



The international diffusion of RDA: a wide overview on the new guidelines

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This issue of *JLIS.it* is focused on RDA, *Resource Description and Access*. In light of increasing international acceptance of this new cataloging content standard, the editors of the journal wish to capture the background of how RDA came to be and the implications of its implementation at this time. This special issue offers a wide overview on the new guidelines from their making to their spreading around the world.

Two authors devoted to the reconstruction of the events and factors involved in the change and innovation are written by two among the most important witnesses: Barbara B. Tillett and Tom Delsey.

RDA is an ongoing text. During its development, it has aroused great interest and discussions and solicited many studies and insights. For this reason, in this issue, a paper on the relationship among ISBD and RDA is offered by Elena Escolano Rodríguez, former chair of ISBD Review Group of IFLA; a contribution on RDA as a content standard by Carlo Bianchini and Mauro Guerrini, and three articles on critical positions of RDA, by Michael Gorman, the editor of AACR; by Alberto Petrucciani, the editor of *REICAT – Regole italiane di catalogazione* – the current Italian cataloging rules, based on FRBR; and, about the consultation of the Toolkit, by Agnese Galeffi and Lucia Sardo.

No doubt, beyond any criticism to the new guidelines and possible issues in their application, the transition from AACR to RDA represents an attempt to widen the dissemination of a





shared corpus of bibliographic guidelines in the world. In this special number of JLIS.it the reader will find a wide range of different points of view by many communities represented at very high level: Susan R. Morris and Beacher Wiggins for the Library of Congress; Françoise Leresche and Vincent Boulet for France; Christian Aliverti, Renate Behrens, Verena Schaffner for Switzerland, Germany, and; Simonetta Buttò for Italy.

The paper by Judy Kuhagen shows how the dissemination of RDA requires a huge amount of translation work.

Increasing relevance of RDA on the global stage requires deep changes in its governance. Gordon Dunsire, chair of RDA Steering Committee (RSC), formerly Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA, carefully describes this process.

Last, but not least, an essential point for RDA is its openness to other communities. So, in this special issue, it was indispensable to include the paper of an archivist – Federico Valacchi – representing the Italian debate on RDA and its implementation in this special area.

RDA aims to create a universal and shared standard that allows the production of well-structured metadata to create advanced and interactive search tools and to allow users to access and obtain a wide range of informative resources, from the simple to the most complex contents. The standard is designed to make the most of the ability to automatically generate some elements of the description, to multiply the possibilities of consultation by the user, and to fulfill the task of navigating in the world of recorded knowledge that has emerged as the basis of modern cataloging theory.

It is a deep metamorphosis of the cataloguing theory, in many respects still in progress, actually started in very distant times. For



example, at least since the *Paris Principles* of 1961, the theoretical milestone of the second half of the last century, a process was triggered that has led to overcoming the centrality of the book in bibliographic cataloging. At that time, cataloging practices were still intrinsically linked to a card catalog with bibliographic descriptions sorted alphabetically by author and title. However, in a footnote of the *Introduction* of the *Paris Principles*, it was clear that the term “book” included other library materials that have similar characteristics, recognizing that libraries were collecting more than books. In fact, there had been cataloging instructions for non-book materials for many decades before then. The new standard goes even further to enable the description and access for all kinds of resources that cultural institutions wish to make available to their users. RDA greatly expands the way inaugurated by AACR2.

RDA serves as a universal standard, capable of offering "full coverage" of all types of content. It takes account of the need for dialogue, both with the universe of existing data and with present different standards – including those used in other communities (archives, museums, publishers, semantic web, etc.). The new guidelines cover a wide range of attributes to describe resources of different nature: cartographic material, notated music, still and moving images, three-dimensional form, etc.

RDA is a content standard, that is, it defines the content of bibliographic description, the data necessary to identify and access a resource, but it does not require a specific technology or syntax for physical recording or displaying of data. So, as a content standard, RDA is designed to easily create data for the semantic web, but each agency can apply the standard independently using the technology available to them – a book catalog, card catalog, online catalog, resource discovery tool in



the semantic web, etc. RDA is a tool by which it becomes possible to switch from record management to data management. Many data elements provided by the guidelines are created by ontologies and controlled vocabulary terms. Those terms are also freely accessible in RDA registries on the web.

Although we recognize that new standard is still evolving and that meeting its objectives and aims is still an ongoing effort, those objectives and aims remain valid goals that the international community shares in realizing. RDA remains a visionary tool to help move bibliographic descriptions and access into the future of resource discovery systems that better serve users.

We hope this special issue of *Jlis.it* enables the further understanding of this cataloging standard and inspires the development of future systems to connect users with the wealth of information resources held in our cultural institutions today and in the future.



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