

The Integration of Library Users into the European Cultural and Scientific Space through Searching Electronic Information Resources

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Summary

A period of transition doesn't imply only economic changes in a country or an organization but also a scientific, technological and cultural reversal. Its' success will depend on the way disposable resources are being used. The Learned Society is unimaginable without indispensable information resources for users of different educational vocations. Technical skills are being developed in accordance with new software on the world market. Information literacy became a precondition for attaining intellectual freedom. Contemporary tendencies enforce the adjustment of libraries to technological change as well as to the needs of users who are conquering an electronic city. Internal and external, real and potential library users tend to penetrate the European cultural and scientific space as fast as they can. They also tend to make positive influence on its development. Librarians have a key role in preparing users for further work. Their creativity in almost all activities will depend very often on appropriate search and the use of the electronic information resources.

Key words: e-information resources, library, development, Europe, integration.

Introduction

Integrative process at the Old Continent goes on intensively thanks to the tendencies of his inhabitants to share economic and political reality and also participate in technical progress which contributes positively to their cohesion. Europe includes almost 50 states. There are 27 members of the European Union among them (1).

For famous poet Homer, Europe was not a geographical designation but a mythological queen of Crete (2). It is her name that connects symbolically the Old Continent and Ancient Greece which was being very long the core of the West European cultural development. As there are numerous nations in Europe, their cultural influence on one another is obvious in almost all fields of human life and activity.

According to a study of the Faculty of Economics, Finance and Administration at Singidunum University in Belgrade (3), it is from 1992-2000 that Serbia had lost potential social product of over 100 billion euros. Every employed citizen was losing 300 euros monthly e.g. almost 29.000 euros as a total amount. According to the same resource pensioners were losing an average amount of 150 euros monthly in comparison with 1992, so it is more than 14.000 euros. It was almost impossible to get medicaments and patients used to go very often to hospitals with their own towels, anesthetic ampoules and other indispensable material. Several thousand young people tried to find happier destiny abroad.

The role of library users in the European integration process

If Serbia would keep postponing the entrance to the European Union it would make this country less interesting and attractive for foreign investors. New investments offer more chances for the increase of employment. Serbia paid very high price for the fact that it didn't become member of the EU yet although the library users approach it quickly, everybody in their own professional field and everyone in his own way. They access cultural and scientific sites but also promote a dialogue with their colleagues and friends using the advantages of the Information Society.

The end users belong to diverse generations and professions. Furthermore, they perform different activities. Except this, their interests are not identical. Real and potential users make great influence on the development of communication among the countries of the European Union by contacting individuals who are also willing for professional cooperation no matter whether they are located in a library or out of it. The interactivity of sites helps the users a great deal to remove obstacles for penetrating cultural and scientific space of the contemporary world.

New technologies make the development of scientific thought more intensified and the preservation of civilizational achievements more successful. Therefore the users get included into these streams with the assistance of the librarians. They participate together in the Information Society relying on their professional knowledge, cultural interests and experience.

An academic library user is not just a citizen interested in the content of his inbox. He may be a scientist, an expert, a publicist etc. Everything that he performs will be done much better if he keeps following contemporary activity of his colleagues worldwide and particularly from Europe. Librarians are present in order to instruct, give a piece of advice, focus users' attention on collections, programs and services.

Electronic information resources

Big contemporary libraries do not ask whether e-information resources should be used or not. The question is just which e-information resources should be used, under which conditions and who should be the one to address and instruct

the users having in mind their needs and interests as well as the results of technical progress. As far as top management is concerned it is very important to access the librarians in the adequate way in order to prepare them for further work. Top management which has an insight into the activity of the librarians, their obligations and responsibilities, can make influence on their perfecting more successfully. New technologies imply investments into staff, equipment and space.

Many countries of the European Union are the members of OECD e.g. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. This paper concentrates on the countries of Europe. They cooperate very intensively with developed and other countries in the field of culture and science either directly or in an electronic way.

The development of culture and science is one of priorities for all those governments which make efforts in order to establish peace and progress in the world. The automation of libraries makes globalizing more efficient. That is particularly important for countries in transition. They unavoidably follow the tendencies in OECD countries which are more developed and also very progressive in the implementation of the information technologies.

