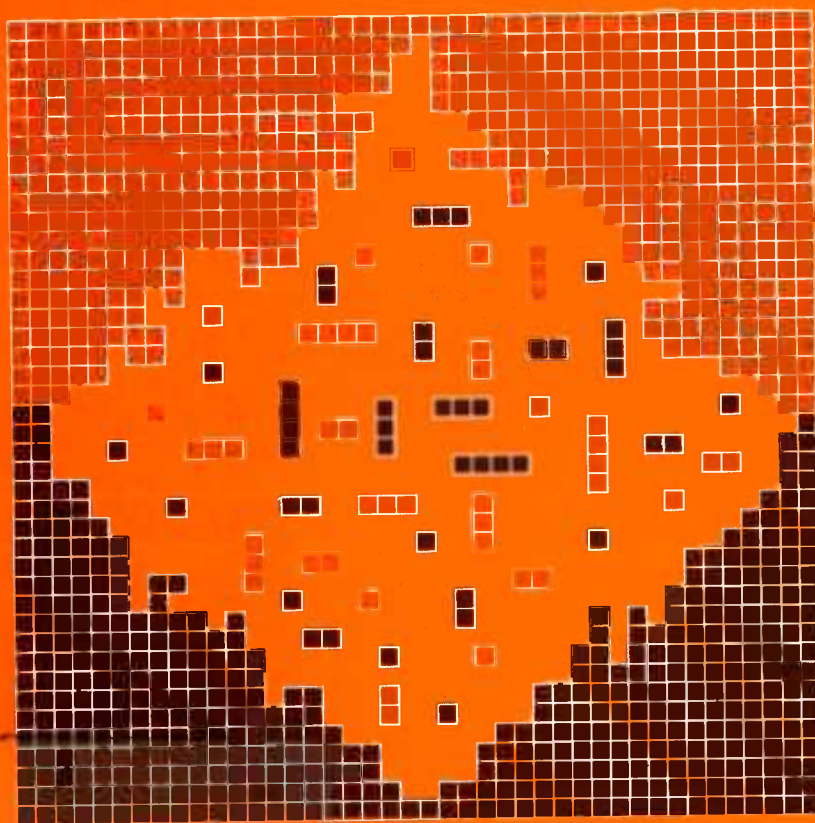

International Cooperative Information Systems

Proceedings of a seminar held in Vienna, Austria, 9-13 July 1979



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Cooperation of the International Atomic Energy Agency
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The International Nuclear Information System (INIS)

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1980 is the 10th anniversary of INIS. John Woolston was here at the beginning and I'm going to be here next year at the 10th anniversary so at this Seminar we've got a 10-year span covered. It is quite a milestone, I think, because it was an undertaking that was ambitious to say the least and it has been extremely successful. What I would like to do is to share my views on why the program has been successful. I think the first reason goes back to the initiators. I looked through the files and picked out the 1968 report of the INIS study team; a few lines from the chapter called Basic Assumptions indicate that this group of people designing something that hadn't been tried before included some very wise people indeed:

The main feature of INIS is that the international control of the literature of nuclear science should be based on maximum decentralization consistent with reasonable efficiency....To maximize the transfer of information there must be some central control and administration....Clearly the rules for bibliographic description must be unequivocal and uniformly applicable, of consistency, so that large and small countries with widely varying traditions of documentation can work to one system....The discretion for the inclusion or exclusion of any item rests entirely with each national centre....The aim must be to arrive at an agreed form for input both in terms of bibliographical elements and file structure so that tapes can be merged with a minimum of conversion....INIS has a major responsibility to make all of the literature of its mission, the nuclear sciences, available to all of its Members so as to supplement present bilateral arrangements. In fact, guaranteed access to the documents, as hard copy or microcopy, that are included in the tapes or printed lists is a basic function of this service.

Now those were some of the basic assumptions that were decided upon in the original design and they have certainly stood the test of time.

In 1975 the second INIS advisory committee met. They thought the guiding principles should be: first to maintain the high quality of INIS; to introduce changes infrequently and only after they had been tested carefully to ensure their smooth introduction; to continue to evaluate developments in information processing technology so that those that improve the effectiveness of INIS can be incorporated; and to take into account the need to observe international standards when changes are introduced and to ensure that INIS does not get out of step with what is being done worldwide. Once again, those guiding principles stood the test of time; the third advisory committee, which met in February of this year, endorsed

