

# The Multifunctional Thematic Database *Lituanistika*

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**Abstract.** The paper presents *Lituanistika*, a multifunctional, multilingual, interdisciplinary (within the scope of social sciences and humanities) and international database in the area of Lithuanian studies. As Lithuanian studies involve scholarly works on the past and present of the Lithuanian state, society, culture, nation, and language, the builders aim at collecting, digitizing, evaluating, preserving, analyzing and disseminating (providing access, Open Access included) current and earlier research of various genres of the selected topic from all over the world. The paper describes the historical context and the reasons for its compilation, its gradual growth and improvement during three phases of its formation in 2006-2014, as well as its status quo and plans for its further development and application. It also deals with the issue of multifunctionality and tackles the question of compatibility of the various aims of the database.

**Keywords:** multifunctional database of SSH research, scientific heritage, Lithuanian studies, open access, research evaluation, bibliographic and bibliometric approach.

## 1 The context and reason for the appearance of the database

Originally, the database *Lituanistika* (hence LT DB) was started as a tool for the evaluation of SSH research [1]. In the year 2006, when the DB was started, a sharp debate took place concerning the qualitative and quantitative methods of assessment of research, their applicability to soft and hard sciences, and their impact on different research cultures. The social sciences and humanities (hence SSH) research community tried to resist an increasing pressure to apply quantitative, i.e., bibliometric approach to SSH in general and specifically to the part of it that addresses the issues of the past and present of the Lithuanian state, society, culture, nation, and language. The main argument of historians, philologists, economists and other researchers dealing with the subject called Lithuanian studies (or *Lituanistika* in Lithuanian) against measuring the numbers of publications and their citations in commercial databases that there is a different culture of SSH research. Publishing in national journals and publishing houses in the national languages, a larger generic variety of their publications (studies and monographs being as important as research papers), and a wider scale of fields, subfields, areas and methods of research, a different approach to citation and co-authorship, and due to that there exists an underrepresentation of the national SSH research in such databases as Web of Science and SCOPUS [2].

The need to preserve the specificity of the SSH research combined with the attempts to improve its quality fueled by the need to promote the works on the topic of Lithuanian studies internationally was met by the Research Council of Lithuania (LMT) in cooperation with the Lithuanian re-search institutions, ministries, publishers and libraries, including the Ministry of Education and Science, Lithuanian Academic Libraries Directors' association (LABA); Lithuanian Research Library Consortium (LMBA). The project sponsored by the structural funds of EU was implemented in three phases: 2006 – 2008, 2009 – 2010 and 2011 – 2014.

During the first phase of compilation the overall structure of the LT DB was designed and the procedures for collecting, digitizing, and evaluating thematically suitable research were set. All the works to be included in the DB, regardless that they were published before, had to be evaluated from two perspectives: their compatibility with the topics of Lithuanian studies and the quality of their research. The latter criterion was necessary at that time as not all research items were methodologically sound and trustworthy. Therefore all works had to be peer reviewed irrespective of the channel of their publication and judged as suitable or non-suitable for the LT DB. Thus, evaluation criteria and processes have been established. Moreover, research publications are rated by peer reviews with regard to their originality, novelty, quality, validity of argumentation and theoretical approach, and the presence of critical reflections, to mention a few criteria.

Later on with the appearance of a list of trusted journals and publishers (with the acceptance rate of more than 90 percent to LT DB of the post publishing peer review) the need for peer review gradually decreased leaving more space for other functions and activities, e.g. educational events, investigation of user opinions, negotiation with the publishers concerning Open Access. A short administrative or regulatory check-up of specific types of publications replaced peer reviewing and only in ambiguous cases expertise was required. In the first phase of LT DB preparation IT tools and a web portal were created, a critical mass of publications collected, digitized and reviewed.

In the second phase the DB was considerably extended and opened for publications from libraries worldwide with special attention for the centers of Lithuanian studies in foreign countries, ranging from Poland to Tasmania. In the last stage the bibliometric approach was introduced as an attempt to make LT DB applicable as a tool for research evaluation together with some other additional improvements such as a search tool for the database internal citations and the outstanding authors of LT DB [3].

