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PRESENT PRIORITIES IN INFORMATION STRATEGY AT TARTU UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

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Although we can say that an information system of a university library is loosely tied to the whole information system of the university, it is obvious that an information system of a university will never be perfect if the university library is not well automated.

On the other hand, to make the activities more effective, the libraries in a region must cooperate closely.

Tartu University Library is quite a large library with over 3.5 million items, the majority of which are still in the closed area. Hence often the only way to get the book you want begins with searching the huge library catalogue.

Tartu University Library has the largest collection of old and rare books in Estonia. At the same time the library is offering access to CD-ROM databases and databases on the Internet. Between these two extremities the main part of the collections consists of scientific literature and, differing from most western libraries, the textbooks for students make up a remarkable part in the collections.

The university administration has made the library responsible for creating an electronic library. In my opinion the first step we must take is to automate the traditional library activities to make the library catalogue better accessible and to smooth the library workflow. At the moment this priority comes up especially acutely as the university is going to reduce the library staff significantly this year. So the library has to improve its functionality quickly.

The two main functions the library is fulfilling now and is going to improve by implementing information technology are:

1. to make the data generated by the library staff accessible to the university community and via Internet:
 - electronic catalogue of the library together with its branch libraries (and other research libraries);
 - bibliographic databases (the information about the publications concerning a specific topic but not necessarily located in the library);
 - patrons' database and circulation module;
 - databases used for buying, ordering and exchanging of publications;
2. to offer access to the bibliographic and other databases created by other institutions on CD-ROMs and on the Internet.

1. Integrated Library System

Today

Tartu University Library started to make the system analysis of the library already some years ago. When in 1993 the King of Sweden, Karl Gustav, supported us financially, we could begin developing the software.

The first module we implemented was a cataloguing module, in 1994, and now we have the catalogue of the library since 1994 (incl. periodicals that were initially in another database).

We decided to begin with the newest literature coming to the library because it would be the most important for the students and the lecturers. We had to make a choice, because even if we wanted to catalogue every incoming item to the system, we would not have been able to acquire enough computer workstations.

We process the materials published in latin alphabet since 1994 using our software, other items go the traditional way (are catalogued using typewriters).

The electronic catalogue of Tartu University Library is accessible via Internet

telnet ingrid.utlib.ee

login: Ingrid

or

URL: <http://ingrid.utlib.ee/ingrid>

As our software does not yet allow the cataloguing of articles from books or periodicals, the bibliographic databases, like "The Annual Bibliography of Tartu University Lecturers", that in my opinion is an important part of the national intellectual resource, are maintained with the help of another software for bibliographic databases - ProCite.

Nowadays, automating the traditional library activities like cataloguing, acquisition and circulation, is usually solved by purchasing a commercial integrated library system, that integrates all these functions helping to smooth the library workflow, and making the library catalogue accessible to the library community and via internet (including the information for the patrons about the availability of any particular item).

Looking forward

Tartu University Library is not going to develop the software further, but is just doing everything to keep it running. We will and we are already putting our strength into purchasing a commercial integrated library system in cooperation with other research libraries in Estonia.

For several years there has been the Working Group on Automation at the Estonian Librarians' Association. The Working Group has been quite successful in getting support from different agencies and even from the state budget for improving the infrastructure in the libraries. The largest part of our funds have come through the Working Group on Automation for several years already (except 1995 the university supported us) and will come from this source next year too.

In the end of 1994 the representatives of the libraries in the Working Group agreed to purchase a common integrated library system for seven bigger research libraries and to form a consortium to coordinate the project. We have had some preliminary talks with some agencies who could support us. If everything goes well, then we may be able to install the system in summer 1997. It depends on the sponsors to what extent and with which means we will be able to organize the retrospective conversion of the library catalogues.

About the history of the cooperation of Estonian research libraries and the birth of Estonian Librarians' Network Consortium you can read in Tartu University Library Web-page.

2. Making databases on CD-ROMs and on the Internet accessible for the patrons

Today

All the CD-ROM databases in Tartu University Library are accessible for the patrons on the five computers of the Information Department of the library, there is also the possibility to search databases on the Internet with competent helpers.

The number of CD-ROM databases in Tartu University Library is increasing all the time, reaching 50 today. Thanks to the agreements with the Sciences and Technology Network our patrons have access to more than 200 databases on-line. As Tartu University Library is an European Documentation Centre, the library has free access to all on-line databases of the European Union.

The patrons have an increasing interest to the databases and it is already difficult to find a free PC for searching a database. Although there are people (especially among computer people) who do not need any help in searching any database, there still remains quite a large number of users who need competent help while searching. At the moment the librarians can only afford individual trainings, but we have realized the need of more systematic training for groups.

Looking forward

Soon the information searching strategies may occur in the obligatory programme for students. Consequently we are trying to get support from several agencies to purchase a modern computer class for student-oriented user training purposes (and why not for training librarians as well).

Is it necessary to implement information technology in the libraries?

The President of Estonia has initiated the computerization of all schools in Estonia, so I hope the Internet will be accessible from every school in Estonia soon. And it would be great!

But the coin has another side as well. What if our children wandering in the Internet cannot find anything on the local library catalogues and bibliographic databases there?

There are very many people who think of all the nice things that Internet offers. There are few who think of contributing to Internet, librarians are among them. Libraries in Estonia are working hard to get their catalogues to electronic form, but they need strong support from their host universities and from the government policy.