

Editor's Notes

Welcome to the first issue of the IASSIST Quarterly, vol. 31. We are now a month before the 34th IASSIST conference, also known as the IASSIST 2008 conference. However, the IASSIST Quarterly vol. 31 is known also as the 2007 volume. Yes, we are behind our schedule; but at least we are consistently so. Our lack of currentness is not critical. We do not expect to bring you the weather forecast. The spring issue might be out when leaves are turning. And that would be ok. But staying in tune with the seasons by lacking a year is somehow annoying. And with production we are even missing that. This editor is looking forward to discussion of solutions to this hang-up at the coming IASSIST conference at Stanford University in May. One way of bringing us more in sync with the reality of time is by IASSIST members not only going to the conferences, and not only presenting at the conferences, but by changing their presentation into an article for the wider public. And by doing so you get the extra bonus of having your writing reviewed and proofed and thus ending up with a much better product.

At the IASSIST 2007 conference in Montreal in a session named "New Discovery Tools: Thinking Outside the Catalogue" Taina Jääskeläinen and Tuomas J. Alaterä from the Finnish Social Science Data Archive gave a presentation on "Multilingual Web Services - Possibilities and Pitfalls". In turning this presentation into an article they qualified the first part into "Multilingual Web Services of Data Archives". In their article, the first in this issue of the IQ, they share their experience of setting up a website supporting the Finnish, English and also Swedish languages. One serious problem of multilingual websites happens when the user clicks from a page in his preferred language onto what is for him an incomprehensible webpage in the dominant language of the site. For data archives effective retrieval of datasets is a necessity, and it is typically the documentation at the study level that is being searched. Many archives have study descriptions in English for exactly that purpose. If that is not available the authors recommend detailed contact information in order to obtain more information about the datasets.

The second article is from Eun-ha Hong at Wilfred Laurier University and Linda Lowry at Brock University. They are both employed as "business and economics librarians" at their respective universities and they present "Business data: issues and challenges from the Canadian perspective". The article was presented at the IASSIST 2007 conference in the session on "Data Services mash-ups: Maps, Research and Everything!". I find that the Hong and Lowry paper is mostly about research. Their goal is to start a discussion about key challenges in supporting the teaching and research use of business data. They refer to observations

about the growing importance of datasets, and continue with the categorization and trends of business data. There is a trend showing a growing demand in business data; unfortunately the business data often is the product of business models. Or to put it bluntly - the data is expensive. The authors show the uneven distribution of their selection of four core numeric business databases among Ontario universities. Within the business school area, there is the same discussion as elsewhere concerning support for data users when most librarians are not sufficiently educated in that type of data use. A "community of practice" is proposed; IASSIST is seen as a natural home for this and also as reaching a critical mass for convincing the commercial data vendors. I hope the article will bring fruitful discussions at the coming conference.

The last article in this issue is "A Survey Data Archive Network in Africa - Possibilities and Practicalities" by Lynn Woolfrey from the University of Cape Town. Woolfrey is the Data Manager at the DataFirst Survey Data Archive at the university. The point of departure for the article is that survey data archives have two central functions; they both facilitate data sharing and assist in safeguarding the quality of the data shared. Data archives share their data in networks on regional and global scales. However, this type of network is lacking in Africa and the article looks into the possibility of establishing such a network there. Lynn Woolfrey argues for the importance of social survey data in policy-making for social and economic development. The vital role of quantitative data in the development of the African continent was acknowledged in a UN draft charter. The support for statistical agencies would be complemented by a network of survey data archives. Some of the obstacles for this positive development are mentioned: lack of data sharing culture, lack of resources including skilled staff, technical and logistical issues, as well as language where research uses several languages (though that is not as many as in Europe, I could add). A first start in this direction resulted from the 2007 IASSIST conference, with the establishment of an African mailing list with representatives from South Africa, Cameroon, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Ghana, Mozambique, Niger, and Uganda. With the need and the rationale for the establishment of the network, and with the support from participants in similar networks, the development of an African survey data network will be interesting to follow.

Remember to have a look at the website <http://iassistdata.org> and the IASSIST blog - the IASSIST Communiqué - at <http://iassistblog.org>.

Articles for the IASSIST Quarterly are very welcome. Articles can be papers from IASSIST conferences, from other conferences, from local presentations, discussion input, etc. Contact the editor via e-mail: kbr@sam.sdu.dk.

Karsten Boye Rasmussen, April 2008