

ISSN in international public administration: the case of the Publications Office of the European Union

Madeleine Kiss

European Union, Publications Office. Worked at the Central Library of the Commission in Luxembourg for 17 years. Cataloguing Services Manager at the Publications Office from 1998. Actively involved with Mrs. Pellé and Mr. Roucolle in preparing the agreement between the ISSN International Centre and the Publications Office, signed on 13 June 2002, which acknowledged the Office as an exclusive agency for the allocation of ISSN to all continuing resources produced by the institutions, bodies and EU agencies.

E-mail: madeleine.kiss@publications.europa.eu

Abstract

The assignment of ISSN numbers to continuing resources identifies them whilst ensuring the traceability of their evolution over time, for instance possible changes to the types of media on which they are made available to users. Even during this age of new media technologies and electronic dissemination, the identification of these resources remains essential. Access to electronic resources can not be satisfied with a permanent URL; it is only a mechanism to access the publication through a simple standardized string. It does not provide the necessary information regarding the identification of the publication itself. Even though publications produced by governmental bodies are mostly not for sale but rather freely made available to the citizen for no charge, their identification through the ISSN provides invaluable information to the readers. Unlike traditional publishing where titles remain more or less stable, proof of their popularity, continuous resources in the world of public administration are often updated to reflect changing events and priorities. So alongside its role of identifying key titles of serial publications, the ISSN can also be used to monitor the political and social changes over a given period.

Keywords: ISSN. European Union. New media technologies. Electronic resources.

O ISSN na administração pública internacional: o caso do escritório de publicações da União Europeia

Resumo

A atribuição do ISSN a recursos continuados é sem dúvida importante. Identifica tais recursos enquanto assegura o rastreabilidade de sua evolução no tempo, por exemplo, nas possíveis mudanças nos tipos de mídia na qual estão disponíveis aos usuários. Até mesmo durante esta era de novas tecnologias de mídia e disseminação eletrônica, a identificação não pode ser satisfeita por um URL permanente; é apenas um mecanismo de acesso à publicação por meio de uma sequência padronizada de letras. Não oferece a informação necessária em relação à identificação da publicação em si. Embora as publicações produzidas por entes governamentais não estejam em sua maioria à venda, mas sim gratuitamente disponíveis ao público sem custo, sua identificação por meio do ISSN oferece informações

valiosas aos leitores. Ao contrário de publicações tradicionais, onde o título permanece mais ou menos estável, prova de sua popularidade, recursos continuados no mundo da administração pública são geralmente atualizados para refletir mudanças de eventos e prioridades. Assim, junto com seu papel de identificação de títulos-chave de publicações seriadas, o ISSN também pode ser usado para monitorar mudanças sociais e políticas ao longo de um determinado período.

Palavras-chave: União Europeia. Novas tecnologias de mídia. Recursos eletrônicos.

El ISSN en la administración pública internacional: el caso de la Oficina de publicaciones de la Unión Europea

Resumen

La asignación del ISSN a recursos continuados es sin duda importante. Identifica tales recursos y asegura la rastreabilidad de su evolución en el tiempo, por ejemplo, en los posibles cambios en los tipos de medios de comunicación en que están disponibles a los usuarios. Incluso durante esta era de nuevas tecnologías de comunicación y diseminación electrónica, la identificación no puede ser satisfecha por una URL permanente; es sólo un mecanismo de acceso a la publicación a través de un encadenamiento estandarizado de letras. No ofrece la información necesaria en relación a la identificación de la propia publicación. A pesar de que las publicaciones producidas por organismos gubernamentales en su mayoría no están a la venta, sino más bien gratuitamente a disposición del público, su identificación a través del ISSN ofrece informaciones valiosas a los lectores. Al contrario de publicaciones tradicionales, donde el título permanece más o menos estable, prueba de su popularidad, recursos continuados en el mundo de la administración pública son generalmente actualizados para reflejar cambios de acontecimientos y prioridades. Así que, junto con su papel de identificación de títulos clave de publicaciones seriadas, el ISSN también puede ser usado para observar los cambios sociales y políticos en un determinado período.

Palabras clave: Unión Europea. Nuevas tecnologías de comunicación. Recursos electrónicos.

INTRODUCTION

The ISSN is used not only to identify a serial uniquely but also to track its evolution both in historical and social terms through, for example, changes to its title. The identification of a serial publication remains a task performed by information professionals because it requires knowledge of the appropriate cataloguing rules according to international standards.

