

Public library development project „Trešais tēva dēls”

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ABSTRACT

In the fall of 2006, the Latvia received 16,2 million US dollars from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), for development of Latvia's municipal public libraries. The grant given to Latvia is the first outside of the Americas and the first in the Eurasian continent. All means are used to develop Latvian public libraries in the fields of information and communication technologies. The aim of the project was

to ensure free access to computer and internet connection in all Latvian public libraries, to train librarians to work and to train library users to work with the new equipment and software, as well as use the electronic signatures and other innovative library activities. In essence, the project is cooperation between BMFG, the government and the local authorities.

KEYWORDS: library, information professional, librarian, new technologies

1. About the project

In the fall of 2006, the Latvia received 16,2 million US dollars from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), for development of Latvia's municipal public libraries. The Foundation had a high esteem for that which has already been achieved in the Latvian libraries, for example, in the framework of the „Network of light” project which involved a continuous and progressive development and automation of all Latvian municipal libraries. The grant given to Latvia is the first outside of the Americas and the first in the Eurasian continent. In addition to the Gates Foundation grant, the public library development project „*Trešais tēva dēls*” is co-financed by the Latvian state and Latvian local authorities, as well as by the Microsoft corporation that has donated software. All these means are used to develop Latvian public libraries in the fields of information and communication technologies. In essence, the project is cooperation between BMFG, the government (via the Ministry of Culture) and the local authorities.

2. The meaning of the „*Trešā tēva dēla*” symbol

The symbol of the third son (*Trešais tēva dēls*), known from fairy tales, has been chosen as a name for the municipal public library development project co-financed by the Latvian state and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. For a long time, the view has dominated that libraries are dusty collections of books that may be used to pick up some reading material, that libraries do not support the development of society, of the individual and of the state. The chief goal of the project communication campaign has been to destroy this stereotype, to prove that libraries have always been centers of information and knowledge, that modern technologies have long been introduced that help develop the activity of the libraries.

„*Trešais tēva dēls*” was created as a new brand for libraries. Initially it was used to attract attention to Latvian public libraries, the changes that occurred during the project. Now this brand is used to signify the introduction of the Internet and other modern technologies in the libraries. This sign shows that each person may go to a library to satisfy his or her informational needs using the facilities offered by the library.

To explain the meaning of the „*Third son*”, a fairy tale hero was chosen, well known to many nations around the world - everyone knows the story of the third son. The older brothers think that the third son is a fool who does not wish to attain worldly good, he is interested in far simpler things. Upon reading the story of the third son, we know who are the real fools – both of the older brothers, who talk the talk but do nothing, while the „fool”, on the contrary, speak little but always rescue someone or come victorious. The third son always surprises with his intelligence, skill and modesty, while his capabilities are doubted, he is always full of determination to save the princess in the glass mountain.

The story of the third son is a story of a person who has overcome obstacles, overcome himself, since he does not initially believe that he may be the hero and attain his goals. In the context of the project, it was the story of the library that develops, develops to survive, to prove to others that it may grow and is not merely a dusty storeroom for books. The third son is both Latvian and international, he may be encountered in the folklore of many nations – therefore it was understandable for both Latvian and foreign societies. The third son has not disappeared in our days either, he appears in cartoons and films, the misunderstood and hated who become heroes and save the world and humanity (Shreck, Neo from Matrix, Spiderman).

The title of this project „*Trešais tēva dēls*” has become a well-known, friendly and attractive symbol,

it told of a simple man who with his strength of spirit is able to withstand everyday troubles, is able to learn new things and transmit them to others. The title corresponds to the mission defined by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation: Every life, regardless of the geographical location, is equally valuable.

3. What's done?

The aim of the project was to ensure free access to computer and internet connection in all Latvian public libraries, to train librarians to work and to train library users to work with the new equipment and software, as well as use the electronic signatures and other innovative library activities. That was the main BMGF precondition, to give Latvia this grant. To fulfill the requirements, the library law has changed.

An implementation of the project has started in November of 2006 and finished in June of 2008, but there are some activities, for example impact assessment of social and economic benefits of the project, that will take place till 2010.

There are 527 local governments that takes part in the project and has signed the cooperation agreement with the state agency "Culture information systems" who implements the project This remarkable number makes the project one of the biggest in state. Big importance in getting so big support was the collaboration with The Ministry of Regional Development and Local Government and with the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments.

In this comparatively short time period has been done a lot of things to reach the specific aim. Around 4000 computers are installed in Latvia's 874 libraries, an average of 3.4 computers per library. The number of computers is being calculated on the basis of the members of the public served by each library. Specially equipped computers are also being supplied to the Latvian Library for the Blind and its seven branches

throughout Latvia, also special computers for site-impaired users are going to Latvia's 28 main regional libraries. In addition to the computers, libraries will also receive multi-functional equipment for copying, scanning and printing. The Library for the Blind will receive special Braille printers. All the computers are loaded with the latest software enabling library users to utilize state-of-the-art techniques for searching and processing information. All the equipment is intended for use by the public and free of charge.

In 853 libraries are improved local area networks and internet connections and 17 libraries has connected to the internet first time. All 874 libraries now have broadband access to the internet, available both to people working with the library's computers and to those who come to the library with their own laptops, because free wireless access to the internet will be available at all libraries and in their immediate vicinity.

