

## Werk

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## **Regional Library Cooperation in Belgium**

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Regional library cooperation among research libraries in Belgium cannot be entirely separated from library cooperation on the national level. Indeed, national library cooperation existed long before regional library cooperation even started. In fact national and regional library cooperation are intertwined. In spite of this common origin some differences between the regions in Belgium can be observed.

### **Federal structure of Belgium**

Before picturing the regional library scenes some information should be given on the federal, regional and community structure of the country which is richly diversified by history, language and culture. Out of a highly centralised state, created in 1830, gradually from the nineteen seventies onwards federal structures of a rather great complexity were created. Gradually more decision making and consequently a bigger share of the budget have been passed on to the three communities and the three regions especially since 1994.

### **Maps Belgium**

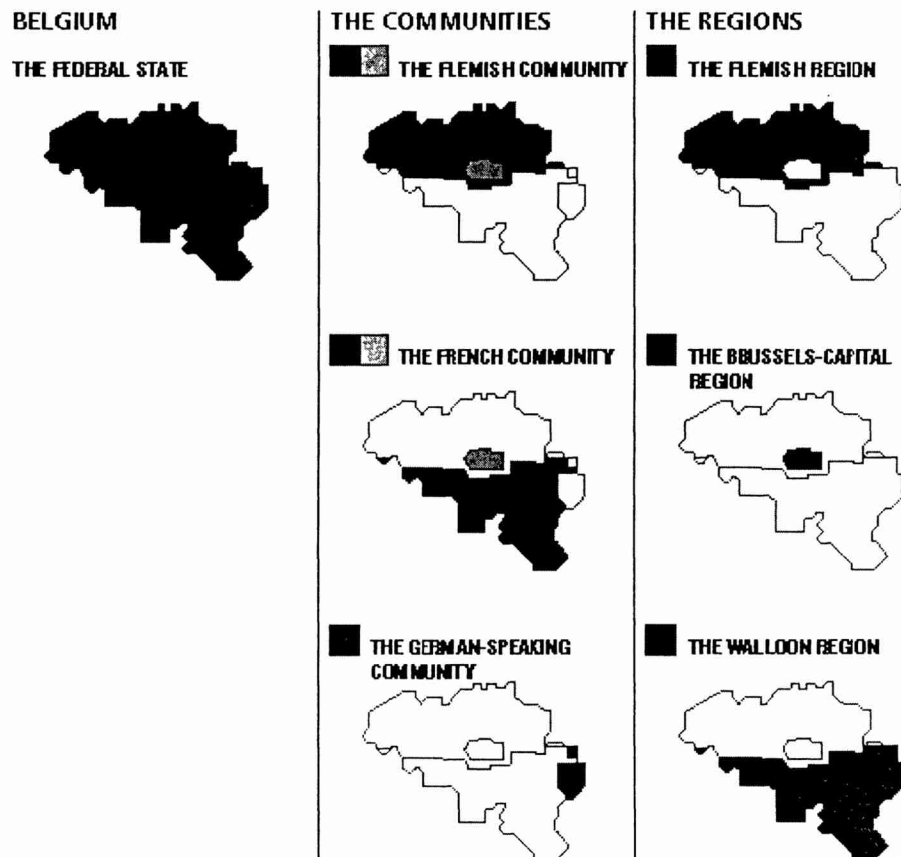
The federal state has no responsibility any more for culture and education. Still there is a Federal Ministry for Science Policy. Very few libraries depend these days upon the federal state. This is the case for the Royal Library in Brussels, libraries in the federal ministries and in federal research institutes and museums.

Belgium has three cultural communities. Communities are language-bound.

- Dutch: Flanders and Brussels
- French: Wallonia and Brussels
- German: border region with Germany (ca. 60.000 inhabitants)

<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at the LIBER Annual Conference, Leuven 1995.

Belgium is also divided into three regions according to the territory.



