

Strategic Development of Libraries and Information Services in Hungary

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The Ministry of Culture has prepared a three-year-old project for the government about the development of the national information network of libraries, archives and cultural institutions. This paper discusses the libraries project. The basic pillars of the project are the national information infrastructure development programme, the filling of the network with information resources, and the digitisation of in-

formation wealth. It is an important task to co-ordinate the cultural digitisation programme, to institute legal regulations on multimedia harmonising with European legal regulations, and to play an initiating role in copyright of electronic resources. These are the task for which the John von Neumann Multimedia Centre and Digital Library has been established.

Introduction

A strategic development plan makes it possible to replace hasty decisions by well-considered ones, and ad hoc changes by strategic development concepts. In the field of establishing library-information networks it means that from the opposite pairs of development and standstill, development and its deficiency, well-considered planning and hasty decisions, the positively oriented ones will dominate. In an information society, services rely basically on the system of public (open) library supply that provides *free access to information as a citizen's right*. Accordingly, the library acts as a basic institution collecting, processing and providing information for the information society.

The informed country consists of a network of towns and municipalities that have access to information. This network is comprised of basic networks in the towns and municipalities that make it possible for local institutions, enterprises, various organisations and the local inhabitants to participate in the network. Through this participation, they improve the quality of life and efficiency and increase economic competitiveness in the country.

PEST analysis

The following major factors determine strategic development:

- the *political intentions* that give priority to information and information provision;
- the *professional laws and government programmes* in the field of higher/public education and culture that provide funding for information services;
- the *economic factors* determining the opportunities for bodies of public collections, cultural institutions and institution systems;
- the *social factors* defining who needs information and to what extent given the expanding need for participation in society;
- the *technological factors* enabling the establishment of an up-to-date network infrastructure for the whole country, including small communities, as well as the creation and extension of information resources as required.

The related vision for the library system is determined by the following trends:

- unlimited, free, immediate access to information,
- the spreading of digitisation,
- the increasing role of (virtual) libraries without walls,

- co-operation between networks in the fields of economy, culture, science and research, administration etc.
- globalisation and world-wide co-operation in any field of collecting, processing and providing information;
- the establishment of the information highway and of informed (intelligent) cities and regions,
- the effects of the rapid development of information technology.

Formulating the global aim

By providing free access to national and international information and knowledge, the library system as a whole should be capable of:

- providing information on the legal regulation of citizens' rights and democracy for the further development of the democratic state,
- orienting citizens about the issues of the economy as a whole and the market economy, and about the active use of related information,
- assisting all those participating in the various levels of education,
- supporting life-long learning,
- contributing to an awareness of culture and art and preparing citizens for taking part in related activities,
- assisting in the practical use of one's free time,
- providing assistance in the development of those skills (literacy) that are necessary for the active use of the activities mentioned above.

To sum up, the aim of providing free access to national and international information and knowledge is to realise the „informed country,“ i.e., the country of citizens who have access to information.

The library policy of the Cultural Ministry

The Ministry of Culture of Hungary has prepared a project plan entitled *Information for the government*. The project is about the development of a national information network of libraries, museums, archives and cultural institutions and the John von Neumann Multimedia Centre and Digital Library to be realised as part of the computerisation and telecommunication network project related to the millennium celebrations. The document also includes an action plan as part of its

strategic plan, as well as the time-schedule and method of implementation.

In order to achieve the aim of having an informed country, it is necessary to develop the system's elements in overlapping time phases. The plan foresees a continuous and phased development of telecommunication and computerisation infrastructure. The technological development of libraries can be phased as well: it will start with developing central libraries and creating the system of shared cataloguing. It will continue with the modernisation of the local systems of libraries that provide information, and end with the modernisation of user-libraries and school libraries. „Telehouses“ established in libraries could become the information centres of smaller municipalities. There, citizens can use not only the ordinary library services but also can use all the telecommunication/computer facilities that they need for work, learning and information-gathering. The telehouse will achieve its aim if it does not detach itself from the information service for the community, i.e. it needs to be established in the library.

