

Collaborations at the level of Romanian academic libraries

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Abstract. During the last two decades specialists underlined many times the need for a co-operation policy at the level of Romanian academic libraries. At the same time, the lack of co-operation and the inability of reaching a common direction have been pointed out and criticized. Despite the fact that Romanian libraries and librarians are not the best example in this area examples of collaborations between these libraries can be found during the past years. In order to investigate the different reasons for this lack of co-operation we decided to conduct a research at the level of academic libraries in this country. Part of this research consists in an analysis of the way in which collaborations in the space of Romanian academic libraries are reflected in some of the main LIS (Library and Information Science) Romanian journals. Another important part consists of a questionnaire survey at the level of academic libraries' directors. The paper presents some preliminary results of this research and comes with examples from one branch of a large academic library in Romania which refer only to collaborations with the academic staff, students, and the faculty, and which involve different kinds of resources available in the library.

Keywords. academic libraries, collaborations, librarians, co-operation, Romania

1. Introduction

Libraries, as all other types of organizations in the current society, cannot function in isolation, in the absence of some co-operation relations and agreements. Academic libraries especially are the type of structures which need to draft co-operation policies and apply them to all their relations developed with the university, the users and external organizations. Many academic libraries can be characterized as active, dynamic structures and the elements they have in common is openness to new, to change, to co-operation, participation in different networks and partnerships with all their types of resources. In order to be part of the global information and education market,

academic libraries need to have and prove the exercise of co-operation relations. The quality and the increase of quality of their information products and services are nowadays in close connection with their sharing capacity and their involvement in sharing and co-operation programmes which implies mobilization and capitalization of all their available resources. Recent library co-operation examples include acquisition and cataloguing in co-operation programmes, inter-library loan, consortia licensing agreements for electronic information resources, the development of standards, different types of partnerships with faculty, IT departments, users, other libraries or other types of structures. Stoica considers co-operation as the fundamental direction for the development of the library field. (Stoica, 2005: 46) The diversity and richness of co-operation relations also facilitate innovation and by analyzing innovations in information organizations Rowley brings many examples of co-operation at library level noticing the increased need for collaboration and underlines the difference between co-operation and collaboration. (Rowley, 2011: 260) In order to build co-operation programmes there are necessary elements such as unity of vision, recognition of the same values, common languages, and mutual respect (Stoica, 2001: 162) and maybe from the presence or the absence of these elements comes the degree of co-operation displayed by different libraries. Co-operation equals nowadays normality for academic libraries, it is one of the successful functioning models of nowadays, adequate for the present society requirements. The current management in libraries should pay special attention to the size of co-operation. In case of collaborations at the library level, which this paper has in view, elements such as trust, honesty and equity as well as the possibility of unpredictable outcomes are fundamental. (Von Krogh, 1998 cited by Rowley, 2011: 260)

2. Romanian academic libraries and co-operation

The need for a co-operation policy at the level of Romanian academic libraries has been underlined by specialists many times during the last two decades. At the same time, the lack of co-operation and the inability of reaching a common direction have been pointed out and criticized. Therefore, as underlined in another recent paper (Porumbeanu Madge, 2012) the libraries in Romania are not the most relevant organizations in terms of co-operation. The need for development and increase of co-operation at Romanian libraries' level was pointed out by the author since 2006 as part of the necessary steps in the implementation of the knowledge management process. (Porumbeanu, 2006) Upon analyzing the situation of academic libraries in Romania and the need for co-operation, communication and coordination, Stoica remarks that "the inability or the refusal to co-operate are not just managerial infirmities, but also forms of exclusion". (Stoica, 2001: 161)

Despite the fact that Romanian libraries and librarians are not the best example in this area there can be found examples of collaborations between these libraries during the past years. There has been progress and many changes have taken place in academic libraries in Romania but many co-operation ideas did not materialize and the progress has been more on a declarative level.

However, an important step took place when after a few failed attempts, it was finally established the consortium “Anelis Plus” for the acquisition of electronic information resources which includes universities, institutes of research and development and central universities libraries. In the years 2000 there were some co-operation initiatives at the level of academic medical libraries too but unfortunately they remained more at the stage of ideas. Clearly one could notice at some libraries, for example the Central Library of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Cluj-Napoca or the Central University Library “Carol I” Bucharest, a different attitude towards co-operation, openness, and innovation.

Among the most visible aspects leading to the lack of co-operation at the level of Romanian academic libraries we could mention the following:

- the management does not pay the necessary attention to co-operation, that is as a strategic issue;
- the lack of an adequate vision for the current times at the management level;
- the lack of an efficient process of communication in libraries;
- the lack of a more active integration of Romanian librarians in the national and international professional community;
- the lack of an active integration of Romanian academic libraries in the national and international info-documentary movement;
- the lack of initiatives for co-operation programmes.

