

National Library of the Czech Republic

Buildings

New building

In 2005, the government approved the capital investment proposal for a new National Library building without clarification of and from which sources the funding would come from. [The government approved the funding in 2006]. As of the end of 2005, the funds to buy the land have been raised and the purchase contract almost concluded. Conditions for an international architectural competition were also prepared.

The key action items in 2006 are to sign the parcel purchase contract, to organise and evaluate the architectural competition [opened on 16 May 2006 http://www.nkp.cz/competition_library/ENpodminky.htm], and to secure financial resources for the project. The new building at Letná will tie in with the construction of the Prague inner circular road to be completed in 2008–2009. The Library should open its doors to the public in 2010.

The building concept, as defined for the architectural competition, recognises the fact that libraries throughout the world are undergoing a gradual transformation from more or less closed institutions with traditional services anchored in their own collections to open institutions with substantially broader social and cultural involvement. In addition to basic services and considerably greater access to collections in open reading rooms divided by the fields of study, the new library should feature open spaces with a literary café, exhibition areas, and places for social and cultural interaction.

The new National Library building is bound to be a modern multifunctional space where all visitors can meet their colleagues and friends in a pleasant atmosphere or enjoy a cultural event. The library will provide its users with access to millions of documents and pieces of information from all parts of the world. All that will happen in properly configured and suitably equipped zones – from the open spaces to partially segregated areas for team work, to fully enclosed spaces for totally undisturbed and/or loud teamwork. Aside from a variety of refreshments available in an on-site restaurant and café, the new library will offer plenty of choices about where to sit and relax. A definite advantage of the Letná site is the proximity of a park, which makes it possible to study inside or outside.

The following diagram expresses the basic concept of the new library, with the various services allocated into zones that do not interfere with, but complement each other. The degree of zone openness or seclusion is indicated in the diagram by a colour transition from green to red (colours in the diagram have the same meaning as traffic lights colours). The solid boundary line delineates the cloistered library core, the National Archival Collection.



Renovations

Revitalization of the Klementinum as a National Cultural Monument

In 2005, repair work was done on the peripheral cladding of the Klementinum's Main Courtyard and Vine Courtyard. The facades, cornices and extant architectural elements in the Main Courtyard were repaired and got a new coat of paint, while conserving the original plaster to the greatest possible degree. Windows were also repaired. Sundials in the Vine Courtyard finally received a restoration treatment, too. Two more sundials were discovered on the courtyard's western wall, thus adding to the unparalleled set of 13 already-known sundials in the Klementinum area. The fountain in the middle of the courtyard, a rare work from 1676, was restored as well. This revitalization of Vine courtyard will be completed in 2006.

Step by step, the Klementinum's interior spaces are also being rejuvenated.

After some inevitable alterations, the Klementinum Gallery started to operate partially in the corridor on the first floor, facing Křižovnická Street. The entire Gallery including the hallway on the ground floor with frescos from the life of Ignatius de Loyola will be inaugurated in April 2006, at the occasion of an exhibit marking the 450th anniversary of Jesuits' arrival to Bohemia.

The unveiling to the public of those areas in the Klementinum's that are most interesting, both artistically and conceptually, remains a distant dream. One of the conditions of that happening is completion of the new building at Letná and transfer the modern collections.

Information technology and networks

Shared Cataloguing Project Launched in Aleph-Cluster

In 2005, after more than one and the half years of intensive preparations, a project of shared cataloguing using the Aleph-Cluster system started in the National Library of the CR, Moravian Library in Brno and the Research Library in Olomouc.

The preparations for closer co-operation among the three largest libraries of the Czech Republic included harmonising both the descriptive and subject cataloguing (this activity started already in 2004), adjusting working procedures and cataloguing lines in particular libraries, and implementing the system. During the first semester, the system was tested in practice, and in June 2005, shared cataloguing operations commenced. In July, the working procedures were again re-adjusted and, as a result, members of the acquisition and cataloguing staff from the Moravian Library in Brno and from the Research Library in Olomouc have been working in the database of the National Library of the CR (NKC). They can create digital records, or use existing records, adding their own data. Then they copy the records into their local databases, since Aleph-Cluster enables the local database records to be connected with the NKC and, if necessary, feed the changes made in the NKC into appropriate local records.

