

BISON: we're in this together – building a Norwegian community of practice for librarians involved in work related to review articles

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Abstract

Librarians involved in assisting researchers with planning, execution and documentation of systematic literature searches are well aware of the considerable amount of practice required to conduct reliable, transparent, and reproducible literature searches. In addition to building the necessary skills and knowledge, factors such as changes in databases, updates in standards or methodologies, and development of new tools makes it difficult to keep up to date. In response an online community of practice has been established in Norway to serve as a platform for facilitating knowledge sharing in these areas. However, building and maintaining an active community is not an easy task. This article describes the development, the activities, the challenges, and the possible future for the community.

Key words: review literature as topic; community networks; online social networking; learning; Norway; librarians.

What it is

BISON is a Norwegian, online, open community of practice for librarians interested in systematic literature searching. The main purpose for the community is to support knowledge sharing and networking in the context of systematic literature searching and information management related to systematic reviews and other evidence synthesis.

The name BISON is an acronym formed from the Norwegian phrase for *Librarians Involved in Systematic Reviews in Norway* (in Norwegian: *Bibliotekarere Involvert i Systematiske Oversikter i Norge*). In addition to being a short and snappy acronym to make life easier when we talk about the community, the name BISON of course also refers to the actual animal bison, which we think is appropriate as bison live in herds.

The concept of *community of practice* comes from a theory that focuses on learning as a social process (1). BISON facilitates for that kind of learning, especially for librarians who work at smaller libraries.

BISON started in 2017 as a spin-off from a workshop given by Andrew Booth, professor in Evidence Synthesis at University of Sheffield. The title of the workshop

was *Novel Opportunities in ReViews and Evidence Generation (NORVEGE)*. So, both inspired by the fact that librarians at different institutions face the same challenges, and by Professor Booths talent for acronym making, BISON was created.

Who we are

When librarians attend conferences or engage in groups online, it is often in relation to their professional specialisation, such as librarians in the health sciences, or on a broader scale, various library associations. From the onset BISON aimed to be a broad and inclusive community for librarians from all disciplines and subject areas, with the aspiration of fostering multidisciplinary cooperation and research. Equally significant was the aim to create a setting where both experienced as well as newly qualified librarians could find a sense of belonging. That being said, this inclusivity extends beyond librarians of profession. The community welcomes anyone interested in topics related to the development or use of review articles of all kinds, e.g., systematic reviews, scoping reviews, integrative reviews. So, while the BISON acronym in itself focuses

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on librarians, there are no actual requirements demanding any specific sort of training to become a member.

BISON has yet to formulate a mission statement describing an explicit purpose, method of operation or strategy. While this might happen in the future, the community has during the past six years been defined by a set of non-established guiding principles to which the members readily adhere, e.g., that no question is too basic or odd when it comes to literature searches or work related to the development of review articles, all questions asked in the community will be answered if possible. Keeping the language in the community to Norwegian also helps lowering the barriers to post questions.

From the start, the community had a focus on creating a feeling of inclusion and accept and thereby ensuring that the expert looking for recommendations on new methods articles would feel just as home as the novice wondering what a proximity operator is. That way, by promoting a safe and open community, BISON aims to be a resource for both the employees at the one-person library at a small research institution as well as the information specialists at large university libraries. In this regard we see it as an especially important feature of the community that more experienced librarians can be a resource for the less experienced librarians in becoming more familiar with the parts of library practice related to review work.

We recognize that many librarians have limited resources to be actively involved in networks by e.g., presenting in webinars, but wish that BISON can be a community for learning and support in their work activities. That is why there are no requirements dictating that the members have to participate actively in the community, even though active participation is the basis of the community.

What is happening

The community is completely dependent on member initiative. The members arrange different sorts of webinars with the goal of sharing knowledge, creating network connections, and supporting each other.

A list of themes that previous webinars have been about includes:

- systematic literature searching in the social sciences and in the humanities;
- grey literature;

- Nvivo in the context of evidence synthesis;
- journal-driven reviews;
- member experience exchange;
- systematic literature searching for beginners;
- deduplication;
- co-authorship;
- the use of Oria (the ExLibris discovery system for Norway) in systematic literature searching.

These webinars have gathered a varied number of participants. According to anecdotal evidence the record is about 220 participants (for the webinar on systematic searching in the social sciences and in the humanities).

Previously, several of the webinars have been arranged to last a few hours. Recently the webinars have taken a new and shorter format, inspired by a similar network for librarians working with systematic literature searching in Sweden, called SSIVK. In the Norwegian language the new format is called *Kaffeslabberas*, which could be translated to the English language with the phrase Coffee meeting. This kind of meeting is usually held in the time frame of 45 minutes, divided into three parts: a 15 minutes long introduction, followed up by 15 minutes of discussion in small groups, and finally a 15 minutes long summary. This format has proved successful, presumably because its short timeframe is calendar friendly and because the group discussions lower the bar for networking in the online environment.

At the time of writing, three coffee meetings are planned for the autumn of 2023. The themes will be:

- systematic literature search guidance for PhD candidates;
- webpages promoting systematic literature search services;
- deduplication.

Where we were and where we're going

When BISON was launched initially it coincided with the launch of a new digital platform by the Norwegian National Library. The platform offered groups the chance to establish their own forums, plan activities, create wikis, and so on. It seemed like a perfect place to host an online community. To get members to sign up we arranged a free webinar on searching in social sciences and the humanities, spread the word through a number of mailing lists, and only made the Zoom-link available in the community. It was a successful strategy and soon BISON had over 200 members.

Through following forum discussions, question board activities and several webinars given by the members, BISON reached 350 members in a couple of years. Unfortunately, changes in the National Library's prioritization of technical development made it necessary to find a new home for BISON. The goal was to find a new platform that included the lacking features, such as file sharing, retrieval of previous posts and e-mail notifications of new posts or events.

Easy access to the digital platform hosting the community and making it accessible to as many members as possible was a clear objective when searching for a new platform. Several platforms were considered, and the choice finally landed on Microsoft Teams. Due to institutional safety policies some former members are not able to access the community from their computers at work. While this is obviously regrettable, Teams requires no technical maintenance and facilitates among others both file sharing, searching posts on the discussion boards, and e-mail notifications.

As might be expected, the platform transition resulted in a drop in the number of members, but almost 200 members has joined in Teams. Now the challenge is

keeping the community alive, reminding the members to stop by and join the discussions, spreading the word to even more potential members and remembering that "sharing is caring".

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