Report on activities in 2018 within the framework of UNESCO category II centre operation

I. *Introduction*

Based on the reputation it has gained in a prolonged period in the area of librarianship and in the academic sphere in the regional geographic territory of South-eastern Europe, IZUM is known as a renowned regional centre for the development of library information systems and current research evaluation systems within the region. With its professional and innovative initiatives, IZUM has been present in the region for almost three decades and has managed to gain a large amount of trust.

COBISS (Co-operative Online Bibliographic System and Services) is a reference model of a system representing the platform for the national library information systems and current research information systems in Slovenia, Serbia, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Bulgaria and Albania; in 2018 it also started in Kosovo[1]. The regional COBISS.net network interconnecting all of these is a practical example of complementary synergies, without which we cannot imagine a modern education and research system or cultural, technological and economic development. Libraries cannot take on their role if their work is not supported by modern information communication technology. Neither are they able to function efficiently as isolated islands, so they must connect with each other and provide conditions for dialogue and collaboration as one of the best bases for the development of each country and the international community as a whole.

IZUM provides the libraries in the region with:
- Proven organisational solutions and COBISS software for the automation of library functions with shared cataloguing within the COBISS.net network with user interfaces in several languages (Slovenian, Serbian, Bosnian, Macedonian, Bulgarian and Albanian).
- Proven methodology and software to manage researchers' bibliographies within the COBISS system, applications for setting up a national research information system (SICRIS, E-CRIS), and evaluation of research results.
- A variety of training programmes (for librarians and IT professionals), the organisation of specialised workshops and the international COBISS conference.
- Server capacities for COBISS, SICRIS and E-CRIS applications and services.
- Support in the acquisition of financial resources for development activities (international development cooperation).

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[1] This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence

The long-term objective is to link and connect all higher education and research organizations as well as academic, special and public libraries in target countries into the COBISS.net network and establish compatible systems for the evaluation of research activity.

We recognise the following necessary steps:
- Motivate competent ministries and public authorities, research and educational organisations as well as libraries to recognise and accept the concept of national systems, linked into the COBISS.net network.
- Qualify the national COBISS Centres and national E-CRIS Centres as well as libraries for the implementation of organisational solutions and the COBISS/E-CRIS software.
- Co-finance the development of the national COBISS and E-CRIS systems (library equipment, staff training, managing researchers' bibliographies) until the satisfactory establishment of the said systems in the target countries.

II. Activities and tasks within the COBISS.net project

II.1 Summary

In 2018, 46 new libraries outside Slovenia (approx. three times as much as last year!) joined COBISS.net in total, 12 in Serbia, six in Montenegro, 11 in North Macedonia, one in Albania, 11 in Bosnia & Herzegovina and five in Republic of Srpska. The total number of libraries outside Slovenia included in the COBISS.net network was 411 on the last day of the previous year (1321 together with Slovenian libraries!).

	New libraries	Total on December 31
Albania	1	30
B & H	11	61
Bulgaria	0	2
Montenegro	6	37
N. Macedonia	11	53
Rep. Srpska	5	24
Serbia	12	204

In 2018, the agreement on the implementation of the COBISS system in Serbia expired and the new agreements were signed.

The COBISS.AL, COBISS.BG, COBISS.RS and COBISS.CG systems do not have their own computer capacities to maintain their own national and local catalogues and databases, nor do they have the capacity to run the COBISS applications and services. For this purpose, they use the hosting system of IZUM's server infrastructure. In the middle of the year, the COBISS.BH system started using IZUM's hosting system after couple of severe local hardware crashes. Similar activities started with North Macedonia at the end of the year; the contract is foreseen for the beginning of 2019.

II.2 Development aid

In 2018, with the expected financial aid of (mostly) the competent ministries, but also other subjects of the Republic of Slovenia and international organisations, all planned IZUM's activities in the role of UNESCO's regional centre can be listed in following topical areas:

1. Co-financing the creation of bibliographic records for the purposes of researchers' bibliographies
2. Harmonising national library catalogues with the WorldCat global catalogue
3. Supporting the National COBISS Centres (help with providing the technical conditions, human resources, equipment and infrastructure)
4. Translating COBISS user interfaces, user manuals and other documentation
5. Training COBISS application instructors
6. Training librarians for COBISS
7. Co-financing the purchase of equipment and the installation arrangement in libraries
8. Co-financing the post-graduate librarianship study programme at the University of Shkoder
9. Organising specialised information centres
10. Co-financing the access to selected international e-resources
11. Participation at the international COBISS conference – covering travel expenses for selected participants
12. Planning, coordinating, advising and promotional activities

In line with the financial capacities and absorption abilities some of the topics were more prominent, some less, and some not at all. Because of the lack of expected financial resources, the activity range has been much lower.

