Librarianship Cooperation in the Field of Rare and Ancient Book, New Opportunities for the Padua University Libraries System

Research proposal

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1. Introduction

1.1 <u>Overview</u>

Cooperation has a long tradition in the working attitude of librarians. During the past 100 years words as *collaboration*, *co-operation, resource- sharing* have crossed and influenced all the main activities in the libraries.

One of the oldest traditions in library cooperation has been the sharing of bibliographic information. Technology became the dominant factor in the design of cooperative systems for the acquisition, control and mobility of materials (OCLC, RLG).

In the last years the main incentives to cooperate seem to be the rising material costs, and the proliferation of materials to purchase.

A recent re-organization of the Padua University Libraries System (PULS) in 11 "Poli" offered the opportunity to establish an "Ancient and Special Collection Polo" with a coordinator (the researcher) and a small team of librarians managing the ancient and rare collections scattered in 50 libraries.

Furthemore during the last 10 years formal relationships have been established with all others libraries of the city, almost all very rich in rare and ancient books. Nowadays they all share the same OPAC and some facilities in the ILL domain.

 In this context and in field of rare books and special collections, next step will be a mid-term planning of new activities, where cooperation should be one of the cornerstone.

The rationale for selecting this particular problem is the researcher's main working activity as coordinator of the Ancient and special Collection Polo in Padua University Libraries System and her commitment in planning future activities and the development of this particular Polo.

To this end the project will provide information to allow the top management to develop a strategical, specific mid-term plan in the general context of the PULS.

1.2 <u>Aims</u>

- To investigate what kind of cooperation opportunities may be developed in the field of rare and ancient book between Padua University Libraries and the other libraries of the city

- To support the strategic management with evidences and analysis results in order to establish a mid term development programme in the particular field of special collections

1.3 Objectives

- To explore the 'status quo' situation of the libraries in this field
- To describe the existing interactions among libraries of different institutions
- To gather and analyse informations and opinions from all the subjects involved
- To involve all of them in the decision process
- To analyse the expectations needs of stakeholders and users

1.4 Research questions

Are there opportunities for further development inter-institutions in the field of special collections apart from the same OPAC?

What are the possible success factors, the obstacles, the cultural barriers in establishing a co-operative model in the field of special collections among the Padua libraries?

What kind of influence may have a certain traditional material-centred attitude of special collections libarians?

What are the expected outreachs and changes in the PULS vision?

2. Background

Contextualizing research questions

2.1 Cooperation: some examples

One of the most recent and interesting definition of cooperation focus on breaking down the artificial boundaries between institutions, sectors and domains in order that better services can be provided (Pilling and Kerma, 2002).

This is exactly the meaning for which the research will try to concentrate on the cooperation potentialities in order to find out some further opportunities for the development of the relationship among the libraries of the city and University in the field of special collections and rare books.

Examples of cooperation in the bibliografical area are very frequent in Italy as well as in other countries of Europe and in the world.

To remain in Italy the following are the most famous union catalogues:

IGI, that is the national catalogue of incunabula.

SBN/A (printed books from 1500 to 1830) since 1994 and nowadays containing 530.000 titles, and 1.700.000 holdings.

EDIT 16 since 1981 has been a strategic choice in order to pass over the dissemination of the XVI century books in innumerables libraries. It is now an on-line database containing 57.000 bibliographic records and 359.000 holdings of 1335 co-operating libraries.

MANUS a database for manuscripts.

MAR.T.E. is one of the latest example of co-operative project born at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale of Rome, intended to be a work in- fieri to collect all the digital images of XVII c. editorial watermarks

Other examples are the Thesauri, controlled lists of keywords; classification systems, and lexical databases.

ILL is probably the best example of the resouce-sharing model, and more recently there are some interesting initiatives in the field of Disaster management (CoOL).

Early digital projects were were models of innovation and cooperation. Digital cultural heritage

Internet, WWW and electronic journals have led to an increased interest in cooperative collection development with the development of consortial collaboration.

2.2 <u>Internal Factors</u>

The functional re-organization of the PULS has proved to be a powerful push towards innovation not only in the more expected aspects such as the technological or human resources ones, but also in the strategic need to re-analyse the context setting of all the different libraries in the attempt to create a city system in order to fulfill the local users' expectations in primis.

