Summary and Conclusions

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When we were planning this conference our intention was to host an event that would give the classification a higher profile, update our users to what was going on, suggest innovations that might be considered and provide an opportunity for the interchange of ideas and discussion so that participants could share their experiences and voice their needs. We also would like to attract more people to participate in the work of the classification, either by joining the Consortium under one of the different forms of membership, such as full member, associate or individual or by volunteering assistance on the constant work of updating the classification. The first part of this intention has, I think, been well fulfilled and I hope that the second will follow as a result of it.

Over the past two days we have had the opportunity to hear about people's experiences in implementing the scheme, whether as teachers or as practitioners and have had some innovative ideas presented that we can take away with us as we think about the future direction of the scheme and the different ways in which we might use it. We began with a "think piece" on the nature of classification from Claudio Gnoli who examined the potential of an analytico-synthetic classification in the age of the Internet, having first glanced back to demonstrate how it developed and how, historically, it has been used. He clearly demonstrates that any classification must be a living creature, constantly developing and adapting to new ideas and concepts, both in knowledge itself and in its organization.

We then moved on to the more practical aspect of how the scheme is at present being used and adapted to use in the online environment, with particular stress on its value as a switching language. Marie Balikova took her experiences at the National Library of the Czech Republic as her baseline and demonstrated how the scheme is being implemented there in libraries of all types and sizes. She also showed how appropriate the UDC is to application in a multilingual environment.

This last was a theme that was picked up by a later speaker, Jiri Pika, who drew on his experience at the ETH-Bibliothek Zurich, an institution with a long history of applying UDC in a multilingual situation. It is hardly surprising that Switzerland should be in the forefront of such an application, and as long ago as 1990 Andrew Buxton drew attention to this potential as exemplified in Jiri's institution and its OPAC where the classification works behind the scenes as a means of searching queries made in any one of three languages.

The value of classification as a search tool has been demonstrated in a number of papers, and this gathering has brought home the importance of a means of retrieval that is not dependent solely on language, not least on account of the presence here of people whose native tongues are so very diverse. It has always been one of the great features of the UDC that unlike its parent DDC it is a classification specifically designed for a world where not everyone, by any means, speaks English (an assumption that is all too often made by those responsible for designing retrieval tools today). The value of classification in the Internet environment and in the OPAC was demonstrated clearly by the presentation

from Louvain which showed up how essential it is to have a sensible means of organizing Internet information, and emphasized the continuing and essential role that libraries must play today and in the future. One way in which this can by done is via improving the information included in metadata and by encouraging the participation of the users in this undertaking.

Yesterday we were introduced to the way in which the scheme is used in Slovenia, and were shown how a new Slovenian translation of the classification was prepared, based on the 2001 MRF. Here we heard about a very welcome application of the scheme – the provision in an OPAC for users to search on UDC numbers. This is a feature of the classification that the designers of library systems all too often ignore. They are so busy providing for people searching on words, be they those in a title or in a list of subject headings, that they overlook the far more efficient approach via classification number, which avoids the constraints of language alone and, in the case of the UDC, can also facilitate a search on the separate parts of a number since each element is clearly marked off via the notation.

The practices implemented in Slovenia were followed by an opportunity to hear about some of the products and activities of various Consortium members and to see demonstrations of their products and our first day drew to a close with an opportunity to socialize and to get to know one another better.

Yesterday, we heard about the manual that was developed in Slovenia to assist in the application of the classification, and this role of education, whether of the user in the library or the user in the sense of the person or persons responsible for the actual application of the scheme was further developed this morning when we heard about how the classification is taught, with speakers drawing on their experiences in Romania, Hungary and in Spain. We also had a salutary reminder that the UDC is not always popular with users, whether they be librarians or end-users, and were informed of the controversy in Romania over whether the UDC was in fact the best way forward. This viewpoint is clearly very much influenced by experiences of students in schools of library & information studies, and justifies the decision to devote a whole session to the teaching of the classification.

