

Challenges for the Implementation of Resource Description and Access (RDA) Case Study Germany

Ingo Caesar

Department of Information Science – University for Applied Sciences Potsdam (UAS), Germany
i.caesar@ymail.com

Dierk Eichel

Department of Information Science – University for Applied Sciences Potsdam (UAS), Germany
Dierk.eichel@fh-potsdam.de

ABSTRACT

At the "97th Bibliothekartag" in June 2008 Susanne Oehlschläger from the German National Library spoke about the implementation of the new standardisation system RDA in Germany. As early as 2011 RDA will replace the German cataloguing standard "Rules for Alphabetical Cataloguing" (RAK). RDA is the successor system to AACR2 and RAK. The benefits of implementing RDA are (theoretically) internationalisation of national catalogue data and easier usage.

Parallel to that implementation the Office for Library Standards of the German National Library is planning to combine the authority files for bibliographic description, namely the Corporate Body Authority File (GKD), the Subject Headings Authority File (SWD) and the Names Authority File (PND) to create one common authority file (Gemeinsame Normdatei, GND). If everything goes as planned, by 2011 we can expect a completely new body of rules and regulations for formal and subject cataloguing (RDA), a new exchange format (MARC 21 Authority) and a new authority file (GND).

Nearly all of the now existing systems will be overhauled, updated or mapped to the new applications. The result will be the internationalisation and harmonisation of cataloguing which will facilitate the exchange of data across borders.

We developed an online questionnaire for the qualitative evaluation of problems, opportunities and challenges which will emerge when RDA is finally put into practice.

KEYWORDS: RDA, Resource Description and Access, Standardisation, Germany, Change, Challenges, Issues of Librarians and Experts, Survey

1. INTRODUCTION

The following quotes show the fears about the introduction of RDA currently abroad in the world of German cataloguing: "Articles stating that RDA will be dead on arrival have already appeared (...)" (GORMAN 7) or the statement that RDA has yet to demonstrate its practicability (ZDB-ANWENDERTREFFEN 11). In the days of the good old rules of RAK everybody knew exactly how cataloguing worked. Now in the case of RDA there is nothing but a big question mark. Nobody apart from a few experts knows how it will work in practice because as yet it is only a conceptual draft. In October 2008 we await the first complete full draft of the standards and regulations. After that these drafts have to become still more: practical guidelines and how-to-manuals for practical library use.

2. GERMAN LIBRARY IDIOSYNCRASIES

In Germany the Committee for Library Standards at the German National Library has the main responsibility for fostering the development of RDA as a system of cataloguing rules and regulations and finally as a practical online tool for cataloguing. Australia, Canada, Great Britain and the United States plan to introduce RDA in 2009. Germany knows it needs to follow because "Globalisation of information is indispensable" (GÖMPEL 9).

But are the librarians in Germany ready for the change that is dawning? Are they aware that a kind of revolution is going on?

These are very important questions because the German cataloguing system functions differently from that in many other countries. Historically, the Rules for Alphabetical Cataloguing (RAK) originated in the Prussian Instructions (PI) implemented in 1899. The PI were first overhauled in the 1970s and 1980s resulting in the publication of the RAK. In the same period a number of entirely separate regional library networks were constituted (MÜNNICH 1). There was no agreement on common national standards, therefore these networks lacked compatibility.

RAK is a closed system. It is not made to be easily adapted to other or new cataloguing standards like the Anglo American Cataloguing Rules (AACR or AACR2). Heinz Marloth commented famously: (translated) "It took us more than twenty years to develop RAK (...) but it will take a century to get rid of." (MARLOTH).

These few facts are giving a taste of what might happen when the switch to RDA takes place. Adjusting to the new tasks of the information society in the 1980s was a big step, the adjustment to the internet age was another. Now the German library system has to show and to prove one more time that it is ready to adjust to the requirements of the forthcoming global information network. In our opinion the main point on the agenda is the user task related Functional Requirements on Bibliographic Records (FRBR) approach that is a core element within the RDA system: The objective of the development of RDA is to enable the user to find, identify, select and obtain (TILLET) information as easily as possible.

With the use of an online questionnaire we would like to obtain first impressions concerning our research interest: Are the German libraries and the administrative environment ready for the implementation of RDA?

3. METHODOLOGY

We are using a HTML based questionnaire containing some php scripts. Using a set of twelve statements and questions we want to evaluate how German librarians feel about the conversion to RDA.

