

TEMPUS project NMPLIS - Sustainability

Introduction

The TEMPUS Joint European Project, NMPLIS facilitated the development of new Master's Degree programmes in Librarianship and Information Studies (LIS) in Armenia, Georgia, and Uzbekistan. This report addresses the issues underpinning the future sustainability of these programmes.

The request for funding included a commitment to prepare a report on the sustainability of the principal goals of the project. The European Commission (2006) defines sustainability thus:

"A project is sustainable when it continues to deliver benefits to the project beneficiaries and/or other constituencies for an extended period after the Commission's financial assistance has been terminated."

The Commission has classified the factors that ensure or hinder the sustainability of TEMPUS projects in two categories:

1. context-level factors, i.e. elements external to the project itself but that influence its future in some way;
2. project-level factors, i.e. elements of the project which can be directly influenced.

At the project level, the factors that the Commission identified were:

- quality of project's design in meeting academic, professional and/or social needs;
- involvement of consortium members: sense of ownership and motivation;
- effective management and leadership, e.g. quality of human relationships.

Evidence that these have been achieved can be demonstrated in a number of ways, for example:

- The new curricula have been designed by the staff teaching them to meet their perception of local needs, and differ from country to country; they are not slavish replicas of the western partners' curricula, and it is recognised that they will need to be subject to continual review and revision. The need for regular monitoring of the job market for graduates from the courses was stressed during the seminars on course development and quality assurance.
- The project has strengthened the relationship between the partners, not only between the European Union and the European 'neighbours' but also, for example, within Uzbekistan where the two partner institutions are now working closely together, whilst addressing different sectors of the market for courses. As well as continuing contact with LIS teachers in the European partners and other Western institutions, the partners in the project should also seek to make regular contact with other LIS educators in the other post-Soviet Republics to share insights into their many common challenges.
- A notable innovation in course content is the introduction of teaching about management and leadership. This will not only contribute to the future effective development of library and information services in the country, but will also benefit the operations of the course team.

The potential benefits from this project are wide-ranging. The sustained success of the new Master's Degrees would not only contribute to filling skills gaps in the specific labour market, but also facilitate more effective and efficient library and information support for education, research, and social and economic development in the partner countries. These programmes will develop the human resource capacity required to deliver advocacy for the continuing modernisation of library and information services. Through contributions to the continuing professional education of the existing workforce provided by online access to the programmes' open educational resources, they will also raise the general level of professional competence in the partner countries, and thus enhance public confidence in the ability of library and information services to contribute to national progress.

However, some concern must be expressed about the context in which the new courses will operate, where the Commission identified the following factors contributing to the sustainability of a project's outcomes:

- socio-economic support;
- national support, e.g. matching with political priorities;
- academic and/or institutional support, e.g. strength of institutional support, capacity for securing adequate resources for continuation, active participation of the target groups.

The resources and services provided by a nation's library and information services not only shape the demand for graduates from courses such as these, but could also underpin the future economic and social development of the countries. Continuing progress by the staff teaching these courses will determine the knowledge and skills which graduates could acquire from these new Master's Degree programmes would thus contribute to national development. It is clear, however, that this depends not only on the efforts of the teachers and the graduates, but also on actions that must be taken by the institutions hosting the courses. There are also fundamental challenges that governments *and* international agencies must address to secure the future development of these Republics' libraries and information services.

The following general recommendations are therefore made as a result of this project. These necessarily address a wide range of issues, emphasising the need for a comprehensive, strategic approach to the development of the library and information services that will employ the graduates from the new programmes.

Actions by the European Commission

The modernisation of education and libraries in these countries (and others) has received financial and technical support from numerous international and national governmental and non-governmental organizations. These agencies and their initiatives seem to exist in an information vacuum of their own making; access to information on their activities is limited and fragmented. The European Commission should contribute to improving this situation by publishing in a central, open repository, the final reports on those projects that it supports, following the example set by UNESCO AND USAid.

The national governments of the former Soviet Republics need better guidance to enable them to manage their library and information services more effectively.

In the case of Armenia and Georgia, it seems to be necessary not only to offer some encouragement or assistance to progress the review initiated with support from the Council of Europe, and to prepare and publish the strategic development plans which seem to be necessary if future assistance in this field is to be more effective. In the case of Uzbekistan, there seems to be a plan emerging for some library and information services, but not for others, and a more comprehensive or transparent approach should be encouraged. The post-Soviet Republics should be encouraged not only to participate in reviews of cultural policy and/or library economics similar to those conducted for the Council of Europe's STAGE project in the Caucasus and by the European Commission in Eastern Europe. The structural mode of TEMPUS may offer an existing mechanism for delivering the requisite support for undertaking the necessary surveys and drafting plans for approval by governments.

Such surveys could also provide a basis for policy development by the European Commission, which similarly appears to lack a comprehensive strategy for the development of the library and information services required to underpin a knowledge based economy in the post-Soviet Republics.

