

Beyond the Library Collections

Proceedings of the 2022 Erasmus Staff Training Week at ULiège Library

François Renaville and Fabienne Prosmans (Eds.)

ULIÈGE LIBRARY
LIÈGE





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When David and Goliath work together: The impact of a cooperation agreement on library strategy

Susanne Kirchmair

Abstract

When MCI was founded in 1994, there was no way to know what it would become more than 25 years later, namely a university of applied sciences. As this development was unplanned and unforeseen, MCI had to devise an unconventional solution for providing library resources. As a result, a cooperation agreement was formulated between the University Library and MCI. I will describe the evolution of this collaboration and its impact on library strategy in general. I will also discuss the cooperation's advantages, disadvantages, and challenges. Finally, I will provide insights into recent developments and the future outlook.

Keywords

Library; Cooperation; Collaboration; Strategy; Impact

Article

Introduction

MCI | The Entrepreneurial School[®] is located in Innsbruck, the capital of the County of Tyrol in Western Austria. Innsbruck has 160,000 inhabitants and approximately 35,000 students. Due to its relatively small size – one can easily walk from one end of the city to the other within two hours – and bustling city and cultural life, it is popular amongst young people. Another attraction is the location. The mountains surrounding MCI allow for various outdoor activities all year round. Therefore, MCI is a favourite for winter sports enthusiasts who can enjoy lectures and skiing or snowboarding on the same day, as the slopes are very close to the city centre and can be reached within half

an hour. Hiking, biking, and other activities can also be enjoyed during the warmer seasons.

Institutions involved

Five higher education institutions are located in Innsbruck with many schools for all levels. Two of those institutions are actively involved in a cooperation, which will be discussed later. The two partners are MCI | The Entrepreneurial School[®] (MCI) and the Leopold-Franzens-Universität Innsbruck (University of Innsbruck). Both parties are discussed below to provide background information.

MCI and MCI library services

MCI is a subsidiary of the University of Innsbruck that started as a continuous education offer for the university's alumni. As the so-called "speedboat" of the University of Innsbruck, it was created to ensure its alumni would stay in the education loop even though they had left their alma mater.

In 1993, a new law ([Republik Österreich, 1993](#)) allowed the foundation of *Fachhochschulen* (i.e. universities of applied sciences) in Austria. Until then, it was only possible to receive an academic degree at public or private universities or to attend other higher education institutions to be trained as a teacher, nurse or social worker. Therefore, the emergence of a new type of academic institution fundamentally disrupted the Austrian higher education landscape and challenged such new universities to build the infrastructure for higher education from scratch.

Following the aforementioned new law, the Management Center Innsbruck was founded in the academic year 1995–1996. As its name suggests, it mainly focused on providing continued education in business. After offering courses and seminars solely to a managerial and professional target group, MCI started taking in regular students for the part-time business and management programme, concluding with a diploma.

MCI is a public institution with a broad consortium of ownership (Fig. 1). It offers a variety of programmes and services across a wide span of topics within the range of management, society, technology, and life sciences.

