Editorial

100 Years of UDC

When the two Belgian lawyers, *Paul Otlet* and *Henri LaFontaine* in 1895 asked Melvil Dewey's permission to use his Decimal Classification for their planned classification of the world's knowledge as stored not only in books but also in journal articles - a purpose for which they needed to extend his system by new levels of subdivision and new, more detailed classes - they received the answer: yes, they could not only use the system, but also secure a copyright on their planned enlargement of it, provided they would leave the first three levels of subdivisions intact. Otlet and LaFontaine agreed and the Universal Decimal Classification was born.

At our recent 2nd Russian ISKO Conference in Moscow (a report on it see under ISKO News) we had the good fortune of hearing Dr. *McIlwaine*, London, U.K., now Editor in Chief of the UDC, give a seminar on the present situation and the future prospects of this universal system. We are starting this issue with her presentation for the benefit of our dear readers!

It happened so that exactly a month later, the "CRIMEA'95" Conference on "Libraries and Associations in the Transient World: New Technologies and New Forms of Cooperation" took place on the Krim, Ukraine, with some 600 persons participating. On this occasion the Editor in Chief of the Dewey Decimal Classification, Ms. *Joan Mitchell*, Washington, DC spoke on the DDC and its computerized version, the "Electronic Dewey".

As the use of the UDC having been prescribed by law in Russia - in fact in the entire USSR - had been made compulsory for special libraries by a State Law in 1921 and for scientific and technical journals and abstract services in 1963, Dr.*McIlwaine's* seminar naturally evoked much interest in Moscow, while, on the other hand, the invitation to Mrs. Mitchell to present the latest DDC achievements at CRIMEA'95 suggests that the Russians are now also interested in hearing "et alteram partem"!

An invitation to competition? When reading the paper by *Ia McIlwaine* you will realize that both systems are now cooperating and helping each other in revising their schemes to such an extent that a convergence of the two systems might seem to be developing. And not only that, in addition a cooperation with the Editor of the Bliss Classification, Mr. *Jack Mills,* London, who is continuing his revision work on the 2nd edition of this universal system making it a fully faceted one, has also already been initiated.

Will - in this way - at least three of the six universal systems in use at present merge some day into one single system, if not notationally, then at least conceptually? Let us sincerely hope so - even though this merger may not come to pass in our livetime. And will the other three universal systems, the Library of Congress Classification, the Colon Classification and the Russian Library Bibliographical Classification join this undertaking one day? Ut omnes unum sint?

Alternatively, might there not be another, a somewhat faster procedure leading to structural and conceptual compatibility of the systems? I herewith take pleasure in inviting everybody with some experience in this range of questions to attend the forthcoming ISKO Conference in Warsaw, Sept.13-15, 1995 on "Compatibility and Integration of Order Systems" (a Call for Papers was published under ISKO News in KO-95-1 and a list of papers to be presented is included in this issue, p. 91), as we intend to work hard towards finding solutions to these problems. Don't you agree that something should be done to create a mutual understanding of the structure and contents of our knowledge fields - worldwide? Don't you think that - considering the lack of a conceptual order system in INTERNET - it is time to combine forces in creating the necessary order for the necessary retrieval of information sought?

I would like to appeal for understanding and support not only to you, dear reader, but to all those persons in high places who - or whose institutions would be willing to finance a research programme and a special institution for the systematic elaboration of concept systems of all knowledge fields according to the principles available in modern classification theory by making use in so doing of all the work already done in this direction or still in process at this very moment.

100 hundred years of UDC, 120 years of DDC - wonderful fruits of the ideas of *only one man* and his followers! The very practical principle of using decimal numbers - as already signalled by the fact that man was given ten fingers to count with - is something "to count on" indeed! Yet - are we not able to produce, with the help of a decimal notation, a more adequate structuring of our knowledge than the order which was chosen for the purposes of a liberal arts college in Amherst, USA, as far back as 1873? Even though this order can be shown to be based in some way on *Francis Bacon's* classification of the sciences of 1605 according to the human capabilities of memory, imagination and reasoning, is there no other principle available today for constructing an array of main classes in a numerical sequence? Are we really stuck with a roughly 400 years-old way of thinking?

The "Phoenix" changes which the DDC and UDC editors will have to incorporate gradually in the next 100 years, will probably keep their Editors and all their followers quite busy. However, I would have another solution in the making. Can you guess what I mean?

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