoing and worrying lost of *mother languages* (and the subsequent and progressive abandonment of oral transmission) is causing a double problem for original peoples. On the one side, one of the paths through which aboriginal people build their identity is vanishing. *"Language is the cornerstone of who we are as people",* as was stated by two Canadian natives[22]. On the other, with the language it also extinguishes a code of communication which expresses itself the whole perception of the existence; and together with oral transmission, a complete series of stories that, even through metaphors, recover and perpetuate an entire vision of the world:

"During long hours around the fire, the aboriginal community retold the new generations the significant facts of their past, sang the courage of their heroes and showed the egoistical motivations of the anti-heroes in order to be mocked. These traditional stories reveal, even today, situations lived and suffered through their long fights. They present, as if they were a fantastic tale, the problems that the community has to solve. They help to clarify their thoughts and release tensions. This way of teaching history has not disappeared: creativity and orality are still present"[23].

Each elder who dies carries with him/her, as was said by Lèopold Sedar Senghor[24], a whole library and the transformations undergone by his/her people, all the customs and their tacit laws, all their stories about beginning of the world and origin of themselves, all their explanations, all their experiences…

International projects of endangered languages safeguarding[25] are aimed at the recovery of the speaking inside the particular community, through the revitalization of their information channels and the help of cultural and oral expression initiatives. *"I´m interested in communication, no preservation"*, stated a North American native[26]. In this way, at the same time that it is protected a very important part of human diversity, elements for Bilingual Intercultural Education (BIE) are also facilitated, and, through it, for the group identity consolidation.

Nevertheless, in spite of the good results achieved by some of the above mentioned projects related to linguistic recovering in the world in general (and in Latin America in particular) and the political successes that are been reached in many original societies against their

respective governments –reverting partially, at least, years of submission and oblivion- a huge number of words stop sounding day after day, falling silent in a state of forgetfulness that will not allow them to escape anymore. Wiped away by religious missionaries or primary school teachers, given up due to shame, forgotten after having used them for years, silenced by politicians, victims of hatred and madness, languages (and cultures), wrongly named "minorities", parts of the intangible heritage of the humankind, impassibly disappear without leaving a single track, in front of the majority. Many of them do not have possibilities to survive; helpful hands stretch others too late. . In one way or another, they extinguish. And, as H. Ferrari wrote, such a thing is "a perfect crime"[27].

Memory is murdered with impunity, diversity is broken, plurality stumbles and memory managers (librarians and other information professionals) are scarcely aware of their role in the recovery and diffusion of this set of cultural goods so fragile and so threatened.

Libraries for indigenous communities?

> "In accordance with the information facilitated by the Indigenist National Institute [of Mexico] related to the LIS programmes in indigenous areas, it was confirmed that they do not exist as such. Meanwhile, UNESCO, in its 'Manifesto on public library' (1994), establishes ideal points unsuitable for developing countries´ reality".
> R.A. Sánchez Hernández[28].

There are a good number of quite powerful tools that a library can provide to an indigenous community (and, in general, to any other) for the recovery, revitalization and diffusion of its cultural heritage. The library is not only a warehouse for storing memories and stories: it should be the *cultural lung* of a people, the *community's house*, a meeting point, a place for people to come together to discuss… It has to spread the strategic information, support school education, train employees, and become the entrance door to the knowledge, own and foreign, in order to encourage the discovery and the creation of new paths towards the future.

It has to be taken into account that the library, as an institution, is a strange entity to traditional indigenous universe, which with few exceptions –at least in Latin America- neither knew, up to the arrival of European invaders, the writing nor the books or other documents. However, the library has developed and turned into something more than a mere books store: currently, it manages all types of materials and formats. In addition, indigenous communities are taking part –to a higher or lower degree, with their problems, particularities and reservations about it- in this world more and more global as time passes (what does not necessary mean more a more integrated), making use of writing and reading skills and of the new communication technologies according to their knowledge and their own socio-cultural structure, usually bilingual.

Therefore, to suggest the idea of a library that would be specifically designed for meeting the needs of indigenous users, would not have to sound a bit strange, but should be considered as a fundamental part in the development policies agreed for these groups. Curiously enough, theoretical studies, practical uses and proposals for applying such models are very few throughout the entire territory of Latin America[29]. First Nations do not deserve too much attention and when they receive any help, the resources are canalized so that they are aimed at more urgent needs, such as health, lands and production means´ management, family and rights protection and the improvement of working conditions. Thus, urgent things do not

make room to important ones, and solutions to educational and cultural problems few times are considered "priority" tops[30].