Out of the activities listed above, only the following items were carried out to a satisfactory extent: 4 (translating), 5 (training instructors), 10 (COBISS Conference), partly also item 9 (analysis and preparation in Serbia and Montenegro), where the main obstacle are the demanding negotiations with a foreign partner (OCLC). With regards to item 8, there has been a blockade since 2013 and despite our optimism and great deal of enthusiasm, nothing had improved in 2018. We insist on having this item on the list, as that was also an explicit demand from the COBISS.net Council.

As part of item 4 (translating COBISS user interfaces and user manuals as well as other documentation), work was underway on translations of updates of all current user manuals into Albanian, Serbian and English and editing was carried out for all currently translated existing courses. Also in the process of translation were materials for new courses, which include the course transparencies and all other documentation, required for conducting a course (questionnaires, signatory lists, etc.).

Training activities for librarians (item 6) in all countries were very intensive. The courses from the regular COBISS training programme were attended by 1270 librarians (compared to 359 in the previous year!) in 80 repetitions (compared to 37 in 2017) and in the total length of 189 days.

In some countries, the procedure for acquiring cataloguing permits (*licences*) was successfully completed in 2018.

Summary of training results (note the Serbian increase!):

	Courses	Days	Participants	New CAT licences
Albania	2	8	24	4
B & H	2	8	19	3
Bulgaria	3	11	31	9
Montenegro	2	8	22	15
N. Macedonia	5	19	55	0
Rep. Srpska	3	11	35	46
Serbia	80	124	1084	230

Item 5 (training COBISS application instructors) was carried out in Serbia (13 successful candidates for four courses), Republic of Srpska (two successful candidates for two courses) and Bulgaria (on successful candidate for one course).

II.3   Additional (regular) activities

In addition to the abovementioned tasks that are part of the international development aid programme, the following activities were carried out as part of the regular, horizontal, maintenance, infrastructure and additional tasks:

- **Albania**: Three new libraries joined the system. Three cataloguing courses were carried out. Four librarians were granted a cataloguing permit for cataloguing monographs.

- **Bulgaria**: The negotiations for including new libraries into the COBISS.BG system continued. In 2018, one course instructor acquired the licence for holding the course *COBISS3/Cataloguing – Advanced*. The implementation of access control via LDAP for the *SS. Cyril and Methodius National Library* has begun. Two librarians from the library *Naučno-tehničeska i pedagogičeska biblioteka* in *Sofia* attended the course *COBISS3/Acquisitions*. Talks have begun regarding the options of cataloguing the archival oriental collection.

- **Bosnia and Herzegovina:** Eleven new libraries joined the system and started using COBISS3 software upon inclusion. In three libraries inventory of material was taken using COBISS3 software. Talks have begun regarding the preparation of a national bibliography for serials. The migration of the COBISS.BH system to the hosting facilities on IZUM's servers was carried out.

- **Kosovo[2]:** A major breakthrough was achieved. For years, Kosovo has also been one of our desired target countries. We had many contacts with the Academy of Sciences and the University, both in Pristina. We have been hosting a librarian from Kosovo for five years. She was employed with the intention of acquiring the required education in Slovenia (second cycle Bologna Master's degree in librarianship), take all the courses from the COBISS training programme and pass the national professional librarianship exam. With the Academy of Sciences, an agreement was signed on the use of COBISS, and the abovementioned librarian successfully completed all planned educational processes and was granted all the required certificates so that she is now about to be employed at the Academy. Additionally, the Academy also has another librarian who has already completed training for cataloguing monographs in line with the COBISS training programme. IZUM was invited to take part in the working visit of the official government delegation of the Republic of Slovenia in Kosovo. On this occasion, talks were initiated with the management of the Kosovo national library, representatives of the Kosovo Ministry of Culture and the vice-rector of the University of Pristina. As a result, the activities for the approximation of Kosovo to the COBISS.net network were reinforced in 2018; among other things, a delegation of Kosovo librarians attended the annual COBISS conference.

- **Montenegro**: Six new libraries were included. In one library, the COBISS3/Loan software module was implemented, while in three libraries, the COBISS3/Cataloguing software module was activated.

