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Changing information needs in a transition period in Hungary. Satisfying demands from different sources

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Abstract

During the 1990s a new wave of industrial and technological revolution has transformed the societies of Eastern and Central Europe. The revolution in information and communication in the past decades has opened up a new era for individuals, local communities and various civilisations of the world.

The changes taking place in Hungarian society have placed the Hungarian library system in permanent transition; the old centralised systems have ceased to exist and the only elements to survive are those for which there is a real demand. In 1997, a new Cultural Act was enacted which included, among other things, public library provision.

The traditional library service of ILL is also in transition and it is necessary to carry out an evaluation of the services of the requesting and supplying libraries which are still available. During the 1990s many of the large state-owned industrial and agricultural enterprises went into private ownership and the new owners had no interest in maintaining the libraries belonging to them. Other libraries to suffer included the research institutions' network of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and public libraries. The greatest winners of the transition are the university libraries as it is the policy of the government to increase the number of students participating in higher education.

Many initiatives are underway, using integrated systems, to provide electronic sources of bibliographic and holdings information of Hungarian material with cataloguing and document delivery options available. An ILL order form has been placed on the Website of the Hungarian National Library. The John von Neumann Digital Library was founded in 1997. The purpose of the library is to become the public collection of digitised cultural heritage, to co-ordinate all related activities and to manage the network service.

Paper sources include the Central Catalogue of Books, a card catalogue of books held in Hungarian libraries which has been built since 1924 and contains over 4 million bibliographic items held by about 200 libraries. This has particular information value for older publications eg published in Hungary since 1801.

The proportion of print and electronic sources used in ILL is currently 50 per cent. The use of both sources is an essential element, to fulfil the demand for both current documents and for older documents.

Changes in Hungarian society in the 90s: how do they affect the library system?

During the 1990s a new wave of industrial and technological revolution has transformed the societies of Eastern and Central Europe. The Soviet Union collapsed and the world ceased to be divided into two confronting parts. The former satellite states are once again faced with problems of readjustment to the world system. The challenge is great, as the systems to adapt to (the American or Western

European models) are in a permanent state of transformation, and the characteristics of local societies might be different.

The revolution in information and communication in the past decades has opened up a new era for individuals, local communities and various civilisations of the world. The changes taking place in the Hungarian society called for the transition of the Hungarian library system. As a result of this, the old centralised systems have ceased to exist and the only elements to survive are those for which there is a real demand. The Hungarian library system is now in permanent transition: identical objectives have created systems and services based on co-operation.

In 1997, a new Cultural Act was enacted which included, among other things, public library provision. As a new feature, not only library missions have been identified, but it has also been stipulated which duties are subsidised by the state government, and which duties should be subsidised by local governments or other maintainers.

The National Document Delivery System (ODR) is treated as one of the most important tasks for the Hungarian library system, aiming at making available all documents within the library system to each user through the nearest library. Participating libraries are as follows: the National Széchenyi Library, the Debrecen University Library as the library with national collection interest, national special libraries, libraries of state universities, county libraries and libraries receiving legal deposit copies. As one can see, the National Document Delivery System is constructed for co-operation by three kinds of libraries.

The library system in Hungary suffered significant losses during the 1990s: a large number of libraries ceased to exist without any successors. Amongst the libraries to disappear were those belonging to large state-owned companies - many of these industrial and agricultural enterprises went into private ownership and the new owners had no interest in maintaining the libraries belonging to them. It is regrettable that the financing of technical development and innovation has not yet been solved.

Other libraries to suffer included the research institutions' network of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and public libraries. A large number of Academy institutes merged and they lost their earlier unique importance in scientific research. Researchers from the institutes of the Academy of Sciences went over to universities in Hungary or moved abroad.

The greatest winners of the transition are the university libraries as it is the policy of the government to increase the number of students participating in higher education. In 1999 most of the universities formed consortia, the so-called "universitas", which were extended with new faculties. The increased number of students made it clear that the university libraries' current capability is limited. The library buildings are too small, and the holdings are incomplete and outdated. The university libraries have received serious support in document acquisition and informatic tools. As a result of this, they have become the leaders in library development in Hungary.

Satisfying the permanently changing demands by means of informatics: electronic and print sources of ILL

Electronic bibliographic sources

Central and shared catalogues

Among the few central databases that seem to have survived the Catalogue of Foreign Periodicals held in 600 Hungarian libraries is the most important one. It bears the misleading name National Periodicals' Database (NPA), although it does not contain information on periodicals published in Hungary. With 42,000 titles and one million holdings it is a huge database and extending it with bibliographic and holdings information on Hungarian periodicals is a great challenge. See <http://iif.hu/db/npac/index.html> for details.

