

**Dr. Manuel HERNÁNDEZ-PEDREÑO**

Universidad de Murcia. Spain. manuel@um.es

**Dr. Eduardo ROMERO-SÁNCHEZ**

Universidad de Murcia. Spain. eromero@um.es

**Dr. José-Antonio GÓMEZ-HERNÁNDEZ**

Universidad de Murcia. Spain. jgomez@um.es

## **Public libraries in the context of digital inclusion services: challenges for a more equal citizenship**

### ***Las bibliotecas públicas ante la inclusión digital: desafíos para una ciudadanía más igualitaria***

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#### **Abstract**

Public libraries provide access to technology and digital competence, since training in the critical, reflective and purposive use of information is a compensatory factor for digital exclusion. This study seeks to analyse this training's potential and limitations when designing and applying these services. The methodology is based on qualitative techniques such as interviews and discussion groups. Interviews were performed with ten reputedly expert librarians, using a questionnaire with nine questions about digital literacy services and the role that public libraries should play for digital inclusion. The views of public librarians from the Region of Murcia (Spain) were obtained through three discussion groups, selected according to the population size of the cities where their libraries are located. In addition to this, structured guidelines in accordance with topics on information literacy services, human and material resources, librarians' training necessities or typology of users were followed. It emerges that librarians are highly committed to their function in digital literacy services and digital inclusion. However, this is restricted by the human and material resources at their disposal, and by the specific needs and demands associated with different types of users. The analysis concludes with some proposals for managing these services including collaboration strategies within private entities or public local departments.

#### **Keywords**

Public libraries; digital competence; digital inclusion; qualitative research; vulnerable library users.

#### **Resumen**

*Las bibliotecas públicas facilitan el acceso a las tecnologías y a la competencia digital pues consideran la formación para el uso crítico, reflexivo e intencional de la información un factor compensatorio de la desigualdad digital. Nuestro objetivo es analizar su potencial y sus limitaciones para desarrollar este servicio. La metodología se fundamenta en dos técnicas cualitativas: la entrevista y el grupo de discusión. Las entrevistas se realizaron a diez expertos mediante un cuestionario virtual de nueve cuestiones vinculadas con la formación digital y el rol a desempeñar por las bibliotecas. La opinión de los bibliotecarios de la Región de Murcia se obtuvo mediante tres grupos de discusión, constituidos según el número de habitantes de sus municipios, y siguiendo un guion estructurado que trataba de cuestiones relativas a los recursos, las necesidades formativas y el tipo de usuarios. Se ha verificado un alto compromiso con la función de formación digital, si bien está muy condicionado por los recursos humanos y materiales de los que se dispone, junto a las demandas específicas asociadas a los usuarios que atienden. El análisis propone algunas medidas para mejorar la organización de este servicio, incluyendo estrategias de colaboración con agentes externos al municipio (entidades privadas) u otros departamentos municipales.*

#### **Palabras clave**

*Bibliotecas públicas; competencia digital; inclusión digital; investigación cualitativa; usuarios vulnerables.*

## 1. Introduction

The Library is a public institution, open to all, and in the last 30 years has empowered an educational and social dimension which includes access to Information Technologies and Training Services in Digital Competencies. Library experts and Librarian Organisations perceive this bridging service as an "Added Value" to the intermediary work between Information, Content and Users who traditionally did such. This practice stems from a compensatory compromise which is assumed necessary for a Digital Divide between those parties. Moreover, to put it into practice is an opportunity for those libraries which attempt to be more relevant in the context of Network Societies and to be recognised as key role players in educational policies; including Digital and Social Integration (Lison, Reip, Huysmans & Mount, 2016) so as to bring about Communities that are more integrated and better connected (Mersand et al., 2018).

But what happens in everyday work situations? Do Librarians assume the responsibility for the Digital inclusiveness and, therefore, Training of their Community? Do they see themselves as being capable of this service and adopting it as a priority? How can discourses on this topic of greater or lesser expertise, and of resources, complement one another; or confront one another? What organisational suggestions and strategies are required to be able to intensify this Educational and Digital function?

Questions such as these have prompted our investigation and are justified because the professional reality is frequently characterised by lack of resources, accumulation of tasks and with an insufficient recognition by Workforce and Society. All of that can be generating a distance between the willingness to construct a library resource driven by educational and societal needs (*Consejo de Cooperación Bibliotecaria*, 2017) and which promotes both Digital Inclusiveness and its effective and general implementation.

Our work set out to know about the relevant Vision, as much that of the more experienced professionals, as that of municipal librarians of the Region of Murcia. The high degree of commitment to the function of this research has been confirmed, as have its limitations, and the various challenges to be faced. Among these last-mentioned are: greater co-operation between library systems and with a range of agencies in local government and institutional environments; development of up-to-date guidelines for the provision of such services; the extension, as much of the Pedagogical Competencies for a resultant Librarian profile as of the incorporation of other professionals (such as Educators in Sociology and Psychology) into the larger libraries.

## 2. Spanish Context: Public Libraries as an Inclusive Resource into Digital Literacy

Statistics published in *Las bibliotecas públicas españolas en cifras* (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, 2018) show that there are more than 4,600 Public Library Branches present in the greater part of the country's cities and towns with more than 1000 inhabitants. These are the libraries of the municipalities, Regional libraries that coordinate Regional Library systems, Public Libraries depending on Central Government located in almost all Provincial Capitals, and to these Libraries can be added 77 Mobile Libraries which provide service to 3,226 communities located in 2006 minor municipalities of Spain.

It is, therefore, a system of Information, Education and Culture with a great potential. They are at the service of population groupings, serviced by 12,500 professionals, with about 16 million registered users. In Spain, annually, these provide services at a level of 107 million visits, 50 million loans, 200,000 cultural activities and more than 23million Internet access sessions.

