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*The EU libraries programme*  
*-The Irish academic library context*

## ABSTRACT

*This paper outlines the background to the establishment of the EU Libraries Programme. It explains the structure of the programme and outlines details of its implementation. It gives a brief background to the participation of Irish libraries in the programme. The projects Dublin City University Library was involved in are briefly outlined. Based on the experience of Dublin City University Library, the paper concludes by outlining some of the effects of participation in the programme.*

## Origin of the Libraries Programme

In 1984 the European Parliament first drew political attention to the importance of libraries in the European Community. The following year the Council of Ministers adopted a resolution - known as the *Schwecke resolution* from the name of the speaker who proposed it - calling for action by the European Commission in this area. This resolution recommended the establishment of a European library. While this idea was subsequently abandoned, the exploration of the idea led to the recognition of the importance of libraries across Europe, both within the information market and in the areas of culture and knowledge. The need to coordinate policy, stimulate infrastructure and standardise activities within the European library community was recognised. Thus the goal became, not to create a supranational electronic library but to encourage environments where national and regional networks of libraries would co-operate and interact to maximise the potential of information and communication technologies.

In 1985, the European Commission began an exploratory phase to examine the library sector in EU member states. During this phase areas where libraries were experiencing difficulties in adapting to the new conditions of the Information Society were identified, as were areas where co-operative European actions could help to better utilize resources.

## Launch of the Libraries Programme

In 1990 the Libraries Programme was launched as part of the Third Framework Program for RTD (Research and Technological Development (1990-1994)).

The immediate goals of this first programme were to create a process of change and to stimulate awareness of the benefits and implications of European co-operation among libraries.

The programme also aimed to stimulate the development of modern library services throughout the European Union, through technological innovation, taking into account different organisational structures, skills and library contexts.

The long-term objective was to promote the availability of modern library services throughout the European Union through the cost-effective use of technology, the establishment of standards and the emergence of coherent library policies.

### Structure of the programme

Under the Third Framework Programme (1990-1994) the Libraries Programme was structured around four complementary action lines.

Action Line I aimed to improve access to machine-readable bibliographic records in Europe.

Action Line II aimed to develop the concept of international resource sharing through the interconnection of systems.

Action lines III and IV aimed at stimulating innovative library services and developing prototype or sample products and tools through collaboration between libraries and the commercial sector.

### Irish involvement

In 1989 a body called the Euro-Focus on Libraries was set up by the Library Council-the statutory body charged with library development and library co-operation in the Republic of Ireland. This group became the national focal point for information on the EU Libraries Programme. It promoted the programme, gave guidelines on drawing up proposals and advised on proposals prior to submission. The group found partners for projects through their links in Europe. They got feedback from the commission on projects likely to be funded, and passed this information back to Irish libraries.

### Implementation

Three calls for proposals were made via the *Official journal of the European Communities* in

1991, 1992 and 1993. Over the three calls the level of participation by Irish libraries increased, a factor, which probably reflected the increasing awareness of the programme in Irish libraries. Ireland was particularly successful with regard to the number of projects retained for funding as a proportion of those submitted for consideration. The average rate of retention was approximately 18.5%. The Netherlands had the highest rate of retention 31.4%, followed by Ireland 26.5%. Italy and Greece submitted the highest number of proposals. Their rate of retention was 14.4% and 7.2%. The high rate of retention for Ireland may have been due to the support offered by the Euro-Focus on Libraries group.

In total there were twelve successful projects with Irish participation under the Third Framework. Projects with Irish involvement covered a wide range of issues - catalogue access, document delivery, networking protocols, interfacing tools and library management systems. Academic libraries tended to predominate with ten of the projects being university projects. There are seven university libraries in the Republic of Ireland and one national library. Most of these libraries already had an infrastructure for research and research support, whereas public libraries had not. Project teams run projects with partners from different European countries. One of the participating organisations takes on responsibility for the overall co-ordination of the projects. Of the twelve projects, Ireland was the co-ordinating partner on three of the projects.

Dublin City University library has three projects under the Third Framework.

