

Review of the Evaluation Report of IZUM as a UNESCO Centre (Renewal evaluation of UNESCO Category 2 Centre: IZUM in Slovenia, November, 2025) **and autopsy of the failed COBISS.Net network expansion project**

To evaluate the activities and assess the performance of any institution over a period of time, it is first necessary to know or establish what the plans and expectations were at the beginning of the evaluation period. This was ignored by the experts of the Strategicus Consulting company from Romania, which makes the evaluation report extremely misleading.

When the UNESCO General Assembly granted [IZUM](#) the status of UNESCO Category 2 Centre in 2011, IZUM's strategic goal was to connect all higher education and research organizations and national, public, higher education and special libraries in the target countries (Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia) to the COBISS.Net network within 5–10 years with international development assistance, while the number of employees at IZUM was to increase from 115 to 150. UNESCO adopted IZUM's strategic guidelines for expanding the COBISS.Net network, recognizing that IZUM would contribute to numerous UNESCO strategic goals and program priorities, and most importantly to the overarching goal of building knowledge societies.

The activities of IZUM as an information service for Slovenian science, education and culture (development and maintenance of the COBISS.SI and SICRIS systems) were then determined by Article 3 of the Government [Decision on the Establishment of the Institute of Information Sciences](#) from 2002. In 2012, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia (RS) and UNESCO concluded an [Agreement on the transformation of IZUM into a Regional Centre for Library Information Systems and Current Research Information Systems](#) under the auspices of UNESCO and on its operation in the South-Eastern Europe region. The list of tasks of IZUM under Article 6 of the aforementioned Agreement is identical to the tasks of IZUM under Article 3 of the Government Decision on the Establishment of IZUM. Unlike most other UNESCO Category II centres, which were established as organisational units of larger institutions (example: [IRCAI](#) at the Jožef Stefan Institute in Ljubljana), IZUM was transformed into a UNESCO Category 2 centre as a whole. The Regional Centre for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe – [RCSICH](#) in Sofia has a comparable status.

By signing the Agreement with UNESCO, the Government of the RS committed to immediately change the composition of the IZUM Management Board so that it would consist of (a) a representative of the Government of Slovenia, (b) a representative of the Director-General of UNESCO, (c) a representative of the COBISS.Net Council, (d) a representative of the user community from Slovenia, and (e) a representative of the employees of the Centre. The Government of the RS has also undertaken to provide "all the resources, either financial or in kind, needed for the administration and proper functioning of the Centre", UNESCO therefore undertook to support the program activities of the centre with technical assistance, if necessary.

All of the above was a logical consequence of the previous strategic orientations and results of IZUM and the expected role of IZUM and UNESCO in establishing national library information systems and information systems on research activities in the SEE countries with international development assistance and supervision through the IZUM Management Board. As the leading author of the COBISS and SICRIS/E-CRIS systems, the long-time director of IZUM and the long-time coordinator of the COBISS.Net project, I have repeatedly warned various ministries of the Government of the RS and UNESCO that the expansion of the COBISS.Net network depends on:

- IZUM's ability to permanently satisfy the needs of users in target countries with its products and services (with a guarantee of successful long-term development and cooperation),
- political support and coordination of political-diplomatic activities for the implementation of the COBISS system in target countries (where much depends on political decisions and not only on the interests of libraries),
- international development assistance to libraries in target countries, when they must provide the conditions for the implementation of the COBISS and E-CRIS systems (education, equipment and other incentives).

What happened after that and what is the current situation?

The Government of the RS did not change the composition of the IZUM Management Board and the consequences are as follows:

- UNESCO and users of IZUM services and products outside Slovenia have no influence on the activities and development directions of IZUM,
- the issue of the expansion of the COBISS.Net network is not discussed at the meetings of the IZUM Management Board (a taboo topic),
- IZUM and its partners in the COBISS.Net network do not benefit from UNESCO's patronage.

In 2013, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation (MVZI) blocked financial support for the expansion of the COBISS.Net network (150,000 EUR), and thus preventing the organization of library studies at the University of Shkodra (Albania) according to the program of the University of Ljubljana. As a result, in both Albania and Kosovo today there are no more than 10 librarians with a university education in library science (there are over 600 in Slovenia).

In 2015 and 2016, various ministries of the Government of the RS prevented the acquisition of 10 million EUR of European funds for the COBISS.Net project: "[Supporting the development of national library information systems in the countries of the Western Balkans and their integration in a common educational, research and cultural area of the EU \(2016–2018\)](#)" under the IPA programme (assistance to countries applying for EU membership). At the initiative of the European Commission, UNESCO was ready to take over the project under its wing on the condition that I was personally ready to continue coordinating the project, but it was not possible to obtain political support from the Government of the RS.

In 2017, IZUM got an incompetent director, Dr. Aleš Bošnjak, who immediately announced that he would follow the guidelines of the Government of the RS and the IZUM Management Board, which do not support the COBISS.Net project.

In 2019, the Civil Initiative was established to resolve strategic development issues of IZUM and the COBISS.Net project (www.zacobiss.net) with the following proposals:

- to establish, under the auspices of the Cabinet of the Prime Minister or the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, interdepartmental coordination of IZUM's strategic development guidelines in the COBISS.Net network and coordination of political and diplomatic activities to promote Slovenian interests in the project's target countries;
- to change the IZUM management model and determine the competent composition of the IZUM Management Board in the IZUM founding act in accordance with the specificity of the activities and development guidelines of IZUM;
- to place the COBISS.Net project among the strategic (priority) projects of international development cooperation of the Republic of Slovenia and propose to the European Commission the financing of the expansion of the COBISS.Net network from European funds within the framework of the IPA pre-accession assistance program.

Besides me, the founders of the aforementioned civil initiative were all former rectors of the University of Maribor, one of the former rectors of the University of Ljubljana and the first female rector of the University of Primorska, and the efforts and proposals for solving the COBISS.Net project were also supported by six former ministers and all former mayors of Maribor. Unfortunately, the competent ministries of the Government of the RS, the IZUM Management Board and the IZUM Director ignored all the proposals. As a result, in 2022, the Prime Minister also ignored the initiative for Slovenia to allocate 3 million EUR to remediate critical situations on the ground.

In 2025, the opportunity to obtain (15 million EUR) European funds under the IPA program for the [COBISS.Net Project – Phase III: Supporting the development of national library information systems in the countries of the Western Balkans and their integration in a common educational, research and cultural area of the EU \(2025–2029\)](#) was wasted for the third time. The Director of IZUM did not support the [proposal](#) that the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, at the initiative of the Director of [SQAA](#), sent to the European Commission in early September 2024, and officials at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MZEZ) and the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation (MVZI) also refused to help with lobbying in Brussels. The reasons for this were irrational.

Representatives of three of its directorates told us at the [COBISS 2006](#) conference that the COBISS.Net network expanding project does not fall under the European Commission's tenders. Proof of this is the failure of the IZUM director's initiative to apply for the HORIZON-INFRA-2025-01-DEV-03 tender last year. Meanwhile (2021–2025), IZUM has obtained dedicated financial funds from two ministries (MVZI and MZEZ) for "expansion of the COBISS.Net network and promotion" in the annual amount of 20-50,000 EUR, but is hiding documentation on the use of the said funds.

The current status of the implementation of the COBISS and E-CRIS systems outside Slovenia is as follows:

- At the end of 2024 in the Western Balkan countries and Bulgaria only 537 out of 1,300 national, public, higher education and special libraries (i.e. 41%) and 26 school libraries out of several thousand – a total of 563 libraries – were connected to the COBISS.Net network. At the end of 2025, there were 562, today 557! The average annual increase in the period 2021–2025 was 17 libraries, which means that it would take another 45 years to include all 1,300;
- In North Macedonia, 20 libraries were excluded from the COBISS.MK system in the period 2021–2025 (with the inclusion of some new libraries);
- In Albania and Kosovo, efforts to establish national library information systems on the COBISS platform under the leadership of national libraries failed because IZUM and the Government of the RS failed to establish political coordination and organize library studies. IZUM has deviated from the original organizational model of the COBISS system and is only one of the remaining providers of library management software;
- In Bulgaria, the COBISS system has been implemented in only three libraries, while all others have relied on other systems (also with international development assistance).
- The pompously announced inclusion of some Croatian libraries in COBISS.Net (even announced in a [documentary about IZUM](#) in 2022) failed because IZUM and the COBISS.Net Council ignored the role of the national library of Croatia;
- Due to the limited offer of IZUM without political coordination through the Government of the RS, national information systems on research activity in the participating countries based on the SICRIS/E-CRIS application are at a dead end, because they are not managed and upgraded by the ministries and agencies responsible for research activity. Most countries are therefore developing alternative solutions;
- Due to the wasted trust in the COBISS.Net project, representatives of the ministries of culture, science and education from the participating countries no longer attend [COBISS conferences](#), and for the first time, none of the directors of national libraries in the COBISS.Net network attended the COBISS.Net Council meeting on 7 November 2025;
- The staffing capacities of the national COBISS centres are too modest for the tasks assigned to them.

With all this, we can read in the [IZUM Strategic Plan for the period 2025–2030](#): "We want to connect all research organizations and higher education, special, public and school libraries in target countries to the COBISS.net network, while also establishing compatible systems for evaluating research activities. This will drastically decrease the setback of the local environment development opportunities in these countries compared to Slovenia's achievements and allow them to come a lot closer to the level available to the users in Slovenia." Unrealistic and arrogant!

This is a consequence of the fact that for nine years now, there has been no one in the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and IZUM with the competence to organize national library information systems and manage the project to expand the COBISS.Net network with international development assistance. Officials in the Government of the RS have refused to cooperate with those who have the necessary knowledge and experience for this, and the director, Dr. Aleš Bošnjak, only follows the interests of those on whom his position depends.

IZUM's human resources have been strengthened for 5 years only for the maintenance and operation of the Vega supercomputer. Out of 128 employees, 11 work in the Supercomputing sector, which means that 117 work on the COBISS and SICRIS/E-CRIS programs (the same as at the end of 2011, when we planned to increase the number of employees to 150 in 5–10 years), and their average age is 55 years!

If the results of the planned expansion of the [COBISS.Net](#) network to the countries of Southeastern Europe are disappointing, the results of the operation of the COBISS.Net network are expected, because IZUM still has a team of highly qualified experts for the maintenance and updating of COBISS and SICRIS/E-CRIS applications, for educational activities and system infrastructure. The ratio of the workload of IZUM's human resources for the implementation of the tasks of the information service of Slovenian science, education and culture (excluding supercomputing) in relation to the tasks of a UNESCO Category 2 Centre is approximately 95 : 5%, and the financing of the aforementioned activities is in the ratio of 90 : 10%.

- The activity that IZUM carried out until 2025 for the needs of users of its products and services in Slovenia as a public service pursuant to Article 3 of the Government [Decision on the Establishment of the Institute of Information Sciences](#) was mainly financed from the state budget of the Republic of Slovenia through the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation. Thus, IZUM uses revenues from the state budget to cover the costs of development and maintenance of the COBISS and SICRIS systems software, the costs of maintenance and management of the Vega supercomputer, and the costs of certain other activities.
- The activity that IZUM carried out until 2025 for the needs of users of its products and services outside Slovenia as a marketing activity or as international development assistance (both also in the role of a UNESCO Category 2 Centre) was mainly financed by revenues from the sale of licenses and various services under umbrella contracts on the implementation of the COBISS system in target countries, which IZUM has generally concluded with national libraries. This covers the costs of maintaining and adapting the COBISS and SICRIS/E-CRIS software to the needs of users outside Slovenia (multilingualism, different scripts and other special features), hosting costs and other services. Revenue from market activities in the COBISS.Net network amounted to around 550,000 EUR in 2024, and IZUM received 45,000 EUR from two ministries for development assistance in expanding the COBISS.Net network. It is not known how much funding it allocated for development assistance to libraries outside Slovenia from revenue from market activities.

