

Developing a strategic plan for the University Library of St. Petersburg. A project within the EU's Tempus Tacis Program.

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Abstract

The Library of the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands has developed a project, together with the State and University Library of Aarhus, Denmark, and the University Library of Graz, Austria, in order to support the Library of the University of St. Petersburg, Russia. The main goal of this project, which is financially supported within the EU's Tempus Tacis Program, is to improve the capacity of the St. Petersburg library to serve the university and the region in an effective and efficient way.

The intended output of the project is a strategic plan for the library, which defines a clear mission, describes the main goals and objectives and defines a number of high priority projects which are to be realised in order to obtain the objectives. The project runs from January 1997 until July 1998.

Evaluating the project it can be observed that there are real possibilities to solve the problems of a Russian university library by using modern technology, even in a continuing financial uncertainty. It is, however, important to emphasise access to currently relevant information is more essential than the ownership of a physical collection. This requires a shift in the attitude of the library staff.

1. Introduction

The Library of the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands has developed a project, together with the State and University Library of Aarhus, Denmark, and the University Library of Graz, Austria, in order to support the Library of the University of St. Petersburg, Russia. The main goal of this project, which is financially supported within the EU's Tempus Tacis Program, is to improve the capacity of the St. Petersburg's University Library ('SPU Library') to serve the university and the region in an effective and efficient way. The project runs from January 1997 until July 1998.

The project was initiated when the President of the Utrecht University, Drs. J. Veldhuis, visited the University of St. Petersburg in 1993, in order to discuss the possibilities of co-operation between the two universities. In March 1993 both universities signed a co-operation agreement for the exchange of students and staff, for participation in summer courses and for joint research.

The Rector of the St. Petersburg University also strongly advocated a project that was aimed at improving and modernising library services. Consequently, the University Library of Utrecht developed a draft proposal for the co-operative project.

The partners for this project (the universities of Aarhus and Graz) were found within the already existing European network of international co-operation in education and research, consisting of a number of prominent and broad-based educational institutions which assume a

cultural responsibility alongside their academic and educational tasks. One of the main activities of this network is co-operation with Central and Eastern Europe.

Together the partners applied for financial support of the European Union's Tempus Tacis Program, the result being a support of ECU 76.200. The most important conditions were that the exchange of staff had to be stimulated and that a maximum of 20% could be spent on equipment.

The following chapters give an overview of the project, its intentions, its activities and its results. Also some concluding remarks about its evaluation are given.

2. The University Library of St. Petersburg

2.1 General remarks

This chapter contains a description of the SPU Library, its history as well as the present state of the library and its collection.

The SPU Library is one of the oldest and largest university libraries in Russia. It consists of a Central Library and 21 faculty libraries

The library's collection contains 4,2 million books and 2 million periodicals. The users get their information about the collection from traditional card catalogues. Since 1995 all newly acquired books are put into an electronic catalogue (now 26.000 entries).

The university is financed by the Russian Ministry of the Higher Education. The financial situation is very unstable and insecure. Staff wages are very low. The acquisition budget is limited and there is hardly any money to buy equipment. The library has only a very limited number of computers. The housing of the collection is qualitatively as well as quantitatively insufficient.

2.2 History of the library

The library was founded in 1783 when Empress Catherine the Great presented 1100 volumes from one of the private collections of books to the First Teachers Seminary. By 1917 the library had half a million volumes of books in Russian and foreign languages. Books for the collection of scientific literature were acquired primarily according to the orders of the university professors and teachers, many of them being outstanding men of Russian science. During all its history the library was enriched by private donations and gifts from men of Russian science and culture and from various state establishments.

2.3 Housing

The Central Library is situated in the city of St. Petersburg, in the main building of St. Petersburg University, the Twelve Collegiums, which is a monument of St. Petersburg architecture of the 18th century constructed by Domenico Trezzini. The library was accommodated in this building in 1891 on a total floor space of 3900 sq. metres with the book depositories occupying 2000 sq. Metres. Since 1891 the space of the library has not been increased. Book depositories are situated on the first, second and third floors of the building.

A number of faculty libraries is also situated in the city; the other faculty libraries are situated in Petershof, a campus 40 kilometres outside the city.

The conditions for the work of librarians in the main building do not meet the requirements of sanitary and hygienic norms; working places of the staff of some departments are located between the shelves in the depository.

2.4 Collection

At present the stacks of the SPU Library contain 6,5 million copies (1,45 million titles):

books	4.200.000 copies
periodicals	2.070.000 copies
newspapers	2.500 annual sets of newspapers
dissertations	40.000 copies
other types of editions	235.000 copies

The stacks of the library are situated in more than 20 places in St. Petersburg and the Petershof campus. Totally 3 million copies are located in the main depository (the Building of Twelve Collegiums).

