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BULGARIAN INFORMATION CONSORTIUM: TWENTY YEARS OF LIBRARY COOPERATION

SUMMARY: The paper presents the Bulgarian Information Consortium over more than twenty years of its activities. A few other initiatives for library cooperation in Bulgaria during the first decade of the transition to modern society, economy, and education failed or were not effective. That is why the initiators and later founders of the Consortium started the process very carefully, paying attention to various factors – tough economic situation, lack of national traditions in cooperation, psychological and behavioural characteristics of librarians and library managers in the country, historical path dependency, state of librarian and economic knowledge in the field of collective action, etc. Finally, the Bulgarian Information Consortium was established following three basic concepts: a) strong leadership, b) polycentric governance, and c) private nature. Today, the success of the Consortium is evident. The way of the achievement of this success and practical implementation of the three theoretical concepts are presented and discussed in detail in this paper. In some respect, it is a unique Bulgarian way. However, the lessons learned along that way could be useful for other librarians initiating any form of library cooperation.

KEYWORDS: library cooperation, leadership, polycentric management, Bulgarian Information Consortium.

Introduction

Libraries are often called knowledge keepers. The definition, however, is misleading. Libraries collect knowledge not to keep it but to exchange it. Authors create knowledge not for themselves, they do it for the sake of others. Sometimes, the knowledge transfer occurs more or less directly from creators to users. Giving a lecture is the most direct way. It has many advantages. Users are (supposed to be) interested in exactly this knowledge and are also (supposed to be) prepared for it.

Dialogues and explanations possibly facilitate the process. However, there are also disadvantages. First of all, space and time limitations. The author and the users have to get together in the same place at the same time. Thus, knowledge transfer is limited.

Another possible form is publication. Thus, the knowledge transfer is not direct but mediated (publisher, distributor). Space and time limitations are overcome but new difficulties arise, mainly for users. They have to find out about the existence of certain knowledge, discover it, get certain about its quality, and make efforts to gain access to it. Moreover, there are costs, naturally. That is, this option is more expensive for everyone.

The concept of the positive influence of modern information technologies on these processes is a popular one (there were the same expectations in the years after the invention of the printing press). It is an interesting point and should not be dismissed. Some difficulties can be overcome thanks to the opportunities to make it popular, i.e. building awareness of the existence of certain knowledge, for instance. However, other difficulties still exist, i.e. finding knowledge (searching in an ocean of nonsense), assessing its quality (not its pre-paid place in search engine listings), and its acquisition (the poor results of online learning).

Libraries were established precisely because of the difficulties in the process of knowledge transfer (along with other forms, universities, for example). They have helped to solve some problems (time constraints). However, others, such as spatial limitations, have remained. Thus, quite naturally, the next step has been taken, i.e. cooperation between libraries.

Library Cooperation: Beginning and Development

Cooperation is one of the phenomena of the modern library world. Often, modern information and communication technologies and new user preferences are cited as the main reasons for cooperation between libraries. But its history is much older, in fact, ancient. Although not conclusively proven, the stories of interlibrary loan dating back to more than seven thousand years ago in Mesopotamia[1] or between the librar

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[1] At least two libraries existed in Kouyunjik (Nineveh), the largest city in the world at that time. In 1849, Sir Austin Leard opened the older (Royal Library of Sennacherib), while his assistant Hormuzd Rassam opened the other one (Royal Library of Ashurbanipal) in 1852. The material found in them (historical, legal, agricultural, financial, medical and other texts, including the famous Epic of Gilgamesh) was mixed up when transferred to the British Museum and today it is difficult to distinguish it. Still, the idea of exchanging documents between the two libraries has survived.

ies of Alexandria and Pergamon two thousand years ago sounds quite optimistic.[2]

Joe Kraus in his excellent *Prologue to Library Cooperation*[3] presents other (now undisputed) early examples of library cooperation. Around 1400 AD, Franciscan monks wrote the *Registrum Librorum Angliae* (called *Catalogus Librorum Angliae* in some sources). It was a list of works by ninety authors living in 160 monasteries in England. In the early years of the 15th century, the maintenance and development of this register was undertaken by John Boston, a monk from Bury. The number of authors increased to 700, while bibliographical descriptions and new monastery libraries were added. Anyone interested in a particular document could check the register for the nearest place where a copy was available. Thus, the first union library catalogue was compiled, which was the earliest medieval form of library cooperation. Its purpose was obvious – facilitating access to knowledge and its exchange between authors and users.

The example was followed, albeit slowly, in the following centuries. In 1745, at the suggestion of Jacob Benzelius, the Commercium Literarium initiative began. The universities of Uppsala, Greifswald, Lund, and Åbo (Turku) set aside 30 copies of each of their publications and exchanged them among themselves. In the beginning, it was a university business initiative (as its name suggests). Gradually, its implementation was taken over by the university libraries. This was the earliest documented example of an interlibrary loan (the universities involved at the time are located in three different countries nowadays, but then they were all within the borders of the Kingdom of Sweden).

An overlooked fact of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's biography is his work as a librarian at the Herzog August Bibliothek. The leading German playwright took up the position in 1770 at the invitation of Charles I, Duke of Brunswick. A year later, Lessing began pooling efforts and resources of the universities of Wolfenbüttel and Göttingen to jointly replenish and develop their library collections.

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[2] Actually, the two libraries competed with each other. The Ptolemies (the rulers of Egypt then) even forbade the export of papyrus from Alexandria in order to make it difficult to compete with the library. For this reason, the production of parchment began in the kingdom of Pergamum, finely processed animal skin on which writing can be done. Thus, the documents from the two libraries were easily distinguished: some were written on papyrus, while others – on parchment. Several ancient authors were familiar with the sources in both collections; however, they did not visit either of the libraries. This gives rise to the possibility of interlibrary loan. But there is another explanation – the legend that Mark Antony gave the entire collection of the Library of Pergamon, over 200,000 scrolls, to Cleopatra as a wedding gift.

[3] Joew Kraus, „Prologue to library cooperation", *Library Trends* 24, 2 (1975): 169–170.

