

Cooperation Between Estonian Research Libraries: Integration And Resource Sharing Issues

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Abstract:

In this paper the main fields of cooperation (coordinated collections development, creating common databases, joint supply of electronic resources, standardization etc) between Estonian research libraries are examined and the institutions which have been founded for cooperation purposes are introduced. The results of cooperative activities are brought out. An overview is also given about the legal acts and regulations concerning the operation of research libraries.

Keywords:

common projects; consortiums; coordinated collections development; integrated library system; legislation; standardization; supply of electronic resources.

Introduction

It is said that cooperation is voluntary for the participating libraries. Yes, of course it is true, but when talking about the real situation in Estonia, it seems that cooperation between research libraries is also mandatory and inevitable at the national level. If a library likes to be completely independent and not bounded, it will certainly lose in very many matters.

For working together there must be some preconditions like:

- the object of cooperation;
- the will to cooperate;
- organisers-coordinators;
- “the rules of the game” (regulations, agreements, contracts);
- executors-implementators;
- tools and connections for cooperation;
- the roof under which the cooperation could be realized.

At present there are three main institutions in Estonia, which have primarily been founded for cooperation purposes and under which the research libraries are realizing their common interests and projects:

- Estonian Librarians Association (founded in 1923, reestablished in 1988), that has the committees of bibliography, collections development, education and training, classification and indexing, terminology and rare books; section of

- special libraries; working group of distance learning; roundtable of the directors of research and special libraries etc.
- Estonian Libraries Network (ELNET) Consortium (founded in 1996), that has working groups of MARC-cataloguing, analytical description, authority files, retrospective conversion, music, art and cartographic literature, periodicals, circulation, technical issues, electronic acquisitions, digital library and virtual library.
 - Council of Research Libraries (formed in 2002 by the Ministry of Education and Research).

Some cooperation activities (standardization, collecting and processing of library statistics, digitation from microfilms) are also realized under the auspices of National Library and through the two-way agreements between participating libraries. The representatives of the Department of Information Studies of Tallinn Pedagogical University, which is the only institution in Estonia giving speciality of information science on all academic levels, are also participating in majority of the committees and working groups.

About Legislation

If the cooperation between libraries can be voluntary, it will absolutely be obligatory for research libraries to cooperate with the state authorities, especially in the field of legislation. The core of Estonian research libraries is owned by six universities, which are bodies governed by public law. Until 2001 the roles, tasks and funding of these libraries at the national level were not regulated on the basis of and pursuant to procedure established by law. They were funded from the study budgets of the universities which were not sufficient for guaranteeing the supply of scientific information, but they were offering public services free of charge. For the universities this funding is based on the state order of students for the corresponding academic year and besides teaching expenses it hardly covers the expenses for buying textbooks. Only Estonian National Library had its own statutes, which specified its tasks as national, parliamentary and research library.

Thanks to the study organised by the Ministry of Culture the development plan of Estonian libraries was compiled in 2000, which specified the objectives and the priorities together with strategy, actions and their specific goals. The necessary financial resources for funding the acquisitions of research libraries were also calculated. This development plan activated the cooperation between libraries and the Ministry of Education and Research in the field of legal regulation of the status of research libraries. As a result the Ministry of Education and Research introduced a draft act for changing Organisation of Research and Development Act. These changes were accepted in 2001 and a research library was defined in the Act as an institution or part of it which goal is:

- to guarantee the availability of scientific and technological information at the national level;
- to support research and development activities;
- to promote life-long learning for all people in Estonia.

By the Act the Ministry of Education and Research has the commitment to coordinate the creation and updating of the common acquisition plan of research libraries and to arrange the funding of research libraries from the state budget.

