Werk

Titel: Libraries in the Former Socialist Countries: a New Situation

Autor: Davies, Robert

Ort: Graz

Jahr: 1992

PURL: https://resolver.sub.uni-goettingen.de/purl?514854804_0002|log47

Kontakt/Contact

Digizeitschriften e.V.
SUB Göttingen
Platz der Göttinger Sieben 1
37073 Göttingen

info@digizeitschriften.de

Libraries in the Former Socialist Countries: a New Situation*

ROBERT DAVIES
Carpenter Davies Associates, London

Book Sector Studies: Background

Between late 1990 and early 1992, the UK government's Know-How Fund for East and Central Europe supported a series of studies of the 'Book Sector' in Poland, Hungary, the Czech and Slovak Republics, Bulgaria and Romania. The studies were designed to provide an integrated analysis of the situation across the spectrum from raw materials availability, through printing, publishing and distribution to information service delivery by libraries and other agencies. Each study was managed by International Book Development Ltd. The Book Sector studies focused mainly, although not exclusively, on education and research. Their purpose, in addition to providing a clear picture of the current situation, was to make recommendations which would assist government policy formation and enable governments, if desired, to approach major donor agencies, with a view to investment in the development of the 'Book Sector'.

The outcomes of the studies to date have been various. Follow-up conferences have been held in each of the countries, except the Czech and Slovak Republics. In Hungary it was decided in August 1991 to seek a loan from the World Bank which incorporates a very large component for the Higher Education library provision. This application is still in preparation. In Romania, the World Bank and the government are preparing a large project in the education sector, which is using the Book Sector Study's recommendations. It is expected that the first loan will incorporate a school book provision component; a subsequent second loan may well address Higher Education and research needs. In Poland, there is active discussion of a similar pattern of applications. In Bulgaria, matters are at an earlier stage, but the Book Sector Study is being used in preliminary consideration of a possible education project, co-financed by the World bank and other agencies.

* Paper presented at the LIBER Workshop on Library Management, Budapest, National Szechenyi Library, June 29-30, 1992.

Most of the analysis offered and conclusions drawn in this paper are based on experience gained as the member of the Book Sector Study team responsible for the libraries and information provision in the Czech and Slovak Republics and in Romania. This is, however, corroborated by the reports written by Julie Carpenter and Ivor Kemp on their findings in Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria.

Inevitably, in the time available, a number of generalisations are necessary. It is, however, recognised that the pace, style and stage of change varies significantly between the countries concerned. Likewise, that there are important differences in developing national policies and objectives for education, research and information provision.

Changes in supply and demand for research information

The major shifts in governmental style and philosophy, in administrative structures and in economic and social conditions, since 1989 in the former socialist countries of East and Central Europe, are having a massive impact on the organisation, management, financing and content of research in those countries and their successors.

Under the former, centralised system, the state maintained a very large research establishment backed up by closely-defined hierarchical systems of information support. For instance, the total population of 'scientific workers' approached 250,000 people on both Czechoslovakia and Romania. Library and information support to this establishment could, very broadly, be divided into four categories:

1. Libraries and information centres supporting applied research conducted unter specific ministries, institutes and state enterprises in sectors such as agriculture, health, energy and industry. For example, the Czechoslovak Scientific, Technical and Economic Information system listed around 2,000 information units', although many were clearly small and ineffective. These networks were sometimes placed under one central ministry and/or the 'methodological guidance' of central institutions.

2. Academy of Science libraries and information centres, concerned largely with 'pure' or 'fundamental research'.

3. Libraries, usually including the National Library, with a 'public research' function. For example, the regional 'state scientific' libraries in Czechoslovakia. Although open to the public, these frequently provided surrogate university library services to local universities. In some cases, they had once belonged to universities and in certain of them were still called 'university library', although

not managed by universities and responsible to the Ministry of Culture or direct to the Ministry of Education.

4. Libraries in universities themselves, often under developed and fragmented, concentrating on the provision of undergraduate texts and lecturers notes - partly as a result of the existence of category 3.

