

# Lithuanian Libraries: Providing Services for the Information Society

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*Lithuanian libraries are considerably diverse when it comes to their ability to offer Information Society-related services. Some offer access to databases from the user's home, some make use of an E-mail information service called "Ask the Librarian", and others, particularly in rural areas, are still waiting for computers and the Internet. In this article, the author offers a brief overview of the development of the Lithuanian library network, focusing particularly on the availability of information and communications technologies for household users and professionals so that a range of IT-based services can be introduced by Lithuanian libraries. This involves catalogues, conventional library tools, as well as state-of-the-art electronic products that have been developed through the joint efforts of a number of countries.*

Early in the days of Information Society projects, technologies were seen as the sole objective. Sometimes the thinking involved the appealing prospect of getting more information. "The tunnel mentality" – that's how John Seely Brown and Paulas Duguid described the approach in their book, "The Social Life of Information." They were referring to a situation in which all that is seen and shown to others is the alluring digital light at the end of the tunnel, leaving the entire social context – people, organisations and institutions which allow society to perceive "what information could mean and why it is needed"<sup>1</sup> on the periphery of the view.

Although libraries, which have conventionally been the cornerstone for the infrastructure of the Information Society, were often left at the edge of the "tunnel," the ideas of the Information Society encouraged them to engage in trials and experiments in terms of their role and possibilities in the context of the Information Society.

It was around 10 years ago when serious debates began about the role and image of libraries in the Information Society. Seeking to find their place in the professional com-

munity and then to persuade politicians and the authorities, libraries looked at the Information Society vision which had been developed by colleagues in Denmark, Finland and Sweden. Other sources of inspiration were studies that were conducted under the auspices of the European Union's "Telematics for Libraries" programme. One study, conducted in 1996, was called "Public Libraries and the Information Society."<sup>2</sup> Then there was a report called "The Green Book on the Role of Libraries in the Modern Society," which was presented to the European Parliament in 1998. One year later, the UK Library and Information Commission developed a project called "Vision 2020," which called for a consistent information policy through the involvement of the library sector:

1) Providing universal access to the products of the human mind (Connectivity);

2) Creating a digital library of the UK's intellectual heritage in the area of culture and innovation (Content);

3) Enabling individuals and organisations to perform their full role in the learning and Information Society (Competencies).<sup>3</sup>

The discussions among specialists, academics and politicians eventually turned into long-term provisions for the development of the Information Society. These have promoted and supported the development of Lithuanian libraries for the past five years. One of the earliest strategic documents in this area was a 1996 project aimed at developing the Lithuanian Integrated Library Information System (LIBIS). The purpose was to improve the availability of information for users, to computerise and automate the most important operations of libraries – filing, bibliographic entries, interlibrary lending systems, services for readers, and acquisition of library collections.<sup>4</sup>

A strategy for the introduction of ICT in Lithuania's educational system (2000) and a programme for that implementation (2002) both were intended "to provide schools and school libraries with computer equipment and systemic general purpose and library software." The development of the Lithuanian research and studies information environment and the academic library network<sup>5</sup> – these are among the fundamental tasks in the "Information Technologies for Research and Studies" programme, which was launched in 2001. A conceptual framework for the development of the Information Society, adopted in 2001, set forth the task of establishing "conditions for users of public libraries, as well as the libraries of higher educational and research establishments, to use the computerised services of libraries in Lithuania and abroad, as well as other information sources." The authors of the framework predicted that "libraries will be linked to global computer networks; each library will have at least two computers."<sup>6</sup> Policy regulations related to Lithuanian culture which were approved in the same year indicate that "the main cultural institutions whose activities are related to the development of the Information Society are libraries and museums. The implementation of programmes for the modernisation of libraries and museums facilitates the development of the Information

Society.”<sup>7</sup> A “Library renovation and modernisation programme for 2003-2013,” adopted in 2002, basically targets the widest sector – that of public libraries. It was designed to help Lithuanian readers in acquiring basic knowledge and skills, ensuring equal opportunities to access ICT and enabling libraries to accumulate, maintain and disseminate information about the country’s cultural and scientific heritage.

