

This article offers a general overview on the structural evolutions of documentation networks for research in France. The CADIST system born in the 1980s, made of selected reference libraries designed as documentation repositories in each discipline, was replaced in 2017 by a distributed infrastructure named CollEx-Persée, destined to operate as a network steered by major heritage and research libraries as well as operators for documentation and research. After a few years of transition, CollEx-Persée is now fully in motion, according to several key issues settled on its 2018 roadmap, introducing a new conception of what a collection of excellence should be: research-oriented, with easy access to the material on the national scale and high quality associated services for researchers. All of these aspects will be highlighted by a cross-cartography of collections of excellence and research units.

Der Beitrag gibt einen Überblick über die Entwicklung von Forschungsinfrastrukturen in Frankreich. Das seit den 1980er-Jahren existierende System der Schwerpunktbibliotheken CADIST wurde 2017 abgelöst durch eine neue Infrastruktur namens CollEx-Persée. Bei CollEx-Persée handelt es sich um ein Netzwerk bedeutender Forschungsbibliotheken und Wissenschaftsinformationsdienstleistern. Nach einer kurzen Übergangsphase ist CollEx-Persée nun operationell und hat in den 2018 erstellten Leitlinien eine »Collection d'excellence« wie folgt definiert: Die Einrichtung, die eine solche Sammlung beherbergt, ist auf Forschung und Lehre ausgerichtet, sie ermöglicht Wissenschaftlern einen leichten Zugang zu Information auf nationaler Ebene und bietet auf diesen Nutzerkreis zugeschnittene Dienstleistungen. Darüber hinaus sind die einzelnen Einrichtungen untereinander vernetzt.

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CollEx-Persée – Building information and documentation networks for research

The CollEx Infrastructure was first introduced to the German audience in 2014 with an article about the French experience towards building a national scientific digital library that would encompass all fields of scientific publication and information.¹ Since that date, the situation has evolved. *BSN – Bibliothèque Scientifique Numérique*, or the Digital Scientific Library Infrastructure that was at the center of the ministerial strategy for a few years has shown its limits, mainly due to the lack of an appropriate legal status and of the regular money that would have accompanied it. In consequence, it has recently been transformed into a body called *Comité pour la science ouverte*, or Committee for Open Science, which has a proper focus on strategy and advice to the Ministry for Higher Education and Research (HER), rather than conducting and implementing real coordination projects.

In 2014, CollEx was still just an idea with a name. The idea was essentially to put library collections into the light, by defining Collections of Excellence (hence the name »CollEx«) bearing a special significance and potential for research and innovation on a national scale. This idea was also linked to the fact that the national collection development program that had existed in France since 1983, quite similar to the German *Sondersammelgebietsbibliotheken* (SSG), was no longer

appropriate in the digital context and should be transformed. At the same time, Germany set the example by moving from the SSG-program to the *Fachinformationsdienste für die Wissenschaft* (FID) policy, centered more on services than on collaborative collection development. It was having this German example in mind that CollEx, joined with PERSEE (the national project for retro-digitization of scientific journals in the social sciences and humanities – or SSH – field), was defined and developed to become an official Research Infrastructure within the national Roadmap for research infrastructures (RI) in 2015.

The CollEx-Persée² infrastructure: a general overview

A bit of history

In the 1980s, based on the German example of the SSG, the French higher education ministry created specialized disciplinary acquisition centers called CADIST (for *Centre d'acquisition et de diffusion de l'information scientifique et technique*), covering about thirty disciplines. Financed with a special endowment,³ they were intended to support a very broad acquisition policy for research documentation, especially in foreign languages, coordinated on a national scale. National

access to these collections was provided through inter-library loan services. With a growing discrepancy between the number of publications and the availability of funding, this policy eventually found its limits. A study was realized in 2016 to evaluate this model and make recommendations⁴. Moreover, as the collections grew more and more digital, the model failed to embrace the digital transition fully. There is a clear parallel to be drawn with the German evolution from the SSG model to the FID policy. This German experience was highlighted in February 2016, as a transnational meeting was organized in Strasbourg to understand the considerations that prevailed for the evolution towards this new model and the experiments run since, as the French institutions were building theirs.

