

Library within Cyberspace Paradigm: the Integrated Virtual Library Concept

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The role of libraries, librarians and library associations in the situation when libraries and traditional information institutions are not sole and exclusive provider of relevant information (potentially useful to users) is one of the most frequently discussed questions of our day.

At present, when cyberspace becomes a global communication paradigm of its kind, a traditional "institutional" approach to problems of establishment and management of public information structures is often regarded as unsuitable. The new communication environment emerging in cyberspace is highlighted by open, decentralised and flexible "hyperstructures" as well as by interactive client/server procedures. This constitutes an exact opposite to traditional centralized and institutionally managed library and information structures and processes. However, it is apparent that in practice some of the centralized or institutionally managed library and information procedures (e.g. shared cataloguing, co-ordinated acquisition, union catalogues, interlibrary loan services etc.) are irreplaceable, for both economic and procedural reasons.

The Integrated Virtual Library concept (abbreviated as **INVIK** - the abbreviation stands for "**integrovaná virtuální knihovna**" or "Integrated Virtual Library" in English) presents an alternative approach to questions of role and function of the modern library conditioned by an interactive decentralised and open communication structures and processes which is marked and influenced by medial properties of cyberspace. This concept was aimed at the establishment of the fundamentals for **functional co-existence of the traditional library with the "virtual library"** in the sense of integrated information service which is

able to combine electronic access to both "material" and "virtual" sources of information with a wide variety of methods of delivery and mediation. The scope and quality of services offered is based both on the ability to implement new network sources, technologies and co-operative models into outputs of traditional services as well as on the ability to merge proven traditional library methods and techniques (know-how) in conditions of the newly established global network environment. The desired result is an amalgamation of all appropriate procedural models and techniques, of all accessible sources and means which would provide comfortable and barrier-free access to relevant information sources.

The Integrated Virtual Library - INVIK presents a concept, an idea of communication system (i.e. not only technology in the sense of hardware and software) integrating various sources and services on one interactive communication channel in a medial environment of WWW; i. e. the sources and services that are separated from each other in space and time.

The INVIK system is functioning in the decentralised, pluralistic and open environment of cyberspace. The effectiveness of an integrated virtual library as integral and flexible library/information service depends also on an optimal interconnection and coordination with a local and global library and information environment. The aim of such an interconnection is to obtain a union of all sources, methods, means and techniques available to respond to user needs as fast, cheaply and comfortably as possible.

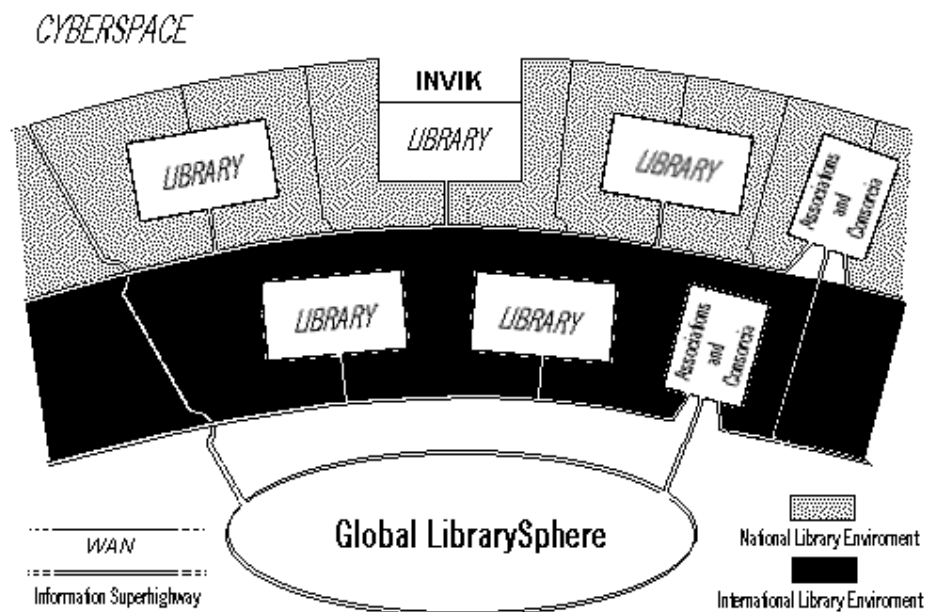


Fig. 1: *Integrated Infosphere*

The scheme enclosed (see Fig.1) shows the position of the Integrated Virtual Library - INVIK within the newly emerging global library and information environment - the *integrated infosphere*. It also demonstrates the obsolescence and inadequacy of the concept of centralized library and information structures as the only basis for a solution of present global information problems. The fundamental deficiency of all centralized library and information structures stems from the fact that inevitably they are centered around institutions. On the contrary, in cyberspace there is no fixed center. It is substituted by "variable centers" represented by **individual users at the moment of placing their information request**.

The homogenous centralized library information structures and bodies together with their established co-operative procedures and models (union catalogues, overall digitising of traditional sources etc.) admittedly improve the logistic bases of the integrated virtual library but they are not the only basis nor the only possibility for effective co-operation and sharing of procedures in library and information environment. Non-existent or defunct union catalogues may be to some extent replaced by decentralised search procedures in WWW OPACs of relevant libraries or by application of network search/retrieve protocols like Z39.50. Similarly, slow and costly processes of "total digitising" of traditional holdings may be replaced by local *"just-for-you-digitising"* (*"digitising-on-demand"*) procedures etc.

For the sake of the best service to its user, INVIK is open to all forms and means of purposeful co-operation with local, international and global library and information institutions, structures and bodies. The concept of INVIK aims at supporting the establishment of a co-operative library information environment which is open, pluralistic, flexible and decentralised and where the quality of user-oriented services provided by any co-operating library is based on **an efficient utilisation of the most powerful procedures available in participating libraries**.

The INVIK concept is a conceptual and methodological basis of the project **INVIK STL – Integrated Virtual Library of the State Technical Library in Prague** <<http://www.stk.cz/en/>>. On March 7th 1998, STL celebrated the 1st anniversary of launching INVIK for public use. The users reaction is quite convincing - between October and December 1997, INVIK was accessed more than 25.500 times. At the same time, the INVIK concept is becoming an alternative platform for interlibrary cooperation among Czech research and academic libraries.