

The Virtual Library of Serbia: The First Twenty Years

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On November 30, 2023, the National Library of Serbia celebrated the anniversary of twenty years since the establishment of the Center for Shared Cataloging of the Republic of Serbia. In collaboration with the Institute of Information Science (IZUM) in Maribor, where the COBISS bibliographic system (*Co-operative Online Bibliographic System & Services*) is developed, for the first time, the National Library of Serbia organized the “COBISS Day” and the conference “Virtual Library of Serbia: The First Twenty Years“.

This was an opportunity for colleagues from member libraries of the COBISS.SR¹ system at the National Library of Serbia, where the Center for Shared Cataloging is located, to come together for the first time. Presentations on current topics were based on invitations from the organizers.. The introductory part of the conference featured speeches by Dr. Vladimir Pištalo, the director of the National Library of Serbia, Radovan Jokić, the assistant minister of culture of the Republic of Serbia, and Dr. Aleš Bošnjak, the director of the IZUM who then presented the acknowledgments. The first acknowledgment was presented to the director of the National Library of Serbia on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the National COBISS Center, in recognition of their longstanding successful collaboration within the COBISS system. The second acknowledgment was awarded to Milorad Vučković, the former head of the Center for Shared Cataloging of the Republic of Serbia, for his dedicated efforts, long-standing commitment, and devotion during the establishment of the National COBISS Center in the Republic of Serbia. In her presentation, the deputy director and the head of the Virtual Library of Serbia sector, Tamara Butigan Vučaj, spoke about the inception of the Virtual Library of Serbia project, which was supported and endorsed by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia. She discussed its developmental phases and the perspective of the COBISS system

1. [COBISS.SR](#), accessed on December 19, 2023

in the context of digital transformation and disruptive technology challenges. The Chief of the Center for Shared Cataloging, Angelina Grujić, in her presentation, reminded the audience of the project System of Scientific and Technological Information of Yugoslavia, the precursor to the VBS project. She also outlined the development of the COBISS.SR system along with its accompanying services, addressing the question of “where we are today and what awaits us tomorrow.”

The conference program was divided into two working sessions moderated by Emina Čano Tomić and Ljubica Ljubišić, library instructors at the Center for Shared Cataloging. The first session focused on presenting the new generation of COBISS4 software as a technological shift towards a unified web application. The conceptual solution for cataloging in COBISS4 was developed in 2020. The following year, the interface with basic functionalities was designed, and by the end of 2022, a trial version of the program was tested by selected catalogers from Slovenian libraries. Their feedback contributed to the creation of the first version of the production program called COBISS Cat,² which was launched in February 2023. The catalogers from the COBISS.Net network are now also able to use this program in its latest iteration. Some specific functionalities available in the COBISS3 version are still in development, allowing catalogers in the transitional period to simultaneously use both COBISS3/Cataloging and COBISS Cat. Branko Kurnjek, employed in the Bibliographic Control sector at IZUM, presented the features of the new interface. He highlighted advantages such as streamlining cataloging procedures, where certain processes were expedited or modified to be more user-friendly. During the panel discussion, Nebojša Kovačević, a librarian advisor from the Department of Serial Publications – Article Analytics at the National Library of Serbia, shared his observations and impressions from working with the COBISS Cat application as a selected cataloger for testing the internet application in the COBISS.SR system.

The new generation of COBISS Lib software was also introduced, and installed in the production environment in September 2023. This web application supports library business processes with all functionalities of existing segments (Holdings, Acquisitions, Serials, Electronic Resources, Interlibrary Loan, and Reports modules). MSc. Zdenka Kamenšek, from IZUM software development sector, participated in the development of the COBISS Lib application, striving to implement solutions from COBISS3 in the best possible way. During her presentation, she emphasized that the functionalities familiar to users remained unchanged, while the redesigned interface was

2. COBISS Cat, accessed on December 19, 2023

modern and transparent for use. The use of peripheral devices such as printers, RFID plates, cash registers, etc., requires the installation of the new COBISS DGW service. The logic behind performing procedures in COBISS Lib has remained the same as in COBISS3.

