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AN OVERVIEW OF LIBRARIES IN ALBANIA

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Public libraries, academic libraries, school libraries, special libraries and National Library make library system in Albania. Most of the libraries are relatively new, created in 20th century. Political and economic changes of 1990 had their influence in libraries too. All types of libraries are passing a hard period because of the limited budget. In this situation they are trying to get money as donations by several foundation and institutions. The situation is going to be better year after year and the mentality of librarians is changing too. They understand that the most important duty in the information society we are living, is to provide free access to information and without restrictions for users.

Legislation

Before there was no library law in Albania. In 1998 a working group with representatives from different types of libraries, organized by the Ministry of Culture worked on compilation and discussion for the law of library services. The working group studied the situation in the country, the experience of other countries in library law and took in consideration the recommendations of the Council of Europe concerning library legislation. This law was approved by Parliament in February 2000 and comprises all types of libraries. It is the legal basis for the creation, financing, development and operation of library system in Albania. The free access to information is to be guaranteed by that law. It establishes right reports between centralization and autonomy of public libraries. Each library is considered as part the national information system.

The legal deposit act in Albania is revised several times. The last version is approved by the

Parliament in 1994. According to it, five copies of every printing material are to be sent free of charge to the National Library. Municipal libraries are entitled to receive five copies of each publication printed in their municipality. The law doesn't include electronic publications.

National Library

National Library is the main library in Albania. It is founded in 1920 and at that moment it had 6.000 volumes. Today it has in the stacks about 1.000.000 interus (books, periodicals and other materials) National Library carries out traditional functions of a national library. Its activities cover:

- Collecting, cataloging, conservation and access to documents, submitted under legal deposit, collecting publications of albanological character published abroad, a representative collection of foreign literature covering all fields of human knowledge, collection of rare books and manuscript important to Albanian culture, as well as theses and doctoral dissertations. There are some difficulties in ensuring the deposit of published materials, even the law provides for it. The establishment in the National Library of ISBN agency is a good help to find information about books that are going to be printed.
- Creation and publishing of current and retrospective national bibliography. National Library publishes national bibliography of Albanian books and the bibliography of Albanian articles of periodicals since 1960. The previous period is covered by retrospective bibliographies. National Bibliography will be produced soon as an output of machine-readable catalogue.
- Provision of cataloging in publication (CIP) for books published in Albania. CIP started in 1979 and lasted until 1991, the year when the decentralization and privatization of publishing houses happened. The process restarted in 1997 at the same time with ISBN.
- Developing a national preservation strategy, organizing restoration of valuable library materials.
- Developing loan and exchange relations with other libraries in Albania and abroad.

- Center of librarians' education and training and a research institution on library and information science
- Albanian ISBN agency

Processing of library materials:

Cataloging rules have gone through changes. NL uses UDC since 1965 and takes care to know extension and corrections of the scheme. AACR2 are in use from 1989. These rules are used in all libraries in the country. The subject cataloging is relatively a new experience for us. It started in 1995 based on a list of subject headings, which was the translation in Albanian of Sears List of Subject Headings. Realizing that the list was restricted from the collection of the National Library, catalogues decided to use LCSH translating and customizing in Albanian the headings they need to use. Working in that way, the list is going to be wider day after day.

National Library started to create a database using CDS/ISIS software, provided by UNESCO. A year ago we changed it with another one, which is an integrated library system, ADLIB. UNDP, SOROS Foundation and the Ministry of Culture sponsored the automation project. The system is installed already, the LAN also and the records existed in CDS/ISIS are converted in the new software. Actually in the database are 10.000 records of books and more than 100.000 records of articles. Now the automation department is working to put in use other modules (circulation, acquisition, and serials).

Readers can get information using OPAC from new books and card catalogs for previous materials. The user interface offers 8 pre-defined search fields: words from the title, author, publisher, subject, year of publication, language, and series, ISBN. The Boolean operators, truncation, displaying and printing of results are available.

INTERNET access is also available free for users as well as some databases on CD-ROM providing bibliographic citations and full text articles in social sciences and medicine.

Retrospective conversion is the project of the near future. It is estimated that it will last 2-3 years. The home page of the National Library will be available soon in the INTERNET.

National Library is member of IFLA and CENL.

