

The history of the documentation on addiction in France

30 years of a turbulent history - Maintaining access to information despite challenges

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In 1986 the so called Toxibase network, a national organization made up of nearly 20 centers, was settled to provide in France a unique online database accessible to professionals in the field of addiction as well as the general public. This article recounts the setup of this network (1986-1991), its expansion (1992-1998), its apogee (1999-2003) and its decline (2004-2007). For budgetary and political reasons, several regional centers have gradually closed down since 2005, thus the territorial network could not be maintained and the Toxibase association was dismantled in 2007. The OFDT was given the assignment of becoming the national resource center on addiction in 2009. In parallel, the flow of information and publications has been steadily increasing, hence the interest of a website giving access to the public to all OFDT publications and an easily searchable bibliographic database, referencing documents selected by information specialists.

Keywords

History, Documentation, Database, Network, France

Toxibase: the French network on addiction

The association Toxibase was created in 1986 through the diligence of professionals in the field of drug addiction and public authorities (DGS¹⁰ and DGLDT¹¹), despite considerable reluctance and pessimism. Indeed, in the late

1980's France had to face great drug issues such as a heroin epidemic and the emerging AIDS epidemic, in a context of a very strict policy towards drug users (1970 Law on narcotics) (Pompidou et al., 1971).

The aspiration to implement a national network on pharmacodependencies was motivated by the fact that the French care

¹⁰ Direction générale de la santé [National Health Directorate].

¹¹ Direction générale à la lutte contre la drogue et la toxicomanie [General Delegation for the Fight against Drugs and Drug Addiction].

system for drug addicts was in its early stages (Damade, 1989). The first challenge was to gather an existing team of clinicians. Moreover, working data and published papers were difficult to track down and hardly available on short notice.

The first configuration of the network gathered six centers: the Coordinating Center in Lyon, the CEID¹² in Bordeaux, the IRS¹³ in Reims and the Saint-Germain center, Marmottan Hospital and Didro center in Paris (Toxibase, 1991-2005) (fig 1).

Toxibase presented itself as a reliable, performant and rigorous tool for clinicians and implemented a computerized bibliographic database from the beginning.

From its start, the association had also the ambition to better promote French works and studies at international level. Thus, the establishment of ELISAD, the European Association of Libraries and Information Services on Alcohol and Drugs, grew out of the initiative of Toxibase who invited in 1988 16 European librarians in the field of drug addiction to a round-table meeting in Lyon. It made those participants more aware of the added value they could find through regular meetings and collaboration. One year after the creation of a Working group of European documentation and information centers on alcohol and drugs in Stockholm, ELISAD was formally established in 1990 during another meeting in Lyon. It gathered at this time 25 centers. The main ones dated back to the late 1990's and even the early 1970's for a few of them but only six (including Toxibase) could rely on a computerized database. This

partnership was also inspired by several European and international existing networks. The most important of them was SALIS, founded in 1978 and considered as ELISAD "big sister" (ELISAD, 2008).

In 1992, the Toxibase database was managed by information specialists and made considerable progress. Its access was available online but limited and expensive. Then an access through a specific computer terminal (Minitel "36.17 Toxibase") was made available with more diversified services. The Minitel, considered in France as an ancestor of the Internet, was a computer terminal used to connect to the French Videotex service (Rouault, 1993).

In 1993, the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) and the French Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (OFDT) were both created. As part of a convention with the French State, Toxibase partnered from 1994 to 1995 with the EMCDDA's Reitox network¹⁴ for the start-up of the OFDT. An article published in 1995 in *European Addiction Research* (Köstler, 1995) described the different services proposed by this "central information service in addiction research in France": besides the database, a bibliographic search service by phone or email with primary documents supply, a quarterly journal *Toxibase - Revue Documentaire* (first issue published in 1992), a press clipping review and thematic syntheses. The main audiences of the services were, in decreasing order, students, social workers, health professionals, teachers, information professionals and physicians. The added benefits of this network to the information

¹² Comité d'étude et d'information sur la drogue [Drug Study and Information Committee].

¹³ Institut de recherches spécialisées [Institute of Specialized Research].

