

Consortia for Electronic Library Provision in Belgium

by JULIEN VAN BORM & MARIANNE DUJARDIN

THE GENERAL PICTURE

E-libraries just like the former paper-based libraries will become increasingly essential and indispensable tools in research and education. Library consortia seem to be the way to get e-libraries started all over the world. However, it is unclear yet whether this is going to be a longlasting workable model. In an article published in 1997 Maurice B. Line (UK) has put a series of questions behind the concept of library cooperation¹. *"Library cooperation has always been assumed to be a good thing, but much thinking has focussed on the means of cooperation rather than the ends that cooperation is intended to serve, neglecting to fully explore other means of attaining those ends. Cooperative schemes have rarely been subjected to rigorous cost-effectiveness analysis, most have been national or sub-national rather than international; and some areas where cooperation could be useful have received little attention. Cooperation on a goodwill basis is already giving way to commercial arrangements between libraries as well as private suppliers. The growth in the number of private providers of various services, together with the ability of information technology to transcend geographical boundaries, are among factors that make a radical reappraisal of cooperation desirable"*.

Library consortia, a new kind of library cooperation, were created as a spontaneous reaction to the journals crisis and the new e-environment. Consortia in the early years of the e-information were also seen by the publishers as the way to market the new product. But will this model last? Will e-libraries be monolithic and highly centralised as this was the case with the classical, paper bound library or will they be construed as a fuzzy set by researchers and teachers themselves? Presently, both tendencies exist: scientists (and students) having created individual access to a limited set of publications and web sites highly relevant for their research and teaching on the one hand side and libraries trying to secure the (extra) budget required for buying campus-wide

access to large and expensive reference and full text databases on the other hand. Moreover, competition by commercial e-libraries, operating on a world-wide scale, is just around the corner. These commercial e-libraries represent the latest generation of digital publishing business distributing educational and research contents online².

The Belgian research libraries follow the international pattern and are rapidly becoming hybrid libraries especially in business, science, applied sciences and biomedicine (the STM disciplines). Still they have large paper bound collections on board and no library is willing to replace these in the near future by a purely electronic collection of journals. The fear of losing the content and thus the „*raison d'être*“ of the library and the concern for users not yet familiar with e-information sources are the cornerstone for a prudent, yet conservative policy. Increasingly e-information and e-journals are being taken on board. Paper and electronic go side by side in new hybrid libraries partly also due to the market policy set by the publishers in combining paper and electronic in an attempt to keep or improve the annual turnover reached during the past paper period. The transition from paper to electronic occurred in Belgium somewhat later than in other Western European countries. This confirms the position of Belgium often taking up an average position in Western Europe.

FROM INFORMAL TO FORMAL COOPERATION

Up to the advent of e-information, library cooperation in Belgium took place in a sphere of mutual understanding of the common problems and goals. Minutes of meetings and informal contacts and deals often laid the basis for cooperative activities. The National Conference of University Libraries and the Royal Library (the Belgian national library) has created several often expensive products and services without formal contracts and without creating a corporate body ad hoc with deed of partnership.

• CCB	Union catalogue of books on CD-ROM ³
• Antilope	Union catalogue of periodicals ⁴
• Impala	Belgian electronic document ordering system ⁵

This way of simple and informal dealings could not be carried on with regard to e-information. Formal license agreements had to be signed in a consortial environment.

BELGIUM, A FEDERAL STATE

Consortium building in Belgian has to be set in the framework of the federal structure of the country (population 10.6 million) where culture and education are the sole responsibility of the three cultural communities: Flemish, French and a small German community. Research still gets some federal input, but is becoming increasingly the competence of the regions (Flanders, Walloon region and Brussels)⁶. That explains why consortium building takes place mostly along these lines. Flemish libraries and libraries in the French speaking part of Belgium are creating separate consortia often for the same databases. There are some minor exceptions as this is the case with Beilstein-Crossfire (chemistry) where scientists with the help of some librarians have created a consortium, and to a limited extent between the two catholic universities of Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, once united in one single university in the city of Leuven. Publishers and intermediaries, however, expect dealings on the basis of the entire country or at least start negotiations from their market expectations per country.

FLANDERS

Flanders has started the migration to the hybrid library in 1995 with a proposal for the ELEKTRON-project. It took 5 years before in the millennium year 2000 a consortium was eventually set up for secondary databases, extended in 2001 by full text databases.

