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What kind of consortium do we need and what kind do we have?
Case study of PFBN

Introduction

In [1] John F. Helmer asked, among others, the following questions:

- Why are library consortia experiencing a renaissance at this time?

- Is there an ideal model for library consortia or, lacking an ideal, can one at least identify some indicators of success or "best practices"?

- How do consortia with overlapping membership and similar missions most effectively and efficiently coexist?

- How can member libraries minimize the "dark side" of consortia (time, cost, bureaucracy, loss of local control, political entanglements) while maximizing the benefits of collective action?

And immediately he answered himself: "Although I cannot definitively answer these questions, one of the overriding lessons taken from my study of consortia is that *there is no single best model* for a library consortium."

Hereunder, I will try to present the activities of The Poznań Foundation of Scientific Libraries (PFBN) and, at least partially, answer some of the above questions.

Let us start with an attempt to sketch the classification of library consortia, not analysing the definition of the notion which creates quite a lot of problems in itself, mainly due to the lack of a suitable structure in our law. For the needs of this article, I will use the expression that I once heard from Ann Okerson: Consortia are all about sharing resources and improving access to information. [3]

Against this background, I would like to present the rising and the activity range evolution in PFBN, consider contemporary tendencies in consortia development and, finally, indicate the goals determining the activity of PFBN for the nearest future.

Libraries form consortia in order to realise many collective goals. There are numerous criteria according to which classification of consortia may be conducted. For the needs of the article, I would like to present my simplest and, certainly, not perfect, as it combines many criteria and does not utilise others, classification of consortia:

1. utilising the hardware (computer systems) and/or software (integrated library systems) coming from the same producer.
2. sharing the hardware (computer systems) and/or software (integrated library systems) which results in collective management and administration of these resources - local
3. the same as above, but on a larger scale - Regional (including national)

4. consisting of libraries which represent similar scientific disciplines.
5. aiming at collective purchases of the access to information sources or collective creating of such sources.

The above classes are not separable, though. Libraries may belong, and in fact they often do, to one or more consortia. According to such a classification, one institutional consortium may have a function of several consortia of the mentioned above types.

Also in a formal sense, relations that unite libraries within consortia may differ in a significant way, beginning from consortia with a legal entity, through various associations, agreements constantly cooperating and creating a consortium de facto, though not de iure, to established ad hoc groups united in order to realise a collective undertaking.

Establishing PFBN

PFBN was established by 12 scientific institutions of Poznań:

Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu (The Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań)
Politechnika Poznańska, (The Poznań University of Technology)
Akademia Rolnicza w Poznaniu (The Academy of Agriculture of Poznan)
Akademia Ekonomiczna w Poznaniu (The Poznań University of Economics)
Akademia Medyczna im. Karola Marcinkowskiego w Poznaniu (The Karol Marcinkowski University of Medical Sciences in Poznań)
Akademia Wychowania Fizycznego im. Eugeniusza Piaseckiego w Poznaniu (The Eugeniusz Piasecki University School of Physical Education)
Akademię Muzyczną im. Ignacego Paderewskiego w Poznaniu (The Ignacy Paderewski Academy of Music in Poznań)
Akademia Sztuk Pięknych w Poznaniu (The Academy of Fine Arts in Poznań)
Papieski Wydział Teologiczny w Poznaniu, (The Papal Faculty of Theology in Poznań)
Polska Akademia Nauk, Oddział w Poznaniu (The Poznań Branch of the Polish Academy of Sciences)
Poznańskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk, (The Poznań Society of Friends of Science and Arts)
Bibliotekę Raczyńskich (The Raczyński Library)

The foundation was registered on 6th May 1996. Its goal was defined as: "Organising and Conducting the System of Automatic Library Procedures Service, including the major scientific libraries of Poznań. It enables an optimal usage of the libraries' resources by utilising the technique of electronic data processing."
The statutory organs of the foundation are:
- The Assembly of Founders consisting of academies' rectors and other representatives of libraries- members of PFSL, which is a resolution taking organ which supervises the Foundation's activity.
- The Council of Foundation is an organ with the right of initiative and with opinion-controlling capacity in relation to the Board of the Foundation.
- The Board of the Foundation manages and represents it outside.

At this time, the basic tasks of the Foundation included:

- Choosing the software and hardware
- Purchasing the software and hardware,
- Installing the equipment in particular libraries,
- Implementing integrated library system in particular libraries
- Training the librarians in cataloguing in USMARC format,
- Training the librarians in operating the ILS,
- Training the system librarians and the administrators of the main web servers ,
- Providing the librarians with training materials,
- Supporting co-operation among libraries in Poznań as well as among library consortia,
- Current service and maintenance of the servers in the Poznań library network
- Solving technical and organisational problems connected with computerization in libraries.

