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10 Things I Get From You: The Benefits of Partnerships in the Pursuit of Improvement and Sustainability in Libraries

Wie Partnerschaften Innovation und Nachhaltigkeit im Bibliothekssektor befördern

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Abstract: Globalization and growth in digitalization have led to a greater connectivity between individuals, groups, organizations, and libraries. This article will share ten practical outcomes from one librarian's personal experience with partnerships. A clear example of these collaborative benefits may be seen in the Czech-German Library Next Door partnership, as well as the individual partnership between the Stadtbibliothek Chemnitz and Ústí Regional Library. Partnerships and collaborations allow all involved members to overcome their own shortcomings, strengthen others around them, and excel at their greatest strengths.

Keywords: Partnership, International Cooperation, Czech Republic

Abstract: Globalisierung und Digitalisierung führen zu einer immer stärkeren Vernetzung zwischen Einzelpersonen, Gruppen, Organisationen und Bibliotheken. Im Artikel werden zehn höchst sinnvolle Wirkungen solcher Partnerschaften aus Sicht einer Bibliothekarin vorgestellt. Ein Beispiel für die klaren Vorteile einer Zusammenarbeit ist die tschechisch-deutsche Partnerschaft „Bibliothek nebenan“ sowie die bilaterale Partnerschaft zwischen der Stadtbibliothek Chemnitz und der Regionalbibliothek Ústí. Partnerschaften und Kooperationen ermöglichen es, die eigenen Schwachstellen besser zu erkennen und zu beheben, den Partner zu stärken und die Vorteile beider Seiten weiterzuentwickeln.

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I could write this article on the merits and value of international cooperations by citing the increased openness, broadened capacity for tolerance among staff members, and cultural enrichment, not to mention an „easy A“ in diversity points for grant writing.

But if you are reading this, I am certain you already know about all those benefits.

I don't know what you have studied, read, and experienced, and I would rather not presume to know about your worldview. I would hate to waste your time by preaching something that you already know, as though I happened upon this deep, universal truth which is already known by those wiser than I.

What I can do is present my discoveries and reflections on the partnerships, international and domestic I have experienced in my career, hoping that maybe in what I share there will be something that happens to interest you. And if you were considering the establishment of a professional partnership, maybe you can get a deeper look into it from one perspective.

1. Partnerships contribute to sustainability. No one has access to unlimited resources, and the sharing of things we need allows their functionality to be extended through space and time.
2. Partnerships afford us greater richness through resource sharing. Shared resources lead to shared benefits, which lead to shared outcomes. No one is perfectly equipped, no one can do everything, but through the sharing of resources (tangible and non-tangible), our faults have a better chance of compensation.
3. Partnerships force us to find new solutions to problems. Often we find that the problems facing each of us are the same, and that our old ways of dealing with them will not work in one or both contexts. In order to move forward, we need to think outside the box. Partnerships open the box for us to be able to do just that.
4. Partnerships force us to address our own shortcomings. Especially as librarians, many times we enter this field because we love books, because they affect how we look at the world around us by allowing us to escape into our own heads. Since we are used to creating our own little world in our books, we may become blind to this little world's flaws. Partnerships can act as protective forces against this blindness. Our partners can hold up a neutral, external reflection for us to see, if we choose to accept it. This is a matchless opportunity for growth.
5. Partnerships force us to learn to communicate better, especially if communicating in a language that is not our mother tongue. In relationships with colleagues who have the same linguistic background as we do, we take it for granted

that they understand us, and do not often examine our role in the communication (that is itself another issue for another article). Regardless of individual linguistic skills, when there is a case of a misunderstanding across a language barrier, we tend to first ask the question, „did they understand the words I said?“ We are more inclined to try a different set of vocabulary, a simpler syntax, or using diverse examples, rather than dealing with the conflict in a counterproductive way. This leads to increased trust and understanding, and a better rapport between colleagues. Such benefits may even spill over into our relationships with our fellow nationals.

6. Partnerships bring new life to activities and routines which have worked for a long time, but may have room for improvement. Change is necessary for progress, and introducing variety is a natural, organic way to affect change. External partnerships by their very nature bring change into an organization, a refreshing chance to progress.
7. Partnerships highlight both the strengths and weaknesses in a program or organization. Sometimes we knew about them before, and sometimes we can enjoy a nice wake-up call. We may also see how what we thought of as a weakness is the exact missing component for our partners. Our weakness can become a common strength.
8. Partnerships, for better or for worse, increase our appreciation for what we have. We may get stuck in a rut with our own resources and opportunities, and see only obstacles. Inspiration is not a bottomless well, but it needs to be replenished. Partnerships can be a source of inspiration for what we already have at our disposal: our resources which we take for granted may be new for them. Seeing through someone else's eyes how something ordinary for us can be an unthinkable windfall for our partners, or how we can use something we already have to support those around us, gives us a new appreciation for what we never thought was anything special.
9. In a very practical sense, partnerships can provide more manpower for tasks and projects. Librarians may be superheroes, but we are not omnipotent. Sometimes a task simply cannot be done by one person or one group. Partnerships allow us to accomplish bigger things than we could alone.
10. Partnerships connect good people to good people. As the world gets more individualized, and we tend to alienate and “other” the people around us, we need more positive human contact than ever in our professional and personal lives.

I have been fortunate to travel and work with many different people throughout my most formative personal and professional phases of life, so perhaps I am a bit biased. But I truly and sincerely believe that collaboration is the way to accomplish great things.

Since the year 2022, the Czech Republic has been not only Germany's neighbor, but also its partner through the Library Next Door cooperative project. This means that the Czech Library Association has collaborated on shared programming and projects with the Federal Union of German Library Associations. This has brought together individuals, groups, libraries, non-profit organizations, and national institutions to realize projects and exchange knowledge in ways that would not have been possible a few short decades ago. This partnership between two central European nations shows the fruit of what men and women have sacrificed their lives to achieve: diverse people sharing the best of themselves with each other to overcome weaknesses. The result is greater and stronger librarians, creating greater and stronger libraries, which carry the mission forth to create a greater and stronger world.

This is not an easy task. It involves risk, as does any new endeavor. But it is only by facing risk can we defeat our own doubts.

It has been said that the world does not need more highly educated or highly accomplished individuals. The world needs more people who have come alive, who are on fire for something. Librarians, in their unique ways, are often already on fire for something. Standing by each other in solidarity, each individual flame is brighter. In a supportive (and well-supported) library, that light is magnified even further.



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