The chronology of the problems and efforts to solve the COBISS.Net project is presented on the website www.zacobiss.net, through which it is also possible to access over 40 articles, essays and letters from the period 2011–2025 with warnings and proposals that were ignored by the ruling political structures in the Slovenian government and Parliament.

On September 14, 2025, I presented my view of the past 15-year period to the long-standing UNESCO representative on the COBISS.Net Council, Dr. Bhanu Neupane, in a [comprehensive letter](#), which I sent the next day for information to the other members of the COBISS.Net Council and also to the experts from the company Strategicus Consulting from Romania, who were at IZUM at the time. Mr. Bhanu did not respond to my letter, but he told me in 2016, when we were together in Brussels, that UNESCO would not argue with the Government of the RS. The director of Strategicus Consulting, Ghica Gheorghiu, thanked me for the information, but the information he received from me or which was available via the website www.zacobiss.net was not taken into account when preparing the evaluation report.

What did the experts from Strategicus Consulting find out and what do they suggest?

Without stating expectations, they found: [The evaluation shows that IZUM has fully met the expectations of a UNESCO Category 2 Centre. It operates effectively, autonomously, and efficiently, delivering high-quality outputs with rather modest resources. Its results - an interoperable regional library system, a professionalized information sector, and active South-Eastern European cooperation - embody UNESCO's core principles of knowledge sharing and regional solidarity.](#)

Renewal of status: [UNESCO should renew IZUM's designation as a Category 2 Centre for the period 2026-2032, recognizing its exemplary performance and strategic value for South-Eastern Europe.](#)

To understand their findings and recommendations, it is important to know and consider:

- that there is no institution in Europe that has the status of a public institute and is comparable to IZUM in terms of activity,
- that the organizational model of the COBISS system and the COBISS.Net network is original and incomparable with other systems and library networks,
- that the experts of the company Strategicus Consulting are not experts in library information systems and information systems on research activities, and
- that the interests and level of information of the interviewees in the process of evaluating the operation of IZUM as a UNESCO centre are different, and the motivation of some to conceal their responsibility for the current situation is also high.

With the Call for proposals (Annex 1), the company Strategicus Consulting apparently received universal instructions from UNESCO for the evaluation of the activities of two Category 2 Centres in Slovenia ([IRCAI](#) and [IZUM](#)), which are not comparable in terms of legal and organizational status or type of activity. IRCAI (International Research Centre On Artificial Intelligence) is an organizational unit within the Jožef Stefan Institute, while IZUM is an independent public institute. IRCAI is an international research centre, while IZUM is a development centre and information service in the regional network COBISS.Net. According to the above instructions, a mixed methodology combining qualitative and quantitative data sources should be used, with the evaluation parameters primarily being the extent to which the centre's objectives have been achieved, as set out in the agreement signed with UNESCO.

In the case of IZUM, it is important to know:

- that in 2012, IZUM's **strategic goal** within the framework of the international development cooperation project was "to connect all higher education and research organizations and higher education, special and public libraries in the target countries (Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia) to the COBISS.Net network and to establish compatible systems for the evaluation of research activities in the mentioned countries" in the shortest possible time (as evident from various action plans and annual programs) and
- that the agreement between the Government of the RS and UNESCO from 2012 does **not determine the objectives** of IZUM as the Regional Centre for Library Information Systems and Information Systems on Research Activities, but rather in Article 6 **only determines its tasks (functions)** in the COBISS.Net network, which are identical to the tasks of IZUM under Article 3 of the Government Decision on the Establishment of IZUM from 2002 with the expansion of the territorial framework of activities to the SEE countries.

