

## USAGE OF ELECTRONIC INFORMATION IN LITHUANIAN LIBRARIES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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*The paper provides information on the usage of electronic databases in Lithuanian research and public libraries. The data collected from the libraries in 2005 is compared with the data collected in 2001. Provides statistical data.*

### **Background and goal**

Four years ago, at the III Nordic – Baltic Meeting of Librarians held in Tallinn, a first study on the usage of electronic documents in Lithuanian libraries was presented [1]. Since then the situation has radically changed; therefore we decided to provide you with the up-dated information.

The most important change started with the establishment of the Lithuanian Research Library Consortium ([www.lmba.lt](http://www.lmba.lt)) which was found in December, 2001. At present there are 31 members, including national, academic, significant state, county public and research institute's libraries. The main objectives of the Consortium are: promoting of the creation of virtual libraries, preparation and implementation of advanced technology and innovative projects in the libraries; subscription to electronic databases for Consortium members and other libraries [2]. Although few big research libraries also started delivering services as Consortium – they are subscribing to databases for themselves and other libraries as well – none of them are legally registered as the consortium nor is this their main activity:

- Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania acts as the consortium (or administrator) for public libraries for subscription to two Lithuanian databases: *LITLEX* and *ELTA*. Both subscriptions are fully funded by the Ministry of Culture.
- Kaunas University of Technology acts as consortium for six academic libraries getting access to *IEEE Xplore* database. The subscription is fully funded by the Lithuanian State Science and Studies Foundation.
- Ministry of Education and Science continues subscription to *ISI Web of Science* for two biggest universities: Vilnius University and Kaunas University of Technology. The subscription is fully funded by the ministry.

- Three libraries are subscribing to law information (databases *WestLaw* and *HeinOnline*) via the Consortium of Legal Resource Centers and Legal Information Specialists which has its headquarters in Latvia.

This paper will not cover compilation of databases, as all academic, significant state and public libraries are using sophisticated software and compile their catalogues and local databases. Two big library automation projects are still running in Lithuania: LIBIS (Lithuanian Integrated Library Information System) for the national and all public libraries and LABT (Lithuanian Academic Libraries Network) for all academic libraries. In 2005 we can state, that all significant state, all academic (including colleges and research institutes) and all public libraries are using library automation system. In 2004 the Ministry of Education and Science had finally chosen unified software for school libraries, but the system is not running in all schools yet. School and college libraries will not be covered in this paper.

### **Questionnaire**

The aim of the questionnaire was to get information about the usage on subscribed on-line databases in Lithuanian libraries. The questionnaire was very simple – only 10 questions to be answered.

The data was collected in February – March, 2005, exactly four years later the previous questionnaire. It was sent to all 31 members of the LMBA Consortium and all 60 public libraries. Altogether to 91 libraries. We have received 29 answers (93,55%) from LMBA members and 20 from the public libraries (33,33%). The paper is based on these answers and on the data available for the LMBA Consortium.

While in the study of 2001 we tried to overview how libraries are equipped with tools to use electronic information, this was not necessary in 2005, as all libraries (with the exception of the village branches of public libraries that are not covered in this paper) have and use PCs both for their everyday work and to serve their readers. All use internet. While in 2001 only 40% of public libraries were able to offer PCs connected to the internet for their readers, all academic libraries enjoyed internet services. The situation today is different – due to several governmental and private initiatives (worth mentioning “Langas į ateitį” [www.langasiateiti.lt](http://www.langasiateiti.lt)) even all public libraries (except all the branches in villages) are offering internet services for their readers.

Start of delivering Internet services for the users and the first on-line database subscribed

According to the collected data most research libraries introduced internet services for their readers in 1995, although two libraries started offering internet in 1992 and 1994. Three internet reading-rooms were opened in most advanced public libraries in 1998. The greatest jump in introducing internet services in research libraries was in 1996 -1997, while in public libraries – in 2001 – 2002 (see figure 1).

Few research libraries started ordering databases on CD-ROMs in 1991-1992. The greatest expansion in usage of on-line databases started with *EBSCO Publishing* in 1999 when this database was offered by the Open Society Fund-Lithuania. For public libraries

the first widely used on-line database was Bibliographic database of Lithuanian articles, which was offered for the market by the National Library in 2000.

