

Library Policy: European Projects and Lithuanian Perspectives

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The necessity for national strategies in library and information services particularly sharpened in the context of emerging information society. Recent initiatives of the European Union to create a pan-European platform for information policy made it absolutely evident that *each country* has to define its own way of creating the information society. National policies have also to be open to dialogue and cooperation between countries and on European level.

The purpose of this article is to consider the possibility for Lithuanian libraries to integrate European library network by creating national library policy and harmonizing it with the policy of the European Union. I will argue that national and supranational library policies in most cases are fragmented and dispersed and that this is – to a certain extent – due to the multifunctionality of the library itself.

Library policy: some definitions. There is no consensus about what constitutes library and/or information policy. The UNESCO document *National Information Policies* (Montviloff, 1990) defines policy as “*a set of principles and strategies that guide a course of action for the achievement of a chosen goal*”. In the realm of libraries and information there are particular problems in defining what that goal (or goals) might be, largely due to the nature of both library and information itself. Information is multidimensional, touches upon many domains and has both economic and social dimensions. Informa-

tion policy, therefore, is multifaceted and can be motivated by many objectives, some of which are in conflict with another, e. g. protection of privacy versus freedom of information, copyright versus exploitation of ideas (Oppenheim, MacMorrow, 1997).

The content and purpose of the library are shaped and directed by a diversity of social concepts. Different definitions of the library put emphasis either on inner standards or social responsibilities, on collection and preservation or on use and access. In addition, libraries vary in types and profiles. Emergence of a virtual library forced to question the concepts and definitions of a library as an institution that are deeply enrooted into professional consciousness of librarians.

The role of the library in the society is multifaceted, it is connected with different sectors that do not necessary are interconnected between themselves: culture, information, education, science, research, technology, leisure, etc. These sectors are administered by different ministries which – as a rule – do not have traditions of cooperation. With such scope of activities and social responsibilities it is very difficult to grasp the integrity of library functions, especially for those who look at libraries from the outside. This could be a reason why library policies in many cases are fragmented, included into different *other* policies, most often – into cultural or information policy of a given country, region or continent. In many cases this is a policy towards the *public libraries* that is taken for the whole national library policy.

Library policy in Lithuania. It is difficult to speak about the coherent library policy in Lithuania. It can be reconstructed from different initiatives, documents, programs and projects at different levels. Some of them are targeted directly at libraries, and some show the possibility for libraries to participate, to contribute and to benefit from integration into some other wider sphere – culture, information, education.

There are certain pre-conditions for library and information policy in Lithuania to be created. Many political decisions have been made and necessary institutions established (Lithuanian State Council for Information Policy, Lithuanian Library Council, Consortium of research libraries, etc.) to coordinate the activities of different players. There is a legal basis for library operation and development: Law on Libraries, statutes and regulations of libraries, etc.

Since 1995 we have a *Law on Libraries*. The Law defines the library as "an institution of culture, education and information, wherein printed matter and other documents are collected, organized for use and kept, and the information contained in them is systematized and disseminated, for the purposes of knowing, associating, preserving information collected by people, training and recreation" (Law..., 1995). The Law clearly emphasizes the cultural role of the library and represents the concern for safeguarding the libraries and their collections during the first years of Independence. The Law also states that printed matter and other documents, regardless of their authorship or the political or ideological orientation, must be accessible to everyone, free of charge.

LIBIS (Lithuanian Integrated Library Information System) project aims at creation of integrated library information system by computerization of libraries, creation of online catalogues, union catalogue and databases (Lietuvos..., 1994). The project is financed by the Ministry of Culture and is supported by the Open Society Fund – Lithuania. Creation of LIBIS has several stages – first these are research libraries, then public libraries and finally school libraries that join the system.

Programme for Revival of Public Libraries was created recently by the Ministry of Culture because the public libraries were underfinanced during the recent decade. There was a lack of funding for acquisition, no funding at all for technological innovations, maintenance, even telephones and heating became a luxury. The revival of public libraries is planned as a three years (1998–2000) programme and foresees many different measures to improve the situation in public library sector.

Traditionally, libraries in Lithuania constitute a part of the state *cultural* policy. In the National cultural report (1997) prepared within the framework of the Council of Europe study, libraries are described as cultural and educational institutions with traditional paper-based collections. No perspectives for libraries or their potential for IT application or growing into community information centers is indicated. Such conception neither stimulates change of attitudes within the professional community nor creates any attractive vision of future development.

The most recent developments of library policy in Lithuania are connected to the *Information Society project*. Libraries are seen in it as an important

part of information infrastructure and access points to information for all citizens.

