Chapter 98
Economics of Resource Sharing via Library Consortia

Arnold Mwanzu

International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE), Kenya

ABSTRACT

The chapter seeks to discuss the role played by library consortia in resource sharing among libraries, media organizations, and archives. It will outline the existing models that are functioning effectively especially in the developing countries and discuss the best practices. The target audience being libraries, archives, and media. While unravelling the economics of resources sharing among the information players, the chapter will address the challenges and opportunities in supporting research, teaching, and learning. The value of the book chapter is that it will give an insight into the development of library consortia and their significance as opportunities to provide equal access to research in libraries, archives, and media. The chapter will also provide a comprehensive comparison between library consortia in developing countries and developed countries highlighting how resource sharing in developing countries has helped to bridge the gap of information access, thereby showing progressive development.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of library consortia in the modern era is touted as a proactive and reactive response to the risk of libraries being rendered irrelevant in the ever-growing information industry. To accommodate all information user audiences, Libraries have undergone a dynamic shift from old-fashioned shelves of books to virtual information access enablers. The timely revolution has seen libraries come together to cost share the acquisition of electronic resources and in turn strategically place Libraries in a position to maintain a competitive edge. Resource sharing via consortia is a mode of library operation whereby part of the functions of a library are shared among several libraries with the aim of maximizing the availability of materials and services at an affordable minimum expense. The different objectives of library consortia include collective acquisition of electronic resources, capacity building and continuous professional development of human capital, collective policy and standard formulation etc. It may also involve resource sharing for instance of bibliographic databases, creation and use of a union catalogue,

sharing digitization equipment, expertise and services. Resource sharing via a library and information service network calls for automation of services, efficient communication and effective cooperation.

Muhammed (2012), considers resource sharing to denote a working arrangement where two or more libraries make their collection available to their respective users as well as enabling collective sharing of respective functions. Kent & Galvin (1977), define a resource as a thing/ person/ action to which one turns to and in time of need. Sharing on the other hand refers to apportioning, rationing or contributing something that is owned to benefit others. In the library, archives, media and information services context resource sharing has been alluded to sharing of; information, personnel, equipment, expertise and services.

Most libraries are well aware of the current predicament of competition in the information industry and that they cannot entirely satisfy their users with the information resources they have. With these, library networking has stepped up to bring about innovative ideas that can overcome the situation. According to UNESCO (1985), the networking and resource sharing functions of a consortium are: Cooperative acquisition; assignment of specialization in material acquisition; Co-oriented subscription; Exchange of duplicate holding; Cooperative cataloguing; Inter-library loan; Reciprocal borrowing privileges; and Reference and/ or referral service. UNESCO also classifies the following as activities of resource sharing: Union catalogue of books and periodicals; Indexing and abstracting services; List of new arrivals on accessions/ acquisitions list; Bibliography development; Network newsletters; Directories and inventories; Manuals; Translation service; Users interest survey; Joint research projects; In-service personnel training; Workshops and meetings; Marketing of network services; reprographic services etc.

Today, majority of the libraries and archives predominantly in the less developed and developing countries are considering and preferring cooperative acquisition to overcome the challenge of insufficient and diminishing budgets. Library consortia are the best solutions for establishing a formal structure regarding resource sharing. This must be backed up with formal agreements and memoranda of understanding for each participant library to ensure commitment and compliance. Cooperative collection development of participant libraries and archives can easily lead to acquisition of many relevant collections for member institution as compared to individual institution collection development. Also, important to note is that access to resources is increasingly considered more important than collection building. The consortia models that exist are meant to facilitate wider access to electronic resources at affordable costs and with the best terms of licensing.

There is no doubt that information technology has in the recent past made significant progress especially in the library and information domain. Through technology the current information handling procedures have become appropriate for supporting and encouraging the sharing of resources among libraries and information centers. The pace at which technology is advancing shows no signs of waning therefore libraries and information centers find it worthwhile to explore networking possibilities made practicable by the advent of consortia. There has been notable renewed interest in cooperation of libraries for communal benefits, conspicuously at national and international levels. Both big and small libraries survive the competitive information era by accelerating cooperation with other information providers so as to maximize their resources and services. The 'progress through partnership' with other libraries and information centers helps to deal with the ever-increasing costs of information resources and tremendous growth of literature. Collaborative advocacy and marketing via consortia helps to achieve optimal utilization of subscribed information resources. Consortia can work together to explore technological solutions and meet needs of users thus resulting in user satisfaction.

Library consortia are networks which exist primarily to mitigate the challenge of the diminishing library budgets and to lessen the operational cost of libraries, archives and documentation centers.

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