

Cooperation in Context: Library Developments in Central and Eastern Europe

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Major research and academic libraries in four Central and Eastern European countries (Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia) have undergone significant changes since their socio-political transformations that began in the early 1990s. In-depth interviews with forty-nine (49) key library policymakers were conducted in 1999. The data suggests that cooperation and resource sharing are at the heart of the institutional changes taking place in the libraries in the four countries. Commonalities and differences between and among the countries were identified along four dimen-

sions: centralisation vs. decentralisation, individual vs. collective goals, product vs. process orientation, and global vs. local considerations. A typology of cooperation models ('artificial,' 'contested,' 'directed,' and 'voluntary' cooperation) was devised that reflects the changing nature and visions of cooperation as reported by the respondents interviewed. The results raise questions about the exogenous vs. endogenous forces that contribute to the adoption of new attitudes and values toward cooperation and resource sharing.

Introduction

This paper builds on prior work on library and information activities in the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) region (Borgman 2000, Lass and Quandt 2000), and reports the findings from a large research project on the role of libraries (with a focus on the major academic and research libraries) in the development of national information infrastructures in four CEE countries: Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland (Caidi 2001). The major academic and research libraries in Central and Eastern Europe have traditionally been the major content providers in their countries, and have paved the way for automation and provision of services and access. As such, they have the potential to play a key role in the formulation of policies for the development of national information infrastructures.

The data, which were collected between March and June 1999, provide a historical snapshot of library developments as perceived by the players

themselves as they reported on the road travelled since the socio-political changes of the early 1990s. Many issues arose from the rich data, including: the adoption and use of information technologies, governance and funding, cooperation and resource sharing, attitudes and values, and the focus on users and services. These issues were strikingly similar across the four countries, with differences being more in degree than in nature as some countries seem to be moving at a different pace along the spectrum of issues raised.

In this article, I explore the recurring theme of cooperation. Like most libraries in the West, CEE libraries are seeking various forms of collective memberships to pool their resources and serve their users, in a context of economic hardship and of declining budgets for education and culture. Establishing a climate of cooperation appeared throughout the data as a prerequisite for any further attempts at developing a national information infrastructure (to be understood here as a complex arrangement of people, technology, in-

stitutions, content, and conduits (Borgman 2000). Cooperation, however, is not a universal panacea, and has to be understood within the context in which it is being undertaken, which includes the institutional arrangement, cultural practices, values attached to cooperation and support from parent organisations. This article is an attempt to examine how the various actors articulate their vision of what cooperation means to them and how it is being done in their country.

Libraries and cooperation

The Oxford English Dictionary (2nd edition) defines cooperation as “the action of co-operating, i.e. of working together towards the same end, purpose, or effect.” In the many definitions of cooperation that emerge from the various bodies of literature, one finds a similar emphasis on the need for a coordinated effort (which may be voluntary or imposed) by interested parties in order to achieve a common goal that would be difficult to attain on one’s own. In their history of library cooperation in the West, Woodsworth and Wall (1991) mention prominently fiscal constraints and the need to achieve critical mass as essential factors leading to cooperative arrangements. The realisation that there are costs attached to processing, delivering and accessing information has quickly replaced the notion of cooperation as a moral value (what Gherman (1987) refers to as the “apple pie and motherhood”-based decision). In particular, the shift from a materials-oriented to a user-oriented perspective and the emphasis on information access are cited as the primary motivation for inter-library cooperation (Buckle 1993, Sewell 1981). Integrated library systems, the adoption of common standards, and the formalisation of cooperation through various arrangements (e.g., cooperatives, library networks, consortia) have made possible resource sharing, inter-library lending, shared cataloguing, joint collection development and acquisitions, etc.

CEE academic and research libraries are increasingly realising that in order to survive they need to cooperate. Cooperation, however, is a complex phenomenon that has benefits but also involves trade-offs and sacrifices, and therefore requires continual re-negotiation over the terms of the partnership. The concept of cooperation can be better apprehended through the variables

that account for its complexity. I examine here briefly four such ‘dimensions’ of cooperation: the individual vs. collective goals; the centralisation vs. decentralisation tension; the product vs. process orientation; and the global vs. local considerations. These will be used as a framework to examine the evolution of cooperation in the four countries studied.

Individual vs. collective goals

One of the major challenges of undertaking cooperative projects is the trade-off between individual vs. collective goals (Axelrod 1984; Hofstede 1980, 1991; Ostrom 1990). The principle of individualism is self-interest and self-reliance, where the interest of the individual is put over the interest of the group or the ‘common good.’ By contrast, collectivism favours cooperative strategies and a joint approach to solving problems: the various parties usually share similar goals and interests, or have some degree of interdependence. Sufficient incentives (reward or benefits) are necessary for the various parties to abandon their selfish behaviour and opt instead for a joint approach. These incentives may be the result of voluntary membership, fiscal constraints, or even coercion from an external power.

Although the joint welfare is usually at the heart of the cooperation endeavour, cooperation does not exclude conflicts: these may occur as a result of individual prestige, antagonisms, disagreement on the terms or the goals, and so on. Organisational scholars know well that conflicts and competitive strategies are a reality that can potentially hamper collaborative efforts and even destroy the collective undertaking if not dealt with in a timely and effective manner (Badaracco 1991; Kanter 1994). Communication is therefore essential in negotiating the individual vs. collective goals: it enables the definition of roles and responsibilities, the setting of goals and allocation of resources, as well as the resolution of any conflicts that may emerge.