In spite of the particular indigenous movements –who are completely aware of the importance of preserving their identity and acquire knowledge- constantly demand tools and instruments for the younger generations' education, which show respect for their own culture (a right that is guaranteed by all Latin American National Constitutions), few governments, organisms, and NGOs bet on libraries implementation within native communities, and those who do so, generally make the same mistake once and again: to start small public units with collections, methodology and staff completely strange to the users. The failure of such projects is, therefore, absolutely foreseeable.

Since 2000, different models of indigenous library are being slowly implemented and improved in Latin America, taking advantage of ideas already assessed in multicultural units of Scandinavian countries or in aboriginal libraries of Australia and New Zealand, plus conducting additional research and discovering, at the same time, which are the possibilities in the regional context. These local proposals use to be projects on a very small-scale, put into practice by individuals or small research groups in the frame of universities, governmental institutions or independent NGOs. In most of the cases, the theoretical models are developed considering interdisciplinary perspectives which include anthropology, history, linguistic, education and laws, in addition to librarianship. A set of well known proposals are enumerated below[31]:

– Magüta Museum of *Ticuna* people, placed at the confluence of Javarí and High Solimões rivers, Amazonas State (Brazil). It is a library that depends on a museum; its activities have to do with oral heritage recovery and bilingual teachers support. Similar experiences have taken place, on a smaller scale, at the *escolas da floresta* (forest schools) in Acre region, and in the area of Rio Negro river. Virtual libraries access is a common practice among *Ticuna*, *Waimiri-atroari*, *Makuxi* of Roraima, *Karajá*, *Guaraní* and other indigenous peoples.

– Municipal libraries in the *Wayuu* area of the Guajira (Colombia). One of them (placed in the city of Rio Acha) belongs to the Bank of the Republic of Colombia.

– UFro-DIBAM mobile library, (Temuco, Chile). An outreach programme that was launched in 1998 by *Universidad de la Frontera* (Frontier University) in *Mapuche* homeland in southern Chile. It gave birth to a sound library in *Mapudungu* language (cassette-records according to the different communities demands, depending on the subjects of interest, with the help of a translator), and developed an extended work within the community, especially with women and children.

– Communitarian information rooms in Puebla, *Náhuat* region of the Central Range (México). Experience led by CESDER (*Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo Rural*, Center of studies on rural development) and its Information and Documentation Center "Lorenzo Servitje". They implemented local and traditional heritage recovery.

– Rural libraries network (over 600 units) in Cajamarca (Central Andean Range, Peru). They were both voluntary and collective units. They are preparing an Indigenous and Rural Encyclopedia that will store and show the popular knowledge they are collecting.

– Bolivian ethnological network, which includes APCOB (Santa Cruz) library, CEDEPA (Oruro) library, Ethnological Library (Cochabamba), CER-DET (Tarija), CIDDEBENI (Beni), MACPIO, MUSEF and THOA (La Paz), and CICPA. In Bolivia outstands PROEBI ANDES (*Centro de Documentación sobre Educación Intercultural Bilingüe Andes*, Andean documentation center on BIE).

– Popular libraries in *Ashäninka* communities of the Peruvian Gran Pajonal.
– National System of Public Libraries in Venezuela. They implemented a mobile libraries service (several kinds of library-ships and traveling cages) along the rivers of the basin of the High Orinoco, with services to indigenous populations (mainly *Piaroa*). The activity was centered upon the Central Public Library "Simón Rodríguez" in Puerto Ayacucho, Amazonas State.
– Specific materials y services to *Qom*, *Moqoit* and *Wichi* students were developed in CIFMA Library, in Presidencia Roque Sáenz Peña (Chaco, Argentina). Other services were put into practice in *Pit'laxá* (Pilagá) areas of Formosa province, and *Wichí* and *Avá* of Salta province. In the city of Rosario (Santa Fe province) the "Ethnic Popular Library *Qomlaqtaq*" has been entirely developed for the *Qom* community.