The ELEKTRON Project

The ELEKTRON project (1996-1998) was a feasibility study for electronic library provision in Flemish research libraries. It was conducted by the Flemish Research Libraries Council (VOWB), a non-profit organisation⁷. The VOWB tries to coordinate scientific library work in Flanders through studies and projects. A particularity of the VOWB is that it groups the 6 university libraries as well as libraries in the 27 polytechnics (higher non-university education) and a few other research libraries. University and polytechnic libraries are represented in an equal way in the Board of the VOWB. In reality, however, university libraries and libraries in polytechnics are quite different in size, acquisition power, staff and users. Polytechnics support teaching and research that does not rely as heavily on information provision as this is the case in the university libraries. The selection of e-databases to be

acquired in the framework of ELEKTRON and its successor is strongly influenced and has to a certain extent been hampered by this dichotomy.

The Danish Electronic Library Project provided valuable input for the definition of the ELEKTRON project⁸. The goal of ELEKTRON is the creation of a Flemish network for electronic provision of research literature up to the desk of researchers and students via ILL and full text databases. Equal access to information had to be realised as far as this responds to a real need in the varying research and educational context of universities and polytechnics. The feasibility study had to demonstrate that this goal was achievable in technical, organisational, legal and financial terms. The university libraries of Antwerp, Ghent and Leuven took the lead of the demonstration project. For the very first time the technical teams of these three universities were confronted with each other's technologies, likes and dislikes and their ideas for the future development of e-information. They had to compromise! The selection of the Web as the carrier of information was of course an easy one. The creation of a single interface for access to e-information (full text and reference information), a single sign on system, the use of the upcoming Z39.50 protocol and the identification and authentication of users via X.500 LDAP technology⁹ gave rise to a series of sometimes difficult debates. But in the end all went well. By the end of 1998 64 databases were accessible to universities and polytechnics for a test period of a full month. This overwhelming (free) offer was used 8,900 times to the great satisfaction of librarians and their users. It was no more than a foreplay to the real thing: constant and guaranteed access to e-information for all users in polytechnics, universities and other research organisations in Flanders. Costs of the demonstration project: 125,000 EUR.

1999. The Budget for the Realisation of ELEKTRON

The ELEKTRON feasibility and demonstration project had made it perfectly clear that the major Flemish university libraries could set up a common access structure to e-information.

- Library catalogues.
- Link from catalogue to electronic document ordering.
- Reference databases, linked (ERL) to the library catalogues, especially to Antilope, the national union catalogue of periodicals.
- Full text databases.

However, the extra budget for the start up of such a system was still missing. Because of the journal crisis funding was not easily available in the universities and almost totally absent in the polytechnics. Hence the request for substantial (and permanent) central funding by the Flemish Ministry. Similar projects in other Western European countries such as Denmark and Germany had already been given central funding by the ministry at least for the initial phase of the e-project. Extensive lobbying was required in order to create a new article in the Flemish educational budget. In the end 1,825,000 EUR was earmarked on the 1999 budget. Due to the elections and the creation of a new government coalition new lobbying was required in order to be able to use the available budget. In the meantime the sheer volume of the budget had attracted some other powerful players. The Flemish Research Library Council (VOWB) was no longer the sole player in the field. The new ministerial cabinet, the managers of the major universities and to a limited extent the Polytechnic Council (VLHORA)¹⁰ became the main negotiators around the ministerial table. The VOWB, the initiator of the ELEKTRON-project, got a secondary, partly technical role in the debate. Late in December 1999 the Flemish Government came to a decision: almost half of the budget would be spent for the acquisition of all the back files and the subscription of the current year of the *Web of Science*. With the rest of the budget some other mainly reference databases would be bought. The original concept of bundling the creative forces of the major university libraries in order to create a uniform access structure for e-information was abruptly abandoned. The possible link with DELOS, the network of excellence for digital libraries, never has been discussed¹¹. The selection of databases within the available budget (1999) and the distribution of these databases over universities, polytechnics and some Flemish research institutes remained the sole concerns around the negotiating table.

2000. First Operational Year: Reference Databases

With the exception of ABI/Inform no full text databases were bought in 2000. The license agreements were signed by the Minister of Education. Serving for *Web of Science* is done by the two larger universities (Ghent and Leuven). The same universities plus the University of Antwerp and IVS, a private company and Belgian agent for SilverPlatter (ERL databases), do the serving for the ERL-databases. No formal consortium has been created. Two research institutes (VITO and IMEC) were taken on board and the polytechnics were given access to the databases where appropriate, considering their study programs and the level of teaching and research.

