

INTERNATIONAL ISBN AGENCY

MR BRIAN GREEN — EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ANNUAL REPORT TO CDNL 2007

PANEL

The annual ISBN Panel, now simultaneously the obligatory annual general assembly of the newly formed company "International ISBN Agency", took place in Paris at the beginning of November, and was hosted by Unesco. It was excellently organised by Maha Bulos who, besides many other duties, was also responsible for the ISBN agency for international publishers (group no. 92); the past tense is due to the fact that Ms Bulos just retired and thus left a keenly felt vacancy. She always was one of the advocates of the needs and concerns of the book sector in Asian, African and Latin American countries. The Unesco agency has always been of a particular nature - countries have national libraries that have legal deposit rights and exert bibliographic control over the national book production. What about international publishers, ie international organisations that have bases in many countries and do a lot of publishing, often through local offices? Years ago Unesco made plans to build a catalogue of such publications, starting with United Nations publications. But the project fell through owing to lack of funds, and to this day the Unesco ISBN agency does not have any record of actually used numbers and the corresponding publications - there is no bibliographic control at all.

The Panel was dominated by one current issue, namely the sunrise date of 1 January 2007 for the shift to 13-digit ISBN. The agencies did not report any major problems - the last years have been a period of preparation for the change, and most major publishers introduced the new format in 2006 and used the 10- and the 13-digit format side by side for their current publications. This guarantees proper processing of the ISBN also in the future. Certainly the trade and other user communities will keep their previous software in place so that they will also be able to process 10-digit numbers, at least for a protracted transition phase. On the other hand, the 13-digit version of the number has been used for many years in the form of the bar-codes. So there should be little or no problems for the professional publishers in the industrialised countries.

The standard does not stipulate a conversion of ISBN in databases and directories, like national bibliographies, etc. Any change here would interfere with the correlation of the data on the physical unit and the metadata. It is suggested that OPACs use a little software plug-in which allows a simultaneous automatic search with the respective other format of the ISBN. Then nothing can go wrong.

Last year's panel took place in Teheran, and it was very successful as the first outreach of the ISBN system as far as their meetings went: all previous panels had taken place in Europe. This was certainly a breakthrough, and for 2007 the Panel is announced to take place in Buenos Aires in conjunction with the ISSN Directors' Meeting which is hosted by a different organisation, however.

PIID

The future of the International Publishers Directory is still unclear. A continuation of this work comprising about 700,000 publishers addresses, is envisaged but the editorial costs have to be cut: this will probably mean that data will be merged without much editorial effort, and that will certainly lead to duplicates and inconsistencies, especially with regard to non-Latin scripts. Still, there is no other comprehensive directory of this kind, and it fills a need of the international book-trade.

CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The International Agency website will be updated in the future with the support of a content management system which was presented at the Panel by Doug Minett (Canada). It would link different applications and could also be used for the building of PIID.

INTERNATIONAL AGENCY

The Agency is registered in London as a company with limited guarantee. Its members are the ISBN agencies. Currently Piero Attanasio (Italy) is the chairman of the board. The daily work is done by Editeur which holds a three-year contract with the International Agency. Brian Green is in charge of the administration. He has considerable experience, especially in the technical side of the book-sector; he was instrumental in the introduction of ONIX, and he is concurrently chairman of ISO TC 46/SC 9. In contrast to the former Berlin office, there is now only one ISBN staff, in spite of the fact that members now pay more than 200,000 Euro annually while services were free of charge under the previous administration.

PUBLICATIONS

The ISBN Newsletter will not be continued. The last issue containing the minutes of the previous three Panel meetings was issued by H Walravens, without any support from the Agency; but he considered it his duty to give an account in printed form of the last years of the work done in Berlin, hampered as it was by shortage of funding.

He intends to give a brief account also of the first 35 years of ISBN as well as an updated ISBN bibliography - a publisher already expressed interest. A bibliography of this kind might sound an atavistic enterprise in the internet age. But most of the respective publications may be considered grey literature, and so it may be useful after all.

UZBEKISTAN

Uzbekistan is a new member of the ISBN system. First contacts were made some years ago at an international library conference on the shores of Issyk-kul (Kyrgyzstan) but it took some time to overcome all bureaucratic hurdles. In September 2006 a training course was organised in Tashkent by the good offices of the local Goethe Institute. A short report was published: H Walravens: ISBN in Uzbekistan. *Bibliotheksdienst* 40. 2006:10, pp. 1170-1171.

INTEROPERABILITY

At the last ISO TC46 meeting in Chiang Mai (Thailand, spring 2006) an initiative was started to improve the interoperability between the different ISO TC46/SC9 identifiers. A working group met several times and is apparently making progress.

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