In Argentina, the author has been working from 2001 in the implementation and assessment of his own model, aimed at meeting the needs of original populations in the northeastern region of the country, where the *Qom*, *Moqoit*, *Pit'laxá* and *Wichi* peoples live. The project, called "Indigenous Libraries", was made true thanks to the support given by a set of grants, and is based on the idea of evaluating both the information requirements and the cultural features of each community, in order to be able to offer a coherent and pertinent solution to them from the library, an organism that can modify completely its structure and adjust it to the most diverse conditions.

When the first approaches to those aboriginal communities took place (2001), the author came to know that those who are supposed to benefit from the project (either related to librarianship or to something different), are rarely asked in first place in order to listen to their real needs, their wishes of collaborating, their problems and the solutions that they intend to find. Generally speaking, we use to start working in a quite paternalistic manner, offering solutions in which addressees neither participate, nor believe, nor are consulted about, and consequently do no result in the appropriate ones and become more and more artificial. Although such an attitude is a serious mistake in any context, in the indigenous one –always forgotten, never listened to- plays even a more decisive role towards the project failure. Taking all this into consideration, the author decided to adopt a *grass-root perspective* and follow an *action-research methodology*; this way, he was able to consider the continuous and active participation of the community in the project plus assess and re-define his goals according to the outcomes, opinions and advices received on the part of the final users.

Taking part, making decisions, forming opinions…

> "In the frame of grass-root development, empowerment and democratization take the place of charity and symptoms treatment".
> Charles D. Kleymeyer[32].

Grass-root development implies to accept, from the very beginning, that the only way of working with the addressees of any project is *all hands on deck*, shoulder to shoulder.

Therefore, it is necessary to listen to the needs in first place, the dreams, the searches and the possibilities of the participating community, previously evaluating it through qualitative tools for collecting data (e.g. participant observation, life stories and thick description). Such approaches allow you to come into contact with the human factor, a very important item that

it is usually put aside. Once the problems that your project intends to solve have been discovered, you should listen to the final users again in order to know which the most suitable answers are, according to their assessments, and being totally aware of their resources, their structures and their cultural context.

This way of working when planning the project, gives you the opportunity not only to know the addressees, but to take them into account. Hence, the solutions offered will perfectly suit the community needs.

Nevertheless, your collaboration with the final users should not end at this fist part of the project. Through its development, it is equally important that the addressees take part and participate actively in the decision making, as well as in the continuous evaluation of the results. In this way, the users are able to appropriate the project, take it for their own use, and turn it into one more element of their community. The project will have sustainability as long as its users can make it suitable for their circumstances (adapting themselves to it as well) and, what is more, can include it in their lives. Thus, you will have in your hands one of the most valuable and trusty tools in any project: the addressees' feedback.

In order to make a profit of such assessments –and of having been thorough and conscientious enough when planning your project in advance- it is highly recommended to use the *action-research* methodology. This methodology establishes a fluent and continuous dialogue between the practice and the theory. During the first step, theory has to be put into practice and results evaluated. Considering them, theory has to be reviewed and changed accordingly. With this "modified" theory, you go back to practice and repeat the process as many times as it is necessary, improving the method and the project constantly, building and re-building what you have thought and what you have put into practice, the ideas and the facts. This method allows you to learn from errors and re-direct the project in order to reach a successful end – that might turn into a new departure.

Combining *action-research* methodology with *grass-root development*, the continuous evaluation on the part of the users and their feedback will allow you to aim the project in the direction they want to follow. Professionals should bring their knowledge and their academic qualifications (either from LIS or from other disciplines) in favor of interested populations and their own welfare and development, in a collaborative and responsible manner.

Planning is fundamental: never should we improvise our actions. In line with the feedback on your work given by the users you should raise new questions and be flexible with the answers and solutions that might be offered.

Applying these ideas to reality, the author found –in its initial approach- that the needs and concerns among the populations where he wanted to implement his project "Indigenous Libraries", were mainly centered on their language and culture recovery, and also on its transmission to the younger generations, who have progressively abandon its use in favor of the "prestigious", dominant language (Spanish) and the national culture.

The addressees were totally aware of their need to recover the communitarian memory, to revitalize the traditional cultural expressions and the oral tradition, and to achieve that children and teenagers feel them part of themselves. Likewise, they wanted to insert the local culture between the schools activities (that include, in the northeastern region of Argentina, some bilingual education programmes) and also to find the way of spreading valuable information (health, rights, employment, sustainable development, technology) joining together the indigenous information channels with the modern means used by the library (writing skills and ICTs).

