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The Modern and its impact on models of information organization in Brazil: the decline of the National Library and the rise of the National Book Institute (1930-1954)

Abstract
This paper seeks to discuss how the National Library of Brazil lost ground on the national scene after the coup d'état led by Getúlio Vargas in 1930 and even more so after the founding of the National Book Institute (INL). It highlights the fact that there was a change in the models followed by Brazilian libraries with the European model being replaced by the North American. It shows that several of the functions that previously belonged to the National Library were incorporated into the INL when it was founded, which contributed to the contemporary decline of the National Library, both in relation to other libraries and in terms of the techniques used in its wide-ranging collections. It concludes that the INL served as a means of propaganda for the national culture as it supported the Brazilian publishing industry and encouraged the creation throughout the country of libraries promoting national knowledge.

1. Introduction
At the beginning of the 20th century, the Brazilian National Library under the directorship of Manoel Cícero Peregrino da Silva underwent several changes, including the inauguration of a new building and the publication of a new regulation, although the biggest change implemented in the institution was the application of Otlet’s precepts of documentation to the organization of its collection.

Undergoing a profound transformation, the National Library adopted documentation precepts, becoming the Brazilian hub of a worldwide network of information exchange. In addition, it assumed national leadership of initiatives in favor of universal knowledge and the organization and diffusion of the country’s intellectual production. Accordingly, it inaugurated a bibliography and documentation service, in the mold of Otlet and La Fontaine’s proposals, which set about trying to publish the National Bibliography. In addition, the National Library served as a consultation warehouse for the National Bibliographic Repertoire (RBU), an information service which operated as a kind of reference desk for users to locate information they wanted, whether it was in the Library or not.

Moreover, the International Exchange Service was expanded, and contact with various institutions around the globe became more intensive and profitable. While receiving several publications from abroad, the Library also sent out its own, thus serving to disseminate both Brazilian intellectual knowledge and propaganda about the ideals defended by the newly proclaimed Republic, which demonstrates Brazil’s potentialities and how the country sought to develop in the wake of republican ideals.

However, in 1930, a new regime was installed in Brazil, and the so-called First
Republic ended, initiating a period that subsequently saw the establishment of the Estado Novo (New State) dictatorship, with Getúlio Vargas as its ruler. In fact, the great characteristic of the period was the reorganization of the Brazilian state, with new institutions being founded and many others going through a process of restructuring. In informational terms, if until 1930 the National Library had a monopoly on matters concerning the organization of information in the country, dictating rules and serving as a mirror for the other institutions, with the coup of 1930 and the consequent establishment of the Estado Novo that hegemony was broken and the Library lost many of its functions to the newly created the National Book Institute (INL), which took the lead in library affairs and the organization of the national bibliography, for example.

This paper aims to highlight how the change of the axis of influence in the organization of information in Brazil occurred, shifting from Otletian Documentation, of eminently European origins, to North American Librarianship.

We will use bibliographical research, especially from articles published in the Public Service Review, where the Public Service Administrative Department (DASP) – a body superior to the INL – published several opinions on the organization of information in the country, and legislation regulating the functions of Brazilian public administration bodies. In addition, consulting the Institute’s archives, held by the National Library, also assists greatly, since it will help us to understand the social role of the institution.

It is clear that the change in the model of Brazilian government resulted in major transformations to the institutional political framework. This explains why the National Library – which maintained a prominent position in the context of the First Republic – was rejected by the new government, since new guidelines and symbols were being forged. As a result, the National Book Institute emerged with the goal of being an achievement of the leadership period of Getúlio Vargas, whose first government lasted from 1930 to 1945.

In addition, mention must be made of the distinct cultural context in evidence, namely the rise of the Modernist movement, which since 1922 had begun to dominate the Brazilian scene. Thus, the kind of modernism that impacted the national intellect was more connected with what was later called the American way of life and with issues focused on the formation of a Brazilian culture concerned with national ideals, and whose Italian fascist model seduced some of the rulers of the country, especially Vargas.

