

ICONLIS CALCUTTA 2004

“National Libraries: A perspective for a leading role in the e-services époque”

ANTONIA ARAHOVA and SARANTOS KAPIDAKIS
NATIONAL LIBRARY OF GREECE – IONIO UNIVERSITY
taraxova@nlg.gr sarantos@ionio.gr

- **Key Words:** *collaboration, interactivity, e-services, national libraries, e-educator.*

1. Introduction:

1.1. Brief Historical Review

In 1829 is decided by Governor John Kapodistrias the Foundation of Public National Library and its co-installation with the National Museum in the island of Aigina. Three years later, according to relevant decree, “The Library is separated from the Museum and becomes independent, as a public library from so on”. In September of 1834, The Public Library has been transferred in Athens, having in its occupation more than 8000 volumes, preserved initially, at “The near the Ancient Market Hot Springs” and later at a Church, nearby the Cathedral. The donations were all time overtaking and the wealth of book supplement demands the quest of new establishment place.

On the parallel, begins constituting, since 1838, and the University Library in the well known Kleanthi’s Residence, at the foot of Acropolis. Having as a basic kernel the 52 volumes of historical and geographical books, which had been donated by Ouintorp, Massachusetts President, in 1842 manages to treasure more than 19.000 books. In 19/31 of March of 1842, the two libraries are united administratively in the same place, in the SE side of the upper floor of the Athens University Building and George Typaldos Kozakis is the first director, for 20 years, since 1842, and achieves to enrich with 80.000 volumes, King’s, Emperor’s, and individual’s donations.

In 1866, in conformity with royal decree, the two libraries amalgamate administratively in one “The National Library” that remains united from its constitution until 1890. Facing serious problems, as lack of place and organization, remains at the University till 1903, when takes place a staff increase and a new organizational structure is voted. This is the year, when a new of ancient architectural order, marble building is manufactured, thanks to the donation of the exceedingly rich Valliani Brothers, on the schedule of Danish architect, Theophilus Hansen the Younger, while the supervision of the performance and construction had the German architect, Ernst Ziller under the surveillance of specific committee.

In 1929 the director of The National Library of Greece demands from the University the two libraries separation “as a result of the specification, on the contrary of the wrong prevalent tradition of catholicity”. The independent National Library of Greece has just been born.

1.2. Mission

- The National Library of Greece (NLG), as the central Library of the region, has as its primary mission the collection, the process, the preservation and to highlight the material of their collections in order to be accessible to the readers and the general public.
- Also it develops activities to reinforce the cultural and educational life of the Region. Its function is to be the official national center for information, in library science, bibliography and for preservation and digitalization of the printed material.
- On the other hand it manages the national collections of material of other libraries in Greece and abroad, which act under the Greek authority.
- It is also the national connecting center between the Greek public libraries and with other Organizations and Institutions abroad. It draws up and publishes the retrospective and the current national bibliography and also the material of the catalogues that belong to their collections.
- It collaborates on library matters with other Organizations and participates in research programs. It keeps up with new developments of the field, for the application to the improvement of the services that provides to the public. It represents the country abroad in matters that is responsible.
- N.L.G. having in its occupation more than 4 million volumes of books, papyrus, palimpsest, Byzantine manuscripts, incunabula, rare and special publications, valuable parchments, illuminated scrolls and codices, historical documents as archives of local ethnic material, lithographic paintings, wood-engravings and old maps, has to face the challenge of playing successfully the dual role, as a depository of the national cultural creativity and also, as a transmitter of knowledge and information worldwide with adequate and modern means.

2. E-services époque: In section 2 we will examine the services’ situation in the National Library of Greece and we will analyze our thoughts about their modernization in a national collaborative framework.

As it was highlighted in the last IFLA Conference, “in the field of librarianship and information science, certain methodologies for the measurement of efficiency, effectiveness and quality of services have been developed.” It stands as a great challenge for national libraries to define strategic goals keeping their eye to the user’s satisfaction. Although national libraries differ more than any other libraries among each other, they have the privilege and the authority to line a national strategy as usually they play a leading role in linking processes

The last two years National Library of Greece, under the initiative of the new director, Dr. Zahos, having as a mission statement the modernization and the radical improvement of the crucial services factor, is performing a strategic planning, giving

great importance to the contribution of electronic services. During 2003 services were provided to 16.850 readers and approximately 34.060 book and magazine titles were used by them.

