

Kyrgyz Libraries Community – Co-Operation for Development: New Challenges and New Approaches

Kırgız Kütüphane Topluluğu – Gelişim İçin İşbirliği: Yeni Fırsatlar ve Uygulamalar

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Abstract

“Kyrgyz Libraries Information Consortium” one of the largest library associations in the country, celebrates its 10th anniversary. The Consortium was established in 2002 and through membership, it comprises more than 400 libraries within Kyrgyzstan, including the National Library, the State Patent and Technical Library, the Library of the Academy of Science, and many other academic and regional libraries. The Consortium’s creation was an answer to the challenges the country faced: lack of information, very low level of technological development, no budget for collection development, lack of cooperation and collaboration between libraries in the country as well as with the international library community.

The history and development of the Consortium, the Consortium mission, its goals, its main initiatives and the strategic directions to be taken are presented in the article. The importance of library development and how libraries in developed countries established strong and effective organizations are reviewed and analyzed here. This paper also presents the challenges and approaches that must be taken for future development of libraries in Kyrgyzstan.

Keywords: Kyrgyzstan, Libraries, Kyrgyz Libraries Community, Library cooperation, Library consortium

Öz

“Kırgız Kütüphaneleri Bilgi Konsorsiyumu” ülkedeki en büyük kütüphanecilik derneklerinden biridir ve kuruluşunun onuncu yıldönümünü kutlamaktadır. Bu Konsorsiyum 2000 yılında kurulmuş olup, üyelik sayısı sonucu Kırgızistan içinde toplam 400den fazla kütüphaneyi kapsamaktadır. Konsorsiyum içinde Milli Kütüphane (The National Library) , Devlet Patent ve Teknik Kütüphanesi (State Patent and Technical Library), Bilim Akademisi Kütüphanesi (Library of the Academy of Science), ile bunların yanısıra çok sayıda akademik ve bölgesel kütüphaneler de yer almaktadır.

Konsorsiyum’un kuruluşu ülkede karşılaşılan güçlüklerle bir karşı çıkış olmuştur: yetersiz bilgi, çok düşük düzeyli teknik gelişmeler, koleksiyon geliştirmek için bütçe ayrılmaması, ülkedeki kütüphaneler arası işbirliği ve beraber çalışma alışkanlığının olmaması gibi sorunların yanısıra, uluslararası kütüphanelerle ilişkilerin de kopuk olması gibi güçlükler sayılabilir.

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Konsortium'un tarihi ve gelişim süreci olduğu kadar, misyonu, amaçları, girişimleri ve izlenecek stratejik hedefleri bu makalede ele alınmıştır. Gelişmiş ülkelerde kütüphanelerin önemi ve bunların nasıl güçlü ve etkin kurumlar olarak geliştikleri incelenerek burada sunulmuştur. Makalede aynı zamanda Kırgızistan'da kütüphanelerin geliştirilmesi için karşılaşılan güçlükler ve gelecek için izlenmesi gereken yaklaşımlar üzerinde durulmaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Kırgızistan, Kütüphaneler, Kırgızistan Kütüphane Topluluğu, Kütüphane işbirliği, Kütüphane konsorsiyumları

Introduction

Kyrgyz Libraries Information Consortium, established in December 2002, celebrates its 10th anniversary. One can say that 10 years is not a long time, but if you strive and wish to make changes and to succeed, ten years can also bring a lot of experiences and achievements. It was a challenging and dynamic period for the library community and the country in general, which brought us a new awareness of the community. What has been done and what results have we achieved? What are the new challenges and approaches in future development of the library community?

Objectives

Since Kyrgyzstan's independence in 1991, the library community - being a part of the society - has been much influenced by all the problems of the country's transition: break down of connections with the former Soviet countries, cutback of economic activities, lack of funding and poor budgeting, lack of coordination and collaboration.

Kyrgyz public libraries and information services system to comprises of 1041 libraries all together, also including the National Library, 925 libraries in 7 oblasts (regions) of the country, State Library for Children and Youth, and two city library systems (Bishkek and Osh) with 40 libraries in total. The public libraries book stock is estimated to be around 10 million items throughout the nation.

