

# THE IFLA WORLD DIRECTORY OF NATIONAL UNION CATALOGUES

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*National Union Catalogues are valuable sources of information on national holdings including major national collections. An IFLA initiative is creating a 'Union Catalogue of Union Catalogues' which aims to provide a comprehensive worldwide listing of these collections via its Web site.*

There have been significant developments in the concept of union catalogues over the years, with the traditional image of rows of card files (c.f. the British Library Document Supply Centre's Union Catalogue of Books (UCB)), microfiche listings of libraries' holdings (remember the Regional ISBN fiche?) or even an online union catalogue (the German Zeitschriftendatenbank) being replaced by the new modern images of distributed catalogues, virtual union catalogues and clumps.

Although the effectiveness of distributed catalogues has been far from proven, as far as location finding for interlending purposes is concerned, there is a clear trend towards developing links between existing catalogues. Libraries realise that, with limited resources and time, it is not possible to continue contributing individual holdings information to a central databank in order to maintain traditional union catalogues.

Whatever the format of the union catalogue, however, one challenge remains: how to know what union catalogues exist in any given subject area, geographical region or country. A complete list of union catalogues would provide a starting point for library users seeking holdings information for material in any given field of interest.

Conveniently, the IFLA World Directory of National Union Catalogues (IWDNUC) offers just this service: a "union catalogue of union catalogues" available through IFLANET, IFLA's web site. The Directory aims to list all union catalogues which are national or international in coverage, and to act as a starting point for union catalogue searching worldwide.

The Directory is an IFLA initiative which is supported by a number of sections:

- IFLA Section on Serials
- IFLA Section on Document Delivery and Interlending
- IFLA Section on Bibliography
- ISBN International Agency
- ISSN International Centre
- IFLA Core Programme for Universal Availability of Publications (UAP)

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The data has been compiled by the staff of the IFLA Office for UAP and International Lending, and is overseen by a working group of representatives from all the supporting sections and institutions. Data so far have been collected by means of a questionnaire sent to all national libraries, and other institutions known to be responsible for national union catalogues. Many more references have been included as the existence of other, perhaps more specialised, union catalogues have become known to the compilers.

Which catalogues are included? The Directory lists *national* union catalogues. This means that catalogues which cover only libraries in one region of a country, or only a certain number of libraries in a country, are generally excluded. This decision is not always clear-cut, as there are many important regional catalogues which are used by libraries outside the region, and in areas of doubt, these catalogues have been included.

The Directory also lists catalogues which are *currently* maintained, but not those which are now *closed*. Although this is usually clear-cut, a case can be made for including those catalogues which may be closed, but are still of great value because, for example, they cover a specific sector of material (such as ancient Mongolian manuscripts), where holdings information is unlikely to change over the years, and there is no alternative information available. Again, benefit of the doubt has been given, and such catalogues are included in the Directory.

Many of the catalogues listed are the union catalogues covering the major national collections of a country, e.g. *Catálogo Colectivo de Publicaciones Periódicas* (the union catalogue of serials in Spanish libraries), and are general in subject coverage. Specific catalogues, either because of their subject or the type of material, are also included, if they are national in coverage, for example the *Union Catalogue of Slavic Manuscripts in Macedonia*, which contains records of the Slavic manuscript holdings of the National Library and the Institute for Old Slavic Culture.

The records provide information about each catalogue, covering subject, date range, the size of the catalogue, and the number of contributing libraries. Also included is some information on how far ISSN's are used, and whether or not ISDS records are used for serial listings.

In order to ensure a comprehensive Directory, union catalogues are included even when they are not accessible from outside the managing library. For example, the British Library Document Supply Centre's *Union Catalogue of Books (UCB)*, which has holdings records on cards for thousands of older monographs, is listed in the Directory although it is not accessible outside the BLDSC. It is a major finding tool for older material, and it is useful to be aware of its existence. Staff at BLDSC have recently begun the retrospective conversion of UCB, but it will be some time before the records are available via the BL's OPAC97.

Of course, where union catalogues are accessible to outside users, the Directory includes full details of how to access the catalogue, and also how to obtain the material which is listed in that catalogue.

Where the union catalogue is accessible on the Internet, then the URL has been provided, and a clickable link allows you to go directly from the Directory to the union catalogue. Telnet access details are also provided where appropriate. For all records, there are also, of course, full contact details for the responsible organisation. A number of countries which responded have no national union catalogues. This information is also recorded in the Directory, to ensure as complete a listing as possible.

The Directory is still a fairly new initiative, and the listing which is now available is seen very much as a first edition, with obvious omissions, and possibly already some out of date information. A large number of updates and additional catalogues will be added in March 1999, and there are plans for further development which include:

- *Expand the Directory*  
There are gaps in both the countries which are listed, and the list of catalogues within each country. In particular, there are gaps in the listings of special subject catalogues, and international catalogues covering more than one country.
- *Improve the information which is provided, for example:*
  - access routes to the union catalogues via other systems, e.g. OCLC
  - record format and their suitability for downloading for copy cataloguing

- in the case of general catalogues, clarify the relationship between the union catalogue and the national bibliographic record
- up-to-date information on conversion projects

The future of the Directory will be dictated to some extent by the use which is made of it. The project to compile the Directory came from a clear demand from library staff for such a database, and its development fits well with the aims of the IFLA UAP Programme to initiate practical tools to improve access to publications. Statistical data on its usage is available from IFLANET, and, as with all IFLA projects, a balance needs to be sought between the resources required to maintain the service and the demand for that service. Colleagues world-wide are invited to consult the

Database, and to send feedback to the UAP Office. Reports of additions, amendments, omissions and new developments are all very welcome.

The Directory is available at  
<http://www.ifla.org/VI/2/duc>.

All communication relating to the Directory should be directed to Richard Ebdon at the following address:

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