Beyond the economic limitations, a vision for a dynamic entrance to the e-services époque can be realized. An implementation of quality collaborative e-services can function as a renaissance of objectives and motives. Undoubtedly, the need for certain new services, as e-reference and e-learning, is in combination with the satisfaction of their users' needs; only an interactive and collaborative framework can effectively assure this. The National Library of Greece, with all the other academic librarian sources, will serve as a national coordinator of enduring knowledge accessible to all, contributing to the cultural, social and economic advancement of Greece, by defining the organizational schedule, ranging the sequence of the ready to answer academic partners, dealing with the right method of the personnel training for the virtual user and all this in the base of respecting the particularities of the Greek reality. The bringing together of libraries with a growing organizational interoperability is the wind of noticeable organizational change in existing Greek service structures demonstrating highly innovative service solutions.

National Library of Greece can have a manager role in organizing a special, properly adjusted to the Greek librarian reality, schedule where there will be information's diffusion by establishing a national consortium, adopting virtual solutions and playing the role of e-teacher, of an e-guider to the librarians of the academic, the public, the school library, a museum's library, a gallery's library. Even though it sounds quite ambitious, a good start can be done with the academic libraries, which are well harmonizing with the technological evolutions and plus there are successful academic consortial approaches to digital services, especially to e-reference in an international level.

National libraries need to raise awareness of their role as implementers of national collaborative frameworks, as protagonists in the driving of the "e-services car". National Library of Greece has a long tradition of assisting users to find information using traditional services. Also the last two years has email communication with its customers and uses web forms. The customer submits an email query to which the librarian supplies an answer within a timeframe. The first step for the transformation has been done; an experimental "Ask a Librarian" link is on its website that will be very soon approachable on the World Wide Web. What we design as a schedule is an expansion of the service in a national level joining forces to provide e-reference to the patrons and e-learning to the librarians from the libraries that will be involved in. The national librarian is a facilitator in the learning experience. He is the human contact centre queuing and routing queries to the next available service point and all this in an interactive procedure.

In section 3 we examine the two basic parameters of the e-services (Staff and Management), we explain why only the Web is not enough for providing electronic information and the new role the national libraries are able to play as e-educators, responding to the users-librarians' needs.

3. Parameters:

- **Staffing:** Staff needs to have clear guidelines about the appropriate type and the time of answering or forwarding the queries to librarian specialists within the network. Mainly the staff of the national library is the one who will have the responsibility to operate the whole effort guarantying the flexibility in the work arrangements. Facing the new challenges, in collaboration with the librarians of the academic libraries can deal with the factors that impinge on the easy, reliable, quick, interactive and trustworthy granting of e-reference.

- **Management - Administration:** The effective management of the service demands simultaneously the centralization and the wide dispersal of jurisdictions. For the national library to be the “first among equals” is the key for a new, upper qualified, in a national prospective, role; to be the “national guide administrator” of all, undistinguished, the other libraries of the nation in the field of e-services. Even though there is a heterogeneity among them, national library, being the keeper of all the collections material, can turn on the light for a new collaboration where the factor of interaction and successful on time satisfaction of the patrons demands are the dominative.

3.1. From the users’ view:

The users’ expectation is increasingly for digital services 24 hours a day. So, in order to address this demand, libraries are moved to cooperative projects. Some of the most important are the following:

- **The Library of Congress Collaborative Digital Reference(CDRS)**
- **The 24/7 Reference Project**
- **AskUsQuestions.com**
- **The Virtual Reference Desk(VRD)**
- **The Internet Public Library**

All of them strive to “advance the provision of digital reference and the successful creation and operation of human-mediated, Internet-based information services”. This enables and the librarian and the patron to interact, share and control the information queries remotely; it is the e-share in the information hunting. From that point of view, the librarian of the national library can be the Request Manager of the queries posing by the librarians and are relevant to the questions they deliver from the users. He can process and database tracks to the appropriate addressee-library where the specialist librarian will answer. On a login screen the librarians act and interact assuring the reliability of the answers and the strength of the live human contact. The questions and answers are later archived to serve as a resource to the national network.

