



67th IFLA Council and General Conference

August 16-25, 2001

Code Number: 161-165-E
Division Number: VII
Professional Group: Library Theory and Research
Joint Meeting with: -
Meeting Number: 165
Simultaneous Interpretation: -

Research on a national level and European co-operation: positive interaction

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Abstract:

Carried out within the framework of the Community policy as regards research and development, the European action of the Bibliothèque nationale de France privileges two directions: : the entry of Europe into the digital age and the strengthening of the potential of research and technological development. Being based on its spheres of expertise, BnF joins to other European partners to make share its tracks of research. On the other hand, for other projects which require a significant investment, research is launched from the start at the European level and profits then at the national level. The research led to these various levels has also strong interactions with international organisations and working groups. The concept of sharing acquired during these programs could be extended to other institutions in particular, to Archives and Museums.

Introduction

Many national libraries carry out research projects or would wish to carry out some. The question of the means acts often as a brake upon such initiatives. These projects generally relate to the Information Society, interest common to several institutions beyond even libraries. This is why a European co-operation has been set up, with backing from Community bodies for looking further into a research topic or for carrying out programmes which would be too onerous at a single national level.

After a description of the research context in Europe, a series of practical examples taken from the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) will illustrate how the national, European and even international levels overlap and interact.

1. The framework of research programmes

The European action of the BnF takes place with the support of the *Conference of European national libraries* (CENL) in the framework of the main Community policy action lines for the Information

Society. Within the CENL, the technical commission, COBRA+¹ (Computerized Bibliographic Record Actions), acts both as a platform for discussion and a launching pad for those European projects. Its main features are to facilitate access to and sharing of resources, by focussing on user needs and the use of communication networks. The two lines of research adopted by the BnF concern the entry of Europe into the digital age and the strengthening of European potential for research and technological development (RTD). This corresponds to the European Commission's *Fifth RTD Framework Programme* entitled "Creating a user-friendly information society".

Considering its mission, its spheres of expertise and the European policy which has just been described, the BnF has decided to participate in European research projects to tackle the following issues:

- defining and using metadata,
- developing access to catalogues,
- cataloguing and long-term preservation of electronic documents,
- interconnecting with other institutions
- and, focusing on multilingualism.

These projects involve more or less in-depth research. There are several types of interaction between European projects and those of the BnF. Research is either conducted within the national library and then leads to a European project or it is conducted on a European level with repercussions for the national library or on a national level. Nor should one forget the international level, which always underlies such projects.

2. Local research as an impetus for research on the European level

When the BnF decided to submit the AUTHOR² project to the European Commission it had already done a great deal of work in one of its spheres of expertise, *authority control*. It had in fact been conducted in-depth research for several years on the management of authority files in its departments. In addition, in the framework of the IFLA, it had also conducted a survey³ of other bibliographic agencies or national libraries managing authority files. The BnF thus started the project with the intention of *sharing* its research and goals with respect to authority files, with other European partners, the aim being to stimulate debate and discussion of the sharing and re-use of authority data. The AUTHOR project, which is intended mainly for professional librarians, has investigated the possibility of having access to the authority files of national library partners so as to be able to share the results of work done on national levels and re-use authority data. This project which enabled to develop a prototype to test the feasibility of this re-use, was based on specific competences to each partner.

The MACS⁴ project, while leaving a lot of the work to professionals, immediately focussed on end-users in order to provide them with multilingual subject access to the catalogues of the project's partner libraries. This enables users to simultaneously search with a single query in the language of their choice (English, French or German) for all relevant documents indexed by the project's partner libraries in their own language. For this project the research aspect was dealt with in the feasibility study⁵ financed by the European Commission. Once again, this project was largely based on the experience of each national library partner and in particular on the German and French national networks which manage their own subject authority files.

These two projects show how a national research project may lead an institution to get involved in research on the European level.

