

[*RDA in the Wider World*](#)

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RDA, Cooperation in the Cultural and Heritage Sector - First Approaches in the German-Speaking Countries

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Abstract:

Austria, Germany and German-speaking Switzerland have implemented RDA for cataloguing. The transition has been prepared in an extensive cooperative project in the three countries over the past three years.

The objective of the first step has been the implementation of RDA in libraries and library networks. As a next step, the experts have already started to consider the cataloguing of special materials such as rare books and have joined together to create new working groups. These already extend beyond the circle of libraries; representatives from other cultural institutions are also taking part. Existing cataloguing codes and standards in the archive and museum area will be aligned with RDA for the first time. Currently, RDA contains no or not enough rules for the cataloguing of special materials such as literary archives, rare books and manuscripts; however these are being introduced in the international review process. Working Groups for “Literary Archives and Autographs”, “Rare Books”, “Graphic Materials” and “Manuscripts” are or will be set up.

Those working groups for special cataloguing build a bridge between the communities. The goal is not the full integration of the existing non-librarian rules in RDA. We aim for guidelines that are interoperable with RDA. The distinction between the descriptive and the access point part of the rules seems necessary here. The Gemeinsame Normdatei, GND, a cooperative authority file, controls the access points and already applies RDA.

The conceptual work of the working groups concerns the entity work, the titles, the hierarchies and the RDA implementation scenarios. The cataloguing of unique objects demands a new definition of the entity work and the delimitation of the other WEMI-entities. The harmonization of standards for archives or museums with RDA requires that the librarian title concept be revised. In archival cataloguing models, the provenance of the items is important. The harmonization of the ISAD(G) provenance model (hierarchical description) with the RDA instructions to series/items is a desire. The development of RDA implementations scenarios for collections of museums and archives would be useful.

The paper shows how the RDA project is organised in the German speaking countries. It presents the first experiences with RDA cataloguing. The paper reports on the working groups concerned with the cataloguing of special materials. It also provides an insight into how the cooperation with galleries, archives and museums is organised with respect to RDA.

Keywords: RDA, Libraries, Museums, Archives, GLAM

Introduction

The project for the implementation of the international standard Resource Description and Access (RDA) to libraries in Germany, Austria, and German-speaking Switzerland was completed at the end of 2015 after running for just three years. This project was carried out cooperatively with 16 partners and its success was due to no small extent to the libraries' long tradition of using common standards, despite the cultural diversity of the countries involved. A major asset in implementing such a project was the fact that the German-speaking countries have had a common library policy body for more than fifteen years in the form of the Committee for Library Standards in which national libraries, library networks, public libraries, and special libraries are all represented at the managerial level. From the outset, the Committee for Library Standards has concerned itself with the adoption of international standards by libraries and library networks in the German-speaking countries and, in the autumn of 2011 after a long period of preparation, resolved to launch a project for implementing the RDA standard and to oversee the process as the governing body. This resolution was put into action in July 2012 with the establishment of a dedicated RDA working group which reports directly to the Committee for Library Standards. The German National Library (Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, DNB) assumed responsibility for managing and organising the project.

A decision with such far-reaching implications as the adoption of a new code for the cataloguing of resources represents a great challenge for all concerned. It is not only technical factors such as improved recording structures, faster and therefore cheaper processes, or the adjustment to changed conditions which need to be taken into consideration here. Inevitably such a change also involves dispensing with familiar aspects, aspects which appear to function perfectly well, and also some highly popular aspects. In addition, if such a change is to take place within a linguistic and cultural environment which is unfamiliar to many, then this places major demands on all involved.

Cataloguing codes in the German-speaking countries

Cultural policy in the German-speaking countries is heterogeneous in nature, which should be taken into consideration when analysing the situation in the libraries. Library cataloguing in Germany for example is effected to this day both by the German National Library and also at the regional level by the library networks.

The "Instruktionen für die alphabetischen Kataloge der preussischen Bibliotheken und für den preussischen Gesamtkatalog" ("Instructions for the alphabetical catalogues of the

Prussian libraries and for the complete Prussian catalogue") was published in 1899 by the Royal Prussian Library as the first bibliographic cataloguing code to claim validity for the entire German-speaking area.

The development of the rules for descriptive cataloguing (RAK - "Regeln für die alphabetische Katalogisierung") in the 1970s represented the systematic start of modern cataloguing based on electronic data processing, aimed at facilitating the exchange and re-use of the data. A new aspect of this code was its user-orientation and the separation into basic and special rules. Here a distinction was made between use in academic and public libraries, and separate editions were published for special areas, e.g. "RAK-Musik".

The rules for subject cataloguing (RSWK - "Regeln für den Schlagwortkatalog") developed in the 1980s for subject indexing emphasised the importance of labour division and cooperation as a means of improving the library services. This solution was then subsequently pursued by libraries and library networks for the German-speaking countries.

The situation in the German-speaking countries is not at all comparable for archives and museums. There is no organisational structure to build up a common project and there is no tradition for common rules or standards. In the museum community especially, nearly every institution is working with its own rules or standards to describe its collections.

