

APPENDIX II

BINATIONAL CENTERS

HISTORY

Binational cultural centers began in Buenos Aires. In 1927 in that city an organization was formed by Argentines who had lived and studied in the United States. These Argentines wanted to maintain contacts and friendships with the American people and with each other. To do this they created a cultural institution—one which would support itself and its cultural activities by fees earned from the teaching of English to Argentines and the teaching of Spanish to resident Americans. Today there are 132 centers of this type in 29 countries; 85 percent or 112 of them in 19 Latin American nations.

In the 39 years since the first center was established in Buenos Aires, binational centers have taught English, Spanish, Portuguese, and even Quechua to hundreds of thousands of people and loaned books to interested persons in their cities. Millions have attended concerts, art exhibits, and other cultural activities in the centers. Public program attendance in fiscal year 1965, for example, reached 3,378,113.

The U.S. Government was not involved in the binational center program until World War II, when Nelson Rockefeller, Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, became interested and wanted to provide some practical encouragement to these centers. By 1945, 28 binational centers were receiving some kind of help from the U.S. Government. The help provided included books for libraries, and occasional grants of money, but English teaching specialists and teaching materials were the most important form of aid. The cultural sections of the U.S. embassies began supporting and encouraging the centers in appropriate ways. Throughout the world in fiscal year 1965, all forms of support from the U.S. Information Agency totaled \$2,722,619 (\$2,007,890 of this in Latin America) but for every dollar spent by the 132 centers, 72 cents was raised locally; for each American employee provided them, the centers hired 35 people.

Over the years refinements have been made in the type of assistance given to centers and the type of programs which the centers are trying to carry out. It is now general practice for the United States to provide an executive director to administer the large centers. In fact, worldwide personnel costs account for \$1,980,258 of the total USIA support figure mentioned in the preceding paragraph. Direct assistance usually consists of supplies, teaching equipment, support for lectures and seminars, etc. This assistance may be for special projects as well as defraying a center's operational deficit.

The English, French, Russians, and other countries have also created networks of cultural centers. Those of Communist countries, usually termed "friendship societies," are thinly veiled propaganda devices.

The unique value of the U.S.-assisted centers has been their status as local organizations. Founded largely on local initiative, the centers offer a direct means of activating interest in the United States. In those areas where the official activities of foreign governments are regarded with suspicion, a binational center, which has local sponsorship, frequently finds wider acceptance. The binational center remains under the control and guidance of the local board of directors—people from the community. They were founded because the local population wanted them and they have retained their local character. They have proved to be the kind of institutions envisaged by the first founders in Buenos Aires nearly 40 years ago.

ORGANIZATION

Binational centers are nonpolitical, nonsectarian, nonprofit cultural institutions. They are incorporated under the laws of the host government and governed by boards of directors chosen from U.S. citizens resident in the host country and citizens of that country. The board members are sincere, dedicated individuals who are working toward the same goals as the United States; their dedication is the strength of the binational center program.