

R E P O R T

On the study visit to the Royal National Institute of Blind Persons, London, Stockport and Peterborough, United Kingdom

Background

From 2009 in the Republic of Serbia there is an organized development in the area of librarianship for print disabled. The specialized institutions, as well as the system of public libraries co-ordinated by the National Library of Serbia (NLS), are in charge of taking care of the needs of print disabled. In order to provide better services for print disabled, the Centre for Blind and Visually Impaired was established as a department of the NLS. The National Library of Serbia plans to work on developing the digital library for the blind. The main target group are blind students, and the idea is to build collections of publications in suitable electronic format with the content they need in order to finish their studies. So visiting the studios of the Royal National Institute of Blind Persons in the UK presents an important experience for Serbian librarianship, for re-thinking, planning and realizing similar activities in the Republic of Serbia.

Applicant

Dragana Milunovic, MSc, Library Adviser in the Centre for Blind and Visually Impaired

Term and venue

September 8-14th, 2013 Royal National Institute of Blind Persons, London, Stockport, Peterborough, United Kingdom

Purposes of the study visit

The purposes of the visit were to study the segments of the RNIB's activities concerning library and information sciences that could be implemented in the NLS system, but also in the system of the public libraries in Serbia. These are: studying digital contents in DAISY (Digital Audio Based Information System) formats, studying the usage of the software and hardware for the blind and visually impaired, studying the

models of approaching to this special group of patrons, developing their reading skills and habits, as well as the ways of inciting the patrons to use the library services.

Narrow professional activities in RNIB

Tuesday 10th: RNIB Offices in Judd Street, London

The visit involved:

- Introducing to the content of the Research Library, its organization and users-researchers in the field of blindness and visual impairment; visiting the archive, hosted by Robert Saggars, RNIB Heritage Services Manager;
- Access to Publishing, hosted by Helen Gunesequera, Publishing Strategy Officer. Discussion about the new Treaty on copyright for the visual and print disabled.
- Access to TV, hosted by John Paton, Digital Media Development Officer. Demonstration of various TV devices of different manufacturers and well as their characteristics and user preferences.
- Visiting the exhibition Touching the Book: Embossed Literature for Blind People in the Nineteenth Century, The Peltz Gallery, Birckbeck School of Arts, hosted by Sean Wilcox, Heritage Services Assistant. Comparing with the similar exhibition in the NLS installed in July 2013, presenting the beginnings of the Braille production in Serbia from the early 20th century.

Wednesday 11th: RNIB offices in Stockport

The visit involved:

- Introducing to the National Library Service and a short overview, hosted by Pat Beech, Manager;
- Introducing to the RNIB activities for children, hosted by Hazel Sharrock, Children's Librarian;
- Introducing to the readers services, hosted by Megan Chivers, Music Librarian and Readers Services Officer;
- Introducing to the bibliographic services, hosted by Wendy Taylor, Bibliographic Services Officer;
- Introducing to the digital services and the web presentation of the RNIB, hosted by Jon Hardisty, Collection and Technical Services Manager and Simon Morgan, Digital Services Librarian;
- Discussion on the topic of social background, as well as similarities and differences in the organization of the professional library activities in Serbia and the UK, legislative on the topic of the equal right to read to all, possibilities for developing the charity work and fundraising, possibilities for cooperation with the local authorities, with publishers, with libraries of different types as well as their estimated future role in the information society.

Thursday 12th: RNIB offices in Peterborough, hosted by Tracy Pearson, Stock Officer

The visit involved:

- Introducing to the work processes in studios, hosted by Martin Pugh, Manager;
- Introducing to the production of large print materials;
- Recycling procedures;
- Processes of booking the library materials and their shipment to readers;
- Storing different types of library materials and their organization in the library stock;
- Talk and Support Services.

Friday 13th: RNIB Talking Books Studios, Camden, Academic House, hosted by Daryl Chapman, Studio Manager

The visit involved introducing to the work processes in studios: reading books (volunteers and professional actors), voice capturing and processing the recording in order to get the final product in talking book format.

Additional professional activities

Visiting the British Library, hosted by Milan Grba, South East Europe Collections Curator.

The visit involved:

- All the reading rooms of the BL;
- King's library;
- Special collections;
- Current exhibitions (Propaganda: Power and Persuasion);
- Introducing to the procedures of registration and the ways of using the BL services;
- Introducing to the procedures of acquisition of the library materials in various formats;
- Introducing to the procedures of cataloguing in ALEF system;
- Introducing to the continual professional education in the libraries in the UK, hosted by Rossitza Atanassova, digital curator;
- Discussion and exchanging experiences and opinions about the similarities and differences between the organizational structure of BL and NLS, as well as the library networks in both countries (Milan Grba and Rossitza Atanassova).

Visiting the Swiss Cottage Library, Camden, London, hosted by Sam Eastop, Cluster Manager (Culture and Communities).

The visit involved:

- Introducing to the library interior and the self-help borrowing procedures of the library materials;
- Introducing to the special services the library offers to visually impaired (Dolphin system) and deaf (online translation services to and from the sign language) users;
- Discussion about the similarities and differences between the organizational structure of the network of public libraries in the UK and Serbia (Sam Eastop and Jon Hardisty, as well as the colleagues from the reference desk).

Benefits for the National Library of Serbia and for the Serbian library network

1. Possibility of applying the experiences in establishing the digital library for the blind as well as in improving the existing services for the blind and visually impaired users;
2. Planning the digitization strategy of the collections for the blind and visually impaired in the Republic of Serbia;
3. Transmission the knowledge to librarians in the NLS, and in the library network in the country;
4. Publishing a professional paper in Serbian library professional periodicals concerning the study visit to the UK;
5. Establishing co-operation with the Royal National Institute of Blind Persons and with the Ulverscroft Foundation.

This study visit as well as the background project will also contribute to the NLS as being a socially useful institution for the community of persons with disabilities in the Republic of Serbia, but it would also allow the NLS to follow the newest accomplishments in the field.

Estimated future plans based on the study visit

After sharing the experiences with the colleagues in the UK, one of the basic ideas is an inspiration to try to find new legal and financial possibilities for development of the future digital library. Also, the newly acquainted knowledge in the field of librarianship will be shared with the personnel and patrons in other libraries in Serbia.

National Library of Serbia is rather active in the field of publishing the literature on the subject of librarianship. It is making preparations to publish yet another title soon concerning developing library services to persons with disabilities, which will benefit the patrons with visual impairment as

well as the librarians serving them. This study visit will, hopefully, contribute to better prepare that publication.

Developing the publishers awareness on the topic of accessibility of e-books is also planned.

Contacts, partnerships and future co-operation

Besides planning to adhere to the contacts now established in the United Kingdom, the National Library of Serbia is planning to raise funds from the Ministry of Culture in 2014 in order to organize a seminar on the topic of building the digital library collections for print disabled, in which process it plans to invite some lecturers from RNIB to Belgrade and to some major cities in Serbia.

Conclusion

The study visit to RNIB has been a valuable experience not only in professional, but also in organizational and administrative aspects. Many thanks to Ms Joyce Sumner, the secretary of the Ulverscroft Foundation, as well as to the Foundation itself for recognizing my application as socially useful; to all the colleagues from RNIB that introduced me the work processes in the Institute; to Mr Milan Grba, South East Europe Collections Curator in the British Library for friendly support in the early phases of looking for a way to realize a study visit to RNIB; and last, but not least, to Mr Jon Hardisty, Collections and Technical Services Manager in RNIB for nearly a year of supporting correspondence, organizational and professional help.

Belgrade, September 19th 2013 Dragana Milunović