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Introduction to the theme: University Libraries and Partnership

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1. The Theme and our Obligations

The main theme for the conference is:
Libraries and Librarians making a difference in the Knowledge Age.

We all believe in that, and we all understand that libraries have to adapt their services, their processes, their behaviour etc. to demands from their mother institutions and their users. But it also means that we can see the possibilities in the technological development and can find ways to use our resources in the best possible way.

The condition we need in the libraries today is in several ways different from the situation five to ten years ago. As a consequence of that the roles for the libraries have changed. We are working with new tasks in new areas, where new competences are needed.

Co-operation, partnership, out- and in-sourcing and resource sharing are important elements to ensure this.

We have chosen to focus on partnership in our meeting to day. We will present you for some cases and examples, but what we hope is that together we can discuss in which areas and in which ways partnership is of interest for our libraries.

2. What is Partnership?

It can be defined as an agreement between two or more partners to work together to achieve common aims. Besides, economical and resource saving reasons there is two obvious reasons to enter a partnership:

- We learn from each other
- We get stronger together – and we can do that without loosing the diversity

In the university libraries we have been working with partnerships for many years and in many ways. Typical within the interlending area with formal as well as informal agreements. Within the last years the traditional interlending agreement has been enlarged with consortia agreements where other activities besides interlending has been a part, e.g. common license agreement to electronic resources as electronic journals. But there are several other examples of partnership and resource sharing where university libraries are involved.

3. Why form a Partnership?

We have realized that a self-sufficient library no longer exists, and the change in focus “from collection to connection” means co-operation – and the development in Information technology, digitisation and networks means co-operation with new functions and areas.

Some libraries face the situation that they are forced to form a co-operation within other areas – typical within the last years is: Co-operation with the computing division in the university.

I can end up with a merging of the two areas or the co-operation can be achieved as a partnership where the library keeps control and identity.

A merging is always risky.

The hen asked the pig: “Shall we merge and form a company, which produce Bacon and Eggs”. The pig answered: “I don’t know, I guess it means that I will be slaughtered”. “Well”, said the hen. “One of the partners will always be slaughtered when two partners merge.”

We don’t want to end up like the pig, so why not be more pro-active and work for partnership instead of waiting for a merge.

Although partnership should be well known and accepted in the university libraries, my colleagues often maintain an attitude of reserve when I discuss this. Some are concerned about the identity of their libraries if they establish a close co-operation to another institution. Some are concerned about their independence and others can mention a lot of barriers as:

Organisational problems, Technological premises, Copyright restrictions, difference in culture and missions etc.

It is very easy to find barriers, and I am sure that members of your staff can mention a lot of barriers too, if you suggest a partnership agreement, which will affect them.

The truth is of course that in many partnership agreements there will be a lot of costs. A good partnership is an agreement where both parties achieve some advantages. The library will benefit, but will have to accept compromises too. It can be difficult to foresee all consequences, therefore when establishing partnership agreements confidence is the key word.

4. Different Types of Partnerships and Co-operations

In the printed version of my introduction, I have mentioned some examples of partnership – just to illustrate the variety of partnership – and I could mention several others. I am not going to repeat the examples now, but there is no doubt about the value of the kind of co-operation for our library.

In Denmark we have several good examples of positive effects of partnership. 3 years ago the Danish Government put about 22 mill. Dollars into to a five-year project when developing Denmark’s Electronic Research Library. A lot of results have been achieved so far within this framework, consortia license agreements, digitisation projects, development of subject - gateways etc. And in all projects one main condition has been partnership among several libraries with a co-financing from the libraries.

Another example from my own library is a digitisation project we have run with a publisher and a public library. As a partnership project we have produced a digital version of some yearbooks about cars and

boats. We have made them accessible on the Internet, and the publisher has been able to produce and sell DC ROM versions.

We have been able to establish a partnership agreement about the use of different kinds of non-book materials, which allow us to produce and sell copies and ensure the copyright holders a fee from the sale.

We are involved in a joint venture with museums and archives in a national culture network, where the participating institutions present digitised materials within several areas.

Finally, our library is involved in a University Library Development Programme in Ghana in Africa. In this connection we have accepted to act as a support library for university libraries in Ghana, and a number of Danish research libraries have accepted the same responsibility. You can call it a one-way partnership, but our impression is that few resources from our side create great impact on the university service in Ghana.

We have been able to develop new services. We have saved money and we have established new competences as a result of our partnership arrangements. We have learned that compromises are a part of it, and that we need to be open minded and not too individualistic to succeed in partnership.

5. The Paper today

To day we will have 3 papers focusing on different areas, different types of partnership. But in our discussion I don't think we need to be limited to discuss the 3 cases, which will be presented to us. Let us also draw upon the experiences we have from other cases. Let us have a broad discussion of the theme.

I will stop my part, and we will now have three lectures with focus on different aspects of co-operation and partnership.

- First: Partnership among Library
- Next: Partnership between University and Library and
- Finally: Co-operation between Library and Suppliers.

But the speaker will also look at the background and the conditions for co-operation, in-and out-sourcing and partnership.

I know that we will have three very interesting papers, but it is up to us all to ensure that they will be followed by an interesting discussion. So please let us have your points of view.

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