MARINE AND AQUATIC LIBRARIES OF UKRAINE TODAY

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ABSTRACT: This brief report is intended as a survey of activities at Libraries of marine research institutes in Ukraine. I believe that librarians from all over the world would be interested to learn about the trends of development, tasks, and problems involved in current work of their Ukrainian counterparts.

1. Brief excursion into history of the subject.

To disclose the causes which impede progress of Ukrainian libraries and scientific information centres, I would like to begin by stepping back into the Pre-Reconstruction period. At that time the Soviet Union was a closed system, rigid and unwilling to learn or allow learning about anything but its own problems and interests. It was merely impossible them to suggest that the Union would disintegrate, so strong was the subordination of the periphery to the centre. With regard to libraries and institutions of scientific information, the picture was as follows: Moscow was the heart of an information network comprising the largest and most important institutions such as All-Russian Institute of Sci-Tech Information, Russian State library, Russian National Public Library for Science and Technology, Natural Science Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and Moscow State University Scientific Library. State subsidies were distributed by and from the centre, and the lion’s share was granted to the listed organizations. The money was invested in the equipment and diverse sorts of literature supplied from the Soviet republics and from abroad to complete acts already available. This “complete set” policy contributed to publishing abstract bulletins which covered all trends of science and technology. The journals published under the aegis of the All-Russian Institute of Sci-Tech Information and Russian National Public Library for Science and Technology are the example. Required information, such as documents, reprints of papers, and requests through Inter-library Loan System was easily accessible and pleased both scholars and librarians. Periodical and serial publications were also easy to subscribe to, and requesting books from book shops in Moscow and Leningrad did not present much difficulty. The work of a librarian was a matter of ordinary routine.

2. The fruits of Reconstruction

Five years after the outbreak of Reconstruction the system was still alive and operative as the governmental subsidy was sufficient. It cracked in 1990 and has been changing from bad to worse since then. Among the causes to blame are the replacement of the All-Union monetary system by diverse currencies issued in the former Soviet republics, and the unwillingness of
republican governments to coordinate mutual settlements. Thus, since the Soviet Union fell, the ex-republics are back where they started. In the Soviet epoch republican libraries and information centres in what was collectively referred to as the provinces were provided less subsidies. Nowadays the economic situation in all of the newly independent republics is so desperate that even the largest and most significant libraries are short of funds. As a result, library collections, the exchange of documents, and access to information sources are rather restricted.

Paradoxically, however, at present we encounter little difficulty in subscribing to and receiving periodicals from abroad. The list of foreign serial publications we used to get by subscription or exchange did not reduce. At the same time, the periodicals published at home are beyond our grasp now and it is almost impossible to purchase books and keep on exchanging reading matter with institutes of Russia. The reasons are few but serious. These are high printing and postage costs; closing down a number of journals; decline of publishing activities of research institutes; and poor advertising of new books written in special fields of knowledge.

3. Why the idea of developing information service in Ukraine may appeal to the West.

It would be erroneous, however, to deduce that under the Soviets the situation was better. As soon as Reconstruction made the access to knowledge accumulated abroad free, rapid progress was made in nearly every field of human activity. We have adopted the latest communication tools and international software and gotten used to computer, fax, and e-mail nets. We have found that access to information is more important than possession. The world community has been enthusiastic about our Reconstruction, and that has brought nice fruits. A variety of funds were established by foreign enthusiasts to support and stimulate the advancement of science throughout the former Soviet Union, and in Ukraine in particular. It is thanks to Soros International Science Foundation that Ukrainian libraries are supplied with periodicals and books published all over the world, and the librarians attend conferences and workshops held abroad. A case in point is my visit to Plymouth Marine Library last year that was supported by the British Council Foundation. Scientists of the Institute of Biology of the Southern Seas are participants of such international scientific organizations as ACOPS, CIEMS, CEASM, JGOF and GESAMP. Being under contract with research institutes and centres our research workers can be found in many countries of the world. Their papers regularly appear in reputable scientific journals and magazines.

4. The network of marine science libraries in Ukraine.

The totality of Ukrainian libraries fall into three groups. The first comprises libraries of research institutions affiliated with the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine and concerned mainly with fundamental sciences. The second group includes libraries of research institutions established and supported by a number of Ministries which are concerned mainly with applied
sciences. The third are libraries of universities and higher education institutions belonging to the Ministry of National Education, concerned with training specialists.

The majority of these libraries keep on observing dull routine, showing no interest in switching to computer-assisted models of work. The Library of the Institute of Biology of the Southern Seas is among those few marine science libraries of Ukraine which have succeeded in introducing and developing automation, and have adopted the CDS/ISIS software. One of these days on-line services will also be offered to users at my institute.

5. IAMSLIC and EURASLIC as factors contributing to the progress of Ukrainian marine libraries and information centres.

I believe it was a fortunate occasion that I met people who introduced me into IAMSLIC and EURASLIC. Together with personnel of the library I head we learnt a great deal about the experience gained by our colleagues in different countries. This knowledge helps us to reorganize our work in accordance with up-to-date standards and to put useful innovations in daily practice. It was a brilliant idea to establish these associations. Integrating libraries dispersed all over the world into a single network provides much progress in their activities and creates a precedent for developing mutually beneficial relations and professional contacts, that, in the long run, means living in peace and friendship.

I believe that libraries of Ukraine are on the way to raising professional standards and offering qualified and efficient assistance to interested researchers.

Thank you.