

# 1. History and Background

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## 1.1 National bibliographies

“A current national bibliography is a mirror that reflects the culture of a country. By looking at the current national bibliography one is able to learn about the uniqueness of a country. The emphasis on agriculture and technology, the make-up of its society through its various language publications, particular customs and ceremonies important in the life of the nation, the importance of education, literature and science, prominent literary authors of the time and political, social and religious trends within a country are all discernible. A current national bibliography should reflect the interests and unique characteristics of a country much as a mirror reflects the uniqueness of an individual.” (Bell, 1998)

### Definition

More than 50 years ago the definition was: “the ideal (current national) bibliography is conceived as a complete listing of all books, documents, pamphlets, serials and other printed matter published within the bounds of a single country and within the time limits of the previous year or less.” (Conover, 1955)

The definition from 1998 is more general: National bibliography in the modern sense is defined as a cumulation of the authoritative and comprehensive records of the national output (i.e. products of the national publishing industry) of a country, published regularly, and with the least possible delay. It is produced in accordance with international standards by the national bibliographic agency. Publication details and authorship are investigated and verified in detail.

The changes in publishing over the last 10 years, which especially have brought a multitude of electronic information resources and the World Wide Web, have changed the scope of the national bibliography. This, combined with advances in the search-engine technology, demands a reappraisal of national bibliographic services.

## 1.2 Legal deposit

To make national bibliographic control function, it is also important to combine the registration of the national bibliography with a legal deposit function of a country. Legal deposit is an obligation by law or another kind of rule to make printers, publishers and distributors deliver one or more free copies of their publications to the national library or other “legal

300 palabras

deposit libraries“. In some countries of the world where the publishers want an early registration of their publications in addition there may be voluntary agreements between publishers and the national bibliographic agencies.

### **1.3 International recommendations**

The national bibliography defined as a bibliographic system or a special national bibliography is relatively new. The phrase “national bibliography“ appears in the literature about the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century primarily as a description of the national lists of books. It is not until the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that a broader definition was recognized. (Madsen, 2000)

An essential decision to extend the definition to all kinds of documents was made by the international conferences arranged by UNESCO in 1950, by UNESCO in cooperation with IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations) in 1977 and by IFLA in November 1998. The results of the conferences are a series of recommendations that have greatly influenced the structure of national bibliographic services throughout the world.

#### **1950 – Conference on the Improvement of Bibliographical Services**

The recommendations that derived from the UNESCO Conference in 1950 had the overall intention to emphasize that the national bibliography is not only one list, but a system of bibliographies that together is a registration of the documents published in a country. (Conference on the Improvement of Bibliographic Services, 1950)

It is characteristic for these recommendations that they start with the request that national bibliographies should include lists of books and pamphlets published and on sale in each country. This is linked to the fact that, several countries among others Great Britain at that time (before 1950) had only so called “booksellers lists.” These were lists of books published only by the book trade and publishing firms.

It is stressed that not only books and other printed materials but also audiovisual materials should be included in the national bibliography. Concerning periodical indexes there is a condition of selection: only important articles should be registered. It is also recommended that directories of institutions and firms selling documents in the country in question should be established.

Besides the above mentioned very detailed recommendations of what kinds of documents should be registered in the national bibliography the 1950 recommendations include very short directions as to what demands there could be made to the levels of cataloguing, to the publishing of the national bibliography, to legal deposit and to holdings of the documents at the national library.

The 1950 recommendations became central by defining that the national bibliography is not only a list of books but a system of bibliographies and by introducing the idea of the “national bibliographic service”.

### **1977 – International Congress on National Bibliographies**

The UNESCO/IFLA conference in 1977 resulted in the publication of *Guidelines for the National Bibliographic Agency and the National Bibliography* (International Federation of Library Associations, IFLA International Office for UBC & UNESCO, 1979). These guidelines contain many recommendations that not only specify selection criteria for the national bibliography but also address the level of cataloguing and the basis for registration.

In the guidelines the national bibliography is defined as “the cumulation of the authoritative and comprehensive records of the national imprint of a country, published in a printed form (and/or produced in other physical form, such as catalogue cards, machine-readable tapes) regularly, and with least possible delay.” UNESCO/IFLA defines “national imprint” as “the products of the national publishing industry.” That means that it is the home country of the publisher that determines where a document should be registered.

There are great differences between the two sets of recommendations. While in 1950 it was very important to list all the different types of documents that should be registered, the 1977 recommendations give a minimum of what a national bibliography should register:

National bibliographies, as a minimum, should include the records for monographs and first issues and title changes of serials, including official publications, of the national imprint; and other categories should be included as rapidly as possible to meet the requirements of the national library community and the resources of the national bibliographic agency...

It is also mentioned that “the (national bibliographic) agency may, as a matter of policy, determine that the national bibliography should include not only the records of the national imprint but also certain other categories of material. These generally relate specifically to the country and can be considered part of the national collection, that is, all publications relating to any aspect of the country’s cultural, historical, geographical and linguistic environment”.

The guidelines emphasise very much that the national bibliography must secure the basic authoritative registration of a country’s imprint including authority control of personal names and corporations, and that the registration should be in accordance with the international rules of cataloguing and classification. Nationally and internationally there should be compatibility between the bibliographic formats used. The national bibliography of a country is essential for universal bibliographic control (UBC) and it is important to be able to exchange and reuse bibliographic data.

