

Management of Change in Romanian Technical Libraries: Case of Library of the *Politehnica* University in Timișoara

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Abstract. A short historic overview of the situation of Romanian University Libraries is the starting point for presenting the actual development of the Technical University's Libraries. The paper makes a brief presentation on the actual situation of Romanian Technical University Libraries, through some statistical records. As a particular case, the paper presents the experience of the Politehnica University Library of Timișoara in managing last years' changes.

An overview of the most important problems and shortcomings that characterized the starting point of the library changes, ten years ago is listed: manual searching system, inefficient services, obsolete collections, reduce number of staff, with inappropriate knowledge.

The actual status of the library organization is presented, when the library faces another big challenge: moving into a new building, with the need to manage a higher level of automation and services.

Keywords: automation, building, collection, changes, management, staff, Politehnica, Romania, statistics, Timișoara.

1. Historic Overview of the Situation of Romanian Libraries

After 45 years of communism, at the beginning of the 90's, the situation of the Romanian libraries, in general, and that of the university libraries in special, was quite easy to describe.

1.1. Number of the Libraries

In every important city from each county, there was at least one public library. Also, each school had its own small library.

In Romania, at the end of the 9th decade, there were 4 important university cities - Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Iași and Timișoara, with at least 3 universities each: one humanistic (of science), one technical and one medical. Each one had its own library, with specific collections. In addition to these universities, there existed a few colleges in smaller cities and, of course, some small libraries too.

1.2. Libraries Collections

Some old libraries had important heritage, dating centuries ago, like: *Bathianeum* Library from Alba Iulia, which collection includes a part of the famous *Codex Aureum*, the Babeș-Bolyai University Library in Cluj-Napoca, owning an

important collection of 16th century manuscripts (*incunabula*), the Central Libraries of the Universities of Bucharest and Iași.

Due to the political situation of the country, most part of the libraries' collections consisted of classics of Romanian literature, books of Romanian contemporary authors, and books edited in other socialist countries. The collection of the foreign periodicals was also quite limited, because it was "dangerous" to have access to foreign information.

The situation of the technical libraries' collections was almost the same: the political orientation of the country restricted the acquisition from western countries. Their only possibility was to buy technical books edited either in the former Soviet Union, which luckily happened to be translations of some of the best known foreign books, or in other "socialist" countries. It was not the same situation with periodicals edited in western countries, since it was almost impossible to subscribe to foreign periodicals. Due to this situation, the international library exchange of publications was one of the most important ways of acquisition.

1.3. Library Professionals

The schools of librarianship had been suppressed for more than 30 years. People working in libraries learned on the job, from the older librarians. The only training courses for librarians were organized by the Ministry of Education.

1.4. Conclusions

Although the number of libraries was rather high during that period (as seen in Table 1), the information offered was poor, and in the technical libraries, most of the collection was obsolete. Library staff was limited and had no adequate studies. Manual searching systems and inefficient services were also some of the characteristics of Romanian libraries during that time.

Table 1. Comparative overview of Romanian Libraries [1].

		Number	Volumes
Total Libraries	1990	16.665	154.852.000
	2001	13.442	167.294.000
University Libraries	1990	48	25.011.000
	2001	89	23.129.000
Technical University Libraries	1990	5	3.907.821
	2001	5	3.932.714

2. Changes in Romanian Libraries

The present situation in libraries is totally different. After 14 years, changes in the society are reflected in the deep changes in the Romanian libraries. Following a difficult period of political, economic and cultural life, libraries have to face the society's increasing needs for information, fill the gap of tens of years and develop present resources. They, also, have to face the information technology (IT) that the society demands, and the important changes that took place in their profession.

During the past ten years, librarians tried to learn and apply, in their own libraries, the experience of their colleagues from developed countries: managing their libraries, organizing new services, and, last but not least, learning to use the information technology as a starting point to improved services.

According to these, the first step libraries had to make was implementing library automation programs. Because of lack of information, few of the librarians had knowledge of those programs. Unfortunately, there had been no coordinated effort to introduce information technology at the university libraries' level. Each library tried to make changes according to its own rules, with no common goals.

There are particularities for each category of today Romanian libraries: public libraries, school libraries and university libraries.

