Cross boundaries - join forces: challenging new frontiers

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Abstract

The paper presents fruitful cooperation between EAHIL members from different countries and successful initiative to prepare a project for creation a Virtual Library for Moldova universities. The idea to prepare the project application came thanks to EAHIL membership and communication between colleagues from different countries during EAHIL conferences and workshops. The Project EU partners are EAHIL members from Hungary, Romania, Lithuania and Latvia. The project application MISISQ (Modern Information Services for Improvement Study Quality) was submitted to EU EACEA Tempus program in 2013 and was granted one million Euros for implementation during years 2014-2016.
The main Project goal was to create an Academic Virtual Library for Moldova universities. Project objectives are:
- to purchase and implement modern Integrated Library Information System
- to create institutional repositories for University research output and ETD in Moldova universities
- to prepare course material modules on information literacy for training trainers and deliver courses to Moldova librarians

The MISISQ project ends in November 2016 and the achieved results and benefits for project partners are presented in the paper.

Keywords: International Cooperation, Communication, Projects, Virtual Libraries, e-Repositories, Information Literacy.

Introduction

My presentation goal is to share with you my experience on fruitful international Library cooperation projects that have been born thanks to EAHIL. Many years ago, in 1994 Norwegian SMH libraries sponsored several Lithuanian persons to attend the 4th EAHIL Conference in Oslo. Elisabeth Husem was a president of EAHIL and we were lucky, that Elisabeth together with other Norwegian colleagues initiated a long term partnership program between Lithuanian and Norwegian medical libraries which lasted 15 years. Through the Partnership Program our medical librarians have gained a great deal of professional knowledge and skills for implementing new library technologies and the possibility to participate in European conferences.

It is already an old story. But it shows how important was EAHIL for us when our capabilities were so limited. Norwegian partners helped us a lot to make a breakthrough. And it is now our turn to pass over our acquired partnership experience and knowledge to others who need more.

When we met Moldova participants at the EAHIL Conference in Cluj-Napoka in 2006, we could not imagine ourselves that after seven years in 2013 we shall initiate and write together a project and apply to European Commission Education, Audiovisual and Cultural Executive Agency (EACEA) for grant for neighbouring EU country Moldova university libraries.

According to the Agency requirements it is necessary to have 3 EU country partners. So we invited well known EAHIL members Marta Viragos (HU, Ioana Robu (RO) and our neighbours Latvians to join the project

Project objectives

The project application under the title Modern Information Services for Improvement Study Quality (MISISQ) was accepted and one million Euros was granted to implement project ideas and goals during years 2014-2016.

The main aim was to create a Virtual Library and improve information services for quality education in seven biggest Moldova universities.

To achieve these objectives three main tasks had to be resolved:

1. Creating information infrastructure for Moldova university libraries and implementing Library Information System for creation and sharing union electronic catalogue, acquisition and circulation of documents, searching and access to information resources for local and remote users;
2. Creating institutional e-repositories for study and research output of Moldova universities;
3. Improving information literacy among academic community to ensures effective usage of information resources and scholar communication internationally;

It was a real challenge to accomplish these important tasks for Moldova universities in a short three years period.

Partners

The Project involved seven biggest higher education institutions of Moldova with a total number of 47 000 of students as Moldova country partners and four EU Universities from Lithuania, Latvia, Romania and Hungary.

EU country partners were chosen according to specific project objectives, previous contacts and taking into account very short time for collection of documents and mandates from all partners. According to Tempus Agency requirements it is necessary to have at least 3 EU country member partners. We knew from previous contacts, that University of Debrecen had well running e-repository. We also knew Marta as an active EAHIL Board member. So we invited the University of Debrecen to join the project to aid with their expertise in creation of e-repositories in Moldova universities.

Also we knew well from former EAHIL activities, that Ioana Robu (RO) is high skilled information literacy teacher and could contribute in "Training Trainer" courses for Moldova libraries' staff. Courses and course a material in Romanian language is an advantage, as Moldovans use the same language and no translations and interpretations are needed. So UMF was invited to be responsible for Information Literacy work package.

The Library of the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences and Riga Technical University were responsible for implementation of Integrated Library System (ILS) to Moldova Universities as we have experience on ILS, based on long term experience with ExLibris software.

National Council of Student Organizations from Moldova was invited to contribute in preparing questionnaire about students' information needs, analyse them and present proposals to improve library services.

The Ministry of Education of Moldova is more formal partner than practical player, but we hope they will help include information literacy courses into universities' curriculum.

