Thema International Steering Committee Minutes

Meeting held Wednesday 9th April 2014, 10:00–12:00 BST (UTC+1), Marlborough Room, Earls Court

Attendees:
- Mikolai Baliszewski (Nat. Lib of Poland) [obs]
- Graham Bell (EDITEUR)
- Maria Börman (Bokrondellen)
- Francesca Cacciapaglia (IE)
- Virginie Clayssen (EDITIS)
- Laurent Dervieu (Electre)
- Simon Edwards (BIC)
- Fride Fosseng (Bokbasen)
- Bente Franck-Saetervoll (Bokbasen)
- Noah Genner (Booknet Canada)
- Karina Luke (BIC)
- Renek Mendrun (ISBN Poland) [obs]
- Kim Halling Mortensen (Boghandlerforeningen) [obs]
- Maiken Thorson (Bokbasen)
- Diane Oulliet (BTLF)
- Pierre Liboiron (BTLF)
- Jesus Peraira (DILVE)
- Christer Perslov (Bokrondellen)
- Simonetta Pillon (IE)
- Chris Saynor (ONIXsuite)
- Len Vlahos (BISG)
- Michael Vogelbacker (MVB)
- Howard Willows (Nielsen) [Chair]
- Jon Windus (Nielsen)
- Olaf Winslow (Boghandlerforeningen) [obs]

1. Howard Willows (Chair) welcomed attendees to the meeting, and pointed out that this was different from all previous Thema meetings – we now have a live standard. Implementation of that standard is the next challenge, and 2014 must be the year of initial implementations. Attendees introduced themselves. HW noted the voting details as outlined in the Committee’s Terms of Reference (the TORs are available at http://www.editeur.org/153/Maintenance-and-Support).

2. HW considered the minutes of the last meeting, noting a number of matters arising:
   a. most but not all national groups have provided contact details for EDITEUR’s Thema web pages. Where these are missing, please provide them to Graham Bell (graham@editeur.org);
   b. MV asked about the status of the original Thema provisional board and technical committees. These have been combined into the single International Steering Committee, as agreed at the previous Frankfurt meeting. EDITEUR and the ISC will manage the future development of Thema in much the same way as ONIX for Books.

   The minutes were approved.

3. GB outlined the main activities since the last meeting:
a. the old Pantha website has been retired, and the URL now points to the EDItEUR website;

b. all Thema content is available via EDItEUR, and updates such as translations, mappings etc are being added as they become available. Version 1.0 was posted (Excel file, in English) on 1st November 2013, following ratification at the Frankfurt meeting. GB noted this had been downloaded over 3000 times (counting only unique IP addresses) in the first three months. Full German, Norwegian and French translations of the subject headings are now available (Excel files), together with an executive-level briefing on Thema and a basic user guide;

c. the online Thema browser at http://editeur.dyndns.org/thema has been updated with full German, Norwegian and French translations;

d. the International Publishers Association endorsed Thema (IPA Secretary General Jens Bammel: “Subject classification of books and e-books is critical for publishers and the need for a global scheme is clear, given the increasingly international nature of the book trade. A number of IPA members are now actively collaborating on Thema, which solves problems for publishers. We fully endorse the initiative.”) and distributed a version of the exec-level briefing to all its members;

e. further publicity for Thema includes LV’s article in Book Business Magazine (http://digitaleditions.napco.com/publication?i=193797) and GB’s article in Publisher’s Weekly book fair newsletter (to appear the last day of the London Fair).

HW stressed the momentum that has been built, and the difficulty of maintaining it.

4. HW began a wide-ranging discussion of various outstanding proposals for the next version of Thema, referring to a paper which had been circulated prior to the meeting. He noted that over the past two months, there had been a ‘flurry’ of requests for clarification and new suggestions, and that these continue to be received. These queries illustrate the fact that as people study the scheme for translation or implementation purposes, they naturally see ambiguities or areas where the scheme does not quite capture the whole value of existing national schemes. On the other hand, the relatively small number of suggestions imply the broad structure of Thema is well founded, and does not suggest any urgent need for updates. During 2013, there was an expectation that a 1.1 might be necessary in the first half of 2014, but this does not appear to be the case. Many of the suggestions can be handled through clarifications in the Thema user guidelines. Only a few require new codes, and none appear to be urgent.

HW noted that Thema must balance stability and responsiveness, and suggested the group considers the timetable for the first minor update.

LV noted that BISAC is updated annually, whereas (per HW) the BIC scheme is on a four-year update cycle, and GB noted that the previous meeting suggested the long-term update cycle for Thema should be between these two. BFS suggested ‘the sooner the better’ for an update of Thema, with a 1.1 around Frankfurt. MV and JP specifically supported this, and it was generally agreed.

GB also noted that there had been previous discussion of a ‘fast track’ for approval of national extensions, in particular for new groups joining Thema. LV, JW suggested such extensions could
simply be approved by the chair. BFS suggested rapid discussion and approval of national
extensions via a mailing group, and MV agreed this would be a useful way forward.

HW then summarised some of the current outstanding suggestions, to clarify how they might be
treated:

a. Use of style qualifiers for literature (eg poetry in the romantic style);
b. New codes to avoid loss of detail in the Children’s section;
c. Use of qualifiers for literature (eg ‘Spanish literature’, as distinct from literature by a
Spanish author, literature in the Spanish language, or literature set in Spain).

The first of these can be handled easily via additions to the user guidelines, but no change in the
scheme itself. The second demands only a little discussion, but requires a new 1.1 release of the
scheme. The third is more difficult, as there is a conflict between the use of the obvious
geographical qualifier for the setting or location and for ‘culturally Spanish’.