The conceptual framework for the digitalisation of Lithuania’s cultural heritage was approved in August 2005, and it is a fundamental step forward. It is expected that there will be another programme, the implementation of which will ensure access by users to the Lithuanian cultural heritage in digital form. The conceptual framework speaks to more than the task of implementing ICT. It also addresses the issue of initiatives and projects aimed at the development of electronic content. A general overview of strategic documents and programmes which was launched in Lithuania a couple of years ago tells us that the focus in this respect has been placed on the development of strategic documents, with the overall objective of promoting ICT access and automation in libraries.

## DEVELOPMENT OF LIBRARIES IN LITHUANIA

Lithuania’s library system is not static, it changes and develops all the time. Among changing indicators regarding the activities of libraries, there is the fact that the number of libraries has been steadily decreasing (Figure 1). In 2004, there were 3,133 libraries in Lithuania.<sup>8</sup> This was essentially due to economic, administrative and demographic developments on the national scale. There was a range of objective and subjective factors, including the number of libraries which submitted statistical reports in a specific year. In this context, the development of the quality of libraries cannot be assessed from one point of view alone. Notably, a decline in the number of registered readers must be assessed not only in

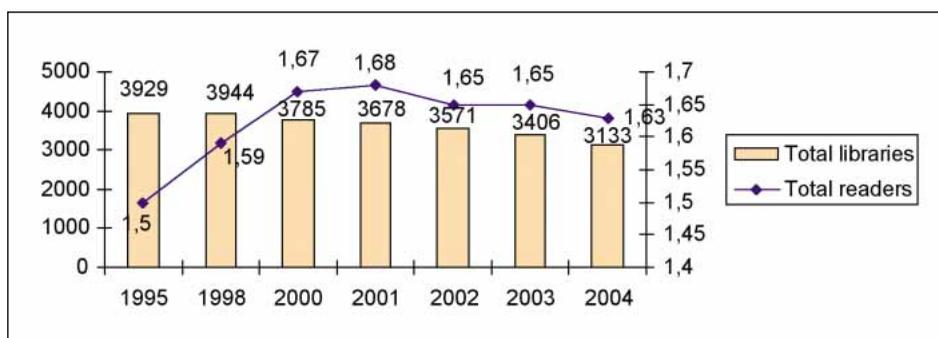


Figure 1. Development of the number of libraries and readers in Lithuania

terms of a general decrease in the number of libraries, but also in terms of a general decrease in population numbers. It is also true that uniform library cards have been introduced.

In 2004, Lithuanian libraries recorded more than 1.6 million users and nearly 28 million visitors. Despite the declining number of library users, the trend in terms of the number of visitors has been positive (Graph 2). Readers who are registered at Lithuanian libraries represent 47.5% of the total Lithuanian population, with the average resident visiting a library more than eight times a year. The average Lithuanian library has 483 registered users and 7,864 visitors.

During 2004, Lithuanian libraries recorded over 1.6m users and nearly 28 m visitors. Despite the declining number of library users, the trend of the number of visitors is positive (Graph 2). Readers registered in Lithuanian libraries represent 47.5 of the total population in Lithuania, with an average statistical unit attending libraries more than 8 times a year, averaging 483 registered users

and 7,864 visitors per Lithuanian library.

At the end of 2004, Lithuanian libraries had a collection of more than 102.3 million documents, with 62.5 documents in library funds per registered user, on average, or 29 documents per Lithuanian resident. A total of 28.8 documents were issued per user, on average – 13 documents per resident. Over the last few years, funding for Lithuanian libraries has developed most unevenly, which is clearly seen in Graph 3. Increasing or decreasing trends in the availability of funds were essentially based on the number of written-off, outdate or damaged documents, and on the number of newly acquired documents. This, of course, depends directly on the funding that is allocated for new acquisitions.

