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**Government libraries in Greece:
Current situation and future considerations**

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Abstract:

*The sector of government libraries in Greece is one not adequately researched.
Although the Hellenic Statistical Authority of the Ministry of Finance collects
statistical data from all public libraries every two years, this data is not sufficiently
promoted and exploited to the benefit of the particular community. The primary aim
of this research is to contribute to the collaboration of government libraries in
Greece. Specifically, this paper is focused on describing the following two methods of
collaboration: a) the shared cataloguing and b) the access to co-operative collections
through joint agreements.*

*For collecting the necessary information we used data from the Hellenic Statistical
Authority of the Ministry of Finance. Furthermore, we conducted research through
interviews and searches on the websites of the organisations involved. We used
quantitative and qualitative analysis of the information gathered in order to deliver
our final results. Among our findings is the limited amount of available information
about the libraries on the hosting organisations' websites. Furthermore, we found
that even less libraries do actually have their own websites or host OPACs with the
resources they possess. Government libraries are scattered and isolated from each
other and users cannot locate easily -if at all- the data they store. At the same time
government libraries seem to hold a rich collection of various formats of information
which is partly or fully organised via integrated library systems. There are*

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government libraries whose information and services have reached more than a satisfactory level and could lead the way for others, too.

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1.   INTRODUCTION

Government libraries, as any other type of libraries, have to deal with constant changes in the area of information systems and telecommunications. These changes influence, first, the way that libraries function and, second, the role that libraries are invited to play in order to be able to satisfy the needs of their users. Attempting to broadly describe the current situation of libraries, we note that:

- there is a constant increase in the amount of information in digital format,
- libraries seem to be more and more interested in creating co-operations with other libraries or other organisations that might have relevant or interesting data for them, and
- libraries seem to swear off being called 'warehouses' of information and prefer to be characterised as 'access providers'.

At the same time, libraries have to face the economic crisis and the constant decrease in their budget. The problem is prominent even in the area of government libraries, especially when there is neither systematic nor organised co-operation among them.

According to the IFLA Professional Report No 106 titled 'Guidelines for Libraries of Government Departments' (Bolt and Burge, 2008), '*co-operation and networking among government libraries are tasks of paramount importance for government libraries to meet the needs of the twenty-first century.*' Specifically, it is mentioned that government libraries have to deal with an increasing need for information and research, when there is insufficient support and understanding from the senior management of their parent organisation. Having to manage this conflict and meet expectations, they have to look for support and assistance from their peers.

In the Professional Report there are some examples of regional, interregional and professional activities in co-operation, such as regular meetings about professional topics, shared cataloguing, support for colleagues facing closure or budget cuts, library visits, working circles for special topics or projects and joint agreements as money-saving measures.

1.1   AIMS

Driven by this reality, the primary aim of this ongoing research is to contribute to the collaboration of government libraries in Greece. It is also worth mentioning that due to the economic crisis they face, and specifically

due to the reduction to their budget, Greek government libraries have to deal with a difficult situation. This means that they have to keep satisfying the needs of their users, but with less economic resources and sometimes with limited personnel. For further and more detailed data concerning the Greek economic situation, the web site of the Bank of Greece provides the Governor's Annual Report.

Specifically, this paper is focused on describing the following two methods of collaboration: a) the shared cataloguing (union catalogues) and b) the access to co-operative collections (for example databases or electronic journals) through joint agreements in order to both save money (consortium) and increase their appeal to the public.

The main interest is to provide a conceptual model (methodology) that would be responsible for suggesting the main key points that a government library in Greece should take into consideration in order to be a member of a union catalogue or a co-operative collection.

1.2   DEFINITIONS and CONDITIONS

Union catalogue

A union catalogue is, to put it simply, an assemblage of catalogue records from two or more libraries that is primarily intended to facilitate inter-library lending and other forms of resource sharing. Its fundamental idea is the obvious truth that a library user can only take advantage of the resources of other libraries if he or she knows what those resources are. The basic concept of union catalogues as the foundation of resource sharing is as relevant today as it ever was. Because of advances in cataloguing, technology and the standardisation of cataloguing data provide us with a more powerful and current tool than we have ever had. When talking about union catalogues, we must be clear that the primary purpose of such catalogues is to provide listings of the collections of libraries that are available to a distant library user by inter-library loan (of books, sound recordings, videos, and other tangible objects; by document delivery (of journal articles and other short texts that can be faxed to a remote user); and, by gaining access to databases owned or licensed by the library. Looked at one way, there is clearly no point in listing items to which remote users have no access (reference materials; rare and precious materials that cannot leave the library; and, electronic resources subject to restrictive licensing agreements). Looked at another way, knowledge that something exists can be valuable in itself, even if a library user cannot have direct access to that resource (Gorman, 2007).

