IFLA's ISBD Progamme:
Purpose, Process, and Prospects

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Let me begin by briefly covering the origins, purposes and coverage of the ISBDs.

The concept of the International Standard Bibliographic Description has now endured for more than 30 years and has proved to be IFLA's most successful effort at promoting the cause of cataloging standardization. One reason that explains why the ISBDs have flourished and remain essentially intact after more than a generation is the continuing influence of the forces that prompted their formulation in the first place. These include demands and opportunities arising from the automation of bibliographic control as well as the economic necessity of sharing cataloguing. Standardization of descriptive cataloguing has proved to be an economic and technological necessity to the creation, conversion, and use of machine-readable records. The ISBDs were also intended to serve as a principal component of IFLA's program to promote Universal Bibliographic Control, the ideal of which in Dorothy Anderson's words is "to make universally and promptly available, in a form which is internationally acceptable, basic bibliographic data for all publications issued in all countries."

The ISBDs seek to serve three primary purposes: First, and of greatest importance, they are intended to make it possible to interchange records from different sources. As subsidiary purposes, the ISBDs, secondly, have assisted in the interpretation of records across language barriers, so that records produced for users of one language can be interpreted by users of other languages. Thirdly, they have facilitated the conversion of bibliographic records to electronic form.

The first of the ISBDs to be published was the *International Standard Bibliographic Description for Monographic Publications (ISBD (M))*, which appeared in 1971. There have followed projects to produce ISBDs for Serials, Non-book material, Cartographic materials, Rare books, Printed music, and, most recently Electronic resources. For article level publications, *Guidelines for the application of the ISBDs to the description of component parts* was issued. The entire inventory of the ISBDs in all their editions is listed on IFLANET, with some entries providing hot links to freely available electronic versions[1]. Along the way, the need for a general framework to which all the ISBDs would conform was felt, resulting in production of ISBD(G); the only utility of G is that of ensuring harmony among the other ISBDs.

Schedule and procedures for issuance of new or revised ISBDs

Procedures are essential in all standardization work in order to ensure that the steps by which a document becomes a new or revised standard are well known and consistently followed. The ISBDs

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[1] http://www.ifla.org/VI/3/nd1/isbdlist.htm

are no exception to this rule. As a result, at the 1989 IFLA Conference, the Section on Cataloguing adopted a schedule and established procedures for development and distribution of such documents as new or revised ISBDs. In 2002, these procedures were updated to take advantage of the opportunity for electronic publication of texts, both in draft and final form; to speed up the review process by using email to announce the availability of drafts for review; and to enable quicker return of comments and suggestions regarding these drafts to the ISBD Review Group.

Originally it was thought that each ISBD should be considered for updating on a five-year cycle. More pragmatically, they have been revised as the need has arisen to implement general applicable changes or by the evolution of library materials, such as those that resulted in publication of ISBD(ER) and most recently, the ISBD for continuing resources.

There are essentially five phases in the development of a new and revised ISBD.

- Creation of draft text. During this phase, a working group may be appointed comprising cataloguing experts and, when appropriate, format specialists from both within and outside of IFLA, unless the Review Group believes that it itself possesses sufficient expertise to accomplish the objectives of the revision. Typically for every project, an editor is designated to prepare the text according to the decisions of the working group.

- Worldwide review. Once a draft text is completed, it is ready for worldwide review and comment. At this point, the text is forwarded for posting on IFLANET. Thereupon, an announcement is sent to IFLA-L and other appropriate electronic networks, as well as to voting members of the sections sponsoring the project. Normally, two months are allowed for review of an ISBD undergoing revision and usually an additional month if the text is entirely new.

- Final revision. All comments are considered. In accordance with the group decisions, the editor revises the draft. At this point, special attention is given to provision of examples in a variety of languages in the text and appendices and the preparation of an index. When a final text is determined, the ISBD Review Group as a whole reviews the text, primarily to ensure conformance with ISBD(G).