Database	User community		
	Univer- sities	Poly- technics	Flemish research institutes
• ISI databases			
Web of Science	6	0	2
Journal citation reports	6	0	2
• ERL database			
Current contents (ISI on ERL)	6	27	2
ABI/Inform	6	4	1
Econlit	6	19	1
Soc. abstracts	6	12	1

Table 1. Databases and their user community in 2000

2001. Reference and Full Text Databases

Since the 1999 budget could only be used in 2000 the 2000 budget (2,000,000 EUR) was used in the year 2001. Since the back files of *Web of Science* were bought on the previous years' budget, nearly half of the budget could be used for new data. Given the serials crises (an increase of 8 to 10% per year mainly for STM-journals) the university authorities around the negotiation table in the Minister's office requested the acquisition of full text journals. As subscriptions to e-journals are very often closely related to the subscription of the paper copy, paid by the universities, polytechnics and other research libraries, this was not an easy construction. It required for the first time a license agreement to be signed by all the universities and the polytechnics. These are de facto consortia of varying composition. Serving, where required, is done by the same institutions as for 2000. Access to the databases again was given only for the universities, polytechnics and Flemish research libraries active in the disciplines covered by the databases. The level of research and teaching remained a decisive factor in attributing access to polytechnics. The number of polytechnics had dropped from 27 to 25 due to some mergers of polytechnics.

Database	User community		
	Univer- sities	Poly- technics	Flemish Research Institutes
1. Secondary databases			
1.1 Already available in 2000			
• ISI databases			
Web of Science	6	0	2
Journal citation reports	6	0	2
• ERL database			
Current contents (ISI on ERL)	6	25	2
ABI/Inform	6	4	1
Econlit	6	19	1
Soc. abstracts	6	12	1
1.2 New databases			
• ERL-databases			
ERIC	6	25	2
INSPEC	5	13	2
MLA	6	7	0
Wilson Art Index	5	9	0
• SwetScan/SwetsNet Navigator	6	25	2
2. Full text databases			
EBSCO Academic Search Elite	6	0	0
EBSCO Business Source Elite	6	25	0
Blackwell/Munksgaard	5	0	0
Academic Press	5	0	0
Harcourt Health Sciences	5	0	0
Institute of Physics	5	0	0

Table 2. Databases and their user community in 2001

Table 2 indicates that the universities benefit most of the newly accessible full text databases. Hence the request for additional full text databases in high demand in polytechnics (Kluwer databases).

The Future?

2002 will see a status quo. The budget made available most probably will be around 2,000,000 EUR. 2003, however, will be rather different! The budget might be spread over the universities and polytechnics. It can be earmarked for e-information provision, but that is not guaranteed. And even this might result in the reduction of the regular budget for information provision (paper and electronic) by universities and polytechnics. Libraries will have to fight for this extra budget and will have to create a series of consortia of different size and content, most likely along the lines of polytechnics with polytechnics and universities with universities.

Started with some borrowed ideas from the Denmark's Electronic Library Project, ELEKTRON might end after a period of 3 years as the Danish example with libraries left on their own to tackle the information crisis. Rich institutions will have access to the new information and poor will see this access denied (the Mattheus effect). The idea behind ELEKTRON has always been of a highly democratic nature. Give every institution in the higher education access to the building bricks and judge the use of it at the output side, the quality of house built with the bricks.

Flemish Problem Areas in E-information

The extra and rather generous funding of the Flemish ELEKTRON project and the actual way it has been set up have created a series of specific problems in e-Flanders.

- *Free*
The fact that everything is „free“ makes the selection of databases very difficult. No contribution is being asked from the user community (the universities and the polytechnics). Everyone asks and asks without the classical economic questions about cost and cost/efficiency. A substantial contribution by the universities and polytechnics could have augmented the available budget and would have had a dissuasive affect on asking for data which are less pertinent to the activities of the requesters.
- *Consortia*
Flanders did not learn how to create consortia that have to be (partly) autofunding. The original concept of co-funding in ELEKTRON has been abandoned far too soon.