Centralisation-decentralisation tensions

Tensions are unavoidable among individuals or institutions that are engaged in a set of relationships with others. These usually arise during the process of negotiating the terms of their partner-

ships or to set the boundaries between institutions. The tensions usually translate in terms of what to centralise and what to decentralise? In the library and information science field, centralisation vs. decentralisation is a theme that emerges constantly. Traditionally, "centralisation" refers to convergence of control or power in the hands of one or a few. In turn, "decentralisation" is associated with fractionalisation of control or power among a more dispersed group, and usually requires a larger delegation of authority and a great deal of mutual trust (Putnam 1993; Senge et al. 1999). At the heart of the centralisation-decentralisation tension is the adequate distribution of role and the proper sharing of responsibility.

Product vs. process orientation

As libraries work toward achieving common goals, there is a need for the collaborating parties to see a concrete result, a pragmatic outcome that can justify – to funding sources, users, the library staff, etc. – the sacrifices made and the loss of independence of each individual institution (Kanter 1994, Yoshino & Rangan 1995). The pragmatic outcome is the 'thing' that partners committed to achieving by joining forces, such as a union catalogue for instance. However, a focus on the concrete 'thing' downplays or hides the importance of the process (i.e., the formation and maintenance of the relationships between the various parties that form the group). The social networks newly created are equally important to document as they raise issues of power between members of the group, or between groups. Social power is often defined in terms of control: groups have power if they are able to control the actions and 'visions' of other members or groups. This ability to control others presupposes access to certain resources, such as money, status, fame, knowledge, information, or even certain forms of public discourse and communication (e.g., Lukes 1986; Van Dijk 1988a, 1988b; Wrong 1979). Power, as is often the case, can also be contested.

An alliance is more likely to be process-oriented if competitive strategies and pressures dominate over collaborative ones. This may translate in lengthy discussions over a long period of time, without any signs of a concrete outcome (or a contested one). Communication in a process-oriented alliance may be used to promote dissension and

create factions as much as to manage differences and create a shared vision (Pasquero 1991).

Global vs. local considerations

As the world economy becomes increasingly interconnected via a global information infrastructure, there is a need to reflect on political and cultural issues associated with cooperation in a networked, global environment. These include technology diffusion (i.e., 'acculturation' or 'localisation' of technological artefacts), the social construction of knowledge, cultural practices and national identity. The attempts to agree upon and adopt foreign systems and international standards offer opportunities as well as challenges. The challenge seems to lie in reconciling the particular national tradition (along with the preservation of identity, culture and language) with the universal mechanisms of globalisation.

In a context of shrinking budget for education and culture, libraries all over the world are seeking for means to afford the scarce resources. In the remainder of this article, we examine how the four dimensions of cooperation inform the ways in which library policy-makers in the four Central and Eastern European countries reflect about the changing nature of cooperation in their countries and its impacts on library developments.

Method

The choice of these four countries, collectively known as the Visegrad Group, was motivated by their similar level of economic development, the advanced state of reforms undertaken, the political stability, as well as the level of support they receive from Western countries. These countries face the double challenge of integrating into an increasingly global system while undertaking the domestic transformation that all post-communist states face. The data are full of examples of how they are responding to each.

The focus of the study is on the major academic and research libraries (including the national libraries, and libraries of the national academies) that have shown leadership in adopting information technologies and that have deep concern with information access. As such, they play important roles in policy decisions regarding library services in their countries.

Most of the data collected were in the form of in-depth interviews, in which a broad agenda of research questions was presented to respondents about what they viewed as opportunities and challenges for libraries in developing their nation's information infrastructure (Caidi 2001). Face-to-face interviews were conducted between March and June 1999 with 49 library leaders and policy-makers, in 37 institutions. A dozen less formal discussions with other respondents, library system vendors, and project managers also were undertaken. The basis for selection of respondents was that they hold significant policy positions (e.g., library directors or associate directors). Interviews were conducted in English and in two cases required the services of a translator.

Of the 49 respondents interviewed, 27 were men and 22 were women. 16 respondents were from Hungary. 13 from Czech Republic, 14 were from Poland, and 6 were from Slovakia. 10 of the respondents represented national libraries; 26 represented academic libraries and 9 represented other types of research libraries (e.g., State Research libraries, libraries of the Academy of Sciences, etc.). In addition, two respondents were affiliated with a Ministry; and two others were not directly working in libraries but in related fields (e.g., a foundation and a LIS program). The average number of years that respondents reported having worked in the same library is 14 years (across countries), with Hungary respondents averaging 19 years.

A close reading of the interview transcripts was undertaken in order to identify themes. These themes were noted (e.g., categories and sub-categories), given tentative titles, and grouped with quotes from respondents' interviews along with preliminary interpretations. This process was iterative. The body of data was coded using the QSR Nud*ist 4 software. The technique used to explore further the 'cooperation' theme was through frame analysis. Frames are usually referred to as the templates or filters that organise how one makes sense of new information encountered (Entman 1993). As semi-structured elements of discourse, frames elicit "storylines about what is to be comprehended" in a situation or about a topic as perceived and described by a respondent (Fisher 1997, 6.2). In keeping with the spirit of frame analysis, I explored both the content and the construction of respondents' dis-

course around cooperation, using various pointers: what triggered cooperation? Were there recurring leads in respondents' accounts? What were the narrative devices used? How were the roles defined? What was the tone of the 'stories'? Could any underlying messages (cultural practices, broad beliefs, etc.) be identified? etc. The content as well as the narrative forms were coded for their intrinsic properties as well as for the insights into wider issues of interest for this study.