LV, MV suggested that an informal Thema technical subgroup be selected to process and
summarise issues such as this one month prior to Steering Committee meetings. Membership of
the subgroup would vary according to the issues at hand, but should not exceed around six
members (including the Chair and a representative of EDItEUR). It was agreed this was a good
way to progress the various issues around version 1.1. GB said the role of this subgroup is to
process proposals, to summarise the issues, and to recommend solutions to the main Steering
Committee. If an ISC meeting in Frankfurt aims to finalise and ratify Thema 1.1, then any
suggestions for inclusion in 1.1 must be submitted to the Chair and EDItEUR by mid-June, in
order to ensure sufficient time is available for the technical subgroup.

**ACTION GB to set up Google Group and invite members of the ISC to join**

**ACTION nominations for the technical subgroup to discuss current issues to GB by 23rd April**

**ACTION deadline for final suggestions for version 1.1 to be fixed and publicised**

5. Each national group provided an update on its activities.

a. HW noted the establishment of the UK Thema group as a subsidiary of BIC’s Metadata
committee, and that this includes a representative from Amazon. BIC has made the
decision not to update the BIC scheme from 2.1 (as would normally happen this year),
and no future updates are planned. BIC committed that should such updates prove
necessary, they would only increase the compatibility with Thema. GB noted that some
UK-based system vendors had already implemented Thema within their product
management applications. BFS asked when Nielsen would be ready to export Thema
(based on mapping from existing BIC codes), and JW confirmed this would be by end of
June;

b. MV noted the dissemination efforts in Germany, with 120 publishers attending Thema
seminars and briefings. A full German translation of the scheme has been completed.
VLB, the German Books in Print, now handles Thema subjects and qualifiers, and will
cope with ONIX including Thema codes from May. Thema classifications for all books will
be available via a mapping from the existing Warengruppen Systematik classification.
German system vendors Klopotek and Triagon have stated they’ll have Thema solutions
‘soon’;
c. In Norway, BFS and FF noted that Bokbasen has completed a full translation of the scheme, and has noted significant interest from booksellers. Bokbasen will begin exporting Thema codes (based on mapping from the existing proprietary scheme) in June. HW has delivered Thema training in Oslo to Norwegian, Swedish and Danish delegates;

d. CP and MB noted that Bakordonellen in Sweden has formed a Thema group, and is working on a Swedish translation of the scheme (expected to be complete around May). Implementation of Thema within Bakordonellen’s system is expected in October, with old titles mapped from the existing scheme – but going forward, classification will primarily use Thema;

e. The French national group is meeting quarterly, said LD and VC. It has completed a full French translation. Although French publishers are still concentrating on implementing recent updates to the CLL classification system, they are expected to implement Thema after that – and a CLL to Thema mapping is underway;

f. In French Canada, there has been little activity so far, but BTLF is studying mapping of subject codes from Thèmes Electre to Thema, and is interested in the French translation;

g. For the Italian group, SP and FC noted that it has completed a mapping from the existing CCE subject scheme to Thema, and that a full translation of Thema is underway (expected completion around July);

h. JP explained that the Spanish trade has recently completed an industry-wide change to a modified Spanish form of the BIC scheme, which involved a lot of software changes. In Spain, these codes are mandatory for ISBN registration, and are printed on the books themselves. There is no expectation of adoption of Thema in the short term, and no promotion yet (so that the message on the modified Spanish version of BIC remains clear). However, initial Thema mappings and translations are in place, and developments are expected in a couple of years.

i. The US Thema group – essentially BISG’s subjects committee – is notably diverse, including representatives from Kobo, Amazon, Barnes and Noble etc. There has been a significant about of promotion and seminars, and a mapping from the existing BISAC scheme to Thema is available (under the same licence terms as the BISAC scheme itself). This mapping will be kept up to date with changes in both schemes. At present, activity centres around coding for export products.

j. For the Canadian national group (in which BTLF participates for French Canada), NG reported that Booknet Canada’s Biblioshare service already both accepts and exports Thema codes via ONIX. Indigo, Canada’s largest bookstore chain, plans on implementing Thema in its systems in 2015. And Booknet Canada in association with BISG has developed an online BISAC to Thema translator (http://bisactothema.biblioshare.org). This is free for all to use, and provides both one-off and batch translation functions.

6. HW called for any other business.

a. MV asked for clarification about the licensing costs of Thema. GB explained that Thema – like all EDItEUR standards – is free for all to use, subject to a very permissive EDItEUR licence, and that this was one of the reasons why management of Thema was
transferred to EDItEUR. GB noted that a link to this license should be added to the Themaweb pages.

b. GB asked that a number of new national groups that are being formed be considered for provisional approval, so that representatives from these countries can take part in the discussions leading up to the agreement of version 1.1. All were approved, although the formation of a Danish group is still dependent on internal discussions within Dansk Boghandlerforeningen:
   i. Poland – RM and MB in attendance;
   ii. Denmark – OW and KHM in attendance;
   iii. Australia – the group will be facilitated by the Australian Publishers Association, (but in line with the agreed Terms of Reference for Themarnaional Groups, will also be open to participation via the Australian Booksellers Association);
   iv. Japan – the Japan Publishing Organisation will facilitate the group, in parallel within its existing ONIX group.

c. OW noted that he would seek endorsement of the scheme via the European and International Booksellers Federation (of which he is Treasurer)

7. HW announced that the next face-to-face meeting of the Themana International Steering Committee will be during the Frankfurt Book Fair.

It is likely to be 10am on Wednesday 8th October 2014, but this is dependent upon room availability in Frankfurt. Details will be confirmed as soon as possible.

Graham Bell
EDItEUR
9th April 2014