

Virtual Library of Latin America, BV@L

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LIBRARIES AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The development of information and communication technologies (ICT) has enabled the creation of various types of information services which present different possibilities of structure and access to information repositories. As a result, new library concepts have been proposed in the late 20th century, such as that of the Virtual Library.¹

1 As the diversity of supports has been used for information organization, the bibliographic control organization has also become more complex. It has required the development of new rules for

However, these definitions have not always been convergent, especially concerning the Virtual Library which is often used as a synonym of Electronic Library –its purpose is to promote the remote access to traditional library contents and services with the integration of electronic resources and services available in computer networks, enabling interaction among users, information in digital format and electronic networks.

Virtual libraries are complex environments and they require the use of international standards and procedures. For an adequate planning and management the following issues have to be considered:

- Aims of the virtual/digital library installation.
- Selection and management of adequate contents.
- Creation of metadata (data about data) according to international standards.
- Information technologies, hardware, software and workflow.
- Definition of services to be offered.

the treatment, storage and access by libraries and other types of information units for the management of information resources in digital environment. A considerable number of studies for the identification of traditional, electronic, virtual and digital libraries are included in the agenda of important universities and research institutes for the implementation of national and international policies (Sayão, 2007).

- Organization and management of the virtual/digital library.
- Governance.

Resources for building libraries with those characteristics can be the following:

- Databases with links to documents in digital environment or printed out.
- Tools for indexing and location.
- Information collection with notes to Internet resources.
- Directories.
- Primary sources with varied digital formats.
- Photographs.
- A set of numerical data.
- Electronic magazines and journals.
- Electronic books.
- Vídeos.
- Music.
- Notes on thematic issues, among other types of application programs.

According to Unesco,² virtual libraries are important tools for the universal access to knowledge and information available in digital and traditional

2 Unesco. *WSIS Plan of Action*, 2003.

media as well as they are strategic mechanisms for the promotion of education, peace and human values. In addition, they are tools for information democratization and culture connection in all geographic and social frontiers.

The world-wide practice derived from the organization of several projects about the installation of virtual and digital libraries has enabled the necessary conditions to broaden the availability of these important communication channels. They are part of the educational, research and cultural organizations agendas and should be especially considered in regions in which the institutions that promote equal access of peoples to information are scarce.

Based on this point of view, the project “Virtual Library of Latin America–BV@L” was carried out aiming to become a new tool to enhance information convergence and promotion in that region.

VIRTUAL LIBRARY OF LATIN AMERICA– BV@L: CHARACTERISTICS AND GOALS

Latin America is made up by countries from South America, Central America and Mexico (North America). It is surrounded by the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and has important natural resources, such as the Amazon Forest which owns at least half of all the known living species.

One of the main Latin America³ characteristics is its cultural diversity. Also, other issues as its potential of natural resources and its cultural heritage developed by the peoples who have lived in the region can be mentioned. Presently, many of those issues are identified as cultural heritage and their preservation has outstanding value to humanity, as established by international conventions managed by Unesco.⁴ In this sense, the appropriate arrangements to disseminate information on Latin Amer-

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- 3 The 'Latin America' concept poses a problem for many scholars when cultural, social and even geographical identity issues are considered. Notwithstanding, this concept arisen in the 19th Century, under the influence of France and the United States of America, was consolidated as various nations established their independence from colonizing countries; then, it was strengthened when adopted by international institutions as they mentioned the group of countries in the region. The region was colonized from Mexico through Argentina by Iberian countries, namely, Portugal and Spain, in the 16th and 17th Centuries, consolidating a 'Latin' culture, coming from countries considered as such in Europe due to the Romanic languages. Latin America also possesses deep roots in the indigenous cultures established in the region when these were uncovered by Europeans; moreover, it was the main destination of millions of slaves from Africa, as it was also the stage of many migratory currents of many countries in the end of the 19th Century and beginning of the 20th Century, expanding even more its socio-cultural diversity.
 - 4 Information on cultural heritage and the list of issues identified within this category in Latin America are available at the website <http://whc.unesco.org/en/about/>

ica as well as to promote access to these contents will contribute especially for the generation of new knowledge and for the improvement of its visibility in the national, regional and international circuits.