Findings

The rich data gathered elicited many issues essential to our understanding of the nature and dynamics of cooperation as well as the library developments that occurred in these countries, as perceived by the actors themselves. Four 'stages' of cooperation were identified from respondents' accounts across countries. The result is a typology of cooperation that includes: 1) artificial cooperation; 2) contested cooperation; 3) directed cooperation; and 4) voluntary cooperation. This typology is not to be interpreted as a stage theory, with four phases of development that occurred within the library community in the countries studied: no longitudinal data was collected to enable such a claim to be made. Rather, the typology presented in this article is based on a one-time retrospective self-report by respondents, as they described their transition over the past decade. In the remainder of the article, I will refer to these as cooperation 'models' rather than stages.

Artificial cooperation: Libraries under the socialist regime

In this typology of cooperation, the "artificial cooperation" model was well defined historically, and usually referred to the time when the socialist regime was prevalent in these CEE societies. Throughout Central and Eastern Europe, modernisation was based on the rationality of centralised state planning, which touched every sphere of society including libraries. The term "artificial" cooperation was borrowed from a Hungarian respondent who used it when discussing the changing roles of the national library:

Before, library laws could make the National Library the Mother of all libraries, and therefore create [pause] ar-

tificial library networks with other libraries. (...) Even when the National Library used to have this coordination function, the library network it coordinated was more on paper than in reality.

During the Socialist regime, library laws (in Hungary, but the situation applies to the other three countries as well) codified the library network as a centralised system consisting of both a network of public libraries under the jurisdiction of local or regional committees; and a state-wide library network based on subject specialties and differentiated by scientific disciplines. In most cases, cooperation circles depended on the Ministries under which various libraries belonged (Education, Culture, Health, Agriculture, etc.) with little coordination among them. This lack of coordination between ministries reflected on and impacted inter-library cooperation (or the lack thereof).

Cooperation, under the socialist regime, was a must and was controlled from the top. Cooperation was prescribed by law. For instance, such library needs to be the technical library of the country. There were cooperation circles in theory, but it did not really work. At that time, it was a must but cooperation was really low. (A Hungarian respondent)

In socialist times, separate types of libraries were gathered into networks: public libraries, special libraries, university libraries, etc. as well as special, territorial, or area networks connecting these networks with a set of rules; but nobody was interested to provide services then. (A Polish respondent)

Many respondents referred to the artificial library networks imposed on libraries by the ministries as an official attempt at encouraging cooperation. It is clear from the data however, that contrary to a commonly accepted definition of cooperation (the need to have a common objective to achieve), there was no collective goal that united libraries under this artificial cooperation model and very few incentives to cooperate. Reasons for the lack of incentives were traced back to an inadequate or non-existing telecommunication infrastructure in the countries studied. The embargoes and the lack of funding impeded libraries from acquiring modern integrated library systems and halted the development of common formats and standards, hence impeding inter-library cooperation.

The artificial cooperation model reflects the commitment of libraries to being repository of

books, where preservation and collection seemed more important than providing services to users. Few materials were made available on open stacks. Circulation of materials was minimal, and access to many services was mediated.

This emphasis on preservation and collection-building (characteristic of libraries under the socialist regime) has had repercussions on the relationship between libraries. In particular, there were no attempts at sharing data, making each other's catalogue available for users from other libraries to access. In many instances, respondents mentioned that they had no idea what other libraries (sometimes within the same institution) carried in their collections. There was much duplication of resources, high rates of original cataloguing, and no unified approach to librarianship (Borgman 1996, 2000).

Attitudes were also shaped according to the prevailing mentality of the time namely resistance to innovation, lack of initiatives, lower reliance on technology, and low expectations. Moreover, acquisition and collection development were undertaken centrally for libraries. As a result, there was no urgency to cooperate for financial reasons (e.g., scarce resources).

Before, libraries did not need to cooperate because there were small guaranteed amounts of money that were coming in. It was enough for them, so libraries did not care about others and worked alone. (A Hungarian respondent).

Despite what may seem like a clear indication of lack of cooperation – no common goal, no communication, no incentives – respondents still seemed to think that this was a certain form of 'cooperation,' albeit led almost single-handedly by the national libraries and/or a state agency. Cooperation was an idea imposed from the top, much like other policies and concepts, under the socialist regime. As a result, cooperation was minimal despite the existence of library networks (labelled "cooperation networks" by the ministries). The national libraries acted as coordinators for the country's libraries. These libraries were often referred to as the "Head of all libraries" or the "mother of libraries." In reality, the so-called coordinating functions of the National Library were associated in the mind of many respondents with the centralised system and imposed on them from the top.

Libraries are more independent from [the National Library] than before. Now they ask for our opinion. Before, they would give directions and we just had to do whatever they said. (A Czech respondent)

Contacts with abroad were also very limited. Librarians had little opportunities to travel abroad and attend conferences, either because of the costs, the control over the information and communication flow, or the restrictions over the flow of people. The CEE countries studied were never as isolated from the West as other countries under socialism. Yet, the tendency was to refer almost exclusively to the socialist past, as if it was a closed world. These references to the socialist regime were a recurrent trigger and an element often prevalent in this artificial cooperation model, and is made obvious by the extent of the vocabulary and language used to characterise it: “traditionally,” “in the socialist era,” “under the socialist regime,” “in socialist times,” “after 1989” etc. The “before/ after” dialectic denotes a clear break in the ways of functioning of libraries and CEE societies as a whole.

