

Chapter 6

International Librarianship: One Librarian's Experience in Reducing the Digital Divide

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ABSTRACT

This chapter expresses the author's lifetime work experiences in international librarianship. It includes trainings in bibliographic exchange formats and database management under UNISIST Program in India and Nepal; his 25 years of teaching of CDS/ISIS in the developing countries as UN consultant; his work of introducing IFLA standards and introduction of a new master's program in Library and Information Science in three of the former Soviet republics; his assistance to get them funds to link to the internet and digitising their historical manuscripts and learned journals; his work as an instrument in Commonwealth Professional Fellowships to help British Commonwealth countries to embrace the latest techniques in information management. To make UK's voice heard in the field of international standards led to author's participation in the UNIMARC and UDC projects. The author is now working on information literacy education project in the universities of the Western Balkans.

DEVELOPING INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

I never imagined I would travel as part of my work even when, just after the beginning of my career, I joined the British Library, a national institution with good international links and a number of inter-

national roles such as its internationally-renowned document supply centre. In 1977, I was working on a project in the British Library to develop a new relational database to host the institution's catalogue (Hopkinson, 1977). Influenced by the fact that I thought that the project was about to be discontinued, I joined by internal transfer within the British Library a newly created body hosted by the British Library, UNIBID (UNISIST Inter-

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national Centre for Bibliographic Descriptions), whose task it was to produce a similar standard to MARC (the standard by which national and other libraries exchange bibliographic data), but for the abstracting and indexing community (Dierickx, 1983; Dierickx & Hopkinson, 1978).

UNIBID worked on behalf of UNESCO and was part of UNESCO's UNISIST programme which was intended to develop a world information system, the intention being to use the facilities that the primitive computing of the day could offer (Dierickx, 1974). To this end, UNIBID was developing the *UNISIST Reference Manual for Machine Readable Bibliographic Descriptions* a manual which described a format which was intended to be to the abstract and indexing world what MARC was to the library world. During the course of my work I jointly edited the 2nd and 3rd editions (Dierickx & Hopkinson, 1981; 1986). Simultaneously the Library of Congress was developing with the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions a new format based on MARC and designed to be an international format. This format, UNIMARC, UNiversal MARC format, developed in 1977, was intended to be a switching format between different national MARC formats (IFLA, 1977). The Reference Manual format was developed by UNESCO on behalf of the secondary services' world of scientific information represented by INSPEC, Chemical Society, Chemical Abstracts amongst others. There were two distinct fields here though to a layman it might be difficult to understand the reason for this. Libraries created and still create catalogues of books which might be sought by author, title or subject. Secondary services produce lists of articles usually retrieved by the names of the authors or by fairly specific subject terms. There was a fear particularly within UNESCO that this would lead to two polarised formats which would handicap developing countries. Third World institutions did not have the funds to develop sophisticated computer systems with both formats. UNESCO called a symposium in 1978,

which I assisted in organising, to discuss the issue, and for which I wrote a paper and jointly edited the proceedings¹ (Dierickx and Hopkinson, 1978). The outcome was a new format named the Common Communication Format for Bibliographic Data which I edited jointly after having worked on a comparison of data elements under contract to UNESCO (Hopkinson and Simmons, 1984). I was responsible for producing the proceedings. At that conference I met Dr F.J. Devadason, a young specialist like myself, who later became the director of the library at the Asia Institute of Technology in Bangkok (an institution based on the US Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MIT). It was through him I learned of the pre-eminence of India in the world of international classification; developing countries often have a specific area of expertise in which they excel and which should not be ignored by those interested in helping those countries to develop.

Working in this environment led to an understanding of the need to take into account organisations in developing countries in the field of scientific research, in this case research into the best ways of selecting and storing data for cataloguing articles, books and periodicals in order to be able to disseminate it for many different purposes, repurposing it as we say today. I worked on the Common Communication Format (CCF) which was required to bring together opposing parties, those representing the national libraries and those representatives of the abstract and indexing services (Hopkinson, 1986). All this took place through discussions at meetings over a number of years which took place in Ottawa, Geneva and Paris and it was my responsibility to be the rapporteur of the UNESCO Ad hoc Group on the Establishment of a Common Communication Format. The protagonists were being persuaded to developing a common format by UNESCO who particularly desired it because there were organisations in developing countries where they wanted to establish common databases containing both kinds of materials. In the end, I was the

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