Central Library

In the central depository the books are stored on the shelves in 2 and 3 rows, on the floor between shelves; the height of the shelves is 4 meters. A part of books is kept in piles, books are placed on the shelves too tightly and could be damaged when taken from the shelves. In such conditions disinfecting the books is hardly possible. There is no ventilation in depositories, the temperature and dampness regimes are not maintained.

Rare Books and Manuscripts Department

The most valuable part of the collection is accumulated in the Rare Books and Manuscripts Department. The collection of rare books and manuscripts numbers about one thousand Slavic and Western-European manuscripts and more than 49 thousand rare books.

Because of the lack of necessary space and personnel in the Rare Books and Manuscripts Department there still are many editions of the 15th - 18th century which have not been moved to this department. The total number of the books which require special care regime of storage is about 500.000. About 130.000 books should be selected and moved to the depository of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Department.

There is no special reading room for work with rare books.

The Central Library has a bindery and a restoration shop, being a section of the Rare Books and Manuscript Department.

Faculty Libraries

The stacks of some faculty libraries (e.g. the libraries of the Oriental Studies Faculty, Law Faculty, Languages Faculty) are also of great scientific, cultural and historical value. The library of the Faculty of Oriental Studies has a unique collection of oriental manuscripts (55000) and is one of the oldest libraries on oriental studies in this country. Faculty Libraries in the Petershof campus have enough space for depositories and reading rooms; libraries which are situated in St. Petersburg itself, however, all have lack of space.

2.5 Users

The number of users of the SPU Library numbered 46474 at January 1, 1998:

- 29463 students,
- 2292 teachers,
- 1416 researchers,
- 3850 post graduate students,
- 4381 auditors,
- 5053 others.

2.6 Services for the readers

The system of services of the Central Library consists of:

- lending department (lending sectors for students and researchers, reading room, exhibition of new acquisitions, interlibrary loan sector);
- reference and bibliography department. Furthermore, there are:
- lending departments of the faculty libraries (22);
- reading rooms in the faculty libraries;
- reference and bibliographic service in the faculty libraries.

At the start of the project the Central Library had one reading room (50 seats), a reading room for reference books (15 seats) with a few reference books on open shelves.

Catalogue

The readers can get information about collections from catalogues and card indexes of traditional card form. Since March 1995 the information about all new books in the Central Library is put in the electronic catalogue (now 26 thousands entries). This electronic catalogue is now available for library users in experimental form.

2.7 Staff

At January 1, 1998 the personnel of the SPU Library numbered 293 people:

- 276 librarians, of which
- 165 with higher education (47 with higher education in librarianship),
- 111 with secondary education (14 with secondary vocational education),
- 17 attending staff. (watchman, lift operators, office cleaners, etc.).

2.8 National and international co-operation

The SPU Library provides methodological support for the university libraries of the north-western region of Russia (66 libraries). It consults, holds seminars and conferences and organises apprenticeship for the library personnel in bibliography and librarianship.

3. Description of the project

3.1 The project plan

The first analysis of the situation of the SPU Library showed:

- a lack of financial resources and no real prospect of improvement;
- a lack of planning: there was no development plan;
- a lack of control over the present and future situation.

It should be emphasised, however, that this situation is not typical for all Russian university libraries: in fact there are large differences in the way Russian libraries have taken advantage of new opportunities.

The project, therefore, is concerned with library management and more specific with the following topics:

- the management of library activities;
- the use of modern technology for the management of these activities;
- the organisation of the library in view of the needs of its clients, the university and the region.

With the help of strategic planning methodology the planning of the library has been enhanced. More specific, threats and opportunities in the environment (within and outside the university) were identified, and the library's own strengths and weaknesses are analysed. On this basis a plan of action for the medium term was developed.

The first phase of the implementation, which includes the introduction of some technology, has been supported.

The intended output of the project was a strategic plan for the library, which defines a clear mission, describes the main goals and objectives and defines a number of high priority projects which are to be realised in order to obtain the objectives.

The project, therefore, had to clarify the concept of strategic planning and its main methodological aspects. Also the library management and staff had to be supported in defining the library's mission and goals, and analysing the library as well as its environment in terms of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

3.2 The project's activities.

The main activities of the project were:

- a seminar concerning the principles and practice of strategic planning;
- attachment of 8 staff members from St. Petersburg in Utrecht, Aarhus and Graz;
- a conference about the strategic items and choices;
- support in the composition of the strategic plan;
- a conference about the definition of implementation projects;
- a concluding meeting about the follow up.

The strategic planning seminar.

This seminar was organised for the library management and main staff of the SPU Library and was mainly concerned with a briefing about the principles and practice of strategic planning.

