INITIAL EVALUATION REPORT:

THE CONSPECTUS PROJECT

OF THE CZECH NATIONAL LIBRARY

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Executive Summary

The conspectus project undertaken by the Czech National Library over the past two years is a model of good library practice and the project leadership has displayed excellent management skills as well as professional judgment. Not only has the staff applied and adapted the basics of conspectus practice to fit their unique situation and the current information and technological environment but they have done so with good sense and a degree of pragmatism that is sometimes rare in libraries where the culture has often emphasized perfection and rules over usability and cost-effectiveness. The results of the project are an easy to understand description of the existing information resources of the National Library along with policy statements outlining goals and guidelines for further development and management of each segment of the collection.

A number of preliminary tools were developed in the initial stages of the project as the staff met the challenges presented by the use of methodologies, structures, and even vocabulary that did not easily fit the circumstances and environment of the CASLIN group and the National Library. The library met these challenges by adapting existing tools and developing new ones such as a concordance to identify the relationships between one classification scheme (Dewey Decimal Classification) and another one used more often in Europe (the Universal Decimal Classification) and the related subject. The need for standardized vocabulary and authority terms for subjects was identified not only as a key element for the success of the CASLIN Uniform Information Gateway but also for the sharing of conspectus and policy statements about collections of strength and depth. In addition to these more theoretical problems, the staff had to face the challenges presented by collections that have not traditionally been organized by subject or discipline and yet for which they wished to provide both descriptive collection levels for existing collections and goal levels with narrative collection development strategies to outline the types of materials to be added to reach the goals. They solved this problem, at least until more enumerative types of analysis are possible, with the concept of "qualified estimation" using the expertise of senior staff and managers to describe and characterize the subject divisions based upon their first-hand knowledge of them. They also organized their collection information in order to account for the differences between domestic and foreign production and depository materials as well as other types of domestic items. All of these structural and adaptive strategies contributed to making the final product well organized and understandable.

One of the highlights of the project is the excellent web presence developed to communicate about the project to other libraries and users. As part of the CASLIN Uniform Information Gateway project, the conspectus project contributes important baseline information and provides the tools for strategic decision-making concerning information resources not only in one library but across many libraries.

The progress the Czech National Library and the CASLIN group of libraries has made since 1989 is remarkable. This project is further proof of the quality of the professionals within the information management and library communities in both the Slovak and Czech republics and especially those at the Czech National Library. The willingness to adapt and develop tools and to find answers is evident in many aspects of this project. While there are minor questions of interpretation and implementation to be addressed in further communications and consultations with the library, the over-all sense of the project is one of success. The challenges for the future are ones of refinement and application. They involve extending the skills to others to enable them to add their data and policy goals to those developed at the National Library so that coordinated information resource management can be a reality in the not too distant future with the CASLIN library community.

Project Overview

The conspectus project undertaken by the Czech National Library is both remarkable in its scope and in the accomplishment of so much in such a short time. The project was undertaken for a number of simultaneous reasons: (1) to enable the CASLIN Uniform Information Gateway for Integrating Heterogeneous Resources (UIG) to operate with the necessary prerequisite of uniform description and analysis for the collections in Czech libraries; (2) to provide a uniform and easily understood structure for navigating and linking the elements of the UIG; (3) to provide a basis for applying the *Guidelines for a Collection Development Policy Using the Conspectus Model* (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2001) to the management and development of information resources at the national level; and (4) to provide the "raw material" for strategic planning, coordinated collection development and grant proposals. The policy guidelines, developed by the IFLA Acquisition and Collection Development Committee, reflect what has become standard practice in libraries of all sizes and types throughout a large part of the world. The guidelines are based upon both the structure and vocabulary of the WLN/OCLC conspectus and provide a template for the implementation of "best practice" with regards to information resources policies. The use of this document (an international standard) in conjunction with the conspectus project enabled the National Library to organize its concepts of existing collections and to articulate policies for the management and further development of each type of collection with its unique characteristics targeted for use by specific and distinct audiences.

