A Library Network is born across the sea

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Abstract. The presentation focuses on the establishment of a new thematic library network in Greece encompassing the majority of organized maritime orientated collections within special and/or University libraries: The Maritime Libraries Network (MarLiNet). The Network originated from the initial cooperation of three libraries with significant maritime collections, namely those of the Eugenides Foundation Library, the Aikaterini Laskaridis Foundation Library and the Library of the University of the Aegean about a decade ago. The interest of the three institutions to cooperate on the maritime transport collections resulted in the signing, in 2010, of a first Memorandum of cooperation and in the establishment of the "Triangle of Maritime Libraries" with the written intent for it to become one day a "Polygon". Today, the network consists of 8 libraries
1. Aikaterini Laskaridis Foundation
2. Eugenides Foundation
3. Hellenic Maritime Museum
4. Hellenic Naval Academy
5. National Technical University of Athens
6. University of Piraeus
7. University of the Aegean
8. Naval History Department (Hellenic Navy)

These libraries, possessing important maritime collections and sharing the common vision of improving their services to their research and general readers (users), meet regurarly on a monthly basis through their representatives in order to coordinate the actions of the network.

The paper provides an overview of the vision, the values and the main purposes underlying the cooperation of the MarLiNet. These are mainly:

a. Expanding the availability of titles to their users
b. Saving resources through a rationalized strategy of new acquisitions
c. Increasing the readability of their shipping collections; and
d. maximizing their visibility as important collections on maritime transport subjects, a step already taken through the on-going construction of a joint website.

In the above context, we are discussing in this presentation our short-term and long-term planning as well as our strengths, weaknesses and the challenges that this network offers. Finally, there is reference to some best practices and lessons learned by other relevant initiatives.

Keywords: Maritime Libraries Network, Libraries collaboration, Common collections, Consortium values, Collaborative website

1. Introduction

The transmission of knowledge and learning in today's digital era is a process completely aligned with concepts of collaboration and interaction. Libraries are important and timeless pillars in distributing and organizing the access to knowledge; as such, they must follow the dominant trend of collaborations and networks by subject, national or regional/international level.

The first collaboration examples among libraries appeared in the mid 17th century. Especially in the current era of limited funding, compeling libraries to evaluate and justify any expenditure, the solution of collaborations is a one-way street for the expansion of their services with the minimum cost. No library can survive independently anymore, no matter its size or the width of its collections (Horton and Pronevitz, 2015). Consequently, the dominant trend is the formation of coalitions between libraries of every kind both in international and national level, mainly characterized by their variety in the number and identity of the participating libraries and the subject areas they specialize in.

In Greece in the last few years, due to the economic instability and crisis, networks and collaborations are an ideal approach to save resources of every kind. The rapid progress in technology, the web dominance and the ever increasing needs of patrons for access to information, direct libraries to form collaborations and networks in order to ensure improvement of services, the exchange of know-how, the implementation of common practices and possibly the tracking of joined funding and the creation of united catalogues (Semertzaki, 2008).

Collaborations among public, academic or municipalities' libraries, as well as networks of state and private libraries are a very common phenomenon nowadays. Similar collaborations based on subject areas are also a recent form of consortium because the common subject of the participating members leads to the development and design of common practices.

Internationally, in the sector of maritime transportation there are plenty of important collaborations and networks. Typical examples in the sector of information are national networks such as the Naval and Maritime Libraries and Archives Group, which is a non-profit network, consisting of museums, public libraries, academic institutions and governmental and commercial institutions with the aim to manage, keep and distribute library collections and archives concerning naval and maritime history in the United Kingdom (The Society for Nautical Research, 2014).

Another distinguished collaboration in the naval sector at an international level for the past 43 years, is the International Association of Aquatic and Marine Science Libraries and Information Centers – IAMSLIC established in 1975, which covers all areas of water and marine sciences by offering a forum to exchange and investigate ideas and issues of common interest among the involved members (IAMSLIC, 2018a).

