"Greek Libraries: A Vision for a National Entrance to the Virtual Reference"

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Abstract:

The paper attempts to identify strategic issues for Greek libraries wishing to pursue a more active policy with regard to the changes affecting librarian system due to the increased use of information and communication technologies. The article starts out by sketching the changes currently occurring in the organizational schedule of libraries in Greece. We can identify two major areas in which libraries can develop strategies to enhance services for their patrons. Following domains are discussed: collaborative design and the relation between physical and virtual learning environments. Next, possible implications for library staff regarding the changes are discussed. The article also includes thoughts on alignment between library strategy and the strategy of the Open University. Greece is standing in front of a new challenge; the extent and strength of the library support that can be offered to this new generation of distant learners! The point is to help the Greek patron in formulating his own information needs within a national collaborative virtual-based reference question forum. Greeks, as we think all people incoming in libraries, love the quick, accurate and friendly interaction between the patron and the librarian in intermediary face-to-face way.

Introduction:

In Greece, undoubtedly, there are profound changes going on in the librarian field and the educational and cultural system itself. These changes are needed because of ever growing pressure, partly because society itself is changing into one in which knowledge work becomes ever more important, and partly because of the variety in the information and communication technologies which are transforming our economies, our needs and our point of views. Both of these factors evoke change and offer a solution to the problems with which the Greek librarian struggles. Patrons, especially students, more and more are behaving like consumers who want to make informed choices about how and when they want to collect information and knowledge, which implies patrons are no longer committed to one library, maybe the local or their institution, in case they are students.

More and more information is made available through the web. Search engines assure the accessibility of this material. But web is not enough and is not reliable in all cases. A search of the World Wide Web will turn up only the online information. Instead of that, certainly a National Library or every other library has sources more accurate and reliable. Especially a library-to-library services operation with reference experts submitting patrons' questions online guarantees more the thorough tracking of the

existing material and pusses away the danger of many times "dull" web sites with strange scopes and motives. Greek libraries must try to face effectively the problem of modernising in a collaborative way the e-learning and e-reference services. The intermediary librarian has to clarify the information need of the patron and get enough information himself in order to help the patron. So a theme that we haven' t dealt with is how to become "e-educators of the librarians", of all our nation's libraries in order to solve in the origin the theme of the two highest importance e-services, e-reference and e-learningThe virtual librarian tries to bridge this gab by asking questions and using the answers to closing the gab, making new sense and good impression to the patrons

The librarians' questions do not represent the actual information provision, because it has been compromised to the collecction material of his library or in the network's library. Greece is a small country with spectacular manuscripts, rare books, many of them unique in the whole planet. In order to organize better the "how to deal with" these collections, the better way to do it is to educate in real time the real time protagonists, the virtual librarians. So, there must be a determination of the scopes and a thorough description of what we are waiting. The Greek librarian wants to maintain in an active role, being involved in a dialogue with the other intermediary in a schedule where the unbelievable can be happened.: all the available resources can be in real time offer in specific categories that can be revalued and renewed.

Special Parameters – Strategic Areas:

- To libraries and librarians, the digital approach seems more threatening; however, we think in both options there will still be a need for library staff to support each other and the educators with respect to the selection of adequate resources for a certain question or a given course, especially as it concerns the Greek libraries. In Greece there are 32 universities and consequently 32 central, academic libraries, belonging to 18 universities and 14 technical educational foundations, with branches in almost every department. There are also 120 special libraries, considered to be research centers, 46 public libraries, having no branches, 600 municipal and communal libraries, among which only the 200 have possession of more than 3000 volumes and their operation depends on the local government, 500 school libraries, 27 Children's libraries and 6 libraries established by foreign delegations contributing to the furtherance of knowledge regarding the culture of these countries and assisting in this way Greek researchers. Through web services, initiatives and by launching new ones aimed at approaching the library patron, we can replicate what is most valued in the public environment: personalized guidance in the gathering and selection of the best resources, providing users, in a national level.
- Under the auspices of the nearly century-old IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations), each country's national library organized its country's reference services to share the load of the world's questions in their primary languages. As about Greece, The National Library of Greece (NLG), as the central Library of the region, has as its primary mission the collection, the process, the preservation and to highlight the material of their collections in order to be accessible to the readers and the general public. having in its occupation more than 4 million volumes of books, papyrus, palimpsest, Byzantine manuscripts, incunabula, rare and

special publications, valuable parchments, illuminated scrolls and codices, historical documents as archives of local ethnic material, lithographic paintings, wood-engravings and old maps, has to face the challenge of playing successfully the dual role, as a depository of the national cultural creativity and also, as a transmitter of knowledge and information with adequate and modern means.

