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The international book exchange in Russian libraries: yesterday, today and tomorrow

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The report analyses the history and the development of the international book exchange in Russia, its role in the process of book acquisition and collection development in the near future.

Library holdings are enriched in all countries by purchase of literature, international book exchange and by gifts.

The purchase of literature is always the main and the most effective source of acquisition. Gifts are an additional and auxiliary source, but no one can plan or predict the results of this kind of acquisition. The percentage of gifts as a part of all library holdings could vary from library to library. International book exchange is being paid serious attention in Russia. This can be explained by a brief analysis of the history of various ways for the formation of libraries' holdings in the Soviet Union. In the 1950s the Soviet government published a number of enactments directed to create a centralized system of information in technical sciences, which included science libraries and centers of technical and scientific information. Import of literature from abroad was strictly regulated by these enactments and was controlled by a special subdivision of the Committee for Science and Technology. In accordance with established order in the USSR there were 1900 libraries collecting foreign literature. The allocation of foreign currency for the purchase of foreign literature was centrally distributed and lists of titles were strictly controlled and subject to approval. The country tried to get as much foreign literature as possible with a low rate of duplicates. This was considered as informative independence. International book exchange was also strictly regulated. According to the last enactment of the Soviet Council of Ministers in 1977 50 organizations had the right to exchange literature. As a result of such practice in 1991 Soviet libraries for example got the following number of foreign magazines:

The number of titles			The number of sets		
Order by purchase	Exchange	Total	Order by purchase	Exchange	Total
10296	9573	15908	36151	21146	57297

It is evident that the number of publications received through international book exchange was impressive. For example in the case of the Russian National Public Library for Science and Technology this rate was 40 % and in some other libraries it was more than 50 %.

The data of 1991 were taken as an example, because this was the last year of stable and obligatory financing of libraries and central regulation of the book acquisition at libraries and for the whole information space in Russia.

During recent years Russian libraries were put on "hungry diet". The system of coordination was destroyed and at present there is no comprehensive information about the real situation of library holdings. We only know that the amount of foreign exchanges with libraries has decreased drastically and that the conditions of their holdings have deteriorated. Therefore, in the last decade international book exchange became of particular importance for us.

As a consequence of the financial constraints the exchange is almost the only source of foreign literature acquisition for many libraries. For a number of them this source is absolutely new and is inadequately pursued because earlier they had no possibility to exchange literature with foreign countries. They have to solve many problems: how to find a partner abroad, how to get the literature to be offered for exchange and to know about the optimal way to send it to partners. In recent years the libraries, which had a tradition in exchanging literature with foreign partners, changed their approach, increasing its efficiency and usefulness. Now practically there are no political constraints, which were important before. The libraries at universities, scientific institutions exchange their own publications, i.e. scientific proceedings, methodological handbooks, guides, monographs, etc. It is reasonable and not expensive for the library to send these non-commercial publications. It should be taken into consideration that the above-mentioned publications are rare and the subjects described cover significant aspects of the scientific and cultural life, therefore they are highly appreciated and demanded by exchange partners abroad. Such literature is published a very limited circulation. Even to obtain information about the availability of these publications seems to be a problem. In many cases the only chance to acquire such publications is to get them through international book exchange. Hence, the exchange is of benefit to both sides.

The main principle of international book exchange is a voluntary agreement of exchange on mutually advantageous terms. Benefits resulting from these terms depend on the situation of the partners and reflect their special needs. During many years international book exchange was mainly accomplished according to the "edition for edition" principle. But at present we also take into consideration the informative value of the items proposed for exchange. This means that an exchange is accomplished on an equivalent pricing basis. It has to be pointed out that the calculation of the balance of value is often rather difficult. In some cases the book dealers export catalogues could help to be informed about the Russian literature distributed by these companies.

At present many exchange partners are suffering financial problems. The reason of this lies in the decrease of the budgets for exchange at libraries both in Russia and other countries. The loss of interest at partners in developed countries to conduct an exchange could partly be explained by the difficulties involved, such as lots of paperwork, extra counting, etc. Besides, there exists a certain reluctance to continue or start exchange relationships in an atmosphere of political and economic instability, because there is an uncertainty of how expensive and reliable the exchange is or will be. On the other hand the well-

developed cooperational contacts based on many years of trustworthy relationship give the partners the confidence that he could rely on the delivery-receipt of the other party's current publications as well as on their publications of low circulation. For example, since the Russian National Public Library for Science and Technology has been founded the Library of Congress (USA), the British Library (UK), the American Chemical Society (USA), the Japan Physical Society (Japan), the National Library of France and some other institutions are among our exchange partners.

