

## **INFORMATION AVAILABILITY IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL TENDENCIES IN LATVIA**

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The article deals with the actual topic of national information policy and its implementation in Latvia.

The goal of the paper is to evaluate information availability from the global viewpoint emphasising the context of the knowledge-based society and the role of libraries in the provision to information in Latvia.

The article is the theoretical approach to this topic and is based on studying and analysing of documents and literature on this topic.

This article is divided into a number of chapters. The information society, the e-Latvia program, national regulations and international guidelines in the field of library activities, libraries and intellectual freedom, the library system as a part of e-Latvia, electronic documents and information literacy – these are questions to which attention is paid in this article.

The issue of information policy is one of the main questions in the information society not only in Latvia but also in other countries in the world.

The application of new information and communication technologies is changing the way in which we work, learn and enjoy ourselves. We are seeing the emergence of a new set of social, political, economic and cultural structures – a new information-based society.

To accelerate the development of these information-based societies, countries all over the world have formulated frameworks of policy [20].

In 2001, the Library Association set up a number of limited life Policy Advisory Groups to prepare reports for the Library Association Council on a variety of topical subjects. One of these Policy Advisory Groups was set up to cover the area of National information policies. This Group decided to commission a report on current developments in National Information Policy in a selected number of overseas countries. Funding for this report was given by 'Resource', the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries. The contract for this research was awarded to the Department of Information Science, Loughborough University. The research was led by Professor Charles Oppenheim and Adrienne Muir [18].

National Information Policies have come to the fore in the UK in recent years, as a result of a large number of initiatives undertaken by the Government, including the National Grid for Learning, efforts to promote e-commerce, the launch of UK online and the stress on e-government placed by current administration. The remit of the research was to identify significant Government and Government-funded initiatives in a number of aspects of National Information Policy in a variety of developed countries, including Canada, USA, Member States of the European Union, South Africa, Hong Kong, Australia and New Zealand.

On a global scale, there is a growing gap between the rich and the poor in access to information as in so much else. The technological developments of the last 50 years have made more information more available to more people than at any other time in human history. At the same time, however, the cost of those technologies, and the cost of gaining access to information through them, has made it often difficult and sometimes impossible for information to be obtained by its potential beneficiaries. This is the central paradox and the central political dilemma of the information revolution [4].

### **Information society**

In view of current globalisation tendencies, information and its applications have no geographical limits. Like any other country in the world, Latvia is an integral part of the world information space. Information society is a complex of technical, legal, cultural and organisational measures designed to promote welfare of the society by means of quality information services [11]. The optimum result cannot be achieved by using quantitative methods alone, providing for the informatisation of the existing processes where the form is changed only while the former content remains. Instead, an innovative approach is required, enabling the change of traditional procedures in all fields and spheres, including the library and information sciences.

The preconditions for the performance of the new economic and social tasks that the society is currently faced with are as follows:

- general availability of information;
- the ability to transform information into knowledge;
- issues related to the development of information services and their compatibility on a global scale [19].

### **e-Latvia**

The *e-Latvia* programme seeks to find practical ways and possibilities for solving these tasks. It is a socio-economic programme laying down priority tasks for the development for a national information infrastructure. These tasks can be divided in three functional groups:

- ☐ general Internet access: cheaper, faster and secure connection;
- ☐ general information *literacy* and availability;
- ☐ information services and applications [19].

All of these groups of tasks apply to the sphere of libraries to a considerable degree. The *e-Latvia* programme features ca. 30 state and local government sponsored projects with the total financing of LVL 50,894,000, of which the largest share is allotted to the development of a single library information network, amounting to LVL 12,743,000. An estimated 12 million lats are required to carry out the informatisation of all Latvian educational establishments.

Libraries are to become the principal provider of all kinds of information (i.e. scientific, technical, commercial, financial, educational, reference and other types of information) in any place and in the country as a whole. The development of electronic and virtual libraries would provide a possibility to search for and obtain general local and global information at any library as well as enabling the delivery of information required by the user and availability of information services to remote users at their workplaces and places of residence.

