

Consortia: Philippine Experience

By

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ABSTRACT

Many libraries in other countries with very high financial capability are now into cooperative endeavor in on-line databases subscriptions. Consortia or inter-library cooperative may not be new in Developing countries like the Philippines but many activities in library cooperation still revolves around the basics such as bibliographic access, inter-library loan, cooperative acquisition, indexing, and cataloging. Just like in other countries, academic libraries and institutions are also the primary players in consortium undertakings in the country.

KEYWORDS: Consortia, resource sharing, inter-library loan, library cooperation, net working.

0. INTRODUCTION

It's a known fact that no library even those in developed countries could claim completeness in their collection and this is more so for libraries in a developing country like the Philippines. Though the desire to provide our patrons with materials for their research needs despite a limited budget has always been the prime motivation that led librarians into means that could complement whatever collection they have in their own library. And so consortium was introduced. Consortia have been in the Philippines even in the early 1930's though it was termed differently but the idea was one and the same, as it is understood in the present year.

Active library consortia in the Philippines are usually based in the academic environment and almost all these academic libraries open their doors to outside researchers who are properly endorsed by their individual home offices or schools. The visiting users are subject to the existing policy of the library such as paying the visiting users' fee that ranges from forty pesos to about a hundred pesos or about eighty cents to \$1.60 and only a limited number of users are accommodated in a day. Membership to consortium gives a visiting user a

free access of the other member libraries resources. Based on the existing consortia in the country the following were the primary considerations that were looked into, status and the university/college thrust, geography, infrastructure and support staff.

1. HISTORY

The idea of library cooperation is not new idea in the Philippines neither with the rest of Asia though it was the fashionable term used in 1950s' and the 1960s' while resource sharing was for the 1970s' and now we have consortia (Dayrit, 1978). Different terminology but having the same essence that of sharing resources and services depending on the arrangement agreed upon by the concerned parties. Library cooperation has been going on for decades in other countries like the United States, where strong tradition of sharing services and resources among academic libraries have always been a common practice. They started in the early 1930s by the Triangle Research Libraries Network and library consortia continued to flourish from then on (Bostick, 2001). Shrinking budget against rising book and periodical costs necessitate an action that would satisfy the growing patron demands was and still is the common experience of other libraries all over the world that gave birth to resource sharing in countries like China, Italy and even Japan. The new age of technology where computerization lay supreme and the advances in information technology have dramatically revolutionized the acquisition, storage, accession and transfer of information and all these modified priorities of libraries in a consortium. Before, the traditional primary purpose of establishing consortium was to share the physical resources such as books and periodicals but now sharing electronic resources has become another important goal for library consortia (Dai, 2000). Also there are vendors of databases who would rather transact their business with consortia than by individual library thereby leaving smaller institutions helpless in such a situation.

Is this so in the Philippines? Let us go back and see first how consortia started in this country and the different events that in way paved the existing library resource sharing. For the sake of clarity, the words consortia, library cooperative and resource sharing are used in this paper interchangeably and basically based on the definition of 9th ed of Harrod Librarians' Glossary and Reference Book.

It was in 1931 when the subject of cooperation was introduced by Mr. Cirilo B. Perez, a librarian of the Philippine Bureau of Science Library [Vallejo, 1983]. He read a paper on cooperative book purchasing during the 1931 Librarians' Conventions and he emphasized that time, money and energy will be saved if only libraries would unite and cooperate in the many library tasks such as selection, purchases, cataloging, classification, binding, reference and bibliography. The focus of the 1959 Annual Conference of the [Association of Special Libraries of the Philippines \(ASLP\)](#) was cooperation specifically on cooperative acquisitions, cataloging, information services, and inter-library loan and on bibliographical cooperation. Ten years later, a paper by Maxima Ferrer on bibliographical cooperation was published. This was followed by an article of Fr. J. Baumgartner discussing the need for cooperative acquisition centers for academic libraries. There were other articles, lecture, seminars that followed reiterating the need for cooperative endeavors and these inspired librarians to plan and take some actions in the hope of easing some of the difficulties being experienced in the fulfillment of their library mission. Since the United States strongly influenced the Philippine education, the tradition of sharing services and resources among academic libraries was carried-over.

