

National and International Library Collaboration: Necessity, Advantages

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ABSTRACT

The advantages of cooperation between research library associations can be demonstrated quite clearly. Where cooperation becomes *essential* is where there is a common cause to champion or an initiative to pursue for the common good. Thanks in part to the power of information communications technology, research is becoming increasingly international in scope. The members of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research teams are frequently drawn from across the world. Correspondingly, scholarly publishing (especially in medicine and the sciences) is dominated by a few multinational publishers. In this context, issues that play a vital role in global scholarly communication - such as copyright, journal pricing, the managing of datasets, digital preservation and open access - are issues for the research library community everywhere in the world.

Certainly there are many challenges at the local or regional level. However there are definite roles that research library associations can play most effectively at the national or international level. It is clear that by sharing expertise, building partnerships and alliances, it is possible to address common issues much more effectively than when working alone. What is special is that potentially the most powerful form of cooperation is advocacy at the national and international levels. It is essential for research library associations to work together at the political level to move their agenda forward. Examples are lobbying about copyright legislation (nationally, or within the [EC](#) or at [WIPO](#)); or promoting the cause of Open Access. The unique value of LIBER is to provide a forum and a platform for European research library associations to explore and benefit from cooperation and their shared strength.

INTRODUCTION

This essay is an expanded version of a presentation made to the LIBER Pre-Conference *Co-operation among Europe's Research Library Organizations* held in Warsaw on July 3, 2007. Some additional references to the Canadian context are introduced, together with a brief discussion of relevant elements of the strategic directions adopted by the CARL membership at its Annual General Meeting held in May 2007. The aim of the preconference was to explore the value of national and international library cooperation and to stimulate collaboration amongst research-intensive library organizations across Europe. It was felt that the viewpoint of a non-European national research library association might add a useful perspective to the discussions.

THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF RESEARCH LIBRARIES

[CARL](#) is the Canadian Association of Research Libraries/Association des bibliothèques de recherche du Canada. The Association was formed in 1976 and consists of the 27 principal academic research libraries across Canada. The 3 other members are major national research institutions: [Library and Archives Canada](#) (formed through the amalgamation of the former National Library of Canada and the former National Archives of Canada), the Canada Institute for Scientific and Technical Information ([CISTI](#)), and the [Library of Parliament](#). Membership is institutional. Two General Meetings of the membership are held every year. Governance is through a Board of Directors consisting of regional representation plus the President and the Vice-President/President Elect. The Association's business is carried out through an elected Board and through a Committee structure, supplemented by working groups and task forces. These latter are formed on an ad hoc basis to tackle closely-defined issues within a specific time period.

Total combined materials expenditures for CARL libraries amounted to \$250,232,472 in 2005/2006, and the total number of volumes held for the same period was 83,696,168. CARL members represent most of the holding and most of the annual expenditures by Canadian academic libraries. The Association is thus well placed to play a leadership role for the Canadian research library community.

GLOBALIZATION OF RESEARCH

The hallmark of research in the 21st century is that it is becoming increasingly global: studies on the environment and climate change are obvious examples. Frequently, research teams reach across traditional disciplinary boundaries. Equally frequently they bridge international boundaries in order to form their teams. Multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary research affects patterns of scholarly communication, from informal communications between researchers to the dissemination of published research results. The key factor is the recent and rapid rise of information communications technology, and notably the internet. The ability to engage in nearly instantaneous, ubiquitous communication, to exchange information and to build remotely accessible databases has changed the ways in which research can be conducted. It makes possible sophisticated collaborative research ventures. Two notable international examples are:

- [The Global Exploration Strategy](#) - NASA and 13 other national space agencies are coordinating an approach to future manned space exploration. The shared vision focuses on travelling to “solar system destinations where humans may someday live and work”. In addition to NASA, the multilateral discussions include agencies from Australia, Canada, China, the European Space Agency, France, Germany, Great Britain, India, Italy, Japan, Russia, the Republic of Korea and Ukraine.
- [The Human Genome Project](#) - The U.S. Department of Energy and the National Institutes of Health began working on the Human Genome Project in 1990 in collaboration with the Wellcome Trust and other major contributors from Japan, France, Germany, and China. The Project was completed in 2003. Primarily, the project aimed to discover and make accessible for future scientific researchers all estimated 20,000-25,000 human genes.