- From their side, Academic libraries, in higher education find their *raison d'être* in supporting research and education, a relevant question is how libraries can and should transform themselves in order to cope with the changes in our educational systems.
- The relation between physical and virtual learning environments. In Greece, we could say that Digital libraries are already available from anywhere in the world, offering flexible arrangements for students / knowledge workers. These are really well done efforts, but independent actions.
- Our point of departure seems to be how librarian staff can best be supported when dealing with digital learning environments and enriching these environments with resources available in digital libraries.
- Guarantying a free discussion frame specific policies can be clear concerning ownership of materials, faculty compensation, copyright issues, and the utilization of revenue derived from the creation and production of software. The institution assesses patrons' capability to succeed in electronic services and distance education programs and applies this information to admission and recruiting policies and decisions.
- The library evaluates the educational effectiveness of its distance education programs (including assessments of student retention, and student satisfaction) to ensure comparability to the scopes it poses.
- Lifelong learning leads to an emphasis on "learning to learn". Knowledge becomes obsolete at an ever-increasing rate in a knowledge economy, and knowledge workers need to be able to refresh their knowledge on a regular basis.
- Librarians must be aware of changing trends in education and the impact these trends have on the delivery of library service. In Greece there is only one University, The Hellenic Open University that provides distance learning courses since 1997. In the model we propose, it is sketched a close cooperation with the academic libraries of the other Greek institutions according to the thematic unions that are relevant to the specific bibliographical staff each of the other universities' libraries owns. The bringing together of libraries with a growing organizational interoperability is the wind of noticeable organizational change in existing Greek service structures demonstrating highly innovative service solutions.

Reaching the Goals – Satisfying the Requirements:

- Requirements of distance learners can be grouped into three categories: the need for materials and facilities, the need for information services, and the need for user services. The need for information services includes: bibliographic information about reference sources, books, journals, and non-print materials available at their own library or through inter-library loan, information on other organizations offering distance education courses, and information on regional study centres or libraries and the services they offer. In Greece there is a

consortium of all the Greek academic libraries called "The Horizontal Action", which provides a unified knowledge base of the plurality of the material that has been digitized. Even though this is an important step, it is still not enough. The need for user services includes guidance from library staff regarding how to use the library collection and equipment available at the library, choosing reading material, planning their learning and using study skills for independent learning and this is the crucial point.

- The existence of a unique collection, such as the some of the oldest Manuscripts of the 7th and 8th century, precious maps, three of them aging since the beginning of the 14th century, does not necessarily make for good library service. Collections are passive resources dependent on good staff to enliven them, to provide access and research support. In endeavouring to fulfil the library needs of the distance learner, librarians face several problems.

- Moreover adopting a national theory to the e–services issue, that limits the chaos of the different approaches and the economic cost of the various projects which many times "one does not recognize the other". The transformation will be really amazing if we utilize the geographic and thematic diversity of libraries under the umbrella of a national body, as it is the National Library and The Open University. Many talks about centralized and decentralized models in the field of e-reference and e-learning. But every orchestra needs a conductor for the diversity of the patrons' demands, the appropriate queering of questions.

- As it concerns the technical issues, information science is and will always be willing in providing the best solutions for a shareware distributed request tracking system. The essence of this mission statement is a challenge and is waiting to be fulfilled, primarily due to our will. Everyone agrees that resource sharing is the only means to cope with the present situation and to meet the demands of library users by ensuring access to a wide range of resources available at various libraries, academic, special and public. A national policy demands the methodical sharing of experiences and the expertise in this way will allow Greek libraries to make the most effective use of their limited resources.

- An idea would be to make the collective resources of the province's post-secondary libraries, of the academic libraries, of the cultural institutions' libraries available to students and researchers regardless of their location in the province, and to enhance resource sharing among libraries through the innovative application of a systematic policy schedule where all the questions are coming to the National Library where the expertise reference librarians are providing not only to the right, according the query, library, but the right librarian who can have a total, more or less icon, of the existing collection material, not only in his but in any other similar library. With primarily commercial index and abstract databases, created especially for this scope, in a national horizon, we can create a new approach means that, together, libraries are able to offer more resources to their users than they ever could alone. As well, costs can be reduced in regards to overall costs for licenses, data and storage and system/contract administration.

