The Lithuanian libraries' future: scenario planning for developing strategies

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Abstract: During the last decade one can observe an increasing growth of publications dedicated to library future in general and specifically to scenario planning as a mean to envision the future. Most efforts of scenario and any other future-oriented thinking are motivated by the anxiety about library roles in the changing society and desire to use planning instruments for creating the niche for libraries in future, coping with an intellectual challenge of distinguishing major drivers of change and their impact on libraries. The turn of library researchers and practitioners to scenarios as tools of strategic planning can be explained by several heavily quoted advantages of this method. It provides a guided and disciplined framework for thinking of complex and 'fuzzy' issues; builds on individual creativity, imagination and insights; allows exploration of different paths of possible and plausible changes in future; expresses complex issues as appealing and easy-to-understand stories about the future. The aim of the paper is to analyse the major changes, opportunities and challenges that will affect the development of the Lithuanian public, research and special libraries in 2023. The paper is based on scenario planning research carried out in the large-scale national project LiBiTOP in 2012-2013. The findings revealed that conditions of information access and involvement of libraries into the implementation of the national strategies will have a significant impact on the future demand of library services in Lithuania. Major opportunities for the development of libraries in future included a presence of issues in acquiring and use of information experienced by users and the state support to libraries. Threats covered high expectations and requirements to library services, high level of competition in information sector, and decreasing allocation of resources to libraries. The findings of scenario planning research could be usefully employed to develop the library responses to opportunities and threats and identify strategic alternatives for actions under different scenario conditions.

Keywords: libraries, scenario planning, strategic management, Lithuania, LiBiTOP

1. Introduction

During the last decade one can observe an increasing growth of publications dedicated to library future and scenario planning as a mean to envision the future. These publications range from general observations and thoughts about

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the future of libraries to employing scenario planning for thinking about the future (e.g. Reflecting on the future of academic and public libraries, 2013; Digital convergence – libraries of the future, 2008; O'Connor and Sidorko, 2010; Ludwig, Giesecke, Walton, 2010; O'Connor and Au, 2009; Maggs, Chelin, 2013). Most efforts of scenario and any other future-oriented thinking cited above are motivated by the anxiety about library roles in the changing society and desire to use planning instruments for creating the niche for libraries in future, coping with an intellectual challenge of distinguishing major drivers of change and their impact on libraries.

Scenario planning is a method of strategic planning that aims at exploring different paths of the future development of an organization to facilitate strategic decision making. Scenario planning is not a way of predicting the future, but rather a mean to gain an in-depth understanding of the extent and variety of possible changes in the strategic environment of an organization and prepare for the future. In business and public sector organizations scenarios are used in order to check the suitability of present strategies and develop new ones enabling the organization to act successfully and adapt to its environment in a better way (Schoemaker, 1995; Scearce, Fulton, 2004).

The turn of library researchers and practitioners to scenarios as tools of strategic planning can be explained by several heavily quoted advantages of this method. It provides a guided and disciplined framework for thinking of complex and 'fuzzy' issues; builds on individual creativity, imagination and often (although not necessarily) on group discussions and insights; allows exploration of different paths of possible and plausible changes in future; expresses complex issues as appealing and easy-to-understand stories about the future (Ludwig, Giesecke, Walton, 2010; Giesecke, 1998; O'Connor and Sidorko, 2010).

The aim of the paper is to analyse the major changes, opportunities and challenges that will affect the development of the Lithuanian public, research and special libraries in 2023. The main research questions:

i. What are the perceived changes that will affect the demand of services of the Lithuanian public, research and special libraries among their clients and users in 2023?

ii. What threats and opportunities for the future development of these libraries will emerge due to changes in the external environment in 2023?

The paper is based on the findings of scenario planning research performed in the large-scale national project LiBiTOP in 2012-2013. In this research the future of public, research and special libraries was analysed. Libraries of this type comprise the significant part of the whole Lithuanian library network.

