

BULGARIAN INFORMATION CONSORTIUM: TWENTY YEARS OF LIBRARY COOPERATION

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Summary. The article presents the concept development of a library cooperative in the world and in Bulgaria from its inception until today. Special attention is paid to setting up the Bulgarian Information Consortium, the first library association for cooperative database subscription. Its twenty-year history and main activities, applied governance models and results achieved are traced. A conclusion is drawn that success of library cooperative private initiatives is possible, albeit difficult to achieve.

Keywords: library cooperative; leadership; polycentric management; Bulgarian Information Consortium

Introduction

Libraries are often called knowledge keepers. The definition, however, is misleading. Libraries do collect knowledge not to keep it, but to exchange it. Authors create knowledge not for themselves; they do it for the sake of others. Sometimes knowledge transfer takes place through a more or less direct relationship between its creators and users. Giving a lecture is the most direct way. It has a number of advantages. Users are (supposed to be) interested in exactly this knowledge, and are also (supposed to be) prepared for it. Dialogues and explanations possibly facilitate the process. However, there are also disadvantages. First of all, space and time limitations. The author and the users have to get together in the same place at the same time. Thus, knowledge transfer is limited.

Another possible form is publication. With it, knowledge transfer is not as direct, but mediated (publisher, distributor). Space and time limitations are overcome, but new difficulties arise, mainly for users. They have to find out about the existence of certain knowledge, discover it, get certain about its quality, and make efforts to gain access to it. Moreover, there are costs, naturally. That is, this option is more expensive for (each of) them.

The concept of the positive influence of modern information technologies on these processes is a popular one (there were the same expectations in the years after the invention of the printing press). It is an interesting point and should not be dismissed. Some difficulties are overcome thanks to the opportunities to make it popular, i.e. building awareness of the existence of certain knowledge, for instance. However, others are obviously not, i.e. finding out knowledge (searching in an ocean of nonsense), assessing its quality (not its pre-paid place in search engine listings), and its acquisition (the poor results of online learning).

It was precisely because of the difficulties in the process of knowledge transfer that libraries (as well as other forms, universities, for example) were set up. They have helped to solve some problems (time constraints). However, others, such as spatial limitation, have remained. Thus, quite naturally, the next step has been taken, i.e. cooperation between libraries.

Library Cooperative: Beginning and Development

Cooperation is one of the phenomena of the modern library world. Often, modern information and communication technologies and new user preferences are cited as the main reason for cooperation between libraries. But its history is much older, in fact, ancient. Although not conclusively proven, the stories of interlibrary borrowing dating back to more than seven thousand years ago in Mesopotamia (1) or between the libraries of Alexandria and Pergamon two thousand years ago sound quite optimistic (2).

Joe Kraus in his excellent *Prologue To Library Cooperation* (Kraus, 1975) reminds other (now undisputed) early examples of library cooperation. Around 1400, Franciscan monks wrote the *Registrum Librorum Angliae* (called *Catalogus Librorum Angliae* in some sources). It was a list of works by ninety authors living in 160 monasteries in England. In the early years of the 15th century, the maintenance and development of this register was undertaken by John Boston, a monk from Bury. The number of authors increased to 700, while bibliographical descriptions and new monastery libraries were added. Anyone interested in a particular document could check the register for the nearest place where a copy was available. Thus, the first unified library catalogue was compiled which was the earliest medieval form of library cooperative. Its purpose was obvious, namely facilitating access to knowledge, its exchange between authors and users.

The example was followed, albeit slowly, in the following centuries. In 1745, at the suggestion of Jacob Benzelius, *Commercium Literarium* initiative began. The universities of Uppsala, Greifswald, Lund and Abo (Turku) set aside 30 copies each of their publications and exchanged them among themselves. In the beginning, it was a university business initiative (as its name suggests). Gradually, its implementation was taken over by the university libraries. This was the earliest documented example of an interlibrary loan (the universities involved at the time are located in three different countries nowadays, but then they were all within the borders of the Kingdom of Sweden).

An overlooked fact of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's biography is his work as a librarian at the Herzog-August-Bibliothek. The leading German playwright took up the position in 1770 at the invitation of Charles I, Duke of Brunswick. A year later, Lessing began pooling efforts and resources of the universities of Wolfenbüttel and Göttingen to jointly replenish and develop their library collections.

In 1775, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was invited to join the court of Karl August, Duke of Saxe-Weimar. In Weimar, Goethe (a lawyer by education and practice) held various administrative positions, incl. and one (from 1882) called prime minister today. Part of his work was related to educational reforms. On his initiative, a unified catalogue of the libraries at the universities of Weimar and Jena was compiled.

The *Commercium Literarium* idea was developed in the so-called Akademischer Tauschverein, an association for interlibrary exchange. Founded in 1817 at the Universität Marburg by 18 German universities, it soon grew to include universities from all leading countries on four continents (3).