At the next step the requirements for a research library and the conditions and rules for nominating research libraries were specified by the regulation of the

Ministry of Education and Research in 2002. By this regulation the requirements for a research library are as follows:

- the main task (specified in statutes) is to collect, to process, to store and to make available the information supporting research and development activities;
- the destination group is research workers;
- public access to free of charge basic services;
- the availability of the system for selecting adequate information and the conditions for preserving and using it;
- the collections are developed at least in two subject areas from the following: natural sciences, technological sciences, medical sciences, agricultural sciences, social sciences, humanities;
- the collections are described and classified according to the international standards which are valid in Estonia;
- the library carries out research and development activities, publishes reports of its activities, is engaged in acquainting the research and development institutions and researchers, creates bibliographical databases;
- the collections are reflected in the common electronic catalogue of Estonian libraries (ESTER).

For getting nominated the owner of the library must submit an application with different appendices (the statutes, development plan, acquisition plan, annual report, financial report, self-evaluation report etc). The applications will be evaluated and the proposals for nominating or refusing will be made by the special commission at the Ministry of Education and Research. Officially the research libraries will be nominated by the Government of Estonia at the proposal of the Minister of Education and Research for a five-year period. At present the nominated research libraries are:

- Tartu University Library (2002)
- Tallinn Technical University Library (2002)
- Academic Library of Tallinn Pedagogical University (2002)
- Estonian Agricultural University Library (2004)

The regulation about funding principles of research libraries is still under construction. The first funding was received in 2003 and the distribution principles and allocation coefficients were based on the agreement between the Board of the University Rectors and the Minister of Education and Research. The total support was about 1,2 million euros, from which 665 000 was divided between research libraries and 543 000 was allocated for the joint supply of electronic resources through ELNET Consortium.

Coordinated Collections Development

Estonian research libraries have more than three decades of history in coordinated collections development. The activities were started in 1970s by the commission of collections of the State Library Committee. The publication of the union catalogue of foreign periodicals was initialized in the 1960s and the publication of the union catalogue of foreign books in 1974. Two large studies of collections and their use were carried out in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1990s the activities were continued by the committee of collections development of Estonian Librarians Association. The list of central research libraries and their operation principles, the fundamentals of collection development and the acquisition plan of research and

special libraries were confirmed by the regulations of the Minister of Culture and Education in 1994. These regulations fixed the division of tasks between 15 Estonian research and special libraries. In this acquisition plan 57 subjects (based on the classification of Estonian Science Foundation) were used as responsibility areas and three acquisition depth levels were specified as follows:

A - as completely as possible

B - selected items

C - few selected items

It is hard to assess how these regulations and the methodology used had effect on the real coordination of collections development because:

- the regulations did not guarantee any additional funding for fulfilling the specified tasks;
- there was no tool (online information system) available for sharing operatively data about the existing collections and current orders of participating libraries;
- the acquisition levels were library-oriented and superficial;
- the classification scheme of Estonian Science Foundation was too general and did not cover all the topics of research and development; it was also complicated to use it in practice, because the libraries are classifying their collections according to UDC.

For achieving the real effect it was necessary to get additional funding, to implement common information system and to change the construction and methodology of the common acquisition plan. Unfortunately the applications and activities for getting additional funding for collections development had no principal results until the end of the century. In 1997 research libraries started learning, testing and adapting the common information system, which was taken into use in 1999. The use of integrated online information system became an important precondition for working forward on the common acquisition plan. After discussions it was decided to use UDC for specifying detailed responsibility areas and to replace library-oriented acquisition levels with the levels which content is exactly defined. RLG Conspectus was first introduced to Estonian research libraries in 1997 and was further used as an example in this field. Conspectus gives a framework for cooperative collections development. By goals and activities it could be examined as:

- assessment of available collections;
- specifying acquisition goals and priorities;
- coordination of current acquisitions;
- preservation and withdrawal of collections;
- strategical planning and guaranteeing necessary funding.

