Report

of an expert on the database „Lituanistika"

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Foundation

Introduction

This section summarises the Lituanistika project as understood by the expert.

Aims

The database Lituanistika was created in 2006 to address two main sets of issues:

1. A tension between the striving for improving quality of research in Lithuania and the need to support social sciences and humanities (later SSH) research in Lithuanian language and published in Lithuanian journals and publishing houses; the increasing use of bibliometric, quantitative tools in evaluation of research in Lithuania, perceived as not appropriate for SSH, sharpened the problem

2. A need to promote globally scholarly work on Lithuanian history, culture, language etc. in the world as a part of European and global knowledge. This work is mainly done by researchers based in Lithuania in Lithuanian language.

The project serves also other purposes going beyond the direct aims of creating a database:

3. Spreading standards of scholarly writing and publishing among SSH researchers in Lithuania

4. Improving the use of IT tools in research among SSH researchers in Lithuania

5. Developing better evaluation methodologies and process for SSH research.

Current status

The project has been implemented in three phases: 2006 – 2008, 2009 – 2010 and 2011 – 2014. During this time the following steps have been made:

- IT tools have been developed

- Evaluation criteria and processes have been established

- The database collected a large number of publications (going back to year 2000 and for some types of work even back to 1991) in two collections: accepted in Lituanistika and not accepted

- Educational events have taken place

- Additional, new services have been developed: a portal, a citations module and a database of Lithuanian researchers working on themes covered by the Lituanistika DB.

Plans for the next stage:

1. To decrease the number of peer- reviewed publications

2. To make the evaluations public

3. To look for other ways of rating publications

Expert evaluation

The expert has been requested to evaluate the progress of the project including among others the overall philosophy of preparation and usage of the database, its structure and functionalities, and possibilities of its integration into a wider network of international databases for SSH research.

The specificity of the project in comparison to other similar DBs is that, although it includes a large number of SSH disciplines at the same time it focuses only on a selection of research themes in these disciplines referring to Lithuania – its history, culture language as well as its social and economic problems. On the other hand the database is open to publications from all over the world. The fact that it is an interdisciplinary and international database with a very sharply defined focus defines in a certain way its possible uses.

The project has made immense progress toward achieving its aims:

- A mechanism to submit publications for inclusion has been set up and is operational. The large number of collected publications proves that the mechanism works.

- Criteria and procedures for evaluation of publications have been developed and implemented. They seem to be accepted both by the research community and by the authorities (e.g. the Ministry, the Research Council).

- The database includes a large number of publications divided into two sets (1) publications certified for their scholarly quality – Lituanistika DB; (2) publications assessed as not fulfilling criteria for scholarly publications.

- A portal providing easy access to all scholarly works collected in the database is operational and English summaries of publications in Lithuanian are being prepared. This means that the access to a large body of scholarly works published on Lithuanian topics in Lithuania and to some extend abroad has been provided.

- Additional, new services have been developed: the citations module and the database of Lithuanian researchers.

- The quality of SSH publications must have improved if it has been decided to approve the inclusion of selected types of research dissertations and publications on the basis of a regulatory/administrative evaluation.

This is important and well done work. The up-to-date outcomes of the project already contribute to the achievement of its overall aims.

However before deciding about the next phase of the project more information is needed on how the individual functionalities of the Lituanistika DB contribute to the achievement of specific goals of the project. Probably some of the information mentioned below has been at least partly collected but it was not discussed in the meeting. It should be collected and interpreted in the context of the wider aims of the project as well as of the plans for the future developments.

It is recommended that the following issues are studied:

<u>The promotion of scholarly work on Lithuanian history, culture, language etc.</u>

It is necessary to study the use of the Lituanistika DB by foreign researchers. Has the database improved access of foreign researchers to Lithuanian research; is this research better known (for example more cited)? Has the study of Lithuania in the world increased?

