

# **A BRIEF PRESENTATION ON THE USE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN PERUVIAN LIBRARIES**

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## **General country information**

Peru is a republic with a population of a little more than 22 million people, with a 65% urban concentration; it is situated just below the Ecuador on the South Pacific coast of South America, with more than 1,2 million square kilometres of territory, of which more than 60% is covered by the Amazon jungle. Most of the population is located on the coastal towns, like the capital, Lima; this city has around 8 million inhabitants.

After more than 16 years of unstoppable inflation, currently the economy is stable although recessed. A leftist rural guerrilla group and some others political and criminal bands created a long period of violence that caused more than 30.000 deaths and a serious disruption of the rural highland areas of the country.

The official illiterate population of the country is around 13%, but a high level of school desertion and lack of continuing opportunities for learning cause a significant although non-officially estimated percentage of the population to be in a state of functional illiteracy. The literacy language of the country is Spanish, but there many native languages spoken in the highlands and jungle, by rural aboriginal population, without a minimal presence of printed materials in these ones.

## **The library profession**

There are two library schools in the country, both in Lima and both teaching at the B.A. level. Between the two the total registered student body is less than 100 concurrent in all five years of teaching.

The only professional association is the Colegio de Bibliotecólogos del Perú, state-sanctioned as all the Colegios in the country. It has around 250 active members, with an annual increase in between of five to eight members. There are another 300 librarians in the country, but lacking a professional degree (more than a B.A., less than a M.A.) or acting as librarians but trained in other professions. Almost all the professional, Colegio-member librarians of the country work in Lima.

### **Internet connectivity**

Since 1994 Peru is connected to the Internet. Currently there are two ISPs, the Red Científica del Perú (Scientific Network of Peru) and Unired/Infovía, departments of the main PTT operator of Peru, Telefónica del Perú (a subsidiary of Telefónica de España). All the major cities and almost all university-level institutions are connected, although the level of connectivity and its spread within the organisations varies. There is no public subsidy nor has it existed for the academic and scientific access to the Internet. The regulatory agency of telecommunications estimates that some 600.000 Peruvians (3% percent of the population) have access to the Internet, although no information on the methods for collecting this figure has been released.

At the Universities, the single most popular use of the Internet is e-mail, followed by browsing of the Web. Very few institutions provide any kind of value-added Internet services, including library catalogues or distance learning, and most of them are private universities located in Lima.

### **Library services and institutions**

#### *National Institutions*

The National Library is by law the head of the National Information System. However, reality shows very little leadership from the National Library in matters of library and information services, due to serious limitations in staff, technical resources and budget. Expected to move at the beginning of next year to a new building, the National Library tries constantly to improve its support to public and schools libraries outside of Lima, focusing most of its resources on that specific subject.

The National Library does not act as a national bibliographic agency, nor as co-ordinating centre for ILL, nor as standards body for library matters. In terms of technology, it tends to subcontract specific projects based on special budgetary assignments, or off-sources technical management of services branded as prepared by the National Library. Recently there has been news about the acquisition of Aleph Library System for automation and web access to the National Library catalogue, though there has not been a formal release on the grounds for this acquisition nor of a estimated date of delivery.

### *University Libraries*

Some university libraries have the resources needed to keep collections up-to-date and well-designed services running. The Peruvian web-accessible library catalogues are based on these institutions. Sadly, they are a minority, since there are many universities without even the pretence of a library. Since there is no formal national co-ordinating body, nor acting consortia, there is little or none ILL activities, nor active exchange of bibliographic data. There is little tradition of co-operation and sharing in this sphere.

### *Public libraries, school libraries*

These two are commented together since technically they depend of every local mayoralty /school board but have co-ordinating institutions at the national level, being the National Library in each case. The National Library has no budget nor power to lead these institutions, only to give support; the decision power rests on the local authority. Said so, the counties with more resources tend to have adequate libraries. At the school level, there is no current information on the resources being invested nor there is any kind of formal follow-up of activities by the national authorities. The estimation tends to consider school libraries on public schools as very poor.

## **Technology market:**

### *Automation software*

Most of the libraries use Micro CDS/ISIS. Although there is no formal users' group, e-mail lists are used as a thriving exchange mechanism. Since many libraries are unwilling or unable to acquire commercial software for their catalogues and services, there are many locally- or regionally produced extensions of CDS/ISIS that allow interfacing with a webserver for Web access to the catalogue.

Some institutions have developed their own solutions based on different combinations of software (there's one using a Lotus Notes/Domino solution). The Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú is the only institution currently offering web access to a fully automated library catalogue, using Sirsi's Unicorn. But for the recent acquisition of Aleph by the National Library, there is no other commercial installation in the country

### *Data base market*

There are no commercial data base products made in Peru. Most of the library-related data bases are mostly multimedia collections made or sponsored as a cultural-extension product by commercial institutions.

Since there is no national bibliographic agency, there is no significant experience on the acquisition of finished library records. Only the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú libraries use a Z39.50 to extract records from the U.S. Library of Congress and other similar institutions.

With emphasis on the medical sciences, there is constant acquisition of foreign, commercial data bases for use in libraries. In market terms, Peru stands at 7<sup>th</sup> in South America, only in front of Ecuador, Bolivia and Paraguay and close to Uruguay.