

A Plan to Make Brazilians Read

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On the average, a Brazilian reads less than 2 books per year; 1.8 books per year, to be exact. Colombians read 2.4 books per year, the English read 4.9 books per year, Americans read 5.1 books per year and the French read an average of 7 books per year.

How do you get Brazilians to read more? In November, the Ministry of Culture will launch a campaign, the Book Hunger - National Book, Reading and Library Plan, which will increase the number of libraries and bookstores around the country, reduce taxes on books and stimulate reading.

The idea is to set up a network with 14 ministries at the hub that will extend to foundations, institutions, NGOs, state-run enterprises, local officials and the publishing industry and bookstores.

The ministry will also be opening libraries in the 1,300 Brazilian municipalities that do not have them and open others in rural areas, schools, hospitals and Indian villages. Each of these new libraries will open with 2,500 volumes.

Illiteracy

The price of books, lack of libraries, and illiteracy can be considered some of the reasons for Brazil's low reading index. For the vice-president of the Brazilian Book Chamber (CBL), Bernardo Gurbanov, the low level of formal education is one of the chief causes of the reading situation in Brazil.

According to a CBL study, Portrait of Reading in Brazil, 61% of Brazil's literate adult population has very little or no contact with books. Among the 17 million people who don't like to read books, 11.5 million have 8 years of schooling or less.

"Without a doubt, we would require at least one library in each municipality. But it is not enough simply to erect buildings; it is necessary to complement this with planning aimed at education, instilling the habit of reading, and the offer of books, not just the classics, but the most contemporary and modern ones," Gurbanov argues.

The vice-president of the CBL criticizes the current wisdom that a library is set up mainly through book donations.

"We have to change this conception, which is already widely disseminated. The idea that a library comes into being through donations is mistaken and perpetuates backwardness," he judges.

Gurbanov, an Argentinean who has lived in Brazil for 27 years, praised the initiative of the "Reading is also a passion" project, launched in June at a match between the Brazilian and Argentinean national soccer selections.

"Brazil and Argentina have a special passion for soccer, as we all know. Let's hope this will be the kickoff so the people of Argentina and Brazil can develop the same passion for reading, without all this rivalry that exists in soccer," he commented.

According to Gurbanov, this is an initiative that can contribute to stimulating the habit of reading.

"I was in Argentine twice in April, and I observed once again that there is an interest in reading and a widely disseminated habit of reading. The Argentinean educational system encourages reading as a recreational activity," he explained.

What follows is a summary of the most important findings of the study, Portrait of Reading in Brazil, and data from other research.

The Habit of Reading

- Schooling is the chief determinant of the degree of affinity for book-reading.
- Book-reading is valued, in fact, by only 1/3 of the literate adult population.
- The so-called classes B and C contain 70% of book fans.
- Among the 17 million people who don't like to read books, 11.5 million attended school for eight years or less.

Access to Books and Libraries

- Studies by the Ministry of Culture indicate that approximately 1,300 Brazilian municipalities in the poorest regions don't have public libraries. - Half the books read at present are not bought.
- 61% of literate adult Brazilians has very little or no contact with books.
- 6.5 million individuals from the poorest segments of the population say they are unable to buy books.
- 7 of every 10 non-readers have low purchasing power.
- 73% of the books are concentrated in the hands of only 16% of the population.
- Over half the book purchasers (58%) are concentrated in six states in the South and Southeast regions.

The Book Market

- Brazil has 1,500 book stores (the ideal would be 10,000).
- 89% of Brazilian municipalities lack bookstores.
- The Brazilian publishing industry is eighth in the world ranking by production volume.
- There are about 530 active publishing houses ("active" means that at least five books or 10,000 copies are published annually).
- In the United States, 30% of the books that are published are acquired by public collections. In Brazil only 1% of what is published is destined for libraries.
- Book acquisition by North American libraries is greater than Brazil's entire consumption.

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