The challenge looked like very big and almost difficult to tackle. First, the traditional library model based on books, had to be forgotten: the lack of written materials in the respective

indigenous languages was (and even today continues to be) almost complete. The question was how to perpetuate a language when written materials do not exist, when the particular culture is orally transmitted and the spaces for the transmission of such oral contents were disappearing.

Facing this situation, the author decided to design a library model mainly based on sound collections. Such libraries would be small in size, with a totally adaptable structure and located at the schools, a place where the whole community (and especially children) would gather together. In this way, those documents would also become practice materials for bilingual learning and teaching, and would be at the whole indigenous group disposal.

Therefore, the library was divested of shelves and walls, of catalogues and labels; it was adapted to extremely difficult weather conditions and building features, and was modified almost completely in order to meet the different communities' needs. In some of them, the library was a simple cage kept in a corner of the classroom; in others, it was an uneven shelf or an indigenous bag made of *caraguatá* vegetal fibers…

The work of oral recovery for developing the sound collection was hard and tough; however, it included the collaboration of many elders of the different communities, interested in passing the sounds of their language and the knowledge that it arranged into a particular system, into the new generations. From 2002 to 2005 many collection works were done; voices were recorded in four languages (*Qom*, *Moqoit*, *Pit'laxá* and *Wichi*) in simple one-hour magnetic cassettes, since this was the easiest support, either to buy, to use or to reproduce in the small aboriginal schools. The materials collected covered a wide range of knowledge, from genesis myths, to legends, epic tales, personal stories, oral history, medicine, cooking, chants, riddles, games and much more. In general, the indigenous oral transmission is accompanied by other cultural expressions such as chants, dances, body language or music, elements that not always were picked up or recorded with the instruments used. The contents were registered in the above mentioned *mother languages* as well as in Spanish, or combining one with the other, since the mixture of both languages –the original and the dominant- is quite common in Argentinean aboriginal communities. The recordings gave rise to memories recollection and to the creation of spaces where the art of speaking was practiced again. Not only the elders, but also many adults joined these rounds, where it was intended to save the memory from silence and record it in a cassette. The sound collections (that did not reach one hundred) were zealously kept in the schools, and were used, first of all, as a means of re-encounter between children and the traditions they were forgetting. Children discovered the ancient tales and, once at home, shared them with their families. The acquaintances also got involved with the project and recorded their own words, or simply retold other versions of what had listened to children, who later on brought that new knowledge to the school and put it in common with the rest. Slowly a chain of events was set in motion and continued working without stop. In many occasions it included the presentation of "living books", narrators and tale-tellers, who orally passed on their knowledge to the audience (who at this stage was not only made up of children but also included many other members of the community).

Some of the sound materials were transcribed –using an adaptation of the Latin alphabet- and written in a paper support, especially tales and legends. Such writings were illustrated by children and became the first volumes of their raising libraries as well as texts for practicing writing and reading in their original language. Later activities (p.e. *Qadede Idá?at*[33]) succeeded in getting that children wrote the stories told by their illiterate grandparents, and translated them into Spanish; at the same time, children achieved to read classic literature to their elders, translating them from Spanish into their *mother tongue.* That way, familiar spaces of reading-writing and orality were created that allowed to strengthen the fragile

bonds between generations, which are seriously damaged in all Latin American indigenous communities due to the youth disdain for the relationship with the older generations labeled as "indian"[34].

These oral channels were also of use to recover local history, genealogy and geography. Health practices and indigenous natural pharmacology were rescued and compared with the western medical knowledge, in collaboration with local health services[35]. Activities were planned in order to transmit –using written material and bilingual oral channels, with a lot of drawings and pictures- strategic health information, joining together the most important parts of both universes. In this way, new medical knowledge was easily adopted by the native addressees, since their cultural frame of reference had been taken into account as well. The project was improved with other works on human rights, labor training, natural resources management and similar subjects, always considering the group interests and priorities.

It was in 2004-5 when some of those materials started to be digitalized. By that time, in some of the computers provided by the government, in a number of communitarian schools it was possible to listen to the sound collections and write (and read) some of the stories of the village. Granted that the materials yielded by the libraries belong to each community (since they codify their traditional knowledge), they will be the ones that decide what their destiny will be.

