

Building Bridges: The Cooperation of Polish Academic Libraries

Katarzyna Slaska
University of Warsaw Library, Poland
k.m.slaska@uw.edu.pl

Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of the paper is to present the value of libraries' cooperation on the example of Polish academic libraries. Libraries all over the world have been cooperating on collection building, shared cataloging, and resource sharing for many years. However, cooperation plays especially an important role in libraries since the information explosion in the 20th century. Nowadays, the libraries put emphasis on the role of computerized library networks involving electronic catalogs, digital libraries, integrated library systems, shared databases, internet connections, and shared applications.

Design/methodology/approach

The presentation examines three areas of Polish academic libraries cooperation: (1) shared cataloging in the frame of NUKAT - a union catalog containing over 4 million descriptions of documents held by 170 Polish academic and scientific libraries, (2) reciprocal borrowing program for Warsaw academic libraries (BiblioWawa), a joint project of 7 Warsaw academic libraries, which provides the Warsaw academic community with convenient access to circulating library resources of the cooperating libraries, and (3) works and activities of the Directors of Polish Academic Libraries' Conference.

Findings

The paper presents not only the success of library cooperation, but also the difficulties and barriers. Experience of academic and scientific libraries in Poland indicates that cooperation, however is not always easy, and is inevitable for the libraries. The best way of achieving good results in cooperation is by building bridges between libraries – establishing consortia and networks which enables libraries to work together more effectively and efficiently.

Originality

/value

Discussed in the paper are examples of experiences from Polish libraries in the field of cooperation. It contains many useful information for librarians responsible for library cooperation. They can also serve as a source of inspiration for academic libraries from other countries.

Keywords: cooperation, shared cataloging, interlibrary loan, Poland

Introduction

Cooperation between libraries, networking, and resource sharing are one of the most talked areas in the librarianship all over the world. It is not a new idea in library environment. Cooperation is deeply ingrained in library culture. The term 'cooperation' in the dictionaries is defined as the joint action of two or more organizations for mutual benefit. According to this definition the term 'cooperation among libraries' can be described as a common effort of two or more libraries to share their resources, experience and knowledge for providing better services to their users. In the literature on library cooperation, a variety of words are used to define collaborative efforts: cooperate, collaborate, collude, conference, committee, coalition, consortium. I would like to pay your attention that all of these words begins with the word "co" or "con" - it is the short form of the Latin word meaning "with". It is worth stressing because it gives the best explanation of the cooperation spirit. That's why cooperation is like building bridges between libraries, between their users, between nations and countries.

The libraries cooperation can have different levels and forms. It can be used as a synonym for consortium, association or library network. Libraries collaboration may be formal and informal, local, state, and regional, national and international. It can be based on voluntary agreements among two or more libraries or it can be imposed on libraries by library law or by local or central government that finances libraries. However always it is essential that the cooperating libraries are willing to work together toward common goals.

Cooperation plays especially important role in libraries since the information explosion in the 20th century, increase in the output of publication and technological revolution in libraries. Now the libraries put emphasis on the role of computerized library networks involving electronic catalogs, digital libraries, integrated library systems, shared databases, internet connections and shared applications. Cataloguing and classification methods were developed to bring a uniform order to the library information. Nowadays the librarians share resources of many kinds: library materials, metadata, computer resources, digital publications, best practices, and expertise in a rapidly growing variety of networks and consortia. In today's world the main goal of library cooperation is to maximize the availability of materials and services, to provide better services and to minimized expenses.

In this paper I would like to present three examples of cooperation among Polish academic libraries, showing different aspects of library cooperation:

1. NUKAT - shared cataloging project
2. **BiblioWawa - borrowing program for Warsaw academic libraries**
3. Directors of Polish Academic Libraries' Conference

The above examples, of course, do not constitute the entire cooperation of academic libraries, however they illustrate very well the importance, possibilities and difficulties of library cooperation.

The NUKAT Union Catalog

The union catalog NUKAT (National UNiversal KATalog) was launched in 2002 as an initiative of several academic libraries and the National Library of Poland. Today NUKAT is built by 170 libraries and data it contains grow quickly - 1 million descriptions in 2008, more than 2 million in 2011 and over 4,2 million of bibliographic records in April 2019. NUKAT offers access both to bibliographic and authority records. NUKAT Union Authority File built by NUKAT member libraries is a guarantee of correct and uniform headings used in NUKAT descriptions of documents. NUKAT holds descriptions of books, journals, sound recordings, printed music, movies, maps, iconographic documents, ephemera, manuscripts and early printed books. NUKAT librarians do shared cataloging and download ready descriptions (bibliographic records) to their local catalogs which provides NUKAT end-users with one-stop access to information on the resources available in many reserach and university libraries.

NUKAT database is supervised by NUKAT Center of the University of Warsaw Library - the Library also is a place where NUKAT server is situated. The University of Warsaw Library offers help and advice to more than 2000 catalogers who build the union catalog every day and all end-users who search for literature to work, study and have fun.

Cooperation of libraries in frame of NUKAT is a classic example of library consortium. The term "consortium" is derived from the field of economics and refers to the grouping together of different independent companies in order to bring together financial or material resources under a single managing body for the joint performance of specific operations. Library consortium is a joint venture of any group of libraries which have formally agreed to coordinate in or consolidate certain functions to achieve mutual objectives and to fulfill the common goal. In this case the goal of NUKAT is to bring benefits for users and librarians.

