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Problems of construction of university libraries in Hungary

Needs and reality development

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Library construction in Hungary set in a European environment

In the second decade of the 20th century, Einstein's theory of relativity gave a never experienced impetus to research and, in connection with it, to higher education. This immense development also made its effects felt in the construction of university libraries. No sooner had World War I finished than university towns in Great Britain started to work feverishly on constructing new libraries.

In Germany and France, most of the libraries destroyed during the war were rebuilt and several new universities were constructed with superb libraries. Similarly, new university libraries were built in Austria, the Netherlands and Finland. In fact, since the end of World War I - with the exception of the period of World War II - we have been witnessing enormous development in university library construction in the surrounding European countries.

For a better understanding of the development and the present situation of Hungarian university libraries, I would like to refer to some of the most important milestones in our history.

The history of Hungarian libraries goes back one thousand years and it is deeply rooted in the European culture. As part of the library culture, the art of library construction had already existed in the early centuries. In the first library, founded at Pannonhalma in 1001, cupboard-like cavities were formed in the thick walls of the monastery for storing books. The

library that King Matthias had had constructed, was worthy of his world-famed collection of Corvinas. Following Matthias renaissance masterpiece, several beautiful libraries were built in the 16th-17th centuries, among their founders we find not only the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches but also several families of the aristocracy.

The historical background of university libraries

Next September we are celebrating the 360th anniversary of Hungarian higher education. In the late Middle Ages there were already three universities functioning in Hungary (Pécs, Obuda and Pozsony) but we can speak of continuous higher education only from 1635, i.e., from the foundation of the University of Nagyszombat by Péter Pázmány. The latest member of the 24 universities belonging to the Ministry of Education, the university of Postgraduate Medical Training was founded in 1987.

If we examine the development and construction of libraries in the same context, the picture is not so cheerful. Today, out of the 24 universities, only four have a self-contained library building. This represents only 16,6% of the universities. The central library in the main building of Kossuth University in Debrecen may have been ideal as a library at the time of its foundation but it could not keep pace with development and proved to be inadequate for storing when it became the second national (deposit) library of the country. Library stocks at the medical universities, for example, in Debrecen and Szeged were crammed into mansions of well-off families. During the past 20-30 years, however, some development could be seen at the big universities when new faculty and departmental libraries were instituted. The other universities have also made efforts to improve conditions of storing and availability of library stuff by rebuilding, extending and modernising existing facilities.

Thus, the present problems of university libraries in Hungary root in the history of universities discussed above. This is further complicated by the fact that in most cases the universities do not have a campus, they are usually scattered in the town; very often, the libraries are several

kilometres away from other services and facilities. While the majority of the universities in Europe, especially in Germany, were built after World War II and represent an up-to-date system of institutions with libraries of good seating capacity, the dates of birth of the 24 university libraries of Hungary are as follows:

In the	17th century	1 university
	18th century	4 universities
	19th century	8 universities
	20th century	11 universities

were built, but after World War II, only 3 universities were founded: the University of Agriculture at Gödöllő, 1949, the University of Veszprém, 1949, and the University of Postgraduate Medical Training in Budapest, 1987. Although the University of Economics and the University of Miskolc were constructed in 1948 and 1949, respectively, they both have a tradition going back to several centuries. The main streams of university construction in the 20th century took place in Europe in the 1960-ies and 1970-ies, while in Hungary not a single university was built during these years. Since our old universities were, without exception, set up in the centre of the towns, no big campuses could be created to provide the background for development. The only university, which, in this respect, has an ideal location on a 80 hectares' ground, is the University of Miskolc. There are only campus-like universities in Hungary: the Medical University of Debrecen, Kossuth University of Arts and Sciences, Debrecen and the University of Wood Industry in Sopron.

Special libraries and documentation centres in Hungary face the same problems. During the past two centuries, no functional building has been planned or constructed for these libraries. This fact cannot be denied by the transfer of the Széchenyi National Library to a relatively convenient building, which is more representative than functional in its nature.

The construction of public libraries presents a more favourable picture, especially after the 2nd World War. The efforts of librarians in this direction were successfully backed by the initiation of new construction standards for libraries. 12 new county libraries were built,

their total area comprising about 42.000 m². Unlike university and special libraries, public libraries show considerable development.

The policy involved in and responsible for the improvement of Hungarian economy, the policy of science, higher education and the policy managing human resources have for one hundred years failed to recognise, develop and integrate the special interests of universities for the development of the country.

Organisational structure of Hungarian higher education libraries

Historically, the latest restructuring of higher education dates back to the 1948-1949 higher education reform whose main objectives were the development of economic, technical and scientific education through the reform of the institutional structure. By creating specific universities with narrow profiles and by rendering them under the supervision of the different ministries, overall and systematic surveillance of the whole educational structure was discontinued. Regional factors were not seriously taken into consideration when designating the geographical site of new educational institutions.

Independent of this scattered institutional structure, the structure of special training became also extremely dispersed and specialized. This is not only inflexible, but also extremely uneconomical.

After the change of the political system in Hungary both political and economic analyses considered the development of higher education as a priority on laying the basis for this development.

