

# SERIALS ARCHIVING AND THE CONTINUITY OF KNOWLEDGE

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Paper presented at the Third European Serials Conference, Ireland, September 1996

*In Hungary, as in other Central-Eastern European countries, the continued activity of libraries is problematic. The difficulties caused by new technology, automation and electronics are compounded by the consequences of the social and political system. Libraries have to solve the problem of meeting the increasing needs of users, ensuring access to foreign databases and original documents, while having to make up for decades of backwardness; developing Hungarian databases and making sure that the Hungarian document wealth is protected and accessible. Until recently, libraries, apart from a few instances of bilateral cooperation, have mainly tried to solve the problems themselves. From the early nineties there have been several initiatives to ensure greater progress on a national and international level.*

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## **Serials archiving and the continuity of knowledge**

It is a generally accepted fact that nowadays the position of libraries and information centres is very complex, their activity is affected by many factors outside their sphere of influence. In Hungary, as in the rest of the countries of Central-Eastern Europe, the situation is made even more difficult by the effects of former dictatorial regimes and the change in governments. This change in the government affects not only political and economic life but also the cultural life and the activities of Hungarian libraries.

Here is a list of some of the most important factors:

- centralised state control replaced by democratic local governments;
- the change in the maintainers of the institutions;
- the cessation of censorship, a deluge of newly published documents;
- unrestricted import of foreign documents;
- unrestricted access to foreign databases;
- large-scale increase in user information needs.

These factors and effects are heightened by the world-wide flood of information in recent years, automation, the spread of computerisation and the development of integrated information systems in libraries.

To aid the better understanding of the theme of this lecture, I would like to give you a brief overview of the state of the serials collection in Hungarian libraries.

According to 1994 statistics, there are 3,838 libraries in Hungary. Company libraries, school libraries and other (church, private, etc.) libraries were not included in the statistical survey. Of these, 122 have a significant periodicals collection. The university, college and the major scientific and technical libraries are the ones which acquire the majority of the foreign periodicals and provide the users with direct and indirect services.

Public libraries mainly subscribe to Hungarian periodicals. According to the records of the National Szechenyi Library Hungarian Periodicals Database, the number of legal deposit sent

in and the serials appearing yearly that come under the sphere of the database is 3,500-3,900. About 1,200-1,500 of these are newspapers and journals.

Theoretically Hungarian periodicals should be available in the public libraries, but only a fraction of these publications can be actually found in them. Only about 35-40 city libraries subscribe to more than one hundred current periodicals.

The foreign periodicals acquisition of the major libraries, including the large national, scientific and research libraries and the university libraries, is registered by the National Periodicals Database. According to its records, the number of current titles is about 20-25 thousand which, and unfortunately, continually falling.

An accurate and detailed breakdown of the collection according to libraries is not possible because of limited records. We can get a fairly good picture, though, of the size of the collection in individual libraries from the data of a survey conducted in 1991 for the preparation of the IMF Higher Educational Libraries Development Project.

It is evident, from the data available, that the periodicals acquisition rate per institution is very small at the moment. We are unable to

*The current periodicals acquisition of thirteen university libraries*

Name	Hungarian periodicals	Foreign periodicals
BME	107	844
VE	595	562
KLTE	867	459
GATE	705	706
EFE	336	165
KEE	239	320
AOTE	203	287
DOTE	320	1,115
SzOTE	705	706
SOTE	49	455
ME	1,375	951
MTE	110	117
OTE	83	143

analyse in depth here the libraries' collections according to how well they meet specific needs but as earlier surveys show, of all the Hungarian libraries only the universities have a special literature base of a more or less acceptable standard. Unfortunately, in terms of quantity and content, no university library holds even half of the special literature that would be considered optimal based on professional or economic criteria.

During the past decades political decisions have had a negative effect on the acquisition of foreign special literature. Today, acquisition is not influenced by political factors but it is affected by limited financial resources. Libraries have had to reduce their periodicals acquisition by 40-50 percent in the last 4-5 years, due to the dramatic withdrawal of state funding and the high rise in document prices.

There are about 4.5 million volumes of serials in the above mentioned 122 major libraries from previous acquisitions. Most of the existing stock is stored in its original form, that is on paper.

#### **Cataloguing, access to information, preservation.**

##### *Cataloguing, access and preservation of Hungarian serials*

There are two libraries, the National Szechenyi Library and the Kossuth Lajos University Library, which collect Hungarian serials by legal deposit. As mentioned before, registration with complete bibliographical data is done in the Hungarian Periodicals Database. The database is available on CD-ROM, as well as in the more traditional forms.

The cataloguing of Hungarian serials is done in the National Library in the Periodical Publications Repository which is a part of the Hungarian National Bibliography system.

Current awareness services are satisfactory, but only barely. The result of decentralised processing is that there is no source from which one could get relevant information.

Access is also made difficult by the fact that the article database is on traditional media. Online access to the article database is possible only by location.

The preparation of a comprehensive development project is under way, an important part of which is the creation of an online database of articles in journals with the help of cooperating partners.

Services to be achieved:

- online access to databases in the nation-wide system;
- bibliographic production tools.

Both current and retrospective information services will be available with the completion of this project.

The plans do not include retrospective conversion. For financial reasons especially, it is unrealistic to think about the availability of this in the near future.