Although in some countries, efforts were made to rationalise these networks by developing 'unified systems' of libraries on a legal basis, the evidence suggests that parallelism and duplication of activity on the one hand; and lack of accountability to users on the other, were severe shortcomings. Information obtained, e.g. on-line, from western sources, was ususally channelled through one or two central organisations.

The move toward the free market and the collapse of the old political control structures since 1989 has already had a far reaching impact on libraries and information services. Among the key outcomes evident are:

1. a strong pressure toward disintegration of the centrally controlled hierarchical information systems and networks described above as a result of:

- decentralisation and increased institutional autonomy;
- the reduction or withdrawal of government funding, leading to the privatisation, merger or closure of many institutes;
- the ideological association of some information networks with the old political structures;
- doubts concerning the cost-effectiveness and utility of maintaining many of the smaller information units;

2. a pronounced trend toward the relocation of research activity in universities and institutions of higher education, in order to benefit from greater academic freedom and cross-fertilisation between teaching and research;

3. a move toward contract-based systems for awarding research grants, operated by national councils or commissions, focusing on areas of national priority and leading to competition for the remaining state funding for research;

4. a hugely increased demand for information from international sources, especially from the west, driven both by a desire to have access to what was unavailable in the past, for financial or ideological reasons; and by the need to participate in the global and regional market economy. This is associated with a transformation of the subject profile of demand for information, with an

emphasis on: the 'newly freed' social sciences (e.g., politics, history, religion); on 'catching up' in the applied sciences and technology; on market economics and its associated professional disciplines; information to support R & D in products and services for the domestic market and for export, e.g., trade information regulations, patents and standards; information about foreign markets themselves, abouth foreigh companies which are potential partners etc. In a number of these areas, national authorship, publishing and information production remains in short supply.

5. an acceptance of the need to reform educational objectives in a way which will place greater emphasis on individualised learning and research and which will depend heavily on wider and freer access to up-to-date information.

The response of libraries and information services

The current ability of libraries and information services to respond to these changes in need and demand is limited by a large number of factors:

Perhaps the most obvious and severe problem is the chronic *under-resourcing* of libraries and information services in all non-salary finance. This has been a pervasive problem for many years but has worsened dramatically since the mid 1970's accelerating since 1989 as domestic price inflation and deteriorating foreign exchange availability have combined to sqeeze budgets. As a rule of thumb, although most major libraries have chosen to concentrate their remaining finance for acquisitions from the west on essential periodical subscriptions, the number of such subscriptions declined by between 33-66% from 1974-1989 and has continued to decline since. Sources of domestic supply and from the former socialist countries are also under strain or have collapsed. The quality of library stocks has therefore been deteriorating for some time. Now, when the need to re-stock libraries in new subjects and to provide greater access to international information sources is at its height the financial situation is at its most critical. Since 1989, governments have not been able to give libraries priority for resources and in the conditions of extreme economic strain, during the period of national transition.

The options available for governments appear to be to wait until economic recover takes place before investing in the revival of libraries and information provision - although, it is questionable whether such a recovery can take place without better information supply; to convert book and information production subsidies into institutional budgets wherever possible; or to seek external support for investment in improved library information services to assist the transitional process. The World Bank has demonstrated itself interested on supporting governments in this area.

There is no doubt that the amounts required to finance acquisition and information access at la level approaching that in west Europe would be very large indeed. For example, an estimate of the annual amount required, on a per capita basis for universities in the Czech and Slovak Republics, calculated at about 70% of the UK figure per students (to allow for the lower cost of domestic purchases) would be US $ 27 million. In Romania current expenditure per student on acquisions appears to be running at no more than 5% of the UK rate.

It may, therefore, be necessary to focus on provision in areas of national priority, to maintain the cost at an acceptable level. For state-funded research institutes outside the universities, there is almost certainly a need to develop an acceptable financial formula for information provision. This could either be based on a figure per head of research population, once this has settles at a stable level or a yardstick percentage of all research contracts. Experience elsewhere in Europe needs to be further investigated. There is also a need to identify those libraries and information centres which are key national resources and represent an irreducible 'core'.