In agreement with this scenario, since 2007 the Fundação Memorial da America Latina⁵ has initiated the development of a project on the implementation of the Virtual Library of Latin America –BV@L, aiming to promote access to information and to the cultural heritage of this region and to enhance the dissemination of available knowledge produced by that institution. BV@AL was launched in February 13, 2009 and is available freely on the Internet.⁶

5 The Fundação Memorial da America Latina was launched in 1989 by the State of São Paulo Government. Its mission is to promote cultural, political, economic and social diffusion on information and activities of the Latin American countries. The Fundação focuses on the following aims: a) to promote support of the Latin American expression and to encourage the creative development; b) to coordinate initiatives with institutions devoted to Science, Art and Education in Brazil and other Latin American countries; c) to disseminate the history of Latin American peoples for the new generations. Also, the Foundation keeps the Library on Latin America “Victor Civita” which contains holdings on specialized matters. Website: <http://www.memorial.sp.gov.br>

6 Latin America Virtual Library website: <http://www.bv.fapesp.br/php/index.php?lang=en>

BV@L is a unique tool in those matters in the region and has been built with financial support from the sponsoring agency Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo – FAPESP⁷ and with institutional support from the Fundação Memorial da America Latina. The technology and methodology used were provided by BIREME/PAHO/WHO– Latin-American and Caribbean Center on Health Sciences Information, with the necessary customization.

This virtual library was planned and implemented based on the dimensions showed in *Figure 1*: contents, human resources, financial/material resources, management, technology, information access.

The BV@L network was created for data processing and management (*Figure 2*).

BV@L contains user interfaces in three languages: Portuguese, Spanish and English. *Figure 3* shows public interface in English.

The main goals of BV@L are:

- ▶ To organize and to disseminate information resources about the region which are available in the “Memorial” holdings and on the Internet - at national, regional and international levels.

