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Literature Review: Collaboration of Archives, Libraries, and Museums in a digital world
Introduction

These three articles relate to the collaboration of libraries, archives, and museums, also referred to as LAM, using the digital technology that is available. As Marcum states, “today's information technologies open opportunities never equaled before to make the world's cultural heritage accessible, usable, and valuable”(2014, p. 86). One of the biggest advantages to digital collaboration is forming joint search engines that include the resources of libraries, archives, and museums. This digital technology allows these institutions to better serve their users, provides the institutions more visibility, and allows them to cut down costs. Digital collaboration also comes with its own obstacles, including problems integrating different forms of metadata into one database.

Literature Review

Günter Waibel's and Ricky Erway's article, “Think Globally, Act Locally: Library, Archive, and Museum Collaboration,” states that institutions, by providing digital access to their collections on their own websites, are “dividing their content into small puddles of information on scattered websites(2009, p. 324)” which are not being used to their full potential. Users are less likely to search multiple sites when they have access to search engines. Waibel and Erway suggest that these digital materials need to better connected, like the cabinets of curiosities that combined all forms of material on the subject of the collector's interest(2009, p. 325-26). Institutions would serve users better by providing a search tool that allows access to multiple institution's collections and provides all information relevant to the search. Waibel and Erway promote the ideal of this collaboration becoming global, but emphasize that collaborations must be focused on geographically close institutions to be able to put this ideal into practice(2009, p. 326). This local focus gives a starting point to where collaborations should begin. It encourages collaborations of institutions under the same administration, which would already share many of the same goals and allow for compromises to be made more easily.
It, however, might not provide a good framework for disparate institutions to accomplish a successful collaboration.

To show how local collaborations play an important role in the global ideal, Waibel and Erway discuss LAM workshops that were funded by the Research Libraries Group (RLG). These workshops encouraged collaboration between LAMs under the same organization, like universities, to find catalysts that permit successful collaborations (Waibel, 2009, p. 327-29). These catalysts provide reasons for keeping a collaboration running despite setbacks. However, they do not cover thoroughly how these catalysts are supposed to prevent a collaboration from failing.

Waibel and Erway suggest two ways that digital collaboration can be put into practice. First, “one search” is a search tool that enables a user to find all relevant information on an area of interest from multiple types of institutions (Waibel, 2009, p. 331-332). Second, “leveraging terminologies” allows for better search results by using authority files to broaden what keywords relate to (Waibel, 2009, p. 332-324). Both these ideas allow for collaborative searches. However, according to Kirchhoff, most archives and museums do not develop authority files, at least in Germany (2008, p. 261). This would bring many obstacles to setting up terminologies to include archives and museums and could prevent this tool from working as expected.

In “Archives, Libraries, Museums and the Spell of Ubiquitous Knowledge”, Kirchhoff, Schweibenz, and Sieglerschmidt present an example of a digital collaboration between all of Germany's “memory institutions”, which are institutions that “organize the European cultural and intellectual record” (Kirchhoff, 2008, p. 252). The example discussed by Kirchhoff, Schweibenz, and Sieglerschmidt is BAM (Bibliotheken/libraries, Archives, and Museums), a joint portal that promotes digital convergence for the whole of Germany. This collaboration allows free access to all of Germany's cultural history (Kirchhoff, 2008, p. 256). It allows users to find information they need in a quick and easy fashion. Kirchhoff, Schweibenz, and Sieglerschmidt note that the benefits of the BAM
include high speed of retrieval, access to more than one collection, and an enhanced search based on
authority files (2008, p. 255). The BAM shows how a digital collaboration between libraries, archives,
and museums can be done successfully. It also shows how beneficial this type of collaboration can be
to its society and users.

However, the BAM still comes with its own set of difficulties. As pointed out by Kirchhoff,
Schweibenz, and Sieglerschmidt, one of the biggest difficulties was that the form of metadata varies
with the type of institution creating it (2008, p. 258-59). Museums didn't even have regulations
concerning their metadata before this project was started. The varying forms make it more difficult to
enter the metadata into the portal to be processed. This required the use of the CIDOC Conceptual
Reference Model (CRM), a program that is compatible with many different forms of
metadata (Kirchhoff, 2008, p. 259). The difficulties in this collaboration show that they can be
overcome and still obtain a successful outcome. It is a way to improve technology and techniques, so
that the similar collaborations can use them in the future.

Marcum's article, “Archives, libraries, museums: Coming back together?” , focuses on
collaboration of LAMs in a more general sense. Marcum discusses the reasons behind why a
collaboration might take place. The need to save money and a “fear of irrelevancy” are two of the top
reasons (Marcum, 2014, p. 78). Users tend to focus on resources that are readily available and provide
easy and fast access. In today's society, that means users will most often use the internet first to find the
information they need. Marcum notes that the increase in digital technology has “blurred the
boundaries between (2014, p. 77)” these institutions. Users expect to have access to all relevant
information in a centralized internet database and don't understand that information can be separated by
the types of institutions which hold it. Collaborations take this user preference and make it a reality.

Marcum places an emphasis on the obstacles that can affect collaborations. She notes that
LAMS lack common standards when it comes to cataloging and each have a different expectation of
how they serve their users (Marcum, 2014, p. 79). These, among other obstacles must be overcome for a collaboration to be successful. Marcum represents these potential obstacles very clearly, but doesn't present solutions to overcoming them. One important point Marcum makes is that collaborations between LAMs are not a new tradition. The growing popularity of collaborations goes back to an earlier tradition to places like the “Mouseion of ancient Alexandria” (Marcum, 2014, p. 81-82).

Conclusion

LAM collaborations were a tradition long before they became an expected part of the information profession. New digital technologies have increased the collaborations available for LAMs. Connecting digital offerings of individual institutions is becoming an expected collaboration of the profession. Users expect easy access to information and LAMs are responding to this. The BAM is a good example of what a collaboration of this type can do for its community. These collaborations still have their difficulties, but by overcoming them LAMs can provide better service and access to cultural history.

References