The emergence of private enterprises in the information field and their ability to supply the needs of their own or other organisations in R & D, market information, etc., is hampered by extremely difficult market conditions for start-ups.

The investment capital necessary for hardware, software, database access and telecommunications is one problem; the depressed economic demand is another. The policy response of governments could have a profound effect on the stimulation of an information service market. Among the possible measures which might be considered are:

- a conscious policy of awarding information - rich government research contracts to commercial enterprises;
- incentives for investment in Information Technology.

Previous centralised planning systems have not yet been replaced by adequate, streamlined mechanisms for strategic planning in the libraries and information field. A number of key issues can only really be tackled by effective strategic planning at the national and local levels.

These include the *accountability* of library services to their clients and users. The process of placing or returning major libraries to the control of Ministries (e.g., education) and organisations (e.g., Universities) to which their services are mainly supplied is underway in some countries. In other cases, however, a number of issues remain unresolved, for example the respective policies and services to be provided by National Libraries, Academy Central Libraries and major 'public research libraries' (such as the Central University Library in

Bucharest). In some cases, libraries now appear to duplicate services and to be in competition for scarce public resources.

At local or regional level the best method of making academic and research accountable to the universities and institutions serve also requires strategic planning and negotiation.

The development of IT is one of a number of other issues referred to below, which also require adequate strategic planning mechanism.

The evolution of bodies and mechanisms which can represent the needs of the information sector is doubly important in view of the enormous programmes of critical legislation which are being enacted. In several countries, there has been considerable work on new library laws and discussion over their nature, e.g., should they cover all libraries, or focus only on those of one type, e.g., public libraries. However, it is clear that other, more general legislation such as Scientific Research laws, Education laws and local governments laws are having an equal or greater impact on library and information provision. There is a need for representative bodies to make an input to the processes of framing, drafting and debate.

Consideration might be given to the foundation of National Library and Information Councils to develop strategic planning in areas such as co-operative acquisition politcies, collection development, resource sharing and network development. At the local level, professional bodies able to formulate Local Information Plans designed to make the most effective use of combined library and information resources of a city or region, might be considered.

Because of the gaps in accountability at present and because it will not be easy for universities to develop fully their own libraries in the short term, there will probably be a need to establish negotiating and contracting mechanisms which will enable a library controlled by one Ministry to sell its services to institutions controlled by another at national and local levels. Such mechanisms will enable research institutions to assess the comparative cost-benefits of developing their own services and of using external public or private sector services.

Resource Sharing

To optimise the expenditure made nationally and to minimise the unnecessary duplication of expensive foreign acquisitions will remain important for the foreseeable future. The libraries of East and Central Europe are no strangers to resource sharing systems. Policies of acquiring limited numbers of copies of foreign periodical titles, the compilation of national union catalogues of foreighn titles on card and inter-library lending systems are all very well established. Document request satisfaction rates of 90% for items held in the country are commonplace although supply is slow by western standards. The volume of

international document request remains, however, severely limited by lack of foreign exchange. In 1989, Czechoslovakia sent only 14,495 document supply requests to foreign countries through the official channels.

It is clear that policies to upgrade the efficiency of resource-sharing are very important. Among the key needs appear to be:

- the development of automated catalogue databases;
- their effective distribution, on-line through Public Data Networks, via academic networks or on CD-ROM;
- the upgrading of document supply systems by improvements in reprographic and communication facilities (photocopiers, fax etc.) so that it is not necessasy to end original documents through the post;
- increased develoment of cost-recovery mechanisms tso that 'net lender' libraries are not entirely limited in their services by their own budgets, which may continue to diminish in real terms.

The case for the establishment of national document supply centres versus that for the development of distributed networks of specialised libraries needs to be examined and costed carefully.

Access to international databases (previously controlled through a central channel) on-line and on CD-ROM, and to overseas document supply services will remain vitally important back-up: The need for finance for this activity may be best considered as part of the need to acquire transitional investment finance from international sources.

Acquisition Policies

Until 1989, acquisitions in major libraries were heavily dependant upon the legal deposit of domestic publications in comparatively large numbers, or upon their purchase at subsidised prices and upon exchanges, mainly with the socialist bloc but also with institutions in the west.

