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Theme:

Managing Libraries in a Changing Environment - Legal, Technical, and Organizational Aspects.

At the Crossroads: Library and Technology

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Abstract:

Given its turbulent history and recent political changes, Serbia's culture faces many challenges to adjust to the emerging needs of the community.

Belgrade City Library, the largest public library in Serbia, is confronted with a rapidly changing environment. There are three major aspects to this change: new technology, and the potential for new services that it brings; evolving demands of library users; and librarians' own new expectations for education and training.

Belgrade City Library is a parent library for a network of 13 municipal libraries and their branches, and as a consequence, has a special responsibility to reach out and change widespread public opinion that defines a library more traditionally - as a collection of books.

Despite insufficient funding, Belgrade City Library has introduced a number of significant technological improvements in recent years, which include an online catalog, audio archives, web 2.0 applications, mailing lists, and web user forums. While some of these innovations may constitute the norm in other countries, they represent very important first steps in bridging the technological gap between Serbian libraries and their state-of-the-art counterparts.

At the Crossroads: Library and Technology

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Introduction

Introduction

- Turbulent history and Serbia's culture
- View of libraries and librarianship
- Mission of reinforcing a positive image
- Belgrade City Library



Given its turbulent history and recent political changes, Serbia's culture faces many challenges to adjust to the emerging needs of the community. Belgrade City Library, the largest public library in Serbia, is confronted with a rapidly changing environment. Librarianship is still often viewed by the community as an insignificant profession and libraries as dusty warehouses with collection of books and grumpy staff. Our mission today is to reach out to the public and focus on the ways in which the values of librarianship and the trust the community places in our library could reinforce a positive image.

Retrospective

Retrospective I

- Belgrade City Library founded in 1931
- World War II and after
 - Damaged, yet open
 - Later development
 - 1961 Belgrade city library becomes parent library for the City's libraries



Founded in 1931, the Belgrade City Library has gone through many changes throughout history. During World War II, even though the old building and a valuable part of the collection were damaged, the library was open to the public throughout this time. After the War, the library developed in terms of creating new organizational plans, opening new divisions, founding a professional center for libraries in Belgrade and striving to form a unique network of all public libraries in the city. In 1961, the Belgrade City Library became the parent library for this network.

Retrospective II

- Golden age of librarianship
 - 70's and 80's
 - Internationally recognized
 - Standards
 - Automation 1987.



The 1970s and 80s were a golden age of Serbian (back then, Yugoslavian) librarianship. The National library of Yugoslavia and Librarian Society were members of nearly every international federation and association, and libraries were operating at their full potential. International standards such as ISSN and ISBN were implemented in mid-80s, which was followed by the formation of an automated library systems. Belgrade City Library was the first public library in the country to implement such system in 1987. Culture was flourishing and so did the libraries. Support from the government never seriously failed until later years.

Retrospective III

- Distressing 1990's
 - Scaling down
 - Yugoslavia divides into six countries
 - Library network disintegrates
 - Serbia cut off from the world
- New millenium
 - Re-gaining government support

During the 1990s, everything was scaled down: Yugoslavia divides into six countries with six “different” languages and the library network that had just started to bond, disintegrated. This period was the toughest – it was a time of isolation, economic stagnation and inflation. Serbia was cut off from the international scientific and information communities. In 1993, not one book entered a single public library in Serbia. Cultural institutions in general were anything but prosperous.

With the new millenium and socio-political dramatic changes in Serbia, libraries started regaining government support and received higher priority.

Today

Today

- Evolving
 - Technologies
 - Users' demands
- Meeting the community needs
- In the heart of Belgrade

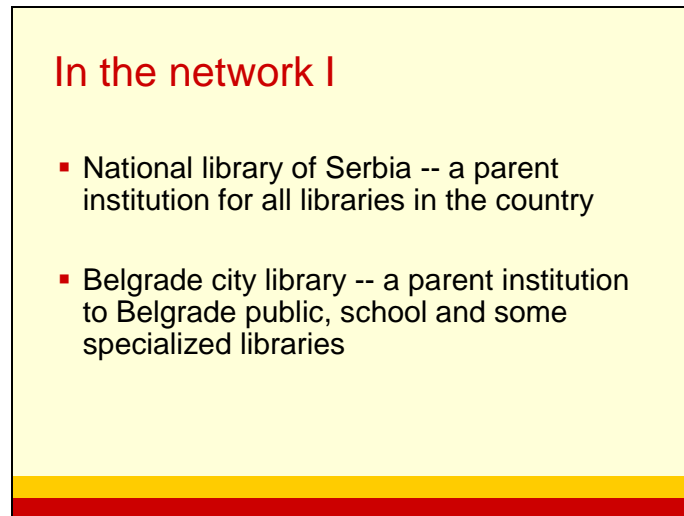


Since we face continuous challenges due to rapidly evolving technologies, increasing demands from the community for a multitude of new services, and constantly insufficient budgets, we tend to focus on issues such as automation and reevaluation of services that we offer.

