GÖRÜŞLER / *OPINION PAPERS*

Strategic Issues in Electronic Librarianship[*]

Elektronik Kütüphanecilikte Stratejik Konular

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Abstract

All of us working in Turkish libraries at the start of the 3rd millennium are very much aware that we are engaged in an "uphill struggle" in nearly every aspect of our work. Technology continues to evolve at a pace so rapid we can barely stay abreast of information disseminated about it, let alone harness it to our advantage and, more importantly, to the benefit of our patrons. Even the issues we discuss this year in various meetings on digital librarianship will change before the year is out. Yet our mission will remain essentially unchanged, and we must fulfill it, meeting myriad needs with limited means. Using Koç University Library as a case in point, this paper identifies strategic issues facing Turkish libraries today and relates information about some interesting initiatives being taken by our American and British colleagues in dealing with them. Key issues are: redefining collection development, acquiring the right mix of resources, deciding what to save and how to preserve it, and creating viable mechanisms for cooperative endeavors.

***Keywords:** Electronic librarianship*

Öz

Üçüncü binyılın başında Türk kütüphanelerinde çalışanlar olarak, yaptığımız işin hemen hemen her yönüyle "zorlu bir mücadele" verdiğimizin bilincindeyiz. Teknoloji öyle hızlı gelişmeye devam ediyor ki, bırakınız teknolojiyi kendi avantajımıza –daha da önemlisi kullanıcılarımızın yararına- kullanmayı, teknoloji hakkında yayımlanan bilgilerle bile ancak başa çıkabiliyoruz. Bu yıl çeşitli toplantılarda tartıştığımız dijital kütüphanecilikle ilgili konular bile yıl bitmeden değişecektir. Ama misyonumuz temelde değişmeyecektir. Bu misyonu binlerce gereksinimi sınırlı olanaklarla karşılayarak gerçekleştirmek zorundayız. Bu makalede, Koç Üniversitesi Kütüphanesi örneği kullanılarak, günümüzde Türk kütüphanelerinin karşı karşıya olduğu stratejik sorunlar belirlenmekte ve bu sorunların çözümü için Amerikan ve İngiliz meslektaşlarımızca başlatılan bazı ilginç girişimler hakkında bilgi verilmektedir. Derme geliştirmenin yeniden tanımlanması, kaynakların dengeli olarak sağlanması, neyin saklanacağına ve nasıl korunacağına karar verilmesi ve işbirliği girişimleri için uygulanabilir mekanizmaların yaratılması temel sorunlardır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Elektronik kütüphanecilik

Introduction

All of us working in Turkish libraries at the start of the 3rd millennium are very much aware that we are engaged in an "uphill struggle" in nearly every aspect of our work. Technology is evolving at a pace so rapid we can barely stay abreast of the information disseminated about it, let alone harness it to our advantage and, more importantly, to the benefit of our patrons. About the only thing that changes more rapidly than emerging technologies is the value of the Turkish lira!

Even issues we discuss this year in various meetings on digital librarianship will change before the year is out. Yet our mission remains unchanged: to enable our users to find information that is relevant to their need *at the time they need it.* To do that, we must not simply *find* but, indeed, we must *create* solutions to our problem of meeting myriad demands with limited means.

Founded in August 1993, Koç University Library is still in an early stage of development. We are not actively engaged in digitizing our collections, but nearly all patron information searches are computer-based, and certainly all of our internal operations are, except for serials maintenance. That, too, soon will be automated with the implementation of a new library system.

Ours is actually a "hybrid" library, a term now in common usage among our American and British colleagues to describe collections that are a mixture of materials in various formats. In the current year, more than half of our capital budget will be spent on electronic media. From other budget heads, the University also makes substantial investments in the requisite hardware and software to sustain our automated operations and services.

Ultimately, no library can afford to own and store everything its patrons may want to use at one time or another, and I personally am not wed to the idea of ownership. However, I am deeply committed to providing our Library's patrons with access to as many resources as possible, so that they can make informed choices of reading materials in their quest for knowledge and in their endeavors to extend the boundaries of their disciplines through creative research.

