Some Problems of Collecting and Utilizing Foreign Journals in Polish Libraries

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Some problems of collecting and utilizing foreign journals in Polish libraries

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Abstract
Polish academic libraries suffer from a significant lack of foreign scientific journals. Funds assigned by the Ministry are insufficient. The central system of periodicals subscription also reveals many shortcomings. These problems should be solved through co-operation with the Central Academic Libraries. The Library of the Technical University of Wroclaw is one of the three Central Technical Libraries which undertake various actions in order to increase the level of services in the area of foreign scientific journals. Among others, a computer system, SPEC, has been elaborated to assist the subscription of foreign journals for the libraries of Poland.

1. Some problems of collecting and utilizing foreign journals in Polish libraries
There are approximately 5,000 libraries and information centres of various types, excluding public libraries, in Poland which collect scientific literature and references. Among them 225 are academic libraries (according to the statistics from 1987). Most of these libraries are located in higher education institutions (92), institutes of the Polish Academy of Science (81), and industrial-research institutes (29).

Scientific journals provide scientists with information necessary for the steady enrichment of their knowledge and for carrying out creative research work. For this reason journals constitute a very significant, and also frequently used, portion of the collection of every academic library. Therefore, academic libraries try to acquire those journals which will best satisfy the needs of their patrons. The demand for journals and the policy for their acquisition varies from discipline to discipline. While discussing the problem for supplying Polish academic libraries with journals, account must be taken of the fact that journals are divided into Polish periodicals (approximately 2,200 titles), periodicals published in the Eastern Bloc countries (6,000 titles) and periodicals published in the Western countries (approximately 8,500 titles).

Such a division results mainly from economic conditions. Generally, academic libraries have sufficient money for Polish journals and for journals...
from the Eastern Bloc countries. Problems dealt with in the next part of this paper refer to Western journals which have the common feature that they are available in hard currencies only. Economic problems, and particularly a deep economic crisis at the beginning of the 1980s in Poland, imposed certain import restrictions on all spheres of the economy, including the purchase of journals for hard currencies. It is thus extremely important to make a proper use of every single dollar, that is to purchase the most important titles in the appropriate number of copies, and also to create conditions in which any number of readers will have an unlimited access to any of them. These requirements can be realized by such actions as: organization of the central system of journal purchase; creation of a network of central libraries; and supplying the libraries with reprographic devices.

2. Organization of journal purchases

The purchase of all scientific journals from the capitalist countries is governed by the Ministry of National Education. The journals are directed to the academic libraries as well as to other types of libraries and information centres, approximately 550 customers in Poland. During the annual action of renewing subscriptions, every library supplies the list of titles which it would like to receive in the following year. The orders are not sent directly to the Ministry but to the co-ordinators of the second level, of which there is a total of 40 in Poland. A library may make changes in the list of journals previously subscribed to, provided, however, that these changes will not cause any increase in the amount spent on journal purchases assigned to the library. Then the co-ordinators of the second level present a summarized specification to the Ministry where the final subscription plan is worked out. This plan takes into consideration libraries’ requirements, nevertheless certain amendments must often be introduced. These amendments result mainly from the shortage of money, when the funds approved by the government are insufficient for buying all the journals needed. The amendments are introduced in consultation with the co-ordinators of the second level and directly with the libraries in question and they include dropping some titles, changing titles, or reducing the numbers of copies of some journals.

Apart from the money provided by the government, so-called central funds, some institutions may assign some foreign currency for the purchase of journals for their libraries. These titles are also included in the general purchasing plan but the Ministry has no right to make cancellations or amendments. Institutions’ own funds constitute approximately 15% of the total sum assigned annually for the purchase of journals. The draft of the subscription plan is then presented to the experts’ committee acting as the Ministry of National Education. The committee calls in specialists, mainly academic professors, representing various fields of science and technology. The approval of the Committee is an indispensable condition for the final acceptance of the subscription plan by the Minister.
The Minister has chosen the two biggest technical libraries, the Library of the Warsaw Technical University and the Library of the Technical University of Wroclaw, to implement all the processes connected with the operation of the subscription plan. Organization of the purchase, import, and distribution of journals according to the plan approved by the Ministry rests with two specialized institutions, enterprise Prasa, Książka 'Ruch' and the Foreign Trade Office ‘Ars Polona’. Some significant disturbances in the whole system of foreign scientific journal import to Poland have been observed for a few years. There are two main reasons for this situation. The first is that the Ministry has been given insufficient funds to ensure a smooth import of journals at the level requested by the libraries. This leads to the cancellation of many titles which have been subscribed to hitherto and also to a considerable reduction in the number of copies bought. In this situation it is very difficult to introduce any new valuable titles into the purchase plan. The second reason is the fact that the sums allotted by the government for the purchase of foreign journals are delivered very irregularly to the Ministry. It hinders making subscriptions, breaks the regularity of supplying individual journal parts and often causes total inhibition of the transmission of some of the titles. Financial losses occur as the result of interest payment on loans obtained for the part of the purchase from foreign agencies.

The consequences of the situation presented above are extremely disadvantageous for library users who are interested in access to the latest scientific literature. Numerous complaints are written both to the libraries and the Ministry. It is essential to introduce some changes, which, even with the financial plan, will make it possible to simplify significantly and accelerate the whole procedure of purchase. In order to improve the situation in the area of collecting and utilizing foreign scientific journals, it is very important to undertake various organizational actions regarding Central Academic Libraries.

