

Academic libraries in transition in Hungary

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Facts about the country

Area: 93,030 square kilometres
Population (1 February 2001): 10,197,119 persons
Official language: Hungarian
Capital: Budapest
State form: republic
Administration structure: 19 counties and the capital city
Urban population: 64.6 per cent
Employment (2000): agriculture 6.5 %, industry 33.7 %, other 59.7 %

Higher education institutions

The Hungarian higher education has a dual system. There are colleges and universities and some colleges associated with universities as college faculties of the universities. A university can offer college level courses, too. The tenure of training at college level (corresponding to B. Sc. level) is minimum 3 years, maximum 4 years; the tenure of education at university level (corresponding to M. Sc. level) is minimum 4 years, maximum 5 years (with the exception of medical universities, where the duration of education is 6 years).

In the year 2000 many smaller specialized higher education institutions have been merged and universities and colleges with more faculties have been created.

There are now:

18 State universities
12 State colleges
26 Denominational Institutes
9 Private and Foundation Colleges.

Some elements of higher education development strategy that effect libraries

- Offering a wider range of courses for the students and increasing the standards of education with an emphasis on the establishment of a flexible educational structure satisfying the changing demands of the labour market;
- Unifying intellectual resources (initiating multi-, trans- and interdisciplinary activities);

- Higher educational institutions becoming the intellectual centres of regional development taking into account the tasks related to the inevitable consequences of the accession of Hungary to the European Union;
- Integration of universities and colleges to avoid discipline duplication and improve the stability of institutions and make them less sensitive to swift changes in the market and economy;
- Introduction of performance - and quality - oriented financing which will enable the institutions to elaborate long-term institutional policies;
- Making more efficient use of intellectual and infrastructural capacities by eliminating redundant multiple structures;
- Achieving an expansion of enrolments. In 1991 only 12 percent of the age group 18-22 was accommodated in higher education. Recently the ratio was 28 percent, and the government plans to increase the ratio to about 50 percent. It does not mean the doubling of the absolute number of students, however, since there is a dramatic decrease of the young generation in Hungary;
- Introduction of the credit system in all higher education institutions.

Academic libraries

According to the Higher Education Act (1993) no higher education institution in Hungary can operate without a library or library system. For historical reasons several smaller and bigger departmental and faculty libraries function within each institution. Most of them are part of the central or main library, but some of them are an integral part of the faculty or a department.

- One of the main aims of current development efforts is to make the institutions create a clear two -or three - step hierarchy of libraries within the university or college. Information and communication technology and some nationwide structural developments support this idea even if several site libraries exist due to different geographical locations.
- At the same time it is essential in information society to position the library system as a service organization and therefore a central part of the university or college.
- Another main objective is to provide quality service throughout the institutions. Whatever point a user enters, the library system should have the same service and access to all information available within the system.
- Main emphasis is given to information literacy, so that libraries more and more become integral parts of the teaching and learning process that will make future professionals ready for retrieving and using information throughout their careers and for lifelong learning purposes.

The role of governmental bodies in supporting academic libraries

Ministry of Cultural Heritage

The Act about public collections (ACT No. LXC 1997) deals with all types of libraries and, – things among other – determines that academic libraries at universities should act as special collections for public access as well. College libraries can also apply for this public access status. Additional collection development fund is only available to institutions with this status.

Ministry of Informatics and Communications

In 1992, the Government created a separate Ministry whose task it is to deal with information and communication technology at national level focusing at the co-ordination and development for the establishment of the information and knowledge society.

Ministry of Education

The main co-ordinator and financing body of education related ICT development in relation with academic libraries. Below are outlined some nation-wide programmes which are aiming at providing central services for academic library networking, and quick and easy access to professional and scientific information.

The National Information and Infrastructure Programme (NIIF) is the main organization for network development among academic institutions. The purpose of this programme is to link Hungary to international networks and to develop the national network among academic institutions and public collections.

The Electronic Information Service (EISZ) is a government initiative (launched in 2001) to provide scientific information in electronic format in order to support higher education studies and research. The programme focuses at content access to professional literature at an international level and draws up national licence agreements with different publishers and suppliers to make more information accessible for more users at a reasonably low cost.

The information Centre for Students (HIK): its main aims are to provide information facilities study, research, communication and free-time activities as well as to house different student organizations and a variety of other activities.

Financing academic libraries

As HEIs are autonomous, the provisions of funding the libraries is the competency of the institution. Due to integration and mergers, the new organizational structure has not been established fully, the financial decision-making at institutional level has not been finished yet. This means that several libraries suffer from insufficient funding. University budgets have different components, but there is no collection-development budget allocated for libraries. It is generally regarded that student numbers (FTE) cannot be the only component for calculating collection-development figures. When budgeting purchase, especially subscription for foreign periodicals, the ever increasing and differentiated price of information should be considered as well.

Government fund for collection development

A Fund for the development of scientific and professional collections is financed by the Ministry of Education and a Fund for national document supply (ODR) is financed by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage.