
The Greek Library Scene An Overview*

ALEXANDRA PAPAZOGLOU

Hellenic American Educational Foundation, Athens, Greece

LIBRARIES are unfortunately not a priority in the Greek society and Greek librarians do not enjoy the social status accorded to other professionals.

This statement, I should say, encompasses all the problems faced by the Greek libraries and the library profession in general. There is a lack of coherent legislation governing the role of libraries in education and in the public sector, and consequent lack of financial provision at government level. Furthermore, there is no coordinating government body or office for the systematic development of the libraries and the library field.

* Originalmente apresentado no 4.º Congresso Nacional dos Bibliotecários Arquivistas e Documentalistas, Braga, Março 1992 embora não tenha sido incluído nas Actas respectivas.

Libraries are understaffed and in many cases staffed by non-librarians, although there are two schools in the national vocational system that train librarians. Library buildings are in their majority not designed as such and are often poorly furnished and equipped. Until very recently Greek librarians had no bibliographic and other professional tools to assist them in their work.

During the last decade, however, a few basic changes marked the development of the Greek library scene. The introduction of new technologies in the library field, the publication of some basic bibliographic tools, the creation of Greek bibliographic standards, the growing number of trained librarians, the slight shift of emphasis in the educational system and the benefit of the EEC programmes, are a few of the

factors that have influenced the Greek library field. These factors will be discussed first, followed by the actual description of the various types of libraries in Greece.

Factors of Change

New Technologies

The introduction of new technologies in the library field has caused the Greek librarians to be greatly involved with the issue.

Library automation

Library automation of the card catalogue has become an obsession. Quite a few libraries are now computerized at various levels.

The small size of the Greek library market, the particularity of the Greek character set and the inadequate funding of Greek libraries, do not favor the marketing or the development of commercial products. However, a few of the well known library systems, like ADVANCE of GEAC and TINLIB of UMI, are represented in Greece today. A few rather inadequate products were also developed by Greek software companies. Two University libraries, those of the University of Crete and of the University of Patras, developed their own rather sophisticated automated library systems.

The Greek National Documentation Centre has produced a micro-computer-based software package which runs on IBM PC-XT's and compatibles and is suitable for a number of small databases in many libraries. This product, given its advantage of being available free of charge, is used by many of the department libraries of the University of Athens and by some public libraries. The Micro-IS of UNESCO, being also supplied free, is another library programme used by the University of Thessaly, and the National Library and some public libraries.

Libraries are unfortunately not a priority in the Greek society and Greek librarians do not enjoy the social status accorded to other professionals.

Unfortunately in Greece all cataloguing is being undertaken by each individual library. There is no cooperation among libraries for the sharing of record creation, and bibliographic control. An example of this lack of cooperation is illustrated in the case of the University Library and the Public Library of Thessaloniki. Although they are both trying to automate, they are unaware of each other's activities.

Having no coordination, each library in Greece is trying to automate by experimenting. Unlike

the case of Israel, that has developed a library software called ALEPH, there is no national library automation software that could be used at least by the larger libraries. Each is on its own.

On-line information services

Several of the special libraries have recently set up on-line information projects. The National Documentation Centre (EKT), established at the National Research Foundation in 1984, offers an on-line information service subscribing to about 800 databases. One of the most interesting, locally produced databases that is available at EKT, is the database of the Medical Bibliography, called BIBI.

CD-ROM Technology

This has started to infiltrate the Greek libraries, in particular the academic and special ones. In the case of the University of Patras, the CD-ROM technology is making amends for the terribly inadequate collection (10,000 volumes) of the University.

Despite all these new technologies, research in Greece is no easy matter. There are no library networks, no printed union catalogues and the researcher has to visit many libraries to cover his/her subject.

Bibliographic Tools

The lack of basic bibliographic tools makes the job of the Greek librarians a very lonely experience. There are no established Greek Books in Print, whereas the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules and the Dewey Decimal Classification System are still not available in the Greek language.

We lack retrospective bibliographies, we have no periodical indexes, no union catalogues, until 1990 we had no National Bibliography and up to a year ago no Subject Headings. But things have started to change recently. In 1990, the National Library, which up until then played no leading role in the library community, produced the first issue of the *Greek National Bibliography* for the year 1989, and has continued the project since then. The records presented, 20,000 by now, are in AACR2 form and stored in the UNIMARC format.

In 1991 the Greek Publishers and Booksellers Association started the quarterly circulation of the *Bulletin of Greek Bibliography*, that records the current publications. In the same year the *Greek Medical Subject Headings*, with their English translation, became available to the market.

