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# Libros Para Pueblos: An Exploratory Case Study Libros Para Pueblos: une étude de cas exploratoire

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### Résumé de l'article

Cet article est le fruit d'un projet d'étude de cas sur deux ans qui examinait les bibliothèques communautaires soutenues par Libros Para Pueblos (LPP), un organisme sans but lucratif dans l'état d'Oaxaca, au Mexique. LPP est une organisation de bibliothèques gérée en grande partie par des bénévoles basée dans la capitale d'Oaxaca de Juarez. Afin d'analyser le travail du LPP, nous avons utilisé les neuf aspects élaborés par Mostert et Vermeulen (1998) pour évaluer les bibliothèques communautaires. Au cours des 20 dernières années, le nombre de bibliothèques soutenues par l'organisation est passé de deux à plus de 70 dans tout l'état. Le travail qui a facilité cette croissance est menée par une petite équipe de personnel mexicain ainsi que par un comité exécutif et un conseil d'administration composés principalement d'Américains et de Canadiens vivant au Mexique. Le travail requiert du temps et est exigeant, mais il est alimenté par une idéologie positive de la lecture provenant des souvenirs d'enfance liés à la lecture. Cette motivation est partagée par un réseau de 11 coordonnateurs de bénévoles régionaux mexicains qui forment et soutiennent le personnel local des bibliothèques. Les employés locaux font souvent leur *tequio*, qui est une exigence sociale pour travailler pendant un ou deux ans dans le service public. Nous soutenons que le succès des bibliothèques LPP est influencé par : 1) une structure organisationnelle qui impose un leadership mexicain au niveau exécutif et pour les postes rémunérés; 2) l'initiation provenant des représentants locaux; 3) les configurations communautaires socialistes qui sont uniques et complexes dans la région d'Oaxaca; 4) une importante communauté de retraités qui sont bénévoles à divers niveaux; et, 5) des dons nationaux et internationaux.

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## Libros Para Pueblos: An Exploratory Case Study

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### **Abstract**

This article is the result of an introductory two-year case study project that investigated community libraries supported by the not-for-profit organization [Libros Para Pueblos \(LPP\)](#) in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico. LPP is a largely volunteer-run library organization based in the capital city of Oaxaca de Juárez. In order to analyse the work of LPP we used Mostert & Vermeulen's (1998) nine areas for evaluation of community libraries. Over the past 20 years, the number of libraries the organization supports has grown from two to more than 70 throughout the state. The work that has facilitated this growth is carried out by a small Mexican staff, along with an Executive Committee and a Board of Directors made up of Americans and Canadians living in Mexico. The work is both time consuming and demanding, but it is fuelled by a positive reading ideology that is a result of memories of childhood reading. This motivation is shared by a network of 11 Mexican Regional Volunteer Coordinators who train and support local library workers. The local workers are often doing their *tequio*, which is a social requirement of working for one or two years in public service. We argue that the success of LPP libraries is

influenced by: 1) an organizational structure that mandates Mexican leadership at the executive level and in paid staff positions; 2) initiation from local representatives; 3) the unique and complex socialist community configurations of the Oaxacan region; 4) a community of retirees who volunteer at many levels; and 5) national and international donations.

## **Keywords**

community libraries, volunteerism, reading culture, Mexico, Oaxaca

## **Introduction**

Libros Para Pueblos (LPP) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to “partnering with communities in Oaxaca, Mexico, to establish lending libraries for children, provide free access to books and technology, and develop advocates for the joy and discovery of reading” (Libros Para Pueblos, n.d.). This article, based on an exploratory case study conducted in 2016 and 2017, is an introduction to this organization. We define LPP as an organization serving rural community libraries and to our knowledge, no scholarly literature has been written about the community library work being conducted in Mexico. Our article begins to fill this gap. We do this by using Mostert and Vermeulen’s (1998) nine areas of evaluation in the analysis of LPP: 1) establishment; 2) aims; 3) government; 4) finance; 5) users; 6) information; 7) services; 8) staff; and 9) cooperation, paying particular attention to the work that the staff and volunteers do to support reading promotion in the state of Oaxaca.

## **Libros Para Pueblos**

Libros Para Pueblos was founded in 2000 and is based in the capital city of Oaxaca de Juárez. Over the past almost 20 years, the organization has supported the establishment and maintenance of an increasing number of local libraries throughout the entire state of Oaxaca. Today it supports 74 local libraries (LPP Annual Report, 2018) and, according to the organization itself, more than 14,000 children and adults used LPP supported libraries in 2017 (True Roots International, 2018). The main focus of LPP is reading promotion among children, and the support of parents reading to their children. Once a year the organization provides the local libraries with new children’s books in Spanish, and in indigenous languages whenever possible. LPP also trains the local library workers, and in recent years several of the LPP libraries have been equipped with tablets in order to improve information literacy among the children in the local villages.

## **Oaxaca**

Located in the south of Mexico, Oaxaca is the country’s fifth-largest state, covering more than 95,000 square kilometres (Dent, 2002). It is sparsely populated and known for its indigenous cultures, which have survived better than in many other parts of Mexico due to the rugged and isolated terrain. Sometimes access roads are impassable. With more than 16 indigenous languages actively spoken, it is the most

ethno-linguistically diverse state in the country. An estimated 17% of the population is categorized as illiterate (UNESCO, 2014). Oaxaca is also one of the poorest states of Mexico (Rojas Miranda & Cano Cruz, 2015; OECD, 2015). UNESCO (2009, 2014) identifies direct correlations between indigenous populations and poverty, marginalization, access to education, and educational attainment (2014, p. 3).

Agriculture is the main industry, with a majority of the population living in small towns or villages in rural areas. Typical to the state of Oaxaca is the complex social system of *ejido* land. The *ejido* system was created in the 1930s, as a part of the land reform after the Mexican revolution, but was based on a system of similar type that existed in the pre-Hispanic era. An *ejido* is an area of communal land used for agriculture, wherein community members individually farm small allotments and collectively maintain communal holdings. The *tequio*, which is a social requirement of living on *ejido* land and of working for the community, is administered by Comisariado de Bienes Comunales (Commission of Communal Good). It is a co-operative system of:

village-wide labour draft through which workers are mobilized by mandate of the elected village political authorities on an ad hoc basis . . . as a user of communal village resources, [each citizen is] obliged to provide his [sic] labour, without remuneration, for *tequio* purposes... *Tequio* obligations [are accepted] in the same spirit as they (and we) accept taxes: as an unavoidable price for residence in their communities and for the right to use communal resources . . . The work is 'voluntary' yet compulsory (Cook, 1982, as cited in Zakus, 1998, p. 476)

It is important to note that the *ejido* system encourages cultural institutions to work towards the development of all residents. A local community library can be included in this system, and voluntary work in the library consequently serves as a way for an individual to offer something for the benefit of the whole community.

