When the [knowledge] ditch is dug by our own hands…
Libraries, indigenous peoples and strategic information

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Opening
Common errors, simple paths

> Culture is the smile that shines everywhere:
> in a book, in a child, in a cinema or in a theatre.
> I have only to invite her to come and sing for a while.
> Ay, ay, ay, the life passes but culture stays here!
>
> León Gieco. "Culture is the smile".

Ditches and divides

It is a scene that repeats once and again in Latin America, especially when it refers to indigenous contexts. Statistics and international organizations echo the political discourses (and the other way round) and claim a number of good practices shortening the social, cultural and economic differences that exist in our world. At the same time, reality says the real numbers and shows situations of illiteracy, misunderstanding, lack of education, shortage of information, loss of identity and missing training… Problems that would be, all of them, solved with solidly built and well oriented programs that have become scarce at the present.
In the same way as others barriers and walls, digital divides and informative ditches are realities that can not be denied: they are palpable, easily noted not only in this "global South" always taken as an example of "poverty", but in the "global North", which is also populated by many dispossessed people. Inequalities, far from disappearing, are getting bigger day after day. The question is "why do they exist?"
It does not only consist of unfair differences where some have more economic resources than others, or historical distances between those who "have" and those who don't, or an imbalance in social or political power… Obviously, those are the general basis of the

problem, but there is something else: a *wrong attitude*. Divides and ditches do not appear suddenly: they are raised and dug day after day, step by step, and we are the ones who, with our attitude and our practice (or its absence) make it possible their (re)production and perpetuation.

When we speak about differences and barriers, about their analysis and the likely solutions to those problematic situations, few times the voice of the addressee, his/her opinion or his/her interest is taken into account. S/he is considered as an *object* that needs help, an identity with no values or proper thoughts, which is urgently demanding our support in order to follow a particular path that we have determined according to our own cultural patterns: the path of knowledge (of *our* knowledge), the path of education (of *our* education), the path of development (as far as *our* society plans it in a way that is right or appropriate for its purposes)… Nevertheless, the simplest common sense shows that there are not equal paths for two pairs of different feet, and that what is useful, easy and quick to do for someone can not be convenient for other.

Therefore, maybe when we do not pay attention or give the word to those "in need of help" we are taking the first mistaken attitude that will lead to the production of misunderstandings and omissions, which are, precisely, the ones that feed many world inequalities.

If we want to build bridges over the deep trenches that divide the humankind in every aspect of their life, we should understand and accept, in first place, that *dialogue* is the basis of any kind of approach, and that this approach is the first step towards the comprehension of the "other", of his/her life, experiences, expectations, past and present, and also of the future that s/he desires for him/herself, which maybe won't be the same that we want for ourselves.

In the specific case of the current differences concerning the access, the comprehension and the use of information on the part of diverse social sectors, the most likely solution should start by identifying the origin and the nature of the unbalance, the difference or the inequality. That is why the first step in the design of any proposal that be aimed at promoting a change within a particular sector of society should be *listen to the interested party*, pay attention to it, get to know it, come near to it and its daily circumstances. Grass-root development, action-research and the popular and critical pedagogy exactly set up that: the change should stem from the participative opinion of the addressee.

To listen to implies a number of things. It means to came near to a person, place yourself next to him/her, ask him/her and wait for his/her answer, paying attention to his/her voice, each single word and the silences between them, listening to whatever s/he has to say and tell. It also means to be able to understand what the words say and silence, and the language and the culture in which frame we can found the ideas or structure that form its background.

To listen to intends to think carefully of the "other", recognizing and valuating their existence. It teaches how to put yourself in another person's shoes, especially when his/her situation is an unpleasant and difficult one. It will be at that very moment when we will be taking the first step towards real approaches: ditches, divides and walls that separate one from the other will be scheduled for demolition, and we will be laying the first brick on the bridge.

Listening allows us to know. Once we know a bit more of something we can learn much more about it, we can understand it better. And it is exercising our ability to understand that our comprehension will continue developing as much as the dialogue that should guide and

produce it. It will be a remarkable achievement in the way of suggesting solutions worthy of their success.

Continual mistakes

A fundamental mistake continues being the root of the many differences that keep on separating one from each other at the present (including digital divides): the belief that there is a *unique model*, which is not only "the best possible", but the one that "works better" and, as a consequence, the model that should be implemented everywhere for all to live "equally good". The implementation of this *unique model* is a kind of unilateral exchange: an unbalanced relationship in which one of the parties has the most powerful position.

