

## **SELF-FINANCING SERVICES IN LIBRARIES: A METHOD OF INCREASING LIMITED LIBRARY BUDGETS IN POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIA?\*\*\***

**By Sally Wood Lamont and Iona Robu**

**Abstract:** This paper reports the self-financing experience of the Cluj Medical Library, Romania. The recurrent library budget given by the University covers mostly book and periodical acquisitions: other expenses, such as equipment, consumables can only be partially (i.e. 10-15%) covered from this budget, the rest must be borne by the library itself.

In order to continue improvements, the library budget had to be increased by self-financing schemes, therefore a conscious decision was made to introduce fees for additional library services given. The influence of old mentalities are discussed as well as the implications and results of the scheme.

### **Introduction**

#### Background

I (i.e. Sally Wood-Lamont) initially became involved with Romania as Coordinator of the Scottish Books for Romania Appeal which was launched by Edinburgh University Library in January 1990. I had been working in Edinburgh University Library for over 20 years and in the latter years I was Head of Donations and Exchanges Department. This appeal gathered in over 500,000 books from libraries, publishers and bookshops.(1) All books were sent with convoys/lorries going to Romania on which space was bought or occasionally donated.

#### Cluj Medical Library Project (2)

In 1991 a Medical Librarian in Cluj, Ioana Robu, asked for help in the Medical Library field. I arranged an attachment within Edinburgh, Manchester & Glasgow University Libraries. I realised then that if I wanted to change the libraries in

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Romania, first of all a Romanian Librarian had to be fully trained in Great Britain and secondly I would have to go out and work myself there so that together we could use our experience in both countries to inaugurate a working plan. In 1992 I arranged for Ioana to spend a year and a half in Scotland to do an MSc in Librarianship at Robert Gordon's University, Aberdeen : her thesis subject was *Automation in Romanian Medical Libraries: Survey of the Paths towards an Optimal Solution* (3). In 1993 I received sabbatical leave from Edinburgh University for 18 months and with Ioana came back to Cluj to initiate the Cluj Medical Library Project. Its aim: to automate the Central University Library of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy and make it a model for all Romanian libraries to copy (4). Soon after her arrival back in Cluj Ioana became Director of the Library and I worked alongside her as a Library Consultant.

A server, ten workstations, a Novell site network and an Australian library automation system called ALICE was purchased with single donations from Scottish charities; the total sum raised from these doubled by a matching SOROS grant. By October 1994 the library was ready to initiate full circulation. New readers had been registered on computer; all foreign books had been entered on the database; Romanian books from 1985 and 40% of the multiple textbooks. We now turned our attention to providing the services that all Western libraries do as a matter of course and which Romanian libraries have had limited opportunity to install. The primary problem was finance.

### **Budgeting and financial management of Romanian university libraries**

All Romanian university libraries function entirely with money allocated from the government through the Ministry of Education and administered by the patron university. (5) Libraries do not have direct control of their budgets, with the exception of very large university libraries (four in the whole of Romania). The recurrent Medical Library budget, controlled by the Medical University, covers mostly book and periodical acquisitions. In theory the cost of consumables and other equipment is also covered, but this involves so much paper work and disruption of the work flow, plus the uncertainty that the material requested will actually be received that one wonders whether the whole process is worthwhile after all. There are signs that more money will be allocated to libraries and that financial bureaucracy will loosen up, but it is a slow process. Moreover, one must keep in mind that inflation still runs high, at over 25% per year.

In these circumstances, we had two ways of quickly making things work better: (1) optimize the use of the money allocated; and (2) introduce self-financing schemes.

## **Optimization of financial resources management in our library**

In order to utilise our recurrent budget to the best possible advantage for our readers we broke completely from the traditional methods of using Romanian State book/periodical agents. We order all our books from a Scottish bookseller in Edinburgh, who gives us 10% discount on most purchases covering the cost of transport. Therefore we are able to purchase our annual order at cost price without the expensive levies of the Romanian State agents. Similarly we order our periodicals direct from Swets and Zeitlinger in Frankfurt and gain a 2% discount and have one of the best services in all libraries for the receipt of journals. We are able to claim missing issues and fill gaps, a service that is unavailable with state agencies.