A large project and consortium of various Hungarian libraries is underway, using different integrated systems aimed at both cataloguing and document delivery. Its name is the Hungarian National Shared Catalogue Project (MOKKA). Established in 1998, its aim is, among other things, to create an easy-to-use searching interface for finding bibliographic and holdings information on monographs

available in Hungary. It is most regrettable that the system is still under construction and we have no reliable information as to when it will be launched (<http://www.MOKKA.hu>).

Some university libraries, using the same integrated system (CORVINA), have started the VOCAL Shared Catalogue Project (<http://vocal.lib.klte.hu>), containing the OPACs of 21 university libraries. The VOCAL database has become the basis for the National Document Delivery System Database (ODR) and has succeeded in becoming the most important operating and increasing source of bibliographic and holdings information of books. In addition to this, entries for monographs purchased for document delivery purposes by ODR but non-VOCAL members have been added to the VOCAL database. The holdings of 56 libraries are included and most of them accept online orders. The requests will be forwarded by the system to the holding library. ODR member libraries will have overall responsibility for document delivery and they will keep records on filled requests and obtain postage refunds (<http://odr.lib.klte.hu>).

I would like to mention two more shared catalogue projects, both containing the holdings of 4 libraries: AROMO (<http://aromo.aszi.sztaki.hu>) is the catalogue of a college and three university libraries; THECA (<http://biblio.osb.hu>) contains holdings of four Catholic libraries.

Individual library catalogues

As a result of a three-year development, the National Széchényi Library has begun to use a new integrated system, Amicus. After unifying its two separate databases in Amicus, it has formed the largest electronic catalogue available in Hungary. The OPAC of Amicus, LibriVision is an easy-to-use electronic tool for users, being at the same time the gateway to searching in other library catalogues in Hungary and also abroad.

Unfortunately LibriVision does not contain the complete holdings of the National Library - entries of pre-1976 documents and those of special collections are not yet included (<http://nektar.oszk.hu>).

A blank ILL order form has been placed on the Website of the National Library. It is free to use for any library, but a preliminary registration is needed (<http://www.oszk.hu/kok/kokkezde.html>).

Electronic full text sources

Among the full-text electronic sources also available for ILL is the Hungarian Electronic Library (MEK). Initially a joint project of the Hungarian National Infrastructure Development Programme and the National Széchényi Library, it is the central collection of the public-domain Hungarian and Hungary-related electronic texts for educational, scientific research and cultural purposes. A permanently increasing source, which contains scientific studies, university publications, classic and contemporary literary texts, recently augmented by the Hungarian or Hungary-related electronic documents published outside Hungary (<http://www.mek.iif.hu>).

The John von Neumann Digital Library was founded in 1997. The purpose of the library is to become the public collection of digitised cultural heritage, to co-ordinate all related activities, and to manage the network service built on the digitisation of the cultural heritage of Hungary. The name Neumann refers to the father of the computer. Based on the world's digital library projects, the most valuable pieces of Hungarian cultural heritage (classical belles-lettres and Hungarian scientific history) are being digitised (<http://www.neumann-haz.hu>).

Print sources

The Central Catalogue of Books, a card catalogue of books held in Hungarian libraries has been in existence since 1924. It is an enormous source of bibliographic and holdings information, containing over 4 million bibliographic items held by about 200 libraries. Although in recent years it has not been extended with any entries from libraries that are unable to produce catalogue cards, it is of great information value for older publications, books published in Hungary between 1801 and 1952 and books published outside Hungary since 1801. Of course, it is losing its importance as electronic sources are growing.

The proportion of print and electronic sources being used in ILL is currently 50/50. The use of both sources is an essential element, as there is demand for current documents on the one hand, and that for older documents (eg published in the nineteenth century Hungary) on the other.

Services helping ILL

Apart from the sources used for document delivery, I would like to survey two services which are helping the ILL service. The first one is the Hungarian Online Librarian (MIT-HOL), monitored by the National Library Reference Division. Anyone interested may ask questions on any topic via email. The questions will be forwarded to competent librarians within the Hungarian library system. Answers will be given via email as well (<http://mit-hol.oszk.hu>).

The second is a mailing list used by librarians engaged in document delivery. The purpose is not only to find holdings for a certain document within Hungary but to also find a supplier (<http://www.bibl.u-szeged.hu/mailman/listinfo/kvtkozi>).

As you can see there are remarkable achievements in supporting ILL, but we are still waiting for a common interface in which we can search and retrieve in the essential library catalogues.