



World Library and Information Congress: 69th IFLA General Conference and Council

1-9 August 2003, Berlin

Code Number: 033-E
Meeting: 126. Classification and Indexing
Simultaneous Interpretation: -

SWD/RSWK at the Swiss National Library: Celebrating 5 years of indexing and cooperation

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Abstract:

The Swiss National Library (SNL) adopted the SWD/RSWK indexing standard in 1998. Now after five years, it is interesting to look back at the decision to adopt this standard and to measure its benefits. The presentation will deal on the approach taken at the SNL in the context of using MARC21 and will show how subject access is ensured. The benefits of using SWD/RSWK at the SNL will be explained and in particular will stress the value of cooperation with the DDB and the SWD Kooperationspartners. Lastly, the presentation will deal with the growing use of SWD in libraries in Switzerland and the attempt by the SNL to establish an SWD network.

Introduction

The German library community generally regards the Schlagwortnormdatei (SWD) and the Regeln für den Schlagwortkatalog (RSWK) as the “de facto” indexing standard for German speaking countries. This standard introduced in Germany in 1986, has progressively been adopted by most libraries in Germany and in Austria and by a few in Switzerland. In 1998, the Swiss National Library (SNL) chose the SWD / RSWK as its indexing standard for subject access to its general collection. This decision marked a decisive step for subject indexing at the Swiss National Library. It ended 100 years of development of its indexing system based on the Universal Decimal Classification (UDC) and committed the library to work cooperatively at contributing records with SWD / RSWK headings and to participate in the development of the SWD.

This presentation will deal with this decision to implement the SWD / RSWK at the Swiss National Library. The work involved in creating a new subject access will be described with

special attention to the coding of the SWD authorities and indexing in MARC21 format. The presentation will also show how the library benefited from that decision, both in terms of resources and quality of access. We will conclude by describing our current projects to promote the use of SWD in Switzerland.

The decision to close a catalogue is never easy to make. It is only through a genuine concern for quality access to information that steps should be taken to modify access or stop completely access work done over a long period of time. In the early 1990s, the Swiss National Library embarked on an 11 year long project to improve the ways and means the library delivered its services. It was responding to the realization that the library had not kept up with the technical, informational and economical development of modern libraries. A reorganization plan was created to improve the library's services and library management. This led to the creation of a new infrastructure that included the installation of an automated library system, the complete renovation of the library building and the creation of new user services. As the library reviewed its core activities; how the library collects, preserves and makes available to users the published documents and how the library provides leadership on a national and international level, the question was asked how these could be fulfilled in this new environment. Services and processes were evaluated in order to verify their relevance to the core activities of the library.

It is within this reorganization that the subject catalogue was evaluated. Did subject access based on a UDC indexing system provide appropriate access in the context of the 21st century? Did it contribute to the development or promotion of standards in Switzerland? Did the library exercise its library leadership at the international level by its involvement in indexing standard developments?

Sadly, the answers to these questions were no! The fact that the library had developed a fairly sophisticated subject catalogue using UDC with German language captions, first as a card catalogue from 1895 to 1991, and then as an online subject catalogue from 1992 to 1998, did not guarantee that this subject access met the requirements of the library's core activities. In fact, a study conducted at the SNL in 1997¹ concluded that the subject catalogue did not provide an appropriate subject access to the collections. The UDC authority file of the SNL had not been maintained and developed properly in the previous years and thus lacked the precision and scope of a modern subject catalogue. Subject access through topical subject headings was only possible through 14'000 entries and the subject entries for geographical and personal names did not contain elements of modern bibliographic records.