We thus highlight the role of the INL as a promoter of culture through books, creating and modernizing public libraries throughout the country, especially in the most backward states, according to the government at the time; as well as its publication of books about Brazil and, above all, Brazilians. Therefore, if on one hand the inspiring model was American, the culture to be valued was Brazilian. In general, if one of the forms of disseminating Brazilian culture was through the creation of libraries, the
model that served as an inspiration for their establishment and organization was the American one, focused on the organization of information, but also on the education of its users.

2. The National Library and Otletian documentation

The National Library played a prominent role in the development of knowledge organization in Brazil, gaining, for a start, a new and modern building, inspired by the most advanced to be found in Europe and the United States in the first decade of the 20th century. In addition, it assumed the leading role in national librarianship, a fact highlighted by the enrichment of its collection, which was already the largest in the country and now became even bigger. This was achieved, moreover, by being given regulatory powers which promoted its leadership in initiatives to contact similar institutions abroad.

There is no shortage of evidence indicating the National Library’s aim to further knowledge organization at that time, with many distinct services being set up: the Information Service – created to provide guidance on where and how its users could get the information they wanted; the International Exchange Service – one of the ways used to enrich the collection; the Librarianship course – which sought to train professionals to be able to deal with the documentary variety of its collection; the Bibliography and Documentation Service – the utmost example of the Otletian documentalist influence in the institution (Juvêncio 2016).

Symbolic of the age when Brazil was ruled by emperors, the Library – the second most expensive item in the compensation that Brazil had to pay to Portugal at the time of independence in 1822 – had continually seen its relevance diminished, whether from being housed in inadequate facilities, or from governmental disenfranchisement. Only after 1900 did it gain prominence in the national life of the capital (Juvêncio 2016; Schwarcz, Azevedo and Costa 2004).

If there is one thing that the Brazilian Republic knew how to do, it was the construction of symbols, especially from positivist ideals. The National Library was thus called to take its place as a symbol of national power and the modernization that was sweeping through the then capital, Rio de Janeiro, and serving as an example to other national institutions of how Brazil could prosper. In addition to its sumptuous building, a major legal apparatus was set up so that it could carry out its functions as a repository for national memory. In fact, the main highlight in this regard was the issue of a new and modern Law of Legal Deposit, which obliged all national printers to send a copy of each work published in the country to the institution. In contrast, the Library would be responsible for publishing the National Bibliography, in order to publicize what was produced in the country, be it by Brazilians themselves, or foreigners (Juvêncio 2016).
The last of the actions carried out by the Library, the National Bibliography launched its first issue in 1918, after sending an official to Belgium to study the techniques employed by Otlet and La Fontaine in the construction of the Universal Bibliographic Repertoire (Juvêncio 2016; Rayward 1975). However, following his death in 1921, the institution found itself without a substitute and the production of the bibliography took a hiatus until the 1930s.

3. The National Book Institute

Manoel Cicero Peregrino da Silva left the administration of the National Library in 1924, and in the following years the institution suffered from the absence of the greatest icon of its modernization. The 1930s began with a sudden change in the Brazilian government system. After a coup, Getúlio Vargas deposed then President Washington Luis, taking control of the country (Gomes 2013).

The Vargas Era, as it was known, lasted 15 years (1930-1945), and though he was elected for another term between 1950 and 1955, he ended up committing suicide in 1954, after a great scandal with opponents (Abreu and Beloch, 1984).

The Vargas Era is known for its attempt to organize Brazil’s state machinery and public welfare, with the foundation of various institutions and a series of social breakthroughs such as the right to vote and regulation of labor laws. One of its most prominent bodies was the Public Service Administrative Department (DASP), responsible for organizing and managing the entire national public administration. At that time, libraries, archives, museums and other similar institutions followed the dictates imposed by the DASP in the organization of their services.

The word in vogue in the period was “culture”. These institutions thus began to serve as instruments for the promotion of national culture, with the enlargement of their institutions and the establishment of monopolies in several areas, including the economic sector. It is no surprise that Vargas was adept at implementing the fascist ideals in vogue in Europe.

