The future is longer than the past:
An Interview with Margaret Stewart

The Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA has been working on a new standard for resource description and access designed for the digital world: RDA. This standard is scheduled to be released at the end of November 2009. RDA will provide a flexible framework for describing all resources - analog and digital, i. e. data that is readily adaptable to new and emerging database structures and data that is compatible with existing records in online library catalogues. Underlying RDA are the conceptual models FRBR (Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records) and FRAD (Functional Requirements for Authority Data). The German library community is contributing to the development of RDA by taking part in reviews of the several drafts of RDA.

Margaret Stewart, representing Library and Archives Canada on the JSC and Chair of the committee by June 30, 2009 visited Germany in June and was so kind as to give us an interview.

Mrs. Stewart, a personal question first: You have been representing Library and Archives Canada on the Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA since 1999, and your term as the chair of that committee has recently expired.
How do you feel at this important time when the new cataloguing code Resource Description and Access, RDA is bound to be coming up very soon?

> **Stewart:** It's a wonderful feeling to have completed this phase of the RDA project. Now that the content for the first release of RDA has been submitted to the publishers, I, along with my colleagues on the JSC, am very pleased to be able to turn my attention to planning for implementation.

The library community worldwide has been debating lively on the emerging new standard. Pros and cons have been exchanged in detail.
What do you think are the benefits of a changeover to the new standard RDA for the library community as a whole?

Stewart: You are right – RDA has generated a lot of debate which has served to demonstrate how much people really care about the future of cataloguing. I believe there are many benefits of moving to RDA.

I will highlight two of them below.
The library community is facing challenges of the digital world on a number of fronts and our traditional users have many ways of satisfying their information needs. It was very clear that RDA and the descriptions created according to RDA needed to operate within the web environment. One of the key features of RDA is its well-defined element set and vocabularies which will support the use of RDA data in library catalogues and, in addition, will facilitate the reuse of RDA data for resource discovery services that are being developed by both libraries and the broader metadata community.   RDA's goal of defining a well-structured element set resonated with the Semantic Web communities and has led to an ongoing collaboration. Work is ongoing to make the RDA element set and vocabularies available in a registry that will facilitate machine to machine applications.

The second benefit that I would like to highlight is the use of FRBR and FRAD as the underlying structure of RDA. Not only do these models provide RDA with a strong conceptual foundation, they also pave the way for systems to take advantage of the data created using RDA to provide more meaningful displays for users by bringing together different formats or versions of a work and by allowing the user to move easily between related works.

There is more than one type of library, i.e. the landscape is heterogeneous with academic, public and special libraries, big and small ones.
Do you think that these advantages apply also for small and even one-person libraries?

Stewart: For smaller libraries, I would like to highlight additional advantages such as RDA as a customizable web-based cataloguing tool with functionality to enhance the cataloguing process by including a step-by-step guidance for the creation of a catalogue record, ability to view only instructions related to core elements and and the potential of integration with library systems. Another advantage is that RDA instructions are based on principles which should make RDA easier to learn and apply.   These benefits would, of course, apply to larger libraries as well.

RDA is developed primarily as a cataloguing code for libraries but is intended to be suitable also for museums and archives, and others.
How are those communities involved in the development of the new standard?

Stewart: The JSC consulted the descriptive standards used by the archival and museum communities when dealing with elements applicable to archival resources and museum objects. This will enable libraries with archival collections, for example, to use RDA to describe those resources. We consider more extensive consultation with the archival and museum communities to be a high priority following the first release of RDA.

By now, we know only the full draft of RDA. The JSC received a plethora of comments to that draft and discussed them during its meeting in March 2009. People are eager to prepare for the new standard even if it is not yet released.
Will the final text differ considerably from the draft?

Stewart: The RDA structure has not changed; however, there were a number of revisions made to improve the standard.

Because of the number of comments received, it was clear that, even meeting for over a week, we would not be able to address all of the feedback. The JSC had to prioritize the comments; any comment that touched on the RDA element set was considered a high priority as were comments that noted inconsistencies in the text. More information on the changes can be found on the JSC Website at http://www.rda-jsc.org/0903out.html.

When RDA will be published as a final product by the end of 2009, librarians will have different perspectives on the new standard.
What would you recommend a <u>cataloguer</u> who wants to prepare for the new standard?