This ample Public Library System has, conceptually and historically, a guaranteed commitment of equitable access to information and knowledge. That includes its absolute openness for whatever person, the absence of financial charges, and an educational purpose, as shown as being available in the UNESCO *Manifestation about Public Libraries* (1994). In the last 25 years, libraries have been progressively incorporating a training service of Informational and Digital Competencies that are necessary to render the Right to Access Information. This inclusion of Digital Skills into the educational function has been broadening itself to further extend the idea of permanent, or life-long, learning and to proceed with its consolidation into a service which began as "Information Literacy" (Gómez-Hernández & Licea, 2005).

Indeed, Public Libraries have always contributed to education in various ways: facilitating documentary and technological resources, work and study space, carrying out programmes of reading development, collaborating with student centres, welcoming students as its more numerous users and providing self-taught work. In the last 25 years, the libraries have paid attention to this last-mentioned facet through three routings of Digital Inclusion (a), facilitating within its premises access to computers, tablets, e-books or portable computers (b), free connection to the internet, as much through these three routes, as through wifi networks to these computers and (c) Training services within the Digital Skills scope, above all directed

at groups such as the elderly, immigrants, or in general, at people in vulnerable Social and Digital situations (Gómez-Hernández, Hernández-Pedreño, & Romero-Sánchez, 2017).

In fact, this professional assistance is recognised among the *Professional Profiles of the Spanish Public Library System (Work Group on Professional Profiles, 2013)* through the inclusion of "Specialist in User Training and Computer Literacy", with the functions of:

- (a) analysing different levels and groupings of users, and their information capabilities, so as to identify appropriate courses and programs.
- (b) planning, designing, and imparting training activities for the acquisition of computer skills,
- (c) developing and implanting teaching materials and tools, so as to facilitate the use of the contents and resources in an autonomous manner,
- (d) developing activities to manage whatever information tool,
- (e) designing evaluation methods for training activities and materials
- (f) training in the handling of information which corresponds to informational needs.
- (g) providing users with basic knowledge and skills, so as to benefit them with an enduring training
- (h) supplying users with the necessary resources to, effectively and critically, select and use the information with a general knowledge objective,
- (i) evaluating the usages of the information resources
- (j) working in conjunction with educators, tutors and agents for cultural development
- (k) identifying institutions and sectors of them, with which to establish alliances for the development of instruments, materials and training proposals.

During the recent Economic Crisis which had repercussions on library material acquisitions, technologies, economic and human resources, and even on the loss of some 400 Service Branches, the Libraries saw their levels of total material loans and user visits only slightly reduced. But, in spite of these problems, libraries intensified their effort by responding to the Social, Technological, Educational demands, or the Cultural requirements, of their users, and by increasing their attention to people in vulnerable situations. The opening of wire-less networks, and the growth in internet access sessions were to be demonstrations of this.

Nevertheless, Spanish Municipal Libraries have difficulties in mounting Educational and Digitally Inclusive projects. Only some 2.3 professionals on average (the equivalent of a complete working day) which, in about 50% of the cases, have an Auxiliary (Category - C1 or C2) Contract and resources are very limited. There is an annual investment per inhabitant on book acquisitions which scarcely exceeds 50c per capita on average. Reading and Studying Spaces, Infrastructures and Technologies have been out-of-date since the ten years of the financial crisis (Gómez-Hernández, 2016). For reasons of this background, it is not strange that Library personnel declare a feeling of work-related stress (Barría-González, 2012), of not having time to think about their work; but of only having time to attend to the day's emergencies, and that it is burdensome to assume roles which, at the beginning, are not traditional ones or are added to other tasks which do not disappear.

These circumstances have perhaps limited the degree of success and consolidation of more projects of Digital Inclusion in the domain of Public Libraries, although there have been very good testimonials of their work.

- In Andalucía the Alba Plan of Digital Literacy initiated an ambitious plan of Library Professional Staff Training with the intention that they may program, in their libraries, Library Workshops dedicated to teaching Digital Competencies to the local citizenry, including those related to the Creation, Publication and Communication on Social Networks, and of local Digital Contents which will remain published on the Internet as a form of enriching local Digital Inheritance. (Fernández-Villavicencio, 2012). Curtailed by the economic crisis, a precedent of prior years was the implanting, by way of the Public Libraries, of the Andalusian Diploma of Information Skills, and currently, Libraries are collaborating actively with the plans of the "Andalusian Digital Compromise".
- In Catalonia, apart from the outstanding Programme of Training and Digital Enablement in the Libraries of Barcelona, it is noteworthy that, through the incorporation of various agents, the Accreditation of Digital Competencies (ACTIC) has been created. By means of that, an

evaluation is made of those who desire to obtain this Certification. It is an evaluation carried out in the libraries, and with their participation, in the training activities (Vives Gracia, 2009).

- In Castilla-La Mancha, the Library Solidarity programme has been launched. This, over and above its social integration activities, has included the TIC-Fácil programme (Literally TIC-Easy) for the formation of elderly and disabled people, those societies involved with mental health, migrants, refugees, and the enablement of training volunteers, etc. (Martínez Ayllón, 2008).
- In many cities, the Public Libraries promote a *Plan of Digital Inclusion* which usually consists of an initiation for voluntary associations of people considered vulnerable in this domain; such as; the elderly, women, people with a low level of studies, and immigrants. Two examples:
  - in the Municipal Libraries of A Coruña courses are undertaken with titles as diverse as "Introduction to Computerisation", "Internet and Electronic Mail", "Employability and Work Searching", "Text Processing", "Mobile Phone", "Configuration of one's Personal Image in the Internet", "Internet and Electronic Book Security" (Blanco-Pardo, 2016), and
  - in the Municipal Libraries of the city of Huesca, the Digital Inclusion Plan would distinguish itself through its promotion of the citizenry and its integration with measures devised mainly for the more vulnerable social groupings (Ayuntamiento de Huesca, 2016).