Until recently, the provision of LIS education in Armenia, Georgia, and Uzbekistan still largely followed Soviet educational models. There are mixed levels of international recognition accorded to LIS qualifications formerly awarded in these countries, although generally they are not accepted as equal to those awarded in Western countries. The European Commission has been promoting the implementation of the Bologna process, whose underlying aims are to make academic degree standards more comparable and compatible throughout Europe and internationally, underpinned by rigorous quality assurance processes, and the project has aided in the development of programmes fitting their scope. Armenia and Georgia plan that all institutions should adhere to the European Union's Bologna principles, while Uzbekistan had adopted the methodological approaches to the accreditation of institutions that have been recommended the Council for Cooperation in the Area of Education of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Although the details of the latter are not generally known to the author, the available evidence suggests that harmonising methodological approaches to the accreditation of institutions in the European Union as far as possible with those in the Commonwealth of Independent States, while avoiding *imposing* a European model on recently different cultural values, does not require an intellectual effort, but a diplomatic one on the part of the European Commission.

Actions by the national governments

Privatisation of parts of the education sector in some of the post-Soviet Republics has posed new challenges for the state sector, not only in the attractiveness of new curricular offerings by the private HEIs, but also in any comparison of the investment by private and state-funded HEIs in staff, premises and equipment, including library facilities and resources. It challenges the state to monitor the quality of educational provision in both privately and publicly funded institutions, ensuring that they are of comparable standard, and thus triggers an urgent need for quality-assurance and accreditation mechanisms.

It is also clear that there are significant challenges that must be addressed to secure the future development of these Republics' libraries and information services in order to shape the demand for graduates from these courses. For example, in all three Republics, the public library services seem to have been unable to sustain even their previous limited role, and school libraries serve little useful purpose.

The preparation in each of the post-Soviet Republics of an overall strategy for the development of all library and information services and their integration in government programmes for economic, educational and social development is imperative. It is first important for the government and institutions to know what is actually happening, requiring relevant data (including skills audits) to be collected, analysed and compared with international best practice. If the results are made available for cross-sectoral consultation and discussion so that relevant developments can be identified and priorities agreed, appropriate strategic decisions and plans for the allocation of available resources can be made. They should be encouraged not only to participate in reviews of cultural policy and/or library economics similar to those conducted for the Council of Europe's STAGE project in the Caucasus and by the European Commission in Eastern Europe, but also to prepare the strategic development plans which seem to be necessary if future assistance in this field is to be more effective. UNESCO's NATIS principles are suggested as a starting point for consideration at the highest level of government.

The existence of national governments' strategies will also assist other international governmental and non-governmental agencies to offer more effective assistance for library development in any of the former Soviet Republics by focussing their assistance in support of these plans in place of their present, uncoordinated and largely unsustainable actions. They would, for example, enable these agencies to have prior reassurance that national governments would be committed to the expenditure required to maintain a service after it has been initiated with aid.

The decision makers at all levels of government, as well as managers directly responsible for library and information services, need to review their role and the provision that is appropriate in contemporary society, to initiate new models of information service provision, and to encourage the effective use of their resources. In Armenia and Georgia, the governments and national libraries need to be encouraged to review their responsibilities for the conservation, preservation, and dissemination of the national heritage, regardless of whether it was produced in a written format or as electronic media. The government of Uzbekistan may need to review whether it needs to implement a patents information service to protect its citizens' intellectual property rights. In all three partner Republics, the managers of cultural/educational services such as public libraries and school library services need up to date knowledge to demonstrate their role in contemporary society, to encourage the effective use of their actual or potential cultural resources, and to initiate new models of information service provision.

Actions by other international agencies

International governmental and non-governmental agencies offering assistance for library development in any of the former Soviet Republics should be encouraged to focus their assistance in support of each national government's strategy, in place of their present activities, which are uncoordinated and largely unsustainable.

At the same time, these governmental and non-governmental agencies should seek prior reassurance that national governments would commit to the expenditure required to maintain a service after it has been initiated with aid.

The International Federation of Library Associations, the Library Assembly of Eurasia, and the relevant National Librarians and Library Associations should consider whether there is still a need for a Workshop on Universal Bibliographic Control in Central Asia and, if so, seek funding to support it.

Actions by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

HEIs in Armenia and Georgia need to develop a more strategic and coordinated plan for the integrated provision of computers and network infrastructures to meet their need not only for library and information services, but also for the introduction of electronic administration.

The partner institutions in the Caucasus and Central Asia will need to ensure that the currency and relevance of the new LIS programmes are maintained by ensuring that their staff implement the Quality Control and Assurance measures to which they have been introduced during the NMPLIS project.