The participants we ask to give their opinions on the statements by choosing one value between 1 (I totally agree/absolutely right) and 4 (I totally do not agree/not at all). A fifth value "No answer" was preset.

It is not easy to elicit meaningful patterns of opinion when dealing with a phenomenon like RDA that lies in the future and therefore has not even reached a kind of "BETA-version" status. Consequently, the results are more qualitative than quantitative. What we tried to do is to evaluate the range of opinions that the participants hold regarding a new and unseen standardisation system.

We have to confess that some aspects of the evaluation have to be taken with reservation. Most of the assessments are subjective. But in this instance we guess

that it is the easiest way to try and understand what reservations and feelings German librarians have.

One field, the field for general comments, was particularly useful to get an insight into the prioritising of actions to be taken or what the participants think the biggest problems are. More about this in the chapter "findings."

First of all, we would like to apologise for the fact that some results are looking too simplistic for such a complex topic. Maybe this evaluation just serves to give a first impression. Nevertheless, that could be valuable too. The results of the survey are necessarily highly speculative because the challenges of RDA have not materialised yet.

4. THE PARTICIPANTS

All participants were subscribers of the German InetBib mailing list. About 5000 subscribers received the invitation to participate in the survey. InetBib is administrated by Michael Schaarwächter at the University Library of Dortmund. Subscribers of the list are (for example) representatives of the German National Library and other important German libraries, representatives of universities who are interested in standardisation and representatives of library associations (e.g. the Association of German Librarians) and research institutions in the field of information science. Of course, all other kinds of libraries are participating in InetBib as well. Because the subscription to InetBib is free for everyone who is interested and because everybody who knows about the survey is able to participate in it, it was not possible to check the data systematically. We can probably assume safely that participants would not have any interests in falsifying their answers. The InetBib list is an accepted and widely used means of communication in the German library world.

5. QUESTIONS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

We asked the participants to evaluate the following statements (the questions have been translated here, German questionnaire attached).

1. I have informed myself thoroughly about RDA.
This statement is aimed at the following questions: Is somebody actively participating in the change or not? Is he or she aware of the general information on RDA that is readily available in library publications?

2 RDA has been a point of discussion in my institution.
This statement and its evaluation are dealing with the question whether employees of the institution are aware of the forthcoming changes. On the other hand, the answers should tell us whether the preparation for the change to RDA is simply ignored.

3. We have already thought about the conversion to RDA in my institution.
The evaluation of this statement should show whether

participants are actively engaged in preparing themselves for conversion or, respectively, whether the institution welcomes the change. We take non discussion to mean that the institution ignores the challenges.

4. Someone (or a committee) is in charge of RDA affairs in my institution.

This statement focuses on responsibilities. To have a special person or task force who is engaged in informing herself or himself and reporting to other staff members is a significant indicator that the responsibility to adapt to the change is taken seriously and that it is taking place in an organised and purposeful manner.

5. My institution actively searches out information on RDA on the websites of the German National Library or on the website of the Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA.

These two websites are in addition to face-to-face talk the main sources for keeping in touch with developments. If there are many participants engaged in keeping up-to-date this could be interpreted as an indicator of acceptance and approval.

6. I am expecting problems arising from the conversion to RDA.

We want to know how alarming the situation is. If many participants are expecting problems than one could assume they are worried.

7. I think that the implementation of RDA will bring benefits.

The statement is supposed to show whether people see the need for change.

8. I prefer the status quo (RAK + MAB2).

This statement is aimed at giving an indication whether people are willing to change or not.

9. I prefer rules and regulations that are taking account of national cataloguing traditions.

The statement is a polarised version of statement No 8. People who agree with this statement can be assumed to be willing to accept German isolation in cataloguing.

10. What do you think the main problem of conversion to RDA will be?

1. Communication with the users of the institutions:

Need to retrain users.

2. Communication inside the institution

3. Know-how deficit

Same as point 2 but with a stronger focus on a possible perception of a lack of expertise within the institution.

4. Compatibility of data:

Old data need to be mapped to RDA, or the other way round, RDA must be able to integrate the old data, or in the worst case, two systems are needed for a transitional

period.

5. Switch to the new software:

Which library software system should be used? How will it work?

6. Loss of jobs:

Fears that higher skilled jobs in subject cataloguing will be lost.

7. Problems relating to job descriptions:

Staff insecurities because the divide between formal cataloguing and subject cataloguing will become obsolete.