The vision of the effective public library in the information society is "that every public library in any European community should offer access to the human record in whatever format it is stored, that the local public library is part of the world-wide library net and supports all kinds of education that the service provided is of a high professional standard" (Public..., 1997). To reach that level, Lithuanian libraries have not only to implement and provide access to the information and communication technology and networks but also to reconsider their social role and to change attitudes from collection-oriented to service and user oriented institution. In a country with strong tradition of cultural role of libraries and weak perception of their democratic value, it can be extremely difficult to expect that politicians would consider libraries to be an integral and active part of the emerging information society infrastructure.

Therefore, European dimension and EU information policy and library programmes are very important as they reveal the potential of the libraries in the modern world which might be still difficult to perceive in our country.

European Union's library programmes: a short overview. EU library and information policy is also fragmented. There are several administrative sources of policy fragmentation, e. g. information policy formulation is the responsibility of several relatively independent Commission Directorates (DG) (Sillince, 1997). Libraries participate in various programmes that are administered also by different DGs.

European Union first draw its political attention to libraries in 1984 when European Parliament highlighted the importance of libraries. In 1985 the Council of Ministers called the European Commission to action in this field, still it took some time before the action was undertaken. The first Libraries programme was launched in 1990 and it had its emphasis on innovative library programmes and services, networking, computerization and technology-based library products and tools. On a long-range scale European Commission had an aim to foster and accelerate *change* and stimulate awareness of benefits of cooperation among libraries.

In 1994 the second four-year library programme *Telematics for Libraries* started. It is much more ambitious and integrated. It reflects the current trends

of developing information society in different countries, on the European scene and even world-wide. The programme focuses on libraries role in an electronic information infrastructure. It aims at encouraging a more-market oriented approach among libraries, resource-sharing and cost-effective library operations due to higher level of networking and cooperation.

During the last two years three documents that constitute the main framework for coherent *library policy* in the European Union were prepared:

- A report on The Information Society, Culture and Education by the European Parliament's Committee on Culture, Youth, Education and the Media, draftsman: Eluned Morgan (known as Morgan report) (8);
- "Public Libraries and the Information Society" (known as PLIS study) (9);
- Report on the role of libraries in the modern world by European Parliament's Committee on Culture, Youth, Education and the Media, rapporteur, Mrs. Ryynänen (10).

Among other things these documents propose that the Commission should draft a *Green Paper on the role of libraries in the Information Society*. In all three mentioned documents the need for *national policy* is highlighted. Most of the EU countries have prepared and adopted national information policies (11). The need to ensure that the citizens of Europe are able to access the wealth of digital information resources is one of the key yet complex issues receiving attention by policy makers involved in the development of the Information Society. The Green Paper should therefore invoke responses on options for future coordinated action at the European level aimed at:

- improving conditions for citizens' access to information resources by addressing the legal;
- technical, economic and policy issues which can enhance or inhibit access via libraries;
- assisting libraries in meeting the needs of citizens, for example by recommending suitable;
- infrastructures, alliances and training measures.

Lithuania's participation in the EU library and information Society programmes. Although Lithuania is not a member state, there are some possibilities for its libraries to join EU library and information programmes. The Fourth Framework Programme (1994 – 1998) of the European Commis-

sion, encouraging the implementation of research and technology programs, contained a specific line for international cooperation, within which the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the New Independent States were a priority objective. The "Telematics for knowledge" area of the Fourth Framework Programme specifically addresses the libraries sector, aiming to increase the ready availability of library resources across Europe and to facilitate their interconnection with other information and memory organizations. The overall approach is "The 5th Framework programme for research" will be opened up to 10 accession countries from CEE" (12).

Lithuanian library and information institutions during the recent years were or are currently involved in several EU projects and programs: *Phare-Tempus*, *CECUP*, *PubliCA*, *CobRA+*, *Libecon 2000*, *DEDICATE* and others.

As for the EU, for the CEE countries too, the information society is a top priority in order to improve competitiveness and enhance the efficiency of public administration. Recent initiatives to include EEC countries into EU programs are *ESIS* (The Inventory of European Information Society Projects and Actions), "Establishment of Electronic Information Services in CCE/NIS".

An action plan "*Towards the Information Society in the Central and Eastern European Countries: Thirty ideas for European initiatives*" that cover Lithuania among other CEE countries has identified thirty actual themes for pilot projects that would foster integration of west and east. The last – 30th idea covers library sector: *Libraries in the Information Society – Know How, Awareness, Training – LISKAT*. It has several aims:

- to intensify EU / CEE Countries co-operation between libraries, in particular to assist libraries in the accession countries in modernizing their infrastructure and developing new services appropriate to their role in the emerging information society;
- to transfer appropriate know-how, results and initiatives of EC financed projects and actions under the Telematics for Libraries Program;
- to train the professional library community to fulfill their role as gateway to the global Information Society for citizens and specialists;
- to sustain the momentum gained through these actions through a network of local partners.