3. Central Academic Libraries

The system SINTO (System of Scientific, Technical, and Organizational Information) has been established in Poland for a few years. Its aim is to make the processes connected with collecting, compiling, and rendering information and sources accessible more efficient. SINTO integrates the activities of local information centres, libraries, and archives. Specialist systems, branch-department systems, and central libraries are fundamental elements of the functional structure of SINTO.

Specialist systems, the total number to be 11, are created according to the types of information sources, e.g.: patent specification, standards. Branch department systems, the total number to be 19, are formed for defined fields of the economy, e.g. food industry, building industry, and chemical industry.

The task of central libraries is to collect, according to the specialization plan obligatory in SINTO, compile, render accessible, and record, national and foreign library materials, and to compile central branch catalogues. Moreover,
central libraries provide information for the specialist and branch-department systems. There are 19 central libraries functioning at present in Poland, including three technical libraries, which are responsible for collecting the resources for definite branches of science and technology. Each central library organizes the network of co-operating libraries, consisting of academic libraries which specialize in collecting material in the subject for which the central library is responsible.

The main effort of central libraries concentrates now on creating optimum conditions for collecting and utilizing scientific journals, particularly those considered the most important and bought for hard currencies. Within the network of co-operating central libraries the principles for collecting volumes are determined and, what is more important, branch catalogues of journals collected by all network libraries are compiled in the central libraries. This form of co-operation is particularly important in relation to the poor central catalogues produced by the National Library in Warsaw.

So far, central libraries have not managed to change the functioning of the national system of subscription and purchase of foreign journals. The changes envisaged would assign the central libraries the position, and the role, of a co-ordinator of the second level in the place of the present 40 co-ordinators drawn from different branches and departments. The postulate of preference in covering the expenses of central library activities and also the increase of funds for library materials and first of all for the purchase of foreign scientific journals are also connected with the changes.

4. The Main Library and the Scientific Technical Information Centre of the Technical University of Wroclaw (BGiOINT)

The Main Library and the Scientific Technical Information Centre of the Technical University of Wroclaw is one of the three central technical libraries (CBT) appointed in SINTO. According to the specialization plan the Library is responsible for collecting the volumes in the fields of: among others, electronics, electrotechnics, electricity, power engineering, thermodynamics, cybernetics, automatics, telecommunications and communications. 23 libraries and information centres all over the country constitute the library network.

In the library collection there are over 800,000 volumes. Nearly 2,500 journals are subscribed to including approximately 800 journals imported from the capitalist countries. The Library renders services to more than 15,000 users, 7,500 students and 2,500 research workers of the Technical University of Wroclaw, and students and workers of the other Higher Institutions of Wroclaw, the total number of the institutions being 11.

BGiOINT specializes in designing and exploiting library and information computer systems. The first and the biggest SDI system in Poland, based on foreign databases INSPEC, CAS, PASCAL, ISMEC, SCI, INIS, AGRIS, COMPENDEX, ASSISTENT, and SEBAN, was started here in 1974. At present more than 2,000 users, from the whole country, use the system, in which approximately 5,000 search profiles have been drawn up.
The cataloguing of all the library volumes was automated more than 10 years ago. The computer creates and prints all catalogue cards and a database is also created for future searches in the public access catalogue. The information about the research work carried out at the Technical University of Wroclaw is stored in the database (SEBAN) which is formed in the library; here, about 65,000 records comprising publication descriptions, reports, and other analyses conducted by the workers of the Technical University after 1969 are stored in the database.

The problem of collecting and utilizing scientific journals enjoys special interest in the library of the Technical University. It was just here where the idea of working out the computer system (SPEC) to assist the subscription coordination of scientific journals from capitalist countries originated. The system is continuously being perfected, and it provides various analytical materials which make it easier for the Ministry to make decisions as far as journals purchase is concerned. Supplying libraries in Poland, including the libraries at the Technical University of Wroclaw, with journals is not satisfactory. This fact became even more apparent with the spread of SDI services in the country: accessibility for online searches from the world databanks is still very limited because of some technical and financial reasons. The Library at the Technical University of Wroclaw was inundated with requests to make references available, the information of which is transmitted by means of SDI prints. The limited possibilities of purchasing new journals made the Library conduct intensive searches for different ways of getting necessary journals. The number of foreign libraries with which the exchange of scientific literature is conducted has increased, agreements for co-operation have been signed with 12 foreign libraries, new copiers have been bought for the Library (nevertheless their number is still insufficient), and the system of journal microfilming was introduced. All the journals from capitalist countries, collected at the Technical University of Wroclaw, are microfilmed. Because of these improvements, making copies became more efficient, which is particularly important in the case of orders sent from outside Wroclaw.

5. Recapitulation

Collection and proper utilization of foreign scientific journals is one of the most important and urgent problems to be solved in Polish academic libraries. The main difficulties are connected with obtaining appropriate funds for covering the purchase expenses. The nation-wide system of journal subscription, taking into consideration the place and the role of central libraries, needs significant changes. Also, a radical improvement in providing libraries with photocopiers is necessary, since without them the provision of a proper service to the library users is impossible.

Acronyms

BGiOINT Biblioteka Główna i Ośrodek Informacji Naukowo-Technicznej (Main Library and Scientific Technical Information Centre)
Henryk Szarski graduated from the Technical University of Wroclaw in 1972. Since then he has worked in the Main Library and Scientific Information Centre of the Technical University of Wroclaw on various posts. He received his Doctor’s degree in 1979. Since 1984 he has been Director of the Main Library and Scientific Information Centre of the Technical University of Wroclaw.