8. No answer

11. To which occupational sector do you belong?

The following fields are selectable:

Research or teaching

Library association/ library organisation

Museum

Archive

Academic library

Public library

Special library

Documentation centre

Student

Other

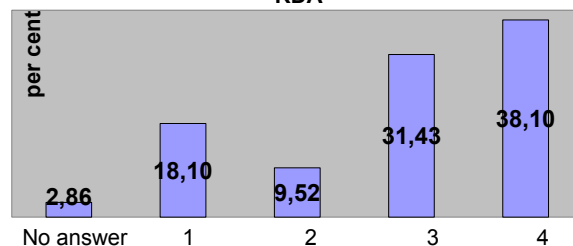
No answer

12. Finally we placed a textbox at the end of the online questionnaire for general comments or questions.

6. FINDINGS

105 (adjusted) people participated in filling the questionnaire from the 20th to the 26th of October 2008. Here are the results of the evaluation:

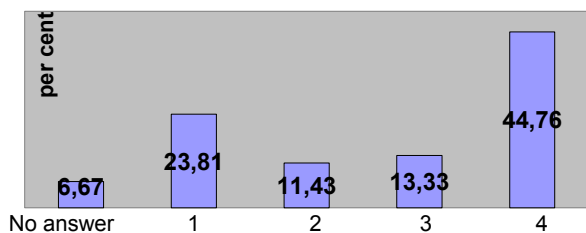
1. I have informed myself thoroughly about RDA



1=(I totally agree/absolutely right) to 4 = (I totally do not agree/not at all)

Nearly 70% of respondents are little or not at all informed about RDA. Therefore interest in the topic does not seem to be at all widespread.

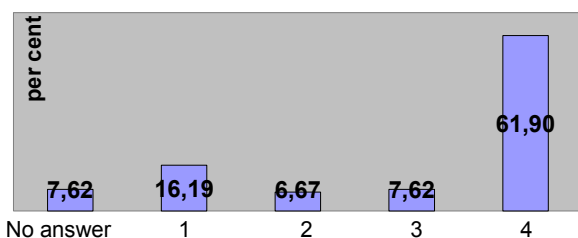
2. RDA has been a point of discussion in my institution



1=(I totally agree/absolutely right) to 4 = (I totally do not agree/not at all)

RDA is not ignored but it is not a key issue either. About 45% of institutional discourses ignore RDA completely. In about 14% it is not mentioned much. Over 34% of institutions however have discussed the issue.

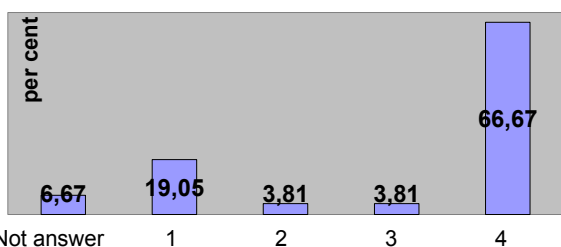
3. We have already thought about the conversion to RDA in my institution



1=(I totally agree/absolutely right) to 4 = (I totally do not agree/not at all)

In more than 69% of institutions in all sectors the implementation of RDA is little or not at all discussed. This is alarming.

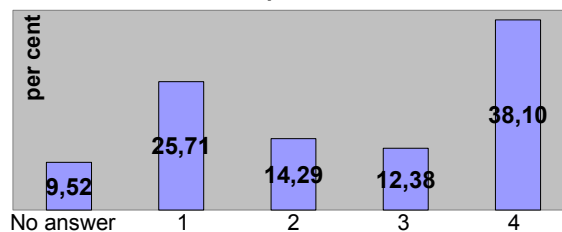
4. Someone (or a committee) is in charge of RDA affairs in my institution



1=(I totally agree/absolutely right) to 4 = (I totally do not agree/not at all)

Few institutions have assigned responsibility to specific persons. More than 66% do not have anybody who is in charge of collecting and disseminating information about RDA affairs. On the other hand, about 20% seem to have somebody in the role of an RDA-disseminator.

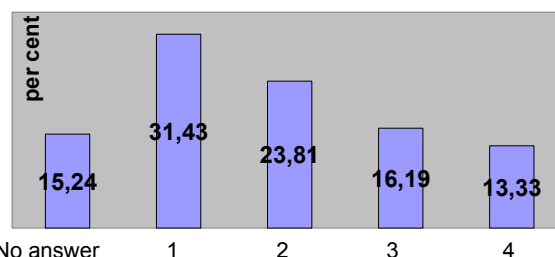
5. My institution actively searches out information on RDA on the websites of the German National Library or on the website of the Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA



1=(I totally agree/absolutely right) to 4 = (I totally do not agree/not at all)

About half of the participants do not access official sources of information on RDA but about 40% do so.