This means that IZUM must (as is evident from its annual work programs):

- "develop and maintain COBISS software with multilingual user interfaces (taking into account some specific needs of users outside Slovenia) and provide appropriate manuals for using the said equipment;
- ensure the transfer of new functionalities of the COBISS and SICRIS systems from Slovenia to the countries of the COBISS.net network;
- provide consulting, technical assistance and education services to users of IZUM products and services outside Slovenia and also train the National COBISS Centres that operate or will operate in individual countries for this purpose;
- ensure that information on research potentials and research results and the impact on the development of said potentials is ensured in the target countries."

In view of the above, when assessing the achievement of the centre's objectives, evaluators should separately evaluate the achievement of the objectives of the planned establishment of national library information systems and research information systems in the SEE countries and separately the scope and quality of IZUM's services for the SEE countries. They should also separately evaluate the financial aspect of the expansion of the COBISS.Net network with international development assistance and separately the financial aspect of IZUM's marketing activities in the COBISS.Net network. **Everything is mixed up in the evaluation report!**

The experts from Strategicus Consulting clearly did not recognize that IZUM's activities (according to Article 3 of the Decision of the Government of the RS on the Establishment of IZUM from 2002 and Article 6 of the Agreement of the Government of the RS with UNESCO from 2012) are not an end in themselves and must be evaluated in the context of achieving IZUM's strategic goals in expanding the COBISS.Net network, which was also the reason for obtaining UNESCO patronage in 2011 and 2012.

When IZUM promoted the COBISS.Net project in 2002, its first strategic goal was to connect all Slovenian libraries to the national COBISS.SI system with the support of the Government of the RS, and all research organizations, researchers and projects to the national SICRIS system. Its second strategic goal was to implement the COBISS and SICRIS/E-CRIS systems outside Slovenia, for which it obtained and allocated over 3,000,000 EUR of development assistance to libraries and other institutions outside Slovenia from various sources over the next ten years. When IZUM received UNESCO patronage in 2012 through the Agreement between the Government of the RS and UNESCO for the implementation of the COBISS and E-CRIS systems in SEE countries, it was also supposed to receive an international management and supervisory body, which the Government of the RS did not provide, and in 2013 and 2014 (due to a lack of understanding of the path to achieving the project's goals) it also refused political and financial support for the expansion of the COBISS.Net network. Meanwhile, IZUM has achieved its strategic goal in Slovenia, but outside the borders of Slovenia, the results of the expected expansion of the COBISS.Net network have been disastrous, and the strategic goal of expanding the network is no longer achievable.

The evaluators' conclusion that "IZUM has fully met expectations" is completely wrong and is probably the result of the evaluators' incompetence and their ignorance of the expectations of stakeholders in the COBISS.Net project in 2012, but it may also be a consequence of the interests of those responsible for the collapse of the COBISS.Net project. The proposed renewal of the status of UNESCO Category 2 Centre does not make sense because IZUM does not need any patronage from UNESCO for the tasks it performs under contracts with partners in the COBISS.Net network, and the content of the draft new tripartite agreement (Government of the RS - UNESCO - IZUM) is not compatible with the new [Decision on the establishment of the Institute of Information Sciences](#), which was adopted by the Government of the RS on 6 November 2025.

The following are comments on some misleading statements in the report by chapter.

3. Introduction / Background

[The regional COBISS.net Council, composed of national library directors and heads of national COBISS centres, provides governance and collective oversight.](#)

The statement is incorrect. The COBISS.Net Council is not a governing body of IZUM and does not provide collective supervision, and is not composed only of directors of national libraries and heads of national COBISS centres. It is a consultative body that was appointed in 2016 by a decision of the Director of IZUM and is supposed to consist of directors of national libraries in the COBISS.Net network and heads of national COBISS centres, representatives of ministries/agencies that manage national E-CRIS systems, and the Director of IZUM. In 2020, a representative of UNESCO joined it, but the actual composition is different for each session, depending on the interest of the Director of IZUM and the responsiveness of those invited - as can be seen from the [minutes of the sessions](#). Representatives of institutions that manage E-CRIS systems are not invited to the sessions.

