
Library consortia and cooperation in this digital age: an Overview of the Philippine Experience

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by

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ABSTRACT:

For developing countries like the Philippines, there is a remarkable range of cooperative activities and consortial arrangements that even transcend geographical boundaries. This article presents an overview of Philippine experience with library cooperation, their commonalities and variations, the significant contributions of different library consortia to the growth and development of libraries within and outside their sphere of influence, and the challenges these local models of consortia are facing in this digital age.

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Definitions

The term "Library Cooperation" is defined as:

*"the creation and operation of equitable, that is mutually 'fair', collaborative arrangements between libraries and information providers which enhance the common good through making information available to all potential users (without obstacle to access by reason of cost) which is more extensive or more valuable to the user and/or is of lower cost to the collaborating providers." Currently it represents "(a) ... a comparatively small, but vitally important, part of total library and information activity and that, while adherence to the concept of library cooperation forms part of the value system and organizational culture of those who work in library and information services, its place in terms of actual activity seems overstated; (b) ...the utilization of information technology has reached a threshold and... industrial societies are about to experience radical changes which will fundamentally alter the context within which library and information services will be provided. However, the proximity of these changes is not generally fully understood, particularly in public libraries."*¹

Simply defined, library cooperation refers to a reciprocally beneficial sharing of resources developed or pre-existing by two or more libraries, or, it may be an umbrella term for a wide spectrum of cooperation processes and mechanisms for libraries.

"Partnerships" is a term increasingly used for cooperative activities between and among two or more libraries.

Dr. Adolfo Rodriguez of the Centro Universitario de Investigaciones Bibliotecológicas, Mexico City presented models of library cooperation with varying commonalities and variations during the first IFLA/SEFLIN International Summit on Library Cooperation in the Americas.² His presentation included common types of cooperation, namely: interchange, exchange, cooperative institutions like schools of librarianship, library associations, and private/state institutions.

¹ Taken from Apt Partnership (1995), *The Apt Review: a review of library and information co-operation in the UK and Republic of Ireland for the Library and Information Co-operation Council by the Apt Partnership*. British Library R&D Report 6212. Sheffield: LINC. ISBN 1 873753 06 3.

² Bruce Edward Massis, editor. *Models of cooperation in U.S., Latin American and Caribbean libraries: the first IFLA/SEFLIN International Summit on Library Cooperation in the Americas*. Munich: Saur, 2003. 86 p.

An interchange is usually between two or more institutions involving a temporary exchange of resources, while an exchange will involve cooperation on a wider scale, to include exchange of all kinds of materials, exchange of information (for both staff and reader inquiries), user access to participating libraries, sharing of bibliographic catalogs, union lists, and other bibliographic utilities, and cooperative training programs of personnel of participating libraries. Other types of library cooperation may involve member institutions in library associations such as the institutional members of the Philippine Association of Academic and Research Libraries (PAARL) and member librarians of the Medical and Health Librarians Association of the Philippines (MAHLAP). Private and state academic institutions likewise engage in cooperative programs mostly involving interlending activities.

In an article by Edward Shreeves, the concept of “resource sharing” is based largely on three functions, namely, bibliographic access, interlibrary lending services, and cooperative collection development.³ The purpose of cooperation here suggests the need of participating libraries, 1) to know what is available for sharing from other libraries through union catalogs, bibliographic listings, opacs, indexes and other bibliographic utilities; 2) to avail of expedited interlibrary loans and document delivery services; and, 3) to build complementary collections of materials on which to draw.

From the above discussion of definitions and concepts of cooperation, we will present an overview of Philippine experience with library cooperation, their commonalities and variations, the significant contributions of different library consortia to the growth and development of libraries within and outside their sphere of influence, and the challenges these local models of consortia are facing in this digital age.

Background of Library Consortia in the Philippines

Consortium is now the popular mode that brings together librarians and libraries for activities and objectives that cannot be as effectively undertaken individually. It may be called a “consortium,” a “network,” an “association,” or a “virtual Library.” It may be informal, formal, or government-sponsored. For a consortium continuum, it may start out as an informal organization of cooperating libraries with a casual purpose (say, for interlibrary lending), within a local or regional coverage (like the Mendiola Consortium, the Intramuros Consortium, and the Ortigas Consortium). Other attributes of an informal consortium is that there is no visible funding, and governance is likewise informal. Each participating library contributes staff time freely for consortium activities.