Attention must be paid to the Followings:

- Librarians need to consider the level of access its patrons will have in terms of computer equipment. The point is to ensure that all member libraries can fully participate in services. The choice of platforms, databases and services is geared to allow participation by the smallest, as well as the largest, libraries and by users with the most basic, as well as advanced, equipment.

- Greece is the country of culture and in the smallest village there is a cultural centre with archaeological, literature, mathematical old books and Greek librarians need to act as members of the national cultural-educational team. They need to be aware of the policies and objectives of a new well organised, friendly and similar to their needs organizational motive concerning virtual reference and e-learning so that they may define their own roles in the process. Especially, academic and national librarians who continue to concentrate on their custodial and service roles will find themselves increasingly marginalized from the e-educator and e-reference process. If Greek librarians make the education function the central focus of its services, the library will move from its usual position on the periphery of the institution to a more prominent position on national and international level. So many of the issues facing educators also face librarians as they are becoming teachers as well. The point is how librarians will be "taught" by other librarians, performing as good teachers and sufficient students in the process of providing the e-learning and the e-reference

- The technological tools required may not be accessible to all students. Students' access to personal computers has risen dramatically in the past decade. In Greece almost the 60% owns and knows how to use a computer. Certainly, technology is not a panacea for solving all of the problems associated with distance sources, the role of librarians is irreplaceable on pointing what and how much of it user need to deliver. The goal really is not to make technology the all of it, but how librarians' knowledge and experience can be carried through a seamless and transparent to users technology.

- Great importance must be given in the collaboration with the two library schools, The Technological Foundation in Athens and The Department of Librarian and Archival Studies of The Ionian University in the island of Corfu, as this issue will have to be incorporated into curriculums if librarians are to be prepared to face the challenges.

- Librarian's learning leads to an emphasis on "learning to learn". Knowledge becomes obsolete at an ever-increasing rate in a knowledge economy, and knowledge workers need to be able to refresh their knowledge on a regular basis. This is where the role of the National Librarian is restructured and all updated. He has the advantage to carry out the mission of the national library, to develop activities to reinforce the cultural and educational life of the Region, to manage the national collections of material managing well in an harmonizing way, paired fields of thematic subjects, sending them to the right librarian and "teaching" him how to become the good virtual e-educator, "e-tour guider", because user needs more guidance in reaching the information he needs rather than showing what information he needs. He can become the national connection between the Greek libraries.

- National Library of Greece can have a manager role in organizing a special, properly adjusted to the Greek librarian reality, schedule where there will be information's diffusion by establishing a national consortium, adopting virtual solutions and playing the role of e-teacher, of an e-guider to the librarians of the academic, the public, the school library, a museum's library, a gallery's library. Even though it sounds quite

ambitious, a good start can be done with the academic libraries, which are well harmonizing with the technological evolutions and plus there are successful academic consortial approaches to digital services, especially to e-reference in an international level. At these 32 institutions there is a core library located at the main institution. In some of them this core library administers other smaller libraries located at regional centres.

