

# What and Why a Research about Reading Promotion on Public Libraries in the Metropolitan Area of Lisbon

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**Abstract.** Research Practices for Promoting Reading in Libraries in the MLA (Metropolitan Lisbon Area) looks at how we process practices to promote reading (PPR) in public libraries (PL). The reason for this research is the lack of focused qualitative studies or extensive investigations in this area. Against this backdrop, we developed a research to expand the knowledge on the subject, and the reality of what and how that is translated in the PPR's performed in the PL's. We seek to assess concepts and discourses that frame the promotion of reading; identify and characterize dominant or singular developed PPR; know the role of mediation and participants in these PPR; know the assessment given by librarians about the PPR that they promoted. This seems relevant in a time global transformation, where the domain of the practice and uses of reading and skills in various literacies are compelling and cross needs in a culture of information context.

**Keywords:** Information literacy, literacy promotion, promotion of reading, public libraries, qualitative research.

## 1 Critical Literature Review

We started our project by conducting a literature review, a structuring stage of the investigative process. We found theoretical and practical literature on the educational and civic role of libraries in dissemination, access and promotion of reading and literacies; by extensive theoretical and practical literature on reading, information literacy and other literacies. However, the concepts about reading literacy, literacy [1-3], information literacy [4-6] and other related concepts, as some authors warn [7-8], cases of metonymy and semantic differentiation might occur. Noticed there are theoretical and practical studies in these fields on the Portuguese reality, but as regards the PPR in PL, in general, they are monographic or disclosure of specific PPR studies. Extensive studies focus on quantitative research providing general or diffuse information about PPR activities by P.L. Thus, on the PPR in PL of MLA, literature is characterized by a lack of information allowing on this reality.

We argue that consideration of the results of research on the period under review made in the Science Open Access Repository in Portugal,<sup>1</sup> the websites of the universities with science information and documentation, in the minutes of the Congress BAD.<sup>2</sup> Except for special cases, also in internet searches and other documentation [9-12], [2], , we found no studies characterizing what they are and how to process the PPR in Portuguese PL; or the existence of legal framework [13]; or normative guiding<sup>3</sup> to promote reading in PL [14-16],. Annual surveys produced by the official body that oversees the PL<sup>4</sup> and existing quantitative studies on reading [17-24], [10], [12] and on readers [25-28], limited to the quantification of enunciation and typological practices performed<sup>5</sup> and do not address processes of conceptualization and implementation of PPR and literacies. In short, they do not explain what actually are these PPR and literacies in Portuguese PL, or what differentiates them from recreational activities or animation, and that situation is not very clear in IFLA guidelines [29].

While actively promoting reading<sup>6</sup> [30-31] is a recent historical field for contextual perspective views, practices and uses of reading, we found theoretical information about its historical diachrony [32-36]. We also found quantitative historical studies [37] and qualitative and theoretical research addressing sociological meanings of reading [38-39] and changes its course of practices of cultural and social phenomenon

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<sup>1</sup> It is known as RCCAP

<sup>2</sup> BAD - Portuguese Association of Librarians, Archivists and Document. Meeting Minutes from 2001 to 2012 in <http://www.bad.pt/publicacoes/index.php/congressosbad/issue/archive>

<sup>3</sup> In the DGLAB site - General Directorate of the Book, Archives and Libraries, <http://rcbp.dglb.pt/pt/ServProf/Documentacao/Paginas/Linhasorientadoras.aspx>, the official body that coordinates the National Network of Public Reading there are no reference documents guiding practices aimed specifically to promote reading and literacies for Portuguese PL. In its online archive contained some guidelines IFLA and UNESCO Manifesto.

<sup>4</sup> DGLAB - General Directorate of the Book, Archives and Libraries.

<sup>5</sup> A more systematic information on existing libraries of the National Network of Public Reading is the annual surveys produced by the Directorate - General DGLAB Book Archives and Libraries. In them (see the statistical report of 2011 and 2012 at [http://rcbp.dglb.pt/pt/ServProf/Estatistica/Documents/RELATORIO\\_Estatistico\\_2011\\_DGLAB.pdf](http://rcbp.dglb.pt/pt/ServProf/Estatistica/Documents/RELATORIO_Estatistico_2011_DGLAB.pdf) and [http://rcbp.dglb.pt/pt/ServProf/Estatistica/Documents/RELATORIO\\_Estatistico\\_2012\\_DGLAB.pdf](http://rcbp.dglb.pt/pt/ServProf/Estatistica/Documents/RELATORIO_Estatistico_2012_DGLAB.pdf) . These surveys, which can be related to PPR are limited to numeric data sessions: Story Time; Meetings With Writers; Reading Clubs / Communities of Readers; Exhibitions about books and authors; Art exhibitions; Conferences lectures; Workshops to promote reading; Other workshops; Training in reading promotion; Training in computer science; Other training; Other activities; Number of on-going projects. Not for concrete information on which promotion are made on information literacy and other literacies, nor on the theoretical and conceptual model that fits these activities, nor on its evaluation exists.

