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DDC in France and at the BnF: History, usage, innovation and expectations

When it comes to subject classification in France, the supremacy of DDC is definitely unquestionable: today, DDC is currently used in the National library, in the 16 300 public libraries, as well as in most of the 480 academic libraries of the country.

It should however be noted that the dissemination of the DDC in France only happened in the eighties. From the early twentieth-century until then, France had indeed gradually chosen UDC to organize its collections. Paul Otlet and Henri Lafontaine had published in Belgium the first edition of UDC in 1905. Borrowing to DDC its strong and efficient structure, the two bibliographers added facets to deal with complexity and multidisciplinary. Their work inspired French librarians who then adopted UDC as a standard indexing tool.

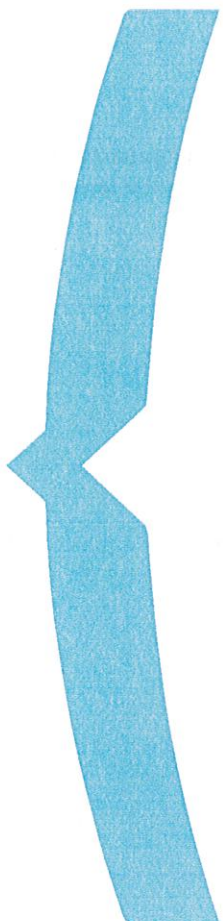
A pioneer in the field of French public libraries, Eugene Morel, a library officer at the National Library was interested both in the open stacks he had observed in Anglo-saxon libraries and in new works published on classification. Support and influence were provided to French libraries after the First World War directly by the American Committee for Devastated France (ACDF) whose Library section was very active. Training courses were provided at the American Library in Paris and the first manual on Information and library science to promote DDC in the country was published in 1931. Both the work of Morel and the post war promotion of DDC by American agencies contributed to make this classification better known. However, as long as the development of public libraries had not been initiated in the country, DDC remained at a standstill.

It is only in the late sixties, when new and massive library construction programs were launched and school information centers developed that DDC gained a bigger popularity, building over the vision and practice inspired by Morel. Until then, the question of updating UDC had been considered a problem among professionals.

In 1988, following official briefing notes, UDC was officially abandoned, making way to the DDC in all academic and research libraries.

In 1992, DDC was also chosen by the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) where it has served a variety of purposes:

- as a shelving notation ;
- as a tool to facilitate the publication of the French national bibliography;
- as a set of built numbers used for the indexation of the French current production and for facilitating book search in the open stacks;
- as subject classification for the books digitized in the French digital library Gallica (gallica.bnf.fr), which currently holds over 3 million digitized documents.
- last, as an additional information to subject headings : in every subject heading record of the Rameau vocabulary (the French equivalent to LCSH), a label displays a correspondence with LCSH and DDC.



Today, the BnF is the national agency in charge of maintaining the French translation of CDD (in cooperation with Canada and Quebec) and to oversee its promotion and development in the country, with dedicated expert staff for these tasks. As such, the BnF aims at consolidating the use of DDC in France which implies taking into account the various contexts and types of libraries where it is used while integrating DDC in broader, innovative plans aiming at massively publish and promote library metadata and related resources in the web of data.

As the National Library of France, we would like to use DDC classification as a scheme so that data could be disseminated and used for interoperability purposes.

As librarians and users of the DDC, we need to continue contributing to the periodical revision of the schedules so that hierarchy and captions reflect as well as possible the current state of knowledge in our local cultural and social environment.

As manager and maintainer of the French indexing language RAMEAU, used in most French speaking countries, we need the legal and technical means that could facilitate the implementation of mappings between DDC and Rameau in the linked open data framework.

As representatives of French libraries, we would like to use the number building tool in order to facilitate reuse of data indexed with DDC among libraries and other cultural and research institutions.

As users of the French WebDewey, we would like to have a possibility of control about relative index terms so that user generated content complies with preferred terms in the relative index.

As translators of the Dewey Decimal Classification in French, we would need to have convenient means and tools in order to smoothly present to OCLC the translation issues we encounter, so that we could overcome the arising problems as work progresses ; similarly, we lack convenient means to point out parts of Dewey material that could be matter of change and revision during the translation process rather than after ; last, we would welcome better means or tools that would facilitate communication with other translation teams in other countries.

As developers of user discovery interfaces and services in French libraries, we would like open and stable access to DDC captions and relative index terms so that we can provide subject access to Dewey classified collections with word queries ; we would also very much appreciate open access to DDC number component data so that we can provide subject access through facets of built numbers in Dewey classified collections ; last, we would like summaries to be provided together with open and persistent URLs so that they could enable hierarchical navigation within library collections.

As contributors to the web of open and linked data, we would very much like DDC to be exposed according to its standards, so that it could become a powerful way of linking our data to other datasets.

In countries like France where DDC is widespread and where national libraries easily provide numbers in multiple online contexts and services, DDC has truly become a standard due to play potentially an ever greater role in the future. If DDC in France is still mainly used as a shelving tool, many are those who see in built number with its caption, a subject whose retrieval search and browsing capability could be most promising. It could also be a strong facilitator of interoperability and mapping: through its double component, DDC classification has got a major asset and a good machine-readability.

We believe that we never had as many technological possibilities as today to pass on information and knowledge using DDC. We would very much appreciate renewed perspectives and means to enforce them through closer cooperation between OCLC and DDC users.



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