

Electronic resources and local community: the example of State Public Library of Tarragona

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Forewords

Internet has been a great drive for the public libraries in the development of the local and community information systems and as an opportunity to create electronic contents and resources.

The public library performs a multiple role as a provider and creator of electronic services and products, and also in the organization and distribution of the information created by other cultural, social and economic agents.

The Tarragona Public Library Web (TPL) was launched in 1998 with private funds of Dow Chemical and with the volunteer collaboration of the social network TINET.

From the beginning, the creation and organization of contents, and, mainly of virtual resources for the community, has been a main goal in order to satisfy the specific needs of our local community. Later, other services and resources have been added to this through a continuous development up to now.

Nowadays, the Web is hosted in the server of the Generalitat de Catalunya, and it is part of their institutional Web.

The ongoing evaluation and interaction with our community has facilitated the Web to be a useful site in constant transformation and with a continuous contents renewal.

The TPL Web allows us to transform virtual clients into real visitors of the library and inversely, the TPL works for the e-incorporation, by creating virtual customers and reducing the informational gap in our community through specific programs.

The Quality Management System, certified according to ISO 9001:2000 since February 2004, includes virtual services and resources. It is continuously evaluated through specific indicators, and there is an operations team committed to its improvement, renovation and innovation.

Virtual services and resources of the TPL: the start-up

Spanish libraries did never develop information services in the fashion of the so-called Community Information Centres, came into being in the 70's in the Anglo-Saxon libraries. They came up to satisfy the information needs that everyday life and the exercise of the citizenship rights required, making easier the individual and social development of the community.

In Spain, the citizen's information services have been created in the sidelines of the public library.

Generally, public libraries themselves have to put a dent and explain their role in this new society, as information and knowledge centres at the community service.

This was the library background in 1996 when we decided to create the TPL Web, launched in may 1998 with the fundraising of the private company "Dow Chemical" and with the technical support from TINET, a virtual civic net working to impel the Internet among citizens.

Therefore, the TPL Web started exclusively as an initiative of the TPL thanks to private fundraising, and it went on like that up to 2003, when its costs were assumed by the Department of Culture of the Generalitat de Catalunya, the public administration to which the TPL belongs to. The current design of the site is arranged according to the patterns of the Generalitat de Catalunya.

From the beginning of the Web, in 1998, specially as it was financially depending on a private entity, we were really aware that the success or failure of the services and virtual resources that we offered, would be determined by their utility and our ability to keep the pace with the changes in the users needs and the technological innovations.

Virtual resources and services development as a strategic goal of the TPL

The creation and maintenance of digital resources and services was one of the strategic goals included in the Management Agenda since 1998, with a double purpose:

- Being useful to the citizens, and therefore, to create services and virtual resources adapted to their needs and in constant change and transformation.
- To improve the image and the prestige of the library within the community and especially among specific groups as politicians, media, companies, etc. That's to say: we thought of them in terms of gaining in presence within the community.

Accordingly, the creation and maintenance of these services and virtual resources are integrated as a whole in the Management Agenda and in the Quality System implemented, and, from its beginning, in a crosscutting way within the strategic plan that aims to create a positive institutional image within the community.

From the beginning, we took into account that it was basic to build bridges with citizens and other social, cultural and economic agents, establishing two communication channels: one towards virtual costumers in order to incentive their knowledge and use of the public library, and a second channel, the other way round, to release the Web and its contents at the physical library itself.

Finally we worked intensively in a strategic line destined to train people in the use of the Information technologies and Internet, in order to reduce the digital gap and to create added value to the in-person services of the library.

As a result, from 1998, the TPL Web provides a wide range of services and virtual resources oriented to the general public in general as well as to facilitate the use of the library by its users from their homes.

Later, from 2002, we included, as a strategic goal, the cooperation between the library and the "Administració Oberta de Catalunya" (www.cat365.net), an on-line administration project held by Catalunya public administrations. This cooperation is currently under a redefining process.

Virtual resources and local community: a necessary reciprocal relation for the public library

While planning the contents and resources generation, the difference between the public libraries and

the others as universities, specialized or school libraries, is the difficulty to specify and delimit its virtual users and, as a consequence, to offer contents, services and resources adapted to them.

Thus, the generation of digital contents by the TPL is always produced starting on the point of view of its utility for the citizens, no duplicity and the generation of contents and resources that help us to improve the image and the prestige of our library within our community.

