

The Third Russian National Conference for Reading Promotion and Development

The author describes the goals and aims, stages and expected results of the National Program for Reading Promotion and Development in Russia. The main attention is paid to the Third National Conference for reading promotion and development which took place on November 2009 in Moscow. A lot of different statistical data about current publishing policy and activity, infrastructure of bookselling and library sectors, reading habits and public literacy are given.

Keywords: national program, reading promotion, Russia, national conferences, libraries, book industry, government agencies, public organisation.

Die dritte russische nationale Konferenz zur Leseförderung und –entwicklung

Der Autor beschreibt Ziel und Zweck, die Etappen und erhofften Resultate des nationalen Programms zur Leseförderung und –entwicklung in Russland. Das Hauptaugenmerk betrifft die dritte nationale Konferenz zur Leseförderung und –entwicklung, die im November 2009 in Moskau tagte. Es werden viele unterschiedliche Statistik-Daten zur aktuellen Verlagspolitik und –Aktivität, der Infrastruktur des Buchhandels und der Bibliotheken, der Lesegewohnheiten und der allgemeinen Lesefähigkeit gegeben.

Schlagwörter: Nationalprogramm, Leseförderung, Russland, Nationalkonferenzen, Bibliotheken, Verlage, Behörden, Öffentlichkeitsorganisationen

La troisième conférence nationale russe pour la promotion et le développement de la lecture

L'auteur décrit les buts et les buts, les étapes et les résultats attendus du programme national pour la promotion et le développement de la lecture en Russie. Le point principal concerne la troisième conférence nationale russe pour la promotion et le développement de la lecture qui a eu lieu en novembre 2009 à Moscou. Beaucoup de dates statistiques divers sont donnés sur la politique et l'activité actuelles des maisons d'édition, de l'infrastructure des librairies et des bibliothèques, les habitudes de la lecture et la capacité de lecture en général.

Mots-clés : Programme national, congrès nationaux, promotion de la lecture, Russie, bibliothèques, maisons d'éditions, organisation publiques

Since 2007 in Moscow take place annual and very community all-national conferences for reading promotion and development. Among participants are representatives from the main libraries, publishing houses, bookselling structures and companies, public schools and universities and various officials from federal and regional governing bodies responsible for science, culture and education.

The third one of such Conferences took place on November 20, 2009 in Moscow at the "President-Hotel". The number of its participants was more than 120 not only from Moscow and St.-Petersburg, but also from about 35 regions of Russian Federation.

The main problem to be discussed traditionally was the progress of implementation of the National Program for Reading Promotion and Development which has 3 stages: anticrisis - for 2007-2010, stabilization – for 2011-2015 and normalization and development – for 2016-2020. The Program was elaborated by a joint team of the Interregional Library Cooperation Centre together with the Federal Agency for Print and Mass Media and Russian Book Union at the end

of November, 2006. Hereinafter we shall try to give in condensed version the main conclusions and resolutions of this annual meeting and also present some useful information about the current state of affairs in this sphere.

Nearly all speakers were unanimous in the opinion that for today we still have a lot of problems with the realization the main goals of the above said Program. At the same time Russia has every necessary prerequisite and resource to implement successfully the National Program for Reading Promotion and Development:

- it has institutional bodies to store and disseminate printed matter and written documents (libraries, educational and research establishments, publishing houses, bookstores and archives);

- there is a vast amount of socially important information stored in precise order by those institutions;

- professional literati - journalists, fiction authors, translators, and literary scholars and critics - and their organizations are actively working in Russia;

- government and private publishers steadily supply books, magazines and newspapers to the market;

- specialized stores, supermarket departments and bookstalls offer readers an extensive choice of printed matter.

Russia still has a group of readers oriented on serious special literature and quality fiction; it also has public organizations of booklovers and amateur writers;

- it has sufficient mass media resources, which can be used to promote reading;

- it has a developed network of educational establishments and libraries;

- the public has not entirely broken with its developed reading traditions, and has not lost the desire to pass it to the young generation.

Libraries are the only social institutions to monitor the entire range of national printed matter and acquire as many publications as possible to offer them for public use - free, for the most part. As all institutional spheres are regionalized, and with low public purchasing ability (especially in small towns and in the countryside), libraries are one of the principal social institutions that can assume a major part of responsibility for information accessibility in such a vast country as Russia is - all the more so as library attendance (roughly a billion visits a year) thrice exceeds that of all other cultural establishments taken together.