According to actual resources "OECD brings together the governments of all countries committed to democracy and the market economy from around the world to:

- Support sustainable economic growth
- Boost employment
- Raise living standards
- Maintain financial stability
- Assist other countries' economic development and
- Contribute to growth in world trade" (4).

A precondition for the creative economy is a librarianship which accepts the development of information literacy as an imperative. Creative economy is based on useful information. The users search e-resources because they need more actual data and professional papers also. Search sessions may be carried out if the user has certain level of technical skills. If this is not the case, the librarian is present as a person the user may rely on. So, technical progress refers to both: librarians and users as well.

"Information transfer has become a significant economic and social activity, which is critical to the society's well being. As information processing has become the focal point of economic activity such issues as intellectual property rights, privacy, accuracy, access continue to challenge our global society." (5)

Human resource is the most important for performing library and information activity in an adequate way, then for its' improvement, the development of marketing as well as library image in relationship towards users in general. (6)

According to statistical research carried out in Australia by Michael Middleton, following skills are important in information sector:

- how to use traditional and automated reference resources in locating required information,
- adequate evaluation of users' information needs,
- efficient search of diverse databases in order to locate an indispensable information,
- defining a strategy of searching in accordance with users' requirements,
- successful oral and written communication with users,
- helping users to evaluate information resources and information,
- searching Internet in a useful way,
- overtaking initiative in order to develop permanently technical skills and knowledge,
- efficient communication through presentations,
- the implementation of knowledge in the field of bibliography and informatics in order to discover the origins of information,
- everyday evaluation of personal professional work,
- successful addressing users into library materials in different languages,
- presenting materials orally to small groups of users,
- overtaking the initiative to solve the problems which appear in group work,
- solving problem in connection with the access to information,
- making education possible in small groups of users etc. (7)

Every library can point out an access to its' own work. One of those which is well known and doesn't neglect any segment in working process is TQM (Total Quality Management) access. It contributes a great deal to the efficiency of work in organizations which implement contemporary equipment and employ staff ready to be trained.

In a library which implements Total Quality Management (TQM) there are no departments which can be privileged at all. They should all be included into the process of development. In a library which has accepted "TQM", personnel is very concentrated on services for the users, there is an indispensability to act in accordance with their reactions as well as to learn permanently so that higher quality of services may be achieved. (8)

The offer of the e-services for the users' needs will depend on the acquisition policy in the library. That policy will be successful if it relies on the expectations of the users which are to be followed permanently through surveys and focus interviews. Marketing is to be intensified in technically progressive libraries having in mind their space conditions, financial and intellectual resources. Of course, normative acts are unavoidable, so their authors should be able to follow technical progress in a Learned Society.

Consortium for Coordinated Acquisitions in Serbia gives the opportunity to its' libraries-members to use indispensable electronic services for the work with users. Thanks to the aggregates of databases the readers may search more than 35.000 e-journals through articles, to receive their full-texts and use them for further work. Except this, the users may search Internet in those libraries which have such a centre. They may also use the advantages of an electronic cooperative catalogue either from home or from their working places.

Work with the users of library services

Marketing orientation in the libraries of all types imposes focusing on the users, their expectations, needs and requirements. Only loyalty to librarianship can lead to an efficient work with the users who have different observations and interests. Librarians may find cultural inspiration for their work in actual events, particularly among jubilees. Such examples may stimulate users to carry out non linear search of databases, in fact, search of e-information resources in general. The users sharpen their technical skills in this way. This is the first step to prepare them for future electronic education no matter in which field. Although the word of mouth is usually the best, the electronic education is sometimes unavoidable.

The users make positive influence on the library work searching disposable electronic information resources and implementing new technologies. Some questions and wishes that previously were being rarely pronounced became usual and welcome such as: "Please, I would like to download this sound file and listen to it if possible", or, "I would like to send this animated file by e-mail to my friend", or, "can you help me, please, to create this computer presentation? I need it for an exposé at the second year of my studies", and so on. Library staff is being adjusted to such questions and desires. It is library staff which leads internal and external users through the electronic environment with a clear intention – to help them enter and stay in the Open Society. However, feedback with the users shouldn't be underestimated. In a way, users develop clear orientation among librarians towards contemporary tendencies in informatics.

