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CADIST Astronomie: Acquisition and Distribution of Scientific and Technical Information in Astronomy in France

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Abstract. The CADIST system was initiated in 1980 by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research of France. The objectives were twofold: to rationalize acquisitions over all academic libraries and to lower costs. It dispatches thirty significant subjects over all twenty key libraries. Paris Observatory library was chosen as a "bibliothèque-support" for astronomy and astrophysics. Its mission was to cover academic literature on the subject as exhaustively as possible, and to diffuse this literature through an interlibrary loan system. We describe the implementation of the system, its difficulties, the influence of new computerized means on its organization, and the future prospects. In spite of its being old the CADIST system keeps pace with new technologies and is still efficient.

1. Introduction

In which structure do acquisition and dissemination of astronomical information take place in France? Is it peculiar to this subject or does it merge into the same system as exact sciences and humanities?

We have to satisfy queries in astronomy issued from enlightened amateurs as well as researchers or students from universities.

In order to answer in the most exhaustive way at a reasonable cost this large variety of demands, an appropriate system had to be designed: the CADIST system (Centre d'acquisition et de diffusion de l'information scientifique et technique).

2. The CADIST principle

In 1980, the Library Direction, under instructions from the Ministry of Higher Education, decided to reduce redundant acquisitions among French university libraries. Twenty "bibliothèques-support" (library-holders) were in charge of covering nearly thirty subjects. Each selected library was already well-furnished and specialized in a domain. Their mission was not only to acquire publications as completely as possible, but also to disseminate them outside their institution.

In counterpart those libraries were subsidized by the state. In that way Paris Observatory Library became CADIST library in astronomy and astrophysics. The type of acquisitions should be of an academic level and exclude related sciences such as physics and mathematics.

At the same time, a national policy started with the development of library services such as national collective catalogs of periodicals, theses and monographs. Of course every CADIST library has to participate in the elaboration of those retrieval tools.

Access to the documents should be opened to everybody: researchers from the Observatory and external readers as well. For the latter, the request should be transmitted by a library, not by an individual. Private enterprises have access to the documents as well as academic institutions.

In the spirit of the founders of the system, the requesting library has to check first if there is a local source, the request to the CADIST center being the last resort.

The lending activity issued by CADIST represents nearly 27% of the whole lending activity of the university libraries.

Every year, each CADIST library has to give an account of its lending activity as well as the rate of increase of the collections in its assigned domain. An evaluation of the missing items is made in this report as well.

The grant given by the Ministry may be used in a limited proportion for the maintenance of the collection and their dissemination. It may also be used to pay for temporary staff. The amount of the grant is dependent on the lending rate.

The lending rate in astronomy has been regularly increasing during the last seven years. We got 957 queries in 1997. It follows a general tendency in France where lending activity doubled between 1980 and 1995.

According to official ministry sources 65% of demands in 1997 were satisfied within three days and 85% within 6 days.

The rate of satisfied queries is 85%. This rate is nearly the same for other exact sciences. Among the non-satisfied queries, there is a sizeable fraction of misdirected demands.

3. Difficulties of the CADIST system

The exhaustivity of items to acquire is impossible to achieve. Professional astronomical journals and books have been witnessing a constant growth in publication. A pertinent selection is necessary in the acquisition activity.

The CADIST grant does not allow any purchase of neighboring disciplines items. These items have to be purchased from regular funds of the Observatory.

It is not possible to lend everything. The old stock of the library (before 1920) cannot be lent and may only be consulted locally.

The autonomy of the French universities which started in 1968 gave birth to some discrepancy in lending costs. Some borrowers noticed that some libraries were cheaper than others and they do not respect the last resort rule. Should we increase our rates?

On the basis of a European instruction passed in 1995, publishers are claiming copyright from libraries. Until now, we are exempt from abiding with this instruction.

4. CADIST and strictness in resource sharing

We are facing an increasing number of publications together with more and more specialized subjects which are concerning a restricted audience. Consequently, expenses are increasing while the budget is constant and even decreasing. It is necessary now to be strict on the choice of new acquisitions. We recently had to cancel subscriptions of journals outside the domain of astrophysics. The multidisciplinary aspect of our collections is becoming a luxury. To alleviate this restriction of our documentary field, only powerful retrieval tools can help.

Presently, there are three national collective catalogs for retrieving and locating information. They are produced by a national bibliographic agency (ABES) related to Higher Education.

1. The Pancatalogue created in 1991 is a catalog of monographs received by university libraries or assimilated institute

2. The CCN-PS created in 1983 for serials

3. Telethese for French dissertations published since 1972

Those three resources can be explored either through the network Renater (science research network on the Internet) or on CD-ROM. They assist in identifying and locating items in France. Libraries which are not equipped with computers can use the minitel. We still receive inquiries by mail.

5. CADIST and new technologies

The CADIST system came about in the eighties after a survey of existing libraries by the Ministry all over the territory. At that time the specificity of the collections was established on the basis of the specificity of the university itself. The CADIST map is not illustrative of a decentralisation model. It takes into account the geographical concentration of documentary resources. In a way the decision of the government to organize the distribution of scientific information did not give a better access to a majority of libraries.

A library could launch a query in the right direction without being sure that its correspondent was in possession of the item. The phrase "We know that you have this book, could we borrow it" became possible ten years later after a national effort of signalling records through computerized systems like OCLC.

The link between libraries was started in 1987 by a message routing system before the implementation of the third bibliographic tool (the Pancatalogue) already mentioned. This system was integrated into the Pancatalogue in 1995 and known as PEBNET.

All of these steps have considerably reduced disparities in terms of access to information in France. A library at Bordeaux or at Nice has the same means in its possession and the remoteness of the Parisian sphere is no longer a drawback.

We can say that, at the present stage of development, the CADIST system in spite of its centralized nature makes it possible for everybody to retrieve the item needed thanks to new technologies.

Improvement of the system could be done at the level of individual libraries by discerningly using computing equipment at their site. Some of them chose to put their catalog on the Internet. Catalog sharing with OCLC had the advantage of making known the old stock of Paris Observatory library through the Worldcat database.

In 1997 we had the surprise of seeing that one of our 1692 record by Cassini contributed to making possible a comparison between two astronomical events separated by three centuries. It was about the impact spot on Jupiter recorded in 1690 which had similarities with the SL9 comet crash to Jupiter in 1994 (PASJ 49, L1-L5 (1997)). The original document was consulted in the library. Its digitalization could have facilitated greatly the work of the two Japanese researchers.

6. Future development of the CADIST system

While the repartition of the scientific documentation has not changed since 1980, its retrieving and distribution is going to have new developments. L'ABES is going to create SUD (Système Universitaire de Documentation) in which the three bibliographical resources (Pancatalogue, CCN-PS, Telethese) will be merged into one database. Loan requests and loan processing will be integrated in the system. Every step of the research up to the document delivery will be accessible to "accredited" end-users.

7. Conclusion

The CADIST astronomie is a part of the general academic information structure. In the last ten years emphasis was put on identification of primary information stocks in libraries, on their automated retrieving and distribution. The next ten years will undoubtedly be devoted to making this primary information coexist with directly accessible documents such as electronic journals and digitized books.

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