In 1775, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was invited to join the court of Karl August, Duke of Saxe-Weimar. In Weimar, Goethe (a lawyer by education and practice) held various administrative positions, including one similar to the prime minister today (from 1882). Part of his work was related to educational reforms. On his initiative, a union catalogue of the libraries at the universities of Weimar and Jena was compiled.

The *Commercium Literarium* idea was developed in the so-called Akademischer Tauschverein, an association for interlibrary loan. Founded in 1817 at the Universität Marburg by 18 German universities, it soon grew to include universities from all leading countries on four continents.[4]

The history of the National Central Library (NCL), founded by Albert Mansbridge[5] in 1916 in London, is quite interesting. It quickly became an attractive centre for young people who were listeners rather than full-time university students (and therefore unable to use the university libraries) but wished to further their education. At their insistence, NCL developed an advanced interlibrary loan system. The library was later transformed into the National Central Library, part of the British Library Lending Division, still servicing book lending in the UK and internationally.

The advantages of library cooperation rapidly made this approach common throughout Europe. The first union catalogue of periodicals was compiled in Milan in 1819. A joint catalogue of the publications of the Austrian university and scientific libraries was developed under the editorship of Ferdinand Grassauer in Vienna in 1898.

Cooperation between libraries and publishing houses also developed. In 1610, Sir Thomas Bodley signed an agreement with the Stationers' Company[6] to provide the Bodleian Library[7] with a copy of every new book registered in their representative Stationers Hall. Later, this arrangement grew into the UK Statutory Compulsory Deposit. The ex-

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[4] Despite some difficulties (legal and financial, on the part of the participating universities), the Akademischer Tauschverein can be assessed as a successful initiative. Its existence was terminated at the beginning of the First World War.

[5] Mansbridge was a prominent person of his time, a pioneer of adult education, a creator of educational organizations in England, the United Kingdom and worldwide, and a member of the government and parliamentary commissions in the field of education (including the Royal Commission at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge) and religious affairs (including Selborne Committee on Church and State), and author of economic studies and publications.

[6] The City of London Livery Company for the Communications and Content Industries.

[7] The history of Oxford University's main library is interesting. It was established in the 14th century by Thomas Cobham, Bishop of Worcester, with a donation of a small number of books. In the first half of the 15th century, Humphrey, brother of Henry V and Duke of Gloucester expanded the collection with a significant donation. After a period of decline, the library was restored in 1602 by a group of donors to the University on the initiative and under the leadership of Sir Thomas Bodley. Since then, it bears his name, the Bodleian Library.

ample was followed by the other European countries, so the libraries began to receive a copy deposit of each new edition.

Library cooperation also developed across the Atlantic Ocean. Its beginning has been associated with the name of Charles Coffin Jewett, appointed as a librarian at the Smithsonian Institution in 1848. His work in the field of librarianship, and especially in compiling a union library catalogue, earned him wide recognition, and in 1853 he was elected president of the first Librarian's Convention, an organization promoting library development in the United States for a long period. Next came compulsory depositing, various joint catalogues, interlibrary and cooperative collections (initiated by the US Library of Congress in 1945). This was how the Big Deal began and the focus was on accessing materials instead of owning them. Gradually, agreements between libraries for interlibrary loans and shared cataloguing became partnerships, licensing agreements, joint service programmes, and shared technologies.

The history of library cooperation is a long one. It can be traced in detail in numerous researches. A valuable source in this area is the series *Handbook on the International Exchange of Publications* (UNESCO, 1950 et seq.).[8] Although brief, this historical overview allows several conclusions to be reached:

The need for knowledge exchange is the basis of library cooperation. Modern technologies and consumer sentiments neither cause it nor express its nature and essence. Its history is considerably older.

Library cooperation has the potential to provide advantages in the process of knowledge exchange. That is why it was set up a long time ago and still exists today.

An important factor in carrying out successful joint library initiatives is the presence of prominent leadership.

Library Cooperation Today

The abovementioned should not be understood as denying the role of technological development, especially nowadays, when most libraries around the world have network electronic catalogues. In addition to library networks, large bibliographic associations have been set up in support of interlibrary cooperation, such as the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC, founded in 1967), Western Library Network (WLN), Research Libraries Group (RLG), etc. Since 1995, the Electronic Access to Resources in Libraries (EARL) initiative has enabled public

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[8] The first edition appeared in 1950 under the editorship of J. Dargent. The next ones, in 1956 and 1964, were edited by Gisela von Busse. The fourth edition dates from 1978. After a long break, the publication was resumed, now as an edition of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA).

libraries in the UK to deliver online information and provide knowledge-based services.

The library cooperation is also supported by setting up associations and international organizations. The oldest organization in the library and information field is the International Federation for Information and Documentation (IFID), established by Paul Otlet and Henri La Fontaine in Brussels in 1895 as the Institute for International Bibliography (Institut International de Bibliographie) with the aim of creating a catalogue card index for world literature. The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) was established in 1927 (the first working meeting was held in Rome in 1928). The organization publishes the IFLA Journal and currently has 44 sections in various areas of library science, including the Document Delivery and Resource Sharing Section which deals with library cooperation and interlibrary loan nationally and internationally.

In 1922, the then-existing League of Nations set up its own advisory body, the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, which in 1926 grew into an institute based in Paris, and in 1945 was the basis for establishing the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESCO. In 1958, UNESCO held a seminar in Vienna on the role of national libraries in the cooperation related to union catalogues, international book borrowing, exchange of publications, exchange of library specialists, etc. Since then, the organization has supported the development of cooperation between public libraries in the world.

Library Consortium

The most significant progress in library cooperation during the last century has been achieved thanks to the initiative of libraries themselves, namely library consortia. The earliest example dates back to 1933, when Duke University, North Carolina State University, and the University of North Carolina founded the Triangle Research Libraries Network (TRLN), a consortium for sharing catalogues and collections, shared digital initiatives, collaborative remote supported collections, and federated staff model.

