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EDUG statement regarding future subject cataloguing at the DNB

Dear Elise Conradi, dear Members of EDUG,

thank you for your mail with EDUG's Statement for regarding future subject cataloguing at the DNB.
I must first apologize for the very delayed reply. Elisabeth Niggemann, the Director General of DNB, asked me to take care of it since subject cataloguing is one of the areas of work in the domain of acquisition and cataloguing I am heading.

In your letter you adressed the topics of compatibility of DDC notations, specificity of subject search and the Semantic Web, but let me first state that the DNB will not abandon the use of DDC but will apply it in a different way considered more approriate to meet the challenges the DNB currently faces. The most pressing of these challenges is the vastly increasing amount of digital publications to be collected and catalogued by the DNB. In the next 5 years we expect our digital collection to sextuple to 26 million documents. At the same time the physical collection continues to grow at about the same pace as before.

The DNB has the goal to create subject access points not only for a sector of its collection, but for as many documents as possible and do this in a homogenuous way for all classes of documents. It seems obvious that this can only be achieved by implementing novel ways of creating metadata. The DNB has therefore started to develop and implement automated procedures to assign subject metadata to documents.

It has gained positive experiences with the automated assignment of DDC subject categories (used to structure the German National Bibliography) as well as subject headings in the recent years. This encouraged us to proceed on this path.

Whereas it is generally assumed that it is not possible to assign complex notations automatically this should be feasible for short DDC notations. The short notations DNB has used for classifying documents in medicine since it started applying DDC were assigned automatically to more than 132.000 documents by now with acceptable results.

The set of short notations that is currently devised for all subjects will be fully compatible with the DDC and reflects the literary warrant of the DNB. The resulting subject data in catalogue records are of course provided via DNB's metadata services for potential re-use.

The use of short DDC notations has to be seen in conjunction with the application of subject headings. It is true that short notations do not provide aspects like time or place. But if these are relevant in a document they could also be represented by a heading. A primary use of classificatory elements in our concept is to structure a set of documents, disambiguation being another one.

In spring of 2017 the DNB conducted a survey among customers using its metadata services. Some of the questions concerned the re-use and relevance of the certain elements in the catalogue records provided by DNB. It turned out that customers considered DDC notations as little relevant, whereas subject headings were ranked 4th out of 20 elements and are widely re-used.

This result underpins DNB's decision to expand indexing using subject headings from the Integrated Authority File (Gemeinsame Normdatei/GND). We view the GND as an important contribution to the Semantic Web, because of the appropriate structure of GND authority records, which also allows linking to other systems of knowledge organisation, be they classifications or standardized vocabularies in German or in other languages. This includes bridges to DDC.

The DNB recognizes the value of DDC as one of the world's most successful universal classification systems and the international cooperation of DDC users. It intends to further contribute to this network, and it will continue to operate the German DDC agency providing the continuous translation of DDC into German and supporting the products and tools like WebDewey Deutsch.

DNB's current concept of subject cataloguing aims at combining the two roads of subject cataloguing – indexing and classification – in an efficient way in order to achieve comprehensive subject access.

We hope our motivations are comprehensible. Please do not hesitate with further inquiries!

With best regards

Ulrike Junger