

# Cooperation Among Libraries as a Basis for Networking

Matjaz Zaucér  
*University of Ljubljana*

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# COOPERATION AMONG LIBRARIES AS A BASIS FOR NETWORKING

*Zaucer, Matjaz  
Central Technological Library,  
Ljubljana, Slovenia*

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## **Introduction**

Because of the “top-down” automation of most libraries in Slovenia, it can be said that computerization was implemented very early and rather extensively if compared with other libraries in Central Europe. However, the problems related to the maintenance and development of the system have emerged as many libraries consider that they have little influence on decision making in the system. On the other hand libraries suffer from the lack of cooperation and differ in their needs to such an extent that it is difficult to come to a common agreement for further development. The case of academic libraries in Ljubljana illustrates that problem.

## **Cooperation among Libraries**

The term cooperation describes the joint action of two or more parties for mutual benefit. Cooperation among libraries is a term with several meanings. Cooperation can be used as a synonym for system, association, consortium or even network. Libraries can cooperate in exchanging cataloging records, in building complementary collections, in exchanging library materials by interlibrary loan and document delivery services, in joint purchasing of library materials or automated systems, in providing services to each others' readers, etc. Cooperation can consist of voluntary agreements among libraries, or it can be imposed on libraries by library laws or by responsible ministries that fund libraries. It is essential that the participant libraries be willing to work together toward common goals. The purpose of cooperation among libraries is for better availability of materials and/or services to users and offering those and additional services at the same or lower costs.

Formally, according to the Library Law from 1982, all libraries in Slovenia form a network of libraries, which cooperate both horizontally (i.e. on the territorial principle irrespective of the type) and vertically (i.e. according to scientific disciplines and/or branches of professional activity served by respective libraries). Within each discipline or group of disciplines of research or professional activity, the best developed library, irrespective of the type, should be chosen to act as a discipline-oriented central library ([1](#)).

Slovenes were enthusiastic about newly gained Slovenia's independence but the intensive development of some areas, such as foreign politics, army, police, etc., led to a very costly political system. Due to the relatively high increase of expenses for the above mentioned areas financial means for science, education, and culture were relatively diminished. By tradition, libraries tailor services to a well-defined clientele

and compete with other libraries for funding, which is discouraging for cooperation among libraries.

One of the obstacles is the misconception of many researchers and university teachers who believe that library materials and services can be adequately substituted by information reached via the Internet. Communication via the Internet and the purchase of library materials are financed from the same budget: the more money given to the Internet, the fewer periodical titles and books can be purchased. It is very often forgotten that searching via the Internet can be time consuming. It is true that a lot of information on the Internet is free of charge but information is often useless, as its value is not controlled by reviewers, publishers, and librarians. The majority of fulltexts of the formally published material which exists are available only through commercial sources. University teachers who are competent to make decisions are professionals in their scientific field but they often do not have adequate knowledge of librarianship.

Interlibrary cooperation is also hindered by the hierarchy of library system in Slovenia partly due to the Library Law.

### **Academic Libraries in Slovenia**

Although Slovenia is one of the smallest and youngest states in Central Europe - its population of two million hardly represents a quarter of a big city - many diverse libraries and information centers have emerged. The state was founded in 1991 following the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia. The beginning of the National and University Library (NUL) dates back to 1774. It first started to perform its national function in 1807 and in 1919 its university function, which coincides with the establishment of the University of Ljubljana. The library holds about 2,000,000 units of library materials and employs about 130 staff members.

A part of its commissions in the field of natural sciences and technology is performed by the Central Technological Library at the University of Ljubljana (CTL). CTL was established in 1949 to satisfy users from the College of Technology, which later joined the University. CTL holds about 300,000 units of library materials and employs 55 staff members.

The third independent university library in Slovenia is the University Library of Maribor, established in 1903. It functions as the university library of Maribor since 1961, storing 670,000 units and employing 60 staff members.

The third Slovenian university is being developed and has not established a significant library yet.

In the past decades, the University of Ljubljana was an integration of strong and independent members: faculties, academies and colleges, and the cooperation among them was not very close. The university members were financed directly by the ministries. Both university libraries (NUL and CTL) were independent and entirely financed by the ministries.

The University had little interest and restricted possibilities to influence the policy of both libraries. This and the great dispersion of libraries are the main reasons for a

decentralized library and information systems in Ljubljana. The members of the University of Ljubljana maintain about 60 libraries employing about 180 members of staff. Considering enrolment at about 27,000 university students and with approximately 1600 faculty and researchers the total number of librarians is quite large.