Although, in the early nineties the use of foreign agencies was strongly discouraged by the Romanian Ministry of Education, to the extreme that foreign currency was refused, a recent Appraisal Committee from the same Ministry complimented the library for the efficient use of foreign currency and included in the final report a recommendation for all libraries to follow our example!

## **Self-financing**

However if we wanted to continue improvements in the library then we had to find the resources ourselves and a conscious decision was made to introduce fees for additional library services given. A project was drawn and was readily approved by the University Senate. The self-financing services were then included in the official library regulations.

### **Photocopying**

Photocopying services are very rarely given by the library themselves. Many have their own photocopier but only for their own private use. In many cases libraries have received as a donation, a xerox machine but without a budget for consumables - paper, toner and regular services. The country is littered with new xerox machines which lie unused waiting for the next donation of paper or toner.

We persuaded the Rector of the University to purchase a photocopier for the library, promising we would make it self-financing and that it would be for the use of all readers. In fact he bought three Cannon photocopiers for the Medical University one of which was placed in the library along with a colour photocopier that was included as an extra in the deal. We received 2 toner cartridges and a supply of 2 reams of paper; the latter was supplemented by a supply of paper (20 reams) I had received as a donation. (This paper was not A4 size but we asked the Cannon engineer to alter one of the paper trays in order to adapt for its use). With

this extra stock of paper we had the means to build up a cash flow, necessary to start a proper self-financing service where we could buy toner and paper as we required it. We surveyed the rates charged by everyone else in town and also worked out the cost pro rata of each copy taking into consideration all aspects, time, toner and paper costs and agreed on a price that was slightly cheaper than most but would maintain our cash flow. This xerox machine also allowed us to make another new rule in the library: periodicals were no longer allowed to be borrowed. In the past many journal issues were permitted for loan because the more important readers said we had no photocopying facilities and they had not time to read the journals. This had also resulted in gaps in our collections as some of them remained at hospital departments and were never returned. In addition other readers, in lesser positions, were denied the opportunity to read many of the current journals. We moved the young typist into an office on her own elevating her position to secretary and xerox operator. She is now the pivot of the library, answering the telephone, dealing with enquiries, organising the xeroxing and providing a first class service. I must add that the other two xerox machines have suffered the same fate as many others: one is broken and one is only used when someone buys paper or toner.

#### Spiral binding and laminating

A spiral binding machine and a laminating machine had been purchased with the initial donations from Scottish charities as we knew these facilities would be needed for the library itself e.g. signing, rebinding etc. However we were frequently asked to spiral bind for readers and to make badges for conferences, doctors etc. It was logical to again make this a self-financing service, working out costs that would be much cheaper than was being offered in only one other location in town and in this way help the staff and students of the University and also help ourselves. In fact we are now doing most of the badges for Medical Conferences and Library related conferences. In addition these conferences can now offer spiral bound programmes, laminated publicity notices and also copies of papers given, all of which enhance the image that our Medical University is projecting internally and externally.

#### Borrowers cards

The decision to charge for borrowers cards was yet again one of necessity. Though we had an initial supply of 1000 self-seal laminating pouches and we made each of our borrowers cards on a template on the computer - white for student, blue for staff, green for external- ready made plastic ones could only have been ordered from abroad and were far too expensive to consider. In order to purchase more we had to have money and therefore we decided to charge every borrower a token

sum of 500 lei (25 cents) - now raised to 1000 lei because of inflation - which would help us to maintain the supply of these. If readers lost their borrowers cards then they had to also purchase another. We were both pleasantly surprised at the readiness that this was accepted by everyone - long queues were frequent with students proud to have their borrowing card as evidence of being a medical student.

#### Medline printouts

In our library we have *Ovid Medline Plus*, *Biosis Abstracts* and *Bookbank*. With the former we have as yet no printers attached to the computers. Readers are allowed to download their references onto diskettes but many of the readers do not have ready access to computers themselves. There were frequent requests to print these references out. We therefore made this a fee-paying service - 10 cents per page - because of the time involved and the cost of the paper. This again has proved very successful firstly because we compel the reader to be more selective in what he/she requires and secondly they appreciate the possibilities of being able to take away the information.