Moreover adopting a national theory to the e-services issue, that limits the chaos of the different approaches and the economic cost of the various projects which many times “one does not recognize the other”. The transformation will be really amazing if we utilize the geographic and thematic diversity of libraries under the umbrella of a national body, as it is the National Library. As it concerns the technical issues, information science is and will always be willing in providing the best solutions for a shareware distributed request tracking system. The point is the organizational schedule and the role of the national library in it. A title like “E-Share Nation’s Libraries” may give the stigma eagerness of the proposal.

3.2. Why the Web-search tools are not sufficient:

As library use decreases and with more and more information found online on the Web, will we still need reference, even e-reference librarians? A search of the World Wide Web will turn up only the online information. Instead of that, certainly a National Library or every other library has sources more accurate and reliable. Especially a library-to-library services operation with reference experts submitting patrons' questions online guarantees more the thorough tracking of the existing material and pushes away the danger of many times "dull" web sites with strange scopes and motives.

Steven Bell, director of the library at Philadelphia University, says "librarians need to know much more than just mainstream librarianship to maintain their professional vitality" and we would like to add that librarians need to practice librarianship for their country's and their nation's good, feeling technology as a good mean for teaching people and learning by their collaborators. Really is the Internet always everything? It may catch the moment, the year, the decade but surely without the librarian's collaboration it can't give birth to everything. That's why and most of e-reference projects named "Ask a Librarian". The Internet itself does not go where the information is and research is a multi-library process. Information can be true and still wrong. Only after a comprehensive investigation can be objective.

3.3. Can a National Library become an E-educator?:

The past few years radical improvements have been made in educational technology and distance education has taken up a lot of space, creating online classes, setting up virtual study groups and generally doing more or less anything we have experienced in traditional classrooms. It is really noticeable that in 2001 one of the pre conferences in this year's Association of College and Research Libraries Conference had to do with "Teaching and Learning in 3-D Environments". In 1998 the same Association promoted the philosophy that "distance patrons are entitled to library services and resources equivalent to those settings". Today tools, like the us hold classes online, one-on-one reference many people in line figure out who came where patrons are the "course's theme" is how to provide in real-time accurate, comprehensive and reliable information to the users in the type of instantaneous response and immediate gratification. The conductors could be the specialist librarians of the National Library having all the qualifications to function as "e-educators" in the field of the e-reference itself. This can be done in an interactive framework with a wide variety of tools through contact centre software designed expressly for covering that need. VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol), which allow the librarian and the patron – in our case is the librarian himself- to hold a voice conversation on the same line they are using for the Web connection- can be used as a method enabling talking back and forth at the same time, just as if they were on the phone. In any case technology offers functional tools.



The point is how we, the National Libraries, can use those developing new models and implementing distance-electronic learning in what we most care about, the e-training

of the reference librarians. The important thing is not only to replace the crew of the sitting at the buildings desks reference librarians by online voice-message shippers, but how we can create a national, well qualified e-staff that can handle the reference traffic appropriately. A librarian of the National Library will be always there guiding them in online simulations, preparing to cope with specialized needs librarians as “patrons-students” have. Practically that can be realized with the asynchronous (time-lagged) and synchronous (real-time) and the ramifications of the two types of interacting on the e-instructor and the e-student.

This is of the utmost importance for librarians who need a quick introduction or for those who are not intimately involved with distance librarianship but will find themselves in the position of providing services to distance patrons. Librarians are teaching more and their patrons are demanding more instruction from their questions. Our role as instructors promises only to get bigger not only because the electronic environment continues to expand, but mostly because of the mission and the leading role the National libraries have to carry out. The challenge is in front of us! Let’s organize our navigation platform!

4. The Role of The National Libraries in the Social Interaction: (We give emphasis to the benefits of the librarians’ social interaction and we propose directions for upgrading the e-services).