Lithuanian libraries have nearly 8,000 employees, and more than two-thirds of them (6,516) are professional library or information science graduates. Statistically, each library has at least two professionals, and each of those professionals, on average, provides services to 250 regis-

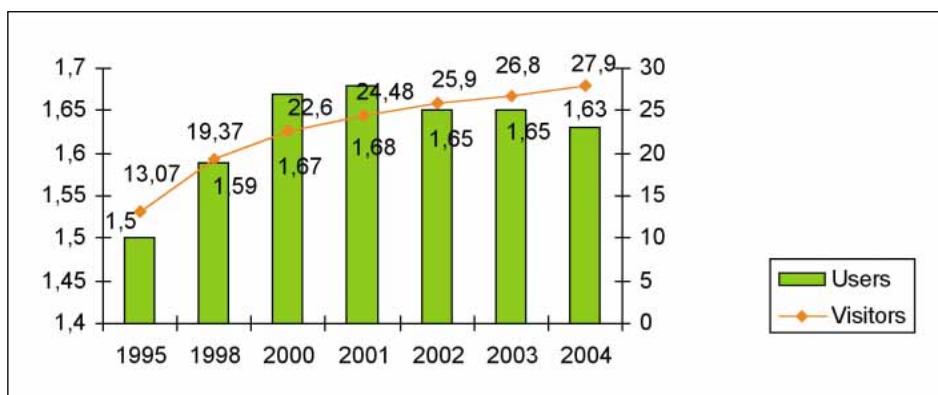


Figure 2. Development of the number of visitors and service users in Lithuanian libraries

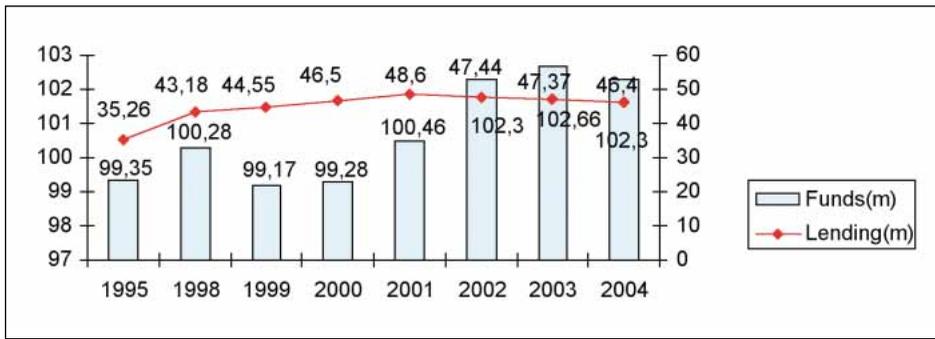


Figure 3. Development of funds and lending volumes in Lithuanian libraries

tered users and more than 4,200 visitors, releasing a total of 71,25 documents.

### THE LITHUANIAN INTEGRATED LIBRARY INFORMATION SYSTEM AND RELEVANT SERVICES

The aforementioned Lithuanian Integrated Library Information System (LIBIS) incorporates three major components:

1) The Lithuanian Academic Library Network (LABT), which integrates the libraries of 76 research and educational institutions (16 universities, 39 scientific institutes and 20 colleges);

2) The LIBIS network,<sup>9</sup> which brings together 73 libraries – the National Library, seven major specialised libraries, five county libraries, and 60 municipal public libraries;

3) The School Library Network (MOBIS), which is to integrate all of the libraries of Lithuania's general education schools by 2006.

The creation of the Lithuanian Academic Library Network began in 1998 on the basis of the globally known ALEPH500 library system (Ex Libris, Ltd.).

