

Medical Academic Libraries in Romania: Co-operation and Partnerships in support of the educational and research policies

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Abstract:

One of the solutions found by libraries to the various changes and challenges in the information society has proved to be co-operation. Libraries in the Western countries have become aware very fast of the benefits it can bring and formed partnerships and collaborations which have allowed them to share a wide range of resources. In other countries the advantages of co-operation were not understood so quickly and when this finally happened things moved very slowly, or the co-operation ideas could not be put into practice due to various reasons. In Romania after a few failed attempts of creating a consortium for the acquisition of electronic resources, the "Anelis Plus" consortium has been recently formed and it includes Universities, Institutes of Research and Development and Central University Libraries; libraries are now collaborating to create the national information and documentation system. Even if Romanian libraries might not represent the best example in terms of co-operation, our research conducted within 2007-2012 at the level of medical academic libraries on the modernization of their services and the information practices of their users together with the results of an interview-based study conducted within January - April 2013 among their directors revealed a different attitude towards co-operation, these libraries having a series of initiatives which demonstrate their openness and their wish to become involved in common projects. This paper presents the experience of Romanian medical academic libraries during the last two decades with regard to their co-operation initiatives and refers to their participation as members of "Anelis Plus" in the implementation of educational and research policies.

Keywords: medical academic libraries, co-operation, consortium projects, Romania

1 INTRODUCTION

The changes in the information environment have called for a reconsideration of libraries' role and functions and a re-thinking of the ways in which these structures can respond to the challenges brought by the new technologies and adapt to the current information needs and expectations of users. The new technologies have come with many innovative modalities for libraries to provide information services and also with multiple opportunities for developing and extending the co-operation relations.

The characteristics of the digital information society require the application of new strategies in the information organizations for an efficient use of all types of resources. The current context provides many opportunities through the Web 2.0 technologies which support collaboration at library level.

For the last decades, in the academic library world especially, many co-operation relations and partnerships formed between similar or different libraries, between libraries and other departments within the university or external organizations. The inter-library loan agreements, acquisition and cataloguing in co-operation, partnerships for supporting the distance learning, consortia for the acquisition of electronic resources, digitisation projects, the development of standards, etc. are just some of the most common examples. The advantages are numerous for libraries, starting from improvement and extension of information resources for users, to promotion of library services and increased funds.

Thus one of the academic libraries' responses to the limited financial resources and to the need for innovation has been to enter various partnerships and collaborations. Innovation is facilitated by collaboration and discussing about collaborative innovation. J. Rowley notes that "Organizations need to build close relationships not only with customers, but also with other organizations in their supply chain and beyond". (Rowley, 2011: 164) The quality of library services depends presently also on their sharing capacity and those libraries that prove they have the exercise of co-operation relationships and develop a partnership culture will certainly enjoy success on the information market. But co-operation involves a complex interaction between the parties involved and things might prove difficult sometimes.

Libraries in the Western developed countries understood the advantages that the co-operation agreements and partnerships can bring and the literature is rich in examples illustrating the various ways in which co-operation was put into practice. (Rader, 2001; Rockman, 2001; Wilding, 2001) In other countries, among which Romania, the benefits of co-operation were not understood so quickly and when this finally happened things moved very slowly, or the co-operation ideas could not be put into practice due to different reasons.

2 ROMANIAN MEDICAL ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

Romanian academic libraries have undergone major changes within the recent years and the transformation was significant for many of them in terms of modernization of their information services for users and also of their facilities.

In Romania, the mission of academic libraries is mainly to actively participate in the education and research process by supporting the didactic and research activities carried on by students, teaching staff and researchers through the development of an adequate info-documentary basis and the facilitation of access to all these traditional and electronic information resources. (Madge, 2013) Along the years they have tried to fulfil this mission.

However co-operation has not proved to be the strong point of Romanian academic libraries although the lack of co-operation has been noted (Stoica, 2005) and the development of stronger co-operation relationships has been indicated as a necessary step in the context of the implementation of new managerial processes. (Porumbeanu, 2006) Consequently, we cannot mention many co-operation agreements or partnerships for the last decades, but we can however give as an example the collective catalogue ROLiNeST (Romanian Libraries Network in Science and Technology) as a successful initiative in this regard. Considering this

situation we decided in 2011 to conduct a research in order to investigate the co-operation aspects in Romanian academic libraries.