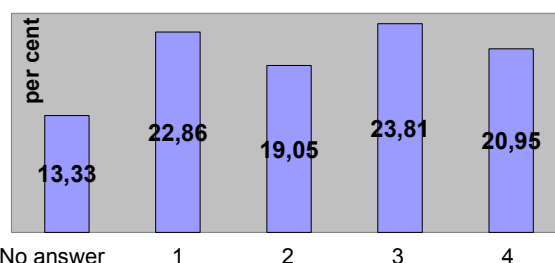
6. I am expecting problems arising from the conversion to RDA



1=(I totally agree/absolutely right) to 4 = (I totally do not agree/not at all)

The high number of abstention (highest in the whole questionnaire) concerning the evaluation of this statement is conspicuous (15.24%). Obviously most participants are of the opinion that the implementation will be highly problematic.

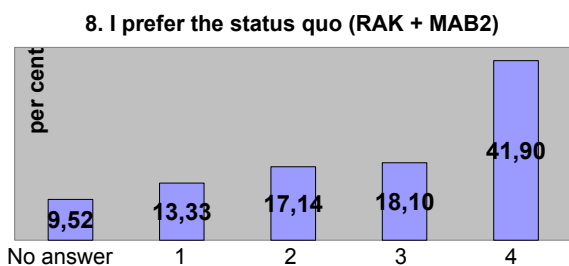
7. I think that the implementation of RDA will bring benefits



1=(I totally agree/absolutely right) to 4 = (I totally do not agree/not at all)

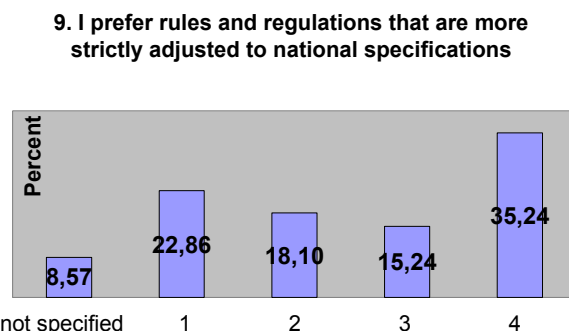
This graph shows a very interesting phenomenon: It shows a high number of abstention, a high value for acceptance but a high value for refusal as well. The

participants seem to be deeply divided and unsure whether to welcome RDA or to condemn it.



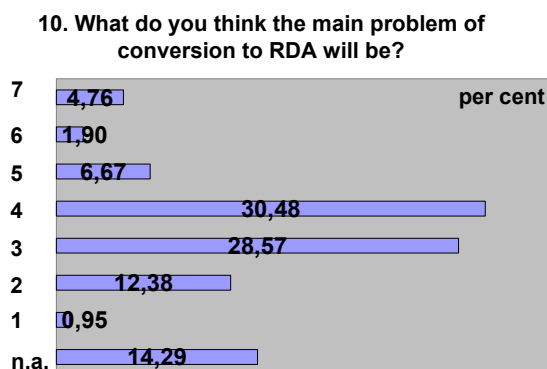
1=(I totally agree/absolutely right) to 4 = (I totally do not agree/not at all)

It is obvious: The contemporary situation is definitely not supported anymore. About 42% do not prefer the current situation of cataloguing (RAK+MAB2). Only the lowest number of participants (13.59%) indicated their wish to stay with the status quo.



1=(I totally agree/absolutely right) to 4 = (I totally do not agree/not at all)

As in statement number eight most people approve of an internationalisation of standards. These participants do not think it is very important to uphold national cataloguing traditions, but an astonishing number, (22.86%, by trend about 40%) would prefer to stick with them.