Through dialogue it is more likely to exchange ideas, to take a position, to learn, to discuss and to gain an initial notion about the real problems and their feasible solutions. At the same time, it facilitates the identification of such problems, the search of their causes and the point from which they start, the explanation for their reasons –if it is likely to find some-, and the outline of the more likely paths towards the future considering the possibilities of the addressees community. Thanks to the dialogue we can build bridges: we can recognize the points of either shore where on their bricks will be laid. In addition it allows us to know which tools are available for going on with their construction. And, most importantly, it permits us to know the reason why they are going to be built.

There are a good number of cases of professionals (from different disciplines) who come near to disadvantaged populations or communities in order to show solidarity with them and offer their help, which can be synthesized as a (temporal) solution to the problems by using budgets, elements and tools coming from outside of the addressee group. The solution lasts as long as it lasts the staff that "helps" and their resources.

The well-understood collaboration does not have its basis only on the urgent solution to the most serious problems, what, certainly, is necessary sometimes. It has to do with providing the training for particular addressees to be able to respond –with and answer *of their own*, taking into account both the time and the form *they* consider to be the best possible- to the needs that they will have firstly identified as such. It implies the recognition that the human groups or sectors with particular problems are not immersed in them because they like that state of things, but because they do not know how to solve, or cannot find ways to deal with them. In such situation, the mission of any professional is to provide his/her know-how: to train the addresses and allow them to do the rest, in the frame of their own context, in a way that is appropriate for them and at a suitable moment.

In the case of information barriers and ditches, the sort of collaboration we are discussing in here, should not be limited to the so called "help" that we have mentioned above. The fences that prevent people from accessing knowledge, having the right to education or expressing themselves freely, are particularly noticeable in our society and the results of such difficulties undermine its possibilities and make it weaker at the base. Considering the fact that the impossibility of accessing strategic and up-to-date information maintains entire groups in the shade of diseases, gross violation of human rights, political affairs, labor exploitation, environmental dangers, lootings, cultural and religious oppressions and a huge incapacity to answer back external aggressions, it is not difficult to understand how most of the current social and economical inequalities are sustained in the ignorance or the lack of information on the part of a great mass of people, who neither know what rights they have

nor how to defend them, who cannot have access to the news or identify which elements are harmful to their health or to their environment… and a long and painful "etcetera" that covers pages and pages of numerous publications and prestigious international NGOs reports.

The collaboration, in this case, should not have either its basis on the provision of a "strange" model, such as the education system, the library, the book or the Internet. On the contrary, it should rest on the previous (ac)knowledge of the situation and the conditions, the dialogue, the solutions given by the addresses (since they are the ones who know them but have not been able to put them into practice yet) and their implementation from a grass-root perspective. It seems clear that the proposition of solutions from an external and western point of view does not always solve what it tries to work out; moreover, many times, only manages to close doors and make the situation worse.

If we admit that the dominant model, the one used mostly, the successful in certain circumstances, should not be considered as the "only one possible" when it comes to offer tools that will collaborate in the destruction of ditches and fences, then we will open the door to creativity and imagination. At the same time, we will be allowing local and peculiar community models to be put into practice and reach the success that they deserve. To tread on "alternative" paths is not always easy: the conventional walking paths use to present a safe and secure image to us that it is difficult to refuse. However, thousands of experiences throughout the entire world demonstrate that other movements are also possible. In the case of information divides, those experiences have been gained in different ways, and all of them have obtained small achievements, which have laid one brick more on that bridge we want to build over the abysm of ignorance.

If human beings are born equals, with the same duties and the same rights, it is their destiny to look at each other's eyes at the same level. When this is not possible –no matter the reason why- something is working wrong. And any professional has the moral and ethical duty of trying to make those differences smaller: each one in his/her field, each one with the power s/he has in his/her hands and inside his/her mind. Each one will search his/her own path, which should accompany the "other's" path, the track of those who are behind the fence.

Development
Information divides in the indigenous case

> Culture is the smile for all the ages.
> It can be in a mother, in a friend or in a flower,
> or maybe to take shelter in the hands of a worker.
> Ay, ay, ay, the life passes but culture stays here!
>
> León Gieco. "Culture is the smile".

The landowners

The most elementary books of history in our libraries tell us about a large continent, populated with hundreds of different peoples, each of them owner of a unique culture, which at the beginning of XVI century suffered the invasion and devastation of its horizons by foreign forces. It was not the only case in the human history: other continents also experienced similar processes that affected them in a way that was certainly not welcome. Rescuing the eloquent testimonies that say what we know to be true, casting a speculative look at the numbers of the population and taking into account the detailed studies carried out afterwards, will not be difficult for us to recognize one of the most impressive genocide cases that has ever occurred; a case that continues in new ways and with new actors, being impossible to think of it as finished and complete.

