Hungarian Libraries and Librarianship, 1990–2013: An Overview

MÁRTON NÉMETH

ABSTRACT
This paper offers an overview of the transformation in Hungarian librarianship after 1990 and addresses the most important elements of professional development during the same period. The main organizations and types of libraries in the Hungarian library world are described. Information is provided on digital library projects and services, professional training and publications, and the development of international relations involving Hungarian librarians.

INTRODUCTION
This paper offers an overview of the results of the transformation and development of Hungarian librarianship and library policies during the postcommunist era. The Hungarian Library Institute of the Ministry of Education and Culture compiled a short publication on this topic in 2006, “Librarians and Librarianship in Hungary.” Furthermore, in 2011, the former head of the Library Department, Judit Skaliczki, published her professional memoirs (in Hungarian) about the development of Hungarian librarianship from 1990 to 2000, prefaced by a brief discussion of the period before 1990 (Skaliczki, 2011). Her book offers a particularly important view of the legislative- and library-policy developments of the time from the point of view of a leading actor in this field.

This paper is largely based on the comprehensive overviews presented by these two publications. However, in order to offer a more complete account of some more recent developments, especially in the field of digital library projects and services, a number of additional sources have been used. Following an initial chronologically organized description of the main developments both before and after 1990, the main library types, representative institutions, and other major segments of the Hungarian library world are presented.

The Situation of Librarianship in Hungary before 1990

During the socialist period (1945–1990), there was no specific library law in Hungary, only government statutory orders regarding library policies issued in the late 1970s. These decrees tried to follow Western European, especially Scandinavian, professional norms, although they were presented with the obligatory communist phraseology. The political economy and general social environment, however, were completely different for Hungarian library objectives compared to those for Western Europe. The statutory orders stipulated a large-scale library system with regional coordination and service centers for libraries by different library types but did not allocate sufficient financial resources to create the system. The coordination centers were set up to assist collaboration among library institutions, but effectively, the scheme was not put into practice (Skaliczki, 2011). The libraries were not convinced that better collaboration with partner institutions in the same geographical region or in similar disciplinary areas could better support library work and more user-oriented services. The librarians’ lack of interest in a modern, user-oriented institutional professional culture and the lack of financial resources for establishing consistent professional services were the main factors affecting the Hungarian library system before 1990.

Before then, the system was ineffective and too large. It consisted of public libraries, trade union libraries, libraries of the armed forces (namely, the army, police, and workers’ militia), special libraries, higher education libraries, and school libraries. Each kind of library had its own network, and there were few collaborative services. There was a serious lack of interest in financial matters at the individual library level, and charging for services was forbidden. The absence of adequate central financial support led to institutions barely surviving and a minimum level of services. All libraries received funding based on the same criteria (number of books, employees, and so on) regardless of distinctions of importance and other differences. The most serious problem libraries faced at this time was inadequate support for the emerging information-technology (IT) infrastructure.

In summary, these ideology-based conditions fostered poor professional attitudes. Even if the central regulations were based on current professional standards, they could not create the professional and social conditions for collaboration, user-friendliness, and effective service. This was especially so because libraries were poorly funded, had inadequate infrastructures, and the prestige of the profession was low. While some new types of services appeared, such as those for music, the use of public libraries had continually decreased by the end of the communist era.
Major Transition Effects during the Early 1990s

The change in the political system had serious consequences for the library system. As Skaliczki (2011) points out, by 1990 the situation of libraries and librarians had become problematic. The library professional had to meet the fundamental challenges prevalent throughout the capitalist world, but these challenges became visible in Hungary only during the transitional phase of the country’s political system. Some of the key questions faced were: Why should public libraries be established when fewer and fewer people were reading? In the future, would there be any need for libraries and librarians? What kind of library framework could be financed in an optimal way as a set of public services through the new economic conditions? Hungarian libraries had to adjust to the global challenge of the rapidly growing sophistication and impact of IT on the mission of libraries, the reorientation of library services, and the emergence of digital libraries. It became clear that Hungarian libraries had to break both with the philanthropic traditions of the nineteenth century and the effects of the political, economic, and ideological conditions during the communist period. The libraries had to face the fact that their main justification for existence had now become efficiency, effectiveness, and usability, both in their physical and virtual environments.

Some library sectors were differentially affected by the political and economic transition. Ideological motivations led to the creation of trade-union libraries during the early socialist period; just prior to 1990, these libraries began to offer public library services as well. At the beginning of the 1990s, however, the entire sector collapsed because there was no longer any need for or financial resources to maintain a large-scale library network based on the trade unions. Special libraries in state-owned though now bankrupt companies were also eliminated, together with their host institutions. While, in general, the library system of the armed forces also soon disappeared as a result of the transition, the specific libraries of the armed-forces training institutions that were part of the higher education sector survived and have become an integral part of this sector.

Public and higher education libraries are now the primary elements of the Hungarian library system. In the post-1990 economy, they have been evaluated, reorientated, and consolidated with the support of foreign grants (Veres, 2008). The system as a whole underwent a SWOT analysis with the assistance of the UK-based International Book Development (IBD) group. (Based in the UK, this organization does business under the name of the CFBT Education Trust, its aim being to cooperate with governments, schools, and other partners to provide excellent education for all.) This analysis offered a starting point for the consolidation of all library sectors in the new social and economic environment (Skaliczki, 2011).