- Balloting. The final version of the new or revised ISBD is then sent to the Cataloguing Section's Standing Committee and any co-sponsoring Section. The ballot provides only two options: to approve or to disapprove, although editorial comments may also be submitted and considered. Ballots not returned by close of voting are considered to be affirmative votes. One month is allowed for this phase.

- Publication and workshop. If the outcome is a vote of approval as is typically the case, the text is scheduled for publication. Today, in all cases, the text is issued electronically, although the e-text may be delayed at the request of the publisher if the text is also to be published in print. At this point, let me mention that a long-term effort has begun to covert to PDF format the latest edition of ISBDs that now exist only in print. As the final step in the process in the case of new ISBDs or those extensively revised, a workshop may be developed to promote understanding and use of the publication.

Although, as already mentioned, some ISBDs have been developed or revised to meet particular needs, there have been two overall revision campaigns affecting the entire Family of ISBDs. Such occurs when changes are determined that have an across the board effect.

First General Review Project

The initial overall revision resulted in the creation of the ISBD Review Committee, which first met in August 1981. The Committee established three major objectives set out for the first general review project:
(1) to harmonize provisions, achieving increased consistency,
(2) to improve examples, and,
(3) to make the provisions more applicable to cataloguers working with materials published in non-roman scripts.

In addition, two narrower objectives motivated this particular revision effort:
(1) to review the use of the equals sign (as its use in bibliographic descriptions had been the source of some controversy); and,
(2) to remove coverage of machine-readable material from the ISBD for Non-Book Materials.

By the end of the decade, the ISBDs had been re-published in "Revised editions." In addition, a separate ISBD was created for Computer Files, which, because of rapid advances in technology, was soon superseded by creation of an ISBD for Electronic Resources.

Second General Review Project

In the early 1990s, the Cataloguing Section in cooperation with other Sections set up the Study Group on the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR). One immediate consequence of this development was the decision to suspend most revision work on the ISBDs while the FRBR Group pursued its charge to "recommend a basic level of functionality and basic data requirements for records created by national bibliographic agencies." This decision resulted suspension of a project to identify the components of a "Concise ISBD(M)", because it was expected that FRBR's findings would in effect provide such a baseline.

In 1998, the FRBR Study Group published its Final Report[2], and the ISBD Review Group was reconstituted to initiate a full-scale review of the ISBDs in order to implement FRBR's recommendations for basic level national bibliographic record.

In the ISBDs, national bibliographic agencies are called upon to "prepare the definitive description containing all the mandatory elements set out in the relevant ISBD insofar as the information is applicable to the publication being described." To facilitate implementation of this principle, the ISBDs designate as "optional" those data elements that are not mandatory when applicable. Therefore, the main task in pursuing the second general review has entailed a close look at the ISBD

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[2] http://www.ifla.org/VII/s13/frbr/frbr.htm

data elements that are now mandatory in order to make optional any that are optional in FRBR

The ISBD Review Group has completed work on three of the ISBDs – ISDB(M), ISBD(CR) and ISBD(G). The Review Group is currently updating three: the ISBD for Cartographic Materials, which probably will be published in 2004; the ISBD for Antiquarian books and the ISBD for Non-Book Materials, which are likely to be published in 2005; and, the ISBD for Printed Music which will be issued in either 2005 or 2006.

Thus, after 30 years, IFLA's ISBD program has yielded standards for representing bibliographic data for all types of library materials and maintained these standards through one or more revisions. The ISBDs have been officially translated into Arabic, Catalan, Chinese, Czech, Dutch, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Latvian, Lithuanian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish and Ukrainian. In turn, the ISBDs have guided the work of national cataloguing committees in updating their codes to foster internationally accepted practices, a point underscored by the compilation of practices by European rules and AACR that was prepared for last year's meeting of Cataloguing Experts[3]. While it is true that in some cases, national rules do not conform to the provisions of the ISBDs in every detail, the general impression is overall compliance and considerable harmony among themselves and with IFLA's recommended practices. Today's publications patterns are changing, largely as a result of the electronic environment in which we increasingly function. As interest in metadata to promote control and access to electronic resources increases, the ISBDs will enjoy new opportunities to influence content and use of these schemas, since most of them will define data elements already familiar to the ISBDs. On the other hand, not only are there new bibliographic situations to consider, but also not every bibliographic practice already in place continues to be as useful now as it was formerly.

