



Working together, learning together: the Consortium of Academic Libraries of Catalonia

Lluís M. Anglada

Lluís M. Anglada (langlada@cbuc.es) is the Executive Director of the Consorci de Biblioteques Universitàries de Catalunya (<http://www.cbuc.es>), Spain, and former Director of the Technical University of Catalonia Libraries, Barcelona, Spain.

Cooperation between libraries is a universal language spoken in different dialects. In 1996 the libraries of the state-funded universities and the State Library of Catalonia (Spain) formed a consortium to act as a channel for cooperation. The organization, operation and funding of the Consortium of Academic Libraries of Catalonia (CBUC) are an example of how this universal language has been adapted to the specific characteristics of the library and university system in Catalonia. The CBUC has a union catalogue, an interlibrary lending program and other cooperation programs; in 1999 it set up the Digital Library of Catalonia, a series of electronic resources shared by all the libraries of the Consortium. From their experience in the CBUC, the member libraries have found cooperation to be hard work but also a meaning of introducing changes and grasping the future.

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- **Introduction**

The *Registrum Librorum Angliae*, a union catalogue of the books of 186 monasteries in England, was drawn up in the late 14th century. This was a cooperative effort aimed at facilitating the location of documents, and shows us that cooperation between libraries is a universal language spoken in different dialects.

Spanish universities were organized centrally until the early 1980s. In 1984 the University Reform Law gave universities an autonomy that allowed them to renew their system of organization and to start a process of renewal of their libraries that has shown significant results in the last fifteen years (1). This renewal involved an increase in the budgets devoted to purchasing collections, building new buildings, and automating the libraries... and marked the beginning of association and cooperation between libraries.

Coinciding with the process or reorganization of the state, the Spanish administration became decentralized and the powers delegated to the regions include responsibility for certain aspects of higher education. Catalonia is an autonomous region of Spain with 6,000,000 inhabitants and a university system of eight public universities and three private ones, forming a university community of 189,118 students, 13,358 lecturers and 6,240 administrative staff. Catalonia has its own language – Catalan – and a national library, the Library of Catalonia, which pays special attention to regional culture.

In the 1980s the Catalan libraries began to cooperate through associations of specialized libraries and the first union list of journals of university libraries, which was, however, discontinued. The decentralization of the administration and of university funding played an important role in finally converting these early attempts at cooperation into the Consortium of Academic Libraries of Catalonia in the nineties.

- **What is the CBUC?**

Background

The Consortium of Academic Libraries of Catalonia (CBUC) is a consortium formed by eight public universities of Catalonia and the Library of Catalonia (Figure 1), whose mission is to improve the library services through cooperation.