7 FAPESP <http://www.fapesp.br/en/>; Virtual Library <http://www.bv.fapesp.br/php/index.php?lang=en>

Library Services in Latin America: three outstanding cases

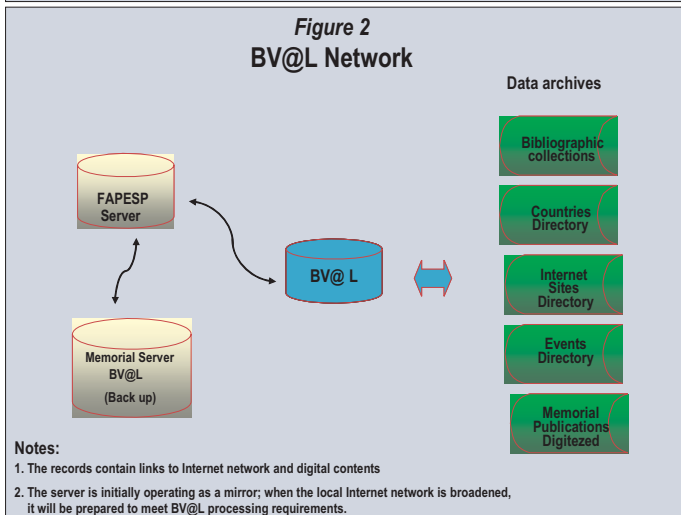
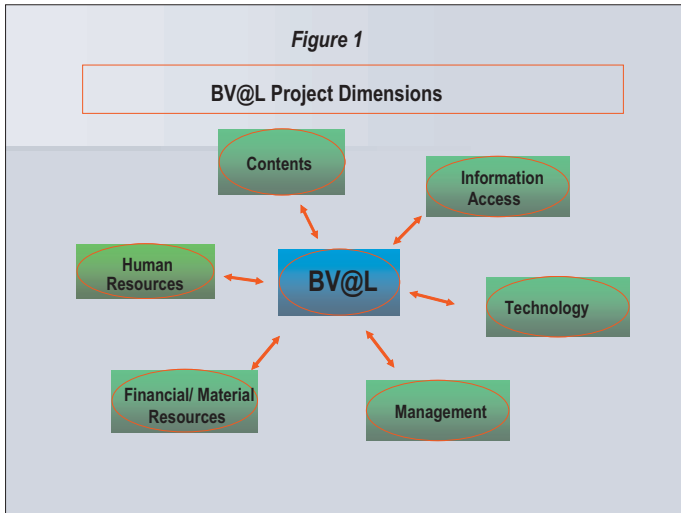
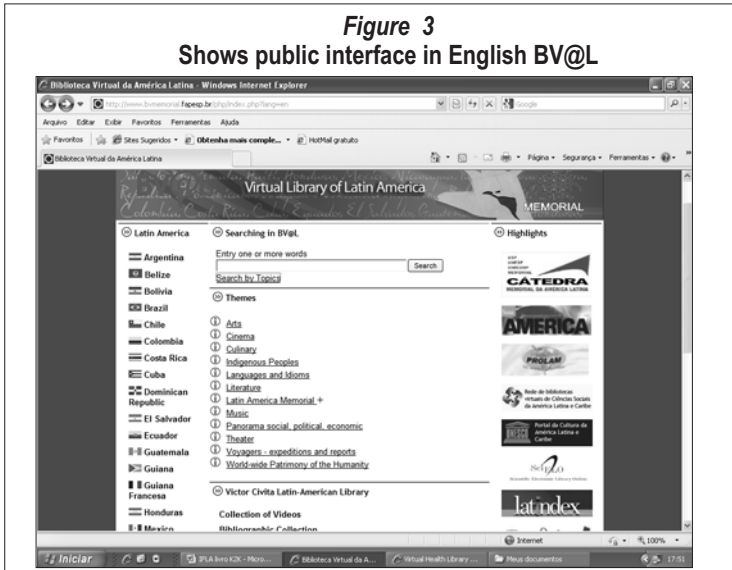


Figure 3
Shows public interface in English BV@L



- To apply qualified mechanisms of access, retrieval and dissemination of cultural, artistic and technical-scientific production obtained from teaching, research and cultural extension from the representative institutions of this area.
- To disseminate information and knowledge about Latin America concerning Humanities, Sciences and Arts produced by the “Memorial”.
- To provide user interfaces in Portuguese, Spanish and English

BV@L provides:

- **Bibliographic databases** and specialized videos in the area, with links for digitized documents whenever available.
- **Directory of countries** of this region containing a brief description as well as information previously selected from websites on the Internet.
- **Directory of websites** about Arts, archives, libraries, foundations, government, institutions, Literature, museums, electronic publications, among others, focusing on Latin American countries in general.
- **Directory of events** carried out by the “Memorial” for the promotion of Latin America.
- **Search by special themes** previously selected to users.

FINAL REMARKS

With the expressive introduction of electronic resources, especially in the last 20 years, it was possible to display publications and information sources in digital environment, creating numerous possibilities of storage and access. These new tendencies have enabled the organization of electronic-virtual libraries –in a previously unimagined broaden array of resources that require international standards for the interoperability,

searching and retrieval of content as well as the offering of services on the Internet.

The definition of a virtual library has to be carried out as one tool to provide universal access to knowledge and information in digital format as well as in traditional supports. Above all, it has to be a tool aimed to information democratization and to culture connection in all geographical and social borderlines. In this context, BV@L will certainly contribute in the process of information dissemination, in highlighting national communication channels as well as in the definition of public and institutional policies of the various involved countries.

In order to fulfill those accomplishments, it is strongly required that governments and institutions recognize the strategic importance of those mechanisms and encourage the installation of those resources as essential agents for the promotion of social and digital inclusion, as proposed by Unesco and other similar institutions concerned with the well-being of peoples and of their culture identification and preservation.

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Unesco. *WSIS Plan of Action*, 2003.