## ***Literature Review***

### **Community Libraries**

Libraries are, first and foremost, social instruments (Shera, 1973). They take their shape and purpose from the communities they serve, which also makes them cultural institutions. When those communities do not enjoy the high levels of literacy and education that have been historically associated with the (usually urban) public library, the need for a new library paradigm emerges (Mostert & Vermeulen, 1998). Examples of this new paradigm can be readily adduced in the category of "alternative library models" (Shrestha & Krolak, 2015, p. 5), a category in which the "community library" or "rural community library" is the most frequently studied, and the alternative library model that describes those that are served by LPP.

Variously termed "rural libraries," "village libraries," "reading rooms," "community information centres," and "community resource centres," community libraries originated in Africa in the 1960s (Stranger-Johannessen, 2014), giving rise to a body of literature that has only recently transitioned from the conceptual to the empirical. Most of that

work comes out of Africa (Dent, 2006; Mostert, 1998), but there are also studies about Asia and Australia (Abu, 2014; Islam, 2009), Eastern Europe or Latin America (Civallero, 2007; Lipeikaite & Oyarzun, 2013), although nothing about Mexico.

Mostert and Vermeulen (1998) provide a definition of community libraries based on literature about the situation in South Africa and describe them as a type of library that has moved “away from the passive traditional Western public library model towards active service-oriented systems, based on the needs of the community as a whole” (p. 71). Some of the important characteristics are that the library has to be established at the request of the community; that the aims are pro-active service and empowerment of all community members, especially the disadvantaged; and that an active cooperation exists between library and community organizations. Community libraries are usually located in small villages and often operate without public support, through unpaid work done by the local population and with funds raised among local people or through charitable organizations. The villages can be isolated and sometimes without electricity. Sometimes the local culture can be largely an oral culture where the written word has little cultural significance, and where the proportion of people who cannot read and write is significant.

Mostert and Vermeulen summarized the basic characteristics of community libraries as presented in the literature, and organized them into nine different areas. They used those different areas as a framework for their evaluation of a community library system implemented by the Pinetown Public Library. And, as already mentioned, we found Mostert and Vermeulen’s areas to be a useful analytical framework for this study of LPP and will return to them below.

West African rural community libraries have been the objects of research during the last 20 years, led by Americans Valeda F. Dent and Geoff Goodman. For example, they have studied the activities of the Kitingasa Library in Uganda (Dent, 2006, 2007; Dent & Yannotta, 2005) and other community libraries in Burkina Faso and Ghana (Dent & Goodman, 2008), exploring the impact of the library on the communities they serve. They are currently investigating the effectiveness of a storytelling/story-acting intervention on preschool children’s school readiness skills in two rural Ugandan community libraries (Dent & Goodman, 2017). Dent, Goodman, and Michael Kevane (2014) offer a comprehensive description of the rural community library movement in Africa, including a solid presentation of the existing research. They also present an overview of select organizations from different parts of the world, supporting and working with rural community libraries.

LPP is not on this list, but the Riecken Community Libraries are included. They assist rural communities in Central America with the establishment of local libraries and information centres. The organization supports approximately 60 local libraries in Honduras and Guatemala (Riecken, 2019).

To our knowledge, there are still no scholarly studies about community libraries in Central America or Mexico.

## Volunteering

Uniting organizations working with rural community libraries in different parts of the world is their dependency on charity and unpaid voluntary work. There are many published studies and much literature available on what motivates individuals to volunteer, although not much focussing particularly on library work.

There are six functional motivations for volunteering: values, understanding, social motivations, career, protective motivations, and enhancement, according to Clary et. al. (1998). They found that individuals volunteer “to express values related to altruistic and humanitarian concerns for others” (p. 1517) and “to permit new learning experiences and the chance to exercise knowledge, skills, and abilities that might otherwise go unpracticed” (p. 1518). Volunteering also offers opportunities for social activities and can provide career related benefits. Clary et. al.’s protective function of volunteering is “protecting the ego from negative features of the self and, in the case of volunteerism, may serve to reduce guilt over being more fortunate than others and to address one’s own personal problems” (p. 1518). Finally, the enhancement function sees individuals “volunteer for reasons of personal development or to obtain satisfactions related to personal growth and self-esteem” (p.1518).

Similar to Clary et. al.’s enhancement function, Jessica B. Rodell’s (2013) research looks into individuals who find meaning through volunteering. Rodell has found that often individuals dissatisfied with their careers turn to volunteer work “when jobs are less meaningful” and that “employees are more likely to increase volunteering to gain that desired sense of meaning in life” (p. 1289). Workers “may also volunteer to compensate for jobs that do not provide enough meaning” (p.1289). Helen Bussell and Deborah Forbes’ (2002) earlier research focuses on altruism and volunteers’ need to help other people (p. 249). They identified a “selective incentive concept,” which indicates a “sense of belonging, the need for affiliation, gaining prestige or self-esteem, or a way of making friends” (p. 249) in volunteer situations.

Morris Okun’s (1994) research looked into the frequency of volunteering among older volunteers and found that this group volunteers to feel useful or productive. They might also volunteer to occupy spare time (Anderson & Moore, 1978) or to express themselves and act on their values and beliefs (Okun & Eisenberg, 1992; Omoto & Snyder, 1998) and to pass them on (Bradley, 1999; Shor, 1992).

Library volunteerism, wherein volunteers assist with libraries and information centres in need, can be initiated by an individual or through an organized group effort or non-profit organization such as LPP or Librarians without Borders (LWB). LWB is a North American non-profit volunteer group that conducts service trips to developing countries and was created by “socially-minded librarians who wanted to address the vast information resource inequity existing between different regions of the world” (Librarians Without Borders, n.d., para 1). Their mandate is to “improve access to information resources regardless of language, geography, or religion, by forming partnerships with community organizations in developing regions”. (Librarians Without Borders, n.d., para 2). Universal access to information is the organizational goal (Peters, 2014). Doing this

in an ethically sound way, however, can be challenging but imperative. LWB founder, Melanie Sellar wrote that international librarianship should be “reciprocal, action-oriented, and focused on advancing our shared profession,” while also “mov[ing] . . . activities beyond short term charity work or descriptive studies into work that can have an influential and long lasting impact” (Sellar, 2016, p. 7; Carlyle & Winn, 2018, p. 72).