2. PHILIPPINE LIBRARY CONSORTIA

Many would harp on the nobility of sharing resources and helping others in need but the basic factor goes back to the status of the institution. Its financial capability would be reflected in the quality of library materials and services it could offer to the consortium members. There was this article on resource sharing that mentioned the parasite member that cannot be tolerated forever for it would lead to the demise of the consortia. No librarian would enter into a resource sharing venture if it will mean that her library is the only who would be sharing its resources while the rest gives nothing in return. Many colleges and universities in the Philippines are threatened to be in this kind of a situation and so refused to be part of resource sharing project. This is also the factor why the same name of universities/colleges are into projects like resource sharing.

Finance is an essential factor but credibility follows very closely. Seeking the participation of an institution becomes a simple task when the participating institutions credibility and integrity are recognized in the community without question. These universities have proven their worth as the leaders in the field as proven by their research output, educational innovations and most of the entire product, the graduates. It is considered an honor to get to be invited in such kind of project involving these universities. Financial capability and credibility, these are the concerns of a library in entering in a collaborative library work like in a consortium. Filipinos' natural attitude

of protecting one's turf is very instinctive and I believe this is also true in other countries for at stake here. There are so many private college/university libraries in the Philippines that are only separated by a fence or just a few steps from each other and yet resource sharing was not considered due to the institutions status.

The Philippine government does not subsidize private colleges and universities hence these schools have to rely on their own resources that in return affect the school operation. Often times when a school is on the red, the library is one of the first to suffer. Universities or institutions owned and financed by the government hesitate to get involved not only just for the first two factors mentioned but also by the librarian's concern on the issue of accountability. Losses in the library are paid by the librarians and there are known cases of librarians who upon retirement gets 20% to 40% less off their pensions to settle losses of materials from the library they served in their life time. This has made the librarians of government agencies even universities to be wary in getting involved in collaborative effort as in consortia for this will subject their libraries to visits of outsiders, meaning more people using their library and this increases the possibility of loss and shortens the life of the library materials.

