Practical experiences of resource sharing activities in the Islamic Consultative Assembly Library (ICAL)

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Abstract:

Resource sharing is a concept which includes many cooperative activities between libraries and other information centers. Advent of IT and ICT's have opened up new opportunities for greater cooperation. So digital interactions, collaborative approaches to digital repositories, providing Content Consortiums and other practical experiences for sharing resources are promising development in the recent years. Nowadays, the Islamic Consultative Assembly Library (ICAL) is participating in the Iranian Consortium of National Content (ICNC) which is trying to prepare an appropriate access to digital resources for all members in national and even international level. On the other hand, the Digital Parliamentary library of Iran, known as "RASAN", provides the users with the digital images of more than half of the ICAL manuscripts. The numbers of digital images are rapidly increasing. This paper introduces practical experiences of some important resource sharing activities in the Islamic Consultative Assembly Library (ICAL) by focusing on digital activities and the Iranian Consortium of National Content (ICNC).

Keywords: Resource Sharing, Islamic Consultative Assembly Library (ICAL), Iranian Consortium of National Content (ICNC), Digital Islamic Consultative Assembly Library

Introduction

Libraries are heart of the organizations due to their information resources, and librarians are knowledge administrators who know the importance of information, knowledge transfer and resource sharing. Today, organizations should empower their libraries not only for themselves but also for promoting inter-library services, for transferring of knowledge. In addition, digital libraries in preparing knowledge-based society and distribution of information through communities with transmission of knowledge in the digital environment (with utilizing IT and ICT infrastructure) are appropriate options.

On the other hand, Technology has become a significant change agent in all aspects of our lives. Now, we are more aware of how we communicate, how we share, how we interact with people, and how we learn. The evaluation of these effects of knowledge on societies is important.

Knowledge work requires not just people but also tools and resources. Information and communication technologies have introduced a wide array of new tools to support knowledge work. IT is useful in most stages of the knowledge sharing process, and it is used for content management. Internet, IT, and ICT developments have facilitated resource sharing activities. Advent of ICT has opened up new opportunities for proper mutual cooperation among libraries.

As digital information spheres are developing, librarians must adapt resource sharing policies, practices, and procedures in libraries. Although interlibrary loan (ILL) specialists provide an invaluable service, proper document delivery and resource sharing activities are needed. On the other hand a library consortium is a promising development for resource sharing.

Resource Sharing:
The rapid growth of electronic resources and the complexities of copyright concerns have made it difficult to obtain library materials freely. So, interlibrary loan (ILL), document delivery (DD) services and resource sharing have become more and more popular in recent years (Yao & Zeng, 2012).

In the age of digital evolution and escalating price of electronic information, resource sharing is critical for effective functioning of libraries. Digital resources and networking have created new opportunities for the organization of services and maintaining virtual/digital libraries. The goals of resource sharing include:
-         facilitating users to have better access to library holdings or services;
-         positive effect on library budget;
-         enhancing of library resources and information to benefit users;
-         enabling the users to be more aware regarding the resources not available in their own library;
-         advocate and support creative use of library/information resources; and,
-         develop shared policies for inter library loan (ILL), special collections and non-circulating materials.

Proper technology advancements, electronic catalogues and indexes for print resources available in the library, standardized software, hardware and databases, proper policies and implementation rules, preparing manuals for operations and training staffs and end-users, etc. are some of the basic requirements for effective resource sharing activities (Manjunatha, 2003, pp. 27-28).

Nowrouzi Chakoli (2012) offers that: "The issue of cooperation between library centers is not a new one. The issue of resource sharing was raised in the 70s but past facilities varied with modern ones. Today, in addition to the technical facilities and hardware in this regard, the cultural issue is also important. The first question in sharing the resources is the consent of organizations. Library centers should prefer group interests over their individual ones."

 Posner (2012) believes that: "Librarians are in a good position to understand and mediate among all stakeholders so that individual and societal interests in learning and in creating new knowledge are ultimately served. Instead of merely minimizing risks to their institutions, they should, instead, lead discussions of how to improve the system for everyone. Therefore, it is vital that librarians make all parties – including the public – understand why open, free, convenient resource sharing is crucial to scholarly communication and popular culture, and to protect what is at stake – the intellectual development of individuals and society – when it is threatened".