- *Trade off between paper and electronic*
In the end libraries will have to abandon some of the paper subscriptions. As in Denmark extra initial funding has postponed this difficult decision for some years.
- *Licence clauses*
The actual licensee clauses have been no concern to the people around the negotiating table. The VOWB, as a minor negotiating partner, could not take up this role. The original texts produced by the publishers and intermediaries have not been checked against the principles laid down in policy documents produced by LIBER¹² and ICOLC¹³, the International Coalition of Library Consortia of which VOWB is a member. Hence e.g. the late discovery of potential problems about interlibrary document delivery, „walk in users“ (occasional visitors from outside the institution) and the non-teaching staff of the university hospitals.
- *Polytechnics and universities in the same consortium*
The information needs of polytechnics and universities are not of the same nature (pure research versus applied research; different study requirements). Publishers and intermediaries do not see this difference very well. Haven't all the former polytechnics in UK got university status? Isn't there the Bologna declaration? This can result in difficult negotiations and possibly in too high prices paid for access by polytechnics.
- *STM bias*
In spite of the attempt to bring in some arts and humanities databases there remains a serious bias in favour of the STM sciences, especially for full text databases, whereas libraries traditionally remain the laboratories „par excellence“ for the human and social sciences.
- *Elsevier*
Contrary to French-Speaking Belgium no deal has been reached with Elsevier yet. The consortium conditions offered by Elsevier are not yet in line with the Elsevier conditions for the Netherlands. A Belgian consortium (Flanders and French speaking Belgium) can probably solve this problem. The present budget, however, does not foresee a provision for an expensive acquisition such as *ScienceDirect*.

FRENCH-SPEAKING COMMUNITY OF BELGIUM

Historical Background

Like all academic institutions, the universities of the French-Speaking Community of Belgium have been experiencing a decrease in their purchasing power. Hence they had no other alternative but to cancel a good deal of their journal subscriptions. Currently, in order to be able to preserve the users' access to quality information, they are developing a joint cooperation.

The federalisation of the country on the one hand and the funding by the Flemish Government of an ambitious project relating to the joint purchase of primary and secondary databases on the other, have lead the 14 universities both from the North and the South of the country to seek and strike more often than not their alliances on community level. Following the example of the VOWB *ELEKTRON* project drawn up by the Flemish Consortium, the nine universities of the French-Speaking Community, which met at the *Conseil Interuniversitaire de la Communauté Française de Belgique* (CIUF)¹⁴, have therefore decided to start consortial negotiations independently from their Flemish colleagues.

The universities of the Belgian French-Speaking Community are very different in size and background. Only three universities out of nine are comprehensive (Université de Liège, Université Catholique de Louvain and Université Libre de Bruxelles); the other six mainly issue „*candidatures*“ diplomas (bachelors degrees) or are limited to some faculties. The three comprehensive universities total 80% of the currently registered students of the Belgian French-Speaking Community.

At the French-speaking level, the first steps for the joint purchase of scientific information resources were undertaken by the Commission of Chief Librarians of the French-Speaking Universities. This Commission, which depends on the CIUF has a twofold mission.

- Favour the dissemination of information and implement cooperation projects between the university libraries of the French-Speaking Community.
- Take a stand on the problems relating to university libraries and, more generally, on the scientific documentation¹⁵.

In 1998, the CIUF Commission of „Libraries“ contacted and started negotiations with several journal publishers and information providers: Elsevier, MCB University Press, Swets and Ebsco. These first attempts were unsuccessful since several important issues that popped up during the negotiations

could not be ironed out. In the first place, the main obstacle was the absence of a joint structure empowered by the libraries and able to negotiate and sign contracts with the publishers. Indeed, the Commission of Libraries does not have legal status, enabling it to sign agreements. The second problem that arose was that of the funding. Unlike the Flemish Government (*ELEKTRON* project), neither the French-Speaking Community nor the Walloon Region was willing to finance such a project in 1998. However, substantial investments were necessary not only for the purchase of electronic resources, but also for their implementation and the technical maintenance. And these investments could not be totally covered by the universities. Other problems remained unsolved, such as those linked to the choice of a joint funding mechanism, the distribution of costs among the universities, and the budgets to which the purchase of these resources should be charged¹⁶.