## **Library Automation**

Automation of university libraries in Slovenia began in 1982, when the Computer Centre of the University of Maribor started preparing computer supported library loan at the University Library of Maribor (2).

In 1987 the Computer Centre implemented the shared cataloging system, which initially linked three major Slovenian libraries (3). In the same year the shared cataloging system was accepted by the Association of Yugoslav National Libraries as the common basis for the library information system of Yugoslavia. The implementation of automation to six national libraries and to larger university libraries of former Yugoslavia was financed directly by the ministries. The Institute of Information Science in Maribor, which emerged from the Computer Centre of the University of Maribor, took care of the development and functioning of the system, named COBISS. Since the disintegration of former Yugoslavia, the system has been widely used in Slovenia and in some regions of former Yugoslavia.

The advantage of this “top-down” approach is simplicity, with only one set of hardware and software to maintain, and one agency to enforce common standards for data structure and content, and to design, implement and maintain mechanisms for cooperation (4). As long as the government is solely responsible for funding all libraries, as was the case in the former political system, this approach is feasible. It was the only quick and efficient way to introduce library automation in a time of variegated libraries’ interests.

More than 150 of the largest Slovenian libraries of all kinds presently participate in the COBISS system, which represents the basis for the library information system and for the system of scientific information and communications in Slovenia. Nearly one third of the participating libraries are university and academic libraries, one third are special libraries, one third public libraries and some are school libraries. The shared cataloging system is based on the cooperative and distributed creation of local online database/catalogues of individual libraries and on the simultaneous creation of the union COBIS database/catalogue. At the moment this union database/catalogue comprises more than one million original records of all types of materials (72% monographs, 24% articles and 4% serials) and 1.8 million holdings data. About one third of the records and one quarter of the holdings data are from foreign regions. COBISS/OPAC client-server software provides online access to the database/catalogues, display and download of the records, access to other information resources (SwetScan, OCLC and other databases on Internet using Z39.50 protocol) and other functions for librarians and end-users. The COBISS system functions on over 50 VAX and AXP (Alpha) computer systems with Open VMS operating system, connected to the DECnet network via the Academic and Research Network of Slovenia or via the X.25 public network. The COBISS system also offers libraries and

information centres the services regarding the automation of local functions (inventorying, acquisition, serials check-in, library loan, statistic reports, etc.) (5).

The system is partly financed by membership fees of participating libraries and partly by the state budget, financial means are assigned directly to Institute of Information Science in Maribor.

The “top-down” approach of implementing library automation has several disadvantages as well, the most obvious of which is the maintenance of the large system and its improving and adjusting to local needs and circumstances (6). With regard to different types and sizes of libraries, their procedures and the organization of work are very heterogeneous which is evident from the variety of their requirements. The diversity of requests is solved partly by the software adjustments and partly by the introduction of standard solutions.

Nevertheless, some libraries are not satisfied with the present system. First, a certain competition exists between the two universities, moreover even between the two towns. As the “top-down” system was developed with the assistance of the “younger” University of Maribor some of the university members in Ljubljana resisted it in advance. The next obstacle are some unsolved problems between the National and University Library of Ljubljana and Institute of Information Science in Maribor mainly regarding the ownership of records in COBIS and production of national bibliography. Institute of Information Science states to protect author’s rights of records’ creators and to be the author of software while the National and University Library of Ljubljana advocates the exclusive legal right of producing national bibliography. A serious problem of managing the total system, determining priorities and speed of development arises. With regard to the small region in which the system is implemented it is obvious that its maintenance and development are very expensive. Only two librarians take part in the Professional Council of the Institute of Information Science. Some bigger libraries and information centres participate in the management of the development of COBISS through the following bodies: Board of Directors of Participating Libraries, working groups and User Conference. There are arguments, that the system should be organized as a consortium (7). All these problems would be much easily solved, if the cooperation took a “bottom-up” approach and especially if the cooperation would be agreed to among libraries in advance. But in that case, libraries would purchase a variety of commercial systems, and problems would be shifted to compatibility and standards. Similar is the problem of smaller public libraries in Slovenia, which decided to buy cheaper commercial systems and now they use them for library loan, but besides that they use COBISS for the searching and verifying part of interlibrary loan.

A very important fact for the COBISS system is that further development will go in the direction of adding new central services for libraries and end-users (document reservation and ordering, interlibrary loan, access to other public electronic information sources, the possibility of storing and accessing multimedia materials and implementation of computer supported authority control) (5).