Though Koç University Library is small and still quite young, it shares many of the same dilemmas of its larger and older sister libraries in Turkey and, indeed, all over the world. We all face the problems of inadequate space to house our burgeoning collections and the difficulty in securing authorizations to increase staff numbers and salaries. We grapple with the critical need for continuing education for our professional staff, to enable them to stay abreast of new ideas in managing information resources and to gain necessary skills in utilizing emerging technologies. In short, we are in fierce competition with other departments of our parent institutions or funding bodies for sufficient money to finance current levels of investment in our material, human and technical resources, let alone to further develop and expand them.

In the case of Koç University Library, the challenges are of rather immense proportions. For various reasons, our budget has steadily declined

from year to year. For example, the year 2000 book budget is only 25% of the 1996 authorization. Given the 5-7% annual inflationary increases in foreign book prices, we have actually incurred a loss of 81% of the purchasing power we had just four years ago.

Likewise, foreign journal subscriptions are subject to annual inflationary pressures. If we were maintaining the print journal subscriptions we had four years ago, we would have had to spend 69% more on them this year than we did in 1996. However, the total of our combined authorizations for serials, CD-ROMs and audio-visual materials is just 14% more this year than in 1996. In order to subscribe to electronic journals and online databases, we have reduced our expenditures for print journal subscriptions by 76% and for CD-ROMs and audio-visual materials by 86%.

Obviously, these are serious statistics; but I do not yet see them as a cause for alarm or a reason to quit my job in despair. Rather, I see them as tools to help my staff and I, in consultation with our Library Advisory Committee, take purposeful decisions related to four strategic issues. They are:

- redefining our collection development policy;
- acquiring the right mix of resources;
- deciding what to save and how to preserve it; and
- creating viable mechanisms for cooperative endeavors with other Turkish libraries.

Redefining Collection Development

When I assumed my position at Koç University in October 1995, one of the first tasks the University President assigned me was to craft the Library's collection development policy. Though relatively comprehensive, it is already outdated. It sets parameters for our acquisition of books and print journals, as well as audiovisual materials and CD-ROMs. However, there is no mention of online databases, let alone electronic journals. Essentially, it is geared to the three line items in our acquisitions budget, which continue to be specified as books, periodicals and CD-ROMs.

Also, at the time I drafted that policy statement, the University itself was at a nascent stage of development and suffered with frequent equipment

failures and unpredictable electrical outages. So, in my estimation, it was premature to invest heavily in electronic source materials.

By 1997, the information technology (IT) infrastructure stabilized and was capable of supporting a CD-ROM local area network (LAN) on the campus network. By 1998, we had 72 CD-ROMs on the LAN, and in 1999, the library server's storage capacity was increased from 20 gigabyte (GB) to 40 GB. At the same time, we cancelled CD-ROMs for which our usage statistics were very low and reduced the number of databases maintained on the LAN to just 21. Still, we ran out of memory space on the server before the end of last year.

1999 also marked the first year that we subscribed to online databases; and by mid-year the usage statistics for these resources were remarkably high. Concomitantly, the usage statistics for all CD-ROM databases dropped even further, and the comparative costs between Web-based resources and those on our CD-ROM network were dramatically different. For example, the average cost per search made by our patrons on the EbscoHost databases to which we subscribed was only 23 cents. On Academic Search Elite, it was only 15 cents. In contrast to this, the average cost per search on all CD-ROMs was $15 and was as high as $25 on ISI's Science Citation Index.

Based on this data, we made the strategic decision to shift towards greater reliance on Web-based resources and to gradually phase out our investment in CD-ROMs. We now are maintaining only seven CD-ROM databases, compared with the 72 of just two years ago; and we are subscribing to 30 online databases, with an additional 18 subscriptions to individual e-journals, whereas two years ago we had none.