Therefore, it is necessary for IFLA to continue to keep the Family of ISBDs abreast with current requirements and to further pursue doing so in cooperation with national libraries and national and multi-national cataloguing committees.

Current priorities and activities

Let us turn next to the current priorities and activities of the ISBD Review Group. First, there is the matter of terminology used in the ISBDs in contrast to that used in FRBR, which has raised the question as to whether such terms as "work," "expression," "manifestation." and "item" should be introduced in place of such terms as "publication." On the one hand, such changes would be a logical extension of the Review Group's charge to implement FRBR to the largest extent practicable. One might conclude that since the principles of FRBR are already widely understood and applied, incorporation of its terminology might foster better comprehension of the ISBDs throughout the information community and encourage interoperability with other standards. But, on the other hand, as Patrick Le Boeuf argued at the Frankfurt IME ICC in his paper on "Brave new FRBR world: "FRBR terminology should *not* be merely incorporated such as it stands into the ISBDs and cataloguing rules, but [these] should keep their own specific terminology, and provide accurate definitions showing how each term in this specific terminology is conceptually related to

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[3] http://www.ddb.de/news/pdf/code_comp_2003_europe_2.pdf

the FRBR terminology".

The Review Group concluded that it was essential for IFLA to clarify the relationship between the ISBDs and the FRBR model. The group encountered difficulties in trying to achieve that alignment, owing in large part to the fact that the terms used in FRBR were defined in the context of an entity-relationship model conceived at a higher level of abstraction than the specifications for the ISBDs. While the entities defined in the FRBR model are clearly related to the elements forming an ISBD description, they are not necessarily congruent in all respects and the relationships are too complex to be conveyed through a simple substitution of terminology. The Group thus decided that development of a table to detail the relationship of each of the elements specified in the ISBDs to its corresponding entity attribute or relationship as defined in the FRBR model would satisfy the need to make clear that the ISBDs and FRBR themselves enjoy a harmonious relationship. Since Die Deutsche Bibliothek had volunteered to support ISBD maintenance and development as its ICABS[4] responsibility, the IFLA Cataloguing Section asked DDB to fund a project to establish a mapping that would detail the relationship of each of the elements specified in the ISBDs to its corresponding entity attribute or relationship as defined in the FRBR model. Tom Delsey was recruited on contract to develop the mapping, and the Cataloguing Section's Standing Committee approved the resulting document entitled "Mapping ISBD Elements to FRBR Entity Attributes and Relationships" on July 9, 2004. It will shortly be published on the IFLA Web site. [HOPEFULLY IT WLL BE AVAILABLE BEFORE YOU READ THIS PAPER IN WHICH CASE YOU CAN SUPPLY THE URL.]

Nevertheless, the ISBD Review Group did decide to introduce some changes in terminology, beginning with the recently revised ISBD(G). Among them is the use of the term "resource" rather than "item" or "publication". "Resource" is given a specific definition in 0.2 of the ISBD(G). The use of the former term "item" is different from the term "item" as used in FRBR, but it is not difficult to confuse them. This led to the decision to use "resource." This decision is consistent with that of the Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR, which is also moving ahead with "resource" as the general term.

In another area of effort, the ISBD Review Group has been attempting to provide improved guidance regarding the use of the ISBDs for bibliographic description of publications in multiple formats, for example, an e-book or serially issued maps. Recognizing the increasing incidence of resources published in more than one physical medium, and the challenges that these publications pose for bibliographic control, the Review Group appointed a task force charged which decided to investigate three topics in particular:
    (1) use of multiple ISBDs and use of multiple general material designations ([gmds]),
    (2) the order in which elements for multiple formats should be treated, and
    (3) the number of bibliographic records to be created for multiple versions.
The task force developed a number of proposed additions or changes to the ISBD(M) that were posted to IFLANET last year for worldwide review.