Instructing the users is usually being carried out directly and in some cases online. In a university library, work is easier if there are specialists in each scientific field. Specialists with long professional experience are usually able to help the users from all scientific fields. A precondition for an electronic course is that the users possess PC with indispensable software but also certain level of technical knowledge. An open dialogue between a librarian and a user makes a topic more clear with the aim to find the most appropriate materials for a potential paper.

In Belgrade, for example, there are several universities. State university has the longest tradition but there are also private universities which keep following international standards and tendencies in their professional and scientific prac-

tice. However, they do not adjust themselves equally to the need of establishing a contemporary library. As far as this is concerned some of them are just in a preliminary phase. Their students address themselves to the "Svetozar Marković" University Library which is a budget institution with a long tradition. It has contemporary equipment. Except this, it is on its' way to become a library 2.0. However, this will require more work with its' staff and the users. Those library users whose technical knowledge is on high level are able to promote web 2.0 space by creating their own interactive sites, up-dating certain web pages by useful contents, as well as by realizing some other activities in the electronic environment.

Classic or traditional catalogues are being replaced by the electronic ones. Library 2.0 would be very difficult to imagine without blogs or wikies which make the work on web more successful and efficient. Text, sound and picture synchronized cause remarkable progress in comparison with previous modest results of searching classical library collections in Serbia. Users focus their attention more and more to multimedia resources of information and materials wherever they are.

Libraries in Serbia do not make much effort to become libraries 2.0. They do not implement often new technologies in promotional activities as there are limiting factors in their everyday work. Financial problems, organization, the training of staff are some of these limiting factors. In such a situation, libraries of Serbia cannot reach the level 2.0 easily.

The Municipal Library of Belgrade makes efforts in order to create useful contents and it implements Web 2.0 technology. These activities are remarkable in Serbia but in comparison with the libraries of developed countries they are still very modest. (9)

E-library and e-city

There are many examples of good practice among electronic libraries. Cooperative electronic catalogue itself is insufficient to illustrate the entire cultural and scientific treasure of a nation. Museums and archives "hide" also very important materials. As urbanization goes on, cities tend to present themselves efficiently in an electronic way also.

Nowadays, cities use web space in order to attract potential investors and tourists by their informative materials. The cities present their advantages to the world as well as the truth about their own history, everyday life and development. In addition, the cities address their inhabitants and Internet users into diverse valuable contents giving them the opportunity to contact municipal bodies because of all problems concerning the quality of life and work in the city. Librarians know very well and accept that "libraries are @ the heart of the Information Society". They should be at the heart of e-cities also. However, the cohesion between libraries and e-cities is not so strong as it should be. There are many examples of successful city sites:

<http://www.zagreb-convention.hr>
<http://www.ljubljana.si/en/>
<http://www.beograd.rs>
<http://www.visitlondon.com/accomodation/>
<http://www.london.gov.uk>
<http://www.florence.ala.it>
<http://www.barcelona.com>

However, searching them citizens may notice that the creators of sites rely mostly on museums trying to make users familiar with cultural life in the city. Therefore, libraries are obviously neglected. So, top managers in the libraries as well as leaders in library associations should make efforts in order to focus the attention of municipal authorities to these organizations, their collections, services and programs. Libraries should become an unavoidable component in the promotional activities of an e-city.

Conclusion

The citizen becomes an e-citizen and the library user becomes an e-user. Librarians do not try to give tasks to the users. They should be willing to help library members as well as potential users. It is technical progress itself which imposes the rhythm of social events in the electronic environment. The users can penetrate the European cultural and scientific space:

- by searching the e-catalogues of leading libraries which contain very rich paper and on-line collections,
- by searching and using interactive sites for their personal and professional aims,
- by using the advantages of famous projects which offer free access to certain library materials,
- by searching the aggregates of databases with full texts of articles in electronic form but having in mind the type of the library they are members of as well as their personal and professional needs.

Complete texts in free access are a way to keep cultural and scientific treasure in nations' and worlds' memory. Library programs, collections and services are being described across sites in Serbia and elsewhere. Serbia tends to become the member of the European Union. Therefore it keeps adjusting itself to the European and world standards in economy as well as in non-profit organizations. Such efforts are being made in order to improve the quality of citizens' life. On the other side, libraries tend to improve the quality of their collections, instruct the users in the best possible way and to offer them good programs in order to meet their expectations.

Resources

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