Needless to say, my staff are now in the midst of producing an entirely new version of our collection development policy. It will be based in part on a study undertaken in late 1998 by the Library Advisory Committee. It will also take into account the reality of our budget constraints, since that situation will not change appreciably, at least in terms of the percentage of the University's funds that will be invested in the Library's resources in coming years. Thus, the policy necessarily must be predicated on the underlying theme of access to information versus ownership. It also must lay the foundation for investing our limited funds in the right mix of resources.

Acquiring the Right Mix of Resources

In spite of the fact that our patrons' usage of online databases compelled us to make such a rapid move to electronic media, we are facing great resistance to the cancellation of print journal subscriptions. Interestingly, this is true in the case even of faculty members who have sophisticated database search skills and whose research specialties are in the disciplines for which all the primary journals are now available online.

They are equally resistant to our reducing book purchases, in order to help finance the costs of subscribing to online databases. In this regard, our 1999 circulation data is quite interesting. Statistically, each of our patrons read an average of 100 books last year, and one out of every two books on the shelf was charged out at least once. That is a very high count, given that students can keep books for a total of 60 days and faculty can keep them for as long as 6 months. Even more interesting is the fact that there is very little difference in the circulation statistics by discipline. The percentage of books circulated was 48-50%, whether classed in the physical sciences, social sciences, or arts and humanities.

In sum, the greatest challenge my staff and I now face is striking the balance between investments in print and electronic resources and acquiring the right mix of resources to meet the information needs of our users. Frankly, at the moment, I do not know what the right mix is. I do not have a crystal ball to predict what we may need just 2-3 years from now, let alone further down the road. What I do know is that my library cannot afford the redundant costs of subscribing to both the print and electronic versions of the same journal titles. Our patrons rarely come now to the Library to use bound volumes of titles for which they can retrieve desired articles from electronic copies at the click of a button. When shipping, processing and binding costs are added to the print subscription rates, the current situation of maintaining duplicate subscriptions becomes economically unsustainable.

The idea of electronic books was being discussed as early as the mid-1970's, when I was employed in the Library of Congress. It has taken a good while for technology to catch up with this idea; but nowadays, electronic books

can be read on palm-sized computers, and soon they will be viewable on cellular phones. Given the phenomenal spread of cell phones, it is likely to be the "rage" among upwardly mobile Turks before our libraries are ready for it.

While this will have a significant impact on public libraries in the near future, I believe it will have a rather limited impact on research libraries for some time to come. It will be physically discomforting to read lengthy scholarly books from a computer screen. Taking printouts of books will be time-consuming and costly for the user and negates the very reason to do away with book collections in the first place. Nonetheless, it behooves us to plan now for this eventuality. Already, the last print editions of a number of key reference materials, such as the Encyclopaedia Britannica, are on our shelves, and future editions are only going to be available in digital format.

Similar changes are happening with audiovisual materials. Our Library still buys videocassettes in VHS format, as requested by faculty who teach foreign language and performing arts courses; but digital video technology is so advanced that VHS cassettes will soon be obsolete. So, this may be the last year we will be buying them; and in the not too distant future, when I cannot get our video equipment repaired or replaced, I will have to grapple with yet another collection disposal issue.

Throughout the centuries, libraries have been the storehouses of mankind's recorded knowledge. Just because technology affords wider and more rapid access to information does not mean that we simply should throw away everything we have acquired. To the contrary, in today's world, we have an even more vital role in the realm of knowledge management – something we librarians have been doing for a very long time that is now a new "catch phrase" in business and industry. The key to playing our role well is deciding what to save and how to preserve it.

Deciding What to Save and How to Preserve It

Coming back to circulation statistics, only 12% of the bound periodical volumes in our Library circulated in 1999. Of course, these materials are heavy and cumbersome to use. So, they most often are consulted in the Library,

with patrons simply photocopying desired articles rather than checking the volumes out to take home or back to their offices to study.