In 1996, the Hungarian government created the Tempus Public Foundation (TPF), which according to its website is a nonprofit organization
“with the task of managing international cooperation programmes and special projects in the field of education, training and EU-related issues.” Participation in the TPF project offered assistance in establishing basic IT infrastructure in library-education departments in higher education institutions, and also the opportunity for travel abroad to establish contacts with Western European library communities (Skaliczki, 2011).

Another major step in 1990 was the foundation of the National Infrastructure Development Program, which created the Physical IT Network Infrastructure Backbone System. As a result, the main research and higher education institutions, libraries, public museums, and archives were able to use a rapidly developing system offering world-class IT infrastructure so as to develop their own network-based IT services.

The basic challenge to the library sector during the initial post-1990 period was its repositioning in the new social and economic environment. The first freely elected government, despite its evaluation and intent to consolidate the nation’s public and research/higher education library sectors during the period 1990–1994, did not formulate a consistent policy. Several development plans were drawn up, but none was put into effect. The establishment of the Hungarian Cultural Fund (NKA), however, of which a library subprogram was part, offered additional resources for libraries to support new services and modernization (Skaliczki, 2011). The library committee makes annual recommendations on the topics and activities to be supported through the NKA program. Topics derive from a formulation of libraries’ strategic objectives; activities, such as the acquisition of equipment, quality-assurance projects, professional publications, and the organization of library campaigns and conferences, are also supported by the NKA funding (Hungarian Library Institute, 2006).

The priorities for the development of libraries are

- a new legal basis on which to restructure the library system;
- a focus on users’ needs;
- a focus on diversified services;
- the automation of library services;
- the provision of finances to support the new systems; and
- the introduction of modern library management (Skaliczki, 2011).

Fostering change in the attitudes of library professionals has also been heavily promoted. The Association of Hungarian Librarians (MKE), founded in 1935, restructured itself after 1990 into twenty regional and ten professional library sections. It now has approximately 2,200 members and sixty institutional members. The MKE’s main aims are

- to assist in shaping and implementing a national library and information policy;
- to represent the library sector in national development strategies;
- to safeguard the interests of library and information professionals;
• to advise librarians in building strategic partnerships with authorities, sponsors, and institutions in other sectors;
• to enhance the public relations of libraries;
• to promote cooperation among libraries at both the national and international levels; and
• to support the professional development of librarians (Skaliczki, 2011).

One of the MKE’s major roles immediately after 1990 was to train workers in public libraries to provide business-oriented information services. The association also devoted itself to collecting information to support a movement for new library legislation, and establishing a set of service and quality standards for IT infrastructure. Recently, the MKE has become a major influence on library legislation and strategic decision making (Skaliczki, 2011). The MKE organizes an annual professional conference. This conference is the most important permanent library event in Hungary and attracts around 600 to 800 participants every year. Other meetings and conferences have also helped to reposition the library profession in the rapidly changing social and IT environments. A major problem for the association is that professional attitudes are changing too slowly in Hungary, hence it cannot fully realize its potential as a library-support organization offering major, innovative professional activities.

The Chamber of Library and Information Institutes (later renamed the Alliance of Libraries and Information Institutes [IKSZ]) was founded in 1990 as a new library organization. Currently, it has more than 230 institutional members and is organized into various geographical and professional branches. Its mission is to strengthen the profile of libraries both at the national and local levels through the development of library activities, the enhancement of library services, and the cooperation of various types of libraries for their mutual benefit. It publishes a journal, Library Correspondent, and has issued a number of other professional publications on library management (Hungarian Library Institute, 2006).

The IKSZ has become very active in establishing beneficial collaborations with foreign partners from all over Europe to share common projects, brainstorming sessions, training, and so on. Another important issue for the alliance has been the promotion of best practices from abroad, both in the higher education and public library sectors. Every year, the IKSZ oversees a national project called “Collaboration for Libraries,” which attracts a high level of media interest and focuses the public’s attention on the importance of library services in everyday life (Skaliczki, 2011). Many others of its programs throughout the country also promote libraries as attractive, community places. Beginning in the late 1990s, a program called “Internet Fiesta” publicized the use of the internet and online library services for all major social groups, from children to the elderly.
The Association of School Librarians (KTE) is the third major Hungarian library organization. It represents its members’ interests especially in relation to local and central governmental bodies. Founded in 1998, the association established a series of training seminars for school librarians that emphasized IT-centered information skills and competences within the school environment. The KTE organizes a number of events throughout the year related to school library issues, and it has a strong presence in social media as well.

