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	<p>National Library's Role in Information Economy: with Emphasis on the Experience of the Russian State Library</p> <p>Victor Fedorov Director General, Doctor, Economic Science Russian State Library, Moscow, Russian Federation</p>
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Once more libraries, in particular, national libraries are facing the problem of defining their role in the modern society to forecast necessary actions for sustainable development.

I. Nail drives out nail or information economy replaces industrial one

Information economy and terms denoting this phenomenon appeared at the end of the XX century, but different economic schools and competent researchers often include different components into one and the same notions.

Let's agree that within the next 15 minutes we will bear in mind 4 definitions given below, which characterize the essence of the considered phenomena and form consistency corresponding to transition from wider notions to narrow ones.

Thus:

Information or Post-industrial Society – a term denoting the highest possible level of society development, in which the most important and vital value is information. The term “Society” includes both economy and culture in all its perspectives.

Information economy means economy where the greater part of the gross domestic product is ensured by processing, storing and distribution of information and knowledge, and where the majority of employers are involved in this kind of activities.

Information Production – the core of information economy, covering the whole complex of fields and areas of activities involved in production, processing, storage and

distribution of information, as well as design and production of ICT tools. Information production includes for example management, supplies and labor management.

Information Technologies (ICT) – is the technological basis of information production. This is the whole complex of interrelated and interconnected state-of-the-art technologies facilitating information production.

It's easy to notice that libraries and especially national libraries are present as active subjects in all the four fields.

According to economists' data, about 90 % of modern economic growth in developed countries is being achieved with the help of new knowledge, technologies and every possible innovation, i.e. products of **creative** labour of a human being.

The result of creative labour is an information product, and it is not material which is typical for industrial age.

According to the opinion of French sociologist and economist Jean Fourastié, shared by many other scientists, an optimal structure of the information society will be reached when about 80 % of economically active employers will be involved in production of intangible goods (or services) and remaining 15 % will be involved in other areas of human activities.

II. To kill two birds with one stone or: the role of a national library in meeting information demands and decreasing digital divide

Information sector of economy produces **information products**, inseparable from a human being's intellectual and creative activities. In fact, information sector that has been created initially by creative individuals, nowadays intensively produces these very creative individuals who meet the challenges of time and society demands.

Let's agree with scholars' conclusion that **information sector** consists of two "traditional" types of economy:

The first type includes areas, where literally and metaphorically creative individuals **are being nurtured, public health and education** being the main ones.

The second type is presented by industries, where creative abilities of individuals are being **realized**. Such main industries are **science and culture** (in the broad sense of the word), including a sphere of creative leisure which also produces information products.

If we schematically draw lines of mutual influence of these industries and compare this scheme with water circulation, we can assert that a **LIBRARY** is a fertile field, a sort of a favored storage, where to and from information and knowledge streams flow. This social institution with its numerous interactive networks and reliable information gathered for centuries ensures information economy development.

National libraries are traditionally the most democratic and accessible social institutions, centers of library community and actively cooperate with each other. All basic services are rendered free of charge regardless financial conditions.

However, at the end of XX – early XXI centuries most libraries in the world, including national ones, are facing money constraints caused by inflation and price growth against the background of reduction of budgetary allocations or insufficiency of their increase.

Trying to find the way out, libraries urge authorities to raise allocations, more and more provide additional charged services, develop services that generate revenue. **On average, in developed countries off-budget funds reach 10-30 % of a library's overall budget.**

It's indicative that when at the end of the XXth century the British Library took up a detailed on-line and off-line survey of its 8 thou users, asking them to define priorities in the library activity within a list consisting of 18 positions (ranking them by the level of importance), **two positions appeared to be next to each other in the centre of the list:**

- Free access to reading rooms;
- Further efforts in raising library's revenues.

Financial interrelation of these positions is evident even for the readers who are not economists by occupation: **the more the library earns, the wider library free services are.**

In priorities stated in national libraries' strategic plans the necessity to create new possibilities for generating income on the basis of new user services is highlighted. These new services are in turn should be libraries' response to emerging information demands.

This challenge is **crucial** in sustainable development of information services. Charged services are, in a way, indicators of arisen, detection and growth of a new information demand and, correspondingly, help libraries to find solutions to create all necessary conditions to satisfy these demands. The same principle ("pay to make it cheaper") that has manifested itself in sharp decrease of mobile communication and Internet technologies prices due to their global expansion over the last few years works here as well.

But the most important thing is **that a National Library in the process of acquiring and accumulating various digital information resources is becoming a guarantor of access to reliable information within information economy.** While digital resources are becoming increasingly important, access to full-text databases is becoming very expensive, and not all potential readers can access Internet at the point they work, study or live. This causes digital divide, which is fraught with very serious social consequences. Under these circumstances a library subscribing to commercial databases and providing access to its wide audience is obliged to prevent the society from stratification into information rich and the poor.