Maps Belgium

- Flemish region: North
- Brussel capital region: Centre
- Walloon region: South

Looking at the various maps, the reader will have noticed that regions and communities do not coincide and that two communities, the French-speaking Community and the Flemish-speaking Community do have their say in cultural matters in the Brussels capital region.

In Flanders there is only one Flemish Council and one government for the Flemish Community and the Flemish Region, whereas there are two different councils and governments in French Belgium: one for the French Community and one for the Walloon Region. It is widely accepted that the financial problems for culture and education in the French-speaking Community of Belgium, are mainly the result of this split of responsibilities in French-speaking Belgium.

After this chapter on the Belgian federal structure, it is time to move on to the topic of this paper: the cooperation on regional level between research libraries in Belgium. But the reader has to bear in mind that funding for regional library cooperation depends solely on the three autonomous Cultural Communities which have not necessarily the same means nor the same intentions.

#### **Library cooperation in the German-speaking Community**

The efforts of the German-speaking Community with a population of ca. 60.000 are limited to the public libraries in this part of the country and the "Medienzentrum" a central research library in the city of Eupen with three decentralised sections in the bigger cities having secondary schools. Audio-visual material in the German language comes from the *Institut für Bild und Wissenschaft* in Munich (Germany). Contacts are kept with the German libraries, especially in the "Land Nordrhein-Westfalen".

#### **Library cooperation in the French Community**

##### *Commission permanente des bibliothécaires en chef du CIUF*

The librarians of the universities in the French Community of Belgium started their regional activities in 1988 by creating "*La commission permanente des bibliothécaires en chef du Conseil interuniversitaire de la Communauté française*", the Commission of Librarians of the Inter-university Council of the French Community. This commission is composed of nine university librarians, the librarian of the Royal Library and since 1991 two representatives of the public libraries in French-speaking Belgium.

The objectives of the Commission are the following:

- study of relevant items in librarianship and information and documentation in general

- dissemination of information regarding these libraries
- cooperative projects
- representation on federal and international level

After all, the university librarians in French-speaking Belgium stand for:

9 university library systems  
 9.000.000 volumes  
 41.000 subscriptions to periodicals  
 63.000 students  
 4.000 academic staff

This Commission has been active in all four of the action lines of the objectives. Collection inventory (over 600 libraries); collection evaluation and use of library statistics in order to derive from these longer term policy plans; use of Conspectus in university libraries; common defensive policy for periodicals especially in economic sciences and history of arts. In most cases the studies were extended to major non university libraries and lead to publications in the series: "*Repères en sciences bibliothéconomiques*".<sup>2 3 4</sup> Thus fulfilling item two of the objectives.

A cooperative project just about to start is the defensive collection building for periodicals in economic sciences and another one in the history of arts whereby as far as possible duplicate subscriptions will be avoided in order to get a maximum number of periodical titles in these disciplines available through university libraries of French-speaking Belgium. The other cooperative projects are integrated with the federal ones:

- CCB: the federal union catalogue of monographs (online and on CD-ROM)<sup>5 6 7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Guide des bibliothèques universitaires en Communauté française de Belgique. 2ième édition. Bruxelles, 1993. (Repères en sciences bibliothéconomiques).

<sup>3</sup> A. Van Compernelle. Le Conspectus, un outil de gestion pour bibliothèques. Bruxelles, 1993. (Repères en sciences bibliothéconomiques).

<sup>4</sup> C. Brouwer. Les bibliothèques scientifiques en Communauté française de Belgique. Bruxelles, 1993. (Repères en sciences bibliothéconomiques).

<sup>5</sup> J. Corthouts, H. Van Sompel. CCB: de collectieve catalogus van België op CD-ROM. In: Bibliotheek- en archiefgids, 69 (1993), p.119-127.