About resource sharing barriers, Seal (1998) pointed out that: "In spite of the benefits of international resource sharing, the actual act of collaboration is sometimes easier said than done because of a number of barriers. These include (1) the simple problems of distance and multiple time zones which can hinder communication; these have been overcome to a great extent through fax and electronic mail; (2) inadequate human resources to carry out international projects; educating staff and re-ordering priorities are required; (3) insufficient funding, a major difficulty that can sometimes be resolved with foundation and/or government support; (4) inadequate technology, incompatible computer systems, or poor telecommunications infrastructure; additional funding and planning are needed to mitigate these potentially serious difficulties; (5) a lack of international standards for bibliographic description, record format, and exchange of data are all limiting factors; only concerted efforts by influential international organizations such as IFLA can someday resolve these obstacles".

Islamic Consultative Assembly Library (ICAL)
Islamic Consultative Assembly Library (ICAL) with a history of one hundred years is one of the fundamental institutions of Iranian contemporary civilization. With the establishment of Constitution in Iran (1906), some of the intellectual Parliament representatives suggested to dedicate a building to a library in order to gather essential sources of knowledge for the Parliament members. It was the first Asian Parliamentary Library.
Establishing this library due many problems faced with the impasse in the first effort. However, in 1908, the educated representatives succeeded to ratify a legal matter in this regard.
Growth and development of the various library collections, documents and books necessitated the administrators to construct a vast library in 1962 which suited to multilateral user's needs. In 1984, the former Senate library was added to ICAL.
In 1996, based on a letter approved by the parliament, the library titled "Library, Museum and Document Center of the Islamic Consultative Assembly".
Today, the library with the use of modern equipments and rich resources especially in the field of Iranian Studies has achieved an honourable stand not only in Iran but also in the Middle East.
The library along with delivering information services to researchers, and library patrons, try in updating and delivering digital services to national and global end-users, too. Expert librarians, technical engineers and computer mans, work together in order to prepare digital services for public, interested public and specialists. One of the main divisions in ICAL, in which the main goal is preparing digital services, is "Information Technology Division". We will briefly review this division in the following:

Information Technology Division:
ICAL benefits from most updated facilities in the Information Technology Division and using new technologies in order to prepare and deliver information services to the wide range of end users. The major activities of this unit are divided in three sub-divisions:
-        Technical Division; including network, software and hardware;
-        Digitization Division; including production, maintenance and dissemination of digital contents; and,
-        Services to Clients Division; including Internet services and library databases.

Technical Division:
Along with preparing a suitable context for the internal network and Internet, all matters relating to maintenance of servers and storage of digital products, maintenance of all computers in different parts of the library as well as existing databases, bibliographic

databases, digital library, office automation, articles database and some other activities take place in Technical Division of ICAL.

Among these services, preparation of the network (LAN) and (WAN), Storage and Backup System (SAN), technical support from library website, with offering full texts of the most important sources of manuscripts, important papers, old editions, etc. have been done in this division.

Hardware and Software equipments:

Hardware equipments:

In order to prepare a digital picture form manuscripts, old printed copies, detailed parliament proceedings and typographies, printed books and publications, modern book scanners are being used, which have a high quality in accordance with world standards to scan and prepare digital copies of resources.

Software equipments:

Digital library software is the main core and most important technology. Digital library software for supplying different performances consists of production, organizing and preservation, searching and retrieving with web server and operating system. Having proper knowledge of expected features related to digital library software, can help in decision making for better digitization. Features of one digital library software consist of supporting various documents and frameworks, supporting the metadata, making online and up to dated content and storage, search and retrieval (metadata, full text), multi-language support, supporting interactions, reactions, access and application management, managing collection and support from international standards like XML-Unicode. The digital ICAL software (RASAN) is selected with accordance to universal standards and protocols.

Digitization Division:

The preservation of digital objects is a new and complex area. By their nature, such objects are unlikely to remain accessible or usable over time without on-going intervention.

So, considering the high importance of existed resources at the parliament library such as valuable manuscripts, old publications, and other resources, the library has undertaken the responsibility of producing microfilms from these resources based on works' importance and preference.

In 1960's, the Digital Resources Unit was founded with no advanced equipment to protect the manuscripts against various damages and facilitated services for researchers. ICAL equipment with modern facilities has accelerates providing microfilms and digital images in recent years.