While there is much literature available on the broad topics of volunteering and international librarianship (i.e., international library work for paid compensation), little research exists on volunteering in libraries internationally or the organizations that serve them, and on groups such as LWB and LPP, in particular.

### ***Project Goals and Research Questions***

The primary goal of this case study was to conduct a preliminary study that would serve as an introduction to LPP and provide a foundational context for a larger, multi-year study. In this phase of our work, we focus on the structure of LPP and workers, both paid and unpaid, who support it. While we use Mostert and Vermeulen’s (1998) nine areas of evaluation of community libraries as a useful analytical framework, we acknowledge that LPP serves the libraries and is not a library itself.

Mostert and Vermeulen’s first area refers to the circumstances connected to the establishment of the library: was it on request from the community and in cooperation from the community? The second area has to do with the governance, and whether there is a community committee participating in the management, ensuring relevant services. The third area is about the finances and whether there are funds for the library, provided by the community or by sponsors. The fourth area focuses on aims, and whether it is about providing proactive service, empowerment of all community members, and making all community resources available to all community members. The fifth area focuses on the users: is the library open to the whole community or can restrictions be imposed? The sixth area is about information related to the everyday-life of the community members: what kind of information does the library provide and how is it disseminated? The seventh area is about the services provided by the library and to what extent these services include an active interaction between the library and the users. The eighth area is about the staff: do they, for example, have different qualities than those of traditional librarians and are they known to and trusted by the community? Finally, the ninth area deals with whether there is cooperation between the library and other community organizations (Mostert & Vermeulen 1998, Table 3).

The framework is robust, however this first phase of our study pays more attention to some areas over others. Notably, we pay close attention to the work that the staff and volunteers do and less on the users of the libraries themselves.

Our overall research question for this phase of the project is: what is LPP doing that has enabled continuous growth of the program?

Secondary questions include:

- How is LPP meeting local needs?
- How do they provide their services while maintaining a respect for, and preservation of, local culture?
- What can we learn about LPP that contributes to the literature about international community libraries?

## **Research Methods**

Our motivations for investigating the work of LPP is connected to our professional backgrounds as reading researchers (Authors 2 & 3), and as a librarian and international librarian volunteer (Author 1). We all have special interests in reading promotion, popular education, and public libraries; have no personal connections to LPP; and have never worked or volunteered for the organization ourselves.

After learning about the organization through our volunteer and professional networks, we became intrigued and realised that no scholarly literature has been written about community libraries in Mexico. This article is a result of our preliminary project and aims to begin to fill the gap in the literature.

Our exploratory case study was based on field work carried out in Oaxaca during March 2016 and February 2017, using general observation, participant observation, and interviews. It also includes close readings of LPP documents. All research methods were approved through University Research Ethics processes and Table 1 illustrates our research activities and locations.

**Table 1**  
*Fieldwork*

<u>Date</u>	<u>Research Activity</u>	<u>Location</u>
March 15, 2016	Interview with past volunteer executive committee member (active current volunteer; requested anonymity)	Restaurant in Parque El Llano (near LPP Offices, Oaxaca Lending Library)
March 16, 2016	Interview with staff member Judith Marcial, Executive Director	LPP Offices, Oaxaca Lending Library, Oaxaca de Juárez, Región Valles Centrales
March 16, 2016	Interview with volunteer executive committee member (requested anonymity)	LPP Offices, Oaxaca Lending Library, Oaxaca de Juárez, Región Valles



		Centrales
March 16, 2016	Informal observation of local library	San Jerónimo Tlacoahuaya, Tlacolula, Región Valles Centrales
March 16, 2016	Informal observation of local library and interview with library supporter	Poblado Morelos Etna, Región Valles Centrales
March 21, 2016	Library visit; Interview with three volunteer local librarians, one of whom had served as a volunteer regional coordinator	Puerto Escondido, San Pedro Mixtepec, Región Costa
March - April, 2016	Research team debriefing, interview transcription and data analysis	Oaxaca, Nova Scotia
February 21, 2017	Informal participant observation of annual conference package preparation	LPP Offices, Oaxaca Lending Library, Oaxaca de Juárez, Región Valles Centrales
February 21, 2017	Formal observation of local library	Oaxaca Lending Library, Oaxaca de Juárez, Región Valles Centrales
February 22, 2017	Interview with volunteer President and Chair of Executive Committee Enid Lynn Rosenthal, volunteer executive committee member (same person as last year, requested anonymity), and new Executive Director José Luis Zárate García	LPP Offices, Oaxaca Lending Library, Oaxaca de Juárez, Región Valles Centrales
February 22, 2017	Interview with Cristiam Omar Santos, local librarian and regional coordinator	LPP Offices, Oaxaca Lending Library, Oaxaca de Juárez, Región Valles Centrales
February 23, 2017	Informal interview with Ronald Waterbury, Martha Reese, and Rachel Lashbrook, anthropologists	Welte Institute for Oaxacan Studies, Inc., Oaxaca de Juárez

February 23, 2017	Library visit, participant observation	Santa Inés de Zaragoza, Nochixtlán, Región Mixteca
February 24, 2017	Library visit; informal interview with local librarian and her assistant	San Felipe del Agua, Oaxaca de Juárez, Región Valles Centrales
February 24, 2017	Participant observation of conference preparation	Escuela Secundaria General, Moises Saenz Garza, Oaxaca
February 25, 2017	Participant observation of the Annual Conference for Librarians	Escuela Secundaria General, Moises Saenz Garza, Oaxaca
February - May 2017	Research team debriefing, meetings, interview transcription and data analysis	Nova Scotia and Sweden

Our research methods included in-depth interviews with the following: two paid staff members (one of whom is no longer with the LPP organization); the board of director leader (president and chair of the executive committee); one previous board member who remains active as a volunteer; one executive committee member; and two volunteer regional directors (one of whom no longer serves LPP in this capacity but remains as a volunteer librarian and the other who also serves as a local librarian). In total, we interviewed five local librarians and observed five libraries. We participated in a one-day annual LPP meeting with representation from more than 70 communities supported by the organization. We conducted participant observation and talked to some of the leaders of the different sessions and workshops. Our data sources also include documents shared by the organization or available via their website (Libros Para Pueblos, 2017, 2018, 2019; Marcial & Hernandex, 2016; True Roots International, 2018). Our work is informed by the knowledge shared by anthropologists and informal meetings with a library supporter.<sup>1</sup>

Table 1 outlines where the interviews took place. English was used in the interviews with those who spoke English, and Spanish in the interviews with Mexicans (two of us speak fluent Spanish). The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. Data analysis included manual coding based on our research questions.

