

INTERVIEWS WITH PUBLIC LIBRARY EXPERTS ABOUT COLLABORATIONS

Thalia Gonda¹, Christos Papatheodorou²

1. Dept. of Archives, Library Science & Museology, Ionian University, Corfu, Greece

2. Dept. of History & Philosophy of Science, National & Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

Introduction

All over the world, libraries of all types come together, uniting their forces by creating communication networks, partnerships, and consortia to cope with the ever-increasing user demands, the systematically decreasing budgets, and the complex social and technological environment. Especially for the academic libraries, forming and participating in a consortium was part of their answer to the explosion in the number of scientific publications due to the transition from the print journals to the electronic ones. Besides the 'big deals' with the publishers, many library consortia were created with the purpose to collectively sustain a shared library system and union catalogue, or to facilitate a network for interlibrary lending. In many instances, consortia have expanded their services to digitization projects, shared facilities for preservation of print materials, and more.

Thus, academic library consortia have received a lot of attention and have been studied extensively. The same does not occur for public library consortia. One reason is that public libraries participate in consortia along with other types of libraries, mainly with academic libraries. Another reason is that in several parts of the world public library consortia are not always a predominant practice and public libraries either collaborate informally (e.g., through networks), or they do not cooperate at all.

Undoubtedly, public libraries would also benefit from forming alliances. The **aim of this research study** is to explore which areas public libraries would need assistance from a collaboration, and which types or models of collaboration would better support public libraries. In other words, this study intends to trace the lessons learned from academic libraries consortia and suggest a **framework to aid public libraries in deciding on a collaboration model** in cases where cooperation has not been established.

Methodology of the research

This qualitative research is part of a PhD research about public library collaborations in a focus on Greek public libraries. In February 2024, a series of interviews begun with the purpose to bring together researchers or hands-on practitioners from all parts of the world who have experience with library consortia, services evaluation and assessment, and public libraries at all levels of administration. The goal is to provide answers to the following research questions:

- Which services the consortia could offer (in general) to their members?
- Which factors are crucial to each service?
- What collaboration models exist and what are their attributes?

The same protocol of questions is being followed with all the experts and each group is encouraged to elaborate about the topic which has the expertise. The invitees are being selected based on their work experiences or on their academic interests and published research. The representation of several countries and of different administration models of public libraries has been taken into consideration. Also, an attempt is being made to accommodate a number of organizations that are an authority on either library consortia, public libraries, or library services evaluation, such as the IFLA Public Libraries Section, the ISO/TC 46 "Information and documentation", the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC), OCLC, Lyrasis, Europeana, EBLIDA, eIFL, NAPLES, PL2030, national authorities on public libraries, and several professional Librarians Associations.

The attached PowerPoint file is being presented to the interviewees to serve as a visual aid during the interview. The interviews are being conducted with Zoom and the sessions are recorded after permission is asked and granted. The audio files produced are transcribed with MS Word 365 and the texts are checked against the audio files to correct anything that has not been transcribed properly. The experts' answers are edited in a minimum way, meaning that the repetitions of oral speech are eliminated, and the periods and the phrases are defined, if needed. After this series of interviews is completed, a data analysis will take place and a report on the findings will be compiled and published.

The suggested framework which is being grounded and refined through the experts' interviews consists of three pillars: the collaborative services that the public libraries need, the factors that create and maintain these services and the collaboration models that will enable the public libraries to acquire these services.

Services

The group of experts are asked to comment on the most common services offered by consortia, as summarized by the bibliography. Since the bibliography usually refers to academic consortia or mixed-library-types consortia, it is essential for this framework to identify whether the same collaborative services are needed by the public libraries, or a different set of services is required. The interviewees are encouraged to consider these labels for *services*¹ as umbrella terms and to pick them apart according to their own perspective:

- (1) Collaborative Collection Development: the cooperative purchasing of print material, electronic content licensing, and shared storage facilities of print collections.
- (2) Cooperative Digitization Services include the platform to upload the digitized material.
- (3) Programmes for Users, such as summer reading campaigns, seniors' technology education or STEM programmes and exhibitions.
- (4) Resource Sharing and InterLibrary Loan (ILL) is the sharing of print materials and of e-content; physical delivery services, loaning from library to library, document delivery, and licensing that allows the distribution of digital material.