According to the statistics by Ministry of Culture, from the end of 1999 to the beginning of 2000, only about 70 computers were installed in the National Libraries and large public libraries: National library, Patent and Technical Library, the State Library for Children and Youth, Osh Oblast Library. There were no computers in rural libraries and no statistics were available on the number of computers in university libraries; most of the PCs were in the main universities in the country's capital city. There were no Internet access or on-line services for the public. National Library and the Patent and Technical Library have just started working on creating their own electronic catalogues, but they didn't have a vision for cooperation between libraries in order to promote information sharing. Telecommunication and Internet accessing in the mountainous Kyrgyzstan are critical issues to provide access due to the geographical challenges. The beginning of 2000 was characterized with very limited access to Internet facilities for libraries,

and almost no Internet was available in rural places. The Soviet State Library System had already collapsed as a system of collaboration during the 1990s, and it was poorly functional ever since then; it was difficult and troublesome encouraging the process of development in the new independent state library system.

Kyrgyz Libraries Information Consortium as a New Way for the Library Cooperation

Kyrgyz Libraries Information Consortium (KLIC) was founded in 2002 as a result of cooperation of two main Associations: Association of Public Libraries and Kyrgyz Librarians Association which agreed to work together after several years of separation and poor communication.

The Kyrgyzstan Library Information Consortium (KLIC), as it is widely known in Kyrgyzstan and abroad, was formed with the mission to consolidate and coordinate the efforts of Kyrgyz libraries and other state and non-governmental organizations which worked in the information field.

The main goal of the Consortium is to develop a Kyrgyz “information space” in order to promote social, cultural, educational and scientific development and to foster library integration into the global information community.

KLIC membership comprises more than 400 libraries within Kyrgyzstan, including the National Library, the State Patent and Technical Library, the Library of the Academy of Science, and many other academic and regional libraries.

The creation of the Consortium was an answer to the challenges the people in the country faced: lack of information, very low level of technological development, no budget for the collections development, lack of cooperation and collaboration between libraries in the country as well as with the international library community.

Executive body of the Consortium is the Board of Directors, headed by the President and Vice-President; it carries out the organization leadership, decision making and implementation processes. Members of the Board, who presented various types of libraries and hence the different user groups, as well as the heads of the Consortium are elected at the General meeting of the Consortium. Strategic directions of the Library Consortium of Kyrgyzstan are determined and developed by the Board of the directors and have to be approved by members of the consortium at their general meeting. This new structure, e.g. the Consortium, forced us to carry on a lot of discussions regarding the Consortium management body, to create not formal but well managed and proactive organization.

To advance forward and to improve the situation of libraries, four core strategy directions of the activities of the Consortium were determined and these were approved by the library community:

1. Developing the libraries' technology base and access to the Internet
2. Open access to digital information for the libraries
3. Digitization and preservation of local content
4. Professional development for librarians and interlibrary cooperation.

These directions are still valid even after ten years of collaborative work and experience. It is time to summarize the positive outcomes, and critically analyze the problems and challenges we have to work on in order to continue our dynamic development.

Developing the Libraries Technology Base and Access to Internet

Taking into account very difficult economic situation in the country and a very limited support from the state and local governments for library development (where only salary and some subscription expences were budgeted for), it is a fact that only library cooperation, strong collaboration and trying to attract off-budget funds and receiving grants could open up hope for success.

Developing the library technology infrastructure provided a basic and very important setting to overcome the boundaries for access to digital information and to create a new system of service and way to professional interlibrary cooperation.

First of all, an analysis of the situation concerning the library computerization was made. Based on this analysis, the main directions of the libraries' computerization and automation were developed:

- ◇ Providing computers and library software for public libraries
- ◇ Developing the Kyrgyz libraries computer network
- ◇ Resource subscription and access to the resources through the network
- ◇ Creating a united catalogue to coordinate the library collections in the country and starting to provide on-line services

After the Consortium management team set and developed their goals, they submitted several proposals to different grant giving organizations and foundations. During 2003 -2005 four grants in total amounting to 73,000 USD were obtained and four very important projects were implemented.

The Consortium provided consulting and supporting work for regional and rural libraries on development their own grant proposals. Under the umbrella of the Consortium, several regional libraries were able to open new computer centers for their users, such as the "Centers to Access for Legal and Economic Information". We could achieve significant results through collaborative work together and in close cooperation.

At the end of 2006 the country statistics (according to the Consortium data) were as follows:

Number of computers in libraries were increased to 300, and now each region has libraries equipped with computers and half of them have access to the Internet. These libraries have become the first and very significant corner stones of the Kyrgyz libraries network, which connected the libraries throughout the country.

We can admit that the number is not too outstanding, but it is a great example of the progress in library cooperation, supported by the Consortium without any state funding.

The computer network and increased level of the library automation helped librarians to go forward in their profession and develop new ideas – this took place for the first time in the history of the library community and the *Kyrgyz Libraries United Catalogue* was created in 2004 - 2005. Based on unified library software (IRBIS), 24 libraries all around the country created the united catalogue records data to share their records and also helped new libraries to create their own electronic catalogues. It was also the first Union catalogue for libraries in Central Asia which was completed after 5 years of collective work; the catalogue data consisted of more than 100,000 unique records and the number has been increased throughout the years.