3. Spin-offs of European co-operation for participating countries

The NEDLIB⁶ project was based on one of the BnF's flagship missions, preservation with a new concern, *the long-term preservation of electronic documents*. At the time the proposal was submitted to the European Commission, national libraries were already aware of the problem of preserving off-line electronic documents and had anticipated the issue of having to preserve a huge amount of on-line documents, but they had done little research on that question. This is why the project's partners, both public (libraries, archives) and private (publishers and computer companies) immediately decided that

the *work should be carried out on a European level* as the task was too great for each country to handle alone. The following items were thus achieved jointly:

- a functional model for the Deposit System for Electronic Publications (DSEP),
- a preservation metadata model,
- a study and experiment concerning long-term preservation strategies,
- the development of tools such as a 'harvester' capable of retrieving selected Internet sites, which could possibly be re-used by the partners,
- and finally, guidelines and in particular the one⁷ describing the implementation and management of a system for preserving electronic documents.

NEDLIB had a strong impact, not only on the European level but also on the BnF and on national level. At the BnF working groups are studying the conditions for selective deposit of Web sites and will conduct an experiment on these lines. Co-operation with the Centre National d'Études Spatiales (CNES / the French Space Agency) has been extremely fruitful as CNES is very involved in the standardisation of long-term preservation of electronic documents. This co-operation with CNES has led to the setting up of a national work group called "Pérennisation des informations numériques" (Long-term preservation of electronic information)⁸. This group enables its participants, both public and private organisations, to share experience and to work together for international standardisation.

In 1997 the BnF decided to make *descriptions of Internet scientific and cultural resources* available to the public on its Web site. This application, called "Les Signets de la BnF" ("The BnF's bookmarks") was launched with great enthusiasm and led the BnF quite naturally to become, one of the partners of the RENARDUS⁹ project. The main benefit of the project include :

- improved access to scientific and cultural resources in Europe, through aggregation and improved consistency of collections, multi-lingual support and a common understanding of academic user needs,
- and scale economies in the area of metadata creation, abstracting and indexing by service providers.

The project enables to work together on the European level to define the functionalities of the prototype gateway and the metadata model for describing the Web resources. This research has caused the BnF to redefine its bookmarks application to bring it into coherence with the decisions taken for the RENARDUS gateway. The search made within the framework of this project could also profit the French sites which describe Internet resources and involve a true co-operation at the national level.

4. European research and its openings on the international level

The European Commission's policy is to support national libraries' Research and Development projects (see the 4th RTD Framework Programme 'Telematics for libraries'). It has since enlarged the scope of this policy in the 5th RTD Framework Programme by strongly encouraging libraries to work with Archives and Museums. Furthermore networks can now be used *to link research and cultural authorities internationally as well as nationally and on the European level*. Indeed, the reflexions led to the European level are confronted with the reflexions led to the international level and become richer by those. A large part of the NEDLIB project and the RENARDUS project, with respect to the metadata standard and common access to gateways leads their partners to participate in international discussions. NEDLIB now enables partners to take part in working groups, for instance the "OCLC/RLG Metadata preservation" group.

The partners of RENARDUS are now able to participate in discussions on metadata, in particular in the framework of Dublin Core. They are also able to announce the work done for mapping the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) to local classifications ; mapping which allows thus a common access to all partner gateways of the project.

Finally, the AUTHOR project which had a national origin, constantly had interactions at the international level mainly within the framework of the IFLA; for instance the study¹⁰ conducted in 1993 about international co-operation in the field of authority data, the work done within the framework of the MLAR working group (Minimum Level for Authority Records)¹¹ and the FRANAR group (Functional Requirements and Numbering of Authority records) set up in 1999.