#### International document delivery service

In the past the only method of obtaining articles from abroad was scouring *Current Contents*, *Clinical Medicine* and *Life Sciences* for relevant articles and then writing to authors for offprints. The prohibitive cost of Romanian postage in relation to current salaries has almost halted this practice and in addition many journals have stopped giving free copies of articles to submitting authors. Our library was the first Romanian library to initiate an International Document Delivery Service linking with the British Medical Association Library in London. They charge £3.60p - \$5.50 for each article, offering a splendid seven day delivery service. Title of journal, volume number, year, page numbers and author are faxed over. The library charges the full cost to the requester but bears the cost of the fax itself and this is now a well established and popular fee-paying service. However the availability of articles is limited to the periodical holdings of the BMA library which has around 360 titles and at present I with the Library Association of Great Britain am in negotiation with the British Library Boston Spa to make their extensive periodical holdings available for Document Delivery at the same price as the BMA library. Boston Spa currently charges £15/\$22 per article which is completely out of reach to all Romanians whose current salary is around \$60 per month.

## Fines

Fines are charged for overdue loans, lost books and disregard to library regulations. These fines are symbolic to commence with but increase with the severity of the offence. For instance, it may be from 1500 lei (30 cents) for 4 days overdue to 30,000 lei (approx 11 dollars) for 3 months overdue. There are also set fines, e.g. 5000 lei (almost 2 dollars) for failure to report to the desk before entering the open access shelves area. Though fines would seem to be the quickest way of making money, the keyword of our policy is flexibility, which means that we very seldom fine a user on the first offence and we try to differentiate between deliberate and unintentional offence. After all, we want to offer better service not to treat users as criminals.

## Results and discussion

These ideas have not been accepted easily in practice and a big factor of this reluctance was that old mentalities continue to persist both within the library staff and by its users. In the Communist times and still now in the supposedly Post-Communist era, self-financing schemes and user-paid schemes meant lining the pockets of the director or the person who inaugurated them. There was no consideration of loyalty to the library only the thought of an easy method to obtain money by fleecing the hand that pays the salary. Our readers were very suspicious and initially perceived the changes as only a method of the Library Staff making money on the side. The Library Staff too thought of it initially as a way of making extra money for themselves and then when we insisted on receipts being given and proper books being kept they became wary of us. Where was the money going? There were also complaints from the senior staff of the Medical University: (a) because they felt that their senior position gave them privileges of borrowing journals; (b) they also expected free photocopying and free user cards; and (c) they also asked where the money was going.

However, the solution was to show ostentatiously that money obtained was for the benefit of the library. Therefore meticulous accounts were kept and shown at each library meeting. A new switchboard was purchased with some of the self-financed money so that instead of only two telephones in the library there were another four extensions giving a benefit to all the staff. A new carpet was bought for the protocol room. One room was given to Periodicals and for the first time periodicals were put on open access. Periodical display furniture was therefore necessary and though we could not order ready-made from abroad because of the high price involved, we commissioned from a local joiner in a nearby village five periodical display cupboards in pine. Six months later a further two were added

bringing the total number of available space for display to 140 titles. A newspaper rack display cupboard was commissioned also. Total cost for all of these was only \$565. Binding material was also bought to strengthen the spines of the heavily used Romanian medical manuals and the staff at the issue desk repair these over the summer vacation.

The major advantage of having our own self finance means that services are maintained without any delays for replenishment of materials. Many a service initiation in the past has fallen by the wayside for lack of continuous investment or cash flow.

We also tried to instill in our staff better public relations, this latter induction being one of the most difficult to introduce. In Romania as in many Eastern European countries one treats the reader according to rank in the University, or whether the reader is a friend or relation. How could we introduce fee-paying services for every reader without the courtesy to accompany them. We had to convince the Library Staff that all new fee-paying services were above board, that they were benefitting the library and readers. After a year, pride and trust in the management has been introduced into the library: morale both inside and outside has been heightened and at long last there is a sense of working together in the library. The University staff are becoming fulsome in their compliments of the library and anxious to use all the services within it. Rectors from other Romanian Medical Universities and Medical Librarians are asking us to assist in installing these ideas in their libraries. We have already held a conference in Craiova for all Medical Libraries that we were asked to organise which has promulgated our example throughout the country. However, one has to be aware that there is no specific law sanctioning self-financing in libraries, and universities have to make their own decisions about the matter, within the newly acquired academic autonomy.

## **Conclusions**

Introduction of fee-based services represent a very good method of improving library service in Romania, a country with heavy constraints on the government budget and in which libraries are far from the top of the money allocations list.

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