Today, in addition to making suitable microfilms from sources, the digital copy also prepared with the best quality, which rendering services to clients frequently is done with this digital copy.

So nowadays, ICAL equipped with modern facilities and providing microfilms and digital images, has been accelerated. The new equipment not only makes the least damage to the resources, but also the images are so fine that the original copies are not required. The Digital Unit has provided digital images of more than 24,000 manuscripts. It is worth noting that in addition to providing internal network library services, many other online services have been offered by library website (www.ical.ir).

For the time being, access to RASAN (ICAL's Digital Library) with more than 14,000 manuscripts has been provided for researchers on the website www.dl.ical.ir. It is worth mentioning that RASAN has achieved the first rank among the Islamic libraries regarding the number of online manuscripts.

The ICAL e-materials, especially e-manuscripts are accessible to the researchers all over the world through the website. In order to introduce and reveal the manuscripts more effectively, the library has been providing some images of them which are easily available with a good quality.[1]

Digitization Manuscripts as treasures:
Manuscripts recall bright periods of flourishing science and culture in Iran and Islam. Iranian and Islamic written heritages include all fields of knowledge such as philosophy, history, medicine, mathematics, music, geography, astronomy, etc.

To guard them, the ICAL administrators have attempted not only to provide the complete list of the library manuscripts, but also to rewrite them in order to make them accessible for researchers. In order to introduce and reveal the manuscripts more effectively, the library has been providing some microfilms and images of them which are easily available to the researchers. Protecting these incredible achievements help researchers to know more about the precious history. Learning more about this heritage can illuminate the dark corners of our history.

Manuscripts are tangible and might be damaged during studying and lamination thus digitalization is a proper strategy for better preservation. On the other hand, for sharing and transforming the tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge, and letting all researches, scholars, students and even interested public in studying and surveying these manuscripts, and realizing the scientific ideas of these unique materials, it was proposed to make a digital copy and let all people have equally access to these sources. With reviewing these resources, new aspects of science history, in Iran and Islamic countries might be discovered while all can study whatever their ancestors has written.

Services to clients:
All information and digital resources in libraries are being provided to clients. In addition to providing library services on the internal network and various databases, many services through the library website address (www.ical.ir) are also offered.

During the last two years significant efforts have been done in this area, part of which is as follows:
- Digitization of manuscripts, lithographies, typographies and old periodicals for better access and better preservation;
- Exploitation of digital library RASAN for the time being and making it accessible;
- Online publishing detailed discussions of the National Assembly and the Islamic Assembly from beginning and updating in three formats HTML, PDF and photo in the library website and the two versions of CDs have been released;
- In addition to the collections of rare and invaluable manuscripts, printed books and documents, there is an incredible collection of 5000 valid periodicals in ICAL. The digital images of some old press are also available;
- Sending books (in PDF format), which are published by Library publication center to professors, researchers and scholars inside and outside the country via email;
- Etc.

The Iranian Consortium of National Content (ICNC)
One of the practical experiences for resource sharing in Iran is National Content Consortium (NCC) which is working and trying to prepare an appropriate access for all members in national and international level. NCC outlook is purposeful policymaking and providing

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[1] The resolution of images is 600 dpi.

appropriate infrastructure, through coordinating the consortium members in order to improve the collection procedures, convert, organize, and data providing processes.

Providing technical and cultural infrastructure, improving the participation of content owners, providing standards for presentation of national digital content and introduction of contents globally are the main objectives of NCC.

Background of Consortium

Integrated access to the existing Persian contents in the country has been a longstanding concern and different centers on the basis of their responsibilities and capabilities have taken certain measures to accomplish this task. Some of these measures include the plan of integration of content in the Tebyan Cultural and Information Institute or the implementation of the Haram Plan in the National Library and Archives of Iran (NLAI) or any other measure in the field of production and organization of content underway in the Iranian Supreme Council of Information or the Iranian Ministry of Science, Research and Technology.

However, it seems that the Iranian user has to hit different sites and visit various search engines in order to gain the desired content, but may not really gain the desired content. Due to this very reason and in order to prepare a suitable ground for the user to be able to gain access to the desired content and at the same time by protecting the intellectual property rights of authors and publishers, the Tebyan proposed the establishment of the Consortium of National Content in 2008.