In the near future, digital channels of information will allow indigenous groups to open their culture to the world, in addition to get that the national societies come near to them and stop looking at them as "different people". They will also give them the possibility to improve their self-management, their education, their training… Although the economic reality will scatter their path with a lot of pitfalls and the "digital divide" will be present in all each of its aspects (adding its effects to the ones caused by other divides), it is also true that indigenous communities have gone further in spite of overcoming centuries of hatred, gaps and absences, even though they have to move on in the shadows. The library has demonstrated, through various and varied small experiences, that it can make a very positive contribution to improve the welfare and the growth of those communities, by being adapted to the particular circumstances (not the other way round).

A way of concluding

> "Ayim da ñitonaxac da so'otaqta'pe naua maichi qadaqtaqa
> Cha'ayi huo'oi naua salegaqta'agueta doqshilashipi
> Cha'ayi ishit da qansoxoñi naua yaqtaqa
> Naigui na qom qataq na doqshi l'aqtaqa.
> Ltadaikc da ñitonaxac da ñapagueta
> Cha'ayi huo'o ca naigui que'eca na'aq de'eda ñapaguenaxac".
> Virgilio Leiva. *Qom* man[36].

The work with indigenous libraries just starts. The experiences keep on developing, small but powerful, with very little institutional support but with a lot of enthusiasm on the part of researchers, librarians and information professionals who are willing to put them into practice. Sound collections, mobile libraries and books written in indigenous languages are only a few, the same as the librarians trained in the particular native community; thesaurus that really fulfill the needs of the original cultures or codes that put away the custom of labeling natives as "primitive peoples" should continue to be improved in a very substantial manner. There are also scarce theoretical works on this subject: studies on indigenous users

and needs, work with anthropological methods, sound collections management, oral tradition recovery, cataloguing of materials in indigenous languages…

Within the numerous services and activities that can be developed in an indigenous library – whose only limit would be the imagination and the available resources- those related to languages recovery and oral tradition, of spoken heritage and sound histories, are of special importance. These services –whatever the shape given- will rescue from oblivion sounds and words that conform one of our biggest values as specie. They will not only recover them, but will also preserve and spread everyone, for they should keep on sounding in their speakers' mouths as well as in other individuals' ears, and should continue to codify tales and legends, recipes and remedies. Above all, they will allow their speakers to retrieve, appropriate and value their own culture, their identity and their dignity… and will let each of us go further, making our inner and outer horizons wider and higher

The creation of oral archives and the sound collections management deserve a detailed theoretical and methodological analysis on the part of LIS, a discipline that does not assume this responsibility in many cases and has handed it over to other professionals. It is necessary to design instruments and tools for practical work, in addition to better and more appropriate education and training for LIS students. As long as they are well prepared, they will be in a better position to think of new ways and manners of recovering sounds and words. Another useful proposal would be to write guides, manuals and working guidelines on the subject for sharing our knowledge and having more information about other experiences around the world.

The work in a frame of *grass-root development* allows us to change our objectives slightly to make them more suitable for the problems we want to solve with a LIS project. The pre-evaluations done in first place –more qualitative and human than quantitative and statistic- facilitates the approach to resources, situations and needs as well as shows us the rules and human patterns that will also be part of our work

Questions and interviews are an excellent manner to know what we are going to do, why we are going to do it and with whom we will be working. To count on the community means to trust them to plan the way to follow, a route that will be traced once and again thanks to the *action-research* methodology and the addressees' continuous assessments and feedback. They will end making the project a part of the community, a part of their lives. As times passes they will be able not only to make it work better but also in a different way if their needs change. They will become the owners of the project and the ones responsible for improving and sustain it in the future.

No doubt this is the best destiny that a project can find: continuing to live.

Mother languages are the basis where identity, endoculturation and education of different human cultures are grounded. Including and using them in the spaces provided for information and training (libraries, schools, cultural centers…) should become the cornerstone of progress and development for truly free societies: plural, democratic, audacious, critical and tolerant towards differences.