The State Unified Library Information System (SULIS), which has been under debate in Latvia since 1997 when the National Programme *Informatics* was launched, serves as a medium for co-operation among the information systems of single libraries or an association there of which features the following Internet-based services:

- ☐ exchange of bibliographic information according to international standards which have been approved for use in the field;
- ☐ search, order, and receipt of information from Latvian and overseas libraries as well as other Internet information resources;
- ☐ a unified user interface for information search and document orders.

The principal task of this project is to create a co-ordinated system to capture, preserve, and systematise values of national culture and science at state and public libraries and provide access to them; a system which, through the use of modern technologies, would provide a universal information service in the form of information search and delivery of documents from Latvian and global information sources. At present Latvian libraries use four different library information systems. These systems are to be integrated into a single unified system providing for optimal information exchange among libraries in Latvia and overseas [22].

The basic precondition for the introduction of a unified system and provision of the universal information service is the availability of an Internet connection in all libraries. According to a 2000 survey of 875 public libraries (which amounts to 90% of the total number of public libraries in Latvia), Internet is available in 44 libraries (4.6%) [22].

As an information centre the library plays a significant role in providing access to information. How does this work in Latvia? Library activities are regulated by the unified state policy in the field of libraries developed by the Ministry of Culture [21]. The role of state policy in the provision of information and library activities is regulated by several national and international regulations.

**National regulations:**

- The Library Act [1];
- The National Library of Latvia Act;
- The act concerning the implementation of the National Library of Latvia project and other applicable regulations [12];
- The National programme “Informatics”[13];
- The “Library” sub-programme of the National programme “Culture” [14];
- The “e-Latvia” programme [19];
- The concept of the State Unified Library Information System [22].

The “Library” sub-programme of the National programme “Culture” lays down the aims and tasks to be implemented for the development of libraries by 2010.

The National programme “Informatics” states: “The principal component of the programme and the basis for its implementation, designed to help achieve the principal aim of creating an information society in Latvia and to provide population-wide access to information, is the provision of a unified service in the country” [13]. The term “universal service” means a set of services guaranteed by the state which are:

- available to all community members according to the procedure laid down by regulations;
- available on a non-discrimination basis (e.g. of some community groups or state regions);
- provided continuously and conform to certain publicly declared verifiable quality standards which are monitored;
- provided at socially acceptable rates corresponding to the purchasing ability in the country.

The universal information service is defined in the Concept of the State Unified Library Information System as “an access provided under regulations to all Latvian residents to the following types of information:

- information of national importance;
- business, finance, market and commodities’ information;
- scientific, technical, economical and similar information;
- general reference and recreation information, latest news” [22].

**International guidelines in the field of library activities:**

- UNO documents;
- UNESCO documents (manifest of public libraries [16], manifest of school libraries);

- IFLA (*International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions*) guidelines [16];
- European Community documents (resolutions of the European Parliament on libraries in a modern society; programmes, projects and directives of the European Commission and European Council);
- international standards;
- the Copenhagen Declaration [15].

In the international guidelines in the field of library activities the main role of public libraries in the free access to information to all its users is the most important.

“Oeras manifesto for public libraries, local museums and archives” approved within the framework of the ECIST project PULMAN in Oeras, Portugal in March 2003 continues the initiative about public libraries in society taken by the Copenhagen Declaration. To realise their potential in the digital era, public libraries must be prepared to offer new and innovative digital services that empower citizens to successfully achieve their personal goals in a changing world and to contribute to a cohesive society and a successful knowledge-based economy in Europe.

The PULMAN Guidelines [17] are intended to lead public libraries and their local cultural partner organisations into this era. They are intended to assist policy makers and practitioners alike in thinking about the policies and strategies which their services are intended to support and how best they can achieve them. They indicate what types of service can be considered and identify key issues which need to be examined in their development and delivery.

