

EDITORIAL

Classification Science - a True Scientific Discipline ?

"Classification is coming of age ..." this was the starting statement in Eric de Grolier's concluding synthesis of the recent Augsburg 4th International Study Conference on Classification Research, June 28-July 2, 1982. (Cf. the report on p.97 as well as the forthcoming Vol. II of the Proceedings which contains the full text of his synthesis). He sees the inter- and transdisciplinary field of ours as having matured into a real science within the past 50 years. Of the criteria making up a true scientific discipline - university chairs, an international journal, international and national conferences - , only one criterion is still missing, namely the establishment of an international society of classification or of a federation of classification societies and groups. This, however, may become a reality soon.

Right after the Augsburg conference a group of 16 people from 8 countries and 4 classification societies met at the same place to discuss a draft constitution of such an international association (see the Communication on p.95). Thus, the first steps toward realization of this last criterion seem to have been taken. Those who had been working toward this goal of creating the international association were not the ones who started the international journal in 1974. The impetus came from another direction, namely from the part of The Classification Society, North American Branch (NAB). The mathematization of our field which was attempted in many contributions of the last 30 years has suddenly received new support with far reaching consequences through statistical methods of class construction and determination. These methods are not new at all - the big bibliography by Jürgen Wilke (1) provides some 7500 titles for the period 1901-1975 - but their utilization becomes more and more common, now also in combination with computerization. The classification societies which were formed in England in 1964, in USA in 1968 (as a branch of the English one with some 430 members) and in France in 1978 are almost entirely composed of members interested in these methods alone and their applications in many subject fields. Thus, next to the interest in classification as a field of study and activity toward the organization of knowledge in libraries, information centers and similar institutions, and next to the application of classification methods in the systematization of objects, as e.g. in botany and zoology which e.g. is the concern of the Systematics Association in England with its more than 400 members, a young tribe has appeared consisting mainly of mathematicians, statisticians and computer science people which is about to outgrow very fast the former groups and is now looking for a forum for the exchange of ideas and experiences.

Is it possible to form an international association or federation of classification societies with members from such different backgrounds? Will they understand each other, will they cooperate, will they be able to seek and represent the common basis of classification method-

ology? Will they work towards a unified classification science to become a true university discipline?

In my opinion such an association would indeed be possible and it is also highly necessary, not in the last place for political reasons. Would one assume that the members of a political party should all have the same education in a certain subject field or discipline? Should not the aim be to accumulate people and interest on the international and national level in the field of the organization of knowledge, regardless of methods used and application fields served? Should it not be worthwhile to associate in order to find ways and means for this purpose alone?

So far, the journal INTERNATIONAL CLASSIFICATION has tried to serve the two different approaches of (1) conceptual classification and (2) numerical taxonomy although admittedly the latter approach has indeed been underrepresented so far. It might perhaps become necessary to start either a second series of this journal or an entirely new journal devoted to the numerical taxonomy approach in order to keep up with the growing number of contributions in this field as exemplified e.g. by the 55 papers which were dealt with also this year at the NAB conference in Montréal (see also the program on p.93 of this issue).

If an international association can be founded it would consist of those few regional societies and groups of both kinds of approaches, the conceptual and numerical ones which are existing already. It would therefore be advisable that such kinds of societies with members from different application areas of classification be established also on a national level in all the other countries. In the Federal Republic of Germany as well as in Sweden this kind of "pluralistic" classification society already exists, with people from all kinds of backgrounds and engaged in all kinds of fields collaborating in many ways, e.g. in different special interest groups of the society and during the annual and regional meetings.

There are usually in each country a few individuals interested in the structuring, organization, representation and retrievability of knowledge, however, they do exist. It seems to me that the time has come for these relatively few people to get together and organize themselves for mutual support and information exchange and in order to be able to communicate as a group with the groups in other countries.

It is always necessary to think of both aspects in life: (1) to take care that the inner kernel develops and (2) that the outer appearance fits and expresses harmoniously the results of this development. So far classification knowledge has been in the hands of mostly introverted individuals and idealists. If it "is coming of age" then the time is ripe for its contents become presentable in adequate form, in textbooks and journals, in university curricula, and through conference proceedings, as well as through national societies and an international association which also ought to take care of the professional aspects of this science. Everybody concerned should really soon become concerned about this - would you not agree?

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(1) Wilke, J.: Bibliographie zu Verfahren der multivariaten Statistik, der mehrdimensionalen Klassifikation und ihre Anwendungen in Natur- und Gesellschaftswissenschaften. 1901-1975. 2 vols. Berlin: Akademie-Verl. 1978