How are Portuguese Public Libraries "facing" Covid-19

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Abstract: Between March, 18th and May 2nd 2020, Portuguese public libraries were forced to lockdown, like the rest of the country, because of the declaration of the emergency period by the Portuguese government due to Covid19 pandemia. Away from public facing traditional services, Portuguese public libraries had to adapt to new pandemic reality. This paper aims to analyse what were the challenges and the strategies adopted by Portuguese public libraries, namely using Facebook, from a sample of 18 libraries, one of each Portuguese district. Also, we can concluded that the National Public Libraries Network (RNBP), coordinated by the Directorate-General for Books, Archives and Libraries (DGLAB), was of great importance on encouraging and engaging online initiatives.
Keywords: Health information, Public Libraries, National Public Libraries Network, COVID-19, mediation, Facebook, Portugal.

1. Introduction

In times of crisis, public libraries should act even more as agents to ensure democratic access, to true and reliable information and to fight against the proliferation of fake news and disinformation within local communities. Thus, this work aims to answer the question: how have Portuguese public libraries coped with the challenges posed by COVID-19 during the state of emergency?

The case study aims to show the reality that Portuguese public libraries faced at the beginning of 2020, during the state of emergency, far from the public in the traditional way; what activities, services and strategies do libraries use to ensure

services and connections with the quarantined community, during the physical closure of services and the isolation of the population at home.

2. Public Libraries
2.1 Public libraries and social networks

Public libraries have very important missions to accomplish in society as cultural, social, civic, democratic and educational agents. Development and access to information are crucial tasks for public libraries, which ensure equality and accelerate development in the world (IFLA / UNESCO, 2001).

Public libraries are responsible for facilitating learning at all stages of life and can also contribute to informational education of citizens and users, in what Gómez Hernández calls the transition from print to electronic culture (Gómez Hernández 2008, 59; IFLA, 2017). In libraries, the digital environment can help promote reading among adolescents and young adults through the establishment of reading clubs, for example (IFLA, 2017a).

González Fdez-Villavicencio (n. d.) states that Libraries 2.0 are based on new strategies that promote user participation in the design and maintenance of services. Thus, public libraries can no longer be "seen as precious reliquaries or showcases" (which they often do) but "they must be seen as formative and interactive, creating everything that happens next in the cognitive life of the user" (Carr 2000, 126).

In exceptional periods, such as those of crisis (economic, social, political, sanitary or environmental), war, natural disasters and pandemics, public libraries are often "oases of tranquillity" for local communities (Garrido, M. &Wyber, 2019). Physically distant from their users, public libraries must rethink their information access strategies and research alternative means of book lending, or reading hour.

Web 2.0 is considered the "Social Web" or "People's Web". The underlying principle of collaborative technologies is the possibility for anyone, provided they have access to a computer connected to the Internet, to be able to edit content, and publish opinions. Web 2.0 lives on the sharing of information and knowledge and the practice of sharing information is common to documentation and information professionals (Eiras 2007, 79; Stephens, 2006).

Public libraries can transfer many of their functions to the digital environment, but how can they ensure equal and democratic access to their collections? Therefore, the distribution of the Internet and the WWW is not yet universal, especially in isolated areas (Alvim, 2016).

Social networks, like Facebook, are defined by the creation of public profiles of natural or legal persons, public or private, who share information, communicate and discuss with other users of a network (Alvim, 2011).Facebook is a social

media network, mainly with generic multimedia content, with the advantage of allowing information to be shared with other social media networks and other media. As of October 2019, there were 6,847,000 Facebook users in Portugal, which represented 67.1% of its total population. The majority were women (51.6%). People aged 25 to 34 made up the largest user group (1,570,000 users) ("NapoleonCat.Stats", 2019).

Libraries have a new challenge in adopting this social network platform and actively use the network to improve their services to the community and fulfil the missions intended for public libraries (Alvim, 2016).

2.2 Portuguese public libraries: brief characterization

In 1987, a national public reading policy emerged in Portugal, creating a network of public libraries. The objective of this policy was to build libraries all over the country with the help of local governments. A movement for the creation and establishment of municipal libraries has been generated in Portugal, with public reading programs and cultural activities, etc. At the start, in 1987, only 51 municipalities joined. These libraries were created according to established criteria and generally follow the principles and guidelines defined by UNESCO and IFLA in this area, including the IFLA / UNESCO Public Libraries Manifesto (IFLA / UNESCO, 1994).