Russia presently has more than 130,000 libraries of various types. That number of course has shortened now, but remains steady thanks to professional community efforts. On the whole, despite all hardships of the transition period, libraries are among the few systems in culture, education and research to largely preserve their personnel and organizational resources.

Federal and regional comprehensive research, public and university libraries (roughly 1,000, all told) develop in keeping with world standards. Their majority is up to the latest information technological demands. A union catalogue of Russian libraries is being compiled on the basis of the national Libnet library information centre. It uses latter-day technologies of corporate meta-database formation. Russia has several hundred thousand librarians - most of them with higher library or pedagogical education. A vast library stock, mainly in the largest libraries, is an essential and inalienable part of the national cultural heritage and information resources.

Universal compulsory education is, for today, the primary institution of socialization to many Russians, and is extremely important to a considerable part of the nation. The school lays the basis for students' future social achievements and forms their personality, attitudes to themselves and others, and cultural competence. The fate of Russian research, economy, art and entire community today depends on the state of the school. Compulsory education is presently the only institutional structure responsible for the development of basic public competences.

This social institution has accumulated considerable experience, and possesses a methodological basis and other resources, it takes to promote readers' competence, with a wide range of methods of teaching children to read, including limited-abilities pupils, who study in

special corrective schools. More than 90% of instructors who teach reading have higher education.

The family tradition of reading aloud to children is receding into the past. So the school and its library is, to the majority of children, the place where they open their first books. The Russian universal compulsory education system includes a ramified net of institutions, which involves almost the entire population of the relevant age groups - which means that it is the basic institution fostering future readers' generations.

To publish diversified quality literature and efficiently disseminate it countrywide through traders are the basic functions of the book industry. The Soviet Union possessed a ramified network that included major publishers, printers, bookstores, a personnel training system and much else. The shift of this industry to market relations in the late 1980s and early 90s had its pros and cons (to which we shall refer in detail later on). Be that as it may, the industry has lately made considerable progress.

Russia has outrun the Soviet Union for the number and diversity of published books (approximately about 130,000 in 2009). The market volume exceeded \$3 billion in 2008. A wide title range of publications, especially in large cities, has replaced customary book shortages of the Soviet time, when trade could not supply enough books in great demand. Russia presently has several thousand major publishing companies, the largest of which are, at the same time, Eastern Europe's largest. Russia has not only prosperous bookstores but also online companies based in many parts of the country. The National bibliography of books and other publications is being made on the basis of the Russian Book Chamber. The Books in Print system is making progress.

The sophisticated infrastructure of reading support and promotion demands a powerful basis of scientific methods to be run effectively. This point is especially topical for Russia, which is traditionally self-reliant for research and education resources.

Present-day Russia has every opportunity for scholarly studies of the problems of reading, literacy, libraries, education, book industry, etc. There are the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Russian Academy of Education, leading related higher educational establishments - culture and printing universities, the Literature Institute and others - and public organizations, to mention but few. Not only national libraries - the Russian State Library and the Russian National Library - but also many federal and regional libraries have a considerable research potential.

Pre-revolutionary Russia, and later the Soviet Union had a sufficiently effective system of running individual reading-related institutions. Though the reform years partly dismantled that system, or it could not cope in the changed socio-economic situation, there is every prerequisite to rather quickly revive the entire managerial structure. This will be possible if relevant government bodies - the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Culture, the Federal Agency for Print and Mass Media, the Federal Agency for Culture and Cinematography, and the Federal Agency for Education - pool their efforts to blueprint and implement latter-day state policies to systemically link between themselves the basic parts of the reading infrastructure.

The state and the library community have done much within the preceding 15 years to designate the bearings of library policy. The federal laws "On Libraries" and "On the Legal Deposit", adopted in 1994, laid the basis of numerous regional bylaws and other legal and normative acts. Government and professional library standards are being blueprinted - in particular, on the Russian Library Association line. Fundamental research methodological centers are functioning on the basis of two national and twenty federal libraries, and the central public libraries of all constituent entities of the Russian Federation.

The regulatory and legal framework of education management is undergoing a major reform to grant extensive competences to ever more of its participants:

- Amendments to the law "On Libraries" grant regional and municipal education managerial bodies greater freedom in determining the educational content. Educational establishments are granted, at an institutional level, the right to independently elaborate curricula, and choose teaching methods and tutorial material;

- The presently elaborated concept of ethnic cultural development supposes adapting the educational content and process to the interests of all ethnic entities represented in Russian general educational establishments;

- The federal bill "On Amending Legal Acts of the Russian Federation" aims to enhance the role of employers' organizations in drawing the lists of trades and professions for vocational training, elaborating national standards for vocational training, and monitoring its quality;
- A trend is emerging for greater participation of pupils' parents in educational establishment management.