The case of the National Central Library (NCL), founded by Albert Mansbridge (4) in 1916 in London, is an interesting one. It became in no time an attractive centre for working young people who were listeners rather than full-time university students (and therefore unable to use the university libraries) but wished to further their education. At their insistence, NCL developed an advanced interlibrary loan system. The library was later transformed into the National Central Library, part of the British Library Lending Division, still servicing book lending in the UK and internationally.

The advantages of library cooperation rapidly made this approach common throughout Europe. The first unified catalogue of periodicals was compiled in Milan in 1819. A joint catalogue of the publications of the Austrian university and scientific libraries was developed under the editorship of Ferdinand Grassauer in Vienna in 1898.

Links between libraries and publishing houses also developed. In 1610, Sir Thomas Bodley signed an agreement with the Stationers' Company (5) to provide the Bodleian Library (6) with a copy of every new book registered in their representative Stationers Hall. Later, this arrangement grew into the UK Statutory Compulsory Deposit. The example was followed by the other European countries and so the libraries began to organise a copy deposit of each new edition.

Library cooperation also developed across the Ocean. Its beginning has been associated with the name of Charles Coffin Jewett, appointed as a librarian at the Smithsonian Institution in 1848. His work in the field of librarianship, and especially in compiling a unified library catalogue, earned him wide recognition, and in 1853 he was elected president of the first Librarian's Convention, an organisation promoting library development in the United States for a long period. Next came compulsory depositing, various joint catalogues, interlibrary and cooperative collections (initiated by the US Library of Congress in 1945). This was how the Big Deal began and the focus was put on accessing materials instead of owning them. Gradually, agreements between libraries for interlibrary loans and shared cataloguing became partnerships, licensing agreements, joint service programmes, and shared technologies.

Library cooperative history is a long one. It can be traced in detail in numerous authors' research. A valuable source in this area is the series *Handbook on the International Exchange of Publications* (UNESCO, 1950 et seq.(7)). Although brief, this historical overview allows several conclusions to be reached, namely:

- The need for knowledge exchange is the basis of library cooperation. Modern technologies and consumer sentiments neither cause it nor express its nature and essence. Its history is considerably older.
- The library cooperative has the potential to provide advantages in the process of knowledge exchange. That is why it was set up a long time ago and still exists today.
- An important factor for carrying out successful joint library initiatives is the presence of prominent leadership.

Library Cooperative Nowadays

The abovementioned should not be understood as denying the role of technological development especially nowadays when most libraries around the world maintain network electronic catalogues. In addition to library networks, large bibliographic associations have been set up in support of interlibrary cooperation, such as Online Computer Library Center (OCLC, founded in 1967), Western Library Network (WLN), Research Libraries Group (RLG), etc. In the UK, Electronic Access to Resources in Libraries (EARL) initiative since 1995 has enabled public libraries to deliver online information and provide knowledge-based services.

The library cooperative is also supported by setting up associations and international organisations. The oldest organisation in the library and information field is the International Federation for Information and Documentation (IFID), established by Paul Otlet and Henri La Fontaine in Brussels in 1895 as Institute for International Bibliography (Institut International de Bibliographie) with the aim of creating a catalogue card index for world literature. The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) was established in 1927 (the first working meeting was held in Rome in 1928). The organisation publishes the IFLA Journal and currently maintains 44 Sections in various areas of library science, incl. Document Delivery and Resource Sharing Section which deals with library cooperation and interlibrary loan nationally and internationally .

In 1922, the then existing League of Nations set up its own advisory body, the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation which in 1926 grew into an institute based in Paris, and in 1945 was the basis for establishing the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation UNESCO (UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). In 1958, in Vienna,

UNESCO held a seminar on the role of national libraries for their cooperation in the field of unified catalogues, international book borrowing, exchange of publications, exchange of library specialists, etc. Since then, the organisation has supported the development of the cooperative of public libraries in the world.

Library Consortium

The most significant progress in the library cooperative during the last century has been achieved thanks to the initiative of libraries themselves, namely library consortia. The earliest example dates back to 1933, when Duke University, North Carolina State University and the University of North Carolina founded the Triangle Research Libraries Network (TRLN), a consortium for sharing catalogues and collections, shared digital initiatives, collaborative remote supported collections, and federated staff model.

The advantages of the consortium as a form of library co-operation quickly became apparent and today it is the dominant trend. OCLC (Online Computer Library Center) is an example of a library cooperative in a global aspect. It was established in 1967 as a non-profit organisation with headquarters in Dublin, Ohio, USA. OCLC was created on the initiative of the Ohio Association of Colleges and Academic Institutions. OCLC's mission is to provide shared technology services, research, and programmes to help libraries meet the information access needs of users, organisations, and communities. The main goal of the consortium is for libraries around the world to reduce their costs through collaboration, since OCLC's motto reads "Because what is known must be shared".