- **North Macedonia:** Eleven new libraries were included and started using the COBISS3 software. Talks have begun regarding the migration of the COBISS.MK system to IZUM's hosting servers.

- **Republic of Srpska:** Five new libraries were included. All libraries use the COBISS3/Cataloguing software module. In one library, the COBISS3/Loan software module was activated. In 2018, one course instructor acquired the licence for holding the *COBISS3/Records downloading and holdings* course, and one course instructor acquired the licence for holding the *COBISS3/Loan* course. Training also began for acquiring the licence for the *COBISS3/Cataloguing – Advanced* course.

- **Serbia:** Twelve new libraries were included and started using the COBISS3 software. In COBISS.SR, work continued actively on the direct inclusion in the COBISS3/Loan software module or the migration from COBISS2 to COBISS3. As a result, there were

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[2] See Footnote on Page 1

18 installations of the COBISS3/Loan software module, nine of which were migrations from COBISS2/Loan to COBISS3/Loan. This means that now all libraries in the COBISS.SR system started using the COBISS3/Loan software module. At the National COBISS Centre (NCC), once course instructor acquired the licence for the *Use of inventory software* course. They also started using the more advanced LUCENE/SOLR search engine for searching in the local database.

Albania is the only country within the COBISS.net family where, despite 30 libraries being included in the system, the national library still refuses all cooperation. Despite our many visits and intense correspondence there is no progress in sight. The issue is quite concerning as the national library is unwilling to cooperate due to emotional and unrealistic reasons. IZUM is still willing to actively help but it is obvious that more convincing and diplomatic efforts will be required.

The COBISS.net Council (composed of the directors of National Libraries, heads of the National COBISS Centres and representatives of institutions performing E-CRIS activities) met in November 2018 (during the COBISS Conference) for the third time. The main topic was international development assistance for financing the COBISS.net project presented together by IZUM and UNESCO in 2016. Among other things, the representatives discussed a new approach towards the licencing methodology, promoting activities in particular countries and IZUM's development plans.

II.4   Active event participation and organisation

We were invited by the Permanent UNIMARC Committee to their regular meeting in Rome (Italy). Our colleague Ms G. Mazić is still the elected chair of this important body. We had the opportunity of direct discussions with the individual performers of technical and developmental operations, in which we could explain to them our dilemmas, present our proposals and demonstrate our actual work.

A similar UNIMARC User's Group meeting concurrent with the Middle East Regional UNIMARC User's Group meeting was held in Teheran (Iran); due to our reputation of activities in the region of Southeast Europe, two of IZUM's experts were invited as hounorable speakers.

We also participated at ALA and IFLA conferences and some other events, but we will not specify the details here as they are of no relevance for IZUM in the role of a UNESCO Centre.

Together with our Bosnian partners, we organised the COBISS Days in Bosnia and Hercegovina.

In November 2019, we organised the traditional biannual COBISS Conference. The event lasted for three days with over 260 participants from 11 countries, including Kosovo.

Unfortunately, we were not invited to any UNESCO events related to Southeast Europe.

III. Development (sub)projects

In the scope of development (sub)projects, IZUM additionally performed additional development task in accordance with its approved Annual Work Programme. It was aimed at the area covered by IZUM as the category 2 centre under the auspices of UNESCO.

R23 – Implementing authority control in COBISS.SR

In 2018, we completed most activities linked to the transition to the entry of personal names under authority control into the bibliographic records in COBISS.SR. The COBISS3/Cataloguing software with authority control, which provided parallel personal names in two scripts in the new bibliographic record model, was tested in Serbian libraries. As part of the project, we also tested the newly automatically created ISBD and CIP records, which both received positive reviews by the Serbian librarians. Up until June 2018, eight Serbian cataloguers acquired the licence for holding the *Transition to COBISS3/Cataloguing with authority control* course. After that, the Serbian National COBISS Centre (NCC) organised another 58 of these courses and trained 751 librarians for cataloguing with authority control. Simultaneously, training took place for future course instructors for the *Use of COBISS3/Cataloguing – Updating CONOR* course and the handover of the updated courses *Use of COBISS3/Cataloguing – Beginner's* and *Use of COBISS3/Cataloguing – Advanced*. The courses for cataloguers were held at VBS between May and November 2018. After the takeover of the *Use of COBISS3/Cataloguing software – Updating CONOR*, the Serbian NCC held seven such courses and trained 77 librarians from leading Serbian libraries, so that they can be included in the editing work within the COBISS.SR database immediately after the transition to cataloguing with authority control. In December 2018, we performed a test of linking authority records with bibliographic records and sent the results for verification to the NCC. Upon agreement with the Serbian National COBISS Centre, the initial linking of authority records and bibliographic records in the COBISS.SR production databases will be carried out before the end of March 2019, then the CONOR.SR database will also be integrated into COBISS.