Librarians need to know what to know. They, as well, need to have the help of other librarians. Interaction can question and tailor answers. As access to material becomes easier, emphasis will shift from the mechanical aspects to knowing what material to access. National Libraries have an important socializing function to deal with. They can have a decisive role in creating mechanisms for seeking “the invisible information”, the one that is not yet digitally indexed, it is originated from rare booklets or often it is in the exclusive occupation of the national library of their country or of a collector who accepts to trust his valuable and unique acquisition only in the hands of the National Library, as it suppose to be and it has to be the national keeper of the written cultural creation.

We can’t overlook the ad-hoc and contextual nature of most information seeking, the personal desirability from social interaction and the benefits the librarian community will enjoy if we put into practice the possibility the users-librarians collectively and interactively seek information methods and environments inside a collaborative frame where librarians, with the instructive active presence of the National Library, find, create and maintain knowledge. Providing electronic services, we do not try to abolish the social world.

National Libraries can built the social functionality among the librarians of their nation, reminding that e-services are services where professionals-librarians are involved seeking for flexible, accurate, distributed construction for interactive communications. It would be so useful to focus on in-person reference transactions! We can create a shared folder that could be accessed by all desk staff during their shifts at the off-site services desk, with the immediate feedback available as a specialist librarian will be stand by for guide ness. An idea could be to set up an appointment system to indicate when a librarian needs help by simply clicking the “National Reference” icon. The librarian of the National Library can guide him to the appropriate academic or other contributor and the

two librarians can talk each other on the phone or by chatting. In this way, social interaction is reinforced!

4.1. Directions:

- Gathering statistics in order to assign responsibility to a specific librarian, automatically track and record response time.
- Interactive corporate updates – Policies and Procedures
- Explore ways to help reference librarians share their online successes
- Form an organizational schedule, having as a centre the National Library, where a “hearing” database will gather librarians’ comments when learning from each other’s best practices.
- Create a Knowledge Frequently Asked Questions Database for questions posing not by the users, but by the librarians-patrons. The Administrator of this database will receive notification every time a guideline answer is ready by the librarian of the National Library.
- Especially, as it concerns the Greek librarian community, the experts librarians are few and more or less they know each other. So, experts will be permitted to log in the system but will be allowed the full range of administrative permissions. But when there are many queries from the librarians in the queue to be answered, is an administrator’s subject area to regulate the row. Apart from the outside the national library experts, a similar type would be in force and for the inside the national library other librarians, contributing, in this way, to the personnel’s training but mainly cultivating the social interaction, we talked about before.
- National library has to play the vital role of the mentor in ensuring the follow-up of the communication links and encouraging discussion for the best practices for e-reference and e-learning.

5. Conclusion:

As Gwynneth Evans, General Director of National and International Programs in IFLA, underlined: “It is evident that national libraries in all parts of the world play an important role in the economic, social, intellectual and cultural life of their societies. The library community is increasingly aware that its members must influence the public agenda”. Today the national library is still searching for a permanent and comfortable position that is nimble enough to be flexible, accessible and continually up-to-date honoring its national mission.

In this sense, there is a need to highlight its expertise, abilities and irreplaceable resources in order to take a leading role in the e-services management environment. Of strategic importance to this effort is the understanding and development of service convergence. The challenge of establishing relevant training is not new to librarians and there is now the possibility of embedding training support within the learning management system as a part of the learning activity. National libraries are called to provide not only leadership, but also timely input to the development of appropriately developed services. They need to reposition themselves to be viewed by the community

that they serve as managers and oversees of the repository space, promising quick, flexible, stable and comprehensive access to information.

The two key words, collaboration and interactivity, push them to provide a new “work frame” for their nation’s librarians to work and learn with each other. They are the ones that can become a viable and productive community player invigorating, the social interaction. There are no in one day solutions for addressing this complex issue, but opportunities exist for the national library within collaborative frameworks to contribute to the building of infrastructure for management. That will have a significant impact on the future direction of information and knowledge. There is a challenge in front of us to transform current practices and may be through joint pilot projects strengthen the National library’s central role in navigating the sources and supporting the e-époque.

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