

FOCUS ON UNISIST PROGRAMMES

This is the fifth instalment of this Feature. Report on the British Library ISDS National Centre is continued from the previous issue. Other reports are presented from the UNISIST Newsletter Vol 2 No 3.

AN ISDS NATIONAL CENTRE – THE UNITED KINGDOM EXPERIENCE [Continued from the previous issue]

The first problem is to consider the extent of numbering to be undertaken, and in the early stages it is proposed to concentrate on serials published from 1973. A good deal of retrospective numbering has already taken place in the Bowkers Serials Bibliography (covering Ulrich's Periodical Directory and the Irregular Serials and Annuals publications). Further retrospective numbering is also taking place in the course of producing the New Serials Titles 1950-1970 cumulation. With this situation in mind the British Centre will limit itself to:

- Handling requests for retrospective numbering received through the International Centre and from users;
- Number previous titles of serials which change from 1973 and are not numbered in Bowker or NST.

Coverage

In considering serial coverage it is noted that the ISDS definition is all-embracing and permits the inclusion of both numbered and unnumbered monographs in series. For British purposes we propose to be more specific in the case of monographic series, especially as a general interpretation of the definition could well lead to a considerable amount of work in the needless assignment of ISSN to a wide range of items. Publishers series for example are often adequately dealt with under the ISBN machinery, and in any case the majority of these are not true serials. Obviously there will be no doubt need both an ISSN for the series and ISBN for the parts. It is proposed therefore to treat monographic series as follows:

- To normally exclude monographic series issued by commercial publishers whether numbered or not;
- To include monographic series emanating from academic, scientific and educational institutions and societies whether numbered or not.

Operations

The Copyright Receipt Office in the British Museum will be used as the source for material, and cataloguing procedures, based on the Guidelines for ISDS will be carried out in the following manner:

- Serials will be catalogued and assigned ISSN and the details entered on ISDS worksheets;
- Bibliographical checking as necessary will be undertaken to ensure that as many elements as possible are initially provided;
- Completed data sheets will be transmitted to the International Centre;
- Notification of ISSN to publishers.

In order to establish the system quickly it will be important to advise publishers as soon as a number is assigned to their serial. At the same time it is hoped to develop an in-advance of publication service so that ISSN can be assigned in the first issue of a serial. An immediate response to user requests is also particularly important for although early ISSN for new journals can be made available there will no doubt be many problems of a retrospective nature, and also concerning non-British serials. In order to co-ordinate this activity the national centre could act in the capacity of a clearing house, and even resolve many problems itself. Ultimately as the centre develops it will be in a position to provide access to the ISDS files through various outputs, but at this time these services are some way off and in the initial stages we must concentrate on setting up operations, developing user-relations, and consolidating a base from which development can take place.

Source of environmental information

Following a recommendation adopted at the United Nations Conference on Human Environment, Stockholm, 1972, a pilot project for the setting up of an International Referral System for Sources of Environmental Information (IRS) is being undertaken by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

The IRS may be considered as the first step towards facilitating the exchange of information about local, regional and international experiences in environmental matters. The IRS is conceived as a switching mechanism between users and sources of information and is developed in accordance with UNISIST recommendations and using the experience gained in implementing the UNISIST programme. IRS is not expected to be a full-scale information system but will facilitate multidirectional exchanges of information through a network of users and sources.

More information on this project may be obtained from the United Nations Environment Programme, Palais des Nations, 1211 Geneva 10.

UNISIST ACTIVITIES IN SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION POLICIES AND STRUCTURES

1. Information Policy Objectives

The General Conference of 1972 recognized the need for Member States to create focal points for the co-ordination of national activities in scientific and technical information and of UNISIST National Committees to be responsible for ensuring maximum participation in this programme. Many countries have not yet reacted to the letter of the Director-General of Unesco sent out to Member States inviting them to set up such bodies (see Newsletter Vol. 2, No. 1, 1974). Explanatory action is being undertaken to increase the establishment of national focal points and UNISIST Committees.

In order to offer Member States a means of confronting the important policy issues before them, a checklist of proposals for information policy objectives was prepared based on the Annex to the above-mentioned circular letter of the Director-General. The list, which is fairly comprehensive, is primarily meant for national focal points for information development or a national authority similar to such a focal point and contains some 120 detailed objectives of an information policy. In practice any one country is likely to find that several of the functions are performed already - even if there is no formal focal point. The UNISIST proposals for these Information Policy Objectives were reviewed by the Steering and Advisory Committees of UNISIST, who recommended the widest possible circulation.

2. Regional Co-operation in Information Policy

There is growing evidence that co-operation between Member States in information activities

within a geographical or otherwise defined region strongly supports and stimulates the development of information policies, structures and infrastructure at the national level, if such co-operation is based on factors that are common to the Member States within the region concerned.

Such common factors may vary widely in nature, such as common language, geographical position, communication facilities, comparable or complementary information structures, services and/or infrastructures, economic and social interaction, existing agreements at conceptual and/or operational level, etc.

In the framework of UNISIST Objective IV, plans are being initiated to explore the feasibility and desirability of the development of regional co-operation at a technical level between a number of Member States in the South Asian region.

