

Worldwide Immigration and Its Relation to Library Services

Do planners “pay it no mind”?

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THE WELL-WORN APHORISM from the constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization states that “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.” As we reach the end of the twentieth century, another force can be seen at work to defeat war, namely, the construction of hundreds of thousands of new communities—communities of persons, communities of nations, and in many senses, new international communities. The chief architect of this force in our society has been the immigrant, migrant, refugee, displaced person—all names for the individual who sought a new home in a strange country and, on arrival, was faced with the task of adapting to a new community.

The various types of migrants cited above not only reflect different motivations but also present widely different needs and expectations in terms of public services, including libraries. For purposes of this article, the distinction is made between permanent and temporary migration; the latter is treated elsewhere in this issue by Fest. Permanent immigrants have left their homes either voluntarily as refugees from political persecution, or as persons displaced by economic or political factors beyond their control. Whatever the reasons, “emigration...is a traumatic undertaking. The moment an emigrant steps aboard a plane, a ship, or a train *en route* to another country, he has already ceased to be a Portuguese, a German, a Scot, or whatever he used to be, and....has now become a consumer and indirectly, a tax-payer [in his new country].”¹

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Immigration impinges in varying degree and on several levels on both immigrants and the host society. The major role that the immigrant has played in all countries in the twentieth century will someday be realized, and credit given to a force that has profoundly stabilized relations between men and nations.

The purpose of this article is to summarize some of the considerations that face library planners as they study the role that public libraries can play in meeting needs of immigrants. Most evidence shows that, generally, the immigrants themselves plan and develop the kinds of library services that they need, often with public support, but in many cases without. They often develop parallel systems of library and reading services—those catering to their general needs and those catering to the special needs of their own linguistic communities. Whatever methods are used, the role of the immigrant in all countries has been an important one in furthering the transmission of cultures and the spread of literatures, and in securing the advancement of the indigenous populations.

While the present-day global society may have brought benefits to some settled persons, it has also brought about massive migrations and transplanting of persons on a scale never before seen in history. In the face of the uncertainty, poverty and racial strife that has generally been the lot of most immigrants, the needs of the new arrival in a country have been for mutual support, tolerance and active job encouragement. At the time of this writing (1979), 14 million migrant workers can be identified in all parts of the world. These are persons in the first stages of a process which could lead to their permanent transplanting to countries far from their native homes. To each immigrant the main concern is to develop a way of living that can sustain him (migrant men outnumber migrant women three to one) and deter the unpleasantness that big cities, crowded housing and broken family ties bring about. As well as being the architect of new communities, the immigrant is the chief contributor to the development of the pluralistic society, the society pledged to share common objectives and to respect differences.

William Grieder, writing from Washington, D.C., tells how his small son slowly categorized the persons eating in a neighborhood restaurant: "He's black and she's black and they're black." Then he observed with equal clarity and volume: "Mommy's white. Daddy's white. I'm white." A painful silence ensued. A black teenager at the next table did not look up from her cheeseburger. She merely remarked, "Don't pay it no mind, honey."²

Extent of Population Movement

Learning to live in a multiracial society is a basic part of every child's education. The extent of the changes that have taken place in North America are matched by similar changes in Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America. In the years 1950-74, the United States and Canada accepted 11.3 million permanent legal immigrants.³ Net legal immigration to the United States since 1960 has averaged about 350,000 people per year. This is in addition to the number of illegal immigrants, variously estimated at between 2 and 12 million. The most common estimates lie in a range of 3-6 million.

There are now more than 2.5 million migrant workers in Arab countries. Since about 75 percent of the migrants are Moslems, there is reason to believe that in many cases their stay will be permanent. In West Africa around 1.3 million migrant workers are found in the Ivory Coast, Ghana and Senegal, coming mainly from Upper Volta, Mali and Guinea. About 3 million migrant workers were in South America in 1975, more than two-thirds of them in Venezuela and Argentina.⁴ Here also, familiarity with the language and the desire to establish roots in the new countries lead many to long-term settlement. The principal countries supplying Latin American immigrants, among others, are Bolivia, Colombia and Paraguay.