The Swiss National Library was not the only library in the 1990s to reevaluate its subject access. In 1995, the British Library reinstated the LCSH as its indexing standard for the records created for the British Library's catalogues (MacEwan² 1998), (McIlwaine³ 1995). One factor was the demand of other major libraries, namely the six legal deposit libraries in Great Britain that the British Library participate in shared cataloguing projects by assigning LCSH to its cataloguing records. The other factor may have been the acknowledgement that many subject heading languages had progressed, both quantitatively and qualitatively in the last ten to fifteen years. In reviewing the principal subject heading languages in German (SWD / RSWK) French (RAMEAU) and English (LCSH), all had gone through an intensive period of critical reevaluation and development. At the Subject indexing IFLA Satellite Meeting held in Lisbon, Portugal in 1993⁴, there was a clear recognition that most subject indexing systems adhered to common principles for the construction of subject heading

languages. They followed similar semantic and syntax principles as well as mechanisms for efficient subject document retrieval.

Implementation

In June 1997, the Swiss National Library approved the recommendation to adopt the SWD / RSWK system. The SWD /RSWK standard was the most obvious choice for the SNL. The main language used at the SNL is German and about 60% of documents collected are in the German language. In the linguistic and cultural context of Switzerland where the mother tongue of 75% of the population is German, the library had to make sure that the chosen system met this linguistic reality.

Before starting to plan the implementation of SWD / RSWK, some solutions had to be found to maintain and even improve access to the collections prior to 1998 by the UDC subject catalogues. While many options were discussed, including retrospectively re-indexing part of the collections with SWD / RSWK indexing, the library decided to preserve the three card catalogues, the *Sachkatalog* (UDC), *Ortskatalog* and the *Personenkatalog* that provided subject access from 1895 to 1991. Work was undertaken in 1999 to scan and microfilm the 1'400'000 cards that made up these catalogues. Access to these catalogues is possible since 2000 on the SNL WWW site (<http://www.coris.ch/newbns/Allemand/menu.asp>).

Another problem that had to be solved was the future cohabitation of two different subject indexes in the Helveticat database; the UDC subject entries produced from 1992 to 1998 and the new SWD headings. The listing of two different types of subject headings in the same index would be impractical and confusing for library users. The solution would reside in removing or transferring the UDC subject entries to another file so that only SWD authorities and subject heading strings would be listed.

A decision was taken in 2001 to extract the UDC headings and copies of the corresponding bibliographic records and merge these with those in the scanned UDC catalogue database. Work of integrating the text files from the Helveticat database and the card images was initiated in 2002 and will be finished later on in 2003. By integrating these two files, subject access to documents indexed prior to 1998 will be rendered easier by means of one search interface and database.

The next consideration was the organization of the implementation of SWD / RSWK. Planning was done not only to prepare the indexers for the task of indexing with SWD / RSWK, but also to organize the work process and to solve the technical problems associated with the standard application of SWD / RSWK in the environment of the MARC21 communication format. The implementation project identified seven major tasks that needed to be accomplished for a successful introduction of this new standard at the SNL. These included tasks related to documentation, communication, system design, coding and training.

With the decision to adopt the SWD / RWSK standard came the responsibility to apply this standard consistently and to adhere to the principles and policies of the RSWK. The staff was confronted with the reality of working in a cooperative environment where records with SWD / RSWK headings could be derived and where records produced by the SNL could be used by others. This meant that the work process had to be organized in a way to ensure consistency as well as quality in indexing. The implementation of SWD /RSWK focused on developing the necessary skills to apply that standard efficiently and correctly and to make sure that

subject access results would be consistent with the expectations of users familiar with SWD / RSWK.

Three tasks were targeted as the most critical for using SWD / RSWK successfully at the SNL. Training was the first and the most urgent one to implement. Migrating from a relatively easy indexing practice without a structured indexing manual to an indexing standard with clearly defined rules and with an authority file of over 500'000 authority records could not be achieved without an intensive training program. A six month program was established (from July to December 1997) that consisted of in-house training (self-training exercises and subject based presentations) and a formal training session given by staff of Die Deutsche Bibliothek (DDB). In all, 600 hours were invested in acquiring a good working knowledge of this indexing system and in February 1998, the indexers switched without problem to the new system.