In RLG Conspectus the content of each acquisition level is exactly specified and marked with acquisition depth indicator (level code) as follows:

0 - out of scope

1 - minimal level

2 - basic information level

3 - study support level

4 - research support level

5 - comprehensive (maximal) level

These levels are used cumulatively - each higher level contains the lower ones. They could also be adjusted with language codes etc.

In the first phase some research libraries started a pilot project, which aim was to compile its own acquisition plan by UDC using acquisition depth indicators

according to RLG Conspectus. The result of this work was presented as matrix, which rows mark (divisions, categories and) subjects by UDC and which columns contain level codes. The analysis of the filled up matrix indicated that in our case it was not suitable to use the whole set of RLG levels and the cumulation principle could not always be accepted.

During 2002-2003 the first version of common acquisition matrix was compiled including the acquisition profiles of three nominated research libraries and National Library. This matrix was approved by the Council of Research Libraries and submitted to the Ministry of Education and Research. It is also one of the basic documents for the Ministry in the process of deciding the funding coefficients between research libraries. In 2004 the complete acquisition matrix of all Estonian research and special libraries will be compiled by UDC using three acquisition depth levels:

- basic information level
- study support level
- research support level

The content of each level has been exactly defined for common use. If the coverage in different libraries coincides, they can agree, who will have the basic responsibility in this subject (or topic), and instead of duplication, the funding can be used for strengthening other subjects. The main goal of these activities is to use the limited funding more effectively at the national level.

Creating Common Databases

The first cooperative project in this field was initialized in 1974 for creating the database of foreign books of about 30 Estonian research and special libraries. For data processing the Soviet mainframes with no online connection were used. The only useful output of this project (continued up to 1990) was the printed union catalogue.

At the end of the 1980s the biggest research libraries started to work out their own application programmes for creating databases on PC-based environment. These applications were not standardized, incompatible with each other and allowed to exchange records between libraries only after complicated data conversions. There was a need for regular cooperation and a working group of library automation was formed by the Estonian Librarians Association in 1992. During 1993 this group worked out two essential documents on the basis of which libraries could create their IT development projects for several years. These were common principles of library automation and the project Information System of Estonian Libraries.

By 1995 it became evident that on the basis of self-made programmes and a set of different databases Estonian research libraries would neither be able to offer services that would satisfy the user nor implement the unified information system of required standards without the support of international foundations. This understanding forced to found a non-profit non-governmental organisation that would allow to communicate more efficiently and to strengthen cooperation between libraries to achieve common goals. In 1996 ELNET Consortium as an independent legal person was founded and an integrated library system INNOPAC (Innovative Interfaces Inc.) was selected by software tender. The financial support for buying software was provided through the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Additional funding from the state budget was received for creating the necessary hardware environment.

At the end of 1998 ELNET Consortium launched the “all in one” solution which is based on INNOPAC software and two servers (databases) located in Tallinn and in Tartu. The integrated system serves simultaneously as:

- database of Estonian national bibliography
- database of CIP records (books in print);
- union catalogue of participating libraries;
- tool for storing and managing the local data (acquisitions, patrons, circulations etc) of each member library;
- centre for distributing (downloading) bibliographic records;
- source for coordinated collections development.

In 2001 two biggest public library systems – Tallinn and Tartu central libraries joined the Consortium. There is only one cooperative INNOPAC system for 8 Tallinn libraries and another one for 4 Tartu libraries.

The shared electronic catalogue database (ESTER) contains data about books, periodicals, sheet music, maps, sound recordings, articles from Estonian journals and links to electronic documents. It is impossible to search simultaneously in Tallinn and Tartu systems, but using the gateway function, the search made in one system can be repeated in another system by a mouse click. In both systems there is only one bibliographic record for each title to which participating libraries will add their unique data (shared MARC21 9XX fields) and link their item records. The realization of this kind of model is based on the deepest cooperation between ELNET member libraries and harmonized and fixed in written “rules of the game”. Each title in the system is described by unified cataloguing rules, supplied with UDC numbers and Estonian Subject Headings which for retrieval purposes will be translated into English automatically through authority file.