Before, the forms of cooperation were very formal. After the changes, the financial situation of libraries got worse because of economic system. Nowadays, libraries say that they have to cooperate because they can serve users better. (A Hungarian respondent)

Before, embargoes used to be the obstacles. Now, funding is the problem. (A Slovak respondent)

The underlying message for this “artificial cooperation” model seems to be one of official encouragement, but institutional discouragement. While officially encouraged, cooperation was presented in such a way (top-down) that it did not fit in with the realities of libraries (no incentives to cooperate; divisions between libraries, and lack of coordination between ministries). The data also show the profound distrust of the centralised planning that characterised libraries under the socialist regime. After the political changes, there was a clear change of tone, and more optimism for the development of libraries and the possibilities of doing things differently, as can be seen in the ‘contested’ cooperation model.

Contested cooperation: the transition era

This model coined “contested” cooperation [1] corresponds to the situation of libraries after the

socio-economic and political changes. Libraries, like all other institutions, were undergoing tremendous changes. The socio-economic and political changes that followed the end of the socialist regime resulted in a new type of discourse, which was focused around change, along with an obsession with the West (and especially the idea of catching up with the West) through the adoption of international standards, and “modern” ways of practising librarianship.

The rejection of centralised modes of organisation in favour of autonomy and independence to act on one’s own terms is at the heart of this ‘contested cooperation’ model. Cooperation was not sought after consciously. Rather, libraries were more interested in upgrading their systems, gaining autonomy, or reclaiming their historical roles and individual prestige.

Before, we had money to buy materials, but we could not select all that we wanted. Now, we are free to select any materials, but we don’t have money to buy them (A Hungarian respondent)

The situation worsened after the political changes. People thought: we are now free. We do not want to obey any rules. (A Czech respondent).

In an effort to throw away decades of socialist traditions and rules, many institutions focused on their own individual needs and operated in survival mode, often quite disconnected from others’ endeavours. As a result, competitive strategies and individual objectives prevailed over collaborative strategies and common goals. It is as if the pendulum of centralisation moved all the way over to decentralisation, after the socio-political changes. The competition for funding had much to do with this, along with a lack of national approach (i.e., uniform strategies, national visions and policies) and an overall lack of leadership in the library scene.

Cooperation is “contested” in this model for a number of reasons. First, there was resistance from people to get involved in large-scale projects that would remind them too much of the centralised planning models.

We are a little allergic to organisation: We were too well-organised for 40 years. (A Hungarian respondent)

We, Polish, do not like centralisation very much. (A Polish respondent)

A related reason is that the situation of libraries was not viewed as being conducive to cooperation projects. As this Hungarian respondent noted, "Two good libraries can cooperate, two bad libraries cannot." Libraries considered more important to improve their internal processes, update their systems, and try to work more efficiently.

The other important element related to this contested cooperation model has to do with the focus on end-products. After the changes, the economic difficulties were such that any project was deemed meaningless if it did not translate into a final product, or solve a concrete issue (money was tight). Automation of libraries according to modern standards of librarianship was considered the most pressing need (and a very concrete undertaking). Examples of products include the development of local area networks, network-based services, acquisition of CD-ROMs and other library materials, storage capacities, new computers, servers, OPAC modules and other software (Lass & Quandt 2000). This pragmatic stance was prevalent across all countries and in all accounts, as illustrated in the excerpts below:

Cooperation is a very difficult thing. If it to do something that's OK; but if libraries come together and don't achieve anything, then next time they might not be willing to cooperate. (A Hungarian respondent).

The data also suggest a lack of communication between libraries (and/or interest about what other libraries were doing), as each was trying to catch up from a backward technological state. Competitive strategies were prevalent over collaborative ones, as most libraries were attempting to get funding to automate their internal and external processes and be part of the West, on their own terms. There were little or no attempts to adopt uniform approach to buying foreign systems, implementing common standards or establishing uniform policies and national strategies for libraries.

There is not much cooperation with other Czech libraries, because there is no need for it (...) There are lots of discussion but not much results. Attitudes are still individualistic. No energy. No legal ground for libraries. Cooperation is not a priority. (A Czech respondent).

The new players that entered the library scene – Western philanthropic foundations, and other for-

eign sources of funding (EU's TEMPUS, PHARE, etc.) – provided incentives for libraries to start undertaking changes. These foundations and agencies allowed many librarians to travel abroad and be exposed to modern techniques, technologies, and services. They were instrumental in helping libraries purchase modern integrated library systems and getting familiar with international library standards and protocols. Along the way, ideas about the role of the library institution in society and the relationship between libraries were being redefined.

In Slovakia, each library has its own status, role, functions. Relationships between libraries have to be re-defined under new conditions of a democratic society. The future is unclear because there are some political issues and money involved: who gets what? It is very much about politics. (A Slovak respondent).

The role of the National Library was also widely discussed in this cooperation model, and elicited mixed reactions. The national libraries, in all four countries, seem to have had difficulties transferring their leadership role to the post-transformation era. University library respondents, in particular, openly criticise the national libraries' ability to pave the way for libraries. They deemed their country's national libraries as too slow and rigid, and viewed university libraries as more able to lead automation projects and develop library consortia.

The National Library does not know how to cooperate. It is not able to cooperate. It is so slow and inadequate, and late for automation. The National Library is not leading the way for standards or building a national union catalogue (A Polish respondent).

The National Library respondents, on the other hand, intend on maintaining their role in contributing to the development of libraries and the information infrastructure in their country, as a national library respondent put it: "I do not want to be the Head of a Book Museum only, but of a living library, with a future."

At the core of this cooperation model lays an uncertainty about what to decentralise and what to maintain centralised, and we find this tension present throughout the remaining cooperation models. In the contested cooperation model, there seems to be a trend toward decentralisation as a universal panacea that would allow libraries that

have been dominated for decades by a centralised regime to be more autonomous, and do things differently.

