

A consortium of odours...

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Fiesole, March 2001



- As you enter, you are engulfed in a consortium of odours in which dried and pickled fish predominate.
 - E. Huxley, *Back Street New Worlds*



Overview

- Types of consortial groups
- Benefits obtained / compromises made
- University of Chicago as a case study
- Consortia at their best
- Consortia at their worst
- Issues for the future



Types of consortial groups

- By type of library
 - Very large multitype
 - State/Local multitype
 - Group with much commonality
 - Consortium of convenience



Types of consortial groups

- By typical activities
 - joint purchase only
 - broader resource sharing
 - library operations beyond resource sharing
 - consortium existing within a larger structure



Types of consortial groups

- By source of funding
 - central funding - new money
 - mandatory pooling of money
 - product by product selection, participation voluntary



Benefits obtained

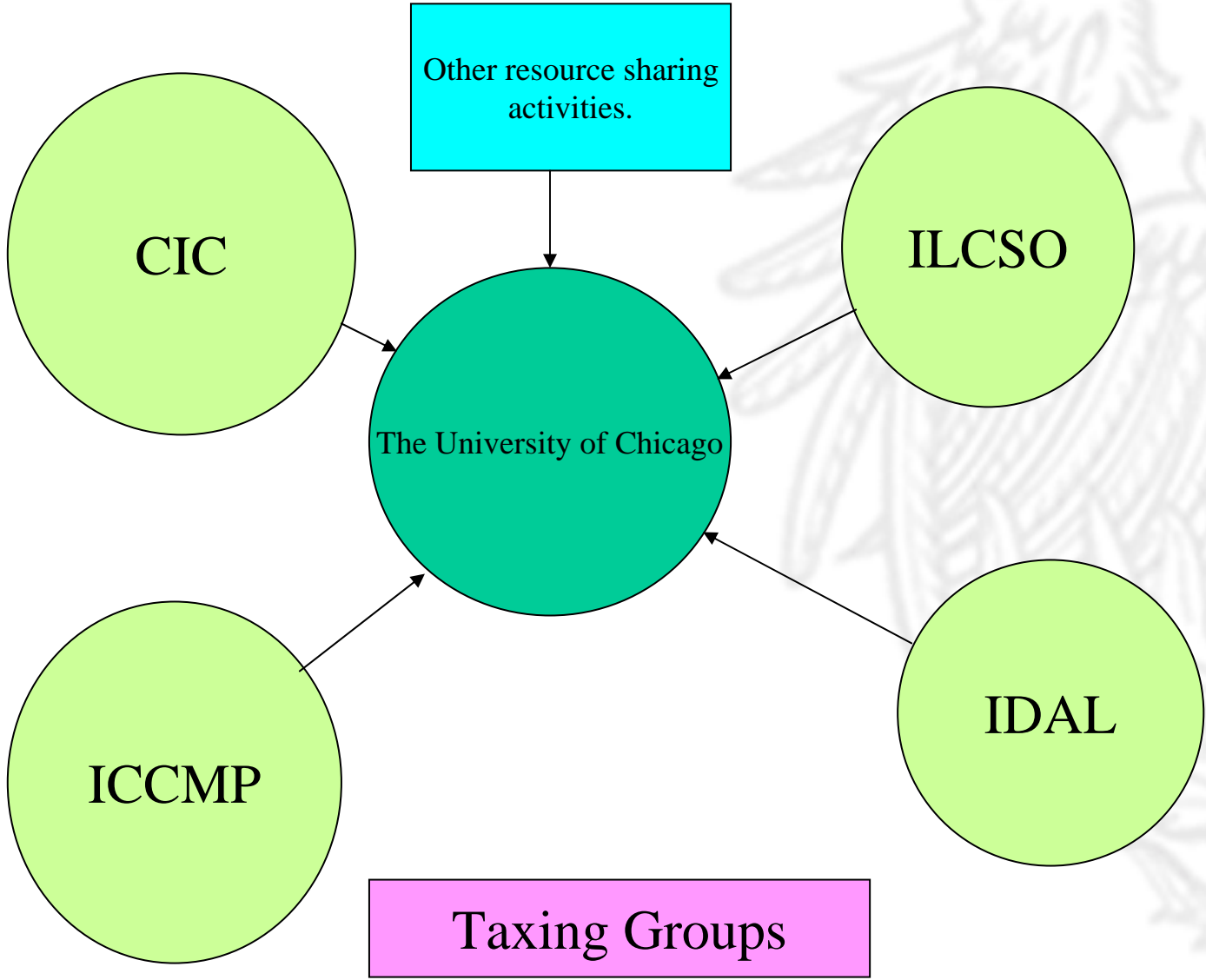
- Access to many products quickly
- Stretched our local holdings
- Some cost savings - some products free
- Provided infrastructure
- Multi-catalog access
- Increased patron services - borrowing, etc.
- Some cooperative collection development



Compromises made

- Loss of local control
- Central license negotiation
- Products not always our first choice or exact fit
- Delays are common
- Often go “on our own” first to obtain immediate access, join group later





At their best...

- Combine strengths of individual libraries
 - cooperative purchase allows access to joint holdings
- Support cooperative collection development
- Provide central services and support
- Allow patrons access to multiple collections
- Allow multiple catalog searching



At their best...

- Exist for reasons that go beyond cost savings
- Exist within a larger framework
- Provide a structure for ongoing discussions
- Alert members to new offerings
- Allow us to speak with a single voice
- Keep long-term projects on track



At their worst...

- Merely a buying club - the Costco method of librarianship
- Provide road blocks and slow down the decision-making process
- Mandate supply sources
- Ciphon off local money with concurrent loss of decision authority



At their worst...

- Complicate the process
- Consume vast amounts of time
- Reduce the impact of individual voices



Future perfect?

- The easy decisions have been made and the easy products obtained
 - increasingly difficult to negotiate
 - increasingly difficult to find commonality
- Publishers are saying “no deal” to consortia
- Competing consortia
 - many voices, all talking to the same suppliers about the same products, all consuming time



Future perfect?

- Better technology will result in improved delivery and will increase options
- Consortial overhead
 - some now looking at outsourcing some portion of their activities
- Homogenization of offerings
- How do we keep the momentum?



Future perfect?

- How long can we justify altruism
- How do we accommodate the need for both local decisions and group-wide benefit?
- The successful consortium will be more than a purchasing club
- Have consortia become the resource sharing method of choice? Is this a bad thing?