During our library visits and at the annual LPP meeting we each kept individual notes and also took photos. We made reflection notes during the library visits, talks and

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<sup>1</sup> In order to maintain anonymity, we sometimes withhold identifying information in our discussion below.

interviews, which we discussed and edited together later the same day. The photos and field notes, along with the transcriptions, also serve as our data.

As noted above, we received ethical research clearance for our project. We did not recruit for participants outside of the administrative level of the organization; other participants came to us through word of mouth within the organization. Before all interviews, the participants were informed about our research goals, their right to not participate in the study, their right to anonymity and confidentiality, and their right to withdraw from the study. In addition, the annual conference session leaders we talked to in Oaxaca City were also informed about our study and agreed to participate. Generally speaking, the people with whom we spoke were interested in the study, happy to talk to us, and proud of their work for LPP. For our library visit to the rural village of Santa Inés de Zaragoza, the local librarian contacted the children's parents beforehand. He informed them about our study, and the parents gave permission for their children to participate and talk to us during our library visit.

## ***Findings***

Our findings are outlined below. We are using Mostert and Vermeulen's (1998) nine evaluative elements as our framework for discussion. While they encouraged these themes be applied to community libraries, and not necessarily organizations that serve the libraries, we think they offer an effective framework through which we can discuss LPP. Below we discuss what we have found out about the following aspects of LPP: 1) establishment; 2) aims; 3) government; 4) finance; 5) users; 6) information; 7) services; 8) staff; and 9) cooperation.

### **Establishment of LPP**

Libros Para Pueblos began in 1998 with Tom Dunham and Jim Breedlove delivering packages of books to schools without libraries. Dunham and Breedlove were both temporary residents of Oaxaca who self-identify as expatriates of the United States and who "wanted to share their love of reading among the boys and girls of Oaxaca" (Marcial & Hernandez, 2016, p. 2).

The organization was officially established two years later. Libros Para Pueblos can now be defined as an organization for rural community libraries with its base in the capital city of Oaxaca. For the first 10 years, the organization grew slowly to support 20 libraries. The early libraries were usually affiliated with or located within schools. During this decade, a wealthy Mexican donor provided unlimited funding for what is called the inauguration collection, that is, 400 Spanish-language children's books that serve as the main collection. With this influx of cash, the organization grew from supporting 20 libraries to more than 70 over a period of seven years. As we discuss below, the libraries are now found outside of schools, and in one case, within a prison. No more than 10 libraries have started and failed.

## **Aims of LPP**

The overall aim of LPP is to strengthen the reading culture in Oaxaca through reading promotion among children and their parents. LPP supports the establishing and running of local community libraries all over the state of Oaxaca, many of them in rural areas, so that children in remote and isolated villages can have access to library services. The aim is also to increase the competence of the library staff through different types of educational activities. The focus so far has been mainly on picture books, to get children to discover the pleasure of listening to stories read by their parents, and to read the books themselves. The organization provides the local libraries with new books every year and an important rule for all LPP libraries is that the children must have the opportunity to take these books out from the library and read them at home.

## **Government**

### ***The LPP organization.***

One salaried Mexican executive director, a programming coordinator, and an administrative assistant currently manage the administration of the program, and they are sometimes aided by a university student doing his or her service work for six months or a year. The program is governed by a volunteer board of directors and includes a president and chair of the executive committee, who, although she is an American, has been a full-time resident of Oaxaca for more than 15 years. There are also two Mexican citizens on the board of directors. The executive committee has four members who live in Oaxaca full-time. Their various roles include working with paid staff to order and deliver library books, communicating with library sponsors, and developing programming for children and the local librarians. The LPP community libraries are guided by a network of 11 volunteer regional coordinators and locally appointed librarians (with the librarian title not necessarily meaning formal library science training or education). Based on our observations and as highlighted on the LPP website:

The network of Regional Volunteer Coordinators are previous or current Mexican librarians who offer their expertise in reading promotion through planning, creating and implementing workshops, and providing advice one-on-one to the librarians, as part of our Librarian Development Program. Each Regional Coordinator has an area in the state for which he or she is responsible. (Libros Para Pueblos, n.d.)

Most of the current administration of LPP are based in the building that houses the Oaxaca Lending Library and its many volunteers.

### ***Oaxaca Lending Library and LPP.***

The Oaxaca Lending Library (OLL) is mentioned in this research because of the importance it has to LPP. The OLL serves as a hub for the central activities and the government of the LPP organization. The building houses the offices of the LPP staff and the LPP Board meetings usually take place here. Importantly, the founders of LPP

were originally volunteers and patrons of the OLL. Indeed, many of the current LPP volunteers learned about the organization and its work through their interactions with the OLL.

The OLL is open to all six days per week. It resembles a typical small North American public library and has four paid staff, a director, and volunteers. The library board and volunteers are largely made up of retired temporary residents originally from the United States and Canada (some former librarians), and the majority of the collection is in English with some Spanish-language materials. The collection consists of all public library genres, and formats include monographs, periodicals, audio books, and DVDs. The library has a number of adjoining rooms for a children's area, teen area, computer area, and a volunteer-run canteen. The rooftop space is used for organized yoga, wellness and social activities, and *intercambios* (i.e., language exchanges) or English conversation sessions. Author talks, community walks, movie nights, and lectures are also available as special events. Patrons of the library over the age of 18 pay an annual borrowing and user fee of 500 pesos per person (i.e., approximately \$34 CDN) or 700 pesos (i.e., approximately \$47 CDN) per family, while children and students with identification do not pay fees. The patrons we observed during our visit were mainly North American temporary residents of Oaxaca on holiday or wintering in the area. The few locals in attendance were visiting the library specifically for the *intercambios* and to use the computers.

At the time of our visit we were informed that the OLL had approximately 450 children registered and 2,000 books in the collection and that theft, dust and mould were the main concerns of the staff. There are two rooms in the OLL building that are used as a local LPP library with children's literature in Spanish and consequently serves Spanish-speaking children living in the centre of the city.