Fig. 1: Map of Portugal (homeland) with the capitals of the 18 districts. Source: Wikipedia.

There is currently a National Network of Public Libraries (RNBP) coordinated by the General Directorate of Books, Archives and Libraries (DGLAB), a department of the Ministry of Culture, with 219 libraries operating in the Portuguese municipalities (fig. 1), of a total 308.

Due to the state of emergency (from March 18 to May 2, 2020) determined by the Portuguese government for the containment of the COVID-19 pandemic, the DGLAB has created a document with guidelines for libraries on the processing of documents in the face of the pandemic (Direção-Geral do Livro, Arquivos e Bibliotecas, 2020a). These recommendations are based on the guidelines of the Directorate General for Health and on scientific reference bibliography.
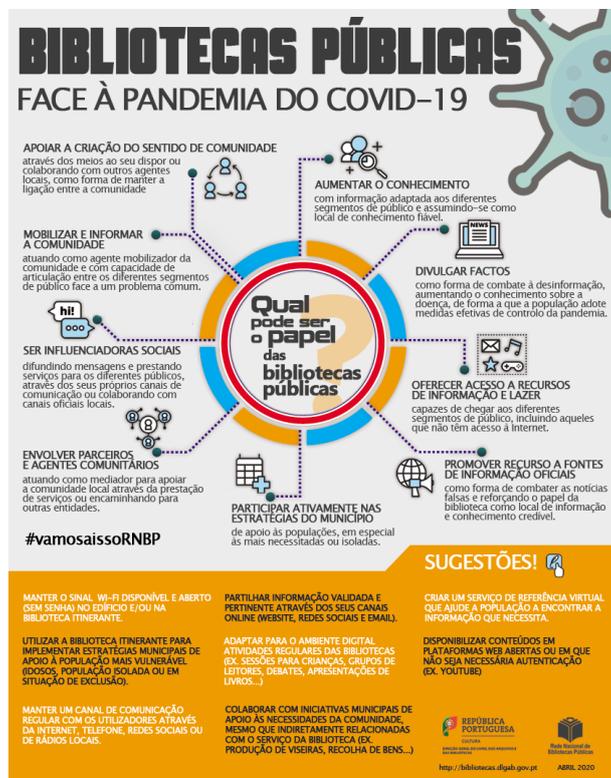
Fig. 2: DGLAB Poster Public Libraries facing the Covid-19 pandemic.
Source: DGLAB

Public libraries, which are administratively dependent on municipalities, have adapted their way of acting to remain relevant, close and useful to the population they serve. In order to help libraries adapt to the new reality, the DGLAB published a poster (fig. 2) containing a lot of information on the role that public libraries can play in the face of the pandemic, such as supporting the creation for a communities of readers; increase knowledge; mobilize and inform the community; be social influencers; involve partners and community agents; disseminate facts; provide access to resources to official sources of information; actively participate in municipal strategies. This body proposes concrete actions: creation of a virtual reference service, adaptation of regular activities to the digital environment, keeping the Wi-Fi signal available and open, among others DGLAB has created a digital platform to collect all information on the activities and news of all public libraries during the quarantine (Direção-Geral do Livro, Arquivos e Bibliotecas, 2020c).

DGLAB proposed the use of the hashtags #BibliotecasNaSuaCasa (Libraries In Your Home) and #vamosaissoRNBP (let's do it RNBP) to encourage public libraries to share content adapted to the situation of the lockdown situation (fig. 3).

Fig. 3: DGLAB Poster on Municipal Libraries at the service of the community. Source: DGLAB.

At the end of the state of emergency, the DGLAB issued recommendations for library professionals for the reopening of public libraries and the definition of internal procedures related to the use and circulation of the bibliographic collection (Direção-Geral do Livro, Arquivos e Bibliotecas, 2020b).

3. Methods

A brief bibliographical review is presented to examine the state of the art around the theme of public libraries in Portugal and its official policies, through the General Directorate of Books, Archives and Libraries (DGLAB) observed before and after the onset of the pandemic.

After defining the case study method, the data collection technique that best answers the initial question and the subject of this survey was selected, choosing to observe the websites and pages of the Facebook social networks, as the main data collection operation. The National Network of Public Libraries (Portugal), created in 1987, currently has 219 libraries. From this network, 18 libraries located geographically in the district capitals of mainland Portugal were selected for observation. Due to the fact that two municipal libraries in the district capitals (Porto and Coimbra) do not have a Facebook page, they have been replaced by others which are located in the most populous cities after the capitals, namely Matosinhos (Porto district) and Figueira da Foz (Coimbra district). Data collection was carried out through a content analysis grid, from March 18 to May 2, 2020, a period that includes the "emergency period" established by the Portuguese government.