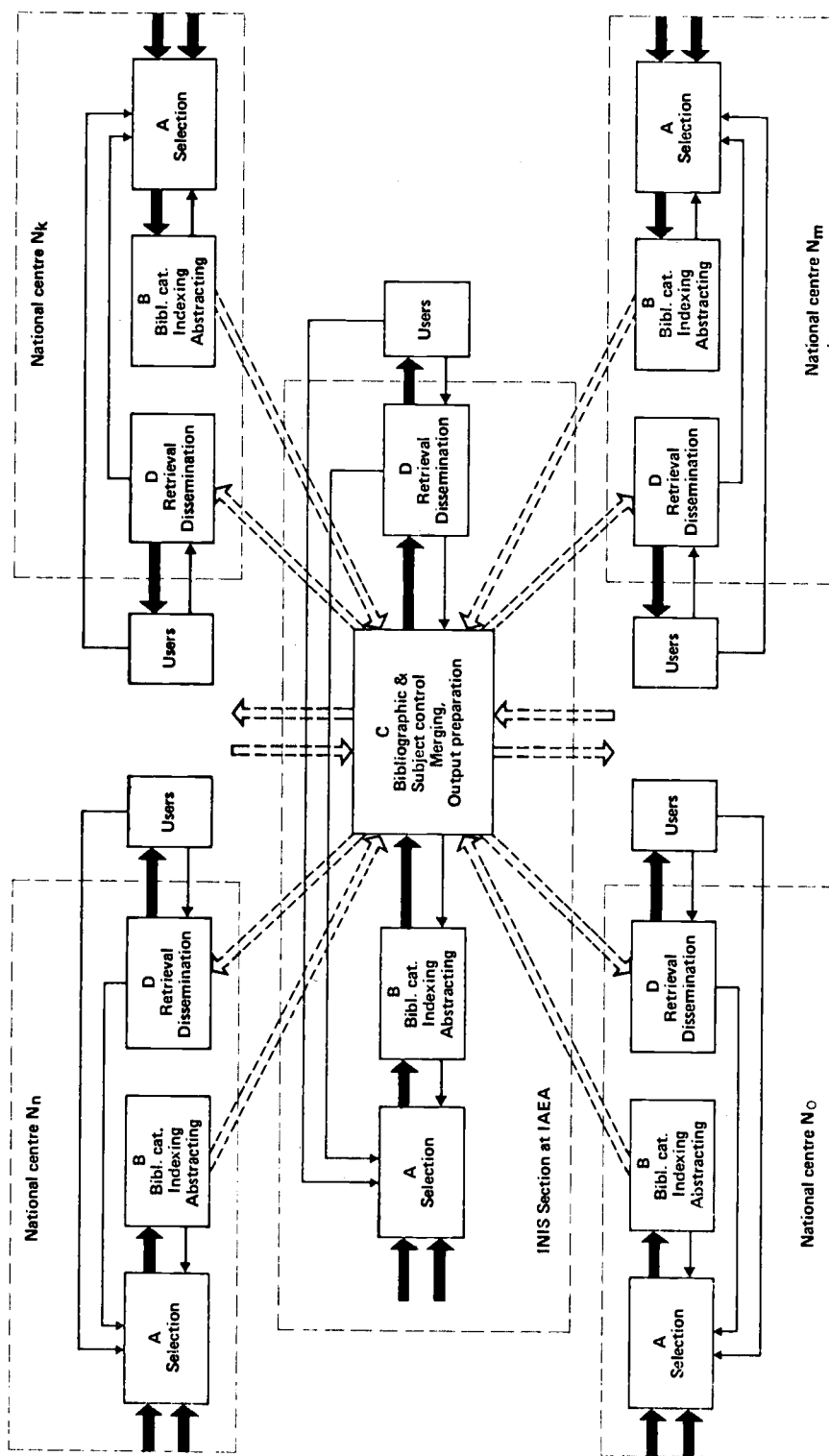


Fig. 1 General organization of INIS operations (courtesy A.G. Romanenko, INIS).

those same principles. So INIS got off to a good start. Its designers seemed to know what they were doing and to have conceived a good solid approach to an international information system.

But let me look at INIS from today's perspective. What makes the system successful? There are many factors contributing to success in the current INIS set-up. Decentralized input is one; the advantages include comprehensive, non-

