International Conference 'COBISS 2024' Institute of Information Science (IZUM), Maribor, 23-24 October 2024)

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Translated from Serbian:
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The 24th traditional international COBISS Conference, under the slogan "Working Together to Build Trust in Science and Development", took place from October 23 to 24, 2024, both in person at IZUM in Maribor and online.

During the two days, 34 lectures were held, attended by more than 700 participants from 11 countries.

The topics of this professional Conference of librarians and researchers were closely connected to the principal activities of IZUM, which predominantly refer to the development and operation of the COBISS system. This year, the speakers were leading experts who presented various compelling topics: the possibility of utilizing artificial intelligence (AI) in librarianship, service accessibility for vulnerable groups, the launch of a new technological solution for electronic books lending - COBISS Ela, the introduction of a new generation of library software (COBISS Lib, COBISS Cat and COBISS+), and others.

In the first presentation after the official opening, under the attractive title "AI is here. Don't panic," Svein Arne Brygfjeld from the National Library of Oslo explored the major technological advancements over the last thirty years, emphasizing their significance for the libraries. He highlighted that AI is transforming library activities, thus making libraries more efficient. For example, in Norway, the digitization of library collections has enabled the National Library to make a wealth of materials available online, benefiting the public and researchers. Also, the library has established a

laboratory to research and integrated AI into library processes. This laboratory works on creating new models, data analysis, and software development available to all, so as to facilitate access to knowledge. The examples from Scandinavia and Luxembourg demonstrate how AI ameliorates the search for content without the need for additional data and improves language models adjusted to local culture. The importance of collaboration through initiatives such as AI4LAM, which supports the AI integration into libraries, archives, and museums, was underlined.

Milan Gabor, founder and director of Viris, active for more than a decade in the field of cyber-security, was the author of the following presentation (AI, Cyber-security Risks. Who Will Win: Hackers or System Administrators?). With technological advancement, AI is becoming a "battlefield" between hackers and system administrators. The possibility of AI misuse was outlined, as hackers can employ AI tools for so called phishing, as well as for writing malicious codes. The winners in this struggle will be those who are faster and more innovative in using these new technologies.

PhD Erik Novak from the Department of Artificial Intelligence at the Jožef Stefan Institute in Ljubljana talked about artificial intelligence and its potential utilization in librarianship. AI is defined as the ability to simulate human functions such as visual perception, language processing, and pattern recognition. Technologies such as deep learning enable advanced applications in language processing, which are essential for librarianship. AI can enhance administrative tasks, automate cataloguing, and aid in analyzing content popularity.

In the second part of the session, Milena Bon, from the National and University Library in Ljubljana, spoke about artificial intelligence, followed by Elizabeta Trpčeska Petruševska, from the Kočo Racin Library in Tetovo, and Tanja Žuran Putora from IZUM. Their presentations demonstrated how artificial intelligence could assist libraries in keeping pace with the digital age. The need for "AI literacy" in libraries was emphasized, as they are becoming more than a place for borrowing books. AI enables the automation of numerous routine tasks, including cataloguing and helping users find information. Libraries are actively preparing for these changes in order to be of better service to their users, and one such example was given by Tanja Žuran Putora when she spoke of the smart assistant – COBISS Assistant – a new feature within the COBISS Lib[1] application.

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1. At the time of writing this text (November 2024) COBISS assistant was in beta version.

The second session was titled "Vulnerable Groups and Library Services". All four presentations – Antun Smerdel (Archives of the Republic of Slovenia), Valerija Škof (journalist – Spletna TV), Marija Repe Kocman (IRIS Center), Andrej Krajnc (IZUM), stressed the importance of accessibility for vulnerable groups, with a focus on different types of disabilities, including visual and audio impairment, general physical and sensory limitations. Efforts to make public resources, such as archives, libraries, web-sites, more inclusive were emphasized. These initiatives include adapting physical spaces, digital platforms and printed materials to be accessible to people with disabilities, such as designing materials in Braille or sign language literature. The need for continuous development and raising awareness was stressed to make resources universally available.

The last session of the first day of the Conference was dedicated to the new generation of COBISS software.

Jani Pulko (IZUM) presented the planned COBISS+ upgrade, which focuses on the so-called "mobile-first" design that should improve the user experience on all devices.

New features of the COBISS Lib application were presented, which entail software and hardware upgrades, and staff training as well. Igor Andrin (Ljubljana City Library) talked about the implementation of the new COBISS/Borrowing program in the Ljubljana City Library. This required extensive testing, training, and alignment with the existing systems such as the "Urban citycard".

During the development of the COBISS Cat software, cataloguers' feedback was used to help shape the software. Nevenka Zupančič highlighted that this approach reflected the current trends in software design.

Angelina Grujić (National Library of Serbia) spoke about the transition from COBISS3 application to COBISS Lib and COBISS Cat in Serbian libraries. After testing and initial presentations, a survey was conducted among librarians in order to estimate the use of new software solutions, and the results revealed that 80% of librarians incorporate modern operating systems, which enables an easier transition to new applications. The survey also indicated to challenges, such as technical difficulties and more sluggish adaptation of new systems. National Library of Serbia intends to modernize its equipment and provide additional training for librarians to ensure a smoother transition to COBISS Lib and COBISS Cat.