From the story of respondents around this cooperation model, what emerges is a strong sense of chaos, following the changes, along with a mix of optimism (about the future) and distrustfulness (toward the past and the “old way of doing things”). In particular, there was a strong sense of rejection of centralisation as a remnant from the previous regime. Individualistic goals seem to override common goals, as cooperation had traditionally been experienced as occurring more on paper than in reality. Unless there are good incentives for libraries to work together, they do not see any reason to do so.

Directed cooperation: Foreign foundations and state agencies' Involvement

The third model of cooperation is referred to as “directed” because cooperation between libraries was generally not a spontaneous undertaking, but rather was “strongly encouraged” upon them by other players. It differs however from “artificial” cooperation, in that some collective goals were identified, and resources were available to take the projects to completion. However, these cooperative projects were not always initiated by libraries themselves (e.g., from the bottom-up).

This cooperation model is not as clearly bound to a time period as the two others were (in the mind of respondents), but follows nonetheless from the transition to a free-market economy. After the initial excitement and overly optimistic expectations about the scope and possibilities of change, the everyday needs of libraries became the number one priority (i.e., the contested cooperation model). As funding became increasingly scarce, libraries found themselves competing for it and compelled to look for outside funding. It is around that time that Western library-oriented philanthropic foundations such as the A.W. Mellon Foundation or Soros' Open Society Institute, started to fund projects in the CEE region (around 1990–1992). Their contribution resulted in a wave of library automation projects being funded, along with the start of cooperative projects and library consortia built around common systems (VTLS, Horizon, Aleph, etc.), or based on resource sharing (e.g., CASLIN, HUSLONET).

When asked about the incentives that led libraries to seek alliances with other libraries, respondents do not hesitate to admit that money was the biggest drive at the time, along with the possibility to get technology and training from foreign foundations that started to manifest interest in CEE higher education institutions and their libraries. The possibilities afforded by foreign foundations and EU initiatives to allow CEE librarians to go abroad and expose them to different library practices was essential, and resulted in a transfer of knowledge, skills and a shift in their librarianship paradigm.

Funding now is a main reason for library cooperation. Any other reason is idealistic. (A Hungarian respondent)

Some library directors participating in CASLIN were not deeply interested and convinced in cooperation, and were doing that for pragmatic purpose. For money. (A Czech respondent)

In addition to foreign foundations that encouraged cooperation between libraries, ministries and state agencies also started adopting a systemic approach to libraries (rather than dealing with individual libraries). Finally, library system vendors also played a role: by approaching consortia of libraries, they in effect gave some legitimacy and credibility to the (real or perceived) cooperative endeavour.

Now, there are grants available for libraries to participate in cooperation on automation. Those libraries that buy a common system are seen as having advantages: for example the Ministry of Culture promotes cooperation this way; not saying, “you MUST cooperate” but by motivating libraries in other ways. This is a real incentive for libraries to cooperate. Other funding institutions also encourage libraries to cooperate. (A Hungarian respondent)

Another respondent commented that cooperation and the establishment of cooperative endeavours would have happened in his country (Poland) anyway, but that thanks to the Mellon Foundation (in this case), they occurred ten years earlier than it would have otherwise. The implications of this remark are useful for the purpose of framing this “directed” cooperation model, namely the acknowledgement that there were external pressures put on libraries to work together; along with the recognition of the difficulties (and benefits) to undertake cooperation, and the definition

and distribution of roles. It is therefore not surprising that respondents' discourse around this model of initiation and development of alliances between libraries was tainted with frustration and pessimism, along with tremendous learning and shared experiences. The data analysis provides ample account of the presence of power and resistance, autonomy and dependence relationships and the emergence of interest groups or factions.

The pressures imposed by foreign foundations on libraries to encourage them to cooperate took various forms: in some cases, the foundations encouraged libraries to submit joint proposals. In Hungary, for instance, the Mellon Foundation gave grants to approximately twenty libraries. These libraries did not have an overarching common objective, but nevertheless submitted their requests through a joint proposal handed over by the Centre for Library Science and Methodology of the National Library.

Another means used by foreign foundations to encourage libraries to adopt a joint approach was to advise them to select a common integrated system. The rationale was that this would give libraries more leverage when negotiating with library vendors (who would have more incentives to deal with a large consortia than with individual libraries) (Lass and Quandt, 2000).

In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the Mellon Foundation funded a dozen libraries organised into one "loose" consortium (CASLIN) with several sub-consortia (Molin, Kolin, and Linca, generally referred to as CASLIN+) that overwhelmingly used a single software system, Aleph. As Lass (1999) pointed out, as system vendors started to deal with a library consortium as a single entity, it was able to give a sense of communal purpose to the cooperative endeavour (e.g., CASLIN) despite any dissension that may have existed among the participating libraries.

In Poland, about forty major Polish libraries opted for three different major automation systems (VTLS, Dynix-Horizon, and Innopac), and created several tight consortia organised in drastically different ways. The VTLS consortium (including the four core founding libraries, plus the Wroclaw consortium, the Krakow consortium, and the Lublin consortium) was characterised by highly distributed functions (Quandt 2002). The Dynix-Horizon consortium included a university

library in Torun, a consortium of libraries organised as a separate organisation in Poznan (e.g., the Poznan Foundation for Scientific Libraries), and the Lodz consortium (supervised by a lead institution: the Technical University of Lodz). As for the Polish National Library, it opted for the Innopac library system.