Stewart: A good starting point would be the JSC Web site http://www.rda-jsc.org/index.html There are a number of documents that would help a cataloguer familiarize themselves with the new standard. In addition, because the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR) and the Functional Requirements for Authority Data (FRAD) serve as the conceptual models for RDA, it will be useful for cataloguers to become comfortable with the FRBR and FRAD concepts and terminology. There are numerous presentations on RDA and FRBR/FRAD available on the JSC Web site that would assist in the preparation for RDA.

And what would you recommend a <u>cataloguing department manager</u> to prepare to the new standard?

Stewart: For cataloguing department managers, I would recommend that they consult the JSC Web site so that they can read some of the essential background documents, assess the extent of the change to RDA and begin to think about training needs for their staff. Cataloguing managers should also consider system implications and discuss the impact of RDA with their library system vendor, book vendors and other partners.

We understand that RDA will be published as an online-tool changing the practical use of a cataloguing code.
Could you, please, tell us what will be the main differences for a cataloguer in the daily work with the RDA product compared to his/her former work?

Stewart: Cataloguers will need to prepare for creating descriptions using RDA as a Web-based tool. There will be a number of features to assist the cataloguing process. For example, RDA will include a step-by-step cataloguing feature using "workflows" and for cataloguers familiar with MARC 21, there will be RDA to MARC 21 and MARC 21 to RDA mappings. In addition, RDA will include the ability to annotate certain instructions with policy decisions. These annotations can be shared within a cataloguing department and could, essentially replace separate cataloguing manuals that are pervasive in most libraries.

Will the RDA product be suited also for self-study?

Stewart: I would say yes, in combination with the supporting documents available on the JSC Web site.

The economic situation of many institutions - not only libraries - is hard and urges them to reduce their costs whereas at the same time the tasks do not decrease.
Do you think the RDA product will help to reduce the costs of cataloguing?

> *Stewart:* I think that RDA will help reduce the costs of cataloguing on a number of different fronts. RDA as an online product will be easier and more efficient to use.
>
> RDA has clearly defined core elements; libraries may choose to record only the core elements defined in RDA to help reduce cataloguing costs for certain resources. These core elements are the minimum that should be included in a description to allow users to find, identify, select and obtain the resources that they are searching for.
>
> RDA has been designed to support the reuse of metadata from external sources, such as ONIX data from publishers and metadata extracted from a digital resource. The reuse of this metadata would result in efficiencies in the cataloguing process.
>
> And finally, if in the future, RDA data is stored in object-oriented database structure that mirrors the FRBR and FRAD conceptual models, there would be separate records for the FRBR entities: work, expression, manifestation and item. Relationships between entities would be reflected through links (preferably using identifiers). In this scenario, all of the attributes of a work would be recorded only once and would be linked to different expressions and manifestations of the work, obviating the need to repeat work level attributes for each manifestation.

Does RDA also support automated cataloguing processes? And if yes, how?

> *Stewart:* As mentioned in the response to the question above, RDA supports the use of data that thas been derived from a digital source using automated mechanisms, such as scanning or harvesting embedded metadata. It also supports the reuse of imported metadata from external sources such as publishers.
>
> I hope that future library systems will develop new ways of automating cataloguing processes to increase the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of cataloguing.

RDA is intended to be an international standard.
Does the JSC plan to make an ISO standard of RDA?

> *Stewart:* No, there are no plans to make an ISO standard of RDA.
> The RDA element set is compatible with the element set used in IFLA's *International Standard Bibliographic Description*. In addition, the IFLA *Statement of International Cataloguing Principles* informs the principles used in RDA.

What are JSC's future plans for a worldwide co-operation with regard to standardization processes of RDA?

> *Stewart:* The JSC will continue to work with international partners, such as IFLA and the ISSN Network. The Committee of Principals, the committee that

oversees RDA and JSC activities, will be reviewing the governance of RDA with a view to increasing international representation.

Library and Archives Canada is confronted with the task, not only to change to the new cataloguing code, but also to change the integrated library system.
How does your institution prepare itself for this change?

> *Stewart:* Because it is not yet known if the timing of the implementation of a new library system will align with the timing of the implementation of RDA, LAC has recently decided to plan to implement the MARC 21 changes needed to accommodate RDA data in our existing system, AMICUS. It seemed too risky to have the implementation of RDA dependent on the change-over to a new system.

What would you advice the German library community in dealing with all these changes concerning international standards and at the same time keeping relaxed?

> *Stewart:* We as a community are facing many changes. I think the key word is "community". We are all in this together and we will be able to get through this period of change together. The German library community is not alone!

And what is your personal motto for these changing times in our community?

> *Stewart:* "The future is longer than the past "

Mrs. Stewart, thank you for answering our questions.