This exploratory case study did not allow for a more meaningful sample or the total observation of the Portuguese libraries due to the volume of data to be collected. The selection option for the capital district libraries was that they were considered to serve a larger number of populations. Although the representativeness seems very low (8%), the existence of the DGLAB and RNBP directives, launching clear, motivating and stimulating guidelines that were followed by the libraries analysed, makes us suppose that the rest of the Portuguese public libraries have followed the same examples and indications. Thus, these 18 libraries will be the mirror and the representation of the others.

Content analysis of Facebook pages and websites has been performed and they are described qualitatively. As shown in Table 1, the data were also processed quantitatively using the analytical grid.

4. Results

Considering the use of Facebook pages during the emergency period, one can say:

The Aveiro Public Library on Facebook gave preference to the hashtags #fiqueemcasa (stay home), #vamostodosficarbem (everything will be fine) and #boasleituras (good reads). It informs of the closure of the library and of the online and telephone service for book lending. The return of the books must also be done by appointment. The library team worked and revealed photos of various groups with employees wearing masks in the work environment. The item "Boas Leituras" (Good reads) is always accompanied by an image, a suggested book and the hashtags #boasleituras (good reads). The publication of videos (17) for children has been prioritized from April 23 and May 2 only with mention of the celebrations. There was a concern to disseminate links to hobbies, games, challenges, recipes, creative writing workshops, for all ages.

The Beja Public Library began publishing articles on the pandemic even before the state of emergency was declared. From then on, a major literacy effort in the event of a pandemic under the heading "useful and reliable information" was made, with a lot of information communicated mainly between March 16 and April 20. Activities designed for citizens rely heavily on image and audio-visual media. In addition to maintaining storytelling time for children, always in the middle of the day, other audiences were reached with the item Voyager without leaving the House and the History and heritage of the region.

The Braga Public Library begins the quarantine period with the publication of the municipal poster "Are you from Braga? Show that you have closed the door!" which is a joke with a local expression, but which encourages people to stay at home, with the hashtags #ficaemcasa (stay at home), #ésdebragafechaaporta (you are from braga close the door) and #bragaemcasa (Braga at the house) which was reproduced in all messages during this period. In the early days, they disseminate information about COVID-19 through posters of health entities. During the period of the state of emergency, an intense

broadcast program of 90 children's videos with story reading, using the hashtags #horadoconto (story time) and #BLCSconta (the library tells a story) a story, a book, a place of exploration and learning was displaced. The #BLCSTónico (the library is a tonic) is a posts article that is in the process of being published and contains thoughts with encouragement and hope for these times. After March 20, the campaign "Lerdásempremaissaúde" (Reading always gives more health) begins, which will be the cover of the library page. Also, the slogan "Ler é saudável" (Reading is healthy), accompanied by the hashtag, publicizes initiatives related to the lending services that can be done by phone or email and by prior appointment to retrieve documents. The loan lasts four weeks. The library offers books that you put outside the building in flower pots. Library staff continued to work for the community using the hashtag #TratamentoTécnicoOn (Technical Treatment On). This team prepared for the April 2 celebration with an online program, and for April 23 (book day) they posted videos with writers and others who have witnessed what libraries are like in their lives.

The Bragança Public Library has published mainly videos and posters on COVID-19, coming from health organizations and the municipality. The Facebook cover page demonstrates this concern with the tagline "COVID-19. Fique em casa! Proteja-se a si e aos outros "(COVID-19.Stay Home! Protect Yourself and Others." The library placed great emphasis on publishing children's stories, with around 32 videos, and 11 others, with challenges and crafts for children.

The Castelo Branco Public Library shared information from the DGS and the municipality on Covid-19. Between March 30 and May 1, on weekdays, always after 1 p. m., the Castelo Branco public library offered a "Story Time", mainly for children, out of a total of 26 videos. Between March 17 and April 6, library services provided online reading suggestions; between March 24 and April 2, the library shared six audiobooks and one video. From March 27, the library began to share the content of the page "CB.Acontece", a page that combined initiatives from all the cultural sector of the city of Castelo Branco, such as the children's story hour, music, theatre, cooking, scientific, and creative workshops, or invitations to draw, during the quarantine period.