Thanks to cooperation considerable economies have been made in man-power, information technology and staff training expenses. The quality of the common database is guaranteed through standardization and unification. The end-user can make searches under one constant user interface either in the catalogue of one library or in the union catalogue of ELNET member libraries.

Supply of Electronic Resources

Estonian research libraries started the trials of paid online databases in 1998. At the same time the tasks of the ELNET Consortium were broadened and the working group for coordinating the supply of electronic resources was formed. The first contracts were signed in 1999 when three libraries jointly purchased EBSCO databases. Since 2000 ELNET Consortium has successfully participated in the OSI (Open Society Institute) initiated eIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries) project and been among the most active users of EBSCO databases. Since 2001 ELNET Consortium is carrying out the tasks of negotiating and contracting with the suppliers of online databases as an operating institution representing the common interests of Estonian libraries. The e-journals usage statistics has always been high. However, it was impossible to fulfil the expectations of the researchers towards e-library because of the lack of central financing.

In 2002 the first central financial support of the Ministry of Education and Research for purchasing EBSCO databases established preconditions for significantly wider access to e-library in Estonia. In 2003 the central financial

support in amount of more than 0,5 million euros allowed to increase considerably the number of jointly subscribed databases. Through ELNET Consortium 8 e-journal packages (more than 10 000 titles), 5 abstract databases and 4 other packages (factographical, dictionaries, reference works etc) were subscribed. The number of the libraries participating in consortium-wide access reached from 2 to 9 depending on databases. Thanks to the country-wide license more than 100 Estonian libraries and institutions got access to EBSCO databases. So we may say that in some cases a “big deal” can be a very good deal.

As the license fees are rising it is very important to guarantee the increase of financing for continuing the existing subscriptions. In 2004 the financial support of 0,8 million euros is expected from the Ministry of Education and Research. Although the growth of the support (0,3 million euros) does not allow to increase the number of databases it covers the rise of license fees. The national-wide coordination of the needs for electronic resources, centralized negotiations and contracting through ELNET Consortium has many advantages. Firstly, the same financial resources enable cooperating libraries to buy more because of their bigger critical mass. Secondly, in some cases the negotiations about the price and conditions are very complicated and there is not enough professional competency in each library. There are different methodologies available for calculating the license fee and it is very important to achieve the optimum solution in price and performance. By this model majority of the trials of non-subscribed databases are organized centrally by ELNET Consortium but the evaluation of databases using end-user assessments and opinions, usage statistics, impact factors etc, is the task of member libraries. The evaluation results will be summarized and discussed by the working group and the list of necessary electronic resources with approximately calculated expenses will be compiled. Of course, the list is always larger than the real financial possibilities and the final decision for the joint supply will be made by the Council of Research Libraries.

Following the example of the Finnish FinELib the goal is to establish a targeted financed e-library with additional funding from the participating institutions to ensure Estonian researchers with a critical amount of scientific information.

Standardization

The activities in the field of standardization were initialized in 1990 when the working group for creating communication format for the exchange of bibliographic records was formed by Estonian Librarians Association. The Estonian Communication Format based on Common Communication Format of UNESCO was published in 1991. The creation of Estonian version of the UDC as a joint project was started in 1993. It was started without any special funding – 32 classifiers from 10 libraries and also a few specialists outside were doing it beside their everyday work. As a basis for translation the UDC Master Reference File was used but Estonian UDC is not an exact copy of it including adaptations and updates. The Estonian UDC was completed and published in 1999. The next big project – creation of Estonian General Subject Headings was completed in the same year and thanks to the financial support of the National Library and Ministry of Culture it was realized noticeably quicker.