According to Tsimpoglou (2008) some of the main issues that should be taken into consideration are: the existence of cataloguing rules, classification system, metadata schema, web OPAC, character set metadata and client–server protocol for searching and retrieving information from remote computer databases.

Co-operative collection development

According to the ALA's *A Guide to Coordinated and Cooperative Collection Development Among Libraries,* co-operative collection development (CCD) is defined as ″Cooperation, coordination or sharing in the development and management of collections by two or more libraries making an agreement for this purpose.″

1.3   SCOPE and GREEK REALITY

For the purpose of this research, we investigated the Greek government libraries. Specifically, we focused on studying the libraries of Greek ministries and their secretariats, both general and special. During the period that this research covers, there have been fifteen (15) ministries and fifty (50) secretariats[1].

One more source of information regarding the Greek reality was the Hellenic Statistical Authority. It provided us with data for 9 (nine) libraries including data valid until the year 2008. This data belonged to the libraries of: the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Rural Development and Food, Ministry of Justice, Secretariat General of Information and Communication – Secretariat General of Mass Media, Ministry for Development, Competitiveness and Shipping, Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity, Ministry of Labour and Social Security and the General Secretariat for Public Works (Ministry of Infrastructure, Transport and Networks).

The statistical data provided by the Hellenic Statistical Authority referred to: a) the number of staff and its qualifications, b) the number of available books, serials, databases and CDs/DVDs (audiovisual material), c) the classification system, d) the number of available PCs, photocopying machines, audio-visual machines, e) the number of library members, loans and interlibrary loans, and f) the square meters of the library and of the available studying area. The data is analytically described in the following six tables.

Table a: Number of staff and its qualifications

Librarians (MSc)	3
Librarians (BA)	8
Other discipline (BA)	1
Secondary education	7
Total	**19**

Table b: Number of items per collection

Books (titles)	162693
Books (items)	181280
Serials (titles)	965
Serials (items)	29824
Audiovisual material	1064
Databases	3

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[1] Data source: http://www.primeminister.gov.gr/english/government/ (Accessed April 2012)

Table c: Classification system

DDC	5
UDC	1
Other	3

Table d: Number of PCs / Photocopying machines / Audiovisual machines

PCs	27
Photocopying machines	8
Audiovisual machines	5

Table e: Number of library members / Loans / Inter-library loans

Library members	5201
Loans	1671
Inter-library loans	40

Table f: Square meters

Library	1568
Studying area	378

After having conducted an exhaustive research on the Internet regarding the government libraries, both the ones provided by the Hellenic Statistical Authority and the government's website, we realised that the number of ministries' and secretariats' libraries is fewer than the actual number of existing ministries and secretariats. Even fewer is the number of libraries whose collection is organised and a detailed library regulation is provided. Out of the nine aforementioned libraries, only three of them turned out to actually have their own web pages where we could get more information about them. Most government libraries are just mentioned (if at all) within the parent-organisation chart as another service or department and no more than that.

Therefore, we decided to study those libraries that are in better condition and already have extrovert behaviour towards society in order to transfer the knowledge to the others, the less organised ones. The basic criteria for choosing a library were: to have an official website, to have organised their collection via an integrated library system and to have an official library regulation published on the Internet. The following libraries satisfy these criteria:

1. the *Library on Gender and Equality* of the General Secretariat for Gender Equality, Ministry of Interior
2. the *Library* of the Secretariat General of Information and Communication – Secretariat General of Mass Media
3. the *Library* of the Ministry of Rural Development and Food

Summarizing, we note that the sector of government libraries in Greece is one not adequately researched. Although the Hellenic Statistical Authority of the Ministry of Finance collects statistical data from all libraries every two years, this data is not sufficiently promoted and exploited to the benefit of the particular community.

2. METHODOLOGY

Based on the aforementioned conditions of developing either a shared cataloguing (union catalogue), or a co-operative collection, it was important to study Greek government libraries and collect detailed data about:

- their profile: aim(s)/objective(s) and target group
- their collection: subject areas, format, languages, databases/Internet access, collection development policy
- their collection organisation: integrated library system
- their facilities: reading area, photocopying/scanning/photographing facilities
- their collaboration with other libraries: co-operative organisation, co-operative material, structured or unstructured forms of co-operation, suggested organisation for co-operation
- their networking cataloguing co-operation: cataloguing rules, classification system, arrangement of collection on the shelves, metadata schema, web OPAC, character set metadata, client–server protocol for searching and retrieving information from remote computer databases.