An example of a successful international consortium comprising 50 developing country participants is eIFL.net (Electronic Information for Libraries). Its main purpose is to negotiate, promote and support the dissemination of scientific electronic resources for library users in the educational and scientific sectors, professional communities, government organisations and civil society.

This new (from the perspective of the millennial development noted above) trend in library cooperation led to the creation of a large number of consortia of various nature. Studying its early stage, James Kopp found four types, namely a large consortium (mainly concerned with computerisation in a large number of libraries); a small consortium (engaged with user service and day-to-day issues); a cooperative in a particular field and a consortium for interlibrary loan or reference service (Kopp, 1998). According to him, these four types are basic for the consortia that arose later in the USA.

The topic of the legal status of consortia is also interesting (Horton, 2015). The most common forms are non-profit organisations, associations of university libraries, governmental organisations, associations and the one without legal status. Structured consortia of non-profit organisations are associations registered with an independent legal status. Their activities are related to providing services in the fields of education, science, charity, religion, etc. Library cooperatives also carry out educational initiatives. Examples of consortia with non-governmental and non-profit status are eIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries), LIBER (Ligue des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche – Association of European Research Libraries), Consortium of European Research Libraries (CERL), International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC), Amigos Library Services, Midwest Collaborative for Library Services, and others.

Library associations are also set up within universities. Such are Florida Center for Library Automation, Consortia of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois, GALILEO, Minitex, etc. The main services they provide are maintenance of shared resources, digital repositories, shared integrated catalogue system, common site for remote access to resources, etc.

Other library consortia have the status of state organisations. Such type of consortia are usually created on behalf of regional libraries on a geographical basis and are managed according to state regulations,

i.e. conducting tenders for public procurement, announcing vacancies, reporting, etc. Examples of state consortia are OhioLINK, Florida Virtual Campus, etc.

Informal library associations without legal status are also set up. They are established for a specific occasion, such as sharing a joint purchase, organising an event, working on a specific project, etc. Such is the case of libraries in Colorado, which for more than 40 years have organised an annual interlibrary loan conference without setting up a formal association.

The analysis of the stage of setting up consortia allows to formulate the following conclusions about the nature of the modern library cooperative, namely:

- Along with the continuing importance of leadership, the need for initiative of all participants and the capacity for joint work is increasingly coming to the fore.
- State intervention is a possible but not an obligatory solution. Moreover, it often causes problems with the motivation of the participants.

Library Cooperative in Bulgaria

During the second half of the period of existence of the First Bulgarian Kingdom (681 – 1018), Bulgaria developed as a significant spiritual center. Christianity was adopted, Cyril and Methodius' students began their work, there were translations and creation of indigenous literature. Reproducing and distributing books inevitably required a development of cooperation forms between the newly founded literary centres. Unfortunately, the period has been poorly studied from this perspective (Nikolova-Houston, 2012; Nikolova-Houston, 2013). There is an interesting proof in the book of Gaston Sergheraert (8) – Syméon le Grand 893 – 927 (Sergheraert, 1960, 98). The author noted the establishment of the first national library of Bulgaria with a rich collection of manuscripts: Greek, Latin and Slavic. The centralised management of the spiritual processes (by the kings Boris and Simeon), need for books, regular communication with Constantinople and Rome and presence of a national library suggested a lively exchange of texts.

The study of these processes in Bulgaria usually starts from the years of the Renaissance. Four periods stand out (Nikolova-Houston, 2009). The first can be called restorative (until the restoration of the Bulgarian state - 1878). There are three sub-periods that can be outlined. The earliest one (here it is called ecclesiastical) was related to the maintenance of collections of texts (at first handwritten, and later also printed) in the Bulgarian monasteries of Rila, Zograf, Hilendar, etc. People (mainly monks) who were interested in the knowledge in them visited them in person. The school sub-period follows. Bulgarian educational initiatives can be found quite far back in time. Schools, in the modern sense of the word, were opened after 1800, namely: in the town of Kotel - 1812, Svishtov - 1815, Sliven - 1825, etc. They probably had collections of books to aid learning. A school that positively had a library was the one set up by Vasil Aprilov in Gabrovo in 1835. The third sub-period – the community centre – began in 1856 with the establishment of a community centre in the city of Svishtov. The first point in its statute sets the task of creating a city library. In the same year, two more community centres were set up in the cities of Lom and Shumen, and by 1878 their number reached 130 (all of them with libraries). Formal connections between libraries, ecclesiastical, school or community libraries, was not a characteristic feature of this period. However, it is interesting due to its other features, namely:

- interaction and service of other structures (formal and informal) such as churches, schools, guild organisations, etc. provided by libraries; Successful library cooperation even today requires contacts and joint initiatives not only between libraries, but also with the surrounding world.
- development without the so-called state support; Library cooperation is often associated with public funding. At that period there was no Bulgarian state, while the administration of the Ottoman Empire showed no interest in supporting these ventures. And yet they were set up.