### ***Local libraries connected to LPP.***

For the first decade of the organization's existence, the libraries that LPP supported were mostly attached to schools. With an influx of financial support and after conflicts between Oaxacan teachers and the state government led to long-term school closures, the organization evolved into assisting other forms of libraries. There are currently three types of rural community libraries that LPP supports in cooperation with the local community: those run by the municipality (state), school libraries, and other community libraries. In municipal libraries, the buildings are maintained, and the librarians are paid a small salary by the local government. LLP supplies the library with children's books and offers the librarians week-long training sessions during the summer months in the capital city of Oaxaca. In established municipal libraries, LPP usually enjoys a space where the children's books are displayed. According to one executive committee member, "Those books that are there are maintained and checked out by the librarian who is already there and involved with the municipality . . . They take that on as a library duty and in many cases their books are not allowed to be taken out, but our children's books are." This model allows for local libraries to maintain established cultural protocols, with some adaptation to the LPP mandates. These requirements include a

financial commitment from the local community, a space that allows the children's books to be displayed face out, and consistent hours of operation.

School libraries are the second type of library supported by LPP. The school administers these libraries, and teachers take turns managing the library. They use an existing room if they can manage to find space, and they set up the library there. Children come in usually once a week as a minimum. The children use this as a time to check out books and have books read to them.

Finally, community libraries are different from the municipal libraries since they are not directly funded by the government. In addition, local authorities take more of a role in these community libraries in terms of initiating, forming, and supporting them. The librarians in these libraries work as their *tequio*, typical to the state of Oaxaca and part of the complex social system of *ejido* land mentioned earlier.

### **Financing the work of LPP**

The work of LPP is mainly supported by financial donations and the unpaid work of volunteers. The organization has dedicated volunteers at many levels who are well-educated, energetic Canadian and American expatriates committed to the ideals of literacy and library access. The volunteers donate not only their time and expertise, but also their money. One executive committee member with whom we spoke financially sponsors three libraries: "So I sponsor, well my third library this year, so I usually do different programs with libraries that I'm involved with directly. Somewhat separate from the other activities I'm involved with. But it gives me a connection that is more specific and person-to-person." As he articulates, he finds the intimacy of working directly with the community more rewarding than the financial support he provides. The time and educational expertise this man gives to LPP is the equivalent of a part-time job if not more.

LLP is funded by a network of sponsors in Mexico and from abroad, including the German organization, [Libros Para Mexico](#). Individuals or groups sponsor a library for five years at approximately \$1,000 CDN each year. LPP has financial support from Mexican philanthropists and especially from one wealthy anonymous benefactor from Mexico City. The organization also relies on funding through their Visit a Library program. For a 600 peso donation (approximately \$30 CDN) visitors receive transportation to one or two of the LPP community libraries, admission fees to local sites, as well as snacks and water. They meet children and librarians, and might also visit a cultural or historic site. When we asked about the ethics of putting children on display and effectively selling the library, several volunteers expressed a concern that was illustrative of the tensions between material and ideological work. They recognized the voyeuristic potential of this practice, when the locals become other and are conflicted because of the financial possibilities that can result when donors see the work that is carried out in the various villages. Indeed, we felt this tension ourselves when we visited the libraries.

The local libraries classified as municipal libraries are also partly financed by the municipality since the municipality offers premises and sometimes pay a small salary to the librarian if the work is not done as a *tequio* obligation. The same applies to the LPP libraries located in schools where the teachers responsible for the library are paid by government funds.

### **Users of the community libraries**

The aim of LPP is to focus on children and especially children in remote areas. Their programming and training, however, also seems to encourage parents to regularly read stories aloud to their children, which is not always easy since some parents may be illiterate or speak almost no Spanish.

While we did not focus on the user perspective in this first case study, and we aim to add them to the second stage of this project, we visited a community library connected to a school in the small village of Santa Inés de Zaragoza. Teacher, librarian and LPP Regional Coordinator, Cristiam Omar Santos and his wife, Guadalupe Santiago, read stories to a group of 20 children who ranged in age from 8 to 12. In the same space outside the library, the leaders conducted a group activity about friendship and led a literacy activity using origami. The children seemed enthralled with the stories and eager to take part in the activities. One of us conducted a read-aloud in English to the children while an LPP volunteer conducted the Spanish version. Then, several of the children gave us a tour of the two rooms filled with books, showing us their favourites and telling us which ones they were going to read next. The building was an extremely simple, concrete square construction with dirt floor. The children seemed very proud that the books were lined up face out on floor to ceiling shelves. We were also very interested in the decorative and political Paulo Freire quotes painted on the outside wall which anyone passing could see.

### **Information work of LPP**

In recent years there has been a slow but growing shift to address the technical equipping of libraries in order to train children in the use of digital media and improve their information literacy. The LPP website notes that 56% of the libraries it supports have access to at least one computer and that 40% of the libraries are connected to the internet.

A concerted effort to bring technology to the libraries began in 2015, with five tablets in the community of Santa Inés de Zaragoza. Children gained Internet access by sitting outside the grounds of the local health clinic. According to local librarian Christiam Omar Santos, they eagerly engaged in searching Google, using social media, playing games, exploring websites, and reading stories. In the school the tablets were successfully used for enrichment activities while teachers also gave special classes after school to grade five and six students on various computer skills. Based on the success of that pilot study, a proposal for funding was submitted and accepted by a benefactor. As a result, in 2016 five tablets were introduced to each of nine LPP sponsored libraries, with more

added in 2017. Each regional coordinator has access to a tablet and is the key to overseeing and expanding the project.

### **Services of LPP and community libraries**

The local libraries connected to LPP receive the following services from the organization:

- 100 new children's books every year for each local library.
- Instructions on how the library can be organized and the books displayed.
- Support and training for local library workers, both personal training through contact with the regional coordinators and through participation in courses.
- An annual one-day meeting in Oaxaca City with sessions and workshops on different matters related to library work and reading promotion. This meeting is mandatory for the communities, if they don't send at least one of their local library workers, they don't receive any new books.
- Technical equipment (digital tablets) for some libraries.

The rural community libraries connected to LPP offer the following services to their users:

- Children's books that the library users are allowed to read at home.
- Activities in the library for children, such as reading aloud, drawing, support with school homework.
- Training for children in how to use electronic tablets, in order to increase information literacy in some locations.
- Training in how to use digital media and search for information in several libraries.

In all of the libraries we visited, the books were displayed face-out, which is required by LPP. The librarian and her assistant at the Biblioteca de Parque Colosio, a municipal community library, told us that this attracts the children and encourages them to check the books out to take home. For some rural librarians, the concept of taking books out of the library could represent a contradiction or a tension in how promoting a culture of reading differs between Mexico and the United States or Canada. In many Mexican municipal libraries, books are not taken out of a library, which leads to challenges when a new LPP library opens. Parents do not usually encourage their children to bring books home for fear that the book might be damaged or lost. One executive committee member reflected on his experiences with a library opening in a remote and rural village:

[The] parents were very afraid that if the kid brought a book home and lost it or tore it up or something, they'd have to pay for it. And that's more than a day's salary. . . . we had to work with the librarians and they with the parents to insist that 'it's your library and we want you to protect the books, we want you to bring them back because if you don't the other kids can't borrow them. But if



something happens, you're not responsible for paying for the book.' That relieved the tension for the families and they felt [better] about borrowing the book.

