SPECIAL LIBRARIAN NETWORK BASED ON RUNNET: 
NECESSITY OF CREATION

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ABSTRACT: Recent transformations in the former Soviet Union as well as 
decentralized science management, appearance of a multitude of private and 
small publishing houses and other conditions occasion depressing gaps in 
collections and put all libraries, especially small ones, into rather complicated 
circumstances. It makes interlibrary loan very necessary. But one does not run 
the risk of lending materials, especially foreign materials, because of possible 
postal accidents (without considering postage). At the same time, some types of 
documents, including theses and scientific reports, are not even available. The 
development of electronic connections could allow us to overcome these 
problems. The possibility of using a segment of the recently created 
RUNNetwork (Russian Universities Network) managed by one of the federal 
centers attached to the St. Petersburg State Institute of Fine Mechanics and 
Optics (Technical University) for high-speed text and graphic information 
exchange between EUR- and IAMS/LIC members will be considered.

Necessity

The situation in interlibrary relationships in the former Soviet Union is rather changed after 
disintegration of the country, which formerly was covered by a common network of closely 
connected libraries. Although all republics and their academies were officially independent, in 
actual practice they formed a strictly centralized network with headquarters in Moscow.

A part of domestic relations has turned into international relations. So the home interlibrary 
exchange turned into an international exchange with still no regulations.

The new foreign publishing houses are no longer amenable to the former All-Union laws, such as 
the Legal Deposit Law providing five main Russian libraries, and the Library of the Russian 
Academy of Sciences between them, with a copy of any issue coming off the press.
The Legal Deposit Law was promulgated by Catherine the Great in 1783 and was strictly observed until the recent time. Over the course of two years (from 1991 till 1993) the right of RASL for a legal deposit was in doubt. Luckily nowadays this right is restored by the law.

So if some years ago the RASL could easily get one copy of any home issue (and the home was a large one!), nowadays we have large gaps in current acquisitions. The situation is much worse with little libraries, which have much less means.

The state publishing policy has also changed. For scientific publications it resulted in a virtual stop of funding editions, which caused a great reduction of them. It is rather common that a book coming off the press becomes a bibliographical rarity right away. There are even editions of only 50 copies (e.g. “Hydrological year-books”). It goes without saying an edition of 50 or even 300 copies is not available for all interested people and libraries, even large and especially foreign ones.

Acquisition of foreign materials is even worse as the hard currency funding is considerably (that is destructively) reduced. It does not allow for acquiring the most needed foreign books for the central library let alone for the small ones.

The destruction of the former Union and especially the interregional conflicts are associated with unreliable postal service (which was always the case, however). Librarians fear sending books and journals by post for interlibrary exchange, and do not want to risk mailing foreign items, which usually are unique copies in the country and probably irreplaceable.

Contacts of Russian scientists with their foreign colleagues are worth mentioning, too.

Russian schools of thought are broadly represented at international meetings and many scientists from the former Soviet Union have emigrated or work abroad. This might be erroneously assumed to result in fresh exposure to new information. But conference proceedings are usually kept by participants and are available only for a limited number of scientists. The latest information is more likely exchanged between close friends.

Meanwhile papers are generally presented in electronic form and are easily entered into the data bank of the electronic network.

From all above mentioned we could draw the conclusion that the only way out of the actual library situation in Russia is promoting electronic networks connected with similar international ones.

Possibilities

Fortunately one year ago a Federal University Network of Russia was created. One of the Operating Federal Nodes is located in St. Petersburg Institute of Fine Mechanics and Optics.
Technical University. The Russian University Network (RUNNet) is a noncommercial network which provides services for the benefit of the Russian scientific and educational community, with high speed inter-connectivity and access to the Internet and covers practically all of Russia overlapping our needs geographically (we have some related libraries in Moscow, Yaroslavl', Petrozavodsk, Irkutsk).

Figure 1. RUNNet geography.
Obstacles

Unfortunately we still cannot use the electronic network widely because of shortage, honestly said, an absolute lack of any suitable technical base (beginning with diskettes up to a computer, at least a primitive one). It would be pertinent here to thank scientists of the Institute, to which our library is attached, for their letting us use their computers.

We (Russian science and libraries) could have gotten by on funds newly provided, thanks to the hardly begun conversion, if there had not been so many unexpected extra expenses.

This notwithstanding we are endeavouring to create catalogues and some data banks (such as “Institute scientists publications” and “North-West lakes investigations”, for instance) and bring them up for electronic network use (see Ivanova A. “Library of the Institute of Limnology (Branch of Russian Academy of Sciences Library): Creation of a database and catalogues especially adapted for EURASLIC and IAMSLIC network connection", p. 201).

Some general drawbacks have been revealed, such as the absence of compulsory parallel translation of titles and headings into English in standard entry and catalogues.

There would be no traffic jams because of narrow streets, if from the first automobile or even from the first cart the roads had been built for the future scale of traffic. So now we are trying to do all we can to be ready to join a common network.

We hope that our communication through RUNNet to Internet with other networks will let us do a qualitative jump into information waves.