The agreement between the Government of the RS and UNESCO defines the "Functions/objectives" of IZUM in Article 6. In fact, these are only functions (tasks) and not objectives. In the evaluation report, 11 tasks are presented under the misleading title "[Objectives and mandate of the Centre](#)".

4. Methodology

[The evaluation combined: desk research of official documents, annual reports, financial statements, legal agreements, relevant UNESCO policy documents etc, field mission interviews and group discussions held in Maribor \(September 2025\), online interviews with selected international partners and UNESCO representatives.](#)

The list of reviewed documentation in Annex 5 shows that the evaluators did not review or did not have access to the following (very relevant to the evaluation) documentation::

- Annual reports on IZUM's work and financial operations, approved by the IZUM Management Board
- IZUM's Strategic Plan for the period 2019–2024,
- Umbrella contracts on the implementation of the COBISS system in the target SEE countries, which IZUM has concluded with national libraries (except in Albania, where the contract is concluded with the Academy of Sciences of Albania),
- COBISS.Net: Supporting the development of national library information systems in the countries of the Western Balkans and their integration in a common educational, research and cultural area of the EU (2016–2018) – [proposal for the European Commission 2016](#) and [abridged version for the ministerial meeting in Sarajevo + Letter of Support](#),
- COBISS.Net project – Phase III: Supporting the development of national library information systems in the countries of the Western Balkans and their integration in a common educational, research and cultural area of the EU (2025-2029) - [proposal for the European Commission 2024](#).

In the list of reviewed documents, we can find the "COBISS Action Plan 2024-2028 – Supporting the development of national library information systems in the countries of the South Eastern Europe and their integration in a common educational, research and cultural area", which IZUM is hiding even from the members of the COBISS.Net Council. The minutes of the meetings show that they are not familiar with it!

Annex 4 presents the IZUM organizational chart from 31 December 2024, which does not reflect the situation at the time of the evaluation. USE – SERVICE MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT was already divided into two sectors in January 2025. Annex 5 contains a list of 22 interviewees (14 from IZUM, 5 from the Government of the RS, 2 from UNESCO and 1 from the National Library of Serbia, which has been the president of the COBISS.Net Council since 2024, but is not aware of the events before that). It is very strange that the independent evaluators did not consider it necessary to conduct interviews with representatives of all national libraries and COBISS and E-CRIS centres in the COBISS.Net network.

[Evidence from reports was cross-checked against web data, press coverage, and interview testimony to validate implementation claims. This triangulation distinguished between planned, implemented, and partially executed activities.](#)

The content of the evaluation report does not indicate that the evaluators checked the media reporting, although they were aware that all articles about IZUM and the COBISS.Net project are available on the website

www.zacobiss.net.

5. Findings

5.1. Relevance

[IZUM's relevance is firmly anchored in its role as the principal regional knowledge-infrastructure institution in South-Eastern Europe. Across all reviewed years, the COBISS.net network has served as a backbone for library interoperability, cataloguing standards, and research visibility across eight countries.](#)

This only applies to libraries connected to the COBISS.Net network (41% excluding school libraries), while the planned development of national COBISS.XX and E-CRIS.XX systems has not been implemented and has even failed in some countries. The visibility of research is also limited mainly to projects for which IZUM transferred data to E-CRIS.XX systems from other international databases, and cooperation with ministries and research agencies has failed.

The long-standing non-participation of Albania's National Library in COBISS.net remains a gap in regional completeness. Despite the inclusion of more than 30 Albanian academic and public libraries, the lack of endorsement from national authority restricts the network's integration. This issue, recurring in reports from 2014 to 2019, stems from institutional disputes rather than technical barriers. Addressing it may require mediation at intergovernmental or UNESCO field-office level.

The finding is correct and also applies to the National Library of Kosovo. It has been known since 2010 that a political agreement is necessary. In 2013, several Albanian ministers proposed signing an intergovernmental protocol on the implementation of the COBISS system in Albania, but the competent Slovenian ministers did not support this, and UNESCO has so far done nothing to gain the support of the national offices.