I would like to present some figures connected with our international book exchange. This Library has received from this source 1200 titles of foreign journals and approximately the same amount of serials and materials of conferences. Without exchange of literature we would not have been able to receive any material of a lot of scientific conferences because they are not being sold.

In the last decade we noticed a substantial growth of the ratio of editions obtained by exchange compared to the total number of editions acquired from abroad.

1991	27 %
1995	51 %
1999	76 %
2000	59 %

But this was the result of a reduction of the total number. The absolute number of editions received from the book exchange decreased.

1991	26405
1995	17996
1999	13444
2000	10225

The number of partners also became smaller.

1991	2096
1995	1580
1999	923
2000	852

It has to be pointed out that the more expensive editions could not be acquired through international book exchange. The specialists of the Russian National Public Library for Science and Technology studied the demand of readers and have collected a list of some 2000 most important foreign journals. At present we get only 700 of them and 400 are resulting from the book exchange agreements. Another 650 journals are also important because some subject areas only can be covered by editions we get from international book exchange.

It seems that the publication of journals in electronic forms and electronic access to the literature are diminishing the importance of book exchange because the electronic media considerably facilitate the access to the literature. At present libraries do not try to get as much of the literature as possible. Printed editions have been partly replaced by electronic editions. Hence currently the need for book exchange is going down, because traditionally only printed editions had been exchanged. Nevertheless in our practice there were cases when electronic accesses were offered in exchange of printed materials. Libraries are trying also to get a printed edition and an electronic access to it. However it should be noted that access to electronic versions is still does not have much impact on the book exchange at Russian libraries. Leading libraries in Russia have become members of the consortium formed by Russian Foundation of Basic Research which offers a privileged access to electronic journals of leading foreign publishers: Elsevier, Springer, Kluwer, Academic Press and so on. These editions can rarely be obtained in the process of book exchange. Currently only 18 Russian libraries enjoy access to these journals.

Libraries with a good technical background may be interested in the project of the Open Society Institute (Soros Foundation) and the company EBSCO providing the electronic access to 3400 journals mainly in social sciences, offered by the data base of EBSCO. The cost of the annual access to this database is from 500 to 8000 dollars for various libraries. But in fact this project doesn't influence the exchange programs considerably. I think (and this was confirmed to me by my consultation of specialists at leading libraries) that the interest of Russian libraries in international book exchange will remain high in the near future. Our foreign colleagues also will not give up the exchange activities entirely. It can be observed that the growth of electronic publications, the qualitative leap in the technical condition of libraries, the new computer programs have their influence on the book acquisition in general and the international book exchange in particular. Present possibilities of an exchange of information make it possible to give up the principle of comprehensiveness for foreign book acquisition and to rely on electronic publications having appropriate web access. But, first of all not all publications are provided in electronic version. Secondly, it is hard to imagine the British Library or the Library of Congress without unique book and journals collections. Each library wants to keep and increase its cultural and national values. At present only printed editions are being exchanged, but it is quite obvious that also the exchange of electronic versions will be developed in the future. In Russia electronic versions are less popular than abroad, but their number will inevitably increase. Even now our libraries have their own products offering electronic information that could be the subject of further exchange. For example Russian National Public Library for Science and Technology has thematic bibliographical databases which include:

- Russian Union Catalog of Sci-Tech Literature
- a ecological database;
- a databases of Russian periodicals, of grey literature ,
- a database of Russian scientific organizations.

As a conclusion I want to present some statements which are quite common for libraries involved in international book exchange.

- International book exchange is an important source of enrichment of libraries holdings. It is the only source of book acquisition for certain libraries.
- All specialists are aware of the tendency of a decrease in book exchanges. But simultaneously they consider it not necessary to aim at an artificial preservation or increase the number of partners of this exchange.
- International book exchange will be most efficient only if libraries make a strict choice of editions and will acquire the most important editions only.