Library Science Talks (LST): celebrating 20 years of presentations in Switzerland (1995-2014)

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Introduction

In 1995, Corrado Pettenati, newly appointed director of the CERN library, decided to organise a series of conferences for the CERN library staff to inform them about new library technology trends. The idea was that staff would benefit from hearing about current projects and products and that could then apply some of the ideas to the library. During that year, three presentations were organised around the theme of interlending and electronic document delivery services. As explained on the poster, “research and university libraries currently face reductions in their acquisition budget and at the same time increasing reader demand for literature” and new document delivery services were seen as a solution. The first presentation was given on September 21 by Genevieve Clavel on behalf of the Swiss National Library, about the Swiss Union Catalogue of Serials. The other two were by Annetta Julen on interlibrary lending and electronic document delivery at the ETH in Zurich (12 October) and by Carlotta Alpigiano, on document delivery at the European University Institute in Florence (26 October).

It is not known what impact these first three talks had on the CERN library, but we can say that 20 years and 120 presentations later, the Library Science Talks (LST) is a well established and renowned Swiss conference programme. This paper will give an overview of the history of the LST and give some insights on the themes and contributors who have made the programme so successful.

The first edition of the LST in 1995 was limited to CERN employees only. Starting in 1996, the programme was advertised at other international organisations in Geneva as well at the University of Geneva libraries. In 1997, as the result of this publicity, several librarians from these institutions became regular participants. Also in 1997, the presentation by Andy Powell on Metadata was repeated in Bern at the Swiss National Library on September 16. This led to the active participation of the Swiss National library in the financing and organisation of the LST programme in 1998. On September 14, 1997 an agreement was signed between the CERN and the Swiss National Library to formerly establish this partnership. At the same time Corrado Pettenati began negotiating with the then AILIS President, Mareile Langsdorff-Claus to co-finance the programme. Since 1998, this partnership between the CERN, Swiss National Library and AILIS has allowed to organise and finance an average of six talks per year.

The programme was coordinated at the CERN by Corrado Pettenati until 2005. Jens Vigen who had replaced Corrado Pettenati, took over from 2006 to 2008, and since then, it is coordinated by Tullio Basaglia. At the Swiss National Library, Genevieve Clavel coordinated the programme from 1998 to 2011 and Patrice Landry took over from 2012 onwards. The annual programme is prepared in September and the organisers (CERN, AILIS and Swiss National Library) rely on a network of conferences, contacts and suggestions from colleagues to identify the most relevant speakers and topics. Conferences such as the IFLA, ELAG, LIBER and national association conferences and specialised conferences in Germany, Austria, France and Italy are privileged sources for finding speakers.
Short history of the programme

From the start, the LST programme has attempted to target topics and speakers that reflect new technical and library trends. Generally, the planning of a LST programme year tries to cover 3 general themes: new technical trends, innovative projects and new policy issues. It may be important to remember that the LST programme was initiated in a rich technical innovation era; birth of the WEB in 1989, the release of the WWW software in the public domain in 1993 and the development of web interfaces / systems (Gopher, Mosaic) in the early 1990s. Already in the first years of the LST programme, presentations dealt with the Z39.50 search protocol, web based OPACs and online databases. Throughout the following years, the LST programme mirrored the evolution of technical, social, management approaches that have changed how libraries operate. We’ve determined that over the 20 years of LST over 20 broad themes were covered by the speakers. We would like to highlight some of the themes that were covered.

The LST programme covered a number of digitisation projects. In 2002, Elmar Mittler, from Göttingen University discussed the state of the art of journal digitisation projects in Europe. This was followed in 2006 with two presentations; one on the newspapers digitisation project at the British Library and the other on Google Books. These were followed in 2010 by the presentation on the Great War Archive project at Oxford University, and in 2011, a presentation of the British Library’s Impact Project on digitized historical texts. In 2012, Max Kaiser reported on the state of the Google Books digitisation project at the Austrian National Library.

Electronic archiving also received some attention. As early as 1998, the issue was discussed by David Bearman (Archives and Museums Informatics) which was followed in 1999 by a presentation on e-archiving at the ETH Zurich by Karl Böhler and one on the issue of self-archiving in 2001 by Stevan Harnad, University of Southampton. Two major archiving projects were presented; the German NESTOR project in 2005, and the Bibliothèque nationale de France’s SPAR project. Web archiving was also covered by three presentations in 2001, 2007 and 2009. The latter was by Gildas Illien, who discussed the issue of web archiving at the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

E-publishing (e-books and e-journals) also received good coverage over the years with 11 presentations. The first presentation was in 1996 on the pioneering work of the IOP Institute of Physics in publishing their journals in electronic format. This was followed in 1997 with the organisation of a daylong LST programme on electronic publishing in physics which brought together scientific societies and publishers. Over the next 17 years, issues such as the production, management, government policies and trends of e-books and e-journals have been presented. In his 2013 presentation, Patrick Losinski reported that e-books are now in high demand in public libraries but that much work is needed in convincing publishers to make e-books available there. Consequently, there is now a risk of content divide by this restriction in accessing e-books in public libraries.