A number of other organizations representing various types of libraries have been established over the previous fifteen to twenty years. The most important are

- Association of University Librarians (Egyetemi Könyvtárigazgatók Kollegiuma [EKE]);
- Alliance of College and Faculty Librarians (Főiskolai és Kari Könyvtárigazgatók Szövetsége [FKKSZ]);
- Association of Ecclesiastical Libraries (Egyházi Könyvtárak Egyesülése [EKE]);
- Hungarian Reading Association (HUNRA);
- Alliance of Hungarian Medical Libraries (Magyar Orvosi Könyvtárak Szövetsége [MOKSZ]); and
- PUBLIKA Public Library Group (Publika Magyar Könyvtári Kör) (Hungarian Library Institute, 2006).

Library Policy Framework and Legislation

The name and scope of the ministry responsible for cultural policy have changed several times since 1990; in the past, cultural policy was either represented by a single, independent ministry or was joined with education. Today, a single Ministry of Human Capacities is responsible for healthcare, social issues, culture, and education and is administered by several state secretaries that are responsible for its particular subfields. The Ministry’s Department of Public Collections is now responsible for the public-policy issues of libraries, museums, and archives. A separate library department had a central role in the writing of the 1997 library law, Act CXL; additionally, it was also mainly responsible for establishing the library sector’s priorities for EU funding at the time that Hungary was entering the European Union.

Act CXL (on Public Library Provision) set the legal framework for the new library system, incorporating the following concepts:

- Libraries are the core institutions of the information society.
- The library system is a prerequisite for the free flow of information.
- All citizens have the right to access services provided by the libraries, which are open to all users.
• The development of the library system and national library services must be financed by the state.

The act introduced the official concept that “libraries are open to all users,” encompassing various types of libraries whose services can be accessed and used by any citizen. It also defined the criterion by which a library could be included in this category: a focus on services to users. Libraries that are registered as open to all users benefit from additional state funding for enhancing their services, such as collection development, ICT (information and communications technology) infrastructure, and the ongoing training of librarians. The act also includes provisions for the National Document Delivery System (ODR) and other central services, while also establishing the organization and financing of the entire library system (Hungarian Library Institute, 2006; Skaliczki, 2011).

The operating costs of local libraries are covered by the annual budgets of the local library authorities. The operation and development of the Hungarian library system as a whole is coordinated centrally and financed by the state. This central funding is made available through development programs that are formulated according to the strategic objectives outlined in a national library policy. Eligible institutions must submit project proposals in specific activity areas.

A system of the professional supervision of libraries abolished in 1990 was reintroduced in 2002 as a means to raise the standard of the services provided. The program began with visits to nearly 2,000 village libraries and continued with a pilot project concerning the quality-based supervision of municipal libraries, eventually including the National Library as well. Recent projects are focused on academic libraries (Hungarian Library Institute, 2006). An advisory board (headed by a former cultural state secretary) assists the national librarian and state library-policy administration in setting the main strategic goals of the National Széchényi Library (NSZL).

According to 2012 official library statistics, there were 8,491 librarians working in 3,717 libraries with 4,304 service points, excluding school libraries. In general, libraries are open for about three-and-a-half days per week (for a total of 19.43 hours). More detailed statistical resources are available with Hungarian and English descriptions on the Hungarian Library Institute’s website (http://ki.oszk.hu) (Somogyi, 2013a).

Since the 1997 implementation of Act CXL, three national library-development strategies have been promulgated. For the first period, between 1997 and 2003, the following strategic objectives were achieved:

• The establishment of the National Document Supply System (ODR)
• The establishment of the “open to all users” accreditation system for libraries
• An acceleration in the automation of libraries
• The establishment of the Hungarian National Shared Catalog (MOKKA)
• The introduction of the system of ongoing training for librarians (a set of accredited courses or a second university degree are required for all qualified librarians)
• The establishment of the Hungarian Library Institute as a professional body according to the Danish model in order to manage and serve Hungarian librarianship in an innovative way through collaboration with the administration of state cultural policy (The institute is a unit of the NSZL, but with an independent legal identity that places it in an intermediary position between the ministry and national library [Ska-liczki, 2011].)
• The modernization of the organizational structure and services of the NSZL (Hungarian Library Institute, 2006)

The main strategic objectives set out for the second period (2003–2007) were

• raising the quality of services in order to meet EU standards;
• increasing access to library documents and information in line with the principles of democracy and equal opportunity (via the ODR and MOKKA);
• developing the library supply chains in rural areas (that is, county and city libraries that supply mobile libraries, temporary service points, and other services required by villagers in their respective regions); and
• making librarianship more attractive by restructuring librarian training reflect the knowledge and skills characteristic of international best practices (Hungarian Library Institute, 2006).

The third strategic period began in 2007 and ended in 2013. Its goals were determined in conjunction with the overall National Strategic Development Plan, which seeks to increase the competitiveness and employability of citizens. The key goals of the third period were

• improving the library and ICT infrastructure in villages by means of new service points, mobile services, and extensive ICT developments (so that village residents may be able to access the same range of document and information services as those in urban areas);
• broadening access to information and knowledge, including the modernization of the NSZL, the setting up of regional libraries as knowledge centers, enhancing cooperation among academic libraries, county libraries, and business partners, and developing the infrastructure of municipal libraries;
• enhancing reading through a nation-wide reading project, which will support the improving of children’s and school libraries to help develop the knowledge and creativity of young people (promoting the
culture of reading will require stronger cooperation between libraries and the publishing industry; and

- digitizing collections according to a National Digitization Plan for Libraries in which major academic and public libraries collaborate with the NSZL (Hungarian Library Institute, 2006).