Creation of a Non-profit Association

It was becoming indispensable to set up a „legally autonomous“ body representing the French-speaking universities and their libraries, which would act as the only and privileged representative in negotiations with the publishers. The ASBL (non-profit association) known as „*la Bibliothèque Inter-universitaire de la Communauté Française de Belgique*“¹⁷ (BICfB) was created in June 2000 under the aegis of the *Conseil des Recteurs des universités francophones de Belgique*¹⁸ (Cref). The BICfB aims at „*promoting, coordinating and developing a joint policy between university libraries in the field of scientific documentation*“.

The nine university institutions of the Belgian French-Speaking Community, represented by their rectors, the University Foundation of Luxembourg and the chief librarians of each institution are members of this Association. Unlike *ELEKTRON*, the BICfB does not represent the interests of polytechnics or institutes of research of the Belgian French-Speaking Community.

The first aim of the Association consists of promoting partnerships between the Belgian French-Speaking university libraries and developing cooperation activities, particularly in the field of electronic documentation. The BICfB's objective is to meet the users' needs while taking into account the electronic information market and its evolution. Thanks to the cooperation between universities, it will be in a position to guarantee to the French-Speaking Educational Community, a wider access to electronic scientific information.

As part of its missions, the newly-born BICfB will also participate in the set-up of a joint policy in terms of electronic documentation and define the details of the implementation of the interlibrary cooperation, while bearing in mind the specific needs of each institution on the one hand and the preservation of common interests in the other. The BICfB will also develop study projects meant to favouring interlibrary cooperation.

The BICfB is also willing to stimulate inter-university cooperation with a view to joint purchase, sharing and broadening of the electronic scientific documentation (electronic journals or secondary databases). For this purpose, the BICfB takes care of the management and the coordination of joint electronic resource purchase projects. It is responsible for the selection process, the acquisition and data processing of documentary resources, as well as their funding in accordance with the identified needs of each institution and the publishers' offers.

In a first step, the BICfB has studied the offers and demands in the field of electronic documentation, followed by the selection of resources and the identification of the participating universities. Parallel to the selection of resources, it has drawn up a budget and determined the financial contribution of each institution. It is presently organising the access to resources from each participating institution, as well as the setting-up, the computing management and maintenance of such access. In a further step, it will analyse statistical data and assess the proposed products and services. Finally, it will examine the possibility to test and develop new electronic services with a view to disseminate more efficiently scientific information among the end users.

Funding

Each member institution participates in the BICfB's funding. In addition to an annual fee of 1,240 EUR, each university participates in the operational costs in proportion to the allowance it receives from the Belgian French-Speaking Community. The larger universities are therefore covering nearly 80% of this contribution which amounts to 100,000 EUR per year.

In 2000, a request for funding was submitted to the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research of the Belgian French-Speaking Community. Further to this request, the Belgian French-Speaking Community has agreed to participate in the funding of the BICfB's projects. By means of a signed agreement, taking effect on 1 September 2000, the BICfB will receive from the Belgian French-Speaking Community a yearly subsidy of 250,000 EUR during

three years in order to partly cover the costs for the purchase and management of electronic documentation. For the year 2001, the BICfB has a budget of 495,000 EUR (combined budget of 2000 and 2001).

Acquisition of Reference Databases

The subsidies of the Belgian French-Speaking Community will be used for the joint purchase of secondary databases. In the past, limited initiatives had sometimes enabled the extension of a database access license from one university to another (*Current Contents* acquired by ULB and UCL) or the joint purchase of electronic documentary resources by three universities (*INSPEC* acquired by ULB, UCL and KUL).

The first phase of this project was the selection of the databases to be acquired. A table with all the databases requested by the various universities was set up. The joint purchase mainly concerns the funding of databases already acquired by the universities. This table was set up with a view to launching a call for proposals dealing with grouped purchases¹⁹. Due to limited financial conditions, more expensive scientific resources, such as the *Web of Science*²⁰, were discarded from subsidised resources. Although they are not subsidised at this stage, these expensive resources could also be purchased by the consortium.

70% of the annual public subsidy will be used for the purchase of secondary databases. As agreed with the French-Speaking Community, the universities commit themselves to contribute the same amount. Therefore, the BICfB can use up to 350,000 EUR for subsidised joint purchases. All the BICfB members have selected together the databases that would be subsidised and fixed the maximum rate of subsidies to 50% of the paid price. The participating rate for each database will be decided by the BICfB's Board of Directors. Given their speciality, some universities of smaller size are definitely not interested by all the databases.