¹⁴ The EMCDDA coordinates a network of national correspondents in all EU countries, Norway and Turkey. These national monitoring centers gather and analyze country data according to common data-collection standards and tools.

specialists were the pooling of journal subscription fees, the shared current awareness and, generally speaking, a rationalization of their work. In 1996, the Toxibase network consisted of 10 centers and

by 1997 the database was made accessible on the Internet with a paid access (the Minitel service was definitely closed in 2012). In 1997 also, Toxibase became a SALIS member.

Toxibase Services	
A network organized by a Coordinating Center in Lyon	
<p>Contribution to the bibliographic database Press review (<i>until 1999, then by the MILDT afterwards</i>) Thematic synthesis Bibliographic searches Supply of primary documents Toxibase Journal Thesaurus on addictions</p>	<p>Four databases: - press articles (<i>from 2000</i>) - prevention tools (<i>from 2000</i>) - AToD* websites (<i>from 2001</i>) - ongoing researches (<i>from 2004</i>)</p>
<p>Contributing to the bibliographic database was the main activity expected from the information specialists of the network. Journal subscriptions were dispatched between centers and each one had a cataloguing list of journal articles, institutional publications, websites and research results to follow-up and a current awareness to perform. Lots of abstracts in English were translated to French and the interface of the online database was bilingual.</p>	
<p>* Alcohol, tobacco and other drugs</p>	

Box 1. Toxibase services in 2005

1999 was a turning point in France in terms of drug policy. This in turns impacted Toxibase and its network. The 1999-2001 Government Plan for the Fight against Drugs and the Prevention of Addiction (MILDT, 2000) was issued by the Interministerial Mission for the Fight against Drug and Drug Addiction (MILDT)¹⁵. One of its main purposes being to improve the access to information and documentation on this topic, the first generation of Centers for Information and Resources on Drugs and Dependencies (CIRDD) was settled up in order to fulfil this objective as well as providing methodological support on the elaboration of projects. Three

of them were already Toxibase centers. Very importantly, substances such as alcohol, tobacco, prescription medicines and performance-enhancing drugs were included in this Government Plan, and consequently fell into the scope of OFDT and Toxibase missions. The financing and consequently the control of Toxibase became directly monitored by the MILDT, which made available the Toxibase products (including the database) on its own website (www.drogues.gouv.fr) at the end of 1999. Due to technical and administrative issues, this online access was finally transferred back to Toxibase in 2003 and the

¹⁵ The MILDT (renamed MILDECA - Interministerial Mission for Combating Drugs and Addictive Behaviours in 2014) is the central structure, reporting to the Prime Minister, for

coordinating governmental action in the drugs field, as well as promoting and funding drug-related research.

network got its own website (www.toxibase.fr)¹⁶.

Nevertheless, as of 2002-2003, the Coordinating Center and some other centers began to face financial difficulties and not later than 2003, an audit was requested by the MILDT's President. The ensuing guidelines implied the simplification of the CIRDDs network, the national coordination directly by the MILDT and a greater complementarity between partners through closer local links.

In 2004, a five-year Government Plan (MILDT, 2004) advocated a merger of the territorial networks (DATIS¹⁷, OFDT, CIRDD and Toxibase) while enforcing a pooling of resources, the clustering of centers on a regional level, that contributed then to the termination of the proximity centers. This Plan also decided in 2005 to entrust a new mission to Toxibase i.e. the coordination of the documentation mission and the status of State operator. The same year, the CIRDD 93 (fig 1) was closed and the MILDT stopped funding the documentation center at Marmottan Hospital in Paris. Marmottan is considered a pioneer care center for drug addicts in France. It was founded in 1971 by Claude Olievenstein, a famous psychiatrist. The financing came thereafter exclusively from the psychiatric hospital Perray-Vaucluse from which Marmottan relied on administratively. As this documentation center was strongly involved in the Toxibase network, the loss of its participation has been a great drawback.

The new challenges that Toxibase had to face required a reorganization of the network which began in 2005 with a study on the implementation of a new bibliographic software, the same tool across the network in order to improve the working methods. The

choice was made one year later and the information specialists were rapidly trained, when unexpectedly a new decision came from the MILDT: as of 2007, Toxibase would no longer receive any funding. The President of Toxibase and the Director of the OFDT were then commissioned to work on a merger of Toxibase into the OFDT's activities. Nevertheless, because of financing issues, the proposal was not viable. This failure put a stop to Toxibase and the coordinating center of Lyon was closed in June 2007.