³ Edward Shreeves (1997), Is there a future for cooperative collection development in the digital age? *Library Trends*, 45(3), 373-90.

An informal consortium may in time develop into a more formal structure, with a defined purpose, funding from fees or grants, a formal governance structure to supervise its program, and paid staff to monitor its activities. A good example is the Inter-Institutional Consortium, the first consortium established in the Philippine in 1972, with five (5) institutional libraries as original members, namely De La Salle University-Manila, St. Scholastica's College, St. Paul College-Manila, Philippine Christian University, and Philippine Normal University. Adamson University is the newest member. All except PNU are private Christian institutions, while four are exclusive Catholic schools, one is protestant (PCU), and the last is non-sectarian (PNU). It is governed by a Board of Responsibles, with a permanent secretariat. Its projects are funded by the United Board for Higher Education (a US-based run non-profit organization). But the participating member-institutions contribute annual fees to cover the consortium's administrative and operating expenses.

The table below illustrates the concept of a consortium continuum:

A government-sponsored consortium, on the other hand, is one that has a prescribed purpose (usually imposed by the sponsoring government agency), with a geographical coverage, government funding, government oversight, and permanent staff. The DOST-ESEP Consortium is an excellent example. This Consortium consists of eight (8) institutions, namely:

- Ateneo de Manila University (Loyola Heights, Quezon City)
- De La Salle University (Taft Avenue, Manila)
- Mindanao State University – Institute of Science and Technology (Iligan City, Lanao del Norte)

- University of Santo Tomas (España, Manila)
- University of the Philippines College of Engineering (Diliman, Quezon City)
- University of the Philippines College of Science (Diliman, Quezon City)
- University of the Philippines Manila (Pedro Gil, Manila)
- University of the Philippines Los Baños (Los Baños, Laguna)

It started in June 1993 as a network of institutions under the sponsorship of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) and focused on a program of activities to upgrade the S&T infrastructure in the country via education, in particular engineering and science education, as prescribed in its Memorandum of Agreement drawn up by DOST. It derived its funding from a World Bank grant. A permanent secretariat was established at DOST in Taguig, Rizal.

Consortial Goals

Consortial goals may be categorized into the following:

The table above suggests that informal consortia may only achieve the first two goals, namely, networking or linkage among the participating institutions, and certain programming activities that normally involve only interlibrary loans. A good example of this informal consortia is PAARLNET, a network of academic and research libraries engaged in interlending activities, organized by the Philippine Association of Academic and Research Libraries in 2000. To achieve economies of scale, leverage of resources, and obtain funding, a more formal and structured type of consortium arrangement is recommended.

As mentioned earlier, formal library cooperation in the Philippines began in the early 1970s with the setting up of five (5) academic libraries within the Ermita and Malate area along Taft Avenue for interlending and catalogue-sharing activities. The Inter-Institutional Consortium (1972) was established to meet certain objectives, which may be categorized into the following:

- Communications/networking or linkages (a committee of librarians was formally established, under the governance of a Board of Responsibles)
- Cooperative programming (such as centralized cataloging of materials; shared indexing; bibliographic listings, and digital conversion of selected rare Filipiniana books were accomplished)
- Economies of scale (when mass producing a good results in lower average cost) was achieved
- Pooled purchasing (as illustrated in acquisition of personal computers in the late 1980s and in shared subscription to online resources such as OCLC FirstSearch,)
- Funding procurement (as all major projects continue to be funded by the United Board for Higher Education)
- Risk sharing (the risks are shared by the participating libraries)

These cooperative activities are still going strong but the introduction of computerized catalogs and electronic networking has revolutionized the ways that library business was transacted. In the 80s and 90s. Variations of consortial trends and activities, which, while still involving interlending and resource-sharing activities, had become increasingly more focused on electronic networking, digitization, skills development training in ICT, and collaborative electronic resource acquisition, and cooperative licensing programs. This is the direction conceived by the DOST-ESEP Consortium to achieve the above consortial goals, and to succeed, certain ingredients were required:

- a shared vision and philosophy
- a well-focused organization
- perceived cost-effectiveness
- accessibility of the network's resources
- staff skills, attitudes and commitment
- the quality of response provided;
- the depth and range of resources available;
- network visibility and the image projected to the outside world.
- an ability to adapt over time.

