

Brief report on the ABCD-evaluation workshop Antwerp University March 2011

○ **Introduction**

In the week of 21-25 March 2011 there was a meeting convened by Egbert de Smet, promoter of the DOCBIBLAS project (*Development and Capacity Building in ISIS-Based Library Automation Systems*) at the University of Antwerp, Belgium, in order to evaluate the current status of the ABCD implementation and to gather recommendations on further support.

Participants were all 10 university system librarians of the VLIR-UOS partner universities (4 from Africa, 6 from Latin-America) which had opted to start using the ABCD-software developed with the support of the project of VLIR/UOS.

All 10 university libraries were represented at the workshop. Also present were two other key players: Guilda Ascencio and Ernesto Spinak.

We give a very brief account here on the status of implementation, the challenges noted and the recommendations given. A more extensive report will be given to VLIR/UOS at a later stage and will be available upon request.

○ **Status of implementation**

From the reports on the actual status of implementation, it became clear that all were more or less successful in using the basic modules of ABCD: Central, OPAC and Site. One library (Moi University in Kenya with extensive assistance from the project promoter) reached the status of full deployment including the EmpWeb loans module. Most other university libraries also were close to finishing the preparation of either the EmpWeb or the Central loans modules. But the use of SeCS-Web is limited to only one or two where sufficient journals are to be administered to justify the use of this specialized ABCD module.

Along with these implementations it was noted that ABCD has attracted the interest of other surrounding institutes, e.g. in Kenya, Bolivia and Ecuador at least several other universities showed an interest to also try ABCD. In Cuba the software has been selected to be used in all universities and institutes of both the Higher Education ministry and the Health sector. The current development and new ideas for ABCD were highlighted by G. Ascencio, e.g. multiple bases-folders and loans system based on copy-information into the catalog, and E. de Smet (using meta-search and PDF-upload for digital library purposes). The project's promoter and the participants were happy to note that there is still quite some real life and development.

○ **Challenges**

Challenges however also exist and should not be ignored: installation difficulties, still insufficient (or insufficiently updated) documentation, the problematic relationship with IT-centres providing the necessary connectivity for ABCD, lack of in-depth knowledge on the underlying (C)ISIS database management, interoperability with other softwares by OAI/webservices and full-text capabilities.

○ **Recommendations**

The main recommendations mostly were based on the observation that ABCD is a quite generic software (not a closed-box solution), which in itself is very valuable and represents a major advantage to other FOSS solutions for libraries and documentation centers, but requires for this very reason also more than typically support and training.

The high 'dynamics' typically for Southern university library staff (mostly good people leaving for better-remunerated posts...) requires repeated training efforts. The documentation, mostly lacking in English, should be completed and updated more frequently as long as the software is getting many changes and new features. Communication interfaces (bidirectional web services, SIP2 for self service loans) should be developed for better integration with other information systems in the institutes. OAI and full-text applications should be improved to maintain the claim that ABCD is a 'swiss knife' for libraries and documentation centers. Other servers and

websites with mirrors outside the Health-sector-bound BIREME scope should be established and in fact are available for this purpose, e.g. to offer ABCD downloads.

The statistics package should be elaborated to support international standards for library performance measurement.

VLIR/UOS is kindly requested to continue their support to not risk losing their high investments and in view of the very high but not-yet fully reached potential of ABCD with the partner institutes.

Regional networking should be supported with some activities (regional workshops, mirrors).

For the developers it is recommended to provide full packages of updates (not just patches) for easier installation and better synchronizing in between the many users. More digital library functions and documentation should be provided, including tutorials.

For the institutions themselves it is recommended to start using collaboration platforms such as Google Groups for better/easier communication and organization of regional activities, with more active promotion of ABCD in the surrounding community (academic and local).

○ **Conclusion**

Generally the participants were very happy with the dynamics generated by the workshop, not only in improving technical knowledge (with e.g. an excellent introduction about the power of the CISIS tools by E. Spinak) but also in social networking - nothing surpasses face-to-face interaction! - amongst ABCD managers and encouragement for the developers/managers of ABCD being present at the workshop. Seeing ABCD managers being enthusiast and very keen on further improvements is indeed the best possible encouragement for the project leaders.

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