

A JOINT LIBRARY OF TWO UNIVERSITIES CASE: LAPPEENRANTA ACADEMIC LIBRARY

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Abstract

The number of universities and universities of applied sciences has been cut down in Finland. This process will be the future trend. Different levels of collaborative work is going on in order to find new forms of organizing library services. In 2011 Lappeenranta University of Technology (LUT) and Saimaa University of Applied Sciences (SUAS) set up a joint library, Lappeenranta Academic Library (LAL). Arrangements and planning were carried out in 1,5 yrs. The project was many-sided as a joint library was to be created, not to merge two universities. The Academic Library is a part of LUT organization and the library personnel is employed by LUT. Library services in general are equal, but different needs can also be taken into account. Demands on services for researchers, teachers and students may differ depending on university, but generally all services are available to members of either organization. Printed collections are combined but electronic collections are still separate. Databases are licensed to organizations, not libraries. There are double agreements on licenses. The fact that there are separate networks in library premises is problematic. In electronic licenses no savings are achieved, but the situation is better in print collections. Also less people work in the library now as the services have been adjusted. The library serves new fields of science now. This process forced the staff to a learning process. Librarians have to understand the thinking in distinct fields of science. The data administration departments work together, too. A forum has been set up to highlight questions and problems concerning joint libraries such as the status of personnel, consortium level actions and licensing of electronic material. Joint libraries are one answer to resource problems of libraries in the future.

Keywords: Co-operation, Finland, Higher education libraries, Mergers, Organizational structures, Restructuring, University libraries

1. Reorganizing – collaborative work at universities

The Finnish HE (higher education) network has met a structural change during the last few years. The network consists of 16 universities and 25 universities of applied sciences. In this article universities of applied sciences are usually referred to as polytechnics. Universities as well as polytechnics have been merged to larger entities and also the amount of small units has been reduced. Grounds to this development include changes in demography, work, and operational environment. The number of HE organizations has been reduced from 50 to 41 in about five years but the structural development will still be carried on. The process has to go on because the university and polytechnic network is still too fragmented. There is also a substantial need to meet the requirements of changing working life. (Education and Research 2011-2016, 2012)

Universities and polytechnics have also organized their services together and for example library services may have been reorganized alongside locally. A task force set up by the Finnish Ministry of Education studied the structural development of university and polytechnic libraries. It was suggested that potential should be combined in order to set up larger and more substantial libraries by cooperation of several HE organizations. More powerful libraries are capable to offer better scientific library and information services in their region. Centralized national services to scientific libraries should be developed and improved, too. (Teaching and research environment 2020, 2009)

The established collaboration of libraries and their national services support the above change. The National Library of Finland and National Repository Library offer centralized services to libraries. There is a close liaison between library sectors and a remarkable cooperation is done in library associations, too. These networks and services form a considerable support to an individual library in enlarging and developing its services. Numerous national level initiatives and projects have been carried out, among others the joint library system, union catalogue, National Electronic Library Interface and Research Library Statistics Database, that enable an individual library to allocate its resources largely to local issues.

Open and free access to libraries is based on general library model in Finland. People have a right to use libraries and traditionally the basic services are available free of charge. This means that also university and polytechnic libraries as publicly funded organizations have customers from outside the organization. A nationwide network of large and diverse scientific libraries can offer substantial information services fairly across the country for the needs of research and education. (Flemming, 2011)

2. Campus project case Lappeenranta

The structural development of HE organizations aims at an explicit segmentation of liabilities of universities and polytechnics as well as closing down overlapping functions. A reassessment of the focus areas of universities and polytechnics needs to be done. Also cooperative infrastructures should be built up. The ultimate intention though is to save money. That is why new models of cooperation needed to be found. In Lappeenranta, a task force consisting of representatives of both the local university (Lappeenranta university of technology, LUT) and the local polytechnic (Saimaa university of applied sciences, SUAS) was set up to find new types of library collaboration. The task force ended up to a suggestion that, based on a service contract, one of the organizations sells library services to the other organization. One of the most important marginal terms was that all library employees have the same single employer. Of course the qualifications of employees should be equal, too. The centralized functions and the minimum level of campus library services were also determined. At the beginning of this study the two HE organizations had a total of nine library units which should be combined to four campus libraries. The size of the library staff was suggested to be 27-30 steady and 3-4 temporary employees. (South Carelian Scientific Library, 2006)