The second task involved the use of the SWD authority records in the MARC21 format. In 1997, the DDB had not yet developed a conversion program from PICA format to the MARC21 format for SWD records. It appeared that the Swiss National Library was the first library to request SWD records in MARC21. Work on this conversion program started in 1997 at the DDB in collaboration with the SNL. A definitive version was produced in 1999 and the DDB now distributes SWD records in MARC21 format in DAT tape format and by FTP.

To meet its goal of indexing with SWD / RSWK at the beginning of 1998, staff at the SNL designed a conversion program that could be used in conjunction with the CD-ROM Normdaten. This program used conversion work already done at the DDB and most fields and sub-fields were correctly matched to MARC21. The indexing work process was designed to copy and convert only SWD authorities needed for indexing. Thus, contrary to the practice used in many networks, the decision was made not to load the whole SWD authority file into the SNL production at that time.

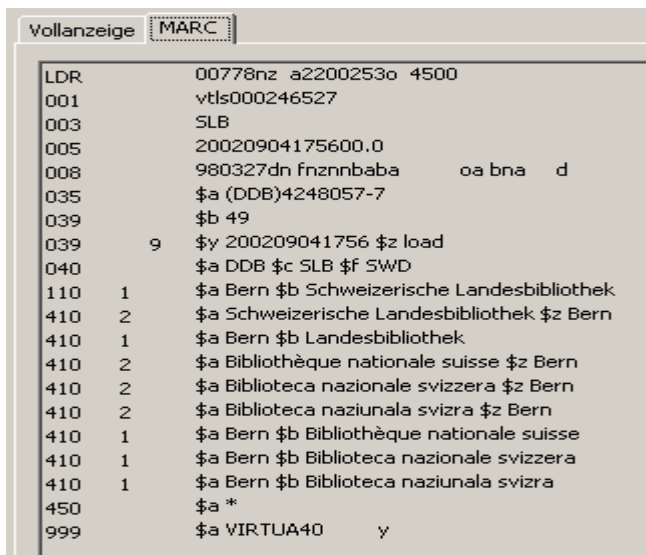
A copy /conversion program was created to load these converted records in the SNL Helveticat system. This allowed the indexers to add records to the database quite rapidly and with the minimum of manual intervention. This task improved at the end of 1998 when the SNL installed the WIN-IBW software that allowed the library to connect to the DDB database. Today the process is quite efficient and seamless. The SWD in the MARC authority format reproduces most of the elements in the PICA format. The following examples (figures 1 and 2) show how the SWD authorities are displayed in the PICA and MARC21 format.