This new approach to libraries as a system – rather than individual entities – allowed libraries to have more visibility and a stronger voice. As these Polish respondents put it:

Poland as a poor country had to reduce its ambitions and not have many different systems: when we are about to receive support from the government, we have to be unified.

Informal cooperation is good for short term. In the long term, it is good to have something down, like a policy, and financial backup. A good central cataloguing would be a good way to cooperate but only if it is well organised. Cooperation just for cooperating is a waste of time.

In a few instances, the Mellon foundation through its representative had recourse to monitoring and sanctioning in order to force the libraries to adopt a cohesive approach when the progress toward a unified national union catalogue was halted by "micro-politics" (Lass, 2000).

In the 1990s, there were so many opportunities to meet and discuss issues together, so I thought these people [project participants] would be better prepared to do it. But they were not. They did not know each other and behaved differently. There were different systems, different styles of work, lifestyles, and visions. They don't make a good team. We work hard and I don't doubt that we will succeed but it is not going smoothly. (A Polish respondent)

The situation of libraries in this model of cooperation resembles a Prisoner's Dilemma in that libraries are enjoined to cooperate with each other, while legacies of individual prestige, limited funding and lack of transparency oblige libraries to compete with each other and do their best to promote their own interests and their users' needs.

Cooperation is an eminently political process, and this is particularly obvious in this cooperation model, as there does not seem to be a common philosophy and even a common goal (other than the end product). Hence, collaborative strategies (creating library consortia) evolve alongside competitive strategies, such as maintaining one's

prestige and status, or working along the lines of forming “fan clubs” based on the purchase and use of common (and often foreign) library systems. The subject-based library networks of the ‘artificial cooperation’ era in the eyes of many respondents seem to have been replaced by “systems-based” library networks (such as Aleph, VTLS, Dynix, Tinlib, Horizon, etc.), hence excluding those who do not have the same systems, and limiting a larger cooperation.

Library consortia are very strong-headed and they know everything, especially the VTLS libraries. The consortia are based on library systems. [The respondent’s library] can cooperate with everybody, every library consortium, but not in a dictatorship relation: it has to be true cooperation, with clear goals. (A Polish respondent)

The data show that not only did respondents hold different visions of what the outcome should be, but they also experienced difficulty communicating across their position to one another, and reaching an understanding. One respondent referred to the idea of “speaking different dialects” to describe this situation. There seems to be a problem of communication or a failure to reach any form of compromises. The lengthy and acrimonious discussions around standards and library protocols (e.g., choice of the MARC format or agreement on authority files) exemplify the situation, and contributed to depict a passive image of libraries as a group. For instance, there were many instances of “wait-and-see” attitudes, or “we can’t do anything,” “I don’t think it will work,” and “I am not very optimistic about the future of MOKKA.” In his ethnographic study of the management of delays in the development of the CASLIN project, Lass (2000) advances that these attitudes may have acted as self-fulfilling prophecies.

In summary, the terms of the cooperative endeavours in this cooperation model were being negotiated, with some respondents privileging their own individual goals, at the detriment of the common objectives; and others referring to a ‘good,’ ‘real,’ or ‘ideal’ cooperation as if such a thing existed.

However, there also seems to be a transition that was taking place between old values inherited from the past and new attitudes and ways of thinking deemed more appropriate (and now authorised and encouraged) for undertaking

any necessary change. Changing what Alexis de Tocqueville refers to as the “soft” factors (e.g., habits, mentalities and cultural routines) is usually the most difficult task (and a slow process) not only within the culture of the organisations, but also at an individual level. The new trend puts the accent on the necessity to work together, and make compromises. This becomes even more evident in the “voluntary cooperation” model.

Voluntary cooperation: Becoming an “Us”

The “directed” cooperation model was essential in bringing the libraries together and encouraging them to coordinate their efforts (sometimes at the risk of being sanctioned if they did not). It allowed them to set up the stage for inter-library cooperation. As in any inter-organisational alliances, the next logical step is the development and maintenance of the alliance, which Kanter (1994) likened to a marriage situation starting with “getting engaged,” “setting up housekeeping,” and “learning to collaborate.” This stage is discussed extensively in the organisational communication and management literature (Ring & Van de Ven 1994). The “voluntary” cooperation model reflects these trends. Without maintenance, the technological system becomes a ruin as exemplified by the uncertain future of the Czech and Slovak Library Information Network (CASLIN) and MOKKA, in Hungary.

This voluntary cooperation model coincided in the CEE countries studied with the withdrawal of foreign foundations from the library scene, the emergence of new legislation for libraries, and changes in the Higher Education regulatory environment (for instance, in Hungary, there was a trend toward the integration of various universities into one “Universitas” build on the North American campus model).

The sense of proactivity that appears throughout respondents’ accounts with relation to their activities around 1999 is a big change from the earlier complaints about being imposed a structure and rules. The respondents are increasingly appropriating the projects and positioning themselves as the architects of their own collaboration and future. They are not only internalising the rules of cooperation, but also in some cases even reinventing them. New leaders and formal structures are being discussed and devised in an at-

tempt to change the library structure. As the State backs away (at least from its authoritative stance), there are efforts and commitment on the part of libraries to create genuine cooperation, and establish deeper relationships. State agencies are increasingly viewed as partners, rather than "bosses."

