Cooperation and resource sharing. Joint initiatives by the Swedish universities of technology libraries

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National resource libraries

About ten years ago a system of national resource libraries was formed among Swedish research libraries. Within broadly defined subject areas, one library was assigned the role of national centre. The main purpose of the system is to develop library services for the nation as a whole. On the basis of a programme, approved and financed by The Royal Library’s Office for National Planning and Co-ordination (BIBSAM), the national resource libraries have carried out a number of projects, often in close collaboration with other libraries.

The Swedish Universities of Technology Libraries

The library of The Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm has chosen to perform its duties as national resource library in a formal collaboration with five other libraries: The libraries of Chalmers University of Technology in Gothenburg, Lund University, Linköping University, Luleå University College and Studsvik. This has led to a particularly strong collaboration between the Swedish Universities of Technology Libraries. New initiatives and projects are discussed and decided on by a steering committee consisting of the library directors of the six libraries. Projects dealing with
common problems in different fields such as indexing, user education and inter-library lending, are carried out by working groups with participants from all the six libraries.

Marketing the libraries’ services

The Universities of Technology Libraries are primarily serving researchers and students of their own institutes. However, they also have an important duty in providing information for research and development in the public and industrial sectors in Sweden. It is therefore essential to make the libraries’ services well known outside the universities. One efficient method to meet the target-groups is presentations and demonstrations at technical fairs. In order to reduce costs, share resources and demonstrate the collaboration, our libraries appear together on one common exhibition stand. Joint brochures and posters are produced, which can be used both at fairs and on other occasions. A joint service catalogue makes it possible for the staff at each library to direct customers to special services in any of the other libraries.

The EELS project

Engineering Electronic Library Sweden, the EELS project, is an example of a more extensive project which is carried out by the Universities of Technology Libraries. EELS, which has recently been launched on the Internet, is an information system, presented under World Wide Web, for quality-assessed information sources on the Internet. It is an attempt to provide mainly the technical universities with links to evaluated resources. Major quality factors for the evaluation are accessibility, maintenance, documentation and reliability of the producer organization. The main part of EELS follows the subject classification system produced by Engineering Information. EELS is a joint project carried out by the Swedish Universities of Technology Libraries. The Library of The Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, the National Resource Library, is coordinator. Technical support, including the necessary server, is provided by LUB Netlab, the development department of Lund University.
Library. Responsibility for evaluating the quality of information sources in specific subject areas is allocated to specialized information scientists available in the six libraries which are involved in the project. The information scientists evaluate, describe and classify the information sources and communicate them to the project coordinator in an agreed format. The project aims to pay special attention to Nordic information sources. Some subject areas still remain to be covered and some subjects still have very few recommended sources, but the start of the project is promising. There have already been some very encouraging comments from library netters. The main problem for the information scientists has been to find the time needed to work on the project. They are all heavily engaged in user education in information retrieval, for undergraduate and graduate students. In preparing the courses it is, however, necessary to assess resources on the Internet. The idea is that this work can be used also for EELS and in this way the results can be shared efficiently among the libraries. In practice it has proved difficult to find the time for reporting sources to EELS. A solution may be to invite technical university libraries in other Nordic countries to take part in the project.

**Support for education**

The libraries of Lund University and Linköping University are jointly operating a project in the field of environmental information. The task is to support the Environment Education Programme of the Swedish Council for the Renewal of Undergraduate Education. The Environment Education Programme is a large-scale project initiated as a result of the Agenda 21 Conference in Rio 1992 (UNCTED). The main purpose of the programme is to integrate environmental aspects in all fields of academic education such as, for example, management, law, economics, teacher training. This means that students and academic teachers in all subjects will need information on environmental issues relevant to their speciality. Swedish universities and university colleges have been invited to take part in the Environmental Education Programme. So far 20 project proposals have been accepted by the Council, and for
each project a specified sum of money has been allocated to library service. Moreover, the university libraries of Lund and Linköping support all the 20 projects by providing electronic information services and consultancy. Linköping University Library is responsible for advice and support to library staff in university colleges. Courses in information retrieval and user education, as well as study visits to information centres, have been arranged. Linköping University Library also gives continuous information on new books and other information sources in the environmental field, via an electronic conference. Lund University Library is responsible for maintaining a submenu in Lund University Electronic Library that is tailor-made for the environmental education projects. In the submenu one can find material produced within the projects, databases produced by Lund University Library and links to environmental sources on the Internet. Agenda 21 is presented in English and Swedish, as text and as a searchable wais database. Furthermore about 30 electronic conferences on environment are presented as a wais database. As soon as a new contribution reaches one of the conferences it is automatically copied to the database. This database is one of the most used sources in the submenu. The electronic information services have recently been evaluated. From the statistics collected we knew that the environmental submenu is frequently used, but we did not know whether the lecturers involved in the projects were the actual users. The evaluation showed that the lecturers used the electronic information services and regarded them valuable. However, it turned out that too many were not sufficiently familiar with the services, but were interested in more information, instruction and training. This will be a task for the project team next year.

Conclusion

In my opinion the model of collaboration used by the Swedish Universities of Technology Libraries is effective and successful in many ways. This conclusion has also been confirmed in an evaluation of the Swedish National Resource Libraries
This model of collaboration saves resources and enhances the libraries' competence and capacity in a very efficient way.

References