These success factors will make or break any consortia. But in the case of the DOST-ESEP, the government ensured its success by engaging the services of a

full-time project coordinator and the committed efforts of a committee of library directors (heads of participating libraries) to spearhead the following initial activities:

- reciprocal borrowing (controlled user access to member libraries)
- communications (sharing ideas and library information among members)
- continuing education (sending staff to pursue graduate studies and overseas training)
- technical expertise (providing technical assistance in planning and managing library automation projects)
- staff development (providing training for professional and non- professional staff particularly on ICT)

Electronic networking

Before addressing this in more detail, there is one other significant factor contributing to the success of consortia, and that is the development of ICT. With the increasing use of Internet and electronic resources, digital libraries are now an emerging platform for library cooperation, and cooperative purchasing of electronic materials and site licensing of databases are only two of the newest resource-sharing initiatives in this digital age. Within the academic sector, the development of the DOST-ESEP Consortium, which linked the eight flagship institutions in the field of science and technology using ICT, has pioneered the possibilities for joint working and sharing of information.

Library use for consulting online public access catalogs (OPACs), consortium purchasing of electronic materials, interlibrary loans, and email communication play a significant part in the life of the academic communities involved in the DOST-ESEP Consortium, and has shown the possibilities for other sectors. Funding the installation of a single library automation software, with a number of licensing capabilities for the member libraries, has enabled many technical problems to be addressed, which otherwise would have posed great difficulties for individual libraries to cope. For the period 1994-1998, the DOST supported an academic library infrastructure in all the member institutions, thereby strengthening facilities and resources for these eight academic communities over the next five years.

The overarching vision was to facilitate the best possible arrangements by taking proactive steps to sustain and enhance personal access to research resources in the field of science and technology. In the process, extensive collaborative arrangements were made for collection development; with all participating institutions contributing to the efforts of a pooled purchasing of library materials in the sciences and engineering disciplines. These collective efforts resulted in an enhanced collection development program for the participating libraries, and to a great extent, the increased availability of information about the location of rich information resources available around the globe. The increasing use of the Internet and the

World Wide Web improved the ability of library users to navigate around important collections, again, on a global scale. Towards the end, DOST-ESEP provided new technological and organizational arrangements to support the strategy for electronic networking.

Another good example of electronic networking is the LibraryLink Project spearheaded by the Ayala Foundation Inc. (AFI) for the establishment of a Filipinas Heritage Library (FHL), an electronic library of Filipiniana materials, with De La Salle University as its initial partner in July 1997. The legal basis of the cooperative arrangement is a memorandum of agreement signed by each member library to submit its Filipiniana database on a regular basis to AFI-FHL to enable the latter to link the catalog with AFI –FHL. AFI, in turn, agrees to maintain the infrastructure (both server and network to facilitate access to the online catalog) and update the catalog regularly and expand its network of shared catalogs. . To date, with the participation of 69 member libraries and more than 174,000 records, LibraryLink has become a one-stop resource center for Filipiniana resources. Among its future plans is to provide full text of Filipiniana materials that can only be accessed by participating libraries.

Models for Library Cooperation

Models for library cooperation are concededly many and varied, both here and abroad. In the United States, two enjoy unprecedented success: OCLC and RLIN. Founded in 1967 by university presidents, Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) introduced an online shared cataloging system that is widely used today by more than 41,000 libraries in 82 countries. Its FirstSearch Service introduced much later in 1991 has become a reference tool subscribed to by more than 20,000 libraries all over the world. The Research Libraries Group's RLIN (Research Libraries Information Network), on the other hand, succeeded in establishing a union catalog of research resources as a common cataloging tool.

Establishing a consortium is usually guided by elemental criteria framed within the context of the following questions:

What is the consortium's mission and purpose?

Is the mission and purpose best met with a formal or informal consortium?

Who is the consortium designed to serve: by library type, size or geography?

Is there a consortium in place that serves or could be developed to serve that mission or purpose?

What resources, financial or other, are needed to support the consortium's mission and progress?

What other consortia have complementary missions and resources which could enhance the consortium's value to members?

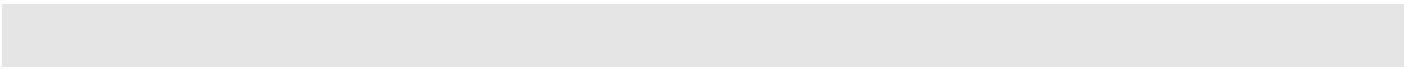
Answers to these questions are fundamental to a determination of the eventual success of the consortium. Hence, the effectiveness of a consortial model depend on whether the missions or purposes of the participating institutions are mutually supportive; on whether expertise or resources are complementary; and whether the value to the members is increased through multi-consortia cooperation. In other words, the consortium will usually attract cooperation from other consortia with complementary objectives or programs.