2.1. Public Libraries

During the last 5 years, the Ministry of Culture has developed a national program for introducing integrated library management software in public libraries. Each of these libraries has implemented a program, but only some of them offer access to their on-line catalog through the web page.

Development of *School libraries* is poor; their collections consist of the most important Romanian and foreign authors, i.e. the classics. Most of them do not have any library automation program.

2.2. University Libraries

New universities were established and, along with them, new libraries. Even nowadays, the development of these libraries is quite different. Among the university libraries, all of the four Central University Libraries offer information about their collections through the on-line catalog. Few smaller university libraries have also automation programs, but not all of them succeeded in implementing them, due to some technical and management difficulties.

2.3. Technical University Libraries

Although the number of universities increased in the last decade, this was not the case with the technical ones. Therefore, the number of the technical university libraries in the country remains the same, meaning 5, as listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparative data of Technical Libraries.

	Year	Volumes	Subscriptions		Standards
			Romanian	Foreign	
Library of "Politehnica" University in Bucharest	1989	1.357.086	303	357	152.314
	2003	1.378.773	88	222	166.485
Civil Engineering University Library in Bucharest	1989	578.655	57		not available
	2003	513.377	118		not available
Library of Technical University in Cluj- Napoca	1989	373.626	164	63	176.250
	2003	443.000	54	46	225.000
"Gheorghe Asachi" Technical University Library in Iași	1989	900.676	180	107	271.914
	2003	999.014	95	37	306.736
Central Library of <i>Politehnica</i> University in Timișoara	1989	670.505	257	54	145.450
	2003	668.641	86	26	156.430

Each of these libraries is providing information not only to their own students, but also to researchers from public and private institutions of the particular region. Their collections are technically and scientifically oriented and particularly valuable due to the large number of scientific periodicals and to the rich collection

of Romanian and European *Patterns and Standards*. Some data about their collection are synthesized in Table 2. Because of the poor funding and of the continuous growing prices of the foreign periodicals, each year, the subscriptions remain almost the same or are even smaller. This is why libraries have fewer subscriptions for 2003 than for 1989, even if they dispose of much money. It also shows that there was only a small increase or even a decrease in the number of their volumes that was due to the massive withdraws of the obsolete documents and of the large number of copies documents.

2.4. Professional Organization

In our country, there was no tradition in working in professional associations. That is why, it took until 1991 for the libraries to organize themselves according to their professional interests in two library associations: one of the public libraries and the other of the educational libraries. The university libraries and school libraries are part of the Librarian Association in Education. However, the libraries of the Romanian Academy and of the Ministry of Defense are not affiliated to any of these associations. Since 2000, there has been an attempt to unify all library associations, starting with a federation, but no further steps have yet been accomplished [2].

2.5. Library Professionals

In 1992, the Romanian library school was reestablished in Bucharest. Since 1996, hundreds of persons have taken their degrees in librarianship. Unfortunately, most of them preferred to find jobs in other institutions than libraries, because of the low compensation rates.

Alternatively, the continuous education for all library personnel has been encouraged, through formal and informal learning. Library personnel may benefit of scholarship in various forms, both for undergraduate and for graduate librarians.

2.6. Libraries' Collections

Acquiring publications in Romanian libraries is still difficult, but only because of poor funding. It is a well known trait of librarians everywhere to complain about poor funding. Alas this is true in regards to our libraries.

3. Management of Change in *Politehnica* University Library in Timișoara

In 1989, the situation of *Politehnica* University Library was no different from the other Romanian libraries.

We cannot talk about a modern Romanian Library before 1990: none of Romanian technical libraries were automated. We knew that “modernization” is what we needed to do in our libraries, but this word was so comprehensive that we didn't know exactly what to do and where to start from.

In order to manage changes, the most important things are to know *what* changes need to be made and *how* to make them. Now we realize that this should have been a national strategic planning process, which does not exist even nowadays. Common goals and objectives should have been defined. That is why university libraries made steps toward the information technology era, by following their own rules. That is why Romania still does not have a national catalog. That is why we do not have shared cataloging.