- the success of library cooperation requires personal commitment and involvement; The example of the first Bulgarian community centre in Svishtov is illustrative. Emanuil Vaskidovich donated over eight hundred volumes of literature, and the rest of the founders, Hristaki Filchov, Dimitar Nachovich and Georgi Vladikin, a total of 4,800 grosh. During the public announcement of the idea, their fellow citizens collected a considerable amount of over 37 thousand grosh. In 1904, Kiril Avramov made a donation of 200,000 golden Bulgarian leva.

The second period (1879 – 1944) was a modernisation one. The number of community centres and community libraries grew to over a thousand in 1910 and almost 4,500 at the end of the period. The public libraries in the cities of Sofia and Plovdiv were established, as well as those of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and the ten universities established during the period. In the country, there were rapid processes of catching up with the backlog in the field of library cooperatives, namely:

- formal unification: in 1911, an old idea belonging to the Constantinople Bulgarian ChitalCommunity Centre of 1870 promoting a unification of centres was implemented through the establishment of a Union of People's Community Centres;
- coordination of services: thanks to an initiative of Yancho Khlebarov, processes of coordination in the assembly of community libraries, book exchange and interlibrary borrowing began;
- inclusion of new participants: scientific and university libraries; the same practices (book exchange and interlibrary borrowing) were implemented by them not only on a national but also on an international scale;
- the most important characteristic of the period is compliance with the needs of the users; The practice of community centres and their libraries to lead their users to knowledge chosen by them (so-called recommended lists) was limited. Libraries increasingly developed their collections and services in response to the needs of the users.

The third period (1945 – 1989) was associated with stagnation in the library cooperative. A relatively modern interlibrary borrowing system was regulated only in 1987 with the creation of a unified service system and regulations for its operation. In the beginning, it was only related to the provision of books. The service was primarily aimed at the needs of scientists, teachers and specialists (Yanakieva i dr. 2013). The advent of reprographic technology activated this service by providing the possibility to copy articles, parts of books and other documents. As all belonging to the public life in the country, the library cooperative was characterised by the following:

- clumsy centralised leadership (via the National Library) replaced the flexibility of personal initiative; The implementation of traditional activities: coordination of the collection of foreign editions, limited international book exchange, internal book exchange and interlibrary borrowing, did not change the picture of stagnation and non-development forward;
- inculcating the concept of state funding and management (e.g. the assembly of foreign literature only through a specially created commission) instead of individual efforts and contributions;
- breaking ties with the world library community (except two UNESCO conventions) and lagging behind modern trends.

It was only at the end of the 1960s that initiatives were implemented in the field of library cooperation, i.e. compiling joint catalogues.

After 1989, the modern development of library cooperation in Bulgaria began. With the fall of the communist regime and the subsequent financial crises and political reforms, libraries in Bulgaria gained autonomy, public access to information and resources, and the opportunity to cooperate with international institutions. On the one hand, library holdings declined due to a lack of collection funds, but on the other hand, collections opened up to readers from everywhere as a result of automation and democratic approaches. The cooperation of libraries in this period developed as a result of the advent of the Internet and new technologies as well as the limited funding. The opportunity to apply for

international programmes to fund and implement reforms also had an influence on the change in library practice. The role of the Union of Library and Information Workers, established in 1990, can also be noted here.

Cooperation was also exhibited in compiling joint catalogues including collections of several independent libraries. Some of them took place in the libraries of the BAS, foreign books in the National Library, foreign periodicals in Bulgaria in the National Library, academic libraries in North-Eastern Bulgaria at the city of Rouse University Library, libraries at the University of Plovdiv, libraries working with the AB software, of out-of-print, rare and valuable editions, etc. At a later stage, electronic joint catalogues *Regina* of the regional libraries were compiled, National Agrarian Scientific Information Complex Catalogue of four libraries, namely Agricultural Academy, Agrarian University in Plovdiv, Thrace University in Stara Zagora and Forestry University in Sofia, and a unified consolidated online catalogue of the academic libraries in Bulgaria on the initiative of the National Academic Library and Information System Foundation, funded by *America for Bulgaria* Foundation.

Another form of cooperation began in 2002 as a result of the need for specialised scientific information of four medical libraries in the cities of Sofia, Varna, Pleven and Plovdiv. They concluded a contract for joint access to the ProQuest Medical Library database with the company that distributed the databases in Bulgaria. A year later, the library of the Thrace University in Stara Zagora joined.

The case of state intervention should also be noted here. A national license agreement for access to the Scopus platform has been publicly funded since 2007. It was later expanded to include Thomson Reuters and Clarivate. Today, this mechanism provides access to the SciVerse® Science Direct® platforms, to the full-text database Science Direct Freedom Collections and Science Direct Classical Collections, as well as to the Scopus and Web of Science platforms (9).