Conscious of the wide range of potential virtual users that we had, our local community was considered as our preferential client from the beginning.

We analysed, chose and defined citizen's patterns by identifying their needs and expectations, for us to lately be able to produce useful services and contents through the Web, that have been evaluated and renovated along these nine years.

To do so, the capability of keeping a continuous interaction with our virtual visitors has been a priority, with the final purpose of changing the virtual visitor into a client and the client into a loyal one. This interaction with the client, his ideas, suggestions, and degree of satisfaction, have been the guidelines that always have led us into the correct way towards the creation of new services and the renovation of the existing ones.

When we speak about virtual clients we have to be aware of:

- The difference between the visitor of the Web and the clients for whom the services have been created.
- The difference between the "territorial users", that's to say, users that belong to the community where the library is working, and the global, "non territorial" users, that can visit occasionally or regularly the Web.

After having established this difference, the second step was to focus and identify the library virtual costumers profiles we wanted to cover. Finally, we determined their needs and launched services adapted to these needs.

Besides that, we had to analyse the context, the virtual market of the information where these services and contents were incorporated, and where they are actually developed. In order to make them useful, we had to avoid duplications.

The creation of digital services and resources in the virtual market context requires a transformation of the services as the contents are transformed in the virtual space. This market, in constant and fast transformation, has determined the evolution of the services and virtual resources that we offer.

The virtual resources of the TPL

The virtual resources currently provided through the TPL Web could be classified in several groups:

Resources and services for local information

The Local Information Service was created virtually to satisfy the citizen's needs of practical and useful information (commercial, administrative, cultural or tourist information, links with local administrations...etc).

These services include the Local Reference Information Service, whose goal is to give a virtual answer to any question about the city of Tarragona with a maximum delay of three days.

This Local Information System is formed by information and services provided by administrations and institutions of the city of Tarragona that, up to now, were dispersed on the Internet, as well as by services and information created by the library itself when the lack of information detected in the virtual market of information advises it so. Thus, we have produced several virtual resources: subject guides, virtual information directories, specialized Webs on interesting topics for people, etc.

The goal of the Local Information Service is to shift to the virtual space the philosophy of the Information systems for the community, and, by doing so, to put at the citizen's disposal the full set of resources, information and services generated by the community. The library organizes or produces contents only when necessary.

A work team that aims to establish new strategic guidelines and improve its content, is currently revising the Local Information Service.

This new guidelines will make of the SIL renovation, one of the strategic quality goals for 2008.

The local and regional press database (BDP)

It's a full-text documentary database elaborated by the BPT and freely offered through its Web, that contains news of local interest published in press, magazines and official publications, both at national and local level.

This database, that provides full-text access, was created to cover the needs of information of sectors such as media, public administrations, political parties, labour unions, companies, scholarly associations, agencies, etc., but it is also very appreciated by the general public.

It is periodically advertised among these population profiles through customised campaigns.

Currently it offers more than 20.000 bibliographic full-text records since 2005. Our Service Offer establishes the 48 hours update, as one of our quality commitments, although it is usually updated everyday.

The information generated by this database allows us to produce other products, such as bibliographic records, lists of news references, press dossiers about events or current issues, and it is the basis to create several virtual guides.

Subject guides and Webs produced by the BPT

The TPL (BPT) produces guides on subjects of interest for the community that are also available through the Web. The subjects matter is varied, from local topics to author or city characters guides, public services in Tarragona, etc.

Some of the titles, as an example, are *Benvinguts a Tarragona* (a guide for immigrants and newly arrived to our region), *La gent gran a Tarragona* (services guide for elder people), *No a la violència de gènere: Informa't* (Guide of services and resources to mistreated women), *Aprendre el català: guia bàsica* (Basic guide for learning catalán), etc.

On the other hand, some of the services of the TPL (BPT) produce contents that are later transformed into virtual resources for citizens and offered through the Web. Some examples of this are the directories of practical addresses, monographic guides on public services, etc.

Virtual resources and activities in the TPL (BPT)

The BPT Web is also a tool to make people know about all the cultural and educational activities of the library.

Every document produced for these activities becomes a virtual resource as well: author biographies, subject guides, collection updates, etc. In doing so many of the cultural activities become virtual resources for the citizens.