Figure 1 is the "Swiss National Library" authority record in PICA format

```
005 Ts
012 /xxw
021 4248057-7
800 |c|Bern
801 |x|Schweizerische Landesbibliothek
808 |a|GKD
810 6.7
811 XA-CH-BE
830 |k|Schweizerische Landesbibliothek / Bern
830 |c|Bern / Landesbibliothek
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830 |k|Bibliothèque Nationale Suisse / Bern
 830 |c|Bern / Bibliothèque Nationale Suisse
 830 |k|Biblioteca Nazionale Svizzera / Bern
 830 |c|Bern / Biblioteca Nazionale Svizzera
 830 |k|Biblioteca Naziunala Svizra / Bern
 830 |c|Bern / Biblioteca Naziunala Svizra
 845 |g|Schweiz / Nationalbibliothek
 845 |s|Nationalbibliothek / Schweiz

Figure 2 is the same authority in MARC 21 format:



The third task had to deal with the organization and display of the SWD headings and subject heading strings in the subject index of the Helveticat database⁵. The fundamental question was to determine how subject headings are displayed in the index: as separate SWD headings or as strings of headings according to the RSWK syntax rules. In our research on the use of SWD headings in online library systems, we had found that many library systems displayed SWD headings separately in the subject index. After much discussion and consultation, the SNL decided to display the indexing results in a pre-coordinated format (strings of headings) and also apply the permutation codes to increase the possibilities of successful browsing in the subject index.

For example, a search using “Bern Schweizerische Landesbibliothek” yields the following results.

Figure 3

Ihre Suche: Helveticat - Schlagwort: Bern Schweizerische Landesbibliothek

Anzahl Treffer	Einträge
0	Bern Schweizerische Landesbibliothek
1	Bern Schweizerische Landesbibliothek -- Architektur
1	Bern Schweizerische Landesbibliothek -- Architektur -- Erweiterungsbau -- Geschichte 1994-2001 -- Bildband
4	Bern Schweizerische Landesbibliothek -- Architektur -- Führer
1	Bern Schweizerische Landesbibliothek -- Architektur -- Renovierung -- Geschichte 1994-2001 -- Bildband
1	Bern Schweizerische Landesbibliothek -- Archivalien -- Spoerri, Daniel -- Ausstellung -- Bern <1997>
3	Bern Schweizerische Landesbibliothek -- Bericht
1	Bern Schweizerische Landesbibliothek -- Bibliotheksbestand -- Ausstellung -- Bern <2002>
1	Bern Schweizerische Landesbibliothek -- Bibliotheksbestand -- Videokassette
1	Bern Schweizerische Landesbibliothek Cabinet des Estampes
	Bern Schweizerische Landesbibliothek Graphische Sammlung
1	Bern Schweizerische Landesbibliothek / Graphische Sammlung -- Schweiz -- Künstlerbuch -- Ausstellung -- Bern <1998>
1	Bern Schweizerische Landesbibliothek Gugelmann, Anne-Marie -- Sammlung
1	Bern Schweizerische Landesbibliothek Gugelmann, Rudolf -- Sammlung
1	Bern Schweizerische Landesbibliothek -- Katastrophenschutz -- Videokassette
1	Bern Schweizerische Landesbibliothek Schweizerisches Literaturarchiv
1	Bern Schweizerische Landesbibliothek -- Tür -- Kunst am Bau -- Mosset, Olivier -- Bildband
1	Bern Schweizerische Lichttechnische Gesellschaft
1	Bern Schweizerische Mobiliar-Versicherungsgesellschaft
1	Bern Schweizerische Nationalbank

This access is made possible by the indexing work done at the bibliographic level where SWD headings, taken from the Helveticat subject authority file, are strung together according to the MARC 21 sub fields. The next figure displays the bibliographic record. In the SNL records, all of the permuted heading strings are displayed to offer the end users alternative browsing entries.

Figure 4

Ihre Suche: Helveticat - Schlagwort: bern schweizerische

AutorIn	Allenspach, Christoph
Titel	Renovation und Erweiterung 1994-2001 / Christoph Allenspach, Texte ; Marco Schibig, Fotogr. ; [hrsg. vom Bundesamt für Bauten und Logistik]
Verlag	Baden : L. Müller, cop. 2001
Kollation	67 S. : Ill. ; 30 cm
Reihe	Die Schweizerische Landesbibliothek in Bern
Schlagwort	Bern / Schweizerische Landesbibliothek ; Architektur ; Renovierung ; Geschichte 1994-2001 ; Bildband
Schlagwort	Bern / Schweizerische Landesbibliothek ; Architektur ; Erweiterungsbau ; Geschichte 1994-2001 ; Bildband
Schlagwort	Renovierung ; Bern / Schweizerische Landesbibliothek ; Architektur ; Geschichte 1994-2001 ; Bildband
Schlagwort	Erweiterungsbau ; Bern / Schweizerische Landesbibliothek ; Architektur ; Geschichte 1994-2001 ; Bildband
Nebeneintragung	Schibig, Marco
Nebeneintragung	Schweiz. Bundesamt für Bauten und Logistik
Reihe (Link)	Die Schweizerische Landesbibliothek in Bern
Kopfaufnahme	1286-58960

An authority record for each subject heading string is automatically created. This permits the reuse of this string should another document be indexed similarly.

Figure 5

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LDR      00315nzy a2200097o 4500
001      vtls002537242
003      SLB
005      20030520134931.0
008      030520 a bab      n a a d
110      1      $a Bern $b Schweizerische Landesbibliothek $x Architektur $x Erweiterungsbau $y Geschichte
          1994-2001 $v Bildband