### 3. Objectives and Methodology

The objective of this research is to analyse the point of view of professional librarians about the function of Digital Inclusion and Training in its various aspect, such as: whether these are considered to be their responsibility; and of a priority type; whether it is considered that they may have the competence for carrying them out, and, in conjunction with which other professionals, ought they collaborate; what information gathering strategies, measures and competencies, may be needed for their planning and development; or how it may affect the diversity of users, their level of professional practice, and their ability to bring with it, a new concept of the professional profile of the Librarian. In summary, it is an attempt to analyse the evaluation made by the Librarians themselves of the potential and the limitations which Public Libraries themselves present for training in the Digital Competencies of their users.

The methodological strategy followed is based on two qualitative investigation techniques related to social investigation; the interview by experts and the Discussion Groups; following structured guidelines in accordance with the objectives and applying the comparative method in Discourse Analysis so as to arrive at results. In both cases, Librarians themselves are dealt with in this practice; although in the first case, in addition to exercising direct attention on services, leadership would have been recognised by consensus and/or theoretical reflection around the analytical objectives.

Hence, for the interview of experts, ten professionals were selected. These complied with the requisites of high experience; understood as being: of at least 20 years of experience, the territorial representative (chosen from one of ten different Autonomous Regions of Spain: Andalucía, Aragón, Canarias, Castilla-La Mancha, Castilla y León, Cataluña, Comunidad Valenciana, Galicia, País Vasco and the Región de Murcia), and who; fulfilled at least two of the following conditions; to be represented in National or International Working Groups, to have had Directional Responsibility in services or networks of Libraries or to have developed programs of good practices; inclusive of digital ones. The interview for such representation is based on guidelines structured around nine questions which, in turn, revolve around the function of Digital Training in Public Libraries (1. Assumption of responsibility in the development of this (Digital) function. 2. Factors which impact on the potential of Libraries to perform this function, 3. Key components. 4. Good practice guidelines. 5. Existence, or alternatively, need for: State policy formulation in this sense. 6. Distribution of (e.g. Design, Implementation or Operational) Competencies among the (Library or Regional) Administrations. 7. Type of Training Competencies necessary. 8. Implications for other (concerned) agents or institutions y 9. Future challenges for those libraries exposed to this new ambience). The virtual questionnaire was sent to ten professionals of both genders during the month of May 2018, and replies were received from all in that same month. Their opinions were categorised and analysed on the basis of those discourses most relevant offered for this task and, indexed, with a number assigned to each expert (E1, E2, and successively) so as to preserve their anonymity.

For the Discussion Groups, criteria of homogeneity / heterogeneity were applied jointly. It was, therefore, considered relevant to differentiate the obtaining of professional opinions in the context of the size of the Municipality where the Library was located (homogeneity among participants within the same group); although also obtaining greater diversity, according to their geographic situation and proximity to, or distance from, the Capital, and consequent sectoral specialisations, degree of ageing or percentage of

foreigners in the population (heterogeneity within groupings). For contact and invitation of participants, collaboration of the Regional Library was counted on, and the latter offered space for the development of Discussion Groups. Finally, it was decided to form three Discussion Groups, initially applying the criteria of Municipality population size (GD1. +50,000, GD2. between 20,000 and 50,000, and GD3. less than 20,000 inhabitants); and later criteria of diversity within the population groups. According to the aforementioned criteria, ten professionals were invited to participate in each group; thereby obtaining a large range of opinions. Nine attending in the first and second groupings, and seven in the third. In the three Discussion Groups there was a semi-structured guideline with three Blocks of Questions. 1. Vision, Attitude, and Assumption of Responsibility for this function. 2. Structure and Organisation of Training, Resources Needs of Target groupings, and 3. Development and Application of Organisational Strategies.

The proceedings of the sessions of 4-6 June 2018 were transcribed, followed by the categorisation of participant intervention. A joint analysis of the discourses of the 25 participants was then carried out, although again, separated at group levels. In this latter exercise, the more relevant discourses were literally brought together; indicating, in parentheses, the Participant's Code Number, followed by the relevant Discussion Group Number (P1GD1, P2GD1...).

## **4. Results**

The results were structured around three analytical categories or bases: In the first place, those related to the degree of assumption of responsibility and commitment of the Digital Function on the part of the Librarians, and likewise the Attitude, Aptitude, Professional Perspective and requirements for consideration. Secondly, aspects about considerations relative to the necessary structure and organisation for the development of services, such as new Professional Competencies, Human and Economic Resources, User Groupings and Recipients. And in the third and final place, challenges identified; such as the formulation of organisational strategies favourable to its extension (leadership, network functionality, collaboration between Libraries, the establishment of cooperation and agreements with other agencies, and the features of the new professional profile. In a complementary format there will be presented, the discourses derived from interviews carried out with expert professionals and those with Discussion Group participants. The intention is a search for Complementarity or Difference, in the Visions. Likewise, there will be literal and verbatim examples of the respective positions.

### **4.1. Responsibility and Compromise with the Digital Training function**

#### **4.1.1. Responsibility assumed**

The greater part of the experts interviewed believe that Libraries ought to assume the responsibility of training in the Digital Competencies of their users and to guarantee Digital Inclusion. Only in two cases was there not demonstrated this total conviction to indicate that training in Digital Competencies exceeds the capabilities and resources of the library and that libraries ought to serve as support, rather than lead, this task.