- ANTILOPE: the federal union catalogue of periodicals (online and on the CCB CD-ROM)<sup>8 9</sup>
- IMPALA: the federal electronic document ordering system.<sup>10 11</sup>

The Commission represents the libraries' interests towards the CIUF, the Interuniversity Council for the French Community. Representation is done on the federal level through the National Council of the University Librarians. Representation does not stop at the border. The Commission has permanent contacts with librarians from other French-speaking countries. That's why our French-speaking colleagues participate actively in:

- ABCDEF: Association des responsables des bibliothèques et centres de documentation universitaire et de recherche d'expression française
- ADBU: Association des directeurs des bibliothèques universitaires

Moreover they maintain close contacts with their colleagues in the French-speaking Canadian Quebec and will organize next October in Valenciennes a get together with their French colleagues of the North of France.

Apart from a small amount of money made available by the parent organisation CIUF no permanent subsidy has been made available yet. Hence, no permanent organisational structure could be set up so far. What is also missing in French-speaking Belgium is a single, strong and well organised library association.

<sup>6</sup> J. Corthouts, H. Van de Sompel. CCB: tweede editie van de collectieve catalogus van België op CD-ROM. In: D'une gestion automatisée des archives et bibliothèques vers une information automatisée. Antwerpen, VVBAD, 1993 (Bibliotheekkunde, 51), p.65-82.

<sup>7</sup> See also <http://www.libis.kuleuven.ac.be/libis/ecb/index.html> for a general introduction to the project (Dutch, French and English).

<sup>8</sup> J. Van Borm. ANTILOPE. Bruxelles, 1991 (texts in Dutch, French, English).

<sup>9</sup> See information in English on the WWW server of the University of Antwerp (<http://www.ua.ac.be/MAN/ANTILOPEE/root.html>).

<sup>10</sup> See information in French and Dutch on the WWW-server of the University of Antwerp (<http://www.ua.ac.be/MAN/IMPALAF/root.html> for the French version or [IMPALAN/root.html](http://www.ua.ac.be/MAN/IMPALAN/root.html) for the Dutch version).

<sup>11</sup> K. Clara, R. Philips. IMPALA, het documentbestelsysteem voor België. In: Bibliotheek- en archiefgids, 69 (1993), p.180-185.

### Library cooperation in the Flemish Community

#### *Flemish Library Association (VVBAD)*

Moving to Flanders, the first thing to be mentioned here is a 75 years old strong Flemish Library Association, caring for the needs of librarians in all types of libraries, and also for the needs of documentalists and archivists. An annual budget of over 10 million BEF, 2½ permanent staff and just over 1.000 contributing members. Five regular publications: "Info", a monthly newsletter, "Bibliotheek- en archiefgids", the journal of the Association with one issue per trimester; two series: "Bibliotheekkunde" en "Archiefkunde" and finally the addressbook of the Flemish libraries, published every third year.<sup>12</sup> The Flemish Library Association is partly funded by the Flemish Ministry of Culture.

#### *Contacts with the Netherlands*

The Section of Research Libraries of the Flemish Library Association maintains close contacts with their counterpart in the Netherlands: the librarians in the research libraries of the Dutch Library Association (NVB). But this is not the only way of contact with the Dutch colleagues; there are SABIDO, a Dutch-Flemish body that looks after library and information education and training,<sup>13</sup> a working party on ministerial level, permanent mutual invitations for seminars and all kinds of manifestations, exchange of minutes of meetings and many long standing personal contacts.

#### *From VLIR-Working Group to VOWB*

Of the highest importance, however, for the research libraries are the library activities in the framework of the VLIR, the Flemish University Council. A Working Group for Research Libraries started its activities already in 1984. By that time the activities were supported by a part time secretary (20% of a full time job, made available free of charge by one of the research libraries).

From 1984 to 1987 the main activities were:

- defensive collection building, whereby every university library accepted the responsibility for maintaining the subscription to a

<sup>12</sup> VVBAD, Vlaamse archief-, bibliotheek- en documentatiegids. 2 edition, 1993-1995, Antwerpen, 1993. (Introduction on archives and all types of libraries in Flanders in Dutch, English and French from p.23 to p.50.)