Later in our interview, this same executive committee member said, "I remember one opening. . . . a kid came up to me and he said, 'I can really take the book?' I just tear up when I talk about it! . . . It's just such a small thing, but to him it was a whole new world." This memory illustrates the emotional motivation we heard from many of the various volunteers with whom we spoke. The emotional payback justifies the expenditure of their expertise and energy.

In addition to the education provided to local librarians through training and support, LPP provides children's books in Spanish for each library with a mandate to source Mexican publishers and indigenous stories whenever possible and to avoid books related to religion or politics. A former executive committee member told us that the staff person who orders the books works with approximately eight publishers in Mexico.

So that's our priority – Mexican, quality children's books, by Mexican authors. Second, quality, award winning children's books from other Spanish speaking countries. Then classic children's literature. . . . like we just bought a bunch of, 70 Roald Dahl books – *Matilda*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Charlotte's Web*, you know, things like that.

As mentioned above, in addition to distributing books, a recent initiative is seeing the distribution of tablet technology to the libraries as well.

### **LPP Staffing**

As we introduced in the Government section above, LPP employs an executive director, a programming coordinator and an administrative assistant. All of these individuals are Mexican citizens. The small team manages the administration of the program. Occasionally, the organization is able to bring in a university student to do his or her state-required service work for six months or a year.

Much of the administration of new library implementation comes from the paid staff and the five-member volunteer Executive Committee. While the organization currently limits itself to two or three new library initiatives each year, there was a period when 12 or 13 were opening because of the large influx of financial support from the aforementioned Mexican benefactor. Limiting the number of new openings seems to be much more manageable for the small group of people who do the work. In the words of a previous executive committee member, "Well, you can imagine for that small group of people it was just crazy." Even though the work involved with opening so many libraries in one year is staggering, this volunteer, like many others, has worked for LPP for more than seven years.

The consistency among volunteers is also evident in the 11 regional coordinators, who are all Mexican nationals, and who have also served as, or are currently serving as, local librarians. The coordinators serve as long-term relationship builders between LPP and the local communities. The regional coordinators provide reading promotion

instruction to other local librarians through planning, creating, and implementing workshops, and they give one-on-one advice to the librarians as part of the Librarian Development Program. Each regional coordinator has an area in the state for which he or she is responsible. The regional coordinators were introduced only a few years ago in order to further stabilize the local library work because many local librarians stay for only one or two years. This means there is constantly a demand for the training of new local library workers. Most of the library and reading promotion training is a result of experience instead of formal education.

Among the LPP volunteers at the executive level and staff members we spoke with and observed, only one was a trained librarian. Others at this level had backgrounds in organizational leadership and education. Volunteers and workers at the regional and local levels have experience that ranges from university training in Education to never having worked before.

Holding the ideal of the benefits of reading for pleasure is shared by both local and non-local staff of LPP, and the connection to children is a primary emotional motivator to volunteer for all of the people with whom we spoke. The joy of seeing children reading is palpable for some of them. When we asked two North American library volunteers living in Oaxaca why they do what they do, one woman's face lit up as she spoke about the children. She said, "This gives us a connection with the kids. They know who we are and . . . today there's like 15 kids waiting to get in!" It isn't only the personal rewards, however, that motivate this person. She also has a deep-rooted belief in books and reading. She was very excited to tell us about the number of books checked out of her library and believes that when books go into children's homes, there can be a trickle effect to other children:

When I started at the 1st of February there were four books taken out, and then the eighth there were 34 and then the next one was 42, and the next was 38, and last week there was . . . I didn't even count them! (Counting) – 41! So, you know, it's 50 kids by the time you look at all the kids here, we have more than 50 kids who use it. And some just came to play. But they're getting something out of that aside from literacy. But they are also being exposed to other kids who are reading and then maybe, 'Oh!' So that's a good thing too.

This woman's colleague, who once served as regional coordinator but felt uncomfortable with her Spanish-speaking abilities and not as successful as she could be because of cultural differences, said in the same interview that what she hopes is to one day see Mexicans reading at bus stops. These articulated social transformation ideals indicate a high value put on reading. We also see this in the discussion below:

Interviewer: What motivates you to be involved with OLL [Oaxaca Lending Library] or LPP? What is it that you personally get out of it?

Volunteer: Well I guess you know, lifelong library user. Later on I became a librarian and then I went back and got my Masters of Library Science. So I think it's a lot of satisfaction in the work and then I know as a reader myself there's

slogans 'libraries change lives' and what not, but a lot of these children, the villages are very, very remote. There's nothing else for them to do. The idea of having reading for pleasure is taking you out of your situation, whether you're in poverty or whatever. And also having literacy and opening your horizons up. That kind of thing. But on a selfish, or a different level, you see parts of Oaxaca you would never see as a tourist or a foreigner or an immigrant . . . the inaugurations are just so wonderful. The whole town, literally, the whole town comes out and they'll have dancing and the ribbon cutting, and the pizzole, you know . . . But also, something for their future. They are very, very child centred here. Parenting is very gentle. But as far as having a vision for the kid's success in the 21st century, there's um . . . they only have compulsory schooling to secundaria, which would be our middle school. So, again, to have a future.

This volunteer articulates her desire for social change that is informed by her personal history and values (Okun & Eisenberg, 1992; Omoto & Snyder, 1998), but that these ideals might be imported ideals doesn't necessarily mean that the Mexican workers don't share them and that they don't want to pass these ideals on to young Mexicans (Bradley, 1999; Shor, 1992).