In the same year, a long awaited tool was presented to the Greek librarians, again by the National Library. It is the *Greek Subject*

Headings based on the Library of Congress Subject Headings and adapted to the Greek situation. Another gap was filled in, by the National Library's Publication of a *Catalogue of Established Personal Names*. It is the intention of the National Library to produce in CD-ROM its authority file of 36,000 Subject Headings and personal names.

In the area of the periodical literature, we have no indexes of periodicals with the exception of the BIBI database for the medical periodicals, mentioned earlier. A project, however, funded by the BOTSIS Institution, is indexing all the major Greek newspapers. Soon the product will be commercially available in CD-ROM form. There is also a Union List of Periodicals based on the holdings of some academic and special libraries of the country, a project coordinated by the National Documentation Centre.

Bibliographic Standards

There is a Technical Committee, Committee TE22, of the Greek Standardization Organisation (EOT), which is trying to develop and promote standards of documentation. Up until now, about 15 standards have been developed, most of which refer to the presentation of the bibliographic entry. Many other standards are in the process of development,

like those that refer to methods of subject analysis and to the creation of a thesaurus. The creation of a dictionary of library and information terms is among the objectives of the committee.

The problem of transliteration of the Greek characters is another issue not solved yet. The complexity of the issue is well illustrated in the OCLC name authority file, where the name of the Greek poet Cavafy appears in nine different versions. The problems of the transliteration of records are under investigation in a collaborative EEC project between the University of Crete and King's College, London.

A lot more needs to be done in the area of bibliographic standards. The issue needs to be addressed at the national level and many more professionals, from various fields, need to be involved in the project.

Library Education

Library training, leading to a Diploma, is offered through a three-year course of study at the Departments of Librarianship in the Technological Educational Institutions (TEI) of Athens and Thessaloniki. Although the curriculum offered, especially that of Athens, is rather weak, this course of study, established during the academic year of 1977-78 in Athens and during

1981-82 in Thessaloniki, is the first library professional programme within the formal educational structure.

The introduction of new technologies in the library field, the publication of some basic bibliographic tools, the creation of Greek bibliographic standards, the growing number of trained librarians, the slight shift of emphasis in the educational system and the benefit of the EEC programs, are a few of the factors that have influenced the Greek library field.

There is no university undergraduate or graduate programme in Greece available for the study of Librarianship. Plans to establish such programmes have been the source of discussion and controversy for many years and the setting up of a university programmes in Archives and Library Science at the Ionian University that will start in 1994, has been met with skepticism by the library community, due to the lack of qualified teaching personnel and the philological approach of the programme's curriculum.

The problems attached to the profession due to the educational system are many. It is believed that the lack of a sufficient number of well trained professionals inhibits change and development. TEI gra-

duates are not qualified to proceed with postgraduate training in Greece or abroad.

The lack of recognition of the profession of librarianship is reflected by the absence of a separate grading structure within the civil service and state education and by the employment of non-librarians in library positions.

Although the TEI lack status and recognition, there is a growing sense of professionalism and belongingness among their graduates. They represent a pressure group that will eventually push for changes.

The Educational System

The Greek educational system is a highly centralised, conservative system. It does not support reading outside the school textbook at the primary and secondary level. Even at the University level, it relies basically on the single textbook or the professor's notes. There is very little room in the system for supplementary readings and research.

This environment cannot demonstrate the value of modern library services. Thus, school libraries are small or non-existent and life-long reading habits appear to be underdeveloped.

Up until recently Greeks read for educational advancement and not for leisure, with the exception of

newspapers and magazines. This scene is slowly changing. There is a growing awareness of the need to get away from the single textbook, even at the elementary and secondary level. The timid introduction at that level of audio-visual material, never considered before, shows the new trends.

The lack of basic bibliographic tools makes the job of the Greek librarians a very lonely experience.

At the University level, there is a growing pressure for well organized libraries. Some of the newly established Universities, like the University of Crete, have by far better library organization and library services than does the oldest University in the country, the University of Athens.

The needs of the marketplace push for more research and access to documentation centers. Finally, as seen by the statistics of the book trade, sales of books are growing. The general background that fosters the existence and development of libraries is being slowly formed.

EEC Programs and the Library Field

Many of the libraries in Greece have profited from their partici-

ation in EEC programs, both in gaining new experiences from their cooperation with more developed libraries and in acquiring new technologies.

The University Library of Patras, for example, has been one of the participating members in the TELEPHASA workshop funded by the COMMET programme. The workshops organized aim at transferring knowledge and experience of innovative information services and of information handling.

The University Library of Crete has acquired considerable know-how by having the opportunity, through an EEC program, to train its personnel at the King's College Library in London. These two libraries are also funded for the development of a transliteration system for the Greek alphabet.

Other libraries, like the Democritus National Centre of Research in Physical Sciences and the Centre for Social Research, have been funded under EEC projects in order to automate their card catalog.