From the beginning, the project has had the three elements that are most likely to guarantee success in such a large and complex project—a clear and well-articulated vision, strong leadership possessing logical organizational skills, outstanding communication abilities, and a thorough grounding in librarianship, and funding to enable operations to proceed in a timely and efficient manner. Together these elements have made it possible for the National Library to pursue the many detailed and often very complex tasks necessary to develop the tools to implement the conspectus structure, conduct an initial broad-based assessment of information resources based on qualified estimation in the three distinct collections, and develop and implement a process for communication about the project and its resulting policies, strategies and goals. To have accomplished all of this in only two years while implementing the basic infrastructure for what has become the CASLIN Uniform Information Gateway for Integrating Heterogeneous Resources is further testimony to the quality of leadership and the strong motivation within the project and the library community in both the Czech and Slovak republics but especially at the National Library.

The completion of the conspectus project, along with the writing of a policy to guide the further development of information resources, in such a timely manner now enables the National Library to refine its own processes and results and to assist other libraries in conducting similar projects in order to clearly define their information resources in all formats in a meaningful and consistent manner and to move more deliberately towards coordinated resource development. This project can serve as a model for other projects in other libraries with collections of depth and/or breadth that will help to complete the mosaic of information resource strengths for the region. The conspectus approach to the analysis and description of collections and collecting goals along with the development of policies at the local and national levels is essential to ensure that information is managed in wise and cost-effective manners in the present and the future. The resulting ability to coordinate the management of these resources and to make them accessible to citizens, students, researchers, and scholars provides the basis for the preservation of cultural heritage, knowledge to compete and participate in a global marketplace, and an informed and responsible citizenry. The accomplishment of the goals of the UIG and the conspectus component are within sight at this stage of the project. Further refinement of the process and the dissemination of the tools and skills to enable other libraries to contribute meaningful data to this information gateway are the next steps.

Initial Tools and Organizing Principles

One of the first hurdles faced by the National Library in implementing the conspectus process was the development of tools that addressed the unique nature and unusual environment of the collections. The conspectus was developed for use in libraries organized either using the Library of Congress (LC) classification or the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) structures. The Universal Decimal Classification (UDC) differs sufficiently to require the use of additional tables and adaptations to ensure compatible and comparative results. Each of the organizing systems for libraries has characteristics that reflect the worldview of knowledge and literature as well as value systems from a particular point in time and place. The adaptation of the conspectus structure to accommodate the local practice, as librarians define the irregularities and unique practices found in the organizing principles of each library, of the Czech National Library was one of the first issues to be addressed. While the conspectus divisions with their categories and more detailed subjects provide some assistance with UDC classification and terminology, additional work in identifying comparable and/or different classification usage was required. By addressing the problems and accommodations necessary to adapt the UDC structure as it is used in Central Europe and more specifically at the National Library to the DDC structure as it is typically used in North America and by clearly identifying the varied elements of the national collection the groundwork for the use of the conspectus in other Czech libraries as well as other libraries in the region has now been laid. The concordance with both DDC and UDC classification numbers and the corresponding subject terminology in both English and Czech provides a needed clarification of the subject structure to be used in writing policy based on the IFLA standard, for implementing collecting strategies, and for navigating and linking resources within the UIG.

In addition to coping with the UDC issues, the National Library needed to address subject terminology and to establish authority forms for the approved terms and protocols for the structuring of new terms as needed. This development, while more closely associated with the implementation of cataloging and bibliographic records for the CASLIN Uniform Information Gateway and the sharing of records with the OCLC bibliographic utility, also was necessary to establish standard subject terms in both Czech and English to link and describe information resources in all formats including the descriptions of subject strengths as well as individual item records. This authority file is gradually being built using the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) as a basis and linking classification numbers with terms so that together they can serve as guides to users when searching for appropriate information.