Native peoples of Latin America have been decimated by diseases, aggressions, slavery and wars, and have been subdued in every imaginable front: political, social, religious, cultural, linguistic, educational… Many of them disappeared from the place where on they lived and from the memory, and can only be remembered through others' words, which do not always describe them in the right form. Some others, however, knew how (and were able) to survive, and developed new forms of life, new social structures, new thinking and action patterns. These new paths were not always successful: many peoples stuck in a limbo and neither could go forward nor go back. Others gathered together, in their own space, their peculiar traits with the dominant ones. A few ones persisted in their tradition and built a wall behind which enclosed themselves…

Presently, Latin America counts with more than 30 million people of those considered to be the old "owners of the land", who nowadays cannot always exhibit such a title. The importance of their cultures, among other valuable things, has its roots in constituting a very high percentage of the global cultural diversity. Both at Latin American and world levels, indigenous peoples posse an immense mosaic of languages and cultural features, of philosophies and literatures (oral and in writing), of uses and daily customs… Their cultural baggage has an intimate relation with the environment that they inhabited (which usually is not the one that they occupy at present) and provides a very interesting spectrum of knowledge about the world and its forms, very different from the range of ideas shown by the global dominant culture. In Latin America, many of their words and attitudes have been added to the *mestizo* heritage of each nation, enriching their unique and indisputable identity… And their traditions, sounds and sense of time have been acknowledged, in their most general terms, through the entire world.

In spite of the relative continuity of their historical presence –more important in some cases and less in others- and the acknowledgement of their rights in a good number of international recommendations and treaties, the native peoples –at both world and regional levels- continue to be, in the vast majority of them, fuel to the flames of oblivion. Current statistics show a connection between them and the highest levels of poverty, with all the problems associated: lack of rights, health related crisis, malnutrition, violence, addictions, unemployment, and loss of identity… National efforts –at a Latin American level- use to be reduced to a series of supplementary helps, which are not even enough to guarantee their temporary welfare or the development towards the future that they would wish for themselves.

They have became playing pieces on a political board, participants -generally against their will- in a game of strengths in which they are only pawns moved according to the most powerful pieces' convenience. Their culture, far from being recovered, spread and proudly lived, has turned, in many cases, into a folkloric postcard unknown for themselves, and in

some others, into a burden, an undesirable mark that only generates discrimination. In fact, official and social oppressions have directed them towards the voluntary abandonment of their traditional ways of life in an attempt to "integrate" with the dominant society in order to be accepted, something that, regretfully, they have not got yet: the color of their skin and their facial traits –something that cannot be wiped off- continue being the principal reason for their exclusion in Latin America.

Considering indigenous populations as the "noble savages" of the XVIII century, or coming near to them from old-fashion, utopian frameworks is not good for anybody. Neither is the "victim" position towards which we should pay back a "historical debt" (common, even nowadays, in many politicized currents and others that say to be in favor of indigenous peoples but also use them), nor the perspectives that recover the romantic data and images taken by anthropologist many decades ago, are real though they might seem to… All of them are illusory and distort the truth of a particular reality that has to be acknowledged in its entire depth and width if we want to make the pertinent and successful changes.

Very few aboriginal societies continue with their traditional ways of life in its purest form: all of them have been affected, at a higher or lower degree, by the blows of a global "international" culture. They incorporate western elements within their lives such as T-shirts, plastic, the TV, Coca-Cola, jeans, advertisements and many more. Their oldest stories are filtered through modern attributes such as the Christian God, the *"criollo"* clothing, the "official" language and so on. They are dynamic human groups, who, far from waiting to deal with others at a later time –as if they would have been put on ice-, have evolved, as everybody else, responding to external circumstances. And according to them have also evolved their way of life and thinking. However, it does not mean that they have lost their value or their importance: they are human beings, who share problems and miseries with many of their non-indigenous compatriots; they are peoples that, even though they are submitted to an oppressive form of acculturation, continue to be rich in intangible heritage… They are individuals that, despite everything and in some way or another, have not stopped believing that another future is possible.

When we establish a connection between the concepts of "knowledge" or "information" with the other of "indigenous peoples", two different associations are made. On the one hand, we would be speaking about "indigenous knowledge", the knowledge that is managed by native cultures within their particular intangible heritage, which possesses a richness that is the result of the experiences and reflections built up over the centuries. On the other, we would be referring to the relation between the native societies and the present-day information, in the context of the "Knowledge Society" modern paradigm. Putting aside the first association, this text will give its attention to the second, in which can be established the main ditches and barriers at an information level. Barriers that can also be found as high, in other social sectors of the Latin American continent: rural communities, marginalized neighborhoods, urban surroundings…

Information divides

Information has been, from the beginning of the human societies' history, a powerful, influential tool. It permitted to acknowledge the nature rhythms and qualities as well as its elements, what also facilitated to take advantage of its resources, from food to medicine. It made human groups organization possible, and allowed the creation of estates and empires that were managed thanks to the efficiency with which the knowledge was organized. It

established the grounds for the principal legal and religious system in the world, for the sciences and the arts, for both the most basic and the most complex techniques… Without strategic information about how to deal with all the daily life facets, none of the peoples would have managed to survive with success. The existence of a particular and modern socio-economic model that was born in the light of information provides the best example of its interest and its importance in the development, the welfare and the progress of humankind.