The total list of partners participating in the project includes 13 members:
1. Lithuanian University of Health Sciences, Project Coordinator,
2. Nicolae Testemiţanu State University of Medicine and Pharmacy, the main Moldova Partner, responsible for coordination of Moldova partners
3. Moldova State University
4. Technical University of Moldova
5. Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova
6. Alecu Russo Balti State University
7. Ion Creangă Pedagogical State University, Chisinau
8. State Agrarian University of Moldova
9. Riga Technical University, Latvia
10. Debreceni Egyetem, Hungary
11. Iuliu Haţieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Romania
12. National Council of Student Organizations from Moldova
13. The Ministry of Education of Moldova

Project implementation

Integrated Library System (ILS)
Purchase and installation of Integrated Library System was the main project task and the most expensive in terms of money and time. MD libraries had near 1.5 million bibliographic records and they were in the printed card catalogues. Any other library processes (acquisitions, cataloguing, sharing metadata, circulation, statistics, OPAC, serials, interlibrary loan) were not computerized, users could access and use library resources only during library open time. An open public access catalogue (OPAC) did not exist. Therefore it was problematic to find information even in physical library. It was impossible to implement new services for local and remote users without integrated library information system. These reasons made reliable study process at universities quite problematic.

We wanted to acquire an advanced and modern ILS for joint usage of Moldova universities, that could improve library staff workflow and information services to students and academic community. Initially it was considered whether to acquire well known commercial or open source ILS. After several live presentations of Koha and Aleph providers the choice was made in favour of one of the best ILS Aleph/Primo from ExLibris Company.

The offered solution was based on ExLibris integrated library system Aleph and the delivery and discovery system Primo. It was implemented as shared multi tenancy architecture for all interested institutions and hosted locally in Moldova.

To be more specific it means that the whole system comprises one Aleph installation with seven separate Aleph „databases" and one Primo installation. This configuration allows each institution to have an own access to their catalogue and additionally to have a common view about all seven institutions.

Our role as a project coordinator was to prepare ILS technical and functional specification for an international tender, to arrange and accomplish the tender, to coordinate signing contracts and monitor ILS implementation. Servers for Aleph and Primo installations were configured by Lithuanian IT staff, as MD IT staff did not have sufficient professional experience. Our staff provided with many remote and live consultations on Aleph workflow. Together with Riga Technical University specialists they delivered training courses on Aleph modules, Marck21, Primo.

E-repositories

All Moldova Universities' scholar publications, theses and dissertations, education resources existed only in printed format. Their metadata were also in printed cards and printed lists. There were no e-repositories in Moldova universities at all. So it was the essential demand for universities to set up institutional open access e-repositories for archiving of education e-resources and research output. Another important project work package was to help creating institutional e-repositories for Moldova universities. The comprehensive survey and analysis of university needs, content, structure, IT staff skills and future plans were performed by Hungarian partners. Based on this survey it was decided to use DSPACE software platform for MD institutional repositories. Partners from Debrecen University arranged a workshop in Hungary for MD IT staff and in order to share their vast experience on e-repository and DSPACE issues. Currently seven institutional e-repositories are running and new e-documents are being submitted by librarians and authors. Institutional e-repositories will be integrated with MD Virtual Library searching and discovery tool PRIMO at the end of project this year. User Documentation Kit has been prepared by MD partners jointly under consultations of Hungarian partners. Internet addresses of repositories are available at the MISISQ project website <http://misisq.usmf.md>.

Information Literacy

The main goal of this work package was to improve information literacy skills of Moldovan students and teachers in order to aid education process and extend access and use of information resources.

Information literacy level of academic community depends a lot on library staff professional skills and quality of information services at the library. Up-to-date professional knowledge and new skills of librarians is an essential factor for successful e-library development and implementation of the project. A full-scale information literacy program has been planned to provide for librarians of Moldova universities.

To cope with information explosion and enable effective information usage and management it is necessary to train trainers from Library staff so that they could organize permanent educational courses for students, researchers on new information technologies and effective usage of information resources.

The survey of MD librarians has been performed and according to the results the training program Training Trainer for librarians was built by Iona Robu from UMF (RO). Eight training course modules were accepted by the project management group members on hot topics such as Discovery tools/Searching Primo; Evaluation Research Output; Research and Publication Process; Critical Appraisal of Information; Teaching Methodology; Reference Management tools; Specific DB; Copyright;

The Course modules will be used in the future for students and library users training on information literacy under the curriculum and free choice basis. Educational materials will be translated into Moldovan language, printed and published on the web. Educational courses are planned to be organised in the EU partner countries. To assure quality of course materials, peer-reviewing have been performed by project EU partner experts.

Among the main project development work many dissemination activities have been performed by Moldovan and project EU partners: creation and maintenance of project website, publishing of various flyers, posters and souvenirs. Several articles have been published in the local and national journals.

Conclusions

The MISISQ project could be a good example to show, how libraries can cooperate on national and international scale and each partner can benefit from this cooperation. Moldova university libraries created Library Consortium and jointly acquired advanced Integrated Library System Aleph and discovery tool Primo. This enables sharing metadata between Moldova universities, integration of external and internal information resources and jointly maintaining Virtual Library.

To be successful and sustainable there must be a two way process and mutual benefits. In our case EU country partners also gained benefits acquiring experience and confidence to be professional experts, managing international and big budget EU project.