If in its era, Librarians contributed to strengthen or initiate the reading and writing habits of the citizenry, in this current era, it corresponds by opening doors to a broader literacy; so as to diminish the Digital Divide. If, to that, we add that Reading is offered in Digital Media, and that our Information Search and Catalogue Access Systems are digitalised, this function becomes unavoidable (E2).

Decidedly and absolutely; yes. Although the fact that libraries participate in this training is not going to make the effects of the Digital Divide disappear, it would be absolutely absurd to disregard it as a resource. It is such for the minimization of, not only the effects of, the Digital Gap; but rather something more terrible, as I see it; the Information Gap (E9).

In my opinion, we are speaking of two different things. The hatching of new technologies in a Digital Society which has put many people at risk of Digital Exclusion. The Public Library System ought not skirt around that problem; but rather assume the responsibility of Training in Digital Competencies which, currently, exceed our Library capabilities and resources (E5).

Educational work has not, traditionally, been carried out from Libraries. It has been facilitated, but the role of Trainer has not been assumed. I believe that Libraries ought to collaborate, establish Action Plans, share Resources, etc.; but not assume all the responsibility of complete formation or training (E3).

From their perspective, Municipal Librarians also assume the carrying out of this function, as has been unreservedly asserted by 13 of the 25 Discussion Group Participants and, above all, by those who proceed from large Municipalities. They consider it a fundamental task to adapt themselves to the Social reality and to the Community's needs in those matters in which there is an omnipresent Digital Component, and which can produce satisfaction within a profession which is exercised very vocationally.

It is essential that we cannot go against society's tendency. Not to modernise ourselves would be to remain as a book site to which people would come to consult the printed word (P8GD1).

It is a function of the Public Library. The contrary is like saying that food is not sold in a restaurant; it is part of our work (P2GD2).

The Libraries must be flexible and adapt themselves to new demands which the user is asking of us, and to help him / her with problems. Among these, there can be the need for access to information. It is not to be Masters, but indeed to adapt ourselves to these new technologies and, to see in them, a possibility of extension of the Library and the capture of new users (P3GD3).

For me, it is satisfying when you help somebody whom the Town Hall has sent here and we teach him/her to do their Tax return, or their Unemployment documentation. And if I don't, I lose my users (P1GD3).

Nevertheless, the remainder of the Discussion Group Participants question the direct acceptance of this responsibility with various arguments; such as the need to make equipment available, to have to continue carrying out other priority functions, to need other characteristics, or to have, the collaboration of other municipal departments.

It is very important, and it ought to be given, but always that there may be resources. Currently, it is very difficult; such as things are in the Libraries (P4GD1).

I also consider that to include these new technologies in the library and to teach the basics is fundamental. It is quite another thing that we may achieve it; because, without committed politicians and adequate staff, it is impossible (P3GD2).

I don't know up to what extent it must be us who train them, because these new generations are more up to date than we are (P7GD2).

I see two basic problems; either the lack of training in librarians or the antiquated staff trained for such posts (P8GD2).

#### **4.1.2. Requirements and Challenges**

The importance of attitude and frame-of-mind of Library Personnel towards this educational function, are among the requirements most often mentioned by some experts consulted about the development of this Digital Training and Inclusion on the part of Public Libraries,

One of the factors which impact is the perception of Library Personnel relative to their educational function. Many Librarians do not consider that teaching is a part of their function and those who, indeed are convinced of this fact, lack Educational Competence (E7).

There are two fundamental factors: Attitude and Aptitude. Not everybody considers that it (education) may form a basic part of our profession. Therefore, in many cases it is a labour of conviction. Another issue is Aptitude. That is to say, the preparation, being trained not only in the Content and Topics which they may be going to impart; but also, that they be trained in pedagogy; which enables them to speak with authority (E9).

To highlight the library as an active learning centre, as a reference point and as an essential agent in Social and Economic Development of the Community, is considered a fundamental challenge.

To incorporate unhesitatingly the Digital Function as an Added Value which positively benefits Society's point-of-view of such centres as an Innovative Resource open for anybody, and which responds through Digital Media, 24 hours a day, every day of the year, taking into account that, for such a purpose, it may be necessary to work in a collaborative manner; and with cooperation between administrations (E2).

Local Librarians, speaking from their own perspective, agree with the experts in indicating the importance of attitude; prior to the provision of service. They also refer to another series of factors which impact on the adequate development of the Digital Training function. Among these, it is fitting to highlight that, in some

Municipalities, there is a scarcity of human and economic resources, or the lack of training. These aspects will be seen more extensively in the following section, where both the structure and ideal development of this function are dealt with, although it will also be seen in the types of strategies carried out for their execution.

## 4.2. Structure and Organisation

### 4.2.1. Specific Formative Competencies and Knowledge for Project Design

The experts mention, in their responses, that it is important that Librarians rely on certain skills, attitudes and fundamental knowledge, for the development of the function of Digital Inclusion and Training; highlighting the following:

- Information Literacy: The librarian him/herself should master and be up-to-date on matters of Information Management processes (searching for, obtaining and evaluating information) so as to be able to teach it to others.
- Digital Literacy: Knowledge of Applications and Computer Tools, their skills language, and the security risks which the Digital World brings with it.
- Digital Communication: Capability for communicating with, and relating to, others, and for working with Digital Tools and in Digital Environments; such as Social Networks.
- Content Creation; as much Textual as Audio-Visual: knowing how to make computer graphics, diagrams, blogs, podcasts, videos, presentations, tutorials.
- General Communicative Competence for dealing with, helping, sharing experiences and facilitating the learning process of one's interlocutors; including attitudes of service and empathy with the learning requirements of Disadvantaged Individuals or Groups.
- Pedagogical Competencies and Skills of organising, planning, and evaluation of the learning process.
- Knowledge of Content, relative to Resources for Employment Preparation; others for exercising one's rights derived from transparent and open government, social networks, transparency and other rights which have to be seen as daily necessities of users:

On the one hand, there are those Technological Knowledge Items and Skills which are intended for transmission to users; placing a special emphasis in the attitudes / aptitudes necessary so that they develop a critical attitude. On the other hand, there is the necessity that the Librarian acquires specific competencies in training methodologies and participates in them (E7).