The unequal access to information resources –basic or not- violates a series of rights that have been agreed, over the centuries, by legislative (inter)national organisms and powerful social and humanistic movements. It limits the freedom of accessing the knowledge as well as the freedom of expression, the right to education, the right to actively participate in a democratic system as citizens, the right to get the necessary information in order to decide what will be your well grounded opinions and attitudes towards the issues of your interest, the right to a healthy life, the right to a decent employment, the right to use your particular language to communicate with others and learn… To solve it, is one of the biggest challenges that the world faces today: the information divides are one of the most regretful injustices and inequalities that are present and alive in our planet at this very moment, and the damages that they may cause –generally in the long term- affect the roots of our society and they are, therefore, as deep as they are long.

In a very general outline of the situation, the native Latin American peoples are "at the other side" of the information divide in two senses. On the one hand, they do not have access to the same opportunities as their more advantaged fellow citizens: ICTs, education, training, up-to-date information about interesting issues, learning processes… On the other, neither have they access to resources and materials that reflect their particular cultural models, their possibilities and their own needs. This situation happens in a very critical context itself: indigenous societies are submitted to a progressive loss of identity, to a growing acculturation and to a strong shortage of both their possibilities of progress and their opportunities to enjoy the basic welfare services. Their claims do not only insist on the opening of sustainable development channels and on getting their lands back, but also on the recovering of their cultural rights. They are conscious that no solution to their problems will be found without information (suitable for their particular traits and needs). However, it is noticeable that the answers to those problems are not limited to the implementation of literacy programs or the diffusion (generally, in a very irregular and unequal manner) of technologies that make it possible the access to the digital universe. Although such elements and dexterities are necessary and useful, there are other movements that should be developed and supported, at least in parallel, in order to achieve a really fair access to and distribution of information goods.

In first place, Open Access model should be encouraged for breaking the chains that lock up the strategic knowledge with commercial keys that do not permit its use by those who have a tight budget. A second step would be to review the strong and determined international copyright policies, which drastically restrict the diffusion of certain categories of strategic documents. In the third place, it should be considered the importance of creating information materials in all the languages used in a particular region, in order to support their survival and allow the people who use it to maintain their cultural identity alive. Finally -but maybe, the most important point- it should be encouraged the development of solution strategies that include not only their information channels and the models, but also the peculiar characteristics and possibilities of each region, people and

group. This point consists of a good number of complex actions that might include from the creation of radios and oral archives to the re-formulation of LIS programs and the bilingual official education, passing through the publishing of materials (audio-visual and printed) in the native languages that have strategic information (related to, for example, health care, human rights, environmental management, techniques and technologies, family planning, addictions, etc…)

The information problem has to be dealt with from a very realistic perspective, which many times, moves away from the great declarations of interest, written or spoken in forums and international organisms. It is useless and unproductive (even painful) to force a reality into the models and the standards designed by institutions that do not know it, no matter how good are the intentions behind. To achieve, for example, that the IFLA/UNESCO "Manifesto on Public Libraries" would be successfully applied in rural areas of northeastern Argentina, is something impossible, not only taking into account the resources shortage, but also considering that this "Manifesto" was written without thinking carefully in the particular circumstances and needs of their final users; in fact, it might happen that we would be providing them with elements that they do not want at all. However, the idea behind this document is good, and can be put into practice if we know how to adapt its postulates to a particular situation, to a population of flesh and blood, with needs, emotions and weaknesses (far from the papers and the great meetings where such guidelines use to be written) and to a complex social, political and economic context.

If we want to shape reality into an ideal model, we will only achieve failures: we will be widening a divide that is deep enough at the present. And what is even worse, we will be doing it with our own hands, the same that wanted to be of any "help".

Libraries in indigenous communities

From 1996 onwards, in different points of Latin America, many experiences related to the creation of libraries in indigenous communities, both rural and urban, have been implemented. In outline, the aim of such undertakings was to be able of shortening the educational and information distances that existed between the native groups and the dominant society, providing spaces and opportunities that would make smaller the differences, and the above mentioned distances, and creating intercultural areas for new approaches and the interchanges.

