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Working in a distributed electronic environment: experiences with the Norwegian edition

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Abstract

This paper describes the development of the 5th Norwegian edition of the Dewey Decimal Classification. The new Norwegian edition is an intermediary edition with features from both DDC 21 (1996) and the Abridged Edition 13 (1997) to meet the subject needs of Norwegian libraries. The edition was developed in a distributed XML environment, and with close communication between the Norwegian editorial team and the Dewey editors at the Library of Congress. This collaboration resulted in improvements to DDC 22 and the 5th Norwegian edition.

Background

The introduction of Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) in Norway came as a result of one man and his search for a career. In the late 1880s the student and bohemian Haakon Nyhuus bought a one-way ticket to the USA. By chance he was offered a job at the Newberry Library in Chicago where he met William F. Poole who was impressed by the young man and recommended him for the position as head of the Cataloguing Department at Chicago Public Library. His bibliographic career was rather short – and so was his stay in America. In 1897 he returned to Norway to head the municipal library in Oslo. Nyhuus soon became the most important library reformer Norway has ever seen. In 1898 he introduced DDC in the library. Nyhuus did not particularly like the Dewey system and characterized it as “the old carriage with its ten wheels, some of which are a little loose and shaky from wear and tear”. Nevertheless it is due to him that Dewey is now used by all public libraries and by a wide range of academic and scientific libraries in Norway.

Norway is a scarcely populated country which inhabits some 4,5 million people. The libraries tend to be small and collections rather limited in size. Even though the larger university libraries and libraries with very specialized collections tend to use the international edition in four volumes, most libraries consider the tables to be too detailed for their needs. There is a strongly felt need for having terminology in Norwegian. Several subject indexes and gateways are organised according to DDC and the Norwegian edition forms an important basis for the creation of subject headings. For these reasons the Norwegian tradition is to translate, abbreviate and slightly adjust every second full edition of DDC into Norwegian, based on national literary warrant.

The needs and requirements of a new edition

As our latest translation was based on the 19th edition of DDC from 1979 there was dire need for an updated classification tool based on the 21st edition from 1996. Negotiations for a contract started in 1997, but for reasons mainly due to funding and organizational problems the contract was first signed in 1999. Immediately after the signing, the National Library of Norway organized the translation as a project with a reference group to provide professional support, a steering group and most importantly the editor: Isabella Kubosch. The project was initially planned for a period of one to one and a half years, but we ended up spending three full years.

What makes the Norwegian edition special - and also time consuming to produce - is the focus on literary warrant in Norwegian libraries. The Norwegian edition (the fifth in line) is hence an intermediary edition with features from both DDC21 and the abridged edition 13 (1997). During the translation process we have monitored the national bibliography and the union catalogue to identify the number of documents pertaining to the various class numbers. By applying this approach we developed a tailor made product suitable to our needs. We acknowledge the fact that merely translating the abridged edition would have saved us much time and energy, but as we consider the abridged edition to be generally speaking too shallow, that was never an option to us.

The project

Planning is the key issue of every project. In our case the initial planning and preparatory period lasted 4-5 months. During this time we scrutinized the editorial rules that OCLC/Forest Press had developed, studied the "Guidelines for Preparations of Translations and Adaption, Edition 21", translated the glossary and agreed on the Dewey terminology to be used throughout the tables and schedules. We also decided on sources for terminology and translation e.g. dictionaries, encyclopaedia and various relevant Internet sites. We chose "Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language" for terminology, knowing that this was the tool that OCLC used.

Another core activity at this stage was the updating of a copy of the international full as well as the abridged edition with all the announced amendments and corrections (the "DC&" and later on "New and Changed Entries" published in PDF format on the Internet). We also updated the fourth Norwegian edition of DDC (DDK4) by scanning the most recent version and converting the files into Microsoft Word. Then we integrated the separately published schedules on computer science (004-006, 621.39), music (780) and specific aspects of culture (306.4) into the main schedules. We also updated our locally developed geographical subdivision of Norway. As soon as OCLC/Forest Press had given their consent to our

proposal we integrated the subdivision into Table 2. The machine-readable files formed the basis of the new edition.

The earlier mentioned guidelines for preparations roughly suggested the appropriate order in which the different tables and schedules should be translated. As advised we started out by translating Table 1 then moved on in this order: Table 2 and 5 in connection with 900, Table 4 and 6 with 400, Table 3 with 800, then 000, 100, 200, 500, 600, 700 and 300, and finally Table 7. We were careful to translate divisions that relate to each other in one sequence e.g. 720 Architecture with 690 Buildings in order to ensure a consistency in the use of terms and level of abbreviation.

The most important issue during the initial stages was, however, the making of a policy statement followed by a time schedule. This process involved a large amount of work, but on the other hand a well-founded policy statement saves a lot of discussions, hesitations, rethinking and even worse: redoing at a later stage of the process! Our policy statement was written in Norwegian and an English outline was sent to OCLC/Forest Press for approval. The single most important statement was the decision to avoid using options in order to enhance the national and international exchange of classification data. We decided, however, that most options found in DDK4 would have to be continued in order to keep reclassification in Norwegian libraries to a minimum. The overall policy was therefore to avoid creating new options.