The host organizations continued with the task after this assignment was carried out at library level. In 2009 LUT and SUAS decided to establish a common campus, i.e. the polytechnic would move to the LUT campus. The total number of students and staff on the common campus was going to be almost 9000. At this stage there were only four library units left, so only two library units were needed, namely the main library in Lappeenranta and another small campus library in Imatra. The Lappeenranta common campus consists of Lappeenranta university of technology and the technology, business, social, and health studies of Saimaa university of applied sciences. At the Imatra campus there are the technology, hospitality and fine arts programs of SUAS.

In spring 2009 the preliminary actions for the joint library were taken. Neither the administrative form nor the organizational position of the joint library was known then. They were not fixed until June 2011. The joint library started August 1 in 2011. Saimaa university of applied sciences and Lappeenranta university of technology agreed on a transfer of business and eight employees of the library of Saimaa university of applied sciences started as employees of LUT in the new joint library. At that moment also all library collections of SUAS were moved under the control of the new joint library.

3. Building a joint library

In spring 2009 in order to build up a joint library, a project was started. The project was divided into subprojects of premises, collections, library information system, services, personnel, and information management. Also the planning of the contracts and organizing the joint library were needed. Every employee of both libraries participated in the working groups of this project. In the six subprojects there were more than ten different working groups. Five of the employees who participated in the project were retired before the new library's start-up. The disappearing tacit knowledge and know-how had to be taken into account and attended carefully. The size of the joint library's personnel was 22 at the start-up.

A major part of the space planning work was the renovation and reorganizing the old university library premises to meet the needs of the joint library. The collections of three libraries should fit into one library. Also more working area was needed for the staff and space for team work and thesis writing for students. The amount of students on campus was going to increase by nearly 3000 students. Merging three libraries' collections into one library called lots of planning in the play. What comes to e-collections, the state of licenses was checked and the access of walk-in customers was resolved for the beginning.

A joint library must have a unified library information system. Therefore, the two Voyager databases were to be merged to one integrated database. An agreement concerning this integration project was done with the supplier more than a year before the fixed date of the joint library. Merging two library databases turned out to be an all-round task. The library information system contains all crucial rules, practices, and processes of the library and the whole policy concerning customers, collections, circulation etc. is determined in the system. As two totally different library organizations are to be merged, many questions rise as one of the library organizations is widely decentralized and the other one totally centralized. In this project a deliberate risk was taken related to the fact that unnecessary work may be done and the bill paid to the supplier may be wasting money as the database integration task had to be ordered quite early. At this phase there was no final decision at the HE organization level on the formation of a joint library. A visualized situation of having two separate library information systems in one library was out of question.

The staff prepared itself to the library integration by participating in working groups from the beginning of the first project. Later on a knowledge charting was started. One central idea was to introduce the personnel of two library organizations to each other and to each other's jobs. The fundamental target was though to discover the fields of know-how and skills needed in the future and what kind of knowledge the library staff already masters. The task was done as group work, each group having members from both libraries. An outside trainer for the new method was needed

and also a specialist from the organization of our own was used as consultant. Based on the work done in these teams new job profiles were sketched and a preliminary plan was made of how the employees will be placed in the new joint library.

The library managers were responsible for searching and producing financial, functional and operational data for negotiations for an agreement. Arrangements for the agreement took time and the negotiation process was finalized only a few weeks before the library was to be opened. Since Saimaa university of applied sciences is liable to tax, taxation of outsourcing services was a remarkable issue. After petitioning the tax authorities gave a prejudgement concerning joint library services being duty-free and this enabled to put the joint library agreement in action. The process of forming a joint library went on substantially more slowly at the organization level than at grass roots level in the libraries. However, the library was the only merged unit in the joint campus project. Moreover, neither the IT management departments nor the data networks were unified, which awoke new questions about one library serving the entire campus. Solving these problems was mostly put off for a while.