Regional development is complemented by the co-operation of research/special libraries and higher education libraries. Co-operation within special fields may at the same time be complemented by the regional principle.

A significant element in the project is *the filling of the information network* being established *with content* and *the creation and extension of these information resources* – an activity that also can be phased continuously. In the course of this activity, *the databases of economy and of local authorities and government* should be developed, *the cultural resources digitised* (to establish electronic libraries, museums, art collections, cultural institutions etc.), *the retrospective conversion* of library catalogues carried out, and *multimedia* applications implemented.

The basic pillars of the project are:

- developing further network connections based on the HBONE network operated by the National Information Infrastructure Development Programme; and, as a result, the inclusion of all municipalities – and if it is possible, also designated municipalities of the Hungarian communities outside the borders of Hungary – into the information system,

- filling the network with information resources, and
- digitising the information wealth.

When we were planning for the implementation of the programme, we paid attention to ensuring the *continuous* operation of the infrastructure being created, as well as organising *the education and extension training* to acquire the knowledge necessary for the use of new tools and methods.

In the present economic situation, it is the population that is most disadvantaged regarding access, that is least aware of the possibilities offered by the information society. To overcome this it is necessary to develop the *library system* as well as the *information services of libraries and other public collections, and cultural institutions*. We can avoid the undesired situation where society is divided into a narrow stratum of *information-rich* and an overwhelming majority of *information-poor* if the country is covered by a computerised library-information telecommunication network and the library is the most important centre of information-gathering, learning, individual training, education, recreation, tourism activities, information services on economy, self-governments and the government.

As a result of computer and telecommunication development in the field of education, those leaving school will have become acquainted with the versatile services offered by information technology and they will have a demand for these services at their workplace and for information-gathering and cultural activities. It is the task of public collections (libraries) to provide access for all to these kinds of information, on the one hand, and to produce the information in electronic form, on the other. Often they are already using the information being maintained and provided today in a traditional (printed) form.

To carry out these tasks, it is necessary to develop a computer-telecommunication infrastructure for public collections and cultural institutions. It is important to organise these institutions into a network, to implement a division of labour among them, and to digitise the information wealth. Furthermore, it is essential to construct databases, to acquire and provide documents on electronic media, and to train the staff of public collections according to the requirements of the information society.

Developing the computer-telecommunication infrastructure of libraries

The activities in this field include the connection of public collections and cultural institutions onto the wide-area network, to provide adequate computers and software and to develop (if justified) local area networks. Infrastructure development has to be implemented in three categories of public collections, according to the role of each institution within the network of public collections and its participation in the division of labour:

- the *national library*: a high-speed, broadband network connection, a developed local area network with many workplaces, large storage capacity, open system software;
- *research and special libraries with national responsibilities, university libraries, county libraries*: an adequate speed connection, a developed local area network with many workplaces, large storage capacity, open system software;
- *city libraries, college libraries, and institutional libraries*: a connection via leased lines or telephone, a local area network (in larger libraries), large-capacity client computers and software; and
- *village libraries*: adequate technical equipment to access union catalogues and the Internet.

Organisation of networks, division of labour

Libraries (public collections) are the largest data providers for the information infrastructure world-wide. They should carry out this activity organised into a network, implementing a rational division of labour. This division of labour and the network principle is also valid for the processing of documents and information (shared cataloguing, construction of specialised databases) and the document supply.

Special attention should be paid to avoiding parallel developments, to the co-operation of various types of institutions. This relates also to the creation of networks and the construction of databases.

Shared cataloguing

Participating institutions carry out cataloguing and classification in co-operation, thus reducing parallel work to a minimum. It is a precondition of shared cataloguing that the participants be connected into a network, possess the necessary

hardware and software, an adequate server and adequate rules and standards regarding the contents of processing.

The online catalogue to be established as a result of shared cataloguing (and retrospective data input) efforts will cover almost 100% of the holdings in the country, and will be used by ca. 120–140 participating (contributing) libraries with another 60 connected libraries that will be just users.

