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Teaching classification to fit a modern and sustainable LIS curriculum: the case of Croatia

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Abstract:

Library classification in the Croatian library school at the Department of Information Sciences, University of Zagreb has an important place in the department's curriculum. This is due to the fact that classification is the most important indexing language in Croatian libraries, documentation centres and services and its role has not been undermined by library automation is the case elsewhere. The course Classification and Classification Systems has undergone many changes since the school was established in 1976. One of the most important objectives of the course, besides introducing classification as a tool, is to teach about content analysis and classification as a process. Another important goal of the course is to teach students how to adapt and use classification for different purposes and in different environments. The current syllabus embraces the use of classification in information organisation and presentation in different kinds of collection from book and non-book materials to information resources on the Internet and even more importantly, the course covers the application of classification in information retrieval and discovery. It is the intention of the course to contribute to the education of librarians and will enable their skills to be applied in the wider area of the information profession.

1. Background

One would expect that the importance of library classification would ensure the steady development and expansion of classification research and its continuous presence in the LIS curriculum. However, the

teaching of classification in many LIS schools lost its importance in the 1980's. Centralized cataloguing services, and an avoidance of expensive indexing methods , as well as the wider application of library systems in the eighties resulted in decline of both, application and teaching of classification (see for instance Buckland, 1990, Weinberg, 1995 and Downie, 1999).

Internet technology in the nineties, however, created the need for information organisation skills and it became necessary to find a better solution for information discovery, either by developing new indexing techniques and languages or by adapting existing ones, such as classificaton, to suit the new environment. The knowledge regarding the theory of classification, classification systems and their practical application, becomes more important with new technological developments (Kwasnik, 1999). These have expanded the field of application and created new functional requirements for classification systems. LIS education can greatly influence the future of information organisation on the Internet by educating more professionals with a thorough understanding of indexing tools and classification in particular. Each library school has an equal responsibility in contributing to this mission irrespective of its geographical or cultural background. This paper will illustrate how the LIS School at Zagreb University, Croatia, carries out the objective of teaching library classification in order to contribute to its wider application and survival.

1.1. LIS Education in Croatia

The first Library school in Croatia was established in 1975 at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb, offering undergraduate degrees in librarianship. The curriculum was based upon American and British LIS education from the seventies, with the influence of current European and Croatian library practice. In 1985, Librarianship became a part of the Department of Information Sciences and this directed its future development towards the broader area of information studies. Over time, the programmes were enriched with postgraduate courses and a part-time programme in librarianship was introduced. Consequently, changes to the curricula in the years following were influenced by the fact that librarianship started to view itself as a part of the information studies field rather than just being concerned with the education of library staff.

Today the Department of Information Sciences delivers both undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes of study in the area of Librarianship, Informatics, Archive and Museum studies. Graduating with a B.A. in librarianship is the only way of acquiring professional librarian status in Croatia today, which is a small country with 4 million inhabitants and less than two thousands libraries. Until recently, when undergraduate degree programme in librarianship were established at the University of Osijek, the Zagreb department was the only library school in Croatia.

Twenty years ago the lack of academic staff made LIS education more dependent upon the professional community. Most of the lecturers were librarians with certain specialisations and considered their mission to be, primarily, the education of future library staff. Teaching of, for example, the indexing course was based almost exclusively on the skills and knowledge a librarian needs in a Croatian public library, as staff teaching this subject happened to have that provenance. The department's vision and objectives have changed in the last three decades as more academic staff have not only library experience, but also undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD degrees in library and information studies.

At the moment LIS education in Zagreb seems to be more advanced than current library practice, the development of which has been held back by the harsh economic situation in Croatia (Lasic-Lazic; Slavic, 2000). It is the hope of academic staff that by preparing professionals for a more technologically demanding environment, this may help improve library practice in the future. This may also help the professional community to apply the necessary skills outside a traditional library environment.

2. The use of classification in Croatian libraries

The role of classification in the Croatian LIS curriculum is very much determined by general practice in European and in particular Croatian libraries. The old Sayers differentiation between the 'bibliothecal' and 'bibliographical' use of classification is very much a reality in Croatian libraries (Sayers, 1935). Library classification has an important place in Croatian libraries as classification is used not only for shelf arrangement but more importantly for information retrieval supported initially by classified catalogues and more recently by OPACs. Due to its important role, not only in providing subject access to the collection, but in underpinning the entire work of librarians in supporting acquisition, collection organisation, management, and maintenance (e.g. weeding, inventory revision), as well as reference work, classification was considered to be too important to be carried out by cataloguers. It was performed by subject specialists who usually divide their work between the reference desk and the classification department. The Croatian approach to teaching classification, therefore, is very different from, for instance, the American one, that can have cataloguing and classification combined in one single course module. In Croatia, due to its important role, classification is naturally established as a separate module that was from the beginning, some thirty years ago, taught according to the approach influenced initially by the German tradition and theory of subject catalogues (der Sachkatalog, der systematische Katalog, der Schlagwortkatalog).