DIAGRAMM FOR THE LIBRARIES AND FOUNDATIONS CONNECTION
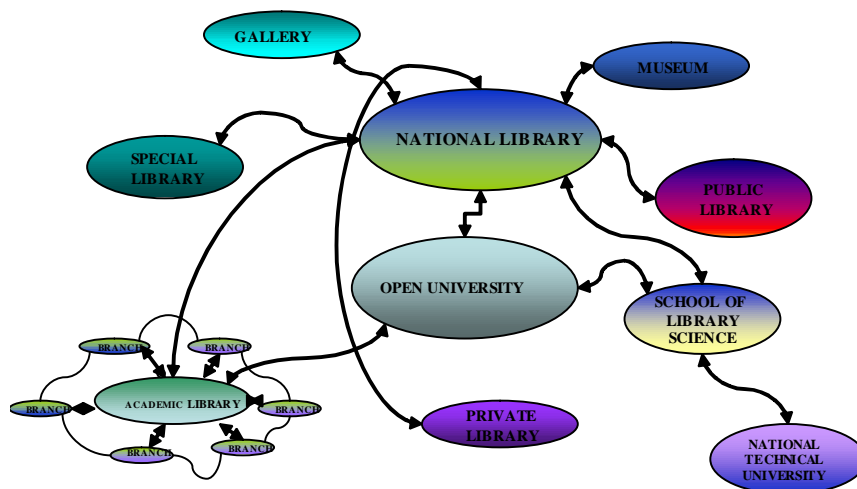
- In Greece surveys show there seemed to be a significant mismatch of expectations between users and library managers about the role of libraries. We found further evidence of the obstacles users face in getting access to libraries and the character of their library use. For librarians, creative and pedagogically-led approaches to virtual reference demands close working relationships with each other. The self-contained package approach has the potential to deskill librarians as well as users, as does the illusion that a limited electronic reserve collection can fulfill the functions of a national. Instead we envision a more hopeful and exciting future, in which librarians and the academics of The Open University collaborate to expand the pedagogical boundaries of distance learning, ensuring that electronic developments are integrated with traditional concerns for wide reading, fully informed and with all the available in the nation sources following a philosophical precept suitable to the idiosyncrasy of the Greek reality.
- The users are what should be the centre of our world. During implementation, ongoing management and assessment of distance education programs, the library must be a partner in institutional discussions, according to the Greek Open University. Librarians are necessarily to adopt the skills to effectively find and evaluate the information, in order to be successful with their personal and professional endeavours. To reach these goals while serving distance education students, or distance educational patrons, libraries must work collaboratively.

Greek Librarian Community Parameters:

- Each library has a unique independent role but also so relevant to any other. What Greeks love most and what they are expecting most about libraries is the expert, personalised service that librarians provide. The ages under 50 years old are quite familiar with computers and it is not by chance that The World Information Conference it was held this June in Athens with more than 10000 participants.
- The originating institution is responsible for involving the library administration and other personnel in the detailed analysis of planning, developing, evaluating, and adding or changing of the more used Knowledge Databases, educating the staff in virtual reference systems and promoting the collaboration by grouping thematically the libraries in a wide and more specific range. Certainly, Archaeology, Ancient Greek and Latin Philology, Philosophy, Greek History, The The History of the Olympic Games, The Values of Freedom, Democracy, The History of Writing, Geography, Art and Architecture are only few of the fields that patrons could be easily guided as they are in their first priority. Our vision matches the heterogeneity and the functional richness of different local e-services. In Greece especially in The University of Macedonia, The University of Crete and The University of Ioannina has made few but quiet serious steps by implementing e-reference systems, like Ask a Librarian, via email or telephone. In our vision these separately functioned e-services models can be unified in one, a national one in which each member can deliver, depending to its collection, questions and from general users, and from students, especially Open University's students, and from pupils following the example of e-tutor that the last 2 years is successfully applied in Boston within the cooperative schedule of The Boston Public Library, Harvard University, City of Boston and Massachusetts Consortium.
- In Greece, if a distance education student needs library services, the student would be required to exercise initiative and perseverance. The student could turn for help to the nearest institution, usually a public or an academic library. With the advent of consortial arrangements among our universities, galleries, museums, academies, private foundations, even more private library collections, a student could feel less depressed instead of driving across all the country or Athens, the capital. In practice, the academic or public library that the student elected to go to for help may or may not have had any procedures in place to serve the special needs of a distance education student. We have a moral obligation to show in practice as a nation the growing importance of library services to the success of distance education universities.

Challenges:

Greek librarians participating in online projects may begin to see interesting connections between the traditional and electronic services, as well as learn how to translate their skills to a new environment. Most of them, they are very aware of new technologies and they have strong motivation to offer in the right time services, they feel it as a recognition to their mission.

In Greece the educational and cultural level is quite high, as many famous worldwide scientists in any field of scientific research are Greeks and so, it stands as a coherent need for our libraries to face challenges, dealing with new methods of accessing materials and learning more advanced information evaluation skills. Besides setting up email accounts and proxy settings, they will also have to learn how to sufficiently express their information needs to other librarians via online forums such as chat and email, and develop more advanced critical thinking and evaluation skills about the resources and how to deal with them. With new technologies, people need assistance not only with typical questions about research processes and procedures, but also about dealing with the technology itself. Help support and technical support must both be provided in a seamless manner.

Collaboration between libraries, departments, student services, and other institutions adds yet another challenge, as all entities need to remain true to their own mission and policies, while finding ways to maximize the benefits of all the resources and talents available. Convenience and coherence are two incentives for providing library resources and services over a National Virtual Reference Program. Online services can be designed to logically connect to the other educational materials and programs the students need for their coursework.