The Problem of Urbanization

The pattern of settlement of newcomers is universal. The prime target for relocation is the urban center, and the spread of urbanism is a fundamental result of today's immigration waves. Because this is a worldwide phenomenon, it can be studied on a worldwide scale, and solutions to the problems of settlement may be attempted without regard to national distinctions.

Somewhere near the midpoint of the scale from a small neighborhood to an urbanized continent is the "million" city. These cities are urban settlements with populations of 1 million or more. Their numbers have increased nearly fivefold from 1925 to 1965; containing 2.9 percent of the world population in 1925, they had come to hold 8.2 percent in 1965.⁵

The rate of growth of "million" cities is faster than that of the world population. Two other facts should be noted: a snowball effect is discernible in that the larger, "multimillion" cities show an even faster rate of growth, and the greatest development is in the lower latitudes.⁶

Because these cities of south-south migration are almost totally without public library services, it is unlikely that the classical methods of library development used in the north-north immigration of the early twentieth century can be repeated in the South. New and different solutions are required, and many of the southern urban centers, such as those in Venezuela, Malaysia, Tanzania, and Nigeria, are attempting to develop them.

While many classifications of urban and rural society have been proposed, one which recommends itself to librarians concerned with planning services in a multicultural setting is the Ekistics* grid, which gives a feeling for the complexity of relationships involved in urban settlement patterns. In this classification there are five basic elements: nature, man, society, skills, and networks. Added to this is the category of synthesis. Included in the category of networks are the following: public utility systems, transportation systems, communication systems, and land use systems. Running across the scale are fifteen sizes of human habitation, ranging from a single-room dwelling to towns, metropolises, urbanized continents, and the giant Ecumenopolis.

Particular attention should be given to the part played by networks in this grid. It is here that changing public library service patterns can be located, as their planners attempt to meet the educational, cultural, recreational, and training needs of the various sizes of conurbations created by immigrant populations.

The Problem of Language

Multiculturalism implies, among other things, multilingualism, and no library service in the world can afford to neglect the facts of language. Many countries which were once considered single-language nations politically and socially are now in the forefront of bilingualism, and the range of official services which they supply in several languages increases daily. In the United States the bilingual phenomenon involves principally the Spanish-speaking, who are the nation's largest non-English-speaking group, as well as the fastest growing and the one that clings most strongly to its own language. According to a 1976 survey of the National Center for Education Statistics, one of every eight persons in the United States has a non-English-language background and one-third of those are Spanish-speaking. The survey also found that three-fourths of a conservative total of 11.2 million people of Hispanic background in the United States were born there.⁷

*The science of human settlement, developed by C. Doxiadis (*Encl. of urban planning*).

Worldwide Immigration and Library Services

A ruling by the United States Supreme Court made bilingual instruction in the public school system mandatory for children from non-English-language backgrounds, and the federal government has set up a regulatory mechanism to assure that they receive it. Apart from education, there are statutory protections for bilingual voting rights, and court actions have entrenched decisions taken in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut guaranteeing bilingual services in areas such as pension and welfare rights, judicial proceedings and the rights of members of labor unions.

Canada has rapidly changed from a two-language country to one in which, in a number of regions, several languages are dominant and English or French has come to be the second language. In terms of Canadian politics, the most important ethnic issue is the use and retention of languages. By the "official language designation," 67 percent of all Canadians speak English only, 18 percent speak French only, 13.4 percent speak both English and French, and 1.5 percent speak neither.

Whatever his origin, the immigrant faces hardships and problems which libraries can alleviate. Command of the new language is the most urgent need, whether it be for searching for work, shopping, or information on elementary rights and duties of a citizen. Failure to understand and speak the dominant language can be a severe obstacle to economic progress and personal happiness. Free "second-language" courses are offered during the day and in the evenings in many if not most countries of immigration.