I talked about various costs earlier, but in terms of space utilization as well, preserving print volumes of redundant journal titles that are unlikely ever to be touched in future makes little sense. The biggest capital cost of libraries everywhere today – and certainly in Istanbul – is the value of the real estate they occupy. Whether constructing new library buildings or renting auxiliary warehouse space, the long-term investment in library collections is enormous.

If Koç University Library continues to bind and shelve the print journals for which we presently maintain subscriptions, we will exhaust the shelf capacity of our new building by 2005 at the latest, and we have not moved into it yet! On the other hand, if we cancel print subscriptions and weed out backsets of titles available in PDF format in our online databases, we will have shelf space for as many as 300,000 scholarly books. At our year 2000 book acquisition rate, we will not reach that number until about 2035.

Given these projections, I have proposed to our Library Advisory Committee that we adopt a policy to enable the Library to start weeding our permanent collections now and donate the excess journal volumes to other libraries, particularly to those damaged in last year's earthquake. Since we will have enough shelf space for the next 5 years, the Committee is more inclined to postpone doing so until we run out of space and are forced to seek an alternative. Moreover, their preferred alternative is to rent auxiliary storage space in a warehouse, as so many libraries in Europe and North America have done for many decades.

I find it very difficult to justify the costs of preserving obsolete collections, whether they are to be shelved in the central Library or stored in an off-site warehouse. I define obsolete collections as outdated textbooks and duplicate copies of any book no longer in high demand, as well as bound volumes of print journals that now are accessible in PDF format on the Internet. Just the costs of warehousing them include the monthly rental fee for the space, salaries for additional staff to maintain the storage deport, and shuttle services to transport materials on demand between the warehouse and the campus.

Leaving the issue of warehousing aside, there are other substantial costs to consider, particularly in regard to maintaining print collections of digitized

journals. First is the redundant cost of the subscriptions. Second is the handling cost. Since 1993, Koç University Library has spent more than $100,000 on the shipping, processing and binding of journals. By 2005, we will have spent about a quarter of a million dollars for this purpose, and that is before incurring any cost for active or auxiliary storage. Surely, we should continue to acquire and preserve print journals that are not in PDF format in our online databases; but it would be more productive as well as cost-effective to invest the savings of unnecessary handling costs into other electronic resources or more good books.

Whatever we are going to save and preserve must be purposefully decided, and I think it should be decided in collaboration with other libraries. Since none of us has enough funds, manpower or space to acquire and preserve everything, we simply must find effective ways to cooperate with one another.

In this regard, I would like to share with you some of the initiatives being undertaken by our international colleagues.

Creating Viable Mechanisms for Cooperative Endeavors

In February of this year, I attended a British Council seminar that dealt with strategic, policy, and management issues related to electronic libraries. It was a week-long residential conference, conducted at Loughborough University and attended by 45 senior administrators of public and research libraries from 30 countries.

Substantively relevant and highly interactive, it was one of the most productive weeks I have ever spent with library colleagues. For 5 days, we started our discussions over breakfast at 7:30 each morning and continued them until the pub closed each night at 11:00. What stimulated all of us to engage in such long discussions was the succession of fascinating presentations on what is being accomplished in British libraries through cooperative projects. Many of the projects involve librarians working together with booksellers, subscription agents, university computing centers, and commercial technology firms. A senior official from the National Science Foundation in Washington, D.C., also spoke about similar initiatives being undertaken in the United States.

We discussed such wide-ranging issues as:

- digital library research;
- the content of the electronic library;
- the move from holdings to access and related resourcing issues;
- copyright laws and site licensing;
- the roles of intermediaries – publishers, vendors, and library staff;
- digitization and the preservation and archiving of digital materials;
- metadata – the new term for the data found on catalog cards;
- costing and pricing electronic resources and services;
- managing technological and cultural change; and
- the impact on users of the "explosion" of information in electronic media.

British librarianship is in a very dynamic state at the moment, because Prime Minister Blair has taken a personal interest in libraries as one of the pillars of the "learning society." Under his leadership, the British government has provided substantial funding for various electronic library projects through the UK Library Information Commission and the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) of the UK Higher Education Council.