Each member institution of the Consortium will have to sign an agreement that will determine the modes of cooperation with the BICfB. By means of this agreement, the institutions of higher education will give a mandate to the BICfB enabling it to negotiate in its behalf and for its account the conditions and modes of acquisition of subsidised databases with the dealers. Moreover, each member will commit itself to sign personally the purchase agreements with the dealers and to pay the corresponding invoices. As regards the BICfB, it will commit itself to reimburse the institutions afterwards.

Taking into account the public subsidies and the discounts granted by the database dealers to the consortium (ranging from 40% to 80%), the universities will then be able to acquire these resources at a lower price and set aside money for the purchase of other resources. In addition, the Consortium also negotiates (outside subsidies) the purchase of other electronic resources and can rely on grouped purchases to get discounts.

Acquisition of Electronic Journals

In order to avoid a progressive impoverishment of their scientific information resources, the libraries of the French-Speaking Community of Belgium have decided to cooperate and to form a consortium for the joint purchase of electronic journals and therefore benefit from the advantages the publishers concede to consortia.

Besides the subsidised purchase project of databases, the French-Speaking Consortium is currently negotiating with Elsevier for the acquisition of ScienceDirect. A three-year-contract should give access to hundreds of electronic journals published by Elsevier. Each university would have access to the electronic version of the subscriptions of all the universities that participate in the consortium. In the absence of a reliable solution to electronic archive, the university libraries would like to keep their paperback subscriptions. Furthermore, the possibility to exchange titles should increase the number of journals accessible through ScienceDirect and, in the long run, the BICfB's libraries should have access to all the journals published by Elsevier, according to relevance and electronic availability.

The current price policy imposed by the publishers leads to an imbalance between the larger institutions participating in the Consortium, as the access to ScienceDirect is calculated on the number of subscriptions to paper journals each university had in 2000 with Elsevier. Since the cancellation policies adopted by the various institutions were very different from one university to another, there are a lot of differences in the financial participation of universities of the same size for the same product. This situation has led the BICfB members to contemplate the setting-up of an internal balance mechanism.

The Consortium members have strongly expressed their willingness to allow access to these resources to all the universities of the Belgian French-Speaking Community. The commitment towards the consortium will be quite heavy for the small universities as their financial means are limited. During the negotiations with Elsevier, the BICfB's representatives did their best to protect the

interests of the small institutions. Although they are not interested in all the titles accessible to the Consortium, the creation of a consortium gives them the opportunity for a substantial increase of their scientific information resources thanks to the investments made by larger universities.

Future

One of the next Consortium stages will be the set up of a working group gathering computer managers of all the universities. Among other things, this working group would study ways to implement a joint management of scientific information resources with a view to allowing access 24 hours a day to the ERL networked databases to all the member institutions. After that, the BICfB will also examine the offers made by other publishers and will start negotiations for the purchase of electronic journals. Preliminary contacts have already been made with Academic Press, Blackwell Science & Munksgaard, Johns Hopkins University Press, American Chemical Society, MCB and Springer.

The creation of the consortium for the purchase of databases is the first strong sign of the willingness of its members for the implementation of a solidarity mechanism between universities, mainly towards small institutions. The first decisions of the BICfB were made unanimously and prepared with the co-operation of all members.

Currently, the BICfB members are eager to start the cooperation in order to prove that such a consortium is viable. It wants to prove that it can implement solidarity, equity and balance mechanisms between all the universities of the Belgian French-Speaking Community and that it can guarantee access to scientific information to its users. The BICfB will then be in a strong position to bargain for more funding and will submit subsidy requests to the Walloon Region and the Belgian French-Speaking Community.

Although it is not envisaged in a short-term, the extension to other institutions is not excluded in a later stage. Cooperation with the Royal Library and the university libraries of the Flemish-Speaking Community will be studied in the future. However, before opening to other partnerships, the BICfB must first go ahead, implement internal balance mechanisms and find its cruising speed.

PROBLEM AREAS IN BELGIUM

The main problem areas in consortium building for electronic information provision must be more or less the same in every country in Western-Europe. There are, however, two extra problems, typical for Belgium.

Typical Belgian Problems

The funding mechanisms related to the federal structure of the country at least for the time being make it rather difficult to create a truly Belgian consortium. Moreover the consortia in the North and the South of the country do not have the same composition. The polytechnics are on board in Flanders and not in French-speaking Belgium.

