

Review of the Database of Lithuanian Studies (DLS)

Theo van Leeuwen, CWTS, Leiden University, the Netherlands

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Let me start by saying that I was very much impressed by the work you have done on the database so far, and the presentation of the database concepts & design, the structure, and its' functioning were very clear.

As I am not a scholar in the field of Lithuanian Studies, and also do not speak that language, it is perhaps best to discuss the whereabouts of the database by the various presentations given on the DLS, but before getting into that, I would like to raise an issue that struck me then, and later, after re-reading my notes of the workshop.

What struck me most of the DLS, and the presentations given on it, was the DLS had several 'faces'. On the one hand, it seems a bibliographic system, on the other hand, it looks like some sort of bibliometric system. Is it a repository, or is it an evaluation tool? And I was struck by more of this apparent contradictory functions of the system, intentionally stating now 'apparent contradictory' as the different functions shown to us can have opposite effects, require other types of information or policies. In one sentence summarized, my impression was and is that one needs to make choices where to go with this system, as now it is quite confusing what functions it has, and not all functions ascribed to it right now coincide well with other elements integrated in the system. You are at cross-roads now, and it important to determine what direction to take from here.

Having said that, let me say that the presentation on the technical installment seemed to be influenced by what I described above. The moment the requirements of the contents and functioning of such a system change, this will create all kind of technical challenges for the design of the technical operation of the system, and as such, we could notice that several steps have resulted in various changes in the technical embedding of the system. Furthermore, I am not really an expert on the technical features, so I will not go into too much details here, as that would not contribute much.

Let me continue by giving a list of the various elements that seemed to me as somewhat contradictory, and come to conclusions later:

Originally, the DLS was constructed out of a wish to conserve Lithuanian culture, and as such it seems to have the function of a repository. Publications included were in Lithuanian language, the system was disclosed in two languages. However, the focus on

Lithuanian language makes it difficult for international peers to connect to the system (for both scholarly outreach and help with the system), only people speaking and reading Lithuanian are able to connect to the contents of the system. This might lead to serious underestimation of scholarly activity in Lithuanian studies (see for example a recent published article in *Bibliometrie-Forschung & Praxis* on the effects of such language issue for assessments of particularly SSH research).

A second issue which seems to be somewhat contradictory is the element of peer review as such. Peer review can only be performed by people able to speak, read and write Lithuanian. Peer review is of course an international business, particularly since the effect of the above (only Lithuanian speakers can review) creates a certain bias and subjectivity in the review, due to the small scale of the language area.

A third issue which seems to be somewhat contradictory is the element of peer review in the case of DLS. Initially, peer review was not obligatory (in the repository phase ?), later on it became obligatory. This now starts to look more and more like reviews of the complete oeuvre of the scholars involved. And as stated above, if this is combined with public availability of these reviews, this will be problematic for researchers in the SSH domains. Particularly since the system mainly focuses on written codified scientific communication, thereby excluding much of the scholarly output of SSH and Law scholars.

A fourth element that seems to be somewhat problematic is the tension between creating a bibliographic or a bibliometric data system. As a bibliographic system, it has surely a strong right to exist, when making the transition towards a more metrics oriented system, some issues need to be mentioned here: 1) as stated above, many types of output might be missed, so what level of accuracy does the system give when assessing scholarly activity (think about the richness in scholarly outputs I showed at the Vilnius event for the SSH and Law units in the university I studied), so the coverage in output terms is already a first problem; 2) the citations are collected within the universe of the DLS itself, remember this is a relatively small citation universe, which cannot lead to any conclusions on international visibility when it comes to scientific impact measurement; 3) within the DLS, various scholarly activities are present. Among these, varieties in citation cultures will exist, similarly as we observe these when comparing physics and philosophy in the Web of Science, for example. Therefore, normalization of citation impact is relevant and necessary.

Conclusion: for metrics applications it is too early, better focus on descriptive metrics (e.g., the maps and network techniques based on citation data, focus on structure rather than 'research quality') rather than evaluative metrics, notwithstanding any outside pressure to create such an assessment tool. As probably/possibly not all publications of scholars active in Lithuanian studies are covered, usage of this system for evaluation purposes will be crippled anyway. As stated above, it is now a moment to make choices, and given all the constraints

that are there, and the increasing pressure on research assessments, also for scholars in the SSH and Law domains, it would be best if this system would not be made available for such purposes, simply because it is highly likely not well enough equipped for that purpose. That is mainly due to choices made in the past.

My impression is that the people working on the system are properly skilled, and highly dedicated. However, these people have to deal with a system that has grown over time into a certain direction, and the sidesteps taken, due to decisions and/or policies I do not know, do not always easily relate to current chosen directions for developments.

References:

Van Leeuwen, T, "Bibliometric research evaluations, Web of Science and the Social Sciences and Humanities: a problematic relationship?", Bibliometrie-Forschung & Praxis, (http://www.bibliometrie-pf.de/article/view/173)