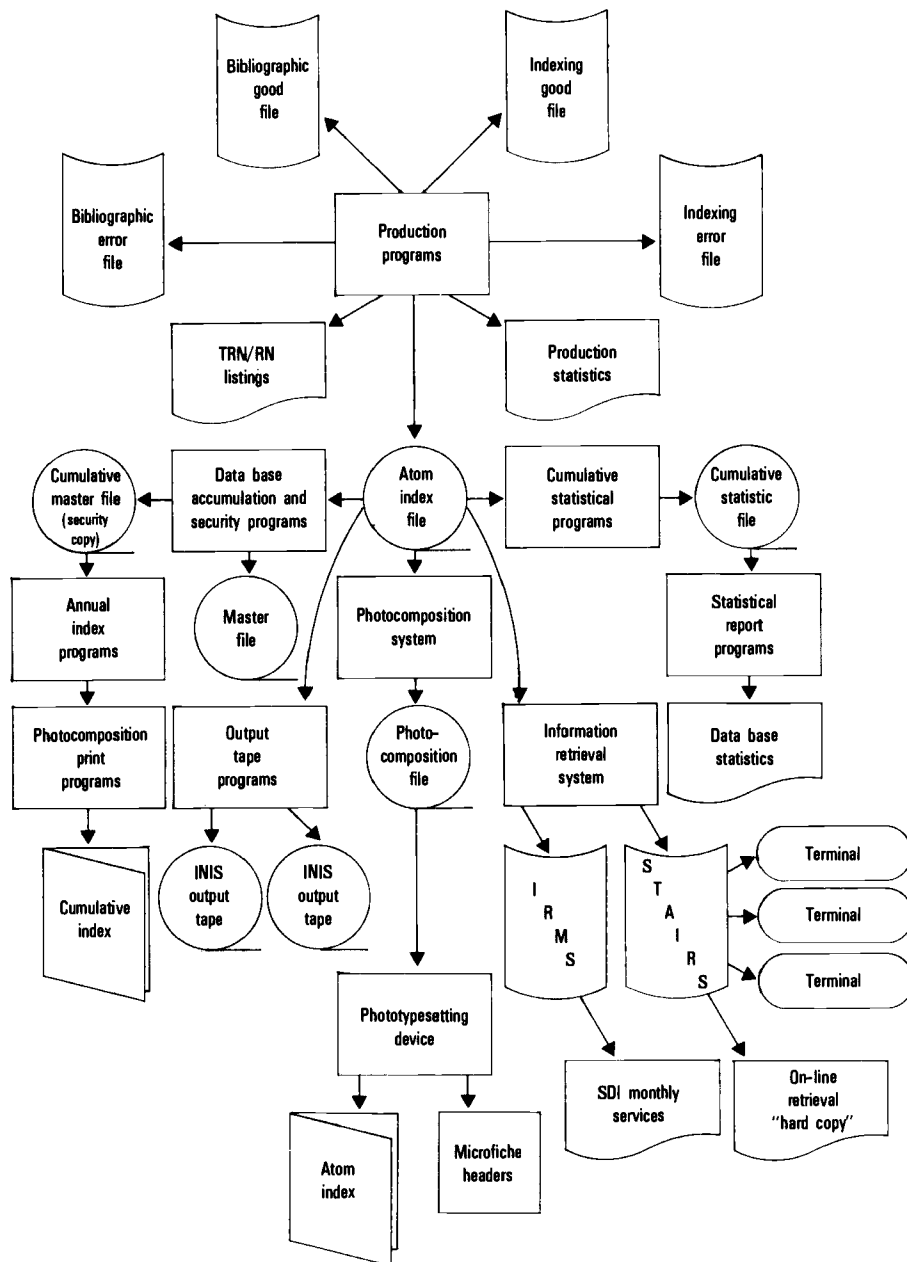


Fig. 2. INIS output (courtesy A.G. Romanenko, INIS).

duplicating coverage, involvement by the member states of the International Atomic Energy Agency, and an interest in the success of the program. To have successful decentralized input, however, you need to do two things: you need to prepare detailed guidelines to the member states and to provide training. A great deal of work must be done to produce documented instructions on how the inputs must be submitted, and the written documentation needs to be supplemented with training. Also, there must be adequate means for input and feedback between the inputting centres and the central Secretariat. The communications are essential so that when some of the guidelines are not observed people can be informed immediately and measures taken to correct problems. The central operations of INIS are linked with member states through national centres, each with an INIS liaison officer (Fig. 1).

The second factor in the success of the program is the "territorial formula." There are two things involved: the rights of the member states as an important return for the input that they send to the system and the responsibility of the members to submit the nuclear literature produced in their country. They have full rights to the entire file, to the entire data base, within their country. The output from INIS comprises magnetic tapes, a bimonthly abstracting journal *Atomindex*, and microfiche (Fig. 2). An INIS liaison officer has been appointed in each country, and any exploitation, any use of the INIS data base, has to be approved by the officer. Within their country, the liaison officers have full control over the use of the INIS data base. These rights and responsibilities seem to have been balanced well, and the cooperation has always been excellent, certainly an important aspect of the program.

The third factor in the success is the strong central management, which is very responsive to the member states through the liaison officers. INIS liaison officers meet once a year, and during their meeting central staff listen carefully. We don't do anything to the INIS program — we don't make any changes — without notifying the liaison officers and giving them a chance to respond to the proposed changes. This means that sometimes it takes a long time to introduce a new change; the input from member states is essential because INIS is their system. That's where the users are.

Another factor is an intangible one. There's a tremendous spirit of goodwill and cooperation in the INIS program. The liaison officers are very interested in doing a good job, in submitting good input. They want to make the system work. They also want to make effective use of the output. They are very interested in working with the Secretariat to expand their services to their users. This goodwill and cooperation is very important because that's where much of the motivation is generated.