An initial PEST analysis put in evidence that in the Environment context the major strengths are the union catalogue OPAC, the formal convections already signed, and the presence of a particularly rich bibliographic heritage whose collections are often scattered in different libraries of the city.

An approximate estimation suggests a number of nearly 800.000 old monographs hold by all the city libraries.

From the researcher's point of view this kind of situation is seen as extremely positive and a good starting point to develop a new setting where to establish new trends in the field-work of ancient and rare books collections.

Another specific strength of the PULS is the presence of a team of librarians working together since a long period now that could represent a good basis as regards the recruitment and the training of new personnel for the other libraries that in the majority of cases don't have structured human resources.

2.3 <u>Initial literature review</u>

A review of the rare book librarianship literature reveals that little has been written on the topic of cooperation or services in the past 20 years. The focus of the few articles that have appeared is primarily on cataloguing, bibliography, local history, preservation, and conservation.

The document-centred approach in rare books librarianship is witnessed by the large amount of references regarding technical, bibliographic, ethics in acquisition policies, cataloguing, preservation, historical aspects of rare books.

In 2001 the Keynote Address of ARL conference was a reflection about the state of art of special collections librarianship looking at the year 2001 as a possible turning point (Stam, 2001), the author asked for more access, abolishing the word keeper and curator, diminishing the barriers to student handling and changing librarians vision.
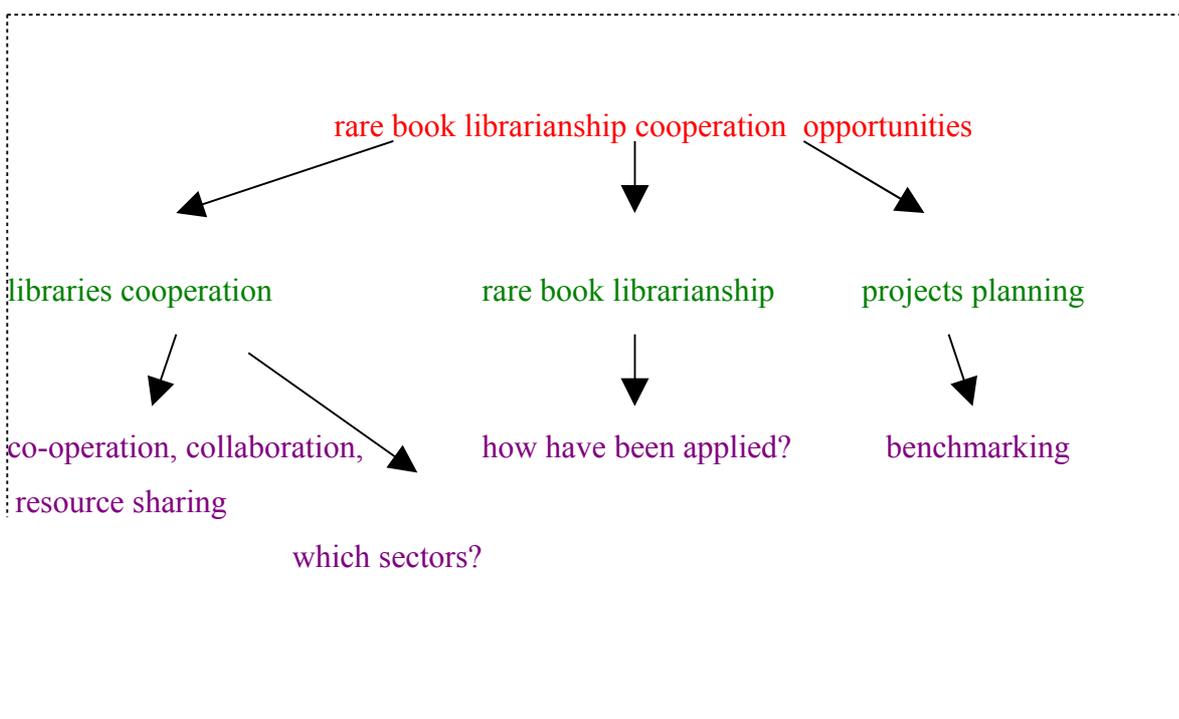
The need for rare books and special collections librarians to reassess where they are and what the future holds is witnessed also in another article of 2001 about the "Reinventing the Treasure room". Bengtson lists some of the principal activities indispensable to change from a protecting attitude to a use attitude such as teaching, fundraising, research, and IT development (Bengtson, 2001)

In Italy in 2004 one of the most experienced and influential librarian wrote for the first time about a service culture for the ancient and historical collections[1] (Crocetti, 2004) even if mainly from the point of view of the librarian as researcher.