### **1998 – International Conference on National Bibliographic Services (ICNBS)**

The 1977 recommendations as well as the earlier 1950 recommendations contain instructions concerning the publication of printed national bibliographies. Although, in 1977, it was mentioned that the national bibliography might be published electronically, and that national bibliographic data could be part of an international database, the focus remained on printed bibliographies. These recommendations are aimed at promoting the national bibliographic system in countries that are not able to utilize information technology.

In the newest set of recommendations (that were the result of the ICNBS) it is taken into account that the dynamic progress of information technology gives new possibilities and makes new demands on national filing and registration. Google was still to come.

As new extensions, the 1998 recommendations (International Conference on National Bibliographic Services, 2002) stress the role and responsibility of the national bibliographic agencies and the importance of legal deposit:

- Affirming that national libraries and national bibliographic agencies may work co-operatively with other agencies but that the overall responsibility for co-ordination and implementation of standards should rest with the national bibliographic agency (para. 4)
- Reaffirming the value of legal deposit as a means of ensuring that the cultural and intellectual heritage and linguistic diversity of the State is preserved and made accessible for current and future users (para. 5)

The most important changes concerning the previous recommendations are related to the following subjects.

**Legal deposit:** It is stressed that legal deposit regulations as the basis for national bibliographic services are a matter of urgency:

- (Recommendation 1) States should, as a matter of urgency, examine existing deposit legislation and consider its provisions in relation to present and future requirements; and, where necessary, existing legislation should be revised.
- (Recommendation 2) States currently without legal deposit legislation are urged to introduce it

**Coverage of the national bibliography:** In contrast to the previous recommendations that listed different types of documents the 1998 recommendations only mention the "current national output." That means all documents published in a country regardless of format (carrier), e.g., printed, audio-visual or electronic, should be covered by the national bibliographic registration. A natural consequence of this could be that all the new document types including Internet documents should be treated on equal terms with the more traditional document types.

Future activities in the 1998 recommendations include:

- (Recommendation 3) IFLA should support revision of existing sets of guidelines to make provision for all new and future forms of publications.

### 1.4 New recommendations/guidelines

When looking at the evolution of the recommendations from 1950 to 1998 it is remarkable that in 1950 the emphasis was on a very detailed description of what kinds of documents should be registered in the national bibliography, and there was very little about directions as

to what demands there could be made to the levels of cataloguing, to publishing of the national bibliography, to legal deposit and to holdings of the documents at the national library.

The 1977 guidelines specified the minimum recommendations for kinds of documents a national bibliography should register. The emphasis was placed on securing the basic authoritative registration of a country's imprint including authority control of personal names and corporations. The registration should be in accordance with the international rules of cataloguing and classification and the bibliographic formats used should be compatible. Between 1950 and 1977, the focus shifted from the coverage of the national bibliography to the registration and formatting of the bibliographic data. The shift may have occurred because the coverage was considered obvious and the challenge at that time was moving toward online cataloguing and sharing of bibliographic data.

In 1998 there are no details concerning coverage of the national bibliography. The recommendations are very general, such as:

- (Recommendation 4) National bibliographies should include the **current national output**, and where practicable also provide retrospective coverage. When necessary, selection criteria should be defined and published by the national bibliographic agency
- (Recommendation 5) The national bibliography should include records for materials in all languages and/or scripts in which publications are produced within a state; and wherever possible these records should include the languages and/or scripts in which the publications originally appeared

The unique feature of the 1998 recommendations is the emphasis placed on the role and responsibility of national bibliographic agencies and the importance of legal deposit.

## 1.5 Conclusion

This Working Group found that the 1998 recommendations specified general principles, but did not offer guidance as to how the **current national output** is defined. The Working Group also found that there is a need to define the inclusion of electronic information resources of all kinds in the national bibliography.

In the recommendations the definition of the national bibliography includes that it is exhaustive

... all books/(total) current national output published at any time in a specific country. Another distinguishing feature of national bibliography is that it is largely "objective" in the sense that its goal is the complete registration of published documents (within certain formal frameworks) notwithstanding the physical form of the documents concerned, the subjects they deal with, or their quality.

Since 1977, it has been assumed that the national bibliography is a **complete** registration of all publications in a country regardless of format and at the same level of cataloguing,

which was often interpreted to mean the highest existing level. Agency managers who are responsible for budgets consequently view cataloguing as being very expensive. This thinking has further led some managers prematurely to conclude that there is no need for a national bibliography to cover Web documents at all. Some view that no national bibliography coverage is needed, because access can be provided by browsers searching the Web.

After the review of the existing guidelines, and taking into account the practical experience of national bibliographic agencies, the Working Group makes the following recommendations:

- The responsibility to develop, maintain and promote rules, standards, selection criteria should be assigned to a national bibliographic agency.
- The national bibliography should include all types of publications but not necessarily all publications. Exhaustiveness need not be an absolute goal.
- Pragmatic formal selection criteria should be defined and published.
- The national bibliographic agency should decide on different levels of cataloguing for different kinds of publications, based on the significance of the resource.
- National bibliographic agencies are encouraged to exploit all available technology to support the creation and maintenance of the national bibliography.
- National bibliographic agencies should seek opportunities to collaborate with other stakeholders to support and improve the national bibliography.
- National bibliographic agencies should analyse and periodically review the use (including potential use) of the national bibliography.

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