The lack of coordination among libraries and weak ties to publishers and other relevant stakeholders have inhibited achieving the last strategic goal of digitizing the collections. However, there is a good chance that it will be achieved during the next strategic planning period. The setting of aims and goals for the fourth strategic period that started in 2014 is still under consideration. Discussions are ongoing between the Ministry of Human Capacities and representative professional organizations. The National Electronic Document Delivery System, Database, and Repository project called ELDORADO will be continued, along with relationships with business partners involved in the development of library software and content. This program will build a common database of all digitized or born-digital documents in Hungary, while also offering a single interface to access documents with public domain rights. It will also offer access to legally established e-document services in partnership with respective stakeholders (Videotorium Science Online, 2013). A key player is the NSZL, whose collection is based on legal deposit: the library preserves two copies as legal deposit from all published documents in Hungary, one copy for long-term preservation purposes and the other a service copy. This collection will be digitized through ELDORADO (made feasible by the acquisition of a new scanner that can digitize up to 2,000 pages an hour).

The Hungarian National Digital Archive (MANDA) portal, which was set up by the government in 2011, will provide access to digital materials from libraries, archives, museums, and the digitized collection of the former Hungarian Film Archive and Institute. The archive also assists in the digitization of these materials and promotes the coordination among different types of cultural institutions. MANDA is expected to be Hungary’s major national collector/contributor to the Europeana initiative.

**Main Types of Libraries in Hungary**

*The Széchényi National Library (NSZL)*

The NSZL celebrated its 210th anniversary in 2012. Its core mission is to collect, preserve, and deliver to users all documents that form part of Hungary’s cultural heritage. The library has the largest collection of prints and books published before 1711 in the country, and it holds some of the oldest complete texts in the Hungarian language, such as the codices incorporating the Funeral Sermon and Prayer (end of the twelfth century) and the Old Hungarian Laments of Mary (thirteenth century) and
the thirty-six corvinæ, a rare-book collection from the Renaissance period, from the library of King Matthias. The collection includes other historical treasures, such as the Chronica Hungarorum, which was published in 1473 and the first printed book in Hungary, as well as a large number of other manuscripts of masterpieces of Hungarian literature. In 2013 the library had 16,363 registered users and 7,321 active users, of which 2,799 were newly registered (Somogyi, 2013b).

The NSZL publishes the Hungarian National Bibliography updates online through the library’s internet portal twenty-four times a year (National Bibliography, 2013). The library uses the AMICUS integrated system. The retrospective archiving of card-catalog records commenced in 2003, although the digitization of the collection had already begun in the late 1990s, with a focus on the library’s special collections. In fact, the NSZL, together with the Hungarian Library Institute, has assumed a leading role in promoting best practices in digitization in Hungary and has participated in several international projects.

Through the coordination of the NSZL, the most important current library catalogs have been incorporated into The European Library (TEL). NSZL is also a major partner of Europeana. Through the help of NSZL librarians, TEL and Europeana interfaces and services have been implemented in the Hungarian language. A large set of digital collections and collection descriptions have become available to Hungarian users by means of these services. NSZL is a partner of the international eBooks on Demand (EOD) project, which provides digital editions of books ordered from its online catalog through participating libraries. The physical book is retrieved from the library and scanned; upon payment by the user, the book becomes available for downloading.

The Hungarian Library Institute

The Hungarian Library Institute, which is the national authority for public libraries, is included within the organizational structure of the NSZL though is managed by the Public Collection Department of the Ministry of Human Capacities. Its mission is to provide services to assist in the efficient operation of the library system. Some of its tasks are

• collecting and publishing national library statistics;
• assisting in the setting of standards, guidelines, and methods related to library and information services;
• operating a special library consisting of library- and information-science materials;
• assisting in the collection development of libraries; and
• participating in the ongoing training of librarians and library assistants (Hungarian Library Institute, 2006).
Academic Libraries
The number of Hungarian university and college libraries—both state-funded and private—exceeded 200 in 2005. Most operate as libraries “open to all users” (as described above), and all are members of the ODR. The economic and social changes of the 1990s had a major impact on academic libraries. The merging of universities and colleges that began at the end of the 1990s brought about many organizational and operational challenges and required a large degree of resource sharing and cooperation. The number of students in higher education rose dramatically between 1995 and 2010, which has resulted in an unprecedented increase in the use of the collections and services of academic libraries. Today, these libraries are increasingly providing online services, including access to electronic journals and databases, so that now, not only do they require funding for academic literature, but also the libraries have to negotiate licensing terms and manage electronic resources. Academic libraries have also gained considerable experience in digitization (Hungarian Library Institute, 2006).