The newly emerged national associations of publishers and distributors of printed matter are actively voicing their desire for joint decision-making on not only departmental but also socially important problems, such as the promotion of reading in the Russian community.

As follows from the above, certain institutions of the socio-cultural reading environment not merely survived in the reform years but made progress. On the whole, however, the national infrastructure of reading promotion and development suffered considerable losses. More than that, Russia closely approached the critical threshold of disrespect for reading. At present, we can say that irreversible processes are starting in which the national cultural nucleus may perish.

The volume of information has been snowballing in every country and worldwide since the 20th century's second half. It is becoming ever more diversified, and its dissemination is ever more rapid. The global information society is taking shape at lightning speed. In this situation, Russia's progress depends ever closer on the content, organization and digestion of information circulating in it.

Russian society is rapidly changing and getting more complicated, as all other transition societies. Information processes are getting more disorderly, as compared either to the Soviet years or to the developed countries:

- Information exchanges are impeded ever worse between Russian regions, between the various types of settlements (megalopolises, large cities, medium-size towns and villages), between population groups and strata, and between people of different trades and professions. Information exchanges between Russia and other countries are also insufficient;
- Dominating the national information environment are sources and channels of fragmentary audio-visual information, while demands of an overwhelming part of the population for reliable systematized written (printed and/or electronic) information are not met;
- Necessary knowledge does not reach the mass consumer in time and in accessible forms, while available information is inadequate to help with essential problems;
- Essential information exchanges between the state and the public are insufficient, and so impede broad public participation in solving socially important problems;
- Socially necessary knowledge spreads slower than it should for effective socio-cultural adaptation of society.

All this impedes the development of Russia as information society, i. e., postindustrial society with an innovation economy – a society adapted to contemporary global processes and competitive in the global economy, politics and culture.

In this situation, exchange of written (printed and electronic) information and reading – that is, active absorption of written information, is essential for national development, because none other than written information, mainly in book form (printed or electronic), and written documents (manuscripts, diaries, and private and office correspondence) guarantees the storage of socially important information and knowledge. Reading is the basic and irreplaceable source of social experience past and present, Russian and foreign. All other channels (television, radio, everyday communication, etc.) carry the more superficial information, whose value as all too often short-lived. They are auxiliary – a kind of guide to reliable written information or illustrations of the past and current events.

Reading is the crucial way to absorb basic socially important information – professional and everyday knowledge, cultural values of the past and present, information about present-day developments and those rooted in the past, and normative ideas. Reading is the systemic nucleus of multi-ethnic and multi-tiered Russian culture. It is also an indispensable mechanism of maintaining that nucleus – both its professional and everyday parts. Reading is the most powerful machinery of supporting and enriching the native language.

National and global changes are especially rapid with globalization underway. Their understanding, evaluation, absorption and integration into the available socio-cultural context largely depend on the degree of absorption of written culture, as fixed in printed matter and concentrated in specialized institutions - educational and research establishments, libraries, archives, publishing houses, and distribution agencies. All this demands a level of readers' competence sufficient for effective search, selection, organization and conscious use by the public of information/texts necessary and important to it.

However, the status of reading is evidently deteriorating in present-day Russian society. Here are some statistics received after sociological questionnaires which, of course, cannot be precisely true, but give us the main tendencies:

- The share of people who never read at all or read occasionally is growing. 7.5% of the population read at least a book a year in 1991, as against 60% in 2008. The share of young regular readers fell from 48% in 1991 to 26% in 2008.

- Traditions of family reading are receding into the past. 80% of families regularly read aloud to children in the 1970s as against present-day 7%.

- Public interest in the printed mass media is shrinking. 61% of Russians read newspapers every day in 1991. Only 20% did so in 2008, with a respective 16% and 7% for journals and magazines.

- Reading tastes and preferences are ever more indiscriminate. The choice of professional literature, classics and entertaining fiction shows tastes degrading even in the intellectual circles.

- Public literacy is deteriorating. PISA international sampling revealed functional illiteracy of more than 10% of Russian school pupils as against 1% for the best-developed countries.

- Publishing policies are shifting toward books of primitive form and content, and small informative value.

- Entertainment is getting into the foreground of the functions of reading. Readers, especially young, want to reduce intellectual efforts to the smallest possible.

