

	<p style="text-align: right;">2nd Version Date : 14/08/2007</p> <p>Best practices for subject access to national bibliographies: interim report by the Working Group on Guidelines for Subject Access by National Bibliographic Agencies.</p> <p>Françoise Bourdon Bibliothèque nationale de France Paris, France</p> <p>and</p> <p>Patrice Landry Swiss National Library Bern, Switzerland</p>
<p>Meeting:</p>	<p>89 Bibliography with National Libraries and Classification and Indexing</p>
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Abstract

The working group to establish guidelines for subject access by national bibliographic agencies was set up in 2005 in order to analyse the question of subject access and propose key elements for an indexing policy for national bibliographies. The group's mandate is to put forward recommendations based on best practices for subject access to national bibliographies. The group is presently assessing the elements which should be included in an indexing policy and will present an initial version of its recommendations in 2008.

1. Introduction

The IFLA Classification and Indexing Section has been concerned with the question of subject access to national bibliographies for a number of years. In 1994, it had already set up a working group whose goal was to survey subject heading lists used in national bibliographies and national library catalogues. In 1995 and again in 1997, a questionnaire had been sent to national libraries to collect information regarding the type of subject headings, application rules and indexing manuals in use. After a final survey in 1999, the findings of the group covering practices in 88 libraries were published in 2000 by Magda Heiner-Freiling.¹ Subsequently, another working group was established to deal with a related aspect of this question; the relevance of subject access for various user groups.

This presentation will describe the activities of this working group by explaining its terms of reference and by presenting the steps that have already been taken in its task to select key criteria to define more precisely the type of subject access which should be made available to users.

2. Context

According to the information collected in the previous studies², various indexing tools such as classification schemes, thesauri and subject heading lists are used by national libraries and national bibliographic agencies to create subject access to the documents listed in their national bibliographies and catalogues. The majority of indexing tools in use have been developed according to the rules and principles of controlled vocabulary in the field of classification and indexing. However, it is difficult to determine with percentage of documents indexed as well as the level of indexing. Ideally, bibliographic agencies and national libraries should give complete and detailed subject access to all major publications. Realistically, it is often impossible for libraries to offer subject access, which ensures a complete treatment of collections according to international indexing standards. In 1992, in the introduction of his book "Minimal Level Cataloguing by National Bibliographic Agencies", Jay Lamprecht³ states:

"In the real world of limited resources, difficult decisions must be made at all levels. A national bibliographic agency must determine what portion of its budget will be devoted to cataloging. Those who administer the cataloging operation must decide how to allocate resources among bibliographic description, subject analysis, assignment of access points, maintenance of authority files and other functions"

The financial aspect is but one of the numerous factors that can influence the scope and quality of analytical treatment by national libraries. Personnel training, normative levels of classification tools in use and the absence of a comprehensive indexing strategy or policy are other constraining factors which limit libraries in their mandate to offer adequate subject access to bibliographic records listed in their catalogues and national bibliographies.

The working group considers that the development of an indexing/cataloguing policy is a necessary step towards offering users adequate information on the type of subject access available to documents listed in national bibliographies. The goal of our group is to make recommendations to national libraries as to the type of documents which should be indexed according to the needs of various user groups. We hope to propose recommendations about the creation of indexing policies in 2008.

3. Methodology

The working group started its work in 2005 by defining its terms of reference⁴. The main objective of the group was stated as follows:

"The purpose of this working group is to establish guidelines that would ensure that appropriate subject access is given by national bibliographic agencies to meet user needs. In particular, the WG should look at indexing policies of

national libraries and national bibliographic agencies to consider what kind of access should be given to the different groups of users (stakeholders) of national bibliographies”.

In these terms of reference, the working group had defined a series of criteria that were to be taken into account in their analysis. The documents collected by national libraries and national bibliographic agencies can be defined according to certain characteristics: their origin (publishers), their target group (clients), their type (form), their format (physical attributes) and their field or subject. These characteristics constituted the basis to guide our analysis to determine which criteria should be included in an indexing policy. Such a policy should identify documents that should be indexed according to subject heading lists, thesauri or classification schemes and this policy should also propose the level of treatment appropriate for each type of document.

Our working group has taken into account the reports of the Working Group on Guidelines for national bibliographies (electronic)⁵ and has noted many converging aspects between the two working groups. Notably, the importance given to the identification of potential users in order to implement services, which would correspond more precisely to the demand. The degree of precision in the identification of all the actors in the various spheres: libraries, publishers, politicians and user groups (students, researchers), was particularly helpful. Furthermore, it was instructive to note that among the needs of users was the need to search via subject headings.

At the IFLA Conference in Seoul in 2006, our working group met to establish its work schedule and determine its tasks for 2006/07. Members of the committee were first requested to submit for analysis a number of indexing policies available on the Web or from their respective libraries. This “Best practices of indexing” approach allowed us to determine common key elements to these policies. The indexing policies of the national libraries or national bibliographic agencies of the following countries were considered in our analysis: Germany, Canada, the United States (Library of Congress), France, Great Britain, Italy, Norway and Switzerland.

At a meeting at the BNF in Paris in February 2007, Françoise Bourdon and Patrice Landry analysed these policies taking into account the comments submitted by other group members. This meeting allowed us to identify a series of key elements common to these indexing policies and prepare proposals that will be submitted to the working group during this Conference in Durban.

4. Proposal of key elements of an indexing policy

Preliminary analysis of existing indexing policies has allowed us to identify certain key elements that will be considered by the working group. The object of the subsequent meeting will be to determine their relevance and usefulness in regards to the various target groups involved in national bibliographies. The working group will study the following elements:

Indexing policy: strategic aspect

- **For whom is this policy intended?** Should there be different versions of the policy intended for different target groups, for example library administrations, cataloguers, (creators of bibliographic records) librarians (professionals), user groups. In other words, those who mandate, those who create and those who consult bibliographic records. This question must be discussed in order to come up with texts that are adapted to the needs of the various target groups.
- **What are the limits of its application?** Does a national library policy concern uniquely the national library? Should the policy include also specific aspects of work done in collaborative initiatives such as networks, partnerships and record distribution by third parties?
- **Should the policy be published?** If yes, for all target groups? If not, why not and in which context? If it is published, what should be the chosen format?
- **Should it include an historical background?** Should the policy indicate the various versions of previous policies? Should there be an historical background of the various indexing tools used?

Presentation of Indexing tools

- **What are the different languages and classifications schemes used?** Presently? Previously? If several indexing tools are used simultaneously in a national bibliography or in the online catalogue, are they complementary or not? Is indexing provided in bibliographic records derived from other sources?
- **What are the characteristics of each language (tool)?** Name, creation date, origin (original, translation, adaptation, based on an international or national norm?). What kind of indexing tools are used? (Thesaurus, classifications scheme, etc.? Who maintains each tool and how? (authority files, etc.).
- **Is indexing pre or post coordinated?**

Application of indexing tools

- **How are the indexing tools used in the national bibliography and library catalogue of the national bibliographic agency?** In the context of electronic national bibliographies it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the national bibliography from the library catalogue. Does this influence the indexing policy?
- **Are there different levels of cataloguing?** If there are different level of cataloguing (minimal, core level, complete), what is the impact of these levels on the level of indexing (for example, are the number of subject headings or the number of classification notations limited per document?). Does it impact on the scope of indexing, specific approach vs a more general approach? Are the indexing rules applied in a similar fashion for both the current and the retrospective indexing? This issue raises the question of the quality of the

bibliographic records produced by the national bibliographic agencies, notably when records are widely distributed nationally and internationally.

- **Should we take into account retrospective indexing projects?** In the context of network cooperative cataloguing programme, it may be important to indicate this in an indexing policy.
- **What are the types of documents indexed / not indexed?** Does the indexing policy specify which documents are indexed according to the type of publications (i.e. monographs, serials, electronic resources), to the genre (i.e. fiction, documentary), to the date of publication of documents and / or the projected audience (children, general public, specialist)? Are national documents and foreign documents treated the same way? What is the percentage of documents indexed according to the different categories?
- **Is the indexing bilingual / multilingual?** How are the headings attributed? From two lists/thesauri?
- **What is the use of indexing tools in the search interface (national bibliography / national library catalogue)**
- **Are the indexing tools (authority files, classification scheme) made available to users when conducting their searches?**

5. Next steps

During the Durban Conference, the working group will meet to consider these elements and determine with precision which ones should be included in a comprehensive indexing policy. The questions raised in the initial stage will be submitted to the group for analysis. The goal is to produce a proposal for one or a few indexing policy “models” intended for national libraries and national bibliographic agencies. It is hoped that they could refer to the work done by the WG to draft or refine their own indexing policy. This work would also be used to promote the development of subject access to national bibliographies and online catalogues.

The group hopes to submit its recommendations for consultation by 2008. The group will also consider the work of the Working Group on Guidelines for national bibliographies in the digital age to adapt its findings to the work in progress.

Notes

¹ Magda Heiner-Freiling, “Survey on Subject heading Languages used in National Libraries and Bibliographies”. *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, 29:1-2, 2000, 189-198.

² The survey carried out by the working group cited by Magda Heiner-Freiling as well as recent surveys, such as « Report on Subject Access Tools » carried on within the TEL-ME-MOR and EDL projects

(http://libraries.theeuropeanlibrary.org/cooperation/archive/telmemor/docs/D3.3-Report_on_subject_access_tools.pdf ;

<http://www.edlproject.eu/downloads/edlReportsatful3.doc>) show the importance of indexing tools in national libraries.

³ Jay H. Lambrecht, « Minimal Level Cataloging by National Bibliographic Agencies », IFLA Universal Bibliographic Control and International MARC Programme, München : Saur, 1992, p. 16.

⁴ The Working Group is presently composed of : Marie Balíková (National Library of the Czech Republic, Prag), Julianne Beall (Library of Congress), Françoise Bourdon (Bibliothèque nationale de France), Leda Bultrini (ARPA Lazio, Rom), Yvonne Jahns (Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, Leipzig), Patrice Landry (Schweizerische Nationalbibliothek, Bern), Dorothy McGarry, (University of California, Los Angeles), Sirje Nilbe (National Library of Estonia, Tallinn), Eunice Maria Siva Pinto (Biblioteca de Arte, Lisboa), Ingebord Rype (National Library of Norway, Oslo), Magdalena Svanberg (National Library of Sveden, Stockholm) and Thordis T Thórarinsdóttir, (Menntaskolinn vid Sund Junior College Library, Iceland).

⁵ Maja Žumer, « Recommandations pour les bibliographies nationales (électroniques): le travail en cours » 71th IFLA General Conference and Council, August 14-18th, 2005, meeting 133. http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla71/papers/073f_trans-Zumer.pdf