For developing countries like the Philippines, there is a remarkable range of cooperative activities and consortial arrangements that even transcend geographical boundaries. They range from the simple to the most complex of organizations. A number of them were shaped by varying needs and interests. Many consortia are still informal and voluntary in nature, borne from institutional linkages of academic libraries within a particular geographical location, and established expressly to engage mainly in interlending activities and bibliographic access (IIC, IUC, CCAL, Mendiola, Ortigas, Intramuros, PAARLNET, and ALINet). Only one (DOST-ESEP) was government-sponsored. Two are exclusively concentrated on cooperative acquisitions (ALBASA and PLMP). Two are focused on establishing links to the Filipiniana catalogs of participating libraries (ARALIN and LIBRARYLINK), while only one deals with cooperative collection development on European studies. A few are offshoots of library associations; such as academic libraries (PAARLNET), or regional libraries (ALBASA, CCAL, ALINet, DACUN). Among the more familiar include the following:

- Inter-Institutional Consortium (IIC)
- Academic Libraries Book Acquisitions Systems Association (ALBASA)
- Philippine Library Materials Project (PLMP)
- Inter-University Consortium (IUC)
- Cagayan de Oro Cooperating Academic Libraries (CCAL)/ ALINet
- DOST-ESEP Consortium
- FAPE's Aralin project
- Mendiola Consortium
- European Studies Program Philippines (ESPP Consortium)
- LibraryLink Project
- Ortigas Consortium
- PAARLNET (Phil Assn of Academic and Research Libraries Network)
- DACUN (Davao Colleges and Universities Network)
- Intramuros Consortium

Much has already been said of the Inter-Institutional Consortium and the DOST-ESEP. For an illustrative or capsulized summary of the accomplishments of these two consortia to the following tables:

Two of the local consortial models are found in the Visayas and Mindanao regions. ALBASA was originally founded by thirteen libraries in the south in 1973 for the purpose of cooperative acquisitions. Initially funded by Ford and Asia Foundations, it remains one of the more enduring consortia focused on cooperative acquisitions. Cagayan de Oro Cooperating Academic Libraries (CCAL) was established in 1988 by Cagayan Capitol College, Cagayan de Oro College, Liceo de Cagayan, Lourdes College, Mindanao Polytechnic State College, and Xavier University.



Areas of Cooperation: beyond the traditional

Today, the willingness and commitment to cooperate are still measured by the proactive responses of our model consortial libraries engaged in traditional library borrowing and lending to the issues and concerns in expediting their ILL and DDS services. A few of these cooperating institutions also provide direct borrowing on-site for faculty and students, such as IIC, IUC, and CCAL. Because libraries are now able to have a direct link to the online catalogs of the other libraries, users can easily identify the location of desired books or journals, and either request an interlibrary loan or go to the owning library.

Other traditional areas of cooperation, in addition to reciprocal borrowing, are focused on sharing ideas and information among members, and providing opportunities for education of staff and library users. Continuing education and staff training encourage sharing of expertise and technical assistance, particularly in planning, managing and implementing/assessing library automation projects.

Thanks to the Internet, collaborative programs now extend far beyond the traditional. Much of the information that is available on the Internet is free. And even if some are not free, they are usually low-cost. Once the networking infrastructure is in place, the expense of electronic information becomes minimal. What this means for cooperating libraries which use the Internet as their base of operations, is that the information they are sharing is far less costly than if the same information were printed and shipped thousands of miles. Equity in terms of library cooperation should not be a major problem. Each library has its own unique materials that can be offered to the public domain, and in the context of free or almost-free.

Unquestionably, one of the most difficult adjustments that librarians must make vis-a-vis the Internet is to recognize that the value and focus of the Internet should be in full text rather than in a mere catalog of bibliographic information. This is not to say that the cataloging of printed materials will not be an important aspect of library work, but providing full text content will be more in step with developments occurring in the larger realm of information. As much as we would like to catalog the Internet, there are adequate indexing software and search engines that are doing a reasonably good job of classifying knowledge on the Internet. At this juncture, there is a more urgent need for content on the Internet, and this is something that we need to carefully explore as the focus of cooperative projects

Geography is conceded to be one major obstacle to library cooperation, but it is of no consequence if the Internet is used as a cooperative medium. The advantages of using the electronic medium to carry out collaborative projects is fairly evident. Large volumes of paper do not have to be transported. In terms of materials exchange, if electronic materials are lost in transit, they can simply be re-transmitted. In contrast, the loss of paper materials is potentially fatal. Fax, telephone, and

microform are all possibilities for information transferal, but none can compare with the possibilities that the Internet offers in terms of immediacy, resources conservation, and retrievability.