Already before the opening of the library it was clear that the technical solutions of two distinct IT departments of two organizations will have a substantial influence on the library's service function. This sets limits to the prospects of customers' independent working in the library premises. When starting the joint library there were separate desktops for students coming from the university and students coming from the polytechnic. Only a few open access computers were available. A project for joint customer desktops started though and the library got new solutions for customer's access to databases and independent working on desktops.

4. Lappeenranta Academic Library

Lappeenranta Academic Library is positioned as a separate department in the administration of Lappeenranta University of Technology. The academic library is a publicly funded library that is open to public and it can offer services also to outside organizations by contract. At the moment the library offers minor library and information services to local health district organization on contractual basis. The library works in two campuses, in Lappeenranta and Imatra. The distance between these locations is about 37 kilometers. Among other things the cost allocation principles and administration are specified in the contract of service between the two organizations. The organizations are fully accountable for part of the costs of the joint library. The rest of the costs are divided between the organizations on the basis of FTE (full-time equivalent).

The library organization consists of four principal areas of responsibility, namely customer service, printed collections, electronic collections, and IL-teaching. The division of tasks in and between the groups is flexible. A single employee usually belongs to one or more operational teams crossing the limits of the home nests. These kinds of teams are for example the team of duty service and the team of teachers (information specialists who teach IL). As specified in the contract of service the advisory board guides the library service development and work out the financial plan and the budget draft. Both organizations, the student associations, and library staff have their representatives in the board. The library director prepares all subjects on the board agenda for presentation and is in charge of the academic library as a whole.

The personnel of the academic library are employed by the university. The library has 21 employees and half of them have reached a higher academic degree. Library services are available by equal rules to the personnel and students of both the university and the polytechnic. The demand for library and information services may be divergent. One reason for this could be that the university is more focused on scientific research and in the polytechnic very much attention is paid in teaching, pedagogy and problems close to working life. However quite similar pedagogical choices have been done in both organizations. Students of both organizations spend very much time in the library using the collections and doing group work.

The academic library offers information literacy education to students of the university and the polytechnic by same policy and rules. Teaching is integrated into the curricula and separate study modules according to their specific needs. All information specialists have pedagogical qualifications and they all are capable and obliged to teach any group. One information specialist is in charge of developing information literacy teaching as a whole. The lesson schedule is coordinated by a librarian. The content of information literacy teaching is based on study program schemes agreed on national level. The study program consists of the basics in the first study year and advanced information literacy of the substance field of one's own when working on master's thesis. The information literacy study program is realized together with substance field teachers and integrated into substance fields' study programs.

The printed collections of the library are equally available to all customers. The cost allocation of a printed book depends on the principal user group of the book. There are three categories of books in the library depending on the payer. So the books of the library may be funded by either the university or the polytechnic or collectively based on FTE. The decision of the category of the book is made by the librarian in-charge of acquisitions. The cost allocation of periodicals between organizations is more distinct. So far only newspapers and popular journals are funded collectively. In a library user's point of view the most apparent advantage of the joint library is particularly the joint use of printed collections and a larger and more diverse printed collection.

The benefits of a joint library concerning the electronic collections are not as obvious as those of the printed collection. The licenses of electronic material include a walk-in customer's access to it. On the one hand because of limitations of licenses and on the other hand because of separate data network solutions of the background organizations the joint library has problems allowing walk-in customers' access. By logging into the network in the library premises it is possible to access only the databases licensed by the user's own organization. So no straight walk-in customer access is allowed to the other organization's databases. A student, teacher or researcher must always approach the librarian to get a temporary access to other organization's databases in the joint library.

Cutting the increase of library costs and developing library services on sustainable basis were crucial ambitions in founding the joint library. The number of employees has decreased because of retirements from the nearly 30 employees of two former library organizations' to 21 employees. Library service processes have been rationalized to some extent and also overlapping activities have been erased. Investing to self-service equipment and information systems in a more substantial library has become cost-effective. During semesters there is an average of 1700 visitors per day in the library. There has been a cut in library premises from 3800 square meters in 2009 to about 3000 square meters at present. Still, the expenses on library premises are a remarkable 22% item of library's yearly budget.

