FOCUS ON UNISIST PROGRAMMES

This is the third instalment of this Feature. In this part, a report of the 1st Meeting of the UNISIST Steering Committee is presented. This is taken from the UNISIST Newsletter vol. 2 no. 1.

FIRST SESSION OF THE UNISIST STEERING COMMITTEE, PARIS, 5-9 NOVEMBER 1973

The Steering Committee is mainly responsible for guiding and supervising the planning and the implementation of the UNISIST programme; for assessing priorities among the various projects; for reviewing the results achieved and defining the basic areas requiring international co-operation and for making recommendations on the future programme.

The first session of the Steering Committee was held at Unesco Headquarters in Paris from 5 to 9 November 1973. The Agenda for this meeting included:

i) The examination of the UNISIST current programme and priority projects.


iii) The examination of proposals concerning Member States' support for activities under the programme.

iv) The co-operation with the intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations interested in the UNISIST programme.

I. Examination of the UNISIST Current Programme and Priority Projects

Under this item of the Agenda, eight projects, some of which have just been started or are still in a preparatory phase whilst others are already well under way, were presented for discussion. The results of the discussions are summarized as follows:

1. International Serials Data System (ISDS).

   The Secretariat described the main objectives of the project which was considered by most of the delegates to be an important and useful undertaking. It was felt that the Steering Committee should exercise a general responsibility for reviewing the progress of this international network as it should do for all international centres created within the framework of UNISIST.

   It was felt to be important to consider how many of the products were needed in relation to the probable charges for them and at the same time recommended to restrict the coverage for some time to science and technology.

   The discussion showed that the question of pricing policy needed close attention. There was no broad policy yet, though the exchange of information between the International Centre of ISDS in Paris and national or regional centres would be free of charge. The proposed Broad System of Ordering (BSO, see below) should be included as a data element in the "Guidelines for ISDS".

   The Committee approved the action taken so far by Unesco in the creation of the International Centre and asked Member States to continue the establishment of national centres in accordance with the "Guidelines for ISDS".

2. Establishment of International Information Centres. When introducing the subject, the Secretariat described the main objectives of International Information Centres or Clearing Houses which should be created within the framework of UNISIST in order to ensure an
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adequate information coverage of all possible aspects of information transfer related to the programme. These objectives are: to help to avoid duplication and insufficiencies in research and development on specific aspects of information transfer; provide information on advanced experiments and techniques; foster the implementation of new techniques and experiences in developing countries. In order to fulfil these objectives, each centre should provide the functions of information service, analysis, referral, advice and education, functions which may be phased in gradually as the centre grows.

Besides ISDS, three centres already exist: two clearing houses for scientific and technical classification schedules, keywords, descriptor lists and thesauri at Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, United States of America (English language) and I.I.N.T.E., Warsaw, Poland (other languages) and an International Information Centre for Terminology (INFORTERM) located at the Austrian Standards Institute in Vienna. Since the UNISIST Intergovernmental Conference in October 1971, a number of proposals have been made, mostly by Member States, to establish other international centres and Unesco is negotiating with several organizations and governments for the establishment of these centres.

There was general agreement among delegates that the proposal for the establishment of international information centres was sound in principle, but some doubts were expressed about the present method of procedure. It was proposed that, initially, the new centres should be confined to subjects of a conceptual nature namely, ISDS, standardization in documentation and information handling, terminology, bibliographic descriptions, etc.

3. World Machine-Readable Inventory of Abstracting and Indexing Services. This inventory may be considered as a first step towards the establishment of a world network of interconnected referral services - one of the long-term objectives of the UNISIST programme. It will provide printed publications (guides and bibliographies) and other specialized services from an established data base and serve as a reference tool for librarians, documentalists and information specialists. The work started as a joint project of FID and NFAIS (National Federation of Abstracting and Indexing Services - United States of America). The final master file is expected to be completed by the end of 1974. A copy will be available in both Europe and the United States and special services will be available in both Europe and the United States and special services will be offered from the two files.

4. Broad System of Ordering (BSO). The main function of this system will be to serve as a switching mechanism between individual classifications and thesauri in the process of information transfer. It will be an essential tool for systems interconnexion (the improvement of which is one of the priority projects of the UNISIST programme) and will play a useful part in ISDS, the referral network and the operation of information systems. Some delegates expressed doubts about the wisdom of introducing yet another broad scheme of classification to those already existing, however, it was explained that the main function of this new system would be to serve as a switching mechanism between existing schemes and that it was not to be considered as a new classification system.

The Committee recognized the usefulness of the project and the representative of UNIDO gave it firm support as being a means of helping developing countries to adopt more sophisticated information systems.

5. General concept of a UNISIST Manual for Systems Interconnexion. In order to make existing standards in documentation and information widely known and to promote their widespread use, it is intended to compile a Manual for Systems Interconnexion containing information on standards, rules, guidelines, directives and other means of normative character relevant to systems interconnexion. This Manual will comprise five chapters dealing respectively with bibliographic descriptions, conceptual treatment of documents, presentation of documents (or elements of them), reproduction of documents and mechanical treatment of information. Input would come from various sources, notably ISO/TC 46, former and existing UNISIST Working Groups and other groups working on similar subjects. It will probably take a loose-leaf form and be updated regularly. The compilation of such a Manual, being a long-range project, will be carried out phase by phase and its first draft is not to be expected before the end of 1974.