There is another reason for the important place of classification in Croatian libraries. Croatia has always maintained strong links with other South Slavonic cultures and languages (Serbian, Slovenian, Macedonian) in the historical, cultural and political boundaries of South-East Europe. When it comes to information exchange, alphabetical indexing languages were not favoured by Croatian librarians in this multilingual and multiscript environment. Library classification proved to be far more useful and it was applied in the full scope of an indexing language. This became much more apparent when in the fifties Universal Decimal Classification UDC) became the official classification system for the national, public, academic and most special libraries in the former Yugoslavia. UDC became literally universal as it bridged different libraries, different collections, different languages and different scripts in this multinational, multilingual and multiscript environment. The Croatian National Bibliography as well as many secondary publications in the wide area of scholarly communication uses UDC (articles in most Croatian scientific and research journals contain a UDC classification number). In Croatian libraries today, library services ranging from acquisition and information services to collection management and selective dissemination of information rely upon UDC and in this environment, it is used as the prevalent indexing tool.

3. The paradox of undeveloped countries

Of all the negative effects troublesome and poor economic environments have on library automation in Croatia, a positive consequence is that, having inadequate system support, librarians continue to use their core library skills. As they are unable to search, find or download a record that may exist in a Croatian National Library system, Croatian librarians have to catalogue and classify the same book in their local application as a part of their daily routine. Furthermore, as they lack funds for vendor library systems, libraries often engage in a lengthy and thus more expensive process of incrementally building their own library systems. This permits librarians to influence the system being built, therefore, whenever the librarians involved ask for better solutions in the subject approach, this often results in better exploitation of library classification or subject heading systems. Contrary to what has happened in the rest of the world, classification has not lost its important role in the process of library automation, and paradoxically, Croatian librarians may still need to know more about the practical issues of using classification in the automated library system.

In terms of management in poorly automated Croatian Libraries, the importance of the Internet can appear as another paradox. Lacking a national library network, unified catalogues and national information communication infrastructure, librarians are actually likely to be more dependent on access to the Internet in order to be well informed, to find necessary information when cataloguing and classifying books or when using OPACs worldwide. The Internet can often act as a 'backup' for the lack of other information resources. In using the Internet librarians need to be well acquainted not only with their own systems of information organisation and access but also with world recognised and accepted methods and tools. This reality greatly influenced the teaching of classification and will be explained further in the syllabus of *Classification and Classification systems*.

4. Teaching classification at the University of Zagreb

There are currently two teaching modules focusing on classification that are compulsory at the undergraduate level: *Theory of Classification* and *Classification and Classification Systems* but only the latter is related to classification as an indexing language, and will be further explained. The former is an introductory course that consists of only 12 two hour lectures covering philosophical and logical background of classification and its wide application in science, research and practice. *Classification and Classification System*, however, can be described as a module as it consists of 24 lectures and 24 practical tutorials that are being delivered throughout the academic year.

4.1. Course Objectives and coverage

The *Classification and Classification Systems* module covers some of the general issues in indexing and it is designed to enable students to understand the principles of content analysis and collection organisation based on content description. The purpose of this module is to introduce indexing and retrieval that bridges old library traditions and the wider scope of information discovery. Usually, classification schedules are merely the source for real practical 'application schema' that one library designs for its particular library purpose, its collection and its patrons. Although a document can have only one location in the collection it has to be retrieved by any relevant subject description. Therefore, teaching classification has to cover two different levels: collection organisation and information retrieval. Also a collection to which a library classification is applied can consist of objects as well as of any kind of document. Apart from those printed on paper it can contain documents stored on any kind of multimedia or digital carrier and may be in any kind of digital format. It is an important objective of the course to teach the students that a library classification system is a flexible tool that can and should be applied to suit ones particular needs. To be able to use classification in a different and more flexible manner, an indexer has to understand the philosophy and structure behind library classification, hence the difference between enumerative, semi-enumerative and analythico-synthetic classification is taught. Therefore, although the stress is put on UDC, students are also introduced to other widespread classification systems such as Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC), Library of Congress Classification (LCC), Bliss Bibliographic Classification (BC), Colon Classification (CC) and Cutter Expansive Classification (EC). While CC and BC are introduced primarily because of their faceted structure and EC because of its important place in the history of classification, DDC and LCC are analysed in a more practical and comparative manner. After being acquainted with general classification systems students are briefly introduced to special classifications (e.g. Decimal Classification for Forestry, INSPEC and ICOM Classification) that are mostly analysed from the point of view of their structure and their practical value.

