That's Collaboration: NII-University

A Community Dedicated to the Sustainability and Growth of Institutional Repositories

More and more universities and other institutions throughout Japan are establishing institutional repositories. As a new form of NII-university collaboration, the Digital Repository Federation, a community of institutional repository managers in Japan, has been established. The aim of the Federation's activities is the sustainability and growth of institutional repositories.

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Institutional repositories are digital archives established at universities and other academic institutions to preserve the educational and research achievements produced at that institution (articles, research papers, learning materials etc.), and to make them freely available to the public. Institutional repositories are attracting a great deal of attention as a means of making available the educational and research outcomes of academic institutions, which up to now was usually not in general circulation, to potential readers throughout the world, and to enable these institutions to fulfill their responsibility to be accountable to society by showcasing the fruits of their education and research.

Joint NII-University Projects

The term "institutional repository" (IR) as a joint project made up of NII and university libraries first appeared as a keyword in the report entitled " New Trends of the Digital Library" (the Japan Association of National University Libraries, May 2003) (*1). The report recommended "increasing the dissemination of the educational and research outcomes of academic institutions by means of institutional repositories" and proposed that "a pioneering joint project made up of NII and university libraries be established" as a means of achieving this objective. In that same year, 2003, the very first IR in Japan was made publicly available on a trial basis by the Chiba University. As of the end of 2008, there are 88 IRs in Japan. There are now approximately 1,300 IRs worldwide, and Japan ranks fourth in terms of the number of IRs that have been established.

In the background of the rapid growth of IRs lies the NII Institutional Repositories Program (*2), part of the NII's Cyber Science Infrastructure (CSI). Since 2004, NII has been promoting the provision of information sharing about the software and training courses to enable systems to be designed with open specifications that conform to international standards. In 2005, thanks to the effort of the person in charge at that time, the CSI-commissioned project that would eventually become the pioneering joint project was initiated. Unlike previous one-way structures in which NII would take the lead and solicit university cooperation, this initiative was characterized by the fact that the university solicited projects that were designed to resolve problems.

The CSI-commissioned project implemented in FY 2005 - 2007 was continued in the form of the Phase 2 in FY 2008 - 2009, based on the achievements of that FY 2005 - 2007 project with the backing of the "Report on the prospects for future scholarly information infrastructure" (Council for Science and Technology May 2006) (*3). In FY 2008, more than 70 universities cooperated as partners to promote the project.

The Digital Repository Federation (DRF) (*4) was established in November 2006 as a community of IR managers in Japan under the leadership of Hokkaido University, Chiba University, Kanazawa University and Osaka University. DRF continues to attract new universities and other institutions. At the time of its founding, DRF had only 25 participating institutions, but this number has now increased to 85 (56 national universities, 3 public universities, 24 private universities and 3 research institutions).

Building Equitable Relationships on a Nationwide Scale

Specifically, DRF conducts five activities. Its two main activities are (1) operating an open mailing list and website and (2) holding workshops and other meeting events several times each year. In addition, DRF also (3) conducts research regarding copyright, improving access and other issues, (4) shares expertise with similar initiatives overseas, and (5) studies approaches to ensuring a sustainable community.

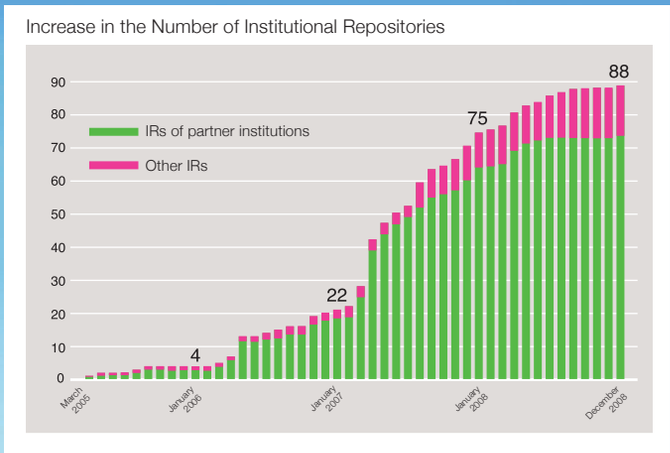
Even in the past, there have been many opportunities for librarians to get together. University libraries have various cooperative relationships that include inter-library loan (ILL) services, which enable students and researchers to order the books and documents they need, and shared union cataloging (NACSIS-CAT). DRF is further enhancing this environment by creating ongoing equitable cooperative relationships