The advantages of the consortium as a form of library cooperation quickly became apparent and today it is the dominant trend. OCLC (Online Computer Library Center) is an example of library cooperation at a global level. It was established in 1967 as a non-profit organization with headquarters in Dublin, Ohio, USA. OCLC was created on the initiative of the Ohio Association of Colleges and Academic Institutions. OCLC's mission is to provide shared technology services, research, and

programmes to help libraries meet the information access needs of users, organizations, and communities. The main goal of the consortium is for libraries around the world to reduce their costs through collaboration since OCLC's motto reads „Because what is known must be shared".

An example of a successful international consortium comprising 50 developing country participants is eIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries). Its main purpose is to negotiate, promote, and support the dissemination of scientific electronic resources for library users in the educational and scientific sectors, professional communities, government organizations, and civil society.

This new (from the perspective of the millennial development noted above) trend in library cooperation led to the creation of a large number of various consortia. Studying its beginnings, James Kopp determined four types of consortia – 1) a large consortium (mainly concerned with computerization in a large number of libraries), 2) a small consortium (engaged with user service and day-to-day issues), 3) a cooperative in a particular field, and 4) a consortium for interlibrary loan or reference service.[9] According to him, these four types are basic for the consortia that arose later in the USA.

The topic of the legal status of consortia is also interesting.[10] The most common forms are non-profit organizations, associations of university libraries, governmental organizations, associations, and the ones without legal status. Structured consortia of non-profit organizations are associations registered with an independent legal status. Their activities are related to providing services in the fields of education, science, charity, religion, etc. Library cooperatives also carry out educational initiatives. Examples of consortia with non-governmental and non-profit status are eIFL, LIBER (Ligue des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche – Association of European Research Libraries), Consortium of European Research Libraries (CERL), International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC), Amigos Library Services, Midwest Collaborative for Library Services, and others.

Library associations are also set up within universities, such as the Florida Center for Library Automation, Consortia of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois, GALILEO, Minitex, etc. The main services they provide are maintenance of shared resources, digital repositories, a shared integrated catalogue system, a common site for remote access to resources, etc.

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[9] James Kopp, „Library consortia and information technology: the past, the present, the promise", *Information technology and libraries* 17, 1 (1998): 9.

[10] Valerie Horton, „Library consortia overview", In: *Library Consortia: Models for Collaboration and Sustainability*, eds. Valerie Horton and Greg Pronevitz (Chicago: American Library Association, 2015), 2.

Other library consortia have the status of state organizations. Such type of consortia is usually created on behalf of regional libraries on a geographical basis and is managed according to state regulations, i.e. conducting tenders for public procurement, announcing vacancies, reporting, etc. Examples of state consortia are OhioLINK, Florida Virtual Campus, etc.

Informal library associations without legal status are also present. They are established for a specific occasion, such as sharing a joint purchase, organizing an event, working on a specific project, etc. Such is the case of libraries in Colorado, which for more than 40 years have organized an annual interlibrary loan conference without setting up a formal association.

The following conclusions about the nature of modern library cooperation can be formulated according to the above analysis of the establishment of consortia:

- Along with the continuing importance of leadership, the need for initiative of all participants and the capacity for joint work is increasingly coming to the fore.
- State intervention is a possible but not an obligatory solution. Moreover, it often causes problems with the motivation of the participants.

The rapidly changing modern society gives rise to the need to constantly rethink the subject of library cooperation from different points of view as liaison work, cross-institutional and cross-continental partnerships, evidence synthesis, data literacy, and open scholarship.[11] Library consortium governance is also a topic of interest for the researchers – types and models, intra- and inter-consortia engagement, components and benefits, scholarly communication, structure and funding, licensing and negotiation practices, management issues and challenges, and Open Access issues.[12]

Library Cooperation in Bulgaria

During the second half of the period of existence of the First Bulgarian Empire (681–1018), Bulgaria developed as a significant spiritual centre. Christianity was adopted, Cyril and Methodius' students began their work, and there were translations and creation of folk lit-

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[11] Carrie Forbes, ed., *Academic Libraries and Collaborative Research Services* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 42.

[12] Jill Grogg and Rosen Hannah, „Consortia: An Evolving Landscape", *Collaborative Librarianship* 12, 2 (2020): 182–183; Anil Kumar Dhiman, *Library Consortia* (New Delhi: Ess Ess Publications, 2021), 73.

erature. Reproducing and distributing books inevitably required the development of cooperation forms between the newly founded literary centres. Unfortunately, the period has been poorly studied from this perspective.[13] There is an interesting proof in the book by Gaston Sergheraert *Syméon le Grand (893–927)*.[14] The author noted the establishment of the first national library of Bulgaria with a rich collection of manuscripts: Greek, Latin, and Slavic. The centralized management of the spiritual processes (by the kings Boris and Simeon), the need for books, regular communication with Constantinople and Rome, and the presence of a national library suggested a lively exchange of documents.

The study of these processes in Bulgaria usually starts from the Renaissance. Four periods stand out[15]. The first can be called restorative (until the restoration of the Bulgarian state – 1878). Three sub-periods can be outlined. The earliest one (here it is called ecclesiastical) was related to the maintenance of the collections of texts (at first handwritten, and later printed) in the Bulgarian monasteries of Rila, Zograf, Hilendar, etc. People (mainly monks) interested in the knowledge visited them in person. The school sub-period follows. Bulgarian educational initiatives can be found quite far back in time. Schools, in the modern sense of the word, were opened after 1800 – in the town of Kotel (1812), Svishtov (1815), Sliven (1825), etc. They probably had collections of books to aid learning. A school that surely had a library was the one set up by Vasil Aprilov in Gabrovo in 1835. The third sub-period – the community centre – began in 1856 with the establishment of a community centre in the city of Svishtov. The first point in its statute sets the task of creating a city library. In the same year, two more community centres were set up in the cities of Lom and Shumen, and by 1878 their number reached 130 (all of them with libraries). Formal connections between libraries –ecclesiastical, school, or community libraries – were not characteristic of this period. However, it is interesting due to some other features, such as:

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[13] Tatiana Nikolova-Houston, „Slavic Medieval Manuscripts. Origins, Preservation and Access. Part I", *Catholic Library Journal* 83, 1, (2012): 28–29; Tatiana Nikolova-Houston, „Slavic Medieval Manuscripts. Historical, Archival, and Aesthetical Value and Visibility. Part II", *Catholic Library World* 83, 2 (2013): 115–119.