As expected, communication seems to play a key role in this model. More interaction and exchanges between respondents, and the creation of fora for discussion enabled a sense of communal purpose that is evident throughout the accounts. After having integrated library systems and developed their OPACs, the CEE libraries studied are coming together to solve common issues, to serve the needs of their users (shared goal) and contribute to the development of libraries at the national level. The creation of national union catalogues (NUCs) and other shared cataloguing systems (e.g., MOKKA, CASLIN, NUKAT, VOKAL) in particular illustrates some of the dynamics at play in this voluntary cooperation model. Despite the "directed" nature of the NUC projects in the initial stages, the development of these projects has followed different trajectories depending on the nature of the relationships between individual libraries in the various countries.

In Hungary, for instance, special-purpose organisations consisting of a group of large academic and research libraries were created to establish MOKKA, the Hungarian National Shared Catalogue. These libraries submitted proposals directly to funding sources (e.g., Soros, Ministry of Education).

In Poland, three system-based library consortia were "encouraged" to work collectively toward the national union catalogue. The definition and distribution of roles for each player was lengthy and still has not stabilised. However, there are encouraging trends that contribute toward the realisation of the common goal and the eventual stabilisation of the collaborative project. Such trends include the boundary-spanning roles played by some libraries, which were able and willing to act as intermediaries between the different library consortia. For instance, a few libraries using the Dynix-Horizon systems purchased and learnt to use the VTLS system and were able to act as intermediaries (or as a respondent puts it as "exchange agents") between the two systems by allowing the exchange of records between the

Dynix libraries and the VTLS libraries. Similarly, the creation of the Centre for Authority Files and Formats was a major milestone for the country, in that this Centre became the major NUKAT coordinator across library systems. These advances led a Polish respondent to comment:

Before, cooperation was authoritative: biggest libraries ordered smaller libraries. Now, there is more cooperation and a more democratic process. There are lots of barriers to this good cooperation, but library systems' consortia is a trend toward good cooperation.

In Czech Republic and Slovakia, CASLIN has been very influential and helped libraries to catch up with library developments in the rest of the world (Svoboda 2000) although its future is uncertain. Various consortia were established as extensions of CASLIN. These include the Kosice Library Information Network (KOLIN), the Moravian Library Information Network (MOLIN), and the Library Information Network of the Czech Academy of Sciences (LINCA). These consortia learnt from the CASLIN mistakes and were able to develop into effective collaborative tools, while leaving room for individual institutions to experiment on their own.

The discourse around this "voluntary cooperation" model constantly revolves around the need to find a balance between centralisation and decentralisation. National union catalogues, because they are shared by multiple communities and the object of constant negotiation, can be viewed as platforms that enable the decentralisation of power. However, respondents seem to be increasingly aware that cooperation means losing independence, and that some amount of centralisation may lead to better cooperation. In this sense, cooperation was perceived as a means to achieve the needed centralisation that will ensure the effectiveness of the cooperative goals. Purchasing electronic databases and placing them on the university network was such an example of a centralised management enabling better use of the electronic resources for the benefits of all member users. The findings in the countries studied suggest the usefulness of a hierarchical structure administered centrally that combines the advantages of the decentralised and centralised solutions (e.g., a high-level committee in charge of long-term visions and policy (Board of Directors or Council of Rectors); a Steering Committee

that makes most of the important decisions; and a Management team that deals with routine tasks and activities) (Quandt 2002).

As Bicchieri (1990) suggests, cooperation has better chances to become well-established in small groups and then diffuse through an evolutionary process to larger groups. The Polish experience illustrates this case. The progress toward a Polish union catalogue (a result of three well-organised library consortia that joined forces to develop an NUC) is so far the most successful endeavour of the three NUC projects. The Hungarian experience, which started from the bottom-up and aimed at including all Hungarian libraries, has failed (so far) to create a single consortium that speaks with one voice. As for CASLIN, despite the initial success, its future is uncertain. In his assessment of the CASLIN project, Svoboda (2000) refers to the "post-Mellon-funding" phase as the start of the decline in cooperation drive, of a series of divisions and micro-politics which ultimately led to the lack of a common vision. When the disagreement is due to differing perceptions and no agreement seems to be possible between the various parties, it becomes very difficult to restore cooperation (Harrington & Axelrod, 1994).

Discussion and implications

This analysis of 'cooperation' using frame analysis resulted in a useful typology that depicts how the library policy-makers interviewed made sense of the changes that occurred within libraries, and informs the evolution of cooperation in these four countries in the last decade.

The framing of the 'artificial cooperation' model revolved around the idea that "cooperation was only on paper, not in reality." The definition of the situation was that while officially encouraged, cooperation was presented in such a manner (top-down) that it did not fit in well with the realities of libraries. The diagnosis is that everything happened above libraries' heads. The solution was the total rejection of centralised state planning after the socio-political changes. This frame is the result of a profound distrust of the centralised planning that characterised the socialist era.

In the 'contested cooperation' model, the prevalent frame is contained in this respondent's quote: "We are now free. We do not want to obey

any rules." The diagnosis is that competitive strategies were prevalent over collaborative ones, as there was no uniform policy or national strategies for libraries. This frame doesn't offer a general solution: unless there are good incentives for libraries to work together, they do not see any reason to do so.

The third cooperation model ('directed cooperation') is built around the "We were forced to cooperate" adage. The definition of the situation was that cooperation between libraries was generally not a spontaneous undertaking, but rather was "strongly encouraged" upon them by various players. The diagnosis was that the monetary incentives were among the main reasons for libraries to attempt the foundations for inter-library cooperation. The solution was to devise various types of consortia and alliances (based on systems, types of libraries, etc..) although these sometimes turned out to become boundaries that excluded others from joining the endeavour.

