

THE POST-PERESTROYIKA SCI-TECH LIBRARIES: WILL THEY SURVIVE?

By Andrey Zemskov

Abstract: The economic and structural changes on the territory of the former USSR have affected the fate of Sci-Tech libraries, which are closely concerned with the economy. Under the new administration, Russia has no funds or inclination to protect libraries. Highly qualified staff leave to work for commercial enterprises. During the transition period it is vitally important to retain the skilled librarians as a core for future revival. The possibilities are considered of international help under the auspices of IFLA.

1. The general situation

To enable the reader to follow my arguments and suggestions, I will briefly recount the general situation in Russia today. Since our last meeting, at the 57th IFLA General Conference in Moscow, the Soviet Union has ceased to exist and it is highly improbable that it will ever come back to life. Besides the disappearance of the State itself, the whole set of the integrating All-Union structures has also vanished and the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Finance and State Committee for Science and Technologies etc., have been abolished. In the policies of all the newly created states the desire to achieve full-scale national independence is much stronger than the economic pressure for unification.

The prestige of President Yeltsin as leader of Russia is very high and it enables him to undertake drastic reforms. A positive factor which gives a certain hope for some help from within is the surfacing of rich and ambitious shop-keepers, and private sector bankers and businessmen as well as considerable freedom of action for directors of state-owned manufacturing plants and institutions. These people and organisations could start supporting libraries now. Unfortunately however, their charity is directed instead towards children, war veterans and the churches. Either we lack sufficient experience in organizing fund raising

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companies or these people have been rich for too short a time to think of more visible forms of charit and self-affirmation. Among the negative side effects of the reforms, I should emphasize the following:

Inflation causes financial loss for all government-supported and administration-dependent organizations.

Permanent confusion and the frequent changing of administrative structures results in their inability effectively to solve problems.

There is much incompetence, self-interest and corruption within local and municipal authorities.

2 What is now happening in the Sci-Tech libraries?

The librarians of the Sci-Tech libraries of the non-Russian Republics do not seem bitter and disappointed. As mentioned above, the national self-determination has favourably affected their fate and funds. Moreover, Diasopra renders support to the national cultural funds in some former Republics which is why the life of libraries there has not deteriorated. As for Russia, we observe some differentiation: those libraries, which had always been under the authority of Russia did not lose legitimacy but met only with economic difficulties, whereas those under the subordination of the former Union (and these are the major libraries) have suffered a double catastrophe. First of all, the All-Union ministries have been eliminated or placed under the jurisdiction of Russia, with the consequence that many staff were dismissed and their fate uncertain for two months until they were able to obtain other employment. This fate befell library staff at a later stage. Consequently, there was no help forthcoming from this source since the officials were fully occupied with the problem of their own survival and librarians were busy discussing the destiny of the officials. Major challenges are now being faced by the two leading institutions, The All-Union (now All-Russia) Institute for Scientific and Technical Information (VINITI) and the former Lenin Library. A fundamental difference was apparent between the Sci-Tech libraries and STI centres concerning their ability to adapt to the new conditions. For instance: "Informelectro" and the Sci-Tech Centre of the machine-tool industry were able to make an excellent entry into the market economy. They managed to expand the market to diversity their services and will certainly survive. But, for the remainder of the Sci-Tech libraries closely connected to the economy, the changes brought about had a devastating effect. The new administration in Russia has neither the resources nor the inclination to protect them. The government fails to allocate more money for

acquisition and running expenses for premise rental, technical support and postal services, and transportation even though the cost of these has risen tenfold in six months. Salaries fail to keep up with inflation and are not paid regularly. Efforts by libraries to develop a policy of charging for services are also diminished by the effects of inflation. The best staff are lured away by the economics of the private sector where salaries are 2 to 3 times greater. As a result of this brain drain the staff compliment of a library is transformed from a united and effective team into a disjointed group of people lacking a common purpose and unable to work effectively. So the future recovery of libraries is made that much more painful and difficult.

It would be incorrect to say that the higher authorities have completely forgotten libraries, but their concern is occasional, partial and unsystematic. President Gorbachev's decree of April 1991; "On Rendering Help to the Major Libraries", which was issued emotionally without proper consultation with major libraries, has not been fulfilled. Similarly ineffectual are the decisions of the Yeltsin administration. Consideration of the problems of libraries in the Russia Supreme Soviet, caused by the controversy over the Hasides' collection, is not likely to change anything because, at the executive level there will be further disagreement or sabotage. Up till now there has been a lot said about culture and libraries but these words have not been transformed into action by the government into a viable programme with adequate financial support.

As for the social life, the Moscow Library Association seems to reduce its activity. It may be the result of mental fatigue, but the effectiveness of meetings, civil actions and demonstrations is at an all-time low and no-one pays attention to them any more. The recently created Library Charity Fund has, as yet, accomplished nothing tangible. The Association of Research and Sci-Tech Libraries has worked somewhat more effectively and at the last meeting in Lithuania the representatives of library societies of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Moldavia spoke in favour of strengthening co-operation on a Union Catalogue and on the problems of inter-library loans. Some profitable projects within the framework of the Association have been realized and a society of ISIS users has been established.