999      $a VIRTUA20      y
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Assessment of SWD / RSWK at the Swiss National Library

This year marked the 5th anniversary of the introduction of the SWD / RSWK at the Swiss National Library. This is a good opportunity to look back at the decision to apply that standard and to reflect on our experiences with SWD / RSWK. In doing this assessment, three themes emerged as the guiding principles that have influenced our subject access work since 1998.

The first one is of course the “standardization” of the subject access practice and the quest of achieving an acceptable level of quality. The use of the SWD / RSWK influenced our outlook on “why” and “how” we could or should achieve good subject access to our collections. Its use led to a reevaluation of the vision and approach to indexing still influenced by the previous practice. The application and maintenance of a controlled indexing vocabulary (SWD) established on the basis of specific application rules (RSWK) in a cooperative and shared cataloguing environment had a profound influence on the indexing team. This led to the adoption of a quality based approach to indexing that would be acceptable to both internal and external users of the library.

This aspect of standardization also pushed the library in examining how indexing should be given to different categories of documents. It was felt that it was necessary to distinguish between documents in regard to their importance and relevance to the users. This led to the drafting of an indexing policy in which the library clearly indicates which type of documents should receive subject access. Documents that deal with Helvetica aspects, particularly for general interest documents and mass distribution documents published in the four Swiss national languages and English are given priority. Categories of documents not indexed are: documents of less than 50 pages, unpublished theses, some literary works, publications of international organizations based in Switzerland and gray literature. In drafting this policy, the application of RSWK and the indexing policies of other national libraries, namely that of Die Deutsche Bibliothek were considered.

The use of an indexing policy resulted in a more coherent approach to subject access. Over the 5 years, an average of 15'000 document per year were indexed with SWD headings. This amounted to about 65% of documents that were acquired and catalogued at the Swiss National Library each year.

A second theme that emerged from the experience of using a standard indexing practice is that of the value of cooperation. Standard indexing work is normally conducted in a cooperative environment. The development and maintenance of a controlled indexing language is made possible by contributions from various libraries and library networks. Sharing records issued

from similar standards is considered today as the most cost efficient method of doing cataloguing and indexing work. The SNL has consistently been able to derive about 40% of cataloguing records with high quality SWD / RSWK headings from Die Deutsche Bibliothek database, from German networks and Swiss libraries using SWD. The library is also aware that other libraries acquiring Swiss publications are looking to the Swiss National Library as a record source.

The SNL also benefited from the development of the SWD authority file which consists today of over 580'000 authority records, including 150'000 common noun headings. This rich authority file has been a great help to the indexers of the library and has again proven to be quite cost-effective. From 1998 to 2002, close to 37'000 SWD headings were input in the Helveticat subject authority file. From this amount, 30'427 headings were copied directly from the DDB authority file. This meant that 82% of headings used for indexing Helvetica documents were already available to the indexers.

Another aspect of cooperation is of course the possibility of contributing new subject headings. The Swiss National Library was accepted early on as a member of the SWD Kooperationspartner, as a member of the SWD editorial team. This was an appreciated opportunity to be involved in the development and maintenance of an authority file. Up to now, the Swiss National Library has contributed close to 5'000 new and modified authorities. These are mainly authorities that deal with Switzerland, headings relating principally to personal, geographic and institutional names.

The need to create new SWD headings has progressively decreased over the last few years. This trend can be explained by the fact that the SNL can reuse more and more existing subject headings and that headings relating to Switzerland are more or less up to date in the ILTIS database.

