

**PROJECT FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF ICBALC INTO ICBIDIAC:  
THE CARIBBEAN AND IBEROAMERICAN NETWORK OF CURRENT RESEARCH  
IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE**

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**BACKGROUND**

During the II Conference of Education and Research in Archive, Information and Library Science in the Iberian Peninsula, Latin America and the Caribbean, a prominent issue of debate was the lack of public exposure given to research carried out in our field in both Latin America and the Caribbean. This is the case as much with local bodies as it is with international ones. We became aware of such a problem on reviewing both publications in our region as well as *Current Research*. Within the latter, the contribution of Latin American research was (and still is) very poor; in three years, our only input has come out of the research of the *Centro Universitario de Investigaciones Bibliotecológicas (CUIB)*.

The weak exposure of our research affects not only its visibility, but the very possibility of studying its development and projection.

Having these concerns in mind, the aforementioned Conference of 1995 entrusted CUIB with the task of collecting and spreading research produced in our region. Work began immediately with the design of a collection sheet –similar to that of *Current Research*– and a database to systematize the information that was being collected. This database was named ICBALC, that is, *Investigaciones en Curso en Bibliotecología e Información en América Latina y el Caribe* (Latin American and Caribbean Library Science and Information Research in Progress).

In turn, *Investigación bibliotecológica: archivonomía, bibliotecología e información*, the journal of CUIB, was chosen as the channel to voice the contents of the database. On top of being a publication specialized in research in our field, the journal offers the advantage of being indexed in international secondary publications, thus enhancing the database's exposure worldwide. To achieve this aim, the journal opened a new section entitled *Investigaciones*

(Research), allowing the exposure of ICBALC to be kept up-to-date (two reviews a year, with each journal issue).

The first review of the research in progress was presented in the last journal issue of 1995. This means that, until 1998, four reviews have been made<sup>1</sup>. Despite the fact that no formal channel of information supply was established with the different countries, they were made possible by the cooperation and efforts of some of our colleagues in the field. Unfortunately, such cooperation has become increasingly difficult as those who collect information generally lack the time and resources to collect the data regularly. As we face the weakening of ICBALC, we run the risk of returning to the problem of insufficient exposure of our research. More so, if the present trend were to continue we would lose the chance of being able to count on a reliable source when studying the characteristics of research in library science.

In order to solve this problem –fundamental to the survival of this project- and enhance the exposure of ICBALC we included in our web-site its content as well as a form to request information about on-going research. Unfortunately, this strategy did not bear the desired fruit, and we remain as far as before from achieving a significant degree of representation internationally.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DATABASE**

The present-day global environment demands knowledge of each other's activity as a starting point for the desired integration of nations. This reality forces upon us the requirement of using adequate instruments so that both ourselves and others will be able to know what we are doing, be able to analyze it, and use it in the decision-making process. By carrying out its task of systematizing and reviewing regional research in Library Science, ICBALC thus assumes the crucial role of facilitating information to be used in representative studies of the degree of research done in our countries.

ICBALC's format allows the user to search for data using a number of variables. These searches can be performed both by using variables independently and by and cross-references. The variables available are: research areas or topics, countries, institutions, funding sources, average research duration and individuals or groups responsible for it. The latter enables the user to identify specialists, as well as finding out the degree to which research is done individually or collectively. As to abstracts and statements of purpose, they facilitate the analysis of the different methodological frameworks and foci utilized by researchers.

To date, the database has systematized data on over 300 notices of research in the following countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Mexico, Uruguay and Venezuela. Some of these nations, however, accounted for only one research notice; therefore, it cannot be guaranteed that they are represented faithfully.

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<sup>1</sup> **Investigaciones en proceso en América Latina.** *Jornal Investigación Bibliotecológica: archivonomía, bibliotecología e información.* CUIB/UNAM. v. 9, No. 19, Jul/Dec 1995. p. 61-73; v. 10, No. 21, Jul/Dec 1996. p. 47-57; v. 11, No. 23, Jul/Dec 1997. p. 155-166; v. 12, No. 24, Jan/Jun 1998. p. 156-163.