In the world of commercial publishing, a serial title can be seen as the calling card of that serial. To have

your article published in a journal as prestigious as the *Lancet* is undoubtedly for any researcher the pinnacle of achievement, a sign of peer-recognised quality. And the title of the *Lancet*, first published on 13th June 1829, has never changed over the years for obvious reasons.

However this same stability does not necessarily apply to a public administration. For instance, the history of European construction has passed through a succession of different periods from the establishment of the European Coal and Steel

Community (1951), through to the European Communities (1958), and finally to the current European Union (2010). In addition to this evolving history, the production of publications has increased in correlation with the number of official languages of the Union.

There has also been a significant evolution in terms of European policies. For example, the magazine *Women of Europe* recognized the role of women in society. Influenced by a general social shift, a new magazine, *Gender equality magazine*, extends coverage to gender equality.

And let us not forget the proliferation of media which has also had a significant impact in the identification of continuing resources. In this context the introduction of the ISSN-L, linking the various media, has helped manage this complexity.

THE ROLE OF INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS

The Publications Office, established in 1969, is tasked with the publishing and preservation of institutional publications, bodies and agencies of the Union. The latest decision on its functioning is Decision 2009/496/EC, Euratom. There is, however, no single entity charged with ensuring the cultural preservation of these publications. Instead each library of the various institutions, bodies and agencies ensures the preservation of its own output.

Until June 2002, the International Centre ISSN was responsible for assigning ISSN numbers (including the production of the related bibliographic

records) to the entire editorial production of continuous publications of the European Union. This task was very difficult, however, as the Centre did not always receive the voucher copies required to enable it to carry out its responsibilities fully (most importantly for the production of the bibliographic records); moreover ISSN requests were often made directly to the various national depository libraries.

However the situation changed when in 1999 the Publications Office was formally requested to start cataloguing at source all institutional publications using the MARC format. From that moment on the Publications Office could become an agency for assigning ISSN and ISBN to its editorial production as it was able to produce standardized records and enable access to its production.

But there remained a real challenge ahead for the work undertaken by a team of librarians at the Office, in collaboration with the ISSN Centre. The allocation of new ISSN numbers and producing the corresponding bibliographic records did not present any particular difficulty in itself. Rather the issue came with the retrospective assignment of ISSN numbers to old collections which were scattered in many different places and were very difficult to track down. Nevertheless, since becoming an ISSN centre for the publications of the European Union, the Publications Office has been autonomous in its assignment of ISSN.

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

Since the beginning of the existence of what is now known as the European Union, the application

of successive treaties has had a secondary impact on the editorial production. The establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community saw the appearance of a range of publications whose contents have remained stable over the years, but which have nevertheless undergone structural and linguistic changes since the start.

Among the best-known publications one can mention the *Rapport général sur les activités* (from 1973 known as the *General report on the activities* in English) and the *Bulletin mensuel d'information de la Communauté européenne du charbon et de l'acier* which became over time the *Bulletin of the European Union*. All institutions, bodies, offices and agencies publish their general report or activities, some also publishing more specific activities such as the *Reports of cases of the tribunals of the Court of Justice*.

Figure 1 - Reports of cases of the tribunals of the Court of Justice in different languages



An interesting case is that of Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Union that was – and remains – one of the most prolific publishers since the start of European integration. Through its output it is possible to follow the evolution of

specific EU policies through, for example, the publication of statistics on coal until 1985, and those relating to the steel industry up until the decline of this economic activity in the 2000s.