The 1991 call of proposals under the Action Plan for Libraries stirred a lot of interest within the Greek library community. Many programs were submitted, but the general impression librarians were left with, which was confirmed by the results, was that the specifications of the programme were aiming at a more advanced level of development than the one enjoyed by the Greek Libraries.

The Greek Library System

According to the latest statistics, there are 615 libraries in Greece with a total book collection of 4,773,908 titles and 6,804,167 volumes and a periodical collection of 82,239 titles and 681,821 volumes. On the basis of these statistics, there is 1 book for every 1.4 people.

In this section, the existing categories of Greek libraries will be presented. These are: the Public Libraries, the Special Libraries and the School Libraries.

Public Libraries

There are three types of public libraries, their type being determined by their legal status, administrative responsibility and target group. These are the public libraries (*dimosies*), the municipal libraries (*dimotikes*) and the children's libraries.

Public Libraries

Under the legislation introduced in 1949 and revised in 1976, there are 41 public libraries, including the National Library, in the 52 Greek counties. They are the responsibility of the Department of Libraries of the Ministry of Education, by whom they are financed. Eighteen of these 41 public libraries are known as cen-

tral public libraries and provide a mobile service to the surrounding districts.

Collection size ranges from 20,000 to 60,000 volumes, with the average collection being 50,000. The number of people that can be employed by each library is limited to ten, a major handicap in the development of public library services in the country.

Library buildings are too frequently like the bookstock, old and inadequate. There are two interesting exceptions in this rather bleak situation. The Public Library of Veria and that of Larissa are going to acquire library buildings especially designed as libraries.

The National Library of Greece

Cramped in an inadequate building, understaffed, as well as staffed with inadequate personnel, it has just commenced to play a leading role in the Greek library scene by starting the production of the Greek National Bibliography. In 1990 already 20,000 records are available in AACR2 form. Its other major contribution is the creation of the Greek Subject Heading and the Authority record of personal names.

The library has a bookstock of 1.25 million items and is growing at a rate of about 10,000 items per year. There is a policy of acquiring all items published in Greece or about

Greece. This policy is aided by the existence of a legal deposit law. The library is also acting as the ISBN center in the country.

In 1992, an automation system was in the process of being installed at the National Library. We all hope, that this application will be the beginning of new developments in the area of cataloguing and bibliographic control.

Municipal Libraries

They are the responsibility of the local authorities and are financed from the municipal budget.

There are currently approximately 400 municipal libraries. The level of provision varies according to the interest of the local politicians, tradition and the scale of private donations.

The municipal library system in Thessaloniki, the second largest city of Greece, is the best developed in Greece, with a number of branches, some exclusively devoted to children. The buildings of the branches are spacious, with good quality furnishing and imaginative children's provision.

Children's Libraries

There are 21, originally government funded, libraries serving children in the 6 to 16 age group in the

rural areas and smaller communities. Currently all government funding has been withdrawn from these libraries that are solely supported by a private Foundation. All 21 libraries are linked to the Centre for Children's and Adolescents' Books in Athens, which provides central book purchasing and processing facilities.

The lack of recognition of the profession of librarianship is reflected by the absence of a separate grading structure within the civil service and state education and by the employment of non-librarians in library positions.

A major task for the Greek public libraries is to define the role they should play in today's Greek society.

Academic Libraries

There are fifteen university institutions in Greece today. The University of Athens, founded in 1847, and the one in Thessaloniki, are the oldest and the largest ones. During the last 20 years, however, 7 new universities were established: in Patras, Ioannina, Crete, Thrace, Thessalia, Aegean and Ionio.

University library development in Greece has been hampered, as it was

pointed earlier, by the traditional view of teaching based on the single textbook. Dispersion of the collection is usual among academic libraries in Greece, due to tradition and physical limitations. The existence of many campuses and the fact that collections are centered around individual members of the academic staff, do not support the existence of a strong central library, but favor the development of the department libraries. Library services offered to students are generally limited.

The University of Crete is lucky enough to have the most advanced library system in the country. Its libraries offer lengthy opening hours and an integrated library system, developed by the Institute of Technological Applications at Heraklion, in collaboration with the library. There is a strong central library at the Rethymnon Campus and a large Department library at the Heraklion Campus, serving the medical and science faculties.

Many of the libraries in Greece have profited from their participation in EEC programs, both in gaining new experiences from their cooperation with more developed libraries and in acquiring new technologies.

University libraries are in the process of being automated. In some cases they offer interesting services,

like the one provided by the CD-ROM center of the University of Patras. All of them, however, suffer from being understaffed, since employment of new personnel has been frozen in the public sector, or staffed by untrained personnel. Almost all university library buildings are inadequate in size and few of them are properly furnished.