Geographical consideration is one of the primary concerns in Philippine consortium for this will greatly affect accessibility of one member library with the others. Many of the universities and colleges participating in cooperative endeavor are in land lock areas and most of the time they are practically neighbors with a radius of less than 500 meters to one or two kilometers. One might wonder to the importance of this and only one who lives in the Philippines would perhaps understand the practicality of this consideration. The country is an archipelago composed of 7,107 islands and stretches from the south of China to the northern tip of Borneo with three geographical areas namely Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao (LuzViMinda). It has 16 regions, 78 provinces and 82 cities with Manila as the capital. Its also in Manila, the National Capital Region (NCR) where majority of the universities and colleges are located and numbering to about 256 against the total number of 1, 603 tertiary level schools all over the country. Going to one major island to the next takes about an hour or two by plane, about eighteen hours to twenty four hours by boat and if possible by land, takes about two to four hours less than by boat. Its not only the time that one will consider but also the expenses. Lets have a specific example of this. A researcher resident of Cebu, the Queen City in the Visayas, who goes to Manila, located in Luzon Island, to do research would naturally wish to take the plane to save time. For a round trip airplane ticket, he will be needing approximately 5,000 pesos or \$100.00 plus his board and lodging and his expenses may run up to about 10,000 pesos or about \$200 and this excludes the actual research expenses such as photocopying. A graduate student working on his thesis or dissertation may perhaps not hesitate to take the financial load but how many have the resources to do so. The undergraduate students occupy the bulk of library users who most often than not are working in a tight budget and they are our essential concern. Perhaps, to those people from developed countries would find this amount very affordable but not in the Philippines with a minimum wage earner getting about two hundred eighty five pesos or less than \$6 for a day's work. This amount is still dependent on the workers' location as well as the kind of employer he has. Since our concern is the great majority of students and not just those few that could really afford even to have vacations outside the country, accessibility of the resources become an important factor to look into. Why choose Manila as the point of destination? Manila is, one of the cities of Metro Manila that is composed of not less than fourteen (14) cities, the capital city of the Philippines and the center of business and commerce. Metro Manila is also the site of the many prime universities and colleges in the country namely Ateneo de Manila University (ADMU), De La Salle University (DLSU) and the University of the Philippines (UP) to name a few. These universities have branches in the other major islands but the main campuses that are located in Metro Manila have the bigger population as well as larger library collection and state of the art hardware and facilities. Researchers and students all over the country not only for research purposes but also for an educational tour of its facilities that are not often seen in their own libraries frequently visit these schools. There other colleges and universities in Metro Manila, of more than two hundred more, but only few are involved in library cooperative for proximity is not just the sole basis for such endeavor which will be discussed as we go along. Within the city, access to the different libraries of the different universities become a primary concern due to the horrific traffic which can become so frustrating specially when it's raining and this is a frequent occurrence from the month of June to December. Late last year and perhaps early this year of 2003 are exceptional time due to the occurrence of El Nino and rainfall was meager. One becomes lucky if the point of destination is along the line of the light rail train that could bring one to his destination in less than thirty minutes or cutting time travel by 60% to 70% otherwise one has to allot at least two hours of travel and unfortunately many of the universities are located farther from this fast way of transport. If one is taking a public transport such as the jeepney or the bus, expect some possible discomfort considering the Philippines as a tropical country with average temperatures of 78°F/25°C to 90°F/32°C+, literally sweating it out is a common experience. Proximity makes access to resources not only very convenient but economical as well. The question of establishing a consortium was thrown to some academic librarians and it was a unanimous answer that one of the factors they will consider is the geographical location of the members. Distance of one library from another member library may discourage students of visiting and accessing the other member resources. In other countries such as Japan, students may access and borrow materials from another member school simply by requesting their home library to borrow those materials for them. A mobile goes around three times a week to pick-up and return books for the consortium members. In some cases in the Philippines, a personnel is sent to the member library to pick-up or return borrowed books using the public transportation and many cannot afford to do this very often during the week for this would affect library services. This will mean the library is under staff by one personnel who was sent for the errand and this would also mean added expense on the library. So instead of a library-to-library transaction, the next practical thing is for the students to do it

themselves hence the importance of proximity. It has been our experience that even in the absence of a formal agreement like in consortia, a library-to-library book loan could be reached on the basis of a formal request that could be reinforced if the requestor is a known figure to the other library. This is also done on the premise that the location of the requesting library is accessible to the lending library for immediate retrieval. Participation in librarians assemblies and related activities is a venue of establishing network. This network becomes helpful in sourcing for materials for our patrons. Getting to know the other librarians in a county of Philippines size not so difficult. For the professional growth, many librarians especially those in the academic environment are strongly encourage to attend seminars, lectures, forums, etc. Participation in such a basis for promotion

To prove the point, lets look at the existing consortia in the Philippines starting with Manila. The Mendiola consortium has four member private colleges/ universities namely San Beda college, College of the Holy Spirit, Centro Scholar University and La Consolacion College. All the private institutions are located less than 500 meters from each other and this consortium has been going on since it started in 1978 although groundwork started in 1975. Then we have the Inter-Institutional Consortium (I-IC), earlier known as Taft Consortium. There are five member colleges/universities of this consortium with four private tertiary institutions members and one state university and all are located in the heart of Manila within 400 meters to one or two kilometers radius of each other. I-IC started also in the early 1970. Next is the Ortigas Center Consortium whose member institutions are also of the same distance from each other as of the I-IC. This particular consortium includes member libraries belonging to the business sector. Then the latest addition in library cooperative consortium, the Intramuros Consortium with four member academic libraries that is just about seven minutes walk from each other just like the Mendiola Consortium. Intramuros Consortium is almost two years old.