CHALLENGES TO THE LIBRARY COMMUNITY

The new realities of how research is conducted pose their own unique challenges to scholarly communication. Since scholarly communication is a critical component of the research cycle, research libraries - whose *raison d'être* is to facilitate scholarly communication - have a vital stake in the issues. The international research library community is essentially aware of this but we need to be more proactive in acting upon its implications, and there needs to be more integration of the research library with the research enterprise. This realization can also stimulate library cooperation at both the national and international level.

It should be noted in passing that a successful research team needs to incorporate the skills, talents and expertise of the librarian to acquire, make available and preserve the data as well as published and unpublished materials relating to a research project.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIBRARY COOPERATION

There are many examples of international scholarly communication issues that offer opportunities for fruitful cooperation between libraries:

- International scholarly publishing, especially in the scientific technical and medical fields, is largely dominated by a small number of commercial publishers. Organizations such as the International Coalition of Library Consortia ([ICOLC](#)) identify common concerns of libraries and can help coordinate a common response.

- Copyright is another international issue. Although each country has its own copyright laws and legal traditions, the principles and the issues are common for creators and copyright users alike. In the world of 'globalization' there are strong pressures to 'harmonize' copyright law, with the aim mainly, to provide protection to copyright owners. This can be at the expense of consumers and such sectors as postsecondary education.¹
- A third example is preservation. This encompasses both preservation of the printed record and the preservation of digitized and 'born digital' materials in any number of media and formats. It is the inalienable duty of research libraries and national libraries to preserve their documentary and cultural heritage and to pass it on to future generations. There are many and increasing examples of such cooperation taking place across international boundaries.

In the instances cited above, librarians have identified a common issue critical to the research library community, and are working on possible solutions. Their efforts need our support.

It is very important, and perhaps comforting, for the research library community to realize that 'we are all in the same boat'. This may seem trite or obvious but we often ignore or overlook the fact. It is easy to brush the implications aside on the grounds that there are more immediate and pressing problems at home: this is understandable and the priorities of one's own home institution must be paramount. However it is short-sighted not to consider the longer-term needs of one's institution and the profession, and indeed one's ability to make a difference. It is not enough to recite the usual litany of complaints that prevent us from playing our part: not enough staff, not enough money; not enough space, not enough time, and so on. The truth is that for research libraries we are indeed 'all in the same boat,' and can sink or swim together.

We are all in the same boat!



Notwithstanding the above, it is the duty of every library to serve its own users first. Each library must have a clear idea of the community which it serves - its composition, its characteristics and its expectations. It should also know, of course, how it expects to meet these expectations in terms of collections, staffing and services. The needs of the home community are paramount. To neglect them is to do so at one's professional peril. If each library has its own clear vision as to its mission, guiding principles, goals and objectives then perhaps there will be less danger that the urgent questions will obscure the important ones. (These might not be one and the same.)

CARL'S VISION

The role of a national library association is rather different, but many of the same principles apply: the association must represent the wishes and aspirations of its members, otherwise its members will not support it in the long run. It runs the risk of becoming irrelevant and of withering on the vine.

CARL recently undertook a strategic planning exercise to see if the expectations of its members were properly reflected in its action plans. The aim was to produce a document that would be concise and memorable, rather than to elaborate all the possible issues and possible courses of action. To summarise: [CARL's vision](#) is "To be recognized internationally as a leading research library association whose member libraries are assets and major contributors to the development of research in Canada." In order to accomplish this, the membership decided on the following Guiding Principles:

- Access to Information: CARL supports and promotes the right of all individuals to have access to all expressions of knowledge, creativity and intellectual activity.
- Research libraries - a strategic national resource: CARL promotes the development of the collective human resources, materials and services of its member libraries as a strategic national information resource.
- Scholarly communication: CARL has a fundamental role in facilitating and enhancing the process of scholarly communication.

The difference from previous planning exercises was the addition of 'strategic enablers': "CARL will be an inclusive leader, an influential partner and a consensus builder. CARL will develop its programs, activities and initiatives based on partnership models because it recognizes that such models will be critical for the success of the strategic directions and thus the effectiveness, visibility and impact of the Association. As the leadership organization of the Canadian research library community CARL will advance its agenda using advocacy and partnerships. Advocacy occurs through the development and execution of systematic programs that engage with the academic community, influence government and inform the public. Partnership is both a strategy and a capacity. CARL will expand its capacity to build partnerships, and seek out partnership opportunities."