The most important manifestation of library cooperation during this period was setting up the Bulgarian Information Consortium (BIC). It is analysed in detail below. There are two lessons from these years: private initiatives for a library cooperative are:

- possible;
- difficult.

Theoretical Foundations of Library Cooperative

The topic is of intense academic interest. It has been studied by scientists from different scientific fields who have different theoretical views. The following have been proven popular:

- cooperative economic game (Cohen & Vijebrg, 1980) analysing minima and maxima in utility;
- cooperative decision-making involving more participants (Hayes, 2003);
- analysis of conflict of interest policies, in particular the key elements of transparency and openness in library consortia (Verhagen, 2007);
- economic analysis of the potential savings of consortia in different library services (Kingma, 1998);
- theory of the life cycle of international consortia (Shachaf, 2003);
- user perspectives of electronic resources (Shilpa, 2016), etc.

Of particular interest are the analyses of the reasons for the success or failure of the library cooperative, such as:

- presence (absence) of trust between participants (Jakubs, 2015);
- level of adaptability of the participants to the shared mission (Hirshon, 1995);
- understanding of the inevitability of various problems of a technical, psychological and behavioral nature in cooperation (Ameen, 2008);

- acceptance of the fact that cooperation saves money, but it is not free and the necessary costs must be borne (Williams, 2000), etc.

Guided by the accumulated experience of the global and national development of the processes of the library cooperative and by the ideas of its researchers, the creators of Bulgarian Information Consortium (BIC) set two principles in its foundation and functioning, namely:

- leadership: not all library consortia succeed, often positive results come late, disinterest and interpersonal problems exist, negative psychological characteristics of the participants are manifested (opportunism and free riding), financial resources and efforts are needed (which cannot be paid), etc. Strong leadership is the key to overcoming such problems (10).
- polycentric management: management (governance) with many decision-making centres, each of a certain degree of autonomy. This modern term belongs to Michael Polanyi (Polanyi, 1951), while its application in common resources management - to the Ostrom family (Ostrom, 1961), (Ostrom, 1990).

Bulgarian Information Consortium (BIC)

The establishment and development of BIC goes through several stages.

Preparatory Stage: The first informal union of university libraries in Bulgaria took place in 2000 as a result of the work on the MODUL project: Modernisation and Organisational Development of the University Library, financed under the EU Tempus programme. The project was initiated and led by the director of the library of the New Bulgarian University (NBU), Nadya Terzieva. The libraries of the University of Sofia, the University of National and World Economy, the Technical University - Sofia, the Free University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, the University of Murcia, Spain, the University of Portsmouth, England, the University of Braganza, Portugal participated. Non-academic participants were the Union of Library and Information Workers and the Dutch firm Martinus Nyhof. Trainings and visits of library managers and specialists were carried out and experience was shared in the areas of strategic library planning, library marketing, modern forms of financing, and specialisation of librarians in various scientific fields. An indisputable result was setting up the first informal library consortium in Bulgaria and the realisation of a shared subscription for ISI's Current Contents Connect electronic databases for research and educational purposes for participating libraries.

The most significant achievement of the project was the first steps towards building trust and capacity for joint work. The NBU library took over all the administrative work (incl. certain financial obligations) in its attempt to convince the other participants of the possibility of each of them getting benefits for themselves in working together. Formally, the project ended successfully: on time and with a high rating. But from the perspective of the library cooperative, the results were not so convincing. It became clear that the careful selection of participants with unidirectional goals and willingness to work together was of utmost importance to achieving success. Moreover, true cooperation proved to hardly happen in a short period of time (Terzieva, 2005).

Establishment Stage: In 2002, the Library of New Bulgarian University launched the Bulgarian Librarian Network project. After successful participation in *Electronic Information for Libraries* Competition, announced by eIFL (11), funding was won to set up the first library association in Bulgaria for shared access to academic databases (Terzieva, 2002). The libraries of the Technical University - Sofia, the Academy of Economics - Svishtov, and the American University in Bulgaria - Blagoevgrad also participated in the project. The project was implemented and highly appreciated by the funding organisation. Already at the end of the year, on November 6, 2002, a non-profit association was registered under the name **Bulgarian Information Consortium (BIC)** with headquarters at NBU. Its

mission has been to provide access to the best information resources at prices that participants can afford. Its goals are the following (Terzieva, 2007):

- promoting the use of electronic information resources for scientific and educational purposes;
- representing member libraries before publishers to obtain preferential prices for subscription to their products by concluding a unified license agreement;
- training and continuing education in a professional environment.

The management structure consists of a General Assembly with representatives of all legal members and a Management Board, which includes representatives of the four founding universities. Before its members and before external organisations, the Consortium is represented by the Chairman of the Management Board.

Development Stage: The establishment of BIC leaves a large number of questions open. In the years to follow, their answers have been sought and gradually found.