Practically special treatment needs to be given to the following:

  I. Statements of mission and purpose, policies and regulations;
 II. Statistics on kinds of library use;
III. Statistics on types of collections;
 IV. Institutional and organizational characteristics;
  V. Comprehensive budget(s);
 VI. Professional personnel vitae;
VII. Agreements and guides to the acceptance of the new framework;
VIII. Reconsideration of the development and planning of e-services

Issues: Throughout all stages of planning and administering electronic services, some universally acknowledged issues must be addressed.

- Law-Copyright Demands: These include accreditation, authentication, copyright, licensing, privacy, and security. In the Panhelleic Conference of Greek Academic Libraries, last November, law scientists have put new copyright issues as these services move to an online environment. We are very willing to accept the generally agreed relative rules. Whether interpreted liberally or conservatively, legal agreements outline library rights regarding the use of electronic material. A regular review of licensing practices should insure the library's ability to make electronic materials available for all required services and library users. National Library can become the administrative paragon, as it has the governmental authority to keep and provide the total amount of the printed material and therefore NLG is aware of the integrated nature of this issue. Defining NLG as the network administrator, familiarizing staff members with the network security plan, and understanding the institution's policies is important.

- **Educational Reasons:** Open lines of communication between NLG and all the other libraries, universities and information technology staff are essential. Librarians develop Web meetings tailored to specific concerns and assignments of their colleagues librarians; the point is not only to provide information, but to give the necessary guidelines to the librarians, to "e-educate" them to locate appropriate electronic resources. Librarians usually face the same difficulty in apprehending and efficiently managing the electronic collections as remote users do, as management of electronic collections encompasses a multitude of activities, the best performance of which demands searching and sorting capabilities in describing electronic artefacts, such as and sorting capabilities to make the content of electronic collections accessible to library users. Also in our country children are chatting on MSN as that is a part of their life and they will expect it as the norm when using library services and therefore due to the increasing competition in the delivery of information services for higher education, implying that libraries might lose their monopoly position in information services if there won't be a collaborative structure.

- **Demographic Characteristics:** In our country demographic shifts from and to the capital, especially as it concerns students, make inevitable the collaborative systematizing of all libraries. We are a small country "accountable" to carry out, in these modern times, the promotion of our glory past and our hard working present lining a "together" prospective for our future dedicating to increasing the effectiveness of libraries using the latest developments in virtual technology.

- **Social Parameters:** A new implement philosophy about services reflects a greater emphasis on outcomes assessment on the need of a new schema as a continuation of great steps, a real renaissance in librarianship the last 5 years. The ideas of Intellectual Freedom, Privacy, and Access, Evaluation, Cooperation and Interaction are the ones that must dominate. Characteristically it is evident that in The Ministry of Education there is a Special Secretary having the responsibility in librarian and archival themes, facing the Greek libraries as a corpus. The equitability delineates the elements necessary to achieving this underlying and uncompromising principle, collaboration, where the manager can be the NLG for the better adoption of the technological innovations in the transmittal of information and the delivery of knowledge. Open, flexible, virtual, synchronous, or asynchronous, distributed transformation of knowledge not only to users but especially to librarians as users. NLG as the originating institution refers to the entity, singular or collective, its/their chief administrative officers and as a national organization is responsible for the offering or marketing and supporting of e-services users: the credit-granting body. Each other library has an autonomous, but also dependent to the others e-services provision. It's like a multi-library cluster, responsible for meeting the needs of its own patrons and staff but in a collective site. Greek librarians are few and they know each other, so the whole story is more personalized and than might be more friendly for them and the others as patrons. Collaborative work is necessarily social. Thus a system that flouts social rules, norms or customs, even if it does useful things, may fail to be used. The key to selecting, or developing, successful collaborative systems appears to involve an understanding of what is currently done, and designing systems that not only can mesh with that way of working, but can adapt gracefully as people change their way of working over time.

- Technical and Economic Matters: When tailoring a new service to a certain environment, like Greece libraries, there must be some acknowledgement of the costs to implement and maintain it. Thanks to the EU almost all the libraries of growing and developing institutions, have been funded as programs and enrolments have been and are continued to be growing. This national effort could be supported by complementary resource bases such as computing facilities, instructional media, and telecommunication centres from The Greek National Technical University and The Institute of Technological Systems, Foundations that has shown an amazing valuation of the EU digital and virtual projects.