One of the main instruments for such an exploration is the identification of factors and interests in common, primarily through a comparative review of main problem areas and issues in scientific, technical and industrial information policy and management. Based on this identification and the examination of services, structures, resources and needs of the regions during meetings of information experts and representatives of national focal points and/or UNISIST National Committees, it is hoped that programme guidelines can be formulated for the development of national and international information activities within the region.

3. Economic and Legal Aspects of Information Policy

One of the main reasons for the UNISIST Steering Committee to note, in its recommendation to the forthcoming eighteenth session of the General Conference of Unesco, the special importance of information policy to some Member States, was the recognition of the growing importance of legal and economic problems, in particular proprietary, cost and pricing aspects of information policy. Much study has already been carried out on these issues by several organizations and individuals. However, in the context of the UNISIST Programme, concrete agreement between Member States on these important issues is aimed at. In view of this objective a preliminary survey of relevant issues is being worked out as a basis for studies on the financial, economic, administrative and legal aspects of a scientific and technological information policy. The results of these studies will be used for the development rules, regulations and codes for international use in order to overcome existing barriers in information transfer.

4. Long-term Information Policy

As the awareness of information as a resource increases and the interest in UNISIST and national and international policies develops, great gaps in our knowledge about the effects of the application of infor-

mation are being discovered. It is now becoming more clear that information policy must seek to ensure that the world's professional and specialized knowledge is fully and properly used in guiding social evolution. The information requirements of policy makers, planners, managers and those faced with the increasingly important societal problems of today and tomorrow are becoming critical. UNISIST action in the field of long-term policy development, monitoring and forecasting is being developed in two directions.

First, exploratory studies are being undertaken, partly under contract, on the development of a long-range plan and programme for information policies as they interact with changing societies. The studies will comprise outlines of the nature, function and scope of information; information and the decision process with particular reference to government; government, public policy and the information function; public policy, social development and the enrichment of the individual, and the need for dynamic task-oriented information processes. The studies are aimed at practical programme development in this increasingly important field.

A second direction in which action is being undertaken has as its purpose to add to the knowledge of information and its significance for the present and the future society by:

- (a) studying the effects of the application of information and information technology and the interaction between such application and social significant situations;
- (b) developing indicators and values for the "knowledge industry" and for information technology assessment, primarily on the bases of collected statistics ("Infometrics") on the need, usefulness, economic and social value, degree of utilization, processing, production, etc., of information;
- (c) designing comprehensive and responsive models of the growth of knowledge which can be used to predict action requirements in a given situation and/or in response to specific external and internal pressures.

The establishment of a UNISIST International Information Centre to carry out these functions on a global scale is presently under study.

REPORT ON THE SECOND AND THIRD MEETING OF THE UNISIST WORKING GROUP ON BIBLIOGRAPHIC DATA INTERCHANGE

The second and third meetings of the UNISIST Working Group on Bibliographic Data Interchange took place at Unesco Headquarters, Paris, on 15-16 October 1973 and 8-9 April 1974 respectively.

At the first meeting of the Working Group in May 1973 (see Newsletter Vol. I, No. 3), a Task Group (TGI) had been established in order to carry out a preliminary study of the overlap between existing and proposed formats for bibliographic data. This comparative analysis was confined to two levels: (1) General record formats (carrier) (as it exists in ISO 2709) and (2) Data fields and tagging structure.

As far as carrier formats were concerned, TGI found that all systems investigated had adopted ISO 2709 as the carrier for bibliographic records. The Working Group welcomed the growing acceptance of ISO 2709 and urged national and international bodies concerned to promote the use of this standard. Organizations using ISO 2709 are, therefore, invited to notify Unesco accordingly. It was, however, felt that an extension to ISO 2709 was needed to permit a more efficient handling of correction records and a Task Group was established to prepare a report in advance of the 3rd meeting of the Working Group with a view to its submission to ISO/TC 46 for discussion at Helsinki.

The report was duly presented at the third meeting and contained three basic proposals: (1) the introduction of an optional fourth subfield, (2) character representation should not be in the standard itself and ASCII should not be made obligatory, and (3) use of alpha and alphanumeric tags should be permitted. The following supporting recommendations were also agreed: (1) the existing ISO 2709 standard must be retained as a valid implementation of any revised standard, and (2) any revision programme should not necessarily be restricted to the recommendations presented above. It was agreed that these recommendations should be submitted for consideration by ISO/TC 46.

With regard to character sets and character coding, TGI felt that no suitable standard existed at the present time and recommended supporting ISO/TC46/SC4/WG1.

As to level 2 (data fields and tagging structure), it was recognized that there was a need for the development of a common standard for data element definition and identification from which subsets could be developed for particular types of use.

In the studies carried out by TGI, the main literature types reviewed had been serials and monographs. The Working Group considered that the serials field did not require its further attention as a healthy collaboration had developed between ISBD(S) and ISDS as regards bibliographic description of serials as collective entities while the UNISIST Reference Manual (see Newsletter, Vol. I, No. 2) was primarily concerned with serial articles at the analytic level and used ISDS elements (ISSN, abbreviated key title) wherever an overlap occurred.

[To be continued in the next issue]