Roles which can public libraries play in an e-Europe and in addressing the major social issues facing Europe today and over the coming years are:

- 1) social exclusion;
- 2) digital literacy;
- 3) lifelong learning;
- 4) e-learning.

National and international documents lay down the principle according to which libraries with electronic catalogues form the basis for the whole state information system. Latvia accepts to the local service model developed in European countries, which features the preparation of information based on local records of facts and provision of such information in public libraries [5].

### **Libraries and intellectual freedom**

The traditional simplified notion of the library as a perfectly arranged book storage place and the librarian portrayed as a person dusting rows of books no longer exists. As a result of the growth of information technologies, the library has become an

information mediator. Thus the question of the library in the capacity of a safeguard of intellectual freedom has become more important.

Internet has brought change to the global concept of freedom of information. Can free access to information be provided at all? What does the notion of "free access to information" mean? Is it free from any control, individual factors characteristic of user groups and purposes? Who has the right to control information of another country or culture? In view of current globalisation tendencies characteristic of the modern society, new information assessment criteria need to be established.

Libraries can be used by the governments of non-democratic states as an instrument of power by making them the only publicly available source of information. The history has evidence of manifold methods of authoritative regulation resulting in librarians destroying or at best hiding documents and misrepresenting the data contained in library catalogues. The standard defined by an open modern society makes information generally available and allows to discuss it openly. Well-informed population is the best defender of a democracy. This can be used by libraries in their attempts to implement the ideals of democracy in life.

In 1997, following several years of discussion the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions set up the FAIFE committee (*Committee on Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression*), a professional establishment based in Copenhagen whose primary task is to discuss the professional activities of information specialists and cases of restricted access to information through ideological, economic or religious pressure.

In autumn 1998, an international conference "Freedom of expression, censorship, libraries" was organised by the National Library with the organisational support of FAIFE in Latvia. The chief subject matter of the conference was the ingraining of the concept of intellectual freedom in countries developing free and democratic societies [10].

An official statement on libraries and intellectual freedom was made by the IFLA in the Hague in March 1999:

- ❑ libraries must provide free access to information, creative ideas and works. The library is the gate to knowledge, thinking, and culture;
- ❑ all members of the society must be provided with library services to meet their informational and educational needs. No documents shall be excluded from the library information files as a result of their origin or views expressed therein;
- ❑ libraries must provide documents treating the same historical or political events from different perspectives. Publicly condemned or unrecognised documents shall not be written off or hidden from readers;
- ❑ as an informational establishment the library should be prepared to dispute and challenge censorship;

- ❑ the informational freedom of a library user shall not be affected by his/her origin, age, past or views;
- ❑ all exhibitions and public events organised by libraries shall be objective and shall not cause personal injury [8].

### **The library system as part of e-Latvia**

In the library science the issue of typology is still current. At the moment two library typologies co-exist in Latvia – the one and only official, included in the Law on Libraries (passed in 1998), and the typology set out in the subprogram “Libraries” of the National Programme “Culture”.

The Law on Libraries offers classification of libraries according to the regional principle:

1. libraries of national significance;
2. regional central libraries;
3. local libraries.

The typology set out in the subprogram “Libraries” of the National Programme “Culture” (see Appendix) divides the libraries into two large groups according to their functions:

1. research and special libraries;
2. public libraries.

The libraries accessible by general readers are considered public (on the contrary to the special libraries). General access libraries (“public libraries” in English, “tautas” in Latvian, “массовые”, “общедоступные” in Russian) represent just one type of public libraries in Latvia. The public libraries funded by the local authorities of towns and communities belong here.

Still neither of the given typologies is unanimously accepted by the library science experts. For instance, the issue of the libraries of educational establishments is not solved, as the libraries of secondary specialised establishments are regarded as the research and special libraries, while the libraries of general educational establishments – as the public libraries.