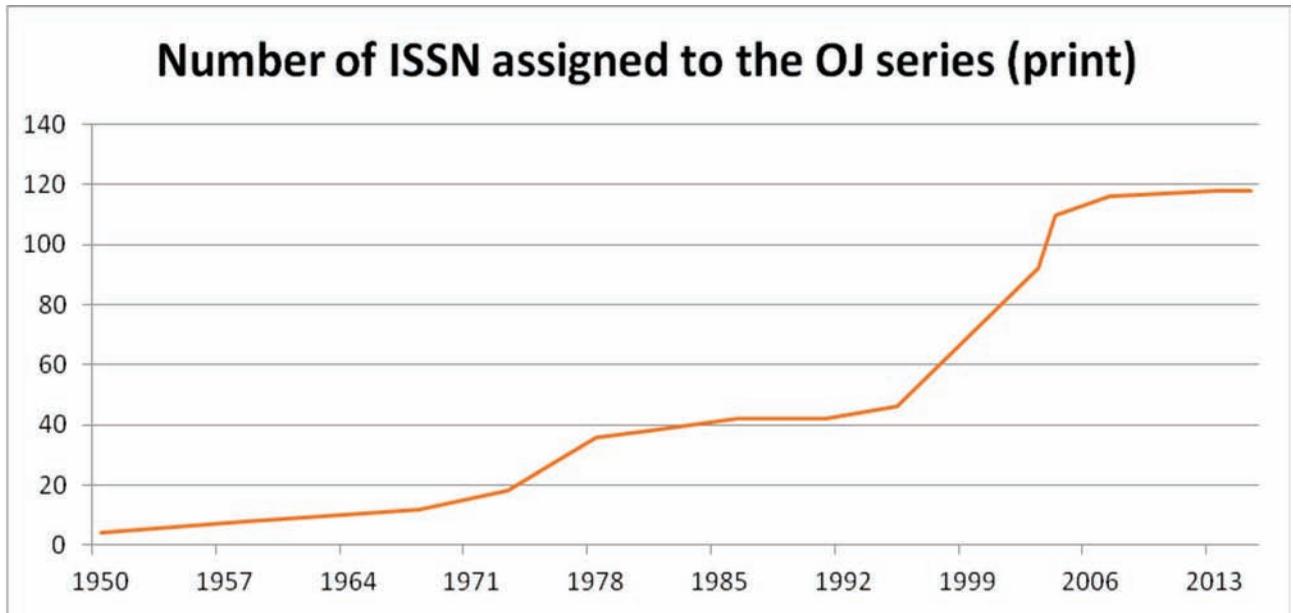
It would be impossible to detail in this article all the structural and linguistic developments over the years, especially when you consider that in 1952 only 5 ISSN were allocated (4 of these for the Official Journal) and yet today there are more than 8,000 ISSN, both closed and current, covering all types of support. So instead, given that its production is a mandated task assigned to the Publications Office, I will concentrate in this article on analysing one specific illustrative example, that of the Official Journal (OJ), from its inception to the present day.

As mentioned earlier, in 1952 there were four ISSN which identified the printed version of the Official Journal in the initial four official languages. Today there are over 100 ISSN that identify the different series of the Official Journal in their various languages/formats.

Graph 1 shows the evolution of the editorial production of the series of the Official Journal in print. Whilst it has remained relatively stable between 1952 and 2014, the trend illustrates the impact of the increase in the number of official languages at each enlargement with its arrival of new member states.

For more detailed information, the Interinstitutional Style Guide managed by the Publications Office provides a complete history of the evolution of the Official Journal (EUROPEAN UNION, 2015).

Graph 1 - Number of ISSN assigned to the OJ series (print)



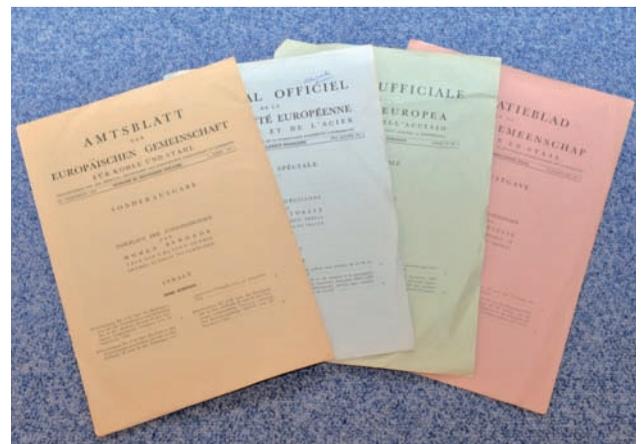
STRUCTURAL EVOLUTION OF THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL

Following the entry into force of the European Coal and Steel Community Treaty (ECSC Treaty), an official journal was created for the publication of notices, decisions, etc. and was published on a daily basis in print.

The first Official Journal of the European Coal and Steel Community was published on 30th December 1950 in four languages: German, French, Italian and Dutch. A colour code was used to distinguish between the editions of the various languages (respectively yellow, blue, green and orange).

The existence of official languages for the European Union has led to a unique feature in the world of publishing, that of simultaneous publication in all official languages as dictated by the various enlargements which have led to an increase in the number of member states. This is further discussed in Section.

