UDC or DDC: a note about the suitable choice for the National Library of Liechtenstein

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Introduction

The Universal Decimal Classification (UDC) is currently used in the National Library of Liechtenstein (NLL). Librarians have been using the 1978 German medium edition "Dezimalklassifikation: Internationale Mittlere Ausgabe: FID 550" published by the German Institute for Standardization (Deutsches Institut für Normung - DIN). Since DIN ceased its activity as UDC publisher, there has been no other interest in publishing a German edition of the classification. Hence, the NLL library lacks a suitable and up-to-date UDC edition in German to extend and modernize its content indexing. In order to update information access to its collection, the NLL is faced with two options: reclassifying books to the more recent edition of the UDC or reclassifying to DDC22 (Dewey Decimal Classification), recently translated and published in German. In 2007-2008, as part of a graduate library & information science programme internship, research was conducted to assess the suitability of the two classification schemes in supporting collection management and information access in the NLL - with relation to costs, work expenditure and practical classification issues. This text is a brief summary from the final research report.

Research background, method and findings

The NLL was founded in 1961 to fulfill three roles for the citizens of Liechtenstein. As a national library, it collects everything regarding the country of Liechtenstein, including image and audio documents. As a scientific library, it holds the literature needed for study and career advancement and provides information from foreign libraries. As a public library, it fulfils its public cultural and educational role. The library collection today contains approximately 240.000 books.

The goal of my internship as an undergraduate student was to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of DDC22 and UDC, in order to help librarians at the NLL decide upon a suitable solution. With the help of this study, the Library of Liechtenstein would be selecting the most advantageous option in relation to costs, the staff effort involved and practical advantages for document retrieval. This project was supervised by the head of the library, Mrs. Barbara Vogt.

My task was to provide fundamental clarifications regarding the two classification systems. The structure of both systems was compared, in order to demonstrate the notable differences between the DDC and the UDC schemes. The research was supported by reports from other libraries undertaking the conversion to DDC, as well as the opinion of experts in UDC and DDC schemes. The research also took on board information got from Vera Uhlmann about the experience gained by the Swiss National Library, which introduced the DDC in 2000, and from Gisela Von Briel, of the Regional Library of Thurgau in Switzerland, which has been using DDC since 2003. Dr. Heidrum Alex, head of the subject-indexing department at the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek provided valuable insight about licenses, access, costs, application and work input by using DDC. Information regarding the UDC scheme was obtained from several UDC experts, among them Dr. Jiri Pika from the ETH Library of Zurich (ETH has been using UDC for

over 25 years), Dr. Aida Slavic, Associate Editor of the UDC in The Hague, and Mr. Miguel Benito, from the Swedish School of Library and Information Science.

The task of the author was to summarize the strengths and weaknesses in relation to two options in front of the NLL: a) to modernize the existing UDC system already used by the library and b) to reclassify the entire collection to the DDC. The study of various aspects of DDC and UDC schedules, the conditions of use and the tools available provided a sufficient amount of information to present.

One of the most important arguments in favour of DDC is its position as the most widely applied scheme in the world (200,000 libraries in 135 countries). UDC, on the other hand, is used in around 130 countries (100,000 libraries). As opposed to DDC, which is used mainly in public libraries, UDC tends to be used in larger, academic, research, national or special libraries. While there have been no editions of UDC in the German language for thirty years, the greatest advantage in using DDC is that there is a recently published translation of DDC in German (2005) with the next edition planned for 2010.

While both schemes are regularly maintained and updated, DDC has the advantage of being financially well supported by OCLC, and applied in WorldCat and other large bibliographic repositories on the Web. In addition, there is a European DDC Users Group (EDUG) supported by OCLC while the UDC user group for German speaking countries (DACH) has not been active for some time.

Some arguments against Dewey include a strong Anglo-American cultural bias, while UDC, which is often said to be biased towards European culture, has obvious advantages. Because of the fact that German specialists have traditionally had a strong influence in the development of the UDC scheme, many areas of the humanities and social sciences in UDC are much better suited for knowledge organization in European libraries. On the other hand DDC seems to be in a better position with respect to the fact that the German National Library is now using DDC and ready-made DDC indexes will gradually be available for use by German speaking countries. The small number of users in German speaking countries of both DDC and UDC is at the moment a state of fact for both systems.

One of the disadvantages of DDC noticed in this research was the limited scope for scheme adjustment and the complex set of instructions for building numbers for each class that are not applicable to the whole system. This aspect, together with the lack of logic in the scheme structure, may create obvious difficulties to staff training and scheme application. In relation to this, UDC has the advantage of having a fixed set of rules that are applicable to the entire system. While this principle puts more stress on the initial training, once this is completed the consistency and logic of the UDC scheme makes its application easy and does not require detailed instructions or guidance. A further disadvantage in using DDC is that pre-combined numbers cannot be easily split and searched for. In this respect, UDC's analytico-synthetic feature can be seen as advantageous, as it enables more flexible number building and re-arrangement of building elements, allowing for more flexibility in shelf-arrangement to suit local needs. Synthesized numbers are expressive and the elements from which they are built are evident and can be searched using Boolean logic.

In summary, the strongest argument against the UDC is the lack of an updated edition in German. Schedules available in English do not provide the necessary UDC search terminology in the German language and a lack of terminology impedes the use of the scheme.

Summary

Email correspondence with classification specialists indicates that it may be difficult to anticipate which solution is the best for the future of the NLL. If librarians are already using UDC, even if this is the 1978 German edition, the logical way forward would be to continue with the same system. It would be important to point out that, even if the NLL chooses not to abandon UDC, reclassification of part of the collection would still be required in order to bring collection organization up-to-date with the current UDC schedules.

The library has a list of notations used in call numbers, a so called *Classification Authority file*, which are in everyday use. One solution would be to gradually modernize this classification tool. A mechanism for doing this is to extend and update the list of notations from the English schedules of the UDC and then attach the German translation (which can be easily arranged from the old Dezimalklassifikation tables and other available vocabulary sources.

If some classes do not have to be changed, new terms or class designations can be attached to the numbers. In case the decision is for a reclassification, for example from 681.3 to 004, this can take place gradually and via adding, without major disturbance to the physical collection arrangement. In this way, new search terms can be attached incrementally to the old numbers and new numbers can be assigned to the old classes that are still being used on the shelves.

It would be possible to maintain the old UDC notations while adding new UDC numbers to the catalog. It is also possible to leave the old books with the old numbers and assign new numbers to new books, linking the two in the catalog.

The best solution would be to accomplish a German translation of the UDC as it happened, for instance, with the Swedish edition, which contains 6000 notations (a tenth of the UDC). For the National Library of Liechtenstein this would be more than enough.

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