

BICTEL/e : a multi-institutional repository project in French-speaking Belgium

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The BICTEL/e project has been launched in the beginning of this year by the Bibliothèque interuniversitaire de la Communauté française de Belgique a.s.b.l., an association jointly funded by the Communauté française de Belgique and the French-speaking Belgian universities. The mission of the Bibliothèque interuniversitaire, created on behalf of the Conference of university rectors (CReF), is “to stimulate the collaboration between the 9 French-speaking universities in Belgium, especially as regarding the common acquisitions of electronic resources but also the development or adoption of common tools”.

The first achievements of the BICfB were the joint acquisitions of bibliographic databases, followed by negotiations with Elsevier, which ended up in a 3 years contract for the complete ScienceDirect journals database. Further deals are planned.

From the start on, the Bibliothèque interuniversitaire was aware that, looked at it in an isolated way, such deals are interesting, but that on a more general level they contribute to consolidate the present situation in furthering the concentration of market parts in the hand of some major publisher, the market being as inelastic as are the library budgets. So the position of the university chief librarians forming the executive committee of the BICFB was clear : aside of those more or less “Big deals” we had to support alternative solutions to respect the library’s mission, which is to warrant and facilitate access to information. So a non-unsubstantial part of the financial resources of the Association was kept for an open archive project.

The aim of the project is to set up the technical and administrative infrastructure to receive freely accessible electronic scholarly publications produced in the 9 universities in French-speaking Belgium. BICTEL/e will act at the same time as a data provider and as a service provider.

On data provider level, a separation is made between electronic theses and dissertations and e—prints : for both of them each institution will have at its disposal a separate database, together 18 databases, distributed over 3 servers. For the electronic theses and dissertations, the etd software developed by Virginia Tech has been chosen, topped with an OAI layer. This allows at the same time to be harvested by OAI service providers and to be present in the international union catalogue of the Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (NDLTD). The e-print archives, using the EPrints software from the University of Southampton, will collect all other kinds of electronic scholarly publications, such as working papers, pre-prints, re-prints, conference papers etc., to build up a huge academic repository. The two types of repositories will be author self-archiving, but while for theses and dissertations submission, the author will have to go through a formal approval process, for the e-print archive there will only be a check on the authors belonging to the institution. The possible need for further-going authentication (timestamps, digital watermarks, and so on) is still under discussion. Using the two different systems allows also a better approach of the specificities of electronic thesis and dissertations, as

- a need for classification by department or research units
- a need to identify dissertation directors and jury members
- the possible confidentiality of documents (with the need to limit access to the whole or to parts of it)

As service provider, BICTEL/e will provide a unique access point through a harvester enabling end-users to search the system globally, by type or by institution, and so create a geographically based archive of scholarly production in French-speaking Belgium. Contacts with Flemish colleagues let hope that a similar structure could be build up likewise for the Flemish-speaking universities, with possibly another harvester on top, allowing also a view on federal level. The repositories could of course also be harvested by subject based services or by the future virtual Belgian union catalogue (project UNICAT), also based on OAI.

As said, the project limits itself to the technical and administrative infrastructure. It will however be successful and able to play its modest role in the joint effort for building up an alternative model for scholarly communication only if all the stakeholders will be aware of the stakes and participate. : It needs content ! So the libraries role can't stop here : it's up to us to promote this kind of model through active lobbying.

This should be done in different ways, depending of the type of documents :

Theses and dissertations are a special type of documents. They are often never published and stay confidential although we have to do with original and valuable studies. When published, it's often with huge delays ; so the interest to publish electronically and make the works better distributed and better known is easy to be realised by the authors but also by the institutions who see the visibility of their scientific output hugely increased. There is however a need for formal validation and administrative procedures which have to be put in place together with the university administration.

Lobbying for e-prints is more difficult : authors are afraid of problems with their publishers (Marie Christine will give some answers to those fears) and see a thread for their scientific career. Others have already their traditions, posting their papers on pre-print servers of their scientific community, or on a departmental web sites.

.It's clear that, contrarily to thesis and dissertations, there could be here no obligation for deposit, but that we will have to convince : here some ideas how we'll try to do this.

- The first thing to do is to show that it works and that it's used => if it's used, it's useful to the author who wants to be read. There are statistics available that show that articles freely available online are more highly cited
- We will then start with groups of people that already manifested interest : as for example research centres that work already with working or discussion papers and so on,

- convince people that there is no exclusivity, and that double posting enhances the visibility, surely if it's done in a standardised and interoperable way
- help authors in negotiating with publishers : a lot, if not the majority of publishers allows postings to institutional archives
- talk directly to those people who give already open access to their papers : a simple search for UCL in a research index like CiteSeer allows to identify more than 600 papers already freely available on one or another site.

As time is very limited, I will stop here. For more information you can visit our prototype, (still with a very limited number of documents), or contact Florence Dardenne for all technical questions. Thanks to the organisers for the opportunity to present our project and thank you for your attention.