Data in 2004 showed that Internet users have been provided with access to an electronic catalogue of academic books which contains more than one million bibliographic entries and three million document entries. There are also facilities for ordering Internet publications. The creation of the Lithuanian research and studies publications database (PDB) involved 52 libraries, and 14 libraries contributed to the development of an electronic database for MA graduation papers, theses, and

their executive summaries. In 2005, users were introduced to the Virtual Library Portal,<sup>10</sup> which operates on the basis of ALEPH, MetaLib and SFX programming products. This portal allows users to perform searches in:

- LABT library catalogues;
- The LIBIS consolidated catalogue;
- The catalogues of foreign libraries;
- Foreign databases;
- The Lithuanian database for MA and PhD papers and theses;
- The Lithuanian research publications database.

The portal will be developed and expanded further to incorporate a full-text document database.

The first stage of the LIBIS network project was launched in 1996 and completed in 2004, after the LIBIS system was installed in all of Lithuania's country, municipal and central public libraries by UAB "Sintagma sistemas." The project is being monitored by the LIBIS Centre, which is located at the Lithuanian National M. Mažvydas Library. Lithuanian and foreign users can browse the electronic LIBIS catalogue, which contains nearly two million bibliographic entries. Information can be found about the documents which are held by Lithuanian libraries. A total of 29 electronic library catalogues can be accessed via the Web sites of the libraries.

When the automated reader service subsystem was launched, users were offered facilities for ordering online publications. The electronic services which are offered by the Mažvydas Library are, clearly, the

most diverse, and they are offered to libraries and individual users alike. The library's Web site provides access to range of national bibliographic databases, and remote users can access the subscribed databases. A collection of electronic resources is being developed at this time.

Libraries which have joined the analytical bibliography module of the LIBIS system are provided with free access to the relevant databases which concern bibliographic entries of Lithuanian and foreign periodicals, continuous publications, conference materials and collections of articles. Other Internet users can subscribe to the database, paying a specific fee at a library or through a micro-payments system. This system was designed so that payment can be made via mobile telephone operators for the fee-based services which libraries offer – execution of subject inquiries, search for publications, and other kinds of information.

Between 2005 and 2010, LIBIS access will be expanded and made available in the branches of public and museum libraries. Other plans include diversification and expansion of the scope of electronic services that are provided, making it possible not only to locate documents, but also to order and receive documents or parts thereof via electronic channels.

The School Library Network is the most recently launched project. Strategic plans envisaged the complete automation of school libraries by the end of 2004, but during the course of that year, only 10 libraries in secondary schools volunteered to take part in training and the testing of the MOBIS system (which was designed by UAB "Sintagma sistemas"). The system, which is specifically tailored for educational purposes, will facilitate the automation of all library activities, from the ordering of documents to the provision of services to readers. This will allow school libraries to join the Lithuanian Integrated Library Information System. It is now expected that work on the project will be completed by the end of 2006. In 2004, there were 1,438 school libraries in Lithuania.

## ACCESS TO E-INFORMATION AND DATABASES

Traditional documents such as books and periodicals make up the bulk of Lithuanian library collections, with other types of documents representing only one-third of the total collections. The pattern of distribution in this area has changed a bit over the course of time, but non-printed documents such as audio records or audio-visual documents still account for less than 1% of total library assets. In 2002, electronic documents represented as little as 0.03% of library collections. This figure rose a bit to 0.05% and then to 0.07% in 2003 and 2004.

Libraries have organised centralised and electronic subscriptions to Lithuanian and foreign electronic databases. The Lithuanian Research Library Consortium manages subscriptions to foreign databases, while the Lithuanian National Library provides access to the LITLEX (legal information) and ELTA (news agency) databases. Libraries can subscribe independently to specialised databases which are tailored to the specific needs of their readers. The Agricultural Library, for instance, subscribes to AGRICOLA and AGRIS, while the Lithuanian National Library has access to the database of the Global Legal Information Network, the Global Books in Print database, etc.

