ISBD: the challenge of updating standards whilst maintaining stability
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As the title of the conference says, it is a big challenge to keep standards updated that have endured nearly 36 years taking into account the evolution of publications nowadays. I am going to present a standard well known by all of you, but in order to understand the recent decisions and activities, I am going to present a point of view not so well known, although the previous chair of the Review Group John Byrum has shown it all around the world with his several papers in which I am pleased to acknowledge this presentation is based on with his permission\(^1\), namely the process of creation and revision of the standards for bibliographic description, and the revision process that has followed their creation focussing on the most recent activities.

The concept of the International Standard Bibliographic Description dates back to the 1969 International Meeting of Cataloguing Experts in Copenhagen, sponsored by the IFLA Committee on Cataloguing. The development of this standard was pushed by the automation of bibliographic control as well as the economic necessity of sharing cataloguing. The main goal of the IFLA agreement was at that time, and continues today, to offer consistency when sharing bibliographic information. The ISBDs were 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.”

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The ISBDs seek to serve three primary purposes: First, and of greatest importance, they are intended to make possible the interchange of records from different sources by means of establishing the content of bibliographic records and regularizing the form in which this should be presented. Secondly, ISBDs have assisted in the interpretation of records across language and scripts barriers by means of prescribed punctuation, 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. Except this last purpose, which corresponds to a time when ISBD was first created, the other objectives continue to be pursued.

The first of the ISBDs to be published was the *International Standard Bibliographic Description for Monographic Publications (ISBD (M))*, which appeared in 1971, but a revised text was published in 1974 as the "First standard edition". Other ISBDs subsequently appeared for specific kind of materials: ISBD(S) for serials was also published in 1974; ISBD(CM) for cartographic materials and ISBD(NBM) for non-book material, were both first published in 1977; ISBD(A) for older monographic publications (antiquarian) and ISBD(PM) for printed music first editions were published in 1980; and for computer files the ISBD(CF) first edition was published in 1990. Along the way, the need was felt for a general framework to which all the ISBDs would conform, resulting in production of ISBD(G) published in 1977; the primary utility of G is that of ensuring harmony among the other ISBDs. For article level publications, *Guidelines for the application of the ISBDs to the description of component parts* was issued in 1988. The entire inventory of the ISBDs in all their editions is listed on IFLANET; in every case, at least the latest version of each ISBD is freely available in an HTML or PDF format.²

**Schedule and procedures for issuance of new or revised ISBDs**

At the IFLA World Congress in Brussels, held in August 1977, the Standing Committee of the IFLA Section on Cataloguing made important new decisions in relation to IFLA’s programme of ISBDs. It was decided that all ISBD texts would be fixed to a life of five years, after which revision would be considered for all texts or for particular texts. Although so considered, 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, more recently, the ISBD for continuing resources.

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 are no exception to this rule. 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 electronic environment opportunities to speed up the review process.

² [http://www.ifla.org/VI/3/nd1/isbdlist.htm](http://www.ifla.org/VI/3/nd1/isbdlist.htm)
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.

- **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. 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 goes over 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.

- **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. As the final step in the process in the case of new ISBDs or those extensively revised, a workshop may be held in conjunction with an IFLA conference to promote understanding and use of the publication.

Although some ISBDs have been developed or revised to meet particular needs, there have been two overall revision campaigns affecting the entire Family of ISBDs.

**First General Review Project**

Consequently to the decision taken in 1977, which I just mentioned above, 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 1980’s, the ISBDs had been re-published in “Revised editions.” The standard for monographic publications ISBD(M) previously revised in 1978, was revised in 1987, cartographic materials ISBD(CM) revised in 1987, non-book materials ISBD(NBM) revised in 1987, for serials ISBD(S) revised in 1988, printed music ISBD(PM) revised in 1991, and the general one ISBD(G) revised in 1992.

In addition, a separate ISBD was created for Computer Files (1990), which, due to the rapid advances in technology, was soon superseded by creation of an ISBD for Electronic Resources (1997).
Second General Review Project and Current Activities

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 in the permanent 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 Report3, and the ISBD Review Group was reconstituted to initiate a full-scale review of the ISBDs in order to implement FRBR’s recommendations for a basic level national bibliographic record and ensure conformity between the provisions of the ISBD and FRBR’s data requirements.

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

Another important task has been considering the adaptation of ISBD terminology to FRBR’s terms as “work,” “expression,” “manifestation.” and “item” that should be introduced in place of such terms as “publication” or “document”. 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, the relationships are too complex to be conveyed through a simple substitution of terminology. Taking into consideration Patrick Le Boeuf’s advice 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 the FRBR terminology”. The Group thus decided that the 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. Die Deutsche Bibliothek as its ICABS responsibility supported the project for which Tom Delsey was recruited to develop the mapping, and the Cataloguing Section’s Standing Committee approved the resulting document entitled

4 IFLA-CDNAL Alliance for Bibliographic Standards

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”. This decision was taken because 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.

To date, ISBD(G), ISBD(M), and ISBD(CR) have gone through the general revision project. ISBD(ER) was submitted to the Standing Committee and approved. ISBD(CM) went through the world-wide review process and was revised following that process, but was not at that time submitted to the Standing Committee because work was begun on a consolidated ISBD (to which I will refer next).

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 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 Review Group discussed these issues at its 2003 meeting 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 Working Group 4 at the Frankfurt IME ICC.