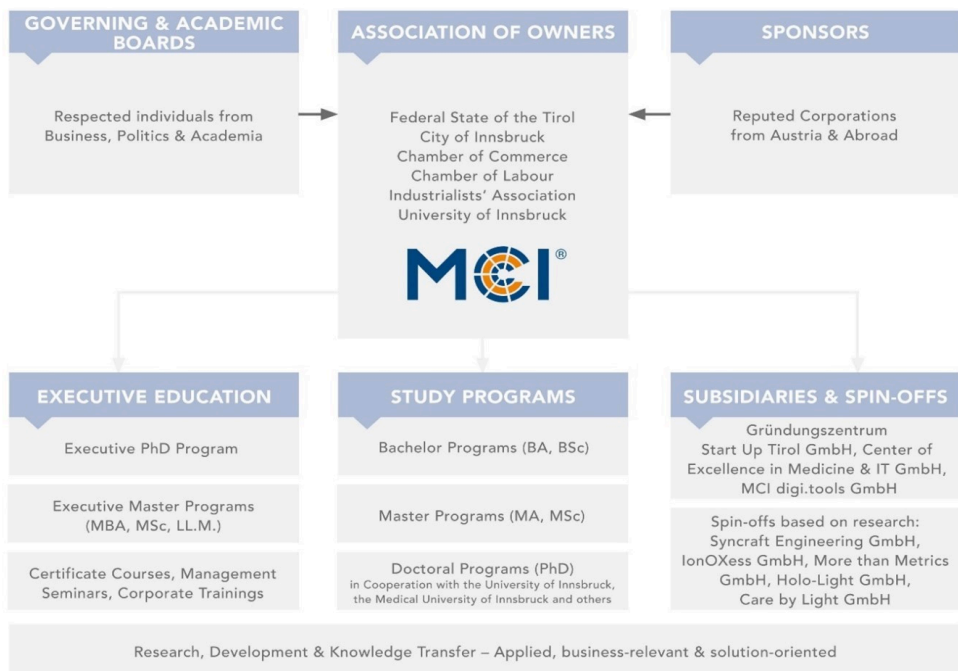


Figure 1: MCI Consortium (MCI, 2021)

MCI receives federal funding for allocated study places and charges regular tuition fees of EUR 363 per semester. It has also received several accreditations, such as AACSB and FIBAA.

MCI offers 29 study programmes with a total of 3,634 students, has 304 partner universities across the globe, and, so far, is proud to have educated 14,572 graduates (MCI, n.d.-d) who are well prepared for and welcomed in the labour market. Furthermore, MCI has about 400 employees from 37 nations, including 300 internal faculty members and 887 external faculty members, due to its practice-oriented approach (MCI, 2022, p. 3).

The MCI campus consists of five central locations within walking distance of each other in Innsbruck. It offers all the necessary “infrastructure with attractive and well-equipped lecture halls, computer labs, and group working rooms, with state-of-the-art workstations and research facilities, student hostels in the vicinity, a wide choice of good places for eating out, convenient parking, and excellent public transport” (MCI, n.d.-b).

Recently, MCI Management Center Innsbruck was rebranded as MCI | The Entrepreneurial School[®] to strengthen the well-known brand and adapt to the international market. MCI’s mission is to provide a “meaningful connection between universities, grandes écoles, business schools, universities of applied sciences, and the world of business. It represents a strong international brand that successfully combines academic teaching and training, solution-oriented research and development, impactful knowledge transfer, [and] innovative start-ups” (MCI, n.d.-a).

It is widely known that the “availability of research facilities and a place for quiet reflection in combination with efficient access to scientific literature is fundamental to a modern university infrastructure” ([MCI, n.d.-c](#)), and MCI meets these criteria. The primary goal of MCI’s library services is to support all study, research, and teaching activities.

Therefore, MCI provides libraries and study areas with a wide selection of books, journals, magazines, and recent newspapers. In the three main MCI campuses, libraries are equipped with a printer and copier, a book scanner, reading desks, and personal computer workstations. These libraries are purely reference collections.

MCI library services offer access to an extensive digital collection of e-books, e-journals, and other research from many different subject areas. In total, we have licensed 20 databases. This collection is constantly being expanded to meet the needs of the staff and students. All the online resources are easily accessible on and off the MCI campus. To access the licensed online content remotely, we use the EZProxy server from OCLC.

The MCI has a cooperation agreement with the University of Innsbruck and the State Library of Tyrol (ULB) to complement its library services and provide the opportunity to borrow books and use interlibrary loans and reading rooms.

In October 2011, the first academic librarian began with the new formation and expansion of MCI’s library services. Since 2020, all library services at MCI have been handled by a team of two full-time academic librarians. They are responsible for administration, communication, teaching, training, and development.