In 2001, the Lithuanian Research Library Consortium took over the task of representing Lithuanian libraries in an "Electronic Information for Libraries" project which was organised by EBSCO Publishing and the Lithuanian Open Society

Institute. The consortium offers subscriptions to seven electronic databases to its members and to other libraries:

- 1) Cambridge Journals Online (from November 2003)
- 2) EBSCO Publishing (end of 1999)
- 3) Emerald Fulltext (mid-2005)
- 4) Integrum-Techno (2005)
- 5) Oxford Reference Online (2003)
- 6) ProQuest (November 2003)
- 7) Science Direct (October 2002)

Library visitors are offered training in the area of electronic information, and they can develop their skills in searching through electronic databases. The best-known database among Lithuanian users is EBSCO, and statistics show that if it had 27,000 visitors in 2002, then in the first half of 2004, that number was up to 40,000. Readers at academic libraries have been the most active in accessing the database, but many other users are discovering it, as well. That is particularly because public libraries have increasingly been subscribing to the services (six in 2002, 11 in 2004).

Database subscription costs are partly subsidised by the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Culture, but mandatory contributions from library budgets are often a serious obstacle against the ability of libraries to offer access to electronic information.

## PUBLIC COMPUTER, INTERNET ACCESS

Public Internet access in Lithuanian libraries was first made available in 1995, first by the Lithuanian National Library. ICT services are now available in all academic libraries, as well as the central

libraries of counties and municipalities.

Statistics in 2004 showed that Lithuanian libraries had 5,879 computers, among which 82% were connected to the Internet. The number of computers available to library visitors increased by 1,021 between 2003 and 2004, and of these, 947 were connected to the Internet. Table 1 provides statistical data about computerised workplaces that are available to the public and to staff in certain libraries and library networks.

Lithuania's first Internet reading rooms appeared between 1993 and 2002, with generous financing from the Open Society Fund of Lithuania, the Open Society Institute's libraries, as well as other schemes and individual sponsors. A survey in 2003 on public Internet access in libraries showed that of the 490 computer-aided workplaces with Internet facilities which existed at that time, 30 had been financed by the Open Society Fund and the Open Society Institute, 61 had been arranged under the auspices of the Culture Ministry's "Provision of the Information Society" programme, and 40 were financed by the "Window to the Future" business alliance. In 2004, a total of 78 libraries were computerised. Among them there were 14 city branch libraries, one children's branch library, and 63 rural library branches. Still, the rural branches of public libraries are still very much neglected in terms of Internet access (Table 1). In 2004, there were 1,151 rural branches, and of these, 177 branches had 327 publicly available computers. Two-thirds of these were connected to the Internet.

Table 1. Computer-aided working places in Lithuanian libraries in 2004

Institution	Publicly available computers	Of which: with Internet access	Computers for staff	Of which: with Internet access
National Library	71	32	352	345
Lithuanian Academy of Sciences Library	24	24	101	101
County public libraries	102	84	238	230
University libraries	609	600	457	448
College libraries	382	362	87	87
Medical library networks	33	33	40	40
Technical Library Network	31	15	81	77
Agricultural Library Network	2	2	14	12

Table 2. Computerisation of municipal public libraries

Municipal public libraries	Libraries	Number and percentage of computerised libraries		Publicly accessible computers	Of which: with Internet access	Computers for employees	Of which: with Internet access
Central libraries	60	60	100 %	461	434	749	737
City branches	152	80	52.6 %	185	177	48	39
Children's branches	14	10	71.4 %	20	20	6	6
Rural branches	1,151	177	15.4 %	327	209	44	24
<b>Total:</b>	<b>1,377</b>	<b>327</b>	<b>23.7 %</b>	<b>993</b>	<b>840</b>	<b>847</b>	<b>806</b>

The computerisation of rural libraries moved forward significantly in 2004 and 2005, thanks to a new project – “Establishment of Public Internet Access Facilities in Rural Areas.” The project was implemented by the Lithuanian Information Society Development Committee and the Ministry of the Interior. Of 300 public Internet access facilities, 209 were established in libraries, and they went online on 1 June 2005. The result of this is that the level of computerisation at Lithuania's libraries has expanded significantly in 2005. Still, the gap in terms of Internet and ICT availability for urban and rural residents and librarians remains very much in evidence. Public libraries in regional and urban municipalities have, on average, seven or eight computers, while the number in rural areas is just one publicly accessible computer per 10 libraries.