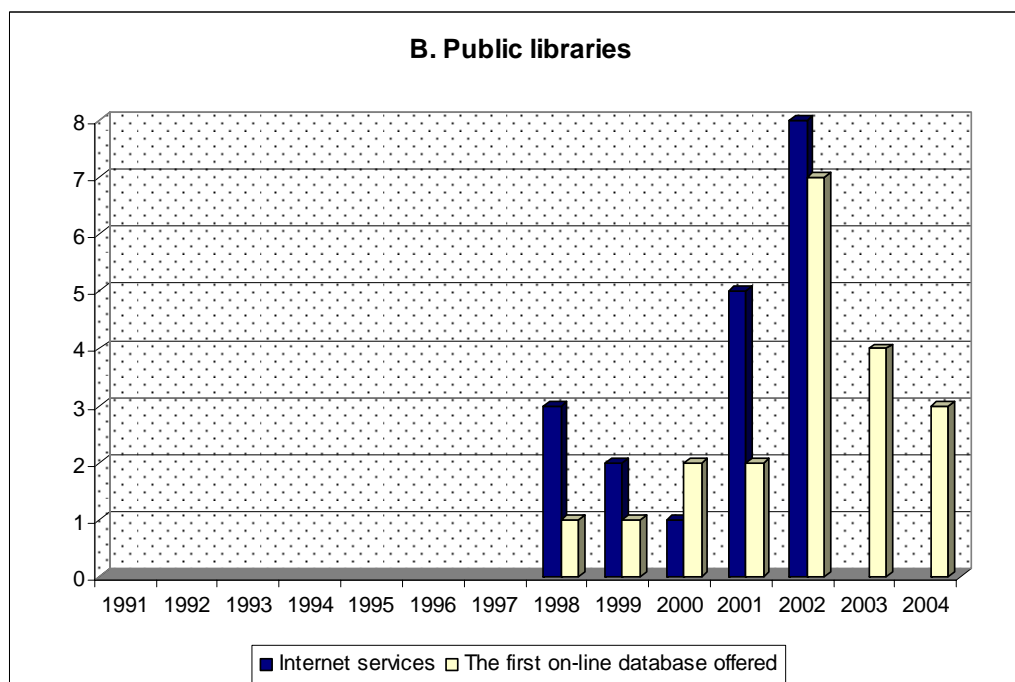
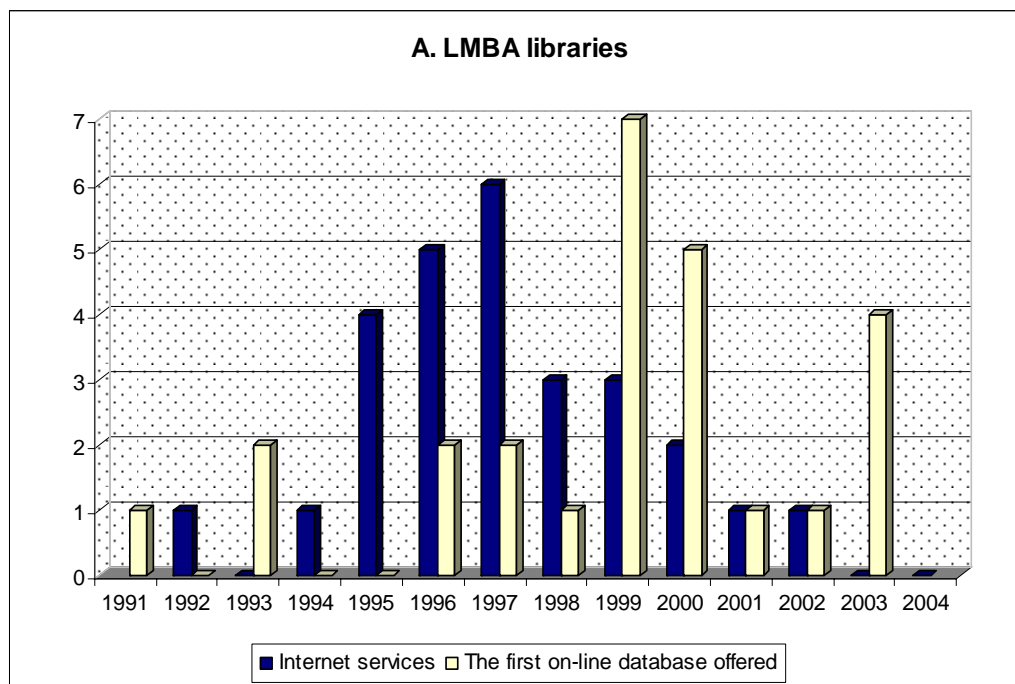