3. The facts

The amount of scientific and technical literature published in Russia is decreasing due to a shortage of paper. Besides this, some new publishing houses do not send a legal deposit copy to our Library. This has led to a reduction in domestic literature acquisition in 1991 by 20% as compared to 1990. Due to the shortage of hard currency the number of foreign books we get through the "Mezhdunarodnaya

Kniga" agency has diminished by half, the number of foreign periodicals by 23% and I am surprised that the supply has not completely ceased. International book exchange, which provides more than half our foreign literature, has enabled us to smooth out the drop. There were 450,000 readers (12% fewer) and the circulation of items was 5.5 million less (-21%). Interlibrary loans have decreased by 50%. Note should be made of the high level of requests for actively used databases on Ecology and High Temperature Superconductivity, also, the interest in book exhibitions on marketing, management, and basics of market economics.

We are continuing the automation of library housekeeping activities based on a wide application of PCs: only a well-trained librarian who loves computers will be able to give professional advice on this. We are using our own or other legally acquired software. This may sound trivial to a foreigner but for our country, in which piracy and violations of copyright are widespread, this is essential. In cooperation with the Datalogic Company, the Library has created a bar-coded system for use in the physics and mathematics reading room. Automated systems have been developed for circulation control, ordering books and periodical parts, and control of author's abstracts. Local systems were also introduced for new periodicals and special publications such as "DataPro" and "Faulkner". We maintain the computerized Union Catalogue with financial support covering entry records from Sci-Tech libraries of all former Republics and following the ISDS practice.

The 57th IFLA General Conference and its workshops provided a creative stimulus for our Library. We have completed the plan for the Library's development taking account of the new economic situation. The increase cost for renting our premises made us reconsider our retention policy (on the ground of Andy Stephens' ideas on Life Cycle Costing) and we weeded out 440,000 items. Our collections now contain 8 million items. We took part in developing the general plan for the Russian Parliamentary Library and worked out the plan for its automation. The programmes for stock conservation, information storage on CD-ROM, and retrospective conversion are being worked upon now. Even though we all wish to enter the MARC-oriented community of libraries our MARC promotion is not very successful and the publication of the Russian translation of the UNIMARC Manual has been delayed by more than six months. We are developing desk-top publishing systems for the Library's transactions, Union Catalogues and Lists and Reference Materials. Commercial companies having their own photocopying equipment are becoming more common in Moscow and as a consequence of the reduced demand, a 50% reduction of staff in our copying division has been enforced.

Before asking for help you have to show what you are doing to help yourself. Table 1 shows the types of charged services and the throughput in income units of 1000 roubles per annum. It will be seen from this table that our income from these services has doubled each year since 1989 and in 1992 we have 880 agreements to bring in 3 million roubles. Most of the services listed in the table are used by institutions rather than individuals. The revenue from photocopying, which amounts to about 5 million roubles per annum, is not included here.

Table 1: Charged services: net volume in units of one thousand roubles

Services	year		
	1989	1990	1992
1 New acquisition services on customers' request	157	235	251
2 Subjects search on request, copying, delivery	88	154	619
3 Advertizing presentation	3	25	95
4 Bibliographic processing	37	46	77
5 Consulting on library management	17	21	11
6 Sales of databases on floppy disks	15	50	50
7 Information processing and sales of computer time	-	-	169
8 Publishing and book sales	1	42	509
9 Seminars on UDC and norms	-	-	10
10 Others	3	9	56
TOTAL	320	743	1388

The snowballing inflation reduces our efforts, and the revenues from charged services in the total budget remain at the level of 10%.

Consequently, the income from these activities can only support salaries and do not constitute a significant contribution to the acquisition of literature or to the development, or on-going financing, of large-scale programmes.

4 Viable solutions

The origin of the present problems is clear: it results from the collapse of the economy and instability of the administration. The question in the title of the paper should generally be answered in the affirmative - "yes! some libraries will survive". But the main task of libraries is not only to survive, we should work

normally serving users and accumulating knowledge. From this viewpoint the situation is rather complicated. We are now in a crisis and the most acute period will last for two to three years. If the world's library community renders no assistance, there is a possibility that some small and medium-sized libraries will disappear and the large ones will degenerate. During the transition period it is vitally important to retain at least the highly skilled librarians as the keystone for future revival. In any case we will be grateful for any sort of help. The question is what kind of assistance the libraries need most to enable librarians to support themselves and no longer remain losers or beggars.

First and foremost the help should be of a professional character. The basic idea is that the result of this assistance should enable Russian libraries, with their collections, databases and catalogues, to become open to the world community. To achieve this we need exchange of specialists and technical and technological modernization. Reliable and lasting support could be given if Russian libraries were able to participate in some useful projects or programmes to earn some hard currency. The importance of humanitarian aid is obvious.