IV. Statistics

The following section contains some statistics and graphs representing results and achievements of IZUM's work in the region in 2018. Slovenian libraries and their data are excluded (except in the bibliographic records cross-reference tables).
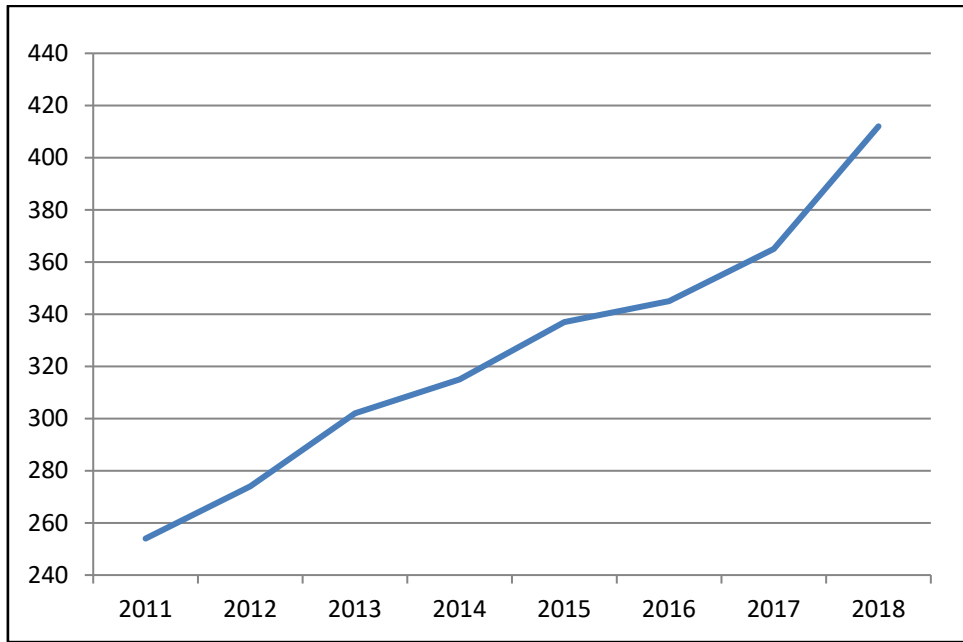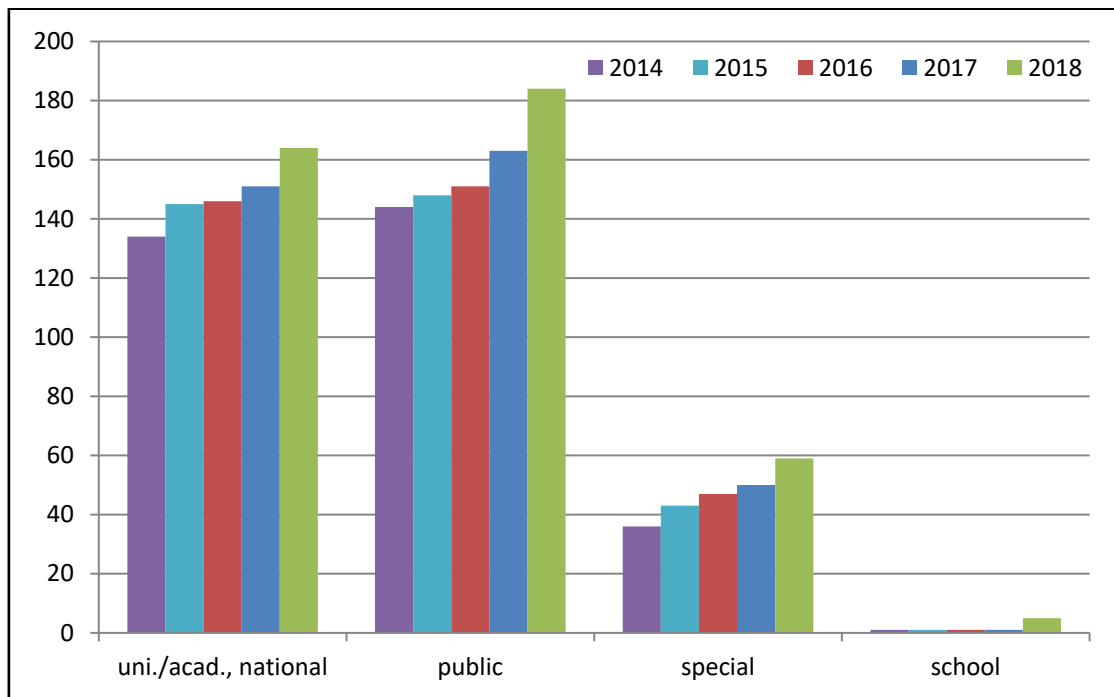
Fig. 1: COBISS.net Libraries Growth (total)