Looking at these few articles, at the beginning of the 21th century, the user centred approach seems to involve also the rare books and special collections librarians.

The literature about cooperation, and resource sharing, seems to be very rich and the problem wull be that of circumscribing the references in the area of innovative aspects besides the cataloguing and digital ones that appear to be the most frequent.

The researcher wull try to explore the Italian and English literature of the last 15 years through the use of OPACs and electronic resources on the framework of the following relevance tree:

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[1] in Italian *Una cultura di servizio per le biblioteche storiche*

2.4 <u>Benchmarking</u>

A critical analysis of other comparable Universities will assure to the research a more grounded theory approach to the same question.

A brief preliminary research has put in evidence two interesting examples of cooperation at Leiden University with the Scaliger Institute, and at London University with the Warburg Institute.. Founded in 2000, the Scaliger Institute aims to stimulate and facilitate the use of Special Collections of Leiden University Library in both teaching and research offering favourable working conditions and expertise, organizing symposia, master classes, special courses and lectures. Furthermore, the Institute hosts a fellowship programme for visiting scholars in collaboration with the Mellon Foundation.

London University: The Warburg Institute has an active programme of teachng, seminars, lectures and colloquia, often arranged in collaboration with other institutions or learned societies, both British and foreign. Fellowships programme for long-term and short-term period.

These two Institute cooperate in digital projects exchanging expertise and resources.

3. Methodology

3.1 <u>Overall approach</u>

The analysis of the various approach within the qualitative research arena has been a very critical step in the search of the most suitable method.

Overall the practitioner-researcher approach to projects and problem in ways that yield solutions, has been considered as the more convenient by the researcher who will work in order to provide information for policy decisions.

All the principal research methods have been considered and only an extensive reading has led to the choice of the Case Study approach as it provides an opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth. Researchers identify an instance which could be the introduction of a new way of working, the "*way an organization adopt a new role, or any innovation or stage of development in an institution*" according to the Bell's words (Bell, 2005)

The conceptual argument is intended for broad application. The case study illustrates how local conditions may be takent into account in the following setting:

- Institutional context
- Reasons for reorganization
- Issues in reorganization

Researchers use this method when they are looking for insights into the phenomenon under study and believe the context of the event is relevant to full interpretation and understanding of the situation (Peter Jarvis 1999).

In the case of a research for reasons for reorganization the usual critics to case study as the danger of distortion, and the almost impossible generalization, have not been considered relevant factors because the relatability of a case study is more important than its generalizability.

3.2 Research design

If a well-prepared , small-scale study may inform, illuminate and provide a basis for policy decisions within the institution (Bell, 2005), the *structured-case research* method can guide researchers undertaking case studies to build theory.

In the structured-case research the *conceptual framework* is a structure which guides researcher by clearly setting out their expectations (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The components are:

- the research themes,
- literature,
- insights,
- theoretical foundations

The research will be based on this method that seems to give to the researcher a well-defined framework within working on. Furthemore the concept of research cycle seems to guarantee the need to check the steps of the research continuosly. While the conceptual framework is defined for each research cycle it will be refined or revised as a result of reflection on the learning gained during the cycle. In this process it is vital that the researcher remain open to serendipity that is one of the researcher's aims. At last also the oscillation between data collection and analysis and between analysis and reflection permitted in this kind of method, will be another way to be flexibile and open-minded till the end of the project.

3.3 Data collections techniques

In order to aim at reliability a methodological triangulation will be included:

- pilot discussion with key informants to understand the most important issues
- semi-structured interviews to the libraries' directors
- focus group with librarians and users
- literature review and analysis of documentation

While the pilot discussion will be a sort of brainstorming, the interviews will be structured in order to ask each respondent the same questions in the same way and to facilitate the task of collecting and analysing the responses.