Figure 1: When libraries started offering internet services and on-line databases for their users:

A – in the LMBA libraries; B – in the public libraries.

### **Subscription to on-line databases**

Libraries were asked to list the subscribed databases in the questionnaire. It turned out that public libraries are mainly subscribing to Lithuanian databases, only few subscribe to *EBSCO Publishing*, *Integrum* and *Oxford Reference Online*. The most advanced public libraries are: Šiauliai City Municipality Public Library which is subscribing to greatest amount of databases – 7 altogether, and Utena A. and M. Miškiniai Public

Library which is subscribing to 6 databases. All the rest enjoy the subscription to 2-4 databases. In average public libraries are subscribing to 3, 4 databases (data from the questionnaire). We know that this figure should be smaller if all libraries would have answered to the questionnaire.

The situation is very much different in research libraries. Only 3 members of the LMBA Consortium are not subscribing to a single database. Five research and academic libraries are offering over 10 databases for their readers. In average the research library is subscribing to 5, 7 database.

27 research libraries answered that they are subscribing to databases via the LMBA consortium, 6 – via Kaunas University of Technology, 5 – via Lithuanian National Library, 2 – via the Ministry of Education and Science, 3 – via the Consortium of Legal Resource Centers and Legal Information Specialists, 4 – via other consortiums.

All 60 public libraries are getting access to *LITLEX* and *ELTA* databases via the National library, 8 of them are subscribing to various databases via the LMBA consortium.

54% research libraries and 50% public libraries are subscribing to databases directly from the publishers. Even 94% of them (97% research and 94% public libraries) would prefer to do this via consortium.

### **User training**

It is very important for librarians themselves to know how to use databases and to be able to teach the users. This is not simple. Therefore the LMBA consortium provided a set of trainings called “How to Search in Data Bases: Train the Trainer” in 5 biggest cities: Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Šiauliai, and Panevėžys. These trainings were provided using the grant from the Open Society Institute in Budapest and had great effect on further user training. 42 participants of the trainings provided 80 trainings themselves, so training 1117 users.

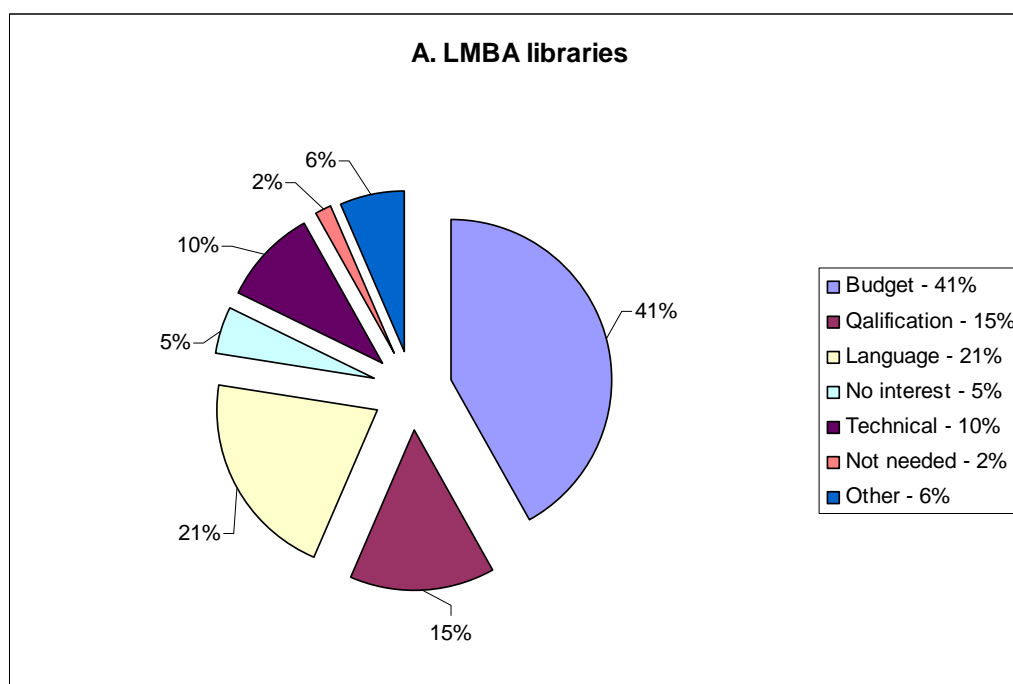
According to the questionnaire 89,7% of research libraries and 65% of public libraries provide regular trainings for their readers. After such trainings the number of users is growing immediately.