A world with only a few "dominant" languages would be a silent place, a landscape in black and white, an odorless forest, a tasteless fruit, as if someone has wiped away the unbelievable diversity that characterizes it. It will be the sad scenery of an impenetrable darkness without light or sounds breaking its opaque monotony. The paintbrushes for coloring the canvas of the world are now in our hands. However, we must not forget that one day they should go back to the hands of the real artists: the indigenous peoples.

End notes

[1] UNESCO, "Knowledge versus information societies: UNESCO report takes stock of the difference," http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001418/141843e.pdf (accessed November 8, 2007).

[2] *Vid,* National Geographic Society's program "Enduring voices" (http://www.nationalgeographic.com/mission/enduringvoices); *Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages* (http://www.livingtongues.org); UNESCO's Red Book on Endangered Languages (http://www.tooyoo.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/Redbook/index.html); UNESCO's Endangered Languages (http://portal.unesco.org/culture/es/ev.php-URL_ID=8270&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html); and UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger of Disappearing (http://portal.unesco.org/culture/es/ev.php-URL_ID=2229&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html).

[3] B.L. Whorf, "Science and Linguistic," *The Technology Review* 42 (1940): 231.

[4] R.L. Beals, *An introduction to anthropology* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1959).

[5] O. Ramon i Mimó, "Declaración Universal de los Derechos Lingüísticos," *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación* 13, January-April (1997), http://www.campus-oei.org/oeivirt/rie13a12.htm (accessed November 10, 2007).

[6] Term that came into life in 1992 by Croatian doctor and historian Mirko D. Grmek after National Library of Sarajevo was attacked (25.Aug.1992), in order to define the memory and cultural treasure deliberate destruction of "the other", the adversary, the unknown. Even though the term has only been used to refer to documental heritage destruction (archives and libraries), it starts to be applied in intangible contexts as well.

[7] According to North American librarian Sylvia Bugbee, "killing people is the greatest crime, of course. But killing the memory of a people, preserved in their records, is the second greatest crime, a form of genocide. As memory managers, we have the duty of speaking against its destruction". *Vid.* http://listserv.muohio.edu/scripts/wa.exe?A2=ind9904d&L=archives&T=0&P=4469.

[8] Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano wrote: "We know that the loss of memory mortgages the future. Who cannot learn from the past is sentenced to accept the future without being able to imagine it".

[9] Throughout this text, the expressions "indigenous", "native" "aboriginal" and "original peoples" would be used as synonyms, since their meaning and connotations in Spanish are similar.

[10] It is the name of an Argentinean indigenous people, also known as "Toba". The quotation comes from an oral record dated 07.Jul.1995, included in the work of Elena L. Achilli and Silvana Sánchez, *La vida social de los tobas: propuesta para una currícula pluricultural desde la memoria grupal* (Santa Fe: AMSAFE, 1997), 63-79.

[11] Data provided by World Bank / UNPFII. Quoted in Rural Poverty Portal, "Statistics and key facts about indigenous peoples," http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/english/topics/indigenous/statistics.htm (accessed November 20, 2007).

[12] J. Matos Mar, "Población y grupos étnicos de América," *América Indígena* 4 (1993).

[13] R. Stavenhagen, "The challenges of indigenous development," in *Indigenous Development. Poverty, democracy and sustainability* (Washington: Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, 1996).

[14] PNUD (Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo), *Segundo informe sobre desarrollo humano en Centroamérica y Panamá* (2004).

[15] F. Del Popolo y A.M. Oyarce, "Población indígena de América Latina. Perfil sociodemográfico en el marco de la Conferencia Internacional sobre la Población y el Desarrollo y de las Metas del Milenio," in *Pueblos indígenas y afrodescendientes de América Latina y el Caribe. Información sociodemográfica para políticas y programas* (Santiago de Chile: CEPAL, 2005), 40.

[16] IWGIA (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs), "Indigenous peoples," http://www.iwgia.org/sw426.asp (accessed September 19, 2007).

[17] The independent news platform *Indymedia* provides, for Latin America, valuable contents (in Spanish) on the situation of First Nations in each country.

[18] E. Barnach-Calbó, "La nueva educación indígena en Iberoamérica," *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación* 13, January-April (1997), http://www.campus-oei.org/oeivirt/rie13a01.htm (accessed November 10, 2007).

[19] Even if three indigenous languages –Quechua, Aymara and Guaraní- have been declared official, national languages in three countries in South America (Paraguay, Bolivia and Peru), European, dominant languages are still stronger and better considered than them.