Since 1989, there has been a collapse of academic and research publishing in the former socialist countries, due to economic factors. This, together with high postal costs is gradually causing the inter-dependent system of acquisitions by exchange to disintegrate and to call into question the cost-effectiveness of maintaining large departments devoted to the administration of exchanges.

Many of the myriad small, private publishers which have emerged since 1989 are ignorant of or avoid the legal deposit system. Although the proportion varies according to subject up to 90% of all titles required are only available from foreign sources, usually in English, German or French.

The financial problems caused by this, have been noted. The need is however, likely to persist to a large extent, although it is to be expected that domestic academic publishing and information production will be rebuilt to supply a somewhat higher proportion of the demand in some subjects.

The *supply and distribution* of foreign books and journals was previously operated by state-owned and subsidised import companies which controlled access to foreign exchange. These companies are increasingly subject to market forces and privatisation and have found it difficult to maintain adequate services to libraries.

The increasing availability to institutions of direct currency convertibility at the going market exchange rates will give institutions the ability to 'shop around' for the best book and journal supply deals, even though the current value of their allocations is small.

This is bringing into play the direct use of foreign exporting suppliers: The evidence suggests that, for example, savings of up to 30% on periodical subscription lists are available by this route. Acquisition libraries do, however, lack experience in using and negotiating with such foreign suppliers, especially in small institutions and remoter areas.

Access to bibliographical information offering awareness of what has been published is also somewhat restricted. The financial costs of subscribung to on-line, CD-ROM or hard copy bibliographic information services have limited knowledge of international publishing and information output. Libraries have equally not had access to the bibliographic services provided by many exporting book and periodical suppliers.

Domestic national bibliographies and indexing databases hampered by the problems of maintaining comprehensive legal deposit arrangements, by hard copy production costs and by the problems encountered in making such sources available electronically. Trade sources of bibliographical information have not as yet emerged in consolidated form; publishers are not fully accustomed to promoting their wares to libraries and literary and scientific journals, carrying good comprehensive bibliographic listings are, again for economic reasons, few and far between.

It is to be expected that such services will emerge as the publishing and information market stabilises. In the meantime, there may be value in considering whether bibliographic information can be largely left to the commercial sector or, if not, what national or public sector objectives and activities in support of library material selection cataloguing and document supply shpuld be.

Buildings and space are a serious problem in the development of library and information services. In most of the countries there has been little or no construction of purpose-built libraries for about 30 or 40 years. In some countries, the restitution of church or private property presents an additional

threat to libraries Major libraries are fragmented on many sites: adversely affecting service delivery. Storage conditions are frequently poor and many millions of books and documents comprising each country's national literary heritage and an irreplacable body of research material is decaying frequently unprocessed and inaccessible and afflicted by most known library conservation problems.

Finding solutions to this will not be an easy matter. As a first step, it may be necessary to conduct a full survey of the buildings and space available for academic and research libraries in each country. Based on the information gained, it ill then be necessary to determine what mix of solutions is most likely to improve the situation at affordable cost. The main options appear to be:

- new building;
- repair and improvement of existing buildings;
- mechanisms for instituions to contract space and service from other existing libraries;
- co-operative acquisitions and resource sharing policies;
- new collection management policies.

Collection Management is a key issue for many libraries. In the past, libraries have been accustomed to policies of constant collection growth. In a sense, size has been one of the few measures of 'performance'. Discarding of little-used material has been carried out at rates very much lower than in the West. This has contributed to the building and space problems referred to above.

The measures which appear to be indicated for consideration are:

- radical programmes of discarding out-of-date or little-used material;
- access to international antiquarian and library markets for the sale of duplicated material of global interest;
- access to mass conservation techniques and methods of rapid processing and databasing of remaining material;
- the adoption of 'steady-state' or low-growth policies on the overall size of stock.