After five years, the SNL indexers have reached a good productivity level. They have acquired a good experience and have reached a high level of efficiency in producing new headings and RSWK indexing. They can also rely on an authority file that is up to date and on the potential of deriving subject headings from a fairly large amount of records with SWD / RSWK headings. This has resulted in an increased productivity from 3.3 documents per hour indexed in 1998 to the present average of 3.6 documents per hour.

The last theme that can be used to summarize our experiences with SWD / RSWK is the one of opportunity. Working in a cooperative environment such as the SWD / RSWK has committed the library to working for a larger public and reacting positively to external demands. This has led to a pro-active dialogue initially with Die Deutsche Bibliothek and progressively with members of some German networks. The indexing staff of the library is involved in many projects and working groups that relate to bibliographic control and access, namely the Konsortium DDC Deutsch and the MACS project. The latter is a perfect example of this notion of opportunity. It is by adopting the SWD / RSWK that the Swiss National Library participated with Die Deutsche Bibliothek, the Bibliothèque nationale de France and The British Library in the discussion of a multilingual concept. This led to the creation of the MACS project⁶ whose goal is to ensure multilingual subject access through the linking of SWD, RAMEAU and LCSH headings.

Just as importantly, the adoption of the SWD / RSWK standard has encouraged the Swiss National Library to play a more active role in the area of subject indexing in Switzerland. As

a member of the SWD Kooperationspartner, the library is committed to submitting new SWD headings created by Swiss libraries. In 2002, the library participated with the Zentral- und Hochschulbibliothek Luzern in a project to evaluate the submission of new SWD headings at the SNL. This successful initiative has led the library to carry out a feasibility study for the establishment of an SWD-Verbund Schweiz. The principal goals of the study were to present a survey of Swiss libraries' subject indexing practices and to estimate the possible participation of libraries in the submission of new headings. The study also looked at developing a national collaboration model and setting a course of actions for the SNL in this context. The main recommendation focused on establishing a Swiss Subject Authority Cooperative Network, with the SNL acting as the official SWD partner for Switzerland. The study was submitted in May 2003 and reactions are expected later on in the year.

Conclusion

The decision to use the SWD / RSWK has proven to have been a wise and strategic choice for the Swiss National Library. By adopting a standard system, the library has greatly improved its subject access. User reactions have clearly shown that the SWD / RSWK has provided a better subject access. Our experience has indicated that bibliographic records can be retrieved with more precision and that set results are generally better understood by the SNL users. By working in a cooperative environment, the library is committed in providing a good quality indexing of Helvetica documents. The use of that standard has also given the SNL many opportunities to be more involved in the development of subject access at the national and international level. This potential has given the library a rich agenda of possibilities for next few years. The promotion and development of the SWD / RSWK standard in Switzerland, the contribution of multilingual links in the MACS project and involvement in further enhancement of the SWD are some of the tasks the SNL will certainly be interested in pursuing in the future.

References

¹ The report can be accessed at: http://www.snl.ch/d/fuehr/di_index.htm

² Andrew MacEwan, "Working with LCSH: The Cost of Cooperation and the Achievement of Access: A Perspective from the British Library" 64th IFLA General Conference August 16 – August 21, 1998. <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla64/033-99e.htm> (seen 24 April 2003)

³ Ia McIlwaine, "Subject Control: The British Viewpoint" in *Subject Indexing : Principles and Practices in the 90's; Proceedings of the IFLA Satellite Meeting Held in Lisbon, Portugal, 17-18 August 1993, and Sponsored by the IFLA Section on Classification and Indexing and the Instituto da Biblioteca Nacional e do Livro, Lisbon, Portugal*, Robert P Holley, Dorothy McGarry, Donna Duncan and Elaine Svenonius, ed. (München: K.G. Saur, 1995): 166-180.

⁴ *Subject Indexing: Principles and Practices in the 90's; Proceedings of the IFLA Satellite Meeting Held in Lisbon, Portugal, 17-18 August 1993, and Sponsored by the IFLA Section on Classification and Indexing and the Instituto da Biblioteca Nacional e do Livro, Lisbon, Portugal*, Robert P Holley, Dorothy McGarry, Donna Duncan and Elaine Svenonius ed. (München: K.G. Saur, 1995).

⁵ German Access to the Helveticat database at: www.helveticat.ch

⁶ Reports and access to MACS prototype are available at: <http://infolab.kub.nl/prj/mac3>