In accordance with signed agreement, local governments have to improve the safety, to make a library room repair and to provide with essential furniture.

Within the scope of the project, ten permanent and ten mobile, fully-equipped, computerized training rooms of regional significance have been constructed and commissioned. They have been set up overall to optimize training processes for the latest equipment, including portable computers, interactive whiteboards, multi-functional equipment, projectors and screen, as well as memory-card readers for working with electronic signatures.

Training course has acquired about 1800 public library librarians. They are trained to work with the new equipment and software, as well as trained in the use of electronic signatures, innovative library activities and other topics. Altogether, every librarian has undergone a 140-hour training program within the project. Trained librarians will individually consult about the work with

new computers and will organize group training courses for library users. In the future in these training centers are planned to train local government employees, nongovernmental organization deputies and people on the spot, in that way generating unitary lifelong learning center in the state regions.

In collaboration with Ministry of Special Assignments for Electronic Government Secretary, all librarians received free e-signatures. They are trained to use them and to consult inhabitants.

4. Benefit for everybody

Everyone can access the improvements resulting from the “*Trešais tēva dēls*” project at any of Latvia’s 874 municipal public libraries. It is possible to use broadband wireless internet for free, using the library’s computers or with own laptop. All computers are loaded with state-of-the-art software and anyone can use the opportunity to put questions, related with computer equipment, use of e-signature, data basis or other issues, to librarian. So user can easy reach needed information.

Libraries are the only place in state where free of charge and for everyone is available newest Office software and newest educative, entertaining and special software’s for work, studies and relaxation.

5. Long-term prospects of the project.

The society is informed about the project’s achievements. One of the tasks of the project was to raise the prestige of libraries and librarians in society. During the entire project and after it, a communication campaign is carried out that ensures that the society knows of the changes in libraries. The libraries will be supported not only today, but in the future as well, both from the state, local authority, and the non-governmental and private sector. The results of the informative campaign indicate that 83% of Latvian residents have heard of the „*Trešais tēva dēls*” project. This number is considerable and

testifies that the majority of Latvian residents are aware of the changes in the libraries.

The long-term prospects of the project after its completion mainly depends on the further investments of the local authorities in the infrastructure developed during the project, as well as on the general support for libraries on the state level.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the work, and to provide a better understanding to the sponsors and the executors of the success of the project and the portion of society that it has helped to increase the quality of life, prior to the project, during it and after the project surveys of society and various social groups were conducted. The evaluation of the project influence will help to evaluate the strong and weak sides of the project and to ascertain the things that need to be paid attention to in the future. The evaluation of the project influence is the largest study that has ever been made in the library field in Latvia. The activities of the project of this scale are unprecedented both in regards of the type of execution and the content. Usually the evaluation of the project results is done only after the completion of the project, however in this case the evaluation was begun already before the project was started. The process of the project influence evaluation is closely tied with the reconcilability of the project in society.

The initiative of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in Latvia is a world scale project. The library society in the entire world awaits the successful completion of this pilot project that will be the key to success to other European countries for participation in the Global library program.

6. The related studies

The question regarding the prestige of libraries has always been and still is a pressing problem in the Latvian society, obviously, foremost among the librarians

themselves..

In 2007, a student of the Latvian University - Aiga Rutka within the framework of the Bachelor's thesis conducted a study - „Reflecting libraries in the Latvian press in 2005 and 2006”.

The goal of the study was to determine the way that the library is reflected in the Latvian press and what is the attitude of the authors of the publications towards libraries and the library science. Within the framework of the project, a contextual analysis was carried out – it surveyed publications in Latvian newspapers and magazines that were among the most sold press publications in Latvia – in total, 12 various press publications, 3 of them in the Russian language. In total, the National bibliography analysis database located 292 units (publications) for the keyword „library”.

The publications included in the study were analyzed by the author from three different aspects:

- 1 profession of the authors of the publication;
- 2 the thematic of the publication;
- 3 the attitudes expressed in the publication (positive, neutral, negative)

The conclusions of the study indicate that the majority of the authors are journalists or a collective of journalists (79,3%). While the largest part of the publications have a positive attitude towards libraries (41,9%), however publications that express a neutral (38,2%) or a negative (19,3%) attitude were in the majority.

The attitude expressed in the media significantly influences the attitude of the society therefore the opinions expressed in the press are important. The negative attitude of the society towards libraries can certainly influence the professional level of the librarians and the quality of the services. To change the attitude of the society towards the positive, a significant event is necessary; in this case it could be project „*Trešais tēva dēls*”.

dēls”. There is no doubt that the project has shown libraries and librarians in a new light, it would be interesting to know what role does the library play in the modern society today, after the completion of the active stage of the project.

To determine the attitude of society after the campaigns carried out during the project, a study accordingly to the same methodology will be conducted that will evaluate and analyze publications published in 2007 and 2008 regarding libraries and librarians in Latvia. In this way we will determine what changes the project “*Trešais tēva dēls*” has made in the regard that society has for libraries, and whether the prestige of libraries and librarians will be a troubling issue for Latvia in the future as well.

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