Both advocacy and partnerships were seen as critical 'strategic enablers,' an explicit recognition that if CARL is to pursue its agenda successfully these two elements must be present. This notion of 'strategic enablers' is carried through to the 'three pillars' on which the strategic directions are built - leadership, scholarship and stewardship. For each one a major initiative is identified, with goals, timelines and resources allocated.²

MULTIPLE LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS

The realities of the library association world differ somewhat from the theory. There is a saying in Canada that 'if three librarians meet together they form a new library association.' It would be interesting to know if this holds true of other countries. Initially, library associations no doubt form to meet a set of immediate and important professional needs: however as an Association develops there is a danger that the sense of mission and the sense of urgency may diminish; thus the impulse to form a new association.

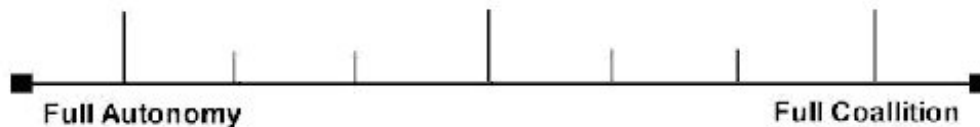
The phenomenon of multiple library associations can be described as follows. Firstly, there are library associations based on geographic location. A city or town is usually the base unit. In Ottawa, where the exception proves the rule, we have a National Capital Library Association. Next there are regional and/or provincial associations: for example the Ontario Library Association, which represents librarians of all kinds in the province of Ontario. Then there is the Canadian Library Association, which represents the interests of Canadian librarians nationally. Since there are ten Provinces (plus three Territories) and a large number of cities and towns, the numbers start to add up. In addition, one must remember that Canada is a bilingual country so to some extent there is a parallel structure of library associations serving francophone librarians.

'Birds of a feather flock together,' so there is a plethora of library associations (or divisions of library associations) by subject interest or by professional background - for instance public librarians, academic librarians, school librarians, special librarians, children's librarians, music librarians, map librarians, law

librarians and parliamentary librarians. These may or may not replicate the geographical structure described above, giving rise to another whole host of possible permutations. Then there are student librarians, retired librarians and many others. The result is a thick alphabet soup of library associations with the ever-present danger of blurring one's effectiveness, and dissipating one's resources through membership in many associations.

AUTONOMY VERSUS COOPERATION

Bob Best Continuum



The workings of the continuum were first described to me by Bob Best so I have named it in his honour. The continuum describes characteristics of behaviour by organizations in the world of political partnerships and coalitions.

On the left-hand side of the continuum you should visualize an individual organization. In the above example this is any given library or a library association. At this point of the continuum the state of affairs is such that you have complete independence and complete autonomy over your own affairs. Only the membership decides policies and priorities, budgets and chooses different courses of action. This enables an organization to be nimble and quick on its feet. These are the advantages. The disadvantages are that you may not have the number of members or enough money or enough power and influence to do all the ambitious things that you would like to do to benefit your organization and advance your agenda. This is a natural state of affairs: not many organizations have the power and resources to act entirely independently and unilaterally.

At the other end of the continuum the picture has changed. Here the organization is a full member of a coalition. You have joined forces with other library associations (and perhaps other organizations) for a common purpose. You have some voice in the decision-making process but the point is that the coalition has one voice, one budget, and one defined course of action on one or more issues. You have traded much of your 'independence' and freedom of action in order to gain strength in numbers and resources.

The fascinating element is that places on the continuum are not fixed. As on some great dance floor, the alliance partners continually bow and curtsy and change partners. As the issues change, so do the partners and the alliances. As an organization you may limit your activity to a letter of support for the cause of another association (or a coalition). You may sign a joint letter. You may decide to support a particular cause financially. You may do this as a 'one-off' or for an extended period of time. You may decide to join a campaign with a definite start and end date. You may decide to make a long-term commitment. You may decide to do some or all or none of the above, in any given number of situations. You may even decide to merge fully with another association and disappear. With that exception - which is rare in the world of libraries - nothing indeed is fixed. There are points all along the continuum.

An association will re-assess its degree of involvement in a partnership or alliance periodically - either as part of a routine process, or more likely because an external event triggers the question. Assessment is based on self-interest of course; in other words the perceived advantages to the association and its members. When assessing

the value of membership in a national or international organization, the Bob Best continuum is a good model to keep in mind.