<sup>6</sup> Mediation process and approach, interacting with participants, develops strategies to enable them to think critically about what they read involving them in activities designed to help them better understand, discuss and retain information, seeking to activate their previous knowledge schemes; stimulating assimilation capacity, comparison, evaluation, information processing approaches and content available, and thus contribute to transform the results of participation in these experiences into new knowledge.

of reading [40-43]. We find relevant literature to enroll reading (promotion and uses; transdisciplinary focus of reading; the role of reading on a information culture; educational paradigms and multiple literacies), [44-47]. Issues relating to access and social uses of reading have also been studies [48], [11], highlighting some of the centrality of cultural literacy and information in the information society and emerging challenges [33], [46]. The cultural and social dimension of reading in the reality of time is a relatively common denominator to all authors and similar view is projected on the importance of the social role of libraries in promoting reading [49] and its increased relevance in a culture of information in the digital environment [50-51] and the culture of information involves the scientific, technological and humanities fields.

When meaningful the literature on theoretical and empirical reflections and studies on the social, educational and civic role of libraries in the dissemination and access to culture, information and promotion of reading and literacies [48-49], [3], [52-53], in literature (and in the practice of libraries) there is some conceptual vagueness as to promote reading, promote literacies and recreational activities, an aspect that is directly or laterally reported by several authors [54-55], [14], [22], [47], [1]. PPR fitting what are the sociological context of cultural transmission and reproduction and social significance of reading in the collective consciousness [56-57], some authors [58-63], despite their different theoretical frameworks,<sup>7</sup> consider the current adverse reality the validated reading. Other [38-39], [46] think they cannot be promoted to be the most adjusted approaches of new technological, social and cultural realities. These reflections are relevant and add interest to the development of PPR, taking into account that in national [12]- [64], [28] and international studies on reading and readers [25], [10], [65], Portugal does not occupy a prominent position in reading skills, although this situation has improved over in the last decade [19].

From the examples above, we found that the theoretical frameworks and research reading and literacies in the PPR literature which refer to Portugal, are either predominantly quantitative or qualitative studies, or are limited and occasional. Despite this, the literature provides us with a methodological framework and established the theoretical horizon for research in the context of knowledge on the subject of an *information society*, although some authors prefer to value the concepts of *knowledge society* and *culture information* [50], [46], [60]. However, before the picture of the state of the art it cannot be argued that there is actual research on what they are and how effectively PPR and literacies in Portuguese libraries are processed, even when considering the approaches to the new realities. Several authors stress the need for the current context of uncertainty, change and challenges to deepen reflection and produce knowledge practices for promoting reading in Portuguese PL [66], a relatively unknown reality. For this knowledge it is necessary to collect data accurate, systematic and consistent about PPR and make an analysis and interpretation that better meets the intervention developed by PL Portugal at a time when reading skills

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<sup>7</sup> Guy Debord, thinker, writer and one of the leading theorists of the Situationist International movement. Mario Vargas Llosa is globally known as a novelist, with his ideological background and political positions also gave prominence to this writer awarded with the Nobel Prize in Literature. His teaching career has less media exposure, even though he has developed a solid academic record at Columbia, Florida, Harvard, Princeton and Georgetown (USA) and universities Queen Mary College, King's College and Cambridge (UK).

and literacies are compelling. This should be crossed with needs in the context of a culture of information that must include skills of reading, writing and literacies in the scientific, technological and creative fields and areas of social sciences [46].

## 2 Research Topic and Questions

The existing gap in the knowledge of reality in PPR PL is a relevant problem in the importance of reading skills, information literacy and other literacies in a culture of information. The other questions of their individual and social value are also central to the mission and purposes of public libraries. Related to our question (what are they and how to process the practices of reading promotion in municipal public libraries in the Metropolitan Area of Lisbon?) emerge: What is the conceptual framework of the public libraries Practices for Promoting Reading in MLA? How are they constructed and operated? How are they viewed by the users? How are they evaluated?