Theoretical research is being conducted at the moment to solve the problems of the processing and preservation of databases and digitised documents.

It is a very urgent and important task to create plans and programmes to develop full text databases and document delivery from them. A document delivery service centre has to be created. The best candidate for this would be the National Library.

The National Library has been using microfilm technology for decades to archive the Hungarian document stock. A document delivery service is also available.

The scientific periodicals publishers are the ones thinking about electronic journals. There are already specific plans and preparations are on the way for newspapers. One of the leading newspapers will soon put its publication on the market in electronic form also. It would be practical to start work on the online database of the Hungarian serials alongside these developmental plans.

The National Library could serve as the document store for the electronic libraries of Hungarian serials.

#### *Cataloguing, access and preservation of foreign serials*

The issue of foreign serials is more complex than that of the Hungarian documents.

Important problems:

- how does the retrospective and current information supply work?

- is the sum total of the existing library collections, the national information wealth, accessible, and how is it to be preserved?
- how is the cooperation realised between libraries and other institutions on the national and international level in the area of current acquisition and services?

Since 1990, major libraries have a wider range of possibilities in the acquisition of foreign databases, including article databases, current contents type services and full text databases. Despite financial difficulties, considerable progress has been made in the implementation of automated equipment and in the development of an infrastructure in university and scientific libraries.

We have been able to develop services which can adequately meet the needs of large numbers of users. Only a few here are mentioned here for the purpose of illustration.

- The National Technical Library and Information Centre publishes article bibliographies of national and foreign technical periodicals on traditional media and on CD-ROM.
- The Central Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences makes available nationwide, on traditional and electronic media, its current contents service with the use of an international database.
- The National Medical Information Centre makes the ADONIS database available to its users.
- The National Agricultural Library and Documentation Centre makes the AGRIS, CABI and the NAL databases available to its users.

The above mentioned services along with numerous others belong mostly to the independent activities of an institution. Limited, largely bilateral cooperation does exist: in the main libraries work jointly on specific tasks.

It is necessary and desirable that cooperation be more widespread. This received the largest emphasis in the preliminary documents of the government programme under preparation: "A distributed interlibrary loan system should be

created based on a shared union database and cooperative cataloguing system ... This is the core element of an effective resource sharing program, enabling users to identify availability and location of documents and to place requests for delivery."

Only with the development and operation of a comprehensive system is it conceivable that the information necessary to social and economic growth will be available to every citizen in Hungary.

The realisation of this goal is not only a question of resolution. Determining factors are the ability of the management of libraries and information centres to see the situation clearly and their willingness to relinquish autocracy and the principle of 'we will do everything alone'. It is also their responsibility to seek the economical and logical solutions to the provision, as well as the development, of their services.

A promising sign in this respect is the project whose first stage started in September 1996. The essence of this programme, which is called IRISZ, is the following:

The Technical University of Budapest Central Library and Information Centre developed a database with the use of the SwetScan current contents database. They have also integrated into the system the National Periodicals Database which contains the bibliographical, stock and location of foreign periodicals subscribed to in the Hungarian library system. This database, updated weekly, is made available electronically to users in twenty university and technical libraries as a pilot project. It also attempts to meet the document delivery needs of users of the database. This means that around 80-100 thousand users can get current and relevant information through this cooperative system.

### The archiving of serials

For traditional media, the conservation of their physical condition is not a major problem but the costs of storage, cataloguing and access are all the more so.

Libraries have tried to solve these problems in different ways. Microfilm has been available in Hungarian libraries for decades. From the

early seventies almost all the major technical libraries put a part of their collections on microfilm. The microfilming of the periodicals collection was mostly for use in international document exchange. Most of the libraries, though, have stopped microfilming due to the difficulties in service and most of all because of the poor quality of the technical equipment.

The Technical University of Budapest Library and Information Centre has started, as a trial run, the implementation of computer technology using PROM. The Russian language periodicals were recorded with this method. The drawback of this method is that optical recording does not contain an index file, so there is no possibility of searching by different characteristics.

It seems that libraries have much less of a problem with the processing of electronic publications and including them in their services. A bigger problem is the storage of these electronic periodicals. The major questions are: storage capacity; user skills in file transfer; upkeep, and data storage costs and accessibility.

It is uncertain whether the previous practice of the libraries taking care of archiving can be continued.

Our opinion is that it cannot. There must come about some sort of collaboration between the publishers, subscription agencies and the libraries.

It is not practical nor economical for smaller countries to strive for self-sufficiency in the areas of information services, document archiving and copying services. While the most important task is to develop national cooperation, international relationships have to be developed as soon as possible. There are several opportunities to widen the existing areas of cooperation and to bring about new collaboration.

It would be extremely important for professional organisations to support the solution to this complex problem by, among other things, creating joint workgroups to draw up and plan the programmes.

We recommend that the EFSG also examine the possibility of creating such workgroups.

A few decades ago libraries were in a very difficult situation due to the dramatic increase

in publishing and reader demands. A drastic and thorough change was needed in the ways things were viewed and done to solve these problems. Libraries with open access shelves were created and the readers became a part of the library processes.

It is perhaps not an overstatement to say that the situation today is similar in complexity to the earlier one and its solution might be aided if we sever our ties with certain traditions. It is time that we, together, developed the electronic open shelf.

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