The leading institutions of this library sector, primarily the largest university libraries in terms of the size of collections and number of users, have been successfully able to transform themselves to meet the continuing challenges of ICT, changing user behaviors, and providing new service models. Some libraries, such as the Corvinus University Library in Budapest and the central university libraries in Szeged and Pécs, are operating in modern buildings that were built in accordance with the best international models. In addition to serving their respective university students and researchers, they also function as attractive community forums. Moreover, these libraries provide major value-added services for the university community: for example, by operating university bookshops and gift shops, selling railway tickets, and so on. These libraries are the centers of academic life.

Special Libraries
Special libraries develop collections in specific scientific areas, showing great variety as far as their supporting authorities, history, collections, and user groups are concerned. Among the most important are the libraries of public research institutions like that of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the Hungarian Parliamentary Library, major corporate libraries, museum libraries, the medical libraries of state hospitals, and the libraries of prominent nonprofit institutions. There were more than 370 special libraries in Hungary in 2005, and over eighty of them have obtained the official status of libraries “open to all users.” Nine special libraries collect literature at a national level and participate in ODR, while also providing records for MOKKA; they are also tasked with providing national subject-specific bibliographies, thematic databases, and subject-specific reviews, translations, and studies (Hungarian Library Institute, 2006).
Public Libraries
All local government authorities must provide library services to their citizens. County and municipal authorities are obliged by law to maintain public libraries, while smaller communities can choose either to run their own, be in partnership with others, or use library services via the service system for rural areas. All county, municipal, and village libraries must be registered as libraries “open to all users” and respond to the requirements stipulated by the 1997 library act. There are twenty county libraries, nearly 300 municipal libraries, and over 2,500 village libraries in Hungary. Some county and municipal libraries that existed in parallel in the county capitals (for example, those in Győr and Pécs) were merged at the beginning of 2014 according to the new public administration service law. Public libraries have some special roles, such as the collection of local documents and information, assisting users in finding relevant information sources for everyday issues, and supporting lifelong learning (Hungarian Library Institute, 2006).

School Libraries
There are nearly 4,000 school libraries in Hungary. How each operates is defined by its parent educational institution. School libraries provide statistics to, and are professionally coordinated by, the National Pedagogical Library and Museum. In 1995, the National Curriculum introduced the teaching of library skills as a compulsory subject.

National Collaborative Library Services
The National Collaborative Library Services consists of the Hungarian National Shared Catalog (MOKKA), the location database of the National Document Delivery System (ODR), and the National Periodical Database (NPA). At the end of the 1990s, fifteen libraries—including the NSZL, the most important academic, research, and special libraries, and the Szabó Ervin Metropolitan Library (in its role as the leading public library of the country)—declared their intention to join forces for the establishing of a national shared catalog based on a single database. This initial group of libraries effectively covered 100 percent of Hungarian publications and 70 percent of the foreign titles held by Hungarian libraries. In 2002, the NSZL took charge of the operation and development of this catalog. Other libraries have since joined the system, bringing the number of participants to thirty-nine by 2006.

MOKKA makes available shared catalog records in order to avoid duplication of the cataloging efforts. Its database supports both current and retrospective cataloging. Today, it offers a new, standardized, user-friendly system designed to be used by both librarians and readers. The development of the catalog has been funded by various grants for national ICT development. It is expected that the number of libraries participating in
MOKKA will rise to a hundred in the coming years, and that the catalog will cover 100 percent of the documents held in Hungarian library collections (Hungarian Library Institute, 2006).

The ODR was established in 1998. The system ensures access to documents and information for all citizens from any library in the country. It is based on fifty-four member libraries, including the national library, the special libraries with a national scope, state-funded academic libraries, and county libraries. Together, their collections cover a substantial proportion of the documents held by Hungarian libraries. Library users can find the locations of documents in the catalog, then with the assistance of librarians can make requests via the system. Requested documents are delivered to libraries in either printed or electronic versions or as photocopies of original documents (in compliance with the applicable copyright laws). During the past few years, more than 500,000 documents have been delivered to users in villages and small towns. The operational costs of the system are covered by the national budget. Member libraries receive funding for acquisitions, technology tools (Hungarian Library Institute, 2006). The ODR was integrated into MOKKA in 2010, the functions of the two systems now appearing together in a single interface. An application interface facilitates the further development of the document display services of the integrated web portal. Records can be exported into several bibliographic-management software platforms. Catalog records provide links to the homepages and OPACs (online public access catalogs) of libraries where requested documents are held.

NPA, which is operated by the national library, is the main catalog of foreign periodicals held by Hungarian libraries. The database contains the bibliographical data of nearly 42,000 titles of periodicals, newspapers, annual reports, yearbooks, and so on, and about a million location data points. The oldest journal issues cataloged date back to 1665. Data are provided by approximately 600 libraries. This database has also been integrated into MOKKA, and is now updated within this new framework.

MATARKA (Hungarian Periodicals Tables of Contents) Database
MATARKA is a database of the tables of contents of journals issued in Hungary. The service is provided by a library consortium managed by the University of Miskolc Library, Archives, and Museum.

HUMANUS (Humanities Bibliographical Database)
HUMANUS is a multidisciplinary online database for the humanities. The NSZL has developed the software and built the database with collaborative partners from both Hungary and abroad. The online interface was developed by the Szeged University Library. The NSZL participates in collecting bibliographical data for essays and articles in the fields of Hungarica. The database includes Hungarian Library and Information
Science articles, most titles of which are also displayed in English and can be searched via an interface in English.