The libraries computer network was a basis for building and promoting new services: access to electronic information, development of libraries digital collection, and increase the number of public and professional services.

Open Access to Digital Information for the Libraries

Library computerization and access to Internet allowed the libraries to start a new kind of subscription to electronic scientific databases, provided by eIFL.net Consortium.

First step taken immediately after the Consortium creation was a membership at the eIFL.net consortium (Electronic information for Libraries “eIFL - Knowledge Without Boundaries, 2012”). eIFL.net is an international organization which works with libraries worldwide to enable access to digital information in developing and transition countries, connecting more than 40 developing countries all around the world. Participation in eIFL promoted a new idea that if interlibrary cooperation and corporate subscription to electronic databases and periodicals are realized, this will provide a wide access to information all over the country.

Because of the high importance of access to information not only in public libraries, but also in the academic libraries, both were actively involved into the process. More than 20 academic libraries have become members of the Consortium since 2003. Their input and very high interest to this initiative bolstered the success of the project in the country.

In general, most of the Kyrgyz libraries were (and still are) print-resources oriented. But after the independence of the country and as a result the collapse of the state support system for libraries, most libraries had difficulties in purchasing printed resources and subscribe to printed periodicals, as these became unaffordable for them. Corporate Consortium subscriptions reduced prices to access the electronic resources, which was a new and very effective way to improve the situation with collection development and providing access to the available modern, scientific and comprehensive data.

The Consortium created rules and set up a system for corporate subscription, as well as drawing development guidelines, assisting the promotion and presentation materials to inform the community and establishing new kinds of services and on-line access to information.

Since 2003 there was a great support by eFL.net KLIC provided access to more than 12 databases, such as, EBSCO Publishing, Cambridge Journals, Oxford Journals and References, Institute of Physics, JSTOR, BioOne, etc.

Thanks to the library cooperation and collaboration, the system of funding and corporate subscription was created.

Digitizing and Preservation of Local Content

The Consortium started working in the area of providing a wide access of information for different groups of users and continued these activities since the beginning of 2008. Experts noted that scientists were becoming isolated from local and international scientific communities, both regionally and globally, however it is a fact that a new generation of young, ambitious and very promising scientists started growing in numbers during 2000s, and that there is a potential to improve the level of scientific work in the region (Osmonaliev K., Kanimetov D., Abylgaziev R., Sharshenalieva Z., Sultankulova A., 2007).

Science development is one of the key drivers of economic and state development. However, scientific research has stagnated as a result of the poor post-Soviet economic and social conditions in the region. Therefore, there has been less interdisciplinary communication between scientific communities regulated or promoted domestically or internationally, and the publications of scholarly journals and books have been critically at low levels. Information support for science is very low. The KLIC research in March 2010 shows that Central Asian scientists desire a web-based access to regional research and results data. They also wish to submit their own findings and to share information with the scientists in the region as well as in the international arena.

The main goal of new Consortium initiative is to develop a comprehensive and modern digital storehouse to collect and organize scientific information, which will be freely and openly available to Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian scientists.

The web-based data center called the "Open Repository of Kyrgyz Scientists". This center was developed with the cooperation of KLIC and the Soros Foundation in Kyrgyzstan during 2009 -2010. A new software, based on the Open Source D-Space software was developed to archive scientific data and resources. A Web-portal <http://krad.bik.org.kg/> developed to provide access to the archived scientific information was opened in 2010.

The Consortium worked very closely with the local Agency for Intellectual Property. As a result of several agreements on Copyrights and Open Access initiative movement were developed and openly presented at the portal. In cooperation with the local Internet Service provider, technological infrastructures were developed to support the information database and access to the data.

Currently, more than 300 resources are available in the repository and the data is growing up on a monthly basis. The idea of the repository found a great support among of the scientific community not only in Kyrgyzstan, but also in the other Central Asian countries. The Open Repository now is a place where scientists from the Central Asian countries can allocate their research materials, articles, scientific work to share with the colleagues at national and international level.

The success of the Open Repository helped the Consortium to continue the work in the area of digitization, preservation and open access to the local information. In 2010 with the support of the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation, a new project was launched - "Literary Monuments of Kyrgyzstan: Ensuring Preservation and Public Access." The digital collection, opened for wide access on <http://rarebooks.net.kg/> compiles selected rare books of Kyrgyzstan. These items are unique; each of them is a priceless monument representing its epoch. At present, the collection amounts to more than 120 book titles on the history and culture of Kyrgyzstan, with a time coverage from 1899 to 1956, which preserve the invaluable historical development of the country, the Kyrgyz state, as well as scientific and cultural heritage of past generations.