3. Research on the theme of co-operation in academic libraries in Romania

Based on personal observations and the opinions of Romanian specialists expressed in literature two years ago we decided to conduct a research at the level of academic libraries in Romania on the theme of co-operation in order to identify the reasons for the lack of co-operation and to analyze the progress registered during the past years. The research was designed to include more studies:

- One study focuses on how collaborations at the level of this type of libraries are reflected in some of the main LIS Romanian journals;
- A second study is based on a survey at the level of academic library directors on collaborations, co-operation policies, partnerships.

As the research is not completed yet, in this paper we will refer just to the collaborations in the past years of one of the branches of a large academic library in Romania, The Central University Library “Carol I” Bucharest, namely the Faculty of Letters Library. The information was obtained through an interview with the head of this branch.

3.1. The Faculty of Letters Library

The Faculty of Letters Library is one of the most important and largest branches of the Central University Library “Carol I” Bucharest and it was the first automated branch library in the complex. Its beginnings date from the end of the 19th century (1892) but its current services are perfectly adapted to the information needs of the 21st century users. It has two reading rooms, one for

books and one for periodicals, and a direct access loan centre with automated operation (opened in 1996). Its Great Reading Room which was recently rehabilitated is included in the national heritage. According to the library report for 2012 it holds a collection of 123,275 volumes (Biblioteca Centrală Universitară "Carol I", 2013). Among the fields covered by its collection we can mention: General linguistics, Ethnography and folklore, Universal literature, Literature theory, Aesthetics, Arts, Culture and civilization, Romanian and foreign languages, Romanian and foreign literatures, Pedagogy, Psychology, Education, Library science, Communication and public relations, History and philosophy. The library holds an important research fund for humanities with some old and rare books and also a representative fund of Romanian and foreign serial publications. (Colecții. Biblioteca Litere, 2013) The statistics for 2012 indicate a total of 1,351 registered users, with 59,713 volumes consulted and 31,508 visits of users to the library. The current number of employees is of eight librarians.

3.2. Collaborations at the level of the Faculty of Letters Library

The collaborations established at the level of this library are mainly with the faculty as a whole, with its users, the students but also the teaching staff, and with external partners and they involve all types of resources available in the library (documentary collections, human resources, the reading room).

We mention below some of the activities resulted from these collaborations:

- The library has a close collaboration with every department of the faculty with the aim of completing its funds and establishing the collection development policy; nevertheless, we must mention that it is more a collaboration on a personal than on an institutional level;
- At the beginning of every academic year, the head of the library participates at the opening ceremony of every department and offers a short presentation of the library and of its resources for students; after that training sessions for smaller groups of students are offered on demand;
- Every month the library e-mails the list with the new documents that entered the collection to all the teaching staff; this initiative was very well received from its beginning;
- There is a continuing collaboration with the faculty which involves the Reading Room of the Library. This one is used for different events organized by the Dean's Office and the different departments (scientific conferences, alumni conferences, interviews recorded in the Reading Room with professors of the faculty or with cultural personalities or it is used for different cultural shows on TV, for book launchings and thematic exhibitions at the Open Gate Week or exhibitions with books of the teaching staff). Because of its extraordinary architecture, the Reading Room was used for recording cultural TV shows (some examples of shows recorded in the past: *Sfinți și meserii*, *Căutătorii de comori* etc.) and for the live broadcast of cultural shows on literature for the national TV channels.
- The Reading Room is also used for different cultural artistic manifestations of the students' associations.

- The Reading Room was also used following agreements with external partners for many advertisements.
- In 2011 the library participated in the cultural event called *Nocturna Bibliotecilor (the White Night of Libraries)*.
- It also participates in all professional and cultural activities initiated by the Central University Library “Carol I” Bucharest (for example *Strada de C’Arte*).
- In what concerns its participation in different research projects, there is a clear availability at the library level but during the last years the staff shortage made this very difficult to happen. The library supports in the documentation phase different research projects conducted by the teaching staff of the faculty. The library used to participate in all research works initiated by the Central University Library “Carol I” Bucharest or in the achievement of different journals indexes. For years it did this for *Revista Fundațiilor Regale*.
- Unfortunately the library cannot perform research works on its own at the moment because of the insufficient number of employees.
- An important component in the relation with the students is the assistance provided to them by the library in what concerns the bibliographies for the graduation papers and the master theses.
- The library also collaborates with colleagues from other branches (for the introductions of the collections in VUBIS or for donations and transfers).
- The collaboration library-university involves the electronic information resources to which the Central University Library “Carol I” Bucharest provides access in all branches, including the Faculty of Letters Library and all these resources can be accessed in the entire building of the University.

4. Conclusions

Co-operation management should be intensified in Romanian academic libraries. And the practice of co-operation should be developed not only at the level of organization as a whole, but at the level of every employee. The existence of an adequate culture in academic libraries in Romania could facilitate co-operation and consequently an increase of quality and innovation.

However, an improvement of the communication process would be necessary, at internal and external level, the identification of possible partners for co-operation programmes, and the development of an organizational culture which encourages co-operation, participation, initiatives, involvement and sharing, in short a culture of co-operation.

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