Special/Research Libraries

These libraries enjoy a better standard than all the others. They are an exception to the rule of inadequate service, acquisitions and lack of trained personnel. This is due to the pressure on research institutions to have up-to-date information and materials. The result is better service and the creation of on-line databases. A great shortcoming for the creation of publicly available databases is the telecommunication system, which is costly and inefficient.

School Libraries

The last category of library does not exist, except in the case of some private schools. Educators are rather opposed to the institution of the school library, since it questions their authority and replaces them from the comfort of the use of the single textbook.

In the public schools, what is actually called a school library is one or two locked bookcases in one corridor. In 1985 a new legislation supporting the creation of school libraries was introduced, but not applied yet.

The Greek Library Association

Although there is no government body to coordinate the library system in Greece, there is a professional body, the Greek Library Association, established in the late 60's that brings together all types of librarians. It has today a total of about 800 members and two branches, in order to better coordinate them, one for the northern part of Greece and one for the area of the Peloponnese. Although it has no legislative power, it is the only official voice of those working in Greek libraries. It promotes the development of libraries, the formation of a coherent government policy on libraries and makes strenuous efforts to improve the status of librarians. It has also started to organize seminars for their continuing education.

The picture of the Greek library scene is far from being a rose garden. It has many deficiencies and problems. Greek libraries still lack the basic infrastructure that will allow them to offer proper and up-to-date library services to their users.

We still lack a catalogue of the existing libraries in Greece, and the statistical data available is very poor.

Although the Greek Library Association has no legislative power, it is the only official voice of those working in Greek libraries. It promotes the development of libraries, the formation of a coherent government policy on libraries and makes strenuous efforts to improve the status of librarians. It has also started to organize seminars for their continuing education.

However, the changes that have taken place in the last decade are very positive. The wheel has been set in motion. We all hope that it will be a fast forwarding motion.

Now two years later, the situation is slowly changing in the library field in Greece.

Many more libraries are given funds to automate, and the general public is becoming more aware of the role of the libraries.

The first regional library network had made its appearance in Crete, where the University library has been networked with the public libraries of the region.

Libraries and their development are even becoming a topic treated in Newspaper articles.

I am sure that in another two years I would be in the happy position to report many positive changes in the Greek library system.

Bibliography

ASSOCIATION OF GREEK LIBRARIANS

Libraries Information Services — base for national development (in Greek). 5th Panhellenic Conference of Greek Librarians. 30 Nov.-1 Dec., 1984.

ASSOCIATION OF GREEK LIBRARIANS

New technologies and Greek Libraries (in Greek). 6th Panhellenic Conference of Greek Librarians. 22-23 Nov., 1990.

ASSOCIATION OF GREEK LIBRARIANS

Information Bulletin (18) June 1991; (19) October 1991.

BIRK, N.; KARAGEORGIU, D.

«Academic libraries in Greece: a new profiles», *Libri*, 38 (2): 1988, pp. 81-93.

BIRK, N., KARAGEORGIU, D.; S. L. SHAFER

«Greek public libraries: an assessment», *International Library Review*, 20 1988, pp. 5-17.

BRITISH COUNCIL

Libraries and information profile 1986-Greece. London, British Council, 1986.

CAVADIAS-HATZOPOULOS, Elga

«Center for Children and Adolescent Books — Children's Libraries». 56th IFLA conference, Stockholm, 18-24 August 1990, pp. 3/20-3/24.

CHATZIMARI, S.

Automated information retrieval in Agriculture; with a case study (Greece).

London, University College London, 1986 (M. A. Thesis).

DEWE, M.

«The New Central Library for Veria, Greece». *International Library Review*, 23, 1991, pp. 287-298.

HARTLEY, R. J.; TROHOPOULOS, I.

«Information Technology in Greek libraries: problems and prospects», *Program*, 24 (4), 1990, pp. 333-342.

KRIKELAS, J.

«Education for librarianship in Greece», *Library Quarterly*, 52 (3), 1982, pp. 227-239.

KRIKELAS, J.

«Academic libraries in Greece», *International Library Review*, 16 (3), 1984, pp. 235-246.

STCLAIR, G.

«Visiting special libraries in Greece; a few surprises for the western librarian», *Special Libraries*, 73 (3), 1982, pp. 202-206.

SKEPASTIANOU, M.

Problems of conservation in Greek libraries and the development of a national conservation policy. London, University College London, 1988 (M. A. Thesis.).

SKEPASTIANOU, M.

«School Libraries in Greece and the Existing Legislation», *International Library Review* 22, 1990, pp. 251-261.

Special thanks to my colleague Stella Hatzimari for sharing her bibliographical material with me.