

Towards implementing a next-generation resource discovery tool: virtual union catalogue of digital repositories in Sri Lanka

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Information managers have a strategic interest in the tools and technologies that facilitate the discovery and access to the resources for the communities that their serve. Traditional online catalogues, repositories and journals databases provide separate interfaces and platforms for users. In contrast, federated search engines and metadata harvesters enable searching from a single interface. This paper documents the success and challenges faced in introducing a virtual union catalogue of repositories.

Vufind, an open source OAI-PMH based discovery tool was selected as the best fit for the purpose. NILIS, University of Colombo agreed to host the trial system (codenamed UNICAT) in their servers. UNICAT accesses selected remote systems (partners), and build copies of

metadata in the local server. Whenever a search is performed, it displays information from all copies of catalogues, and accessing the full text (if available) is one click away. Full text is not hosted on the local servers, but is accessible via links to the original locations.

The first stage of the project was limited to linking institutional repositories. Several repositories had already enabled the OAI-PMH module in their repository software, which was mainly DSpace. Twelve repositories and one network (HELLIS) are now connected. However, there are differences in metadata schema used. Opening repository metadata and common consensus on the metadata schema are policy decisions to be taken by all partner organisations. If the project is recognised at the national level, this has the potential to be the National Digital Union Catalogue (NDUC) of Sri Lanka, which supplements the efforts of the National Union Catalogue (NUC) maintained by the National Library and Documentation Services Board.

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