Facing the challenge of democratization

By Elizabeth Smith

The International Seminar on Library Management

Library leaders from six former communist countries attended the International Seminar on Library Management, sponsored by the Copernicus University Library in Torun, Poland, November 6–12, 1994. The seminar—conducted in English and funded by American, British, and Polish funds—included participants from Estonia, Slovakia, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, and Poland, with speakers from the U.S. and Britain.

The purpose of the seminar was to address the new challenges facing libraries from previously communist countries, and the changes they must embrace to become effective organizations within the new democratic systems.

As the group exchanged information, it became evident that some of the problems facing libraries in newly democratic nations of Europe are similar to those in the U.S. As we in the U.S. struggle to meet users' needs with increased costs, smaller budgets, and downsizing, our counterparts in Eastern Europe are struggling to adapt to new demands and expectations of users, generated by the new political systems.

The problems facing these libraries are monumental, as they are forced to rewrite their missions and policies. Democracy gave library users the freedom to demand and expect better resources and services, and libraries are responding enthusiastically. Areas most under scrutiny are collection development, reference, budget management, new services, reorganization, human resources management, library education, and open access to collections since most libraries have closed stacks. An immediate problem facing many libraries is delivering business information to users. The economic reforms and privatization have placed great demands on libraries for business and trade information.

Managing library budgets with depleting finances generated much discussion after my presentation on the topic. The solutions from participants did not differ greatly from decisions we make in the U.S. Frequently cited were cancelling periodicals, selective book acquisition and resource sharing, downsizing, and leaner organizational structures. Ideas on increasing revenues were also abundant, including charging business users for services, renting videos to the public, and leasing space for community activities. The concept of allocating monies and resources by formula caught much attention when explained in detail by Geoffrey Weston (University of Hull, Britain).

A general consensus among participants was that restructuring library education, especially for library managers, is prerequisite to improving services. New services and improved methods of resource sharing were seen as essential to meeting user needs.

Conversion to open stacks was on everybody's mind after the informative presentation by Andrew McDonald (University of Newcastle, Britain) on library space. His slides of library buildings, layouts, and space allocation, and his expert responses and advice to questions highlighted the seminar.

Ian Mowat (University of Newcastle) took the group through the principles of TQM and the role of management in a modern academic library. His focus on decision-making, teamwork, and open communications generated many questions and solutions to the problems of bureaucracies. The immediate need for the new democracies is training library directors to develop democratic and conducive work environments where expertise, decision-making

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skills, creativity, incentive, flexibility, teamwork, and problem-solving skills are incorporated.

The seminar's participants were well informed on issues of American and British librarianship. They were enthusiastic and committed to their jobs, eager to make the necessary changes, receptive to ideas, and had viable solutions to their problems. Most have e-mail addresses and are eager to establish contact with libraries abroad. The majority of represented libraries are automated or will be soon.

I was very impressed with the Copernicus University Library, a leader among Polish libraries and a pioneer on several fronts. Under the dynamic leadership of director Stefan Czaja, it is the first library in Poland that changed its organization into a less bureaucratic, more democratic and user-friendly one. After an in-depth study of integrated library systems, it purchased the one meeting its specific needs. The library, now preparing to convert to open stacks, will be the first library in Poland, perhaps in Eastern/Central Europe, to do so.

Our hospitable and gracious hosts organized a tour to the beautiful University of Gdansk Library and the Solidarity Plaza and Monument. We visited the magnificent cathedral at Pelplin and saw the "Gutenberg Bible." We attended a concert on the ancient organs at the cathedral in Oliwa, and another one by the Torun Orchestra where a Russian female soloist played Chopin exquisitely. Very impressive was the visit to the Teutonic Knights medieval castle in Malbork dating back to the 13th century. And the ancient town of Torun, the birthplace of Nicholas Copernicus, gave us much to ponder.

Since my last visit to the Copernicus Library in May 1993 many user-friendly changes occurred. Most striking were increases in automation, signage, and the establishment of reference services. I came back convinced that contact with European libraries is beneficial and enriching to all, and welcome by our colleagues abroad. It is evident that our common missions, goals, problems, and solutions far outweigh our differences. ■

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ment. Two indexes assist in locating specific documents available for retrieval, and the index to award abstracts is searchable.

Ftp sites for software and documents

• **Computer-Oriented Geological Society (COGS).** *Access:* ftp://ftp.csn.net/.

• **National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI) MetaData Sites.** *Access:* ftp://ftp.blm.gov/pub/gis/nsdi.html. Clearinghouse provides a pathway to find information, or metadata, about geospatial data available from USGS.

Internet finding tools

• **EINet Galaxy.** *Access:* http://galaxy.einet.net/galaxy/Science/Geosciences.html.

• **WWW Virtual Library.** *Access:* http://www.geo.ucalgary.ca:80/VL-EarthSciences.html.

• **Yahoo Server at Stanford University.** *Access:* http://akebono.stanford.edu/yahoo/Science/Geology_and_Geophysics/.

Usenet groups and mailing lists

Usenet news groups and electronic mailing lists create a means for practitioners in the field to share research findings, discuss problems, announce conferences and events in the field, and pose questions to groups of people with common interests and expertise.

Usenet groups

• **sci.geo.geology.** This is the primary newsgroup for geology with discussion of general interest geological topics.

• **sci.geo.hydrology.** Discussion forum for topics in surface and groundwater hydrology.

• **sci.geo.earthquakes.** Discussion list for seismological topics and earthquake activity.

Mailing lists

• **GEOLOGY.** *Subscribe:* listserv@ptearn.bitnet.

• **GEONET-L.** *Subscribe:* listserv@iubvm.bitnet. Geoscience librarians and information specialists.

• **HYDROLOGY.** *Subscribe:* listserv@eng.monash.edu.au. Hydrology topics from Monash University in Australia.

• **QUAKE-L.** *Access:* ftp://vm1.nodak.edu/LISTARCH/QUAKE-L and listserv@vm1.nodak.edu or listserv@ndsuvm1.bitnet. General earthquake discussion.

• **SEISMD-L.** *Subscribe:* listserv@bingvmb or listserv@bingvmb.cc.binghamton.edu. Seismological discussion. ■