The following table shows the share of each country in ICBALC, in both absolute and percentage terms:

| COUNTRY       | RESEARCH NOTICES | SHARE OF TOTAL (%) |
|---------------|------------------|--------------------|
| BRASIL        | 204              | 54.69              |
| MEXICO        | 91               | 24.39              |
| ARGENTINA     | 40               | 10.72              |
| URUGUAY       | 10               | 2.68               |
| COLOMBIA      | 7                | 1.87               |
| VENEZUELA     | 7                | 1.87               |
| CHILE         | 5                | 1.34               |
| COSTA RICA    | 5                | 1.34               |
| CUBA          | 4                | 1.07               |
| <b>TOTAL:</b> | <b>373</b>       | <b>99.97</b>       |

ICBALC's early success allowed the appearance of some studies on Latin American Research,<sup>2</sup> from which we learnt, for example, that Brazil, Mexico and Argentina are the Latin American countries responsible for the greatest share of it –a result that we explain in terms of these countries' degree of development in library science. Moreover, the three nations show similar thematic concerns, such as education, professional training and the labor market – interests in accordance to the attention they give to training at large. On the other hand, Mexico appeared at the forefront of research interest in the fundamentals of the discipline.

In terms of the way research is conducted, it was found, for example, that an individual approach still prevails over a collective one. This leads to the conclusion that our research, broadly speaking, lacks a variety of foci and, more so, a multi-disciplinary approach so often demanded by the complex interweaving of social and technical issues proper to our field.

In addition, an instrument like ICBALC serves the need to evaluate the development of the discipline in both its practical and theoretical stages. The latter can be analyzed in the light of the challenges and problems posed by the development of library science and its environment. The database also provides the user with information to set up communication channels between different users and researchers, which can only strengthen research in

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<sup>2</sup>Martha Alicia Añorve Guillén “La difusión y el control de las investigaciones y proyectos en curso en bibliotecología y disciplinas afines en América Latina y el Caribe: la base de datos ICBALC”. In the journal *Investigación Bibliotecológica: archivonomía, bibliotecología e información*. CUIB/UNAM, v. 9, No. 19, Jul/Dec 1995. p. 58-60.

-----“Indicadores sobre el comportamiento de la Investigación Bibliotecológica en la región Latinoamericana conforme a la base de datos (ICBALC)”. In the journal: *Investigación Bibliotecológica: archivonomía, bibliotecología e información*, v. 11, No. 22, Jan/Jun 1997. p. 59-61.

particular fields or issues, by enabling it to be nourished by a variety of approaches and thus made more sensitive to the manifold aspects that must be dealt with.

## **PRESENT-DAY PROBLEMATIC**

In spite of the recognition of ICBALC as a necessity by our community and the wide array of possibilities it opened up, the fact is that its reality and functioning has deteriorated somewhat with time. The absence of institutions formally responsible for the supply of data to ICBALC has led to the risk that CUIB's efforts towards the systematization and exposure of research notices may be wasted.

On the other hand, ICBALC only gives notice of research done by scholars, professionals, and graduate students. Undergraduate work is excluded on the account that it lacks a solid theoretical basis. Yet, such work represents, in some countries, not just the greatest information source, but the only one. This is why we believe that ICBALC should include it among its records. After all, better analyses will result from being able to work on the totality of research conducted. At the same time, the theoretical and methodological contributions of the leading countries to the discipline can help undergraduate work become increasingly scientific. Indeed, the classification of undergraduate these will allow schools and professors to perform studies that will enhance the theoretical and methodological tools employed in classrooms.

Another of the database's shortcoming is its failure to account for the research coming from the Iberian countries, with whom we share roots and languages as well as parallel research developments in our field in recent times. As is the case with our region, Spain has much advanced in research in library and information science over the last decade (Frías, 1996). The lack of public exposure of this research makes us propose that it, too, should be integrated in our database. Moreover, a derived result of this happening would be the strengthening of communication channels between the Iberian countries and our region.