The maintenance of current knowledge in the field will not be met by access to foreign texts alone. The teachers of the new programmes will need to interact with their peers in other countries to understand what lies behind different approaches to introducing new concepts and techniques into the curriculum. A carefully conceived and budgeted staff development programme is needed to facilitate regular international contact to enable teachers to stay aware of best practice in their field.

Actions by all libraries and information services

The three partner countries' HEIs and specialist library services could also use enhanced ICT facilities to raise international awareness of the research outputs published in the country by initiating the creation of online document repositories, and providing indexes and abstracts in major international languages. Online availability of theses, journal articles and working papers could increase the availability of teaching material in local languages. These developments would also illustrate an environment more dependent on modern information services, and the role of information professionals who support their use.

The knowledge and skills of graduates from these new Master's Degree programmes will be highly attractive to employers seeking personnel with organisational, managerial, and computing skills. Employers in the LIS sector will need to ensure that they have in place appropriate arrangements for the recruitment and retention of graduates from the new Master's Degree

programmes if they are not to become part of an internal or external 'brain drain.' The employment package will need to include not only adequate remuneration, but also professionally challenging activities.

Actions by the teachers of the new Master's Degree programmes

The teachers of the new Master's Degree programmes in Librarianship and Information Studies have an implicit responsibility to encourage the implementation of all the foregoing recommendations.

Programmes that match the real needs of students, socio-economic actors, and the labour market are more likely to be sustainable. They will attract more students, more funding, and more support from the universities. In order to make an informed choice about a career, prospective students need to be aware of what is involved in the various jobs which would be open to them and their future prospects. Needs can change, however, even during a project's life, and the rapid transfer of knowledge about practices and technology does not necessarily provide an entirely appropriate curriculum for less developed countries. The job market for graduates from the course, and the knowledge, skills *and* attitudes required by potential employers, will need to be monitored regularly in future by the course teams to underpin changes in curricular content and pedagogy.

The partner institutions will need to ensure that the currency and relevance of the new LIS programme is maintained by implementing regular Quality Control and Assurance measures – an annual review of course content and learning resources, teaching methods and students' learning, supplemented by a periodic major review (perhaps every 4 to 5 years) of the currency of the curriculum, its consonance with the requirements of the local labour market, and its calibration against developments in the discipline reflected in courses in other institutions. The outcomes of the annual and periodic reviews should, as a matter of good practice, be posted on the courses' web sites for the benefit of current students and as reassurance for prospective students and the wider professional community.

Some consideration might be given to inviting international representatives, perhaps from the European partners in the TEMPUS project, to take part in the first major periodic review of the course, which should take place in about 2015/2016.

The European Commission indicated that indicators of the sustainability of a project would be found in the intensity and enlargement of cooperation: the maintenance of international networks, continued engagement by the project team with local employers, and the enlargement of the initial network to incorporate other universities. As well as continuing contact with LIS teachers in the European partners and other Western institutions, the partners in the project should also seek to make regular contact with local employers and with LIS educators in the other post-Soviet Republics to share insights into their many common challenges.

The new programmes could also make a significant contribution to professional development through encouraging or directing the focus of students' theses.

Students could usefully be encouraged to use these studies to address small current problems in professional practice. Regular meetings of a course advisory panel, with a regularly refreshed membership drawn from a cross section of the country's library and information services, could help to identify and prioritise these issues, as well as providing the support that may be needed to implement the investigations.

During the first few years after the conclusion of the project, the course teams should seek to involve their national TEMPUS Coordinators in monitoring issues relating to the sustainability of the programme.

Finally, the course teams will need to reflect on the general criteria for the sustainability of LIS programmes that were identified recently:

1. The academic unit reflects the mission and goals of the parent institution yet has a strong sense of self and of its mission; the academic and strategic planning process is consistent with the processes of the parent institution.
2. Faculty are represented on university- wide committees and task forces.
3. There is open communication with university administrators; senior administrators are aware of the programme's goals and accomplishments and acknowledge the programme and its graduates on appropriate occasions.
4. The program offers a cohesive curriculum reflecting a disciplinary and distinctive body of knowledge. The curriculum is demonstrably at the graduate level in intellectual depth and requirements.
5. Faculty reflect current educational practice and philosophies.
6. Faculty demonstrate their scholarship and attract external research funding at least to the same extent as similar units on campus.
7. Faculty are connected with other scholars and other units on campus.
8. Faculty and student numbers in the overall administrative unit meet a campus-determined critical mass.
9. Faculty renewal advances the program and fills tenure-track salary lines.
10. The program is reasonably well supported financially, to the extent that it is able to realize its academic goals and strategic plan.
11. Faculty are visible at local and national conferences.
12. The programme is well connected with alumni and the professional community.
13. The programme raises funds to the same extent as similar units on campus.
14. Students find professional employment within a reasonable period of time.
15. The programme is led by a visionary and diplomatic advocate for graduate education and professional education.
16. The programme receives full accreditation.