Many projects only worked for a short period of time and were mainly based on the use of a common public library as model, and its insertion in the aboriginal reality. The failure of those efforts can be explained in the light of the previous lines of this text: the indigenous universe is, in general, reticent about (or even contrary to) the institutions that come from the dominant society, since they have been tools of acculturation, oppression and denial of basic rights, over the past centuries. It has also to be noticed that elements such as the library have, in the native imaginary (and in many others), a sort of "intellectual" and "elitist" aura; the perception is, consequently, that the library does not have anything to offer to the community, neither can it provide a solution to their most urgent needs.

However, when the library structure adapt itself with enough flexibility to the requirements and characteristics of the final users group, it is able to reach excellent results, and allows noticeable experiences to develop, whose outcomes have perfectly answered to particular situations. That way, those ventures have provided a solid (small but real) foundation for narrowing the divide.

In Argentina, the *Universidad Nacional del Comahue* (National University of the Comahue, General Roca, Río Negro province) inaugurated, in June 2007, the "Biblioteca Mapuche y Pueblos Originarios Ñimi Quimün" (Mapuche and Native Peoples *Ñimi Quimün* Library). This center links the University (through its library "Ernesto Sábato" and the chair of *mapudungu* language[i] in the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences) with the local indigenous community (concretely with the urban organization "Elel Quimün"). The project stands out, in first place, as succeeding in establishing a strong connection between scholar practices and the needs of a community not always bonded to them. This point is an enormous step forward in a territory (the Patagonia) with a heavy indigenous presence and a very sad history of oblivion, genocide, abuse, human rights violations and discrimination that dates back to the establishment of the National Estate (1810) and continues at the present.

The ethnic group that is present in this area –the Mapuche, the one that predominates in the Argentinean Patagonia and the southern Chile- has been noticeable, through the centuries, by their resisting and combative attitude against social exclusion and acculturation pressures; their actions in this respect can be followed through a number of web sites and news pages. Their culture, though under pressure, has maintained alive, as it has happened with their language, in which (especially in Chile) have been produced some written materials. Although most of the Mapuche demands concentrate, currently, on land claims, they neither forget their identity nor their right to have a bilingual intercultural education, a constitutional right in Argentina since 1994.

The work of the "Ñimi Quimün" library just begins: their first steps move around a central point that has to do with the oral memory. In this way, the qualified tools of a LIS institution have been put at the service of the community in order to respond to their real needs in their particular cultural frame, showing respect for their identity and considering their circumstances at the moment. This manner of doing things makes it possible to demolish the existing social and cultural barrier.

At the same latitude, but at the other side of the Andean range, in Chile, the *Universidad de la Frontera* (University of the Frontier or UFro, Temuco, V Region) houses the *Centro de Documentación Indígena* del *Instituto de Estudios Indígenas* (Indigenous Documentation Center of the Indigenous Studies Institute[ii]), a specialized library dedicated, preferentially, to Mapuche culture, and to the diffusion of educational materials both among students and researchers and within the community itself. It is placed in the middle of the Araucania, the heart of the Mapuche people in Chile; its structure and services make possible –as their homologues in Argentina do- the communication between the scholar sectors and the native communities in the area, challenging and overcoming the divides that separate academic from non-academic worlds, rural from urban spaces and indigenous from non-indigenous areas.

From the UFro, and in collaboration with the DIBAM (*Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos de Chile*, Libraries, Archives and Museums of Chile Management) an extension activity was carried out from 1998 onwards (Catrilaf, 2001). It consisted in a mobile unit that traveled around, from one place to the other, in a rural area with a heavy indigenous presence. The scope of its journey included 14 points in 4 communes of the Araucania region at the beginning, and was widened later in 2000. The activities included the creation of a sound library in *mapudungu* (cassette recordings according to the community's requirements, depending on the interest fields, with the help of a translator) and a large and complex information and educational work with the community, especially with women,

elders and children. The collection was mainly focused in children literature and peasant production and its infrastructure took advantage of all the elements that Chilean librarianship was able to provide in the area of mobile units, an area in which the Andean nation has always been prodigal with experiences. The project was launched with the active participation of a Mapuche librarian, Fresia Catrilaf.

This particular mobile unit was a very good solution for isolated rural locations that found it difficult to have access to urban libraries. In addition to the most general services provided by any library, it did so using bilingual materials, and also recovered Mapuche traditional knowledge. It is worth noticing that this unit focused a good number of its activities upon very fragile social sectors such as children and women. The efforts put into this mobile library were aimed at being successful in dealing with the many walls and ditches that exist, not only in Chile but in the entire continent.

These experiences show how it is possible to apply the best professional techniques in particular situations, many times far from the standardized models and the most common environments. It also makes noticeable the imperative necessity of building new -and strengthen the existing- bonds between non-indigenous scholar spaces and the places where the native groups have a heavy presence. In addition, it indicates how a good definition both of the information requirements and of the existing resources makes it possible to develop successful projects.