[14] Gaston Sergheraert is the pseudonym of Christian Gérard, a teacher at the French College of the Assumptionists in Plovdiv. More information about him can be found in: Vasilka Guénova Tapkova-Zaimova, „Les écoles catholiques françaises en Bulgarie", In: *Interférences historiques, culturelles et littéraires entre la France et les pays d'Europe centrale et orientale (XIXe et XXe siècle)* (Sofia: Marin Drinov, 2000); Julia Velichkova-Borin, „Les écoles française en Bulgarie (1864–1948)", Documents *pour l'Histoire du Français Langue Étrangère ou Seconde* 54 (2015): 171–191; Gastone Sergheraert, *Syméon le Grand (893–927)* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve, 1960), 98.

[15] Tatiana Nikolova-Houston, „Bulgarian Librarianship: Surviving change through international cooperation", *Advances in Library Administration and Organization* 27 (2009): 54–61.

- Service provided by libraries and interaction with other structures (formal and informal) such as churches, schools, guild organizations, etc. Successful library cooperation even today requires contacts and joint initiatives not only between libraries but also with the surrounding world.

- Development without the so-called state support. Library cooperation is often associated with public funding. At that period, there was no Bulgarian state, and the administration of the Ottoman Empire showed no interest in supporting these ventures. And yet they were set up.

- The success of library cooperation requires personal commitment and involvement. The example of the first Bulgarian community centre in Svishtov is illustrative. Emanuil Vaskidovich donated over eight hundred volumes of publications, and the rest of the founders, Hristaki Filchov, Dimitar Nachovich, and Georgi Vladikin, a total of 4,800 grosh. During the public announcement of the idea, their fellow citizens collected a considerable amount of over 37,000 grosh. In 1904, Kiril Avramov donated 200,000 golden Bulgarian leva.

The second period (1879–1944) was marked by modernization. The number of community centres and community libraries grew to over a thousand in 1910 and almost 4,500 at the end of the period. The public libraries in the cities of Sofia and Plovdiv were established, as well as those of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and the ten universities established during the period. There were rapid processes of catching up on the backlog in the field of library cooperation, such as:

- Formal unification in 1911. An old idea belonging to the Constantinople Bulgarian Chital Community Centre of 1870 promoting unification of centres was implemented through the establishment of a Union of People's Community Centres;

- Coordination of services. Thanks to an initiative of Yancho Khlebarov, processes of coordination in the assembly of community libraries, book exchange, and interlibrary loan began;

- Introduction of new participants – scientific and university libraries. The same practices (book exchange and interlibrary loan) were implemented by them not only on a national but also on an international scale;

- The most important characteristic of the period is compliance with the needs of the users. The practice of community centres and their libraries to lead their users to knowledge chosen by them (so-called recommended lists) was limited. Libraries in-

creasingly developed their collections and services in response to the needs of the users.

The third period (1945–1989) was associated with stagnation in the library cooperation. A relatively modern interlibrary loan system was introduced only in 1987 with the creation of a unified service system and regulations for its operation. In the beginning, it was only related to the provision of books. The service was primarily dedicated to the needs of scientists, teachers, and specialists.[16] The advent of reprographic technology activated this service by providing the possibility to copy articles, parts of books, and other documents. Like everything related to the public life in the country, the library cooperation was characterized by the following:

– Clumsy centralized leadership (via the National Library) replaced the flexibility of personal initiative. The implementation of traditional activities – coordination of the collection of foreign editions, limited international book exchange, internal book exchange, and interlibrary loan – did not change the picture of stagnation and non-development.

– Introducing the concept of state funding and management (e.g. the acquisition of foreign literature only through a specially created commission) instead of individual efforts and contributions;

– Breaking ties with the world library community (except for two UNESCO conventions) and lagging behind modern trends.

It was only at the end of the 1960s that initiatives were implemented in the field of library cooperation, i.e. compilation of joint catalogues.

After 1989, the modern development of library cooperation in Bulgaria began. With the fall of the communist regime and the subsequent financial crises and political reforms, libraries in Bulgaria gained autonomy, public access to information and resources, and the opportunity to cooperate with international institutions. On the one hand, library holdings declined due to a lack of collection funds, but on the other hand, collections opened up to readers worldwide as a result of automation and a democratic approach. The cooperation of libraries in this period developed as a result of the advent of the internet and new technologies, as well as the limited funding. The opportunity to apply for international programmes to fund and implement reforms also influenced the changes in library practice. The role of the Union of Library and Information Workers, established in 1990, can also be noted here.

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[16] Elena Asenova Yanakieva et. al., *Bibliotechno, spravochno-bibliografsko i informatsionno obsluzhvane* (Sofia: Bulg. bibliotechno-informatsionna asotsiatsia, 2013), 173.

Cooperation was also exhibited in compiling joint catalogues including collections of several independent libraries. Some of them took place in the libraries of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, foreign books and periodicals in the National Library, academic libraries in North-Eastern Bulgaria like Rouse University Library, libraries at the University of Plovdiv, libraries working with the AB software, of out-of-print, rare and valuable editions, etc. At a later stage, an electronic joint catalogue *Regina* of the regional libraries was compiled, then the National Agrarian Scientific Information Complex Catalogue consisting of four libraries – Agricultural Academy, Agrarian University in Plovdiv, Thrace University in Stara Zagora, and Forestry University in Sofia – and a union consolidated online catalogue of the academic libraries in Bulgaria on the initiative of the National Academic Library and Information System Foundation, funded by the America for Bulgaria Foundation.

In 2002, another form of cooperation began between four medical libraries in the cities of Sofia, Varna, Pleven, and Plovdiv, resulting from the need for specialized scientific information. They concluded a contract for joint access to the ProQuest Medical Library database with the company that distributed the database in Bulgaria. A year later, the library of the Thrace University in Stara Zagora joined.