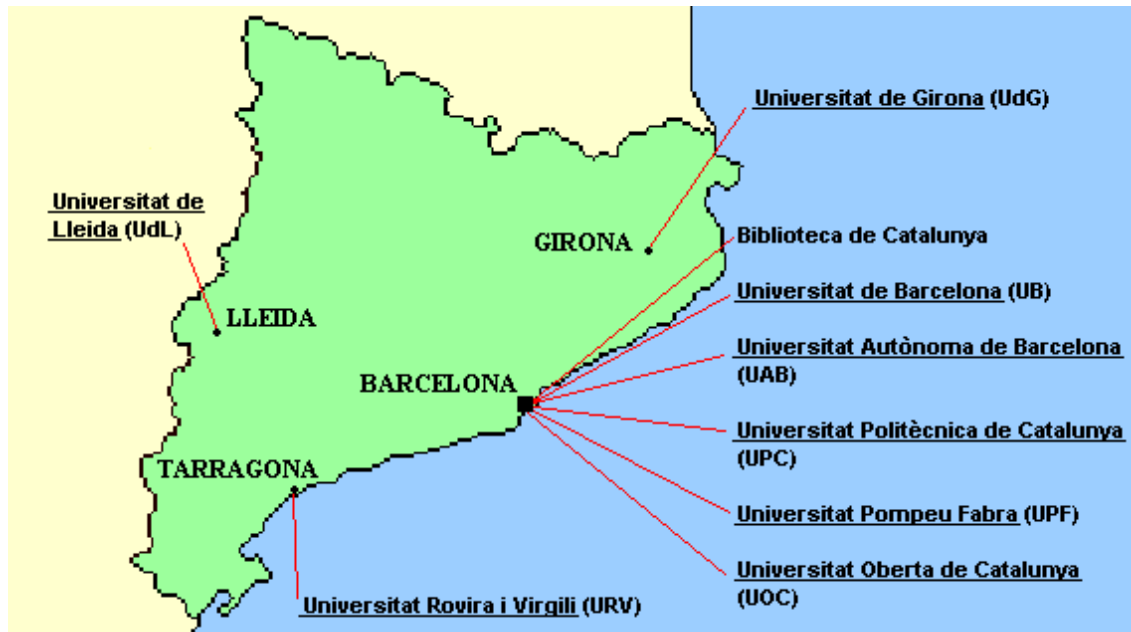


Figure 1: Members of the CBUC

The origin of this consortium is to be found in the changes that took place in the university world and in their libraries in the early nineties. In 1990 there were three universities in Catalonia that were automated with in-house systems. In the following five years the number of universities increased considerably, and it became clear that the development of automated systems by the individual universities was not a feasible option for the future. Though the search for an automated system to replace the old ones and to re-automate the libraries of the emerging universities was not carried out jointly, the choice was informally conditioned by the idea that it would be better to choose the same one in order to facilitate support and installation (2).

This informal collaboration strengthened the relations between the libraries and made their directors and the university managers see that working together could give results that the libraries alone could not achieve. Efforts then focused on making a union catalogue to bring together the automated collections of the libraries in order to improve bibliographic information and to facilitate copy cataloguing through new cataloguing and retroconversion of the manual cards.

This project received funding from the universities department of the government of Catalonia, and in 1995 technical work was started for the creation of the Union Catalogue of the Universities of Catalonia (CCUC). This was a difficult task, because it involved establishing criteria for the formation of the catalogue and drawing up a program for automatic detection of duplicated bibliographic records, but it was feasible because the Catalan libraries followed the same cataloguing and classification standards and used the same version of the MARC format (CATMARC).

The CCUC was formed between 1995 and 1996 by working teams composed of librarians, computer staff and the managers of the different institutions. The desire to undertake further cooperative projects in addition to the CCUC and the need to contract technical staff to maintain the catalogue finally led to the creation of a consortium.

Structure and functioning of the CBUC

The CBUC was set up in late 1996 as a public body with its own legal status. It consists of a Governing Council, an Executive Committee, a Technical Committee, a Technical Office and Working Groups. The Governing Council is composed of two representatives from each member institution and meets twice a year. The Executive Committee is in charge of the functioning of the CBUC, and the Technical Committee – composed of the directors of the libraries – examines the proposals for action and monitors progress. The CBUC has an office with seven persons dealing with the coordination and implementation of the annual work plan. The Working Groups are the driving force of the programs of the CBUC. They are composed of librarians and meet periodically or on an *ad hoc* basis. In 1998 there were 7 different working groups.

The CBUC operates by consensus. In its history no decision has been taken by vote. Its operating policy is to carry out actions in which all the libraries have an interest, however small. This involves drawing up each year a working plan reflecting the will of the different libraries and assigning priorities according to the resources available. This method is effective because the members share a common vision of the future and because our consortium is small in scale, facilitating frequent contacts between members. Nevertheless, a large part of the work of the Consortium involves detecting problems and needs, facilitating decision-making and monitoring the fulfillment of the agreements that are reached.

Funding

Of the budget of the CBUC, 65% is provided by the Catalan university administration, 25% by contributions from its members and 10% from income for services provided to libraries that are not members. Budget planning for the next few years foresees that the financial participation of the administration will decrease progressively as the members' contributions increase. These are

currently the same for all libraries, regardless of their size. This is for two reasons. Firstly, the Catalan university administration believes that cooperation will best be facilitated if during the initial period differentiated funding is not introduced as a subject of discussion. Secondly, the benefits of cooperative activity are diverse and difficult to quantify in such a way as to compensate different contributions and benefits.

Some specific projects of the Consortium, and in particular the Digital Library, have received special funding from the university administration. For example, it is currently funding the extra cost of electronic subscription to journals in addition to subscription on paper. The vision of the future is that the Digital Library needs this initial funding to give it time to reach an agreement on the proportional distribution of costs of information resources in electronic format within a period of two years.