Help with subscriptions. This is an important and specifically professional kind of assistance. The full amount of our subscriptions to foreign publications is 5,500 titles (60,000 items per annum) of foreign periodicals and 8,000 foreign books annually. The total cost of subscriptions is \$ 2.5 million p.a. and users' requests for foreign material accounts for 52% of total circulation. We have determined the core of our collection as approximately 1,500 titles being the 20% that meets 80% of users' requests, and our first priority is to appeal for any possible help to maintain this core at an approximate annual cost of \$ 0.7 million. Of course, one library - even the major one - cannot cope with this task. But an attempt to co-ordinate the efforts of many library foundations or donors under the auspices of IFLA or any other organization could offer a real possibility of success. The initiative of the AAAS, which we are told has announced the intention to pay for subscriptions during the first two most difficult years, is very encouraging. Certainly, it is more sensible to undertake such support for the major national library with wide interlibrary loan facilities and with deposit obligations, rather than to dilute the help by spreading it thinly over a number of smaller libraries.

Assistance through job creation. It is obvious that a normal team cannot function relying solely on external help. The world has known analogous difficult situations in the past. I recollect the days of the Great Depression and the measures for social recovery of President F.D. Roosevelt. So, the task is to find or develop some projects where participation of Russian libraries will be useful, appreciated and paid for. Of course, there is not much scope in the information processing

market and I feel that up till now Russian libraries are inadequately prepared for competition. Nevertheless, something could be done. We are ready to assist in subscribing to Russian Sci-Tech literature, including inaccessible "grey" literature; to create bibliographic records and English abstracts; to supply bibliographic databases or to generate specialized databases on request; to develop software on convert software for Russian-speaking users; and so on. The evaluation of the work and payment for it should be made according to recognised world standards, for to do careless work is to become corrupted. The best kind of help could be jobs for librarians in this country through participation in IFLA core programmes: ALP, UAP, UBCIM, PAC. The interactivities of libraries should be decentralized and direct contacts between libraries established. As for the financial aspects of the problem, it should be noted that today the average salary in our library is less than \$120 per annum, so any project that gives a gain of \$100 thousand to \$150 thousand annually could support the whole of our library establishment.

Professional exchanges. First, we need to obtain proper information such as databases of the various grants which are so popular in the developing countries. This information is not at present available in Russia. We could send 30-40 specialists annually for 4-6 weeks training or work in libraries abroad. The topics in which training is required are: MARC format and bibliographic control, telecommunications protocols and practice, antivirus software production, fund-raising and how to promote the marketing of Russia-made databases and services.

Technical modernization and accessibility. This is a very significant element in an attempt to make the Library, and its collections and databases more easily accessible and thus potentially more useful for foreign libraries. The emphasis should be placed on international compatibility, primarily in the English language. We will do everything we can, including re-cataloguing and translation, towards this end. To speed the work we need assistance and would be grateful if we could obtain any available software for English-Russian and Russian-English translation. We wish to work more actively to introduce the MARC format in our Library and any support would be welcomed. The Library's staff is working on a project of creating a regional Moscow network interconnection the Book Chamber, our Library, the Parliament Library of Russia and the Patent Library. In future, we plan to include the Central Medical Library, the Library of Moscow University and the Library of Natural Sciences. Thus, a link with our Library will eventually provide a gateway to the regional network comprising the major special libraries in Russia. The supply of telecommunications equipment (possibly second-hand) would considerably facilitate access to the collections. We cannot

purchase this equipment now and without it we will stay disconnected from the input ports of the international networks.

Humanitarian aid. Whilst expressing our gratitude for help one should bear in mind its effectiveness. Last year we received 150 parcels and all of them were given to the Library's former staff members - the aged and poor. Thus, these parcels have not noticeably influenced the lives of Library staff. (Our staff consists of 1050 persons and together with their families the number involved rises to about 3000). I think it desirable that food supplies should be sent directly to a specified library without any intermediary.

Possible steps to be taken. In organizing international help we need to do the following:

Inform the world library community of the situation. I hope this paper will achieve that end.

Define the most suitable and effective ways and means of rendering help.

Initiate action to arouse public opinion and exert pressure on political leaders in Russia and elsewhere to assist libraries.

Start a fund-raising company with international professional control.

5. Conclusion

In my opinion, IFLA with all its experience, authority and well-developed contacts with international organizations and its broad network of Committees and Sections, is ideally fitted to cope with the tasks of planning and management of assistance. I think it would be quite useful to get Russian libraries involved in a realization of short- and medium-term IFLA core programmes. The receipt of help in Russia should be decentralized since one cannot rely on ministries, associations or single focal points. These bodies do not have sufficient experience to act efficiently in the matter. The most reasonable way is to set up several focal points or to rely on twinning between libraries and through direct contacts between individuals. By this mean the necessary feedback may be established.

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