The case of state intervention should also be noted here. A national license agreement for access to the Scopus platform has been publicly funded since 2007, later expanded with Thomson Reuters and Clarivate. Today, this mechanism provides access to the SciVerse® Science Direct® platforms, the full-text database Science Direct Freedom Collections and Science Direct Classical Collections, as well as to the Scopus and Web of Science platforms.[17]

The most important modality of library cooperation during this period was setting up the Bulgarian Information Consortium. It is analyzed in detail below. There are two lessons learnt during these years – private initiatives for a library cooperative are:

– Possible but
– Difficult

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[17] Analysis and evaluation of these contracts were difficult due to lack of data. It was an indisputable fact that there were cases of access interruptions. In a highly critical publication, Martin Osikowski pointed out, among other weaknesses, Elsevier's extremely high prices, which caused the University of California, Berkeley, to abandon their services. UC Berkeley is a state university and its annual budget in that period (2018) was $2.8 billion. In 2018, the budget for all state universities in Bulgaria was $240 million, i.e. over 11 times smaller (Osikovsky, 2019, last revised 2022).

Theoretical Foundations of Library Cooperation

The topic is of intense academic interest. It has been studied by scientists from different scientific fields who have different theoretical views. The following have proved popular:

- Cooperative economic game[18] analyzing minima and maxima in utility;
- Cooperative decision-making involving more participants;[19]
- Analysis of conflict-of-interest policies, in particular, the key elements of transparency and openness in library consortia;[20]
- Economic analysis of the potential savings of consortia in different library services;[21]
- Theory of the life cycle of international consortia;[22]
- User perspectives of electronic resources,[23] etc.
- Of particular interest are the analyses of the reasons for the success or failure of the library cooperative, such as:
- Presence (absence) of trust between participants;[24]
- Level of adaptability of the participants to the shared mission;[25]
- Understanding of the inevitability of various problems of a technical, psychological, and behavioural nature in cooperation;[26]
- Acceptance of the fact that cooperation saves money but it is not free and the necessary costs must be borne,[27] etc.

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[18] Jacob Cohen, Wim Vijyerberg, „Applying game theory to library networks", *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 31, 5 (1980): 370–371.

[19] Robert Hayes, „Cooperative Game Theoretic Models for Decision- Making in Contexts of Library Cooperation", *Library Trends* 51, 3 (2003): 450–452.

[20] Nol Verhagen, „The licensing battlefield: consortia as new middlemen between publishers, agents and libraries-a view from the Continent", *Serials* 20, 2 (2007): 131–132.

[21] Bruce Kingma, „Economie Issues in Document Delivery: Access versus Ownership and Library Consortia", *The Serials Librarian* 34, 1–2 (1998): 207–211.

[22] Pnina, Shachaf, „Nationwide library consortia life cycle", *LIBRI: International Journal of Libraries and Information Services* 53, 2, (2003): 98–101.

[23] Rani Shilpa, „SWOT Analysis of consortia in academic libraries", *Journal of Library and Information Management* 3, 2 (2016): 79–80.

[24] Deborah Jakubs, „Trust me: The keys to success in cooperative collections ventures", *Library Management* 36, 8/9 (2015): 660.

[25] Arnold Hirshon, „Library strategic alliances and the digital library in the 1990s: The Ohio-LINK experience", *The Journal of academic librarianship* 21, 5 (1995): 384–385.

[26] Kanwal Ameen, „Barriers in collection sharing among libraries of Pakistan: university library managers' viewpoint", *LIBRES* 18, 1 (2008): 7–8.

[27] Delmus Williams, „Living in a cooperative world: meeting local expectations through Ohio-LINK", *Technical Services Quarterly* 17, 4 (2000): 19–21.

Bulgarian Information Consortium (BIC)

The establishment and development of the Bulgarian Information Consortium (BIC) went through several stages:

Preparatory Stage. The first informal union of university libraries in Bulgaria was launched in 2000 as a result of the work on the MODUL project – Modernization and Organizational Development of the University Library – financed under the EU Tempus programme. The project was initiated and led by Nadya Terzieva, director of the library of the New Bulgarian University (main participant in the project). Other participants were the libraries of the University of Sofia, the University of National and World Economy, the Technical University in Sofia (all from Bulgaria), the Free University of Amsterdam (the Netherlands), the University of Murcia (Spain), the University of Portsmouth (England), and the University of Braganza (Portugal). Non-academic participants were the Union of Library and Information Workers (Bulgaria) and the Dutch firm Martinus Nyhof. Training and visits of library managers and specialists were carried out and experience was shared in the areas of strategic library planning, library marketing, modern forms of financing, and specialization of librarians in various scientific fields. An indisputable result was the establishment of the first informal library consortium in Bulgaria, as well as the realization of a shared subscription for ISI's Current Contents Connect electronic databases for research and educational purposes for participating libraries.

The most significant achievement of the project was the first step towards building trust and capacity for joint work. The New Bulgarian University (NBU) library took over all the administrative work (including certain financial obligations) in its attempt to convince the other participants of the possibility of each of them getting benefits for themselves in working together. Formally, the project ended successfully – on time and with a high rating. However, from the perspective of the library cooperation, the results were not so convincing. It became clear that the careful selection of participants (having unidirectional goals) and willingness to work together (for mutual, not directly personal benefit) was extremely important to achieving success. Moreover, true cooperation proved to hardly happen in a short time.[28] More time and effort were needed.

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[28] Nadya Terzieva, „Nachinaniyata za kooperirane mezhdu balgarskite biblioteki i eIFL. Net" („Bulgarian Libraries Cooperative Initiatives and eIFL.net"), In: *Libraries, Globalisation and Cooperation: International conference*, Sofia, 3–5 November 2004, ed. Alexander Dimchev (Sofia: St. Kliment Ohridski, 2005): 127–132.