2. Research design

For the purposes of determining the future changes, opportunities and threats that could possibly affect the demand for library services the method of scenario

planning was applied. The research involved an exploratory scenario planning. It aimed to create the plausible alternatives of future development of the libraries under analysis (Kosow, Gaßner, 2008; Bishop, Hines, Collins, 2007). In terms of developing scenarios' content the so-called 'intuitive logic' approach was taken (Bishop, Hines, Collins, 2007). The intuitive logic approach builds the scenario plots basing on the interactions between driving forces of different nature. According to van der Heijden et al., driving forces are "those fundamental forces that bring about change or movement in the patterns and trends that we identify as underpinning observable events in the world" (van der Heijden et al., 2002: p. 282). Scenarios were constructed by developing the matrix that consists of two driving forces with the highest impact on organisation and the lowest predictability (i. e. key uncertainties). The poles of each axe represented two opposite extreme outcomes of the driving force, while the axe itself exhibited the whole spectrum of change possibilities between two extremes. The axes of scenario matrix should not be interrelated; the logic of the scenarios was determined by the interaction of extreme outcomes (poles). The driving forces of high predictability (i.e. it is known how this driving force will develop) and with a high impact on organisations were also integrated into each scenario. It allowed developing sufficiently rich stories of the future (Bishop, Hines, Collins, 2007; van der Heijden, 2005; Pillkahn, 2008). In this paper the predictable driving forces were not discussed.

The major data sources for this research were scenario descriptions developed by analysis of insights of 142 library stakeholders that took part in 8 scenario workshops conducted in project LiBiTOP in 2012-2013. Library stakeholders included librarians, legal founders / authorities, users of library services, library suppliers, and library partners. Research participants developed scenarios for public, special and research libraries. During the workshops through the series of interactive tasks, the participants determined key uncertainties and plots of the scenarios.

3. **Findings**

During the workshops participants developed four scenarios for each library type – research, public and special libraries. As a result, 12 scenarios were constructed.

The major structure of scenario was shaped by interaction of the following key uncertainties with two extremes:

    i.   For public libraries: 1) complex information usage (extremes – easy or complex) and 2) economic policy of the state (extremes – neoliberal or social).

    ii.   For research libraries: 1) open access (extremes – vanishing or expanding) and economic condition of the state (extremes – getting worse or improving).

    iii.   For special libraries: 1) library role in satisfying information needs of the society (extremes – increasing or decreasing) and 2) economic condition of the state (extremes – getting worse or improving).

As a result of interaction of key uncertainties and also pre-determined driving forces scenario plots were created. Four themes were common in the plot of all twelve scenarios: conditions and patterns of information use; state policies, programmes and management; stakeholders, and implications for libraries. The plot of scenarios is discussed according to the library type.

The plot of public libraries' scenarios is provided in the Table 1.

Table 1. Scenarios for public libraries

Drive and speed / Jungle	Life-long learning / Miracles happen through cooperation
The market is saturated with innovative commercial publishing, information service and tools at affordable prices. There are no state programmes in information domain, business funding and approach prevails in public sector. Those who are not capable to make timely use of information are socially excluded. Libraries are pushed to provide relevant services under conditions of a surplus of innovative ICT-based services.	Information is free of charge, but difficult to use due to complex tools and information overload. State programmes aim to diminish barriers to information use and develop easy-to-use information services. There are gaps between those citizens who have and have no skills to use information. A demand for ICT and information competency training in libraries grows.
Permanent effort to catch up / The world of Adam Smith's grandchildren	Paradise discovered / Information society
Information access is fee-based, expensive and its use is complicated. State programmes are focused only on training an information literate and competitive workforce. Optimisation of government institutions and commercial approach to culture, social exclusion of citizens who are not competitive on the labour market are prevailing trends. A requirement to provide quality library services at minimum expense is pre-dominant.	Free information of high quality is accessible for all. State programmes are focused on promotion of digital information services, life-long learning of citizens and preservation of national identity. Citizens have well-developed information and ICT competencies and access to digital tools; and their international mobility increases. A pressure for quality library services in a society with a high level of information literacy and rapidly changing ICT.

As shown in Table 1 in all scenarios major conditions of information access were affordability of information and the level of information literacy of citizens. Different motivations of citizens to use information were obvious; they also shaped changing values of the society and varying basis for social

stratification. In four scenarios two patterns of state influence were observed: a) increase vs. decrease of the state influence and b) broadening or narrowing the scope of the national information and cultural policies.

The plot of research libraries' scenarios is provided in the Table 2.

