

Krakow Library Group as an Example of Regional Library Co-operation

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Abstract:

Krakow Library Group (KLG) was established in 1994 to supervise the execution of “The Project of the Automation of the Krakow Academic Libraries”. It gathered 14 research libraries. Initially, its activity was connected strictly with the implementation of the integrated library system - VTLS. Its general tasks were: implementation of the same integrated library system in all 14 libraries, co-ordination of training programmes in relation to the principles and forms governing input data, formats and the VTLS system operation, organising co-operation between the KLG and the Polish VTLS Coordinating Group in order to develop common solutions and to plan joint ventures. After a few years the directors of KLG libraries decided to broaden the co-operation to include in its activity also the tasks and projects going beyond the issues related to the VTLS, and the libraries using other systems. At present, the Group’s main goal consists in the co-ordination of a wide co-operation between libraries in their activity, including: acquisitions (especially of scientific journals), computerisation of library processes, mainly co-ordination of the co-operation between the KLG libraries and the national union catalogue, and upgrading librarians’ professional skills. In the near future Krakow libraries are going to start the co-operation within a project of a virtual library. KLG acts on the strength of the rectors’ agreement. The Agreement defines the rules of participation in the Group, its organisational structure, duties and competencies of particular bodies, as well as the sources of financing its activity. KLG takes also part in various national projects.

1. Introduction

Krakow is the oldest and the second biggest academic and cultural centre in Poland. It is home to 11 state university level education institutions, including the Jagiellonian University, one of the oldest European universities. Also, there are many scientific and research and development institutions here. The libraries of those institutions – and, in particular, the university ones – have been co-operating for years. In the beginning, the co-operation was informal. It was in 1974 when the first attempts at establishing closer co-operation were made and when the project of the KRAKUS automated regional system was created. Only one of its elements was implemented – the union catalogue of serials collected by Krakow research libraries and the Main Library of the University of Technology in Kielce. Preparing information for the system required a lot of effort on the part of the employees at individual libraries (they had to introduce, by hand, changes on the test printouts). The data was supplied to the Jagiellonian Library housing the data

feeding and processing centre. In return for the supplied data, the libraries received, each year, printouts containing information on the collection of serials stored by the libraries participating in the project. Even though the methods and tools used resembled a form of production relying on manual work rather than industrial machines, the information obtained from the system was very valuable and it was frequently used by the libraries' users. What is more, it was the first good lesson on co-operation for Krakow libraries. The regional union catalogue of serials had been created for many years. The prospect of complex computerisation of Krakow university libraries using a professional system led to the closure of the the catalogue.

The co-operation included, apart from KRAKUS, meetings of library directors that were organised a few times a year by the director of the Jagiellonian Library. During the meetings, information regarding the operation of the libraries was exchanged, similar rules for the service of users were established etc. At the beginning of the 1990s, a series of meetings with representatives of vendors offering integrated library systems (including VTLS, Innopac, Geac and Aleph) was organised. The research institutions that were intent on buying a uniform library system prepared jointly "The Project of the Automation of the Krakow Academic Libraries", which provided grounds for obtaining funds. The Project's objectives included the preparation of an organisational structure that would guarantee a proper execution of the Project. The above explains the concept behind the creation of the Krakow Library Group (KLG).

2. Krakow Library Group – History

The Krakow Library Group was officially launched in August 1994, following an agreement entered into by the rectors of all Krakow higher education institutions and the heads of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) – Krakow Branch (renamed to: the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences – PAU) and the Institute of Nuclear Physics (IFJ). The unique scientific and cultural resources stored in the Krakow libraries led to the conclusion that the execution of the "The Project of the Automation of the Krakow Academic Libraries" will play an important role in the whole country.

Thanks to the efforts made by the Krakow Library Group, the A. W. Mellon Foundation awarded a grant. Thanks to the funds obtained from the grant, the VTLS (now: VIRTUA) integrated library system was purchased, as well as two library servers: victoria (in 1994) and galicja (in 1995). The system was implemented by all KLG libraries, except for the Main Library of the Krakow University of Technology that purchased the TinLib (now: T-Series) integrated library system and installed it on its own server, as well as the Institute of Nuclear Physics that withdrew from the co-operation with the Group.

In the period 1994-2001, the KLG dealt mainly with issues related to the implementation of the VTLS system.