The Internet will undoubtedly provide us with many new opportunities for collaborative work once we've acquired a great awareness of the Net's possibilities. One potentially very attractive area for cooperation is open access to electronic journals. The cost of producing an electronic journal would be minimal if contributors submitted their articles in HTML or PDF format. With production costs extremely low, it would be difficult to justify any sort of subscription fee. By encouraging scholars and researchers at our own institutions to publish their works in non-subscription electronic journals, we can help usher in a new era of inexpensive information. The non-traditional role of librarians as information providers is now akin to the role of publisher. We can create the mechanisms for electronic publishing, whether they be journals or monographs, that will have as their basis need rather than greed. Since charity begins at home, free electronic journals in our field are a starting point.

The Internet presents libraries with great potential for cooperative arrangements - provided we are willing to explore newer and better initiatives and be proactive because if we do not actively intervene in the new world of networked information, others will decide our fate. The entire nature of information is undergoing changes since the invention of print, and the change is swift. The Internet phenomenon is characterized by rapid evolution; which means that we need to respond to change much more quickly than we have in the past. If we fail to colonize the sectors of cyberspace that should be ours by virtue of our traditional role as information experts, others will do so. If we fail to move to establish our position as quickly as possible - and cooperation should allow us to accelerate the establishment of our position - then we have put ourselves at risk.

Obstacles and barriers to library cooperation

Geography is not, however, the only obstacle to library cooperation. High hopes and good intentions cannot overcome serious problems of underfunding and understaffing. A successful experience in cooperation requires the expenditure of money and staff time, and unless the benefits of cooperation can be proven to skeptical library administrators, the lack of necessary resources to sustain collective efforts can reduce even the most attractive program of cooperation and exchange to zero. Essentially, it is critical that *all* participating libraries in a cooperative arrangement feel that they are getting a proper level of benefit despite the risks they are taking.

Other obstacles may include outdated technology, the lack of standards, and insufficient information, which tend to create more technological difficulties for cooperating libraries. Consortial arrangements need to be flexible, adaptive to

changing situations, pragmatic and well-focused in order to be effective. Cooperation in the area of digitization is now a major area attracting multiple consortia. Sharing of digitized materials, however, is hampered by copyright issues and the reluctance of major libraries with rich collections to participate. Other challenges to library cooperation stem from negative attitudes, such as skepticism, fear of loss, reluctance to participate, hesitation to take risks, and the pervasive lack of tradition of cooperation. Not to be ignored is the perception that major libraries are still affected by rivalries or competitions, mistrust, jealousy, politics of personalities, and parochialism.

To overcome these obstacles or barriers to cooperation presents a real challenge to librarians. Realizing that librarians should not shrink from their mandated expectations, they should not however undertake them alone. Visible, strong support from their administrators boosts their confidence and morale. The willingness and commitment to change is another. Other needed changes lie in the following considerations:

- Availability of publications
- Bibliographic control (creation of standards)
- Online union catalogs and union lists
- Increased use of technology
- Better understanding of copyright laws
- Better delivery of shared services
- Regular training
- Positive attitude

Recommendations and Conclusion

The nature of library cooperation in the Philippines has been altered significantly with the advent of the digital: a) transforming institutional libraries, the library profession, and the individual librarians and information professionals; b) building technology, standards and infrastructures; and c) sharing knowledge and resources for networked information and communication. This change will continue to evolve in the direction of more variations and commonalities, cooperation taking the shape of more cooperative ventures in terms of networking and partnerships. The growth of multiple consortia will give impetus to the development of bilateral agreements or partnerships as an alternative option. Promoting ILL standards will improve the delivery of interlibrary lending and document delivery services. Libraries are moving on in the direction of standardization and best practices, and it becomes mandatory and inevitable that cooperating libraries adopt these initiatives. Keeping pace with change and taking risks are best taken when one is not alone. So librarians looking for cooperative ventures are advised to be innovative, flexible and determined, ready to take and share risks, and remain focused on team effort. Then we can face the challenges involved in library cooperation in this digital age.