University of Innsbruck and ULB

On 15 October 1669, Emperor Leopold I approved the levying of the “Haller Salzauschlag”, the special tax to finance a Tyrolean state university. This measure was decisive for the establishment of today’s University of Innsbruck ([University of Innsbruck, n.d.-b](#)). In 2019, the University celebrated 350 years since its foundation and is, therefore, one of Austria’s oldest universities ([University of Innsbruck, n.d.-a](#)). The University has 28,106 students in total; of these, 13,439 are international students, and every semester, about 4,000 lectures are held ([University of Innsbruck, n.d.-c](#)).

The University has its own library, which was founded in 1745. As the largest library in western Austria, it supports research, teaching, and study. Moreover, as the Tyrolean Regional Library, it also reflects the regional literary landscape. It offers space for encounters and exchange and builds bridges between the past and the present ([Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Tirol, n.d.-a](#)). Its full name is Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Tirol, which translates to the University and State Library of the County of Tyrol. Its name signifies that the library is not only meant for university affiliates but is also open to the public.

The library has seven branches across the city of Innsbruck, organised by topic related to the specific location. Its holdings comprise about 3.5 million printed media and 80 electronic databases. The library has approximately 200 employees across several faculty libraries and service departments ([Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Tirol, n.d.-c](#)).

Cooperation agreement

After MCI was founded, it soon became evident that academic education needed to be accompanied by the respective library resources.

In the beginning, these resources comprised printed books and journals that had to be provided on-site and some space to use them. These materials also had to be administered in some way. However, the number of students and study programmes was small, and no significant growth was planned initially. Additionally, MCI was located in a city with an extensive university library within walking distance which was also open to the public. Therefore, there was no need to plan for its own library unlike other Austrian universities of applied sciences, which were founded to be stand-alone higher education institutions, often in locations without any university infrastructure.

Development of the cooperation

The cooperation that emerged from the historical circumstances described above is unique in Austria. The following milestones explain the development of the cooperation:

- 1995: Start of the first diploma study programme in business and management at MCI
- 1998: Opening of the new ULB branch “SoWi-Library” (faculty library of social and economic sciences) at campus Universitätsstraße
- 1999: MCI moves to campus Universitätsstraße (now the headquarter)
- 2000: First contract between MCI and “Verein zur Förderung der SoWi-Bibliothek” (association for the advancement of the SoWi-Library)
- 2003: First amendment to the original contract
- 2008: Second amendment to the original contract
- 2015: Change of cooperation partner from the association to ULB

Details of the cooperation agreement

To use the ULB as the MCI library, a payment from MCI was agreed upon in exchange for student and staff access to the infrastructure and services of the whole University library, especially the SoWi-Library ([Chen et al., 2000](#)). Ideas about the future development of the cooperation and further collaboration were also noted, some of which could not be executed due to legal reasons (e.g. the joint use of electronic resources). The contract accounted for other facts as well, such as the foundation of an MCI subsidiary for executive education and the extension of the library's services to this subsidiary ([Niedermair & Altmann, 2003](#)). Payment calculated at a fixed yearly rate was determined for expanding the library's opening hours, and a handling fee was levied for every book bought by MCI ([Niedermair & Altmann, 2008](#)).

After a change in the leadership of the ULB, the new administration lifted the cooperation to a more official level within the University library. This change also ensured that the agreed-upon payments went to a general account for third-party funds for the University library. The changes were retroactively enacted on 1 January 2014 ([Frasnelli & Altmann, 2015](#)).

The main features of the modified cooperation are as follows:

- Free use of the MCI student and staff IDs as ULB library cards with the same rights as University affiliates
- Use of all library facilities of the ULB
- Expansion of opening hours (evenings, Saturdays, and Sundays)
- Acquisition, cataloguing, and other services for printed books
- Additional purchase of highly demanded (text) books

Today, the MCI actively advertises the cooperation as an addition to its own library services, which provides MCI's researchers, lecturers, and students with full access to the university library facilities and services ([MCI, n.d.-c](#)).