In Argentina –but this time in the northern part of the country, next to the Paraguayan border- the author set up, between 2001 and 2006, the project "Indigenous Libraries" (Civallero, 2004). He worked with the Qom, Moqoit, Wichi and Pit'laxá ethnics group in the provinces of Chaco and Formosa, both areas affected by sanitary problems, a lot of people living below the poverty line, malnutrition, high levels of unemployment and loss of identity. The communities of this region, as the Mapuche in the south, have organized themselves –sometimes even politically- into movements that claim both, the right to own the land where on they stand and the right to have an education according to their particular cultural model. In this last aspect, their achievements have included the initial normalization of their alphabets, a number of important experiences of bilingual and intercultural education and the diffusion of their languages. However, the pressures on the part of the official dominant systems (school, religion, mass media…) and the social exclusion continue to be too powerful. Starting from an initial evaluation of the situation, and using with imagination the very few resources at hand, a number of activities were created from a grass-root perspective and following action-research methodology. Among them, were included the review of the well-known documental languages (Civallero, 2005a), the collection of oral tradition (Civallero, 2007a) and the creation of sound collections (Civallero, 2005b). An emphasis was put upon identity and social inclusion issues (Civallero, 2007b). Of special interest were those activities concerning strategic knowledge diffusion such as the bio-medical information (Civallero, 2007d). In addition, it was also very important the recovery of games and music (Civallero, 2007c), as well as literacy programs, the support given to some tasks of bilingual education and family reading (Civallero, 2006).

This venture has demonstrated the possibility of combining successfully LIS tools with the specific knowledge and particular characteristics of the addressee population. It is worth mention the fact that those "libraries" were not information units *stricto sensu*, but small collections located in schools, through which valuable knowledge (from the users' perspective) was spread and their memory recovered. The traditional library models were

dramatically changed and adapted in order to serve better the community. It can be said that those changes were very important in order to eliminate the first barrier: the fine line that separates potential users from public libraries. A second one was removed when it was possible to demonstrate, through the activities carried out, that strategic information can be provided respecting the ethnic features of the addresses.

Organisms like APCOB (*Apoyo para el Campesino Indígena del Oriente Boliviano*, Support to the Indigenous Peasant from Eastern Bolivia) and some others belonging to REDETBO (*Red de Información Etnológica de Bolivia*, Ethnological Information Network of Bolivia) do similar tasks in Bolivia, a nation with a high percentage of indigenous population. Despite the fact that rural libraries addressed to native people are still at a development stage, the existence of books and written materials in the principal indigenous languages of the country (*quechua*, *aymara* and *guaraní*) along with the presence of strong indigenous identity, will allow them to take a step forward and attain their goals in a near future. In the meanwhile, institutions as the mentioned above, propose the recovery of the memory and culture, the use of multimedia resources in such actions and the diffusion of the informative products through the entire society (indigenous and non-indigenous), giving birth to spaces and experiences of communication and intercultural learning, and creating bridges between shores that had been always away from each other.

Digital technologies have been used efficiently to succeed in the achievement of those goals. The case of Bolivian undertakings as Aymara Uta[iii] ("The Aymara house", website dedicated to this culture and its language) and ventures like THOA[iv] (*Taller de Historia Oral Andina*, Workshop of Andean Oral History, which also belongs to REDETBO) confirm the advantage of using ICTs in the recovery and revitalization of native cultural practices. Additionally, channels of interchange, growth and discussion are created, which permit to continue looking for new action and progress paths.

Projects focused in the use of ICTs in the aboriginal context can be exemplified by the undertaking *Centro de Conocimiento sobre / de Grupos Étnicos Indígenas Centroamericanos* (Central American Ethnics Groups Knowledge Centre, GEIC Project) of the National University of Costa Rica LIS School, started in 2004 (Miranda Arguedas, 2001). They have identified the libraries with material on the subject of native peoples, made an inventory of material related to the indigenous knowledge in the country, developed very interesting Internet portals and designed library models for native communities. Presently, the project seeks the implementation of information units in the indigenous communities of Costa Rican Talamanca region (populated with Cabecar and Bribri ethnics groups).

This set of examples show how the digital divide can be overcome in indigenous contexts, using new technologies -were available- to encourage and support the development of native groups and their social inclusion. At the same time, those tools allow indigenous communities to disseminate their knowledge within the (inter)national society, and to introduce their culture in a global space.