A transition: 2014–2016

Between 2014 and 2016, part of the financial support for the CADIST libraries was gradually oriented to supporting the acquisition of digital documentation by funding specific projects, rather than through the annual allocation of a regular annual budget which was the case until then. The digital turn of CollEx was definitely stated as *Persée* platform was linked to the project. In January 2017, the CADIST program was declared officially over and the GIS CollEx-Persée was set up.

What is CollEx?

CollEx means literally »collections d'excellence«, relating to library collections with high quality material, built through long-term and extensive acquisition policies, covering a broad diversity of media formats, and with the potential to lead to innovative research on a national scale. The CollEx-Persée infrastructure is designed as a tool for national cooperation between the main key players in scientific and technical information, in all scientific fields. CollEx-Persée fosters a new conception of what a collection of excellence should be: research-oriented, with easy access to the material on the national scale and high quality associated services for researchers.

Why CollEx-Persée?

The former model proved to be also deficient in the matter of collaboration between librarians and researchers: CADIST libraries tended to act as reference repositories, access to publications to any researcher in France was granted through interlibrary loan, with however (depending on the disciplines) unequal interaction with research communities. As a result, one very strong guideline for CollEx is to manage a closer relationship between heritage libraries, specialized libraries and research networks. Therefore, the SSH research network *Alliance Athena*⁵ offered its very strong support to create CollEx, alongside the Ministry for research and higher education, the French national library,

prominent research and heritage libraries and national agencies (Persée, ABES, INIST, SIAF, CTLe).⁶ Fostering national coordination and policies through integrative disciplinary or transdisciplinary networks, according to several strategic issues, is the main objective of the CollEx-Persée infrastructure.

Status and Organization

For better impact, CollEx-Persée is built as a research infrastructure, included in the official lists of research infrastructures within the French Roadmap for RIs, specialized in documentation and scientific information. The choice of a GIS⁷ status also gives a real innovative turn in terms of governance, by transferring the financial support from the State (the Ministry) to this coordination agency collectively run by the key players in research information. The GIS structure is housed by one of its members. After a call for interest, the National and University Library (*Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire*, or BNU) in Strasbourg was chosen to become the support institution for GIS CollEx-Persée.

The CollEx-Persée organization reflects the inter-agencies and major research libraries cooperation issue, as all information and documentation agencies are part of the board, along with representatives from the HER ministry and from »bibliothèques déléguées«, which are libraries selected after a call for interest for having shown their ability to carry out strategic programs intended to specific research communities.

The GIS, installed for six years (2017–2022), is organized in several bodies:

- the Board of Members, which works as a steering committee, makes strategic and financial decisions; it is run by a president elected among the members;
- an Operational Group, where each member is also represented, is led by the GIS director (head of the supporting institution);
- a Scientific Committee, created after a call for interest among the scientific community; it offers validation of CollEx-Persée scientific guidelines and takes part in the projects selection process.

Apart from these bodies, the GIS director can seek council among a smaller executive board.

About twenty ex-CADIST and/or major heritage and research libraries were designated as reference and leading libraries in CollEx-Persée infrastructure, according to two different levels of integration:

- »bibliothèques déléguées«, or delegate libraries, are full members of GIS CollEx-Persée; they have a representation in the board of members and the operational group; they benefit from a yearly regular financial support, they are leading libraries in their designated field of expertise;
- »bibliothèque associées«, or associated libraries, can be part of the networks, be associated to any CollEx

project, also benefit from financial support but are not represented in the GIS bodies.

The global CollEx-Persée funding remains of 5 million euros, half of which is used as continuing financial support for these two circles of libraries. Many disciplinary fields in both SSH and STM are covered. The CollEx-Persée networks would be incomplete without a third circle of »bibliothèques labellisées«, that is, libraries identified as repositories of significant collections in one or several topics. This »CollEx« label will give those libraries more opportunities to be associated to projects that will be launched in the coming years, according to CollEx-Persée roadmap lines, and financed with the other half of the CollEx-Persée envelope.