Tayerani (2012) reports that: "In November 2011, the Consortium port (http://icnc.ir) officially began its activities and then it provided services such as: 'ask the librarian', 'document delivery service', 'membership', etc to enrich its content. Now in the Consortium port there are more than 900 thousand metadata and 160 thousand digital objects that are available to the users".

Launching the Consortium of National Content

The first gathering of the heads of organizations, libraries and information dissemination centers to discuss the objectives and necessity of the establishment of such a center as well as exploring the executive mechanisms was held on March 2, 2008.

The main objective of the establishment of such a consortium was to find out proper ways to achieve the following goals:

• Preparing a suitable ground for the researchers to have access to national content, particularly in Persian;
• Easy offering of and access to all kinds of information;
• Encouraging the preservation and protection of digital data sources;
• Protection of intellectual and material rights of the owners of content; and,
• Enhancing global awareness of valuable national knowledge.

The consortium of owners of content launched its official activities with the said meeting.

Ownership Bylaw

The ownership bylaw was studied and approved at various sessions of the council of representatives, according to which:

- all content ownership belongs to its owners;
- the Consortium is obligated to protect the right of ownership of content owners; and,
- the ownership of general contents belongs to the members all and none of the members is allowed to either publish or make profitable use of the contents without prior permission of the Steering Board as far as the consortium is in charge.

Bylaw for Membership in the ICNC and its Steering Board
According to the general structure of the consortium, approved by the council of representatives, ICNC includes a Steering Board (present members who have signed the preliminary agreement) that has the key role in policymaking. Content centers and owners interested in presenting their contents can apply for membership and present their contents to the users.

Mission and Vision
Mission
Preparing suitable cultural and technical grounds, winning the participation and cooperation of those having contents, using or defining the necessary standards for offering national digital contents and related services and introducing the National Content on international level.

Vision
The ICNC intends to provide access to content for its members and users on national and international levels. In order to do so, it is necessary to prepare the grounds and develop the necessary culture for offering data in digital form and through coordination among the members of the Consortium. Attempts should be made to improve the processes of collection, conversion, organization and protection and offering of data.

ICNC and ICAL
Members of the Iranian Consortium of National Content (ICNC) are a number of state-run centers each with certain restrictions and characteristics. Islamic Consultative Assembly Library (ICAL) is one of the ICNC members.
As it was already mentioned integrated access to the existing Persian contents in the country has been a longstanding concern. ICAL initially launched RASAN (ICAL digital library). With the passage of time and the growing need for aggregation and integration of the generated bibliographic databases and the digital objects, the ICAL felt more than ever the necessity of using software to simultaneously respond the users' needs. For this reason, it was decided that beside RASAN, AZARSA is also used to cover both the bibliographic data and provide the images of the sources regarding the features of the new software AZARAKHSH. The digital ICAL website address is: http://dlib.ical.ir.

Conclusion:
There are number of areas in the international arena about resource sharing in which librarians can and should focus their efforts. Perhaps the most benefit could be gained through efforts to promote inter-lending, in particular between developed countries and Third World nations.
Another is the preservation and conservation of rare, fragile, or deteriorating library collections which can be done with digitization, deacidification, etc.
Standards are a third area in bibliographic record format, subject headings, data exchange, preservation, and more are all being addressed in a process requiring many years, on an international scale by organizations such as IFLA (Seal, 1998).
Nowadays, libraries preserve various shapes and formats of information resources. E-resources and digital resources are more popular these days due to their distinct features. Digital Libraries (DLs) have its own strategy and process of disseminating and transferring articulated knowledge items, and librarians perceive this process as knowledge sharing.
In the recent years, the importance of Islamic and Iranian manuscripts as man's cultural heritage is realized, especially by researchers and scientists, who know, or want to know about the Islamic and Iranian science, the history of science, culture, literature and any fields

of knowledge. These informative documents reflect Muslims and Iranians thoughts and ideas which (part of them) are now translated to other languages. The key point here, is, how we can facilitate the access to these treasures and sharing resources for researchers and scientists in the country and even all over the world.

ICAL has now more than 900 thousand metadata and 160 thousand digital objects that are available to the users of ICNC and with the efforts of its secretariat and technical staff it is witnessing rapid growth of information on a daily basis. It can of course assist in promoting ICNC to the Consortium of Islamic countries and then to a global one.

Resources:

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