

COBISS.NET BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE OF INTERNATIONAL REGIONAL COOPERATION

1. Introduction

Knowledge is the driving force of development. For the knowledge-based information society, library information systems and current research information systems are an essential infrastructure, indispensable in modern education and research, as well as in cultural, technological and economic development. Libraries cannot take on their role if their work is not supported by modern information communication technology. Moreover, they are unable to function efficiently as isolated islands, but they must connect with each other and provide conditions for dialogue and collaboration as the best possible bases for the development of each country and the international community as a whole.

Few countries have succeeded in establishing a national library information system with shared cataloguing. In most cases, the establishment of a national system is made impossible due to the uncoordinated automation of individual libraries with different types of library software and because libraries fall under different ministries that fail to collaborate in the library development planning stage.

2. The COBISS model and the COBISS.Net regional network

COBISS (Co-operative Online Bibliographic System and Services) is the model of a system proving that successful integration and synergy with the establishment of national library information systems is also possible. What is more, if these systems connect with each other, the result is an exceptional

¹ Institute of Information Science Maribor (IZUM), Regional Centre for Library Information Systems and Current Research Information Systems, Maribor, Slovenia (UNESCO Category II Centre).

driving force for the development of a modern information society. COBISS.Net represents the regional network of autonomous platforms of national library information systems in Slovenia (COBISS.SI), Serbia (COBISS.SR), Macedonia (COBISS.MK), Bosna and Herzegovina (COBISS.BA/COBISS.RS), Montenegro (COBISS.MK), Bulgaria (COBISS.BG) and Albania (COBISS.AL).

It is an organisational model of joining libraries into a national library information system with shared cataloguing, a shared bibliographic database/union catalogue and local bibliographic databases of the participating libraries, a database on the participating libraries, an authority database and several other functions. The professional and technological grounds and requirements for the operation of the system are standardised and shared cataloguing of library materials, uniform management of catalogues and bibliographies, adequately trained cataloguers for shared cataloguing and linking libraries via computer and communication networks.

The COBISS system was designed in the 1980s by the Institute of Information Science (IZUM)² in Maribor, Slovenia, and was accepted in this role in the 1990s by a wide spectrum of countries in South-Eastern Europe. In 2003, an Agreement was signed on the establishment of the COBISS.Net network and the free exchange of bibliographic records that are created within the autonomous library information systems of the participating countries. So far, over 500,000 bibliographic records have been exchanged between the systems. In 2016, libraries originally created only 25% of records on average and downloaded 75% of records, which means great savings of both time and money. At the same time, COBISS.Net is also a form of cultural cooperation, which is especially appreciated in the region, as it contributes to mutual understanding and dialogue.

All libraries within the COBISS.Net network have access to the following:

- 1) proven organisational solutions and COBISS software for the automation of library operations with shared cataloguing within the COBISS.Net network and access to the WorldCat (OCLC) global catalogue;
- 2) proven methodology and software for managing researchers' bibliographies within the COBISS system, and the applications for setting up a national current research information system (SICRIS, E-CRIS) and the evaluation of research performance;
- 3) a variety of training programmes for staff (librarians and IT professionals), organisation of specialised workshops and international COBISS conferences;

² IZUM is a non-profit organisation, a public institution with more than 110 employees, which has never pursued commercial interests in Slovenia or abroad. In almost a quarter of a century, it has won the trust of the public with its professional and innovative initiatives in the wider region. IZUM has become an important regional centre for the development of library information systems and current research information systems. This was also recognized by UNESCO, which, at its General Assembly in November 2011, awarded IZUM the status of a UNESCO Regional Centre.



Fig. 1. COBISS.Net. Support to knowledge and intercultural dialogue. Source: <https://www.cobiss.net/#Member-countries>; <https://www.cobiss.net/cobiss-net-network.htm>

4) server space (hosting) for COBISS applications and services as well as for SICRIS and E-CRIS;

5) Help with acquiring funding for development activities (international development cooperation).

The software, developed and maintained by IZUM, supports different library operations and provides user interfaces in several languages (Slovenian, Serbian, Bosnian, Macedonian, Bulgarian, Albanian and English).

3. Strategic reasons for development assistance to target countries

The *Resolution on International Development Cooperation of the Republic of Slovenia for the period until 2015*, adopted by the National Assembly in July 2008, sets forth the Western Balkans as the first geographical priority. It further defines the substantive-thematic priorities, which include:

- »Cooperation in science and technology, including the establishment of integrated library information systems and research information systems to support education and research, as well as cultural, technological and economic development;

- Providing training for experts from target countries, particularly (i) granting scholarships for various programmes in Slovenia and (ii) supporting education programmes for selected groups in target countries«.

Chapter 3.17 *Strengthening cooperation in science and technology and integration in research and information society* of the *Action Plan on the functioning of the Republic of Slovenia towards the Western Balkans in 2013*, among other things, includes the following:

- »Implementation of the COBISS.Net project (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia). Transfer of Slovenian knowledge to the said countries; access to scientific and cultural treasures collected in the national and other libraries as well as in scientific and research institutions of the geopolitical area of South-East Europe; starting priorities (economic, commercial and political) in the said countries in light of the envisaged EU enlargement«.

As an international development cooperation coordinator of the Republic of Slovenia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has referred to COBISS.Net as one of the most successful international cooperation projects in the region, primarily due to its long-term orientation.