For the time being, the shared cataloguing covers new Czech production of books and some kinds of continuing resources, cartographic documents and sheet music. Co-operation among the country's three major libraries that alone are entitled to receive the complete legal deposit has resulted in accelerated and more efficient cataloguing of the ever-increasing quantity of Czech documents. Right from beginning, all libraries appreciated the project's contribution to a better quality of cataloguing due to closer participation of three institutions and more active involvement of the cataloguing staffs of the Moravian Library in Brno and the Research Library in Olomouc in cataloguing policy.

The digital library

UNESCO Jikji Prize 2005 for Contribution to Preservation and Accessibility of Library Collections

In competition for the first-ever UNESCO Jikji Prize "Memory of the World" – equivalent to the Nobel Prize or an Oscar in its field – the National Library won in a competition of more than 35 organisations. The intent of the UNESCO's Memory of the World programme, and the associated prize, is to commemorate the cultural heritage contained in the various types of documents, to support their preservation and accessibility, and to highlight the importance implicit in this "memory of the world". Library representatives Vlastimil Jezek and Adolf Knoll accepted the prize during a ceremonial session of UNESCO in the Republic of Korea on September 2, 2005. The prize was awarded especially for the long-term work in the field of digital access to rare and endangered library collections and the assistance and help given to many institutions and library communities in this field in many countries mostly from the Central and Eastern Europe and Asia.

The Czech Digital Library Concept

The Czech Digital Library Concept (2006-2010) was prepared and accepted by the Czech Ministry of Culture with the aim to be approved by the government in 2006. The plan starts with the international and national structures plus all the valid Czech legislation that underlies those parts that are being - or will have to be - changed to bring the concept to life. Both the strong and weak points of the present situation as well as the risks and opportunities are analyzed, as is the usual practice in planning. A brief explanation of the present situation and formulation of the main goals to be reached by 2010 are accompanied by detailed tables containing sub-goals, necessary actions, funding, etc.

Documents to be preserved and made permanently accessible are divided into two main groups (traditional hardcopy documents and documents in digital form) or four subgroups: traditional documents and three subcategories of digital documents: digitized historical (pre-1801) documents, digitized "new" documents (i.e., produced after 1800), and documents originally created in digital form.

Preservation of and permanent access to traditional and digital documents are becoming less and less independent. Documents printed on acidic paper and/or frequently used have to be digitized to be accessible. The majority of documents published in printed form today are generated by their originally digital form. However, they are delivered to depository libraries mostly only in paper form to wait there for complicated and expensive redigitization in the future. This is an unsustainable situation which needs dramatic changes in legislation, ways of thinking, and cooperation between repositories and publishers. The sooner the waste of allocating insufficient resources is stopped, the more can be saved for the future. From this general observation, valid internationally, let us switch to the situation in the Czech Republic.

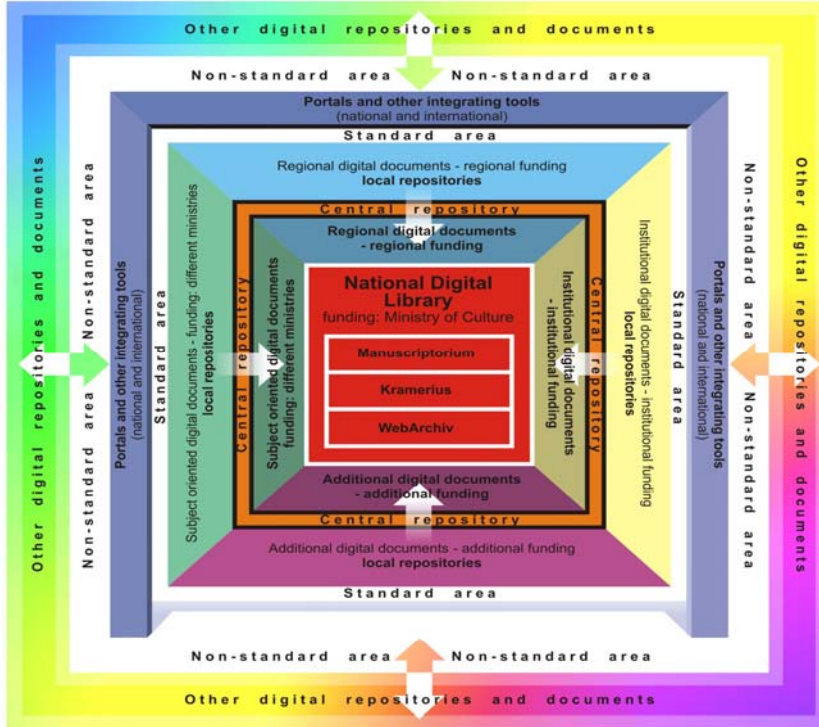
The area of preservation of and access to traditional documents is relatively stable in the areas of authorizing legislation, terminology, standards, and the division of responsibility for preservation and access. There are three large depository libraries (which get the complete legal deposit) at the core of the whole system, and they are accompanied by regional and specialized libraries. Legislation has been permanently updated to accommodate newly produced documents, and it does not need to be changed. However, the depository libraries have problems meeting this legal requirement. Good will is not enough in cases of inadequate conditions and funding. The National Library can serve as a good example - its capacity will be totally filled in 2010. There is a plan for a new building, which, if either unrealized or delayed, will result in the breakdown of the whole system from the center. Even when stored in perfect conditions, traditional documents printed on acid paper are seriously endangered. Their digitization is relatively slow, and more and more of them are becoming inaccessible.