¹ See our previous work about common consortia services: Gonda, T. and Papatheodorou, C. (2021), "Measuring library consortia performance", in *14th International Conference on Performance Measurement in Libraries (LibPMC)*, pp. 201–211. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6319521> and

- (5) Shared Integrated Library System (ILS) and Collaborative Cataloguing refers to the sharing of bibliographic records, union catalogues and shared systems.
- (6) Staff Training and Consulting includes the sharing of consultants, trainers and event organisers; train-the-trainer sessions, or trainings for the libraries' staff, especially for use of tools provided by the consortium.

Factors

The second pillar of the proposed framework is *factors*. Factors are the conditions required for a consortium service to be created and sustained or the assets that the public libraries can pool together to create or sustain a collaborative service. During the interviews, the experts are inquired to comment on the factors which have been identified through literature or through the researchers understanding of the problem. The following labels for factors are also umbrella terms that the interviewees are guided to analyze:

(I) **Administration (or managing):**

- I.1 The bureaucratic coordination of the libraries participating in a collaboration or the Governance of the cooperative.
- I.2 The bureaucracies of the overarching authorities each library belongs to or the Administration of the participating libraries.
- I.3 The mission, the goals and objectives, the legal framework, the decisions, and the assessment of the services.

(II) **Audience needs:** different types of libraries serve different types of users, and they need suitable content or appropriate collections and services. The umbrella term summarizes the concepts: Collection(s), Access, Use, and Services (International Organization for Standardization, 2022, 2023; American Library Association, 2018; Koontz & Gubbin, 2010).

(III) **Facilities and equipment:** the suitable space (International Organization for Standardization, 2013, 2.4) and the technical infrastructure, tools, and furnishings.

(IV) **Funding and expenditure:**

IV.1 *Capital expenditure:* the "expenditure which results in the acquisition of, or addition to, fixed assets", such as "building sites, furnishings, equipment, and computer systems" (International Organization for Standardization, 2022, 3.6.1).

IV.2 *Operating expenditure:* the "expenditure incurred in the running of a library", such as payroll, "rent, acquisitions and licensing, binding, computer network telecommunication, building, maintenance, utilities, repair or replacement of existing furnishings and equipment, events, etc." (International Organization for Standardization, 2022, 3.6.4).

(V) **Staff:** the presence of qualified and adequate number of personnel to ensure the quality of services. The importance of trained library workers is accentuated in every standard (International Organization for Standardization, 2022, 2023; American Library Association, 2018; Koontz & Gubbin, 2010).

- (VI) **Speed:** time efficiency, in the sense that the distance between the participating libraries determines the speed of response or fulfillment of a request for service (Speed = Distance / Time).

Models of collaboration

After examining the policies followed across several countries on different continents, both in terms of cooperations between public libraries and the structure of public library systems, the following patterns have been distinguished and codified into these 3 *models*:

Model A: Nationwide model under the responsibility of a central authority. Public libraries are organized in a central, hierarchical structure with direct control by a government agency - council, ministry department, or the National Library. This model exists in a number of countries in Africa. A variant of this model can be considered a flat structure (all equals) run by an appointed/elected committee, which is found in several national academic consortia.

Model B: National hierarchical model with nodes. In this model, public libraries are organized in a central structure and supported at the local level by either larger libraries or institutions established for this purpose. This model exists worldwide (e.g., in Europe can be found in Spain, in France, in the Nordic countries). A variant of this model can be considered the functioning of State Libraries, which exist in federal states, such as India and Australia.

Model C: Mixed/Regional. When a national binding policy is absent, a variety of relationships and partnerships are developed. The consortia or networks may enlist libraries of different types as members. The pattern of collaborations of geographical proximity with the participation of different types of libraries is found in large countries, such as the USA and China. Parallel to the regional collaborations, other types of cooperatives may develop (e.g., networks with a theme such as the largest libraries, or libraries preserving cultural heritage).

