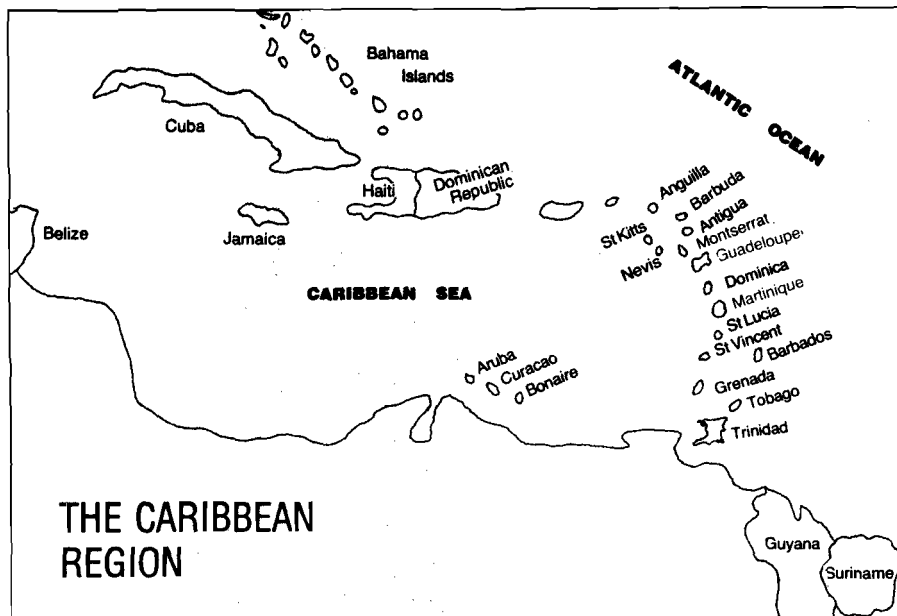


CARIBBEAN
DEVELOPMENT
AND
CO-OPERATION
COMMITTEE



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EVALUATION OF THE TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF THE
CARIBBEAN INFORMATION SYSTEM

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EVALUATION OF THE TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF THE
CARIBBEAN INFORMATION SYSTEM

The technical aspects of the Caribbean Information System were initially designed to bring together a set of easily implementable processes which can at the same time aid member countries in providing a dynamic service. It seems necessary to consider in this evaluation of the technical processes, the requirements for preparing input, and ways in which they might need to be modified.

The technical constraints, computer hardware, and software, as well as regional and international standardization need also to be considered as widest participation in the system is aimed at and automated methods of interchange of information are envisaged in the not too distant future.

Preparation of bibliographic records

The format for CARISPLAN The format which has been chosen is largely influenced by the use of the ISIS software, and by the hardware available to the Caribbean Documentation Centre.

The manual for use of the Bibliographic Worksheet therefore identifies elements which must be included to permit the record to be processed, and others which are desirable for more effective use of the information. The sample worksheet which is annexed to this paper shows the elements permitted and some of the requirements for punctuation etc. One of the factors which we have had to consider has been the compatibility of the entries for CARISPLAN with the entries for the CARICOM and National Bibliographies. The question of using the ISBN format for CARISPLAN entries has been raised, but unfortunately this would not be possible, as the ISIS programme would not be able to permit this. This question is still unresolved, but will arise again and again in relation to formats for inhouse processing, especially as libraries begin to examine the question of automating their holdings. The choice of a particular software is of course the crucial question, but unfortunately it will not be possible for us to discuss it here.

Authorities

As in the establishment of any other technical services, it was also necessary to decide on authorities for cataloguing decisions to permit standardization. This has been even more necessary in a decentralized system. The Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules second edition (AACR II) seemed to be the most widely known set of cataloguing rules, and these were chosen as an aid in standardization of the forms of entries for the data base. Librarians participating in the system have displayed significant familiarity with the rules and therefore the approximately 6,000 entries held so far have been entered according to these rules. This, however, has not completely solved the problem of standardization of entries. The forms of names of institutions and organizations in the region also pose a potential problem for standardization. The official forms of the names have had to be ascertained and incorporated into the data base.

Authority files are being prepared for personal authors, institutions, subjects and conferences and it is expected that these will facilitate standardization of entries. In the meanwhile the issues of CARISPLAN Abstracts can serve as an interim authority for choice and form of entries.

Rationale for changes in the format of the bibliographic record

Since the inception of the System, this present format has been the third which will have been used for preparing input. You might well ask why this. Some changes have been dictated by improvements in the capabilities of the computer facilities, and others have been suggested in the course of the development of the System by participating centres and by staff of the Caribbean Documentation Centre.

Initially a computer which was used by the ECLA Office in Santiago to run a modified version of ISIS, provided a service which consisted mainly of the abstracting journal in its present form.

