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Association “Information Consortium of Kazakhstan Libraries” - a possibility of consolidation of information resources within the country

Kama G. Urmurzina

President

Information Consortium of Kazakhstan Libraries

Abstract:

Today the Republic of Kazakhstan is beginning its journey to the day when it will provide wide, public, unlimited access of users to world information resources.

In September, 2001 was created a new public association based on democratic management methods and entitled as “The Association for Cooperation with International, State and Other Organizations “Information Consortium of Kazakhstan Libraries” The initiator of the Consortium in question was the Republican Scientific and Technical Library joined by the Central Scientific Library.

The purpose of the Consortium lies in ensuring free, equal access of users of libraries to integrated information resources of Kazakhstan and foreign countries using modern computer technologies, telecommunication facilities and international Internet network.

In Kazakhstan eight million readers use the book collections funds of 10,000 libraries accountable to various ministries and working, as a rule, isolated from the libraries of other specialties.

The Republic has no Law “On Library Business” that is to unite all libraries sharing common aims and challenges and outline the obligations of the state towards libraries and the responsibilities of founders for their financial and technical support.

There is no uniform state program for automation of libraries. Hence, a changeover from traditional technologies to computers varies from region to region.

Today the Republic is beginning its journey to the day when it will provide wide, public, unlimited access of users to world information resources. Although it is obvious that it is libraries that will become information support in all fields of human activity, including economy, business, science, education, culture.

Now the libraries are enjoying a differing financial support and care of the founders of the libraries’ needs.

This is the reason why the libraries have a varied level of development, specifically regarding automation and introduction of new information technologies. This is a general picture of the state of library business in the republic.

However, the republic has thriving large well-equipped libraries. Among them is the Republican Scientific and Technical Library of Kazakhstan (RSTL) founded in 1960. It runs 12 affiliates located many hundreds of kilometers from Almaty in the regional centres. The book collection of the library comprises 40 million documents, including normative and patent documentation, firms’ equipment and machinery catalogues, dissertations. The library serves 55,000 readers and over 4,000 enterprises and organizations and is fully automated. All of its subdivisions have access to the Internet. The library sets off the lack of the republic’s budget subsidies by non-budget earnings for paid services, sponsorship support and grants. The library’s non-budget earnings account for 39% of which 30% is paid services.

Aware of the needs of the republic’s library network, RSTL specialists came to conclusion that every single library will never succeed on its own.

The question “How can a vicious circle of hardship be torn up and inertness be overcome?” came up with the two answers: one can wait until the state will pay attention to a disaster of the libraries and authorities will take an initiative from above or the libraries will do as from below. Apparently, it is the second answer that suggests the real success in the given situation as public organizations only are capable of overcoming difficulties efficiently and solving complex corporate issues with concerted efforts of the library community.

However, there must be someone to be courageous enough to take the lead.

The initiator of the Consortium in question was the Republican Scientific and Technical Library joined by the Central Scientific Library. The two are accountable to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. They were inspired with other regional interdepartmental consortia worldwide that successfully solve library problems without receiving the governments’ subsidies. The example was given by the world’s largest information consortium created by the Institute of Open Society, Budapest to unite 39 countries as the participants of the Electronic Information for Libraries Program. Thus, we came to be convinced that it is necessary to create a similar organization of much smaller size.

In September, 2001 Almaty hosted a general meeting of the founders of a new public association based on democratic management methods and entitled as “The Association for Cooperation with International, State and Other Organizations “Information Consortium of Kazakhstan Libraries” (hereinafter as the Consortium).

In November, 2001 it underwent a state registration. Its Charter stated that members of the Consortium must be legal entities engaged in implementing the aims of the Consortium. The members are

libraries, information and bibliographic institutions; as well as any organizations and institutions which have libraries or promote informatisation of libraries.

The senior body of management of the new organization is the General meeting of members of the Consortium. It handles the adoption of the Charter, the making of changes and additions to it; the description of basic activities; the endorsement of the size and the order of paying annual membership fees and contributions etc. The General meeting selects President, a Council and a Revision Committee.

The Council is an executive organ that outlines the priorities of projects and programs of the Consortium, handles membership issues and conducts other current operations.

Administrative, organizational and accounting activities are carried out by the executive director and an accountant.

The Charter determines the terms of powers of elected executives and employees.

All organizational issues were efficiently solved at a general meeting of members of the Consortium in March, 2002 attended by 43 representatives from 38 libraries that became the first members of the organization. They were actively involved in discussing the aims and challenges facing the new association and they way they can be implemented.

The purpose of the Consortium lies in ensuring free, equal access of users of libraries to integrated information resources of Kazakhstan and foreign countries using modern computer technologies, telecommunication facilities and international Internet network.

The primary goals are:

1. Sharing the costs of the Consortium created by the Institute Open Society in Budapest that provides access to text-through databases;
2. Searching for additional non-budget funds for the achievement of set goals;
3. Creating a nationwide service of electronic delivery of documents (EDD);
4. Assisting in professional development of library workers in Kazakhstan;
5. Implementing cooperation with international organizations, Kazakhstan state bodies, establishments, public organizations for the achievement of set goals; participating in the international programs and forums;
6. Publishing;
7. Development of other innovational processes for the organization of access to scientific and production editions;
8. Assisting in creating a single nationwide information venue;
9. Carrying out other activities that do not contradict to the laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

There were quite a number of objectives set out. They were divided in pressing (six objectives that are being achieved) and far-fetched.