The Service System for Rural Areas (Könyvtárellátási Szolgáltató Rendszer [KSZR])

Following the implementation of ODR, an additional system was needed to extend the service to villages and small towns that do not have their own libraries. The goals and mechanisms of this new system were set out in the 2004 document “The Concept of Library Service Provision for Citizens Living in Villages and Small Settlements” (available only in Hungarian). The Service System for Rural Areas (KSZR) involves county libraries and the more important city libraries and provides digital and traditional services. Small communities order and receive these services through village libraries, library service points, and mobile libraries. The range of services includes document delivery, online information services, and the organization of events and exhibitions. Special attention is given to services for children and young people. Funding for the system is provided through a variety of state development programs (Hungarian Library Institute, 2006).

The Licensing of Academic Electronic Content

With the availability of computers and broadband internet in nearly all types of libraries, access to international information resources has broadened considerably. However, the licensing of international academic journals and databases represents a major burden for the budgets of individual libraries. In the 1990s, the licensing of electronic databases was organized through consortia of smaller libraries and was funded by various state grants. In 2001, a national agency, Elektronikus Információszolgáltatás (EISZ), was established for the licensing of electronic academic information for all state-owned universities and colleges. This agency, which licenses a range of services, including EBSCO, Science Direct, and Web of Science, has also been extended to four special libraries, with national responsibilities (Hungarian Library Institute, 2006). Currently, the program is coordinated by the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and covers about twenty-eight major databases. Its financing is shared by the national budget and the institutional subsidies of partner institutions.

LIBINFO: A National Online Reference Service

LIBINFO is the shared online information service for Hungarian libraries, hosted and coordinated by the NSZL and operated by a consortium of libraries, academic and research institutes, and even individuals. Reference questions can be submitted via an online request form and are answered within forty-eight hours by reference librarians participating in the service.
Some Major Digital Libraries in Hungary

Hungarian Electronic Library (MEK)
The Hungarian Electronic Library (MEK) first appeared on the internet in 1994 in the form of a shared information service scattered among servers of Hungarian universities. The following year, this became one of the projects of the National Infrastructure Development Program. In 1996, MEK's first web interface was created. In 1999, following changes in the direction of electronic publishing, the MEK project was integrated into the NSZL, thus achieving its proper place and significance in the hierarchy of library services.

During the past few years, MEK has become a basic information source on Hungarian education and culture, both in Hungary and abroad. An ever-growing number of users keep returning with a certain fondness to its virtual “reading-rooms”—40,000 to 45,000 visitors daily. It operates servers in Transylvania, Slovakia, and Voivodina for the Hungarian minorities residing there, while also cooperating with their local organizations in the development of their own digital collections. Because of the exponential increase of interest in online sources and the rapid growth of MEK, in 2000, it commenced building a new library, called MEK v2.0, on the mek.oszk.hu server (English interface: www.elib.hu). During the course of this expansion, both the collection and its user interface were given completely new, state-of-the-art upgrades.

Since the inception of the project, MEK has been striving to establish communication channels with its users and is open and appreciative of their feedback. The library collects, preserves, and provides, free of charge, digital material in all fields of the sciences and arts. During the initial phase of the project, the collection was comprised of sources already digitized or those that could be relatively easily. The range of sources was, and continues to be, wide; in addition to original internet sources, volunteer digitizers, publishing houses, and authors serve as donors. MEK v2.0 enabled it to obtain significant financial means to acquire documents, thus adding more high-quality and voluminous documents to the collection. While the majority of the documents are in Hungarian, there are sources in foreign languages as well that relate to Hungarian science and culture. All documents selected to be added to the collection undergo a thorough quality check before being converted into the most popular online formats, the goal being to make documents available both conveniently and economically. Because of the extensive and detailed metadata attached to each, MEK documents are thoroughly indexed and can be found easily by the major search engines.

During the course of the past few years, the MEK became one of the most popular and significant archives of Hungarian texts. Technically, a communal movement has formed around it due to the fact that anyone,
even with the simplest of methods and means, can contribute to the development of the collections: individuals can offer digitized works (their own or by others) with due respect to copyright issues. Also, users can make proposals concerning the archiving of material found on other servers or help in document conversions for the collections or by simply taking part in public-relations activities (Hungarian Electronic Library [MEK], 2009). Currently, new, major acquisitions are due to contracts with publishers. The financing of these contracts is supported by the Council of Hungarian Internet Providers. In 2004, the library launched its largest digitization project: the Digital Library of Hungarology, aimed at converting and publishing hundreds of important reference works into electronic form. Hungarology, or Hungarian studies, covers interdisciplinary research dealing with the Hungarian people, its ethnic group, and its history, language, and culture in both past and present (MEK, 2004). Unfortunately, this project ended in about 2008 due to the lack of funding.