Cristiam Omar Santos, the local librarian we interviewed from Santa Ines de Zaragoza, works as a teacher there but is also engaged by the LPP as a regional volunteer coordinator. He won a national award in 2012 for his work in bringing reading programs to rural indigenous communities. His dedication to nurturing reading in his home state was evident not only in what we observed at his library and at the yearly conference, but also in our discussions with him. He is a teacher, a librarian, a regional coordinator, and a father and husband. He grew up in a household with two working parents and a beloved grandfather who taught him to read. He recalls not having children's books and having to read adult literature that was available through his granddad. The first book he remembers reading is the novel *El Llano en Llamas* by Juan Rulfo. His love of reading coupled with the joy of listening to radionovelas with his grandmother, led him to a career as a teacher and later, to his work with LPP. In our discussions, he made clear his dedication to forming readers personally and as a regional coordinator, even if it was on a volunteer basis:

I think that those of us who like this issue [reading] want to learn because it is a great experience for us. We look for ways that we can intervene to train readers, we take it as a teaching rather than a job, and at least for me, in particular, working with so many different contexts, even if they are close, we can review the projects and see what is happening, why readers are not formed, why there is not . . . We know that one issue is the cultural question, right? So, well, the parents did not have a reading environment, they have many deficiencies, poverty is a lot, it is preferable to eat than to buy a book and things like that, but we also want to know what the other instances that are there in the communities

and why they do not contribute to the training of readers or what do we need to achieve it, right?<sup>2</sup>

Creating a reading culture where none exists is difficult work. Later in our conversation, Santos outlines some of the challenges he sees daily:

There is a difference, and I think it is something that you have to recognize with the libraries of LPP, is that in schools, for example, there is a captive audience, that is, groups of children who go to school and there is a teacher who can freely develop the mediation activities they want, and the child will be there, whether he wants it or not, right? . . . However, in the libraries of LPP or libraries that are by private initiative like those of reading rooms, it is a doubly difficult job because it is like getting off the truck in the middle of the street and seeing who reads. Then you have to deploy a series of strategies first to capture the public, second so that the audience that is captured is interested and can follow a process, because at any time we can go, that is, today can reach twenty children and the next week was half, or you can get another ten that are different, then that job is quite complicated. It has much to do with the personality of the librarian, which has to do with the desire to do the job, and with the knowledge that there are social dynamics that are in the community and how to develop it.

The complex cultural and social dynamics within which LPP operates begin with the embedded decades old ejido land governance and local power hierarchies. They are also influenced by the labour conflicts between the Mexican and Oaxacan government who have implemented educational reforms (Ramírez Plascencia, 2018).

### **Cooperation with governments, local leaders and literacy organizations**

In addition to cooperating with the local communities via the regional coordinators and local librarians, teachers and supporters, LPP has established links with local and international literacy programs, such as the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY). In addition, as of 2018,

LPP works with the women's prison in TANIVET, in which approximately 10 children stay with their mothers during their prison term. The library in the women's prison contained old books in poor condition. LPP donated 220 new books, including titles for the children and the mothers. The books for adults were selected based on themes of personal development and life skills. (Libros Para Pueblos, 2018, p. 13)

### ***Discussion and Conclusions***

Our primary research question asked, what is LPP doing that has enabled continuous growth of the program? The analysis, based on Mostert's and Vermeulen's nine areas, has pointed at some especially important characteristics connected to four of those areas: governance, finance, services and staff. We argue that considered together,

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<sup>2</sup> We have translated Cristiam's discussion from Spanish and have tried to maintain his authenticity.

these different characteristics contributed to what we identify as five particularly important success factors:

- 1) an organizational structure that mandates Mexican leadership at the executive level and in paid staff positions;
- 2) initiation from a local representative/s;
- 3) the unique and complex socialist community configurations of the Oaxacan region;
- 4) a large community of retirees from the United States and Canada who volunteer at many levels; and,
- 5) national and international donations.

In this section, we elaborate on the findings outlined above by answering our secondary research questions: How are they meeting local needs? How do they provide their services while maintaining a respect for, and preservation of, local culture? What can we learn about LPP that contributes to the literature about international community libraries?

As the library profession seeks to adapt to an environment of unprecedented technological change, there exists a need for a critical examination of libraries in a global context. In addition to the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the international body representing the interests of library and information services and their users, there are many professional groups and non-profit organizations conducting international library and literacy work. While there is an interest and a need for the support of literacy and information work internationally, and many organizations and religious groups (both for- and not-for-profit) claim to do so, careful attention to working ethically and respectfully is not always the norm.

### **Lasting impact from within**

Over the years, the organizational structure of LPP has evolved, and currently requires Mexican leadership at the executive level and representation at the board level. We think that LPP has an influential and long-lasting impact on the communities it serves, in part, because of its evolving structure that requires Mexican voices at all levels of the organization and especially at the local level. Operations are steered by a largely American and Canadian volunteer executive committee, but importantly, there is a mandate for the paid staff to be Mexican and for two-thirds Mexican representation on the board of directors. This Mexican representation is an important key to ensuring ownership and that the organization is reflective of the community and meeting local needs. As one former regional coordinator told us, local representation wasn't always part of the mandate, but since its implementation, there have been fewer libraries closing. The local representation ensures that the library stays in place even when local political leadership changes.

Another important key in meeting local needs and maintaining the respect for local culture is the system with regional coordinators. All 11 coordinators are also Mexican nationals and have served, or are currently serving, as local librarians. They provide

reading-promotion instruction to other local librarians through planning, creating, and implementing workshops, and give one-on-one advice to the librarians, as part of the Librarian Development Program. Each regional coordinator has an area in the state for which he or she is responsible.

The regional coordinators also take an active role in the annual LPP Conference, which is attended by a community representative and librarian from each LPP library. Attendance at the conference is mandatory each year in order for the representatives to collect their box of 100 new books to take back to their libraries. Since many of the local libraries are located in very remote areas, some librarians have to travel for many hours by bus to take part in this conference. In February 2017, when we took part in this conference, the day included talks from local literacy experts, read-aloud demonstrations, reading and writing activity sessions, and a hot lunch. There was also a hands-on workshop about how to repair damaged or broken books, and the local librarians each brought one book on which to practice.

That nationals implement the activities of LPP does not mean that the organization is without its challenges. In addition to local politics, there are state-wide politics that affect the work they do. For example, local administration can limit children's access to books and programming in school libraries. With the exception of one LPP-supported school library, the libraries are closed for two months at Christmas, two weeks during Semana Santa, the Easter holidays, and six or seven weeks in the summer when the children have their holidays. These closures, coupled with prolonged teacher strikes and conflicts that have plagued Oaxaca over the past 20 years, have moved LPP to discontinue starting any new school libraries, even though as one executive committee member told us, "the school libraries offer us maximum access to kids because at the school they see the library at least once a week, . . . and the teachers are educated and they can see lots of different ways to use the library."

### **Initiation from local representatives**

There remains growth in the number of new libraries even though LPP no longer puts libraries in schools or actively recruits new libraries. Villages or municipalities have to initiate the process themselves. They are required to show a commitment to the program through an application process, which requires demonstrated community support. This initiation suggests that the locals themselves recognize a strong cultural value of books and reading, and that this is not an opinion forced upon them by outsiders.

