

LIBRARIES AS A PRECONDITION FOR THE CREATIVE ECONOMY Experience from Serbia

Economic sanctions and librarianship in Serbia

Economic sanctions introduced by the Security Council of the OUN against Serbia and Montenegro, in May 1992, were making strong influence on librarianship and informatics in this country during eight years. It is by introducing such measures that difficult situation in culture and education became worse than earlier. Librarians who were employed were deviding the faith of the economy. It was very difficult to acquire new litterature as well as non-book materials, the acquisition of new library equipment was also difficult as well as system administrating, means for schooling specialists abroad were symbolic and users felt very well the lack of high quality materials and services. For every subscription on academic journals they had to go abroad because financial chanels between our country and abroad were blocked. So, these economic sanctions were exhausting for libraries and particularly for their users.

Beginning from the abolishment of the hyperembargo in 2000., many positive changements in the society were noticed. Progress in library and informatics started off. However the consequences of economic sanctions are present even today.

Librarians in Serbia make great efforts to include their institutions into the process of globalizing in order to contribute to social progress. The libraries in key cities of Serbia have an advantage in the implementation of technological news because of their space, staff, technical, organizational, financial and other opportunities. There is no modern, electronic democracy without developed libraries, nor progressive society without dynamic activity in these organizations.

Feedback between economy and libraries

The more developed an economy is, the higher will be the means for library and information activity as well as for its' development. If an economy is poor, the library and information activity will be falling behind. Developing countries as well as OECD countries face this truth.

There is a library within the organizational structure of some enterprises, commercial banks and institutes in Serbia. It is not unusual. This is imposed as an indispensability by the working process but the hight of investments into the libraries is different in comparison with developed countries. The efficiency of library work will surely depend on financial means used for this purpose.

Libraries respecting their type tend to meet the expectations and the needs of users in the field of economy. Academic and special libraries as well, will be more successful in these activities. However, public libraries in Serbia should not neglect economic topics. Generally speaking, libraries are mostly budget and non-profit institutions. If they truly devide the faith of economy, even in the most difficult moments, it is comprehensive that, they should do as much as they can to meet the needs and keep fullfilling professional desires of users who go in for economy or who need economic information and materials.

Innovation economy requires strong base in libraries as centres for the dissemination of information, centres which follow contemporary tendencies in world business. The librarians have noticed the importance and the function of electronic resources for the development of the creative economy in Serbia. Very often such an economy is the resource of high profit. Many authors pointed out that scientific and technological progress create new resources for economic growth and development.

Marketing mix in libraries

Marketing orientation is being developed gradually among the librarians in Serbia. Libraries exist because of users, so these institutions should always have them in the centre of their preoccupations. A user starts off to create in a library. It is there that he penetrates the Information Society and devotes his attention to the creative economy but only if the working conditions and materials, programs and services permit him to do so. The production mix of libraries is specific and it consists of:

1. books and non-book materials,
2. programs (workshops, lectures, discussions, video performances, etc.), and
3. services (information, reference services, instructing users, interlibrarian loan services, scanning, classical reading room services, electronic reading room services, etc.).

Such a production mix makes possible for the users to search Internet and to use particular multimedia services. Instructing and enabling the users to search electronic resources is also the duty of librarians. The use of high technologies is a precondition for successful work of many users today. Concentrating on the problems of the creative economy is possible only if the production mix of the library is created in an adequate way. The results of surveys and focus interviews may illustrate well the needs of users who go in for this topic. These techniques may contribute to the promotion of library work.

Marketing mix of libraries has four elements: product, price, place, and promotion. These are Philip Kotler's "4P". Successful libraries tend to find an optimum combination of these four elements. The loyalty of users is a problem which requires permanent attention.

The prices of library services should not be too high because they should not stimulate the users. Except this, the prices should follow the level of library costs. The promotion requires efforts in order to make real and potential users more familiar with the working conditions in the library and its' production mix. Distribution planning may promote the work of the institution, so particular attention should be paid to it from two aspects: the physical transport of materials to the users and the efficient dissemination of information. Therefore creating library and information system is very high on the list of priorities in many libraries nowadays. As far as this field is concerned, there are still many problems in Serbia which are being gradually eliminated and this cannot be achieved without indispensable time, sufficient financial means, good organization of work, adequate staff and technical equipment.

Economists should really be a particular market segment which would include students, researchers, university professors, businessmen etc. University libraries should create a particular marketing mix for every individual marketing segment, therefore, for economists also. The creative economy is the economy of the future. We live in the "learned society". Searching Internet is not an illusion any longer. Electronic resources become more and more numerous.

Information skills are indispensable today. The problems of information literacy are being analyzed from different aspects in Serbia but it is clear that globalizing and digitalization of business and library work are truly intensified. Young generation of economists in Serbia are being prepared to overtake duties in enterprises where they will have to respect and accept productivity, economy and lucrativeness as economic principles.

Strengthening the cohesion among the libraries in Serbia

There are 37 libraries included into the Virtual Library of Serbia. The following address should be used for searching it: vbs.nbs.bg.ac.yu/cobiss/. As far as the cataloguing of library materials is concerned, all these libraries made choice of the software **COBISS 2** of the Institute for Information Sciences (IZUM) in Maribor (Slovenia) (1).

