

**SOME BARRIERS THAT HAMPER THE FREE, FREE OF CHARGE, EGALITARIAN  
AND DEMOCRATIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION RESOURCES IN  
UNDERDEVELOPED COUNTRIES' PUBLIC LIBRARIES**

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These are some of the barriers that hamper the free, free of charge, egalitarian, and democratic access to information resources in the underdeveloped countries' public libraries.

- **Economic barriers. Underdeveloped** countries owe to the developed ones an external economic debt so difficult to be paid in a very long time. Developing countries struggle to pay their national external debt interests and most of their national incomes are allocated on those matters and as an unfortunate consequence, the educational and information technology development are then stopped so they can take care of priority issues like paying their debt interests and coping with basic needs problems: health, public basic services, housing, etc. For instance, some of the resolutions of the Group of Eight who met last year came up with the proposal to give money for Information Technologies to the developing countries, specifically to introduce Internet. But today only 429 million of people in the world have Internet access, where Latin America only accounts with a 4 % (See: Nielsen/Netratings News 6/11/01, <http://www.eratings.com/news/20010611.htm>), and the world has 6,156,268,561 inhabitants according to the U.S. Census Bureau (6/25/01). That is, 429, 000, 000 people in the world have Internet access (14 %), while 5, 727, 268, 561 (86 %) do not.
- **Political barriers.** Some national governments are ruling their people in an anti democratic fashion.. This fact per se affects several human rights, including freedom to expression, to access of information, intellectual freedom and other liberties. Their actions go from simple non violent to violent ones: censorship, intolerance, repression, etc. Besides to this, the international community, specially from the highly developed countries, seems not to have the best ways to approach these problems and issue laws with a pretended international reach which in certain way affect those anti democratic countries mainly on the economic sector. And what happen is that the anti democratic countries blame on the highly developed ones they are intervening in their internal affairs. The international policies against the anti democratic countries then tightens, and the latter ones do so to theirs having disastrous results and not coping with the problems.
- **Cultural barriers.** People from the world have not reached the development on economics, or politics like the majority of the nations. Therefore, their culture keeps

on growing one or two steps behind with the developed one. But what is ahead or behind is something so discussable on economics and politics; on cultural issues is even more discussable. Many people are still indigenous and have not become part of the mainstream of society's development. But they do have too their rights to free access to information, expression, etc. The thing is they historically have been staying apart from society's mainstream.

- **Legal barriers.** The major quest between libraries and legal issues is that libraries stand or should stand for putting information and its technological media the more accessible and free as possible to all worldwide users, but information is produced by authors, and it has a cost, the law then stands to protect the right of authors and/or their publishers and watch for they get their right royalties and utilities. But the law has to legislate too in favor of the universal, free, free of charge, egalitarian, and democratic access of publications and freedom of information, intellectual freedom. Henry H. Perrit, Jr. and Zachary Rustad (see: "Freedom of Information Spreads to Europe" in *Government Information Quarterly*. Vol. 17. No. 4. 2000, p. 403-17.) point out that legislation on freedom of information has developed very slowly. They show a very huge gap since 1766 when Sweden was the first nation to issue an information freedom act until 1951 when Finland adopted such a law. That the USA adopted such a law in 1966 and that until 1992 with the Maastrich Treaty the Europeans Nations began to legislate on freedom of information, and among them, from 1998 to 2000, Germany and the United Kingdom are leading the way. Thus, legislation on freedom of information, where the main issues up to now are to make government information available to a national and worldwide public over the Internet, is a recent issue. If the developed countries are behind scarcely now doing this, it is expected the rest of the world be behind.

Authors who have conducted research on these barriers:

ALA's Intellectual Freedom Office papers and reports

ALA's Intellectual Freedom Manual

Shiraz Durrani

IFLA/FAIFE's papers and reports

Brian Martin

Henry H. Perrit Jr.

Zachary Rustad

Toni Samek

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## References

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Nielsen/Netratings News (2001). "429 Million People Worldwide Have Internet Access, According To Nielsen/Netratings", *Nielsen/Netratings News*, June 11, 2001, <http://www.eratings.com/news/20010611.htm>

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