## **Libraries at the University of Ljubljana**

The following trends are expected in university librarianship: an increased number of students, a switch from teaching to learning, an increased use of library materials and growth of research activity.

The university library system in Ljubljana is not well organized since the cooperation among libraries is not close enough. Neither users nor librarians are satisfied with the present situation. An analysis which was made a few years ago (1) showed two main disadvantages: great disproportions in the development of libraries and inadequate cooperation in building library systems.

The reasons for the relatively low level of university library systems lie mainly in a weak and decentralized university in the past years, a dispersion of libraries, a reduced role for libraries in the university process, uncontrolled cadre policy. In addition the development of libraries was directed by not enough competent non-university authorities. The disadvantages of the library system are evident in producing the university bibliography, disunited regulations and absence of policy in purchasing databases and periodicals. Interlibrary loan cooperation is however quite satisfactory.

Inevitably, cooperating on any project means sacrificing a measure of one's own freedom of action. Beside the general behaviour of human beings, each with his own idiosyncrasies, there are present specific behaviour patterns in a local environment. Librarians, who felt self-sufficient in their nearly independent academic libraries for decennia, are oriented to well-defined narrow clientele and prefer freedom to achieving common university benefits. A great number of less efficient workers intruded into libraries as a result of low salaries and a common belief that anyone is suitable for such jobs, and the former political system allowed little possibility of getting rid of these people. In addition, the former self-management political system enabled everybody to decide on everything for decades. Those two facts represent serious barriers to a willing cooperation.

On the contrary, the interlibrary cooperation is stimulated by automated library procedures. The management of COBISS, coordination of development, agreements on uniform university bibliography, CD-ROM network are driving forces for library cooperation.

One of the important facts that should be considered at the reorganization is that only more intensive organizational connection of library resources (integration, not centralization is meant) can lead to a more effective university library system. Each independent library, either NUL or CTL, has had its own course of development and serves its specific clientele. The foundation of a new university library parallel to the existing ones would be unreasonable and irrational because of duplication of staff, library materials, dispersion of university members and limited number of users.

There are different suggestions for reorganizing the system. NUL is not willing to be incorporated in the University of Ljubljana nor does it agree with the separation into the national and university part. At the same time it wants their double function to be legalized by the Library Law. It suggests a three-level organizational scheme (1):

- the main university library
- intermediary nodes
- basic units

NUL aims to remain the main university library performing all the necessary activities. Intermediary nodes are supposed to be some academic discipline-oriented central libraries: well organized and equipped libraries, mostly faculty libraries, covering one or more scientific disciplines. They are supposed to coordinate libraries on the third level according to their scientific field. The function of the libraries on that third level, which are libraries of chairs, divisions, schools, research institutes, departments and even some faculty libraries, is to provide users of their patron entity with relevant primary documents and literature or at least with referrals to other sources and intermediaries of information.

CTL does not support such a complicated hierarchical model of organization. That is the reason why it submitted another suggestion to the Chancellor of the University. NUL refuses to divide into two parts and to perform its university function within the main university library. Its present organization and national function do not allow it to become a member of the university. The best solution would be that NUL performs a part of its function of the main university library on the basis of a contract with the University.

It is suggested that the University establish its main library as a university unit and forms a new department for managing and developing the university library system. The present CTL is supposed to be transformed into the equivalent university library department serving science and technology users. The former prepares the rules of the library system, guidelines for individual units and defines the competencies of individual libraries. The rules are formally accepted by the University Senate. Library organization and distribution of library materials are regulated by university members thus assuring a uniform library system.

In accordance with this proposal all libraries, together with the main university library, would represent equivalent parts of the entire system. The disappearance of hierarchy would contribute to good relations and more effective work in libraries.

Thus the continuity of the present work would be preserved, the development of the university library system would be directed by the University which would be solely responsible for the system. The service of existing units is expected to be more coordinated and coherent.

The University Senate has decided that the function of the university library will be performed by the University Library of Ljubljana based upon NUL and CTL. The latter is an independent unit of the University Library or an affiliate member of the University of Ljubljana.

## **Conclusion**

To establish cooperation is a difficult and in general, a time consuming process. This is even more difficult in an environment, which has experience with coerced cooperation. That is the reason why it is wise to take advantage of the external

elements which encourage the cooperation. The University of Ljubljana is challenged to reorganize its library system according to its wishes which is enabled by its strengthening role in the changed political situation. The second reason is the already started construction of the new library building (8).

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