Another problem is culture shock, and that hits many immigrants twice, depending on their background and tradition. On one hand, they will personally miss the way of life they had been used to, but on the other hand, their children will adapt quite easily to their new country. While this effortless integration may smooth the children's path both vocationally and socially, it often leads to friction within families and, ultimately, alienation. The most frequently cited examples concern young daughters from families whose tradition dictates that girls be protected for the sake of their own and their family's honor. Naturally, the Western practice of dating is looked upon with anguish by parents from, for example, Italy, Portugal or the Middle East. Some libraries have difficulty inducing women from certain ethnic groups to go unaccompanied to the library. As a way out, functions such as language classes are sometimes held in people's homes.

Multilingual Publishing, Radio and Television Communication

The existence of multicultural and multilingual publishing and broadcasting services operating on a national basis is a powerful factor in transforming a multitude of separate language groups into a single political force. Multilingual publishing and broadcasting have been used by government agencies in all continents as a key method of introducing new citizens to civic duties, civic responsibilities, and civic rights and privileges.

An outstanding example of the role of multilanguage publications is in the USSR, which from 1947 to 1977 experienced massive migration and resettlement. Twenty-five million people left the front-line areas during World War II for the republics of central Asia as well as for Siberia and the Far East. The government understood and financially supported the need to provide reading, broadcasting and television services in dozens of languages when it saw the benefits such a policy would bring. During this period 48,000 book titles were published in translation from foreign (non-USSR) languages, in addition to original publications in ninety-one languages of the peoples of the USSR.⁸

Public Policy and Information Services

As more countries face the need to arrive at some form of public policy with regard to the nature of information they will provide to citizens, the matter of treating immigrants' information needs often arises. This is particularly important in countries that depend on immigrants for their skilled manpower. The treatment of the newcomer requires that he receive no less access to information than he had in his former home. This matter entails a number of critical issues, particularly in the case of citizens of colonial and ex-colonial countries. Eastern European political refugees, and displaced citizens in all parts of the world fleeing from internal revolutionary changes in their home countries, have been active in their insistence on maintenance of their language and cultures.

It is often considered vital for the security of a country's internal affairs that there be censorship of domestic news and broadcasts, and of publications admitted into the country or published there. This poses many problems for public library policies of access, and can very often result in the reduction of collections and staff.

However, at some time in the development of a country its information policy is periodically reviewed and often much pressure is applied by those from abroad who need to maintain contact with sources of

information that will help to develop the economic and social well-being of the country. For this reason, there is a general interest in the library's involvement in the development of public policies on information services, and in supporting active policies of access to information and knowledge.

The World Crisis in Education and Literacy

In 1970 the First Development Decade, sponsored by the United Nations as a common program of the countries of the world to deal systematically with the imbalance in living standards, came to an end. Yet in spite of efforts in many countries, notably India, Iran, Tanzania, Brazil, Cuba, Singapore, and Jamaica, all of which had succeeded in reducing the percentage of their illiterates, the number of illiterates continued to grow throughout the world.

The failure to reduce world illiteracy must be considered one of the disappointments of the First Development Decade. Despite an unprecedented growth of primary education in the 1950s and 1960s and the focusing of world attention on education's value as a factor in economic change: "There were actually more illiterate adults at the end of the decade than at the beginning....The main reasons for the failure to obtain better results were the high rates of population growth in earlier years and the fact that the resources devoted by governments and industry to out-of-school education of youth and adults have been inadequate."⁹ The responsibility for global illiteracy now rests with the industrial countries. They can no longer continue to import trained manpower and thereby drain the resources of poorer countries.

"In a message issued on the occasion of International Literacy Day, (September 8, 1977), the Director-General [of Unesco, Mr. M'Bow] said that this increase in the number of illiterates 'can no longer be tolerated at a time when the community of nations is studying the establishment of a new international order.'" Mr. M'Bow went on to say that "the total cost of a single prototype bomber with its equipment is equivalent to the [combined] annual salary of 250,000 teachers."¹⁰

Because of the scale of worldwide immigration, no public library service is unaffected by the needs of the newcomers. In some cases, the service may resist changing established practices for some time. In the end, however, the different needs become apparent; and although they "don't pay it no mind" in terms of surface differences, only at their peril can libraries neglect the fundamental requirements which the immigrant member of each society presents for consideration.

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