Evolution of the Consortium

Though the CBUC is only four years old, its objectives have evolved rapidly. It was initially set up to run the union catalogue, but it was rapidly seen that it was possible and advantageous to organize an inter-library loan program. The success in the initial projects encouraged new ones to be undertaken: joint purchase of equipment, training, benchmarking, and most importantly the creation of a digital library. This extension of activities was made possible by taking on more staff at the CBUC and increasing the activities of the working groups and the coordination tasks. This extension of activities was only possible thanks to strict annual planning and a great flow of information to the different bodies of the CBUC.

The activities of the Consortium are also having a considerable influence on the libraries of Catalonia that are not members. Some of the services of the CBUC – in particular the union catalogue – are widely used by Catalan libraries. Some of these have incorporated their collection in the CCUC without being members of the Consortium. The functioning of the CBUC has shown the possibilities of regional cooperation regardless of differences between types of libraries (university, public, specialized...) and in the next few years the cooperation is expected to extend to all of them.

- **Programs for increasing document accessibility**

One of the original motivations of the Consortium was to increase the use of existing bibliographic resources in Catalonia. Three programs were developed in order to increase the accessibility of bibliographic collections: the collective catalogue, inter-library loans and reciprocal borrowing.

The Union Catalogue of the Universities of Catalonia (CCUC)

In the absence of union catalogues for Spain or Catalonia, the location of

bibliographic information was a difficult task before the formation of the CCUC. For example, copy cataloguing covered at best 35% of the volumes. The CCUC is now a catalogue with over 1,500,000 bibliographic records, and it gives access to over 3,000,000 physical documents kept in 117 libraries. Cooperative cataloguing through the CCUC has also allowed cataloguing standards to be unified by establishing different levels of coding and reaching agreements on the treatment of serial publications, cartographic materials, the form of the personal headings, etc. Copy cataloguing has increased considerably and reached 70.89% in 1998.

The growth of the CCUC is based on current cataloguing, retrospective cataloguing – which is facilitated by the catalogue itself – and the addition of collections of other libraries (Figure 2). In 1998 five libraries that are not members of the CBUC incorporated their records in the CCUC, and other libraries are expected to continue adding records. The CCUC has a quality control program that deletes duplicated records and headings.

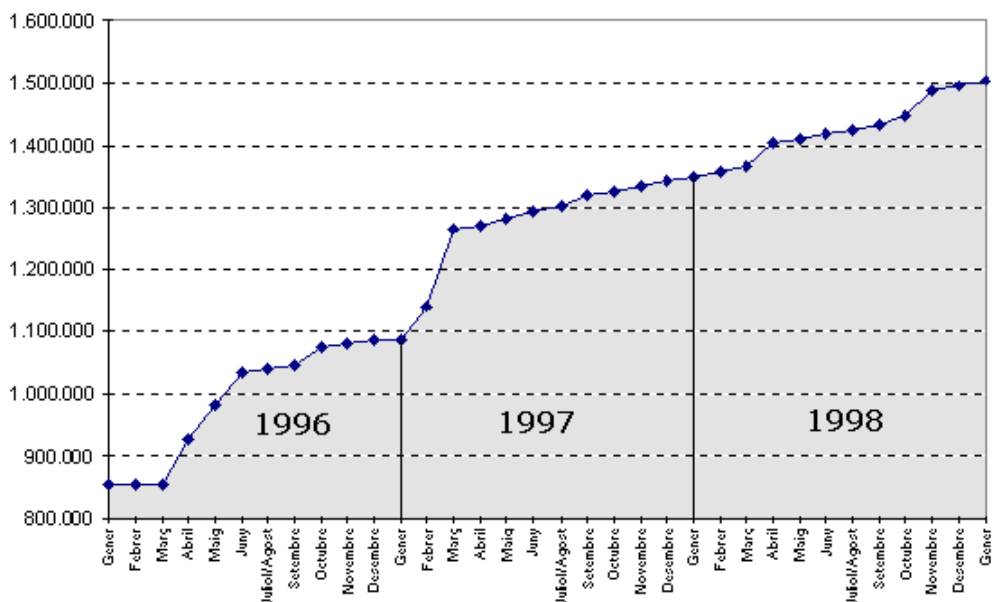


Figure 2: growth of the CCUC between 1996 and 1998

The CCUC can be consulted on the web (www.cbuc.es/ccuc) and has links to local catalogues. This means that once users have located a document in the CCUC, they can go straight to one of the libraries that has the document and consult its location and circulation status. This mechanism of links allows us to offer constantly updated information on the state of the collections and the holdings of the journals. The CCUC also has links to other electronic resources of the digital library of the CBUC.