### **The socialist community configurations of the Oaxacan region**

The complex ejido community configurations both supports and puts pressure on libraries to assist in the residents' moral development and well-being. Such support from the community and government, or lack thereof, can make or break a community library initiative. In addition, within the tequio system, librarians are selected by local authorities, but library work is only one part of their jobs. The commitment is for one, two, or three years, with most serving the library for one or two years. This system has

both its pitfalls and benefits. We think this system is positive because the community chooses the librarians (the term used by LPP to describe library staff), and these librarians are trained by LPP. According to an executive committee member, “in 90% of the cases, people have not had any experience with libraries, . . . and, in terms of our training process, the person comes in, we have to train them for one year and then they are gone.” While training might be challenging for LPP, it might also be considered as worthwhile education for a significant number of people across Oaxaca.

### **National and international donations**

As mentioned above, the work of LPP is funded by a network of sponsors in Mexico and from abroad. Individuals or groups sponsor a library for five years. They raise money and awareness through the Visit a Library program. In addition, LPP also has financial support from Mexican philanthropists, one of whom sponsored the bulk of the library inauguration through the last ten years by purchasing 400 new books for each start-up library. His funds also paid for a used van, auto insurance, and other materials needed for maintenance.

### **Retired North American volunteers**

During our fieldwork we were struck by the amount and type of work that the three paid staff members and the many volunteers perform for the organization. Much of the administration of new library implementation comes from the paid staff and the five-member executive committee. Although they are mostly retired and have the time necessary to dedicate to the work it takes to establish a new library, it is important to recognize that 1) they have a choice about what to do with their discretionary time; 2) the work is time consuming; and 3) the work can be physically and emotionally exhausting.

Among the LPP volunteers at the executive level and staff members we spoke with and observed, only one was a trained librarian. Others at this level had backgrounds in organizational leadership and education. Volunteers and workers at the regional and local levels had experience that ranges from education training to never having worked before. This wide sweep of backgrounds complicates the “*emotional work*” (Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2008; 2010) or “*passionate work*” (McRobbie, 2002; 2010) these cultural workers do. Some of the staff and executive committee members may “benefit from the social prestige that is attached to the relatively ‘high culture’ practice of book reading, and to their own ‘artistry and knowledge’ as professional and/or expert readers” (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2008, as cited in Fuller & Rehberg Sedo, 2013, p. 166) within the expatriated group living in Oaxaca or in their own social network of their home country. However, unlike the print culture in developed countries, reading and book culture in Oaxaca does not enjoy high cultural status. In some villages, it has no status. Through the work of LPP, this may be changing. Like their trained counterparts, the workers and volunteers in the LPP organization with whom we spoke, feel, and enact “a passion for reading” (Fuller & Rehberg Sedo, 2013, p. 164) usually based on childhood memories, and that has sustained the organization for many more years than is common in other community library projects in developing areas.

Most of the volunteers for LPP are retirees, which is quite common as retirees have the time and expertise to volunteer. However, the regional coordinators are not retirees, and most of them do this work while having other full-time careers. That the regional coordinators were or remain local librarians suggests that they believe the difficult work they do is purposeful and reflects their own values and beliefs in children reading for pleasure. Further work with other regional coordinators may shed light on specific motivations for these individuals. Is it a career motivation as scholars such as Clary, et. al. (1998) and Rodell (2013) suggested? Or is it more for personal reasons as Bussell and Forbes (2002) found? Maybe the reason they do the work they do even though it is sometimes “muy difícil” [very difficult], is because they believe in what Deborah Brandt (2004) has identified as the “civilizing” effects of book reading on the individual as underwritten by a functionalist notion of literacy that equates it with economic productivity (pp. 494-99). The notion of reading as civilizing might motivate some LPP work, but we argue that for those we talked with, the reasons are more emotionally complex. Santos, for example, illustrates this when he tells us about the success of a reading program in a nearby village during our interview:

Another very particular thing that we saw was mothers working with their own children . . . they were very willing women who went and sat down with their own son and did [reading] mediation activities. So that was very cool, that was very cool, and the people changed in some way. I'm not going to say that the village became more cultured because that's why we need a longer [evaluation] process . . . , but at least they saw or turned to see the library as something important for their people, as something that has to be done, as something that has to be used and that can give good results at least in the development of this cultural heritage that they may be leaving their children.

In addition to studying the work of LPP deeper and over longer periods of time as Santos mentions above, additional scholarly work will not only help us to better understand the complexity of volunteer motivation, but it will also un-pack the tensions between institutional ideological imperatives and the politics of social change.

Finally, what can we learn about LPP that contributes to the literature about community libraries? It is important to emphasize again that LPP is not a community library itself, but a voluntary organization that supports the formation and operation of local community libraries throughout the entire Mexican state of Oaxaca. However, our study has shown the importance for local communities to have the support of such an organization when building a sustainable local library service. Through LPP, the local library not only receives financial support in the form of new books and (in some cases) computers, but also help with training of the local library staff, which contributes to a sustainable service with development potential. Our study has also shown that in order for this to work, the organization must be well-rooted in the local community structure and culture. Local residents have to understand, respect, and use the library. Although the work of LPP is largely maintained through donations from people in other countries and to some extent also by foreign volunteer workers, there are Mexicans in the organization at all levels, including the executive level and the board.



## **Future Research**

Future research should necessarily include talking to users. Within LPP and, to a growing extent, within many villages in Oaxaca there is a belief in the power of stories to have a positive influence on individual children, the local communities in which they live, and in the overall state of the Mexican society. This belief, albeit not widely held among all of the villages in Oaxaca, has ensured a positive growth for LPP libraries and the literacy services provided. What value do users and their parents put on the books and the services?

We have started the conversation by outlining the material work that is done on a daily basis, from buying books and distributing them to providing storytelling workshops for untrained librarians. Using individual voices, we have articulated the felt ideal that “reading changes lives” as motivation for countless hours of unpaid volunteer hours. We spoke with two regional coordinators, but there are others whose stories need to be told, as do those from local librarians across the types of libraries and across the state. Cultural ideologies and unequal power relations are experienced at individual, organizational, local and regional levels, and can cause conflict; to what extent and to what end needs to be further investigated. Using a critical lens to evaluate the cultural and social value that the LPP-supported libraries bring to individual users and the community, in general, will help us better understand the impact of this cultural work. In the meantime, the work within LPP rolls on with great commitment. The local librarians have received their annual allotments of new books three times since we last visited the organization in 2017, and the regional coordinators are actively providing support to the local libraries through various educational efforts. The future seems bright for LPP.

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