5.2. Coherence

The COBISS.net Council plays a key role in ensuring alignment among member states, meeting regularly to review progress and adopt shared standards.

As I explained in the introduction, the COBISS.Net Council has no role whatsoever in ensuring coordination between member states, as is evident from the [minutes of the meetings](#).

5.3. Effectiveness

Network growth and consolidation. The number of libraries outside Slovenia integrated into COBISS.net rose from around 280 in 2013 to more than 500 by 2021. Integration expanded sharply in North Macedonia (20 new libraries in 2019) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (11 in 2018). Kosovo joined in 2018, achieving full geographic coverage of the Western Balkans.

The figures are correct, but they are misleading because they concern the period up to 2021. The current situation is as follows:

- in North Macedonia, 20 libraries were excluded from the COBISS.MK system in the period 2021–2025 (when some new libraries were included);
- in Albania, 10 libraries were excluded from the COBISS.AL system in 2025 (!);
- in Kosovo, the library of the Academy of Sciences and Arts took over the leading role in 2018, and at the end of 2025, the aforementioned library and several other libraries joined the project led by the National Library of Kosovo. As a result, the COBISS application instructor, who trained for this role in Slovenia from 2014 to 2019, lost her job on 1 January 2026. The future of the COBISS.KS system is uncertain.

The Government of the RS is primarily responsible for all of the above, as it blocked all proposals for establishing political interdepartmental and international coordination, refused to support proposals for obtaining European funds, and initially terminated Slovenia's development assistance for the expansion of the COBISS.Net network, limiting it to symbolic support after 2021.

Activities not implemented. Some planned activities were postponed or cancelled. The postgraduate librarianship program at the University of Shkoder, envisioned as a regional capacity-building measure, has remained blocked since 2013 for reasons beyond IZUM's control. ... However, these unfulfilled items are peripheral to IZUM's core mandate and do not compromise overall goal achievement.

The conclusion that the blockade of the organization and implementation of library studies at the University of Shkodra in 2013 does not threaten the achievement of the entire goal may only reflect a lack of knowledge of the situation on the ground. In both Albania and Kosovo, there are still no more than 10 librarians with a university education in library science (in Slovenia there are over 600). Therefore, decisions on the computerization of libraries are made by local influential people, not by qualified librarians.

5.4. Efficiency

[IZUM's governance model ensures both accountability and operational agility.](#)

Wrong management model of IZUM has been a weak point of IZUM since the adoption of the Librarianship Act in 2001. The problems are described in numerous papers and articles on www.zacobiss.net. Before concluding the Agreement with the Government of the RS, UNESCO requested a change, which the Government agreed to, but has not implemented to date. UNESCO and libraries outside Slovenia therefore do not have a representative on the IZUM Management Board, and as a result, the IZUM Management Board does not deal with the issue of the expansion and operation of the COBISS.Net network at all. The evaluators' conclusion that "the IZUM management model ensures both accountability and operational agility" is absurd.

[Financially, IZUM operates efficiently on a rather modest resource base. Most regional activities have been financed from its regular state budget allocation and self-generated income.](#)

The conclusion that "IZUM operates effectively with a fairly modest resource base" is extremely misleading. Only the budgetary resources that IZUM has at its disposal for "expansion of the COBISS.Net network and promotion" (45,000 EUR in 2024) are modest, but this is also a consequence of the IZUM director's opposition to the proposal to obtain European funds (15 million EUR). IZUM's revenues from market activities in the COBISS.Net network (from the sale of software licenses and other services) amounted to around 550,000 EUR in 2024 and are more than sufficient to cover all costs of adapting and maintaining of the COBISS and E-CRIS applications and other IZUM services for the SEE countries.

[Staff numbers remain stable \(approximately 70-80\), yet the institution manages to serve a network of hundreds of libraries.](#) Without the team that looks after the Vega supercomputer, the number of employees is 117, not 70–80.