The first members of the Consortium were 38 libraries from all the regions of Kazakhstan. They are 18 libraries of high schools, 13 scientific and technical libraries, four regional general scientific libraries and three other libraries.

They embarked on achieving the objective specified in the aforementioned clause 1 and joined the consortium created by the Institute of Open Society that provided access to text-through databases. The libraries enjoy the right of access to EBSCO databases in compliance with the program “The Electronic

Information for Libraries". Interest in a worldwide circulation of documents is on the rise day by day. The concept of organizing access to Russian electronic resources and databases for science and engineering has become attractive in the framework of the eIFL-project.

The libraries of the consortium have to pay considerable fees for access to databases but the libraries cannot provide them from their own budget.

Hence, the financial issue arising from the search of additional non-budget funds for the achievement of set objectives has proved the most pressing.

According to the Charter, the operation activity of the Consortium is carried financed with membership fees and contributions, grants and sponsorship, other financing sources that are allowed by the laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

However, it is clear that membership fees will unlikely make it possible to solve even the most simple issues. Hence, external funds are required and in this case a public organization rather than an individual library has more chances to secure them. RSTL undertook to provide a security and develop projects for securing funds to pay for access to databases.

RESTL developed and submitted projects to an information service of the U.S. Embassy, Soros-Kazakhstan Foundation and Eurasia. The two first organizations provided USD 20,000 for the projects. The latter is under consideration. Under the favorable coincidence of circumstances this year payments for the services of EBSCO will be made with grants. At the same time, the members of the Consortium focus on investing in the programs of the eIFL-project and identifying additional funds at regional levels.

Any library of Kazakhstan as a member of the Consortium can enjoy an opportunity of joining the aforementioned programs and new endeavors.

The third issue is creating a service for electronic delivery of documents in order to deliver copies of texts to remote users. But it is still under consideration. A service has been initiated practically in a number of local library systems. The mission of the Consortium is to generalize accumulated experience, encourage, first of all, the largest libraries to take an initiative and, finally, create an EDD service that will provide interactions in the republic, accept uncompleted orders and continue the search of documents in all libraries of Kazakhstan and beyond.

The solution to the issue No. 4 that lies in the assistance of professional development of library employees came initially from RESTL that created a Centre for professional development of library workers in Kazakhstan. From July 2000, when the Centre began its operation up to December 31, 2001 363 library workers of Kazakhstan, Kirghizia and Tajikistan have been trained at training seminars. They are the representatives of libraries of all departments and types: National libraries of the three countries, regional scientific libraries, industry-based libraries, libraries for youth, children, high school, blind and visually impaired citizens, head libraries of the Central library systems and affiliated public libraries.

The topics of training seminars are relevant and appealing to each attendee regardless of specific features of the library in which he/she works. The topics are Marketing research in libraries, Staffing management, Partnership in the search of an effective development strategy, Internet resources management, Advertising in libraries: theory, methodology, practice, Business-plan in libraries and others.

Part of costs of the Centre was paid with grants of the foundations of Eurasia and Institute of Open Society in Budapest which gave a chance cash-stripped library workers from the most remote regions of Kazakhstan and Kirghizia to be trained and upgrade their qualification.

Regional centres are being created that will surely provide support to libraries of other departments, members of the Consortium.

The frequency of varied training events depends on the funds of the Consortium.

Today's strategy is as follows.

The Centre for professional development of libraries in Kazakhstan will set the priority for training member libraries of the Consortium at training seminars unless otherwise specified by a grant issuer.

In January, seven libraries in Almaty were proposed to attend three-month English language courses free of charge. The libraries sent ten people for the courses financed by the Institute of Open Society in Budapest.

In case the Centre renders paid services an entrance fee for members of the Consortium will be considerably less. If funds are available the Consortium will carry out events for their members.

The primary events were training seminars for the use of EBSCO databases. The Creation of the Republic's Corporate Library Systems seminar was held with the participation of a representative of the Lithuanian national library. He presented the program considering the issues relevant for Kazakhstan libraries.

It is planned to hold the following seminars: Lobbying the interests of libraries at state and regional levels and The State information infrastructure (devoted to access to documents in the regions) which is new for Kazakhstan libraries. The two events will take place in five cities of Kazakhstan. A U.S. speaker has been invited to hold them. The Information Service of the U.S. Embassy agreed to pay all the relevant costs for his/her trip.

The issue No. 5 is to solidify an international community and involvement in international programs and forums and some libraries in Kazakhstan are solving the issue. For example, RSTL cooperates with various funds and organizations; participates in the work of international conferences Krym and Libnet. It also participated in the work of IFLA sessions in Copenhagen, Peking, Bangkok, Jerusalem, got acquainted with the experience of libraries in the U.S. and Finland and used the services of INTAS project. The mission of the Consortium is to involve primarily the republic's largest libraries in international activity.

And, at last, publishing. This activity will be the result of the work done, a means of advertising, promoting awareness of the Consortium's efforts and encouraging libraries to join the association as new members.

We have no doubts that the initiative will be brought to the logical end and Kazakhstan will enjoy improvements in information support to science, production practice, education and other areas of human activity. The realization of hopes depends on our interest and activity.