Closeness, or affinity, is important; focusing on the user and knowing his/her interests and needs and knowing how to share practicalities and experience. In short; professionals with a spirit of service who help and train users in all those aspects which they need, and who involve themselves in the learning processes of Disadvantaged Groups (E10).

On the one hand, we need fluency in managing of ICT (Information & Communication Technologies), Social Networks, topics of electronic administration, and other matters necessary for citizens' day-to-day needs; and on the other hand, we also need pedagogical and communication competencies and skills. Knowing what we have to deal with and knowing how to transmit it; in the best manner; pleasurably, practicably and results-driven are both necessary (E9).

Experts, at times, also advocate the incorporation into libraries of other professionals with pedagogical training; not only to add that competency to the librarian profile, but because.

Well-prepared personnel, who come with pedagogical skills, ought to be incorporated into our staff; so as to respond to the learning needs of the Community being served (E10).

With regard to the opinion of local Librarians, they recognise and request that the same competencies which the experts declare as being necessary, are made available to them. This is a role expected of the Headquarters of Regional Library System (in this case the Regional Library of Murcia). Ongoing Self-development, or that provided in collaboration with the University, the Training programmes of the Regional Public Administration, other Local Municipal Departments, and even the users themselves. Occasionally a feeling of lack of capability is expressed.

I believe in multi-skilling, in fact and honestly, I put it into practice. Training is not lacking. Here, it is all voluntary. One must go and look for courses, to see if they may have value, and organise one's time (P6GD3).

I prefer that my training is provided externally, for example, in courses prepared by the Regional Library, the Town Hall, or the University (P5GD3).

We should not lose sight of the fact that there are people who enjoy collaboration with the library; people who know a lot and who also want to help us (P7GD1).

I believe that there are other training methods and that such work does not have to fall back on us. This because it is going to be impossible that we, as librarians, learn a course in the Regional Library and that we then transmit it to our users (P4GD2).

Especially, those librarians from smaller Municipalities want to meet with their colleagues, so that they may be able to share experiences and lessons learnt. These meetings would be organised by the Regional Library and would highlight the "multi-purpose" character of their profile; by reason of their situation of being the only workers within their institution and, therefore, needing a "practical" training in a broader range of issues. This seems to be the contrary of their Library Economics University Studies. Two incompatible options are notable here, since the size of the staff will lend preponderance to one or other model.

Both; Training in Multi-tasking and Collaboration (P1, P7, P8 GD2).

Ongoing training which was being offered in the Regional Library is fundamental for practical issues (P6GD3).

I like my career and my profession, but the University is very theoretical. Now I am doing a type of work which has almost nothing to do with what I studied. I am a Socio-Cultural worker, Digital Literacy teacher, and "Kindergarten Cop". I would change the University Degree for a higher course which was more focused on practical realities (P2GD3).

Relative to design, and to programming knowledge of training activities, there was no agreement among the experts consulted at the time, of indicating the necessary components for developing a project of Digital Inclusion and Training. Only one of the experts quoted major factors at the level of Pedagogic Design and Development which every training project ought to include, and which ought to go beyond the contents which this type of training should include:

The initial element is to define the objectives which allow us to design the project as such; to delimit the group to which we direct ourselves; to evaluate the technological infrastructure; to establish a schedule; to define the Human Resources on whom we depend (own employee and external ones) and to budget the activities to be developed (E5).

The resources and necessary logistics have to be analysed for launching these training activities. Should one's own librarians impart them, or should external personnel and collaborators be sought to define a calendar, and finally to apply, at each stage, evaluation processes enabling the obtaining of feed-back about the effort invested? (E10).

None of the participant Municipal Librarians in the Discussion Groups made reference to good practice experience in other Libraries; although in some cases, they alluded to those which were developed in their Municipalities and in which Local Librarians participated; directly or indirectly.

#### **4.2.2. Human and Economic Resources**

Among the factors which have most impact on the development of this Digital Training and Inclusion for Public Libraries, a great number of experts consulted, agree in indicating two in particular: Resources available, as much Human as Economic. Relative to Human Resources, it is not only their quantity; but rather their suitability for the function, and their attitude towards, and their identification with, this service.

In the first place, the main factor relates to Human Resources, and more precisely, the pedagogical skills of the professionals in the development of this function. Librarians are not teachers, and the same as for any other discipline, training and vocation are of great importance (E3).

There are two factors which impact on the potential of the Library as a centre which develops programmes of Digital Inclusion: (1) Resources and the (2) Vision of Library personnel relative to their Educational Function (E7).

I believe that there are three fundamental factors: Attitude, Aptitude and Resources. Technological resources are necessary, but not only those; also, time and personnel. Many Libraries believe in this, but they cannot apply it; because the Librarian is alone (E9).

Librarians in average-sized and small Municipalities accuse, even more so, the Economic and personnel shortfalls; which are linked to a certain lack of recognition and to stress in the workplace.

The first problem is the lack of Resources, of adequate Space and of Computer Equipment. Secondly the training of personnel, who ought to be giving this training, is behind schedule. I believe that, to be able to teach, one must also have Communication Skills, as does a teacher, and I consider that I do not have them (P2GD1).

There are many places able to offer this type of training. And maybe in the library, rather than offer this formation, it is better to help the user in a moment of need (P8GD2).

What happens is that, being a small library and knowing almost everybody, there is a predisposition in the user to arrive and ask for something, even though it falls outside the librarian's work function, and the latter, who is similarly disposed, will help by complying (P7GD3).