As mentioned above, authorizing legislation, terminology, and responsibilities for preservation of and access to traditional documents are relatively stable and satisfactory. However, this is not the case for digital (both digitized and digitally originated) documents. Legal deposit legislation does not include Internet resources and must be updated. We are lucky that it is so vague in some areas that it allows harvesting.

Copyright law (in our region, rather "authorship" law) is a serious burden for access and requires changes as well. Terminology is either nonexistent or just coming into use and requiring agreement. A new division of responsibilities is also needed. Both must be justified. Dividing responsibilities will be probably the easier task, however. Cooperation among libraries in the area of preservation of and permanent access to digital documents can be established relatively easily in countries with a history of good cooperation in building national archives of printed and other traditional documents. This is the case of the Czech Republic. We can easily use the already-functioning structure described above in connection with traditional documents and adapt or develop it for digital documents. This is very practical because nowadays libraries function as hybrid libraries, integrating both traditional and digital documents and building services based on them (and, of course, on resources of other libraries and institutions worldwide).

The figure below illustrates the concept of the Czech Digital Library:

Czech Digital Library



Let us start in the middle of the diagram. The center, or heart, of the whole system called the National Digital Library contains selected digital documents as the core national cultural heritage. These digital documents intended for a long-term preservation are both digitized or digitally created, and they are produced within three large national projects funded by the Ministry of Culture.

1. "Memoria" <http://www.memoria.cz> aims to build a virtual research environment for the realm of historical book resources. "Manuscriptorium", the database within Memoria, represents the current state of our achievements <http://www.manuscriptorium.com>.
2. "Kramerius" project <http://kramerius.nkp.cz> focuses on preservation of and accessibility to endangered "modern" periodicals, books, and other documents.
3. "WebArchiv" <http://www.webarchiv.cz/index-e.html> has two main objectives: first, to catalogue online publications as a part of the national output and to integrate their records into the Czech National Bibliography database; and second, to store these publications in a deposit system so as to ensure long-term access to them.

Documents owned or produced by any Czech library, museum, archive, or other institution can be selected to be part of the National Digital Library. Digitizing, creating metadata, and preserving these selected documents are funded by the Ministry of Culture.

Three different repositories have hosted the separate data of Manuscriptorium, Kramerius, and WebArchiv. From 2006 onward, the digital data of these three subsystems will physically share one large repository.

Institutions with digital data not selected for the National Digital Library will also be invited to deposit their data in the central repository at their request, but additional funding will be required from other ministries (according to different subject areas), regions, or institutions. Other institutions produce digital data but are not interested in depositing their data in the central repository. Digital data stored in local repositories built by such institutions and funded by different ministries, local authorities, individual institutions, and corporations can be integrated under the umbrella of national, or international, portals and other integrating tools, if those agencies adhere to agreed standards.