- BIBDEL
- BORGES
- EQUIPSE

BIBDEL was established to explore, identify and improve the availability and accessibility of library services to remote users by creating "libraries without walls." Dublin City University is the Irish national centre for Distance Education. The project recognised that many users who need to study did not have access to the library services they need and sought to explore how information and communication technologies could help these students. The project examined various issues relating to the provision of library services to users at a distance. This included technical issues such as networks, file sizes, speed of transmission and the storage and transmission of data via disk and CD-ROM. Three demonstration systems illustrating the potential for technology-based access by remote users to library services were developed. The project was led by a team at the Library of the University of Central Lancashire, with partners at the University of the Aegean and Dublin City University.

Where some of the technologies of the early 1990s may now seem antiquated, especially with the development of the World Wide Web, this was pioneering work which subsequent research has built on.

BORGES the second project Dublin City University Library had an involvement in, came about at a time when Internet technologies were more developed- 1995/1996.

This project aimed to develop a filtering service via Netscape for messages disseminated by means of Usenet News and the World Wide Web. Users specified their information need by means of an information profile, which was matched by a filtering server against incoming streams of messages.

EQLIPSE, the third project for Dublin City University aimed to develop a software package to support quality management and performance measurement in libraries of all types. The system was based on a client-server architecture and

Aimed to offer compatibility with library systems from various library suppliers.

Partners on this project included library systems developers - Dynix and a software development company.

#### The Fourth Framework

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The EU Libraries Programme continued as part of the *Telematics for Libraries* programme under the Fourth Framework Programme (1994-1998), and built on the work carried out under the Third Framework. There was a continuation and strengthening of emphasis on technological developments with the area of library networking being very much to the fore. This was the grounding for the idea of creating a true European "library space" - an infrastructure of interlibrary networks creating a means, through technology, of effective resource sharing.

Under the Fourth Framework Programme the Library Programme was structured under three action lines. These focused on the continued development of tools for effective services, the move from collection to access oriented libraries, continued co-operation with the commercial sector, and increasing access to networked resources.

QCU Library has one project under the Fourth Framework programme - EQUINOX. This project built on the earlier work of EQLIPSE and aimed to further develop existing international agreement on performance measures for libraries, by expanding these to include performance measures for the electronic library environment. It also aimed to develop and test an integrated quality management and performance measurement tool for library managers.

### Effects of participation in the EU libraries programme

- European funding allowed Irish libraries to undertake research that would not otherwise have been possible. Unlike the British Library, Ireland doesn't have a library research programme; thus participation in the EU Libraries Programme was very attractive. The fact that English is the first language used in Ireland was a great advantage.
  - It resulted in increased level of library research and an increased awareness of such research. Research is about trying out things that may or may not work. Sometimes we learn most from things that don't work.
  - It provided the opportunity to co-operate internationally in research and to create European and international linkages.
  - It provided the opportunity to broaden the scope and content of library research by the inclusion of a wide variety of partners with different backgrounds and experiences.
  - It led to recognition of work and the participating libraries internationally.
  - Participants learned how to carry out EU research - how to prepare proposals, how to critically evaluate proposals. The Euro-focus on Libraries group was very influential in this area.
  - The Libraries Programme helped to develop high calibre staff. This was pioneering work, and generated its own enthusiasm. It was a useful tool in confidence building - library people had to work with systems people, marketing people etc. They also developed research and project management skills and increased information and communication technologies expertise
  - It created an increasing awareness of the potential of the new technologies.
  - It improved the status of the Library within the university, with the Library being seen as an organisation involved in cutting edge research.
  - It offered the opportunity to work on projects beyond the scope of the parent organization.
  - It helped improve links with commercial information providers and created a space for dialogue between suppliers of services to libraries and libraries -
- Prior to this products tended to be developed without the involvement of library staff.
- It provided the opportunity to have input into the development of standards.
  - It facilitated the examination of the issue of service delivery and service quality

- It increased awareness of copyright and licensing issues.
- It increased awareness and acceptance of performance indicators.

The Fourth Framework Programme (FP4) officially ended in 1998, and with it the Telematics for Libraries Programme. The areas covered by the Libraries Programme have been absorbed into the Information Society Technologies (IST) Programme, part of the Fifth Programme FP5 (1998-2002), and includes museums and archives as part of a strategy for cultural heritage.

### Conclusions

While it is true that very few marketable products were developed through the EU Libraries Programme, subsequent research and development built on the work of the projects. Strong links have been established between libraries across Europe, increased links with the commercial world have been developed, and the importance of research in the Library sector has been recognised.