Medical academic libraries in Romania have had a similar evolution in terms of modernization of their information services to the other libraries in the country, but the research we conducted between 2007 and 2012 (Porumbeanu Madge, 2013) at the level of these structures revealed a different attitude towards co-operation, these libraries having a series of initiatives which have demonstrated their openness and their wish to become involved in common projects. In supporting the educational and research policies, these libraries must meet the information needs of different categories of users (students, teaching staff, Ph.D. candidates, researchers, physicians from the university clinics and hospitals) and even if they are not all at the same level of development and modernization, starting with the years 2000 they have been involved in co-operation projects to which we will refer later.

The most modern and in fact a model for all academic libraries in Romania is the Library “Valeriu Bologa” of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Iuliu Hațieganu” in Cluj-Napoca which according to its director, Ioana Robu, “competes and even surpasses in information resources and services similar libraries in Europe and in the world”. (Robu, 2011 as cited in Nesfântu, 2011: 3) This library has started since the 1990s to organize specialization courses for information specialists in the medical academic libraries, focusing on new aspects of information and documentation in the biomedical sciences. And in the following years it initiated important co-operation projects together with other major medical libraries in Romania, mainly the Central Library of the “Carol Davila” University of Medicine and Pharmacy – Bucharest and the Library of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Gr. T. Popa” Iași.

3 CO-OPERATION INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS AT THE LEVEL OF ROMANIAN MEDICAL ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

Notable co-operation ideas begun to appear at the level of medical academic libraries in Romania in the years 2000 when three major medical libraries (from Cluj-Napoca, Bucharest and Iași) had the initiative of starting important projects such as “Who’s Who in the Universities of Medicine and Pharmacy in Romania”, presentations of the teaching staff from these institutions or “The Handbook of Medical Information and Documentation”, a collaborative project aimed at librarians and students from these universities (Porumbeanu, 2009a) but unfortunately the progress was faint and they simply remained ideas. Thus until 3-4 years ago at the level of Romanian medical academic libraries co-operation was especially represented by inter-library loans, mainly doctoral theses, but also books and journal articles.

There have been some attempts of shared acquisition of full text databases, but they failed due to the different interpretations of the financial laws by the universities. At present three medical academic libraries (from Cluj-Napoca, Iași and Tîrgu Mureș) have agreed to buy together AccessMedicine from McGraw Hill and UpToDate.

A first initiative for establishing a consortium of Romanian medical academic libraries was the partnership project from the years 2000, “Free Medical Access for Documentation, Information and Training” but it didn’t work.

Then at the level of academic and research libraries in Romania discussions for setting up a consortium started on October 2, 2007 when the first meeting for establishing the Association “the Consortium for the Acquisition of Electronic Resources in Romania / Consorțiul de

Achiziție a Resurselor Electronice în România (CARER)” took place. A second meeting took place on June 23, 2008 when the Memorandum and Articles of Association were approved and the founding members were three central university libraries, the Romanian Academy Library, five universities in Romania and three research institutes. On 30 July 2008 the consortium has acquired legal personality and was registered in the Register of Associations and Foundations at the District 1 Court in Bucharest. The main objectives of the consortium were to achieve a common framework for co-operation among libraries and education and research institutions with the aim of acquiring electronic information resources and to develop a national digital data base of the scientific production in universities and research institutions for increasing its visibility. Unfortunately once again things didn’t work and by the end of 2009 the consortium didn’t have any activity besides collecting the fee from the member institutions. The Library “Valeriu Bologa” of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Iuliu Hațieganu” in Cluj-Napoca and the Central Library of the “Carol Davila” University of Medicine and Pharmacy – Bucharest participated as well in the initial actions to establish this consortium for the acquisition of electronic information resources.