Fig. 2: COBISS.net Libraries (per library type)

COBIB union catalogues bibliographic records – 31 December 2018								
	COBIB.SI	COBIB.SR	COBIB.MK	COBIB.CG	COBIB.BH	COBIB.BG	COBIB.AL	COBIB.RS	**Total**
Monographs	3.024.253	2.230.635	445.788	368.303	456.400	190.201	539.578	100.188	**7.355.346**
Comp. parts	489.869	172.472	31.481	14.935	2.163	805	6.084	598	**718.407**
Serials	145.200	76.093	11.906	5.221	8.955	786	41.197	2.670	**292.028**
Articles	1.421.956	861.076	131.398	113.376	20.850	9.830	443.446	10.505	**3.012.437**
Perf. works	162.853	2.646	501	255	361	3	1	77	**166.697**
Other	9.349	4.733	218	22	505	17	2	36	**14.882**
Total	**5.253.480**	**3.347.655**	**621.292**	**502.112**	**489.234**	**201.642**	**1.030.308**	**114.074**	**11.559.797**
w/ RSR code	**1.775.699**	**238.516**	**6.844**	**27.107**	**20.063**	**1.986**	**0**	**3.054**	**2.073.269**

Fig. 3: COBIB union catalogues bibliographic records

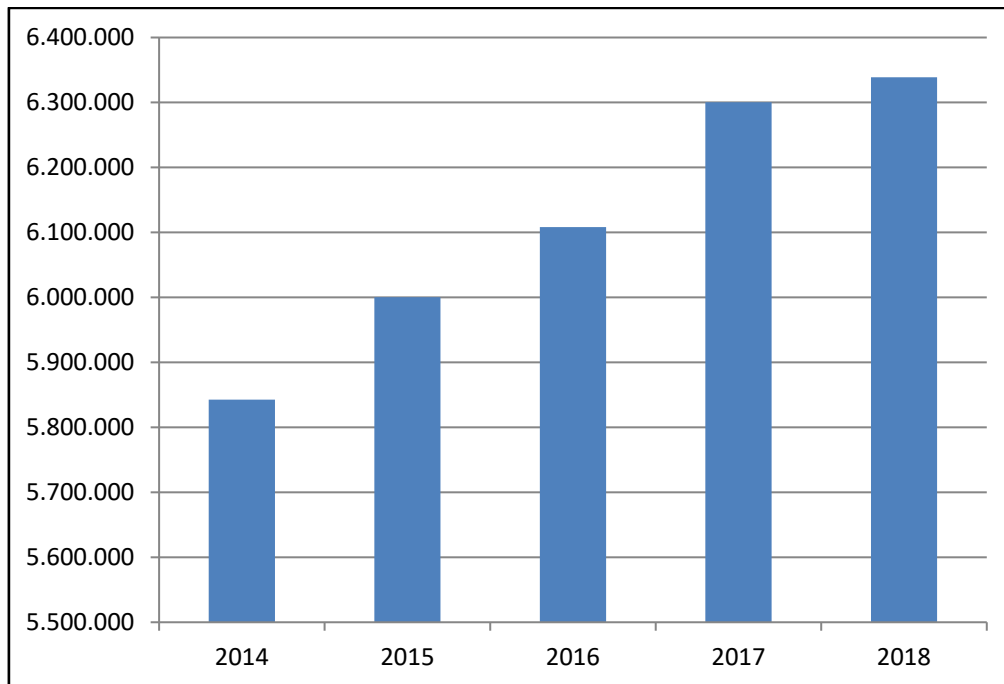| Bibliographic records exchange from 1 January 2018 until 31 December 2018								
COBISS.Net	From COBIB.SI	From COBIB.SR	From COBIB.MK	From COBIB.CG	From COBIB.BH	From COBIB.BG	From COBIB.AL	From COBIB.RS	**Total**
COBISS.SI	0	1.537	180	432	179	139	16	16	**2.499**
COBISS.SR	7.344	0	2469	996	1.192	956	357	326	**13.640**
COBISS.MK	1.032	1.344	0	362	260	430	215	176	**3.819**
COBISS.CG	2.712	8.553	845	0	1.114	1057	26	90	**14.397**
COBISS.BH	2309	1.996	165	354	0	343	16	8	**5.191**
COBISS.BG	1579	20318	597	2031	1555	0	10	10	**26100**
COBISS.AL	31	23	20	4	6	9	0	0	**93**
COBISS.RS	107	26	20	7	0	0	6	0	**166**
Total	**15.114**	**33.797**	**4.296**	**4.186**	**4.306**	**2934**	**646**	**626**	**65.905**