The third item to be developed during the early stages of the project was a format or structure to distinguish and describe the information resources of the National Library because the conspectus structure, the IFLA policy guidelines document, and the WLN/OCLC conspectus manual (*Using the Conspectus Method: A Collection Assessment Handbook*, 1997) all assume that a conspectus project generally deals with the collection of a single library with a clear mission to a particular type of user. The National Library is unique in that it has a wide range of missions, diverse potential user communities, and very distinct types of information resources. The clear articulation of the differences of the three types of collections (e.g., National Archival Collections, Universal Library Collection, and the Study Collection) and clarity about publication origin (domestic or foreign) enabled the staff to define these collections and the goals for segments of each with a degree of specificity that would not have been possible based solely on subject content. For both the archival and the study collection, the purpose is more important in defining existing collections and future strategies than the conspectus subject itself. In each of the three collections, there are materials on most of the same subjects but the purposes of the individual areas of the National Library collections take precedence in defining the management of the subjects within the collection context. This articulation of the three distinct collections is essential in understanding the conspectus project and resulting policy and goal statements.

For each collection then, the staff was faced with deciding how to characterize the collection, how to evaluate it, and last but perhaps most importantly, how to define a collection strategy or policy for each. They met this challenge in a number of different ways. For the archival and study collections, they provided justification in terms of purpose and general content with an emphasis on good management and guiding policies for systematic development with informed estimates at the broad division levels. Thus, while the archival collections may contain material on many different subjects, the general character of these collections is archival (i.e., historical, related to Czech history and culture, and may be unique and even rare) and the collections can best be described relative to the purpose of this collection rather than addressing individual subjects. The same is true of the study collection where the purpose defines the contents within the budget resources available to support it. In the Universal Collection, however, each individual division of the conspectus received more detailed attention and a policy statement congruent with the information culture of each discipline and appropriate for the National Library's mission was developed.

These preliminary tools (i.e., classification comparability, subject term authority control, and general collection definitions or distinctions) were essential steps in implementing the actual conspectus project. The conspectus project then consisted of describing the information resources and then defining policy for the management of each topic using the IFLA policy model and the conspectus structure and language. However, without collections that have been systematically classified using DDC, UDC or some other subject based classification where shelf placement allows for enumeration and date analysis other means had to be created to achieve reliable descriptions and characterizations of the collections. Unlike many other libraries that have used the conspectus methods, the Czech National Library could not use the traditional techniques to help define the subject collections. How did they solve this major problem? They used "qualified estimation" by relying upon senior staff and management personnel with years of experience working in the collections in all aspects of library operations to help define and characterize collections. These estimates and descriptions, based upon professional knowledge, served in place of actual quantitative data for subject classification areas. This is a creative solution that serves the broad purposes for now. As new materials are added, the use of standard cataloging format and MARC or UNIMARC records along with subject authority control will gradually enable statistical analysis to complement and verify professional judgment.

These initial decisions regarding structure and methods then enabled the library staff to proceed with the production of meaningful descriptions with the application of the conspectus collection level codes to characterize the extent and level of each segment. The acquisition commitment codes were then applied to describe the level at which current funding and other resources enable acquisitions in each area or collection. The goal level codes then characterize the ideal for each. The collection development strategies for each provide the guidelines for the management and further development of each collection or segment. They provide decision-making guidelines for each segment. The collection descriptions, along with the general policy for management of each segment, have created a blueprint for the continuous management of the information resources of the National Library. Further, the availability of these collection descriptions and policy statements to the other libraries in the Czech Republic and elsewhere, will enable the coordinated development of strong collections that complement rather than duplicate one another for the best use of resources while providing the information—both historical and current—that is required by the citizens of today's world.