The main principle of development of higher education in Hungary is the catching up with the level of education and research of European universities by increasing the number of enrolled students on the one hand and by realizing new concepts of finance, network development, scientific qualifications and new specialities on the other.

According to the new Higher Education Act passed in 1993 "our universities and colleges should get closer to the operational model in which both the researching staff and the students are able to make use of

the library's information infrastructure in the most effective way thus ensuring a fast follow-up of scientific development".

Development of higher education libraries

The period which saw the emergence of various ideas concerning the development of the libraries of higher education institutions from domestic resources and from a World Bank loan abounded in developments. The first concept, which gave priority to the expansion of library stock was gradually replaced by ideas calling for fundamental reorganisation of the entire library system. It is clear also that the work that the committee is undertaking is highly conducive to integrating the higher education library development concepts into the overall national development plan.

A libraries sub-project team was established within the Ministry of Culture and Education in order to further define all those aspects which required more detailed study and to progress related action and research. The team rapidly decided to approach the issues involved by defining four key separate but linked areas of concern:

- Stock augmentation
- Library automation
- Library structure and space development
- Training

Within each of these study areas they identified specific and individual specialised research requirements, as a result of which it was agreed that nine separate study modules were required to carry out the necessary research.

Present state and achievements

For the study of the present structure of higher education libraries in Hungary a survey was made including 24 higher education institutions. In the 1993/94 academic year, 68.240 students were involved in basic education. The table shows their distribution in the 6 following regions:

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1.	Budapest and its region (Gödöllő)	36.020
2.	Debrecen and its region (3 universities)	7.600
3.	Miskolc and its region (1 university)	6.000
4.	Pécs and its region (2 universities)	7.000
5.	Szeged and its region (2 universities)	8.300
6.	Veszprém and its region (Sopron, Keszthely, 3 universities)	3.340

These data show how extremely unequal the distribution between the capital and the country is. Half of the student population and 51% of the institutions are concentrated in Budapest. The number of the students in the eastern region of the country is twice as much as that in the western part.

In the Hungarian library system, university libraries are given the role of providing the readers with both public and specialized services. The libraries of higher education have been isolated from modern information systems and up-to-date information on research in the West for decades, which has led to a serious lagging behind in scientific research and had a harmful effect on the level of education.

The situation is aggravated by the fact that the great majority of the libraries apply the close-shelved system: only 5% of the stock is available on open shelves (against 80-90% in western countries). The public view of not allowing open accessibility of documents still has its harmful effects.

In most cases, the university libraries are under the direct supervision of the rector, who may transfer this right to the vice rector.

-	Central libraries:	24
-	Faculty libraries:	19
-	Departmental:	812
-	No. of librarians:	872

These data show that library holdings are distributed in the six regions in 24 central libraries and 831 faculty/departmental libraries, the result of which is the dispersion of scientific literature.

The quality of the university library network is greatly influenced by the location, operation and ability of providing services of the departmental libraries. With the exception of bigger faculty/departmental libraries where library services are similar to those of the central libraries,

library function is limited to reading on site. This service is further limited by the fact that certain materials are available for students only with the permission of the head of the institution. Even where reading on site is provided, the reading area and the number of seats do not meet every requirement. The same is true for the opening hours.

Conclusions of the survey

1. The structure of Hungarian university libraries is complicated, out of date, extremely uneconomic, the buildings scattered all over the country and very often they are operated by unqualified librarians.
2. The budget of the university libraries is determined and controlled by the university/faculty. It can be observed also that decision-makers consider the role of library services in higher education extremely different. Some investments can be served as good examples, while there are others where library function was "re-phased" deliberately or "forgotten". Some of the libraries seem to make headway helped with university funds.
3. With decentralised collections of inaccessible documents in the departmental libraries with unqualified personnel the university library is unable to fulfil its basic functions in the national library system.
4. The main obstacle of centralisation is physical because there are no buildings of warehouses where the stock could be stored properly. The insufficiency of reading room and storing capacity is a general problem. Even where storing and office areas are considered to be satisfactory, the learning and reading areas are inadequate in proportion, especially in libraries which provide services to the information seeking public, students and educational staff at the same time and at the same place.

Criteria to be used in assessing plans for the reconstruction or augmentation of library buildings

Almost each library has a developmental project to improve and modify library structure. These endeavours are hindered by two factors: physical space and lack of financial resources.

For making the best use of library space, a completely new conception should be introduced: flexibility for moving and regrouping literature the fastest possible way, according to the readers' needs.

Open shelved reading rooms are required for the readers to move around freely among the documents. Conditions for learning in an agreeable and civilised reading environment should be created. We should also bear in mind that with the implementation of new forms of education much more library space will be needed, not only as a result of the introduction of problem-oriented learning (which will oblige the student to spend more time in the library) but also because non-traditional educational materials (video, interactive CD, etc.) cannot be used in the traditional reading room.

World bank surveys as well as European and American higher education structural models prove that economic considerations and readers' demands both support the creation of open-shelved libraries and libraries of either one or several disciplines.