Developing Local Digital Content in Chilean Public Libraries

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Abstract
In today's digital society, the need to preserve and promote local history is also a challenge. In Chile, the BiblioRedes Program, managed by Directorate of Libraries, Archives and Museums (DIBAM), is meeting this challenge by providing computers with Internet connection to 378 public libraries. Library staffs have been trained in the use of technology and management of public access computers and information technology training services for the community.

Today, libraries have trained more than 200.000 people in their digital literacy program. And for the past two years, community members, museums, libraries and organizations have developed over 2000 web pages with local content to promote their local history and heritage.

Introduction

The rapid changes that are taking place in today's society and the digital age in which we live may go unnoticed to people who do not have access to information technology (IT). However, with all the information available in different formats, it seems that having access to computers and the Internet is essential in order to be informed and be a part of the world today; moreover, this is may be the easiest and fastest way to be seen and heard. Thus, the need to preserve and promote local history becomes not a just a need, but also a challenge, especially for isolated communities.

In Chile, there are about 400 public libraries throughout the country's 13 regions, and as of 2001, and thanks to a grant of the Bill & Melinda gates Foundations and the support of the Chilean Government, 378 of those libraries have computers connected to the Internet. The

Directorate of Libraries, Archives and Museums (DIBAM), through the BiblioRedes Program, has modernized libraries in a way that did not seem possible five years ago. Not only were libraries equipped with top of the line computers and other important technological devices, but also library staffs received the necessary training in the use of technology in order for each library to implement and manage a public access computing program and offer IT training to their communities. This may not seem so extraordinary if it were not for the fact that most libraries did not have any computer equipment at all before 2001; many of our librarians had never seen nor used a computer before; and in some of the locations, whose libraries were now connected to the Internet, the only means of communication was one pay phone for the entire community; other locations relied on the weekly boat to come ashore with last week's newspaper in order to be informed of *current events*. Thus, the BiblioRedes Program changed libraries and strongly impacted communities. Although the Chilean Government has made effort to put computers connected to the Internet in as many public schools as possible and to implement computer access points for the community, in many locations, especially isolated ones, the library is the only place connected to the Internet today and accessible to the entire community.

Digital Training Program

In 2002, and after receiving training, library staffs all over the country began transferring their newly learned computer skills to community members. In 2003, the Digital Literacy training program officially started and libraries exceeded every expectation by training 75.000 people the first year.

The main objective of the Digital Literacy community training is for people use technology in meaningful ways, that is, to obtain information and communicate with others. Therefore, the training program offers people with little or no knowledge at all with scarce or no access possibilities, the opportunity to learn the basics of computers, the Internet and the use of electronic mail. Keeping in mind the diverse geography of the long and thin Chilean territory, with the Andes mountain range running through the country, the Atacama desert in the north, the Patagonia in the south, and the islands scattered along the Pacific Ocean (for example, Juan Fernandez, Easter Island and Chiloe), communication is of utmost important for the people of Chile. Thus, today children and young people who are interns in schools away from the hometowns can communicate with their families, as well as family members that live in other countries. Besides computers being a communication tool, technology has helped small entrepreneurs, such as farmers, fishermen and local artisans, to obtain information about their products and search the web for business and export possibilities.

This is why as of 2004, public libraries had to expand their Digital Literary training offer and add other courses due to the high demand of their communities. As a result, the training program now includes courses on the basics of word processing, spreadsheets and presentation applications.

But with all the skills that people began developing and with all the information about different parts of the world that they now had access to, the next step and strategic objective of the BiblioRedes Program was for the communities and the public libraries to develop web pages with local content. It was necessary for those isolated communities, not only to learn about others, but also to share their cultural richness, traditions and heritage with the rest of the world.

Web Page Developing Tools

Although the Internet is one of the most powerful applications available today for many people, it can be somewhat frustrating for people, who speak another language that is not English, to find pertinent content in their own language. Additionally, if someone from a small city or town is looking up information about his or her own location, the chances of finding information are very slim. This is was Internet researchers call the content divide, a more advanced expression for the digital divide. Therefore, the BiblioRedes Program prepared to meet the challenge of providing community members and public libraries with the necessary tools to develop their own web pages.

In 2004, BiblioRedes launched its portal www.biblioredes.cl and introduced one of its most important services, the web developing tools, known as Nosotros en Internet (Us on the Internet). With the name, BiblioRedes added a sense of belonging to the service; it meant that not only did people have the opportunity but also the right to develop and publish local content in their own language on the Internet. The web developing application runs on Microsoft's CMS (Content Management Service), which has the added value that people who are familiar with other Microsoft applications, will have a much easier time learning how to work with this application. Also, the BiblioRedes portal offers free hosting and 15 MB of space for anyone who registers to develop a web page.

www.biblioredes.cl

Developing Public Library Web Pages

After training library staffs in the use of the web page developing tools, the next step was for each public library to develop its own web page. Because most of the public libraries were developing a web page for the very first time, BiblioRedes came up with a set of guidelines which helped librarians gather, include and organize the necessary information. For example, libraries were asked to include contact information, opening hours, basic facts of the history of the library and its location (town, region), the services available, and photographs of the library.