Public libraries are mostly viewed as collections of books. In past years, our community residents mostly had no idea that a public library could provide such materials and services that could help them obtain information meeting all of their needs—personal, educational and professional. In recent years, expectations and services have been increasingly changing.

Sitting at the heart of the Belgrade public library network connecting 13 municipal libraries and their branches, Belgrade City Library has a special responsibility to reach out to the community and make a difference in city residents' access to knowledge and technology.

In the Network



In the network I

- National library of Serbia -- a parent institution for all libraries in the country
- Belgrade city library -- a parent institution to Belgrade public, school and some specialized libraries

The parent institution for all libraries in central Serbia is the National Library of Serbia. The university library “Svetozar Markovic,” in Belgrade, assumed this role for the network of university and scientific institutions’ libraries. When it comes to public libraries, the main public libraries of certain counties represent parent institutions. The total number of libraries covered within the entire network at the end of 2006 was 2389.

Belgrade City Library consists of 14 different departments and divisions, where 9 are placed in the main building and the rest are allocated elsewhere in the very center of Belgrade. Apart from managing those segments, the library coordinates a network of municipal libraries and branches, covering altogether 77 locations throughout the city.

In the network II

- Legal obligations of parent libraries
 - Maintaining the registry of libraries
 - Maintaining library collection catalogs
 - Offering professional help to the libraries
 - Monitoring professional work in libraries
 - Organizing HR education and trainings
 - Analyzing situation, needs and conditions of libraries
 - Suggesting measures for development and methods of implementation

The legal background for setting parent library basic functions and obligations is based on IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto and Public Library Guidelines for Development. The functions are:

- 1) maintaining the registry of libraries
- 2) maintaining library collection catalogs
- 3) offering professional help to the libraries
- 4) monitoring professional work in libraries
- 5) organizing human resources education and training
- 6) analyzing situation, needs and conditions of librarianship
- 7) suggesting measures for development of libraries and methods of implementation

These obligations apply not only to the Belgrade City Library network, but to other independent municipal libraries, schools and some specialized libraries in the city. Networked libraries differ from independent libraries in that they operate entirely as one huge library with an integrated budget, acquisition, human resources, and membership. The Department of Library Development is a special department that is in charge of coordinating the network and performing the above described functions.

In the network III

- Brief 2007 statistical report
 - Staff 300
 - Collection acquisition 102.600
 - Collection status 1.794.314
 - Members 116.804
 - Cultural programs 3000
 - Belgrade population 1.290.732
- Recent changes and network

Looking at the 2007 annual report, we will find following statistics for the network:



Staff	300
Collection acquisition	102.600
Collection status	1.794.314
Members	116.804
Cultural programs	3000
Belgrade population	1.290.732

Belgrade City Library network in 2007

Aspects to the Change

Aspects to the change I

- New technology
- Insufficient funding
- Bridging the technological gap between Serbian libraries and their state-of-the-art counterparts



There are three major aspects to the changes experienced by the city's libraries: new technology, and the potential for new services that it brings; evolving demands of library users; and librarians' own new expectations for education and training. Recent changes refer to the entire network of 13 libraries.

New technology

Despite insufficient funding, Belgrade City Library has introduced a number of significant technological improvements in recent years. While some of these innovations may constitute the norm in other countries, they represent very important first steps in bridging the technological gap between Serbian libraries and their state-of-the-art counterparts.

Aspects to the change II

- Computer and technical equipment (2007)
 - 244 computers
 - 228 LCD
 - 3 notebooks
 - 3 pocket PCs
 - 40 printers
 - 14 A/C
 - 3 plasma screens
 - Video beam equipment for the network

In order to implement library's new identity and innovative services, we took following steps:

1. Computer and technical equipment

A basic step for making any technical improvement was purchasing new computer and technical equipment in the past few years. It was foundational step for what was yet to come.

Aspects to the change III

- Automation
 - Switching from 1987 Unix system to MARC based BISIS
- Website
 - New looks and services in 2005
- Online catalog in 2007
- Libraries online
- Audio archives, online quiz, ask a librarian
- Web 2.0 applications
 - Blog, Libguides, Facebook

2. Automation

Belgrade City Library was the first among public libraries to introduce automated cataloguing in 1987. With rapid developments, we had to move forward and switch to a new modern system based on UNIMARC. After choosing a locally developed software called BISIS, we started the input of our collection at the end of 2005.

