

The future belongs to cooperation

Erdmute Lapp, Bochum University Library

I know that the concept of cooperation is not new to you. From what I have seen and heard of Croatian libraries you are already cooperating. You are aware that there is no alternative to cooperation.

The project, Jadranka and I have been working on for the past 3 years, is one of 23 cooperative projects with German libraries and libraries from middle or eastern Europe collaborating. The project coordinators always liked our project – the Bochum – Zagreb part of it – because the Croatian partners were so competent and above all were ready to share, which was the intention of the project. They were really pleased with the fact that tables of contents of the journals the RBI library received were put on the Internet and that the articles were available to every scientist in the country.

However, I am convinced that you that we are not using the whole cooperation potential. You will think about this statement and come up with suggestions during the following group work.

In the new paradigm the OPAC is no longer the heart of the library. Our clients are no longer satisfied with the OPAC alone. They want an extended OPAC with subject specific journal articles on CD-ROM. Most of our customers never understood why there are only journal titles and no journal articles in our OPACs. They also want full texts, e-journals and full Internet functionality.

We need integrated library systems: acquisitions, the OPAC and circulation must be integrated, because they are different functions of the same set of bibliographic descriptions. We need compatible systems. We need some centralized services for the library community, but we do not need large union centers with large cataloging staff any more. These large centers were designed in the age of mainframe computers, when libraries were accessing one big mainframe. With decentralization of computing power the network is the union center.

I would like to make a suggestion. A conceptual study on a union system of the future is needed. We also need a description of requirements for such a system. How should the system be set up, would centralized or decentralized cataloging be the better solution? What other services

should a library service center provide? Why should these services be provided centrally? What would be the advantage? How should they be provided?

In the German region Bochum belongs to, the German Middle West, we are also working on these problems. We have been working on these problems throughout the nineties. The regional union center in Cologne acquired the Aleph system as a cooperative cataloging system. The library service center is also providing retrospective cataloging, central services connected with the Digital Library NRW (eg. it is providing one of the central servers, it is participating in the negotiations for consortia licences etc.), continuing education and national staff exchange just to name the most important activities. The center is also planning to design and implement an electronic ILL module for books.