Unfortunately, there were only few sources of information: we got some information from western countries through professional librarians visiting Romania, or through some of our lucky librarians who had earned fellowships in

some American or European libraries. After a couple of years, the Internet became another valuable information resource for librarians, when accessing it became effective.

The management of change in the *Politehnica* University followed some important **steps towards library modernization**.

3.1. Library Automation

After a short documentation and analysis of the long term need to share informational resources for students and researchers, and taking into account the needs of new and improved services for library patterns, the 4 university libraries from Timișoara decided that one of the most important steps toward “modernization” was to *introduce automation* in their libraries.

Analyzing and evaluating the financial situation of the libraries and their technological resources, as well as the professional requirements for the staff, our conclusion was that the process would pose really great efforts, both from financial and professional or managerial points of view. It was almost unaffordable and totally ineffective that each of the libraries made this effort by itself. It was our decision to form a *Consortium* whose main purpose was “to build up a unique information data base for the entire university center”.

Once the *Consortium* was established, our first step was to identify the planning team responsible for carrying out all the phases of the process. The team knowledge about managing library automation was rather poor, but we knew that we had to choose integrated library management software that responds the best to the needs of the libraries. It was not an easy task to define the *Request for proposal*, to select some automation software vendors and then to identify the one with the best quality / price ratio.

Suddenly, we faced the greatest problem: the **funding**. The Universities’ financial resources were limited to some funds from the Government, *Tempus* programs and donations from western countries, which covered the costs of the main part of the technical support: computers and hired telephone lines for the interconnections. Thus, we found out that it was somewhere else that we had to search for financial support: so, the same team wrote the TILINE (Timișoara LIBrary NETwork) project and we applied for funding to the *Soros Foundation*. The foundation financed the project for three of the libraries, the fourth giving up.

Therefore, in August 1995, two of our libraries, each had the integrated library management software installed on their servers, a computer network, and an anxious and, at the same time, curious staff expecting to start training for the *Cataloging* module. Again, in our wish to move fast on things, we neglected the human factor: none of our library staff, except the manager, had ever worked on computers, but they were enthusiastic to begin. The results were spectacular, the catalogers were so excited about on-line cataloging, that each one of the rest of the staff was willing to work on computers as soon as possible. In 6 months, we implemented the *Acquisition* module too.

Now, we can talk about two phases of introducing automation in Timișoara’s university libraries:

- the first one, characterized by exploration, surprises (unexpected situations that needed to be solved on the fly), lack of experience, but an extraordinary wish to change things, which lasted until 1996, and
- the second one, with a more appropriate approach to the problems, a better definition of the goals and objectives, meaning better planning.

The second phase was possible due to a good theoretical and practical documentation performed by the library managers and some of the librarians in American and European libraries.

That was the time when I was the beneficiary of a 6 months fellowship from the American Library Association. Also, together with another member of the planning team, we did not only visited, but were also trained in some important libraries from western European countries, through programs, as *Tempus*, *Leonardo da Vinci*, *Phare*, developed with European partners and funded by the European Union.

It was an important period of knowledge accumulation and new experiences, which were reflected in the next actions in our libraries, defined as the second phase of the changes. From that time on, we proceeded to a more attentive planning of each of the changes, trying to make a deep analysis of the internal facts, considering the benefit for users the central point of library's efforts.

We realized that some important things are to be considered when setting up our planning:

- set goals as clear as possible,
- ensure the training needs of the staff,
- prepare psychologically the staff for the changes,
- ensure the financing,
- settle the right time for making the changes.

Permanent discussions with the staff members, related to the implementation steps, proved to be equally important in the process [3].

One of the most important processes carried on was the implementation of the *Circulation* module, which took 2 years. Before starting the automated circulation control:

- we built up the readers data base, beginning with the teaching staff and continuing with the students from each study year, by faculty;
- we completed the on-line catalog with the essential reading books.

With these two data bases, the automated circulation control started. Today, we are using most of the facilities offered by this module of our program, such as on-line renewal and reserving.

The *Politehnica* Library has 5 branch libraries too, all connected to the Central Library, so all search, cataloging and lending operations are being made on-line.