The Joint Information Systems Committee is in the process of creating the Distributed National Electronic Resource (DNER). When completed, DNER will be a super multimedia network in which libraries, archives, and museums will serve as resource providers. Certain libraries will be designated as the repositories of selected print collections for the benefit of all of the consortia partners. All libraries will benefit from national negotiations with publishers and subscriptions agents for access to various electronic media. Negotiations are based on a national electronic site license, which was developed in close consultation with the library community. Called NESLI (the National Electronic Site Licensing Initiative), it is meant to become a self-financing commercial model within three years. To that end, JISC appointed a Managing Agent to negotiate with publishers, handle subscriptions, create linkages to electronic journals, and provide a help desk to participating libraries. Presently, the Managing Agent is a consortium of Swets & Zeitlinger and Manchester Computing of the University of Manchester. However, participation in the NESLI project is voluntary, and libraries are perfectly free to make their own arrangements directly with publishers or with other subscription agents, as they deem suitable to their own organizations.

Essentially, the national electronic site license developed by JISC conforms to international copyright conventions but does so in a way that favors libraries and negates the adverse impact of terms otherwise imposed on them by the publishers and aggregator services. It also encourages publishers to offer electronic subscriptions separately from print subscriptions, so that libraries trying to stretch limited financial resources are not burdened with the cost of maintaining redundant subscriptions and can instead provide patrons with access to more titles.

In principle, the aim of the National Academic Network and Information Center (ULAKBIM) is similar to that of DNER, except that DNER serves all libraries and other information centers, not just university libraries. However, in Turkey, we have not even talked about the need for a national electronic site license, and the terms governing the consortia created in late 1999 were dictated entirely by the producers or vendors. Though we saved some costs, we did not get particularly favorable terms in other respects. For that reason, not all participants are fully satisfied, and these consortia may not survive.

In that regard, I found the presentation made by Hazel Woodward, University Librarian at Cranfield University, to be particularly interesting. Among other things, she talked about CURL, the Consortium of University and Research Libraries. CURL is comprised of the chief administrators of the member libraries. As the decision-makers in their institutions, they meet periodically to derive consensus on key issues, raise funds, set guidelines for projects they decide to undertake, and designate representatives to negotiate on behalf of the group in certain situations. CURL is one of the founding members of ICOLC, the International Coalition of Library Consortia, which is a fairly new but rapidly growing movement among North American and European library consortia. As its name implies, ICOLC aims to play a central role in the governance of global library cooperation.

Conclusion

I made my first visit to Turkish libraries 20 years ago. Throughout the years since then, and especially in the five years that I have been the director of a

Turkish library, I have participated in many seminars and personal discussions with Turkish colleagues on the topic of library cooperation. Sadly, I must say that I find little tangible evidence of any active cooperation in practice, except for lending books to one another's libraries on interlibrary loan. In fact, it seems to me there is more competition than cooperation and a preoccupation with the idea of trying to have the biggest and the best library. "Best" is a relative term, and "big" does not mean "good."

My aspiration for Koç University Library is not for it to be the best or the biggest library in Turkey. In other words, my staff and I are not trying to compete with colleagues in any other library. However, we are endeavoring to establish a *fine* library that caters effectively to the pursuit of knowledge and research by Koç University faculty and students in the first instance, and also by other scholars in Turkey and elsewhere. This aspiration can never be realized, if my staff and I pursue it on our own; nor can our engaging in pointless competition with colleagues in other libraries fulfill it. It can only be met through fruitful collaborative endeavor from which all of us and all of our patrons can benefit.

I am grappling with the same issues and seeking solutions to the same problems you are facing. For that reason, I appeal to you to join me in working towards a framework for genuine cooperation, replicating successful endeavors like CURL, DNER, and NESLI but tailoring them to suit the needs of Turkish libraries. I sincerely hope that, in the foreseeable future, we will have a properly constituted and viable Turkish consortium that can actively join in the work of ICOLC.