[The main challenge is sustainability of human resources: maintaining a small permanent team to handle regional demands could lead to overstretch in the medium term.](#)

IZUM does not have a special team to address regional needs, but rather solves regional needs with approximately 5% of the human resources potential, with which it otherwise satisfies the needs of users of its products and services in Slovenia. However, IZUM employees have not been dealing with the open issues of expanding the COBISS.Net network for a long time, which is also confirmed by the results.

5.5. Impact

[The cumulative impact of IZUM's work over the period 2013-2021 is substantial. The COBISS.net network has transformed library and research information management across the Western Balkans, providing interoperable infrastructure where fragmented systems once prevailed.](#)

The impact of IZUM in SEE countries is currently limited to 41% of national, public, university and special libraries. That is why fragmented systems still prevail in many places.

5.6. Sustainability

[The Slovenian government ensures predictable funding as part of the public research-infrastructure budget. Officials described this support as "predictable and recurring, ensuring long-term stability". The recent earmarked contribution for COBISS.net suggests recognition of its international value.](#)

The Slovenian government provides predictable financing for IZUM's activities only for the needs of Slovenian users of its products and services, and IZUM covers the costs of additional loads in the COBISS.Net network with revenues from market activity. Slovenia has allocated 21,700,360 EUR of available bilateral development assistance to the Western Balkan countries in 2024. In this context, the government's dedicated contribution to COBISS.Net (45,000 EUR) is only symbolic and does not indicate its recognition of the international value of IZUM and the COBISS.Net project.

Financial diversification, however, remains limited. IZUM has yet to secure significant external project funding.

In 2015 and 2016, IZUM had the opportunity to obtain European funds for the expansion of the COBISS.Net network (10,000,000 EUR) based on a political agreement, but this was prevented by some ministers and senior officials in the Government of the RS, and a third opportunity was wasted in 2025, when senior officials in the Government of the RS and the Director of IZUM did not support the COBISS.Net project - Phase III (15,000,000 EUR).

6. Conclusions

IZUM has fully met the expectations of a UNESCO Category 2 Centre. It operates effectively, autonomously, and efficiently, delivering high-quality outputs with rather modest resources.

What the expectations was not stated. IZUM is not working efficiently, autonomously and successfully in expanding the COBISS.Net network, the results are rather disastrous. In developing and maintaining COBISS and E-CRIS applications and other services for SEE countries, IZUM provides high-quality results, but not with fairly modest resources (its annual market revenues in 2024 amounted to around 550,000 EUR).

IZUM's Action Plan 2024-2028 "Supporting the development of national library information systems in the countries of the South Eastern Europe and their integration in a common educational, research and cultural area" is ambitious and established a clear vision, as well as goals and conditions for the implementation.

The aforementioned Action Plan is clearly a trade secret of IZUM, as members of the COBISS.Net Council are not familiar with it and it is also only accessible to selected people within IZUM. Therefore, it is not possible to judge whether it is truly ambitious and has set a clear vision, goals and conditions for implementation.

7. Recommendations

One of the main priorities for IZUM (with support from the government and the Slovenian National Commission for UNESCO) should be to continue its efforts to actively involve Member States in its regional and international mission. According to past experience (2012–2025), this is unachievable!

Renewal of IZUM's Category 2 status under the auspices of UNESCO is recommended, with emphasis for the next period on: institutional strengthening, strategic positioning and vision alignment with UNESCO, diversification of funding (EU and other foreseeable sources), and developing further partnerships and advocacy initiatives.

Unnecessary and unfeasible, because the provisions of the new government [Decision on the establishment of IZUM](#) and the provisions of the draft of new agreement (Government of the RS - UNESCO - IZUM) are not compatible. Interesting fact: IZUM would now even have to pay UNESCO at least 1,000 USD annually for costs related to the management and monitoring of the centre's work.

Who is the IZUM evaluation report intended for?

Page 8: The intended users of the evaluation are: UNESCO Secretariat and Governing Bodies, Government of Slovenia, Slovenian National Commission for UNESCO, IZUM leadership and governance bodies.

This also applies to this review!

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