- Guaranteeing autonomy. Any library (regardless of its type and size) can join and leave the consortium every year. Entrance fees are low (and deducted from the prices of certain services). There are no exit penalties. Moreover, participation in all initiatives is optional. Libraries freely choose those they need.
- Considering the financial capabilities of the members. Already at the beginning of the Consortium, a model (Cost Division Model) was developed for the distribution of national fees (subscriptions). The fee for each library depends on its financial capabilities, not on the volume of use of the service. Thus, it becomes possible to include more libraries and achieve a lower price for each of them (including those who pay the most) compared to a possible individual subscription.
- Maintaining full accountability and transparency for the funds spent and their benefits. BIC also prepares statistical reports on the usability of electronic resources, presents rankings for the most active users of the databases, most read titles, as well as financial benefits for libraries in the form of saved funds. Every year, national meetings of the members are held to report on the activities of BIC. The Management Board reports to the members on the initiatives carried out, their financial parameters, presenting the plan for the coming year.
- Involving members in the decision-making process regarding new services. This process includes: organising trial access, analysing usability, conducting a survey among members about their interest, requesting offers and negotiating with publishers, distributing the amount of the offer according to the financial capabilities of the members, signing contracts between BIC and each participant in the unified subscription, concluding a license agreement with publisher, collecting fees and paying publishers.
- Minimising management costs. Administrative work is done on a voluntary basis. The services of external contractors (accounting and banking services) are paid and, if possible, modest fees to participating librarians.
- Maximising benefit to participants. BIC conducts negotiations with the suppliers of scientific information regarding the prices of their products. Gradually, their trust has been won and significant discounts are achieved every year. In addition to the financial benefit, BIC provides its members with additional benefits, mainly in the field of innovations in library work and international contacts (Terzieva, 2013).
- Seeking additional income from donors and sponsors to cover the lack of funds in some libraries.

Maturity Stage. On its twentieth anniversary, BIC is not only an established name in the Bulgarian library community, it is the only example of a long-lasting, successful, private library cooperative initiative in the country. Today (2023) the Consortium is national in its nature. The number of the member libraries is 38 libraries located in 12 cities in Bulgaria. There are 7 legal members, incl. the

founding universities, and 31 associate members being able to participate in Consortium services of their choice. These member libraries are national and regional, academic (related to different fields of knowledge), etc., small and large. Thus, BIC proves its ability to support knowledge exchange and educational processes at Bulgarian universities (Terzieva, 2016).

The most highly valued activity of BIC has always been its programme to provide shared access to a variety of information resources for scientific and educational purposes, achieving a reduction in costs of member libraries (Terzieva и Todorova, 2006). Two projects have been implemented within the programme:

- shared database subscription;
- cooperative subscription for printed periodicals with electronic versions between the participating libraries.

BIC coordinates all activities related to the shared database subscription. Over the years, it worked with the publishers EBSCO Information Services (12) (until 2013 – EBSCO Publishing), Emerald Fulltext, Gale Virtual Reference Library, InfoTrack Custom Journals, Oxford Reference Online, JSTOR, ProQuest, etc. The longest-term cooperation has been with the publishing company EBSCO Information Services. At the moment, two license agreements are in operation for full-text access to e-journals, of choice, with an academic, business and medical profile, and to e-books with an academic or business scope. The number of participants from Bulgaria varies every year, ranging from 19 to 41 libraries. Financial data shows that the average subscription fee of an individual library over the years depends on the number of participants. The lowest was in 2006 (41 participants): 1,436.34 USD, while the highest was in 2023: 7,208.70 USD (27 participants). Despite the nearly four-fold increase in the annual subscription fee for the period 2003-2023, together with the development of the collections (from 3,187 full-text titles to 39,983, or an increase of almost 12 times), the price of an article used within the framework of the consortium agreement remains low, within the limits from 0.52 to 6.03 USD. During the period, 1,251.295 articles were downloaded at an average price of \$2.40. This is a many times lower price compared to interlibrary delivery borrowing, which averages \$25 per document.

For 7 years (2004 – 2010) the Consortium developed another initiative, namely to save financial resources of libraries through cooperative subscription for printed periodicals. The main goal of the project is the work team of BIC from the Technical University - Sofia to represent the participating libraries in a public procurement tender and to conclude a contract with the selected supplier company under the most favourable financial conditions. Economy of scale is also achieved in this project by subscribing the combined lists of journals (2,966 total number of subscribed titles in different languages) of 8 libraries and through a public tender the companies apply to win a supply contract. Supplementing with electronic free versions of subscribed journals through a unified platform is the added value that libraries receive. Pulsar Agency Platform also provides an opportunity for exchanging publications between the participating libraries on the basis of the cooperative subscription. The cooperative subscription project contributes to libraries acquiring skills for negotiating favourable conditions for supplying periodicals and achieving additional advantages for their readers that are still valid today.