The second day of the Conference was also divided into three sessions. The first one focused on e-books and their lending in libraries.

At the beginning of the session, a lecture titled "The Future of Reading in a Digital Society, or – Where We Messed Up" was given by Miha Kovač, a professor at the University of Ljubljana. In his lecture, he addressed the transformations brought by artificial intelligence and its influence on education and creativity. Kovač analyzed the historical development of information transfer technologies, describing tools such as printing and digital technologies as a "cognitive exoskeleton" that improves human abilities. He also warned about the issues such as the spread of fake news on the Internet, emphasizing the importance of critical thinking and education. He underlined the importance of establishing a balance between digital tools and traditional reading for the sake of deeper understanding and more complex studying, while increasing the educational standard.

The presentations by Luka Blažič (Miran Jarc Library, Novo mesto), Tanja Turšek (IZUM) and Sandra Jesenek (National Library of Maribor) pointed out innovations and strategic advancements in library services, especially those concerning e-book lending platforms. The focus of the presentations was on the development and implementation of the COBISS Ela system whose goal is to simplify e-book lending through user-friendly solutions, such as e-book integration into library catalogues via the COBISS+ and mCOBISS applications, or by using open-access tools, such as Readium.

The presentation given by Anđela Ognjanović and Nikola Stanković from the National Library Vuk Karadžić in Kragujevac was about the library adaptation to the digital age through the development of the Vuk eBook application, which enables e-books borrowing and reading. The increasing availability of e-books in Serbian and the growing interest among library users was stressed. The speakers described in detail their efforts in managing the project, technical coordination, and ongoing partnership with developers in order to secure a successful implementation and maintenance of the application.

In the second session titled "New Bibliographic Data Models", PhD Tanja Merčun Kariž (Department of Library and Information, University of Ljubljana), Branka Badovinac (IZUM), Teodor Veingerl (IZUM), Gordana Mazić (IZUM), introduced the transformative effect of the IFLA model – Library Reference Model (LRM) and the challenges of implementing entity-relationship cataloguing-ERC in library systems, especially within the COBISS network. The central topics included the adaptation of bibliographic data standards, resolving inconsistencies, and developing solutions to ensure compatibility and integration between shared and local databases. Practical examples were used to illustrate how alterations in cataloguing could

improve data quality and connect bibliographic records. The speakers highlighted strategic projects, technical challenges, and the evolution of metadata standards in order to enhance bibliographic control and modernize library services in the digital age.

"Users as the Center of Our Services" was the last session of the Conference and it covered various approaches and initiatives aimed at improving user experience in libraries, as well as the importance of adapting to the modern digital environment. The speakers focused on developing user support, fostering scientific, and cultural awareness through various media, and current challenges and threats in the field of information security, likewise.

Romana Muhvič Šumandl (IZUM), emphasized the significance of user support and the necessity for direct and personalized service for an excellent user experience. She stressed that growing user expectation for swift, simple and efficient support demanded careful listening and tailored solutions.

Jelena Vukasović (Cultural Center Nikola Đurković, Kotor City Library and Reading Room) talked about setting up a podcast "Keywords", jointly created by the Central University Library and the Rectorate of the University of Montenegro, in order to promote science, education and culture. Through interviews with academics, artists and librarians, the podcast strives to engage the public, especially the young people, to better grasp the importance of science, creativity and academic community in the development of society.

Gorazd Vodeb (National and University Library of Slovenia) emphasized in his presentation that the National and University Library of Slovenia had always followed the development of library resources and services, organizing user training courses. The onset of automation of work in the COBISS system in the late 1980s required user training in using the electronic catalogue. Further technological advancement led to the need for training in accessing CD-ROMs, e-journals and e-books, Internet search engines, as well as in open access publishing. The library currently offers six regular courses, and customized courses for specific groups, and it also has an online classroom.

The presentation by Mirlona Buzo (Center for the Coordination and Dissemination of Scientific Information – QKPISH, Tirana) highlighted the establishment of the Center for the Coordination and Dissemination of Scientific Information at the Academy of Science of Albania, for the reinforcement of the scientific research environment. The Center, with the support of the COBISS system, aims to improve digital access to scientific information, facilitating collaboration between researchers, academics and librarians. The main goals include developing a network of Albanian scientific institutions,

promoting transparency in research results and expanding access to the digital content.

Tadej Hren (SI-CERT) in his presentation – "Current Online Threats and Protection" – underlined that online attackers were constantly adapting their methods in order to bypass security mechanisms and deceive users. Just as one type of attack is mastered, new techniques emerge, often surprising even security experts. Hren presented some of the latest online threats and discussed ways to effectively protect against them.

The Conference provided an exceptional opportunity for knowledge exchange and the presentation of innovations in the field of library and information science. Special attention was given to the application of artificial intelligence, library service improvement and the development of new software solutions, which will significantly contribute to improving the work of libraries within the COBISS system in the future. The presentations demonstrated that libraries are moving towards adapting to modern technological and social demands, while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of knowledge and encouraging inclusion.