A good example of this is the *Racó del cinema* (The corner of cinema). In the audiovisual area of the TPL (BPT) we maintain a space dedicated to the cinema, where quality films and some subjects covered by recent movies are proposed. It also aims to promote specifically the Spanish and Catalan cinema among our users.

Subject guides on films, actors, directors, and events that also become virtual resources, are produced with these goals in mind.

At the moment it consists of nearly one hundred guides, as for instance: *Globalització i cinema: els conflictes d'avui a través de les pel·lícules* (about films on globalisation and current armed conflicts), *Casting: es busca Don Quixot: les adaptacions cinematogràfiques d'un classic universal* (guide on the film adaptations of *El Quijote*), *II República y Guerra Civil a la pantalla* (Guide on the II Republic and the Civil War on a cinema perspective).

This compilation of guides places the *Racó del cinema* as a widely used resource.

All the documents created for users' training and information literacy, become also virtual resources such as tutorials, guides for self-education on computers, Internet, office automation etc.

Collections digitized by the TPL (BPT)

The TPL doesn't keep any digitization project by itself, but cooperates with several digitization projects at a national level. The TPL Web provides access to the

institutional repositories that host some of the digitized collections of the TPL, made up of its relevant heritage collection.

Two of the current projects are the Biblioteca Virtual de Prensa Histórica (Virtual Library of Historical Press), and the Biblioteca Virtual del Patrimonio Bibliográfico (Virtual Library of Bibliographic Heritage), driven by the Subdirección General de Coordinación Bibliotecaria del Ministerio de Cultura (the libraries' section of the Ministry of Culture). Both projects have been welcome by people and media.

The Biblioteca Virtual de Prensa Histórica is a project launched by the Subdirección General de Coordinación Bibliotecaria in cooperation with regional administrations, and provides access to 1470 headlines from periodical publications from all over the country. Through this project, the TPL users have virtual access to a great part of the local newspaper graphics collection of the library. At present, there are already 67 titles of periodical publications available.

The Biblioteca Virtual del Patrimonio Bibliográfico (Virtual Library of Bibliographic Heritage), digitized 345.000 pages in 2006, numbered among which, there is an important collection of manuscripts (X to XVIII centuries) of the TPL, that came mostly from the Cistercian archives of Santes Creus y Poblet.

Professional resources for other libraries

A strategic line developed from the beginning of the Web, is to make available all the internal documentation related to the BPT management susceptible to go public, in order to attend all the questions arrived with the maximum efficacy. The goal is to make this documentation available to every library or librarian, so it can be used in his or her day-to-day work.

At the same time, this documentation makes the library management absolutely transparent for every citizen. It allows, for instance, the access to the Management Plan 2000-2004 report, to strategic goals of the current Strategic Plan (2005-2009), the answers to the poll on costumers satisfaction, the procedure guides, the Quality System documentation of the TPL, etc.

Virtual services for the TPL costumers

Other virtual services provided by the TPL are addressed to its costumers, pursuing the goal of fostering the use of the library and giving the value-adding possibility of using several of our library services, regardless of time or distance.

Some of these services are: virtual library loan (home delivered, social assistance, interlibrary), documentation query, new purchase proposals, catalogue access, loan renovation, several bibliographic information services, demand of official papers, demand of reader card, etc.

The goal is to satisfy the needs and expectations shown in the polls, that's to say, to build customer

loyalty and to make the use of the library easier regardless of the physical and temporal barriers.

Virtual resources and services evaluation

The full understanding of our visitors and costumers behaviour makes easier the decision making process in order to adapt and improve the services and contents, and to keep or withdraw from the Web the virtual resources offered.

In 2006, 195.494 users visited our Web. Using specific software, we are able to know their origin and the use given to our services. It is much more difficult to know their degree of satisfaction with their use of the Web, and whether these services full fill their expectations.

In order to know our visitors behaviour we have, since 2004, a program that studies the Log files generated by the Server, and produces automatically the corresponding reports in a graphic and easy way, so the log ins, visits, consultations and use of the resources of the Web page, can be determined.

This program, hosted in the server of the Departamento de Cultura (Culture Department), and common to the whole department, allows us to divide the results by services, producing reports on Web visitor, that the library BPT can receive in on-line time.

Through these generated reports we can analyze in detail how users navigate around the main areas of the Web, and we can study the tendencies of visitors and visits: discover if they are regular visitors or just occasional, the frequency of their visits, their geographic origin, visits in certain periods, and the length of their stay.