Although the situation is getting better with each year, quite a lot of students studying by correspondence (usually these are older people) have no or very poor knowledge how to use PC. Some elder teachers also face the same problem.

Public libraries are complaining about poor knowledge of librarians how to use databases, therefore train-the-trainer courses are very much needed for librarians. Most readers of the public libraries are more used to printed information, therefore they express little interest to databases.

### Problems

We have asked libraries to list problems they face while subscribing to databases and using them. No wonder the greatest problem is lack of money – 43% of all the libraries face this problem, 29% have language problems, 7% still miss equipment for the use of electronic information (see figure 2).



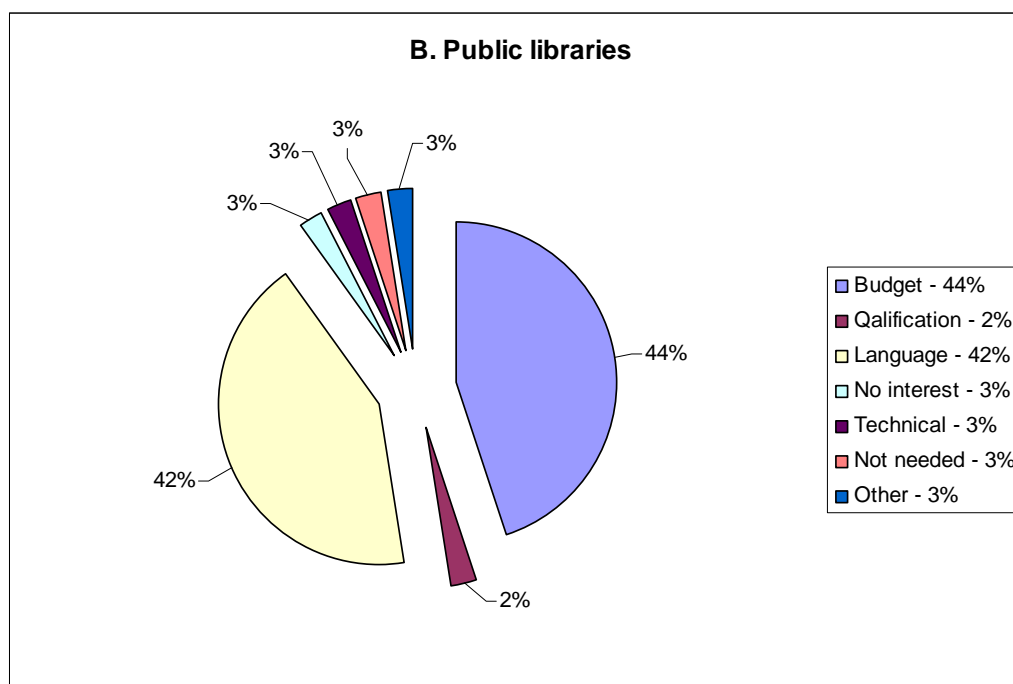


Figure 2: Problems the libraries are facing in subscribing to and using databases:  
A – in the LMBA libraries; B – in the public libraries.