The Latvian system of libraries is formed of state, local government and private libraries which are to acquire the status libraries of national significance, regional central libraries or local libraries through accreditation [21]. Libraries are divided into two types according to their functions: scientific and special libraries, and public libraries (see Appendix). These are:

- The National Library of Latvia which performs the functions of both academic and public library;

- The Academic Library of Latvia which performs individual functions at a national level;
- 932 public libraries;
- 62 special libraries;
- 28 libraries in higher educational establishments;
- 1167 libraries at comprehensive schools, vocational schools and special secondary schools.

### *Research and special libraries*

This group of libraries includes the National Library of Latvia and the library of the Parliament information department, the Academic Library of Latvia which is the chief library of research, libraries of universities, scientific libraries in national fields, and field or institutional special libraries and information centres.

### *Public libraries*

These include public (municipal libraries) and school libraries of local governments, libraries of health care institutions and National Armed Forces structures as well as public, private libraries and those of foreign institutions.

Of these the network of public libraries of local governments is the widest and most easy to access. There are 560 administrative territories of local governments in Latvia with 922 public libraries of local governments, an average of 1 library on 2645 residents. These libraries have 503.9 thousand registered users or 21% of the total population. The stock of public libraries of local governments has more than 13 million books and other documents.

There is a tendency today of the well-defined borders between various types of libraries becoming less common. As new information technologies are introduced into libraries, the search options provided by electronic catalogues of libraries and accessibility of information through an increasing spread of electronic documents is becoming ever larger.

### **Electronic documents**

The increase in the volume of information in the virtual environment creates not only advantages but also a number of problems.

The necessity of developing international internet regulations is being deliberated. Internet cannot be regulated at a national level because there are no frontiers for the information space of the world wide web. The Internet regulation prepared by the European Commission for discussion in 1998–1999 featuring issues related to con-



fidential information, use of copyright, databases, Internet addresses and trademarks, protection of users against false information and other issues may be mentioned among the first attempts to regulate the use of the world wide web. The latest initiative by library organisations is the Internet manifesto adopted at the IFLA General conference on August 2002 aiming to deal with issues concerning copyright restrictions, filtering of information and censorship in the electronic medium [7].

One of the problematic issues concerning the use of electronic documents is the intensification of contradictions between general availability of information and barriers set by copyright. International forums are organised to discuss issues relating to the protection of intellectual property while retaining free access to information. The regulatory documents prepared by institutions of the European Union concerning the use of the global network favour the owners of copyright and their economic interests. At times they are oblivious of the fact that restrictions may affect the use of copies of electronic documents for educational and scientific purposes.

For example, an attempt was made to include in the European Council Directive on the harmonisation of copyright and related rights in an information society a prohibition for libraries to make copies even for the purposes of formation of document archives and preservation. International professional library associations objected against this actively during the discussion of the directive draft. A balance was successfully reached between the obligation of libraries to observe copyright law while providing universal access to information [23].

The librarian community of Latvia is attempting to participate in discussions related to copyright issues which include the initiative taken by the National Library of Latvia in recent years. A seminar "Copyright in Latvia" was organised by the National Library of Latvia and the Latvian Association of Librarians in Riga in March 1999 which included a session dealing with electronic publications and computer software.

Another major event, an educational workshop "Copyright and licensing in Latvia and Europe" of the Central and Eastern European Licensing Information Platform (CELIP) was organised by the National Library of Latvia, Latvian Association of Librarians and the European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations (EBLIDA) [3] in October 2001. One of these organisations is member of the CELIP [2]. The workshop featured reports and discussions on the issue of "Licensing and libraries from the perspective of the European Union and EBLIDA".

### **Information literacy**

Formation and development of information literacy of users plays a fundamental part in the availability of complete information.

The term information literacy is often perceived as describing the ability to use the library reference system, conduct an information search in the electronic catalogue

or the ability to use modern information technologies. This is what libraries (both those at schools and public ones) have been traditionally teaching to pupils in library lessons. With the rapid increase in the amount of information, these abilities have become more important.

With the requirement for life-long education dictated by the modern knowledge society in mind, it is clear that information proficiency is a burning issue not only for schoolchildren but also for any and all members of the society. The term of information proficiency covers a more extensive area, however.

