

The State of Communication Channels in Hungary



Pal Vasarhelyi

Most of the libraries, and in particular the university libraries are financed in Hungary by the state budget, provided directly by a supervising ministry or

indirectly through the budget of the university. This support is increasing slightly each year, but the increase does not allow the level of subscriptions to serials to be maintained. In 1992 there are three factors having an adverse effect:

- the inflation affecting the prices of Western European serials;
- the substantial increase of prices in former “socialist” countries, due to the absence of any state support for scientific publications and the requirement for payments to be made in convertible currency;
- the devaluation of the Hungarian currency, increasing to a significant extent the equivalent foreign currency payments.

These factors mean at least a 25% loss in the value of the budget available. The effect would be devastating without the availability of extrabudgetary financial resources offered by foreign and Hungarian foundations. With some of these being interested in supporting the acquisition of the documents necessary for teaching and research purposes, the Library of the Technical University could obtain e.g. the very valuable contributions from the VW Foundation (Germany) or the “Industry for the Universities” foundation (Hungary). The management of the library invests

Pal Vasarhelyi
Library of the Technical University
of Budapest

considerable time and effort in identifying potential funding sources and preparing appropriate applications, but the financing obtained can still not compensate for the loss in the real value of the budget.

Funds available should be used in the most efficient way. The library applies market methods in implementing the acquisition procedures: competitive bidding is requested for the titles to be subscribed to/purchased and the offers are evaluated both from the point of view of the price and from that of the quality of the services provided. The library has obtained authorisation to import directly, without the intervention of a commercial import company, as was the rule in the past. Regarding periodicals the Technical University library has selected Swets Subscription Service, as the most advantageous from all points of view and concentrated orders on this particular company.

For computer communications most of the libraries and in particular all university and research libraries are supported by an efficient National R&D Information Infrastructure Development Programme. This Programme has established, with state financing, a nationwide computer network and the network based information system and other services which are now at the disposal of about 300 institutions and several thousands of users. The system corresponds to international standards and provides E-mail, electronic bulletin board, file transfer services as well as access to

national and international databases. It allows also the access to the following international networks: EARN, HEPnet, EUnet, Internet, EASInet and, from the end of 1992, IXI.

Postal communications have improved substantially in the last year, due to the fact that there is no more secret police checking of foreign mail.

Language barriers have less and less effect on communications. Universities now require basic knowledge of a foreign language as a minimum for the admission to the first year and the Technical University has introduced courses entirely delivered in English, French and German for Hungarian students. Hungarian authors, on the other hand, are fully aware of the fact that if they

want to reach an international audience, they have to publish in one of the above languages and they do their best to prepare contributions to Hungarian serials/periodicals published in foreign language(s) or possibly to publish in foreign periodicals or conference proceedings.

The role of Hungarian publications, in particular the role of manuals and textbooks is, however, still important in teaching, and the best scientific periodicals have a long tradition, playing an important role in the communication of scientific and development results in the country. The National Szechenyi Library is in charge of collecting all Hungarian language publications, including those published abroad.