Chapter XIV

Progress and Prospects for Estonian Libraries

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information and communication technology (ICT) over the past decades has created new challenges and opportunities for libraries and librarians. As a result of ICT, library services to users have changed, the management of libraries has evolved and the roles of librarians have multiplied. The new millennium presents new opportunities to exploit an ever-growing array of information and communication technologies in the provision of library services. As one millennium draws to a close and a new one begins, there are a lot of questions to answer:

• What will the opportunities be for the expanded use of ICT in libraries?
• How will ICT be used or misused?
• What will be the impact of ICT on libraries, librarians and library users?
• How will the library organization change?
• What is the future of librarianship?
• How will ICT change the role of libraries and librarians?
• How will education and training for librarianship change as a result of emerging technologies?
• Will instruction of patrons differ in the new millennium?
• Will new ICT challenge the existence of libraries?
INFORMATION AND LIBRARY INFRASTRUCTURE

Estonia is a small country situated on the Baltic Sea with the population of 1.46 million and a land area of 45,215 km. Estonian librarianship emerged in the first quarter of the twentieth century, influenced by German and Anglo-American librarianship. After the Second World War it conformed to Soviet librarianship of that time. Already before the Estonian Republic reestablished its independence in 1990, the library specialists started to create the conception of the development of the Estonian libraries in the conditions of the independent democratic state. A row of conflicts and obstacles in the realization of the main functions of the libraries were pointed out (Valm, 1996). In the former Soviet Bloc countries of Central and Eastern Europe, most information technology was unavailable, unaffordable or discouraged for a long period. The improvement of the internal infrastructure was needed to become an integral part of the global information infrastructure.

The rapid development within ICT is in process of changing everyday lives in Estonia now. The changes in the library network in Estonia have taken place mainly in connection with the transformation of the economic structure, changes in territorial and administrative situation and with optimizing the library service. As the institution that provides printed matter and information free of charge, the library has acquired new functions and heavier responsibility in today’s Estonia. The libraries are trying to maintain a central, intermediate function as providers of all published information for all citizens and in helping to navigate through an increasing flood of information also in an electronic environment.

The advanced national library network with sufficient financial resources guarantees the development of unified national information system and information infrastructure. A national library information system that consists of research, special, public and school libraries is an inseparable part of the Estonian information infrastructure, and libraries have an increasingly important role in making reading matter accessible to the Estonian public now.

There are about 1,290 libraries of different type in Estonia. Estonian research libraries have had coordinated development for about three decades. The publication of the union catalogue of foreign periodicals was initialized in the 1960s and the publication of the union catalogue of foreign books in 1974. In the 1990s the activities
Library Showcase: San Luis Obispo County Library, Cayucos Branch - Interview with Melody Mullis
www.igi-global.com/chapter/library-showcase-san-luis-obispo/102368?camid=4v1a