

## Project description

### Title: European Serials Catalogue

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#### Project partners:

European Union (EU): Germany, Austria, (Italy [CASA])

Central/Eastern Europe: Croatia, Hungary, Czechia, Slovakia

#### 1. Summary

The project proposal outlines the use of a shared cataloguing system for serials in combination with an electronic document delivery system in a European context. Information, especially in a more and more unified Europe does not stop in front of borders. Therefore, a coordinated approach would open the opportunity of transnational data exchange, a European information market. It is therefore suggested to start a project aimed at building similar infrastructures for serials management and document delivery among cooperating countries.

#### 2. Goals

Knowledge transfer, exchange of information as a prerequisite for a free and open society and a more and more unified Europe. Library systems can contribute immensely towards this goal if they join forces and work as cost-efficiently as possible on the same basis, using up-to-date technology and avoiding the duplication of efforts. An essential of the project is making the information flow a *mutual* process, with all partners providing and sharing their resources.

#### 3. Situation

A number of European countries have built union catalogues and data pools for the bibliographic control of serials. The oldest and largest is the German Serials Database (ZDB); then there are the French union catalogue CCN, the Nordic union catalogue NOSP, and the two files of the British Library. The CASA project aims partly at consolidating several Italian union-catalogues, in cooperation with Scotland.

After the political changes the Eastern European countries have been trying to catch up with the Western library development, and many have made rapid progress

which is retarded by lack of experts in modern organization and lack of sufficient funds for building sufficient library utilities. They have developed serial databases with partial coverage, insufficient to cope with the evergrowing user needs. Poor serial collections make international document supply indispensable. Therefore the creation of modern shared cataloguing systems, union catalogues and document delivery systems to provide scholarly and educational institutions with the necessary study and research materials is among the most urgent tasks.

The traditional approach would be to let all these countries cope alone with their problems and build their own systems from scratch: This is costly and time-consuming and duplicates the work done in the other countries. Libraries in Central and Eastern Europe have to a great extent corresponding serial collections, and it would be simply wasting funds and man power not to coordinate these activities.

#### 4. Options

There are different ways of tackling the suggested tasks:

- Union catalogues are the oldest approach to the problem. Actually there are several such files in existence in Eastern European countries, usually in card form, and usually focusing on foreign periodicals. There are a number of drawbacks regarding the further use and development of these tools:

- The current computer files are in many parts outdated, both as to the bibliographic records as well as to the holdings information.

- For lack of tradition in serials cataloguing the bibliographic data are often insufficient.

- Maintaining a card-file is expensive, time-consuming and obsolete; the file is not available to a wide audience.

- Converting a card-file to electronic format would improve the situation enormously; it would be a mixed blessing as data are often incomplete and not up-to-date.

- Union catalogue work depends on the cooperation of participating libraries which now suffer from staff shortage; their first priorities focus on developing their own structures, not union catalogues. Updating files is hardly possible any more.

Another model starts with the idea of making cooperation not an extra service but part of the normal library routine, thus providing a new infrastructure:

#### 5. Project description and comments

The preceding discussion indicates that a shared cataloguing system for serials for the project countries would be the best solution. If, for certain local reasons (electronic environment, software or format problems), this goal cannot be achieved immediately, an electronic union catalogue would fit the concept as a first stage.

In order to avoid unnecessary and duplicating work, it is suggested to use the more than 1 million title records of the ZDB and its Austrian sister, ÖZZDB (Austrian Serials and Newspaper Database) as the basis for the project. They are shared cataloguing systems and the ZDB is the basis also for the German electronic

document delivery; thus there is already considerable experience in the organization and handling of all pertinent issues.

There are slight drawbacks to the suggested project but they will hopefully be attacked very soon:

Currently the major obstacle for truly international cooperation in the library field is the difference in cataloguing rules and formats. There are, however, a number of working groups and task-forces to bridge the gaps and get towards a «convergence» among the different library communities, at the same time making allowance for new forms of publications, like electronic serials:

- The International Standard Bibliographic Description for Serials, ISBD(S) is currently being revised by an international working-group.
- The Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules are also under revision, with international consultancy. The results are expected in 1999. It seems that there may be a chance of getting to an internationally accepted definition of a serial title.
- The International Standard Serials Number Systems which maintains a large bibliographic file used by many library systems, is involved in the current discussion. A coordination between AACR revision and ISSN development is expected. The IFLA Standing Committee on Serial Publication is also involved.
- The ZDB would be ready to follow new international agreements... This would remove the major existing obstacles. The ZDB already uses the ISSN as a suitable (though currently insufficient) link between bibliographic records on an international level.
- The ZDB and the ÖZZDB are both about to migrate to other software solutions. The German database will almost certainly join the Pica world and establish a close cooperation with the German national library (DDB). This will definitely mean the development and / or use of interfaces with the MARC / Unimarc communities. The ÖZZDB is about to implement ALEPH, with the same implication. Certain details of the options of future cooperation will only materialize during the rest of this year, in the phase of the implementation of the new systems. On the other hand, both ALEPH and Pica are known systems, and also cooperation projects need some time of preparation during which some details would be analyzed.

## 6. Procedure

The project countries saw major difficulties in working with 1 international database, last not least because of the differences in formats, rules and languages. It was considered a promising way, however, to link the existing serials files not with the aim of a merger but by means of a kind of umbrella software which would allow search and retrieval in all these national databases. It would also allow downloading from the other files, especially the German Serials Database. It should be possible to order the found item electronically.

Special attention was given to the option of linking national article databases and making them searchable with this common interface.

The situation is, of course, different from country to country. That means that a specific interface has to be written for each national database.

[National situation:]

## 7. Prerequisites

- adequately trained staff in the appointed libraries (with the richest serial collections)
- standardization of procedures in the cooperating libraries
- computer and communication equipment in these libraries
- adequate funds for the projects

## 8. Proposed activities:

- establishing and training of a project team consisting of representatives of the individual partner libraries
- elaboration of methodology for project feasibility studies
- feasibility studies for each country involved (requirements of interface / cooperation according to local needs)
- elaboration of concepts for the hardware and infrastructure platform
- preparation of the software with the stipulated interfaces
- test and pilot run

## 9. Benefits of the project

A shared cataloguing system for serials would save the libraries a lot of effort as every serial would only be catalogued *once*. The other libraries would use (download) the bibliographic records and attach their holdings statements. Thus the libraries would save cost and staff time and simultaneously provide a service to the library community.

All changes are made in the national data resources, therefore it is always up-to-date and as complete as the libraries' own files. The proposed software would link the records and thus make it easy for participating libraries to take over changes and amendments.

The document delivery system would work directly with these data and may attain a high degree of efficiency and sophistication (e.g. the German pilot project Subito).

Documents can be delivered in a very short time as no additional, or third institution (union catalogue) has to be consulted.

## 10. Cost / staff requirements

To be specified by the individual partners