Application of Conspectus Methodologies

The Czech National Library staff appears to have remembered one of the most important tenets of the conspectus methodology and that is that it is simply a tool. It is a tool to aid libraries in the characterization of specific collections and in providing management guidelines in the form of goals. As with all good tools, the conspectus methodologies are flexible. It is intended that libraries be

served by the conspectus method and structure and not that libraries be slaves to methods or structures that do not work in an evolving environment. In their application and adaptation of the conspectus methodologies to fit the situation in the National Library and the participating library community members, the Czech National Library has provided yet another strong example of why the standardized conspectus approach is such a valuable tool—it can be changed, adapted, and utilized in particular circumstances and to fulfill particular localized goals while maintaining the basic structure and principles now used by libraries for more than thirty years.

While there are some questions to be asked to help clarify the adaptations used and further amplification of some strategies may be suggested, the adaptations in general make sense. A tool that is capable of evolving over time and circumstances is a far more useful tool than one that can only be applied in one way, for one purpose, without change or development. The National Library has adapted the basic conspectus principles and methods to fit the needs of a national library community as it develops a cutting-edge information mega-tool for the use of citizens and librarians—the CASLIN Uniform Information Gateway. In this new millennium where efficient information access is essential and where technologies are making new things possible at every moment, the conspectus methodologies appear to have informed and enabled the National Library to describe and plan for information resources and to do so in such a way as to enable the sharing of this information and the eventual development of coordinated information resource development. The test of the application of the methodologies is in the usefulness of the results. Thus far, the results appear to be very useful. Time will tell if the longer-term goals are reached as a result of the work of the past two years.

The communication strategies used to convey the results of the conspectus project and especially the use of structured and appropriately linked web pages, is the most efficient, widely available, and easily managed form of communicating this complex information. Here, too, the adaptation of the software and structure of the conspectus methods enabled the National Library to develop their own way of structuring the results of the project so that any user or librarian can understand it. Navigation of the site is simple and intuitive and one needs to know little about the conspectus methodology details to understand that the character, purpose, and depth of collections have been provided along with goals and strategies for informed management of each collection. It is likely that some clarification and even amplification of various aspects of the project results may evolve from a more in-depth evaluation process over the course of the next few months, but the basic approach is sound and appropriate.

Project scope

The scope of the project included all of the collections of the National Library to a greater or lesser extent. This posed some special challenges for the staff but they sought reasonable solutions and adaptations to met the special circumstances. While the National Archival Collection and the Study Collection did not receive quiet the same level of subject analysis as that applied to the Universal Library Collection their inclusion in the total project and the manner in which the information about them has been provided is quite appropriate. The purpose of each provides the basis for determining the principles to be used in developing and managing them. Rather than provide unnecessary verbiage and complication, the National Library wisely chose to summarize the information about each of these collections. This information is exactly what the user or anther library needs to inform their search for resources or to understand local information resources of a similar type and purpose in light of the national collection. To have followed the detailed conspectus approach to each subject within these two collections would have been a somewhat meaningless though very time-consuming process. The decision to handle them is this summary fashion appears to have been a perfect solution.

It is in the application of the more detailed conspectus methodologies for the Universal Library Collection of the National Library that the strength and specificity of conspectus is apparent.

It is in applying the details of the broad discipline divisions and the categories within each of these that the most detail about each discipline is possible. This aspect of the project, the one that is most like other conspectus projects, provides the greatest amount of detail about the character and extent of existing collections, the current rates of acquisition, and the appropriate management strategies for the future for each. In this area it appears that the conspectus methodologies have been appropriately applied and reported for the benefit of internal and external uses of the data. The goal or strategy statements address the concepts outlined as appropriate by the IFLA policy guidelines (i.e., languages, country of origin, dates of publications, types of materials, and special notes based on the information culture of a particular discipline). They are included for domestic and foreign publications and materials in each division. The addition of information that explains appropriate materials or types of materials or collections to which links should be made in the UIG is an adaptation of the usual guidelines and fitting for this project and the new technologies. All of this information is provided in a narrative outline form. This is a traditional approach and it has clarity and parallel structure from one statement to the next. With further refinement, the library may decide to expand or clarify some of these statements in order to make them more comprehendible by the general user. The distinctions between the two types of domestic materials (i.e., those received as deposit copies and those purchased or acquired by other means) are of importance for the management of the collections but these distinctions may be of little concern to others.