Here is brief are some of the highlights resulting from the review. In general there was agreement with the proposal to combine elements from any existing ISBD to a publication, "that exhibits

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[4] IFLA-CDNAL Alliance for Bibliographic Standards

characteristics for the description of which more than one ISBD must be applied". There was also general agreement that the repeated gmd should be confined to the case of a single manifestation with characteristics of more than one format, and that this specific distinction should be articulated strongly and clearly in the ISBD text. And, on the third issue, the overwhelming consensus was a preference for a separate record for each version (i.e., multiple bibliographic records), rather than for a single bibliographic description recording details for each version.

The Review Group discussed these issues at its meeting last summer in Berlin and reached the conclusion that the ISBDs should urge National Bibliographic Agencies and libraries participating in networks to create separate bibliographic descriptions for works issued in multiple formats. This practice would facilitate record exchange, one of the basic purposes of the ISBDs. Other libraries would be authorized to select a single-record approach when they wish. This recommendation in effect addressed a recommendation emanating from the Working Group 4 at the Frankfurt IME ICC. (A bit more on this topic will follow shortly when I discuss recent developments regarding revision of ISBD(ER).)   The Review Group also discussed the use of multiple GMDs, deciding to postpone a decision on the matter until broader issues could be identified and evaluated.

As a result of these discussions, the Review Group set up a Material Designation Study Group, to develop an outline of problems and issues, taking into account relevant recommendation from IME ICC Working Group 5, which studied closely related issues and rendered useful recommendations. Also, the Material Designation Study Group will consider relevant developments arising from revision of AACR. The Study Group will be meeting during the 2004 IFLA Conference for the purpose of delivering a preliminary outline of problems and issues, together with next steps either in the form of further work for the Study Group to accomplish during the following year or in the form of recommendations for the Review Group to consider, approve, and implement.

To address another area of interest, the Review Group in 2002 established the ISBD Series Study Group. This effort reflected concerns that some inconsistencies and ambiguities appear to have developed regarding the rules for recording information in Area 6 for Series and related information presented in Area 7 for Notes. The Study Group's mission is to set out how these areas are treated in all the ISBDs and then propose a common phrasing for the rules examined. The Study Group will also take into account relevant prescriptions from AACR2 and the ISSN Guidelines.

Specifically, the charge is three-fold:
- to clarify the purpose of area 6 and its relation with area 1 in ISBD(CR) and ISSN: identification or transcription;
- to verify the compatibility of sources of information recommended or prescribed in all ISBDs for area 6 and for area 1 in ISBD(CR) and ISSN, and
- to propose a common phrasing for area 6 in all ISBDs.

After circulation of discussion papers that made clear the complexity of the issues under investigation, the Study Group met during last year's IFLA Conference in Berlin. The Group agreed that through all the ISBDs, Area 6 is mainly for transcription of data from the item being catalogued, and less for identification, and that obvious typographical errors should not be

corrected. Earlier this year, the ISBD Review Group considered a proposed change to the ISBD for Continuing Resources, but some reservations were expressed which the Study Group has been asked to consider. Meanwhile, the Study Group is also investigating problems related to sources of information for Area 6, taking into consideration the great variety of publication practices throughout the world in laying out bibliographic information regarding series and sub-series and inconsistent practices among national bibliographic agencies in treating such information. For example, some cataloguing agencies establish only main series, while others establish separate records for main series and sub-series, depending of the distinctive title of the sub-series, or of the existence of numbering.

On another topic, just as the Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR is undertaking a strategic reexamination of the organization and presentation of AACR Part I, the Review Group decided that it too should consider the possibility of combining the ISBDs into a single document.   At the IFLA Conference last year in Berlin, the ISBD Review Group established a Study Group on the Future Directions of the ISBDs and charged it with the following tasks:
- To consider the uses and utility of an ISBD that combines provisions for the entire "ISBD Family" into a single document, with different chapters for the information specific to a particular type of material;
- To improve consistency of terminology and content throughout the ISBDs;
- To consider administrative issues related to the Review Group's growing workload; and
- To assign priorities to new and ongoing projects to ensure timely, balanced completion of Review Group's agenda.