The situation at Lithuania's schools is more optimistic when it comes to the supply of computers and Internet access at school libraries (Table 3).<sup>11</sup>

## OTHER LIBRARY-RELATED PROJECTS

### *The Internet library at the Lithuanian Technical Library*

The Web site of the Lithuanian Technical Library provides access to its Internet library at [http://www.tb.lt/Interneto%20biblioteka/Interneto\\_biblioteka.htm](http://www.tb.lt/Interneto%20biblioteka/Interneto_biblioteka.htm). There is free access to many up-to-date Internet sources, as well as links to the catalogues of libraries in Lithuania and abroad. The creation of this Internet library began in 1998. Taking into account the specific purposes and needs of library users, the information sources in the Internet library are cate-

gorised into groups such as law and legislation, maps and atlases, dictionaries and electronic translators, encyclopaedias, business information resources, organisers of fairs and exhibitions, associations and trade organisations, etc. The content in each category is introduced with a brief annotation.

### *The electronic catalogue of Lithuanian publishers*

In 2004, the Lithuanian National M. Mažvydas Library opened up an electronic catalogue of Lithuanian publishers, including publishing houses and other organisations which engage in publishing activities. The catalogue can be found at [www.lnb.lt/leidejai](http://www.lnb.lt/leidejai). A print version of the catalogue prompted the development of the E-version. At this time users can find information about some 1,500 Lithuanian publishers. There is an overview of the Lithuanian publishing industry, along with information about library services that are provided to publishers. There is also information about the mandatory delivery of copies of newly published materials. New publishers are offered a specifically tailored set of information. Given the variety of the information that is provided via the catalogue, this is quite justifiably known as an information portal.

### *The Utena Region portal*

The M. Miškiniai public library in Utena is recognised as a leader in the provision of IT-based services among Lithuanian libraries. With great insight and participation in international projects, the library often performs much better than other major Lithuanian libraries. Between 2003 and 2005, the library joined with 48 co-operation partners from 36 countries in participating in the “Calimera” project of the EU's Information Society Programme. The main purpose of this project is to ensure high-quality access to the cultural heritage via European museums, libraries and archives, using IT for this purpose. The programme's Good Practice Guidelines on the use of IT in cultural institutions have been translated into a number of languages, including Lithuanian. This resource will certainly be of interest and relevance to people who work in this area – see [www.calimera.org](http://www.calimera.org) for the guidelines and other documents.

The Utena Region portal ([www.utena-on.lt](http://www.utena-on.lt)) is the result of sustained and consistent effort. Users can receive comprehensive information on the regional and municipal authorities, the latest news, an archive of the news, a full-text encyclopaedia about the Utena Region, a directory of Web sites, classified ads, a gallery of photographs, a presentation of books, advertising from local companies, links to electronic library catalogues, and

Table 3. Computers in school libraries

		Number of libraries	Number of computers	Computers per library
<b>2003</b>		1,344	2,224	1.65
<b>2004</b>		1,296	3,024	2.33
<b>of which</b>	In gymnasiums	90	439	4.88
	In secondary schools	465	1,668	3.59
	In pre-school nurseries	82	27	0.32

information about E-newspapers and magazines. A special annex, "Info House for Children", surprises visitors with the creativity of its creators. The library also provides a virtual service, "Ask the Librarian." Recently the library has been pursuing a project which aimed to the development of a portal for Lithuanian public libraries.

### **Musicalia**

The library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences has joined with partners in Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Spain, Germany and Greece in developing a digital repository for manuscripts of early European music. This is part of a EUREKA project, ECH\_TOPICC, 2003-2006. Visitors to the Web site [www.musicalia.lt](http://www.musicalia.lt) can learn about parts of the digital repository, e.g., the items that are held by the library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, viewing digital photographs, listening to the music, subscribing to a news list and ordering high-quality CD recordings of the various digital documents. People make use of this for research and for personal needs.