As the participation in, and use of, the System increased, it was possible to examine the relation to the services requested by the users and librarians of the national focal points, the participating centres, and the Caribbean Documentation Centre. In addition, the staff of Centro Latinoamericano de Documentación Económica y Social (CLADES), who

operate the Sistema de Información para la Planificación en América Latina (INFOPLAN) were also monitoring and reviewing the format of the bibliographic record. An area of particular concern was that it should be possible to use the bibliographic record to record all types of documents held by libraries.

As a result of these reviews the present worksheet has been prepared and includes some additional elements of which the most significant are those which permit a serial to be entered as an entity.

This new worksheet with its corresponding manual have been tested at the Caribbean Documentation Centre, at CLADES and at a recent national workshop in Trinidad and Tobago. It is basically an extension of the previous worksheets and the sample worksheets used at the Trinidad and Tobago workshop illustrate its use.

Techniques used for preparing the bibliographic record

In addition to bibliographic description, a subject analysis has been done and the corresponding abstract and indexing descriptors have been assigned to each entry. It was decided that there should be as much detail in the indexing as would provide meaningful information to a user, and that there should also be an indicative/informative abstract which would summarize the objective, the main activities, results and main conclusions for most of the documents. Other documents would have varying abstracts depending on their content.

Training Methods and Manuals

As these bibliographic records are prepared initially during workshops, and as it is expected that entries received from participating centres can be input without re-examination of the documents, it seems worthwhile that there be an evaluation of the training methods and the tools provided by the System.

The national workshops or inservice training periods have been based on practical exercises of indexing and abstracting documents for the CARISPLAN data base. After the first year, and as a result of feedback from participating centres, it was decided that manuals in addition to the one for the

use of the bibliographic worksheet, should be prepared to guide participants on indexing and abstracting techniques and procedures, and on requirements for CARISPLAN. These have been used in the inservice training and in the workshops and have helped to provide consistency in the decentralized system.

Problems in preparing input

Selection of appropriate documents for input to the system has been a question raised by participating centres from time to time. While the purpose of the system has helped to define the types of documents, and while the activities and interest of member governments also help to define subject scope, there is still the question of whether specialized technical studies in agriculture or chemistry for example should be included now in CARISPLAN for subsequent transfer to other sectoral systems at a later date; or whether they should be excluded from the data base since users are not likely to consult CARISPLAN for such information.

Subject analysis

Indexers and abstractors are sometimes not subject specialists in areas covered by the documents which they input. This has not, however, created a serious problem as they have managed to develop an awareness of new subject areas through a systematic analysis of the contents of the documents and discussion with the authors.

As the abstract is not a normal part of inhouse cataloguing entries it had seemed that this could be an extra workload. It has, however, been possible in most participating centres to have the preparation of an abstract for the current documents produced by the organization incorporated into the library's work programme.

Indexing

The main problems identified have been linked with the fact that the OECD Macrothesaurus does not adequately cover all the subject areas which are required. Other thesauri have had to be consulted and from these descriptors have been proposed. It is recognized that participating libraries should have lists of the descriptors proposed and this will be made available as soon as possible.

The United Nations Information Systems Unit has been given the responsibility for revision of the OECD Macrothesaurus in collaboration with the regional economic commission who will continue to collect and evaluate proposals from their regions for revisions to the thesaurus.

It is expected that a new edition, edited by Jean Viet, will incorporate universally applicable descriptors which have been proposed since the last edition was compiled. It should be noted, however, that the concept of the Macrothesaurus is not one of covering in detail all specialized areas but rather to serve as a common indexing language which would provide a framework for development of compatible specialized thesauri which are required.

Lists of specialized thesauri, and copies of the introduction of those available to the Caribbean Documentation Centre can be provided on requests.

The consistency of the indexing in the data base is recognized as being potentially a problem in a decentralized system in which indexers might change.

The activities of the Caribbean Documentation Centre in ensuring standardization

Worksheets received from participating centres and from the CDC's indexers are checked by the Indexing Supervisor. It has not, however, been possible to do a complete review of the entry in relation to the actual document, and it seems that it is unlikely to be possible in the future. It is in fact envisaged that the entries are of the level that they can be entered into the data base. Occasional verification is required, and it would be necessary to have a copy of the document available for this. It seems that the review process will require deposit in the CDC of each document for which an entry has been prepared. This is also related to the services of reference and document delivery which can be provided by the System.

Retrieval

The computer-produced abstracting journal CARISPLAN Abstracts is the main retrieval tool, although you will have seen that approximately one-third of the entries have been entered on a data base in abbreviated form, this enables post-coordinate searching to take place, and therefore indicates other retrieval services which will become available from the System.

11