In the southern part of the country is the other consortium, Academic Libraries Information Network in Mindanao (ALINET) with thirty-seven members from the different regions of the island. This consortium is relatively young for it started in the late 1990s. Though the members are kilometers away from each other, geographically speaking, they are relative near each other to help and complement each other resources and services. Also traveling in the provinces is a lot convenient for one due to the almost non-existence of heavy traffic.

Then the last consortium in the Visayas and Mindanao, the Academic Libraries Book Acquisition Service Cooperative (ALBASA) as the name implies, this consortium is focus on acquisitions of new materials for all the members. Geographical location of the member college/university in this particular consortium is not really taken as a cause of concern or as significantly as compared with the other existing consortium for the main concern here is book acquisition. The individual member sends their request to the main office that facilitates everything until such time that the new acquisition is ready either for pick-up or delivery. Members meet once a year to discuss experiences, difficulties and possible solutions to whatever problems they have encountered for the year. This once a year meeting is also a venue for re-establishing network among librarians for any future endeavors be it professional or personal in nature.

The thrust of the institution is a point of consideration for this will also determine the collection of the library as well as the available services. Earlier, three universities were mentioned namely Ateneo de Manila, De La Salle University and University of the Philippines and these same universities due to its thrust on research are often members of several other consortiums. Often times, these same universities are approach by funding agencies or institutions to solicit their participation in a cooperative undertaking. For instance in the mid 1990's, we had the European Studies Project in the Philippines funded by the European Union and the three schools were targeted for their research orientation and at the same time offers courses on European Studies. The funding included the establishment of European Documentation Centre now housed in De La Salle as a result of a bidding participated by the three universities. EU provided the funding for the acquisitions of books, periodicals and the computers hardware and software installed in the Centre as well as those distributed to the other two members. The DLSU, Host University of the Centre, funded the construction and the other physical facilities needed as its counterpart of the funding for books, periodicals and computer facilities given by EU. Selection of materials was a collaborative effort of the three member universities through the combined effort of librarian representatives and faculty members. Policies and guidelines for our patrons especially from the individual university were done together by the members likewise the seminars, lectures and forums on European Studies that were organized. Almost about this time the Department of Science and Technology- Engineering Science Education Project, also a consortium, started. Books and periodicals and on-line subscriptions were given for free but no title of journal subscription was duplicated in any of the institution. It was made clear from the very beginning that the member universities will share the resources and services. Each of the participating university gave the commitment to continue the periodical subscriptions even after the allotted funding had been consumed. The point is that all three universities got involved in several consortiums due to its thrust geared to research and in some instances, there were other universities/colleges included in the list of participants.

The mission to support the curricular course offering is the fundamental reason for a library's existence in any university or college and this was the motivating factor behind ALINET. The members realized that their location is so far from, Luzon and key cities of the Visayas like Cebu, location of libraries resources that could answer their needs. So out of necessity, these academic institutions decided to pool together their own resources to help each other not only through making their library materials available to members but also in training library staff members through joint undertakings in the form of seminar-workshops, lecture and the like. Its also through this undertakings that the Consortium is able to earn some seed money to finance future activities since they have no funding agency to support them.

Lastly, support staff. Its fairly common to hear from librarians refusing to go into resource sharing task with the reason of not having the people to take the additional load like additional indexing or bibliographic control or even accommodating additional users of the library. The support staff concern in a way is a factor to be considered and many libraries had remedied this through student assistance. In some cases, new employees were hired to take the task like in the case of ALBASA or overtime pay were given to personnel who rendered extra time to work on the consortia matters like what I-IC did. This last point of consideration has implications related to the financial status of the institution but its weight may not be as great as those earlier mentioned.

3. PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

Despite these factors that are at times were impediments in the pursuit of favorable results as a consortium there were many undertakings worth mentioning. All the consortia mentioned except ALBASA, focus on collective acquisition, are involve in inter-library loan service. This has generated appreciation not only from students and faculty members but also from the management level. As a means to control access, the member's libraries for this purpose access of each library devised an agreed format.

Cooperative indexing of local publications and subscriptions and cooperative cataloguing. In the case of Ortigas Center Group consortium, the only Philippine consortium with members from the industry, that collaborated with Library integrated Services Cooperative (LISCO) produced the "Philippine Business and Industry Index". This is an annual index to selected articles published in specific periodicals in the field of business and industry. Inter-Institutional Consortium and Mendiola Consortium are also into such endeavor. The output, bibliographic data is integrated in the catalog which are accessible on-line. The relatively new formed consortia, Intramuros and ALINET have mentioned to include this as part of their program. Then, Inter-Institutional Consortium (I-IC) Processing Center was a project on cooperative centralized cataloging for the five member institutions of I-IC with the following members De La Salle University, St. Scholastica College, Philippine Christian University, St. Paul's college and Philippine Normal University. A study was conducted to evaluate the efficiency of the Center after its ten years of existence (Garcia, 1993). Based on the study, Center was not able to perform efficiently with the slow rate of completion of the cataloging of books sent to it as indicator. The fast turnover of catalogers and clerks working in the Center that affected cataloging rate was pinpointed as the reason for the situation. In terms of standardizing and quality of cataloging, the Center showed to be effective. The Center was able to provide a union catalog and tools to its member libraries.

Training programs, workshops and the like were also sponsored by all the consortiums including those newly established group. As earlier mentioned, ALINET sponsored lectures and seminars and offered a lower rate of seminar fee to member libraries and at the same time, opening the seminar to non-members who paid a higher seminar fee. From these activities, the group was able to raise a much-needed fund. The other consortia have also sponsored similar activities except that attendance was limited to the personnel of the member libraries.

4. CONCLUSION

Developed countries are now very concern in consortia involving electronic resources for its money saving factor while in the Philippines its still the basic sharing of book and periodical materials in its hard copy. Only there is a bit of difference now for one could request document delivery either through electronic format or fax other than the usual snail mail. This is the common scenario in many libraries specially those in the academic environment but there are those academic libraries with the state of the art facilities. On-line searching is but a common daily occurrence. True that their number is too few compared to the number of universities and colleges existing in the country. These few universities and colleges are the same institutions that are frequently encountered as one

reviews list of members in different consortia undertakings. The librarians' consciousness on the economics of consortia is very much alive among Philippine librarians but still the number one influential factor to determine participation is the financial side of the business and this is also the reason why some other existing consortia would eventually fade out. Individual institutions would continuously flourish and this is very evident in Metro Manila and some other key cities in the country but enticing them to join consortiums with institutions that almost have nothing to offer, maybe a very tall order. Studies conducted on consortia are very encouraging and one recommended a closer look into the policies and guidelines implementation. No one could stop us from trying and wishing and hopefully the existing consortia would continue to flourish and be the inspiration of the others. Before, Filipino librarians were thought to be timid in putting into action what they had proposed but it seems a transition has already occurred as attested by two relatively new consortia. Perhaps the need to provide the patrons their research needs and answering the mission to serve has catapulted the librarians to take things into their hands to see results so as to render better service. This and the scenario in the field of information science in other countries are making the Filipino librarians to think and to re-engineer whatever situation and resources available just like what the academic librarians of Mindanao did. They're maybe short of funds but never of innovative ideas and the spirit to implement this. Then perhaps in the next five ten years, many Philippine libraries consortia will also get involve not only in inter-library loan, bibliographic services or cooperative cataloging but in data base resource sharing.

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