The other important programme of BIC is related to non-formal learning and acquisition of knowledge in a professional environment. Within the framework of the programme, over a period of 20 years, more than 83 events for the library community have been organised in various formats: forums, seminars, exhibitions and national meetings (Todorova, Martinova & Milusheva, 2015).

The idea for the Technology Day Forum arose thanks to the library specialists of the American University in Bulgaria in 2002. Representatives of global companies and publishers are invited to present their products at the forum in the field of library information technologies and electronic resources in before specialised audience. News from conferences of LIBER, IFLA, etc. are also

presented. Within the framework of the forum, BIC has developed cooperation with over 60 companies and has organised 27 editions of Technology Day.

In order to impose its image and attract like-minded people, BIC organises seminars titled *Good Library Practices*. Librarians speak at them, sharing their achievements. Participation in the seminars provides an opportunity to exchange experience and practical approaches in library practice and builds trust between the members and BIC. From 2004 to 2012, 24 editions of the seminars were held. In 2014, another format of seminars titled *The Privilege of Being Informed* began. In the framework of this initiative, publishing houses were invited to present their electronic resources by agreeing a free trial access to the products for the BIC member libraries within one to three months. Within this series of seminars, BIC organised a number of trial accesses with publishers such as Taylor & Francis, CABI, eBrary and ProQuest, etc. The organisation of trial accesses for libraries is becoming an important part of BIC's activity. The interest is also visible from the statistical data on the usability of the resources. As a result of negotiations with publishers, more than 93 trial bi-monthly/quarterly accesses to full-text databases in various fields, e-books and journals have been implemented, with BIC members using more than 915,280 information items free of charge. The number of freely used documents is comparable to that of downloaded articles under the EBSCO national database subscription license agreement and shows that BIC members have almost doubled the access to resources for their users by providing thematic variety without spending additional financial resources.

Given the already established interest of libraries in trial access to electronic resources, BIC became the initiator of holding the first international exhibition of publishers *Biblioworld*. In 2013, its first edition titled *Technologies, Resources, Practices* was held with participants mainly publishing houses with products in the field of science and technology, including Asenovtsi, Ontotext, Prima-Soft, SoftLib, Langry, UniSystems Information Systems and VTLs Europe, Dobie Press, Paradigma Publishing, CAB International, EBSCO Information Services, De Gruyter, Elsevier, Ovid - Wolters Kluwer Health and ProQuest, etc. Publishers paid for their participation in the forum having the opportunity to deliver a presentation and have a stand. As a result of the exhibition, BIC agreed to conduct trial access to the presented products. The second and third editions of the international exhibition were held in 2017, in the field of social sciences and humanities, and in 2019, without a specific field of knowledge, preserving the format of the event. Statistical information on the usability of trial access to electronic resources was published on the association's website.

In 2021, as a result of a survey conducted among its members, BIC organised a new type of seminar to encourage the academic staff to effectively use of digital technologies. Topics on the information needs of researchers, academic staff register and the role of scientific libraries were presented, as well as how to create author profiles in Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar and LinkedIn.

Raising additional funds is another important task of the Consortium. Over the years, stable, trust-based sponsorship relations have been built with Mobitel, Development of Communications and Information and Communication Technologies Agency, Carol Capital Management, Sopharma.

Last but not least, it is the work to promote BIC. A number of initiatives have been developed and are being implemented to create and maintain a website, blog and other publishing and media projects. Since 2002, the Consortium website has gone through five versions. Up-to-date information can be found there, i.e. statutes, rules, conditions for membership, news, events, statistical data, etc. (13). The publishing activity includes New Library Newsletter in electronic (14) and printed version, an annual collection with presentations and reports from seminars and national meetings. Two blogs are maintained. With the growth of social media, the information is placed on the Facebook page of BIC, and the materials from the events are available in electronic format for the members through the site.

Conclusion

Bulgarian Information Consortium is an association of libraries in Bulgaria for shared access to electronic information resources for scientific and educational purposes and professional development of librarians in accordance with modern trends in the profession. The Consortium is a non-profit organisation working through leadership, flexibility and consideration of the needs of its members. Management and operational activities are carried out by a team of the Book Center at New Bulgarian University. The activity is based on the project management approach, in which members are involved to active work with measurable results. The structure of BIC is non-hierarchical and flexible, management and operational activities are carried out by the same people. Communication between members and the operational team is informal. According to its geographical scope, BIC is a national consortium with members from different cities in the country. The association's activities are financed by service fees and membership fees, and it also maintains a small reserve fund. For 20 years, BIC has won the trust of the participants in the association through full accountability and transparency of all actions. The approaches used by the Consortium ensure its stability and longevity. The success of this library cooperative model is due to the private nature of the initiative, which does not rely on state support, as well as to the daily institutional efforts of the New Bulgarian University team.