It would be ideal for the users and the librarians, if all the libraries in Serbia would be included into the same Virtual Library. However all of them did not make choice of the same software and it shouldn't be amazing today. First of all, there are different types of libraries. Second, they usually have different financiers, technical equipment and the structure of personnel. Every library cannot accept foreign software if it is known that expenses for licences are not low. If all the libraries would have the same financier, his influence would be probably stronger when software for cataloguing library materials is to be chosen.

Although there is a competition among libraries in a way, they develop mutual cooperation in their own professional field. Workshops, discussions, meetings, conferences etc. are just some ways for the exchange of ideas and experience, for getting to know the news and define the directions of further development and cooperation. At the same time, these are the ways to develop cooperation among libraries in the field of the creative economy where many users carry out their research either as citizens or institutions. How to keep focusing on the end user?

Very fast and successful exchange of information with users, sites which are well created, funds completed in an adequate way, educational and other useful programs, nice service environment, good working conditions, indispensable services, as well as promotion activities, can make potential users come into the library and become its' loyal members. All this refers also to the users in the field of the creative economy of an urban area. If all the libraries in Serbia would accept the fact that strategic plan should be based on the results of marketing research, their work would be more efficient.

The most frequent problems in the libraries of Serbia today

The libraries in Serbia are facing many problems today. Nowadays, student population is not nominally the same in comparison with that time when, for example, the "Svetozar Markovic" University Library was being built. This institution was built particularly thanks to the Carnegie Foundation which agreed to deposit \$100,000 for the purpose of constructing and equipping a library in Belgrade. Professor Slobodan Jovanovic who was the Rector of Belgrade University, succeeded in getting more funding from state loans. He was obviously aware of the need for a big University. The city donated a plot of land. This extremely important project was done by university Professors, architects Dragutin Djordjevic and Nikola Nestorovic, and so the first building ever built for the purposes of a library in Serbia came into being. The Library was opened on the Day of St Cirilo and St Metodije, 24th May 1926. (2)

As financial means are very limited today, it is very difficult to meditate about one more building of this university library in one of the most heavily populated districts such as New Belgrade, for example. However reconstruction and adaptation would be necessary at least. Financial difficulties are so numerous, particularly if we take into account the economic situation during and after the attack of NATO.

Last year the staff of the National Library of Serbia registered the flood in the warehouses which was the danger for their complete collections. The personnel made great efforts in order to improve the situation. This sad event was followed by mass media. Finally, authorized officials reacted.

Now there is a clear plan for the improvement of sanitary conditions which defines the organizations responsible for investments in such and similar cases, working phases, etc. The plan is accepted. Responsible institutions are willing to overtake their part of obligations in this situation.

Of course, these are not the only problems. Libraries in Serbia facing investment difficulties are not rare. All these organizations make great efforts to overcome the difficulties which may last several years. On the other side, when libraries are really large investments, they contribute to social peace and stability because when new and contemporary projects are finished, they usually absorb certain number of unemployed persons from the labour market. While the libraries are being built, activities in many industrial branches become more dynamic. Therefore libraries contribute to the economic progress.

As far as the acquisition of book and non-book materials is concerned, the problems are not rare. When it happens that a responsible financier does not have sufficient means for completing library collections, there are several ways to alleviate the problem. The library relies on donors and its' individual library members who bring or send some gifts for it. The exchange of publications is also a very important way of acquiring library materials. During the economic sanctions parcels heavier than 200gr could not pass across the frontier with Serbia and Montenegro (3). The situation was normalized afterwards. All users felt the consequences of such measures including those who go in for the creative economy or economic problems in general.

Even today, after the abolishment of the economic sanctions, the situation in the acquisition of library materials is not wonderful. Financial means for the purchase of books are usually much lower than librarians may expect and multimedia materials are very modest. From time to time libraries find donors. These are organizations with such a top management which understands well the situation in the libraries of Serbia. The libraries apply for necessary means whenever some foundations in the field of culture and education publish their announcements.

Key libraries in Serbia give the opportunity to their members for Internet search. In this way they compensate for the lack of library materials thanks to e-resources and many useful contents which may be found on-line. Independent learning of individuals is not Utopia any longer. "The intellectual freedom is a basis for functioning of a democratic society, the right of each individual to seek and receive information without exception or censorship."(4)

There wouldn't be so many electronic publishers worldwide if it weren't for so many users interested in information services. So many e-publishers offer high quality journals in many economic fields such as: international finance, marketing, organization, planning, international economic relations, business statistics, economic history, information systems, banking, Internet

economy and so on. Electronic publishers usually require subscription to be paid for the contents they offer. Sometimes they allow free trial period to potential users so that they may estimate whether they would really need such an electronic service. The development of digital economy requires transition from traditional – paper to electronic form of content as well as the development of library and information infrastructure. Such a transition usually goes on first in urban areas.