Impact on library strategy

The emergence of the cooperation has severely impacted MCI's strategic decisions regarding the library.

The collections, services, and facilities provided by the ULB are fully available for MCI affiliates, and vice versa. As MCI always buys books according to its needs, sharing printed resources and facilities is easy and beneficial for both institutions.

The most severe impact is that if MCI does not need a library due to the ULB fulfilling that purpose, there will also be no need for a librarian and library facilities. Moreover,

there will not only be any need for library software and resources but also no clear development strategy for its collection and services.

However, MCI provides reference collections on its campus for quick use by staff and students. Several study areas are open to the public too. Additionally, there is also a need for the provision of online resources due to legal and practical reasons. Licensing contracts only extend to one academic institution. As MCI is not a full subsidiary of the University of Innsbruck, it has to purchase its own databases. Furthermore, as remote access is mandatory, this access can also only be guaranteed for affiliates of the licensing institution.

Advantages

The advantages of the arrangement described above are clear, as it allows MCI to use the enormous resources, facilities, and services of the ULB.

These benefits also include borrowing materials from all ULB branches, inter-library loans, and document delivery services. Therefore, there is no need for MCI to provide extensive physical spaces for books and reading rooms, physical and digital processing of printed books, circulation, library software, and a discovery system. Consequently, there is no need for specialised human resources or a library department, and one individual at the interface of MCI and ULB can adequately manage the cooperation, exchange of books, and reference collections at MCI locations.

Disadvantages

Despite the advantages of the cooperation outlined in the previous section, many previously hidden disadvantages have become more evident and pressing in recent years.

These disadvantages include, first and foremost, that there was no information professional at MCI for the first 15 years of its existence. Therefore, MCI heavily relied on the ULB, which led to the belief amongst many students and staff that it did not have its own library. This belief was fuelled by creative wording such as “Studienlandschaft” (which roughly translates to “study landscape”) instead of “Library” for the rooms containing the reference collections. Consequently, the library was invisible within MCI.

There were also no specialised services for students, faculty, and researchers, as there was little to no MCI-specific knowledge at ULB. MCI also prides itself on its service orientation, which was practically non-existent at ULB.

All communication at MCI is always targeted towards a German- and English-speaking public. Unfortunately, many ULB websites are only available in German ([Universitäts-](#)

[und Landesbibliothek Tirol, n.d.-c](#)), which is a significant problem, especially for international students.

At MCI, there was a prevalent notion that ULB handles all matters regarding library resources, and, therefore, there was improper handling of institutional licenses and subscriptions. Some journal subscriptions still exist in the names of individuals who no longer work at MCI. This problem persists since some of the former subscriptions have not been identified.

The strategic development of library stock, facilities, and services at MCI has never taken place. MCI's library grows according to actual needs, such as the emergence of new study programmes. However, this strategy is challenging as the subjects that need to be covered range from social sciences and business to technology and life sciences. Furthermore, as staff and student numbers grow, the physical space available for them and the resources needed on campus seem to shrink. As a "real" library never existed at MCI because the ULB was our library, there was never a real space for it.

Although Innsbruck is relatively small, there are no large-scale libraries at the different MCI locations. As a result, one would always have to go to one of the ULB branches throughout town according to their specialisations. Due to licensing restrictions, remote access is not available for ULB's online resources. However, MCI affiliates can use the allowed walk-in user access on ULB locations.

A lack of communication on the part of the ULB has made it difficult to effectively serve MCI affiliates. This issue became evident, for example, when news regarding services or opening hours was seldom communicated in advance, even when such information severely impacted MCI.

Finally, several components of the cooperation agreements were never fully executed, possibly due to a lack of close collaboration, so much so that MCI was not even listed as a cooperation partner of the ULB on its official website ([Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Tirol, n.d.-b](#)). However, MCI strongly promotes the agreement in its official communication ([MCI, n.d.-c](#)).