Despite these failed attempts of co-operation at a consortium level, another similar co-operation initiative was launched on September 5, 2011 when the first meeting of the *Association of the Universities, Research and Development Institutes, and Central University Libraries in Romania / Asociația Universităților, a Institutelor de Cercetare - Dezvoltare și a Bibliotecilor Centrale Universitare din România – Anelis Plus* took place. The association has currently more than 80 members and medical academic libraries such as the ones in Cluj-Napoca and Iași participate as well through their universities as partners in this national project. This professional and scientific association works towards representing the information and documentation interests of its members by promoting and supporting the implementation of the educational and research policies. The main objectives of the “Anelis Plus” consortium are the acquisition of electronic information and documentation resources for supporting education, research and innovation and the development of a national repository of electronic documents. In fact it is a continuation of the “Anelis” project, conducted by the Ministry of Education within 2009-2011, which ensured subscriptions at national level to the main full text packages (ScienceDirect, Springer, Wiley Interscience, Proquest, EBSCO Host, etc.). In May 2012 the consortium initiated and requested funding for a three years project, “Continuous National Electronic Access to Scientific Literature and New Ways to Support and Promote the Romanian Research System – Anelis Plus” whose objective is to develop the national research capacities and integrate the Romanian research development innovation system to the international scientific environment. Thus, within this recent co-operation initiative Romanian libraries, including the medical academic ones collaborate now to create the national information and documentation system.

The “RoBiblioMed” database is by far the most significant project of co-operation between medical academic libraries, namely the indexing of journal articles from Romanian medical journals not indexed in Medline. It is coordinated by the Library “Valeriu Bologa” of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Iuliu Hațieganu” in Cluj-Napoca. It uses MeSH and it will be available in Romanian and English, with the mention that the MeSH terms are only in English. The project is at the testing phase and will be probably ready in October 2013. The contributing libraries will index in parallel certain journals, the titles to be indexed having already been chosen based on the library holdings. (Robu, 2013).

Regarding the Romanian MeSH, the Library “Valeriu Bologa” of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Iuliu Hațieganu” in Cluj-Napoca is seeking funding to develop the project of the MeSH translation at the national level, which will also be an excellent example of co-operation.

It should also be noted that over the years the major medical academic libraries in Romania proved availability for research. They participated in studies (Porumbeanu, 2009a, 2009b, 2010) regarding their users, the organizational culture or the impact of the new technologies on their information services and the results revealed also their desire to co-operate and start common projects.

The results of a recent interview-based study on co-operation relations conducted within January - April 2013 at the level of academic library directors in Romania, among which there were also medical library directors, indicate once again these libraries’ openness for co-operation. In this regard, we can mention the answers to some of the questions. Asked if their library is involved in any partnership with other departments within the university, with other libraries or organizations, the medical library directors gave a positive answer and as examples they referred to projects at the level of the universities through which they received funds for equipments and specialized software. They all declared that in the future they intend to initiate partnerships agreements. Asked about the collaboration and the library involvement in the research activities conducted by the university, the respondents referred to the support offered to the research teams through the reference service and also the library staff participation in research projects and in conferences. There were also references to the applications of these libraries to obtain European funds for different projects. The medical library directors acknowledged the advantages of being members in the “Anelis Plus” consortium. Asked about collaborations in promoting health, one library director said they limit themselves to promoting the information services and the study programmes (the educational offer) of their university at the level of high-schools in their area. The participants mentioned the support offered by the library in the didactic and research activities and emphasized the collaborations with all the departments of the university. Other examples of networks, collaborations and partnerships in which their libraries are involved were those related to the inter-library exchange and loan with other Romanian medical academic libraries and exchanges with similar libraries from abroad.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Co-operation practice has become a key tool in the activity of academic libraries which can lead to increasing the quality of information service and innovation through mobilization and capitalization of all available resources. In order to be able to support the educational and research policies in the current digital environment, academic libraries must be open, take risks, get involved in projects beyond their traditional activity, initiate and develop co-operation agreements and partnerships.

During the last decades Romanian medical academic libraries have proved to be open for co-operation. Even if not all the co-operation projects they started or were involved in at national level materialized or were successful, the perspectives brought by the participation in the “Anelis Plus” consortium and the “RoBiblioMed” project can lead to an active involvement and contribution of these libraries to the education and research strategy in Romania, to the development of the national repository of electronic documents, and to the creation of the national information and documentation system.

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