In January 1997 implementation of an integrated computer library system in 11 major libraries and in ten of the of department libraries in academies and institutions which were the Founders of PFBN started, i.e. software and hardware were purchased and supplied. Simultaneously trainings for librarians employed in our libraries began. An integrated library system Horizon was purchased to serve the libraries belonging to the Poznań library network. In the first quarter of 1997, three servers containing 11 data bases for particular libraries, as well as one additional training base on each server, were supplied and started. A system administrator (a computer specialist) responsible for the current exploitation of the server, and a system librarian responsible for the library system, were employed at each server. Starting from the second quarter of 1997, supplies of IBM PC computers to libraries were initiated. Successively, further work stations were delivered, tested and then supplied to libraries.. In the first stage, 310 IBM PC computers were connected to servers. The process of implementation proceeded unevenly in different libraries. It depended on the size of a library, the staff skills, previous experience with computer library systems. One may conclude that it was finally completed after two years. This period was long enough to confirm the initial assumption about the necessity of legal authorisation of a consortium and the management structure presented above.

Extending the activity - cooperation with libraries from outside Poznań

Already at this stage, a natural need to cooperate with other libraries using Horizon system appeared. In November 1997, PFBN signed a cooperation agreement with other polish libraries using Horizon to automate library processes. The agreement accepted the name Biblioteka z Horyzontem (Coalition for Library with Horizon). In the document signed by 25 libraries, the sides agreed that the goal of the agreement is:
- mutual support in library automation,
- cooperation in exacting contracts from computer system suppliers,
- collective cataloguing in order to exclude repeating the same activities in many libraries and to create quickly a large database for our group,
- cooperation with other library groups, particularly with VTLS consortium, maintaining common data bases;
- coordination of retrospective conversion,
- coordination of electronic librarie projects;
- cooperation in gaining funds for realisation of collective goals.

After a few years, one must state that not all assumptions of those days have been realised. Some - probably because of the fact that the projects were premature and libraries burdened excessively with implementation of the system, others - because they were replaced by initiatives comprising a wider environment. The first ones may be well represented by electronic libraries, the latter by the central catalogue. It is worth noting that a distributed catalogue KaRo [4], created as an initiative of Library with Horizon, was included in NUKAT (Polish union catalogue) project [5] which prevented the libraries of the Coalition from building their own central catalogue. Undoubtedly, collective activities connected with system Horizon exploitation stood a test of time. I mean not only all the institutionalised forms of cooperation, but mainly the ones resulting from direct contacts among librarians at training and meetings of specialists employed in cataloguing departments, system librarians, library computer specialists and managers. From the Foundation point of view, it was not only extending the range of services with common manuals or an electronic magazine publishing, but also enlarging its range. At present, 52 libraries cooperate within Coalition for Library with Horizon.

Extending the range of activities - access to digital sources

The next stage of extending the range of consortium activities was, undoubtedly, coordination of EIFL-Direct project [6] on the area of Poland. EIFL-Direct started in the autumn 1999 at the moment when Open Society Institute - Budapest and EBSCO Publishing signed an agreement, the aim of which, was to establish an multi-national consortium providing its members with access to information in electronic form. This initiative - addressed mainly to the countries undergoing economic and political transformation- let scientists, politicians, students and other users of non-commercial libraries take advantage of information contained in chosen EBSCO bases.

On 15 May 2000, an agreement between Open Society Institute in Budapest, PFBN and the University Library in Poznań was signed. The agreement concerned organisation of EIFL Direct consortium in Poland [7]. According to the agreement, Polish coordinators' task was to inform the potential members of the consortium about its establishing and to present the conditions of membership, to gain sponsors and present periodical reports on the work progress in Open Society Institute. Soon, a tripartite agreement between the University Library in Poznań, Poznan Supercomputing and Networking Center and PFBN was signed. It concerned creating a library consortium which would realise access to magazines in an electronic version within EIFL-Direct project. Engaging PSNC was necessary due to KBN (The State Committee for Scientific Research) requirements referring to financing the project.
The goal of this agreement was to establish and serve a consortium (within EIFL-Direct) which would provide the authorised libraries with access to journals in electronic version. By the terms of the agreement, the Foundation committed itself to organising a consortium, representing it outside, dividing the costs, collecting the sums falling to each library in a total amount of 50% of the license costs, and transferring them onto the DDf Foundation account. The University library obliged itself to serve the consortium logistically, including distribution of CDs with databases. PSNC obliged itself to apply to KBN for financing 50% of the license value and to accept responsibility for installation, periodical updating and maintenance of a local copy of databases, as well as for starting and maintenance of programs enabling access to data bases within EIFL-Direct project.

