

Introduction to the Conference

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The International Conference “Authority control: definition and international experiences” is promoted by: University of Florence (Middle Ages and Renaissance Studies Department and Library System Coordination Office), Ministry of Cultural Assets (Head Office for Book and Cultural Institutions, through ICCU and the National Central Library in Florence), Tuscany Region and Italian Library Association (AIB), under the IFLA auspices. It is sponsored by seven library service agencies acknowledged professionals in the field: Burioni, Casalini Libri, Ellediemme, Licoso, Nexus, Pizzoetichette, Swets Blackwell.

The aim of the meeting is to offer an occasion for rethinking and comparing experiences about a critical aspect of the cataloguing process, and to confirm the attention paid by Italian professionals to the issues most frequently debated at the international level. We may cite some examples: the *Seminar on FRBR*, Florence, 27-28 January 2000, the International Conference “Electronic Resources: definition, selection, and cataloguing” Rome, 26-28 November 2001 (with Proceedings published by Editrice Bibliografica), the Presentation of the feasibility study for the new *Soggettario delle biblioteche italiane* (subject headings in Italian libraries), Florence, 13 June 2002 and the International Conference on Dublin Core, Florence, 14-17 October 2002. The conference proves how well and profitably its promoters – University of Florence, ICCU, National Central Library in Florence, Tuscany Region and AIB – cooperate.

Effective cataloguing requires controlling the consistency of the form of access points to information so that users can *find, identify, select and obtain* the information available in a bibliography or catalogue –as stressed by FRBR. *Authority control* is the process that should ensure homogeneity of form in each voice – author, title, body, or descriptor – chosen as access point; a process that integrates the architecture of the catalogue, not to be separated from its conceptual foundations. Without *authority control* the linking and syndetic structures of the catalogue have feet of clay. Control of form and structure helps eliminate conflicts with other headings already present or likely to be present in the catalogue, increases the precision of searches, and enables appropriate collocation of bibliographic records in OPAC displays.

Authority control is a technique with contents determined by the cataloguer, who is both a child of the times and a member of a real world and a cultural community already defined but at the same time, developing and changing. In short, *authority control* is the process of identifying the various manifestations of a name or title that will guarantee the stability of a default, "authorized" or standard form of heading. The standard form originates from cataloguing conventions based on well-established, accepted cultural traditions, therefore it is the preferred or predominant, most frequently used form, not necessarily one at a higher level in the hierarchy

The catalogue allows users to access records of an author's works or a subject from any linked variant form present in the authority record, as well as from any element in the access point. That's why we talk of a *cluster heading*, a term that evokes freeing the concept from the connotations we associate with 'authority,' enabling the display of any of the associated variant forms controlled by an authority record. *Authority control* ensures the quality of indexes and contributes to the overall quality of the catalogue.

The catalogue gets richer thanks to the linguistic realities implied in its compilation, linguistic pluralism, freed from hierarchies, is a wealth, not a new tower of Babel. Plurality of languages requires a will to cooperate in a homogeneous, non monolithic cataloguing project, a strong point not to be wasted nor to be turned into chaos or a liability for smaller cultural communities. <<Plurality is not only linguistic but cultural. Humankind, like language, exists only in the plural>> the French philosopher Paul Ricouer reminds us.

The Conference logotype draws on the theme of the negative aspect of linguistic chaos (i.e., the tower of Babel) in favour of control of access points, a strict but not enforced control, respectful of the information needs of the community the libraries work for.

As we said (Pino Buizza and I), at the Conference on *Cataloguing and authority control* promoted by ICCU, and as was also concluded by the IFLA UBCIM Working Group on Minimal Level Authority Records and ISADN, the former UBC (Universal Bibliographic Control) objective of worldwide adoption of the same form of authorized headings by all is not tenable. The 2001 GARR deemed outdated the "uniformity" principle of univocal headings, in favour of one or more "authorized" headings related to the same entity, equal to each other but each suitable to different cultural environments and compiled according to different rules, a new view of UBC. Their equivalence at the international level corresponds to the authority record of the single agency that links its authorized form and references to the "parallel" authorized forms and set of references compiled according to other rules and to other languages or scripts. The objective of linguistic uniformity is bypassed at international level: we pursue neither the unique language, nor placing languages side by side. Thus work on access point control becomes the work of an interpreter who must no longer pronounce the right name (authority), but must link together the various names used (authorized). The searcher too must no longer guess the right name in its precise form but has the interpreter at his disposal who translates his query to the catalogue.

The conference wants to be an occasion for both theoretical exchange among leading experts in the field and to provide information on major international and Italian experiences in creating national authority lists and authority files. Another aim is to make a contribution to the current debate on the revision of national cataloguing codes and their possible harmonization.

During the last months the Conference was preceded by a series of preliminary meetings promoted by libraries. Among them I would like to mention the one promoted by the Provincial Library in Foggia on *Authority control and catalographic mediation* 27-28 November 2002 and, most of all, the two-day workshop organized by ICCU on *Cataloguing and authority control*, Rome, 21-22 November 2002, that was an important occasion for a debate among professional and academic experts who are all engaged in achieving a quality product.

A brief presentation of the sessions of this conference.

Session I, *State of the art and new theoretical perspectives*, will discuss how the concept of authority control has evolved and to present the new theoretical perspectives enhanced by the evolution of informatics applied to cataloguing practice, it also offers an overview of IFLA's role in the field.

Session II, *Standards, exchange formats, metadata*, will present international standards in the field of authority control, projects linked to the implementation of exchange formats for authority data and the creation of metadata schemes for the control of the form of access to digital documents.

Session III, *Authority control of name indexes*, will offer an overview of activities and practices related to the creation of name authority files, in a context ever more characterized by the need for exchange and sharing of authority data across cultural, linguistic and formal boundaries.

Session IV, *Authority control of semantic indexes*, offers an overview of the wide and complex nature of subject authority control in one-language and in multi-language contexts at both national and international levels, presenting the most relevant and innovative developments in the field.

Session V, *Authority control: experiences and projects*, provides an opportunity for updating and exchanging opinions in the Italian and international community, presenting some experiences that took place in libraries and similar institutions and the projects, presently in progress, to make authority control easier and more effective. It pays special attention to implementations by national cataloguing agencies who are most responsible for the creation, maintenance and dissemination of authority data.

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We hope this Conference may be a further step towards a future IFLA Conference taking place in Italy.

Have a good working session.