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***NEW MASTERS PROGRAMME IN LIBRARY AND
INFORMATION SCIENCE***

4th Monitoring Report

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Time of final project conference in Tashkent and Samarkand: 10 – 14 October 2011

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Participants: Representatives from all partners in the consortium

Report by: Monika Elbert, external expert

Content of the report

1. Summary
2. Report of the Final Project Conference
3. Conclusions

1. Summary

This fourth monitoring report focuses on the final project conference, held in Uzbekistan (Tashkent and Samarkand), October 10 – 14, 2011.

In the framework of the NMPLIS (New Masters Programme for Library and Information Science) TEMPUS project, the international conference "Towards the Knowledge Society: New Roles for Librarians in a Changing World" was held in Tashkent and Samarkand, Uzbekistan, October 10-14, 2011.

The consortium of partners also invited me to participate in their fifth consortium meeting, held in Tashkent the day before the conference, on Monday October 10, 2011.

My participation in the final project conference 'replaced' the country visit to Uzbekistan, which according to the Technical Annex had been due to take place at the beginning of 2011.

The conference was very successful, and the papers by project partners of high quality. At both locations, Tashkent and Samarkand, there were interested audiences of faculty, students and librarians, who engaged in discussion with presenters, focusing mainly on digital libraries curriculum development, how to attract students, their employment prospects, and the quality assessment and sustainability of the Masters' courses.

An impressive achievement was the publications of the proceedings in print and electronic form, available to all participants on the first day of the conference.

Project activities have been extended for another year, but the conference can be regarded as having been the highlight showcasing the achievements of the project to a broad audience in Uzbekistan and widely through the project website.

2. Background

It should be noted that Uzbekistan is carrying out a wide range of reforms to introduce and apply new information technologies in libraries despite existing economic hardship. The most important task at present is to create an advanced information and library network based on such large libraries of Uzbekistan as the National Library, regional public libraries (ILCs), and information resource centers of leading universities in order to develop nationwide union electronic catalog. The joint efforts of these leading libraries in creating a union electronic catalog would not only significantly reduce the individual expenditure of other libraries, but also establish an effective information infrastructure that provides most of the required services.

The National Library of Uzbekistan, leading universities in the country, the Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences, and information library centers can play a significant role in the creation of a corporate system for an intensive information exchange throughout

the country. Such a corporate system would be the first stage of the virtual library, which helps to reduce the time of searching for information, to create competitive products and information resources, and to improve the exchange of data between organizations in the Republic.

Seen against this background, it is clear that this project was and is very relevant, setting up the masters' courses for highly qualified professionals that are competent in all aspects of the creation and management of digital libraries, and access to and use of digital content.

2. Conference aims and results

The aim of this timely conference was to explore how to ensure that library and information science specialists are best qualified to meet the challenges of our rapidly changing information environment. Another important aim was to disseminate results and achievements of the project to academia, the library profession at large, and national policy makers and funders.

The Uzbek project coordinator, Dr. Marat Rakhmatullaev and his team, along with colleagues from Tashkent University of Information Technologies and Tashkent Institute of Culture were the main organizers. All aspects of the conference, from logistics to content, were extremely well organised, and delivered in the most collegial, hospitable, professional and friendly manner.

Speakers and leaders of discussions included Dr. Rakhmatullaev as well as the coordinators from the project partner countries Georgia and Armenia, and the EU partner countries UK, Italy, Spain and Latvia.

The conference participants included:

- Project partners: Tashkent University of Information Technologies, Tashkent Institute of Culture (Uzbekistan); Robert Gordon University, Middlesex University (UK); Barcelona University (Spain); Parma University (Italy); Rezekneh Institute of Higher Education (Latvia); Fundamental Scientific Library, International Scientific - Educational Center (Armenia); Ilia State University, Library Association of Georgia (Georgia);
- Representatives of the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education, Agency of Information and Connection, Republican Information Library Center of the Uzbekistan Republic;
- Representatives of Europahouse, National Tempus Office, embassies, Goethe Institute;
- Directors and specialists of Uzbekistan academic and public libraries;
- Professors, staff and students of universities from Tashkent, Samarqand and other regions of Uzbekistan

Subjects covered at the conference included:

- New curricula and directions in teaching for information and library studies including the Bologna requirements
- Use of new methods and technologies in teaching information and library services
- Best practices in library and information science education
- Quality management and assurance
- Basic issues on distant education for students and librarians
- Strategies and benefits of working in a library consortium
- Summary of methodology, implementation and results of the TEMPUS project “New Masters Program on Library and Information Science”
- Challenges in sustaining the new masters’ degrees in the three partner countries

The presentations and papers were of a high quality standard and well prepared, outlining and elucidating the various professional and technical strands that the project had addressed during its life-time as noted in the bullet points above.

The major issues of the debate were inter alia the options in developing a digital libraries’ curriculum, the challenges of attracting students and their employment prospects, the sustainability of the degree courses, and strategies to build on the curricula, course content and reputation the project had built during its lifetime.

Last but not least, the conference had a strong element of advocacy for sustained funding of modern library services at the national and regional level, given the high profile it had locally and nationally with university authorities and decision makers at ministerial level in charge of policies and funding, and given the focus on the development of a modern national information infrastructure as noted in section 2 above.

9. Conclusions

The success of this conference, mirroring the successful establishment of the masters’ courses and implementation of project activities, strengthens the reputation of the course and the employability of its graduates needed to manage the nationwide revival of Uzbek libraries, and its flagship new national library building.

The consortium meeting confirmed that almost all foreseen project activities had been successfully carried out; the extension was to finalise the pilots in Georgia, and to ensure

the sustainability of the masters' courses in all three partner countries by targeted promotional activities, and by working with prospective employers.

The conference presentations by all partners demonstrated that new thinking and knowledge about the creation, delivery and quality assessment of Digital Libraries Masters' Courses had been created in the partner countries, in the course of studying and working to build the masters' courses. At the same time, EU partners acknowledge that they have greatly benefitted and learnt from discussions with their colleagues and students from Uzbekistan, Armenia and Georgia, how they overcome their challenges and seize opportunities in the evolving information environments in their respective countries.