This information is very useful, both to evaluate the most used virtual services, the most consulted guides and to establish the strategy to follow for the creation and rebuilding of future services and resources.

Visitor's analysis and knowledge is basic for the library as organization, but far more important is to know the degree of satisfaction of our costumers in the daily use of its virtual services.

That's why BPT always includes in all their satisfaction questionnaires, some questions aimed to measure the knowledge and the use that the citizen makes of the Web and of the services it offers. It also produces virtual polls addressed to specific profiles of potential users of our services and contents.

In the poll made in May 1999 among library users, (a year after the opening of the library web), only 17,5% of them knew about the web. 72,4% of these, valued it as good or very good. Among those who didn't know about the web existence, 77% didn't have any access to the Internet. 19,4% didn't answer to the question (Poll, 1999, page 15).

In the telemarketing campaign from the BPT carried out in July 2002 among Tarragona citizens, (costumers of the library or not), the rate of them knowing the library arrives also at the 17,05%. All the people kno-

wing the library declare themselves as customers of one or more virtual services, being the most used ones, the access to the catalogue (64,44%), the on-line renewal service (26,67%), and the Local and Regional Press Database (8,99%). (Conèixer, 2002, page 12).

In the poll made in March 2004, about half of the library users already knew about the web, and 33,78% of them used it regularly. The exponential increase of library users that know and use the web occurred during the last two years, is direct consequence of the promotion effort of the virtual services that we have intensively made and also of the spreading of the Internet in the day-to-day life of people.

However, it is very difficult to go over the 50% borderline. The last global poll made by the TPL, in May 2005, shows that 52,94% of people didn't still know the Web, a rate lower than the 63% of 1999, but that still shows the need of promoting and spreading it.

Among the people that know the web, 7,85% qualifies it with the best grade, 18% with 4 out of 10 and 10% with 3. Only 7,84% brands it as bad. A significant part of users don't answer this question.

In order to promote the knowledge and use of the TPL Web, several promotional campaigns have been launched among the citizens. They range from ads in the local media, to booklets with information about virtual services to be given with books when the customer borrows them, digital versions of the current affairs guides, including the Internet address in every library publication, introducing the virtual services in the user training for children and in the information literacy programs for adults, advertising the Web in the library access and in the home page of the site of the social net TINET.

Looking to the future: the TPL Web as a place for meeting, learning and getting involved

Internet has been defined many times as an "information highway", but it gradually goes over this definition to become a meeting point, a parallel community, a universe created and supported by technology, that is producing high levels of interaction among all people.

Internet, through the new communication ways that is creating, gets people and interests together and makes it possible to participate virtually in community and political affairs.

The Public Library of Tarragona has prepared for the next two years two strategic guidelines that will be added to the already existing ones about virtual resources and services development:

- New services and resources development in cooperation and with the participation of citizens.
- The Web 2.0 is already there, and it opens a huge path to be discovered for libraries. The virtual ser-

vices and resources will be, more and more, produced cooperatively and with the participation of people. The blogs are performing a real revolution in public libraries.

The goals of the library in relation to this is not as much as hosting blogs in the TPL Web, as the institutional space of our Web in which they are hosted is complicated, as to foster the active cooperation of users that, through their blogs, cooperate in the TPL activities. And, the other way around, the BPT seeks to promote these blogs and the initiatives that may arise as, for instance, the new proposal to join all the readers blogs within a network.

Other interaction example is the private blog of a member of the TPL readers club ("el block de la Jaka") that brings under its umbrella the information and discussions generated in the BPT readers club; on several occasions the readers club has organized exhibitions and workshops about these literary blogs.

Within this strategic guideline of cooperating with the citizen and the community, it is framed the interest on renovating the cooperation with the social net TINET, and recovering the spirit of citizen collaboration that marked the beginning of the Web site in 1998, once the challenge of integrating our web within the virtual space of the Department of Culture of the Generalitat de Catalunya can be considered as finished completely at the end of 2007.

- Active participation in the construction of new electronic administrations.

Within the TPL we wish to be able to participate in the construction of new electronic administrations (e-government), whether through the already established cooperation with the Cat365 project of the Generalitat, and/or with the Tarragona City Council as the closest administration, developing new virtual services and resources.

We hope the project of cooperation between public libraries and the electronic administration Cat365 to be continued after a period of deadlock, and the cooperation with the City Council of Tarragona to start so we will all be able to perform our wishes of cooperation.

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