Figure 2 - First edition of the Official Journal of the European Coal and Steel Community



FIRST CHANGE OF TITLE

Following the entry into force of two further treaties, the European Economic Community Treaty (EEC Treaty) and the Euratom Treaty, on 1st January 1958, the title of the Official Journal was modified, becoming the Official Journal of the European Communities. This new Official

Journal was published for the first time on 20th April 1958.

Given the specific importance of certain Community policies, it was felt that there was a need to produce special series dedicated to certain of these policies. And so, as the common agricultural policy was considered to be one of the political *beacons* for many years, a separate supplement to the Official Journal was published between 1962 and 1967, initially in four different language versions, and subsequently in a single publication containing all four language versions. Later these acts were included in the Official Journal C series.

DISTINCT SERIES

In 1968 the Official Journal was produced in several distinct series that are maintained to this day:

a) L series (Legislation) (EUROPEAN UNION a, 2015) contains mainly the legislative acts and others acts such as agreements or other acts issued from other bodies; after the Lisbon Treaty L series contains as well non-legislative acts. The first Official Journal, L series was published on 3rd January 1968.

b) C series (Information and Notices) (EUROPEAN UNION b, 2015) contains a variety of documents that do not belong to the L series. The first Official Journal C series was published on 12 January 1968. In French the letter C means *Communications et Informations*; in 1968 the English-speaking member states had not yet joined the European Union and so the letter C taken from the French has been kept as the abbreviation.

Subsequently two new sub-series were created to address specific needs.

i. In 1991, a new subseries C ... A (Annex) was created, reserved for the publication of open competitions, vacancy notices and common catalogues (varieties of agricultural species, etc.).

ii. As of 31 August 1991, the subseries C ... E (Electronic) was created, as an electronic version of the Official Journal containing the minutes and the texts adopted by the European Parliament and also other acts from the Council; there was never a print version of this series made available. However the specific publication *Debates of the European Parliament* continued in print until 1999, and on CD-ROM until 2004.

c) S series (Supplement) contains the public procurement notices. It was first published on 7th January 1978 and became available in electronic form on TED (Tenders Electronic Daily) in 1986, then on CD-ROM in 1997.

In addition to these daily series, alphabetic and methodological tables were published in support of the Official Journal.

SECOND CHANGE OF TITLE

Following the entry into force of the Treaty of Nice on 1st February 2003, the Official Journal was renamed *Official Journal of the European Union*.

LINGUISTIC EVOLUTION

The diversity of official languages within the European Union is unique in the world of editorial

production. Indeed, the publication of the Official Journal must appear in all the official languages, although the Irish and Maltese languages are treated as special cases. These two languages are used mainly for the publication of primary law, that is to say the treaties, but may occasionally be produced for secondary legislation.

There were six founding countries of the European Coal and Steel Community. The current number of member states of the European Union now stands at 28 and their number may well increase if one takes into consideration the fact that there are five applications for membership which are currently in the pipeline.

Along with the increase in member states, with successive enlargements, the number of official languages has also increased from 4 to the current 24 languages. In the case of the Official Journal, until 2004, the different language versions were represented by a colour code, for example pink for English. However at a certain point in time this became too difficult to continue.

Figure 3 - **The diversity of linguistic versions for the Official Journal before 2004**



Given the specific requirements of such a multilingual editorial production within the European Union,

I believe it would be useful to describe in more detail the various enlargement phases and to assess their impact on the editorial production.

1952 - 1973

The six founding states of the European Coal and Steel Community were Germany, Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Italy and the Netherlands. At this point in time, the official languages of the Community were the official languages of those states.

It was not until 1958 that the language regime was confirmed by a Council Regulation on the basis of Article 290 of the EC Treaty (now Article 342 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union) and Article 190 of the Euratom Treaty (EUROPEAN UNION c, 2015).

On the basis of this treaty, the Council adopted Regulation No 1, determining the languages to be used in the European Economic Community. This has been amended with each subsequent act of accession.

1973 FIRST ENLARGEMENT

In 1973, the accession of Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom increased the number of official languages from four to six: adding Danish and English to the existing official languages. The recognition of the Irish language as an official language was only made on 1st January 2007 and applies only to publications of primary law. This transitional derogation for Ireland has been extended to the 31st December 2016.