The following topics were discussed:

1. principles of strategic management: planning and control, strategic planning versus blue print planning, analysis in terms of threats and opportunities, strengths and weaknesses;
2. collection management: the housing of collections, collection building, weeding, rare books and manuscripts;
3. innovation of library services;

4. financial management: planning and budgeting, management information, performance measurement;
5. human resource management.

Also during the seminar there was a thorough briefing for the participating institutions about the situation of the SPU Library.

The seminar took place during 5 days in May 1997 at St. Petersburg.

The seminar was attended by the project co-ordinator, who is also experienced in seminars on strategic planning, 3 library experts from Utrecht, Aarhus, and Graz, a project secretary, and 10 persons (library management and main staff) from the St. Petersburg library.

The attachment of staff members.

8 staff members from St. Petersburg were attached during 2 weeks at the participating institutions; they were thoroughly informed about the organisation and problems of a modern university library. Each of them was accompanied and trained by library experts during those 2 weeks.

This took place in September 1997.

The conference about the strategic items and choices.

The main elements of this conference were:

1. Presentations by the staff members of the SPU library, in which they analysed their situation concerning users and public services, collections, housing, staff, logistics, information technology, finances, and external contacts.
2. The presentation by the western European partners of 3 possible scenarios for the SPU library:
 - a future without any strategic change;
 - an emphasis on the library as a centre for all kinds of users;
 - an emphasis on the Central Library as a facility organisation for faculty and other libraries.
3. Discussions about the scenarios and their implications.
4. Preparations for the main elements of the strategic plan: the formulation of a mission and the main goals of the library.

This conference took place in St. Petersburg during 5 days in October 1997.

Support in the composition of the plan.

After the October conference a schedule was made for the composition of the strategic plan.

The specific chapters were divided among the department heads.

Frequently, drafts were sent by e-mail to Utrecht, Aarhus, and Graz, in order to receive comments or suggestions how to proceed.

The result was a text about the mission and the main goals and some ideas and proposals for projects that were to be started in order to realise the goals.

The conference about the projects.

In this conference the main goals of the SPU library, as they had been written down, were discussed with an emphasis on the possibilities to start specific projects to realise these goals. This led to the formulation of 3 projects that could be started on short notice and did not take large investments other than the money that was available from the project for equipment (ECU 15.240).

These projects were described in a detailed way including the phases that could be distinguished, the responsibilities, the time schedule and the finances needed. It was also important to notice that these 3 projects could be started immediately. This conference took place in St. Petersburg during 3 days in February 1998.

The concluding meeting.

This final meeting was concerned with:

1. the final draft of the strategic plan, including the projects that were defined;
2. discussions about the first experiences with the projects;
3. the definition of the most important future projects as a follow up to the projects that were recently started.

These meeting took place during in St. Petersburg during 3 days in May 1998.

4. Results

4.1 Mission and goals

Mission

The mission of the SPU Library is defined as follows: The SPU Library, comprising the Central Library and the faculty libraries, is a prestigious academic library which is well profiled within the university and the region. It is the centre for the scientific information for students, teachers and researchers and offers facilities in an academic environment which is attractive for visitors.

An important task of the library is to store and preserve the cultural heritage which has been built up by the collections.

By giving access to the collections and by giving electronic access to collections outside the university, the library facilitates the scientific achievements of the university community.

The service offered by the Central Library and the faculty libraries are complementary to each other and are performed in the most efficient and effective way.

The library provides its users opportunities to search for and gather information, to study, and to learn how to gather information.

Goals

The principle goals of the SPU Library are defined as follows:

1. to ensure preservation of unique books which have been collected during two centuries;
2. to render assistance to the educational and scientific research processes of the university;
3. to establish information and bibliographical services for the readers at a higher quality level by means of introduction of new advanced computer technologies.

4.2 Priority projects

In order to realise the goals mentioned above the following 3 projects were defined. These projects could all be started on a short notice.

Project 1. Work at collections.

Objective

The objective of this project is a complex of measures aimed to provide the conditions for keeping and using of the main stacks of the Central Library:

1. Clearing the main stacks from duplicates.
2. Checking the arrangement of the books in the main stacks to provide optimum conditions for the use of the stacks and fulfilment of the readers requests.
3. Providing the measures for physical preservation of the main stacks (dusting).

Intended results

- Bringing the main stacks into line with the tasks of the library and the interests of its readers.
- Providing normal conditions for keeping and using of the stacks.
- Solving, at least partially, the problem of the lack of space for rational arrangement of the stacks.

Project 2. Services for the readers

Objective

The objective of this project is to give more facilities to the users in the library by open access to the reference books and other frequently used materials and by the offering access to electronic media .

Intended results

- A reference room with the open access to general reference books and also with 3 computers for the work with the different data bases.
- Internet class with 9 computers.
- Reading room equipped with security system for the open access to journals.
- Reading rooms with the open access in the faculty libraries (law library, economy library).
- Study-course "Internet search and work with on-line data bases".