Acknowledgements

While this is ongoing research, the list of experts we have consulted *so far* during this study composes of:

- Dr Martha Kyrillidou, Director and CEO of Quality Metrics, Chair of Library Consulting Interest Group, ALA
- Dr Milena Dobрева, Senior Lecturer in Information Behaviour Computer and Information Sciences, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK and member of Europeana Network Association Management Board
- Dr Roswitha Poll, member of the ISO/TC 46 “Information and documentation”
- Jane Cowell, Chair of IFLA's Public Libraries Section, President of the Australian Library and Information Association and CEO of Yarra Plenty Regional Library Corporation, Victoria, Australia
- Sharla Lair, Program Coordinator, International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC) and Senior Strategist of Open Access and Scholarly Communication Initiatives, Lyris
- Radka Kalcheva, Director at Pencho Slaveykov Regional Library, Varna, Bulgaria
- Pirkko Lindberg, former Director of Library Services at Tampere, Finland

- Anette Mjöberg, Director of Hässleholm Public Library, Sweden
- Montse Espuga, Library Director, Biblioteca Font de La Mina, Diputació de Barcelona, Spain
- Matt Grabski, Adult Services Librarian at Shaker Heights Public Library, Cleveland, Ohio, USA

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Questions for
the interview

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Thalia Gonda¹

Christos Papatheodorou²

1. **PhD Student**, Dept. of Archives,
Library Science & Museology, Ionian
University, Corfu, Greece

2. **Professor**, Dept. of History &
Philosophy of Science, National &
Kapodistrian University of Athens,
Greece

SHORT INTRODUCTION

- Libraries worldwide **form alliances**, very often by participating in a consortium.
- While academic library consortia have been studied extensively, the **same does not occur** for public library consortia.
- USA + some parts of the world = Public libraries in consortia often with other types of libraries ≠ in other parts of the world, **public library consortia are not common** → public libraries collaborate informally or coexist in one administrative structure.
- GOAL: This research aims to form a **framework to aid public libraries in deciding on a collaboration model** in cases where cooperation has not been established.
- We want to correlate the following parameters into one coherent framework:

SERVICES – FACTORS – COLLABORATION MODELS



DEFINITIONS

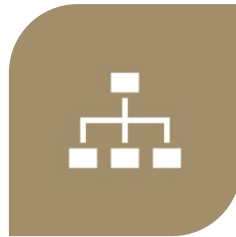
- **Public Library:** a library with “a mission to serve the wider community” and “funded by it, either through local, regional, or national government or through some other form of community organization”
- **Library Consortium:** a formal cooperation between libraries funded by the members or other sources or generating its own income with the over-reaching purpose to achieve economies of scale.
- **Services:** *in the context of this research*, services are activities offered by a library consortium to provide infrastructure, content, or advice, and boost the efficiency of the library members.
- **Factors:** conditions required for a consortium service to be created and sustained.
- **Models of collaboration:** a description of relationships between public libraries within a country.
 - Model A: Nationwide model under an authority
 - Model B: National hierarchical model with nodes
 - Model C: Mixed: multi-type library members with geographical proximity



THE QUESTIONS BRIEFLY...



WHICH SERVICES THE
CONSORTIA COULD
OFFER TO THEIR
MEMBERS?



WHICH FACTORS ARE
CRUCIAL TO EACH
SERVICE?



WHICH MODEL IS MOST
SUITABLE FOR EACH
SERVICE?



WHICH FACTOR IS EASIER
TO BE SECURED IN EACH
MODEL?



As you answer the following questions...
please bear in mind that

we refer to public libraries in a country that
do not cooperate in a consistent manner with
other libraries of any kind

**Q1: In your opinion, which
services should be
offered by a consortium
to the public libraries?**

MOST COMMON CONSORTIA SERVICES



Collaborative
Collection
Development



Digitization
Services +
Repositories



Programmes for
Users



Resource
Sharing & ILL



Shared ILS &
Collaborative
Cataloguing



Staff Training &
Consulting

Q2: How would you rate the services from the most important to the least?

- Rank the services, assigning **1** to the most important consortia service
- Include any services you mentioned in your answer to the previous question

Services	Ranking
Collaborative Collection Development (1)	
Digitization & Repositories (2)	
Programmes for Users (3)	
Resource Sharing & ILL (4)	
Shared ILS & Collaborative Cataloguing (5)	
Staff Training & Consulting (6)	
??? (7)	
??? (8)	

RATING SERVICES



Q3: In your opinion, which **factors are required for the creation** of a consortia service to their library members?

Q4: In your opinion, which **factors are required for sustaining** a consortia service to their library members?

Are the prerequisites for creating a service different from the prerequisites for maintaining its operation, or do the same factors apply?

