The National Library of Finland - providing new services for the information society

The services provided by the National Library for the libraries network and the information society as a whole, are being developed in two parallel processes. The role of the National Library will be expanded from being a service centre for university libraries only to being a service centre for polytechnic libraries, public libraries and special libraries, as well. At the same time, the service concept and the digital library services themselves are being developed in cooperation with the libraries network. The different library sectors have organised the management of each sector to meet the needs of the changing working environment better.

The libraries network – cooperating within library sectors and across them

The Finnish higher education sector is composed of 52 organisations. Finland has 21 university-level institutions of higher education, 20 of which come under the Ministry of Education and one under the Ministry of Defence. Geographically, the university network covers the entire country. There are 29 polytechnics under the Ministry of Education, one under the Ministry of the Interior and one under the autonomous Åland Islands. Most of the polytechnics are multidisciplinary institutions maintained by municipalities or municipal federations. Research is also carried out in several government funded research institutes, which organisationally come under various ministries. All these organisations have well-developed libraries.

There are 21 provincial libraries in Finland, which provide information services in their own regions. In addition, there is a public library in every municipality. Municipal libraries are run by local authorities, which receive statutory state aid for running costs.

The tradition of cooperation among libraries has been an important factor in the development of library services in Finland; the university libraries in particular have a long history of cooperation. One very concrete expression of this cooperation is the shared library system. All Finnish university libraries have been using the same library system since the 1990s. The first integrated library system was called VTLS, but today all university libraries and polytechnic libraries use the Voyager system.

The development of national services for libraries by the National Library, such as the coordination of the shared library system, the national portal, or national licensing has increased the need to develop the coordination and management of each library sector. For both the libraries and the National Library it is important to be able to organise negotiations on national services in a timesaving and practical way to avoid repetitive individual negotiations.

University libraries have been organising cooperation between the libraries in the network for ten years. The Council of University Libraries, formed in 1996, is a cooperative body which aims to promote common activities and supervise the interests of libraries. The Council monitors developments within the library sector, creates new initiatives, improves cooperation between libraries, and between libraries and third parties. The university libraries network has even produced a joint strategy.

Cooperation within the polytechnic and research institute libraries, as well as the public libraries, has been organised more recently and can be seen as a response to the demands of the changing working environment. The forums coordinating activities within the university, special library and public library sectors are called councils, while the polytechnic libraries have formed a consortium called AMKIT. The management groups of the councils and the AMKIT consortium act as negotiation partners for the National Library.

There are three different types of library consortium in Finland. The Linnea consortium was formed to handle matters related to the library system at universities and at a couple of special libraries. Licensing of

electronic resources and development and coordination of the national information retrieval portal are handled by the FinELib consortium. All four library sectors are members of the FinELib consortium. These two consortia, Linnea and FinELib, have been formed to develop certain digital library services. The third consortium, AMKIT, has been formed to foster all issues related to the development of polytechnic libraries.

The organisation of the Finnish libraries network is exceptional by international standards. Each library sector can handle questions related to the whole sector and the management groups of the councils can represent the whole sector in negotiations. There is a growing need for cross-sectoral cooperation and exchange of expertise between the different sectors.

The National Library of Finland and its expanding role

Helsinki University Library, the National Library of Finland, has a dual role in the libraries network. It is part of the University of Helsinki and provides services for the university, but it also functions as a service and development centre for all the Finnish university libraries. As the National Library of Finland, its most important task is to collect and preserve the national published heritage for future generations. Most of its financing, about 80%, comes directly from the Ministry of Education, while about 20% comes from the university.

During the current planning period, 2004-2006, the Library is supposed to take on a wider range of duties and responsibilities than before. The role of the National Library in the provision of national information content and the development of the library network will increase significantly as will its overall impact on society as a whole. The clientele of the Library will be expanded to cover polytechnic libraries, public libraries and special libraries as well as university libraries.

To be able to expand the role of the National Library in the information society, the Universities Act will have to be revised to correspond with the new responsibilities, a budgetary system needs to be developed, a steering system has to be developed to meet the needs of the enlarged clientele, and the services in question have to be defined. Moreover, the name of the organisation will be changed to the National Library to reflect its new role. The Ministry of Education is responsible for steering the change and a working group started work in 2002 on outlining the changes needed. Another working group nominated by the Ministry of Education has the task of implementing the changes by the end of 2005.

In parallel with the expansion of the role of the National Library, another important change is taking place, namely the development of the digital library services concept.

National services for the libraries network - benefits for the libraries

According to the Universities Act, the National Library is today a service centre for the university libraries. The library also provides national services for the polytechnic and public library sector as well as for the special libraries. These services are based on licences and service agreements and the term of the licences ranges from one to three years. In the expansion of the role of the National Library, these services will be established on a permanent basis and certain added-value services will be developed as well. The libraries network has taken an active part in defining these national services. The libraries have prioritised the services and the final list of services is based on this work. National services for the libraries network will be developed in phases. The current plan is to start work on the expansion in 2006 and continue during the next planning period, 2007-2009 (Table 1). What the timetable turns out to be in reality will depend very much on government funding.

Table 1. National services for the libraries network in 2006 and during the period 2007-2009.

