Global and Local Knowledge Organization
One-day conference in Copenhagen on
August 12, 2015

Reader-interest classifications:
local classifications or global industry interest?

Daniel Martínez-Ávila
São Paulo State University – UNESP, Brazil
Email: dmartinezavila@marilia.unesp.br
Introduction

- Tension between rigid standardization and local readers interests in library classifications
  - 1930s – Detroit Public Library first “reader-interest classification”
  - 1970s – explosion of reader-interest classifications in the UK
  - 2000s – BISAC and other bookstore/bookshop approaches in the US and around the world
Introduction

- Reader-interest classifications were claimed in the literature to represent the “local interest” of readers.

- In the recent years, bookstore (reader-interest) classifications have been opposed to the “global imposition” of DDC and the “global interest” of OCLC too.
“A classification designed to serve the immediate needs of the targeted users. Such systems may violate the filiatory sequence to bring together disparaged subjects needed by a user group. Indeed these are useful in mission oriented or multidisciplinary subjects. In a commerce college, e.g., it may be more pragmatic to place commercial law with commerce at 380.

It is true to say that reader's interest classification adopted so far are not satisfactory in the long run and sometimes correspond to ephemeral vogues. It reflects a middle level of ambition in knowledge organisation.

It is a compromise between ad hoc classification and rigorously scientific classification” (Satija 2004, p.182)
Reader-interest classification characteristics

- Generally accompanied by other measures such as guiding, signage, atmosphere, stock levels...
  - Influence of bookstores. Indivisibility of factors
- Sometimes retaining Dewey in “hybrid systems”
- Importance of arrangement
  - For instance Hubbard (1972) gave some normative principles for arrangement:
    - Alphabetical arrangement for the first level of categories
    - Random order for a second level (with the possibility of some other method such as by author, by year or even by quality – e.g. 'three-star books first')
Design of reader-interest classifications

- Degree of adoption vs. adaptation
- Opposition librarian-interest classification vs. reader-interest classification
- Number of categories
  - Some ("universal") recommendations were given. Depending on the size of the collection
- Monitoring and readjustment of categories
Alleged reasons to adopt reader-interest classifications

- Traditional classifications do not meet the needs of the user
  - The majority of users, the browser ones
  - Stated dissatisfaction in surveys
- (Reversible) experiments
  - Pilot experiments. Sometimes retaining Dewey as a “safeguard”
Alleged reasons to adopt reader-interest classifications

- Opportunity to **change the library 'look'**
  - Bookstore approaches, shelving, guiding...

- **Financial cuts**
  - Need to purchase **only what the users want.**
    Stock control

- **The local scene**
Alleged advantages of reader-interest classifications

- Meeting the user's need by gathering materials of interest
  - Distributed relatives: the scattering of books about a given concrete subject across classes representing different aspects of that topic (Dousa 2015)
  - Systems based on academic disciplines cannot easily and neatly accommodate heterogeneous (interdisciplinary) materials in a way that maximizes utility for the patrons (Donovan 1991)
Alleged advantages of reader-interest classifications

- An opportunity to drop Dewey
- Flexibility in shelving
- More adequate for browsing
  - More intuitive. Users do not understand notation
- Increase circulation
  - Perhaps because libraries purchase only what the users want?
- A method of stock control
  - (Martínez-Ávila & Satija, 2015 forthcoming)
Problems with reader-interest classifications

- The Other distributed relatives
  - Not good for purposive readers, minority? Who is “the reader”?

- User oriented materials?: “car maintenance, erotica, and claiming social security benefits” (Reader 1982, 34)
Problems with reader-interest classifications

- Might also correspond to what Hjørland (1992, pp. 175-6) called Subjective-idealism
  - “With regard to the user, a document can be ordered with the user's conceptual structures and subject perceptions in mind. The user may well have his subjective grasp of what the subject of the book is.”
  - “he who seeks the key to the concept of 'subject' in the mind of the user commits an error of psychologism”
Problems with reader-interest classifications

- **Re-classification of stock**
  - From scratch, no other libraries to consult
  - Spine-labeling, amending charge cards and date labels, altering the catalog, changing the physical layout, moving stock, re-guiding, informing the public, retraining the staff, etc.
  - Solution: new branches or new collections, use of DDC-RIC mappings

- Not appropriate for larger libraries
Problems with reader-interest classifications

- Standardization vs. local adaptations
  - “The main reason, in fact, for Detroit's failure [...] was that the Reader Interest System was neither centralised nor universal” (Ainley & Totterdell 1982, 129)
  - “All (except Herts and Sunderland) recommend striving for a universal scheme which can be applied to all libraries in the system with its consequent standardisation and centralisation of routine processing. Some go even further and suggest that since books can be categorised and/or classified by the selectors at the time of ordering, it is possible to have stock arrive from the supplier fully processed for the shelves” (Ainley & Totterdell 1982, 129).
A “dream” come true?

• E4Libraries Category Headings, developed by the Book Industry Communications in the UK, which claimed to be an attempt to standardize those isolated reader-interest categorizations in fiction and non-fiction over the past 40 years in the British libraries (BIC 2010)

• Libraries adopting BISAC in the US are having their stock pre-classified via ONYX
  – BISG centralization not OCLC?
## Dewey by the Numbers (2015-06-01)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Now in DDC 23</th>
<th>New in DDC 23</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explicit assignable numbers in schedules (including built numbers)</td>
<td>40,174</td>
<td>3,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facets (building blocks from Tables 1-6 and internal add tables, added to show languages, geographic areas, ethnic/national groups, genres, etc.)</td>
<td>12,197</td>
<td>675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative Index terms</td>
<td>103,141</td>
<td>6,275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCSH mappings</td>
<td>29,552</td>
<td>14,827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BISAC mappings</td>
<td>3,228</td>
<td>432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MeSH mappings</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sears mappings</td>
<td>6,902</td>
<td>6,902</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

http://ddc.typepad.com/025431/2015/06/dewey-by-the-numbers.html
Conclusions

● “Centralization in cataloging as practiced by OCLC, however, has turned out to be more ominous in the power exerted over constituents/customers. […] While Egan and Shera may advocate centralization with the assumption that all stakeholders have a say in influencing the resulting knowledge structures, the danger is that standardization provides the underlying justification for a goal of universality, thus thwarting the standpoint perspectives” (Fox & Olson 2012, p.86)

● “Even the oxymoronically named "WorldCat Local" avoids allowing any decision-making or personalization at a local level” (p.87)
Conclusions

- Local focus of reader-interest classifications did not include the voice of marginalized groups, with the exception of only one paper (Bridgwater 1990)

- Current (local) reader-interest classifications practices do not seem to deviate too much from the global OCLC activities and problems
  - Development of BISAC is dictated by the pressure of sales logic and lobbyists (e.g. ECPA)
  - “Market warrant” (Martínez-Ávila & Kipp 2014)
Conclusions

- Universalization has been achieved, and yet, the advantages of centralization have not
  - Can libraries' independence rely on OCLC's DDC-BISAC mappings?
  - What about re-classification with each new version of BISAC?
- New books will be always pre-classified according to the latest version
- bookstore stock is sold/gone, library collection is not
References