Although DIBAM manages the library system, public libraries and their staff are financially supported by local governments; therefore, this was also the first web page of a large number of Municipalities in Chile. Through their public library, the Municipality would be on the web for the first time ever, which turned out to be an excellent advocacy strategy for libraries. By the end of 2004, 358 Chilean public libraries had a web page hosted on the BiblioRedes web site. Today, anyone is just a few clicks away from a public library web site, by accessing the Red de Bibliotecas (Libraries Network) service on the BiblioRedes web site and simply clicking on the map of Chile and selecting the location and library of their choice.

www.biblioredes.cl/lebu.cl (from the 8th region, in the south)

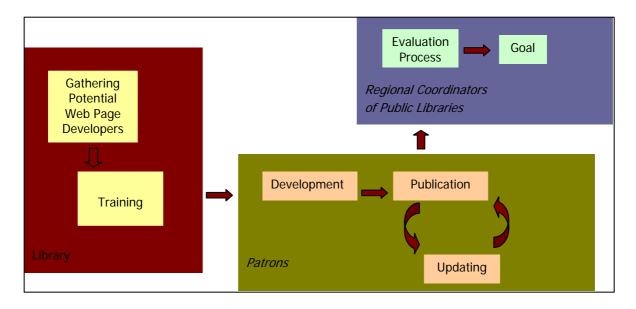www.biblioredes.cl/sanfelipe.cl (from the 5th region, in the central area)

Developing Local Content

Once public libraries had learned the process of creating their own web page, it was time to offer the same opportunity to the community. However, since one DIBAM's goals is to promote and preserve cultural and historical heritage, BiblioRedes trained library staffs on a

model which included a definition of what it was understood by the term *local content*, so that the main efforts of library staff would be geared towards working with local organizations, such as museums, local artisans, poets and writers, artists, groups of friends of the library, neighborhood organizations, small entrepreneurs and community members who wanted to let the world know about the local culture, traditions and history.

In order to help libraries in this new challenge, BiblioRedes develop a Local Content Creation model (see diagram below), which is made up of different stages, starting from gathering groups interested in developing a web page, training, publishing the web page and a final, internal stage, in which the web page is evaluated by the Regional Coordinator of Public Libraries in order to qualify as a local content web page. It is important to understand, that the evaluation process does not mean that web pages are censored in any way as web pages, regardless of their being qualified as local content, are still hosted in biblioredes.cl, except for those that may contain material that is considered against the law. Thus, this is merely a way of keeping score of the web sites that are related to the goals set by BiblioRedes Program.

That is how important partnerships arose and interesting outcomes, in the form of web pages, are now on the web for everyone to see. For example, there are local museums that otherwise would not have the opportunity to develop a web page if it were not for the opportunity they have received at their public library, library staff, and the BiblioRedes web page developing tools. DIBAM has encouraged libraries to train all staff of regional and local museums and archives in the Digital Literacy program, other application courses and web page development. Thus, the partnership among libraries and museums, for example, is very strong since they now work more closely and interact more than before.

However, in the early stages of the local content development model currently being used, BiblioRedes' emphasis was not to have local museums create elaborate and detailed web page. The focus, at that point, was on creating the need and usefulness, for promotional goals, of a web page among these institutions. Therefore, the local museum's web pages, which previously published, were based on prior relations between the museums and the libraries. Starting this year, BiblioRedes is changing its focus on local content development, as we are now guiding patrons – among which are the local museums – to develop web pages with greater added value.

http://www.biblioredes.cl/museoregionaliqq.cl (from the 1st region, in the north)

http://www.biblioredes.cl/paleomaule.cl (from the 7th region, in the central area)

For small, isolated communities and the local organizations, associations, institutions and groups, having a web page was something they only dreamed of or something they had never heard of a few years ago. However, thanks to the work led by public libraries throughout the country, more than 2000 web pages of local content have been created thus far (December 31st, 205). What is interesting to see is that communities are proudly showing their cultural heritage to the world. For example, there are web pages from places of less than 200 people, such as Puerto Cristal in the 11th region in the Chilean Patagonia, in which one can learn

about the history of the place, the customs, the important events celebrated there, and other important information (www.biblioredes.cl/puertocristal.cl). It is through the web, that communities that were unheard of, even in Chile, want to share their past, the culture to the world and the new generations.

Macarena Blanca, Head Librarian of the Public Library of San Felipe, a small town in the central area of Chile (where she was born and raised), says that "she was lucky to have seen horse-pulled hearses, the traveling milkman, trading centers, the town's first drugstore…Also, as a child, she enjoyed the Spring Festival and the Grape Harvest Festival". Consequently, she strives to get people to share their stories through the web, so that everyone who values the past and wants to learn from it, can easily access one of the web pages created at her library.