An undoubted fact is the international leadership of Hellenic shipping worldwide, as it is has been leading the world maritime scene by adapting innovative ideas and practices, offering quality services (Naftika Chronika, 2018). This continuing leadership throughout the years has resulted in a valuable shipping legacy reflected in numerous technical and scientific books on maritime related sciences, as well as in collections of great historical and cultural value, covering a wide spectrum of both international but mostly Greek shipping history.

2.   Maritime Libraries Network (MarLiNet)

The concentration of all this maritime wealth of the country as well as its promotion should be a priority of every organization and every library that is concerned with naval and shipping themes.

Due to the need to promote our maritime cultural heritage, the idea of collaboration among libraries having naval, marine science and shipping collections was born. Specifically, a decade ago three libraries with significant maritime collections, the Eugenides Foundation library, the library of Aikaterini Laskaridis Foundation and the library of University of the Aegean started their cooperation via constructive conversations and exchanges of opinions. This initial ideas' exchange- combined with the interest from the authorities of these institutions for cooperation - led to an initial Memorandum of Collaboration (The Triangle of Maritime Libraries) in 2010 declaring the intention of its

expansion with the inclusion of more institutions with relevant maritime content.

This intention became action and after the unanimous addition of new members, the Maritime Libraries Network – MarLiNet was created in 2018 in Greece, which includes presently 8 members in total including the founding members. More specifically, MarLiNet consists of a combination of special and university libraries, namely:

1. Aikaterini Laskaridis Foundation
2. Eugenides Foundation
3. Hellenic Maritime Museum
4. Hellenic Naval Academy
5. National Technical University of Athens
6. University of Piraeus
7. University of the Aegean
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The libraries – members of MarLiNet which contain important maritime collections, share a common vision to improve their services and their collections via the recovery and shared used of data provided to their research and general users. To this end regular meetings of representatives of the libraries are conducted in order to coordinate the networks actions.

A fundamental quest of the network is not to become just another digital repository specialized in maritime subjects, but to contribute to the creation of an attractive information site at a national and international level – which is soon to start with the sharing of available data - for the interaction and supply of information among academic, scientific and professional communities in the area of maritime transportation, strengthening the information sharing regarding new developments and innovations of the naval and maritime sector.

The common website – besides the access and probably the future provision of a unified electronic catalogue for search in all the collections of the library-members of the network – aims to be an electronic space for conversation and exchange of ideas, information about new actions in the naval area, information about events, conferences and seminars and to interconnect with the designed electronic research infrastructure of the country in sectors of transportation, mostly in the areas of maritime and shipping cultural heritage.

The partial objectives of MarLiNet mostly concern the expansion of material availability for the patrons through the parallel saving of funds via a rational strategy for acquisitions and the increase in the use of maritime collections – a step that has already been planned via the current construction of a common website.

3.   Initial account of actions and planning

During the active work of the Network in its current form, there has been already   completion of some activities and the planning of several more. More specifically, MarLiNet held its first presentation at the 10th International Conference on Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries International Conference (QQML), held in Chania in May 2018. This presentation was followed   by another at the inauguration of the new buildings of the Municipality of Koventarios of the Kozani Library, which took place in Kozani in October 2019. A recent presentation of the Network took place at the 24th PanHellenic Conference of Academic Libraries in Larissa in November 2018. Additionally, the creation of a unified catalogue has already started with the documentation of the thematic fields and categories covering maritime subjects from the members of the Network, so as a next step the unification of the separate collections will be examined, either autonomously, or by exploiting existing applications in the creation of a sub-catalogue. At the same time, the planning and construction of a new common website has started – as has already been mentioned – and it is at the stage of being enriched with relevant information and resources in order to go fully public.