Establishment Stage. In 2002, the Library of New Bulgarian University launched the Bulgarian Librarian Network project. After successful participation in the Electronic Information for Libraries Competition, announced by eIFL,[29] funding was won to set up the first library association in Bulgaria for shared access to academic databases[30]. The libraries of the Technical University in Sofia, the Academy of Economics in Svishtov, and the American University in Bulgaria in Blagoevgrad also participated in the project. The project was implemented and highly appreciated by the funding organization. Already at the end of the year, on November 6, 2002, a non-profit association was registered under the name Bulgarian Information Consortium (BIC) with headquarters at New Bulgarian University. Its mission has been to provide access to the best information resources at prices that participants can afford. Its goals are the following:[31]

– Promoting the use of electronic information resources for scientific and educational purposes;

– Representing member libraries before publishers to obtain preferential prices for subscriptions to their products by concluding a unified license agreement;

– Training and continuing education in a professional environment.

– Guided by the knowledge accumulated from the global and national processes of library cooperation, the analyses of the researchers in the field (shown above), the modern ideas in not-for-profit management, and the experience and lessons from already fulfilled EC TEMPUS project, the initiators of the Bulgarian Information Consortium set two principles of its functioning:

– **Leadership**. Not all library consortia succeed; positive results often come late; disinterest and interpersonal conflicts exist; negative psychological characteristics of the participants are manifested (opportunism and free-riding); financial resources are not enough; individual efforts cannot be paid, etc. Strong

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[29] eIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries) is an independent non-governmental organization based in Vilnius. It has been financially supported over the years by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Government of Denmark, the Horizon 2020 Program of the European Commission, the Agency for Cooperative Development – Luxembourg, the Open Society Foundation, UNESCO, the Development Agency - Belgium, and individual donors through the GlobalGiving online donation platform.

[30] Nadya Terzieva, „Proektat EIFL – rezultati i perspektivi" („EIFL project-results and perspectives"), *Bibliosfera* 3 (2002): 4–5.

[31] Nadya Terzieva, „Balgarskiyat informatsionen konsortsium osiguryava vazmozhnosti" *Biblioteka* 14, 2 (2007): 34–35.

leadership for building confidence and enthusiasm is one of the keys to overcoming such problems.[32]

- **Polycentric governance** (governance with many decision-making centres, each with a certain degree of autonomy). This modern term we owe to Michael Polanyi[33] while its application in common resources usage (knowledge in our case) to the Ostrom family.[34] Polycentric governance engenders trust and faith and helps to overcome opportunism and free-riding problems. During the previous years, with military, cultural, ecological, economic, geopolitical, medical, demographical, technological, and other crises, polycentric governance has become a modern concept for social development and modernization.[35]

The governance structure of the Bulgarian Information Consortium consists (according to Bulgarian regulation in the field) of a General Assembly with representatives of all legal members and a Management Board, which includes representatives of the four founding universities. The Chairman of the Management Board of the Consortium represents it before its members to external organizations.

Development Stage. The establishment of BIC leaves a large number of questions open. In the years to follow, the answers have been sought and gradually found.

- **Guaranteeing autonomy**. Any library (regardless of its type and size) can join and leave the consortium every year. Entrance fees are low (and deducted from the prices of certain services). There are no exit penalties. Moreover, participation in all initiatives is optional. Libraries freely choose those they need.
- **Considering the financial capabilities of the members**. Already at the start of the Consortium, a model (Cost Division Model) was developed for the distribution of national fees (subscriptions). The fee for each library depends on its financial ca-

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[32] Detailed reviews of the place of leadership in economic and management theories can be found in: Benjamin B. Hermalin, „Toward an Economic Theory of Leadership: Leading by Example", *The American Economic Review* 88, 5 (1998): 1188–1206; Brian Dollery and Joseph Wallis, „Leadership and Economic Theories of Non-profit Organizations", *Review of Policy Research* 22, 4 (2005): 483–499; Peter Jost, „An economic theory of leadership styles", *Review of Managerial Science* 7, 4 (2013): 365–391.

[33] Michael Polanyi, *The Logic of Liberty* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 191–195.

[34] Vincent Ostrom, Charles Tiebout and Robert Warren, „The Organization of Government in Metropolitan Areas: A Theoretical Inquiry", *American Political Science Review* 55 (1961): 839–841; Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 221–234.

[35] Frank Gadinger and Jan Aart Scholte, eds., *Polycentrism: How Governing Works Today* (Oxford University Press, 2023), 371–374.

pabilities, not on the volume of the use of the service. Thus, it becomes possible to include more libraries and achieve a lower price for each of them (including those who pay the most) compared to a possible individual subscription.

– **Maintaining full accountability and transparency for the funds spent and their benefits**. The Bulgarian Information Consortium also prepares statistical reports on the usability of electronic resources, presents rankings for the most active users of the databases, most read titles, as well as financial benefits for libraries in the form of saved funds. Every year, national meetings of the members are held to report on the activities of BIC. The Management Board reports to the members on the initiatives carried out and their financial parameters and also presents plans for the coming year.

– **Involving members in the decision-making process regarding new services**. This process includes: organizing trial access, analyzing usability, conducting a survey among members about their interests, requesting offers and negotiating with publishers, distributing the amount of the offer according to the financial capabilities of the members, signing contracts between BIC and each participant in the unified subscription, concluding a license agreement with publisher, collecting fees, and paying publishers.

– **Minimizing management costs.** Administrative work is done voluntarily. The services of external contractors (accounting and banking services) are paid and, if possible, modest fees to participating librarians.

– **Maximizing benefit to participants.** The Bulgarian Information Consortium conducts negotiations with the suppliers of scientific information regarding the prices of their products. Gradually, their trust has been won and significant discounts are achieved every year. In addition to the financial benefit, BIC provides its members with additional benefits, mainly in the field of innovations in library work and international contacts.[36]

– **Seeking additional income** from donors and sponsors to cover the lack of funds in some libraries.

