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The Hungarian Shared Cataloging Project: MOKKA

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Chapter 15
The Hungarian Shared Cataloging Project: MOKKA

Géza Bakonyi

It was only this year that the Hungarian shared cataloging project reached a state, after five years of difficult birth, in which libraries and users could begin to take advantage its services. The main database includes the records of the OPACs of the 15 largest Hungarian libraries: some 1.8 million records net of duplicate records in the database. The database uses authority control on the names, and the records contain the location codes of the member libraries. Through the links related to these codes, we can access the local databases (e.g. for holdings information). The database is updated regularly as material is exported and filled by the member libraries.

A number of special problems proved to be obstacles in the execution of the project.

The first problem was the lack of suitable institutional backing. At the time of the establishment of the project, there was no institution that could provide a financial and professional backing for it; to wit, the National Library had its own problems to cope with, since its own library software was inadequate and it did not have a suitable technology and network infrastructure. Therefore the founding libraries were forced to establish an association for the management of the Hungarian shared cataloging project. Unfortunately, this was not a satisfactory solution either, because it was unable to support the project financially and could not assure professional backing for the project either. As a consequence, at the beginning of 2002, the project was removed from the auspices of the association to the

National Library, and its professional management was replaced as well.[1] The association continues to provide for representation of the interests of the member libraries, and takes care of the operation and development of the project.

The choice of the proper library software was another problem. The vendor selected by tender experienced a crisis and was not able to live up to expectations. As a result, the association was forced to turn to the runner-up. Moreover, the original selection had the further disadvantage that the vendor did not have an agency in Hungary. The new vendor was the Hungarian firm Dataware, and its library software Corvina, originally designed in the USA, had been developed according to the specifications of Hungarian libraries. This library software is used by the largest Hungarian university and public libraries. On the other hand, the vendor was already experienced in building shared cataloging systems, since it had created a cumulative central catalog containing more than 2 million records (prior to deduplication).

It was also problematic that the project did not have a server of its own, which caused difficulties during the development period. However, this year, the National Library concluded an agreement with the Office of the National Information Infrastructure Development Program, which placed one of its servers at the project's disposal. As a result, the project was assured of data storage and sufficient memory capacity, was able to run the software and could cover the payment of the fees for hardware maintenance.

However, the most significant problem was the member libraries' lack of experience in shared cataloging. There was the issue of the quality of the records of the library catalogs, because the main catalog could not solely comprise the customer's own materials. The majority of the member libraries did not have experience in shared cataloging, there were significant differences among local cataloging rules and practices, and the members were at different stages of information technology development. Shared cataloging was made more difficult by the fact that certain libraries used USMARC as a cataloging format, while others used the national

[1] At the present time, the author is charged with directing the project.

Hungarian MARC format HUNMARC, and some did not use any MARC formats at all. Moreover, only few of them were able to export their records in any MARC format.

At the time of the transfer of the Hungarian shared cataloging project, under new management, to the National Library this year, there was already a test database, but it failed to meet numerous requirements; for example, problems were encountered when searching the database, displaying hits, etc. During the past few years, the professional staff of the association concentrated on the documentation of the project (Hungarian MARC application rules, rules for the usage of the Hungarian shared catalog, rules of communication with the central database, cataloging codes, etc.). A very good set of materials was created, but a functioning model that would enable the vendor to prepare a fully satisfactory system was still missing. We therefore turned our attention this year to the preparation of such a model.

The bibliographic and export formats used by the libraries caused us the most anxiety. Records can be uploaded to the main catalog in two formats, USMARC or HUNMARC. As mentioned earlier, some of the libraries do not work with any MARC formats; hence, the export of their records in MARC format was not possible at all, or only with numerous syntactical errors. Another problem is that the libraries that use some kind of MARC format do not have identical experience, because they typically use different versions of different MARC formats. Naturally, this caused a special problem in the case of the linked records (e.g. in case of multi-volume items). This problem is handled by us in two ways. On the one hand, before uploading records we use some software that checks the MARC format run. While it is running, a log file is created and an analysis of the error messages in this file permits the creation of filters for modifying the output of the uploads (at least in the phase of initializing the main database). On the other hand, several conversion programs have been prepared, and with these we can convert the bibliographic records of different MARC formats back and forth. Naturally, we had fewer problems with the conversion from HUNMARC to USMARC. In this case, we had only to face the inconsistency arising from the different versions of the MARC formats: first of all, the contradiction in cataloging multi-volume items, identifying local data, filling in the notes fields, etc. The reverse

conversion was more difficult for us, since the Hungarian MARC format is more segmented, does not contain punctuation marks (unlike the USMARC format), the function of the indicators is expressed by subfields, etc. The conversion software plays a significant role in the system, since the default format of Hungarian shared cataloging for downloading, uploading and displaying records is the Hungarian MARC.