Linked data is presently a hot topic in the metadata /semantic web environment and has been the topic of recent LST programmes. In 2011, Anders Söderbäck advocated for linked open data and described how LIBRIS, the Swedish union catalogue, is demonstrating how the metadata can be used freely without compromising its integrity. In 2012, Gordon Dunsire presented the work of the W3C Library Linked Data Incubator Group and its final report, and described how their work related to
recent developments in bibliographic metadata standards and in 2013, Neil Wilson reported on how the British Library had created a free linked data offering based on the British National Bibliography.

The issues of open access journals and licensing have also been a predominant topic over the years. The notion of setting up a model electronic journals licence for academic research libraries was already addressed in 1999 by Ann Okerson and again in 2009. In 2003, the presentation of the SPARC initiative was the first of many presentations advocating for the adoption of open access journals and repositories and publishing models for open access. One of the most prominent figures in advocating for open access, Lawrence Lessig of Harvard University, in his 2011 LST presentation, reminded us that much work is still needed in copyright law to ensure ready access to knowledge.

The Web has seen a remarkable development over the last 20 years. In the context of libraries, the LST programme has captured some of the projects and initiatives in improving access to library collections and knowledge. Over the years, the LST has focused on projects that have used web technology to create networked information and resource systems, such as MODELS (1996), CrossRef (2000, 2002), Renardus (2001) and portals such as The European Library (TEL) (2002) and EUROPEANA (2010).

And finally, the LST programme has always tried to present new trends in library services, in the publishing industry and in management strategies. Presenters such as Wilfried Sühl-Strohmenger (2007), Derek Law (2009) and Michael A. Keller (2013) are some of the speakers who have presented their visions on the challenges and opportunities for libraries. Other presentations have highlighted the evolution of new skills, new services and spaces in libraries from the perspectives of, for example, Nordic countries. Presentations on the ETH Zurich and EPFL have also contributed in highlighting innovations in libraries.

**Impact**

From the start of the programme in 1995, the LST programme aimed at presenting views and projects from international speakers as well as from experts from Switzerland. The goal was to select particular topics each year and then identify speakers who could speak with authority and knowledge on these topics. Best practices in innovations and new trends in library services have always been one of the driving forces of the LST programme. Out of the 120 presentations held since 1995, 31 (26%) have been by United Kingdom (UK) speakers, followed by 20 (17%) from Switzerland and 19 (16%) speakers from the United States. There have also been 13 (11%) presentations from the Nordic countries (Sweden, Norway and Finland). Germany and The Netherlands have both contributed 10 speakers each. With this wide range of speakers, LST participants had the opportunities to hear about the most current trends and ideas from different regions and culture mainly from Europe and North America.

In its first twenty years, it is estimated that over 7'000 persons have attended the LST programme in Geneva and Bern. From feedback received, participants have appreciated the content and felt that it had contributed to their knowledge. As most presentations are given in English, this has sometimes been a challenge for the German and French language participants, especially in the discussion / questions and answers part of the talks. Nevertheless, participants have generally expressed a good degree of satisfaction for the overall presentations. Since 2008, presenters have made their abstract and slide presentations available on the Swiss National Library and CERN websites, which have proven to be useful for many participants who had some difficulties in following the presentations.
And finally, it is important to mention that some of the talks have actually led to further collaboration between the experts and some Swiss libraries in areas such as linked data, digitization work and open source programming.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the LST programme has proven to be a reliable source of information for many Swiss librarians. What started out as a continuing education programme for staff at CERN in 1995 is now a real option for Swiss librarians wishing to attend talks without having to travel to conferences. Colleagues from around the country attend either location. Based on the attendance at the sessions in Geneva and Bern, it is clear that many librarians consider the programme to be a good source for lifelong professional training and as a supplement to the library education programmes in Geneva, Lausanne and Bern. At the Swiss National Library, the LST programme is one of the continuing education options and staff are encouraged to attend as many presentations as they wish. Over the years, other programmes have been established in Geneva, Bern and Zurich which now provide Swiss librarians with many more possibilities to be informed on the latest trends in libraries.

The LST programme has benefitted from the strong support of the CERN and the AILIS in Geneva and the Swiss National Library over the years and it is hoped that this support will continue in the future. In planning the work for the next 5 years, the organisers are conscious of the challenges in pursuing the rich tradition of innovations and vision that have characterized the previous 20 years. The challenges will remain in finding speakers and themes that correspond to the needs of all Swiss librarians. With such a varied audience, the aim is to create a balanced programme of specialised topics that can be interesting and accessible to as many as possible.

In addition, the programme organisers are conscious that participants may wish to access the presentations through Web conferencing technologies or webinar. In recent years, CERN and partner libraries in Geneva have made a few LST presentations available as webinars. This is an issue that will be monitored and discussed in the communities so as to ensure that the LST programme continues to be responsive to the Swiss library community.

The LST programmers are thus committed to ensure that the following principles which have led our action over the last twenty years will continue to guide us in the coming years:

- Choose speakers that are the most appropriate and authoritative
- Choose themes that correspond to current concerns and interests in Switzerland
- Use technology to expand the access to the conferences (i.e. webinars)
- Ensure that a new public can be reached and regular participants remain loyal to the programme
- Incite more librarians from outside Bern and Geneva to attend the conferences.

**Reference:**