- Requests for the most complicated and informative professional literature and classics of artistic writing are ever more seldom even in large libraries.

- Library popularity shrinks with a growing gap between readers' demands and their satisfaction by medium and small libraries, especially small-town and rural.

- Value orientations are being erased in literary culture: there are no influential people who would introduce a fashion for reading quality books.

- The public - even the intellectual and managerial elite - is ever more sure that the Internet is ousting books and libraries, and their social role will be reduced to naught with its progress.

Libraries presently have ever more duties, and their social role must be enhanced. Regrettably, neither authorities at all levels nor the public-at-large realize this point.

Librarians' remuneration is far below the national average wage, and even that in culture. This rules out any notable progress of library information services. The problem is all the more topical as the information society is ever more demanding of librarians, while the available personnel is advancing in age, and there is no inflow of young people to the library staff.

The library network has no proper managerial system, and performs in an unfriendly, and occasionally hostile, regulatory and legal environment.

The inflow of new editions to public libraries in 2008 was a mere half of what they received in 1990. The UNESCO norm for developing countries demands 250 new books acquired a year per thousand population. The difference between Russian regions on this criterion is several tens. Libraries in more than a half of the country receive a hundred - 150, at most - books a year, so we have every reason to describe that area as an information isolation zone.

Most rural libraries have made only token acquisitions of new literature since the start of the 1990s. Several thousand settlements have not a single copy of the federal Constitution, the Civil Code, a map of Russia, and government editions.

Two federal libraries with the status of national - the Russian State Library and the Russian National Library - have drastically reduced their activities for methodological leadership of the country's libraries. It is presently far below the necessary. There are no systemic efforts to highlight and disseminate promising innovation library services. Library research work in the sociology and psychology of reading is in practically no demand by book industry and trade, and by administrative bodies.

Russia's transition to market relations spurred on book publishing and trade in major cities while badly hitting the industry in other parts of the country. Up to 90% of books coming out countrywide presently do not reach bookstores in a greater part of medium and small towns, even where such stores survive. Provincial traders prefer an extremely limited assortment of books - initially due to inadequate commercial arrangements and lack of operating assets, and now with the poverty of a majority of customers.

There are 5-10 bookstores per 100,000 population in developed countries. In Russia, the figure is 1.5-2. The country has only few stores (in Moscow) with an assortment exceeding 100,000 titles. A majority of stores offer no more than 2 or 3 thousand - which means they cannot fully cope with their cultural and educational duties.

Book delivery by mail to outlying areas takes 3 weeks, against less than 3 days in the United States and Canada. Exorbitant charges make this service unaffordable for a great part of the population. Administrative barriers and high rents impede book trade in a sizeable part of Russia - in fact, everywhere but in cities with the population exceeding a million. Municipal bookstore privatization is going on, and new owners usually turn to other, more profitable commodities as soon as they buy the store.

A greater part of bookstores (up to 90%, according to market participants) have no inhouse databases to badly impede the development of the sectoral return system, and so make traders based in medium and small towns limit their offers to bestsellers.

The publication of popular scientific and technical literature is insufficient in Russia - 11% of the total number of titles against 20-25% in developed countries. There is a shortage of books for children and adolescents (7% vs. 25-30%).

The population is badly informed, or not informed at all, about the latest publications in any field of knowledge. A majority of Russians have no access to such information. The small-town and rural young generation has the greatest problems of all: the absence of new and varied literature for that age group not merely nips in the bud its interest in reading but robs it of an equal start to rule out a good career, which depends on integration into full-blooded social and cultural life.

The Internet provides ample and useful information - but a mere 20% of the Russian population use it. As for the television and radio, only two or three channels usually are accessible in small towns and the countryside.

There is a gap between the necessity to acquire and use information essential for socio-cultural adaptation during the transition period, on the one hand, and access to such information barred to many social groups in many parts of the country—i.e. a majority of the population, on the other. That is the main problem of the Russian book industry.

Russia has not yet fully realized at the state and public level the role of reading among essential vehicles of national progress. That is why the system of popularizing reading is inadequate. There are no government and social policies in this sphere. Long- and short-term objectives have not been explicitly posed, and there is no properly developed legal basis.

True, public campaigns to promote book learning are occasionally held, but their number is far below that in developed and dynamically developing countries. Book advertising is not designed for particular social groups, and its effect is not monitored.

Russia has only quite recently started to acknowledge the necessity for latter-day mechanisms of attracting private capital to maintain the nonprofit sector of the reading infrastructure.