The Évora Public Library, at that time, was already closed for maintenance work. Online activities focused on the item "Todos no sofá… mas cada um no seu" (All on the couch… but everyone on its one) with online conversations in the virtual library room, on various topics, from conversations about board games, strategies to help kids study during quarantine, suggested books on pandemic times. The library invited several experts to have a conversation with anyone wishing to register for a Zoom session, by email from the library. Participation was free. On the commemorative dates of April 2, discussions took place on the "couch" on the subject.

The Faro Public Libraryhas focused on challenging its readers on a regular basis and with remarkably interesting and imaginative responses, using visual and audio-visual materials. Hence the challenges launched on the themes "What books are you reading these days", "Stories with origami", "Sing along with the stories", and "Share with us pictures of you reading or of your reading book at home", on a weekly basis, had imaginative and engaging responses from citizens in general, subsequently made available by the library. The ability to surprise readers, and be surprised by them, has demonstrated a well-articulated strategy with visible results in the number of likes and responses to challenges.

The Figueira da Foz Public Library(Coimbra district) after the closure of its cultural spaces, with the aim of stimulating social distancing by expanding access and offering content on social networks, launched an online activity program with the title and hashtag #bibliotecaestaonline (the library is online) on the Facebook page. The initiatives were aimed at different audiences and benefited from the collaboration of various library readers, regular contributors and others who have kindly made themselves available to collaborate, share content or create new ones. Thus, it carried out activities like: "Quemconta um Conto" (Who tells a tale), video sessions of reading children's stories by different authors, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 10:30 a. m. Librarians asked the children to suggest stories and send them to the library email; Tuesdays, at 7 p. m., they publish the video "Minutos de Poesia" (Poetry minutes), sessions of reading and declamation of poetry by the voice of the guests; Thursdays at 3 p. m. "LeiturasPartilhadaspor ..." (Readings shared by ...) moments of reading through the voices of the guests, to share their own texts of their choices; "Revisitar as 5as de Leitura" (Revisiting the 5th Reading) broadcast of the recordings of several meetings with writers as part of the project to promote and encourage reading, on scheduled days, at 9:30 p. m.; "Vamosfazer ..." (Let's ...) some creative activities to organize as a family, Saturdays at 3 p. m. They used the hashtags #FiqueEmCasa (Stay at Home) #EstudoEmCasa (Study at Home) to promote other activities.

TheGuarda Public Libraryonly started hour-long reading sessions on April 4, and since April 17 has published videos, almost daily, with poems. The library not only shared three books, but also curiosities from the local press, information about a distinguished local man and woman, and "Guarda of other ages" were consistently posted on Facebook. The public library also produced "recollection videos" of past library exhibitions, children's holiday activities and programs, and workshops.

TheLeiria Public Libraryshows that it is fully prepared for the digital transition, therefore from the first day of the emergency period, and every day until May 2, it posted regularly on its Facebook page. At 10 o 'clock a. m., the public library shared storytelling videos ("Às 10 horas Com História"). Reading suggestions, Music of the day, Curiosity of the day, Ideas and games (Ideias e Brincadeiras),

Let's get moving! (Toca a Mexer!) were the daily posts, plus the occasional suggestion of virtual tours of museums, digital libraries, and archives around the world to explore, games to do online, movies to watch, and even theatres, play to see with the family. Once a week, the interviews "Interesting conversations with Portuguese-speaking authors" were displayed. The 65th anniversary of the Leiria Public Library was celebrated online and with the beginning of the "Library at the Door" project, the Public Library is fulfilling its mission of promoting reading, literacy and access to information in the fight against social exclusion, especially in times of isolation. As the cultural advisor of the public library on Leiria's Facebook page said: "This was something the town hall wanted to do and it was time". In addition, the blood drive for COVID-19, in Leiria, took place at the public library. This library has maintained all online services and has developed an online reference service that does bibliographic research and responds to the information needs of the community.

The strategy of Lisbon's Municipal Libraries during the state of emergency was based on offering new activities, broadcasting reading podcasts and organizing educational content. The activities offered, such as anti-quarantine reading (Antiquarentena de leituras), reading throughout the house (leremtodo o lado da casa), capsule of books (cápsula de livros) and reading to fly (ler para voar) were maintained on a regular basis (2-3 times per week) throughout the period under review. The use of audio-visual media was crucial in keeping readers interested, especially for children, striving to produce educational content on various topics.