Unifying two organizations' libraries has been a very special learning process to library personnel and this process is ongoing. Meeting of two organization cultures has demanded a tough and open-minded work from everyone. Self-directed making the acquaintance of people and their work in the partner library before the libraries' merging process, a quite long preliminary work in building the joint library, and an inclusive participation of library staff in this process have proved extremely fruitful. The attitudes of employees towards change may also have changed during this process. A former maybe threatening and pressing looking change has become a quite life-sized part of everyday.

5. Joint libraries in Finland

A total of four joint libraries have been founded in Finland during the last thirteen years. They are the Tritonia Academic Library in Vaasa, Fellmannia – Lahti Region Educational Consortium in Lahti, Lapland University Consortium Library in Rovaniemi and Lappeenranta Academic Library. A joint library is a library that has at least two HE organizations, universities or polytechnics, in the background. The HE organizations have a service contract concerning their common joint library.

Joint libraries form a forum for collaboration. This forum is open to all other university and polytechnic libraries interested in joint library as an operations model. Under this forum it is possible to bring up topics to discussion concerning challenges and success in libraries' development. In addition to the four joint libraries there are a couple of libraries that are on the change process at the moment. The forum of joint libraries also has a mission to see about that issues specific to joint libraries are taken into account in larger development projects in library field. (Palonen, Blinnikka, Ohvo, & Parikka, 2013)

In joint libraries, savings in expenses have been expected especially in costs caused by literature acquisition, personnel, and library premises. On the other hand also such benefits of as more diverse, higher quality and better achievable services have been anticipated. The vulnerability of small units should be history, too. Concerning the electronic library collections no cut in cost growth has been achieved. (Palonen et al., 2013)

E-licenses are still mostly organization specific which means that, for example, campus wide licenses are quite rare unless the campus equals to organization. Access to electronic sources is still in most cases limited to a given IP address space. One specific IP address can occur in an e-license of only one organization. Also the portals to e-collections are organization specific and form problems and extra efforts in service production. The problem of portals and e-licenses being organization specific is partly based on publishers' policies and partly on national level architecture. So far joint libraries need to manage parallel portals and e-licenses of their parent organizations. This causes no savings but much extra work to joint libraries. These issues bring up a limitation to providing access to electronic material form a problem library's walk-in customer. Library desktops are usually connected to one parent organization's network. Access to licensed e-collections has been arranged with either totally separate desktops for customers coming from different parent organizations or only one organization's e-licenses have been offered to use in the library. There are some technical advances that enable logging in to the network of one's own organization via a commonly used library desktop. In this kind of architecture the user has access to the e-licensed material of one's own organization. According to e-licenses libraries have a right to offer access to e-collections for walk-in customers. This has to be arranged mostly either by using separate desktops for walk-in use or logging in as visitor to a foreign organization's network. (Palonen et al., 2013)

Joint libraries have been organized in various ways. So far the existing joint libraries have three different administrative models which are centralized, decentralized and shared. The Lappeenranta academic library represents the centralized model. (Palonen et al. 2013)

Advantages reached in the centralized administrative model are efficiency and better prospects to neutral attitudes towards employees and impartial application of constitution. In the centralized model all employees are under contract to the same employer. In decentralized and shared models there is a necessity of operating under several collective agreements and practices, because employees are under contract to the parent organization they present. The administrative model doesn't necessarily have a straight influence on other practices in leadership or management system. In the employees point of view it is possible that a situation may be problematic to some extent when employees have separate employers, different payroll system and collective agreement but same working environment and same job. In the managements point of view a more laborious managerial task can be seen. (Palonen et al., 2013)

A joint library of two or more HE organizations is one attempt to unload resource consuming and overlapping activities and structures and set up better services in the course of times when on the one hand the level of costs tends to get higher and on the other hand accessible resources tend to get lower. Joint libraries serve several organizations and are open and accessible to all. They all are substantial single providers of scientific library and information services in their geographical regions. Joint library is a worthy way of structuring scientific library and information services in the long term. (Palonen et al., 2013)

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