

PROJECT BIBLIOSAN: THE NEW ITALIAN NETWORK OF BIOMEDICAL LIBRARIES

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INTRODUCTION

BIBLIOSAN is a project for a term of two years, funding by the Italian Ministry of Health and whose aim is to carry out a cooperative and operative network amongst libraries and documentation centers of the Italian Biomedical Research Institutes. The first boost to the project was given in the early 2003 by the Minister of Health at the time, Mr. Girolamo Sirchia, who pointed out the need to rapidly achieve the end of an integration and rationalization of information resources owned by the whole scientific Institutes that operate under the umbrella of the Ministry. The aim was both to increase through the cooperation the access to the scientific information and to guarantee in the meantime economies of scale removing useless resources duplication.

A working group was established with the task to analyze existing situation and to prepare in a short time an executive project. The job was going quickly and in December of 2003 the project was approved and became effective with a first funding for a two years period.

GOALS

An operating plan was arranged by the working group consisting of 8 partners picked out of different types of involved Institutes. The plan provided some main goals to realize within the two years:

1. The first of those was the sharing of available resources with regard to scientific journals owned by all partners through the set up of a collective catalogue accessible via web and of an efficient document exchange and delivery system
2. A second basic aim was to reach the rationalization of acquisitions of all involved partners, so that to obtain a conspicuous cut in journals subscriptions and consequently of total expenditure for this item
3. Linked with this was the following goal, that is to pursue a strong increase in purchasing electronic journals through the establishment of a consortium (or the adhesion to an already existing) in order to achieve a widespread dissemination of scientific information
4. Last but not least the expansion of network through the involvement of other health institutions, such as local health units, hospitals, etc.

THE FIRST PHASE

In January 2004 the project was showed to the Minister and the following month the rules signed by all the concerned parties.

46 partners as a whole were involved in (5 more added in May 2005):

- 32 (+5) Scientific Institutes for Care and Research
- 10 Experimental Zooprophyllactic Institutes
- The National Health Institute
- The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Prevention
- The Agency for Regional Health Services
- The Ministry of Health

The data collecting activity of journals owned in paper format started immediately together with a census of all libraries. In order to speed up the realization of the catalogue and the running of document delivery system it was established to use softwares of two already existing systems, ACNP and NILDE. The first is the National Serials Catalogue located on a server of University of Bologna while NILDE (Network Inter Library Document Exchange) is a software used by a network of more than 400 libraries of all types exactly studied for managing document supply activity. These choices let to make lightning progress and to rapidly achieve the first goal of the project. The harvesting of serials titles was completed within April and the system officially started the 3rd of May of 2004. In the meantime an intensive activity of training on use of the two products was carried out with the participation of librarians of all involved partners. Two learning courses were held in March and July and printed handbooks distributed to all users.

Some data about features and collections of participants now:

- 57 libraries involved (some Institutes have more than one seat, each of them with its own library)
- 350,000 total amount of monographs
- 11,300 total amount of journals subscriptions
- 250 working stations in libraries and 13,000 pc network connected
- 170 units of personnel

The catalogue

Data originated from the partners were collected and standardized by Zooprophyllactic Institute of Lombardy before their inclusion in the ACNP Catalogue. A dedicated interface was created inside this catalogue with the aim to make selective queries only on collective BIBLIOSAN Catalogue. Only current titles were processed in a first time, starting from October 2004 data settling was completed with also the ceased and now the catalogue is complete. Periodical updates are scheduled.

The Document Delivery

The rules of BIBLIOSAN provides that the document delivery service should be supply for free. All partners must committed themselves to interchange documents with each other without fee. The use of NILDE has allowed to immediately start the service. Moreover it must be add the possibility for the librarian to have at his disposal a wide range of functions such as: standardized treatment of requests sending, receipt and clearing; measurability of performance indicators for library and

period; automatic statistics on all data concerning service supply. During the first year of running (May 2004-May 2005) more than 20,000 journals articles have been exchanged amongst all BIBLIOSAN partners with a percentage of 84% of satisfied requests and an average of 1.6 days for request handling.

The web site

A dedicated web site (www.bibliosan.it) is activated since June 2005 (only in the Italian version at the moment) in which users can find together with practical information on the project also the access to all functions above mentioned, such as catalogue queries and the document delivery service.

THE SECOND PHASE

In the early 2005 the project entered his second operational phase, with the goals to reach a strong reduction of paper journals subscriptions and to find the better way for carrying out a coordinate acquisition policy for the e-journals.

Reduction of paper acquisitions

The catalogue pointed out many duplications of journals titles, that means the same journals are buying by several partners. Only 1,800 journals on a total of 11,300 are subscribed by only one library. So there is a wide margin to reduce the number of paper copies in favour of a massive access to electronic format journals. The total expenditure in 2003 for this item was about 8 millions euro and it's easy to understand that a large part of this amount could be better used for the acquisition of electronic resources. A first important step on this subject was the agreement signed in January 2005 with the EBSCO Company for the access to the Biomedical Reference Collection TM Comprehensive Edition, a package of more than 900 online titles specifically targeted on biomedical libraries. This agreement represent an important test bench both to evaluate the functioning of the network and the use level of e-journals. Nevertheless there are two negative factors to consider: the first is the Italian VAT on electronic products in the extent of 20% (vs. only 4% for paper) that strongly disadvantages acquisitions and the second one is the policy of several publishers that strictly link electronic and paper subscriptions forbidding cuts in paper collections.

The consortium

There is no doubt that the consortium is the single way to manage a coordinate acquisition policy for one composed structure gives beyond 50 partners. This choice finds its heads of force in many factors: better conditions of purchases, centralized management of the negotiations with publishers, subscription of uniform and safeguarding contracts. From the analysis of the internal working group is come out that the establishment of a new consortium entails great efforts both on side of its organization as well as of its management. While the solution to join an already existing consortium it seems easier to realize. For this reason contacts have been started with CILEA and

CASPUR the two most important Italian Academic consortia in order to evaluate the possibility to enter the services also creating a dedicated BIBLIOSAN interface. Answers of the two consortia have been very positive and negotiations are under way at the moment.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

The good results obtained up to now must be the foundations for the implementation of new functions and the growth of existing services. The first compulsory objective to reach is to turn BIBLIOSAN from a project into a permanent structure with a consolidated budget, steady funding and operational autonomy.

Four ranges could well describe the future of BIBLIOSAN:

1. Acquisition of resources, that means more e-journals and more biomedical databases
2. Sharing of resources, i.e. to make purchased resources available for all partners involved
3. Production of resources, that is to implement new resources and products not only at librarian and physicians disposal but also for patients and ordinary people
4. Distribution of resources, i.e. to increase and improve dissemination of scientific information to the widest range of users (physicians, nurses, patients, etc.)

BIBLIOSAN network must become the most important tool in order to make, organize and spread scientific information coming out of national biomedical research institutes. The establishment of an open archive containing the results of Italian researchers works and studies or the acquisition and realization of databases specifically addressed towards satisfaction of patients needs could be the next fields of interest.

We strongly hope that, beyond the project, the Italian Ministry of Health will continue in supporting our efforts to realize and develop the national network of biomedical libraries.