Challenges

Even though the unique cooperation agreement is a significant asset, we are facing major challenges due to the development of MCI and higher education and libraries in general.

As this cooperation can only go so far in terms of sharing resources, MCI faces massive expenditures for online resources. There is an increasing need for e-books and e-journals with a remote access prerequisite. At the same time, there is a demand for 24/7 access to resources and facilities for on-campus studying. However, as we are constantly growing, reading areas with round-the-clock access are not our priority, and,

irrespective of this, there is a constant battle for space. Therefore, although we strive to become an almost complete e-library, this task is impossible with budget restrictions.

There is also a strong need for adequately equipped library facilities in additional MCI locations and the adaptation of existing libraries and study areas. Those spaces are far too small for the resources and unattractive for students to spend time in.

We also witness the constant evolution and expansion of study programmes, which make it difficult to provide sufficient resources on every subject. For example, MCI is now offering a programme in medical technologies that requires expensive resources in medicine. Many medical journals are already covered in our existing database subscriptions, but we struggle to get affordable access to technical standards for only a small group of people.

There is an ever-growing need for services and training, such as literature research, bibliographic management, and academic writing, which we are happy to provide to all study programmes. However, our capacities are extremely limited as we are only two full-time librarians who have to cover everything from administration to teaching.

We also see topics such as copyright issues, online programmes, publication services, and open sciences as services for other departments and study programmes. There is a growing need for support, and the library services are the right place for these questions. However, as we are only a small team, we are limited by the domains we can cover adequately.

Furthermore, there are other issues, such as the growth of online programmes, which have their own unique challenges regarding the supply and use of literature. The recent focus on research outcomes in universities of applied sciences also poses new questions and demands more support for junior researchers. Moreover, topics such as the global pandemic, energy shortage, and the political situation in Europe also significantly impact future strategies.

Recent developments and outlook

Library strategy at MCI as well as the agreement will likely change soon. The main reasons for these changes may be attributed to the following two recent developments.

First, MCI is in the process of constructing a new building. For the first time, all five MCI locations, with three libraries containing reserve collections and small study areas, will move into a single building next to our current headquarters. However, as is already known, this new building will not be able to contain all departments. Therefore, the building has been planned without a library, which is usually a central point in any university building. As the plans currently state, there will be a new Library & Learning Centre in our current headquarters. This centre will consist of study areas, rooms for group work, and printed materials for all study programmes. The centre will be a reserve col-

lection as we expect to continue the cooperation and, therefore, still outsource tasks such as circulation, user management, and book handling, including cataloguing.

Second, there is a new department head of our closest partner, the SoWi-Library. In March 2023, she took over from the former director who retired in November 2022 and is now in the process of getting acquainted with her new library and team. For MCI, significant discussion is necessary as the processes and finer details of the cooperation are tacit knowledge. Additionally, we expect the contract to change and will look into the details during the upcoming months.

Conclusion

After more than 20 years, it has been proven that the cooperation agreement between David (MCI) and Goliath (ULB) continues to be beneficial for both parties involved.

ULB benefits through the funding of the extended opening hours of one of its branches, which is beneficial for University and MCI students. It also profits from payment for tasks performed within ordinary working routines. This advantage gives ULB some extra budget for the purchase of resources.

On the other hand, MCI benefits tremendously by outsourcing tasks and processes that would otherwise be extremely expensive and time-consuming. In addition, the use of the ULB infrastructure generates considerably more space for students than MCI could ever provide on its own.

Therefore, we are eagerly awaiting future developments regarding the cooperation and are convinced that even two organisations that are so different in size, such as MCI and the University of Innsbruck, can mutually benefit from this kind of collaboration. We hope the cooperation might also be an exemplary model for other institutions and encourage them to collaborate with their neighbours and even competitors.

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