In terms of cultural promotion, a new institution was created in 1937, the National Book Institute (INL), whose main aim was to publish works about Brazil and Brazilians, as well as to encourage the creation of libraries in the country, actions that the National Library had fulfilled for years but was at that time denied.

In addition, it was its function: "to organize and publish the Brazilian Encyclopedia and the Dictionary of the National Language" – a way of promoting Portuguese as the mother tongue and the culture of the country; "To publish all sorts of rare or precious works that are of great interest to the national culture" - a means of reissuing the classic works of Brazilian writers; "To promote the changes necessary to increase, improve and reduce the cost of book publishing in the country as well as to facilitate the importation of foreign books" - that is, to promote the national book industry; and,
finally, "to encourage the organization and assist the maintenance of public libraries throughout the national territory" (Brasil 1937).

Empowered with the ideals of the modernist movement, which since the 1920s had preached of promoting national culture as a way of strengthening national identity, the INL was the portrait of the national progressive spirit. Gustavo Capanema, contemporary Minister of Education, stated that libraries were necessary because they were "centers of formation of the personality, of understanding the world, of self-education, in short, centers of culture" (Fundação Getúlio Vargas 1997).

Therefore, the underdeveloped states of the country were targeted in the promotion of national culture through the implementation of libraries. Its collection was obviously endowed with the national classics and a minimal structure to serve its users, most of whom were students (Revista do Serviço Público 1938).

In fact, an important publication regarding the organization of information in the country was the Revista do Serviço Público. Published by the DASP, this journal featured articles on how to organize libraries, museums and archives, all aimed at modernizing such Brazilian institutions, providing them with information on the organization of information in the most developed countries, now that they were among their number. North America provided the most significant influence on the discourse of Brazilian thinkers involved in information organization, who all considered the model to be followed was that of the US Public Library, and its ideal that libraries should provide effective assistance in public education since childhood.

Thus, the INL based its actions on the American model of public libraries, as opposed to the National Library, which since its foundation in 1810 had more affinity with European ideas of information organization. From the 1930s onwards, European documentalist ideology lost prestige in the Brazilian intellectual milieu, giving way to American ideology, including more widespread dissemination of the Dewey Classification (Juvêncio 2016; Revista do Serviço Público 1940).

Against this scenario, the National Library once again lost ground, and it was only in the reform to its regulation in 1944 that the North American ideology became present. Another factor that had a significant impact on the decline of the National was the regulation that assigned the INL the function of publishing the National Bibliography. In addition to a clash of competencies, this made both institutions compete against each other to determine who would first publish this work, demanding undue effort and causing unnecessary costs. In fact, it seems to us that the National Library would, nevertheless, have more to lose, having been relegated to the background, in competition with a more powerful and prestigious institution whose height could only result in losses (Revista do Serviço Público, 1940).
4. Final considerations

The National Library, during the period of the First Republic (1889-1930), played a prominent role in Brazilian public administration, and was used as a showcase for modern Brazil, which the newly proclaimed Republic sought to promote as a viable performer on the world stage.

However, since the coup d'état of 1930, models previously in vogue gave way to new approaches to management, including those for libraries, museums and archives. The model of inspiration was now the Brazilian modernist movement - which in the literary and artistic fields had a great deal of prominence, with its icons assuming public functions focused on national culture and education, most of their work naturally being displayed in libraries, archives and museums.

Indeed, even with the nationalist notion so in vogue, it is not surprising that the models used to organize such institutions, rather than purely national ones, were adaptations of US models. The Revista do Serviço Público, through its articles, lobbied greatly for North American institutions to be the inspiration for those of Brazil. Thus, libraries developed their services along the same lines as their American counterparts.

In this context, the promotion of libraries was carried out by installing them right across the country, as a way of developing the culture and education of the local population, with the INL being the leader in this initiative.

It seems to us that the fact that the National Library was greatly identified with the deposed political regime meant that it played a secondary role in the new national organization, being surpassed by the National Book Institute as the new leader in the dissemination of culture and national science, as well as in the organization of the country's libraries.

References