The Matosinhos Public Library(Porto district) has invested in the item "A PoesiaMaldita - aodomicílio" (Poetry at home) every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, at 9 p. m., on the municipality's Facebook and Instagram pages of Matosinhos and the library released one in a small episode of great poetic intensity. They announced with great intensity the update on the LiteraturasemViagem (Traveling Literature) conference, which took place only at the end of May and was held live on the municipality's Facebook page. This library favoured the adult and educated public. He used the slogan "Ler semper! Sugestões para leiturasna Internet" (Always read! Suggestions for reading on the Internet") and recommended films, always with a high level of quality. Story time was supplied with videos produced by the team.

The Portalegre Public Libraryof April 7 has been included in the municipality initiative "Culture on Quarentine" which allowed regular access to cultural content for those who were at home. Alongside the CAEP (Center for Performing Arts), the José Régio House Museum, the Municipal Museum, the Portalegre - Guy Fino Tapestry Museum and the Tourism Service, the Municipal Library actively participated in telling stories on demand, by phone, from Tuesday to Friday.

The Santarém Public Library focused the (very) rare articles on information relating to library services or library networks, and a reminder of the activities developed during 2019.

The Setúbal Public Library has focused its post-pandemic activities on the dissemination of the cultural heritage of the region, both through podcasts produced by the library, as well as on the dissemination of virtual exhibitions and other cultural information.

The Viana do Castelo Public Library focus on children's target audience with the creation of 38 videos with story reading made by the educational service, the item is called "Uma história de cada vez" (One story at a time). It created a library channel on Youtube, with poem's reading by users and citizens of the municipality. As for the the website information was provided about home loans made by email and telephone.

The Vila Real Public Library presented initial information with the Closing Library, informed on how to do book lending's, with extended dates, by phone or email. The library has not released any information on COVID-19, but published photographs of the library's back office, how deposits were made and how its services were organized. Two very simple sections, with the slogans "Ler à chuva" (Reading in the rain) and "Em casa, à espera que passe" (At home, while waiting for it to pass) accompanied by a funny photograph, with animals and books were released. Another appreciated element was the presentation of the collection "Coisas esquecidas no meio dos livros…" (Things forgotten in books…), with the corresponding image.

The Viseu Public Library only posted on April 17th to inform about the "Library to take away" service during the closing period.

5. Discussion

At the start of the state of emergency, Portuguese libraries reacted to the lockdown on the Facebook pages. The first quarantine actions were linked to the sharing of information from municipalities, the government and the Directorate General of Health (DGS) on COVID-19. The proactivity in some libraries was not immediate, as will be discussed later. Four libraries (Guarda, Santarém, Viana, Viseu) have not published any information on Covid-19, namely on hygiene issues, protective equipment, signs and symptoms, risks, health facilities, confinement, teleworking, etc. This situation is a little strange, as they have adapted their activities to online actions. The Bragança and Beja libraries, perhaps because they are located in the north and south of the country, far from the big centres, have always published a lot of information produced by health organizations. In total (see Table 1) Disseminate Information / COVID-19 had 166 references.

As can be seen in Table 1, the analysed Portuguese public libraries replicated online activities, such as story time or reading suggestions, which instead of being carried out in the library building, were performed by video or telephone. For example, Share Videos with Reading Stories had 451 references in 18 libraries. In general, Portuguese public libraries have undertaken all kinds of initiatives for all age groups, although children and young people have been the main focus. Most of the videos with stories were aimed at children's audience. But adult audience was also considered with 92 video sharing with lectures and poetry reading.

Table 1: N.° of references to activities in libraries from March 18 to May 2, 2020

	n.° ofreferences
Share videos with reading stories	451
Activities during state of emergency/Covid19	225
Disseminate information/COVID-19	166
Share videos with lectures/conferences/reading poems	92
Creating educational content	81
Share movies online	71
Share audio books	47
Share free courses/webinars	46
Disseminate digital libraries	36
Share online library services	12
Share magazines/newspapers online	5
Home delivery library service	2

Quarantine related activities are visible. Table 1 shows 225 activities that arose exclusively during the period of the state of emergency. For example, "take out" books which means that instead of going to the public library to get books, the library goes to the community. Hence lending books by reserving on the library's e-mail and phone was a step forward in traditional service. Many other activities have been created for this period, such as the transformation of the World Youth Book Day and World Book Day conferences and celebrations online, using Zoom and the library's YouTube channels.

