

The PADDI Project

Planning Architecture Design Database Ireland

www.paddi.net

Introduction

PADDI is an online bibliographic database and directory of collections relating to architecture and planning in Ireland, north and south. The database includes books and parts of books, articles from selected journals and newspapers, regional planning documents, published and unpublished material from local amenity societies, conference papers, theses and design reports. There are currently over 17,000 records on PADDI and the site also includes detailed help pages, a thesaurus, lists of architects' names and of journals covered, useful links, contacts and some images. PADDI is used by architectural, planning and environmental professionals; academics; students; librarians; government departments; amenity groups; and interested members of the public.

PADDI was established to:

- ▶ widen access to Irish architectural and planning information by identifying and indexing key material;
- ▶ raise awareness of relevant resources and collections throughout Ireland;
- ▶ share the resources and expertise of a wide range of organisations including educational institutions, community groups, government bodies and specialist libraries;
- ▶ act as a catalyst to encourage others to make material available.

Background

The story of the PADDI Project is one of co-operation, of responding to users' needs, attracting funding and of using technological innovations to widen access to architectural and planning information.

A long tradition of co-operation exists between the two major architecture and planning libraries in the island of Ireland. The libraries of Queen's University Belfast in Northern Ireland and University College Dublin in the Republic of Ireland have long been building up collections of local architectural and planning material, both published and semi-published or "grey" material. Prior to the establishment of PADDI, Irish architectural information was not easy to find. And yet the number of relevant publications was increasing rapidly as was the demand from our users for local information. Both Queen's University and UCD provide fee-based services to local architects and planners and they too were starting to look for precedents in Ireland rather than looking only to the international scene.

In the early 1990s, with the aid of grants from The British Library and a number of charitable trusts, equipment was purchased and staff employed to set up two stand-alone bibliographic databases in the two libraries using FilemakerPro with a customised interface. Although these databases were highly popular at their two locations, it was soon obvious that the material collected should be made available to a wider user base and that duplication of effort in the selection and inputting of material could be reduced. In 1999, with the aid of an Irish Arts Council grant, a project manager with a library background was appointed for a six month period to

amalgamate the two databases and make the information on PADDI available on the World Wide Web.

In July 2000 a Research Support for Libraries Programme (RSLP) grant made it possible to appoint a project manager and project officer for a two-year period to complete the transition from local index to globally available Web-based database. A directory of sources was created to complement the database and further improve services to researchers and practitioners by providing a gateway to useful collections and sources of information.

At this stage it was felt that it was time to bring in other key players in the field of architectural information in Ireland so that they could contribute their expertise and further co-operation could be encouraged. A management board was established which included representatives from the two universities acting as lead bodies; the two major architectural archives – the Irish Architectural Archive and the Monuments and Buildings Record; the two professional organisations – the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland and the Royal Society of Ulster Architects; and a local pressure group – the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society.

Our awareness that it was time to move forward coincided with technological innovations and the growing shift in libraries towards IT and electronic resources. Julia will elaborate on this.

Delivering the PADDI Database

The most challenging technical issue that the PADDI project faced was how to deliver the database to as wide and as relevant an audience as possible. Up to 1999, as Karen has said, the database consisted of two separate in-house databases, one in Queen's and the other in UCD. This meant that access was limited to visitors to these two libraries. The two databases each had a different emphasis, reflecting their geographical locations and differences in legislation and planning policy.

By 1999 the possibilities presented by the Internet meant that we could look at how to integrate the two databases and somehow make them available to a worldwide audience via the Web. The practice proved to be somewhat more challenging than the overall vision, particularly as funds were extremely limited. However, at this time, the Republic of Ireland's Higher Education Authority Network (Heanet) was actively looking for electronic services to deliver from its server, the Irish National Information Server (INIS). We asked them if they would be interested in assisting the PADDI project with the technical issues and eventually mounting it onto their server. This they agreed to.

By 2000 it became clear that Heanet's role encompassed only database hosting. They were not in a position to offer technical assistance on issues around database functionality. As a result the PADDI project employed the services of a commercial company, Internet Ireland, with expertise in this area. The issues that we were looking for solutions to included:

Database Functionality:

- ▶ Select and print specific records;
- ▶ Search by date;
- ▶ Boolean searching (or combine terms in different fields);

- ▶ On-line thesaurus and architect's list with ability to click/search terms;
- ▶ Solution to semi-colon and apostrophe problem.