Fig. 4: Bibliographic records exchange

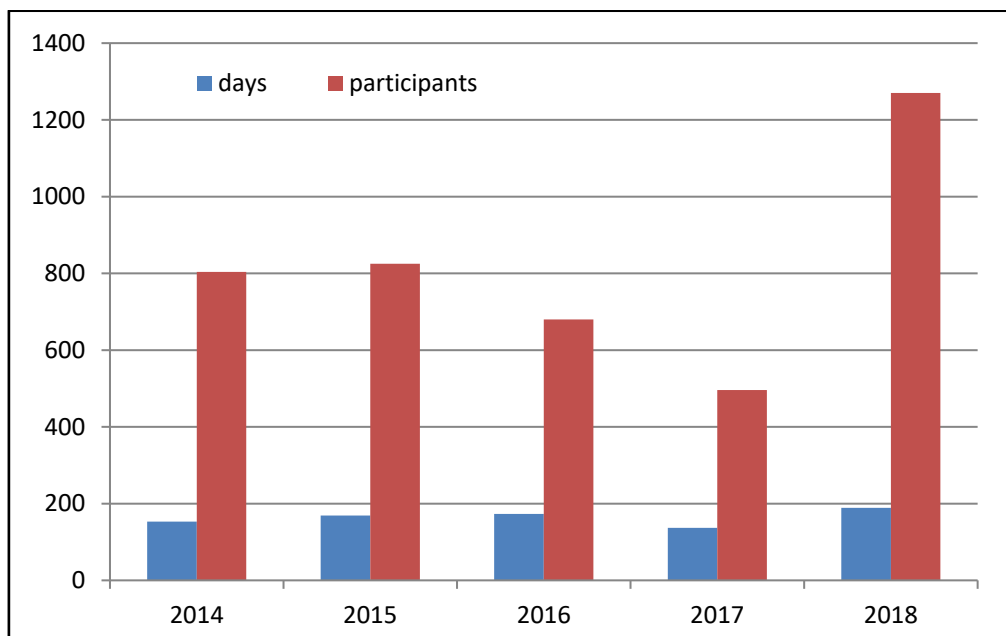Fig. 5: Searching in union and local catalogues
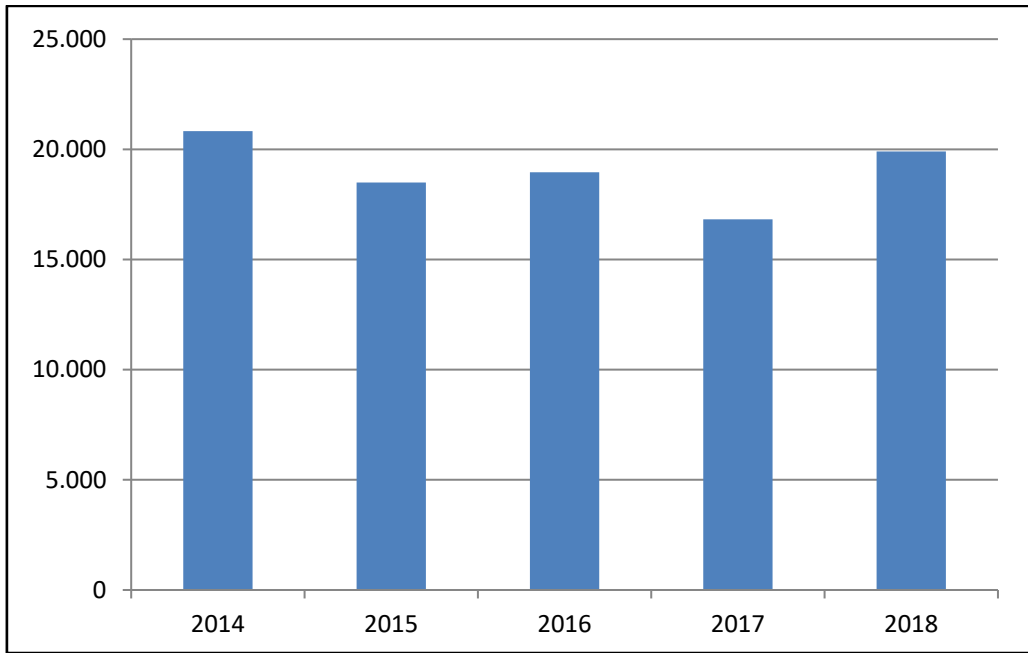

