

(Web)Dewey growing from within

*growing from within
(MGP)DEWEY*

This very first part of this year's EDUG Symposium is intended to get us in the right mood for today. I decided not to overload you with PowerPoint slides right at the beginning. Instead, I would like to try a little experiment and hope that it will put us all in the right frame for today's program. So, make yourselves comfortable. Nobody needs to take notes; there won't be any tests later on. Just relax.

I joined the world of Dewey when it came to publishing the DDC in German, which was still DDC 22 at the time, and that is now over 20 years ago.

So, my perception, my knowing of the DDC begins at the end of DDC's print era, but still with more than enough vivid memories of the challenges of implementing footnotes, centered entries, and coping with inconsistent Relative Index terms in Volume 4 of the printed books.

The DDC was already available in electronic form before 2011, but we all know WebDewey today, so 2011 is the milestone we remember together. At that time, another, probably the very last (?), regular print edition was published of what was then the first release, or first version, of DDC 23, and you notice that I already feel uncomfortable describing it this way. This is because, when we look at it today, the

transformation from paper to a purely electronic and continuously updated DDC had already been completed at that time.

So what is "DDC 23"? Does DDC 23 still exist today? Does it exist and at the same time not exist anymore? Well, that is perhaps more of a philosophical question. At least the seven-year cycle for print editions ends with Michael Jordan's lucky number. I like that.

Since then, there has gradually been something that I would like to describe here as a "shift of thought": Isn't it true that when you think of DDC today, you think of "WebDewey"?

From a terminological or even ontological point of view, this is very interesting, since concept formation takes place in the mind—and can change, even for one and the same thing. But is it then still one and the same thing?

Let's take this one step further: What exactly did you think of when you thought of "WebDewey" just a second ago? Was it the English version? Some of you certainly did think of the English version.

But all of you? Others of you were probably thinking of your own language version of WebDewey—the version and translation of the DDC used in your country.

The possibility of making the DDC available in a purely digital format with updates available more quickly was seen as an opportunity by national libraries to also say goodbye to their long outdated print versions. The DDC in WebDewey became more international. In the following years, German, French, Italian, Norwegian, Swedish, and Arabic language versions were added to the international WebDewey family.

Just as the DDC did in its print era, it also knows how to find ways to adapt to local conditions with WebDewey. Today, it is still one of its strengths that the DDC language versions can lead a dynamic life of their own, with local expansions, locally created built numbers, and their individual local cataloging requirements as well.

At this point, it is also worth mentioning all the mappings of the DDC and external vocabularies, which verbally enrich all our individual WebDeweys and thus not only improve accessibility but also sharpen and expand the view of the classification. In that sense, mappings add yet another layer to what the DDC is today.

The DDC has long grown in terms of content through cooperative projects between the US editors, national libraries, and other institutions. International cooperation with the Editorial Policy Committee (EPC), in its current form, has been taking place since the 1950s—Imagine that! —and has contributed greatly to breaking down outdated structures in the schedules and tables and making the content more internationally balanced.

These efforts, along with the cooperation that has been further intensified by the translations and their constant dialogue with the editors at OCLC and the EPC, are paying off—and are about to take the DDC to a new level by finding and implementing ways to develop the system from within, faster and more interactively with end users than ever before. All these efforts are undoubtedly important, but are they enough?

I'm asking this because the world does not stand still; on the contrary, developments are gathering speed every year.

During this little imaginary journey through the last 15 years, a lot has happened in library and information science!

Standards and formats such as BIBFRAME, SKOS, and RDF, have been established with the aim of improving the interoperability and discoverability of data in machine-readable form, ultimately to ensure free access to information for our end users.

New forms of artificial intelligence will impact the entire library landscape and once again fundamentally transform it.

Dewey numbers will be assigned to title records in increasingly sophisticated automated processes.

End users are changing the way they search for information, not only on the Internet, but also in library catalogs. And also in WebDewey?

We must be aware that all this is happening right now.

And this is also why the step of making DDC numbers machine-readable (again!) as linked data was so important and forward-looking.

And just as I am telling you this, my thought rollercoaster starts again: What do we think of when we think of the DDC today, what shifts of thought are we possibly yet to experience?

Where does WebDewey stand today, and how can WebDewey, which is also the source for Dewey linked data, keep pace with rapid technological developments and the resulting changes in the perception of information and data, not least also in the end user behavior and their needs for DDC-related information retrieval?

All our efforts in DDC translation, provision of DDC data, mappings, and searching for DDC-assigned resources have always been precision-based. Will this change, too, and if so, how? Will we then be able to maintain the deeply rooted and highly valued quality of the DDC as an international classification standard?

Actually, these are too many questions for just one small—but smart—symposium on a single day. But that's also perhaps one of the reasons why EDUG exists: because all these questions are just as important to us as they are to the editors of the DDC.

This being said, I would say, let's explore these questions together today, and have fun exploring them.

Because at the end of the day, we can afford to say: The DDC is not the most important thing this fragile planet needs right now.

Thank you!



Made with Capilot