The interviews advantages of adaptability, and of information beyond written responses, will be balanced by the disadvantages, that are the fact to be a time-consuming, highly subjective technique, with a great danger of bias.

The ethical guidelines suggested in many literature references (Kvale, 1996 for example) will be a useful tool to oppose to this kind of dangers.

Focus group: the purpose of the focus group is to focus the discussion on a particular issue. It is valuable when in-depth information is needed about how people think about an issue. For this reason one must pay attention to strong personalities, and once again to danger of bias.

The idea for now is to organise a focus group both with librarians and users but in the next months a change could be necessary and two different focus group result to be more useful.

Participant observation was initially taken into account as a data collection technique by the researcher. It is a strategy which aims to gain a close and intimate familiarity with a given group of individuals and their practices through an intensive involvement with people in their natural environment. A more close researcher 's reflection about her position drove to the conclusion that there was little confusion between the typical ethnographic technique of participant observation and her actual position of insider in the research setting. In case studies the position of insider is considered advantaged because its easiness to understand the viewpoints and the behaviour of actors and context. The advantage in terms of accessing and understanding the context culture are not free from of ethical dilemmas associated with shared relationships and a subjectivism danger.

As a matter of fact subjectivism and bias towards verification applies to all methods but according to researchers who have conducted intensive, in-depth case studies (Campbell, Ragin, Geertz,

Flyvbjerg) very often they were compelled to recognise as wrong their preconceived views, assumptions and hypotheses and to revise them. Falsification and not verification characterizes the case study as demonstrated by Flyvbjerg (2006)

3.4 Data analysis

The steps in data analysis within the framework of an approach with selection and interpretation into a rich descriptive narrative, will be the following:

- Familiarisation
- Systematic description
- Reflection
- Explanation and description
- Interpretation
- Checking and validation
- Drawing conclusion
- Writing up

It isn't the researcher 's intention to build up theory on the topic chosen with a generalisation purpose. The final analysis will be adressed to the top management of Padua University esclusively. The inductive reasoning process to interpret and structure the meaning that can be derived from data is the most complex, and dangerous for its possible 'creativity' abuse, step of the entire research process. In this phase data in their raw form are considered, examined, and reformulated to become a research product. Morse (Morse, 1994) identifies four steps involved in all qualitative analysis: comprehension of the phenomenon, synthesis, theory about why and how and recontextualisation into the context.

The researcher tries to give answers to the research questions taken into account these steps and using an analytic strategy based on the constant comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) approach. Other analytic strategies as phenomenological approaches, ethnographic methods and narrative analysis have not been considered adequate to the research.

4. Anticipated outputs and timetable

4.1 Anticipated outcomes and hypothesis

The reflection about the meaning and purpose of the research, a first analysis of literature and the researcher's observation in the field work led to the hypothesis that cooperation may be applied with some new opportunities in the large field of *services*. That is, for example, common guidelines on the users rights and duties, digital projects for a wider access to the collections, their reconstruction when they are disseminated among the libraries, and exhibitions on-line to make them known by the public.

The more typical cooperation fields such as bibliographic records sharing, union catalogues, ILL and DDL may be already exploited or not suitable in the field of special collections and cultural heritage.

4.2 Workplan, milestones and deadlines

The following table with the enumeration of the principal tasks is correlated to the Gantt Chart that offers a planning of the development of the entire research thato will be ended by the end of August 2006.

In red the milestones point when to check the timing of the project.

TASK	Purpose
1. Searching literature	Underpinning of rationale and method
2. Key informants	Contextualising, analysis of background, confirmation of aims and purposes
3. Interviews	General and quantifiable data with responses to open-ended questions
4.Focus group	Focus on differences, concrete lives and situation
5.Benchmarking	Comparison and search for best practice
6. Data analysis	Data reflection and interpretation
7. Reporting	Data dissemination, and purpose of the Master dissertation

4.3 Gantt chart

Gantt Chart Format

Task	Duration	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
1	2 mo.	███							
2	1 mo.			███					
3	2 mo.								
4	1 mo.								
5	1 mo.								
6	1 mo.								
7	2 mo.								

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