The theme of the second session was the ongoing projects within the COBISS.SR system. Mile Stijepović, a librarian advisor employed at the “University Library Svetozar Marković” in Belgrade, discussed the establishment and management of the “E-CRIS.SR information system on research activities in Serbia.” He has actively participated in this project since 2005. IZUM’s web application, E-CRIS³ was used to establish a registry of researchers and institutions in the Republic of Serbia, enabling the management of bibliographies for scientific workers and institutions within the national library-information system. The E-CRIS.SR system was recognized in 2012 by the authorities of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia as a valid source of information for maintaining the Register of Scientific Research Organizations and the Register of Researchers in Serbia. After the renewed collaboration with the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia in 2022, the E-CRIS researcher code became one of the author identifiers on the eNauka portal.⁴

Dr. Aleksandra Trtovac, a librarian advisor at the University Library “Svetozar Marković” in Belgrade and an active member of the working group supporting the implementation of the eNauka system, discussed the eScience project and the role of the “COBISS system in the context of the eScience project.” The portal was launched in 2022 and implemented in May 2023 on the initiative of the Ministry of Science, Technological Development, and Innovation with the aim of supporting and advancing the scientific research sector. It seeks to unify the presentation of the entire scientific production and enable the evaluation of scientific results in institutions in the Republic of Serbia. Dr. Trtovac highlighted the challenges and difficulties faced by librarians, who are also NIO editors, in the process of collecting and verifying data on researchers’ scientific results in the Republic of Serbia. The data generated on the publicly available eNauka portal were initially derived from the Research Information System (RIS). In addition to manually retrieving results initiated by researchers, data are supplemented by automatically retrieving results from existing institutional repositories, the COBISS library system, repositories of defended doctoral dissertations in NaRDUS, and the “Our in WoS’ service.”

3. E-CRIS, accessed on December 19, 2023

4. eNauka, accessed on December 19, 2023

Anđela Ognjanović, the director of the National Library “Vuk Karadžić” in Kragujevac, presented the project that can be characterized as a pioneering initiative and a step towards expanding the spectrum of services offered by public libraries in Serbia. This project, titled “Development of Web and Mobile Applications for Borrowing and Reading E-books” in the NBKG database, was accepted in April 2021 and financially supported by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia. In the following year, a connection was established with the e-book lending system, coordinated by the Center for Shared Cataloging. This enabled transparency in data on purchased licenses and e-book loans within COBISS.SR system. This library is currently the first and only one in Serbia to offer such a service to its users. Nikola Stanković, a librarian and a member of the project team at the National Library “Vuk Karadžić” in Kragujevac, responsible for planning, coordination, and project implementation, introduced the attendees to the functionalities of the “Vuk eBook”⁵ application. As the service did not gain anticipated traction and negotiations with publishers of e-books in Serbia did not yield the desired results, it was concluded that publishers are not yet ready for this type of collaboration with libraries.

During that occasion, an invitation was directed to anyone who could contribute to solving the current problem in communication between libraries and publishers, allowing the “Vuk eBook” application to be used to its full capacity. After a lively discussion and exchange of experiences with colleagues from Slovenia regarding e-books, the program concluded with a final part – a quiz prepared by Sandra Deljanin, a library instructor at the Center for Shared Cataloging. Participants had the opportunity to answer questions about the COBISS system using their mobile phones using the AhaSlides⁶ platform and compete for one of three symbolic awards for the quickest correct responses. Based on the reactions of those present, gamification was a pleasant surprise for the conclusion of COBISS Day.

In addition to providing an opportunity for everyone involved in the COBISS.SR system to meet and stay informed about the latest developments from the COBISS platform, the conference was a chance to exchange opinions and ideas, share experiences, and establish contacts for future collaboration. The Virtual Library of Serbia project was initially designed to unify all libraries in Serbia into a comprehensive system of shared cataloging with a central electronic catalog. Although this was planned and prescribed by the Library and Information Activity Law in 2011, it is not the sole system,

5. *Vuk eBook*, accessed on December 19, 2023

6. *AhaSlides*, accessed on December 19, 2023

considering the parallel existence and development of the BISIS system. Still, the cataloging future of both systems is expected to be common and the representatives of the BISIS system attended the conference at the invitation of the organizers.