Interlibrary Loans

The Catalan libraries have traditionally been dependent on external resources

(above all the British Library service). Interlibrary loan was little used in Catalonia and its quality was poor in terms of both the success rate and the response time. After making a study of the situation, in mid-1997 the Consortium started its interlibrary loan program. This is based on unified regulations and fees, the contracting of a messenger service that transports documents every day between the different points of service, the agreement to give priority to consortium members and the annual evaluation of results.

The results have been highly satisfactory. The number of movements has increased continuously (by 57% in 1997 and 20.76% in 1998) and the number of positive responses is high (63.86% of the total in 1997 and 85.32% of the total in 1998). Currently, 93.81% of deliveries are made within nine days. In 1998 it was decided to lower the fees for consortium members in order to stimulate the use of the service, to study electronic transmission of documents as an alternative to the messenger service and to allow requests for interlibrary loans to be made directly from a screen of the web interface of the CCUC.

Reciprocal borrowing

In order to optimize the use of bibliographic resources, the CBUC undertook the task of negotiating an agreement to allow the collection of any library to be consulted by users of the member institutions of the Consortium. Despite the difficulties involved, an agreement was reached in January 1998. This year an agreement is expected to be reached to permit reciprocal borrowing.

- **The Digital Library of Catalonia (BDC)**

In 1997 the CBUC began to study the benefits of making joint purchases of equipment and databases for libraries. The study showed that a core collection of databases were subscribed by all the libraries, and that the licensing of electronic resources could not be dealt with in the same way as the joint purchase of bar codes, for example.

It was seen that one of the main motors of the growth of library cooperation around the world in the mid-nineties was the conviction that digital libraries must be created jointly. Due to its potential and implications, and also due to its great complexity and cost, the creation of a Catalan digital library was clearly seen as a collective task. The aim of the Digital Library of Catalonia (<http://www.cbuc.es/bdc>) was to offer a core collection of electronic resources that provides a homogeneous and interdisciplinary basis for all university members and researchers regardless of the institution to which they belong.

This change in direction gave way to a phase of product identification which consisted in selecting, among all the available electronic services, those that were most interesting for the libraries, those that gave the greatest technical guarantees for consultation (due to speed of access and quality of service) and those that offered the best economic terms for joint purchase. This was followed by a phase of testing, negotiation, contracting and installation in which

it was attempted to make the services contracted by the BDC represent a wide range of the current possibilities (remote access and local downloading, databases and journals, foreign and national providers...). In early 1999 the BDC came into operation, offering databases and full-text journals (Figure 3) that cover a large number of uses and several thematic areas.



Figure 3: Resources of the Digital Library of Catalonia.

In 1997 a service was set up that gave access to the tables of contents in electronic form of over 5,000 journals to which one of the libraries of the Consortium is subscribed. This service is intended to improve bibliographic information and to encourage the use of the libraries' own resources through interlibrary loan within the Consortium. One of the most attractive features of the service is that users can subscribe to the journals that they wish and receive the corresponding tables of contents in their e-mail account. So far the service has been based on the of the Ebsco services, but in the near future it is intended to supplement it with tables of contents scanned by the libraries of the consortium. The service may be accessed by web (<http://sumaris.cbuc.es>) and links have been established between the CCUC and the database of tables of contents and vice-versa.

Besides continuing to study new subscriptions for the BDC and continuing to extend the database of tables of contents of journals, work is also being done in other directions. The Consortium is preparing projects to establish a library of doctoral theses in electronic format, to establish standards for digitizing

documents and to index electronic resources cooperatively.

- **Programs for facilitating change**

Cooperative work around the world has focused on collective catalogues, interlibrary loan, and more recently digital libraries. But cooperation has as many uses as one wishes to give it. In Catalonia we have also used the CBUC to make joint purchases, for training programs and to define a protocol for evaluating library services.