Libraries recommended many suggested links to share movies online (71 references), distribute digital libraries (36 references), share magazines / newspapers online (5 references), share audiobooks (47 references), and so on. Libraries have also expressed an interest in occupying the free time of their

users by offering other access to online leisure resources: links to hobbies, crosswords, scientific challenges (Braga, Faro, Castelo Branco, etc.), with 81 references to the creation of educational content, and 46 references to share free courses / webinars, videos to increase knowledge. It is a finding that libraries are adapted to various segments of the public and see themselves as places of reliable knowledge.

Public libraries, as well as other information services, play a crucial role in sharing and providing reliable information and quality services. Promoting access to official sources of information as a means of combating fake news and strengthening the role of the library as a place of credible information and knowledge is essential. Nonetheless, from the analysed sample, it can be seen that Portuguese public libraries are still very focused on reading-related activities. There are few instances of concern with fake news (Leiria and Beja were public officials regarding fake news), and none regarding the need or demand to document and preserve community memories of the pandemic period.

One of the recommendations of the DGLAB is to actively participate in the strategies of the municipality to support the population, in particular the most needy and isolated. The Leiria Public Library took over this mission, with political support from the municipality, for example, with the blood drive for COVID-19, which took place in the public library. The Portalegre Public Library has a cultural program that has been included in the municipality's online program, as well as that of Museums, Tourism and the Performing Arts Center. Castelo Branco is included in the municipality's online cultural program. The Matosinhos Library has prepared a series of poetry sessions which are posted on the municipality's Facebook and Instagram pages.

The involvement of partners and community actors in online library programs is crucial in this time of pandemic. The libraries of Viana do Castelo and Braga have involved citizens and other cultural agents in the design and production of videos reading poems and stories. Others challenged the public to comment on the home activities.

6. Conclusions

The pandemic period due to Covid-19 has urged libraries to adopt new ways of working in times of lockdown, using information and communication technologies, namely social media like Facebook.

This study of the reality of Portuguese public libraries during the lockdown will allow for a comparative analysis with initiatives designed by local libraries in other countries which were also forced to close during the pandemic outbreak. The activities analysed and identified can serve as an example and inspiration to its foreign counterparts.

For this case study, a sample of 18 public libraries out of a universe of 219 existing in the country were observed, and conclusions can be drawn about the Portuguese national policy and the local policies of each municipality, adopted by the libraries, vis-à-vis the teams, the users and the community in general, at this time of public and social, economic, and health crisis all over the world.

Since the start of the state of emergency, the state body DGLB, has been proactive, producing two fundamental documents, one with guidelines on handling documents in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the other with recommendations of good practice in the reopening of libraries in the national network. The Directorate also created a collection of articles on the Flipboard platform to demonstrate good practices and motivate municipal libraries to serve the community. These documents have been widely distributed by public libraries which have received broad political support, nationally and locally, and many municipalities have asked libraries to collaborate in creating online cultural programs.

With this study, it was not clear whether libraries were supporting a sense of community on the ground through the means at their disposal. We recall some initiatives that have been reported, such as reading stories on the phone by the Portalegre library on demand or collecting blood in the Leiria library.

Undoubtedly, most of the libraries observed were not paralyzed and although they were physically distant from their audiences, they engaged in online initiatives, adapting traditional services to the digital environment: story time, lectures, and poetry sessions. Others did not and created other forms of contact with their users, for example with challenging activities and posts with funny photos and suggested reading.

Some libraries have collaborated with cultural agents, liaising with the municipality itself their response to the community, and maintaining a channel of communication with users during this period.

When it comes to libraries' mission to disseminate facts and share true and relevant information about COVID-19 this set of libraries have also played an important role in the fight against disinformation among the population to adopt measures to control the pandemic.

Among these observed libraries of the National Public Libraries Network, we can say that most of them have been social influencers, disseminating hashtags with incredibly positive and encouraging messages through the channelscommunication, trying to keep their users less isolated and still in communication with libraries.

Finally, library teams worked from home or other physical spaces, as we observed in the shared photographs. The teams were attentive and transformed traditional services into digital services and positioned themselves as agents of communication with the community.

In future work, it will be seen whether public libraries were really relevant and useful for their communities, if they were the walls of online community, despite having closed their physical doors. The "new normal" (working from home, e-learning, take-out, online shopping) can be a paradigm shift for both public and private organizations.

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