Roadmap 2018: highlights

CollEx-Persée develops a program of actions along several key issues:

- Cartography: A disciplinary or (when needed) trans-disciplinary cross-cartography of special collections and research units will be drawn, in order to improve visibility of these repositories of research material; a first step was made in the year 2016–2017 with a call for tenders to all higher education libraries for labelling special collections presenting an interest for research.
- Digitization: fostering a national policy for digitization is one of the many objectives of CollEx; 2018 will see the outcome of a study currently run among HER institutions, and a call for projects will be launched in spring 2018, focusing on the development of content curation tools for already digitalized material.
- Acquisitions: the year 2018 will see experiments in the development of electronic resources licenses destined to specific research communities; the national consortium COUPERIN will be associated in this process.
- Services for research: Development of new research oriented services around scientific information and research data.
- Modernization of inter-library loan services, possibly shaped as free of charge service, focuses on dematerialization, seeking inspiration in the SUBITO services.

From CADIST to CollEx: impact in the BNU

A new role for the BNU: supporting GIS CollEx-Persée

Starting 2018, this new mission implies many responsibilities, such as organizing the GIS activities, funding projects, and stirring the CollEx-Persée networks. Both as the supporting institution for the GIS and member of it, as *bibliothèque déléguée*, the library has to reorganize itself in order to be able to face these chal-

lenges. An extra position was created to manage the GIS responsibilities; it will probably be fulfilled only in September 2018 but the impact of CollEx is already felt in many respects in the library's general activities, and will grow as its role as network leader and national projects manager grows as well. Most of the other *bibliothèques déléguées* will be faced with the same kind of challenges. CollEx-Persée's approach to excellence collections is now a core issue in the BNU's global strategy as a key player in the HER landscape.

Why BNU?

Second largest library in the country after *Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF)* in Paris, but largest in the HER sphere with about 3.5 million documents, having a unique status as an autonomous institution, with national preservation missions, already CADIST in two disciplines for a long time, the BNU applied for this position as an extension and increase to its traditional missions.

From the very beginning of the CADIST network in the 1980s, the BNU was identified as a reference library for two disciplinary fields: Religious and German studies. For historical reasons, the library was hosting very large collections for both disciplines, which are also very well represented among the local research communities. Thanks to this CADIST status and regular financial support from the Ministry, BNU had the means of running a large-scale acquisition policy. The collections also benefited from additional content through a cooperation (until 2013) with BnF as associated center and received a copy from the legal deposit for these special collections.

In the past decades, thanks to the CADIST opportunities, the library developed other activities around its special collections with an ambitious exhibition and cultural events policy, along with numerous national and international partnerships with other HER and cultural institutions. This approach certainly weighted to get BNU's special collections CollEx-labelled. More than a mere documentation reservoir (so to say), BNU has a leading part in the disciplinary networks, a part the library will have to share with other research libraries for some of these disciplines.

Now *bibliothèque déléguée*, the library extended its responsibilities as network leader from the two former CADIST collections (Religious and German studies), to two additional research areas, European studies and Classical studies, with a shared leadership for this special area with the *Bibliothèque interuniversitaire de la Sorbonne*, former CADIST in Classical studies.

CollEx-Persée: an opportunity for the development of shared preservation projects

During the transitional period of 2014–2016, CollEx projects, based on call for projects, were launched in

two directions: development of digital acquisitions first, followed by shared preservation projects for journal collections. If the digital transition is a key issue for CollEx-Persée, shared preservation is especially supported by CollEx for conservation considerations as much as a lever to facilitate this digital transition.

Thematic or regionally shared preservation projects have been developed in France for many years at the initiative of leading research libraries in several disciplines but also regional networks. In this context, CollEx-Persée is an opportunity to bring this dynamics to a larger scale, by including new disciplines within the scope of shared preservation. In this respect, the missions of other operators have grown to a national scale. The CTLEs is more active than ever in driving these kind of projects, alongside the leading library in the related disciplinary field. This agency provides technical support, project management expertise and actual storage areas. The network is built on a partnership of libraries with the adequate special collections.