The most important of these activities has been that which has allowed us to outsource a part of the cataloguing of books. Through this system, the books purchased through certain providers reach the libraries catalogued according to the standards of the CCUC, and even with the data introduced in the local catalogues.

- **What we have learnt**

Maurice B. Line tells us that cooperation is sometimes like second marriages, which represent "the triumph of hope over experience", and that "cooperation should not be undertaken unless it is likely to produce better results than would be achieved by other means" (3). All the projects of a library do not need to be cooperative, and cooperation is not the key to the success of a project, but in many cases cooperation is the most effective means of achieving certain things and in some it is the only way. The current state of technology and its frantic progress must not make us forget that most library users still depend on old technologies such as access to documents through catalogues and loans. The local versions of these instruments are complemented by collective tools such as the collective catalogue and interlibrary loans, without which a library's ability to supply information would be greatly reduced.

Today cooperation is no longer instrumental for libraries - it is strategic. The revitalization of cooperation and the creation of new library consortia in recent years is a clear example of this. (4). In my opinion, there are four elements that today make cooperation a strategic subject for libraries: the globalization of the economy and society, the regionalization of countries, the increasing complexity of the environment and the need to overcome inertia.

Firstly, the economic and social changes that are shaping the so-called information society involve the globalization of the activities of all institutions, including libraries. Information providers are increasingly few, and act in an international market. The clients of libraries ask them for information regardless of where it is located. Therefore, there exists the danger that libraries may see themselves in a subordinate role if they are not able to coordinate their action and defend their interests decisively and jointly. For this reason, in many cases libraries find in cooperative action the best way to maintain their role. In Catalonia the concerted work of the libraries has allowed them to be more

visible for their users and for the administration and to increase their perceived value.

Secondly, in many countries of the world there is an increasing tendency towards regional organization of administration and services. This phenomenon, which is not incompatible but rather complementary to the internationalization of the economy (5), is also occurring in libraries. Gray Potter has examined this phenomenon in the United States (6), but it is also found in Europe in countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany and Spain, where the region has proved to be the natural framework for carrying out certain activities. Catalonia is also an example of this tendency towards regional organization, and the creation of the CBUC was to a great extent the result of the administrative decentralization of Spain, the existence of new frameworks and instruments of cooperation (for example, a Catalan computer network) and the closer ties offered by a relatively region with a well-developed telecommunications infrastructure.

Thirdly, the acceleration of technical and social change is creating a changing and complex environment. The adaptation of libraries to this new environment does not only involves the investment of a considerable part of their budgets in technology but also the need for internal reorganization and the creation of new services. In this environment of increasing complexity, the need for specialized knowledge and its rapid obsolescence go hand in hand. It is vital to take the right strategic directions, or at least to avoid major errors. The members of the CBUC have learned that working together, with all the interactions that this involves, is a guarantee of making and sustaining the right decisions. Specific contributions made by the group go beyond the individual interests of each library.

Finally, libraries are organizations with a long history and with highly consolidated working systems rooted in the habits of professionals. At a time of change and increasingly flexible structures in all organizations, one of the priorities of the libraries must be to create an environment that encourages creative innovation. In this case, isolation and inertia tend to go together, and the best antidote may be to know what other libraries do in similar cases and to exchange experiences and information with colleagues from other libraries. Through daily experience the libraries of the CBUC have discovered the value of cooperative work and have found that many of their activities are aimed at exchanging information, in the certainty that this will lead to a revision of established practices and their redefinition in line with current needs.

Cooperation between libraries is not the universal solution to all evils. It involves major difficulties and problems such as the real or subjective loss of control, the need for good communications, the synchronization of the different rhythms of each library, and the difficulty of reaching agreements between different corporate cultures. In order to overcome these difficulties, the CBUC bases its work on consolidating a shared vision that acts as a driving force for the cooperative activities. It is therefore essential that the participation of the libraries should be based firstly on trust, and on always considering what each library gains in comparison with what it had rather than in comparison with the

others. Secondly, consensus should be used as a system for making decisions; for the cohesion of the group work it is preferable to put off decisions rather than to take them by simple majority. Thirdly, team work and an interdisciplinary approach should be encouraged; though this involves a considerable investment of time, the results achieved are always better than those of activities managed from above with little participation. After all, cooperative work not only gives good results but is also more fun, and we can learn that by working together we also learn together.

References and notes

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