Translation into German

The introduction of RDA in the German-speaking area was the first time that the standard RDA was implemented in a non-Anglo-American linguistic and cultural environment. A key precondition for using the cataloguing code was having the RDA standard available both in English and in a German translation. When it was decided to change to the new cataloguing code it was also resolved to make the work environment available in German. The Office for Library Standards at the DNB was tasked with preparing an authorised translation of the code text into German.

At the end of November 2012 the German translation of the RDA cataloguing code text was made available free of charge on the DNB's website for one year in the form of PDF files and the German text and a German user interface were made available in mid-May 2013 in the RDA Toolkit.

During the project period, the working group RDA in the German-speaking countries reviewed the German version permanently for its suitability and corrected the text or added examples if necessary.

In 2015, the Library Network of German-speaking Switzerland provided a French translation of the D-A-CH¹ policy statements.

International cooperation

The work process in the RDA project is informed at the technical level by input from various international bodies. Worthy of mention here is the work produced by the IFLA Cataloguing Section², the RDA Steering Committee (RSC)³ and the European RDA Interest Group⁴ (EURIG). Cooperation-based and consensus-oriented work is the key to success, although this involves reconciling a number of highly distinct approaches in the different cultures.

¹ D-A-CH is the acronym of Germany, Austria and Switzerland. It is commonly used to designate these German speaking countries.

² <http://www.ifla.org/cataloguing>

³ <http://www.rda-rsc.org>

⁴ <http://www.slainte.org.uk/eurig/index.htm>

The German National Library is a member of the RSC since 2012; there it has represented the interests of the library community in the German-speaking countries over the past years. Since 2016, due to the new strategic organisation of the RSC and the RDA Board, the German National Library provides the European Regional Representative to the RSC.

RDA Project – an overview

Following the decision of the Committee for Library Standards, the cooperative RDA project started in summer 2012. In the next three years many working groups and sub working groups started up their work. The main objective of this work was a cooperative approach of all partners to ensure and maintain the traditional and broad exchange of metadata after the implementation of RDA.

As a first step RDA has been implemented for the Integrated Authority file (GND) in mid 2015. Training sessions were provided in the months before in all partner institutions.

For descriptive cataloguing, the RDA working group worked out the policy statement for the implementation in the D-A-CH community. The policy statement is accessible in the RDA Toolkit since summer 2014. Furthermore, a standard set of elements including RDA core elements and additional elements has been worked out and was defined as a mandatory element set. In a last step the three national libraries completed the standard set of elements with additional agreements for national libraries. All working documents are accessible in a free wiki space RDA-Info-Wiki⁵.

From September 2015 until the end of the year a big part of the library community in Austria, Germany and German-speaking Switzerland went to school. The starting basis for these lessons were the training materials worked out in a cooperate process from all project partners. The training materials are available at a public wiki space⁶. Before starting the training, all institutions instructed RDA trainers. For instance, in the German National Library 35 colleagues started in summer 2015 to work with the training materials, prepared teaching sessions and got additional didactical and methodical support.

In a transition period from October 2015 until January 2016, all 16 partners of the RDA project switched to RDA. Institutions from outside the project now begin to start with the implementation process and are supported by the German National Library especially in the range of RDA training.

An essential element of the work with RDA is the RDA Toolkit. Therefore a consortial licence for all libraries and other cultural institutions in Germany, Austria and Switzerland is provided. It applies for all institutions in the three countries but also for institutions from beyond D-A-CH with head offices in D-A-CH (e.g. Goethe-Institut) but does not apply for commercial institutions. The German National Library is the consortium leader and manager.

Special and rare materials

Already in the first implementation phase from 2012 to 2015 the German-speaking community had a focus on special and rare materials and tried to start cooperation with archives and museums. A joint working group between libraries and literary archives started in 2014. In 2015 a group for old and rare books followed and in 2016 a working group concerned with graphic and other visual material will be organized.

⁵ <https://wiki.dnb.de/display/RDAINFO/RDA>

⁶ <https://wiki.dnb.de/display/RDAINFO/Schulungen>

The goal of these working groups is not to bring all the existing rules into the RDA Toolkit but to build up alignments between existing rules for those materials and RDA. This approach means to continue to use other standards than RDA to describe the collections and made them compatible with RDA.

What exactly does this approach mean? An example: In the German-speaking community literary archives work with the Rules for Literary Estates and Autographs Rules (RNA)⁷. The RNA are optimized for the need of literary archives in the German language context to describe the estates and the personal papers of authors. The standard is easy to use even for untrained staff and there is a strong need to keep the current RNA standard in the same way. Therefore a complete merge of the RNA into RDA is not expedient.

The guidelines of the literary archives should be interoperable with RDA and any contradiction to RDA should be avoided. The access points are constructed according to RDA guidelines and according to the rules of the Integrated Authority File (GND). As a first step, the working group makes a complete review of the standard RNA and eliminates all rules which are already provided in RDA. Those rules which are not covered by RDA will remain in the RNA and a link will be made to them from the RDA Toolkit.