The success of the development of the national COBISS systems in the target countries outside Slovenia as well as the entire COBISS.Net regional network is almost entirely dependent on international technical and financial development assistance instruments. Within their programme of international development assistance, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and IZUM dedicated over 3 million EUR for development activities within the COBISS.Net network in the past ten years. Years ago, individual activities were also co-financed by some international organisations, initiatives and programmes (Open Society Institute, CEI, UNESCO, OOSI, British Council, OCLC, Tempus, etc.).

4. COBISS.Net vision

In the geopolitical area of South-Eastern Europe we wish and intend to:

- enhance the automation and inclusion of libraries in the national library information systems and in the COBISS.Net network;
- attract the interest of the libraries in other countries in the region to take the opportunity to evolve more rapidly by becoming part of the COBISS.Net network;
- harmonise cataloguing rules with international recommendations and standards;

- establish compatible current research information systems (E-CRIS, SICRIS) in the participating countries (databases on researchers, research organisations and research projects);
- encourage the competent ministries and universities in the participating countries to accept the concept of managing researchers' bibliographies within national library systems and ensure the transparency of research results. Over 500,000 bibliographic records have already been exchanged between the systems;
- facilitate the use of research results in order to stimulate innovation processes, and economic and social development in the region.

For this purpose, equal opportunities must be provided for all the participating countries. In doing so, we encounter many problems, not just of the financial kind. Different development levels, different interpretations of the importance of the development of the information society, and, last but not least, susceptibility to technological and social development are the main hurdles when trying to achieve the set goals quicker.

We try to overcome these shortcomings by taking various measures. Because library bibliographic collections (catalogues) are the basis of every library information system and also the source of metadata for various forms of later use, they must be optimally multi-functional at a national level. Among other things, this means that they must contain bibliographic records of practically the entire national intellectual production (both current and retrospective). This is a task that can only be performed adequately by expertly trained library specialists. Consequently, one of our main goals is to establish a well-designed training process in the participating countries that would, through the years, produce sufficiently competent experts of this kind. When creating high quality bibliographic records, libraries (including the national library) can make use of downloading already existing records from other collections. The main advantage of the COBISS. Net network is the easy and efficient option of downloading bibliographic records from other shared catalogues within the regional network. In addition to that, the participating libraries can also download bibliographic records from some other global data sources, such as ISSN, WorldCat, etc.

The National COBISS Centres (NCCs) organised in the individual participating countries are the bridge between IZUM and the autonomous national system. Among the more important tasks are the ongoing training of local experts in these centres and the process of acquiring training licences for individual COBISS software modules. These local experts are trained at IZUM where they become well acquainted with all the processes and then share their knowledge with other experts in their home environment.

In managing researchers' and university lecturers' bibliographies in national library information systems it is necessary to monitor classifications of bibliographic units according to the valid typology for bibliographies in the

COBISS system (scientific article, professional article, scientific conference contribution, etc.). In Slovenia, six specialized information centres carry out this task. In other countries, these types of centres, financed by the relevant national agencies and ministries, still need to be established. And, last but not least, due to the lower level of technologic development in some countries libraries have serious issues with the provision of adequate ICT equipment and high-performance communication connections. A joint venture within the COBISS.Net regional family could alleviate these problems.

IZUM's vision about the expansion of the development of the COBISS.Net regional network under the slogan "Support to knowledge and intercultural dialogue" was supported in 2006 by the national libraries of Bosna and Hercegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, Slovenia and Serbia. All libraries in the region were invited to join. In November 2006, the National library of Bulgaria joined; in December 2012, it was followed by the library of the Albanian Academy of Sciences, followed by some other Albanian libraries later on.

5. Conclusion

The key characteristics of integrated library catalogue and researchers' bibliographies management are rationalisation and added value, demanding cataloguer training, high quality of bibliographic records and multifunctionality as well as transparency of research results. The COBISS.Net regional network is a result of several decades of development in the area of creating national library information systems and current research information systems. The connection between both of these types of systems is particularly important in researchers' bibliographies management and evaluation of research results. The cooperation so far has brought about extremely positive results so we are certain that the COBISS.Net network is of great importance for the development of the region and its successful integration in the EU.

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Davor Šoštarič

COBISS.Net. Best practice example of international regional cooperation

Abstract

In the sensitive geo-political area of South-Eastern Europe, the regional COBISS.Net network is well established in the library community. The network connects library information systems of seven countries and is a highly functional shared system of otherwise autonomous environments, on which the further development of an all-encompassing knowledge society could be based.

Key words: IZUM, library information system, current research information system, South-Eastern Europe, COBISS, E-CRIS, COBISS.Net

Davor Šoštarič

COBISS.Net. Przykład dobrej praktyki międzynarodowej współpracy regionalnej

Streszczenie

W wrażliwym obszarze geopolitycznym Europy Południowo-Wschodniej regionalna sieć COBISS.Net ma ugruntowaną pozycję w społeczności bibliotek. Sieć łączy systemy informacji w bibliotekach w siedmiu krajach i jest wysoce funkcjonalnym wspólnym systemem w przypadku autonomicznych środowisk, na którym można oprzeć dalszy rozwój wszechstronnego społeczeństwa opartego na wiedzy.

Słowa kluczowe: IZUM, system informacji bibliotecznych, aktualny system informacji badawczych, Europa Południowo-Wschodnia, COBISS, E-CRIS, COBISS.Net