The general KLG tasks were defined as follows:

- gradual implementation of the same integrated library system in Krakow libraries;
- co-ordination of training programmes in relation to the principles and forms governing input data, formats and the VTLS system operation;
- organising co-operation between the KLG and the Polish VTLS Coordinating Group in order to develop common solutions and to plan joint ventures.

In 2002, the scope of the KLG operation was broadened, which was reflected in the amended text of the Agreement. The Group's main goal consisted in the broadly interpreted co-operation between libraries, related to their activity, including: acquisitions, especially of scientific journals, computerisation of library processes, mainly coordination of the co-operation between the KLG libraries and the national union catalogue NUKAT, and the execution of "The Project of the Automation of the Krakow Academic Libraries," as well as upgrading professional skills.

Why was a decision taken to modify the Agreement? It was believed that establishing the KLG in 1994 would cause the participating libraries to have the same library system. During the execution of the Project, the Main Library of the Krakow University of Technology decided on a purchase of a different system (TinLib), while the Main Library of the Academy of Physical Education¹ was using the Polish MAK software until 2003. The provision in the Agreement regarding the use of the same system² should have led to the exclusion of these two libraries from the KLG, but nobody wanted it to happen. It was suggested that the Agreement should be amended so that libraries using other library systems could be members of the KLG too.

Also, a suggestion was made that the KLG should be transformed into an open structure institution.³ It was decided that not only other Krakow research institutions, but also those from the whole Malopolska region would be able to enter into the Agreement. The temporary unwillingness to accept new Group members resulted from the fact that the Mellon Foundation awarded to the Krakow environment a grant for a specific purpose, i.e. computerisation of libraries, for a clearly defined group of institutions, that, in order to ensure smooth execution of the Project, launched the KLG. All the assumptions underlying the Project, included in the application submitted to the Mellon Foundation, have been fulfilled and the obtained funds have been exhausted, therefore the Group's tight structure is no longer justified.

The first institution that used the opportunity afforded by the Group's new formula, was the International Cultural Centre of Krakow. Following the procedure, the Centre submitted an application for the membership in the KLG. Having reviewed the opinion issued by the Director of the KLG, the Steering Committee resolved to admit the Centre as a new Group member.

At present, the KLG is composed of 13 Krakow research institutes.⁴

¹ At present, like most KLG libraries, the Main Library of the Academy of Physical Education uses the VIRTUA system – a new version of the VTLS.

² Clause I.3. of the Agreement of 1994 is worded as follows: "Participation in the KLG provides all members with equal possibility of automation of their own libraries in the VTLS system that is uniform for all libraries."

³ Clause I.4. of the Agreement of 2002 is worded as follows: "The KLG may also include other research institutions in the Malopolska region, after they submit a membership application and sign this Agreement."

⁴ Cracow University of Economics, AGH University of Science and Technology, Academy of Music, Pedagogical University, Agricultural University, Academy of Fine Arts, Academy of Physical Education, International Cultural Centre, State School of Drama, Pontifical Academy of Theology, Krakow University of Technology, Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences, Jagiellonian University (Jagiellonian Library and Medical Library).

3. Organisational Structure

The highest authority within the KLG is the Steering Committee, appointed and dismissed by the Council of Rectors of Krakow Universities. The number of the Committee members and the choice of the Committee members are determined by the Council of Rectors that is also appointed by the Committee. Dismissing a member of the Steering Committee may be effected following the member's request or at the request of the Council of Rectors.

The Management Board of the KLG is a decision-making body and it is presided over by the KLG Director. The Management Board consists of the Director and heads of work groups that are appointed at the request of the Director.

If such a need arises, work groups created with the purpose of performing specific tasks, making analyses of a specific issue or presenting solutions to a given problem may be appointed and dismissed by the Steering Committee or the KLG Director.

The Council of Directors is the KLG Director's opinion-forming body and it consists of library directors of all institutions who are KLG members. The Council of Directors assembles as the need arises, on average five or six times a year.

The Steering Committee is responsible for designing the KLG general policy. Also, it is accountable for the coordination of operations connected with the execution of the scheduled tasks and the preparation of rules for participation in the costs of the scheduled projects. The Committee's responsibilities involve day-to-day supervision of the activity of the Management Board, issuing opinions about the KLG Director's reports on the activity of the Management Board, taking decisions regarding all issues brought up by the KLG Director, preparation of annual reports and their submission to the Council of Rectors.