Construction and provision of specialised databases

Public collections create information databases related to various special fields (e.g. culture, special literature on economy or law) and to various regions (e.g. local knowledge databases) within a division of labour, and make them accessible over the networks. It is also necessary to provide access over the network to databases that have been purchased.

Document supply

In providing access to documents, document supply services are increasingly gaining ground over the purchasing of materials. This means that instead of using local subscriptions to fulfil a request, the copy of a requested article is ordered from a document supply service or the requested book is acquired from a document supply service as a loan. To operate this service, a national system of document supply must be realised.

Digitisation of information resources and database construction

The mass of information accessible via the Web conceals the fact that the presence of the Hungarian culture is insignificant. Therefore one of the most important elements of the programme is *to fill the information network being created with content*.

The state should directly participate in the creation of databases, and should make incentives to and co-ordinate the activities carried out by entrepreneurs aimed at cataloguing the cultural heritage from the point of contents.

From among already existing initiatives, the already established *Hungarian Electronic Library* is to be stressed. We intend to continue its development in harmony with the nation-wide digitisation programme. It is an important task to co-

ordinate the cultural digitisation programme, to institute legal regulations on multimedia harmonising with European legal regulations, to play an initiating role in the copyright of electronic resources, to carry out a methodological role in this field and to organise related further training. These are the tasks for which the John von Neumann Multimedia Centre and Digital Library has been established.

Education and training of the professional staff of libraries

The information society, rapid and ever renewing information technology, and the information explosion demand the education and extension training of specialists dealing with processing and mediating information. The locus of these training activities will be the well-equipped education laboratory to be established in the John von Neumann Multimedia Centre and Digital Library.

Financial sources of the project

The concept of the programme outlined is being realised by means of a grant system in which proposals can be made for projects in harmony with the objectives of the concept. Institutions can stipulate in the proposals the hosts they have selected. No independent closed network may be created.

The law on culture (Law No. CXL of 1997) envisages a sum calculated on a normative basis for the development of a computer and telecommunication infrastructure of public collections and cultural institutions, and for maintaining the activities corresponding to their role in the information society. This guarantees the realisation of the programme from central sources. In 1998, 316 million Forints were spent on related grants as an initial step of the outlined programme. Starting in 1998, at least an amount double this sum is guaranteed by the law.

Phasing of the project

1998

The computer and telecommunication infrastructures of libraries are being developed in the first stage almost completely.

The basis for shared cataloguing will be created and its operation started.

Access to shared cataloguing will be ensured for at least 10 county libraries.

The retrospective conversion of library catalogues will be continued.

The activities of the Hungarian Electronic Library will be supported.

Proposals will be solicited for grants supporting the creation, development and provision of databases in special fields, in government, self-government and community information.

The structure of databases systematising digital information will be defined and their uploading will be started.

The creation of the National System of Document Supply will be begun.

The methods of training to achieve modern, computer and telecommunication literacy (distance learning via the Internet) will be elaborated.

1999

In addition to the present 15 participants at least 30 libraries with major collections should be involved in shared cataloguing (including the libraries of museums with national responsibilities).

Participation should be ensured for all county libraries in the shared cataloguing project.

The connection of town libraries onto the national computer network should be started.

The online management of interlibrary lending should begin.

The local systems of public collections should be built out and modernised respectively.

Further grant proposals should be solicited and evaluated for the digitisation of cultural heritage.

Grants for the creation, development and provision of databases in special fields, government, self-government and community information should be awarded and evaluated.

The uploading and updating of databases on digital information should be continued.

Training activities (distance education via the Internet) should be continued.

2000

The John von Neumann Multimedia Centre and Digital Library is to be opened.

The local systems of libraries should be modernised and the migration to a new computerised system should be implemented where necessary.

The connection of town libraries onto the national network should continue.

For larger town libraries, access should be ensured to the shared catalogue.

Newly informed municipalities, towns, regions should be created.

Various multimedia applications should be compiled and implemented related to the millennium celebrations.

All the initiatives, developments and new projects within the three-year government programme will have to be adequately presented to the audience consisting of Hungarian and foreign specialists, the interested audience and visitors to Hungary.

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