The definition of the problem and diagnosis in the 'voluntary cooperation' model is simple: a joint approach to solving libraries' problems has more benefits than an individualistic one. Communication, compromise and collective action were viewed as an important part of the process. Axelrod (1984)'s argument that stable cooperation emerges when there is a set of players who interact repeatedly and who are able to identify other cooperators is well illustrated by the experience of the library community in the CEE countries studied. As Dawes et al. (1990) note, "with no discussion, egoistic motives explain cooperation; with discussion, group identity – alone or in interaction with verbal promises – explains its dramatic increase" (p. 107).

The four countries have all accumulated significant local knowledge from their experiences with technology, cooperation, new values and services. They are all well on their way (albeit at a different pace) toward improving their library systems and "catching up" with Europe and the West.

Overall, the findings suggest relatively little differences between countries as far as 'cooperation' is concerned. Respondents in the four countries seem to depict the various models of cooperation according to very similar frames. These countries' shared socialist heritage translated into similar views with regard to the situation of libraries under the 'artificial' model of

cooperation. Similarly, these countries seem to share similar insights and experiences with regard to the 'contested,' 'directed,' and 'voluntary' cooperation models.

Respondents from all countries emphasised the importance to reach a balance between centralisation and decentralisation (i.e., a shared vision, with plenty of room for individual initiatives). However, the Slovak respondents interviewed expressed a strong interest toward a body that would set clear guidelines and standards for libraries and other information institutions. These respondents seemed particularly wary of the 'chaos' that comes with a totally decentralised approach and tended to lean toward a coordinated approach to library activities. This slight difference however is to be taken cautiously as the sample of Slovak respondents is much smaller than that of other respondents from other countries.

The other more important difference is the one that appeared between types of libraries in the four countries, and in particular between national libraries and academic libraries. These differences stem in part from the status held by these two types of libraries in various stages of their history. For instance, under the 'artificial cooperation' model, national libraries had a central role (e.g., the "Mother" of all libraries) while university libraries' status was low, as the socialist regime favoured scientific and technical institutions (such as the Academy of Sciences). After the socio-political changes, there has been a reversal of roles whereby the role of the National Library was transformed and its leadership was questioned (i.e., qualified as too slow and rigid). University libraries, on the other hand, perceived themselves as the pioneers in automation and cooperation, and started to overly challenge and criticise the national libraries.

Finally, the preservation of identity and cultural heritage was a topic of concern for all respondents, but particularly Slovak and Hungarian respondents. This finding can be interpreted through past and present historical references: Hungary is surrounded by Slavic languages and cultures and as such puts a great deal of effort into preserving its distinctiveness and identity. As for Slovakia, it has become an independent nation for the first time in 1993 (as opposed to the Czech Republic which had been an autonomous

nation in the past), and as such needs to constitute an identity for itself.

Beyond these differences, this typology raises questions about the cultural influences and shared meanings that are being constructed with regard to the concept of cooperation. Respondents were careful to mention that cooperation has always existed among libraries: it has only taken new forms. One is left wondering how much of cooperation is the result of exogenous forces versus endogenous forces? In other words, was cooperation a material action resulting primarily from outside forces (e.g., the foreign foundations and agencies that promoted joint approaches and consortial arrangements), or was it primarily a result of the belief of the library community about the advantages of getting organised for social change? A related question is whether different organisational models would have developed within libraries in these four countries, if the foreign philanthropic foundations did not intervene. Obviously, the resources and know-how brought by these agencies were extremely valuable and there is no denying it, but one could also ponder whether the same choices would have been made, and in particular what would have motivated libraries to get organised and collaborate.

By encouraging a certain model of library development based on consortial arrangements and resource sharing, funding sources (philanthropic Western-based foundations, state agencies, etc.) made it easier to do things in a new way while, perhaps, shutting down any other possibilities. This tension between the exogenous and endogenous forces is analogous to the classic tension in the development literature where the dominating discourse of development and modernity was imposed on local culture at the detriment of more participatory processes (Escobar 1999, Freire 1973, Huesca, 1995).

The point however is not to criticise funding sources, but to point out that getting libraries in the four CEE countries organised is not simply a matter of evening out the voices by assuming (or forcing) general agreement on values and goals. Rather, these funding agencies need to accept that the production of knowledge is a collective process that is produced and negotiated by members of the community, hence the tensions and conflicts. Such tensions are sometimes needed for individuals or institutions to find their own voices

rather than simply learn rules devised elsewhere. Empowerment, after all, is a communicative process (Craig 1994; Deetz 1994).

The findings show evidence of the awareness of most respondents of the importance of creating forums for discussion, starting training sessions and workshops, and changing the values, mentalities and attitudes of librarians and users. Already, the focus of many libraries, according to respondents, has clearly shifted from preservation and collection development to provision of services to users (i.e., extended hours of operation, shift toward open shelves, availability of Internet terminals, revamping of reading rooms, etc). Recent developments in establishing national union catalogues and digital libraries – despite the withdrawal of many foreign funding sources – show a continued trend toward voluntary cooperation; and an eagerness on the part of librarians to build on their knowledge base and pave the way for a new and improved library and information environment in their country.

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Note

1. Sonnenwald (1995) and Sonnenwald & Lievrouw (1996) coined the concept of “contested collaboration” in their analysis of inter-group communication in information system design. “Contested collaboration” is defined as a communication strategy that enables team members to “advance their own particular interests or knowledge claims while maintaining an outward stance of cooperation with the group.” (Sonnenwald & Lievrouw 1996, p.179). While a useful concept, my use of “contested cooperation” differs somewhat from their “contested collaboration” in various ways, which I explain here.

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