Maturity Stage. On its twentieth anniversary, the Bulgarian Information Consortium is not only an established name in the Bulgarian

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[36] Nadya Terzieva, „Balgarski informatsionen konsortsium – 10 godini uspyavame zaedno", In: *Godishnik na Balgarski informatsionen konsortsium*, ed. Nadya Terzieva, Radostina Todorova (Sofia: Bulgarian information consortium, 2013), 28–29.

library community but the only example of a long-lasting, successful, private library cooperative initiative in the country. The Consortium is national. At the end of 2023, its members are 38 libraries located in 12 cities in Bulgaria. There are 7 legal members, including the founding universities, and 31 associate members being able to participate in Consortium services of their choice. These member libraries are national and regional, academic (related to different fields of knowledge), small and large, etc. Thus, BIC proves its ability to support knowledge exchange and educational processes in Bulgarian universities.[37]

The most highly valued activity of the Bulgarian Information Consortium has always been its programme to provide shared access to a variety of information resources for scientific and educational purposes, achieving a reduction in the costs of member libraries.[38] Two projects have been implemented within the programme:

– Shared database subscription;
– Cooperative subscription to printed periodicals with electronic versions between the participating libraries.

The Bulgarian Information Consortium coordinates all activities related to the shared database subscription. Over the years, it worked with the following publishers: EBSCO Information Services (until 2013 – EBSCO Publishing),[39] Emerald Fulltext, Gale Virtual Reference Library, InfoTrack Custom Journals, Oxford Reference Online, JSTOR, ProQuest, etc. The longest-term cooperation has been with the publishing company EBSCO Information Services. At the moment, two license agreements are in operation for full-text access to e-journals – academic, business, and medical in profile – and to e-books with an academic or business scope. The number of participants from Bulgaria varies every year, ranging from 19 to 41 libraries. Financial data shows that the average subscription fee of an individual library over the years depends on the number of participants. The lowest was in 2006 (41 participants): 1,436.34 USD, while the highest was in 2023: 7,208.70 USD (27 partici-

[37] Nadya Terzieva, „Bibliotechno partnyorstvo v podkrepa na obrazovanieto", In: *Dinamichni biblioteki–dostap, razvitie, promyana: XXVI Natsionalna konferentsia na BBIA, Sofia, 9 – 10 yuni 2016 g.* (Sofia: Balg. bibliotechno-inform. asots, 2016): 79–85.

[38] Nadya Terzieva and Radostina Todorova, „Satrudnichestvo na bibliotekite v razprostranenieto na elektronna informatsia za nauchni i obrazovatelni tseli-opitat na Balgarski informatsionen konsortsium", In: *Godishnik na Balgarski informatsionen konsortsium*, ed. Bilyana Aleksandrova, Nadya Terzieva (Sofia: Balgarski informatsionen konsortsium, 2006), 199–201.

[39] Division of EBSCO Industries Inc., a privately held company from Birmingham, Alabama. Today, EBSCO Information Services offers access to MEDLINE, EconLit, Academic Search, America: History and Life, Art Index, Art Abstracts, Art Full Text, Business Source, Clinical Reference Systems, Criminal Justice Abstracts, Education Abstracts, Environment Complete, Health Source, Historical Abstracts, History Reference Center, MasterFILE, NetLibrary, Primary Search, Professional Development Collection, USP DI.

pants). Despite the nearly four-fold increase in the annual subscription fee for the period 2003–2023, together with the development of the collections (from 3,187 full-text titles to 39,983, or an increase of almost 12 times), the price of an article used within the framework of the consortium agreement remains low, within the limits from 0.52 to 6,03 USD. During the period, 1,251,295 articles were downloaded at an average price of $2.40. This is a many times lower price compared to interlibrary loan delivery, which averages $25 per document.

Over 7 years (2004–2010), the Consortium developed another initiative to save the financial resources of libraries – cooperative subscriptions for printed periodicals. The main goal of the project is for the work team of BIC from the Technical University in Sofia to represent the participating libraries in a public procurement tender and to conclude a contract with the selected supplier company under the most favourable financial conditions. The economy of scale is also achieved in this project by subscribing to the combined lists of journals of 8 libraries (a total of 2,966 subscribed titles in different languages) and through a public tender the companies apply to win a supply contract. An electronic free version of subscribed journals through a unified platform is an added value that libraries receive. The Pulsar Agency Platform also provides an opportunity for exchanging publications between the participating libraries based on the cooperative subscription. The cooperative subscription project contributes to libraries acquiring skills for negotiating favourable conditions for supplying periodicals and achieving additional advantages for their readers that are still valid today.

The other important programme of the Bulgarian Information Consortium is related to non-formal learning and the acquisition of knowledge in a professional environment. Within the framework of the programme, over 20 years, more than 83 events for the library community have been organized in various formats: forums, seminars, exhibitions, and national meetings.[40]

The idea for the Technology Day Forum arose thanks to the library specialists of the American University in Bulgaria in 2002. Representatives of global companies and publishers are invited to present their products at the forum to professionals in the field of library information technologies and electronic resources. News from conferences of LIBER, IFLA, and others are also presented. Within the framework of the forum, BIC has developed cooperation with over 60 companies and has organized 27 editions of Technology Day.

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[40] Radostina Todorova, Gergana Martinova and Desislava Milusheva, „Professional Capacity Development: New Bulgarian University Library Case Study", In: *Zbornik radova: Konferencija o informacijskoj pismenosti na Zapadnom Balkanu*, ed. Ratko Knežević, Nikola Findrik (Bihać: Kantonalna i univerzitetska biblioteka Bihać, 2015), 163–165.

In order to impose its image and attract like-minded people, the Bulgarian Information Consortium organizes seminars titled Good Library Practices. Librarians there share their achievements. Participation in the seminars provides an opportunity to exchange experience and practical approaches in library practice and builds trust between BIC and its members. From 2004 to 2012, 24 seminars were held. In 2014, another format of seminars titled The Privilege of Being Informed began. In the framework of this initiative, publishing houses were invited to present their electronic resources by agreeing to free trial access to the products for BIC member libraries within one to three months. Within this series of seminars, BIC organized many trial accesses with publishers such as Taylor & Francis, CABI, eBrary, ProQuest, etc. The organization of trial accesses for libraries is becoming an important part of the activity of BIC. The interest is also visible from the statistical data on the usability of the resources. As a result of negotiations with publishers, more than 93 trial bi-monthly/quarterly accesses to full-text databases in various fields, e-books, and journals have been implemented, with BIC members using more than 915,280 information items free of charge. The number of freely used documents is comparable to that of downloaded articles under the EBSCO national database subscription license agreement and shows that BIC members have almost doubled the access to resources for their users by providing thematic variety without spending additional financial resources.