3. Website

In 2005, we introduced a new version of the website with a completely new design and many new features and online services.

4. Online catalog

One of the most significant developments during the last couple of years has been introducing an online catalog based on BISIS. The system is fully adjustable to our needs, easy to use, and works properly both from users' and librarians' perspective. It became available online just last year and had a positive impact on the number and frequency of users.

5. Libraries online

The Next step was focused on placing all allocated departments and municipal libraries online – not in terms of having them included on our website, but being connected to the Internet at all times. In the past two years, we finalized this step.

6. Audio archives

For those who cannot attend cultural programs at Belgrade City Library, we made available downloads of audio files recorded during the programs.

7. Web 2.0 applications

Web 2.0 consists of using Web technologies in order to develop creativity, information sharing and promoting interactivity with users. The main goal of Web 2.0 is encouraging personal contributions from every user in further Internet development and enrichment of its content.

Belgrade City Library is keeping up-to-date with trends by offering new Web 2.0 contents and services. One of them is a blog, and the other is a secure guide through the Internet resources—Libguides. Both the blog and Libguides are mutually compatible and compatible with Facebook, which puts us in the spotlight of social networking.

Aspects to the change IV

- Evolving demands of users
 - Recognizing and satisfying the needs
 - Quantity and quality of services
- Librarians' education
 - BISIS training
 - Internet training
 - Web administration training

Evolving demands of users

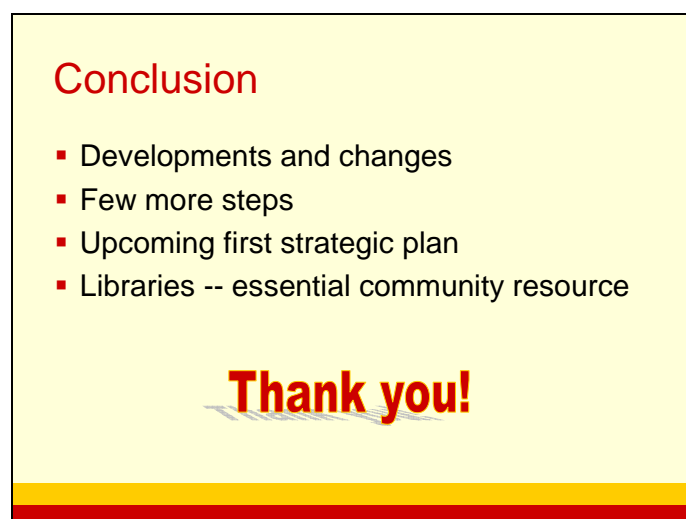
Over the last few years, we have made real progress in enhancing our existing users' experiences as well as opening up the library's resources to new audiences. Driven by the increasing demand for convenient online access to resources, we are developing an offering to make it easier to search and access material in our collections. It has not been easy to recognize, alter, and satisfy the needs of the community. Residents need more than a mere collection of books. By improving the quality of services, we made them more responsive to the needs of those who use them. Our new services are well-received, and we are working hard to improve them.

Librarians' education

A learning organization places great importance upon organized and continuous learning. Together with positive responses to the environment, Belgrade City Library needs to provide all levels of staff with the skills and support they need to do their jobs effectively. The benefits that accrue to an organization with a well organized staff-training have long been established. Not only do staff become more proficient, but also staff morale and commitment are increased as the organization demonstrates that it is concerned about its staff and how they are developing.¹ The mechanization of processes has resulted in new working methods in the library network. The scope of librarians' responsibilities has dramatically increased. Some of the main trainings provided for BLC staff are as follows:

- BISIS training
- Internet training
- Web administration training.

As a part of organizational and individual lifelong learning, we constantly aim to provide opportunities for attending local and international conferences.



Conclusion

- Developments and changes
- Few more steps
- Upcoming first strategic plan
- Libraries -- essential community resource

Thank you!

Conclusion

All these developments and changes have changed the face of the Belgrade City Library. Our Internet business plan involves taking a few more steps in order to be fully accomplished, including: a web user forum, mailing list, RSS, podcasting, personalization and customization, open source, and open content. By offering attractive and popular services online, audiences offline are satisfied as well. On a broader level we have great things ahead of us: we are working to create the library's first strategic plan that would include the upcoming 10-year period. This involves planning for the future and ensuring that the workforce has the necessary skills to meet organizational objectives. The staff of the Belgrade City Library has dealt with challenges and change by adapting and improving the services it provides and reaching out to the community to better serve its needs. Libraries are an essential community resource, and we plan to continuously make improvements in technology, access to information, and learning opportunities for the public.

¹ Anne Goulding (1995), "Investing in public library people", Library Management, Vol.16, No. 4