Fig. 6: Training and seminars

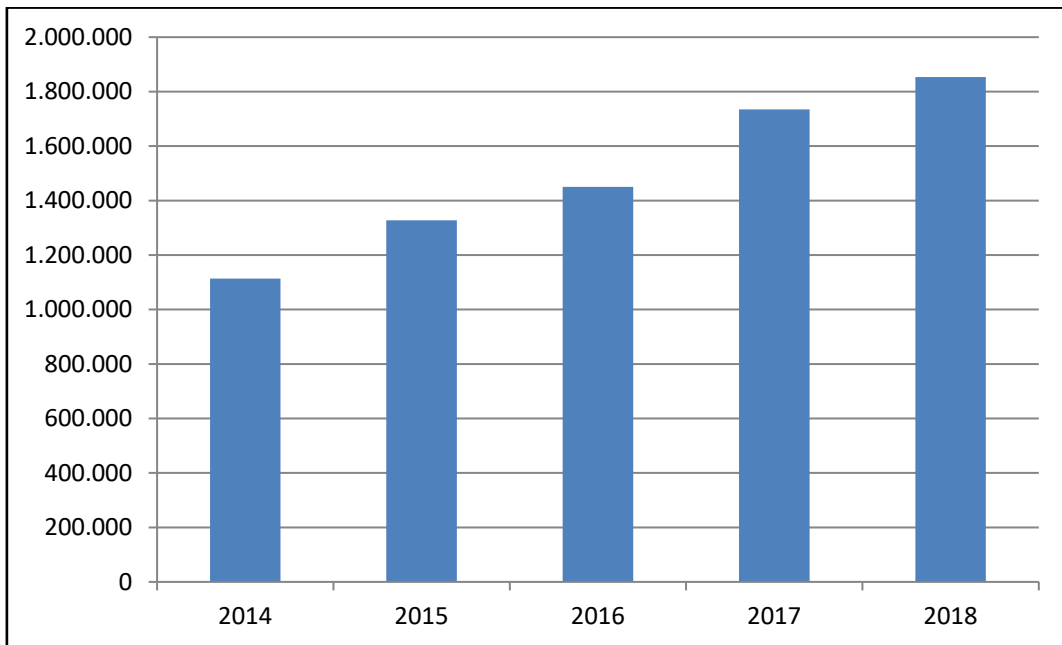Fig. 7: Web bibliographies' printing

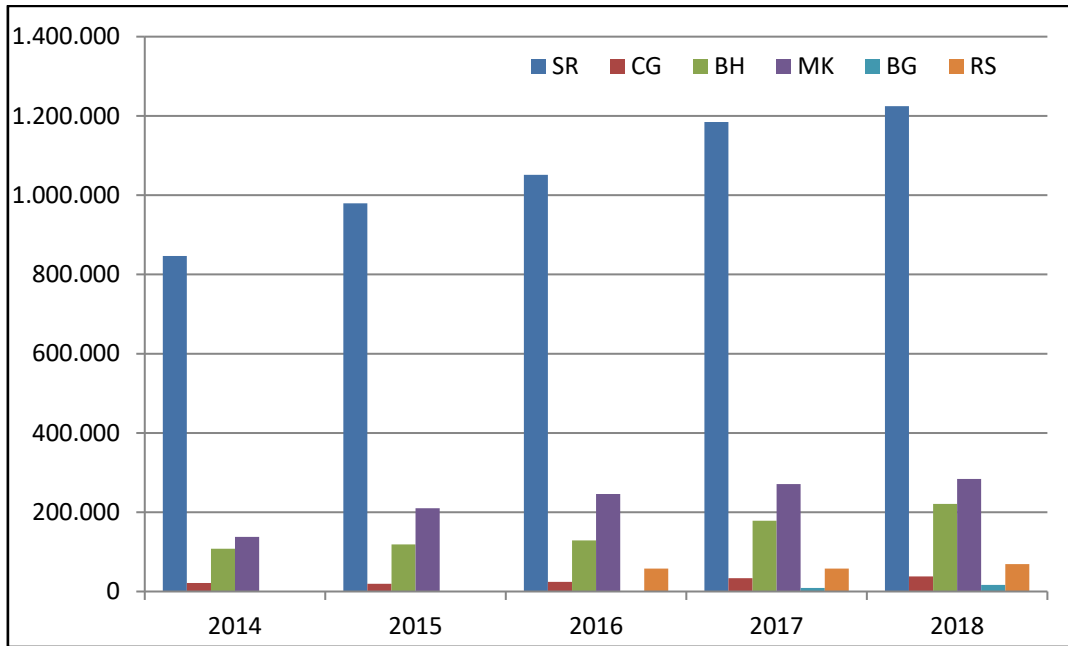Fig. 8: Loan/Circulation (total)