Information literacy consists of four interrelated components:

- knowledge of information sources and organisation;
- the ability to search, assess, use and disseminate information;
- the ability to search for information in various sources of information using modern information technologies;
- the ability to generalise knowledge and to use it in various situations and different contexts.

The practical use of information literacy is often described as measures taken to solve problems concerning information. There is a model called “The big six” which is widely known. This model was designed by Michael Eisenberg, professor of the Syracuse University and Robert Berkovitz, a secondary school media expert. It combines the ability to search for information and the process (i.e. formulating the task, finding the sources, and finding the relevant information) with cognition facilities and the process (i.e. synthesising and assessing the information) [6].

Information literacy involves the ability to recognise the need for information necessary to solve problems, the ability to find appropriate information, the ability to assess the quality of the information sought, the ability to select information which best meets the requirements for solving a specific problem, summarise it which results in the creation of one’s own results, and the ability to assess the new results. The library is a place where such information skills can be mastered most efficiently.

The library is a lodestar, a signpost in the wide sea of information. As an information centre, the library plays a major role in the provision of access to information in Latvia.

In the XXI century, information is becoming the main driving force for the development in every field of human’s activity. The society’s ability to create knowledge and to use it for any process and activity, is becoming the base for development of Latvia, too.

The global programmatic documents of the information society (for example, G8 Okinawa Summit Charter, *e-Europe* initiative of the European Commission) and national information policies [9] contain the same goals, tasks and instruments for their

fulfilment that are well understandable for Latvia: development of economy, balanced regional development and solution of social problems in the same time.

The global, European and the Baltic Sea region's economic and social processes affect also further development of Latvia. Latvia must accept these processes and must actively take part in them. It is necessary to involve into the process not only the specialists in information technologies, but also each member of the society. For the development of economy of the state every school and library, every enterprise and citizen must actively participate in knowledge management process. The development of the electronic and virtual library will ensure full opportunities to search and to receive local and global information in every library.

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### Abstract

In view of current globalisation tendencies, every country is part of the world information space. In an information society, one of the main tasks is to promote welfare of the society by means of quality information services.

There are three major preconditions that have to be observed for the performance of the new economic and social tasks:

- general availability of information;
- the ability to transform information into knowledge;
- issues related to the development of information services and their compatibility on a global scale.

The *e-Latvia* programme is a socio-economic programme which seeks to find practical ways and possibilities for solving these tasks. The *e-Latvia* programme features ca. 30 state and local government sponsored projects. All of these groups of tasks apply to the sphere of libraries to a considerable degree.

The State Unified Library Information System (SULIS) serves as a medium for co-operation among the information systems of libraries for:

- exchange of bibliographic information according to international standards which have been approved for use in the field;
- search, order, and receipt of information from Latvian and overseas libraries as well as other Internet information resources;
- a unified user interface for information search and document orders.

Library activities in Latvia are regulated by the unified state policy in the field of libraries developed by the Ministry of Culture as well as by several national and international regulations.

The Latvian system of libraries is formed of state, local government and private libraries. Libraries are divided into two types according to their functions: scientific and special libraries, and public libraries.

One of the problematic issues concerning the use of electronic documents in libraries is the intensification of contradictions between general availability of information and barriers set by copyright. International forums are organised to discuss issues relating to the protection of intellectual property while retaining free access to information. The librarian community of Latvia is attempting to participate in discussions related to copyright issues which include the initiative taken by the National Library of Latvia in recent years.

Formation and development of informational proficiency of users plays a fundamental part in the availability of information. The library is a place where such informational facilities can be mastered most efficiently.

## INFORMACIJOS PRIEINAMUMAS LATVIJOJE GLOBALIŲ TENDENCIŲ KONTEKSTE

VINETA GERKENA, IVETA KALNIŅA, DAINA PAKALNA

Saotrauka

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## LIBRARY TYPOLOGY

