

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Purpose and Scope of UNIMARC

The primary purpose of UNIMARC is to facilitate the international exchange of bibliographic data in machine-readable form between national bibliographic agencies. UNIMARC may also be used as a model for the development of new machine-readable bibliographic formats.

The scope of UNIMARC is to specify the content designators (tags, indicators and subfield identifiers) to be assigned to bibliographic records in machine-readable form and to specify the logical and physical format of the records. It covers monographs, continuing resources, cartographic materials, music, sound recordings, graphics, projected and video materials, rare books and archival materials and electronic resources.

UNIMARC is intended to be a carrier format for exchange purposes. It does not stipulate the form, content, or record structure of the data within individual systems. UNIMARC does provide recommendations on the form and content of data when it is to be exchanged. Records are usually structured in exchange tape format as the last stage in any conversion process, after form, content, and content designation have been converted to the UNIMARC standard. Those organizations intending to use UNIMARC for data interchange will find it useful to co-ordinate their internal format content designators and field and subfield definitions with those in UNIMARC to reduce the complexity of data conversion when the records are converted into the UNIMARC exchange tape structure.

References are made where applicable to other UNIMARC formats, e.g. UNIMARC/Authorities; but no details are given. For that, users of the bibliographic format are referred to the documentation for those formats.

This Manual is both a definitive statement of the bibliographic format and a guide to its use.

## 1.2 Format Maintenance

UNIMARC is maintained by an IFLA committee, the Permanent UNIMARC Committee (PUC), for which the secretariat is the IFLA UNIMARC Core Activity. Future changes to the format will be primarily defining additional fields, subfields and coded values where needed. Proposals for change usually originate with those creating UNIMARC records or those using UNIMARC records. Changes are made only through the Permanent UNIMARC Committee. UNIMARC will not be modified to accommodate non-ISBD descriptive cataloguing practices or other practices contrary to the international standards on which it is based.

## 1.3 Definitions

The terms defined below are those used in a special sense in this Manual; terms used in their usual bibliographic sense are not defined. Definitions of ISBD data elements can be found in the ISBD documents.

**Access Point** – A name, term, code, etc. that is specially intended for searching for and retrieving a bibliographic record.

**Content Designator** – Codes identifying data elements and/or providing additional information about a data element. Content designators consist of tags, indicators and subfield identifiers.

**Control Subfield** – A subfield, defined similarly in many fields throughout the format, used to provide specific identifiers, relationships, and sources of terms and codes. Among its uses are also to provide links to both authority and bibliographic records, to specific institutions, and to other fields within a single record.

**Data Element** – The smallest unit of information that is explicitly identified. Within a variable field, a data element is identified by a subfield identifier and it forms a subfield. Within the record label, directory, and fixed-length subfields, the data elements consisting of codes are identified by their character positions.

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