Within promotional actions conducted from October 1999 by EBSCO, information materials on membership in the consortium were sent to over 200 institutions in Poland. They presented, among others, the conditions of license contract which provided:

- unlimited number of Polish institutions empowered to membership,
- unlimited access to information for the users of these institutions,
- unlimited number of simultaneous users,
- free training for librarians,
- access to administrative functions, such as bases usage, adding user groups and IP addresses, preparing individual search profiles in the bases.

During promotional actions of the consortium, the interested libraries obtained answers to their questions by e-mails and through the telephone. In the preliminary period, till April 2000, EBESCO enabled a trial access to databases. All libraries and scientific institutions in Poland could receive a free access to bases, registering their participation on the websites of EBSCO Publishing. 126 libraries joined the consortium at that time. Since April 2001 libraries which confirmed their definitive participation in the consortium have been obtaining individual passwords of access to bases. It let utilise fully the administrative tools available for individual members, such as: generating statistics of base usage for a parent institution, preparing individual profiles of base searching, adding user groups and IP addresses. The institutions which declared their participation in the consortium were sent license contracts and bills for a consecutive year of participation.

On a global scale, almost 2000 libraries (academic, medical, scientific, public, parliamentary and non-government organisations) from 39 countries were included in the project in 2000 . At the same time, certain threats appeared, resulting from differences in economic development, different organisational structures of libraries, their possibilities and abilities to organise themselves, i.e. to create national consortia, technological infrastructure. For many participants those were the first attempts to start cooperation, not necessarily international, but national or regional. Many of them were not even aware of the need for such a cooperation. In the majority of countries, it was impossible to collect the annual payment in the full height. Owing, merely, to financial engagement of Soros Foundation and a flexible policy of EBESCO Publishing, access to bases was continued. This situation concerned also Poland whose fees were decreased by 50 % on the basis of agreement between the national coordinator and EBSCO Publishing. If we accept bases usage as the criterion, Poland, in the third year of its activity, is the second largest participant (behind RSA) of EIFL-EBESCO project.

Although 2000 new positions were added to the original number of 3000 magazines, it was obvious that the offer of EIFL-Direct had to be widened with a group of journals not represented at all, or represented on a small scale, i. e. Research and Technology. At the beginning of 2001, EIFL consortium carried out an intense research in chosen institutions in order to examine the demand for information in the area of technical sciences and medicine. In consequence, a new program eifl-Science (eiflS&T) was started. On the basis of the data collected, tender was announced and after preliminary negotiations other publishing houses or information providers were invited to cooperation. These were: American Physical Society, Blackwell Publishing, Cambridge University Press, High Wire Press, Institute for Physics Publishing and ProQuest. Acting as a coordinator, PFBN presented Polish libraries with an offer defining preliminary conditions of access to journals of particular suppliers. At the

present moment, libraries which declared the will to participate were provided with a trial access to databases. It will last 3-6 months (during negotiations not all suppliers agreed on the suggested 6month trial). After this time libraries which will decide to continue cooperation will sign contracts for further periods.

EIFL project is not the only undertaking of PFBN as far as access to bibliographic and text sources is concerned. In 2001, cooperating with Biblioteka Główna Poznańskiej Akademii Medycznej (The Main Library of The Medical Academy in Poznań), we created a consortium of libraries with a medical or biological profile, interested in access to bilingual version of medical subject headings MeSH [8]. Currently, offers of further publishers are being prepared for Polish libraries (Nature, SourceOECD).

Extending the range of activities- equipment and service purchases

During a few years of its activities, PFBN announced tenders and purchased various products for its libraries either on its own initiative or as the answer to their demand. For many years, libraries have been purchasing, through the Foundation, library cards together, which not only allows them to reduce a unit price, but also to standardize their application and introduce procedures facilitating some activities, so far troublesome both for the readers and the personnel of libraries.

A spectacular example may be the tender, announced recently, on delivery of 100 workstations. Such a form of cooperation enables libraries, especially smaller ones, to make purchases at prices that would not be offered to them at a smaller scale investment. Relieving libraries from the difficult and burdensome administrative and legal procedures, as well as from long-lasting negotiations and, in many cases, shortening the time of waiting for a product or service, is also significant.

Extending the range of activities - Wielkopolska Biblioteka Cyfrowa (The Great Poland Digital Library)

PFBN is supervising and coordinating the work on the project of Wielkopolska Biblioteka Cyfrowa [9]. This project is also realised by Poznan Supercomputing and Networking Centre, research libraries and publishing houses of Poznań. Knowledge and experience of all the partners are the guarantee that WBC project will be successful.
It is assumed that WBC will consist of:
- A didactic library - assigned mainly for students, (containing, in the first stage, ca 2000 lectures and coursebooks, but also monographies and journals)
- A library of cultural heritage - containing the most valuable monuments of Polish literary output stored in Poznan libraries (in the first stage ca. 10000 works, such as manuscripts, old prints, letters, maps etc.)
- Regional library - containing literature connected with Poznań and Wielkopolska (The Great Poland) (ca. 6000 units in the first stage).
A pilot installation is supposed to start on October the 1st 2002.