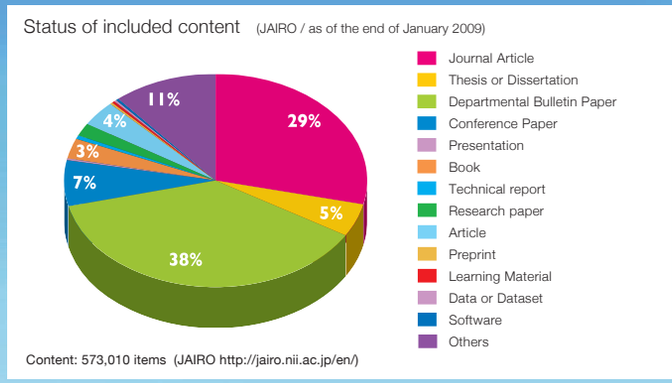
(*1) http://www.soc.nii.ac.jp/anul/j/publications/reports/74.pdf

(*2) http://www.nii.ac.jp/irp/en/

(*3) http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/gijyutu/gijyutu4/toushin/06041015.htm

(*4) http://drf.lib.hokudai.ac.jp/drf/index.php?Digital Repository Federation (in English)





With the sharing of information as a result of DRF and other activities, the number of IRs that have established institutional repositories now exceeds the number of universities that are funded by the NII's CSI-commissioned projects, and the number continues to increase.

(in other words, a community) on a national scale, something that was difficult to achieve merely through occasional opportunities for assembly and training. This has been made possible by the mailing list and the website, which uses a Wiki system that allows people to easily edit content using their web browsers.

Masako Suzuki, DRF Coordinating Committee / Otaru University of Commerce Library, says the advantages of DRF are that it goes beyond the level of an organization and serves as a venue for managers to share expertise with and help one another. "The fact that they can meet face to face and relate to one another as people on a one-to-one basis means a lot," she says. At the same time, she says, DRF also serves as a venue for friendly competition on IR. Since DRF website and mailing list are open, the managers of institutions that are attempting to establish IRs can experience vicariously the experiences of universities that have already done so.

Still, it is sometimes difficult to establish individual repositories. As a solution to this problem, the 11 universities making up the Hiroshima Association of University Libraries have joined to create a shared repository on a single server, and this repository was made available beginning in April 2008. The Hiroshima University Library, which serves as the secretariat, freely provides support for the autonomous efforts of individual universities. Fumiyo Ozaki, DRF Coordinating Committee / Hiroshima University Library, says that creating and maintaining a repository is like raising a child. "The experience brings joy, but in order to continue to raise your child you also need to resolve many problems, so it's important to share information with other parents and use the accumulated knowledge from those who have been parents before you. DRF makes this possible."

Also Contributing to Personnel Training and Internationalization

DRF is a relaxed community. Its operating policy is that organizations and individuals that wish to cooperate autonomously should cooperate with one another to the greatest degree possible. Shigeki Sugita, DRF Coordinating Committee / Hokkaido University Library, says the biggest problem that must be resolved in the future is how to maintain accumulated knowledge and personal connections despite a personnel organization in which managers change every few years. "In addition, in order for IRs overall to serve as a forum for academic communication, determining future approaches from an international perspective will be indispensable."

DRF has achieved successes in the area of cooperation with NII-sponsored IR-related training projects. Moreover, DRF is also contributing to standardization efforts. One example is the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) concluded in 2008 for cooperation with the EU-sponsored Digital Repository Infrastructure Vision for European Research (DRIVER) project.

"In recent years, there has been a dramatic increase in the momentum for IR establishment," says Izumi Sugita, Chief of the Library Liaison Team in the Scholarly and Academic Information Division of the NII's Cyber Science Infrastructure Development Department. "But one of the major roles of DRF is also to establish models for maintaining and expanding the IR following the completion of the CSI-commissioned project, and to work to strengthen cooperation. NII will make the achievements of IRs more visible in order to promote IRs in the future as well."

In terms of the provision of information, IRs fundamentally change libraries from passive to active services. They increase the value of the existence of libraries and increase the motivation of librarians. "I find the most fulfilling part of IRs is the communication with researchers," says Suzuki. "It made me very happy when some researcher told me 'I was really motivated when I realized that people were actually using the IR to read papers I'd written.'"

The hope is that, by helping to energize institutional repositories, DRF can help to energize Japan's entire academic environment.

(Written by Asako Tsukasaki)

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