For the collection of the above data three (3) sources were used: articles/reports (references), interviews with staff, and libraries' official websites. Finally, when having finished with the collection of all the aforementioned data, we interviewed two directors of the Secretariat General of Information and Communication – Secretariat General of Mass Media. Our intention was to bring before the directors the issues pinpointed by the three libraries' employees.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Profile

The aims and objectives of the specific government libraries are to support the mission of each organisation they belong in. Although this implies that their primary care is to satisfy the information needs of their staff, people working in all three libraries are more than willing to give knowledge to anyone visiting their library, such as students, researchers or staff from any other ministry or any kind of organisation and, of course, the general public as well. Libraries operate as lending libraries for their employees and for certain groups of external users as long as they are granted the Library Member Card. Further information is provided in the Library Rules and Regulations of each library.

Subject areas

Regarding the subject areas they cover, the Library on Gender and Equality collects documentation focused mainly on issues of gender equality and history of the women's movement. It is the only library in Greece with an organised collection, responsible to gather and distribute knowledge, both historical and contemporary, to anyone concerned with women's status in Greece and all over the world. Its staff aims is to save this material which marks the beginning and progress of women's struggles for equality in Greece, as well as to make it known to the broad public. Analytically, it is organised in the following thematic units: general information material, women's studies, mythology, religion, social anthropology, women's history, biographies, philosophy, women's movement / feminist ideology, politics, law / legal position, women's status in Greece and elsewhere, social care and insurance, demography, environment, housing, roles of the sexes, education, employment, arts and culture, mass media, language, athletics, psychology, mental physical and reproductive health, sexuality, family and marriage, literature.

The Library of the Secretariat General of Information and Communication – Secretariat General of Mass Media covers the following subject areas: mass media, public administration, European Union, international relations, political & social sciences, law, literature, history, education, culture, religion and folklore.

Finally, the Library of the Ministry of Rural Development and Food is specialised in agriculture providing the richer collection in Greece, while it collects information from other subject areas, such as social sciences.

Format

The main part of their collection consists of print material. There is also a great number of CDs/DVDs and cassettes.

Analytically, the Library on Gender and Equality has organised its collection into two sub-collections: the main collection and the collection of archival and rare material. The main collection counts 10,000 book titles and 38 periodical titles, while it also contains leaflets, declarations, dictionaries and encyclopaedias, posters, photo collections and laws. It is worth mentioning that part of the archival material has already been digitised. The archival collection consists of more than 3,500 items.

The Library of the Secretariat General of Information and Communication – Secretariat General of Mass Media holds more than 12,500 books and more than 13,500 volumes of newspapers. The newspapers cover the period from 1902 to present and correspond to 267 titles, including newspapers of

Athenian press, regional press, Greek Press published abroad, Foreign Press and the Official Government Gazette (1,408 volumes) of the years 1884-2001. In addition to the newspapers and books, it also stores maps, serials and rare books, dating back to 1667. Currently, an important collection of photographic material related to Greek history belongs to a different department of the parent organisation and is managed by it but discussions are taking place about the integration of the available collections.

The Library of the Ministry of Rural Development and Food holds more than 100,000 titles of books and periodicals from the 18th century to present. It is amazing that the specific library stores all the Greek legislation from 1920 to 2001 in print format and from 2002 onwards in electronic. Finally, it keeps in their collection a great number of maps and photo collections.

Languages

Regarding the languages they cover, all libraries provide documentation in Greek and other languages, such as English, French, Italian, German, Spanish and Russian.

Databases/Internet access

Unfortunately, none of the three libraries provides access to external subscribing databases. Though, the Library of the Secretariat General of Information and Communication – Secretariat General of Mass Media has access to the database of Mass Media Legislation which was developed internally with the co-operation of the Centre of International and European Economic Law[2]. As for Internet access for users, it is free of charge in all three libraries.

Enrichment of library collection

The enrichment of libraries takes place through purchase and donations. But, during the last few years, mainly due to the economic crisis and as a consequence to the libraries' budget reduction, purchase has considerably declined. For example, the Library of the Secretariat General of Information and Communication – Secretariat General of Mass Media has quit purchasing journal titles and books, buying only newspapers. It also accepts donations and material sent from the Press and Communication Offices abroad which the Secretariat supervises. Similarly, the Library on Gender and Equality has reduced the number of print material they used to purchase and quit buying journal titles.

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[2] The URL known to belong to this organisation is www.cieel.gr but it was not available at the time this research was conducted. We were only able to locate snapshots through the Internet Archive's *Way Back Machine* (http://archive.org/web/web.php).