Overlap between Databases

Full text databases from various suppliers are often partially overlapping e.g. ABI/Inform, EBSCO Business Source Elite, EBSCO Academic Search Elite, Academic Press. This means paying twice or even more for the same information. It disturbs users in their search for information as the same information turns up in various databases.

Multiple Interfaces

ELEKTRON started in the demonstration phase with the probably naive idea of a single interface for the end user. The only thing remaining of that idea is a single Web page introducing the secondary databases and the full text databases. The next click brings the end user in a series of totally different environments. Some of the commercial start pages are so full of text, icons and publicity that the first time user of this new and expensive product might not find the path to the information actually available in the databases. Hence a requirement for libraries and academic departments to include database training in the regular or extended curriculum. One may hope that standardisation is going to solve this problem one day. This is doubtful, however, in a highly competitive area where the look and feel of a web page and database might influence the decision to subscribe a license agreement.

Baskets

There is hardly any opportunity for the selection of e-titles (once the main activities of every library). According to the rule „The winner takes it all“ a library has no other option than to take the basket with a series of relevant and a series of less or non relevant titles. It is requested that libraries can make a „personalised“ selection of relevant core periodicals. The others being made available on a pay-per-view basis. This alternative may not be hindered by far too excessive prices for selected e-titles and pay-per-view procurement of articles. Moreover universities and polytechnics have varying needs for bachelor courses, master degrees, doctoral programmes and academic staff. There really is no need to give a bachelor access to all STM journals. Given all these parameters to be taken care of, it might prove to be impossible to create a stable consortium for the future with enough overlapping interest.

The VAT-problem

The European Union levies a small VAT percentage on paper bound information (in Belgium 6%). As soon as the same information becomes electronic the VAT rises to a much higher percentage (in Belgium 21%). By going electronic a Belgian library loses all of a sudden an extra 15% of its acquisition power. The VAT problem of the combined subscriptions (paper and electronic) remains unsettled. It is time for Europe to harmonise the VAT rate. Since information is vital for the Information Society it is requested that the VAT rate should be the lowest possible.

Electronic Archives

Publishers start to pay attention to the problem of archiving full text databases. Some of them promise perpetual access on their servers. However, a private company is not very well suited to keep such promises. The supply of a set of CDs per year to the subscribing library is not a permanent solution either. Today's CDs will prove to be useless in less than 5 years time. Other cooperative solutions on the level of the European Union have to be found in order to guarantee perpetual access along the lines laid out by OCLC and the Dutch Royal Library^{21 22}.

Price Setting and Cost Allocation

Price setting has to be refined taking into account that even by campus wide access to medical journals only the biomedical departments will be the heavy and most probably the only users. A breakdown of costs per database by faculty is therefore required. This could be an effective and correct instrument for costs allocation in a consortium.

Missing Use Statistics

Usage statistics are often missing. When supplied, they often lack detail and are generally not very well documented. Where they exist they widely differ in content and meaning between the various suppliers. The European Union funded project EQUINOX (Library Performance Measurement and Quality Management System) has tried to come up with a standard set of statistics and performance indicators in digital libraries²⁵. Suppliers should implement these standards so that uniform statistics and performance indicators can be produced by the libraries in order to assess the cost-effectiveness of the acquisition for the local users community.

Impact upon Libraries

Universities having a decentralised library system have difficulties in establishing the budget for the more general databases e.g. *Web of Science* and *Current Contents*. Universities with a two-tier structure (central library and faculty or departmental libraries) find it difficult to reach agreement over the acquisition of these expensive databases and in cost allocation between the central unit and the decentralised units.

Market Concentration

Publishers such as Elsevier Science and Kluwer Academic Publishers offer all their titles under one licence in a basket. These licences have a runtime of several (mostly 3) years. Such a package deal is facilitated by reductions and milder price increases (journal crisis!). Libraries are forced to operate within inalterable, large and expensive contracts for several years. Price increases and shrinking library budgets might therefore lead to the cancellation of publications not (yet) in the basket of the large publishers. Smaller publishers,

learned societies that so far kept the prices mostly at an acceptable level, might become the first victims of this unwanted market concentration²⁴.

Sustainable Solutions for the Journal Crisis

E-journals combined with paper-based subscriptions are no solution to the periodical crisis especially in the STM departments. On the contrary universities and polytechnics once more are confronted with an extra price increase for the e-versions. New ways of sustainable scholarly publishing have to be found taking care of peer review and ranking journals or even better the articles themselves (cf. the Los Alamos pre-print archive²⁵ without peer review and ranking) and the SPARC initiatives²⁶. The LIBER Workshop on the Open Archives Initiative (OAI) and peer review journals in Europe organised by LIBER in March 2001 is to promote these ideas in Europe²⁷.