Web Site:

- ▶ Addition of more colour and definition to the PADDI logo;
- ▶ On-screen help;
- ▶ New links;
- ▶ Registration and trademarking of PADDI;
- ▶ Registration of the site with search engines;
- ▶ Addition of a statistical package for management information.

Problems and solutions

As the work on integrating the two standalone databases onto the Web progressed, a number of problems emerged. Some of these related to standardisation of data entry and, at a wider level, clarity over types of material to be entered. Whilst we had thought we were using, for example, the same field names during our standalone days, we were not and there were inconsistencies. Parts of books were being entered in one place whilst only references to whole books in another. Examples such as these came to light only at the database merging stage and resulted in much time to discuss, come up with solutions and put right. The creation of a manual to ensure consistency in inputting style was one practical solution whilst other solutions depended on discussion and agreement.

One of the thorniest problems turned out to be agreement over choice of subject headings. We used the Getty Art & Architecture Thesaurus turning to Library of Congress Subject Headings where A&AT presented no suitable subject. Where neither provided a suitable heading, a local term was created. Terms peculiar to us included peacelines and stud farms. No doubt every country could come up with its own examples.

The existence of duplicate entries on the database also came to light once the two standalone databases were amalgamated. With the creation of one Web database it was possible to share out the workload, agreeing which university would scan and index which journals. Global elimination of the duplicate entries proved to be technically impossible and so the solution was to make manual deletions which proved to be very time-consuming..

There are problems remaining around the area of functionality. For example, we still do not have Boolean searching although cross-field searching is possible. To address these problems at this stage would require a substantial input of funding. With hindsight we probably needed more technical expertise at the beginning of the project in addition to information experts. The match between the two is important in order to ensure that the realities and visions of what users of the database wanted were appreciated, enhanced and made more realistic by those with the technical knowledge. As part of this iterative process, more testing of a prototype or pilot would have been useful.

I shall now hand back to Karen to conclude by outlining what we feel we got right and indicating possible future developments.

PADDI was, and is, very much a collaborative project and the two teams based at the two universities were fully committed to the project from the very beginning. A proven gap in resources was identified and the database was developed to meet a clearly expressed demand from users to provide a guide to local architectural and planning information. The two project leaders worked hard early on in the development of the database to build a united team, to plan ahead, to set targets and to ensure everyone knew the role s/he had to play. Because the information was being collected at two organisations wider coverage was achieved; skills and resources were shared, as were the tasks of scanning for information to include in the database and of its inputting. The importance of full and constant communication should be emphasised. While email was swift and continual and usually the best means of communication, there were times when telephone calls helped to iron out more complex queries and regular face-to-face meetings were essential for full discussion and the solution of particularly difficult issues. The partnership between two major institutions that were geographically relatively close but politically separate had great advantages when it came to looking for funding. Because a strong case for funding had to be made, very clear goals were established from the outset. We knew exactly what we wanted to achieve.

Future developments

We also learned that you can never ask for too much money and you never allow enough time to manage a project. The more organisations involved the more problems there will be reconciling institutional differences and if possible these should be identified and discussed at the start of any project.

Long-term viability of any project such as PADDI is always a concern. Both Queen's and UCD are committed to sustaining the project for the benefit of their own staff and students and the wider research community. However it is essential to maintain a high profile both within one's own institution and beyond if further funding is to be made available. The launch of PADDI in both Belfast and Dublin in June 2002 was planned with this in mind.

A project like this never stands still. Already we can see the need for slicker document delivery or indeed for electronic access to full text. Because we are dealing with visually aware users the demand for images is great and although we have provided some images we don't have the resources to tackle this in a major way. We have achieved our aim of raising awareness and acting as a catalyst to encourage others to get involved. As a result a great deal of new material is becoming available to us which increases our staffing problem and may also mean we have to reconsider our criteria for inclusion. We want to uphold the ideal of free access to information but if we don't charge for our services how are we to fund further developments? The search for new funding streams has to be part of any future planning. If we are to achieve economies of scale we need to develop new partnerships, evolve new methods of working and take advantage of technological innovations. The user wants the one-stop shop not an endless array of choices but there are inevitably problems involved in trying to embrace both local and global information. Working together in an increasingly European or worldwide context may be the solution and it is hoped that conferences such as this will stimulate debate and provide pointers to the way forward.