Creating the groups dealing with computerization of publishing houses, purchases of specialist equipment and buying a licence or a copyright to published within the WBC project publications requires the means which are limited in case of the Foundation - a non-commercial institution supported only by its own resources or donations.

Without participation of sponsors, well-known, respected and rich companies, this project will be realised more slowly and in a limited range. Therefore, the Foundation obliged itself to gain both financial and material resources for the needs of WBC. I hope that with the beginning of the academic year 2002/2003 the first readers will be able to look through the pages of works belonging to WBC.

Directions of development - where to?

Before we outline the possible future activities of PFBN, let us have a look at how others deal with that idea. I am forced to restrict myself to analysis (unfortunately, a brief one) of merely one aspect of library consortium activities in a few countries- i.e. to purchasing the access to electronic resources. As we know, purchases in Poland are done, either individually, or collectively by libraries within a consortium organised by or for one publisher or supplier. In the latter case, one library usually commits itself to the role of a co-ordinator and takes over all the duties connected with administrative, legal and financial service of the whole undertaking. [10] There appear two questions: 'Is such operating mode optimum on the national scale?' and 'Is the sum of local optima the same as the global optimum?' Let us look, following Bo Ohrstrom, on the way Scandinavians (Tab. 1) deal with it.[11] In Sweden, Finland, Iceland and Norway access purchases are coordinated on national scale by small, specially established groups.

Tab. 1

	Sweden	Norway	Finland	Iceland	Denmark
Population	8,9	4,5	5,5	0,283	5,3
Central financing	yes	no	yes	yes	yes
Personnel (Staff)	3	2,5-3	6	1	1,5
Contracts	26	11	28	14	33
Number of institutions	71	115	106	all	105
Elsevier	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Springer	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Academic Press	yes	no	yes	yes	yes

One might suppose that the presented model proves itself in the countries where the total population equals only 60% of the Polish population. Let us see, therefore, what is the situation in the country which has a 50% higher population than Poland - in the United Kingdom. Frederick J. Friend [12] writes in Information Technology and Libraries: "Regular discussion among librarians has led to a realization of the common problems they face in dealing with price increases and one common solution in the formation of consortia to negotiate for the purchase of books and journals. In the United Kingdom, the traditional library organizations - the Standing Conference of National and University Libraries (SCONUL), the Consortium of University Research Libraries (CURL), and the regional groupings of libraries-have not taken on this role because of the time commitment required for successful negotiation, but they have supported the formation of new organizations for consortial purchasing. The key organization for the purchase of electronic resources in the United Kingdom is the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC)., JISC has sponsored the

purchase of a wide variety of electronic resources". Further the author states: "Negotiation of purchasing deals at a national level is not easy, but the right organizations now exist in the United Kingdom to achieve good value for libraries in their purchase of electronic publications".

And in Poland? Starting from the turn of the 80s and 90s, a considerable increase in the number of students has been overlapping with constant changes in information technologies. In consequence of low financial means that are at disposal of science in our country, a common access to information becomes more distant.

In view of the fact that publishers and information suppliers unite themselves, consolidation of consumers is indispensable. Individual libraries possess relatively limited possibilities to purchase and spread information. They are usually weak partners in negotiations with suppliers of information sources dictating the prices. Only a consortium of libraries as an organisation based on a formal agreement acquires a significant negotiation power and lets reduce the costs of information purchase on the global market. It is confirmed by experience of numerous American and western European library consortia, often operating for tens of years. At the same time, one may state that the previously mentioned international EIFL-Direct program is transformed into an international consortium, whose subjects are national consortia and not individual libraries.

Taking the above into consideration, I think that it is necessary to establish a consortium that, in order to fulfil various information needs of all the users by means of library cooperation and sharing the resources-will be elaborating and supplying modern and effective programs and information services. It will be the answer to challenges resulting from creation of an information society in Poland. Establishing such a national consortium will be the means to ensure the optimum conditions for the activities of PFBN, it will, therefore become one of the most important tasks of the Foundation in the nearest future.

The presented above history of PFBN shows clearly that the range of its activities, as well as the area of operation have been changing . The Foundation evolved from a consortium oriented on servicing a library system acting on a limited area (according to the classification presented in the introduction the first one), to a consortium combining all the mentioned categories. PFBN will, probably, be continuing basic trends of its activity, yet the major weight will be shifting towards electronic resources service which is indicated by the analysis of its previous activities and by the global tendencies.

* The opinions presented in the article are the reflection of personal author's experience and are not always in agreement with the official views of PFBN.

Footnotes
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