Notes

(1) At least two libraries existed in Kouyunjik (Nineveh), the largest city in the world at that time. In 1849, Sir Austin Leard opened the older (Royal Library of Sennacherib), while his assistant Hormuzd Rassam - the other (Royal Library of Ashurbanipal) in 1852. What was found in them (historical, legal, agricultural, financial, medical and other texts, incl. the famous Epic of Gilgamesh) was mixed up when transferred to the British Museum and is difficult to distinguish today. Still, the idea of exchanging documents between the two libraries has survived.

(2) Actually the two libraries were in competition with each other. The Ptolemies (the rulers of Egypt then) even forbade the export of papyrus from Alexandria in order to make it difficult for a competing library. For this reason, the production of parchment began in the kingdom of Pergamum, finely processed animal skin on which writing can be done. Thus, the documents from the two libraries were easily distinguished: some were written on papyrus, while others - on parchment. A number of ancient authors were familiar with the sources in both collections, however, they did not visit either library. This gives rise to the claim of interlibrary exchange. But there is another explanation, i.e. the legend of the wedding gift of Mark Antony to Cleopatra, the entire collection of the library of Pergamon, over 200,000 scrolls.

(3) Despite some difficulties (legal and financial, on the part of the participating universities), the Akademischer Tauschverein can be assessed as a successful initiative. Its existence was terminated at the beginning of the First World War.

(4) Mansbridge was a prominent person of his time, a pioneer of adult education, creator of educational organisations in England, the United Kingdom and worldwide, a member of government and parliamentary commissions in the field of education (incl. Royal Commission on the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge) and religious affairs (incl. Selborne Committee on Church and State), author of economic studies and publications.

(5) The City of London Livery Company for the Communications and Content Industries.

(6) The history of Oxford University's main library is interesting. It was started in the 14th century by Thomas Cobham, Bishop of Worcester, with a donation of a small number of books. In the first half of the 15th century, Humphrey, brother of Henry V and Duke of Gloucester, expanded the collection with a significant donation. After a period of decline, the library was restored in 1602 by a group of donors

to the University on the initiative and under the leadership of Sir Thomas Bodley. Since then it bears his name, the Bodleian Library.

(7) The first edition appeared in 1950 under the editorship of J. Dargent. The next ones, in 1956 and 1964, were edited by Gisela von Busse. The fourth edition dates from 1978. After a long break, the publication was resumed, now as an edition of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA).

(8) Gaston Sergheraert is the pseudonym of Christian Gérard, a teacher at the French College of the Assumptionists in Plovdiv. More information about him can be found in Tapkova-Zaimova, 2000 and Velichkova-Borin, 2015.

(9) Analysis and evaluation of these contracts was difficult due to lack of data. It was an indisputable fact that there were cases of access interruptions. In a highly critical publication, Martin Osikowski pointed out, among other weaknesses, Elsevier's extremely high prices, which caused the University of California, Berkeley, to abandon their services. UC Berkeley is a state university and its annual budget in that period (2018) was \$2.8 billion. In 2018, the budget for all state universities in Bulgaria was \$240 million, i.e. over 11 times smaller (Osikovsky, 2019, last revised 2022).

(10) Detailed reviews of the place of leadership in economic and management theories can be found in Hermalin, 1998; Wallis and Dollery, 2002 and Jost, 2013;

(11) eIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries) is an independent non-governmental organisation based in Vilnius. It has been financially supported over the years by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Government of Denmark, the Horizon 2020 Program of the European Commission, the Agency for Cooperative Development - Luxembourg, the Open Society Foundation, UNESCO, the Development Agency - Belgium, and individual donors through the GlobalGiving online donation platform.

(12) Division of EBSCO Industries Inc., a privately held company from Birmingham, Alabama. Today, EBSCO Information Services offers access to MEDLINE, EconLit, Academic Search, America: History and Life, Art Index, Art Abstracts, Art Full Text, Business Source, Clinical Reference Systems, Criminal Justice Abstracts, Education Abstracts, Environment Complete, Health Source, Historical Abstracts, History Reference Center, MasterFILE, NetLibrary, Primary Search, Professional Development Collection, USP DI.

(13) <https://bic.bg/>

(14) <https://novabiblioteka.blogspot.com/>

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BULGARIAN INFORMATION CONSORTIUM. TWENTY YEARS OF LIBRARY COOPERATION

Abstract. The article presents the development of the concept of a library cooperation in the world and in Bulgaria, from its inception until today. Special attention is paid to the creation of the first library consortium for cooperative database subscription – Bulgarian Information Consortium. Its 20-year history and main aspects of activity, applied governance modes and achieved results are tracked. The conclusion about the possible, albeit difficult to achieve, success of private initiatives for a library cooperative is substantiated.

Keywords: library cooperation; leadership; polycentric governance; Bulgarian Information Consortium

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