## **2 Status quo**

At present LT DB is a full-fledged thematically defined database of scholarly works representing research in the social sciences and humanities about the past and present of the Lithuanian state, society, culture, nation, and language.

It covers the SSH research literature since 2000 (doctoral theses since 1991) with bibliographic references, abstracts in at least two languages and full texts if legally available. In 2015 it contained ca 53 586 registered publications, 35925 out of them are assessed as suitable for LT DB. The part of the social sciences research is smaller

(49 %) than that of the humanities (51 %). The generic structure of LT DB is quite diverse. Although it is mostly made up by research articles (82 %), dissertations (7%) and monographs (3%) are prominent also. The remaining parts consist of less popular genres: reviews, publications of source materials, reports, studies, dictionaries, etc.

From the point of view of the languages of publication, the Lithuanian language dominates (78 %). The English part (15 %) gradually increases, while publications in other languages that are popular for the topics, i.e. Polish, German, and Russian, remain at the level from 1 to 3 percent.

LT DB is known for its multidisciplinary. Registered research comes from the following areas, presented in the order of decreasing quantity: philology, history, research on educational issues, management, economics, art, sociology, law, ethnology, political sciences, communication and information, philosophy, and theology. Thus a large number of SSH disciplines is included. However, full range of research in the disciplines of SSH is limited by the focus on the selection of research themes in the disciplines referring to Lithuania.

The builders of the DB pursue a full text and an Open Access approach [4]. 96 percent are full texts, the remaining 4 percent provide links to full texts. The full texts are accessible for free as LT DB is an Open Access repository. As such it is registered in the Registries of Open Access Repositories, i.e. ROAR [5], and the Directory of Open Access Repositories, i.e. OpenDOAR [6]. The dissemination of information in LT DB is guaranteed by the use of OAI-PMH protocol (the Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting), which is commonly used to collect information from various Internet sources by all prevailing search engines.

The contents and the set of procedures determine the structure of the DB. It is supplied with five service packages: cataloging, reviewing, processing of bibliography and citations, providing with search and delivery, and a web portal. Search and delivery can be reached via WWW OPAC [7] and via virtual library [8].

An external reviewer of LT DB Gunnar Sivertsen from the *Norwegian Institute for Studies in Innovation Research and Education*, in his reference mentioned some special features that “only partly can be found in similar databases abroad” [9]. They include *internationality* of the approach coming from an extensive use of databases and information sources, especially, in the Lithuanian and Baltic studies centers worldwide, and collecting research in any language. Another feature is *research evaluation and its rating* by peers with regard to the above mentioned criteria.

*Open Access* and the function as a searchable repository for *free access to full text* was assessed by Gunnar Sivertsen as “developed quite far, both technically and with regard to comprehensiveness, compared to similar solutions in the social sciences and humanities (SSH) in other countries” [10]. *Presentation of the most outstanding researchers* i.e. the links of author’s names to their short biographies, significant achievements, and the most important scientific works, according to the expert view “brings the database close to a current research information system” [11]. Concerning the last distinctive feature, *citation indexing or linking* the references in documents of the database as citations that were installed lately because of the multitude of aims of the DB, the expert had some doubts. He questioned the impact of citation indexing in the information retrieval and in creation of information retrieval. In his opinion, “a

full text database provides better mechanisms for information retrieval than citation indexing does” [12]. This has to do with the multiple functions of the LT DB.