E-journals as an important resource of knowledge in the economy

Consortium for Coordinated Acquisition exists several years in Serbia. Ministry for Science and the Protection of Living Environment of Republic Serbia paid subscription to electronic services in different scientific fields for this consortium which is included into EIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries) Direct Project. The supervising library on the territory of Serbia is the National Library of Serbia. There are some electronic publishers in the world who require very high subscriptions to their databases in the field of economics, so high that the consortium mentioned in this text wouldn't be able to find financial means for this purpose.

EMERALD, EBSCO, Proquest, Science Direct and ISI Web of Science (Sical Sciences Citation Index) are only some electronic services which may be used by the library clients from key cities in Serbia who are concentrated on the economy. Full texts of the academic papers received thanks to the search of the databases are not the only content important for further research. Internet offers answers to many actual questions today. Classical library materials are not to be neglected and CD-ROMs are used very often. Today, there is a small number of DVD-ROMs in the library collections of Serbia but this situation will be undoubtedly changed.

The individual in the Information Society and the role of librarians

The economy based on knowledge requires permanent learning. Information retrieval may be carried out easily if users have developed their own information skills and if they have free access to the information resources. An important precondition for business success today is time spent preparing the staff for present and future responsibilities. Investments into the personnel are indispensable for taking part in every competition game today.

Information literacy is indispensable for librarians as well as for users. According to some authors this expression implies the skills in solving following problems:

- the end users do not know which information they have access to,
- they have difficulties in determining the quality, reliability and the accuracy of information.
- Information they look for are difficult to find.
- They are not able to make comparison among offered alternatives.
- They need training (5).

Peter Druker uses the term “postcapitalist society” or “learned society”, because knowledge is considered the main economic resource, so neither capital, nor natural resources (cultivable soil), nor work (6). Generally speaking the Information Society is the Knowledge Society. Information highways make possible for many useful contents to be in free access worldwide. The library and information science experts in Serbia should be prepared for:

- instructing the users,
- designing databases,

- widening the range of reference services,
- metadata management,
- the evaluation of web sites,
- business analysis and
- knowledge management (KM).

Contemporary librarians in Serbia are expected to solve the problems concerning information access in an efficient way, to give adequate and actual information, bibliographic instructions, to take part in the training of users, to develop web sites, to contribute to the evaluation, revision and the modification of library collections, programs and services.

Consulting role of librarians as experts from the practice shouldn't be neglected during the creation of programs for secondary vocational schools and faculties, in the field of librarianship and information sciences.

Factors for attaining success in the libraries of Serbia

Every library should have its' aims, tasks and mission clearly defined. Plans should be based on previously examined library users' needs. Marketing research are to be done in order to complete the image of necessary and adequate production mix. Spatial conditions for the work of users and librarians should be in accordance with legal standards.

Building the library and information infrastructure may enable the users, in the field of the creative economy as well as in other fields to use time in an efficient way and to find feet searching easily electronic resources. The library with adequately prepared staff may answer the requests of modern time when digital economy is being developed in an intensified way. If knowledge management in the library should attain high level, particular attention should be paid to the permanent education of librarians.

The production mix of the libraries will be more efficient if it is created in such a way to follow the development of economic thought, the transition of local economy and its' restructuring in order to attain economic growth and development. So, the structure of collections, programs and services should be adjusted also to the users who go in for the creative economy, if the type of the library allows that. In Serbia it would be indispensable to increase the number of economic journals, the Consortium for Coordinated Acquisition is subscribed to.

It is important that libraries creating their own strategy take into account economists as a particular marketing segment. The adjustment of collections, programs and services to their needs requires accurate calculation of costs because these data should be presented to the funding authorities. The understanding on higher levels within the state is an important factor for attaining success of the libraries which are concentrated particularly on the creative economy. It may be pointed out that stable political and economic situation within a country contributes a great deal to the successful work of these cultural and educational institutions.

The libraries which develop their influence in the society should keep penetrating mass media. These institutions should not neglect the librarians and their activities in many societies, associations, organizations etc. While they are contacting the users, the librarians are getting to know much about their requests, needs, and expectations. The creative librarian makes suggestions to his colleagues and the top management in order to find out an optimum combination of the instruments of marketing mix for the aim segments he is focused on during

working process. The libraries and the librarians should focus on the end users in the field of the creative economy relying on the accesssive information resources and materials.

Endnotes:

- 1) www.izum.si
- 2) A Guide to the "Svetozar Markovic" University Library, Belgrade, University Library "Svetozar Markovic", Publikum, 2001., p. 6.
- 3) Vesna Zupan, Marketing u bibliotekama, Beograd, Svet knjige, 2001., p. 32.
- 4) Biljana Bilbija, The Intellectual Freedom and Contemporary Libraries. International Scientific Conference, Intellectual Freedom and Modern Libraries, Belgrade, 25-27 September 2003, p. 74.
- 5) Carmel O'Sullivan, Is Information Literacy Relevant in the Real World?, Reference Services Review, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, February 2002, Vol. 30, No. 1., p. 9.
- 6) Peter Druker, Post-capitalist Society, Harper Business, New York, NY, 1993, p. 8.