

Chris Banuelos

Tadic/Access

12-04-11

Metadata Cataloging

There have been several standards set up in the world of cataloging. These standards help archivists and librarians to expedite the cataloging process as well as facilitate interoperability of items between institutions. These standards also help to create clear descriptions of information regarding items. For the assignment, I chose to outline some fields from three different standards; MARC 21, Dublin Core, and EBU Core. Each has its strengths and weaknesses and this essay will briefly define what, in my opinion, these are.

The MARC system was developed in the 1960's for use in the Library of Congress. Its acronym stands for Machine Readable Catalog. Therefore, it was designed to be stored in a computer database which could be accessed by a library user, rather than have them use a card catalog. Since MARC is designed for computer use, it is now used in many online catalogs, such as the OCLC (Online Computer Library Center). One advantage to MARC is its use in multiple databases. Since it is a standard that has been in use for such a long time, it has a proven track record. Also, the system has many different fields in which to enter information. These fields offer a high degree of granularity when cataloging an item. For example, there are fields not only for the title, author, etc., but fields for when and where the item was produced exist, or even how the item was acquired. Out of the three systems I analyzed, MARC has the highest degree of granularity.

However, this granularity offers a problem, as well. Entering a large amount of information into a record is time consuming for the cataloger. Also, many times the information repeats itself. Another problem I found with MARC is that the numbering system by which it delineates its fields can sometimes go out of order. For example, the number 500 represents a general note within the record. After 500, the category field numbers will continue chronologically, but then after number 511, the number 500 will reappear again. There is no apparent logic to this and seems counterintuitive to me. Juxtaposed with MARC is the Dublin Core system, which relies on far less fields to convey similar information.

The Dublin Core cataloging system was developed in Dublin, Ohio in the mid 1990's in a workshop hosted by the OCLC. Coincidentally, the OCLC is located in Dublin, Ohio. This metadata gathering system was designed to comply with many different online catalog systems. It uses a simple format featuring fifteen fields of information and a qualified system that adds 3 more fields. For this project I used the simple system. This system's advantage is in its user friendliness. Since there are only fifteen fields containing information, it is not only easy to reference, but it is easy to catalog. The fields relate information such as the title of a work, its author, year of publication, etc. without all the myriad confusing notes that MARC possesses. Similar to MARC, however, Dublin Core's strength is also its weakness.

Since Dublin Core only uses fifteen to eighteen fields, there is some information that simply does not get included. For example, when looking at the record of a film, one is unable to find what format the film is on in the collection. There is no entry for running time. And there is no indication of acquisition information. Therefore, EBU Core became my third choice for metadata harvesting systems as it is a combination of MARC and Dublin Core.

EBU Core was developed by archivists to contribute content to European film and television metadata harvesters. Its current version, 2.0, uses over twenty fields of information which can then be further broken down into subsets, creating over seventy fields in total. Therefore, EBU Core displays traits from MARC in its granularity, as well as those from Dublin Core in its specific fields. EBU Core is quite strong in its allowing of the recording of copyright information. Also, it allows for myriad details of the various formats which can be cataloged. There is a field for digital properties. It also has a field in which the metadata provider can enter their information, as well as when the item was cataloged.

Although EBU Core incorporates granularity within its twenty-one defined fields, there are still some problems with the system. For example, similar to MARC, information can overlap and be duplicated due to the granularity. Also, since it was designed specifically for film and television in Europe, it has a low capacity for interoperability with other online catalogs. This is because many other catalogs, such as MARC or Dublin Core are designed to catalog multiple items, not strictly motion picture type ones. In this sense, it's a great way to store metadata in film archives and repositories. However, it does not provide the flexibility of a system such as Dublin Core.

Out of all three of the systems I analyzed, Dublin Core is my favorite. Its fields allow for indicating what are basic yet crucial bits of metadata while at the same time since they are so limited, offers the widest range of interoperability. In other words, because there are only fifteen fields, institutions can exchange metadata much easier than if there are dozens of fields. Furthermore, the limited amount of fields means that the system can work with almost any type of item that is being cataloged, whether it is a book, a film, a painting, or a photograph. There are

drawbacks to the system in terms of granularity. For example, not knowing the running time of a film could be an issue. However, I believe this is a small sacrifice to make when speed in cataloging coupled with ease of institutional sharing is considered. Because of the lack of fields, I do not believe an organization such as the Library of Congress will ever adopt this metadata harvest standard. At the same time, smaller institutions such as libraries, not-for-profit local museums, specialized archives, and the like would benefit greatly from a system such as Dublin Core.

Bibliography

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