Table 2. Scenarios for research libraries

Revolution will happen anyway	Realistic
Scholarly information is provided by expensive commercial channels. It is not accessible, difficult to use and acquired mainly by personal networks. Due to worsening economic conditions the state funding to research is minimal, research institutions increase the operational efficiency, and the brain drain of researchers abroad grows. Libraries are pushed provide services at minimum expense. The demand for research library services is high.	The state promotes open access to scholarly information, although generally subsidies into research decrease due to declining economy. Research institutions seek for additional research revenue abroad. Libraries experience a competition with other information providers for limited state subsidies for open access of scholarly information.
Fight for survival	**Utopian philantropic**
Scholarly information is expensive and accessible to researchers hired by commercial companies; information sharing between scholars is limited. The state funds research that cannot bring commercial profit. The gap between commercially viable research institutions and those incapable to engage in commercial research increases. An increased demand for libraries to serve researchers whose outputs cannot bring commercial profit and a high level of competition with commercial information providers.	The information pollution grows due to wide accessibility of open access research information; high level of information literacy is necessary to make use of it. The general conditions of research funding and institutions improve. Growing rates of competition between researchers motivate them to publish more and use complex ICT tools. A pressure of high-level information services to scholars and, as a consequence, higher requirements to competencies of library staff.

As shown in Table 2 in three scenarios information access was limited to various degrees due to the lack of affordable information, in one – limited resources of the state to support open scholarly publishing. According to scenario content in Table 2, the ways of scholarly information acquisition varied from using personal networks, open access sources provided by state, and partly using resources provided by commercial companies. General changes in behaviour of researchers were observed in all scenarios. They included brain drain of researchers abroad, the search for additional revenue in foreign countries, and an intensive use of ICT infrastructures and tools.

The plot of research libraries' scenarios is provided in the Table 3.

Table 3. Scenarios for special libraries

Virtual world everywhere and always	Matrix.lt 2023
Technical and medical research information is acquired directly from commercial suppliers by research institutions. Favourable economic conditions increase the purchasing power of medical and technical organisations and the number of commercial information suppliers; the activities of medical and technical professionals mirgate to virtual space, ICT tools are intensively used for professional development. Libraries experience a pressure of competition with commercial information providers.	Quality technical and medical information is less affordable due to general economic decline. The state strives to allocate funds to libraries for ensuring at least basic information provision and merges libraries to increase efficiency. Technical and medical professionals seek for additional revenue by working for foreign institutions or abroad and offering specific knowledge and services. High demand for library services and information provision but the need to draw additional funds.
World of knowledge for everyone	**The world of lost possibilities**
Wide access to highly specialised technical and medical information is a state priority. The main providers of high quality professional and research information are libraries. International competitiveness of the Lithuanian technical and medical professionals grows. Medical and technical professionals apply widely apply ICT tools in their work. The libraries are under pressure to meet high requirements to competencies of library staff and library services.	Quality information is not accessible due to the lack of affordable sources of information; information is sought on internet, by using personal networks; information pollution increases. The state drastically diminishes funding to special library network and it vanishes. Brain drain – technical and medical professionals emigrate. Local technical and medical information providers fail to survive and substantially diminish in number. A pressure to organise library services at minimal expense.

Table 3 reveals different levels of access to information and modes of information provision. Access to information ranges from completely inaccessible quality information to limited and sufficient access. In all scenarios information providers ranged from technical and medical organisations who bought information directly from international suppliers, libraries, and personal networks. The scenarios also provided information on general changes in the work of medical and technical professionals that were mainly influenced by varying economic conditions and use of ICT.

4. Discussion

In all scenarios two major factors had a significant impact on the future demand of library services. These were conditions of access to information and involvement of libraries into implementation of national strategies.

Conditions of access to information covered economical, legal, technological, and social changes that shaped the ability of citizens to acquire and use information for various purposes including educational, professional development, research, leisure etc. In library scenarios these conditions either improved or got worse.

Involvement of libraries into the implementation of national strategies indicated the approach of governing institutions and society in general towards the role of libraries in achieving various national objectives. Such approach covered two aspects a) recognition of libraries as important players in achieving national goals and b) interest of government institutions in developing the capacity of libraries to perform their roles. Involvement of libraries into implementation of national strategies may either increase or decrease in future.

Depending on the combinations of major factors the demand for library services may increase or decrease. The highest demand for library services was identified in scenarios with complicated conditions of access to information due to limited economic capacity (*Matrix.lt 2030*, *Revolution will happen anyway*), difficulties in information use (*Life-long learning / Miracles happen through cooperation*, *Revolution will happen anyway*), legal constraints (*Revolution will happen anyway*). In these scenarios public, special and research libraries were providers of free, authoritative information along with support in its use. Moreover, the importance of library role was recognized by the state; therefore, libraries were provided with funding to support their operation to the extent that was possible under conditions of declining economy.

