

The Swiss National Library: prima inter pares

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The Swiss National Library: *Prima inter pares*

As of January 1, 2006, the Swiss National Library has become a FLAG (German acronym for *management under performance mandate and global budget*) unit within the Federal Office of Culture. This provides the library management more flexibility than before in the pursuit of the Federal Council's goals as part of the performance mandate for 2006 – 2008. The most important goals include:

- Fulfilling of the dual mandate to conserve and access the Helvetica collections;
- Expanding services, in particular online services, targeted at the needs of the customer;
- Developing national and international coordination and cooperation.

SNL management detailed how to achieve the goals in its draft strategy 2007 – 2011, issued in mid-2006, by focussing on the following points for the coming years:

- Consistently orienting services toward primary user groups;
- Establishing a national centre of excellence for paper conservation;
- Establishing and expanding the electronic Helvetica collection.

In other words, the SNL is consistently building on its long-term strengths. It is positioning itself as an internationally leading research library on Swiss topics, and increasingly assuming national coordination and consulting responsibilities. The SNL is not limited to exchanges and consultation when it comes to cooperating with other Swiss libraries, archives, museums and publishing houses, but rather it also passes on the library's knowledge and abilities.

A model in this regard is the e-Helvetica project, where various partners are developing methods to preserve electronic publications over the long term and make them accessible to research. Participants include, in addition to the SNL, the Federal Archive, publishing houses, university libraries – and every Swiss cantonal library. The project is headed by the Swiss National Library (SNL) as first among equals.

FLAG is a first step allowing the Swiss National Library to better conduct its duties in the service of the culture of our country. It remains to be seen if this is enough. As the president of the library commission, I am convinced that the role of *prima inter pares* is the proper position for the Swiss National Library for future challenges facing Swiss libraries as well. It is in some areas the only institution that can issue recommendations on national practices, provide coordination where necessary, including at an international level.

In addition to establishing electronic collections and paper conservation, it is, above all, the digitisation of printed works that requires not just national, but international coordination as well. Whereas other countries have invested millions to make their written cultural heritage accessible globally online, Switzerland has yet to provide additional funding. This makes it even more pressing to coordinate digitisation projects, preferably under the leadership of the Swiss National Library.

The critical investigations leading to the abolishment of some extra-parliamentarian commissions do not affect the library commission. Therefore, it can continue to assume an active role in information and library policies in the future. As has been the case to date, it will continue to work closely in this regard with the SNL. The commission will seek to develop strategies for information access, supply and preservation and serve as an advocate for this in the public arena. The basic strategy was already drafted this year; we plan to strengthen the team with important members from the library and information world starting next year. Libraries and archives, in particular, but publishing houses, professional associations and technical institutes are also valuable partners.

The current and future challenges are too great to be handled individually by each institution. Together, the Swiss National Library as the catalyst for cooperation and the library commission as the broadly supported strategic planning body play key roles accordingly.

Rosemarie Simmen

President of the library commission