To answer these questions we considered conducting a survey based on interviews and documentary analysis of evidence about PPR carried out between 2009-2013. The objective is to know, not "judge", and thus we can build an awareness of research to improve and determine the situation and so overcome the lack of consistent information and the mere enunciation discourse associated with the promotion of reading. We place the hypothesis so that we may know part of the reality of Portuguese reading promotion practices and give a picture of its eventual dominant model, or singular forms they assume in Metropolitan Lisbon Area. The model will be developed with the knowledge of conceptual and operative expression that informs this practices, associating them also to related concepts (literacy, information literacies, transliteracies) and socio-cultural dimensions that frame these practices. We consider these pertinent issues for the increased need of promoting reading skills and literacies, as we have already stated, there are only occasional studies available do not allow us to characterize this reality and are insufficient for effective knowledge PPR which are promoted in Portuguese public libraries.

## 3 Research Objectives

The overall goal of our research is to investigate and analyse practices to promote reading (print or digital and textual, visual, hearing or other readings) and literacies in PL MLA and what they are in order to add knowledge to this relatively unknown reality.

We have very specific objectives: to assess the level of understanding in the researched sample on reading promotion; to get to know the content that PL give to its concepts and values that as such give meaning to their possible theoretical and operational grounds; to identify, characterize and describe how PPR and literacies are developed and made available; to know what inspires them; to know how they are conceptualized, operationalized and supported; the signal models underpinning the PPR (animation activities, educational activities); to know what methods are used; to know how PPR mediation is framed; to understand what approach is taken and to develop strategies for stakeholder involvement; to know how they assess the PPR; how PLs are identified as opponents and/or adjuvants to PPR; to assess the

relationship between reading promotion and developed practices; what levels of convergence/divergence exist between concepts, dominant discourses and practices; and to foresee visions of the future that are detected in these libraries for the qualification and development of practices for promoting reading.

Whereas the purpose of this research is to alleviate the gap in knowledge of the reality of PPR, we intend to collect information that provides answers to these questions (Table 1) and that they may raise new hypotheses and questions to allow us to understand why these libraries promote reading and how to operationalize it. We hypothesized<sup>8</sup> that we can be successful in the objective to meet the descriptive framework of the PPR in MLA PL and the analytical objective of knowing how they are processed, which predominate singular instances (paradigmatic, ideological, historical, etc.); assess levels of consonance and dissonance between theoretical framework, objectives and resulting underpinning the PPR and know which librarians consider MLA opponents and adjuvants for operating their PPR and eventually to prefigure its re-design.

**Table 1.** The procedural framework to develop relationships with the goal of answering questions.

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Relationship to develop</i>
What are the <b>referential models</b> ? <b>What PPR</b> are offered?	Identify <b>references</b> To <b>collect and analyse</b> PPR
What are the <b>dimensions</b> that emerge from the indicators?	Flag <b>dimensions and indicators</b>
What <b>skill levels</b> are involved?	Flag <b>evidence</b>
What <b>needs do you seek</b> to redress?	Flag <b>evidence</b>
How are <b>participants framed</b> ?	To <b>collect and analyse</b>
What are the <b>PPR in MLA</b> ?	<b>Verify relationships between the paradigmatic and the tangible.</b>

## 4 Research Methodology

Having considering the research hypothesis and the objectives set in terms of research methodology we decided to opt for a qualitative research based on a questionnaire and interview supplemented by documentary evidence analysis.<sup>9</sup> We focused this

<sup>8</sup> The possibility of knowing what they are and how to process the PPR from the questions has the potential to frame hypotheses and answer the problem: detecting existing perspectives on reading and literacy; assess any conceptual vagueness and / or artificial dichotomy; verify dimensions of differentiation between and overcoming the mere availability of public access to documentary resources / promotion of social and cultural access ; distinguish dimensions of entertainment activities / educational activities.

<sup>9</sup> The intersection of data and information obtained from the interviews and further investigation with the documentary evidence, materials produced by libraries within their PPR, enable analysis and interpretation allowing a better knowledge of what they are actually PPR and intervention PL of the 18 MLA developed for the promotion of reading and qualification of people in their communities.

exploratory and descriptive study in the period of 2009-2013, based on field research on a sample of 18 libraries in the Metropolitan Area of Lisbon (MLA). It is a restricted but representative geographical area of 2962.4 km<sup>2</sup>, 2.821.876 inhabitants (28% of the Portuguese population) heterogeneously distributed among 18 counties with diverse sociocultural characteristics (urban and rural communities; cosmopolitan realities and periphery) (Table 2). The sample is representative of MLA since it includes all the libraries of the 18 municipalities and interviews were held with the heads of these libraries.