Such policies are closely linked to issues of library *service management*. In particular, the question of 'closed access' or the 'classical' method of organising libraries in East and Central Europe, whereby up to 90% of the library's material is initially retrievable by the user only through a catalogue and is physically retrieved from store by library staff. The contrast with libraries in the West is, of course, extreme: only 9.8% (median) of all shelving installed in UK university

libraries is 'closed access'. Proponents of closed access argue that high standards of catalogue use are encouraged in information users. On the other hand, there do appear to be adverse consequences in service delivery times, in the labour-intensiveness of catalogue maintenance and in the loss of information retrieval efficiency through the non-availability ob 'browsing'.

What seems clear is that any significant move toward 'open access' will have to be gradual, in view of the space problem which exists. In the interim, two developments seem highly desirable:

- the availability at an early stage of OPACs (On-line Public Access Catalogues) to improve information retrieval in the 'closed access' environment.
- the optimisation of lending and use of material outside the library, in order to minimise the need for 'reading room' space.

Reference has been made throughout this paper to the need for developments in Information Technology and the applications of automation in libraries. These are widely understood on a theoretical basis in most of the countries. However, implementations are many years behind those in the West.

The root problem has been the financial and political necessity to use hardware and software which has not been well suited to the purpose. In recent years, considerable ingenuity and skill has been employed in developing the CDS/ISIS system, available free of charge from Unesco. More will be heard of this later in this conference.

It seems unlikely that, in the last analysis, CDS/ISIS can be expected to meet modern library database and networking requirements at the national level.

On the positive side, work and investment on the development of academic research networks is already underway in several countries, frequently with links to EARN or other international networks. National Public Data Networks for telecommunications are steadily being introduced, although it is profoundly to be hoped that high tariffs will not restrict use to the banking and financing sectors.

Libraries and information services will not be able to afford to implement all of those IT and automation applications which they can, even now, identify as highly desirable. It is, therefore, important that strategic plannning mechanisms are evolved in order to identify an optimal and attainable development path for IT and to make the best us of existing national investment and resources. The establishment of an Information Technology Planning Group among the major library and information professional and institutional players in each country might be a useful development, in this respect.

In most of the countries concerned, the priority IT needs of the libraries and information sector appear to be:

- greater access to key international bibliographic databases either on-line or on CD-ROM;
- strategic agreement on database networking and distribution programmes which will: cost-effectively help to optimise resource sharing between academic and research libraries; minimise unnecessarily duplicated acquisitions especially of expensive foreign books and journals; and facilitate inter-library loans and photocopying;
- the introduction of on-line public access catalogues (OPACs) in major libraries;
- the increased availability of appropriate reprographic and communications equipment to enable document delivery in greater quantities, at higher speed and in more appropriate formats;

The *professional development and training* necessary to achieve the change referred to in this paper is considerable. Development of the formal education and training curriculum which exists in most of the countries at university and vocational/technical level should probably be preceded by further study and greater understanding of the future personnel requirements of the information sector. It is probable that training should provide a broader base of information skills to enable greater flexibility in job suitability. Foreign langugae skills are also clearly very important.

There is a clear need for a co-ordinated programme of overseas study tours and short-course training for senior and middle management concentrating on specific management skills such as:

- service marketing
- finance and resource management
- staff and personnel management
- management of IT
- resource sharing strategies
- national and local strategic information planning
- international acquisitions and document supply systems

The development of the role of professional associations can also have an important impact in this area.

Much of the above can be assisted by international co-operation and bilateral assistance.

Conclusion

The key development and investment needs of the academic and research library and information sector in East and Central Europe are very considerable and in total cost run into hundreds of millions of dollars over the next five yeras.

There is a strong need to influence governments in order to attain an adequate priority for investment and policy supportin the sector, wether provided from existing resources or involving financial inputs from external agencies. This is a critical goal. If it is to be even partly achieved, governments must be persuaded that such libraries and information provision is essential to the achievement of their national goals, survival in the global market economy and a successful democratic society.

This task is not necessarily straightforward - some of these things are taken for granted in the West, but have never been fully demonstrated. The idea of 'information audits' in key sectors is one idea which is gaining ground in some of the multilateral development agencies. Our professional community must be prepared to work to make its case whatever methods are chosen.