Management:

The chief administrative officers of The National Library of Greece the Hellenic Open University and The Committee Board of the Academic Libraries bear the administrative responsibilities, through the active leadership of e library administration, to supervise library services in support of virtual reference programme. As the principal and direct agent of "e-guidance" implementation, the two government foundations have the obligation to:

1. assure that e-services plan meets national and also regional accreditation standards and professional association standards and guidelines;
2. provide and eloquent, on an ongoing basis, the suitable interactive "interlibrary" e-services schedule, including instruction, the facilities utilized and innovative approaches to the design and evaluation of special procedures or systems to meet these electronic needs in other countries are encouraged;
3. prepare a written profile of the Greek community's information and skills needs;
4. develop a written statement of immediate and long-range goals and objectives for virtual reference, which addresses the needs and outlines the methods by which progress and the timetable results can be measured;
5. promote the incorporation of the distance services mission statement, goals, and objectives into those of each kind of library and of the originating institution as a whole;
6. involve librarian community representatives, including administrators, faculty, academics, information scientists, governmental representatives and professionals, in the formation of the objectives and the regular evaluation of their achievement;
7. respect the special characteristics each library and each collection has with the development and periodic review of formal, documented, written agreements with them;
8. Assess the existing library support for distance learning, nationwide, its availability, appropriateness, and effectiveness, using qualitative, quantitative, and outcomes measurement statistics, as well as the written profile of needs. Examples of these measures include, but are not limited to:
   1. using evaluation checklists for librarian instruction to gather feedback from students, other librarians, academic staff of the Open University and researchers over a period of time;
   2. conducting reviews of specific library and information service areas and/or operations which support electronic library services;

3. taking into account e-services in the assessment strategies related to national endorsement;
4. participate with administrators, library subject specialists, and teaching faculty in the curriculum development process and in planning for ensuring the appropriate library resources and services according to the profile of needs;
5. promote with good marketing policy library support services to the Greek community monitoring and assessing both the appropriateness of their use of services and resources and the degree to which needs are being met and skills acquired;
6. be in a continually "survey dialogue" with distance library users, the ones for whom is dedicated the whole effort;
7. initiate dialogue leading to cooperative agreements and possible resource sharing and/or compensation for unaffiliated libraries;
8. develop partnerships with computing services departments such as The Greek National Technical University in order to provide the necessary automation support for the librarian community; and
9. practise, apply, and maintain all the preceding in the provision of a facilitating virtual environment in support of providing not only information but guidance to real knowledge
10. keep in mind that the system must also recognise other languages, helpful in understanding questions posed by those for whom Greek is a foreign language.
11. organise a schema with the following characteristics:
- being patron -centred
- being interactive and dynamic
- enabling group work on real time problems
- enabling patrons, even more students to determine their own learning routes
- emphasizing competencies like information literacy to support lifelong learning
- creating FAQ databases and good management reports produced automatically including data used by individual libraries to track usage of the national system by their own constituencies.

Personnel:

Personnel involved in the management and coordination of distance learning library services with clearly defined responsibilities at the appropriate location(s) and in the number and quality necessary to attain the goals and objectives for library services to the distance learning program, include:
1. the librarian-coordinator managing the services holding a postgraduate degree from an accredited library school
2. librarians-administrators and chief-administrators to plan, implement, coordinate, and evaluate library resources and services addressing the information and skills needs of the librarian.
3. additional professional and/or support personnel on site with the capacity and training to identify informational and skills needs of distance library users and respond to them directly; and

4. opportunities for continuing growth and development for virtual services personnel, including continuing education, professional education, and participation in professional and staff organizations.
5. academic staff from the Hellenic Open University.
6. The on-campus political environment, then, must also be factored into the planning of these extended services

Services:

Even though in Greece there is inevitably a considerable differentiation among library institutions in the offered library services, an effective design should include the following: A National Digital reference services, maybe named as 'Greek Virtual Reference Desk', will offer great possibilities to meet these changing needs. NLG should provide facilities, equipment, and communication links sufficient in size, number, scope, accessibility, and timeliness to reach all patrons-members and to attain the objectives of the virtual reference service. Proposals of suitable arrangements include but are not limited to:

1. designated space for consultations, ready reference collections, electronic transmission of information, computerized data base searching and interlibrary loan services, and offices for the library distance learning personnel;
2. virtual - electronic connectivity, face-to-face reference; online chat sessions or even video-based services (by creating the right architectural form).
3. convenient, direct physical and electronic access to library materials for virtual services equivalent to those provided in traditional settings and in sufficient quality, depth, number, scope, current ness, and formats to:
   1. meet the Hellenic Open University's students' needs in fulfilling course assignments (e.g., required and supplemental readings and research papers) and enrich the academic programs;
   2. meet teaching and research needs;
   3. Accommodate other informational needs of the distance learning community as appropriate.
   4. deal effectively with a wide range of informational user needs working on thematic sections relevant to the Greek antiquity, literature and linguistics.
   5. provide the ideal flexibility to partition or centralize the environment as needed in a distributed service organization; the tracking, archiving, search capability, and use-report capabilities critical for the effective management of ongoing operations; reliable, rapid, secure access to all Greek libraries resources; management of information resources reference assistance under the adoption of updated policies; consultation services in the use of nonprint media; adequate service hours for optimum access by users (24/7 is our idealistic goal)

Lankes (1998) explains the relationship between "digital", ie electronic, reference services and AskA services: "As opposed to static Web pages, digital reference services use the Internet to place people in contact with those individuals who can answer specific questions and instruct users in developing certain skills. Digital reference services are also referred to as AskA services, because of such service names as Ask A Volcanologist,

Ask A Scientist, etc ... AskA services normally respond to individual queries on a one-time basis." In Greece links like "Ask The Archaeologist" and "Ask a Linguist" can become examples of very useful services In The Open University there are 27000 distance education students. One way to show them how to practice the e-learning is through Web co-navigation.

The Future of Library Services for Distance Education in Greece:

What will library services for distance students be like? Will either be substantially different than they are today? In Greece professionals grapple with the question of whether these services should be handled independently or whether they should be transparently integrated into a collaborative frame. The decision will be based on finances and philosophy. Not only will the increase in distance education bring about greater collaboration between library and teaching faculty, it will bring about greater collaboration among libraries and institutions in Greece. It's a great opportunity for us to consider what we are currently dealing with, where we are heading, and what we should be doing. The future holds demand for more and more service. The relationship of available time and money as well as use policy considerations will ultimately either facilitate or restrict the progress of electronic library services Reduced funding has resulted in the downsizing of staff/services and an emphasis on rationalization and cost-recovery.. Our present and mostly, our future requires a responsive, up-to-date library service. The increasing number of cooperative ventures it is time to be driven politically and financially as libraries and educational organizations become more cooperative-conscious. Libraries of all kinds will be making agreements among themselves examining to justify their needs and working for the common good.

Library staff, with appropriate training, can enjoy surmounting the challenges, knowing that their work truly makes a difference for remote users, especially students, so let's see its The Role of Librarians:

- Reinforcement in the librarians' educational mission is necessary. Greek National Virtual Desk could use the following online tools and resources: 1) the electronic classroom (virtual classroom through split-screen technology); and 2) the electronic library (catalogue and delivery service).
- Greek librarians should embrace these new opportunities to redefine their roles as teachers, as advocates for information policy development, as organizers of networked resources, as social human beings and take a proactive stance, as eagerly as they welcomed and grasped the technological innovations that so rapidly are changing their libraries

CONCLUSION:

At the heart of the struggle to find a balance between the variety of libraries and the creation of a modern collaborative manager schedule, lies a debate about the role of libraries. We argue that unless Greek libraries are encouraged to play a central role in a national interactive way of operating, the users will face a future in which their experiences as learners are tightly bounded, controlled and limited disregarding the

priceless cultural heritage that is kept in the churches, universities, galleries and anywhere's libraries. We have to reassess the approach to the design and delivery of information, opening our eyes to the under used potential of librarians. Librarians must develop and fund expanded services to meet the demand created by the new distance learning in the Cyberspace Age. Librarians must teach distance learners the Internet, Netscape, World Wide Web and access to a variety of virtual reference. They must also prepare "how to" research guides and make them available electronically. In Greece as more students attempt to accommodate their studies around busy family and professional lives, it promises to become increasingly important in providing an alternative to traditional on-campus education. Only by planning to meeting these challenges of this new environment, will libraries be able to serve the higher education community of the 21st Century, an education that Greece deserves and is struggling for.

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