The lowest demand for library services occurred in scenarios with the lack of recognition of library importance in implementing national goals in line with either improved conditions of access to information (*Drive and speed / Jungle*) or inability of libraries to provide quality services due to dramatic decrease in funding (*The world of lost opportunities*). Such situations were obvious in

scenarios of public and special libraries; however, were absent in scenarios of research libraries. In research library scenario *Fight for survival* there were no state support to open access movement but the funds to acquire information were available; here the libraries lost the part of their target audiences. However, the loss was not critical to their existence, because the state was engaged in supporting research which did not generate commercial profits and, thus, its information provision.

Opportunities for library development included the presence of gaps or issues in acquisition and use of information; support of the state to libraries. Threats included high expectations and requirements to library services, high level of competition in information sector, and decreasing allocation of resources to libraries.

Presence of gaps or issues in information acquisition and use provided libraries with a niche for information services and better arguments to prove their importance to state authorities even in generally unfavourable scenarios. This was obvious in scenarios where libraries had to improve information literacy or competitiveness of users (*Life-long learning / Miracles happen through cooperation*, *The world of Adam Smith's grandchildren*), facilitate navigating in complex information environment (*Utopian philantropian* and *The World of knowledge for everyone*), ensure affordability and / or access to quality information (*Fight for survival, Life-long learning / Miracles happen through cooperation*).

Support of the state was of crucial importance for all libraries. Even in less favourable scenarios with state support libraries were provided with minimal resources necessary to organise information provision (e.g. *Matrix.lt 2030*; *Realistic*) or develop services in a complex information environment (*Life-long learning / Miracles happen through cooperation*). Under favourable conditions the state support provided opportunities for the development of innovative library services and experiments (e.g. *Utopian philantropian*, *Information society / Discovered paradise*, *The world of knowledge for everyone*).

High expectations and requirements to library services generally should be treated as a threat because of putting the pressure to raise a quality standard of library services dramatically. These challenges were obvious in the scenarios *Information society / Paradise discovered*, *The world of knowledge for everyone*, *Utopian Philantropian*.

High level of competition in information sector was another threat to libraries. Volume and variety of information produced by commercial entities created a lot of alternatives to users for getting information. This threat is common for the scenarios *Drive and speed / Jungle*, *Virtual world anywhere and always*, *Fight for survival*.

And finally, the threat of decreasing funding to libraries could be identified in all scenarios with unfavourable economic situation (*Matrix.lt 2030*, *Revolution will happen anyway*, *Realistic*), when the libraries were not important players in information provision (*Drive and Speed / Jungle*, *Permanent effort to catch up / The world of Adam Smith's grandchildren*, *Virtual world anywhere and always*), or both (*The world of lost opportunities*). In case of economic decline reducing budget was used by the governing institutions to survive during the unfavourable period, when libraries were not considered important participants of information provision and the resources were allocated to other entities. Presence of the threat in many scenarios suggested its high probability; however, not in all scenarios this threat was equally crucial for successful operation of libraries.

5. Conclusions

The findings of scenario planning research could be usefully employed to develop the library responses to changes, opportunities and threats in identified future paths. They enable to identify strategic alternatives for actions under different scenario conditions.

The findings have shown that the role of the government support and approach to libraries as strategic players was treated as a factor above library influence. The most vivid illustrations of it were the scenarios of research and special libraries where open access, library policies and public approach to libraries were driving forces for future change. It means that the participants did not envision any opportunities for libraries to influence these domains. However, the practice shows that libraries are able to make impact on the development of policies, in particular those, which are directly related to their activities. The passive approach of library stakeholders to policy and decision-making is an indicator and, perhaps, partly a reason of a generally unfavourable environment for introducing positive changes in library sector.

And finally, another important assumption had a significant impact on strategic planning for libraries. It was the pre-requisite that libraries were designed to close the gaps in information use and access. The opportunities for library development were mostly seen in those scenarios with obvious limitations in information access as the lack of skills, the lack of quality information free-of-charge, the inability of some groups of users to access information etc. However, in generally favourable scenarios there was a great pressure for libraries to stay relevant and to meet the high expectations of users. Perhaps, it means that there is still no answer about what libraries have to offer for the prosperous society.

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