REFERENCES

- 1 M.B. Line: „Co-operation: the triumph of hope over experiences.“ In: Interlending & document supply, 25 (1997) 2, p. 64-72.
- 2 E. Yegin Chen: „Contenders for the crown: six e-libraries and their business model.“ Eduventures.com, Boston (MA), 2001.
- 3 CCB. Belgian union catalogue of books in the main research libraries. See <<http://www.libis.kuleuven.ac.be/ccb/>>.
- 4 Antilope. Belgian union catalogue of periodicals in research libraries. See <<http://lib.ua.ac.be/ANTILOPE/intro.html>>.
- 5 Impala. Belgian electronic document ordering system. See <<http://lib.ua.ac.be/IMPALA/>>.
- 6 J. Van Borm: „Not as fast as the antelope runs: cooperation between research libraries in Belgium.“ In: Bibliotheek- en archiefgids, 74 (1998), p. 96-104.
- 7 VOWB. Vlaams Overlegorgaan inzake Wetenschappelijk Bibliotheekwerk. See <<http://www.libis.kuleuven.ac.be/vowb>>.
- 8 H.M. Kvaerndrup: „DEF. Denmark's Electronic Research Library Project: a project changing, concepts, values and priorities.“ In: Exploit interactive, issue 4, January 2000. See <<http://www.exploit-lib.org/issue4/def/>>.

- 9 LDAP. See <<http://www.salford.ac.uk/its024/Version.Web/Contents.htm>>.
- 10 VLHORA. See <<http://www.vlhora.be/>>.
- 11 DELOS. See <<http://www.ercim.org/delos>>.
- 12 A.C. Klugkist: „LIBER licensing principals for electronic information.“ In: LIBER Quarterly, 9 (1999), p. 388-390.
- 13 ICOLC. International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC): statement of current perspective and preferred practices for the selection of electronic information. See <<http://www.library.yale.edu/consortia/statement.html>>.
- 14 CIUF. Inter-university Council of the Belgian French-Speaking Community which groups the nine universities and university faculties of the French-Speaking Community of Belgium and aims at favouring a dialogue between the various institutions. On these issues dealing with cooperation between institutions, it acts as an advisory body and suggests proposals. Its action relies on reports worked out by specialised Commissions and Working Groups in which participate the representatives of all the institutions involved (members of the scientific and teaching staff, administrative officers and students). See <<http://www.ciuf.be>>.
- 15 This Commission, which represents the French-speaking university libraries as regards national and international authorities, is also the relay with the „National Conference of Chief Librarians“ for the achievement and the pursuit of federal projects.
- 16 D. Meurs: „Les projets de consortium en Belgique pour l'achat de documentation électronique.“ In: Cahiers de la documentation / Bladen voor de documentatie, 2 (1999), p 66-71.
- 17 The Inter-university Library of the Belgian French-Speaking Community.
- 18 The Council of Rectors of the Belgian French-Speaking Community. See: <<http://www.cref.be>>.
- 19 The databases selected by the universities are: *Bibliographie de Belgique*, *CAD-CD*, *Current Contents*, *EconLit*, *Electre*, *Eric*, *Francis*, *Index Translationum*, *Inspec*, *JCR*, *Medline*, *MLA*, *Psycinfo* and *Scifinder* (only one not acquired yet).
- 20 The possibility to extend the consortium *Web of Science* of the UCL and FNRS to other universities of the Belgian French-Speaking Community is currently being studied.

- 21 OCLC. See <<http://www.oclc.org/>>.
- 22 Royal Library of the Netherlands. See <<http://www.kb.nl/index-en.html>>.
- 23 EQUINOX. See <<http://equinox.dcu.ie/>>.
- 24 G. Goris: „Over koppelverkoop, consortia en andere licentieproblemen.“ In: Informatie professioneel, 5 (2001), p. 21-23.
- 25 Los Alamos Pre-print Archive. See <<http://xxx.lanl.gov/>>.
- 26 SPARC. See <<http://www.arl.org/sparc/>>.
- 27 LIBER OAI Workshop. See <<http://documents.cern.ch/OAi/>>.