A number of federal and departmental target programs can be considered related to the reading/literacy problem (the federal program Development of Education in 2006-2010, the federal program Russian Language, the Federal Agency for Culture and Cinematography program Provisions for Library Work and Replenishment, and others). However, government support of reading habit teaching in Russia is below its analogues in developed countries by the factor of 20-30. If we transfer the sums into rubles, Great Britain annually spends on these goals 35,000 rubles per capita, Finland 23,000, and Russia 1,200.

So the ways and means of this program implementation are the main problems to be solved now. The participants of the conference decided that the program-related efforts and measures must be differentiated to the types of:

- regions (advanced; with progress zones; with progress points; depressive);
- settlements (megapolis; major city; medium town; small town; village);
- institutions (libraries; education; book industry; industry for the production and dissemination of other kinds of content - the press, documents, etc.) and the systems of popularizing reading, personnel training for the reading infrastructure, and methodological solution of reading problems;
- readers' groups (book-lovers, amateurs, people who read occasionally, people who do not read at all; children and the youth; immigrants; the intellectual elite, and others);
- content (educational, public educational, entertaining);
- means of disseminating information (books, newspapers, magazines, and documents in paper or electronic form).

The following total of all-purpose and special means are used to attain the Program goals:

All-purpose:

- monitoring and diagnosing the state of the reading infrastructure, i.e. the total of available institutional agencies and the services they provide; and information available to readers (offer); the diagnostic is achieved through correlating the demand and offer, and exposure of the reason of their discrepancies;
- pilot projects (social experiments) supposing targeted and controlled changes of the performance of respective agencies selected so as to represent with the utmost fullness each of the previously selected differential approaches;
- monitoring experiment results and the ensuing extended implementation of the Program;
- evaluation of the social and economic effects of implementing the Program;
- strengthening reading infrastructural institutions and guaranteeing their correspondence to their social necessity in Russian society.

Special:

1. In readers' respect:

- study of readers' interests, demands and the reading competence of the various socio-cultural groups and strata;
- typical kinds of work with target groups of readers on the basis of educational establishments, libraries, literary museums, bookstores, clubs, etc., with support from the mass media;

2. In the respect of reading infrastructural institutions:

- elaboration of recommendations on the sphere of reading for the various socio-cultural groups of readers;
- change of curricula and development of new teaching methods in secondary and higher educational establishments, aimed to promote reading, and increase personal reading and information competence;
- elaboration of target projects and programs for professional and public educational establishments oriented on enhancing reading activity (schools, colleges, libraries, literary museums, etc.);
- highlighting effective work with readers in libraries and other public educational institutions, and promotion of its emulation;

- organization of government contracts for the publication of professional and popular literature and fiction;
 - establishment, promotion and circulation of mass periodicals (as Reading-Matter, New Books, etc.);
 - establishment of permanent radio, television and press rubrics devoted to reading problems;
 - using the Internet to popularize reading.
3. In the respect of the National Program elaboration and amendment:
- contests of the most fruitful reading promotion ideas;
 - contests of the most effective program implementation;
 - monitoring, spotlighting and dissemination of etalon work for program targets in each of the enumerated fields;
 - remuneration of the best program implementation efforts.
4. In the respect of persons responsible for promotion of reading:
- postgraduate education of children's establishment personnel, teachers of basic schools and librarians, and streamlining the system of enhancing their qualifications;
 - postgraduate education of professors of humanities not only in humanitarian and social science higher educational establishments but also in technical and natural scientific, and in respective university departments;
 - organization of special educational courses for parents;
 - contacts with regional and municipal administrations – mainly culture and education agencies - to improve reading-related cultural and educational programs, and enhance their scope.
5. In the respect of the channels and forms of popularizing reading:
- enhancing the prestige of reading with the help of the mass media (television, radio, press, Internet and advertising);
 - street advertisements (cross-street banners, billboards, posters etc) and advertising books and reading in offices (posters, leaflets, bookmarks, etc.);
 - extensive presentation of books and literary events in media outlets and the Internet;
 - establishment of instruments of rapid response to changes of the reading situation;
 - special public events (book and reading festivals, literary fetes, etc.).

The author of this paper is a permanent participant and speaker at abovesaid Conferences. Personally speaking, after 3 years of animated debates I have no real proofs of success not only for the whole Program, but at least for the 1-st stage of it. Of course, we have here a negative effect of the world and national financial crisis 2008-2009, but we must own the deficiencies of the main concept of this Program dealing with the lack of criteria for evaluation such progress in different spheres of book reading.

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