It is worth mentioning that the Library of the Ministry of Rural Development and Food has always been dependent exclusively on generous donations of various organisations, including the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the Institute of Agricultural Research (INIA), the European Union (EU), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Agricultural Bank of Greece and the Centre of Planning and Economic Research.

3.3 Facilities

Reading area-Photocopying/scanning/ photographing facilities

The libraries provide users with well-equipped reading areas where they can spend their time reading. There are photocopying machines that users can use free of charge up to a certain limit defined by the library's regulation. The Library of the Secretariat General of Information and Communication – Secretariat General of Mass Media also provides scanning/photographing facilities for use by the public concerning the material that cannot be subjected to photocopying.

3.4 Collection's organisation

The libraries catalogue their material using an integrated library system. The Library of the Secretariat General of Information and Communication – Secretariat General of Mass Media takes advantage of the ABEKT 5.6 library automation programme which is developed by the National Documentation Centre in Greece. The Library on Gender and Equality uses the Vubis Smart software while the Library of the Ministry of Rural Development and Food uses an older version of the ABEKT software in DOS Version.

3.5 Collaboration with other libraries

The libraries seem to have unofficial collaborations with organisations and other libraries. For example, the Library on Gender and Equality has unofficial and not organised collaborations with academic libraries, such as the Library and Information Services of Panteion University and with some special libraries. A member of the library staff expressed the need for these collaborations to be more organised and official.

Similarly, the Library of the Secretariat General of Information and Communication – Secretariat General of Mass Media keeps contact with newspapers' and magazines' publishers, the Hellenic Statistical Authority and the National Printing Office, as well as with certain academic libraries. These collaborations are free of charge and not officially organised. A member of the library staff expressed the wish for official collaborations in the future with newspapers' publishers, the library of the Bank of Greece, academic libraries-- such as the Library and Information Services of Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences and, certainly, with other government libraries.

Finally the Library of the Ministry of Rural Development and Food has collaborations mainly with academic libraries, such as the library of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and the library of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and wishes to keep this contact. Limited collaboration also exists with the library of the Agricultural University of Athens and the Dimokritio University of Thrace.

These collaborations involve answering questions via telephone or sending an item via electronic mail, post or fax, such as a journal article or a book. Additionally, they involve donating items to other libraries when they are no longer needed by the library or if more than one copy is available. Such collaboration is realised under the mutual understanding that no financial charges are involved. Spending money in any way seems to raise obstacles in serving the public's information needs.

3.6   Networking cataloguing co-operation

The possibility of networking cataloguing co-operation presupposes the collection of information related to the following issues: the existence of cataloguing rules, classification system, arrangement of collection on the shelves, metadata schema, Web-OPAC, character set metadata and client–server protocol for searching and retrieving information from remote computer databases. The table below describes these issues for each library.

Library 1 is the Library on Gender and Equality, Library 2 is the Library of the Secretariat General of Information and Communication – Secretariat General of Mass Media and Library 3 is the Library of the Ministry of Rural Development and Food.

Table g: Issues for networking cataloguing co-operation

	Library 1	**Library 2**	**Library 3**
Cataloguing rules	AACR-2	AACR-2	AACR-2
Classification	Yes (custom) English and Greek	National library of Greece authorities and keywords	Custom
Arrangement of collection on the shelves	DDC based	DDC based	UDC based
Metadata schema	UNIMARC	UNIMARC	UNIMARC
Web OPAC	Yes	Yes	No
Character set metadata	(Not known)	UTF-8	No
Client–server protocol	Z39.50	Z39.50	No

Library 1 classifies its material according to the special women's issues classification system used by the library, which was proposed by the special delegate of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Growth Mrs Jytte Larsen in 1985. This system has been adjusted to the needs of readers as well as those of the Greek language, and it is constantly being enriched with new terms.

3.7   Interviews with directors

Two directors, namely the Director of Analysis and Documentation and the Director of Information Technology Services, of the Secretariat General of Information and Communication – Secretariat General of Mass Media were invited to express their opinions on a number of issues. Such issues involve the types of information they need in order to cope with their professional obligations, as well as getting information about their personal unofficial collaborations with organisations or other libraries. In addition, they were asked whether they would support the possibility of digitising part of their organisation's collection, of conducting user studies in order to understand the real needs of library users and of creating more official collaborations with organisations or libraries that have interesting data in their possession. Finally, they were asked to suggest material for digitisation.