Given the already established interest of libraries in trial access to electronic resources, the Bulgarian Information Consortium became the initiator of holding the first international exhibition of publishers – Biblioworld. In 2013, its first edition titled Technologies, Resources, Practices was held with participation of mainly publishing houses with products in the field of science and technology, including Asenovtsi, Ontotext, Prima-Soft, SoftLib, Langry, UniSystems Information Systems and VTLS Europe, Dobie Press, Paradigma Publishing, CAB International, EBSCO Information Services, De Gruyter, Elsevier, Ovid – Wolters Kluwer Health, ProQuest, etc. Publishers paid for their participation in the forum having the opportunity to deliver a presentation and have a stand. As a result of the exhibition, BIC agreed to conduct trial access to the presented products. The second and third editions of the international exhibition were held in 2017, in the field of social sciences and humanities, and 2019, without a specific field of knowledge, preserving the format of the event. Statistical information on the usability of trial access to electronic resources was published on the association's website.

In 2021, as a result of a survey conducted among its members, BIC organized a new type of seminar to encourage the academic staff to ef-

fectively use digital technologies. Topics on the information needs of researchers, academic staff register, and the role of scientific libraries were presented, as well as how to create author profiles in Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and LinkedIn.

Raising additional funds is another important task of the Consortium. Over the years, stable, trust-based sponsorship relations have been built with Mobiltel, Development of Communications and Information and Communication Technologies Agency, Carol Capital Management, and Sopharma.

Last, but not least, it is the effort to promote the Bulgarian Information Consortium. Several initiatives have been developed and are being implemented to create and maintain a website, blog, and other publishing and media projects. Since 2002, the Consortium website has gone through five versions. Up-to-date information can be found there – statutes, rules, conditions for membership, news, events, statistical data, etc.[41] The publishing activity includes New Library Newsletter in electronic[42] and printed version, an annual collection with presentations and reports from seminars and national meetings. Two blogs are maintained. With the growth of social media, the information is placed on the Facebook page of BIC, and the materials from the events are available to the members in electronic format on the site.

Conclusion

The Bulgarian Information Consortium is an association of libraries in Bulgaria for a) shared access to electronic and other informational resources for scientific and educational purposes, and b) professional development of librarians following modern trends in the profession. The Consortium is a non-profit organization working through leadership, flexibility, and consideration of the needs of its members. It is a private initiative that does not rely on any kind of public support. Management and operational activities are carried out by a team of the Book Center (an administrative structure including a library, book shop, publishing house, and archive department) at New Bulgarian University. All of the activities are based on the project management approach, in which members are involved in active work with measurable results. The structure of BIC is non-hierarchical and flexible, management and operational activities are carried out by the same people. Communication between members and the operational team is informal. According

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[41] Bulgarian Information Consortium, https://bic.bg/

[42] Bulgarian Information Consortium, „Nova biblioteka", https://novabiblioteka.blogspot.com/

to its geographical scope, BIC is a national consortium with members from different cities in the country. The association's activities are financed by service fees and membership fees, and it also maintains a small reserve fund. For 20 years, BIC has won the trust of the participants in the association through full accountability and transparency of all actions. The approaches used by the Consortium ensure its stability and longevity.

The main lessons learned from the story of the Bulgarian Information Consortium could be summarized in:

– Strong leadership is needed for the successful initiation, establishment and functioning of a Library Consortium. It does not mean simply to have a boss, assigning tasks and duties. It means to have a body of active supporters of the idea, ready to dedicate their efforts and work hard for its achievement, without putting personal gain first. In our case, the team of New Bulgarian University led by its leader plays this role perfectly. The support of particular individuals from the other legal members was also crucial;

– The modern mode of governance is also important. We applied deeply the Polycentric Governance approach through a) careful choosing of the founders, b) freedom for all to participate, c) consideration and care for the needs of all participants (not only libraries but also single librarians), d) stimulation and support of any initiative from the members, and last but not least e) fast and clear demonstration of financial benefit from the cooperation;

– Pure private is better than any kind of public. The success of the Bulgarian Information Consortium over twenty years is the main proof. Various other initiatives for library cooperation initiated and financed by public authorities or big donors failed during this period. Feeling the consortium as its own is the main driving force for the people in it.

This paper presents the story of the Bulgarian Information Consortium from the perspective of its founder and leader. This is also a Bulgarian story. Various approaches for successful library cooperation could be found in other countries and historical periods. But we do believe that our way, achievements, and even mistakes may be useful in cases of deep social transformation, financial problems, and lack of tradition for cooperative action.

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БУГАРСКИ ИНФОРМАЦИОНИ КОНЗОРЦИЈУМ: ДВАДЕСЕТ ГОДИНА САРАДЊЕ МЕЂУ БИБЛИОТЕКАМА

САЖЕТАК: У раду је представљен Бугарски информациони конзорцијум током више од двадесет година његовог деловања. Неколико других иницијатива за библиотечку сарадњу, током прве деценије транзиције ка модерном друштву, економији и образовању у Бугарској није успело или нису биле делотворне. Зато су иницијатори, а касније и оснивачи Конзорцијума, веома пажљиво приступили процесу, обраћајући пажњу на различите факторе – тешку економску ситуацију, недостатак праксе сарадње на националном нивоу, психолошке и бихевиоралне карактеристике библиотекара и управника библиотека у земљи, зависност од историјског пута, стање библиотекарског и економског знања у области колективног деловања итд. Коначно, Бугарски информациони конзорцијум је успостављен пратећи три основна концепта: а) јако вођство, б) полицентрично управљање и ц) приватно власништво.

Данас је успех Конзорцијума евидентан. Начин постизања овог успеха и практична примена три теоријска концепта су приказани и детаљно размотрени у овом раду. У извесном погледу то је јединствен бугарски начин. Међутим, лекције научене на том путу могле би бити корисне и за друге библиотекаре који покрећу било какав облик сарадње међу библиотекама.

КЉУЧНЕ РЕЧИ: библиотечка сарадња, лидерство, полицентрично управљање, Бугарски информациони конзорцијум.