The member libraries of the shared cataloging project accepted a cataloging rule that specifies a minimum, obligatory level of cataloging. On the basis of these rules, a filter program was prepared that exercises syntactical control of the records during uploading. Because of the rather liberal interpretation of the cataloging rules by the member libraries (in fact, all of them used their home-made rules), we had to decrease syntactical control when initializing the main database. For instance, not all the libraries use the obligatory fields and subfields (e.g. edition, imprint fields). Moreover, the use of the codes in the different positions of the record heading was also ambiguous. Certain libraries do not indicate whether they do or do not follow the cataloging and punctuation directions of the International Standard Bibliographic Description (ISBD), forget to mark correctly the level of the bibliographic description of the record, and do not mark the place or language of the publication. Unfortunately, we cannot increase syntactical control, since the member libraries become capable only slowly of applying the minimum rules of cataloging. In the case of certain libraries, it is their own library systems that do not support the standard MARC format.

Hungarian libraries began to use computers and networks at the end of the 1980s. It was an exciting and heroic age, but unfortunately it did not pass without leaving some bad legacies. Various character coding tables were used in this period, and if I recall correctly, we used five of them in the member libraries of the MOKKA Project. Regrettably, three different Hungarian character coding tables are used in the libraries even today. Therefore, before checking the MARC format and imposing syntactical control, character conversion must also take place, which creates new sources of errors both in uploading and downloading. Obviously, it is not possible to force the libraries to use the ISO 8859-2 coding table, and the transition to UNICODE also has its difficulties, not to mention that the

vendors of integrated library systems do not seem to be willing to make similar changes in their software.

Ordinary users can access the main database through a WWW interface http://www.mokka.hu. They can search and download a limited number of records. I shall omit the details, but we have tried to provide search and display options that are responsive to users' desires. However, we need to emphasize two features. First, it is not only possible to indicate the names of the local libraries in the displayed record; users can also switch to the local OPACs and gain information on local holdings (that is, how many items there are, whether they can be borrowed or where they are located, and so on.) With certain libraries, this linking process emulates the way in which a URL syntax question is sent through the WWW interface of the local database. In other cases, the project supported a local solution or development.

Another piquancy is that the three largest Hungarian libraries have recently started a new project. They have tried to harmonize their subject headings. The thesaurus records of the National Library and the subject heading records of two university libraries were uploaded to a common central database, through which the local catalogs were searchable. In addition, we linked the main database of the Hungarian shared catalog to this system (http://www.matriksz.hu).

As everyone knows, a shared cataloging project cannot be declared finished at any one particular moment. Consequently, the Hungarian shared cataloging program is a process, and only its first phase was terminated in the summer of 2002. After this first phase, we can summarize the most important lessons and must specify future tasks. These lessons are not only important from the point of view of the future of the program, but can also determine the obligations of the member libraries.

We are fully aware of the fact that the member libraries face countless problems in their daily routine, and the tasks of shared cataloging will demand that we find solutions to further problems. Nevertheless, we believe that launching and operating the Hungarian shared catalog contain a lesson of vital importance beyond the practical aspects: namely, that the attainment of a high professional level is essential for the development of the Hungarian library services.

1 Problems with the Project

Having completed the first phase, it is clear that the group of member libraries must be expanded, but the question is to how many libraries. According to the original plan, we counted on the libraries that participate in the Hungarian document delivery system, i.e. 57 libraries. It is highly probable that only a few of these should be involved in uploading records, since in the rest of the libraries the only new items we have to deal with are items from local historical collections. (Unfortunately, because of the nature of the legal deposit system, not all these items can be found in the catalog of the national library.)

In any event, we must consider the need to realize an effective document delivery system. This implies that location information data of the above 57 libraries must be uploaded. Then queries sent to the union catalog could especially support inter-library loans. Thus, a second step is the realization of the electronic inter-library loan system. However, the shortage of funds makes it difficult to predict when we will achieve this.

At present, the records of the union catalog can be accessed and downloaded (25 records per session) by everyone. The precise rules for downloading and for settling accounts among the members of the project remain tasks for the near future.

2 Problems with the Construction of the Union Catalog

As mentioned above, the main format of the union catalog is the Hungarian MARC format, but many libraries use a version of the USMARC. At present, the archival format for the main database does not perfectly handle the formats of the exported records of the member libraries. It is one of our tasks for the current year to find a solution to this problem by cooperating with the vendor.

The treatment of the authority records is not perfect either, because of the great variety of authority files associated with local catalogs. The manual correction of the authority records is conceivable, but it is time-consuming and expensive work. We are still working on how to solve this problem.

According to the original plan, we would like to use, in addition to the union catalog, other authority files in the background (similar to the name files of the Library of Congress).

3 Problems of Management and Operation

As mentioned earlier, the member libraries do not stick to the obligatory minimum of the bibliographic description. Accordingly, we plan to set up a permanent committee to clarify this situation.

After analysis of the log files created in the process of uploading the records, we make suggestions to the member libraries about how they can correct errors in bibliographic descriptions and the export of records.

We must refine the process of routine uploading by member libraries.

Switching from the Web interface of the union catalog to local databases in order to get the status information on items is still a problem, as is the reverse process. We must develop a software solution for this.

To summarize, the problems of the Hungarian shared cataloging project arise from the great variety of the Hungarian library system: 15 libraries with different cataloging rules, five different integrated library systems, three different archiving formats, two different MARC formats, etc. But our tasks are clear, and the appropriate steps will be taken by the end of 2002.