The working group of library standards at the National Library including representatives of research libraries has been active since 1999. The task of the group is to coordinate the standardization activities at national level, to organize

the translation of international standards and to arrange the creation of Estonian standards if necessary. For the beginning a list of international standards concerning libraries was compiled. First of all it was necessary to find out what the libraries need. It is possible either to accept international standards or to translate them into Estonian. In some cases it is useful to establish the official Estonian Standards but they can also be established as National Library Standards etc. As a result of this work the first Estonian Standard was established in 2000. It was EVS-ISO 11620:2000 Information and documentation. Library performance indicators (ISO 11620:1998). This standard defines general performance indicators, which can be used in all libraries not depending on library type and they are too universal for measuring efficiency and comparing the performance of university libraries. Last year the task force was formed by the Board of the University Rectors for working out performance indicators especially for university libraries. Some of the recommendations of this task force are as follows:

- acquisition expenses per student
- library maintenance expenses per student
- library staff (FTE) per student
- computer-based workplaces per student
- percent of open access collections from total collections
- percent of items described in electronic catalogue from total items
- percent of students passing through the information retrieval courses

Only unified data can be measured and compared. For these purposes the second Estonian Standard was established. It was EVS-EN ISO 2789:2003 Information and documentation. International library statistics (ISO 2789:2003). Since 2003 all the detailed statistics of Estonian research and special libraries is available through the web site of the National Library. Some international standards (ISBN, ISSN, country codes, etc) are translated into Estonian, some of them are under translation (Dublin Core metadata elements, terminology, transliteration from Cyrillic alphabet etc). Some IFLA ISBDs (monographic publications, electronic resources) are translated into Estonian and established as National Library Standards, some of them are still waiting for the translation. MARC21 was partly translated into Estonian in the implementation process of the integrated library system. For the unification of library terminology a web-based defining dictionary has been compiled with equivalents in English, Russian, German, Finnish and French. The dictionary consists of about 3000 library terms and is currently updated.

In 2003 the standard of librarian profession was worked out which defines the unified requirements and professional skills for three levels of librarian profession. According to the Professional Act the committee for assigning the profession of librarian was formed by Estonian Librarians Association in 2004 but the statutes and working routines of the committee are still under construction.

About Other Common Projects

Thanks to the support of Open Estonia Foundation, OSI and Andrew W. Mellon Foundation the different joint projects of **retrospective conversion** were started in 1999 and 2000. The retrospective conversion of Estonian publications is now in terminating phase but there is much work to do with older foreign language collections. At present the number of volumes in electronic catalogue ESTER is about 4 million but the number of total collections of participating research libraries is about 12 million.

The majority of Estonian newspapers published between 1917 and 1940 and many annual volumes of older newspapers have been microfilmed in the 1990s. The total amount of microfilms is about 1500 rolls. The original newspapers are very sensitive of intensive use because of the bad condition of the paper. Microfilming guarantees their preservation but the use of microfilms is uncomfortable, they will be worn out very quickly and their replacement is costly. The aim of the joint project of **digitation from microfilms** is to make the content of microfilmed documents easily available for the end-user in electronic form. For this purpose in 2002 the special scanner was obtained, tuned up and tested and the technology for saving and describing the image files was worked out. In 2003 the software for indexing the image files and the web-based solution for open access was worked out. These activities were financed by ELNET Consortium and the Ministry of Culture. Now the first selection (15 titles from 1857-1920) of digitized Estonian newspapers is available for the public use.

The working group for creating **common information portal** of research libraries was formed in 2001. After studies and discussions the concept, basic principles and requirements have been formulated. The goal is to introduce for end-users an information portal which allows secure single point multi-protocol searching against the variety of sources – licensed full-text or citation databases, local digital collections, web sites, search engines, Z39.50 databases, library catalogues etc. The metasearch software must also be able to search in texts using Estonian diacritics and Cyrillic alphabet. At present only one software product - MetaFind (Innovative Interfaces Inc) has been tested and evaluated. Unfortunately this project has still no special funding and the participating libraries are not able to cover the cost of portal software from their own budgets.