The Consortium pays great attention to the development of the local digital content and provides all kinds of support for further development of these projects.

Professional Development for Librarians and Interlibrary Cooperation

New trends and rapid growth of technologies and continuous increase in information resources required to upgrade the librarians' training in the field of information management and also in developing their professional experiences. This program includes various kinds of activities which the Consortium supports and it has been working on:

- ◇ Professional workshops (national and international)
- ◇ Online and printed guidelines, instructions, and knowledge sharing base

- ◇ Support for Kyrgyz librarians to participate in international conferences
- ◇ Kyrgyzstan Annual International Conference on “Libraries and democratization of Society”

Professional development plays a big role for membership in the eIFL.net Consortium and the eIFL.net provides an opportunity for development in several important areas, such as Consortium management, licensing, Open Access initiatives and copyrights, and obtaining free and open source softwares. The membership offers an unequalled opportunity to be in touch with colleagues all around the world, a platform to share new ideas, initiatives, professional experiences and innovations, and to provide new resources and services to the users.

Our fundamental purpose in making this attempt is to identify areas of cooperation between the libraries and the other institutions and build a high and sustainable level of interest and commitment on each institution's part to further cooperative relationship between them. Based on this kind of the cooperation we are working together on implementing new services and providing new kinds of information resources for each group of our users.

Challenges and Future Plans of the Consortium

Looking back to the Consortiums past ten years history, we are very proud of our achievements, however we know that we still have many things to do in the future. The situation in the library community depends a great deal on the economic and political stability of the country.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to say much about the country's political stability and make any predictions about this; since 2005 two “revolutions” shook the country and as a result brought many problems similar to those we had at the beginning of the independence. Each revolution meant further changes at the state and local levels of governance. Many state programs related to the library and information services development were not supported as a result of political instability, which upset the country's financial and budgetary system. It is impossible to talk about library services and information access development in the country without state support, state programs, state and local budget allocations and funds. The role of the Consortium and its activities are the most critical and important aspects to be considered in the areas of library and information services; furthermore the Consortium had a very good experience working with the government, parliament and local administration. A good example is the matter of Library and Information Services Development to be added in the agenda for discussion at the Parliamentary Committee session, which was first initiated by the Consortium in November 2009. As a result of these discussions, in the new budget year, it was planned to include expenses to cover library collection development, subscriptions for electronic databases, supporting international library

conference as of 2010. However another new “revolution” in April 2010 changed all the plans for library development and cancelled the allotted funds for libraries.

The Consortium started its activities from the very beginning, through building new contacts and new relations with the new Parliament and Government. This requires constant work and hopefully will create a positive impact on the library society, library users, and the state development as a whole.

Another challenge is the maintenance of the Consortium, and how to preserve the viability of the organization and how to sustain further progress? The Consortium has done great work in this area and has its own budget, which it accumulated through selling some of its services (corporate subscription and electronic database access, access to the union catalogue, offering training sessions, etc.). This money helps to support the Consortium’s main administrative activities, support Consortium’s web-presence, co-fund database subscriptions, and finance the annual library conference and several professional development workshops. But low levels of various libraries’ fundings do not allow us to increase the number of base services with pay and consider financial independence and sustainability. Again, this is a wider issue related to the state stability and economic development in the country. At the same time, the Consortium should continue its activities for accumulating money and use every opportunity to attract additional finance, to obtain more support from the country’s various organizations, as well as to continue building a strong professional network abroad.

Modern world and modern technologies require the librarians to be more progressive and knowledgeable to keep their leading positions in the information services market. Continuing education and professional development for librarians is another important challenge for the Consortium. Highly educated library specialists can provide higher level services for the users; librarians must be aware of their real needs and what their information demands are. Supporting librarians to attain high levels of understanding and awareness of the information prospects, we can also increase emphasis on large-scale information literacy training programs for different user groups. Working together with teachers from schools and with the academic librarians can bring additional benefits to the development of information services and helps to advance towards becoming an information society in Kyrgyzstan.

The Consortium realized all the problems and challenges required for the steps to be taken and it strives to achieve the goals for what it was created. A great deal of hard work and time were put in to achieve these purposes over the past 10 years and a lot of interesting work is waiting for us to carry on in the years to come. The unique experience and a well organized Kyrgyzstan Library Society have excellent perspectives for development and we intend to implement all the initiatives with great hopes to be successful in our ventures.

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