In LIS matters, one of the most noticeable experiences is the Magüta Library, included in the homonymous Museum, which is part of the Documentation and Research Center of Alto Solimões, in Brazil (Paoli Farias 1996; Bessa Freire 2001). It works for the Tikuna, a people who live in about 100 villages placed in 8 municipalities of the Amazonas state. The library is situated in the confluence of the Javarí and Alto Solimões Rivers, and was organized in between 1988 and 1991. It is a specialized unit, with supporting duties towards the Tikuna Bilingual Teacher Training Center. Its collection is, mainly, in

Portuguese language, but there is also a part in the native one. The users are both, indigenous and non-indigenous people. The library provides a framework for the production of material and allows aboriginal story-tellers to register their tales by writing.

These experiences show how certain information and educational divides can be overcome, slowly, hand in hand with the library and the technologies associated with it, without going against the behavior patterns and the culture of the final users.

In Colombia, the 10 municipal libraries situated in the region occupied by the Wayuu people in the Guajira region, are an excellent example of units with intercultural services. Six of them are placed in indigenous territory itself (Manaure, Maico, Uribia and Riohacha). On of the three situated in Riohacha (capital city of the Guajira department) belongs to the Bank of the Republic (Gómez Ruiz, 2001), and provides services both, for *Wayuu* and for *Alijuna* (non-indigenous) patrons. The Wayuu librarian Ignacio Epinayu has developed projects aimed at the recovery of orality (Epìnayu Pushaina, 2007) and currently works in the organization of the Documentation Center "Anatolio Quira Arama" of the *Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia* (Colombian Indigenous National Organization), from his own cultural framework but using the most modern LIS techniques as well.

Other Colombian examples are the libraries that work in the region of the Santa Marta range, with the inclusion of indigenous user in them (Kogui, Kankuama, Ika and Wiwa peoples), showing respect for their traditional patterns and supporting the revitalization of their cultural practices. The Guanacas Library is another outstanding example, in the Yaquivá reduction, Inza municipality. It is an indigenous undertaking that won the First Architecture Award of Guada for its structural design adapted to the native tradition. It received, for its construction, the support of the "Tierradentro" program of the European Commission in the year 2005 and, at the moment, provides specific services to the needs of its community. This unit is, as has been said, an excellent example of use of financial resources in objectives that correspond with the local circumstances. Something that has also happened with the venues set up in the Mayan area of Guatemala, especially with the mobile libraries of the Project PROBIGUA in the region of Antigua (Zamora, 2001).

In Mexico –another nation with a high percentage of indigenous population and with more than fifty native languages spoken today- is worth noticing, among others, the experience of the communitarian information rooms launched in 2001 in four locations in the municipality of Zautla (Puebla state, Náhuat people region in the Mexican Central Range) (Márquez Nava, 2001). Such units were leaded by CESDER (*Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo Rural*, Studies Center for Rural Development) and its Documentation and Information Center "Lorenzo Servije". The services were specifically based on the recovery and the diffusion of local and traditional wisdom, providing spaces for learning and sharing knowledge, which had never existed before.

Something similar wants to achieve the project "Biblioteca Quechua" (Quechua Library) of Ayaviri (Puno department, Peru) developed at present by Ayaviri government and the *Colegio de Bibliotecarios de Perú* (Peruvian Librarian Union) (Soto Coronel & Gamarra, 2003). The undertaking –supported by IFLA/ALP- includes, among other direct actions, the collection of local oral tradition. The emphasis put upon the recovery of the regional knowledge of the zone itself and the users community shows the importance given to the knowledge of the services addressees. Local resources hardly have been used in Latin American rural libraries, on the contrary, this fact has resulted in creating a notorious

divide: the one that separates people from their own cultural reality and their intellectual production.

The last series of examples comes from the most northern part of South America. The *Sistema Nacional de Bibliotecas Públicas* (National Public Libraries System) of Venezuela maintains a mobile libraries service (boat-libraries and travel boxes) along the rivers of the high Orinoco basin, with services to indigenous partialities (above all, Piaroa groups) (Median de Silva, 2001). The activity is organized from the Central Public Library "Simón Rodríguez" in Puerto Ayacucho, Amazonas State. The Venezuelan Public Libraries Network has a lot of experience in the attention to indigenous communities, especially in the Amazonas State. In between 1990 and 1996, it was set up, in this corner of the Latin American geography, the project of attention to indigenous communities through librarian public services (Medina de Silva & Zapata, 1998). Finally, the *Sistema de Escuela Bolivarianas en Red* (Network of Bolivarian Schools System) was an experimental undertaking born at the Zulia State, where the Venezuelan Wayuu ethnic lives. Such venue counted with libraries and the participation of "living books".

The smallest experiences are numerous, and they are not always reflected in the written testimonies or in the professional literature. Activities in Paraguay, in the northwestern part of Argentina, in northern Chile, in the Ecuadorian and Peruvian range and western forest regions, or in the Brazilian *Matto Grosso* make it clear the intense necessity of an answer on the part of librarians, teachers, sociologists, communicators and NGOs… It has now become evident that this answer is possible and likely to be achieved and, in addition, a wide range of opportunities can be provided, adapted always to the environmental characteristics, to the population and to their resources. The common and key elements that can be identified in all the experiences are imagination and commitment. Imagination to know how to deal with situations that are not always expected and, probably, far from the best possible; commitment in order to have a reason for dealing with them.

