NETWORKS IN THE PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN FINNISH LAPLAND

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ABSTRACT: Modern information technology offers many possibilities to develop services in the libraries. In sparsely populated areas, like Finnish Lapland, modern telematic communications and interactive library services play an important role in giving the inhabitants access to the information gateway. Aurora libraries, their computerised library system and Internet connections shall contribute to informational equality of inhabitants. New information technology also offers possibilities to integrate other cultural resources into the library system. In Lapland, especially, libraries and museums are developing their cooperation. The idea is that the cultural resources will be put into more efficient use in the future than nowadays. It will be possible to provide new information and know-how for the business community by joining the expertise of educational institutes into this project. The goal is to promote business and employment in the remotest area.

Manet (Finnish Lapland Libraries Network) and Monet (The first project in Northern Cultural Resources Programme) are two examples of projects set up by Lapland Regional Library and other Aurora libraries. Manet improved the availability of library services by making the Aurora computerised system available for distance use. Monet aims to integrate other cultural resources into the system.

KEYWORDS: public library, museum, network, database, distance use, cultural resources, library services

INTRODUCTION

Aurora is the computerised library system that was created by five public libraries in Finnish Lapland in 1992. In six years the membership of the network has risen to 19 libraries: 12 municipal libraries, the Rovaniemi Polytechnic with its six college libraries and the library of the Provincial Museum of Lapland.

Aurora's operation area is large (63,000 km^2) and sparsely populated (about 113,000 inhabitants, 1.8 persons per sq.km). Due to the long distances there is a need to offer a

more effective and flexible library service. Nowadays modern information technology helps us to find various solutions to offer services to people living in such an area.

Aurora libraries have developed their services from that point of view. They have had many development projects during the last years. Two of them will be introduced next; Manet and Monet.

MANET

Background and objectives

Manet (Finnish Lapland Libraries FastNet) development project was started in 1996. At that time Aurora's computerised library system had operated five years. It was necessary to do some technical improvements to the network, especially because the schools in this region were seeking a new, more sophisticated and comprehensive use of public libraries. Aurora libraries started to develop the system available for distance use, which meant also many other changes in the library system. This was set up as a special development project, which ran for two years (1996 - 1998). The project's total budget was 3.1 million FIM, half of which was financed by the European Union (the Finnish objective 6 programme) and the other half by Finnish national funds: the Ministry of Education and the Aurora libraries.

Project implementation

Many technical improvements were carried out during the project: remote connections, local area network (LAN), a data protection system (fire wall), Internet connections and e-mail installations. Aurora network now uses the FastNet service by Telecom Finland Ltd, which has raised the data transfer rate to 256 Kb/s. The LAN system of each library has also been updated to a capacity of 10 Mb/s. One of the most radical improvements was to connect the whole Aurora network to the Internet. This means that the libraries now offer free use of the Internet to their customers, and that the customers are able to have access to the new interactive library from their home terminals, schools and places of employment. The services offered by the online libraries are browsing the database and the customer's personal data (with a password), loan renewal and reserving material on loan. For a small fee the libraries also offer their customers the facility of renting an e-mail box on the library server and accessing it via the library's terminal.

Project achievements

The achievements of the Manet project can be summarized as follows:

1. The member libraries now offer modern information technology for ordinary people who, in many cases, have not had the opportunity to acquaint themselves with it

before. This is why the interface of the system has been designed to be as uncomplicated as possible.

2. The project has extended the information infrastructure to the very remotest corners of Finnish Lapland. Some rural municipalities were only first connected to the information network through their libraries.

3. The staff at the libraries have gained new skills and know-how of librarianship as well as information technology through the project. Training was one of the most important aspects of the project.

4. The project has helped the libraries to contribute to sharing the cultural heritage of mankind. Not only does the new Internet connection enable the inhabitants of Lapland to access the cultural treasures of other nations, but it also gives anyone with Internet access the opportunity to study the most valuable literary heritage of Lapland: the Lapponica collection housed in the member libraries.

MONET

Background and objectives

The development of the services continues in the Monet development project. While Manet has developed Aurora network and availability of library service, Monet aims to integrate other cultural resources into the system. It requires further development of information sources and cooperation with museums, educational institutes and the business community. The project will also run two years (1998 - 2000). The total budget is 3.6 million FIM. Major financiers are the European Union (the Finnish objective 6 programme) and the Finnish national funds (the Ministry of Education, libraries, educational institutes and firms).

Monet will create the Lapland Databank, a multi-faceted media database containing material produced and recorded jointly by libraries, museums, educational institutes and business. Diploma work, literature, articles, news, images and product information will all be awailable from this database. A standardised interface will simplify data retrieval for the user (diagram 1).

The second objective is that libraries and museums will together create a digital information service. It will require of them a new kind of teamwork. During the project there will be an organized training programme to this end.

The third object is to adopt a more efficient telematic operations model for libraries, museums, educational institutes and business (diagram 2). The Lapland databank, digital information services and the expertise of educational institutes will provide new information and know-how over the Internet for the business community. The availability of these services will improve as distance begins to lose its significance. Cultural resources will be put to more efficient use. Virtual commerce will enable

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enterprises to seek out suitable markets from far afield. Our goal is to promote business and employment in Finnish Lapland.

A FINAL WORD

Interactive library, digital information service, cultural resources and their utilisation, development of services and operations suitable for telematic use in an interconnected environment - these are some new challenges for the libraries in the future. These things will be important and in demand and offer many new possibilities to customer service. On the other hand many traditional library services will also be in demand in the future. The role of the libraries will change. However, the most important thing is that the significance of the libraries remains and will even be enhanced.

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