Before starting on the actual translation and abbreviation project, the members of the reference group carefully went through all changes that had taken place in edition 20 and 21. We also identified areas where the international edition was not in accordance with Norwegian attitudes, with our ways of organizing society, or had a US bias. One problematic issue was substituting the notes and the manual with examples that would fit into a Norwegian setting. Even more problematic were numbers that do not reflect how we organize our society. An example of the latter is the classification of the history of the Church of Norway. This church has represented the main, almost the only, expression of religious belief in Norway for a thousand years and has been a state church since the 16th century. Around 86 per cent of the population are baptised members. According to DDC21 the history of the Church of Norway should be classified in 284.1481 (under Lutheran Churches). Due to the historical facts and the sake of avoiding major reclassification we have decided to keep the history of the Church of Norway in 274.81 (Christianity, Church history), but clearly mark that this is not in accordance with DDC21.

One major concern of ours was the use of the word race used throughout DDC21 and especially in table 5 Racial, Ethnic, National Groups. We suggested to OCLC that it should be renamed Ethnic and National Groups in edition 22 and to our content OCLC agreed and also let us use this heading in the Norwegian edition. There are also other examples of changes that will take place in edition 22 as a result of input from our translation.

The issues that concerned us most were the divisions of Norwegian historical periods (948), languages (439.82 and 439.83) and literature (893.82 and 839.83) in DDC21. The division of historical periods was a Nordic concern, it appeared, so we consulted our Nordic colleagues and drew up a paper on behalf of the region. The outcome of this discussion is that we had to compromise a bit. All the periods in DDC21 and DDK4 are now coherent, but the actual class numbers vary somewhat, thus minimizing the need for reclassification. Our main concern regarding the division of language was that Norwegian was classified as an East Scandinavian

language and that DDC21 operates with two numbers: 439.82 Norwegian (Bokmål, Riksmål) and 439.83 Norwegian (New Norse, Landsmål) when Norwegian in fact is one language with two standards of writing (Bokmål and New Norse). These two forms now share the same number in DDC21: 439.82. Subsequently the number in literature is now 839.82 and the period table adjusted accordingly.

Our experience is that even a small country can improve the quality and even influence the development of DDC. We have worked closely with the editors of DDC during the whole project. Our editor was invited to visit OCLC in 2000 and met with the Editorial Policy Committee. This meeting was very fruitful. Our main means of communication with the DDC staff was, however, via email. The editors have been extremely helpful and have answered every single question we asked in a swift and professional manner. They have also contributed to our understanding of particular class numbers, and last but not least been willing to discuss any problem arising and to see the world from a European or more specifically Scandinavian perspective.