Conclusion

The European Commission research and development programmes gives a good opportunity for undertaking research on a European level thus allowing the interconnecting of Europe's national libraries. The European funding certainly allow the impetus, the accomplishment or the support of projects of which some could not be able to born without this help but beyond that, these research programmes familiarize the libraries with the concept of sharing : *sharing of costs, sharing of work, sharing of efforts* and also *sharing of results*. For instance, the workshop UNIMARC¹² which took place in 1996, allowed the partners of the European projects concerned to announce their various experiment using the UNIMARC format. The TEL project¹³, which was accepted by the European Commission as a supporting measure in 2001, aims to a simultaneous and direct access by the user to all the resources and gives thus a perfect illustration since it is going to concretize the **common strategy** of large research libraries : to make available larger and more various information resources to the users. However, it should not be underestimated the fact that the coordination and the follow-up of the co-operation also involve an additional workload which is variously taken into account by the institutions.

This European co-operation could of course be taken further to share our projects and our experiments not only with libraries but also with other institutions, in particular, Archives and Museums, which is what the European Commission would like to see happening.

Notes and References

¹COBRA+ (Computerized Bibliographic Record Actions) aims to co-ordonnate cooperation actions, to promote new projects and support the sustainability and promotion of the results <http://www.kb.nl/gabriel/cobra/>

²AUTHOR (Towards a European network for name authority data), co-ordinated by BnF, aimed to investigate the feasibility for the transnational exchange of national name authority files for personal and corporate names. This project begun in March 1995 and finished at the end of 1997. www.bl.uk/information/author.pdf

³Management and Use of Name Authority Files. Personal Names, Corporate Bodies and Uniform Titles. Evaluation and Prospects by Marcelle Beaudiquez and Françoise Bourdon. - München : KG Saur, 1991. - (UBCIM Publications - News series, Vol. 5). (summaries in IFLA official languages included)

⁴MACS (Multilingual ACcess to Subjects) : The purpose of this project which follows the feasibility study carried out within the framework of the 4th RTD Framework Programme of the European Commission, is to develop a system for providing multilingual subject access for the end-user by mapping terms between existing subject heading languages (LCSH, RAMEAU and SWD/RSWK) Access to the prototype : <http://infolab.kub.nl/prj/macs/>

⁵CoBRA+ working group on multilingual subject access, Final report (1999) <http://portico.bl.uk/gabriel/cobra/finrap3.html>

⁶NEDLIB (For the installation, access and long term preservation of electronic documents) : This project aimed to develop basic tools for use by deposit libraries to ensure that electronic publications can be used now and in the future (1998-2000). <http://www.kb.nl/coop/nedlib/>

⁷The Nedlib Guidelines : Setting up a Deposit System for Electronic Publications / by Johan Steenbakkers. - Den Haag : Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 2000 - (NEDLIB Report series ; 5). - ISBN 90-62-59-1493 <http://www.kb.nl/coop/nedlib/results/NEDLIBguidelines.pdf>

⁸Groupe de travail national "Pérennisation des informations numériques" (Long-term preservation of electronic information) <http://sads.cnes.fr:8010/pin/welcome.html>

⁹RENARDUS (Academic Subject Gateway Service Europe) : The project's aim is to develop a pilot service offering improved subject-based routes to Internet-accessible collections of cultural and scientific resources across Europe. This project began in January 2000 and will finish in June 2002. www.renardus.org

¹⁰International Cooperation in the Field of Authority Data : An Analytical Study with Recommendations by Françoise Bourdon. - München : KG Saur, 1991. - (UBCIM Publications - News series, Vol. 11)

¹¹MLAR Final Report <http://www.ifla.org/VI/3/p1996-2/mlar.htm>

¹²UNIMARC Workshop : proceedings of the workshop held in Luxembourg on 13 September 1996. - Luxembourg : European Commission, Directorate General XIII, 1996.

¹³TEL (The European Library) <http://www.europeanlibrary.org/>

For more information about the European programmes and the National Libraries in Europe

CORDIS : Community Research and Development Information Service

<http://www.kb.nl/gabriel/fr/welcome.html> (en français), <http://www.cordis.lu/en/home.html> (in English)

GABRIEL : gateway to Europe's National Libraries <http://www.kb.nl/gabriel/fr/welcome.html> (en français),
<http://www.kb.nl/gabriel/> (in English)