Furthermore, the official presentation of MarLiNet took place in the Hellenic Chamber of Shipping on 17 December 2018 with great success. In the event, MarLiNet presented itself to the Greek maritime community for the first time as a group of eight libraries established in 2018. Following the speeches from the President of the Greek Chamber of Shipping and the official representatives of the members of the Network, a presentation of the individual libraries-members took place with a reference to the objectives and to the Network's dynamic, the main aim being to initiate a dialogue regarding the needs and expectations of the Maritime Community from the Network. During the event a printed and electronic questionnaire was distributed to the attending members and representatives of the Maritime community, so that their needs and expectations from the Network can be documented at a first consulting stage. A contemporary collaborative network should discover and track all the developments that are consistent with its vision and objectives. Within this direction MarLiNet is actively participating in the digital platform of Historic Heritage of Maritime Transportation and Shipping of the country which is being implemented by the University of the Aegean (ENIRISST project) in cooperation with 11 Academic Institutions and research centers in the country, including the National Technical University of Athens and University of Piraeus which are members of MarLiNet and has the support of other members from the Network as well. This platform will provide access to bibliographic collections, to digitalized historic items of libraries, archives, Institutions and wull allow information networking via access to the network of the collaborative maritime libraries as well. Thus, in the context of processing the data gathered on the expectations of the maritime community from the Network at the Hellenic Chamber of Shipping event, a meeting will take place in order to exchange views among the representatives of all the partners so the co-

operations of the Network and the planned national research infrastructure in the area of transportation and shipping can be combined in the best way.

In September 2019, the MarLiNet is also planning to organize a summer school within the University of the Aegean, specialized in issues of information management and documentation in maritime subjects. This summer school will be addressed to librarians, students, professionals and researchers in related academic areas. The preparation has already started through researching literature, relevant sources of information and international practices and potential contributors.

One long-term objective of MaLiNet is to collaboratively create a Thesaurus of maritime terms. This Thesaurus will be created according to the international standards for the establishment and development of thesauri.

The constant debriefing concerning best practices in the subject areas of co-operations and consortiums specialized in the maritime sector, is a main goal of the Network; this allows networks to follow contemporary trends and developments regarding international search and display tools and services for the collections.

4. International practice trends and potential for the network

Collaborative groups and networks with a large numbers of members, mostly at an international but also on a national basis tend to develop various actions. A typical example is the International Association of Aquatic and Marine Science Libraries and Information Centers – IAMSLIC, which organizes international and regional conferences where meetings, workshops, presentations and educational seminars take place. Additionally, they offer scholarships to support the transport and funding of actions regarding the documentation, recovery and distribution of knowledge and information within all aspects of marine and related sciences (IAMSLIC, 2018β).

Most library consortia and many subject-collaborative groups which are internationally active have followed the rapid evolution of technology and address their needs using several tools and resources available in the market. Specifically, most co-operations use exchange and sharing resources programs, while a common database among their members allows them to vote electronically. It is very common to use shared repositories among the members under the same search engines, offering open access to a significant and ever increasing sum of full content documents.

Newsletters are dominant in almost every website of these co-operative networks as well as members' leaflets, blogs and forums which have basically replaced e- bulletins.

The latest trend in technology - not only in libraries but also in education - is Web 2.0 which is a new generation of services that promises the inauguration of a new era in the internet evolution. It is practically a series of new tools providing an interactive and collaborative use of the internet. Such tools are blogs, wikis and podcasting. Additionally, social networks and folksonomy are parts of this technological evolution. This trend has become apparent   in libraries as well and it is called Library 2.0 (Kaiser, 2012).

A modern collaborative group needs to follow and adapt new practices and tools which are introduced and   become dominant in the international libraries' sector. Some of the mentioned actions are already implemented by our Network, such as the wiki, which as mentioned won't faction a unified electronic catalogue or repository, but will become a common place to exchange ideas, views and facts in the maritime science, shipping and sea transportation.

MarLiNet is a lively network that will stay informed and adopt the latest technologies and   adjust these to its available resources. The quest for better practices and for their implementation according to our users' needs as well as the distribution of maritime and shipping legacy is its steady orientation.

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