Towards a National Resource Center

The databases were still available online but not updated anymore. Nevertheless, and despite the lack of coordination, the network's information specialists continued to work together. A virtual network of the CIRDDs was implemented thanks to an Intranet listing the titles of the references of interest.

The centers kept on working under such circumstances when, after 20 years of existence, it was decided to close the MILDT's documentation center in June 2009. This large Parisian documentation center used to be open to the public and had an important collection of reports and books. Following this closure, the OFDT was assigned by the MILDT the purpose to establish a national documentation resource center on addiction. Nevertheless, since its origins, the OFDT's documentation center has never been open to the public. The OFDT partly recovered the collections of the coordinating center (a few books, some reports and the journal collection, leaving aside the prevention tools for example, and the vast collection of off-prints) and the

¹⁶ Not available anymore.

¹⁷ Drogues Alcool Tabac Info Service [Drugs Alcohol Tobacco Information Service].

most interesting part of the MILDT's collection (journals, books and reports).

Challenges and perspectives

Obviously, it was a crucial challenge for the information specialists of the OFDT. In order to carry out this new mission, the OFDT received in 2010 a specific funding dedicated to a new bibliographic software and for the resumption of several subscriptions previously belonging to the MILDT's. The French open source integrated library system PMB¹⁸ (often compared to Koha¹⁹) was selected. Three databases were integrated in addition to the Toxibase thesaurus: the OFDT's own bibliographic database (11,000 records), the bibliographic database of Toxibase but not its other databases (36,000 records) and a legislative database previously managed by the MILDT (1,300 records). Because of a lack of space at the OFDT, 1,200 reports were digitized and thereafter the hard copies destroyed.

The additional funding has not been sustained and year after year, subscriptions to journals have been canceled, based on the ratio of indexed articles to prices (graph 1).

As the national network stopped, it became more difficult to maintain current awareness on regional publications and on grey literature. However, the gradual suppression of subscriptions did not imply a lesser monitoring of those journals. The references of their articles are imported into a citation manager, EndNote, and articles of interest are retrieved individually. When proceeding to a bibliographic search, the PMB database is searched first, followed by the EndNote

database, and then, if necessary, external sources.

With the increase of the flow of information and resources on the Internet, librarians and information specialists remain more than ever indispensable in detecting and selecting publications of interest. Presently at the OFDT, the current awareness on non-subscribed journals and on other types of publications is maintained through different means such as a RSS feed aggregator, requests on PubMed and Web of Science and related alerts, Update Scanner (a Firefox extension), newsletters, and Twitter. The selection of interesting articles to be indexed in the catalogue is related to the OFDT's topics of interest. Since 2010, the annual increase of the bibliographic database is about 1,200 records, which is a satisfactory progression as it was 2,000 when Toxibase was operational.

Since the OFDT's documentation center is not open to the public, the Opac (Online Public Access Catalogue) of PMB is available to anyone, graphically embedded in the OFDT's website²⁰. This website provides access to all the OFDT's publications and describes its projects. Thematic syntheses are available including links to references in the bibliographic database, with the possibility to rebound on other references. Today, the database includes almost 61,000 records, it is easily searchable and the records are indexed by Google.

One of the PMB's functions is the selective dissemination of information (SDI). The OFDT's staff and partners (130 subscribers) receive an update by e-mail with new references every three weeks. Those references are also available on the Opac.

¹⁸ <http://www.sigb.net/>

¹⁹ <http://www.koha.org/>

²⁰ <https://www.ofdt.fr> and <https://bdoc.ofdt.fr/>

Besides this service, students, researchers and other members of the public can send requests by email, which are replied directly by an information specialist or with the assistance of OFDT's staff members.