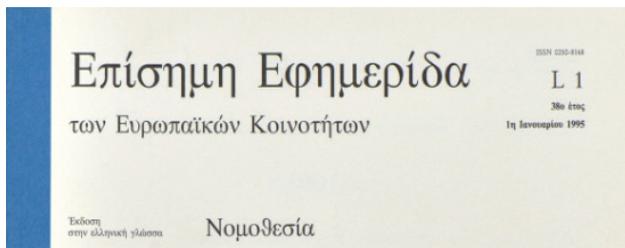
Figure 4 - The addition of Danish and English to the L & C series of the Official Journal. L series : Legislation; C series : Institutions, bodies and agencies



1981 SECOND ENLARGEMENT

In 1981, Greece joined the European Community. The introduction of a new character script had important consequences for the production chains which previously only had to deal with Latin characters. With this enlargement the number of official languages increased to seven.

Figure 5 - The first Official Journal, Series L, in Greek



1986 THIRD ENLARGEMENT

In 1986, Spain and Portugal joined the European Community. Although the editorial production was impacted by the addition of two new official languages, there were no other major issues related to this enlargement. The number of official languages increased from seven to nine.

1995 FOURTH ENLARGEMENT

The enlargement of Austria, Finland and Sweden added two additional official languages to the nine already existing, resulting in 11 languages in common use and 12 languages for primary law, with Irish being published on an exceptional basis. This would be the last time that the Official Journal would be colour-coded to distinguish between the different language editions.

Figure 6 - The 12 official languages of the European Union



2004 - 2007 FIFTH AND SIXTH ENLARGEMENTS

In 2004, the accession of ten new member states and then in 2007 the addition of a further two states brought the overall total of member states to 27. Furthermore the accession of Bulgaria meant the addition of a new script, Cyrillic.

Except in the case of compulsory multilingual production, these extensions had an impact on the hitherto truly multilingual nature of the editorial production, linked to the increased demands on the

translation services, with related delays and costs. The number of translations routinely published dropped and are now in many cases limited to three *driver* languages: German, English, French, and in some cases only English. This however is not the case for the Official Journal which continues to be published in all the official languages.

2013 - SEVENTH ENLARGEMENT

In 2013 Croatia joined the EU. With this latest enlargement the Union is now composed of 28 member states and has 24 official languages.

Following these successive enlargements and due to the lack of appropriate colours, the colour-coding for the different language versions was abandoned in favour of a single colour, blue, the colour of the Union.

Figure 7 - The Official Journal after the latest enlargement.



THE MULTIPLICATION OF MEDIA

The evolution of information technology has led to the proliferation of media in the global editorial

production. Printed output is now complemented by the production of both off- and on-line products. The Publications Office has of course been influenced by this trend. The L and C series (and sub-series C) of the Official Journal were produced in parallel on microfiche and magnetic tapes and become available online in 1981 via the old database CELEX, now EUR-Lex, once again available in all language versions.

Figure 8 - The website EUR-Lex (EUROPEAN UNION d, 2015)



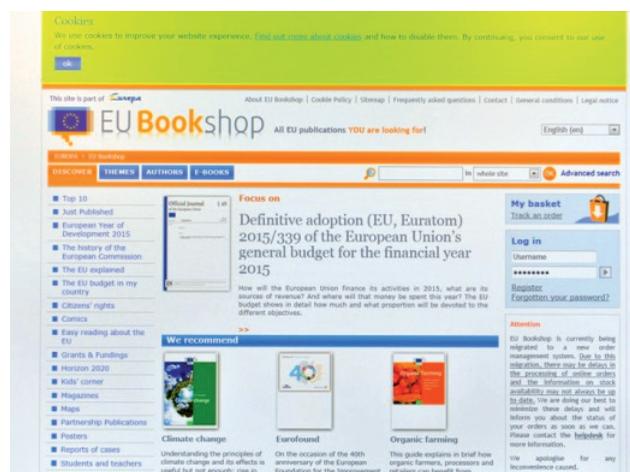
In addition to its print version, the S series of the Official Journal was subsequently published as a CD-ROM and also made available online through its website TED (Tender Electronic Daily) in 1986.

Figure 9 - The S series of the Official Journal on CD-ROM.



