

# The nationality of Argentine librarianship

by Raúl Daniel Escandar

---

Director of the REVISTA ARGENTINA DE BIBLIOTECOLOGÍA (ARGENTINE JOURNAL OF LIBRARIANSHIP). General Coordinator of Sociedad Argentina de Información (Argentine Society of Information), sai@nat.com.ar

---

At the beginning of a new millenium, we librarians have to face a very special moment. During the last four decades, and without being aware of it, we have witnessed important structural changes in our activity. Technological changes have not finish-ed yet and, on the contrary, will keep on tak-ing place to the astonishment and wonder of some and the uneasiness of others.

May be due to my participation in the Argentine Society of Information's *Librarianship Studies Program* or to my visits to different libraries, I become a receiver and a witness of the countless doubts of professionals and students regarding the crisis Argentine librarianship is presently undergoing. This induces me to share with the readers their same concerns, which I myself have had for a long time.

At this point I think: Is there in our country an entirely national library expression, clearly manifested through its development and structural thought? I mean, is our profession framed within a collective body whose parts move in the same direction? Could all Argentine librarians confront the external adversities knowing for sure they'll be winners in the battle? Has the outcome of our daily work matured to such extent that we can show a solid and coherent product to the Argentine society? Are our services valid enough as to be transformed without fearing technological progress?

The context of this century's end, in constant change and agitation —as I mentioned in the initial paragraph— finds our librarianship

disunited, drowsy, and disoriented, moving without direction or destination. When I mention **our librarianship** I am including the profession itself, its study, the professionals working in the field and the institutions re-presenting it. The pronounced differences and contradictions in the professional field have led to the isolation of libraries, forming *is-lands* which pretend to be true and exclusive. I consider this isolation or division is not useful to our profession at the moment of crisis and instability we are living. There are exceptions, of course, to this pattern of isolat-ion, but these turn out to be islands as well in an environment with a doubtful capacity for acceptance.

Actually, as the intermediaries of information and makers of its retrieval, we haven't been able to jointly produce exclusively Argentine products and services; considering the capacities of worldwide librarianship, this is for us a professional impairment. And this happens despite the creation of library networks, the action of professional associat-ions that have deactivated a certain lethargy, and the curricular revision of library schools. Unbelievably, Argentina is one of the few countries in the world that doesn't have a national bibliography or a national union catalog, has not achieved unification in technical proces-ses, doesn't possess the expression of a library philosophy of its own; that is to say, it lacks the products that usually appear in a resource economy aimed at growth and collective development. This situation is worsened, for instance, by the following paradox: al-

though ninety per cent of Argentine libraries use the same software for the automation of their services, an acceptable unification has not been achieved. There are partial efforts, even meritorious; however, at a national level, I believe it will not be possible for the time being to reach an agreement on the criteria and development of the products above mentioned. Besides, I can't resist the temptation of sharing with you these sad realities:

1. A national policy of information services is still lacking and, with great discouragement, I believe it is impossible to expect a library integration encouraged by the government.

2. The lack of funding has prevented libraries from undergoing a prompt and current automation process. Anyhow, I expect that computer development will compulsively force us towards the desired unification.

3. Salaries are so low that freeze all kind of initiative. How can I ask a librarian who earns two or three hundred dollars a month to think about the nationality of resources when he is certainly at a loss by the immediate demands of his pocket?

4. There is no social recognition of the profession, which provokes a permanent discouragement and a significant decrease of the salary at the time of deciding the inevitable equation **salary / professional activity**.

5. The teaching of librarianship is uneven and immature. The proliferation of institutes granting a degree after only two years of study allows the graduation of unstable librarians, which contrasts against university and college studies, which fortunately take longer. However, a deep curricular revision appears to be essential facing the year 2000.

6. The efforts of librarians are isolated, not approved by their colleagues and subject to destruction. Some people live sadly and aggressively others' achievements, and multiplied everywhere this becomes animosity that paralyzes and harms our profession.

My main concern is to be involved in something I cannot change and which is very difficult to overcome. However, I insist on a positive and recovering alternative, choosing

the way of growth and success and not the way of failure. Because failing in our profession now would be a definitive failure.

I open a space of reflection, for the problems of our profession are neither lessened nor completed by what has been said here.

We cannot build up a genuinely national librarianship if we continue being separated for, paraphrasing José Hernández' words: "*...if brothers fight, they are eaten by outsiders*".

*Raúl Daniel Escandar*