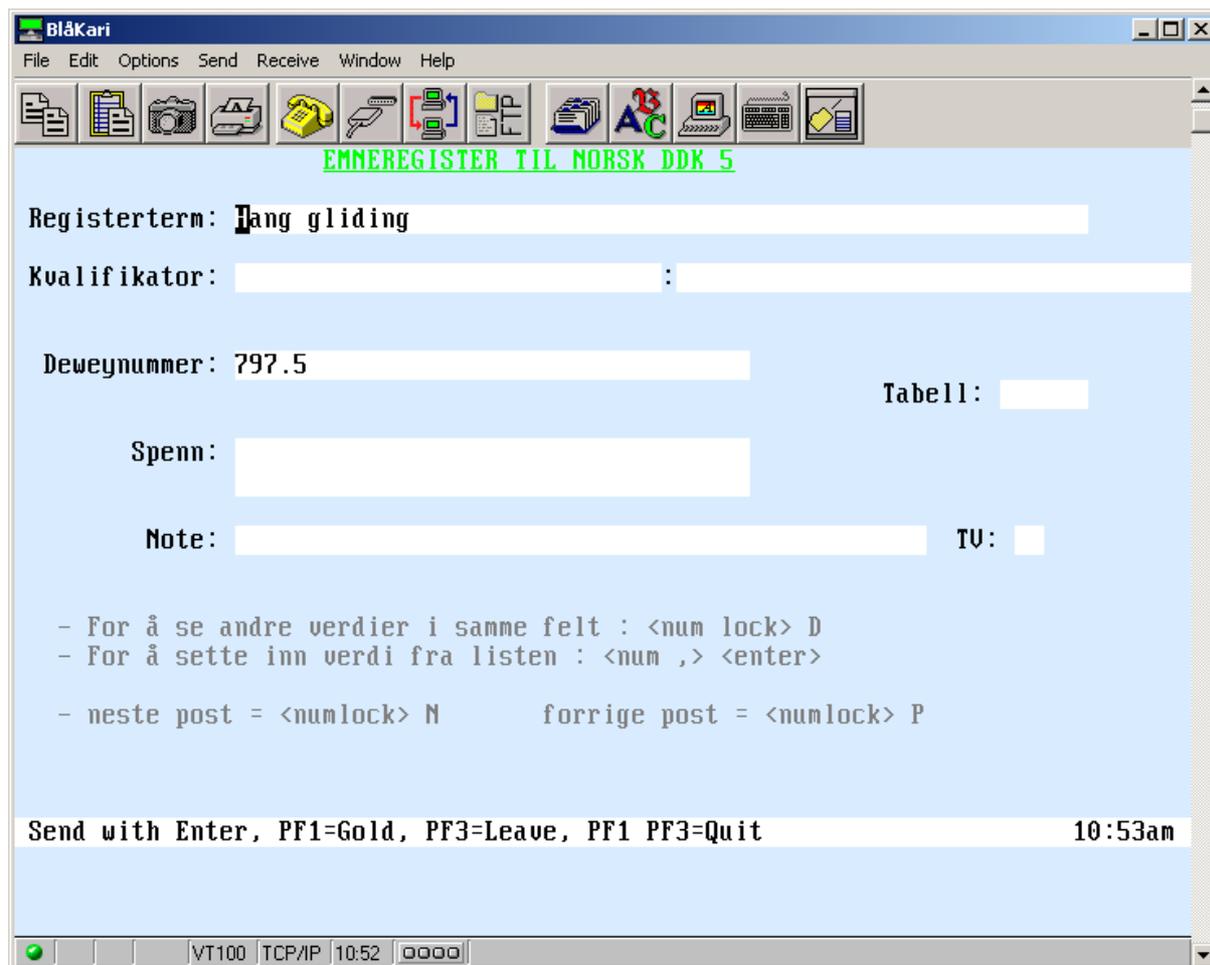
The data solution

Tables and schedules:

We decided to use the Extensible Markup Language – XML as a data solution for the tables and schedules. By using this tool we had the benefit of integrating a hierarchical structure into the document, without having to build a database, and still keep the documents as plain text. XML seemed a logical choice, as it is easy to convert into a print product. It is also a very handy basis for an Internet WebDewey. Although our contract allowed us to publish in printed form only, we have been very careful to choose a tool that could form the basis of a service on the Internet at a later stage if granted the permission to do so. Since XML can be structured with respect to semantics by establishing a Document Type Definition specifying all the semantic components of the tables, the documents can easily be converted to a number of presentation formats. We converted the tables into Rich Text format - RTF – and distributed them via email to the members of the reference group. By using this format the tables could be easily read, printed, altered and returned to the editor.

Example of xml tagging:

```
<klasse n="4">
<nummer>005.1</nummer>
<betegnelse><fotnoteref
href="f000">*</fotnoteref><regterm>Programmering</regterm></betegnelse>
<note>Her: <regterm>Applikasjonsprogrammering</regterm>, utvikling av
programvare</note>
<note>Klassifiser en bestemt anvendelse av programmering innenfor
databehandling med anvendelsen i 005.4-006.7, f.eks. programmering av
datagrafikk <link>006.6</link></note>
<kursivnote>Programmering for bestemte typer datamaskiner, for bestemte
operativsystemer, for bestemte brukergrensesnitt, se
<link>005.2</link></kursivnote>
<kursivnote>Se manualen: <mlink>005.1-005.2 kontra 005.4</mlink>;
<mlink>005.1 kontra 005.3</mlink>; <mlink>005.1 kontra 510</mlink></kursivnote>
</klasse>
```

The manual:

The printed product was considered to be the main feature of the manual, and easy editing was our prime requirement. We used Microsoft Word for the purpose, software that we had easily at hand.

Conclusion:

At the time when the project started, XML as original data representation seemed the most feasible option. Looking back, a database solution might have been favoured. For the XML solution we might not necessarily have chosen the same XML editor today (XMetal), there being more alternatives on the market. Nevertheless, we are quite happy with the result and with the options the various solutions rendered.

Working in an electronic environment

Looking back, we are grateful that we worked in an electronic environment and impressed by the fact that the former Norwegian edition held such a high standard despite of the fact that communication was slower and the tools less developed. It does make a great difference when you can send an email to the editor of DDC in the afternoon and receive a reply the next day! Email has also been a highly used means of communication between the editors and the members of the reference group, other experts connected to the project and libraries who have commented on the schedules in course of the project.

Our software tools have made it easy to make corrections and ensure that the phrasing is consistent throughout the whole document. The process of transferring the files into a printed publication was extremely smooth.

The importance of using reliable electronic resources as reference tools must not be underestimated. Internet is often the best available guide to up to date terminology.

Future plans

Last summer, after three years of hard work, we were able to launch the 5th Norwegian, abbreviated edition of DDC based on DDC21. This summer DDC22 is launched. This reminds me of the saying: How long were Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden?

Our present challenge is to consider migrating to DDC22 and to move forward with the plans for a Norwegian WebDewey. In the meantime we are pleased with the fact that our index is used as a navigation tool in a major subject gateway in Norway thus bringing us one step forward towards an electronic area.

The world is changing in a rapid pace and classification tables naturally – despite every attempt and good intension to be up to date – lag a bit behind. Bearing this in mind maybe the Norwegian library reformer, Haakon Nyhuus, still has a point when comparing DDC to a carriage in need of maintenance?