

COMUNIDAD DE MADRID OPEN LIBRARY PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

The Spanish Economy in relation to the number of immigrants has changed substantially in the last 20 years, mainly, in the last 10 ones. From a 0,5% of foreign population in 1991 to more than 12% in 2010, while the Comunidad de Madrid was, that year, over 17%, though in June 2011 it had fallen down to almost 16%.

From 2005, the Public Libraries at the Comunidad de Madrid are carrying out a program called Open Library with the target to facilitate the integration of the immigrants who arrive to the region with linguistic barriers into the Madrilian society. The program is framed within the actuaciones of the “Plan for the Aument of Reading” of the Comunidad de Madrid, where one of the main priorities is to develop through public libraries, work programs aimed at overcoming barriers in the access and use of information and culture, guaranteeing citizens equal opportunities for participation in the Information Society.

Implementing such a program was necessary because of the change in Spanish society in a short period of time. Open Library is to respond to this new reality, launching new services and activities in public libraries where an intercultural perspective is present. Given this reality, the program develops multilingual library services (self-study of languages, Spanish classes for foreigners, reading in other languages, classes in information literacy and digital activities facilitating the intercultural meeting and exchange, learning to function in society and the ways of actively seeking work), focused on social cohesion and promoting a sense of belonging and attachment to the community.

METHODOLOGY:

The team of the program is made up by the librarians from the participating libraries, bilingual cultural mediators (fluent in Spanish and some of the immigrants' mother tongues) and two coordinators of the program. Mediators are an essential piece of the team, as they carry out the bulk of the implementation of Open Library. From 2005 to present, there have worked 276 intercultural mediators whose native languages are Arabic, Romanian, Russian, Bulgarian, Polish, Chinese and Ukrainian. For the first time a new figure is included in the libraries: the intercultural mediator, who works within the traditional public library, bringing a new vision, sensitivity and experience in interacting with cultural diversity of users.

The Coordinators have the special mission to convey to the staff the Open Library intercultural approach, i.e. developing an active tolerance, overcoming ethnocentrism and listening to the Other, seeking the convergence of cultural diversity to establish links and common meeting points. The basic functions of the coordination team are management, monitoring and evaluation of the program.

RESULTS:

- Creation and maintenance of multilingual book collections in libraries (Arabic, Russian, Polish, Bulgarian, Romanian, Chinese), non-existent until 2006.

- Creation of the subsection "Community Information" (foreign newcomer).

- Creating cultural spaces.

- Annual participation in activities, from 15,000 to 20,000 people, most of them have come to the library for the first time. In this sense approach and highlight the participation of Moroccan women.
- Collaboration with immigrant associations and other institutions has increased.
- Organizing meetings with the library staff concentrating on a multicultural perspective, highlighting the best practices in other libraries and in other countries with long experience in the reception of immigrants.
- The visibility of the library has been increased as the closest center to the citizen that contributes to providing equal opportunities through non-formal continuous learning, as well as promote coexistence through the knowledge of different cultures that make up the municipality.
- Annual surveys show high satisfaction of the users.

SUCCESS

- Maria Moliner Award 2009 for National Reading Promotion for municipalities under 20,000 inhabitants, within the category of Social Integration for the effort made towards the immigrant population and participation by promoting coexistence between people of different cultures and nationalities.
- Open Library in 2012 was selected as good practice by the [Cities of Migration](#) of the [Fundación Maytree](#).
- So far 24 municipalities of different sizes have participated (from over 3 million (Madrid) to less than 5000) and one of the successes of the

program has been tailored to the needs of each municipality as far as each one has different degrees of development of cultural infrastructure and social services.