I have more than 25 years of service and am so tired. I have worked hard and not always has, that which I have done, been recognised. I have seen everything. I have had many different Councillors and sometimes they have not supported the library; they don't understand it. These recent years have been very hard; small budget, few computers and few support personnel. At times, I have been alone, and I have tried to comply with the minimum. I don't know... (P1GD2).

### **4.2.3. Adaptation to Target Groups and Users**

Among the factors which have most impact on the development of Digital Formation and Inclusion for Public Libraries, a large number of experts consulted are in agreement in indicating the type of user to whom they attend. And on this matter the Librarian members of the Discussion Groups are in agreement, with an emphasis on immigrants and, above all, on elderly adults for whom permanent participation in learning activities is the determinant in their development of Digital Competence (Íñiguez-Berrozpe, Valero-Erazu & Elboj-Saso, 2018). But there has been no exclusion, since the librarians defend that their service excludes nobody, and that everything must be the same for all, and consistent with their needs.

The second factor is the type of user. Digital Inclusion ought to mean all sectors of the population; their distinguishing features that naturally group them (age, previous studies, origin, culture...) (E10).

Groups, socially most disadvantaged, who ought to be the first beneficiaries of this formation; Aged Persons (for many of whom technology becomes an insurmountable wall), as it is, for people with scarce academic formation, for the unemployed and migrants (E10).

If, some years ago, it was taught how computers operated and related topics, now what is being taught is how to arrive at information, how to absorb it, and how to structure work for children (P2GD2).

### **4.2.4. Development Strategies**

#### **4.2.4.1. Leadership and Network Functioning**

Some experts are convinced of the role of the Library as the leader of this service for guaranteeing it as a form of Cultural Democratization. But that requires enabling the co-operation between Libraries, the impulse of integrative organisations which may facilitate it; and a political backing:

The Public Libraries ought to lead projects from their Initiation, through their Implementation and Evaluation. They are those who are authentically aware of the real needs of those demanding Digital Inclusion (E3).

There is activity in different geographic areas and a developed willingness in proposals of Work Groups of the Council of Library Cooperation. I believe it necessary to establish Strategic Regional Plans of Communication. These may give unity to this activity and I believe it necessary to consolidate Networks and Infrastructures: above all, in the Municipal Libraries (E1).

The ultimate responsibility for advancement into the Digital Society ought to be National. There ought to be established the necessary National (Communicative and Funds) flows between the Regional and Municipal Administrations, Entities and Organisations for that purpose (E6).

A National plan is essential, as are Autonomous Region plans, which set out the objectives and donate resources for their achievement, However, it is obvious that there ought to be local Entities which assume the operative part of their development; and their final execution (E7).

Local librarians specify their needs for institutional backing; implementing it through the top level of the Regional Library System. And then, its own administration facilitates the means, by way of Regional meetings, so as to share experiences, Training Programmes and Competency Levels; in collaboration with the University.

The law obliges a Municipality of more than 5,000 inhabitants to have a Library; but says nothing more (P8GD2).

The relationship between tasks and job descriptions ought to be revised. Because, just as we are seeing that the functions within a Library are changing, so too all the revisions to functions which librarians, auxiliaries and ordinances are doing, ought to be updated (P2GD1).

What we need is a modernisation of the current Library Law and to demand some minimum regulation and compensation for personnel not yet contemplated in the current law (P3GD2).

From the Regional Library, or the Autonomous Community, down to each Municipality, each member of the personnel would have to have a basic scheme; with some Job Descriptions, requirements and Competencies, and their corresponding Training or Academic level (P6GD1).

Those responsible for our formation and training are ourselves. We are in a network and the Regional Library has a big function. If it does not offer us Training; we must demand it from our local Town Hall, or from our Regional Administration, and say to them "Listen; do what you are not doing" (P2GD3).

As has been seen, the Laws of Libraries which, in the Region of Murcia, date from 1990, are ageing and do not sufficiently take into account the concepts of Digital Training. Likewise, there is a lack of Organizational Guidelines which may help in knowing how to develop these services. In fact, in the Region of Murcia, there is not a document in force with recommendations of the organisation of Library Services, and in Spain the existing Guidelines (*Work Group on the Services of Public Libraries, 2002*) would need an update relative to its services of Digital and Social Inclusion.

#### **4.2.4.2. Internal & External Agreements & Alliances in Municipalities**

A large part of the experts consulted insist that the major problem is the lack of mainstreaming. As much at the National and Autonomous Region levels, as at the local ones, they should be developing themselves in a multi-disciplinary format and by means of the establishment of common Strategic Alliances and common actions.

The Library, alone and isolated, is dead; sadly, but simply. We have to work with professionals who surround us: colleges, teachers, sociologists, social assistants, those responsible for social institutions. That maxim of "Here we are; anyone who wants can come" leads us into a long agony and certain death (E9).

If there is some lesson, we can take from this connected world in which we live, it is of the verification that no Institution, Entity or Organisation, however big and powerful it may be, can, by itself, achieve the objective. If we want to be successful, we ought to be very aware, that on our own, we can't be (E5).

The Librarian cannot become multi-disciplinary, but indeed can redirect his/her management so that a library converts itself into workshop space for learning, into a greenhouse of projects oriented towards collaboration between different Social and Educational Development Agents (E1).

Local Librarians are on the same wavelength, citing collaboration with one's closest interlocutors, other departments of Local Administration, other agents heading towards the same objectives, Educational Centres (both Infants and Primary) and Secondary Teaching Institutions with which to create training programmes directed at Infant and Juvenile Users.