The KLG Director's role is to execute projects arising from decisions taken by the Steering Committee, prepare for it annual reports on the execution of individual projects and financial and content-related reports on the KLG activity, supervise activities resulting from work schedules, supervise the organisation and execution of necessary training programmes, maintain regular contact with the Council of KLG Directors, NUKAT Centre (re. the national union catalogue) and the Conference of University Libraries Directors in order to develop joint ventures and work out uniform solutions.

At the beginning of each year, the KLG Director presents, in co-operation with library directors, the range of issues that will have to be addressed in a given year, regardless of the issues that may arise and require temporary solutions.

Costs of the KLG activity are covered by the Agreement signatories' own funds.

4. Activity

The KLG main tasks include supervision of the proper use of the computing library system.

At present, KLG libraries' catalogues are located on three servers. Four catalogue databases are installed on the HP9000/N4000 (INFO) server. They include databases of:

1. Cracow University of Economics
2. AGH University of Science and Technology
3. Pedagogical University
4. Shared database of:

- 4.1. Agricultural University
- 4.2. Academy of Music
- 4.3. Academy of Fine Arts
- 4.4. Academy of Physical Education
- 4.5. International Cultural Centre
- 4.6. State School of Drama
- 4.7. Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences.

The SUN Enterprise 450 (jadwiga) server contains two catalogue databases:

1. Shared database of:
 - 1.1. Jagiellonian Library
 - 1.2. Medical Library of the Jagiellonian University
2. Database of the Pontifical Academy of Theology.

Two managerial teams operate at both servers and they manage library databases and systems. The teams also run necessary training programmes and provide assistance to the libraries they service. Costs of maintaining the teams are covered in accordance with the rules adopted for each server.

The catalogue database of the Krakow University of Technology, operating in the T-Series system, is installed on the ADAX/1A32 (Kamila) server. The Main Library of the Krakow University of Technology has its own group of managers.

Another important task is that of coordinating the co-operation of KLG libraries with the NUKAT national union catalogue.⁵ The catalogue was started in July 2002 and it is a result of co-operation between libraries at the national level. KLG representatives actively participated in the project-concept-related activities. At present, 46 Polish libraries, including 13 KLG libraries, co-operate with the union catalogue. Other libraries will join the project soon.

The next KLG task is to co-ordinate the purchases of scientific journals and, in particular, of foreign journals. In this respect, libraries have always tried to be rational and they have directed their efforts at ensuring users in the whole region access to the biggest possible number of journals. At the moment, this activity overlaps that of all-Polish consortia ensuring access to electronic journals and worldwide databases.

The digitalisation of library collections is a task whose concept is being currently developed. The Main Library of the AGH University of Science and Technology has been executing such a project since 1998. The undertaking includes academic textbooks and materials comprising the National Reserve of Library Collections (old books, 19-century books and journals). Some digitalisation work was also undertaken by other Krakow libraries, but its extent was minimal. The idea is to create a shared electronic educational collection that will be available online for students in the whole region. Certain attempts had already been made in this area. In 1996, a local KLG Multimedia Laboratory was launched. However, the idea seemed too innovative at that time. A year later the Laboratory was closed down and the equipment was handed over to individual KLG libraries.

⁵ NUKAT is created using shared cataloguing. It is a source of authority headings and bibliographic records. The catalogue ensures access to information on the collections of Polish research libraries and is supposed to facilitate interlibrary loans and retroconversion of local catalogues.

The KLG tasks also include solving problems arising from the libraries' day-to-day operation. These include problems resulting from the ambiguous and frequently changing laws that allow various interpretations.

For instance, over the past years, Poland has witnessed the adoption of a series of laws designed to introduce legal standards that are typical of democratic countries with market economy. One of such laws was the Public Procurement Act adopted in 1997, which from the very beginning contained a number of errors and prescribed absurd procedures. Under the Act, books were treated like goods such as bricks or sand, which meant that libraries should put them out to tender, if the value of the purchases made in a given year exceeded EUR 3,000 (today EUR 6,000). Following a joint appeal made by libraries, procedures regarding the above have been simplified.

Libraries face similar problems arising from other laws, for instance, the VAT act or the customs act that require that libraries follow burdensome official procedures connected with importing scientific journals or books. Limitations imposed on public use of sources of information were introduced by virtue of the copyright act.