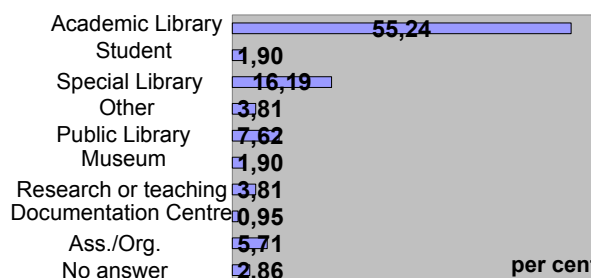
Caption:

No answer

1. Communication with the users of the institutions
2. Communication inside the institution
3. Know-how deficit
4. Compatibility of data
5. Switch to the new software
6. Loss of jobs
7. Problems relating to job descriptions

The compatibility of data (30.48%) and a deficit in how to manage the implementation (Know-how deficit) (28.57%) are the main problems identified. The importance of the second problem is becoming even more apparent in the free text box (12.).

11. To which occupational sector do you belong



Most of the participants belong to academic libraries (55.24%). The second largest group is located in special libraries (16.19%).

12. Free text box comments

In our opinion the comments and announcements in the free text box at the end of the questionnaire were one of the most interesting parts of the project. The following is a synthesis of the opinions of the participants.

Negative opinions

- RDA is too abstract. Too much interpretation in adopting it is necessary. RDA does not take enough account of online catalogues. The quality of cataloguing data is not as high as it is under RAK (German cataloguing rules). Arbitrariness and the complexity of RDA will contribute to decrease in the quality of cataloguing data.
- Implementation will not be possible by 2011 (2013 at the earliest).
- The Committee for Library Standards at the German National Library (Standardisierungsausschuss) has been given the task of deciding which facultative rules of RDA should be implemented in Germany. For that purpose the regional library networks have to

come to some agreement first.

- The information about RDA in German is too sparse (time schedule, financing, provision of instructional materials).
- RDA are in danger of neglecting the International Standard for Book Description (ISBD-Format). Cataloguing rules have to be compatible with *World Cat*.
- The information policy of the German National Library is pitiful. Time is being wasted, the new cataloguing standard should by now be much more advanced. The German National Library is underestimating the efforts needed for the implementation of RDA.
- Meanwhile the resources and finances could have been invested in the further development of RAK and in the unification of the regional library networks. We could have a far more user-friendly German library network now. Although RDA is expected to be more user-friendly this does not justify the time and effort needed to implement it. (instructions, programming, national specifications).
- Library journals should be more involved in dissemination of information on RDA.
- What Germany needs is a common catalogue.
- I am astonished about how little RDA is emphasised in German libraries.
- Those who will have to apply the system in practice should be involved in the decision making process.
- Many libraries do not have enough staff to establish a dedicated RDA committee.

Positive opinions

- RDA will provide an important opportunity to connect Germany to the international library world. Librarians will be able to manage the implementation successfully.
- The ability to cooperate at international level is a good reason to implement RDA.

Other

- The connection between cataloguing rules and data exchange format are ignored in the survey.

7. EVALUATION CRITICS

Some participants criticised that the possibility to choose multiple answers in question 10 (What do you think the main problem of conversion to RDA will be?) and 11 (To which occupational sector do you belong?) was not given. In fact there is not the one and only problem within implementing RDA – the problems are multifaceted. In the occupational area some people are engaged in more than one area.

Another point of animadversion was that there was no free text box at every statement of the survey. There were

lastly some sentiments, that the poll does not regard all relevant areas of the topic.

8. OUTLOOK

To synthesise the results of the evaluation we would like to put forward the following hypotheses:

1. The results concerning the implementation of RDA are ambivalent. This is the reason why there are difficulties in making judgements about the implementation of RDA. The German library landscape finds itself in some kind of interim situation.
2. Confusion is also spreading because the current system is well known and tried in practice, but the new system is not really tangible yet.
3. Because there are no guidelines available yet how to put RDA in practice it is difficult to predict how cataloguing will be affected.
4. The situation is typical of a period of change. The new rules still have to evolve into a working tool with clear instructions for cataloguers. They have not reached that level yet.
5. This objective will be reached in Germany by 2013 at the earliest.
6. The results also show that opposition by the German Committee for Standardisation (Standardisierungsausschuss) could delay or even stall the whole process.
7. There is a danger that Germany will once again follow a "German special way" in adopting RDA and thus negate at least part of the advantages of standardisation and internationalisation.
8. To avoid this, the first step must be to develop practical guidelines for cataloguers to move RDA from the level of a vague threatening idea spreading fear among German cataloguers to an offer of a modern new tool that will allow Germany to participate in international cataloguing cooperation.

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ATTACHMENT

Link to the Survey: Libraryworld RDA ready? (2008) [online]. World Wide Web: <http://fabday.fh-potsdam.de/~s7773/RDA/> (including German questionnaire)