NUKAT gives the possibility of collective use of information by various end users within a network with easy accessibility. Idea of such initiatives like NUKAT is based on the concept that the collective strength and effectiveness of a group of libraries is greater than that of the sum of libraries belonging to the group and that information needs of users have increased so much during last decades that single library is not sufficient. Collaboration within NUKAT helps in standardization of cataloging formats, policies, procedures and practices among cooperating libraries and in achieving better understanding of collection management and development practices. Exchanging of experience and best practices gives the possibility of bringing together diverse ideas and issues and discuss them.

Although many research and academic libraries see many advantages of cooperation in frame of NUKAT, we can identify factors that significantly hinder cooperation between libraries and further development of the consortium. There are cases when the desire for autonomy in libraries is stronger than the desire to cooperate. Psychological barriers are covert in nature and they may arise due to inertia, indifference or unwillingness to change or by viewing shared cataloging as a threat to status and job security. It happens that personal needs taking priority over system needs and strong personalities and their strong authority drive in the group. Therefore, some libraries decided to leave the consortium because they did not accept the cataloging formats and procedures developed by NUKAT. Such difficulties should not be seen as a hindrance to build and develop NUKAT, but more a reason to employ more innovative strategizing. The librarians should build

professional relationships and improve their knowledge through participation in training programs in other libraries, by taking part in the workshops and conferences. It is true that there are obstacles to be overcome, but the cooperation can be improved through the joint efforts of librarians.

BiblioWawa

BiblioWawa is reciprocal borrowing program for seven Warsaw academic libraries, which provides the Warsaw academic community with convenient access to circulating library resources of the cooperating libraries. It was launched in December 2017.

The following libraries cooperate in the program:

- **University of Warsaw Library**
- **Main Library of the Warsaw University of Technology**
- **Main Library of the Medical University of Warsaw**
- **Main Library of the Military University of Technology**
- **Main Library of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw**
- **Main Library of the Maria Grzegorzewska University**
- **Library of the Józef Piłsudski University of Physical Education**

The BiblioWawa program is designed for full-time and extramural undergraduate and postgraduate students, students of postgraduate diploma courses and for academic staff. The eligible user approaches directly the library whose materials he would like to borrow. A librarian of the host library verifies the eligibility and creates the individual library account which entitles the user to borrow the host library materials. Borrowers are responsible for complying with all rules of the library from which they are borrowing.

The program is a form of interlibrary lending and its main goal is to make the greatest amount of documents available to the students from Warsaw academic schools at no cost. The cooperating libraries agreed to enter into reciprocal borrowing and use of materials from other libraries, however borrow books and journals which are not available locally are not sent like in typical interlibrary lending by one library to another but taken by users in person.

The program meets great interest of students, especially during the exam period. The summary of the first year of the BiblioWawa program indicated its many advantages, like increasing the level of loans or closer cooperation of Warsaw academic libraries. The main disadvantage could be the lack of availability of books for students from the library of their own university, if they are borrowed by students of another school.

There are some barriers in interlibrary lending like conservative attitude of librarians, distance, cost and time. They may be eliminated by electronic interlibrary loan systems and lending scanned and born-digital publications. In the last decade many Polish academic libraries have moved from automation to digitization and to digital platforms to open up their resources and deliver web based services accessible round the clock irrespective of locations. The ongoing process of digitization of library collections would ultimately reduce our dependence on libraries in the traditional paper form and now more and more users in many libraries can read books and journals from the distant libraries with the help of login and password only at a nominal cost. It saves a lot of human effort, financial input, as well as application of physical and logistic resources and it seems to be the

future of interlibrary lending, however important barrier in unlimited access to scanned books and journals is copyright.

The solution and revolution in interlibrary lending could be the *Academica* system launched in Poland in 2014 giving access to many million scientific publications under copyright through dedicated terminals located in scientific and public libraries throughout the country. Sharing of scientific publications is organized in accordance with the provisions of the Act on Copyright and Related Rights, and the works themselves are subject to copying and printing limits.

Directors of Polish Academic Libraries' Conference

The third example differs from the previous ones. Libraries cooperation in traditional areas, like: exchanging cataloging records, creating union catalogs, building complementary collections, exchanging library materials by interlibrary loan and document delivery services, exchanging experience and knowledge of librarians, joint purchasing of library materials or library systems or providing mutual services to readers is impossible without good cooperation and mutual understanding of library managements. Because of that an important factor supporting the cooperation of libraries is the Directors of Polish Academic Libraries' Conference. It is an organization representing 90 Polish academic libraries associated in the Conference of Rectors of Polish Academic Schools. The Conference was established in 1997. The goal of the organization is supporting, developing, improving and promoting the university libraries for the public good and social benefits, in particular:

- presenting opinions and positions on matters pertaining to libraries,
- undertaking activities integrating the university libraries,
- supporting initiatives to improve roles and functions of the university libraries,
- representing the interests of employees of university libraries,
- care for the social prestige of the librarian's profession and an employee of scientific information.

The Conference put emphasis on the role of computerized academic library networks involving electronic catalogs, digital libraries, integrated library systems, shared databases, and shared applications and supports sharing resources of many kinds: library materials, metadata, computer resources, digital publications, best practices, and expertise. Many projects financed from EU funds have been implemented thanks to the Directors of Polish Academic Libraries' Conference support.

In today's world the main goal of library cooperation is to maximize the availability of materials and services, to provide better services and to minimized expenses. The information revolution has made academic libraries to adopt new philosophies and technologies for cooperation, resource sharing and minimize the expenses. Maintaining the right level of service and ensuring access to information is the greatest challenge for us. Failure to confront this challenge successfully and fundamentally threatens the libraries mission and vision. In view of this fact, local, national and international cooperation has become inevitable for all libraries. The best way of achieving cooperation is through building bridges between libraries – establishing consortiums and networks which enables libraries to work together more effectively and efficiently.