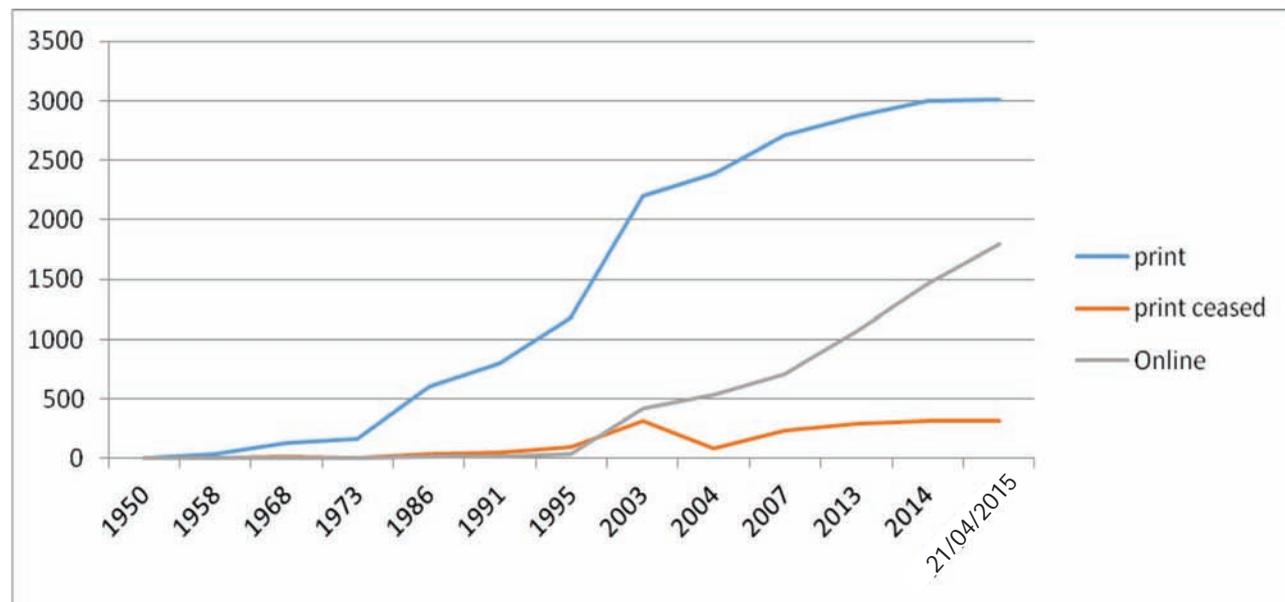
The trend now is clearly to make the whole publishing production of the EU available online via specific sites such as the two mentioned above, or through the EU Bookshop site for general publications, as other media forms are phased out.

Figure 10 - EU Bookshop (EUROPEAN UNION e, 2015)



The fact that content can be made available so easily through sites on the internet has a direct impact on the editorial production of the EU as it can more easily be carried out without necessarily passing

Graph 2 – The evolution of both print and online formats



by the Publications Office. This can potentially lead to a lack of traceability. It becomes more difficult to identify and make available editorial content which is simply put up on a website. So it is primarily through its role as a registration agency for international identifiers such as ISSN, ISBN and DOI, which falls within its exclusive competence, that the Publications Office continues to be able to provide a comprehensive overview of, and access to, the editorial output of the EU.

In the particular case of ISSN-identified publications, the editorial production on paper is being systematically replaced by an online version. However, as printed copies can still be produced on request from the available PDF, the ISSN assigned to the printed versions are not closed.

The graphic below illustrates the evolution of both the printed and online versions during this period.

Although a significant proportion of printed publications continue to be produced in parallel

with online versions, the fact remains that the latter is increasing and the former decreasing.

Thanks to the implementation of the ISSN-L, links can be made between these formats which results in lighter work for librarians since now the ISSN-L can point to all available media.

CONCLUSION

Faced with an information society in constant flux where resources are made accessible rapidly, more and more in an electronic format, the publishing world has adapted. In public administration, titles have evolved with policies and through the application of the MARC21 format, it has been mostly possible to monitor these developments by allowing users to access resources or to be informed about what has happened to them.

It is only with hindsight that the work of professionals is appreciated. To enable them to do their work effectively, it is essential to implement measures to facilitate the deposit of publications in order to have an exhaustive coverage, to make available and to preserve all these resources.

The ISSN remains an essential identifier used throughout the world to identify continuous resources; it is the guarantee of a permanent monitoring of publications. With the introduction of ISSN-L it also shows its adaptability to technological change.

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