In general the main objective of all working groups for special materials is not a full integration of special rules. Quite the contrary: a full integration would inflate the RDA Toolkit and the better way would be cross-references between the RDA Toolkit and the guidelines and rules of other communities to cover the needs of cataloguers.

A second aspect beyond the content issues of this working group RNA/RDA is the organizational structure of such working groups for special resources. All working groups in the implementation project are expert groups from libraries with the members of the Committee of Library Standards in the role of principals. With the working groups for special materials, further principals were taken on board. For the working group of the literary archives, as a pilot project in this context, the Koop Litera⁸ an association of literary archives in German-speaking countries is the partner of the Committee for Library Standards. This extended organizational structure allows a broader range of expertise and is a guarantee for the pursued acceptance of the standardization in this environment.

The Committee for Library Standards has meanwhile defined this organizational structure in its regulations and the working groups for special materials as a permanent component.

Authority data have high value

When we think about cooperation between cultural institutions and their metadata management, we have to talk about authority data. There are already several well established partnerships between very different players in this field. The links between the catalogues of the German or the Swiss National Library and Wikipedia is a good example of how it works.

In the cataloguing tradition in the German-speaking countries authority data and authority control are important. In the catalogues authority data bring together what belongs together, separate what does not belong together, and identify the entity described in the authority record.

⁷ http://kalliope-verbund.info/_Resources/Persistent/442a360d0a1961bcd8843150f2bca0a15996581e/RNA-R2015-20151013.pdf

⁸ <https://www.onb.ac.at/koop-litera/>

The Integrated Authority File (Gemeinsame Normdatei GND) is an authority file for names of persons, corporate bodies, conferences, events, places, topics and works. The descriptive catalogues and the subject catalogues in the German speaking area use the GND as their authority file. The authority records of the GND control the access points of the bibliographic records in our databases. The cataloguing code for the GND authority file obeys RDA for the entities which are used for descriptive and subject cataloguing, such as persons. For the entities which are only used for subject cataloguing, such as topics, the GND follows the “Regeln für den Schlagwortkatalog” (RSWK) which means Rules for the Subject Catalogue.

Authority data as linking point in the cultural sector

Cooperation in the cultural sector means working together for a common benefit: a cost-effective production of metadata and consistent data for the benefit of the users. Therefore, it is important that access points are controlled by the same authority file. Rules and guidelines that are coming into line with RDA accept the RDA rules concerning access points and authority data the best. The reuse of the RDA access points in every cultural database makes it possible to link a library catalogue with other heritage databases. The use of the identifiers of the authority records is the most reliable way to link over different databases. The string (sequence of characters which are the name of the entity) is less important than the unique identifier which defines the entity described in the authority record. Thus, guidelines for constructing identifiers become more important than rules for describing names. Metagrid⁹ for example is a project for the online networking of resources relevant for Swiss history. This service links between identical entities from various databases. So we can say that authority data is actually the most efficient linking point between databases of libraries, archives, museums, digital humanities, cultural heritage etc.

Conclusion

So, what do we need to build up a real partnership between institutions providing cultural heritage, to make our collections visible and to develop our standards?

There is clearly no simple or quick solution. We pursue a policy of small steps. Common use of authority data is the basis for cooperation between institutions in the cultural sector. The well-developed organizational structure of the GND and the rules for authority data following RDA are invaluable advantages in this context.

The next step is the alignment of existing and well-established standards from the wider community as archives and museums to RDA. The goal of the alignments is not to bring all the existing rules into the RDA Toolkit. This approach means to continue to use other standards than RDA too and to make them compatible and interoperable with RDA. The full integration of all special rules would inflate the RDA Toolkit. So the better way would be cross-references between RDA and the guidelines and standards of other communities to cover the needs of non-library communities.

Another argument for an alignment of an existing standard to RDA is the wish and the need of non-library communities to keep their own standards as independent products. The RDA Toolkit is often too complex for non-librarians and all rules integrated in the RDA Toolkit will be under the RDA Toolkit license. Standards that want to be free from a RDA Toolkit license and copyright, cannot be part of the RDA Toolkit, e.g. IFLA standards. Concordances and alignments are anyway feasible.

⁹ www.metagrid.ch

Alignments and concordances from further standards to RDA are needed for the daily work in our institutions. Even now we notice that in our library collections we need rules or policy statements for special or rare materials. Libraries mostly deal with books or journals, may they be digital or analogue, and RDA has been worked out for these resources. But nearly every library has in its collection pictures, estates or even curls of hair. So we need quick solutions and the working groups for special materials have the mandate to work out such rules and training materials and, in a parallel step, to adapt the existing standards for such materials to RDA.

But we should not see this process as detached from the further development of RDA. The RDA Board and RDA Steering Committee started in the last years to “broaden the range of perspectives applied to the development of the standard to ensure that it reflects a wide range of different cultural perspectives”¹⁰. Non-library standards can help develop RDA as a standard for all cultural institutions and as a standard which is not a simple guide for cataloguing but is a base standard for the description of all types of resources and the production of metadata fit for further dissemination in a linked data environment.

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¹⁰ www.rda-rsc.org

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