LIS projects inside aboriginal populations have not pulled down the information barriers that separate them from the (inter)national dominant currents. A long working path still remains for it to happen, which we will have to tread with tenacity, determined not to give up easily. It will be necessary to multiply the efforts in order to respond to the enormous population of addressees. However, all the projects mentioned show that it is possible if we tackle the problem from a different perspective, not with the same mechanisms but in search of a common objective.

Closing
Paths that lead you further, paths that bring you nearer

> Permit reality to go through you
> and that it be what shouts in your head,
> because it is wrong to allow
> this history to pass by your side.
>
> León Gieco. "This is the history".

An Argentinean traditional song tells that "the way is the same for the one who comes and for the one who leaves". It is curious to notice that the same path that brings you nearer can takes your further and the other way round: it depends on the direction we decide to follow. The speech and writing production of brilliant discourses and policies, declarations, meetings and congresses, international working groups and many other movements as well as socio-political and professional phenomena, have demonstrated their capacity to collect isolated individual experiences and turn them into general guidelines or recommendations. However, their usefulness is limited, as it is manifested when we study how very few times the documents produced or the actions they encourage have been put into practice with successful or, at least, inspiring outcomes. There is little doubt about the praiseworthy ideas, goals to attain and desirable situations that those works recover and diffuse, but, despite this, they are far from reality. And in the meanwhile, the divides, the differences and the unbalances keep on growing, at different levels, in different and diverse spaces, but always in a continuous manner, always putting aside more and more people. Perhaps, the way might be good, but the direction followed, far from bringing addresses together, separates one user from the other.

On the other hand, the experiences on a small scale –those that respect the old maxim "think globally, act locally"- have been proven as the best tools for achieving some sort of change, however minimum it might seem. They propose a sort of action in direct contact with the environment as well as the commitment with a situation and a group of people in defiance of adversity and as a way of winning the struggle against it. In these cases the path trodden clearly approaches positions.

Obviously, each perspective complements the other, for they go along the same path. However, if the actions are limited to the first one –as it uses to happen- we will be moving away, making distances longer and allowing differences to grow and to reproduce themselves, doing nothing else but saying or writing good words and expressing good intentions. And our hands –not breaking their stillness- will become the agents of such growth. Since many times, "not doing anything", far from meaning "not collaborating in making a situation worse", is equivalent to "not stopping it from worsening". If there are so many situations of injustice and inequality in our world it is because we –thanks to our indifference and our particular tendency to "look to the other side", to our forgetfulness and our negligence- allow them to happen. Only showing a more active attitude, more solidarity and more comprehension of what is involved, we will succeed in contributing a small grain of sand to the change that we think is possible to achieve.

It is obvious that such a solid and cemented *status quo* as the one that controls our lives at present will not be entirely changed through the individual work. Centuries of history have consolidated the dominant system and have turned it into a perfectly synchronized engine, supported and protected by those who make some kind of profit from its activity. However, if we assume the responsibility that is needed at a local level, the global context would probably, though slowly, begin to change some of its conditions.

Information professionals have a social role to play in a society where the rough material that they manage –the knowledge, a good that is common to all and every of the human beings- is a decisive factor of development and welfare. By having the capacity for managing that good, they automatically assume an ethical duty: to guarantee the egalitarian access to everybody who needs it, whoever they might be. It will be along their committed steps and movements –at academic, personal, political or educational levels- that they will

attain the major goal of closing those ditches, which, as open wounds, cross the social countenance of the planet.

Deprived people –naming them as you want to- are not individuals or groups that live in a world different from ours. They live next to us, at our side, with us and, perhaps because of us. To respond to their demands in a realistic and human way is the only manner of preventing them from being where they are, at the base of the social pyramid where they neither chose nor wished to be placed. Whether they are indigenous communities or *favelas*, peasants or excluded by the way they feel or act, all of them must have the same opportunities, for the skin they wear on the body is the same that ours. They also suffer from our same pains and dream with the same illusions as we do.

A different way might exist and the possibility that it happens is in our hands, and in all the things that they are able to do. It depends on us whether we decide to use them in digging the ditch and making it deeper and deeper, or to collaborate in removing it from the map of our memories.

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Notes

[i] The language of the Mapuche people. From "mapu", land and "dungu", language.
[ii] Available at http:// www2.estudiosindigenas.cl.

iii Available at http://www.aymara.org.

iv Available at http:// www.aymaranet.org/thoa.html.