Since spring 2016, the BNU is leading a new project with the CTLEs about collective preservation of journals in the German studies area. About ten partner libraries located in Paris, Lille and Strasbourg joined the project and a network began to be shaped, based on it. If additional funding was found thanks to this call for projects, the participation of each member rests on strong support from their institution, especially in human resources, as this kind of projects is actually demanding an active participation of many of the library's internal services. Thanks to the size and depth of its collections, the BNU was also solicited to take part as member to other shared preservation plans, in Classical studies, Italian studies, Central and East European studies and Medieval and Modern history. The same situation is to be found in other major SSH libraries, such as the *Bibliothèque interuniversitaire de la Sorbonne* (Paris 1 University).

Shared preservation plans are an opportunity to develop »CollEx networks« which are likely to lead to other CollEx projects according to the guidelines of the 2018 roadmap. For instance, one of the objectives laid in shared preservation projects is to take part in the cartography of special collections. Once the network

is built, the frame is available to identify the adequate projects that need CollEx-Persée's support to develop.

Building national scale excellence through local cooperation

Local cooperation is a key factor in building high quality information services for national research communities. The very peculiar local situation in Strasbourg with documentation services split between university services and an independent institution, both destined to serve the same students and researchers population, leads us to determine national excellence by the ability to cooperate locally. There is therefore a long-standing cooperation between the BNU and the University of Strasbourg, especially for Religious studies, as the CADIST status was shared with the theology library associated to the University of Strasbourg documentation service.

As a result, in the CollEx-Persée context of call for projects to label collections and for shared preservation plans, applications were conceived as a common answer for both institutions, highlighting the local cooperation and complementarity of research collections. The implementation of these projects will become a new tangible common realization and foster further cooperation.

To conclude ...

The ground has been laid in these past three years for a major change in the conception of the kind of services a special or »excellence« library should provide for the research communities, based on documentation issues. The GIS CollEx-Persée offers a frame for these actions, but it is not an isolated initiative; the whole informational landscape has been reorganizing itself for several years around Open Science perspectives. Among many challenges, one of the most decisive for CollEx-Persée will be the ability to coordinate its actions with other French initiatives about Open Science and national access to scientific information in general. Another aim would be to grow this national infrastructure within a few years to a legitimate European infrastructure, like Dariah; for this, the cooperation with other countries will be necessary.

Notes

- 1 Frédéric Blin: Von ISTEEX, BSN und Co: auf dem Weg zu einer nationalen wissenschaftlichen Bibliothek in Frankreich. In: *Bibliothek, Forschung und Praxis* 2014, 38(2), p. 246–252.
- 2 See: www.collex.eu/
- 3 Up to 5 million euros every year in the 2010s; see www.collex.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/CollEx_Rapport_BvDIM.pdf
- 4 www.collex.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/CollEx_Rapport_BvDIM.pdf
- 5 www.allianceathena.fr/
- 6 Persée (www.persee.fr/) is a technical and organizational platform to access journal digital archives. ABES (www.abes.fr/) stands for »Agence bibliographique de l'enseignement supérieur«, organizes centralized cataloguing and provides several shared online catalogues for HER libraries (among other services). INIST (www.inist.fr) stands for »Institut national de l'information scientifique et technique«, is a CNRS unit (Centre national de la recherche scientifique – National Center for Scientific Research) in charge of the scientific information policies at CNRS. SIAF (<https://francearchives.fr/article/26287441>) stands for »Service interministériel des archives de France«, coordinates the national policy concerning archive issues. CTLes (<https://www.ctles.fr/fr>) stands for »Centre technique du Livre de l'enseignement supérieur«, is a key player for shared preservation at a local (storage facility for Paris area) and national scale (coordination for shared preservation projects).
- 7 GIS for »Groupement d'intérêt scientifique« (Grouping of Scientific Interest) is a form of collective organization rather common among French research landscape.



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