In our case, we are already in contact with the Council of the Elderly, that of Youth, and that of New Technologies. When we have made courses with elderly people or groups, in collaboration with the Council of the Elderly, they supplied a technician, and we explained how "Ebiblio" (The National Electronic-Book Service) was to be used (P6GD1).

It is also interesting that we collaborate with other Councils, because they attract the public who normally don't go to the library. It is a form of "getting to know you" (P7GD1).

We have confirmed programmes with more Councils, with practically all of them, annual programmes, signed and with shared budgets (P2GD2).

#### **4.2.4.3. The Evolution of the Professional Librarian Figure**

Local Librarians defend the updating of functions which are attributed to their work functions, in accordance with a professional profile which, in the Libraries, has diverse components in accordance with the broad range of functions which are carried out; ranging from the selection of, and organisation of, information for their use, to a knowledge of the needs of their users in the different facets of personal and professional life, and attention to the possibilities of the same in that which concerns Information, Culture and Education. This recognition, which ought to be transferred to that related to workplace requirements of their respective Administrations, would be an important step for consolidating new services which are being offered; and in reducing the precariousness, or risk, of work stress. The imagined figure of the multi-purpose Librarian has its difficulties. Since it compresses many knowledge types, into only one professional individual, who exercises related tasks, in a generic sense, with those of Social Educators and Social Workers and with experts in Technologies and with those in Communications.

I believe that, relative to the Professional Profiles of Librarians, there exists a document which enumerates an enormous quantity of different profiles which librarians can have. By only throwing a glance, one can see the quantity and variety of things which Librarians do, and how many different Profiles there can be (P3GD2).

### **5. Conclusions and final reflections**

#### **5.1. Broad agreement with the Digital Training Function; although committed in varying degrees, and brought into operation, in accordance with, Human & Material Resources**

Beginning from inputs obtained, as much from the experts interviewed as from the Librarians, including the Discussion Groups, a broad commitment of these Librarians to the function of Digital Training has been verified; although it is moderated by issues of Resources, (Human, Economic and Material), found in individual Libraries, together with the Specific Requirements associated with the User Profile of those who use a particular Library.

Library Experts highlight the lack of Human Resources, Technology, and even adequate Space, for performing their work, and, in accordance with the importance of the task of Digital Inclusion and Training, they want these to be recognised by the Local Administration. The occurrence of the Economic Crisis, moreover, brought with it 10 years of survival strategies; during which libraries carried a heavy responsibility, and Librarians are now showing symptoms of work exhaustion; especially in cases where there is only "one solo Librarian" in an outlet.

On the other hand, it appears that the Vision of the order-of-priorities among many Librarians has not changed sufficiently. That would explain why there no deepening of the Educational and Digital Inclusion Services has been; since these Librarians affirm that they absorb the traditional" or "own" tasks of their profession in preference to the "added" ones. Many Library tasks are becoming increasingly rendered automatic or can be simplified with the help of coordination units. If, conceptually, the users are considered to be the priority, then services directed towards them ought to absorb more time than the Library's progressively computerised routine tasks, or those relative to the Library Collection.

We believe that this is in line with the conclusion obtained when, in 2011, the situation and the perspectives of Spanish Librarians were investigated. (Merlo-Vega, Gómez-Hernández, & Hernández-Sánchez, 2011). Among these conclusions, there are two that stand out: a) the necessity of incorporating Technology and of it being updated - in an ongoing way - in those technologies, so as to exercise the Library Profession in an Innovative and Flexible manner, and b) that those same professionals will be "Trainers in such information".

## 5.2. Diversity of Attitudes and Aptitudes among Professionals

The practical implementation of this service is not uniform. It is manifested, in distances and differences, among which one of the factors is the size of the Municipality. However, this is not always the case relative to the development of the function, because they are influenced enormously as much by Professional formation, as by a predisposition to overcome difficulties and shortcomings through various strategies.

Without a doubt, Municipality size influences the bestowal of Resources for this function. However, beyond being able to count on the necessary minimums, one finds a subjective factor, linked to, and foreseeable in, the reinforcement of a predisposition among Librarian attitudes. That is to say; network tasks reinforce the need for professional recognition and job re-grading, among other matters.

The majority of Librarians express the opinion that their qualification ought to include Digital Competence and Pedagogical Capability so as to teach others; but most of them consider themselves without an adequate degree of mastery of these. They therefore demand appropriate formation and some help to extend their abilities. Hence, when it may be possible, and especially so in the larger Municipalities, professionals in Sociological Education or Pedagogy, ought to be incorporated into those centres. Current Librarians express doubts as to whether such formative activities ought to be imported directly; or, be managed through, and in collaboration with, other specialists of libraries, who see themselves becoming Mediators in those learning processes or Educators in them. We understand that, given the diversity of situations and of the initial formation of this group, a unique type of qualification ought not be determined for the whole sector. There exists an ample range of training needs dependant on; professional levels, the type of users, the number of employees in the team, among others. Some Minimums ought to be recognised; adaptable to each or any Municipality, and, in our opinion, this ought to be orientated towards that established in the *Framework of Digital Teaching Competence (National Institute of Educational Technologies and Teacher Training, 2017)*.

## 5.3. Scarce Knowledge of Good Practices; although Diversity of Development Strategies

Since not even many experts mention them, it would appear that Librarians are not sufficiently aware of good practices carried out in Spain, and which would be good for their orientation, equally so, according to the previously-mentioned *Report on Definitions of Professional Profiles in Spain*, there is difficulty in describing the functions appropriate to a Library Trainer. Logically, the lack of diffusion of these practices is giving rise to many meetings and debate forums. Above all the announcement of the Bank-of-Data Resources Project on this topic is very opportune: The Group of Labour-force Data Bank, ALFIN/AMI, which the Council of Libraries Co-operation will launch.

