With three successful conferences behind us, UDC Seminars have now become a regular and internationally recognized event. Although entitled “UDC Seminars”, the conference themes are selected for UDC and non-UDC audiences alike, tackling issues and topics that bridge the knowledge organization domain, bibliographic control and web development. A particular strength of the 2009 and 2011 Seminar programmes was that they accommodated various classification systems in different application environments while focusing on particular issues and concerns that are shared between communities of practitioners and researchers.

The last UDC International Seminar “Classification & Ontology: Formal Approaches and Access to Knowledge” took place on 19-20 September 2011 in the National Library of the Netherlands. The Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) provided a grant that helped with the programme execution. The National Library sponsored the conference by providing the excellent venue. The conference theme was formulated as to promote collaboration and exchange of expertise between the bibliographic, semantic web and AI domains.

The event was well attended and well received. There were in total 141 delegates from 30 countries across Europe, Asia, North America, South America and Australia in attendance. The keynote address by Prof. Patrick Hayes, from the Institute for Human & Machine Cognition (Florida, USA) and one of the developers of web ontology standards, opened a two-day programme consisting of 21 talks and two poster presentations. Talks were organized into 7 sessions reflecting the various contexts in which classification and ontology intersect. The programme covering topics that spanned technology, bibliographic control, knowledge organization and philosophy were very much academic and research orientated.

On the first day, the keynote address provided an insight into both the strength and fragility of formal ontologies when representing meaning in real life situations. Even basic assertions that something is the same or different can be ambiguous. Nevertheless, logic and formal ontologies are powerful tools in representing complex information and the question remains when and if intricate solutions are needed or indeed feasible to deploy on the web. The talks that followed in the first session illustrated pragmatic and forward looking views and approaches to formalisation of meaning, more in tune with the Web environment which is less ambitious when it comes to refinements but more powerful in scale and more capable of achieving the necessary level of compromise we need for the Web to work. One message that can be taken from the first day of talks is that the Web is open and waiting to embrace all that can be expressed and processed as meaning. A number of speakers stressed the urgency for knowledge classification schemes to be published as linked data if the information value embedded in these systems is to be exploited in a web context. The emphasis here was on possibilities, opportunities and experiments in research environments. The second day speakers exposed more of the intricacies of conceptual structures of classifications, particularities of logic by which concepts can be analysed, organized, subsumed or related in order to present information. This approach is not always compatible with web ontology standards such as, for example, SKOS, that support simpler terminology structures. Presentations about particular schemes illustrated that classifications may indeed require more thought with regards to data modelling should they be used in conjunction with semantic technologies. However, we then also heard about the limitations of existing web ontology standards in expressing semantics, which seem to be unsuited to the semantic complexity typical of
knowledge classifications. The entire scenario of linking legacy collections of documents and the Web with the help of bibliographic classification was, overall, vaguely touched upon. The panel discussion at the end of the conference confirmed that all the issues addressed at the conference are very much ongoing developments with solutions emerging gradually. The panel commended the conference for providing the opportunity for different parties to meet and talk about their specific focus and concerns.

Although the majority of speakers were academics and researchers renowned for their work in the field, many had substantial practical experience working with classification applications, web technology and terminology design and a keen interest in classification and its full recognition in the Web environment. This enabled a lively discussion and useful exchange between speakers and audience. The programme contained many well known names and attracted delegates from a wide range of specialities: software developers, web developers, web ontology standards implementors, librarians and researchers, which created excellent networking opportunities.

Following the conference we collected feedback via a small online survey and received answers from over 40 delegates with very complimentary remarks regarding the organization, programme and the execution of the event. As organizers we are particularly pleased that the proceedings were published by Ergon Verlag, on time for the conference and that the audio recordings and slides of all talks were published immediately after the conference and are easily accessible for all those who were not able to attend.

Reports and reviews of the conference programme were published in Cataloging & Classification Quarterly vol. 50, no. 2/3, IFLA Classification and Indexing Newsletter, 44(2011), Knowledge Organization vol. 39 and various weblogs and newsletters.


Outputs (slides and audio recordings) are available at http://seminar.udcc.org/2011/programme.htm

The next UDC Seminar 2013

The International UDC Seminar 2013 will take place in The Hague, on 24-25 October 2013 and will have a theme related to knowledge visualisation, navigation of conceptual structures, classification schemes interfaces and display. The conference programme committee will be formed in July and the the precise focus and the title will be decided by August 2012. The first call for papers will follow shortly thereafter.

References:
