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Use of UNIMARC in Greek Libraries

Joanna Demopoulos, MLS

Head of Cataloguing Department

National Library of Greece

PUC Member

Greece, or to be more specific modern Greece, is a country without great tradition in libraries. I believe that one of the main reasons is the fact that the library education came really late in Greece. The first state library science school was established, in 1977, within the Center of Higher Technical and Professional Education (KATEE) in Athens. In 1981, was established another library science school within the Center of Higher Technical and Professional Education (KATEE) in Thessaloniki.

In Greece exist two types of higher education institutions: the universities and the Technological Education Institutes (TEI). In 1983, both library schools mentioned above, were upgraded to Technological Educational Institutes (TEI). In the academic year 1993-1994 was established a new library school, at university level that time, at the Ionian University in Corfu under the name School of Archives and Library Science.

Until early 1990's, the Greek libraries were facing serious problems. Since then, there is a continuous effort towards modernization with very good results. Through the participation of the Greek libraries in projects funded by the European Union and the collaboration with other European libraries, the Greek libraries entered in a new era. The above mentioned evolution affected the public, academic and school libraries.

The National Library of Greece was not the exception in the poor quality of the Greek libraries. Automation came really late. The installation of an integrated library automation system started early in 1992. The National Library of Greece adopted UNIMARC both as internal and exchange bibliographic and authorities format. As early as 1993, the National Library of Greece proceeded in the publication of the Greek translation of the UNIMARC Manual in 2 volumes (1993-1996) and of the UNIMARC Authorities in 1996. Later on, in 2003, the National Library of Greece proceeded to the production of a CD-ROM with Greek authorities (personal names of Greek authors, corporate bodies, subject headings, geographic names, uniform titles) in UNIMARC format. These publications were distributed, free of charge, to the Greek libraries.

Public libraries in Greece are supported by the Ministry of Education, the municipal libraries are supported by the local authorities and the school libraries are supported also by the Ministry of Education.

The National Documentation Center (NDC) in order to help the automation of the Greek libraries has developed and supports a library automation system named AVEKT, in UNIMARC format. That system is offered free of charge to public libraries and non-profit organizations. AVEKT has been selected as the automation system to be used by the newly established school libraries.

There are 41 public libraries supported by the Ministry of Education. Most of them are automating their collections using the AVEKT software. Six of them have established the Public Libraries Union Catalogue using the AVEKT software in UNIMARC format.

The majority of the municipal libraries are not very well organized. Of course, there are exceptions as for example the municipal library of Thessaloniki, which has a very good central library with many branch libraries.

In the past, the Greek educational system did not understand the need for the existence of organized school libraries. Some private schools have very well organized libraries. A new legislation prescribed the establishment of a library in every school. In 1994, the Greek state decided to establish 500 school libraries in secondary schools all over the country as a pilot project. A committee of the Ministry of Education selected a collection of print and non-print materials, which were centrally catalogued. The school libraries are using the software AVEKT in UNIMARC format.

As mentioned already, in Greece there are two types of higher education institutions, the universities and the Technical Education Institutes (TEI). The majority of the universities have been established after 1960 and the TEI after early 1980's. The older institutes had good collections but not well organized libraries. One of the exception of the rule was the library of the University of Crete, which from very early automated its library through its own system called PTOLEMEOS. Since 1996, the picture changed dramatically thanks to the funding provided by the Second Community Support Framework of the European Union through a special Action of the Operational Program for Education and Initial Training (EPEAEK). Now, all the academic libraries are using an integrated automated system. In 1998, a group of librarians and information scientists, after examination of the existing situation in Greek academic libraries, decided to proceed in the creation of a natural central Union Catalogue.

The academic libraries created a library consortium, the Hellenic Academic Libraries Link (HEAL LINK). One of its activities is the creation and operation of a central Union Catalogue. The system operating the Union Catalogue is ADVANCE in UNIMARC format. The Union Catalogue is comprised of the higher education institutions of Greece, the National Library of Greece, the Academy of Athens and the library of the University of Cyprus. These libraries are using different systems, namely 21 of them are using ADVANCE, 10 are using HORIZON, 4 are using ALEPH, 8 are using AVEKT and 1 is using VTLS. From the 44 libraries participating in the Union Catalogue, 38 are using UNIMARC and 6 are using MARC21. Within the functions of the Union Catalogue exist Continual Committees for Cataloguing, for the establishment of common rules and policies. These committees are working both in UMINARC and MARC21.

From what I mentioned above, it is obvious that the great majority of libraries in Greece are using UNIMARC as a widespread bibliographic format. Of course, there is a small number of Greek libraries using MARC 21. It is quite peculiar that the use of UNIMARC and MARC 21, is geographically spread in the country, due to historical reasons. Academic libraries of Thessaloniki and Crete were the first automated libraries using LC MARC format. As a result of that tradition, many libraries in north of Greece and Crete are using MARC 21. In the rest of the country, libraries are using UNIMARC. It is characteristic that UNIMARC, as a MARC bibliographic format, is included in the curricula of the library school in Athens and Ionion University in Corfu, while in the curriculum of the library school in Thessaloniki is included MARC 21.