Most users of the public libraries prefer to find information very quickly. As only students know how to search databases, the librarians must help the others. Most specialists working in the province can not find information themselves. If the library has a good information specialist, the users are lucky. Not all public libraries have such specialists. Most users in the province are not interested in new technologies, they do not want to learn. This situation can be proved not only by our questionnaire, but also by the sociological research which was recently conducted under the request of the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania. According to this research one third of inhabitants of Lithuania do not read books [3].

Even research libraries are complaining about language problems (both for staff and users), PC literacy among elder students and teachers. These problems cause psychological problems when some people can not find information in the electronic catalogue, not to talk about foreign databases.

Special libraries (medical, agricultural) are complaining about low availability of specialised databases. They would like to subscribe to specialised databases via the consortium using governmental funds allotted for databases, while the consortium is more concentrated towards general databases.

The users do not like bibliographic databases, they demand full text immediately. Only few use interlibrary loan or electronic document delivery. The main reason – this service is fee based.

Most users are asking for remote access to databases, but only few database providers are offering this luxury. The users do not understand why they can use EBSCO Publishing and Oxford Reference Online from home, while can not use other database the same way.

Some libraries are complaining about complicated tender procedures that are very bureaucratic, big publishers do not care about these requirements and do not bother themselves answering needed questions.

Smaller academic libraries are complaining about shortage of staff for work with databases.

### Who is paying?

As one can notice, money is the biggest problem to get a desired database. No surprise – since Lithuania joined the EU in May 1, 2004 – all publishers changed their pricing policy towards our country. Our biggest advantage is participation in the eIFL project ([www.eifl.net](http://www.eifl.net)) that brings us not only lower prices and better licensing conditions, but know-how knowledge as well as networking with other countries.

Open Society Fund-Lithuania ([www.osf.lt](http://www.osf.lt)), the first promoter of on-line databases for libraries paid a great role in persuading the Ministry of Culture to allot special funds for the electronic resources. Therefore this ministry was the first governmental agency which started partially funding subscription to *EBSCO Publishing* since 2001. The Ministry of Education and Science started allotting special funds for database subscription since 2003. Although the amounts are growing with each year, the research community is not satisfied with the information they have access to. From the very beginning libraries decided that the funds must be used only as partial payment for foreign on-line databases. This is because libraries feel bigger responsibility when they share the cost themselves. The exception was done for two Lithuanian databases for the public libraries – the Ministry of Culture fully paid access to *LITLEX* and *ELTA* to all public libraries in 2005. Another exception – *ISI Web of Science*. The Ministry of Education and Science is paying for the subscription to this database for two Universities since 2001. Since 2003 the British Council is sponsoring subscription to *Cambridge Journals Online*.

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005 (planned)
Ministry of Culture	60 000	60 000	80 000	87 059	201 000
Ministry of Education and Science	0	0	400 000	465 000	630 000

Table 2. Special governmental funds for database subscription (in Lithuanian Litas). 1 EURO = 3,4528 Lithuanian Litas.

### Summary and the future

As the LMBA Consortium is subscribing to databases not only for research libraries, but for public libraries as well, we can give some observations. Research libraries are much more active users of electronic information. This is because of their users need. But not only. The activity and qualification of librarians is also important.

Most libraries do not imagine their lives without on-line databases. Users are getting used to this service not only in research libraries, but in public libraries as well. Although the amount of databases subscribed by libraries is growing each year, user needs – the ones that do read - are growing faster. In order to satisfy these needs libraries will need more databases. This means more money, more work, more training, etc. As all the databases use different interface and different search mechanism, it is complicated both for the users and librarians to get to know all of them. Therefore libraries started looking for one gateway to all e-resources they are subscribing to. Academic libraries have chosen exLibris product *Metalib* with *SFX*, while the significant state and public libraries are still exploring the market.

The fact that few big research libraries started delivering services as Consortium and variety of library interests showed that one consortium is not enough. The same library might be subscribing to on-line databases through several consortiums. Therefore in four coming years – or even sooner - you might hear about the new ones.

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