Implementing UNIMARC in Russia

Olga Zhlobinskaya,
National Library of Russia
olga_zhlobinskaya@nlr.ru

History of implementing UNIMARC in Russia dates back to the middle of 1990th. In 1995 Russian Library Association launched the project "Creation of National Machine-Readable Format for the Bibliographic Records." The initiative of the project belonged to the Ministry of Culture, and all major Russian libraries were represented: National Library of Russia, Russian State Library, Russian Book Chamber, Russian State Public Library for Science and Technology, Library for Foreign Literature, etc. UNIMARC was chosen as a prototype, since (1) it was developed as international exchange format and (2) it was based on ISBD, i.e. it was more close to Russian national cataloguing rules.

At the same time the National Library of Russia was at the beginning of development of its library system, which was intended to support all the main library processes. One of the main issues was that of the choice of the machine-readable format for the system. After close investigation the decision was made that both cataloguing and exchange format in the system should be based on UNIMARC.

To reflect specifics of national practice and to accommodate some differences still existing between ISBD and Russian Rules for Bibliographic description some adaptation of the format was necessary.

- The statements, definitions and rules for the fields or subfields were given in compliance with national standards and guidelines.

- Local fields and subfields were defined if there was no corresponding data element in UNIMARC. To keep within the bounds of UNIMARC fields of national use have "9" as the second or third digit of the tag, and the block 9-- is reserved for local use in the libraries.

None of the adaptations is in conflict with UNIMARC, and indeed Russian format is national version of the basic UNIMARC. In 1998, Ministry of Culture adopted Russian Exchange Format (RUSMARC) as a mandatory one for bibliographic data exchange between the institutions under the Ministry of Culture. All library systems either being designed or

implemented in our country should either include converters or support the cataloguing in this format.

Of course, implementation of UNIMARC was not absolutely smooth and one can not say that everybody was happy with this process. One of the main reasons was that there were already a number of systems in use by some libraries, which were built on other formats rather than UNIMARC, and both software producers and users were not eager to move to another format.

At the same time there were no systems working with an international format; usually software developers declared that internal format was based on UNIMARC or USMARC, but processing of the format inside the system did not allow to call it such. None of the formats supported in existing library systems could be accepted as common one at the national level. On the other hand, the importance of working with one common format was clearly understood by majority of Russian libraries, and as a whole, the process of UNIMARC implementation was quite successful.

Here we regret to mention Russian State Library, which also has a status of national library. Russian State Library works with the format, which is based on USMARC.

Implementation of the national format was vital first of all for data exchange, and UNIMARC was adopted by major cooperative projects.

(1) First of all, project LIBNET – National Information Library Centre. The project was established by the two national libraries (Russian State Library and National Library of Russia), to organize cooperative cataloguing on the national level and to establish national Union Catalogue. Today about 80 libraries participate the Union Catalogue; the catalogue numbers more than 1,300,000 records. The format used is UNIMARC.

Besides the Union Catalogue of Libraries of Russia, the Centre keeps national authority files, which are also in UNIMARC. Number of authority records is about 1,500,000, including 1,300,000 subject headings, 160,000 corporate names and 30,000 names of persons.

(2) Another project to be mentioned is Association of Regional Library Consortia (ARBICON), which was founded in May 2002. It was launched as a result of 3-years all-Russian project "Library Automation" by Soros Foundation developing a series of regional library consortia in different regions of Russia, based on the Internet technologies and open standards. Today ARBICON unifies 13 regional library consortia, over 200 libraries, providing access using the Z39.50 protocol. UNIMARC is used as exchange format.

These are 2 major projects in the country, each of them solving its own task (LIBNET – delivering re-usable high-quality machine readable records, ARBICON – great coverage of participating libraries and material being catalogued), and both projects use UNIMARC for data exchange. This fact seems to be decisive for further existence and evolution of the format in the country.

To coordinate all the activities on implementation and developing UNIMARC in Russia National Service for formats was established in 2001, with basic function defined as development and updating of national version of UNIMARC format for various types of materials. The Service operates on the basis of the National Library of Russia; it includes Council of experts, representing leading library institutions and software producing companies of the country.

What are main directions of UNIMARC development in the country today?

(1) extending formats for other kinds of data, delivering guidelines for specific types of documents; tracking UNIMARC changes and making appropriate updates in the national format to keep compliance with UNIMARC.

Like UNIMARC, national format today is a family of formats. The most heavily used in the country are formats for bibliographic and authority data. The work is in progress to implement national format for holdings, which is also based on UNIMARC. The main difference is the idea that the format should provide working with copy from the acquisitions to item control.

Next, national format for classification data has been developed based on UNIMARC/C, which is supposed to provide support for major classification tables in use in Russian libraries – first of all, Library Bibliographic Classification and Universal Decimal Classification, while keeping support for other classifications, in particular, Library of Congress Classification and Dewey Decimal Classification.

National Service is working on the 2-nd edition of Bibliographic format, which will incorporate:

- Update 5 of UNIMARC/B

- new national standard for bibliographic description (GOST 7.1-2003)

- new Russian Cataloguing Rules

(2) contact with library software producing companies

Realization of the national projects and using UNIMARC in the libraries requires corresponding software. The practice shows that even those systems which are declared to work with the format, often do not provide proper and full support. Often they implement just reduced version or subset, which in no circumstances can be considered the format as such. At the same time, there is a steady tendency for Russian libraries to replace old software for new one based on UNIMARC. National Service provides testing of new library software; developers may apply to the Service to certify that the software does provide full support for UNIMARC. The certification is voluntary for the developers, and today eight library systems are already certified.

(3) user training and informing them about all the updates in time

National Service for formats and National Information Library Centre organize training courses for users on the basis of NLR and in other libraries of Russia. The program includes lectures and practical training on cataloguing in UNIMARC, including multilevel records and embedded fields.

Experts of NLR with the assistance of the National Service for formats developed series of manuals, including description of real examples of UNIMARC records. The manuals are published with the assistance of the LIBNET Centre and are intended to assist cataloguers participating in the Union Catalogue of Libraries of Russia. Three volumes are already published: Vol.1 – books and serials, Vol.2 – special types of documents (printed music, cartographic materials, standards, electronic resources, etc.), Vol. 3 – authority records. All the examples are provided with detailed step-by-step instructions and comments for cataloguers.

At the web-site of the National service for RUSMARC we are trying to reflect the changes in the format in time. Sometimes it is done even before the Update is published. Such information is very important for software developers – they need to be aware of all changes and updates to estimate which version of the format their system supports, but they can not track the flow of changes from the Permanent UNIMARC Committee themselves. It should be noted that the flow is rather heavy. The situation when it is difficult to track the changes in time might cause confusion in using format in the country. Our web-site seems to manage this task, but to provide stability of the format it would be better to keep number of changes within reasonable limits.