Thus a library having made work with network resources its constant work, might act not only as a "safeguard of a nation's memory" but also as a social guarantor of equal access to information. In this connection funds, raised by libraries and **invested into their development**, are themselves deterrence of the growth of prices on information services market, **and fulfill a social role in decreasing digital divide.**

For the Russian State Library the **project "Digital Theses Library"**, which has been under way since 2003, is the latest and probably, the most important project that affected decrease of digital divide.

In 1944 the State entrusted us to act as All-Union (since 1992 – All-Russian) Centre of Theses in all fields of science except medicine and pharmacy.

We receive about 20 thousand titles of Ph.D. theses and 10 thousand titles of doctoral theses in one copy annually. Theses Department is being visited by approximately 400

readers' per day. RSL is the only institution in Russia and post Soviet area which is housing all authentic theses.

By signing an agreement with Russian Copyright Society "Kopirus" we managed to solve the problem of copyright issues and started to digitize all currently acquired (through legal deposit copy) theses and by establishing digital virtual reading rooms in libraries, universities and research institutions across Russia we solved the problem of remote access.

From December 2003 till June 2006 virtual reading rooms were opened in 172 libraries, universities, research institutions, located in 66 of 89 subjects of the Russian Federation and CIS countries (namely, Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan).

III. To play the first fiddle or: Coincidence of vectors of information economy development with RSL's mission

As far as in 1960-s a Soviet academician A. Ursul wrote that "the process of development in some aspect can be changed by the process of information transmission" and that "**tempo of development or progress is similar to the speed of information transmission.**"

In 80-s an American scholar W. Dizard noted that it was difficult to define unambiguously the society that replaces the industrial one, but one thing is obvious in this society – **the prevailing type of economic activities is creation, storage and distribution of information.**

Guided by scientific forecasts of Russian and foreign scholars and experience in strategic planning of other national libraries, I'd like to draw your attention to the mission of the Russian State Library, formulated in 1998 with the assistance of specialists from Andersen Consulting. One cannot but notice how close it is to the above wording:

The mission of the Russian State Library is to collect, preserve and provide for public use the collection of documents universal in scope, reflecting human knowledge and related, first of all, to Russia and its national interests.

Implementation of its mission by the Russian State Library is confirmed not only by the number of visits from all regions of Russia and abroad- the highest in Russia-, but also by diversity of cumulated information resources.

Opening of virtual reading rooms in 66 of 89 subjects of the Russian Federation is now one of the best examples of the library's contribution to the development of information economy, yet it should be noted that this path was chosen by the library long ago.

Since 1972 **Research-information Centre on Culture and Art** has been functioning in the Russian State Library. This is one of the leading research centres in Russia, creating information and documental database of researches on culture and arts, providing with information support different culture organizations and institutions and assisting professional development. These resources in traditional and electronic form are unique.

One of theorists of information economy Manuel Castells indirectly confirmed the right choice of this particular information niche for a National library by saying that "as

information and knowledge technologies dominate in the information society, culture and production forces are closely related to each other”.

IV. That’s the heart of the matter or a National Library’s place in the information economy

It might seem that national libraries and the whole library community possessing the most powerful, organized and reliable resource should almost automatically have very strong positions. Yet, even in library environment there are organizations tending to oppose information technologies and on federal and social levels the belief is being asserted that Internet and libraries are opposing each other.

From this follows that objective conditions of development will lead to completely new information constructions based on modern Internet-technologies and traditional libraries. Who will contribute more to setting up these constructions? It depends on the level of comprehension of the problem and level of activity of all the participants of this process. The current initiative of Google proves this thesis.

In the IFLA/UNESCO Guidelines for the public library service Development developed still in 2001 it’s stated that **even the richest countries can not properly finance each library service.**

Unfortunately, we cannot disprove this statement even five years later.

Thus, preserving and developing functions of national libraries on providing population with reliable knowledge and information, confirmed by the national library status and its partners, we can presume that the number of legal persons and primarily new business internet-companies as library users will be increased.

But here we will already deal with the charged services and correspondingly, off-budget funds will increase.

And the last thing – **cooperation and partnership.** Each National library taking into consideration specific character of its country chooses the most actual fields of information activity and ways of cooperation. In recent years, the Russian State Library has been focusing on:

- **Union Catalogue of Libraries of Russia “LIBNET”**, created by two national libraries of Russia – the Russian State Library and the National Library of Russia. The pilot project has been implemented to divide responsibilities between other Russian libraries for processing Russian books and serials.
- **National Digital Library**, created on the basis of Concept, adopted by RSL and NLR in 2004. In 2005 RSL launched setting up the **Russian Association of Digital Libraries** for promoting this initiative.
- Enhancement of **All-Russian Network of Public Centres of Legal Information**, as the Russian State Library acts as a federal methodological centre in this field;
- Active information interaction in **the Library Assembly of Eurasia** with national libraries on post-Soviet space.

History of development of libraries proves that the library community is one of the most organized communities in social environment.

National libraries differ in scope of activities, structure, collections, budgets, but they have one common necessity to meet increasing demands of changing environment – political, social, economic and technical. Today there are all reasons to believe that rational combination of traditions and advantages of classic libraries and innovations caused by information economy development will enable national and other libraries not only to survive, but to develop successfully.