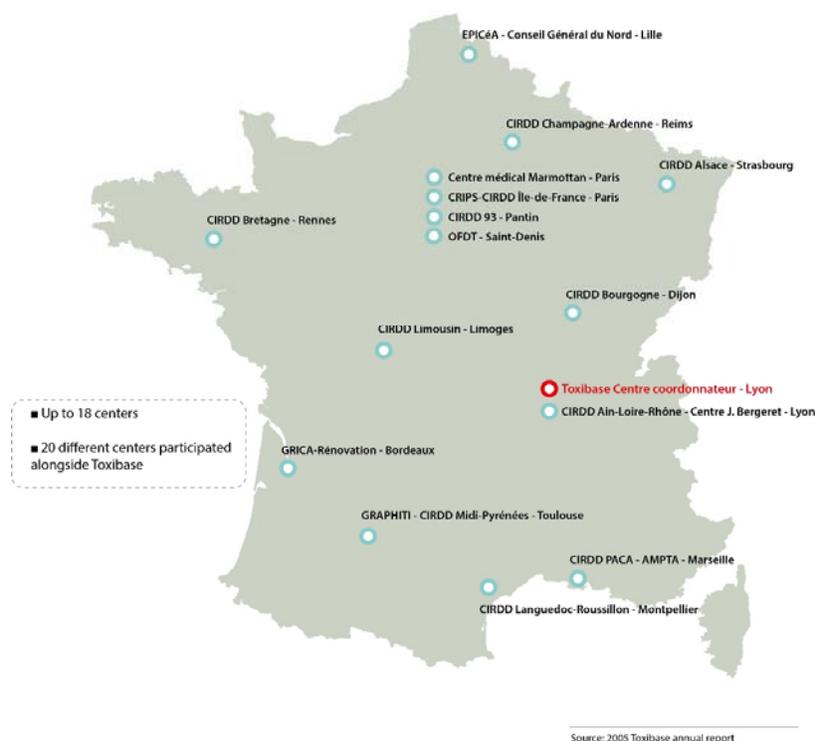
As participating in a network is a rich experience, the OFDT's documentation center takes part since 2011 in the BDSP21, the national database on public health, as Toxibase did before. Each month, references on addiction are sent to this database, which accounted 524,000 references in August 2018. The collaboration between the OFDT's documentation center and other French centers is amply facilitated and invaluable.

Conclusion

Toxibase case is not unique in France nor in the world. SALIS and ELISAD membership decreasing trends are relevant indicators of the dramatic closures of specialized libraries and documentation centers for several years. Nevertheless, and even if all its missions are not fulfilled anymore, some of the networks activities are still completed.

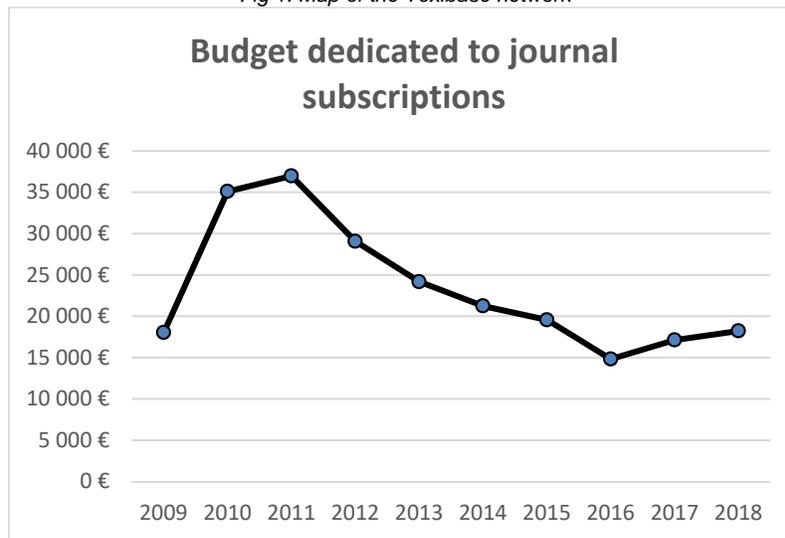
Finally, the OFDT's move to new premises in autumn 2018 (in the same building as the MILDECA, not far from the Prime Minister services) should allow researchers to be admitted to the documentation center with preserved historical collections.

The **toxi[]base** network in 2005



²¹ Banque de données en santé publique [Public Health Database] <http://www.bdsp.ehesp.fr/>

Fig 1. Map of the Toxibase network



Graph 1. OFDT budget dedicated to journal subscriptions

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Special thanks to Julie-Emilie Adès and Anne de l'Eprevier for their reviewing.