Like her, librarians throughout the country are enthusiastically talking to their community members about web pages and what they can do with them. Not only can people advertise products, but they can also share their art, show local festivals and natural resources, promote their culture and encourage people to visit them, thus, contributing to the local economy. Today, old photographs and stories that have been passed on from generation to generation, as in Easter Island where stories were told and never written, will no longer be forgotten as they have a place on the world wide web and a public library where, what long seemed but a dream, a web page can be created.

Local Content Contests

Since the BiblioRedes Program is interested in promoting the creation of local content web pages, two contests have been carried out in the past year in which anyone interested in participating could do so and have the opportunity to win a prize. The first contest was held in the first trimester of 2005 and it involved creating a web page around the work and life of the Chilean poet Nicanor Parra. This contest was a big success and over 80 web sites entered the contest from all over the country. The second contest took place between the last part of 2005 and the first trimester of 2006 and the theme was "Show Us Your Neighborhood, the place you live". It was very rewarding to have people create web sites in different libraries throughout Chile about their towns, cities, neighborhoods. The winning web site is from a small town called Limache, located in the 5th region of Chile, which is famous for its tomatoes! (www.biblioredes.cl/conociendolimache.cl).

The following is the announcement published on the BiblioRedes website, which announced the national and regional winners of this contest.

Also, in order to promote local contents web sites, BiblioRedes set up the first ever Popular Local Content Web Site Fair, held at the newly opened Santiago Public Library. The fair was inaugurated by the former President of Chile, Mr. Ricardo Lagos Escobar, and people had the opportunity to see the work that has been done in public libraries. Those web sites are now located for everyone to access through the BiblioRedes Navegador (Website Guide) service, in which one can find web sites grouped by region of the country.

BiblioRedes as a network promoting online access to DIBAM's museums

The Directorate of Libraries, Archives and Museums of Chile is a government organization which is part of the Ministry of Education. It was created in 1929, gathering different institutions such as the National Library, the few public libraries serving the community at that time, the National Archives and the three national museums: the National Museum of Fines Arts; the National Museum of Natural History and the Historical National Museum.

In the 80s, DIBAM organized itself in different subdirectorates, among them the Subdirectorate of National Library; the Subdirectorate of Archives, in charge of the National Archives and some regional archives; the Subdirectorate of Museums, in charge of 23 regional or theme museums distributed throughout Chile; and the Subdirectorate of Public Libraries, in charge of coordinating the network of public libraries. BiblioRedes is part of the Subdirectorate of Public Libraries, so its strategic planning is oriented by the needs and challenges of the system of public libraries.

However, being the public libraries network the most extensive in territorial coverage of those coordinated by DIBAM, the libraries play a key role in providing access to the digital goods and services created for Internet by DIBAM's museums and archives. Many of these cultural products are pertinent to local history of the communities served by the libraries, but they are stored or physically exhibited in Santiago (the capital city) or the regional capital cities. So,

through the library and the Internet connection provided by the BiblioRedes program, local inhabitants can access an important part of their history.

Since the mid 90s, DIBAM's museums and archives have developed an important effort to publish relevant Chilean cultural content on the web. The result of this policy has been different web sites, being the following the most remarkable:

- www.dibam.cl, the institutional web site, recognized in 2005 as one of the most complete and well-designed web sites of government organizations in Chile. This web site hosts the sites of the 23 regional and theme museums owned by DIBAM. Also, through this web site, library patrons get informed of the cultural activities (workshops, non permanent expositions and others) offered by DIBAM's museums, using for this purpose the cultural activities calendar available.
- www.surdoc.cl, the web access to a comprehensive registry of all the items stored in DIBAM's museums, considering a photo of the object, a brief description of the object and its main characteristics.
- www.artistasplasticoschilenos.cl, an online catalogue developed by the National Museum of Fine Arts of Chilean artists, describing their life and work and giving access to images of their main paintings or sculptures.
- www.fotografiapatrimonial.cl, a recently developed web site of the National Historical Museum, which allows patrons to obtain paid copies of the historical photographs preserved by the Museum. The customers pay for the photos using credit cards.

BiblioRedes promotes these web sites, as part of its policy of fostering cultural consumption among public libraries patrons, and as part of the efforts of delivering through libraries a wide array of digital services to local communities.

Conclusions

The Directorate of Libraries, Archives and Museums, through the BiblioRedes Program, has set the goal for libraries to be more than a place where people have access to information; our goal is for the library to also become a center where information is generated, and for the world wide web to have more Chilean, local content. Libraries are partnering with local communities, associations and organizations to create local content web pages. We strongly believe we are on the right track as libraries have positioned themselves as digital leaders in their communities. This goal has seen the fruit of its work as the BiblioRedes Program was selected as the winner of the Stockholm Challenge Award in the area of culture for the work libraries have made in the generation of local content web pages, an achievement that fills our country with pride.