Further, Spain also shares our concern with becoming aware of the research that is put forward beyond one's borders. The aforementioned document states that "it is necessary to review studies on the scientific production in Library and Information Science abroad as comprehensively as possible." Of course, the very existence of EDIBCIC proves this need for interaction among our countries.

## **PROPOSAL**

The need of an instrument to evaluate the development of research in our discipline, the existence and use of over 300 records in ICBALC as well as the technology that supports this database give us good reason to propose the creation of a Caribbean and Iberoamerican network of research in process in our field (ICBIDIAC). It is our hope that its existence will enable the consolidation of previous efforts in this direction, by means of a commitment to direct participation on the part of the institutions of each country pertaining to the region.

We believe in the importance of making this proposal within the framework provided by EDIBCIC, for it is, after all, this agency that has been entrusted with the responsibility of promoting the development of research and educational challenges in library and information science, with the end in mind of strengthening the discipline in society's best interest.

If this network were created, the Association would be able to count on a database truly representative of our research. This would facilitate work on a research agenda for the region that could have as starting points the existence of shared concerns among countries and the possibility of enhancing their integration according to fields of specialization once the potentialities of each country have been identified.

For the reasons above stated, we propose the integration of a Caribbean and Iberoamerican network of institutional cooperation through which we shall be able to live up to our commitment of maintaining a representative and well exposed database to serve our research needs.

Of course, the functioning of the network would be much facilitated by previous work done by CUIB with ICBALC. This includes database design, storage, retrieval and exposure. Similarly, this center has accumulated a number of research records from the different countries as well as infrastructure that would enable the network's functioning, which would have CUIB as its central node.

ICBIDIAC aims to achieve the following goals:

***General Objective:***

To constitute a database that will include the totality of research work in our field carried out in the Iberian Peninsula, Latin America and the Caribbean. This database should be available on the internet, among other media.

***Particular Objectives:***

1. To give periodic notice and through different means of research in process in Latin America and the Caribbean –as well as Spain and Portugal- in the area of Library and Information Science.
2. To offer an instrument that will serve for the study and projection of research in these countries.
3. To supply with data that will facilitate an exchange of ideas between researchers in our field.

***Participants***

The two main types of participants: CUIB, as the coordinator and central node of the network, and the different academic bodies in the field of library and information science of each country committed to providing the database with information. We will refer to the latter as “offices”.

***CUIB***

CUIB commits itself to providing each participant with:

- Any record related to the institution's country inserted in ICBALC prior to the date it joined the project.
- The data collection form.
- The data capture interface that will contain the database's structure.
- The different authority catalogues that allow the records to be normalized.

### *The Offices*

Academic institutions and bodies in the area will have a say in the constitution of the database. Those committed to participating actively in the project will name an academic figure responsible for collecting, validating and editing research data, as well as entering the records into the database. They will be able to count on full institutional support and authority to carry out the assigned task.

Through this figure, participating institutions will have the right of specifying the degree of coverage of the information they collect, both related to the research done within their own bounds and in other institutions in their country or in the country's totality.

At the same time, participating institutions agree to enter records according to the interface provided by the CUIB and any rules determined to the same effect. In the same way, they will normalize the descriptors

They will, furthermore, be able to conserve their own database, as well as consulting the database's totality on CUIB's web-site.

### *Updating the database*

The database will be updated at least once a year. Any resulting changes must be entered into CUIB's central node in April or October, so that they may be published in either of the two issues of the center's journal appearing each year and thus serve to update its web-page.

### *Formalization of institutional participation*

To this end, the necessary agreements shall be signed.

### **Technical features of the database:**

- Equipment requirements: PC, pentium or higher, minimum of 32 Mb in RAM (preferably), 5 Mb free in disk space, Microsoft Windows 95 or higher installed.
- The capturing process takes place through capturing masks designed using Microsoft Access 97. These masks offer authority catalogues following a relational database structure: authors, key words, research areas and institutions.
- ✓ Each office will receive a diskette with the following modules: capture, modifications, reports, sending of new records and sending of updated records.
- ✓ They will also receive a user guide for each module.
- ✓ They shall be held responsible for any error found in its records.

**Diagram: ICBALC Information Processes:**