FACTORS

Administration (or managing)	Audience needs	Facilities and equipment	Funding and expenditure	Staff	Speed
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Governance of the cooperative• Administration of the libraries• Mission, Goals and objectives, Legal framework Decisions, Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collection(s), Access, Use, Library Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Space, Technical infrastructure, Tools, Furnishings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Capital expenditure, Operating expenditure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• qualified and adequate number of personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time efficiency

SERVICES	FACTORS						
	Administration (managing) (I)	Audience needs (II)	Facilities & equipment (III)	Funding & expenditure (IV)	Speed (V)	Staff (VI)	??? (VII)
Collaborative Collection Development (1)							
Digitization & Repositories (2)							
Programmes for Users (3)							
Resource Sharing & ILL (4)							
Shared ILS & Collaborative Cataloguing (5)							
Staff Training & Consulting (6)							
??? (7)							
??? (8)							

FACTORS & SERVICES

Q5: Which factors influence each service?

Q6: Which factor is decisive for the successful *creation* of each service?

- Rank the factors, assigning 1 to the most important.
- Please give us the most and the least important.
- Include any services or factors you mentioned in your answer to the previous questions.

SERVICES	FACTORS						
	Administration (managing) (I)	Audience needs (II)	Facilities & equipment (III)	Funding & expenditure (IV)	Speed (V)	Staff (VI)	??? (VII)
Collaborative Collection Development (1)							
Digitization & Repositories (2)							
Programmes for Users (3)							
Resource Sharing & ILL (4)							
Shared ILS & Collaborative Cataloguing (5)							
Staff Training & Consulting (6)							
??? (7)							
??? (8)							

FACTORS & SERVICES

⇒ **Q7:** In your opinion, **which factor is decisive for successfully *sustaining* each service?**

- ⇒ Do different factors weigh more in creating & in maintaining a service?
- Rank the factors, assigning 1 to the most important
 - Include any services or factors mentioned previously



Q8: Observations?

COLLABORATION MODELS

Model A	Model B	Model C
Nationwide model under an authority	National hierarchical model with nodes	Mixed
One authority (institution, office, ministry, or library) in charge	One hierarchical structure with internal nodes	No binding national policy
Direct control from an agency which all libraries answer to	3 or more levers: 1 at the top, several intermediate libraries, several libraries dependent on the intermediates	Consortia or networks often multi-type library members & based on geographical proximity
Nationwide	Nationwide	Regional
<i>Variant</i> : a flat structure (all equals) run by an appointed/elected committee	<i>Variant</i> : State Libraries in charge or assisting public libraries within the State	Parallel to this model: other types of collaborations (e.g., networks with a theme such as the largest libraries, or libraries preserving cultural heritage)
Several African countries (<i>Variant</i> : in several national academic consortia)	Scandinavian countries (<i>Variant</i> : in federal states, such as India or Australia)	Big countries such as USA, China

Services	Model A	Model B	Model C
Collaborative Collection Development (1)			
Digitization & Repositories (2)			
Programmes for Users (3)			
Resource Sharing & ILL (4)			
Shared ILS & Collaborative Cataloguing (5)			
Staff Training & Consulting (6)			
??? (7)			
??? (8)			



- Model A: Nationwide model under an authority
- Model B: National hierarchical model with nodes
- Model C: Mixed: multi-type libraries + geographical proximity

SERVICES & COLLABORATION MODELS

- **Q9:** In your opinion, **which model is more suitable for successfully sustaining each service?**
- *Are there any risks in offering service 1 in model A, etc.?*

FACTORS & COLLABORATION MODELS

⇒ **Q10:** In your opinion, **which factor is easier to be secured in each model?**

⇒ *E.g. in model A is easier to have factor I but not factor II, etc.*



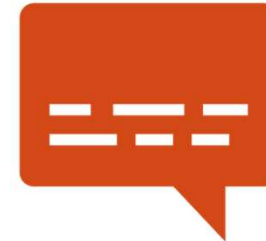
Factors	Model A	Model B	Model C
Administration (managing) (I)			
Audience needs (II)			
Facilities and equipment (III)			
Funding and expenditure (IV)			
Speed (V)			
Staff (VI)			
??? (VII)			
??? (VIII)			

- Model A: Nationwide model under an authority
- Model B: National hierarchical model with nodes
- Model C: Mixed: multi-type libraries + geographical proximity

COMMENTS & RECOMMENDATIONS



Q11: Who would you recommend participating in this research?



Q12: Any comments you would like to make/discuss about this research?

Thank you!!!