Recommendations for improvements and expansions

The two most obvious expansions of the project will be to enhance the use of the conspectus data in the Universal Information Gateway to facilitate access to appropriate subject collections and specific materials by users and to provide further training and incentives for other key CASLIN libraries to pursue conspectus projects. Once more collections have been analyzed and policy statements written to guide the decision-making processes in collection management in individual libraries the potential for coordinated collection development across multiply libraries will become realistic. By sharing the tools and techniques developed or refined by the National Library during the course of the project, they will help to ensure successful conspectus projects by other libraries. The National Library's experience and pragmatic approach to the adaptation of the conspectus methods need to be shared with others, especially those in smaller libraries or those in libraries where risk-taking is not a positive organizational value.

In addition to, or more precisely, as a component of, coordinated information resource development, more cost-effective and wiser resource allocation can become a reality in the leading libraries of the region. Thoughtful, detailed, and well-documented policy statements to guide acquisitions and preservation of information resources among a group of libraries will result in better management for all and therefore better use of public funding while at the same time providing enhanced access to worthwhile information and materials. The results of the conspectus project will prove invaluable for strategic planning and grant writing purposes as well as day-to-day management and access to the information resources. The collection level and goal level codes and the gaps between them will provide the justification for many decisions and future projects.

What has been accomplished thus far is a first attempt at codifying and organizing information resource information using the conspectus methodologies and terminologies. One of the next important steps is to use the data and policy statements in day-to-day decision-making and then to review and revise the statements over the course of the next two to three years. For this refinement stage, a division at a time should be reviewed, revisited, and clarified as needed. After this initial revision, the process need only be reviewed and revised every five years or as needed in shorter increments. It is much easier to refine the statements now that the initial information has been recorded. It might be useful at this stage to involve at least one person who is unfamiliar with the National Library collections. An "outsider" will ask questions or ask for clarifications that will enable the staff to further improve upon the excellent work already accomplished. Any further clarification

will serve to make the collection description and strategy statements more comprehensible to the ordinary citizen and to staff in all types of libraries located anywhere in the world.

Further review and investigation

During the further evaluation of the project, this evaluator will pursue questions with National Library staff members concerning the following:
- The possibility of comparative data with other national libraries
- The use of statistical analysis and comparisons for verification purposes
- Consideration of methods to sample the validity of the "qualified estimation" technique
- The formatting of policy statements with search capabilities within and across statements
- The possible use of shelf-scanning techniques despite the lack of subject classification
- The existing decision-making structure for collections/acquisitions & proposed changes
- Training materials for other libraries
- Further uses of the conspectus data and policy statements
- Implications for other action and projects within the collections
- The staff's perceptions of the value of the project
- Realistic expectations for the implementation of policy goals

While working on-site with staff members, other issues may arise that will be documented in a final written report for the National Library.

Points of excellence

In conclusion, there are a few additional points to make regarding the project, its management, and its implementation. The tools developed and the data and policy statements represent excellent work by the staff members of the Czech National Library but the following are points of particular excellence:
- The courage by the project leaders to change or adapt the conspectus methods and language to fit the present needs and circumstances of the Czech National Library and the CASLIN members.
- The clarity of vision of the project leaders, including their recognition of the importance of implementing the IFLA *Guidelines for a Collection Development Policy Using the Conspectus Model* as well as their understanding of the long-term usefulness in strategic decision-making of such policy statements based upon the mission of the library, the potential users, and the currently existing information resources.
- The evidence of project planning, logical analysis of problems, and the implementation of solid project management principles throughout the project timeline.
- The Czech National Library has shown exceedingly good sense in not allowing the minutia of this type of project to overwhelm good sense and allow the "bean counters" of the library world to sabotage or at the very least slow to a snail's pace the progress of such a project.

For all of these reasons, the staff and leadership of the conspectus project at the Czech National Library are to be commended for a job <u>well</u> done--and, for a job that is done!