

COBISS 2009  
MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE (?)

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The Institute of Information Science in Maribor (IZUM) in cooperation with the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology was the organizer of last year's COBISS conference, held from the 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> of November 2009 in the Habakuk Congress Centre (Maribor, Slovenia). The conference was characterized by two things: firstly, after a long period of having regular annual meetings, the COBISS Conference 2009 was held after a two year break; and secondly, the conference was decided to become ministerial, but it would still maintain the pre-

vious conference form which had brought librarians together from those countries participating in the COBISS.Net project.

Even on the first day of the program *The Ministerial Conference on Information Infrastructure for Science, Education and Culture COBISS 2009* had two panel discussions, which were to justify the prefix in the name of the ministerial conference. It began with opening words by Tomaž Seljak (director of IZUM) which was then followed by speeches from Vojko Volk (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia) and Stamenka Uvalič-Trumbić (UNESCO, Paris). Vojko

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Volk introduced us to the role of Slovenia in the process of bringing the Western Balkans closer to the European Union, while the representative from UNESCO presented the paper *“New Dynamics of Higher Education and Research for Societal Change and Development”*.

The first panel of “Accessibility of Information on Research Potential and the Results of Research Work for Cooperation in the Region” was led by the Slovenian State Secretary for Higher Education, Science and Technology József Györkös and brought representatives together from the Ministries of Science and Technology and Higher Education of countries which have expressed interest in cooperating on the project COBISS.Net (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Macedonia, Slovenia and Serbia). In this panel, we were informed (inter alia) of the Ljubljana Process, which allows for the expansion of the ERA – The European Research Area (EU Countries) into countries that are currently under the EU accession process. We were also informed of the possibilities of connecting COBISS bases and researchers according to Slovenia’s example and the so-called “5<sup>th</sup> Freedom (brain circulation)” that allows for access to knowledge and researchers. Serbia’s representative in the panel was PhD Tibor Sabo, Deputy Minister of Science and Technology.

The second panel of “Library Information Systems for Creativity Overview” brought together representatives from the ministries of culture of COBISS.Net member countries, who individually presented the situation in their respective countries. This panel was led by the Minister of Culture of the Republic Slovenia Majda Širca, and Serbia was represented here by the State Secretary of Ministry of Culture Nadica Momirov.

Upon completion of the second panel, Sir John Daniel (Commonwealth of Learning, Canada) gave an inspiring lecture on distance education in the world of higher education un-

der the title “Responding to the Library Needs of Distance Learners”. This type of education is closely linked to new communication technology and its implementation would allow for a wider access to education (to all who are interested in obtaining one), better education and, what is especially important, lower costs for an education. The lecture emphasized the role libraries have in universities that offer this type of education, in that students turn to the library as an institution, not to the actual librarian. (See the next report for more information on this lecture.)

The next day, the conference continued with a presentation by Karen Calhoun (Vice President of OCLC WorldCat and Metadata Services, Dublin, Ohio, USA) entitled “Traveling Through Transitions : From Surviving to Thriving”. The basic themes of her presentation were related to the latest trends in library science, such as the complete change of attention from the library to the user and finding information to deliver to them. She also reported on a new generation of interactive library catalogues being used and methods for achieving greater efficiency in the management of metadata. She then turned her attention to pressure from the side of library financiers to reduce library’s budgets, personnel, and storage space, as well as talking about the changing information environment and reviewing basic library values. To meet all these requirements, libraries are directed to jointly create new services and new modalities of cooperation.

A block of lectures followed, at the beginning of which were Mirna Willer and Marijana Tomić (University of Zadar, Croatia) presenting their work entitled “Cataloguing Rules and Practice in the Region”. Primož Južnič (University of Ljubljana) then gave a lecture on “Education Trends for Work in the Information Sector”.

Marta Seljak’s work (IZUM), entitled “How to Rationalise Cataloguing and Improve the Functionalities of the COBISS System?”, stood out and launched the “eternal” theme of simpli-

fyng cataloguing. It provided an overview of COBISS.SI and COBISS.Net development, an analysis of the number of librarians who create records in COBISS and their performance. After analyzing the quality of randomly selected records created in 2009, her conclusion was that it is not satisfactory, and that the output of these librarians is low. Something must be changed in the manner of cataloguing and transferring to new rules and formats in order to increase efficiency and improve quality.

At the end of this block of presentations, a lecture written by Zoran Krstulović (The National and University Library, Ljubljana - Slovenia) was held on the topic of “COBISS.SI and DLIB.SI for Access to Electronic Resources”.

Afternoon sessions began with a lecture by Vesna Stevanović (the National Library of Serbia) who described how the national COBISS centre in Serbia functions.

In “A Conversion of the National Library of Bulgaria Catalogues into the COMARC Format”, Nadja D. Karačodžukova (National Library of Bulgaria) described her experience in the conversion project. It is interesting to note that the conversion was carried out directly on a COBISS3 programming platform, and the whole process, including all the iterations, lasted about a year and a half.

IZUM representative Miro Kolarič made the audience more familiar with the Slovenian experience in transferring to a COBISS3 program

platform which began to be used in 2000. At the time of presentation (which used data from 2008) a COBISS3 platform was being used by 274 libraries in Slovenia, and 33 libraries were working in a test environment. It was concluded that COBISS3 has had highest and most successful use in Slovenian public libraries.

I hope that the next conference will be able to remove the question mark from the title of this report and that it will indeed become a ministerial conference, and that the ministers themselves will participate, not just their assistants (although we do not wish to downplay their importance), and that the conference will be remembered by the decisions or conclusions that were passed during it.

IZUM representatives have always been good hosts and in addition to their excellent organization (the great location in which the conference was held, the presence of a large number of inspiring speakers from around the world, etc) they take into account the cultural and social roles of the conference, which aim to have participants get to know one another better. In that, a concert by the band Terrafolk was organized on the first night in the Unionska hall for conference participants, followed by a reception in the Vinagovo wine cellar. A farewell dinner was organized the second evening, which brought together almost all of the 475 conference participants of COBISS 2009. It was, in any case, a very nice experience.