SERVICE	DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICE
General description of the services for which the National Library is responsible:	

• Maintenance • Development • Coordination • Training • Information • Standards	
DATABASES • National bibliographies • Union catalogues • Portal databases • Thesauri	2006 • Unlimited search at libraries • Copy cataloguing at libraries 2007-2009 • Databases freely available to the public • Joint union catalogue for all library sectors
LICENSING • FinELib, The Finnish Electronic Library	2006 • Permanent staffing for all 4 sectors 2007-2009 • Financing of core e-resources for each sector by the Ministry of Education
DIGITAL LIBRARY SOFTWARE • Library system software • Portal software • Digital object management software	2006 • Financing of portal software by the Ministry of Education 2007-2009 • Financing of digital object management software by the Ministry of Education • Financing of digital library server acquisition by the Ministry of Education
STANDARDS	2006 • The standard basis for digital library services
LIBRARY STATISTICS	2006 • Scientific libraries statistics • Development of impact assessment
ADDED VALUE SERVICES • Management • Customer services • Evaluation of impact	2006 • Policy, Services, Technology • Customer relationship management • Communication • Impact assessment of all services

What are the benefits of the change? The most obvious benefit for the libraries network is that the services and the related staffing can be made permanent. With permanent staff, high-quality expertise can be developed in a sustainable way. Expertise is a prerequisite for the development of the services in question. The libraries network will also become an important partner for the National Library in developing and steering the services. Services can be tailored to meet the needs of each library sector; the four library sectors in question are very different in nature and the needs of the libraries and the customers they represent vary considerably. The libraries network, together with the National Library, will become a major force when negotiating, for example, with the Ministry of Education over financing new services or resources. It can even be foreseen that the libraries network, together with the National Library, can grow to be an important leader of opinion in the information society.

Developing the digital library infrastructure

Parallel with the expansion of the role of the National Library is the development of the Finnish digital library. The development of the system is based on three main elements: the library system (Voyager), the information retrieval portal (MetaLib + SFX) and the digital objects management system, DOMS (Encompass). The system is also called the 'triangle' because it has three major elements. There are also

supporting tools such as BookWhere, connected to the library system to support copy cataloguing, or RefWorks, connected to the portal to help researchers handle references. In the development of the services, the focus is on the whole system not just one part of it. The system is already in production but content and services will be improved in the future. One fundamental element of the system is still missing: the software that will enable resources to be kept on a long-term basis.

There are many challenges when developing the system. From the technical point of view, interoperability issues are very much in focus. The system consists of three main elements, the software and the supporting tools. More elements will probably be added in the future, but all these parts must function together. The core customers or users of the system vary. The main idea of a library system is to rationalise work at libraries and from this perspective the customer of the library system is a library. The idea of an information retrieval portal is to give access to heterogeneous information resources and to provide cross searching of multiple databases. The user of the portal is the researcher or student, any person searching for information. Digital object management systems help organisations to handle different types of digital collections and the DOMS customer may be a whole organisation. Even though the individual functions of the system and user groups vary, from the end-user point of view the system should be seen as a complete entity.

Major challenges in development are thus related to end-user needs and how these needs can be met. The user of the digital library may be a researcher, student, teacher or ordinary citizen and the skills of the users vary considerably. The user can also be situated on-campus or off-campus and preferences can vary according to the tools used to access the content. From the user's point of view, he or she should be able to use just one service to search for and find relevant information or documents.

High-quality content is the heart of the digital library system. The system gives access, for example, to the licensed resources, digitised resources, special collections, electronic publications of the universities and other organisations, music collections, open access resources and national catalogues as well as library catalogues. More and more frequently the user can access full-text resources. When full text is not available, the user will be advised in which collection the document is available, using openURL linking. To give an idea of the size of the collections available to the user, some figures are shown in the table below (Table 2).

Table 2. Examples of the content in the digital library

TYPE OF RESOURCE	KEY FIGURE
Licensed resources	20,000 e-journals 25,000 e-books 230 databases
The Finnish Historical Newspaper Library 1771-1890	1,000,000 pages
Union catalogue Linda - Collection information of the Finnish university libraries	4.5 million references
Special collections - the collection of former President Kekkonen	Books and articles by Urho Kaleva Kekkonen

A steering mechanism has been evolved to develop the digital library system and manage its complexity. The steering mechanism consists of a steering committee and a number of special working groups. There are three working groups concentrating on questions related to hardware, software and services, and statistics and impact. All four library sectors are represented in all the groups and the members themselves represent high-level expertise in the special areas of the groups. The system was launched in spring 2005.

The digital library infrastructure is the backbone of the value chain the National Library is building. The value chain consists of electronic publishing, licensing, digitisation, distribution and long-term preservation of key material, plus the expertise related to the production chains.

Conclusions

Organising the four library sectors to meet the needs of the changing working environment is important. Because of this organisation, cooperation between the libraries and the National Library can be more systematic and efficient than before. Organisation of the networks also forms a basis for cross-sectoral cooperation and exchange of expertise between the different sectors.

The work done to expand the role of the National Library is an example of the cooperation between the various stakeholders. Key players in the process have been the Ministry of Education, the University of Helsinki, the National Library of Finland and the libraries network represented by the management groups of the councils or consortia. It has been a valuable process from which the National Library and the libraries network have learnt a great deal. The expansion is planned to take place in 2006. Many challenges will have to be met before the libraries network and the National Library together can be regarded as a major force in the development of content services for the information society. Active cooperation between different types of libraries, other stakeholders and the National Library, and working methods based on transparency and trust will secure success in the future.

Challenges to the development of the digital library, the 'triangle', are considerable. On the other hand, the system offers the users enormous opportunities. When our dream comes true, our users will be able to access heterogeneous information resources including, for example, full-text journals, music and images through one service point. If the different elements function properly, it will guarantee a high-quality service.

The new vision statement encapsulating the National Library Strategy reflects the new challenges "The National Library – the library for the whole nation".

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