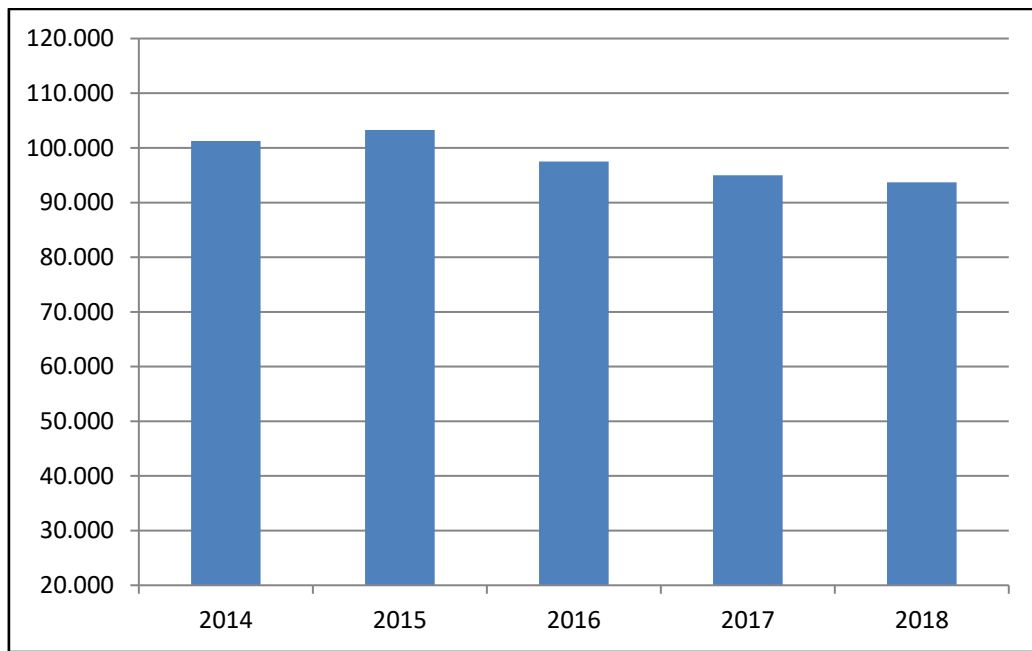Fig. 9: Loan/Circulation (per country)

Fig. 10: Loan renewals and reservation – via COBISS+ (ex COBISS/OPAC)

V.   *Conclusion*

We are proud of our achievements; we started cooperating with UNESCO in 2011 with 254 libraries outside Slovenia. At the end of 2018, there were 412 libraries outside Slovenia in the system – that's an increase of over 60% (see Fig. 1). With relatively humble means we successfully strengthened the trust in Slovenian information technologies throughout the South-eastern European region. To this day, there was no additional financial support for this purpose and under such conditions it is difficult to compete on par with the efforts of the governments of other European countries, who, systematically via intergovernmental diplomacy and international agreements and various developmental aid programmes, strive to gain the trust and affection of the Western Balkan countries to use the technology they have to offer. Thus, we were forced to slow down several planned activities.

Maribor, 20 May 2019   Davor Šoštarič

Appendix

Two-letter designations are used to indicate the autonomous COBISS and E-CRIS systems within COBISS.Net as well as their individual component parts (e.g. catalogues and databases):

.SI	Slovenia
.AL	Albania
.BG	Bulgaria
.BH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
.KS	Kosovo
.CG	Montenegro
.MK	North Macedonia
.RS	Republic of Srpska
.SR	Serbia