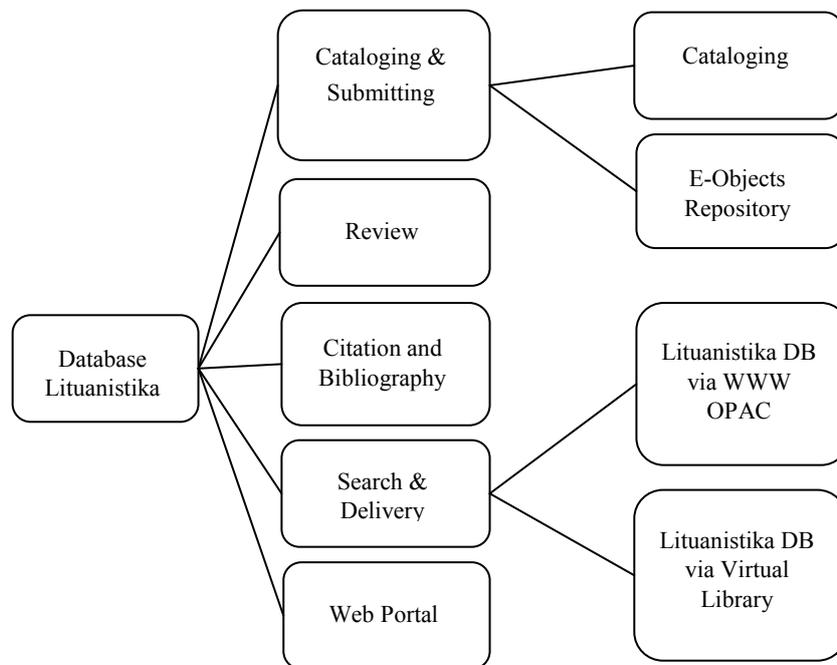


Fig. 1.

### 3 A repository or a tool for research evaluation

As mentioned above LT DB was created as a multipurpose aimed tool supplied with quality-assured contents, open to the public and searchable with advanced technologies. User statistics show that a search in the virtual library exceeds 15 000 queries per month on average, downloads are twice as popular meaning LT DB is already widely used for literature search and access. However, LT DB is not confined to providing an access to the collection of research, there are several additional aims: reinforcement and further development of Lithuanian studies, improved international visibility of SSH research in Lithuania, documentation of the research literature in the SSH that is not covered by commercial citation indexing services, Open Access to scholarly publications, and development as well as organization of research evaluation in the SSH.

A survey has been made to find out the prevailing reasons for addressing LT DB. It showed that the majority of users resort to the database for their research and pedagogical purposes, some of them do it for self-education and studies, and only a small part for other purposes. The prevailing types of queries are similar: search of literature

on a specific topic or search of works of a specific author. It can be concluded that the main function of LT DB is that of a repository. Nevertheless, research evaluation starting from its inclusion (or refusal to include), rating and information on the citation in the same database are important also. The question is where to go during the next phase of LT DB development.

Another external reviewer Thed van Leeuwen, CWTS, Leiden University, the Netherlands finds that it is somewhat contradictory to combine both a bibliographic and a bibliometric system [13]. Hence a question: is LT DB a repository or an evaluation tool? As these functions require different types of information to be included and different policies pursued, the builders have to choose between bibliographic and bibliometric approaches. The reviewer is more supportive of a bibliographic data system as LT DB is thematically limited and does not cover all scholarly output. Besides, citations are collected within the same DB which is a relatively small citation universe therefore, in Thed van Leeuwen's opinion it cannot be used for scientific impact measurement", especially, since many disciplines with quite diverse citation cultures are represented. He suggests to refrain from the bibliometric application and to focus on the function of a bibliographic repository.

#### **4 Conclusions and plans for further development**

Since LT DB falls in the nationally prioritized category of research in the area of the Lithuanian studies and is known for its relevance and reputation it will be continued during the next period of the European support. Therefore it is of paramount importance to make choices and decisions concerning its further development. Based on the users' opinion, external international reviewer suggestions and considerations of the national experts, a plan for development has been made. It is foreseen that the overall design and the main functions of LT DB will be continued, its best features based on international, multidisciplinary, full text, Open Access approaches will be preserved. The newest research published worldwide and in the country should increase the multilingual part of the repository. Citation module, as suggested, will be continued only in its descriptive mode and used for the maps and network techniques based on citation data without any attempts to turn it into a research policy tool. The DB of the outstanding researchers will be integrated into Google Scholar, a repository of OpenAIRE, and that of the Consortium of the Academic Libraries of Lithuania (eLABa) for a wider dissemination and integration into global networks. Finally, a new type meta-level activity is planned to overview both, i.e., publications of broad research areas as well as their evaluation and ranking by experts. As an outcome more scholarly publication channels as reliable sources will be included into a dynamic list of quality assured and post-publishing peer review processes minimized. Developed and improved in this way LT DB will serve its multiple purposes and functions gradually acquiring and additional effect of a specimen of a scientific heritage in the field of Lithuanian studies over the period of more than two decades.

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