

IFLA/FAIFE World Report: Libraries and Intellectual Freedom



Costa Rica

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In 1948, according to the Articles 18,19 of the Universal Human Rights Declaration, freedom shows two ways: Public and Private. However, their boundaries are seldom hard to define. In 1966, the Pacto Internacional de Derechos Civiles y Politicos states that freedom of information is the freedom to search, to receive and to disseminate information and ideas of all kinds throughout different suitable means.

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| Population: | 3,500,000 (1996) |
| GNP per capita: | \$ 2.640 (1996) |
| Government / Constitution: | Republic |
| Main languages: | Spanish |
| Main religions: | Roman Catholicism |
| Literacy: | 95% (1995) |
| Online: | 4,04 (April 2000) |

In general, there is also confusion about freedom of information and freedom of expression, since both are interdependent. Yet, both constitute key values in development and progress.

Costa Rica is located in Central America. It is a small country of area of 59.000 km² and 3.500.000 million inhabitants. It is a democratic government which places high value in civil rights, education opportunities and peace for citizens.

This article analyses the current state of intellectual freedom for information services provided for libraries and information units in Costa Rica.

Library Services and Intellectual Freedom

Librarianship in Costa Rica was first supported by foreign experts who taught practitioners in public libraries. In 1968, the School of Library and Information Sciences at the University of Costa Rica set the foundations for academic preparation. At present, there are 1200 professional librarians in the country.

Education has been priority in the democratic development of Costa Rica. Libraries have had strong development since 1840. At present, conservative figures illustrate the existence of several types of information organizations in Table 1 :

- Information analysis made by interdisciplinary teams (law, biotechnology, etc.) in some service.
- Legislation :

Proposals presented for law projects in the following areas :

- Right to answer and rectification
- Habeas data, right to intimacy
- Security secret information, defense information
- Currently, the law of imprinting provides for national literature productivity protection.
- In commercial advertising, Publicity agencies must to inform about their constituencies.

Opportunities

- Legal structure for information
- Advanced technological development
- Telecommunications infrastructure
- Geographical location
- Academic libraries
- Public library system
- National Library System restructuring
- Strategic alliances among libraries
- Internet for larger populations

Weaknesses

- Restricted information access, due to previous censorship groups, such is the case of censorship for films, television, and art.

- Insufficient available information due to lack of processing.
- Hidden information about development projects or health related issues (drugs, aids, etc.) for security reasons.
- Low reading habits, specially reading instructions (technical knowledge) of population.
- Lack of resources to keep up to date with the latest information.
- Lack of training in right information.

Threats

- Lack of quality in existing information
- Staff and users do not read instructions
- Users read low. Internet users grow.
- Few cases in censorship:

| Type of Library | Number |
|-----------------------|--------|
| School | 150 |
| Public | 61 |
| Academic | 51 |
| Documentation centres | 80 |
| Specialised | 65 |
| Childrens | 10 |
| Total | 418 |

1934 vladimir, ley gurdian

There are several library systems, according to their nature and type of information, for example, academic, childrens, specialized, and school libraries. Library cooperation is a concept widely spread among professionals as a means to improve services and to share resources.

The Costa Rican Library Association approved a Code of Ethics in 1991. The Code regulates the relationship of service, ethics, and right to information.

Intellectual Freedom

Intellectual freedom is approached from the perspective of access to information, as the right to information for citizens as a means to improve the quality of life. Intellectual freedom is also expressed as information property, and the right to communicate information. It also deals with the conflict between lack and possession of knowledge, which entitles power relations.

The concept of right to information shows a sui generi nature that has been founded in the national legislative administration of justice. Since Costa Rica has a democratic government, freedom is part of the civil development. However, power and information keep a close relationship that includes the technological enhanced information environment, and the amount of useful information available to all. Consequently, several aspects have been analyzed as opportunities, strenghts, weaknesses, and threats for intellectual freedom in Costa Rica.

Strengths

- High rate of literacy and high education standards
- Strong tradition for democracy and respect of human rights
- Unrestricted access in public libraries

1990 National Library. Discarded copies of documents

1980 Julian Volio, San Ramón Public Library. Community complains

Conclusion

Information freedom is a traditional right for the Costa Rican society. However, this small country faces several challenges in the provision of information to all. The levels of information quality and the utilisation of information as a resource to improve education makes the difference to overcome the information gap with more developed countries.