

Conclusions from the 2007 “Conference on the Use of Universal Decimal Classification” in Slovenia

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The *Department for Library and Information Science and Book Studies* at the University of Ljubljana organized a one day conference on UDC use in Slovenia on 14 November 2007 in the Bežigrad Public Library (Ljubljana, Slovenia). The conference included eleven talks and a round table discussion. There were 110 librarians in attendance from all types of Slovenian libraries. The event provided an opportunity to discuss and address many issues in relation to the use of the UDC system in Slovenian library network.

The following questions were raised by speakers:

- Can UDC be considered as a standard for all of Slovenia?
- Is there any alternative to UDC?
- Should we move away from UDC or should we adjust it to the libraries needs?
- Is the UDC a burden or necessity?
- Should we use UDC, replace it by another classification system or abandon classification in libraries altogether?
- What information should be represented by UDC and with what other elements of the COMARC format?

The following problems were mentioned during presentations:

- Frequent changes of UDC
- Low support for UDC in COBIB records (Slovenian national bibliographic database) such as the lack of hyperlinks that are, for instance, provided for subject headings

These are some of the suggestions put forward by conference speakers:

- Enable automatic translation of class marks into verbal expressions and vice versa
- Formulate guidelines for the standardised application of UDC
- Create a collective and long term policy on the use of UDC in the Slovenian library network
- User training is important. It is possible to include instructions for using UDC to children at the age of 12 using different efficient methods and techniques.
- A mechanism for the improvement of subject information retrieval in library catalogues ought to be found. These can easily include UDC.
- The UDC contains semantic relationships between concepts. Semantic Web applications that aim to replace library classifications are still in development and are not ready for use in catalogues and bibliographic databases that cover most or all of the scientific disciplines. The question still is whether or not the algorithms used in these systems will be successful in accurate automatic content indexing and in establishing semantic relationships in large collections that are predominantly non textual. Expertise in using UDC and other classification systems is over a hundred

years old and classifications can still be a viable solution providing we make a full use of them.

Following discussions on the use of UDC in Slovenia during the conference the following conclusions were reached.

1. UDC is used for various purposes: bibliographies, statistical reports, subject and content organization and representation. The use of UDC in statistical reports and systematic collection organization proved to be to a great extent standardized. In bibliographies, however, some use very broad and other very specific classes. We haven't recently had a discussion on subject indexing, this issue was rather subsumed to the issue of catalogue searching. It is obvious that these two processes are closely related.
2. Subject headings are very well suited to complement content description expressed by UDC which can express various aspects of document description including both content and form. Therefore, it can be used to provide different access points and support different searching strategies. The use of abstracts and annotations is also recommended to enhance subject description.
3. There are various methods for the physical organization of collections in Slovenian libraries. Some use UDC and others use different systems which are more or less based on the UDC. In some libraries books, music and videos are separated, in others they are kept together. This is a local policy matter for individual libraries and should be solved in relation to users needs.
4. It is the general opinion that the information about a document's type should be present on the book label i.e. this code should be part of the call number. It is possible to standardize this type of information.
5. Even pictograms and label colour schemes used by libraries for different types of documents can be standardized. A selection of universal pictograms for book labels in Slovenian libraries would be very useful for library shelf arrangement and would be very helpful to users. It would be up to an individual library to use all or only some of those from the recommended list.
6. Although librarians and users may be familiar with the meaning of the main UDC numbers it would be better if the UDC index in OPACs would be displayed using verbal equivalents rather than classmarks. As is the case with the Nebis catalogue of the ETH library in Zürich - it may be better if users only see words. In order to enable this option it would be necessary to create a system for translation of classification notation into the verbal subject descriptors. This should not require significant effort as UDC numbers are already mapped to Slovenian Subject Heading system (SSSG). It is recommended that the UDC numbers are replaced by words on the users interface. In a catalogue module used by librarians, UDC numbers and functionalities based on them should be preserved.
7. UDC is very important when we need an overview of the subject content, quality and circulation. A more detailed UDC may be useful in statistics used to control and manage collection development in specific subject areas. For circulation statistics, however, it may be better if the same standardized set of UDC codes is used.
8. UDC has to change in the areas where new knowledge is being added. It is not clear why there should be changes where there was no new development. Our recommendation to the UDC Consortium would be that classes should not be revised and moved for the sake of revision only.
9. It is up to libraries to decide as to whether changes to UDC would be introduced in the collection arrangement. Approaches may be different but in principle libraries

- start to use new numbers for new books and leave copies labeled with old class marks to be withdrawn from circulation over a longer period. Although no proposals have emerged during this conference it was felt that guidelines with respect to reclassification would be needed.
10. In certain contexts and environments UDC use has become revived and this is certainly the case when it comes to systematic subject presentation and subject access in online catalogues.
 11. It is generally acknowledged that the classification process takes too much time, especially for more complex contexts. While some consider this necessary, others have simplified the process.
 12. In the case of patents and standards there are already specially dedicated classifications (ICP- International Patent Classification and ICS – International Classification for Standards), there is no sense in classifying these documents using UDC as well. It would be better to create a mapping of these two special systems to the UDC class mark as used in the COMARC field 675c and enable automatic conversion between these classification systems. There may be other similar examples in other libraries using special classification systems.
 13. It would be necessary to revise and redefine COBISS/OPAC's role and functionalities. Simple extensions are not sufficient. Apart from a friendlier and more attractive interface it would be necessary to provide a different interface for different kinds of user (e.g. children, users with special needs). All data available in COMARC format should be exploited in order to improve retrieval efficiency and a user's catalogue browsing experience. This initiative should be presented to the entire library network and to the COBISS system users.
 14. The improvement of information literacy and user training on all levels and at every opportunity would be needed. Attention should be especially paid to the 'hidden' education of users at the point of use i.e. on occasion when users seek help. Help should be provided in such a way that users would be able to repeat and accomplish the same task in the future independently.
 15. Basic library services such as OPAC ought to be intuitive to use. Training and education should focus on the advanced functions and more complex information problems and tasks.
 16. On the global information network service providers are competing and fighting to attract more users. Librarians seem to be responsible for the creation of metadata but everything that is being created is used through Google. Only good quality metadata will enable good quality results and this is where standardization and uniformity in approach play an important role.
 17. The need and desire to preserve homogeneity and continuity of the Slovenian union catalogue is emphasized. Before any decision in relation to specific systems for subject indexing is made it is necessary to think through the theory, procedures and consequences. From that point of view all alternative solutions should be considered and thinking should be focused on longterm solutions.

Presentations and conclusions of the conference are available at:
http://www.ff.uni-lj.si/oddelki/biblio/oddelek/dogodki/2007_posvetovanje_udk.html.

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