[20] E.A. Hoebel, *Antropología. El estudio del hombre* (Barcelona: Omega, 1973), 36.

[21] J. Rada, "The metamorphosis of the word. Libraries with a future," *FID News Bulletin,* 12 (1996), 26-29.

[22] Mary Richards and Ida Bear. Indigenous people of Winnipeg (Canada). Quoted in B. Richardson, *People of Terra Nullius. Betrayal and rebirth of Aboriginal Canada.* (Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1993), 240.

[23] CIFMA (Centro de Investigación y Formación en Modalidad Aborigen), "Indigenous peoples and the transmission of collective memory" (paper presented at the *Segundo Seminario Quilmes 97*, Buenos Aires, 1997).

[24] In an interview, the ex president of Senegal declared: "White people: go to the lost villages of my land with your record players, your cameras, and collect what the shamans say, the jugglers, the elders, the last guardians of a long human history, only trusted to the voices. When they die, it will be as if for you, for your civilization, all libraries were burnt". *Vid. Gente* 84, October (1978), 21.

[25] Some examples are the *Foundation for Endangered Languages* (http://www.ogmios.org/home.htm) and the *Endangered Language Fund* (http://sapir.ling.yale.edu/~elf).

[26] Tony Supahan, from the Karuk people (United States). Quoted in L. Hilton, *Flutes of Fire. Essays on California Indian Languages* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 1994).

[27] "Extinction … It is the absence of an entire quality of the universe. The complete disappearance of any trait of living things, which in case it had survived would have changed everything, something, or nothing .... It is to remove a melody from a whole sequence. It is to eliminate a whole paragraph from a narration. It is a perfect crime". By Héctor R. Ferrari, in *Muerte de la posibilidad* (Death of possibility), 1985.

[28] R.A. Sánchez Hernández, E.M. Martínez Sánchez and A.B. Valle Rico, "Minorías sociales y bibliotecas públicas," in *Memoria del Segundo Congreso Nacional de Bibliotecas Públicas. Estrategias para el desarrollo* (Guadalajara: CONACULTA, 2002), 99-103.

[29] Two of the first books completely aimed at this issue in Latin America have been written by the author, and have been published as Open Access e-books. *Vid.* Edgardo Civallero, *Bibliotecas en comunidades indígenas. Guía de acción y reflexión* (Córdoba: Wayrachaki, 2007), http://eprints.rclis.org/archive/00011626 (accessed November 20, 2007) and Edgardo Civallero, *Bibliotecas indígenas: revisión bibliográfica y estado actual de la cuestión a nivel internacional* (Córdoba: Wayrachaki, 2007), http://eprints.rclis.org/archive/00011626 (accessed November 20, 2007).

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[30] Edgardo Civallero, "Mi mano, tu mano, su mano... ¿nuestras manos?: *reflections for socially responsible librarians*," *Progressive Librarian* 28, winter (2006-2007), 30-48.

[31] *Vid.* Civallero's e-books for complete information about Latin American experiences.

[32] Charles D. Kleymeyer (ed.), *La expresión cultural y el desarrollo de base* (Arlington: Fundación Interamericana, 1993).

[33] *Vid*. Edgardo Civallero, "Qadede Idá?at. Ancient tradition running through the family" (paper presented at World Library and Information Congress, Seoul, South Korea, August 20-24, 2006), http://eprints.rclis.org/archive/00007582 (accessed November 21, 2007).

[34] The Spanish term "indio" (Indian) is a bad word, generally used with disdain for the native communities.

[35] *Vid*. Edgardo Civallero, "Libraries and aboriginal medicine. Experiences in Argentina" (paper presented at World Library and Information Congress, Seoul, South Korea, August 20-24, 2006), http://eprints.rclis.org/archive/00007599 (accessed November 21, 2007).

[36] Declared during a "Workshop on Toba language and culture" developed in *Qom* community of Daviaxaiqui, in Derqui, Buenos Aires (Argentina) in 2002. The translation says: "I'm glad of what we're doing with our own language / because, by our side, there are non-indigenous persons / [helping us] so we can translate our words / in order to understand their meaning in Toba and Spanish / Big is my joy of learning / because a day will arrive that my study will have a sense".