Code List Representation FAQ (first draft)

Anthony B. Coates, abcoates@mileywatts.com

- **Q: What is a code list representation, and how does it differ from a code list?**
A: A code list in its simplest form is just a set of strings which each represent an item or idea. The OASIS code list representation is not just a simple list of strings. It is a complete description of a code list, including not only the codes, but also alternate codes, descriptions of the codes, and any other data that is associated with the codes. The OASIS code list representation also describes how new code lists are derived from existing code lists, so that the derivation is repeatable, automatable and auditable.

- **Q: How do I use the code list representation XML to validate one or more codes in an XML file, a database table, or in an application?**
A: The OASIS code list representation XML is not a code validation system, and is independent of any specific code validation technique or software. It simply represents code list data in a format that can be used by multiple code list validation systems. It is hoped that 3rd parties will produce software which processes the code list representation XML to produce run-time validation formats such as W3C XML Schema enumerations, programming language enumerations, database code lookup tables, ebRIM repository code list structures, etc.

- **Q: Why not use W3C XML Schema enumerations as the code list representation format?**
A: Because it is not a neutral format for code lists. It is designed as a control language for XML validation engines, and is designed to be able to represent complex structures that are not related to code lists. The aim of the OASIS Code List Representation TC is to produce a neutral XML format for codifying and transmitting information about code lists.

- **Q: Why not use the ebRIM hierarchical code list format as the code list representation format?**
A: Because it is not a neutral format for code lists. It is a format for representing information as stored in ebRIM repositories, and is designed to be able to represent complex structures that are not related to code lists. The aim of the OASIS Code List Representation TC is to produce a neutral XML format for codifying and transmitting information about code lists.

- **Q: How are structured codes represented? Can the code list representation describe how to separate a structured code into its individual parts? Can the code list representation describe the semantics (interpretation) of the individual parts?**
  A: The OASIS code list representation treats all codes as opaque and unstructured, so there is no specific support for structured codes. Unambiguously describing how arbitrary structured codes are decomposed into their constituent parts is not a simple problem, and problems can arise if different software implementations do not implement the decomposition absolutely identically. What is recommended when using the OASIS code list representation XML with structured codes is that the constituent parts of each structured code should be included as associated data for the code, so that the codes do not have to be separately decomposed by each user. Arbitrary semantic information can also be associated with each structured code or with each decomposed part of a structured code.