Related to library automation and particularly related to the Internet, the classification syllabus is extended to cover the following important issues:

- classification as a indexing retrieval tool in an on-line environment

- translation of the classification to a natural language
- use of library classification in resource discovery on the Internet: subject gateways and metadata

In covering these issues the traditional use of classification that still exists in a number of Croatian libraries is compared with its application in an integrated library system. The field of application of library classification is wider than it was several decades ago. It is a course objective to enable students to understand and be able to use classification in the widest scope of its application for:

- **systematic organisation of information**
    - book and non book: multimedia, realia, digital collections
    - bibliographic records in the bibliographies, databases
    - web resources

- **information retrieval in databases, OPACs and on the Internet**
    - searching classification numbers
    - browsing hierarchical classification structures
    - improving recall and precision, and providing a context for search terms

- **selective dissemination of information**

- **classification as a basis and help in development of alphabetical indexing languages and its use as a "switching language" in the multilingual environment.**

In the first semester, lectures and tutorials in this syllabus are planned to proceed simultaneously but at the same time to be somewhat independent. Initially, lectures focus on the history, theory, and structure of library classification in general, and tutorials start immediately with an introduction to the UDC and its application. Students start to do practical classification after three introductory tutorials to the UDC schedules and spend each of the next ten tutorials classifying a different main class in UDC. An additional two tutorials are then devoted to non-book materials, objects etc. Lectures are given in parallel with an introduction to other classification systems and after that with problems of the classification in an on-line environment. In the second semester both lectures and tutorials are devoted to using classification in an on-line environment and students start to use the specially prepared CDS ISIS database called KLAS. They enter their examples into the database and practice searching and browsing. Using this database, the students explore the main issues around handling, sorting, and searching a synthetic classification such as UDC (see further in Lasic-Lazic, Slavic, 1998). The objective of this exercise is to demonstrate the full extent of the capacity and suitability of classification in retrieval. Students analyse the need to search each meaningful element of composed classification numbers as well as to search classification using words. Several tutorials are devoted to the translation of classification numbers to words and a chain indexing technique is exercised along with post coordinate searching using Boolean logical operators. At this stage lectures proceed with a subject alphabetical index to classification and the use of classification in thesaurus building.

In tutorials towards the end of the course, students are introduced to different Croatian library OPACs and a number of web OPACs and they analyse their provision for browsing and searching classification. Having been well acquainted with both a classification system (i.e. UDC) and its retrieval capacity this part of the course tutorials are devoted to introducing the issues of classification management in an integrated library system. The end of the course is devoted to Internet search gateways that use classification and to the use of classification in general and special metadata schemas.

At the end of the module students have to submit a short paper on any general classification system (apart from UDC) or make a comparison between them. A description of five real documents classified

according to the five different general classification systems is also required. After paper work has been submitted and evaluated, students are allowed to attend written exams that consist of 50 multiple choice questions on content analysis, special and general classification systems, and UDC in particular. Students with satisfactory marks are allowed to approach the final and the main part of the exam - the interview. This interview is an oral examination and will cover all the student's work during the year and practical examples he/she did. The interview also covers the paper submitted and finally several questions are posed based on the reading list.

5. Conclusion

Croatian librarianship comes from a small community and therefore borrows from more developed international traditions. This encompasses professional communication and exchange as well as education. Placed between Western and Eastern European traditions and also acquainted with the developed American LIS environment, Croatian librarians strive to take the positive aspects from all of these influences. The Croatian tradition in teaching classification has a good foundation in its wide approach to classification as a retrieval and knowledge organisation tool. Being outside the main stream of library automation, LIS education in Croatia tries to create an awareness of technologically related pitfalls and to preserve the core values of traditional library skills. At the same time the present undergraduate curriculum, as has been shown using the example of the course *Classification and Classification Systems*, tries to anticipate a wider application of indexing skills and their usage in the future networked environment. The fact that the Croatian library tradition fully appreciates classification as an indexing tool and that Croatia is detached from mainstream library automation is helpful in establishing a course entirely devoted to classification with a wider range of topics. Croatian librarians, lacking networked library resources, are likely to be more dependent on the Internet and hence the course in classification uses the global network both as a teaching aid and as the field of classification application. Lectures and tutorials are both devoted to teaching classification as a powerful tool whose application exceeds the boundaries of its bibliographic scope.

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