Discussions are underway with representatives of Die Deutsche Bibliothek to determine the terms of a project that might be funded to create this combined ISBD. Whether the resulting document would supersede the separate ISBDs or whether it would be issued in addition to them is a matter yet to be decided.

Certainly, the activity of greatest immediate urgency to the ISBD Review Group is completing revision of the ISBD for Electronic Resources. In early May, world-wide review of the draft version posted on IFLANET concluded, with many comments submitted from a wide variety of sources. This feedback provided clear evidence that the evolving ISBD(ER) continues to be a source of major interest internationally, no doubt due to the complex and changing nature of the electronic resources themselves. Several contentious issues have emerged from these comments which the Review Group found could not be resolved by means of email, and therefore these issues will be discussed during the Buenos Aires IFLA conference.

Here is a brief list of the most important questions to be resolved:
1) Should Area 3, the "Type and extent of resource area", be deleted? The Review Group had decided last year in Berlin that Area 3 was so problematic that it should not be continued, and the Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR has also decided to delete it. But, some of those responding to the draft text objected to this decision, so it will need to be reconfirmed or overturned.
2) The proposed 2004 version of ER also eliminated lists of specific material in favor of using conventional terminology in the examples in Area 5. There were some objections to this change, so it too will need to be revisited.
3) In the proposed ISBD(ER), the provisions call for the bibliographic agency to consider

"content" before "carrier" (e.g. when describing an electronic map, to consider ISBD(CM) first, then ISBD(ER)), although the proposed revision also allowed an option that gave priority to carrier over content. Based on world-wide reaction, should this option be omitted?

4) There was strong objections to certain differences in the treatment of bibliographic information between ISBD(ER) and ISBD(CR), specifically in relation to acronyms and initialisms and full forms of corporate body names where ISBD(CR) calls for the initialisms to be used as the title proper and the full forms as other title information, while all other ISBDs require the opposite treatment. The choice before the Review Group is to change CR to make it conform to the prevailing practice or to leave the ISBDs at variance with regard to this issue.

5) The proposed revision of ER seems to have failed to resolve the matter of formulating appropriate General Material Designations (GMDs) in cases of bibliographic description of materials of more than one type, such as a serially issued electronic map. The Review Group will need to work more on this aspect or decide to defer its resolution until after the Material Designation Study Group mentioned above can make its recommendations n this subject.

On a more general level, there were some comments suggesting that overall the ISBDs should allow fewer abbreviations and might consider dropping prescribed punctuation, and these suggestions are being referred to the Future Directions Study Group.

Despite the particular issues mentioned above, the world-wide review did produce much agreement with the proposed revisions and, overall, the reaction was quite positive. One point especially garnered considerable support: a policy recommendation to the effect that any difference in medium or carries (e.g., digitization of a printed text) should result in the creation of a new record for the resource, while different format versions of the same resource (such as pdf, html copies of the same resource) should be covered within a single record for the resource.

Last year, as background for the first of these meetings of experts on an international cataloguing code, a survey was undertaken comparing existing national and multinational cataloguing codes. The results demonstrated conclusively that the ISBDs are used extensively as the basis for bibliographic description and usually with very little modification.[5] The Review Group is prepared to work with the authors of these national cataloguing codes whenever there are concerns that we might address by way of improving the ISBDs. In particular, we have established an effective working relationship with the Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR on matters of mutual interest. These collaborations as well as all the work that has gone into the development and maintenance of the ISBDs and the energy currently devoted to projects under way or in the planning have depended mostly on the efforts of individual experts. I would like to close these remarks by expressing appreciation to these dedicated professionals for their many contributions to the advancement of the ISBD program, which even today continues to represent one of IFLA's premier accomplishments in the area of cataloguing.

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[5] http://www.ddb.de/news/pdf/code_comp_2003_europe_2.pdf