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Autor: Häkli, Esko

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Kontakt/Contact

[Digizeitschriften e.V.](#)
SUB Göttingen
Platz der Göttinger Sieben 1
37073 Göttingen

✉ info@digizeitschriften.de

The Reorganized LIBER in Leuven

ESKO HÄKLI

University Library, Helsinki

It was a great pleasure for LIBER to convene this year in Leuven, in the town sometimes called the "Oxford of Belgium". Leuven has a well-known reputation in the history of learning in Europe. It has also a dramatic library history. During a great number of years the Library of the Catholic University of Leuven has actively participated in the work of LIBER, and therefore LIBER was happy to accept the invitation to organize its Annual General Conference here.

The general theme of the Conference of 1995, Electronic Resources and Quality Management, focuses on two important topics which require intensive attention all over the world. Both themes could on their own provide enough topics for a whole conference. We have, however, decided to put these two important aspects into relationship with each other.

The programme wants to raise issues related to the rapid change of the context in which libraries have to find their way. The whole information business is heading towards expanding exploitation of electronic means. Libraries, national and university libraries in particular, have already a substantial experience of handling vast quantities of information in electronic form. They also belong to the pioneers in the use of electronic networks.

In addition to the rapid technological development in this field, libraries also have to cope with organizational changes. Typical for the emerging use of networks is the increasing integration of services. The new Library programme of the European Union e.g. focuses strongly on efforts to assist libraries in becoming active partners in this development. In the future there will hardly be different networks for different types of information. The information will be made available through more or less the same channels. Libraries must, therefore, play an active role in the ongoing integration process if they want to remain in the business. Today we can hardly anticipate how far the integration will go and how deeply it will change the present technical and organizational patterns. But that is exactly the reason, why European library managers have to be alert and discuss the issue together.

One of the recent headlines has been the "electronic super highway". The representatives of the G7 countries met in Brussels in February to discuss the future of the electronic information in the networked world. The European

Community hosted the meeting and is working actively in this field. These themes, therefore, have strong support from the governments. As a matter of fact, many European governments have already drafted strategic policy plans of their own and it would be of great importance to get libraries included in the national work programmes.

Quality management, the other part of the main theme of the Conference in Leuven, is in a similar way one of the key expressions of today. Nevertheless, I am not very confident that we are already aware of its consequences. They may also vary from country to country, depending on the policy of the national governments. As far as I can see, this issue will be with us still for a long time. Library is a difficult issue for us who are library directors. We may in theory be well aware of its requirements and methods, but it is quite another thing to put these insights into practice. One of the great advantages of LIBER has been the fact that it brings together managers, who meet, exchange experiences and learn from each other. In such a way we can support one another in the most efficient way.

The Conference held 1995 in Leuven was an important mile stone. It finalized the new start of LIBER. LIBER, founded by far-sighted European librarians in 1971, has, during the last few years, been very successful. Due to the interesting programmes, our Annual Conferences have attracted more participants from year to year. Many of our Working Groups have achieved remarkable results. LIBER has also made an important contribution in the newly emerged East-West cooperation in Europe.

This obvious progress has been a challenge for us and an invitation to become even more successful. The General Assembly, therefore, in 1994 adopted new Statutes giving the organization of LIBER much more strength and enabling it, as I hope, to better cope with the needs of its member libraries in the rapidly changing Europe. According to the new Statutes, the main responsibility of the professional work will be carried out by the four professional divisions. Our ambition is to develop the Committees of the Professional Divisions into the most important bodies of LIBER. As a matter of fact, they should grow into key organizations in their fields in the whole of Europe, which will enable LIBER to take the lead in European cooperation between research libraries. They should help libraries in identifying new directions of the future and assist them in developing their policies. The Committee should, therefore, be able to engage the best expertise available in European libraries. They should also be able to make an important contribution by helping to raise the level of know-how in the member libraries and by strengthening the ties of cooperation between libraries in all parts of Europe.

The quarterly review *European Research Libraries Cooperation* published by LIBER has, thanks to its energetic editors, developed into an important European library journal. Our goal is to make it even more powerful by

channelling the expertise and the connections of our Divisions more closely to the editorial work.

It is my impression that the reorganization of LIBER has greatly interested many quarters in Europe. It has created expectations which we must be able to meet. Our new divisions will here play a key role. By doing so we will create a strong basis for all types of library cooperation in Europe during the years to come.

At the beginning of the Conference week, the Divisions had their pre-conference in Leuven. The divisional Committees received feedback and support from their member libraries in formulating the work plans in such a way that their priorities cover the needs of the libraries and that the approaches suggested can open new avenues in accomplishing the agreed tasks. In the future, the work plans will play a central role not only for the every day work of the Divisions but also for the programme of our Annual Conferences. It has been decided that Divisions will assume the responsibility for the main part of the professional programme of the coming Conferences. We can enjoy the results of the Division's contributions for the first time in Malta.

With the help of the new arrangement LIBER wants to establish a stronger continuity in the programme planning connecting it directly to the work done within LIBER. But the aim is also to disseminate the results of the work of the divisions and their expert groups as broadly as possible. The Divisions, of course, can still organize pre-conferences and seminars which they find necessary in connection with the Annual Conference.

It is my great pleasure to thank all of them who have helped LIBER to reorganize its structure and to create the new Statutes. In particular I would like to point out the contribution of the Past President of LIBER, Mr. Michael Smethurst, who with a firm and wise hand guided us to our new organization. I would also like to thank the Chairmen of the Divisions who have already laid down a lot of work in organizing the Committees and drafting the work plans. They represent a remarkable piece of programme planning.

LIBER has traditionally had the ambition to act not only as an internal forum for its member libraries but also to represent their interests in relevant connections. This task is becoming more and more important. LIBER has traditionally had close ties to the Council of Europe and we still want to act as an efficient partner for its programmes. LIBER has a unique position in representing the most important European national and university libraries. But LIBER has also to find new ways to create a fruitful cooperation with the European Commission and its programmes. LIBER can bring together libraries, help them form consortia and channel their expertise for the benefit of the European programmes. This will be a great challenge for the new professional Divisions.

As a part of the programme of Leuven, a pre-seminar was organized to present the project EDIL, financed by the European Commission. The seminar attracted about 100 participants and illustrated in a splendid way the possibilities of LIBER to create a forum of European research libraries for such purposes. A similar seminar will be held also on Malta. In other words, LIBER can offer its services to many types of European cooperation and in an efficient way assist the governmental bodies in their work.

LIBER has recently been given a unique opportunity to strengthen its structure and resources. Through a generous three years' grant from the Nordic Council for Scientific Information and Research Libraries (NORDINFO) and with the efficient help of the Royal Library in Copenhagen LIBER has established a permanent Secretariat in Copenhagen. It will assist both the Honorary Secretary and the Treasurer. The Honorary Secretary can in the future, therefore, act more as a managing director. The new Secretariat will also assist the Divisions in their work and ensure that the information LIBER sends to its membership will be correct and timely. LIBER gratefully acknowledges this important support.

On behalf of LIBER I want to thank the local organizers of the Conference in Leuven, who under the leadership of Professor Jan Roegiers made a splendid job. I also want to thank all who showed their hospitality to the Conference and its participants, first of all the Catholic University of Leuven and its Rector, the city of Leuven and many others.

Next year in May LIBER will convene its Annual General Conference on Malta on the kind invitation of Dr. Paul Xuereb.