Both directors seem to have unofficial collaboration with organisations, such as the representatives of the Mass Media, the Prefecture Offices, the Ministry of Infrastructure, Transport and Networks, the Greek Radio Television, the Ministries' Press Offices and Governmental officials. They also specified two valuable sources of information: the Internet and the personal contacts with colleagues belonged to the same organisation they work for. Regarding the types of information they are interested in, they specified that they prefer to have access to both up-to-date and historical data, mainly from the Mass Media. The director of Information Technology Services also showed interest in technical data, related to his subject area, such as Internet technologies and management of information systems.

Regarding the possibility of digitizing any available material, both directors indicated that they would support this effort and emphasised the importance of such a project for the Greek cultural heritage. The director of Information Technology Services specified an in-progress digitisation project of the Secretariat General of Information and Communication – Secretariat General of Mass Media whose primary aim is to digitise approximately 935km of archival films. Except for the digitisation, this project is focused on creating the appropriate software for archiving, searching and retrieving the digitised data. He also mentioned that his department is interested in the digitisation of other forms of data, such as photos and exceptional or rare print editions of magazines or newspapers.

Then they revealed that they would support the conduct of user studies in order to understand the real needs of users and the creation of more official collaborations with organisations or libraries that have interesting data. Specifically, the director of Information Technology Services mentioned that the Secretariat General of Information and Communication – Secretariat General of Mass Media have filed, since 2010, a proposal about electronic submission and dissemination of multimedia content as well as advanced services related to the organisation's areas of interest.

Apart from the interviews with the two directors, we do have to report the communicated interest and valuable support of the Director of Services Abroad. The employees of the Library of the Secretariat General of Information and Communication – Secretariat General of Mass Media mentioned that the director often supplies the library with material either through personal donations or obtained on his demand from the Press and Communication Offices abroad, which are under his jurisdiction.

4.   CONCLUSIONS

Through this study we, first, report on factual data about the present state of government libraries in Greece, namely libraries of the fifteen Greek ministries and their secretariats. Second, we describe the existing collaboration among them in order to deal with the economic challenges they face. Currently, there is no established network among government libraries in Greece. We believe that there are prospects of viability, and even growth and development in difficult times when the know-how of people is given an opportunity.

Driven by all data collected for the three government libraries, the Library on Gender and Equality, the Library of the Secretariat General of Information and Communication – Secretariat General of Mass Media and the Library of the Ministry of Rural Development and Food, it is clear that a more official collaboration among government libraries in Greece should be an aim. Library staff seems to be more than willing to work towards this purpose.

At the same time, results showed that there are government libraries in Greece whose information and services have reached more than a satisfactory level. All three libraries seem to have a rich collection of information organised in part or in total via an integrated library system. At least for two of the three libraries, minor adjustments should be made in order to support the idea of a union catalogue. At this point, the Library of the Ministry of Rural Development and Food must do much more towards this effort.

Unfortunately none of the three libraries provides access to subscribing databases. However, library staff seems to be more than willing to enrich their collection by subscribing to databases and to support this kind of collaboration. Probably the lack of this type of subscription could be identified as a motivation for developing co-operative collections (for example databases or electronic journals) through joint agreements in order to save money (consortium). Libraries have already contacts with various libraries, publishers and organisations. They have constant collaboration with academic libraries and probably further research is needed in this area in order for these collaborations to become official and established.

Conclusively, we would like to note that government libraries should enrich their role in the organisation in which they belong. One way could be by carrying out user studies. A good example is the library community survey that the Library of the Secretariat General of Information and Communication

– Secretariat General of Mass Media carried out in the year 2011. Their primary aim was to study the library community and identify their needs. Their goal was to collect data regarding a) users' personal data, such as age, sex, occupation and education level, b) users' technology familiarity, c) users' knowledge of the type of information and services provided by the library, d) users' contact with other libraries, e) users' subject areas that they are interested in, and f) users' interest in attending any kind of seminar that would help them make better use of the library's services.

5.   RECOMMENDATIONS and FUTURE WORK

This ongoing research aims to focus on supporting the idea of collaboration via union catalogue and cooperative collection development. The lack of collaboration at an official level until now should be identified as a motivation rather than a limitation.

Our first interest is to establish communication among all government libraries independent of their current status of progress but always with the sheer support of their parent organisation. We strongly believe that by recording and making public the data about all the government libraries in Greece, as well as depositing our suggestions about a collaborative network, we will sensitise the community towards the outcome of true co-operation to the benefit of the community.

Second, we believe that it would be useful to participate in more official ways of communication, such as symposiums, workshops or conferences. By organizing these kinds of meetings, library staff would have the opportunity to get closer to staff of other libraries, express their worries and problems and, hopefully, determine solutions. Only through constant communication and knowledge-sharing can problems be resolved. This way libraries might find ways to deal with the serious economic problems they face on a daily basis and meet their public in a more consistent and fruitful basis.

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