<sup>13</sup> B. Wiebenga, W. Vanderpijpen. De samenwerking Nederland-Vlaanderen op het gebied van bibliotheekonderwijs. In: "Bibliotheek- en archiefgids", 68 (1992:1), p.17-20.

small number of periodicals considered as being highly valuable for the region and in danger of disappearance in the Flemish research libraries;

- a study of a central repository for less used books and periodicals: a study item that since that time has been on the agenda without any practical consequence yet;
- a study of cooperative collection development also without any direct application;
- a National Library for Flanders mainly aiming at improving legal deposit in the region.

The National Library for Flanders should not be seen as a means to reduce the role and influence of the Royal Library in Brussels, the National Library on the federal level.<sup>14 15 16</sup>

By the end of 1987 it became apparent that no further progress could be achieved without the availability of permanent staff. Until then studies had been carried out and proposals prepared by some of the members of the Working Group.

From 1989 onwards financial support from the Flemish Government became available provided the university libraries were prepared to co-finance the secretariat of two permanent staff and provided the Working Group created a greater opening for other types of libraries: the main public libraries, the libraries in private enterprise and the libraries in the non-university higher education, called hereafter the polytechnics. Hence a first in depth study on library provision in the polytechnics was published.<sup>17</sup> That study was followed by an unpublished study on document delivery.

The first contract with the Flemish Government had a duration of 3 years (1989 - 1991). By the end of that period it was felt that the permanent secretariat of two members of staff was too expensive a solution and could not be carried on, especially as the Flemish Government was not willing to pay for a permanent secretariat. It was then decided to stop the permanent secretariat and to go for secretarial help (half time staff member) linked to the president of the Working

<sup>14</sup> L. Simons. Een nationale bibliotheek voor Vlaanderen. Antwerpen, 1984 (Bibliotheekkunde, 35).

<sup>15</sup> K. De Bauw. Een wettelijk depot bij de Vlaamse Gemeenschap. In: "Open" 23 (1991), p.259-261.

<sup>16</sup> L. Simons. Over het behoud van ons gedrukt erfgoed. In: "Boek en bibliotheek" 3:1 (1993), p.5-8.

<sup>17</sup> H. Sels. De HOBUBibliotheek in Vlaanderen en haar relatie tot de universiteitsbibliotheek. Antwerpen, 1991. (Bibliotheekkunde, 49).



Group and to project staff that could be found easily in the Flemish libraries. The Flemish Government was willing to subsidize some of the projects to a maximum of 1 million BEF per year, whereas the university libraries were willing to contribute as previously 1,5 million BEF per year. A total budget of 2,5 million BEF per year.

All this lead to the creation in 1992 of the VOWB: the *Vlaams Overlegorgaan voor Wetenschappelijk Bibliotheekwerk*, the Flemish Council for Research Library Matters, which will be called hereafter the Flemish Library Council. The mission statement of the Flemish Library Council has four items:

- Coordination of library activities in Flanders among all types of libraries; hence, the presence of librarians of the universities, the polytechnics, the main public libraries, other research libraries of public authorities and private enterprise;
- Library cooperation through project work;
- Advisory role towards the Flemish University Council (VLIR), the Flemish Government and other bodies.
- Contacts with regional, federal and international organisations.

Building on the work started in 1984 two in depth studies were commissioned:

- Depository of less used periodicals and monographs, which lead to the concept of the virtual deposit library whereby, instead of creating a new deposit library, the participating libraries would take up the responsibility for permanent storage of one copy of less used material for use by local and external readers; these items to be marked as such in the union catalogues: "*conservation copy*".<sup>18 19</sup>
- Conspectus: a pilot study on adaptation and use of the Conspectus methodology in a few selected disciplines as: Dutch literature, sociology, mathematics and medicine. Thereby relying partly on the achievements of the Scottish libraries.<sup>20</sup>

Since 1993 the librarian of the Royal Library is a full member of the VOWB, thus ending a long period of rather difficult relations between the research

<sup>18</sup> W. Bosmans. *Hebben we een gemeenschappelijk depot nodig?* Leuven, 1993.