CANADIAN EXPERIENCE

The experience of Canadian research libraries working within the Canadian confederation may provide some pointers to European colleagues. All the provinces have distinct views that in turn will help shape national policies. Education - including post-secondary education - is a provincial responsibility, so in terms of funding and related issues, much of libraries' attention is focussed at the provincial level. However the federal government also has a number of responsibilities, as well as taking responsibility for research at the national level. Federal legislation also affects libraries through, for instance, copyright legislation and security laws. These are strong reasons for library representation at the federal level by such organizations as the Canadian Association of Research Libraries.

In Canada there are four regional associations of academic libraries. Membership is institutional. In the West there is the Council of Prairie and Pacific University libraries ([COPPUL](#)). The members come from the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba; in Ontario there is [OCUL](#), the Council of Ontario University Libraries. In Québec there is the [CREPUQ](#) Sous comité des bibliothèques. (CREPUQ stands for the Conseil des recteurs et des principaux des universités de Québec). The Atlantic Provinces have the Council of Atlantic University Libraries ([CAUL](#)). All these associations engage in sharing information, professional development and working on projects and initiatives ([Van Borm & Sokolova, 2004](#)).

It is important to recognize the value of library associations for social networking. It is a wise conference planner who recognizes and allows time to take into account that as much work may be done in the coffee breaks and outside the formal sessions as may take place within the formal programme.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIBER

At this juncture it is appropriate to pose the following questions:

- What can I do for LIBER?
- What can LIBER do for me?
- What can LIBER do that no other organisation can do? In other words, how is LIBER unique and if it is unique, will this benefit my own organization, and if so, how?

There are many library activities that benefit from national or international cooperation. Some have been touched upon in this essay.

There is one activity that is best undertaken at a national or international level and that is lobbying, or, advocacy: in other words promoting the interests of an organization at a political level in order to advance one's agenda. Many librarians recognize the need for lobbying but find it alien, and feel uncomfortable undertaking it. However, it is very important for librarians and for library associations alike to represent our case to funders, policy makers, and the media.

Many library associations, including CARL, recognize the importance of advocacy as a strategic activity. We retain a government relations advisor. It is also part of the duties of the Executive Director to spend time on briefing politicians and government officials on our issues and our requests. It is important also to keep in touch with other key players - the granting councils, university administrators, provincial and other counterparts and colleagues everywhere. If we as librarians don't represent our own interests in the public arena, then nobody else will.

If the international research library community is to pursue its agenda effectively it must do more to enter the political arena. There are fine examples of leadership already before us. These need political and financial support from the community in order to flourish. In addition there is a real leadership opportunity for LIBER to assess scholarly communication issues common to all European research libraries and to engage in a long-term advocacy programme to advance the interests of LIBER's members. This will benefit not only the European research library community, but indeed the international research enterprise.

REFERENCES

Van Borm, Julien, and Natalia Sokolova: 'From Library Co-operation to Consortia: Comparing Experiences in the European Union and the Russian Federation', *Liber Quarterly*, 14(2004)3/4, 440-452.
<http://liber.library.uu.nl/publish/articles/000099/article.pdf>

WEB SITES REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT

CARL-ABRC - Canadian Association of Research Libraries = Association des bibliothèques de recherche du Canada. <http://www.carl-abrc.ca/>

CARL – Strategic directions. http://www.carl-abrc.ca/about/pdf/2007_sd_web.pdf

CAUL - Council of Atlantic University Libraries. <http://www.caul-cdbua.ca/>

CISTI - Canada Institute for Scientific and Technical Information. http://cisti-icist.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/main_e.html

COPPUL - Council of Prairie and Pacific University libraries. <http://www.coppul.ca/index.html>

CREPUQ - Conseil des recteurs et des principaux des universités de Québec. <http://www.crepuq.qc.ca/>

EC - European Commission. http://ec.europa.eu/index_en.htm

The Global Exploration Strategy. http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/exploration/main/index.html

HGP - Human Genome Project. http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human_Genome/home.shtml

ICOLC - International Coalition of Library Consortia. <http://www.library.yale.edu/consortia/>

Library and Archives Canada. <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/>

Library of Parliament. http://www.parliamenthill.gc.ca/text/explorelibrary_e.html

OCUL - Council of Ontario University Libraries. <http://www.ocul.on.ca/>

WIPO - World Intellectual Property Organization. <http://www.wipo.int/portal/index.html.en>

NOTES

¹ See for example the work of EBLIDA <http://www.eblida.org/>; and the work of the IFLA Copyright and other Legal Matters Section <http://www.ifla.org/III/clm/copyr.htm>

² For further information the reader is referred to the CARL website at <http://www.carl-abrc.ca/>