**Table 2.** Counties and population of the Metropolitan Lisbon Area

<i>County</i>	<i>km<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>Population (2011)*</i>
Alcochete	132.8	17.565
Almada	70.2	173.298
Amadora	23.8	175.558
Barreiro	32.0	79.042
Cascais	97.2	205.117
Lisboa	84.6	545.245
Loures	169.0	76.749
Mafra	291.5	70.867
Moita	54.6	66.311
Montijo	340.5	58.308
Odivelas	26.6	143.755
Oeiras	45.8	172.063
Palmela	465.9	62.549
Seixal	95.7	157.981
Sesimbra	195.7	52.371
Setubal	193.6	124.459
Sintra	319.4	377.249
Vila Franca de Xira	323.5	136.510
Total	2.962.4	2.815.851

\*Provided from the National Institute of Statistics.

As verified by the most current review no study addresses how to process extensively Portuguese practices for promoting reading on public libraries, in seeking to identify which PPR were produced; and what they aim to promote objectively; what are their theoretical frameworks; and guidelines that frame the planning and operation of PPR. Given the existing theoretical framework, the problem of our research cannot be properly confronted with similar previous studies. So we will choose not to continue the existing theoretical framework. As mentioned in Quivy [67], this is another methodological possibility, that we have structured the data collection and reporting, and analysis of PPR actantial scheme in which they express themselves in another epistemological perspective.

Framed by theoretical studies and research, our research is based on a survey whose approach is oriented to the sources and the problems<sup>10</sup> and we intend to obtain

<sup>10</sup>Developed an oriented sources (interviews and documents) and also to the problems, which 'involves formulating questions by reading secondary sources' approach [68].

information from indicators derived from the analysis of discursive content and documents, available data and evidence produced by the PL, which will allow us to better understand the reality of the PPR in MLA PL<sup>11</sup> and measuring the degree of correspondence between these indicators point and advocated on theoretical concepts and paradigms in dominant discourse on promoting reading and literacies.

We privileged a qualitative methodology [69] using the method of semi-directive inquiry by interviews [70-71]. The various research questions were addressed in a scripted interview<sup>12</sup> encompassing the dimensions and indicators of research (Table 3) and a more detailed questionnaire thus using here a mixed research methodology<sup>13</sup>. Following the interview, later we requested the delivery documentation and the possibility of viewing the materials for survey evidence to submit content analysis [72-73].<sup>14</sup> This will ensure greater usefulness and meaning to the data, additional elements for classification of treatment and interpretation of data and the results of the analysis will be compared with quantitative information obtained in other studies. This will help us better understand the meanings and logical representations that emerge from research and articulate consolidation of the problematic build and analytical model (Figure 1).

We believe that this research will result in greater knowledge about practices for promoting reading in MLA libraries. From it data and information might emerge to

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<sup>11</sup>We use as investigational instruments the following records; the interview guide; Records of sound recordings; notebook records; checklists; critical content analysis of categorical data and statistical results; document content analysis. For the processing of data will do their loading racks and recording instruments. Using techniques of data processing and statistical tools to build tables, graphs and tables needed. The analysis, evaluation and interpretation of information will be made in the size of the phenomenological paradigm. We hope to obtain consistent results to support the hypothesis of the research.

<sup>12</sup>Synopsis of the interview guide questions: What is the framework given to the content of the concept of PPR and literacy? Practices developed highlighted by respondents; Models that these practices shape it (animation activities; educational activities) PPR? What concrete developments and made available? What methods are used for their development? How are conceptualized, planned, operationalized and evaluated? What evidence shows that the activities translate into PPR? What potential developments that are affecting the reading? How is the mediation of PPR and that the instruments fall? That centrality is given to the role and evaluation of participants? What are the concepts, dominant discourses and practices? That adjuvants and opponents faced by PPR? What visions of the future are detected for PPR in the libraries of MLA?

<sup>13</sup>There are investigations such as ours where this intersection may be pertinent to observe a relationship "between qualitative and context of discovery, and (...) the amount and context of the evidence" [69, p. 96]. The mixed option can contribute relativity face a dichotomous engagement. There is also some interaction methods, "even in exact quantitative measures what is measured remains a quality" [71, p.38].

<sup>14</sup>"A set of techniques for communication analysis in order to obtain a systematic and objective description of the contents of indicators (quantitative or otherwise) messages that allow the inference of knowledge concerning the conditions of production / reception (inferred variables ) of these messages" [7, p.44].

confirm or refute consistency of existing empirical processes and their convergence / divergence with canons and paradigms to promote reading. The answers given to the questions of this investigation<sup>15</sup> may also contribute to generate new hypotheses questioning the reality measured and pave the way for further research.

