

# Digital Libraries and Consortia: New Horizons for Scientific Research and Lifelong (e)Learning

Research proposal (draft)

Joseph Rogani

MODULE BP 101

MA/MSc Information Studies  
University of Northumbria – Newcastle  
Università degli Studi – Parma

# ***The Proposal***

***(DRAFT)***

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Digital Libraries. and Consortia: new horizons for scientific research and lifelong (e-)learning**

Keywords: global access, information, digital, co-operation, .....  
.....

### ***Introduction***

As we know, many libraries are turning digital, or are improving electronic services among the more traditional ones. Sometime they start as brand new digital libraries, with no paper-based documents. This is the case of many new enterprises, which offer digital documents and global access to information. Actually, they are “libraries” as a matter of fact, especially when they provide access to e-journals, digitised books and other scientific publications.

What seems important in this evolving scenario, is that libraries of every kind are experiencing the benefits of “being together”.

Library Consortia appear as a possible challenge for everyone who aims at having global and precise access to a vast amount of information. What is more, this information is not only useful for those who carry out scientific research but also for all those who work in different fields of knowledge.

Libraries always worked strictly in contact with the different fields of study, providing students, researchers and all interested users with the requested information. At the same time, librarians always acted as “counsellors” as well as consultants in the field of information and documentation.

Today, Web portals provide everyone with the access to library catalogues and to different kind of digitised content. What is more, the search for “true” information is always a fundamental theme, and libraries play a very important role: thanks to the new technologies, they now interpret a new role, that of “facilitator” and support provider in all the new “electronic” learning processes, not only being just “information providers” but also becoming real Information technology Managers.

In particular, librarians could be directly affected by this new change that deals with Information Technology, and the evolution of traditional learning is strictly connected to the new possibilities offered by e-learning strategies and platforms, also considered that the combined use of different methods of knowledge diffusion is the most proper tool to help users during their learning process.

Of course, this new approach should also consider a possible change in the management [1]of library as well as of other enterprises structure, improving IT knowledge and practice.

## ***Aims and Objectives***

Possible aims and objective are:

- To evaluate the current state of (bibliographic) information diffusion through Web portals at a local level;
- To find out what are the further needs of local researchers and specific users (for instance medical researchers who do not have a Faculty of Medicine at our university, to which to refer);
- To suggest solutions to improve a dynamic access to specific contents;
- To promote the idea of co-operation among different typology of libraries, both at a local and global level;
- To evaluate the possibility to create a system to provide Web-based *on demand* tutorials on library and information resources use and management.
- To connect users, teachers, librarians and communities on a global level for a “global” access;
- To improve the awareness of library consortia about the “real” users’ needs by improving the knowledge of Customer Relationship Management;
- To.....
- To.....
- To.....
- others

## ***Background***

As already written in the Literature Review, which I previously submitted, the idea of sharing information and then spreading it everywhere, which found its “technological” promoter in V. Bush, had already been got somehow in the U.S., where, just in the 1880s, libraries started working together to share their collections [2].

In 1886, the *Library Journal* published an article by Melvil Dewey about “library co-operation”, while a year earlier E.A. Mac had presented, in the same journal, his views on “Co-operation versus competition”. [3]

In the 1939 symposium organized by the ALA and called The Library of Tomorrow, R.B. Downs expressed his futuristic view of library co-operation in a paper entitled: “*One for all: a historical sketch of library co-operation, 1930-1970*”. His study was so greatly appreciated that in 1970 the US Office of Education commissioned the System Development Corporation (SDC) to carry out a nation-wide study of academic library consortia. The aim of this study was to gather as much information as possible about the activities of academic library consortia providing guidance to those libraries that were forming, or planning to form, consortia. The published results demonstrated that the main reason to form consortia was the possibility to share and improve resources while one of the last ones was to reduce costs.

As I mentioned in the introduction of this proposal, one of the concepts underlying the idea of a consortium is the possibility to give access to a great deal of information to a great deal of potential users. It is true that most of this information is limited to affiliated users: but it is also true that many could be the ways to turn this information completely public.

The idea is not new. In fact [4] due to the increased desire for higher education and more information in general, unaffiliated users during the 1960s in the U.S., started to press academic libraries asking for public access, also considered that many public libraries could not manage the big flows of users, who kept growing in number because of the increase in population.

The electronic library is evolving: it is no more just an automated library but an organised centre where information and documents are managed and distributed.

As ICOLC states, "***The use of licensed electronic information resources will continue to expand and in some cases become the sole or dominant means of access to content***", making clear that the measurement of the use of these resources is improved by the electronic environment. It is now possible to exploit the great amount of information kept by the many aggregated databases available, which, apart from periodical content, includes encyclopaedias, dictionaries, biographies and more. All now available through *cross-reference* tools, often offered by the same vendor, which give the user the possibility to search simultaneously in different databases.

Library consortia, so, are the clear sign that libraries are changing. Consortia, help libraries better manage changes by analysing the quality of the content from various providers and by serving as aggregators for member libraries. In the Information Society, the Digital Library is a Key element [5] Furthermore, libraries will provide users with access to the increasing digital resources also thanks to international consortia policies.

### ***Methodology and Suggested analysis***

In order to investigate on the needs of local users, I will prepare some questionnaires that will be submitted via e-mail. This will be done considering a short period of time given in order to have questionnaires answered. Then, short interview with selected sample could be organized in order to add qualitative data to the data collected according to quantitative methods.

The information got out of the processing of those data, will be used not only to obtain a description of the current situation, but also to go deeper into "customers" needs. The intention is to be always on users side, directly asking them what they want.

Of course, it will be necessary to make inquiries also at a broader level, trying to include in the list of questionnaire addresses not only local users but also some users coming from different countries, as far as it will be possible.

All collected data, both quantitative and qualitative, will be processed using the Microsoft application Excel or, if possible, using SPSS.

### ***Planning***

The phase dealing with the preparation of questionnaires should not take more than 3 weeks, including a possible sample selection. Then, I will allow other two weeks in order to receive answers.

The second phase, related with interviews, could be longer. In fact, we should consider not only the practical time to conduct an interview but also the time needed in order to select and then contact the sample to interview: actually, I don't give for granted that samples will be the same for both questionnaires and interviews.

Then, we need to analyse data in order to get some information: these information must subsequently be used to plan a change in the direction of planned intervention to reach the stated objectives.

To summarize:

	Period of time	Suggested analysis
Phase 1	From November the 1 <sup>st</sup> to	
Phase 2	From to	

## ***Anticipated outcomes***

\*\*\*\*\*

### **References**

[1] Hirshon, Arnold. *Libraries, Consortia, and Change Management*. In *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, vol. 25, n.2, pages 124-126.

[2] Bostick, Sharon L. *The History and Development of Academic Library Consortia in the United States: An Overview*. In *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, vol.27. n.1

[3] Nfila Reason Baathuli & Darko-Ampem Kwasi. *Developments in academic consortia from the 19960 through to 2000: a review of the literature*.

[4] Courteney, Nancy. *Barbarians at the Gates: A Half-Century of Unaffiliated Users in Academic Libraries*. In *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, vol.27, n.6, nov.2001

[5] Tammamaro, Anna Maria. *Una strategia per la Digital Library*. In [http://www.storia.unifi.it/\\_storinforma/guest99/tammamaro.htm](http://www.storia.unifi.it/_storinforma/guest99/tammamaro.htm)