The reference room and the Internet class were formally opened during the final meeting of the project.

Project 3. Electronic library

Objective

The objective of this project is provide information about the library in the world wide web; give more possibilities to library users by access to the electronic bibliographical date bases and orientation in world information space.

Intended results

A home-page of the Central Library with:

- general facts about the library;
- an OPAC with access to the electronic bibliographical data bases (including the library catalogue)
- catalogues of (parts) of the Rare Books and Manuscripts department;
- useful links to Internet sites;
- library news;

- sites of the faculty libraries;
- a regional page;

4.3 Future projects.

The 3 projects described above are each in the process of development. The first results have been promising. With these projects the library has set the first step into the direction of a modern and user-friendly university library. For the future years projects with a somewhat longer term will be necessary.

In the final meeting (May 1998) a number of projects were defined, which still have to be worked out by the SPU Library itself at a later moment to get started in the future.

Herewith a short description of 5 future projects is given. The first 3 are continuations of the projects described above and (partly) dissemination for the faculties and faculty libraries. The last 2 were not yet part of a project. After the experiences with the first projects the realisation of these projects is urgent.

1. Working with Collections - Weeding

Many titles in the library's collection are textbooks which were acquired for the students in large quantities. The results of the pilot project for the weeding and dusting of the collection can be used for a larger project for the coming years. The weeding of the collection in the Central Library and in the faculty libraries will require good logistics and a workable timetable. The complete project can be divided in a number of smaller project plans each concerning the weeding of a part of the collection, a floor or department. These smaller project plans can each be carried out in due time.

2. Services for the Readers

With the realisation of the Reference Room and the Electronic Classroom, the readers of the university library are served in a better way. In the follow-up of this project new objectives will be a reading room with general reference work and journals, and secondly advanced services for the users e.g. by way of the realisation of a help-desk for the Central Library, for faculty libraries, faculties and other users.

3. Electronic Library

In the project plan 'Electronic Library' which will be carried out till the end of 1998, many electronic services are started. As a result of this first project for the electronic library it will be decided which parts can be implemented in the normal day to day work and which parts will need special attention and will therefore be part of a next project plan for the electronic library.

4. Staff Development

The changes in the library services require new skills and qualifications of the library staff. It is very well possible that some specific tasks will not be needed any more and will be replaced by new tasks. This concerns the work in the back office as well in the front office. The staff should be able to prepare webpages for the electronic library, to make decisions while weeding the collection, to advise the readers in using the Internet, etc. A plan for the training and education of the staff for these new tasks will be part of this project. The other part of the project is concerned with the mobility of the staff and the new structure and tasks of the organisation.

5. Electronic publication of the collection of the Censorship Committee

The SPU Library has a large and special collection of rare books. Especially the books of the

Censorship Committee published in St. Petersburg in the first half of the 19th century, are a very valuable and unique collection. These texts are well sought after by many scientists all over the world; at the other hand they are very difficult to find and to obtain. A catalogue with full descriptions of this collection in electronic form is really necessary and will advance and help the research. As follow-up a number of the most important texts can also be published full text via Internet. The project plan should mention enrichments to be taken care of by the library, e.g. presentation, formats, indexing, thesaurus, searchable text (OCR). In this project the library can also work together with researchers in the faculties of the university for the scientific enrichments of the texts, like abstracts, annotations and references.

5. Evaluation

At this very moment, the project is in the phase of reporting and evaluation. Evaluating the project, the following remarks can be made.

In at least a number of Russian university libraries the management philosophy puts a lot of emphasis on the collections. This brings forward the real danger of an attitude that is mainly internally directed.

Seen from the point of view of collections, a complete automation of the library's logistic processes would be more or less obvious. However, when financial resources are scarce, a hasty imitation of the process of development of Western European libraries in the automation of library processes is not to be preferred. This would not only take a lot of money, equipment and time, but would also require much dedication of the library staff which for a large part lacks the technical competence and -because of the low wages- the motivation for time-consuming activities like retrospective conversion of material that is only rarely used.

Instead, one should follow the developments of the second automation wave which is now taking place in the Western European libraries: i.e. providing information in electronic form, emphasising that access to currently relevant information is more essential than the ownership of a physical collection.

Without such a development, the danger is real that the library eventually will lose its users who in their daily work at the university more and more (will) make use of computers.

Equipment for public use and training of the library's users, then, must have a high priority within the library. This requires a shift in the attitude of a large part of the library staff. Therefore, in projects like the one described above, discussions with the library management about the consequences of information technology for library services, actually, are more important than the introduction of automated library systems.

When the near future will bring us, Western European as well as Eastern European libraries, more reasonable and flexible arrangements for licenses for electronic information, the scenario described above eventually will offer real possibilities to solve the problems of Russian university libraries by using modern technology, even in a continuing financial uncertainty.