

The Miskolc University Library giving help in the economic restructuring in Northeastern Hungary

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The inhabitants of the 93 square km area of Hungary are in a difficult situation, together with the government and the institutional network, and within this the libraries. During the last 3 years (1990-1991-1992) GDP has decreased by 20%; industrial production by 40% (within this the machine industry by 50%); there have been 35% less investments than before. The consequences are: the deficit of the state budget has reached 7% of the annual GDP; inflation will be over 20% in 1993, too; the 13% unemployment rate is on the verge of being intolerable; nearly half of the inhabitants earn a bare living; hundreds of thousands of people are unable to pay the bills of the public services (electricity, gas, water). The sad factual data of the economy are made even grimmer by the fact that lots of people have lost hope for a better future, which frighteningly consumes their energy to act and also their optimism, and that national pride has suffered serious set-backs, as well. This state of mind is not the consequence of the 1990 political changes, it has developed gradually since about 1978 when the serious deterioration of the economy was first detected.

The economic situation in Northeastern Hungary (my home region) is even worse. Here we relied mainly on heavy industry: mining, metallurgy, machine production and the heavy chemical industry. 18% of the country's exports was produced here and the overwhelming majority of this went to Eastern markets and those markets barely exist any longer. Therefore here the rate of unemployment is 20% compared to a nationwide 13%. There are 2.5 job offerings for every 100 persons who are unemployed. Another problem is that transport (with the sole exception of the railway), telecommunications and public services are underdeveloped and, with the exception of the town of Miskolc (the centre of the county), telecommunications for example, are in a very bad condition and so is the road system.

The first task is to reduce heavy industry (it has already deteriorated anyway) and to develop totally new branches. This huge restructuring work has only one significant library base and supporter in the region: the Central Library of the University of Miskolc.

Before going into details about this, let me say a few words about the university and our role at the university.

From among the 80 or so Hungarian higher education institutions the University of Miskolc was the only one which had the words 'heavy industry' in its name as, until 1991, it had been called Technical University for Heavy Industry covering faculties of mining, metallurgical and mechanical engineering. In the middle of the 1970s the leaders of the university and, first of all, the rector Tibor Czibere, a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, realized that the university should be restructured; thus they had a foresight of 15 years. They made changes so that the university would become a real universitas: in 1981 the faculty of law, in 1990 the faculty of economics were set up; the faculty of arts has been being organized for two years and it is likely to be founded this year (there is no faculty at present but there are more than 600 students). Under these circumstances the library serves a university which is being transformed from a university of heavy industry to one of the humanities and social sciences; while, on the other hand, it also has its role supporting the modernization and restructuring of industrial technology.

These tasks are very difficult from both a professional and a financial point of view.

In accordance with my undertaken task I should like to deal with the library aspects of industrial phenomena. I cannot strive to give a full picture, I only have the opportunity to touch on a few characteristic areas.

1. Transport, telecommunications and public services

Compared with the western part of the country this sector is underdeveloped in the eastern region, which is a decisive obstacle to modernizing capital investments. Therefore in 1992 the government granted a bigger sum of money, in the form of 5-year-range special purpose credit, to promote the accelerated building up of the service networks which are of fundamental importance in the region. One can easily observe in the library the signs of efforts towards modernization. A lot of information is searched for, especially sub planning phase, in the following subject areas: tunnels, drainage, district heating, laying underground electric cables, bridge planning, safety of railroad crossings, garage and service station construction, etc.

2. Foreign patents

As a decisive proportion of Hungarian export is directed to the EEC countries, foreign patents are crucially important for the companies and the Miskolc University library is the only one in the northeastern region which can provide them. We have been DIN patent subscribers for a long time, a good number of which already have the label Die Europaische Norm, too. The same approach can also be observed with Hungarian patents. Regarding these two patent families the library is able to provide prompt services for the new entrepreneurs. The Hungarian Patent Office (Budapest) purchases a wide range of patents of EEC countries from which we can order copies for our entrepreneur clients through interlibrary loan.

3. Providing the texts of law statutes

In the new political climate of Hungary the legislative activities of the Parliament are very intensive. During the past 3 years (1990-1991-1992) Parliament has made 494 decisions: members have passed 262 acts and made 232 resolutions. New businessmen and entrepreneurs are, first of all, looking for law statutes concerning economic and business activities. It is well-known, though, that the language of jurisprudence is difficult for average and everyday people, so a lot of books are published which explain the legal subtleties of specific areas and help people to understand them.

Therefore the library also provides such monographs for the entrepreneurs, for example:

- 'The Shrewd Businessman. How to Make Big Business out of Your Small Enterprise.' Budapest, 1992.
- 'Privatization and Its Difficulties.' Budapest, 1992.
- 'I Am Going to Be a Private Entrepreneur. Manual for Beginners.' Budapest, 1990.
- New Venture Creation. Entrepreneurship in the 1990s. Boston, 1990.

4. Reference questions received from new entrepreneurs and private researchers include:

- Equipment suitable for small workshops making wire mesh
- How, and with what kind of equipment, to make bowden for motorcycles
- Bionics in architecture
- Effects on the human body of oil extracted from parsley seeds
- Russian patents for screws, bolts and nuts
- The bill of exchange as a kind of bond
- The role of pawnshops
- How slums come into being and what their characteristics are
- The role of the President of the Republic in 1946

5. Providing special literature for construction and planning

Among the problems troubling the library another phenomenon is the information need of construction planning. Earlier there were four independent planning companies in Miskolc with about 1,400 employees. All these companies had very well-selected special libraries, especially the one named ÉSZAKTERV which had a well-curated collection. These companies have ceased to exist and now their libraries remain without an owner. At the same time new limited companies have come into being in this sector which are not very strong yet, as there is a long-lasting depression concerning investments. The leading architects and construction experts of the town of Miskolc would like the university library to take over all the aforementioned libraries, thus ensuring that there will be no gap in the services. But as there is no such faculty at the university, neither is there any intention of creating one, the library cannot undertake this task and so is subject to a lot of criticism.

6. Unemployed library members (a category formerly unknown)

In the statistics about the professional groups to which our readers belong, a new element has appeared: the unemployed. Several age groups can be distinguished among them: there are the very young ones, those who are in their 20s, they have not even had the opportunity to have a job; there are people between 35 and 45 who are active and energetic but, for some reason, they have been pushed out of the labour market; and there is an older generation, above 45 or 50. It seems that there are many more unemployed people among the oldest group than the number appearing in the statistics, but a number of them try to hide it (they feel ashamed). This can be suspected from the fact that recently more and more engineers and economists come to the library, during the regular working hours, when they would have been at their workplaces if they had one. They read literature in the following areas: mostly technical literature, the second preference is economics and business, and then materials needed for foreign language acquisition. Two conclusions may be drawn from this: first, that there is a greater number of technical experts among the older agegroups and they strive to learn skills for a new job which is similar to their old one, so they need special attention from that part of the library; second, that it is time to study the group of the unemployed more deeply from the point of view of library services.

I have shared these ideas with you to make you aware of that what difficulties a technical university library, which formerly had worked smoothly from 1735, has been forced to face in the last one or two decades.