Public libraries

Albania is organized in 65 counties and 330 communes. Each one must have its public library. In fact only county libraries are well organized. The creation of some of them in 19th century was the initiative of individual persons, who prompted by their patriotic feelings put at these libraries' disposal their houses, their own private libraries and offered financial support to them. Most of public libraries are opened after 1945. The responsibility of public libraries is shared between the state and the local authorities. 35 of them are main public libraries of the country, possessing 2.250.000 library materials. Some of public libraries preserve in their stocks special collections (rare books, local history etc.). The staff in these libraries goes from 2 to 10 (totally 135 librarians) and each library has a special children department. Before political and economic changes happened, all public libraries were organized with closed stacks and users couldn't see the books. Now the mentality of public librarians is changed. They know that their mission is not to collect and preserve materials, but to provide free access to information for general public. They are organizing open collections when the space permits it. In 1998 public libraries had been one of the priorities of the Ministry of Culture. After a long time, four public libraries moved to new buildings. Central and local government, Soros foundation and some others sponsor the buildings and facilities.

We can't yet talk about automation of public libraries. Only 12 of them have a PC and are working to create their databases in CDS/ISIS.

County public libraries have established close relations with other libraries in the county (school libraries, small public libraries in communes) and work on their staff training, advisory service in organization and technical services in their libraries.

University libraries

There are 3 universities in Tirana, 5 in other cities and 4 higher schools. Each one has its own library. They differ greatly as for their size and collections according to their faculty and the number of students. They all together have nearly 1.000.000 volumes of library collections and the total number of librarians is 95. As the number of the university students and the demands for literature were growing, depending on the conditions of each

faculty, collections of books and periodicals were gradually taken away from the central library to create faculty libraries as near to the student as possible.

Thus University of Tirana libraries have their branches or faculty libraries.

University libraries are involved in projects to improve their services to students and faculty. They started to create their database at first in CDS/ISIS and later two main university libraries (Tirana University Library and Polytechnic University Library) did buy another software. They are working to create a network between main library and faculty libraries. University libraries provide Internet access for their users.



Almost all 8-year schools and all high schools in Albania have a library run by a school teacher. A few of them have a full-time librarian and only one high school library is automated. The software is appropriate for school libraries (Winnebago Spectrum).

Special libraries

Special libraries are dependent units, belonging to research and public institutions, commercial enterprises, religion institutions, associations etc. During the political and economic changes many special libraries have been closed. These recent years some new ones have been established. There are over 100 special libraries in Albania, most of them found in Tirana, with more than 600.000 units. A number of special libraries serve as specialized information centers in their fields.

Depending by their host institutions some special libraries are on the way of automation, but there is not yet any network between libraries of the same

field. The Academy of Science libraries are working on a project to create a network of research institutions libraries depended by the Academy of Science.

Being in this situation, when the main libraries of the country are in the beginning of their automation, local catalogues of individual libraries are not connected and doesn't exist the union catalog in electronic form. This will be the goal of the near future and the National Library must have the leading role in the process of designing, organizing and managing the process.

Librarians education and training

As there are no library schools in the country, NL is in charge of librarians' education and training. The 2-year on-the-job training course has been opened in 1969 and is still continuing. This course is attended by people with higher education and appointed to work in a library. The program of the course includes disciplines related to library management, technical services and user services. Information technology is included in the program as a new subject. 42 librarians finished the program this year and 38 others started to attend the course. For assistant librarians with high education National Library organizes a 1-year course.

The challenges of the information technology are seeking by the librarians, even they are old or new, to know about computers, softwares, networks, electronic resources, and users need in the information age. Being aware that our librarians need to be trained on these topics, National Library and Albanian Library Association worked on a project to set up a continuing education center. This project was sponsored by Soros Foundation and National Library. The training center is equipped with 8 computers, overhead projector, TV video and other facilities. It is established in the National Library. The program of the training center comprises workshops and seminars based on actual librarians' needs.

The Research and Training Department is involved also in translating international library standards and IFLA materials and sending them to other libraries in the country.

Nevertheless, I have to say that the education we provide is not enough and this is one question we can and must profit by the experience of other Balkan countries.

Another point I am interested in is the exchange of professional publication. We publish one journal, which is the only one about librarianship in albania. We receive from National Library of Bulgaria their journal and I give my thanks to them. I think we have to exchange these kinds of publications to let know our librarians what is going on the in our neighbor libraries.

The progres made so far is not sufficient and libraries in albania have long way to go. They have not developed as much over recent years as other libraries in Europe. Their objectives are: getting the ways to rice funds; automation of information; networks; and training.