Of course, very large group of "non-standard" digital documents that do not adhere to agreed standards or newly emerging documents still awaiting standards development should not be omitted. With some limitations, they might be integrated under or linked to portals and other integrating tools. The concept describes different subsystems of the Czech Digital Library together with a system of co-funding from different resources, which is the pre-condition for a viable system.

The first phase of the Czech Digital Library is scheduled for 2006-2010 and will focus mainly on developing standards for digitization (file formats) and metadata, including containers and packaging, preservation metadata, digital rights management and content authentication, storage technologies, and access (including indexing, search and retrieval). Decisions about what to choose for changes and, mainly, the best sequence for making necessary changes (neither too early nor too late) will not be easy; and integrating different existing systems will require some compromises.

Building of the central, truly trusted repository, is one of the most important goals.

10. Acquisitions

- Outstanding new acquisitions relating to national heritage/ culture/ patrimony/ European heritage

A Paris Fragment of the Dalimil Chronicle in Latin Translation

The National Library's most precious accession in 2005 is a fragment of the Latin translation of a chronicle authored by a person known as Dalimil. This chronicle, traditionally attributed to him, is the earliest historical work written in the Czech language and dates back to the very beginning of the 14th century. A fragment of its Latin translation had been discovered in a private collection in Paris and subsequently purchased in an auction at Piasa House on March 17, 2005, for a high but nevertheless advantageous price of 339,000 EUR.

It is a manuscript fragment (12 folia, about one tenth of the original length), hitherto unknown and without no record of its existence. It is therefore a totally new discovery. The manuscript originated in northern Italy, most likely in Bologna, in the early 1330's, perhaps in the years of 1331-1333. It could be hypothetically surmised that it was made for young Charles IV, who was sojourning in Italy at the time, but it is not at all certain whether he commissioned the work. In absence of any document that would place the manuscript in a definite context with some contemporaneous events, its origin has to remain a matter of conjecture.

Of greater importance, however, is the fact that the Parisian fragment is the first and only indication that the Dalimil Chronicle had ever been translated into Latin. Two medieval translations into German have been known to exist for a long time, but the Latin rendition represents a new find of far-reaching significance. First examinations reveal that the Latin and German texts are not so much true translations of the Czech original as its variations, or even different versions.

This means that the Czech, Latin and German textual traditions permeate each other, rather than forming separate branches. Therefore, Czech medieval culture cannot be considered ethnically and linguistically isolated but has to be viewed against a trilingual Czech/German/Latin background. The Parisian fragment of the Dalimil Chronicle's Latin translation provides clear evidence of this relationship, which further enhances the importance of this discovery. It truly inspires a profound historical awareness. This acquisition also illustrates how essential the mission of the National Library is.

Gutenberg's 15th Century Indulgence Document

The National Library succeeded in obtaining another rarity, the so-called *31-line indulgence document* printed in 1454, probably by Johannes Gutenberg, the inventor of the printing press. The document was discovered in two parts, inside the front and back covers of a book from the library of a Franciscan monastery in Cheb. The bookbinder used it as maculature to line up the covers.

The Library reached an agreement with the Bishopric of Pilsen, the present owner of the Cheb collection, to buy the single-sheet print for the very favourable price of 250,000 CZK. No indulgence document has been sold at a foreign auction for a long time, but the actual value would be at least four times as high. The National Library Restoration Department removed both parts of the document from the covers and joined them to form a complete whole.

The document belongs to a group of the world's earliest prints, and has in fact the earliest positive dating among the dated ones. This precious discovery is even more valuable considering that, until recently, there has been only one known Gutenberg print in the Czech Republic, also held by the Klementinum. It is a sheet from the famous Gutenberg Bible, the first great work produced by the new method of printing, finished probably in the period of 1454/55. This sheet happens to have been discovered half a century earlier, also on an inside cover of a book.

This indulgence form is positively the oldest printed document of an official nature. The National Library's copy was originally issued on February 27, 1455, in the Saxon town of Einbeck, to Arnd Rubart and his family. The undersigned Theodoricus Nicolai was one of the priests authorised to travel from one German town to another and collect donations for the defence of the Kingdom of Cyprus against the Turks. By issuing these indulgence forms, the priests gave the donors the right to seek, once in a lifetime and once when they felt death approaching, a confessor who would hear their confession and grant them forgiveness of punishment for the sins they may have committed.