Conforming to the described heterogeneous context, a series of proposals which, without doubt, will contribute to the greater development of this function, and in a more homogeneous manner, will be drawn up by the different Public Libraries of the Region.

- The empowerment of work on *networks*, within the framework of Regional Library Systems, so that they emanate from the coordination of formative and orientational activities, and from resources which librarians need, including; learning through meetings, work groups, etc., is a matter of coordinating efforts and strategies.
- Recuperation from the Autonomous Community Administration of the Regional Library's management, and the extension of support modes to local Libraries, especially in Municipalities of less than 50,000 inhabitants who require assessment and practical support. It is a matter of reversing one of the negative effects of the economic crisis, during which the Councils of Culture & Education restricted themselves to maintaining the functioning of their own libraries, such as those of the Autonomies and Regions, and the means of financing and assistance (in library-book collections, permanent training and financial measures) for the Libraries of the System; prejudicing, above all, the smallest.
- Alliances outside of the Library sector, such as the different Councils or Formative Entities, or those of the "Third Sector", which there may be within the Municipalities, with goals coincident with those of the Library.
- The prescriptive support which contributes to regulation, by way of: a). the elaboration of some guidelines for the development of Educational Services, and for the teaching of Digital Competence, in Public Libraries, within the framework of an overall updating of the norms for Public Librarian Services. b). the administrative and economic recognition of: training work, by means of the updating of job descriptions and catalogue functions, in the *Relationships of Municipal Work-posts*; including Tasks currently exercised by Librarians.

- To achieve the effective diffusion of Spain's existing Good Practices, as guidelines for the extension and re-enforcement of this service, these could be complemented with an Annual Prize, within the community of Spanish Libraries, for the *Best Educational Programs* or for *Digital Inclusion*.
- In the conceptual plan, it is a question of backing the consolidation of the profile of a Formative Librarian, and, in general, a change of a professional Vision, through which, the Priorities ranking of Library Services is re-organised, showing the possibility of social advantages in conjunction with the instructional demands of the Social Networks.

#### **5.4. Endogenous & Exogenous Determinants of the development of the Digital Formation function**

Relative to the causes which influence the positive development of the Digital Formation project, it can be concluded that they are of two types; *endogenous* and *exogenous*. On the one hand, there would be factors of an internal type, or of an *endogenous* character, directly linked to the particular Library, such as : the achievement of a minimum number of Personnel or Economic Resources assigned to Library service, the improvement in space for Training and Social purposes within the Library, the knowledge and further training of targeted public sectors, the enablement, and a permanent professional attitude, for the repositioning of the functions; considering Society's new priorities.

On the other hand, there exist aspects of an *exogenous* type; proceeding from National, Regional or Municipal environments. Included here would be aspects such as: local public support, collaboration with external Entities, reinforcement of Regional Library Systems, and of means of cooperation, or, Central State impact. This, while respecting the Competencies of Autonomies, guarantees that, with access help from within Public Libraries, Minimal Rights information and knowledge ought to be guaranteed for all Spanish citizens. It is a matter of placing Public Libraries in the political agenda, and of incorporating them into the development and training towards the Digitalised Community; improving their contribution – ranging from technological to human – so as to reverse precarious media situations, to integrate the community even more into the public educational resources as a key element for ongoing formation.

#### **5.5. Towards a Public Library in ongoing transformation**

The Public Libraries reaffirm their role as an Educational Service, of Digital Inclusion, and as Democratic Agent of access to Culture and Cultural Content. That has always been so, and statements, identified in our study, demonstrate that it is evolving so as continue doing so, or extending it, with the compensatory focus on Inequalities, such as those of access, which have grown in a Digital Society. We have confirmed the very vocational character of the professionals and their firm belief in the Educational Services in Informational & Digital Competencies, but numerous limitations have been identified.

These latter are relevant so as to advance in surmounting the diverse Development Strategies described. They are not incompatible in terms of context. For Libraries, and the Personnel who compose them, the transformation of their services, their spaces and their professional priorities are fundamental factors to making them relevant, in a context of over-abundant information; but which is very unequal in terms of Citizen Access and Competence. The most recent document (IFLA 2018) agreed by Librarians from all over the world, highlights three major Opportunities for future Library Planning, Strategies and Digital Innovation by Librarians; so as to meet the expanding needs of their users: "We must update our traditional roles in the Digital Age. To support, meaningfully, learning, literacy and reading in a Digital Age, libraries must adapt continuously. We need to understand Community Needs better and design services for measurable impact on peoples' lives. We must keep up with ongoing Technological Changes to seize the opportunities provided by Digital Innovations" (IFLA 2018). In this process of adaptation, a recent study of 53 Public Libraries located in Spain's Provincial Capitals – theoretically the best endowed in the country–concludes that "although the Libraries have commenced to provide many of the services which new social realities demand - such as the search for employment and (therefore) training in ITC competencies, others, more innovative, with use of Digital manufacturing tools or space transformation in places of collaboration or co-working, still apply themselves in minor ways". (Caridad-Sebastián, García-López, Martínez-Cardama, & Morales-García, 2018).

A possible limitation to this investigation could have been that the participants of the Discussion Groups were all Municipal Librarians belonging to only one Autonomous Community (the Region of Murcia) which makes the generalisation of the results difficult. Nevertheless, this limitation has managed to be compensated by carrying out interviews with Librarian "experts" with a high territorial representation (Ten Autonomous Communities) and so, it could be possible to forego the replication of this study in other Spanish Regions.

Finally, our results allow us to consider that there has been progress; although any Innovation in Digital Training and Inclusion, and in its promotion and development from Public Libraries, still has a long road to travel.

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This translation was made by Terry O'Connor Logan [quijoterryo@gmail.com](mailto:quijoterryo@gmail.com)