<u>The use of the database Lituanistika in Lithuania</u>

Who and to what purposes uses the database? What functions are mostly used and by whom? This is key information for assessing if the aims of the project have been achieved and for planning the next steps.

<u>The influence of Lituanistika project on the development of evaluation procedures in the research community in Lithuania</u>

Has the database influenced the way SSH research is evaluated in Lithuania? Is it used for evaluating achievements of institutions or individuals? Has the evaluation of SSH research moved into the direction of more qualitative methods?

It is important in this context to explain the role of the citations module. The module can be of course used by researchers as an additional source of bibliographic and scientific information. But two other potential uses of the module were mentioned as well: 'for descriptive and evaluative bibliometrics' and 'for ranking lists'. Would the use of the module for those purposes be in line with the initial aims of the Lituanistika project that is to move in the evaluation of SSH in the direction of qualitative assessment?

<u>Spreading standards of scholarly writing and publishing among SSH researchers in Lithuania</u>

Educational activities aimed at improving the quality of SSH scholarly production are very important for the future development of SSH research in Lithuania. They are not the mainstream of the project but they should have important impact on the academic community. This impact is of course not easy to assess but an attempt to do it should be undertaken as this information is very important for further development of the project.

<u>Improving use of IT tools in research among SSH researchers in Lithuania</u>

It would be useful to know if the use of IT tools among SSH researchers has increased and if the Lituanistika DB has had an impact on this.

Recommendations

1. The focus of the Lituanistika DB on international research on Lithuania covering a number of SSH disciplines and a large geographical area is very interesting and to my knowledge rather unusual. It is an interesting experiment and should be continued.

2. The general concept and the main functionalities of the database respond well to the aims of the project. It is therefore commendable to continue the work. At the same time it is recommended to study issues listed above in order to ensure that the next phase of the project is well-grounded and responds to the needs and expectation of the SSH research community in Lithuania and to the interests of research in general.

3. It is recommended to develop a structured collaboration with a network of foreign centres of Baltic studies. This collaboration could include collecting systematically information on new relevant publications outside Lithuania and disseminating information on the Lituanistika DB across the world. The centres could also play an advisory role to better connect Lituanistika internationally. This collaboration will enable full coverage of the relevant works published outside Lithuania and would contribute to increasing the importance of Lithuania-related topics in research world-wide. It will also facilitate linking the Lituanistika DB to foreign and international DBs in the field.

4. The role of the Lituanistika project and the database in the development of evaluation policies and practices in Lithuania should be reflected upon. It is my understanding that the project aims at contributing to developing methodologies and criteria which are more quality- based and therefore correspond better to the characteristics of SSH research. This can be achieved by continuing peer-review based evaluation of quality which promotes certain standards in the research community.

5. However using the database directly in evaluation processes should be carefully considered because of its specificity in comparison to other similar DBs. The Lituanistika DB covers only publications on a selection of research themes relating to Lithuania but on the other hands is open to publications from different countries. Using it for evaluation is not straightforward as the production of one institution or individual may be only partly covered to mention only the main limitation. From this point of view it is recommended to reflect on the use of the citations module in the context of evaluation.

6. It is also strongly recommended to discuss possible consequences, positive and negative, of ranking publications included in the Lituanistika database. Most importantly the aim of this step should be well defined and it should be discussed how far is this aim in line with the overall aims of the project.

7. The reflection is also recommended on what would be the added value of publishing evaluations. Currently the evaluation criteria, methodology and process are known to the research community. Also it is known which publications underwent the evaluation and what is its outcome (which are included in Lituanistika and which are not). There is sufficient transparency in the process to develop trust and justify decisions. Theoretically publishing the evaluations could help authors to improve their work in the future. However for this to happen would require very through control of contents and phrasing of each evaluation to ensure clarity, exactness, fairness etc. If this is not achieved publishing individual evaluations may cause more damage than help the authors.

8. If the studies prove the usefulness of educational modules training SSH researchers in writing scholarly publications it could be considered to include them in the regular curricula of SSH studies at Lithuanian universities.