Participation in the EU programmes helps Lithuanian libraries to create modern library services in support of economic, social and cultural life as an integral part of the larger information and communications infrastructure.

Where do we go from here? The answer is – to the common information rich Europe. In the information society we have to think global and to act local. National library and information policies have to be harmonized at the European level. Lithuania has not only to prepare a clearly defined policy for library development in the new millennium, not only to take into account the international and European dimension of the information society but also to create a really modern and powerful library network in the country. For that we have:

1. To disseminate much more intensively in Lithuania the information about EU library programs and projects, about information society projects and other related initiatives.

2. To promote in Lithuania the concept of the library as a democratic institution that has a mission to provide free and equal access.

3. To raise the awareness of the role and perspectives of the library in the information society inside the professional community.

4. To implement education and training programs that would foster change in attitudes and organizational culture of the librarians and would equip them with necessary (IT, networking, management, communication) skills and knowledge.

In library and information policy there are many different parties involved and there is a lack of interaction between them. There should be an attempt made to create synergy between various players, including those at both Lithuanian and European arena.

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Bibliotekų politika: Europos projektai ir Lietuvos perspektyvos

Santrauka

Straipsnyje siekiama apžvelgti Lietuvos bibliotekų perspektyvas Europos Sąjungos bibliotekų ir informacijos politikos kontekste. Straipsnyje teigiama, kad tiek paneuropinė, tiek nacionalinės bibliotekų politikos yra fragmentiškos, dažniausiai jos nėra savarakiškos, o yra kurios nors kitos – kultūros arba informacijos – politikos dalis. Tokią situaciją iš dalies mėginama aiškinti pačios bibliotekos sąvokos platumu, neapibrėžtumu. Bibliotekos priklauso labai skirtingoms sferoms – socialinei, kultūros, informacijos, laisvalaikio, švietimo, mokslo ir kitoms. Daugelį šių sferų valstybėje administruoja skirtingos ministerijos bei kitos institucijos, paprastai nebendradarbiaujančios tarpusavyje. Skirtingų tipų bibliotekos siekia skirtingų tikslų, tai irgi didina jų vaidmens visuomenėje dispersiškumą. Visa tai apsunkina integralios bibliotekų politikos formulavimą ir įgyvendinimą.

Pastaraisiais metais Europoje itin aštriai imta suvokti būtinybę permąstyti bibliotekų vietą ir vaidmenį informacinėje visuomenėje. Nors Europos Sąjunga nėra suformulavusi vieningos bibliotekų politikos, bibliotekų potencialo išnaudojimo ir plėtros, naujų bibliotekos funkcijų kūrimo aspektai įtraukti į daugelį Europos Sąjungos projektų ir programų. Per keletą pastarųjų metų beveik visos Europos šalys parengė ir patvirtino informacinės visuomenės planus, kuriuose numatomas reikšmingas bibliotekų vaidmuo skleidžiant informacinį raštingumą, užtikrinant informacijos priei-

namumą ir demokratiškumą. Ypač svarbūs yra trys naujausi dokumentai: Europos parlamento kultūros, jaunimo, švietimo ir media komiteto ataskaita „Informacinė visuomenė, kultūra ir švietimas“, „Viešosios bibliotekos ir informacinė visuomenė“ ir Europos parlamento ataskaita „Bibliotekų vaidmuo šiuolaikiniame pasaulyje“. Visuose šiuose dokumentuose vienareikšmiškai pabrėžiama tiek nacionalinių informacijos ir bibliotekų politikos formavimo svarba, tiek būtinybė koordinuoti šias politikas tarpusavyje, kuriant Europoje vieningą informacinę visuomenę, nepaisančią valstybių sienų.

Nors Lietuva tik siekia narystės Europos Sąjungoje, jau šiandien svarbu žinoti Europos Sąjungos nuostatas dėl bibliotekų vaidmens XXI amžiuje. Šiandieninis nepakankamas Lietuvos bibliotekų finansavimas neleidžia joms atskleisti ir pilnai išnaudoti savo pajėgumų bei atlikti reikšmingą vaidmenį kuriant informacinę visuomenę Lietuvoje. Būtina nacionalinė bibliotekų politika, koreliuojama ir derinama su: a) nacionaline informacijos ir kultūros politika ir b) su Europos Sąjungos direktyvomis bibliotekų plėtros ir informacinės visuomenės kūrimo klausimais. Bibliotekininkystės ir informacijos sektorius yra nevienalytis; reikia siekti glaudesnio atskirų jo dalyvių bendradarbiavimo, koordinacijos ir sinergetinių efektų.