



People in the News Izaskun Lacunza

At its annual conference in Tartu last year, LIBER appointed Dr Izaskun Lacunza as its Executive Director. Your Ed was eager to catch up with her, to find out about her background and how she feels about taking up this challenging role. Izaskun is an analytical chemist by training, but 'decided to change the bench' when she finished her PhD for a job that would provide a wider picture on new trends in research and development, how it is evolving and how it is being managed by the policy makers. So after completing her PhD, Izaskun went to work for the Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology, where one of the strategic areas was scientific information management at the national level. She and her colleagues focused their efforts on getting national licences for some of the most important content providers; developing programmes to help academic publishers improve their quality standards; harmonizing CRIS systems in the country and acting as the Spanish open access node in several European projects. During this period, Izaskun saw how the approach to scientific information management needs to be a co-operative effort among research libraries and other stakeholders.

Izaskun is really excited about this new challenge as Executive Director and has always been very interested in LIBER as an association that represents and has raised the profile of research libraries in Europe. She sees this as a fascinating moment in which libraries are being re-invented to satisfy the new researchers' needs in the digital environment. Izaskun feels that her new position represents a great opportunity to contribute to the positioning of research libraries as key stakeholders in the construction of the European Research Area (ERA).

Izaskun explained that LIBER is an association with more than 400 members across Europe and that this huge membership supports the power of networking, sharing of knowledge and making the voice of research libraries a strong reference in Europe. As an association, it can reach much higher levels of dialogue at the European and international level.

LIBER strongly believes in the power of international co-operation as the only way to re-invent the role of libraries, as part of a bigger research infrastructure being built in Europe with the effort of the European Commission, national governments and rest of stakeholders.

As Izaskun pointed out, "libraries are not islands of information any more; there is a need to share information, services, projects, ideas."

She argues that researchers have dramatically changed the way they search and relate to information in the last few years, and libraries have to adapt to that change, being part of an

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international infrastructure that offers information to researchers within Europe. Libraries want to contribute to the European Research Area, one of its pillars being creating a world class research infrastructure and allowing the sharing of knowledge within Europe. Libraries have a lot to contribute to the ERA if they work in co-operation.

Co-operation is a word that Izaskun uses a lot. She pointed to DART, which offers access to more than 360,000 open access theses from more than 527 universities in 27 countries, as a great example of how new services can be offered through co-operation.

LIBER is participating in a number of EC projects in the area of data sharing. For example, Opportunities for Data Exchange has explored the drivers and barriers in data sharing, and the expected role of the different stakeholders. Izaskun explained that LIBER supports the idea that data sharing will accelerate data-driven innovation and will be a key issue in the scholarly communication and research infrastructure of the future. Together with data centres, researchers, policy makers and rest of the stakeholders, libraries have a lot to contribute to the creation, curation, preservation and re-use of data. One of the main focuses of LIBER's 2013-2015 Strategy ('Re-inventing the library of the future') will be to identify the skills that libraries have and the ones that they will need to develop to contribute to the research data workflow (probably, with librarians embedded in the research process; librarians specialized in data curation and re-use, etc.).

Izaskun believes that this effort has a European and even worldwide nature, and LIBER is actively participating in an EU High-Level Advisory Group on research data (i-Cordi), which is also a partner of the Research Data Alliance, that aims to accelerate international data-driven innovation and discovery by facilitating research data sharing and exchange, use and re-use, standards harmonization and discoverability.

LIBER is also involved in several projects in the area of digital preservation. A colleague from LIBER recently attended the conference 'UNESCO memory of the world in the digital age: digitization and preservation', where it was made clear that digital preservation would contribute to a more democratic and informed society by assuring accessibility, use and re-use of information. LIBER is currently working in the EC project, Alliance for Permanent Access to the Records of Science in Europe Network (APARSEN), a Network of Excellence that brings together an extremely diverse set of practitioner organizations and researchers in order to bring coherence, cohesion and continuity to research into barriers to the long-term accessibility and usability of digital information and data.

Open access to scholarly communication is another topic of great interest to LIBER and Izaskun believes that the basis of the movement in Europe is the idea that scholarly communication has not fully benefited from the internet revolution. She explained, "It is still being driven very much like in the print days. If scholarly communication wants to encompass the current times, it has to be more immediate, more open not only in terms of reading, but also accessible for re-use by humans and machines."

8 Izaskun points out that more and more institutions, such as the European Union and many national governments, are now defending the belief that publicly funded research outputs should be made open access. That way research outputs will be available to the general public, SMEs and researchers worldwide, stimulating research and making it more open and innovative.

When your Ed asked Izaskun about her vision for LIBER in the next three years, she told me that it is to contribute to re-inventing the research library and to get it ready for the future, making sure that libraries are a strong asset for the ERA: "We want to become stronger in the advocacy and communications side, representing the library's view at the policy-making level. Also, we want to contribute to the scholarly communication and research infrastructure in Europe, and we want to help librarians to define what the new services are that they will need to offer (institutional repositories, virtual research environments for researchers, etc.) and the skills that will be needed for that. In the next three years, the whole organization will work hard to assure that research libraries are a fundamental asset for researchers, faculty and students."

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A formidable task, but Izaskun says that LIBER's new strategy points the way and that she is able to count on the support of an extremely learned Executive Board and of Steering Committees, an office more and more involved in EC projects and a very powerful network of libraries that believes in its projects.

The new position and a lot of travel make great demands on Izaskun's time, and I asked if she ever has a chance to relax. She explained that having moved to The Hague for her new role, she finds she enjoys a quieter life than when she lived in Madrid. This is giving her a chance to catch up on reading many of the books that have been on her 'pending list' for a long time. She is currently reading *El Quijote*, a fantastic novel that looks at life, justice, humour, love and friendship from the eyes of a not-so-crazy nobleman.