In all of the above cases, the KLG prepares problem analyses and suggests solutions that should help libraries in their operation. The President of the Steering Committee, who organises meetings with representatives of government bodies (e.g. Customs Office) and who, using his authority, supports efforts made by the KLG and aimed at determining simple and unambiguous procedures, plays an important role here.

Additionally, in this respect, the KLG closely co-operates with the Conference of University Libraries Directors that tries to overlook the law-making process and the creation of secondary laws.

In recent years, the construction and development of library buildings has become an extremely important issue, as the existing ones could not meet the demands of the rapidly growing number of users, computerisation of library processes and the increasing number of collections (proper storing and lending conditions). A few Krakow universities have decided that the construction of new library buildings or the development of the existing ones is necessary. Here, the KLG was also an active participant and created advisory teams for designers and architects. In this way, opinions were issued both about user software and architectural designs for the libraries of the Pontifical Academy of Theology, AGH University of Science. Today, KLG representatives may assist, and they assist, with regard to the above, other Polish libraries that request such assistance.

Polish university institutions have been constantly changing for many years, and users of their libraries expect that the librarians will not only quickly adapt to the changes, but also meet their demands. Hence the need for constant upgrading of qualifications, the running of, and participation in, training programmes organised for all librarians and related to computerisation, implementation and use of new IT tools and technologies in teaching and studying. The KLG organised, and continues to organise, numerous training programmes and workshops and it provides consultancy services ranging from the simplest to very advanced and specialist ones.

The Group is also the organiser, or one of the organisers, of various presentations and shows connected both with new sources of information and the management of library and information processes. For instance, the issues addressed in the

presentation that has been organised recently included the management of e-journals and other electronic sources.

5. Conclusion

Given the ten-year operation of the KLG, it can be easily seen that the scope of the Group's activity has been systematically increasing. The first activities included the implementation and customisation of the VTLS. At present, various joint ventures are being carried out; they are related to the creation of the National Union Catalogue, construction and development of library buildings, employees' training etc.

In the Council of Rectors of Krakow Universities, the KLG performs activities aimed at increasing the importance of research libraries and makes efforts to have the librarians' salaries increased following the growing qualification requirements.

Directions of KLG development in the next few years will be connected with Poland's joining the EU and integrating Polish science and higher education with these areas in other EU member states. As part of preparation for integration, a few years ago, work was begun at the national level, aimed at creating standards for Polish research libraries (including university and public libraries), which will enable, in the future, making comparisons and assessments of libraries and the relevant financing of libraries as a basic link between civic and information societies. KLG representatives take an active part in this work.

To recapitulate – it needs to be stressed that thanks to the creation and operation of the KLG, Krakow libraries have been increasingly integrating. Finding joint solutions to current problems and creating global strategies and certain visions of development will definitely translate into an improved operation of libraries and greater satisfaction of users – academics and students.

The Krakow Library Group was the first consortium in Poland that was set up with the aim of organising co-operation of local libraries. Soon afterwards similar institutions were established, among them: the Upper Silesian Group of Research Libraries (1995), the Poznan Foundation of Scientific Libraries (1996), the Lodz Consortium and the Wroclaw Libraries Consortium (2001). The libraries form consortia in order to perform various tasks, but, first of all, in order to create optimal conditions for lending items from the library collections by the academic environment and the inhabitants of a given region.

Co-operation does not take place only locally, but also at the national level. Examples include: the Agreement of the Cooperation in Implementing and Using the VTLS or the Agreement “A library with the Horizon”, created in order to support libraries with respect to implementation and use of one library system, the Conference of University Libraries Directors, organised in order to jointly solve problems connected with the activity of university libraries.

Also, the libraries undertake joint ventures and projects, e.g.: NUKAT – the national union catalogue, the Wielkopolska Digital Library – a project involving the digitalisation of the collections held by the regional libraries, BAZTECH – a database with the content of Polish technical journals created by 20 Polish libraries, Doc@med – a document delivery system of Polish medical libraries and ANALIZA – a project aimed at preparing indices and standards for research libraries in Poland.

The number and variety of consortia demonstrate that they have become nowadays a reliable platform for co-operation between libraries. Using different forms (foundations, agreements, associations etc.), libraries perform numerous tasks.

Without a doubt, if they acted individually, without any co-operation or using the intellectual potential of a number of libraries, the execution of a series of tasks would be impossible.

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