

COBISS.AL in the COBISS.Net network

1. What is COBISS.AL?

COBISS.AL, designed in 2012, represents a co-operative bibliographic system for the evaluation of research results in Albania. Within the regional COBISS.Net network, it may also serve as the foundation for the future library information system in Albania provided that all major Albanian libraries choose to adopt the system as their own library information system.

Until the national COBISS centre (NCC) is established in Tirana, all activities regarding the development and operation of the COBISS.AL system will be coordinated by the Albanian COBISS service, organized by IZUM – UNESCO Regional centre for library information systems and research information systems (Slovenia) in cooperation with the Albanian Academy of Sciences.

2. What is shared cataloguing?

For the purpose of COBISS.Net, shared cataloguing is cooperative processing of library material (books, serials, articles, non-book material, etc.) in which cataloguers from different libraries actively participate and exchange their bibliographic records. Each bibliographic unit is originally catalogued only once by one of the participating libraries; after that, cataloguers from other libraries can download such a record, free of charge, to their local databases and national bibliographic systems. This leads to significant savings in human resources and helps streamline costs not only at the level of individual libraries, but also at the level of each system within COBISS.Net.

3. What is the COBISS shared database and what is the purpose of libraries' local databases?

The COBISS shared bibliographic database is being built up through the shared cataloguing process in the bibliographic system of each participating country or its constituent parts. It represents a union catalogue where the material of participating libraries can be found. Connected to the E-CRIS research information system, the COBISS shared database is also used to monitor research results in the form of personal bibliographies of researchers.

The shared bibliographic/catalogue database COBISS.AL was initially established in December 2012 by downloading and merging bibliographic records from the local catalogue of the Academy of Sciences of Albania, from other shared databases within the COBISS.Net network (COBISS.MK, COBISS.SR, COBISS.SI, COBISS.CG, COBISS.BH and COBISS.BG), from WorldCat – OCLC's global catalogue, from the ISSN Register, and from Web of Science (altogether 68,743 bibliographic records – mainly for works in the Albanian language and works by the Albanian researchers in foreign languages). The database is being built up by Albanian libraries participating in the COBISS.AL system, which, until 31 December 2015, contributed 20,780 bibliographic records (either originally created or downloaded from other databases).

Through the shared cataloguing process, each library builds, in addition to the shared bibliographic database, its own local bibliographic database, i.e. local catalogue, on which the automation of local library work processes (e.g. acquisition and accessioning of library material, loan, etc.) is based.

4. What is expected of a library that participates in the shared cataloguing system?

Bibliographic records created in shared cataloguing are designed for different uses. Any errors in bibliographic records may critically impact the applicability of such records and the functioning of a number of applications; and downloading poor quality records would only worsen the problems.

Libraries and cataloguers involved in shared cataloguing should be aware of the effects that their work has on the functioning of other libraries and cataloguers. When creating records, they must strictly observe the cataloguing rules and the rules based on the COMARC formats in order to achieve both the quality criteria of individual bibliographic records and also the quality of the local databases of libraries and the COBIB shared database. This is possible only if the cataloguers are appropriately trained. First and foremost, libraries are responsible for the quality of bibliographic records, and they should monitor the work of their cataloguers.

5. What qualifications are required to become a cataloguer?

Cataloguers who actively participate in the process of shared cataloguing and who create original bibliographic records must have a university degree in library and information science or a university degree in any other area but must pass a professional librarianship exam.

However, a university degree is not a prerequisite for cataloguers who only download bibliographic records from the shared database to a local database.

6. What qualifications are required for shared cataloguing in COBISS.AL?

During the training for shared cataloguing, a librarian will be acquainted with cataloguing rules and COMARC formats for computer-aided exchange of data that are based on international standards; also, a librarian will be acquainted with the functionalities of the COBISS3/Cataloguing software module. This will be followed by training in the shared cataloguing test environment, the creation and subsequent verification of test records, and by taking exams in cataloguing different types of library material. The training will be provided in two parts: first, for cataloguing monographs – books (16 days), and then for authority control and other types of material – continuing resources, component parts and non-book material (x number of days).

Shared cataloguing qualifications are not permanent and must be maintained through practical work, or a cataloguer's permits and privileges for shared cataloguing obtained through the training might cease to be valid.

For librarians who only download records to a local database from the shared database, the aforementioned training is not required. Such librarians, however, must attend the course Use of COBISS3/Holdings software – monographs and serials (3 days).

7. How many cataloguers in a library should be trained for original cataloguing?

Considering it takes twenty to sixty minutes (depending on the type of material; for archival material, it takes longer) to create an original bibliographic record, one cataloguer could create on average 2,500 bibliographic records per year.

In libraries where several librarians are employed, a reasonable number of librarians should be trained for original cataloguing. Cataloguing is a highly demanding work; thus, cataloguers should be appropriately trained and constantly upgrade their knowledge by practical work. Within three years, a cataloguer must create at least one hundred new bibliographic records in the COBIB.AL shared database (including downloaded and updated records from the COBISS.Net network and other foreign databases), or the cataloguer's permits for shared cataloguing shall cease to be valid.

8. What are the conditions for libraries to join the COBISS.AL system?

Any library that is interested and employs librarians with the required formal education and previous knowledge on librarianship may join the system.

Until now, libraries only had to sign a statement that they accept general terms of cooperation and a free exchange of bibliographic records within the COBISS.Net network, as specified in the COBISS Platform document, and that they will enable their cataloguers to attend the requisite training where perfect attendance is desirable. Once the national COBISS centre in Tirana is established, all libraries will have to sign the full partnership agreement within the COBISS.AL system with the NCC.

Librarians (training participants) must commit in advance to perform the cataloguing in the COBIB.AL shared database after the training is completed and to create at least 1,250.00 new bibliographic records (half of what is required per year). The only exception may be libraries where only one person is employed.

9. What financial commitments may libraries expect once the NCC is established?

As a rule, IZUM cooperates with libraries outside Slovenia through the national COBISS centres (NCCs) in the national libraries of the participating countries.

The national COBISS centre pays to IZUM:

- EUR 1,000.00 for every software installation and implementation in a new library, when the library joins the national system;
- EUR 25.00 per month per concurrent user for licence (right of use and maintenance of the COBISS software and user manuals).

The use of COBISS/OPAC and Bibliographies applications is free of charge.

An individual library pays to the national COBISS centre:

- annual membership fee, including software licence fee and operational costs of the NCC, if the NCC does not acquire funds for this purpose from other resources (ministries);
- training services, if the NCC does not acquire funds for this purpose from other sources.

10. What development assistance have libraries obtained within the COBISS.Net project so far?

- Until now, libraries that joined the COBISS.AL system were exempt from paying EUR 1,000.00 for COBISS software installation and implementation, and EUR 25.00 per month per concurrent user for licence (right of use and maintenance of the COBISS software and user manuals). Also, funding for purchasing personal computers and barcode printers was provided.
- Until now, the training for cataloguers was free of charge (financed by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and IZUM).
- Libraries that, in 2013, created more than one hundred new bibliographic records received a subsidy in the amount of EUR 3.00 per each new record in COBIB.AL. Libraries, where each cataloguer created more than two hundred and fifty new bibliographic records in 2014 and/or 2015 will receive a subsidy for 50% of the created records.

IZUM will further endeavour to acquire funding for development assistance to libraries in the COBISS.Net network from various sources (the Government of the Republic of Slovenia, European Commission, etc.). The success of these endeavours will depend also on the expected cooperation with the relevant ministries and agencies of the Government of the Republic of Albania in coordinating project activities.