The National Electronic Periodicals Archive and Database (EPA)
The National Electronic Periodicals Archive and Database (EPA) is a bibliographic database that collects, archives, and provides access to Hungarian and Hungary-related electronic periodicals that are freely available on the internet or on the servers of public academic and scientific institutions and libraries. These e-resources may be either the digital versions of printed periodicals or electronic originals. In addition, to maintain the central searchable database of the metadata and offer access information of these e-resources, EPA also provides hosting services and offers full-text content based on agreements with their copyright holders.

Digital Literary Academy
The Digital Literary Academy was founded in 1998, the Hungarian government financing its collection by buying the copyrights of the most respected Hungarian authors (as identified by a professional board of writers and cultural experts). New critical editions of the works of these writers are digitized, along with rich metadata, and made available through the web portal of the Petőfi Literary Museum, which is the host institution for the collection.

Bibliotheca Corviniana Digitalis
This ambitious program of the NSZL aims to reconstruct, virtually, King Matthias’s library (the Bibliotheca Corviniana). Currently, it makes available, in digital form, thirty-six corvinae in the collection of the national library, and provides information on the corvinae held by libraries in fourteen other countries. In addition to the digitization of manuscripts, a comprehensive database is being established that will provide full codicological descriptions, information that places the artworks in their historical contexts, and the complete bibliography of the Bibliotheca Corviniana.
Professional Training

The first academic training program in library sciences was introduced by the University of Budapest in 1948. Initially, the five-year graduate program had a largely historical focus, although practical skills and the application of IT and computers were gradually included. During the following decades, the universities of Debrecen, Szeged, and Pécs also developed degree courses in LIS.

In addition to the library departments of the traditionally research-focused universities, a few colleges also started professional training in LIS in the form of four-year degrees. This more practical type of training started at the Teacher Training College of Budapest in 1951. Training in the library sciences gradually expanded to other universities and colleges, with more varied systems of study becoming available, including distance and part-time degree courses (Hungarian Library Institute, 2006).

In order to ensure the professional development of librarians and encourage lifelong learning, the rules of Act CXL of 1997 stipulated the structure and financing of the system of continuing education. Ongoing training is implemented in seven-year cycles during which the librarians are required to attend a minimum of 120 hours of instruction during the period. Eligible courses must be accredited by the LIS Accreditation Committee, and financing of the compulsory training system is provided (Hungarian Library Institute, 2006).

The latest challenge for training in LIS arrived with Hungary’s full membership in the European Union. In compliance with the Bologna Agreement, the Hungarian higher education system underwent an overall restructuring; the new system started in September 2006. As a result of the efforts of the library-training institutions and representatives of the wider library field during the preparation of the necessary legislation, training in LIS continued to be maintained as a separate major in three-year B.A. programs and is offered at thirteen higher educational institutions. Follow-on master’s degree programs are currently being finalized by a smaller number of library departments. It had been anticipated that the training would continue to be popular because students graduating in LIS could find employment opportunities not only in libraries and cultural-heritage institutions but also in companies that provide information services (Hungarian Library Institute, 2006). However, the number of applicants to LIS bachelor programs during the previous three years has dropped dramatically. Some bachelor’s and master’s LIS programs have been terminated or suspended recently. Earlier, at its 2013 annual meeting, the Association of Hungarian Librarians focused on this issue; the above-mentioned cutbacks were predictable, but further investigation is needed, however, to understand the complex causes behind the phenomenon (Lengyelné Molnár, 2013). Nevertheless, it is clear that the current up-to-date knowledge, attitudes, and skills of new library professionals conflict
with the still-conservative attitudes in many Hungarian libraries. The general image of libraries tends to be outdated, and the social prestige of the library profession is low. The importance of modern information-service work has not successfully been promoted within society. Library and information professionals must continue to develop more user-oriented services in order to foster wider acceptance of what they do. It seems that the only way LIS education programs can become attractive again is to establish closer cooperation with libraries, universities, and other stakeholders from the information-service market. A book (in Hungarian) by recently graduated library professionals from ELTE University Budapest describes current major trends in education and library management—information useful for planning the future direction of the programs (Kiszl, 2013).

Library Journals and Professional Publications
The following short descriptions in English of Hungarian library journals and other professional publications are from the Hungarian Library Institute’s “Libraries and Librarianship in Hungary” (2006).

**Hungarian Book Review (Magyar Könyvszemle)**
*Hungarian Book Review* was first published in 1876, the same year that *Library Journal* was launched. The journal soon became the major forum for library research in Hungary, and the publication of the Hungarian National Bibliography was tied in with it. *Hungarian Book Review* has maintained its own traditions regarding content: in its quarterly issues it publishes academic studies on the history of books, literature, printing, media, censorship, and libraries. The review is jointly published by the Institute of Literary Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the NSZL.

**Library Review (Könyvtári Figyelő)**
*Library Review* was founded in 1955 with an initial focus on reviewing international professional literature. Today, its content comprises theoretical studies, literature reviews, conference reports, and book reviews; it also publishes short Hungarian-language summaries of selected articles from foreign library and information journals. These articles are chosen according to the current interests of Hungarian librarians as far as library-development trends and new services are concerned. *Library Review* is published quarterly by the NSZL and indexed by several international bibliographical databases.