<sup>19</sup> M. Van Ormelingen. *Verslag van het literatuuronderzoek betreffende een gemeenschappelijk depot.* Leuven, 1993.

<sup>20</sup> J. Braeckman. *Conspectus: van pilootwerk tot werkinstrument.* In: "*Bibliotheek- en archiefgids*", 71 (1995), p.128-137.

libraries in North and South on the one hand side and the Royal Library on the other.

Apart from studies the Flemish Government wanted some action and was prepared to make available more money provided practical results could be achieved. No easy and quick agreement could be reached on weeding the collections and creating a virtual depository of less used materials. Consensus-building around the enhancement of the Flemish participation in the ANTILOPE union catalogue of periodicals was easier. Started in 1972 as an Antwerp union catalogue of current periodicals, it was decided on federal level in 1989 to open ANTILOPE for all periodical titles, including the ceased titles and the titles for which the subscription had not been renewed. But never there had been an attempt to complete the union catalogue with the older titles. With a grant of 5 million BEF from the Flemish Government and 10 million BEF of extra funding by the Flemish university libraries themselves a 15 million BEF project has been launched for the creation of a complete union catalogue of periodicals in the university libraries, the City Library of Antwerp and the polytechnics. This is not done through a system of shared cataloguing as this is the case with PICA in the Netherlands. On the contrary, a decentralised system has been set up whereby machine-readable records are created locally, then sent in batches via FTP to the ANTILOPE-database in the University of Antwerp where they are match-merged with the already existing ANTILOPE records. By the same operation a unique link is made between the local record number and the ANTILOPE record number so that automatic updating of ANTILOPE becomes possible. This project, whereby most participating libraries have to create local machine readable records of the older periodicals, is spread over two years and has to be finalised by the end of 1996. Offers by companies specialising in data entry were analyzed and rejected. Indeed, all libraries decided to do the data entry on their own library system. The data has to be supplied to the ANTILOPE-databank in SGML format. So far the project runs on schedule. Already now the ANTILOPE-database has been enriched by 20.000 new titles from the collections of the Catholic University of Leuven and the University of Ghent. The number of ANTILOPE locations doubled in less than two years time greatly as a result of the Flemish ANTILOPE-work.

Building upon the success of the ANTILOPE operation an opening was created for new and even greater funding of projects by the Flemish Government. Project negotiations have started early 1995 in order to create the EIV: *Elektronische Informatie Vlaanderen* (Electronic Information for Flanders). EIV is to become the electronic information server for the Belgian union catalogues (ANTILOPE and CCB), for bibliographic databases and also full text databases. These goals can be achieved autonomously or in cooperation with other Belgian and international partners. The expected funding by the Flemish Government is of 20 million BEF per year for the next five years. Libraries,

institutes and private industry using this service are expected to pay for these services so that the total budget could be soon of the order of 40 million BEF per year.

### Conclusion

The achievements of the Flemish VOWB and its predecessors are seen in Belgium as highly successful. In less than ten years time the Flemish research libraries created a cooperative structure in which all types of libraries are included. From zero government funding they have moved to 4 million BEF in 1995 and possibly to over 20 million BEF in the years 1996-2000. From limited regional cooperation (mainly local) to full scale regional activities as the ANTILOPE-operation and hopefully the EIV-project. From traditional library topics to new information technology. However, compared to other countries as e.g. the Netherlands there is still room for substantial improvement. The transition in Flanders is thus by no means ended yet and this fragile relationship has been and might be in danger also in the future. But united we stand, divided we loose. Or put it in another way by using the Belgian device: *"l'Union fait la force"* (union brings strength). This brings me back to the cooperative library activities of the French-speaking Community of Belgium, where the take off of such activities was delayed by 5 years and where so far no government money has been made available in order to support the infrastructure that is required for the creation of a modern library and information infrastructure. It is hoped, however, that this will be achieved in the coming years so that the two larger communities of Belgium do not live at different speeds and can, by joining their respective forces, achieve greater effectiveness and obtain a better position in Europe.