The library of Vilnius University is implementing interesting and important projects such as "The Historical Collections of the Vilnius University Library" (1998, <http://www.mb.vu.lt/unesco/index.htm>), "Vilnius in Old Photographs" (<http://www.vu.lt/mb/Vilnius/index.html>), "Recordings of Old Court Books on CD" (2000 and ongoing), and "Monuments of Old Hebrew Writings" (2005 and ongoing). See [www.mb.vu.lt](http://www.mb.vu.lt) for more information about these and other projects.

Since the approval of a Conceptual Framework of the Lithuanian Cultural Heritage, initiatives and efforts to digitalise library, museum and archive collections were no longer isolated, and the expectation is that they will be consolidated under the long-term and sustainable projects which focus on the digitalisation of Lithuania's movable cultural heritage and on the development of Internet access. A new project, "Development of the Integrated Virtual Library Information System,"

was launched this year by the Mažvydas Library, and that is an important initiative in this area. Funding equal to LTL 13.3 million was received from the European Regional Development Fund and the national budget, and that will make possible the creation of a digital data bank, along with various electronic services.

### **SUMMARY**

The role of Lithuanian libraries in the process of developing the Information Society has been widely recognised at the political level, and it has led to the development of numerous long-term strategies and programmes. General trends in the activities of libraries are quite positive, even though registered user numbers are declining. That is largely due to objective socio-demographic developments, and to technological changes such as uniform reader cards, as well as electronic information services for remote users.

The implementation of the Lithuanian Integrated Library Information System will significantly be facilitated by the automation of academic, public, special and school libraries. Given the rather uneven level of ICT use in Lithuania, libraries differ significantly in terms of their ability to offer services that are relevant in the Information Society. Public libraries, particularly in rural areas, are doing worst of all in this regard. This situation does not allow the potential of the public library network to be utilised efficiently in eliminating the geographic and social exclusion of Lithuania's residents.

The information services which are provided by Lithuanian libraries are, to a large extent, based on traditional documents – books and periodicals still account for two-thirds of the total collections at libraries. The efficient utilisation of state subsidies, however, has allowed libraries to increase the number of electronic databases and the number of people who use them to a very significant degree. This has also occurred thanks to the contributions of the libraries and their highly professional employees. E-information services in libraries must be developed further and expanded.

New items need to be added to the range of subscribed databases, and users must be encouraged to avail themselves of the resulting services.

Examples of newly created Internet services and digitalisation testify to the competence of Lithuanian libraries, to their ability to join in broader national and international projects for the development of E-content and innovative information products. □

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2. "Public Libraries and the Information Society – a Study [Interactive]". Luxembourg, Cordis Information Services (1997), viewed on the Internet, 2 September 2005.

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4. Resolution of the Lithuanian Government on a programme for the Integrated Library Information System (LIBIS), 29 October 1996, No. 1273.

5. The Lithuanian Academic Library Network [Interactive]. Kaunas (2003-2005), viewed on 4 September 2005, <http://www.labt.lt>.

6. Resolution of the Lithuanian Government on a conceptual framework for the national development of the Information Society in Lithuania, 28 February 2001, No. 229.

7. Resolution of the Lithuanian Government on regulations related to cultural policy in Lithuania, 14 May 2001, No. 542.

8. Library statistics here and elsewhere come from the Library Centre of the Lithuanian National M. Mažvydas Library.

9. LIBIS is the name of an automated library software application: [www.libis.lt](http://www.libis.lt).

10. See [www.library.lt](http://www.library.lt).

11. Vaitkus, R. "School Libraries: Start of the Information World", presentation at the conference "Lietuvos bibliotekos Europoje: keliai ir klystkeliai." Druskininkai, 23 April 2004 (viewed 4 September 2005). See [www.lbd.lt/reng/vaitkus.ppt](http://www.lbd.lt/reng/vaitkus.ppt).