

RSC Satellite Meeting *Subject Cataloguing - Quo vadis?*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this short contribution is that of presenting the conference *Subject Cataloguing – Quo vadis?* organised by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, Schweizerische Nationalbibliothek and the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek as IFLA Satellite Meeting at the annual meeting of the RDA Steering Committee. The conference, held in Frankfurt on Nov. 4th 2016, dealt with the subject cataloguing under different perspectives, and presented concrete initiatives by many European institutions. The committee in charge of the revision of RDA took the chance to re-open a working platform on a theme, that of subject cataloguing, often left apart in the discussion on Library and Information Science.

KEYWORDS

Subject heading; Subject cataloguing; Resource Description and Access (RDA); Semantic web; IFLA Satellite Meeting.

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The subject indexing has always been a problem because of its different approaches. This is why the semantic aspect still remains muted in the library science debate. The ICP, *International Cataloguing Principles*, despite the premises, don't treat it and even the conceptual model dedicated to the subject, FRSAD, doesn't prove to be useful and adequately structured.

In this scenario, on November 4th, 2016 was held in Frankfurt, at the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, the Satellite Meeting at the annual session of the RDA Steering Committee (RSC), entitled, significantly, *Subject Cataloguing - Quo vadis?*¹

As Renate Behrens remarked in her opening words, the meeting didn't intend to offer a definitive answer to this question but just a starting point to provide a working platform for months and years to come.

RDA was originally created to replace AACR2 and in the United States, where it has been used since March 2013, it is easily integrated with the *Library of Congress Subject Headings*. The speakers of the meeting, however, pointed out how this approach was restrictive for the cataloguing practices of the majority of European countries and to face the indexing of resources different from the paper books.

In this way, the RSC has reopened the debate on the subject relationships. This issue is treated in RDA in a separate chapter, the twenty-third, introduced only in April 2015, and still very synthetic and considered as temporary.

Going back to discuss an aspect of cataloguing often neglected, the conference started from the bases, by analyzing the conceptual models FRBR, FRAD, FRSAD and the new FRBR-LRM.² Then it presented a range of initiatives and projects under construction in different national realities. The German-speaking countries, which share a single standard for subject indexing (RSWK *Regeln für den Schlagwortkatalog* = Rules for the subject catalog), were analyzed with particular attention but there were also speakers from Great Britain, Serbia and Italy.³

To think about the future of subject cataloguing means addressing issues and open questions such as:

- *The semantic web*. The meeting reaffirmed the necessity to use controlled vocabularies for the creation of well-structured and enriched data. This highlights the needs to invest in authority work and test all the possibilities of the clustering process. With a similar process used for persons and institutions in essential projects such as the VIAF, *Virtual International Authority File*, the univocal identification of data via URI would allow to relate subjects and classes from different contexts. Clustering is a process that allows terminology control and reconciliation entity, which for semantic indexing would mean the reunification of the variant forms of the subject in different linguistic equivalents, offering remarkable benefits in terms of data reuse for institutions and possibilities of information retrieval for users.

¹ <http://www.dnb.de/DE/Standardisierung/International/rscSatelliteMeetingProgramm.html>.

² Heidrun Wiesenmüller (Stuttgart Media University), "FRBR, RDA and subject cataloging – with a special focus on the German experience". http://www.dnb.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/DNB/standardisierung/wiesenmueller/SubjectcataloguingRDAFRBR.pdf?__blob=publicationFile.

³ The whole conference program with abstracts and slides of the speeches can be viewed at the website: <http://www.dnb.de/EN/Standardisierung/International/rscSatelliteMeetingProgramm.html>.

- *Automatic indexing and the new role of the librarian.* Subject cataloguing will not disappear but will become data management. Increasingly, the classification and subject metadata of specific types of resources will be generated automatically. The creation of well-structured data, however, can't be done only by the machine but the librarian must have the last word. Especially the National Libraries, considering their institutional function and the amount of treated resources, should play an active role in this transition process.
- *Collaboration with cultural institutions and other information professionals.* Cooperation and reuse of data are key factors in the semantic web. Nevertheless, the attribution of subject is a delicate and onerous phase of the cataloging process and in fact many libraries even today give up doing that also for some types of so-called traditional resources. To extend subject indexing to images, videos, artworks, documents and web pages will it be possible? To provide adequate answers to this problem we should open communication channels with institutions which are normally used to treat these types of resources.⁴

Also, RDA, which declares that it can be applied to all types of media and content, should be updated in order to promote standardization, uniform application, and interoperability of subject access tools for all cultural sectors and in both traditional and semantic web environments.

The RSC Satellite Meeting in Frankfurt has been a significant starting point because it focused on subject access from different perspectives and has tried to reopen a discussion about semantic indexing that considers the current technological environment, the increasingly wide and diversified bibliographic universe and the needs of different countries.

⁴ Also, conceptual models and cataloging standards should be more welcoming and open to concepts traditionally alien to the world of books. Angela Kailus, in her speech "Subject Cataloging of Images in the Museums and Photo Collections" presented the case of Bildarchiv Foto Marburg (German Documentation Center for Art History) with a reflection on the iconographic description methods in the art-historical practice and in the modeling of FRSAAD. <http://www.dnb.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/DNB/standardisierung/kailusRSCSSatelliteConf.pdf?blob=publicationFile>.