## 5 Developed Work

So far we conducted a significant *review of the literature* and made the *research project* that was approved by the University of Évora. We decided on the *sample*, and completed the *authorization process for participation in the sample* of all municipalities of MLA. We conducted the survey of *indicators* that adequately reflect the concepts and evidence we sought to analyse. A *conceptual glossary* associated with the promotion of literacies was produced, and we built the *interview guide* and *supplementary questionnaire*. We have already *completed the process of conducting interviews* and had excellent reception and collaboration. Librarians felt that their participation gave them the opportunity to reflect on PPR and literacies that develop in their PL; that their input would be useful for the purpose of obtaining an identification reference and descriptive than they are in the PPR and literacies of MLA PL; this could clarify the theoretical framework, conceptualization, content, execution and results of PPR promoted by PL.

**Table 3.** Framework for dimensional and sources of indicators

Dimensions	Sources of indicators
<b>A – Participants</b> (the interviewed)	<b>A 1 – Information content of the interviews</b>
<b>B – Formats</b> (contents practices documents and offered frameworks)	<b>B 1 – Evidence</b> collected and categorizations arising from critical analysis
<b>C – Interactive potential</b> , practical involvement and promotion of the objectives	<b>C 1 – Triangulation of variables and units of meaning</b> obtained in interviews with documental and critical analysis of their content and reviews of BP
<b>D – Public Hearing</b>	<b>D 1 – Statistical data</b> collected and compiled by BP reviews
<b>E – Cultural</b>	<b>E 1 – Theoretical and conceptual affiliations</b>

At the moment we are doing the *transcription of interviews* to then release the appropriate information and data grids for analysis. Then go back to the libraries to observe and collect evidence records of documents produced to support the PPR and subjecting the documentary and content analysis. With this research we hope to produce consistent and sustained information that could increase the knowledge on PPR in PL and what contribution these libraries are making to a reality with a more competent readers. We hope that eventually this research can also stimulate further research with qualitative approach in the promotion of reading.

<sup>15</sup> *Answers to be obtained by the research:* What do you mean by libraries promote reading; Relationship between PPR and developed practices; Determination of a possible basic structure relatively common to PPR; Gauging the possible absence of a common denominator to the PPR; Singular instances that predominate in PPR (paradigmatic, ideological, historical, etc.); Theoretical and operational grounds that surround the PPR; Processes of articulation and projection of these fundamentals in PPR developed; How is the assessment of the PPR; Obstacles to the development and qualification of PPR; The conceptual framework and the values that give meaning to the PPR.



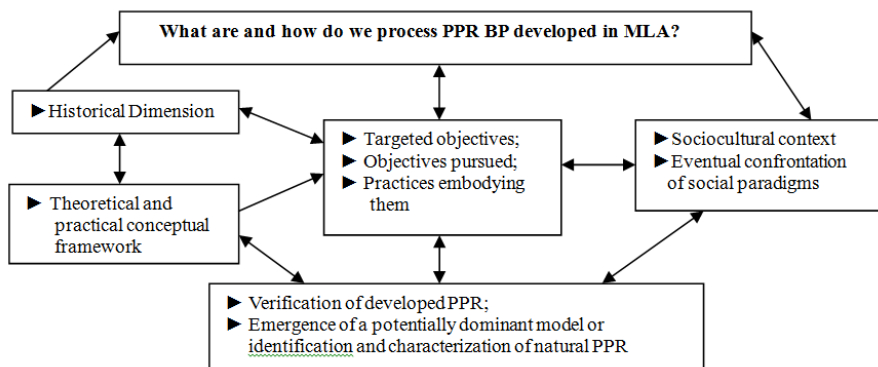


Fig. 1. Diagram of the analysis model<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The analytical model that arises from our problem involves: concepts (around PPR); dimensions (historical practices of reading, social paradigms on PPR; effective practices developed by libraries); indicators (interview data, information obtained through document analysis, conceptual measurement). Research indicators: concept of reading promotion; concept of literacy promotion; practices developed (outstanding practices of PPR performed); tables inspiring references; conceptualization developed for PPR (characterization of practices developed; conceptualization); methods used in PPR; potential targets (developing specific skills and other purposes); perception / information fruition potential; assessment procedures (results achieved; critical factors; adjuvants factors; suggestions for improving PPR); characterization of the respondents.

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