In 2003, we started to plan the implementation of the *Serials control* module, with the main purpose of providing on-line information about our periodicals and making the serial collection more accessible. We started with binding the volumes of current subscriptions. Now, we are preparing the serials cataloging, beginning with the current subscriptions. As they are being cataloged, the bound volumes are going to be available not only in open stacks, but also for loans.

Due to unexpected problems related to our software maintenance, we have to plan the upgrade of the library management software, and, of course, of the required hardware. As a result, we have to adjust the initial planning of implementation of the *Serials control* module and postpone some of the activities.

3.2. Reorganizing Library Spaces

Another major change our library faced with was the reorganization of space on purpose to create new and adequate reading space and to assure rapid access to a browsable, open stack collection.

It was a long and quite difficult process to identify which parts of our book and serials collections were less requested, which were obsolete, etc. Parts of the

obsolete publications were withdrawn from the library and the less requested documents were moved to less accessible places. Through successive changes, we succeeded to set out the proper space for an open access reading room. Also we organized our first *Reference* room.

3.3. Reorganizing Collections for Open Shelves

We decided to offer free access to part of our book collection, for those acquired since 1995, except text-books. In order to create a more convenient and useful location system, we took into account different possibilities, one of these being the *Universal Decimal Classification* (UDC). Analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of using UDC as a method for book location, we realized that it was not totally adequate for our collections, so we decided to build our own call number system.

The system is partly based on the UDC, but with fewer divisions and focused mostly on applied sciences and technology domains. Once the system was defined, the currently acquired books were located accordingly to our new system, and the previously acquired books were assigned the appropriate new location. Today our open access reading room counts almost 20.000 volumes.

3.4. Improving Access to Study and Research Documents

The new information technology and the increasing number of electronic publication imposed the necessity to develop the technical infrastructure support of the library, in order to:

- develop our own databases and to make them accessible only from the campus area network (intranet) and
- ensure the access to databases owned by other institutions.

The main problems which had to be solved were: to find the funds for the technical support and to convince faculties to offer, their teaching materials, research reports, doctorate theses, etc., in electronic formats, for intranet access.

Today, we are developing the library's offer of electronic documents. The users of our library have access from the entire university network to some Romanian databases, on-line publications, our own research database, and through our on-line catalog, to the contents of foreign books and even to full text documents.

We, also, are in the point to reorganize and manage part of our *Standards* collection and the newest part of the textbooks, in order to offer them to our readers in electronic formats.

3.5. The New Library Building

After a serious analysis of library spaces and future library development, our university established the necessity for a new library building. A team from the library was in charge to plan the new building and work with the architect, while a team from the university made the project for the funding. Neither one of these tasks was easy, but finally, we would like to believe that our library will have a modern building, with flexible spaces, which will be accomplished in a couple of years.

Now, our library faces another big challenge: to move the **entire** collection from the actual building with books located in closed storage with no browsing possibility, to the new location. Again, a team from the library is planning how to move the collections in the shortest time and, in the mean time, to solve the books' new location problem.

Therefore, we have to reorganize the text-books collections, all the literature and the reference documents collection (100.000 volumes). We are planning on how to assign them locations according to our call number system, to make them browsable, in the open stacks of the new building.

Final Conclusions

Since 1990, the “Politehnica” University Library is in a continuous and fast changing process, in a long period of transition from a traditional library to one of the future, in which coexist valuable books, journals collection and new, electronic and multimedia materials.

I would like to emphasize that the “Politehnica” University Library suffered substantial changes (in services, staff’s attitudes and organizational structure) due to introduction of the new technology in information services. In the near future, the changes will be even more significant by moving to the new planned building. The same steps we made in the last 10 years in our library were made, during decades, by developed libraries from all over the world. The research work was performed by professional librarians from those libraries. We are the beneficiaries of their expertise and experience, but we have to adjust it to our specific needs and conditions.

This paper shows that managing changes, even with few initial knowledge is not impossible, if continuous evaluation and adjustments in the process are performed, and, of course, up-to-date information related to the subjects is available.

According to our 10 years experience of management of change, we may conclude that:

- sharing experience is important in order to reduce the implementation period;
- forming consortiums and working in cooperation with other libraries is important for costs sharing;
- local and regional cooperation based on common topics and interest is also important for more efficient resources sharing.

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