The controversy in Romania is just one example of current discussions on the problems of using a classification, especially one which, superficially, appears as complex as the UDC. The final session included a paper from Magnaview which demonstrated one attempt to provide an effective support system both for the development of the classification and for its users. We were shown the possibilities which visualization offers so as to enable quick and efficient application of the classification without the user getting too bogged down in the niceties of the different ways in which the scheme can be applied. I would challenge the point made that it is difficult for a user to understand the structure of the classification and that there is a problem in finding the "right" classmark. I do not think there is such as thing as the "right" classmark - one of the most valuable features of the UDC is its adaptability to different situations and therefore what is right on one situation is wrong in another – this is just one of the peculiarities of a classification which is in no way standard (in the way that a scheme like DDC can be said to be a standard) yet which has always been published and promoted by standards organizations! That said, it is always encouraging to be introduced to new approaches to presenting the scheme that are clearer and easier for the user and this is an interesting approach.

Our final session of invited speakers looked at innovations and in many ways it is what these speakers had to say that is what we need to carry forward into our future planning and design. We were shown how two different projects, the European Library and the Memory of the Netherlands have to resolve the problem of finding a single approach into a diverse collection of heterogeneous materials and institutions, all with their own independent methods of retrieval. Mapping, or the linking of the elements in different vocabularies, has been the favoured way forward - this is not a new idea, it was floated more than 25 years ago as part of the UNISIST programme, and indeed at that time, UDC was looked at as a possible solution, but rejected on account of the very flexibility which in many ways makes it such a valuable system, but totally militates against a uniform approach which is essential for such a method to work successfully. The problems of mapping one retrieval language onto another was very clearly demonstrated in the presentation on ways in which to access the cultural heritage, based on the use of different thesauri and the work of such undertakings as the MACS project or RENARDUS to reach a solution. The so-called STITCH (Semantic Interoperability To access Cultural Heritage, Catch Program) has developed its pilot browser in an attempt to overcome many of these difficulties, and in addition to showing us some very nice pictures, the value of using representations as a means to achieve this was a clear example of a possible solution. We also were shown the visual approach to the classification that I mentioned earlier.

Our final paper took one discipline, albeit a large and complex one, that of medicine, and looked at the draft that has been being developed over the past decade, principally by Professor Williamson. The speaker put forward a strong case for utilizing the vacant class 4 as the location for the new classification. This is a proposal which has not been overlooked by those involved in developing the scheme, though the proposed new class 4 has been envisaged as comprehending not just Medicine but Psychology and those subjects currently located in 57 which have a close association with Medicine, such as Biochemistry and Virology. This matter was discussed in some detail on the UDC discussion list and was not favourably received by the majority of the user community. No final decision has yet been taken, but should class 4 be so employed, it is very likely that an alternative will remain in 61 for those users, and there are many, who would resist such a wholesale change.

The final panel gave you all some indication of where the classification going and the plans we see for future development. We welcome input from you all, and your active participation in the work of developing the classification, be it as a member of the Consortium as a user or as someone willing to undertake the work of revising the classification. Revision proceeds in two ways, the development of totally new classes to replace those that are out of date, such as Mathematics (recently revised by VINITI and usefully mapped onto the AMS classification) or Photography which needs redeveloping as Imaging, or to accommodate new fields, as happened with Environmental Science or Biotechnology or simply by alerting the Editor in chief to new concepts which need to be included. These last frequently arise from queries from users about how to class a concept for which they cannot find an appropriate number. While it is not the editor in chief's job to do the work of an individual library's classifier by providing ready-made numbers to order, a new development needs to be highlighted and a placing found and in the past this has frequently been done by means of keeping an eye of topics that occur in the daily press. So, if you have devised a new schedule or developed the scheme in any way, please send an e-mail to the Editor in chief and if you are prepared to work on any part of the scheme, willing helpers are always very welcome.

Finally, as we draw to a close this seminar and you go on your tour of the Royal Library, it remains to express our heartfelt thanks to the Royal Library which has been a staunch supporter of the classification in so many ways, not least in the provision of accommodation. We are extremely grateful to Dr Van Drimmelen for all the help and support that he has given and continues to give to the classification, and to Dr Moree who has been the Consortium's financial wizard and worked wonders with the accounts as well as providing assistance in so many other ways. Finally, we cannot depart without a word of appreciation to Dr Patricia Alkhoven who has been responsible for all the organization and arrangements and without whose industry this could not have happened. We are very sorry that she will shortly be leaving us, and wish her every success in her new post when she takes it up in July. She will be a great loss.

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