**Books, Libraries, Librarians (Könyv, Könyvtár, Könyvtáros)**
The monthly journal *Books, Libraries, Librarians* primarily targets public librarians. It was first published in the 1950s, with topics focusing on the promotion of books, literature, and reading. Today, it is published by the NSZL and covers a broad range of topics in the fields of library policy, library and book history, library services, and methodology.
Library Correspondent (Könyvtári Levelező/láp)

Library Correspondent is published monthly by the Alliance of Libraries and Information Institutes. It offers news and reports on current topics in the Hungarian library field and the everyday issues of libraries. As the journal’s title suggests, its aim is to be a forum wherein librarians can communicate news and exchange information.

Scientific and Technical Information (Tudományos és Műszaki Tájékoztatás)

Since Scientific and Technical Information’s founding in 1954, the monthly journal has been dedicated to the publishing of articles related to both the theoretical and practical aspects of library and information sciences and the promotion of the latest information technologies to Hungarian libraries. During the late 1980s, it was the first Hungarian LIS journal to publish news on CD-ROMs and online products and services, internet resources, and EU information. The journal is published by the Library of the Budapest University of Technology and Economics and indexed by several international bibliographical databases.

Libraries and Education (Könyv és Nevelés)

The quarterly journal Libraries and Education is published by the National Education Library and Museum and primarily targets school librarians. It publishes articles covering the pedagogy of reading, methodological issues, and educational tools; it also publishes critical reviews of school books and related bibliographies and dedicates a section to literature for children and young adults.

Hungarian Library and Information Science Abstracts (HLISA) (1972–2006)

This biannual, English-language abstracting journal was founded on the occasion of the thirty-eighth IFLA conference, held in Budapest in 1972. Its aim was to make the most important publications—studies, articles, monographs, and conference documents—of Hungarian LIS research available internationally. It also published a short bibliography of foreign-language publications with Hungary-related topics from international LIS journals and books. It was published by the Hungarian Library Institute. Unfortunately, HLISA ceased publication in 2006 due mainly to financial concerns.

International Relations

The most important research libraries and main professional associations have become active members of various international organizations, such as IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions), EBLIDA (European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations), and LIBER (Ligue des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche). The NSZL also has extensive relations with individual libraries as well as with a variety of international academic and
cultural organizations like CENL (Conference of European National Librarians), CERL (Consortium of European Research Libraries), Gutenberg-Gesellschaft, and ABDOS (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Bibliotheken und Dokumentationsstellen der Ost-, Ostmittel- und Südosteuropaforschung). The British Council, Goethe-Institut, and Institut Français have assisted Hungarian libraries in building international relations by providing funding for various conferences, special projects, and individual scholarships. Additionally, during the past fifteen years, Hungarian libraries have participated in a number of projects supported by the European Union—for example, LISTED, CULTIVATE CEE, DELOS, PULMAN, CELIP, LICENCE, CALIMERA, MINERVA PLUS, TEL, TEL-MEMOR, LIGHT, Europeana. Hungarian professional organizations regularly cooperate with partner organizations in other European countries, and special attention is paid to the cultural associations of Hungarian minorities in neighboring countries.

Conclusion: Future Challenges
This short review comprehensively summarizes the efforts and service-based results of the Hungarian library system, which has been trying to reestablish and position itself after the fall of the communist regime in 1990 and during the subsequent period of rapid political, social, technological, and economic changes. The future is still uncertain. While librarians try constantly to adapt their institutions to these challenges, their professional identity is still mainly characterized by outmoded, traditional paradigms. While some of the country’s libraries have become viable social-community centers in order to meet their users’ expectations, this has not generally been the case. According to a recent study by Eszter Bencze (cited in Kiszl, 2013), the authority of library leadership is not based on professional values but instead on hierarchical positioning. Because the management culture of libraries is generally hierarchical, it has discouraged professional innovation. However, the major university, public, and research libraries in the country have been, on the whole, led by librarians who are highly respected and operate in a collaborative milieu. Nevertheless, Hungarian libraries continue to face a major problem: according to the latest Eurobarometer report (European Commission, 2013), the majority of Hungarians do not intend to use them. They tend not to understand the value of information services, both physical and virtual, that are provided by libraries and other cultural-heritage organizations. This suggests that libraries need to establish a new kind of identity that will secure them a more prominent place in Hungarian society than they now enjoy. Clearly, this will require a long-term effort by the country’s librarians.
REFERENCES

Márton Németh graduated in 2003 from a five-year, comprehensive master’s-level university program in history, with high-school teacher-training specialization in the Faculty of Arts, University of Szeged, Hungary. In 2005, he completed his master’s degree in library and information science in Szeged. He holds a master’s of social science degree (2007) in European studies from Aalborg University, Denmark. In 2013, he graduated from the International Master’s of Social Science in Digital Library Learning. This program is offered jointly by Oslo University College, Parma University, and Tallinn University. From 2005 to 2012, he worked as an IT librarian in the Directorate of Informatics, National Széchényi Library, and is now a digital-information specialist at Monguz Ltd. in Budapest.