As a result of these initial discussions, the Review Group set up a Material Designation Study Group, with Lynne Howarth as chair, to develop an outline of problems and issues, taking into account relevant recommendation from IME ICC 2003 Working Group 5, which studied closely related issues and rendered useful recommendations. The Material Designations Study Group began discussions on two issues that had been identified for further work:

- placement of the general material designation [GMD]
- identification, clarification, and definition of content and nomenclature of the GMD, area 3, area 5, and area 7

Soon, it became clear that the Study Group’s work on terminology and nomenclature would need to parallel and complement the work of the Study Group on the Future Directions of the ISBDs as it prepares, first, the harmonized text, and, subsequently, the consolidated ISBD. The Study Group decided that, as individual areas of the harmonized text are completed, it will examine and evaluate terminology used currently in the authorized ISBDs and make recommendations for the content and terminology to be used in the GMD, and areas 3, 5, and 7 as appropriate in the proposed consolidated ISBD.

Having addressed the terminology/nomenclature issue, the Study Group then turned its attention to problems associated with where to place or locate the general material designation within the bibliographic record. The Group agreed on the importance and primacy of the GMD as an “early warning device” for catalogue users, and after considering various options the Study Group put forward the following statement, which was approved by the Review Group at its August 18th, 2005 meeting in Oslo: “Recognizing the ongoing difficulties with the current optionality, terminology, and location/placement of the general material designation [GMD], and anticipating that the Future Directions Study Group may be working towards producing a consolidated ISBD for which a Document Type Definition (DTD) can then be developed, the Material Designation Study Group proposes the creation of a separate, unique, high level component (not a numbered ISBD area) – a “content/carrier” or “content/medium” designation that would be mandatory – i.e., not optional as with the current GMD -- for recording in bibliographic records.

“The Material Designation Study Group emphasizes that this component is independent of system displays – that is, different systems can display the recorded content of the “content/carrier” or “content/medium” designation as each system vendor or client institution determines appropriate, and particularly if the component is a part of the DTD that a style sheet will interpret for display (or not, as a library and/or system vendor determines).”

The creation of a unique component, along with specification of its content, will help to focus the content of area 3 (i.e., truly unique/exceptional material), area 5, and, to some extent, area 7. Thus, terminology within each element will be more precise and distinct, addressing current problems with information overlap across related areas. Having determined a unique place for designating content/carrier, or content/medium, the Study Group can now focus on what information must be embedded within that component (GMD), as well as within areas 3, 5, and 7. The Material Designation Study Group will work closely with the Future Directions Study Group, and will also liaise with the JSC appointed GMD/SMD Working Group. Tom Delsey, editor of Resource Description and Access (RDA) will be consulted as appropriate or required for “sorting”, clarifying, and defining terminology as it evolves throughout the process.

To address another area of interest, the Review Group in 2002 established the ISBD Series Study Group, chaired by Françoise Bourdon. 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. Taking into account relevant prescriptions from AACR2 and the ISSN Guidelines, this study group pursued three objectives:
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, taking into consideration the great variety of publication practices and practices among national bibliographic agencies in treating such information.

The Series Study group revealed that there were inconsistencies between ISBDs, and one main task of the Review Group from its beginnings was to keep harmonized provisions and increase consistency. As I have already explained, the process of revision was slower than would be required to fit the standards to the evolution of publications, new investigations and rule changes in order to maintain their currency.

The Review Group then decided that it should consider the possibility of combining the ISBDs into a single document. In parallel the Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR is undertaking a strategic reexamination of the organization and presentation cataloguing rules for Resource Description and Access. Currently there are seven specialized ISBDs, plus the General ISBD. These ISBDs have been revised and published at various times, with no method for incorporating changes made in newer texts that affect all the ISBDs into the older texts. For example, when it was decided to incorporate decisions on what data elements should remain mandatory into the ISBDs based on those required in the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records, these changes were incorporated into the ISBD(M) and the ISBD(CR) that were issued in 2002, and ISBD (G) in 2004 although they applied to all of the ISBDs.

In addition to this situation, the arising evolution of publications that show characteristics from more than one format requires the application of more than one ISBD. Because the ISBDs themselves have some inconsistencies, this brings major difficulties that drove the Review Group to decide in 2003 at the Berlin Conference to set up a Study Group on the Future Directions of the ISBDs. This Future Direction Study Group, chaired by Dorothy McGarry, decided that consolidation of ISBDs was feasible. The Study Group was charged by the Review Group with the task of preparing a definitive text. Its work has been guided by the following Objectives and Principles.

The Objectives are as follows:
• To prepare a consolidated, updated ISBD from the specialized ISBDs in order to meet the needs of cataloguers and users of bibliographic information.
• To provide consistent stipulations for the description of all types of resources to the extent that uniformity is possible, and specific stipulations for specific types of resources as required to describe those resources.

The Principles include:
• The primary purpose of the ISBD is to provide the stipulations for compatible descriptive cataloguing worldwide in order to aid the international exchange of bibliographic records throughout the international library and information community (e.g. including producers and publishers).
• Different levels of cataloguing will be accommodated, including those needed by national bibliographic agencies, national bibliographies, universities and other research collections.
• The descriptive elements needed to identify and select a resource are to be specified.
• The set of elements of information rather than their display or use in a specific automated system will provide the focus.
• Cost effective practices must be considered in developing the stipulations.

All the ongoing revisions of ISBDs were postponed except ISBD (A) as the SG considered it difficult to work on this consolidation at the same time as the review process. We have had 3 years of very hard work in order to develop a text which is up now for worldwide review.

The work plan and time-line for this project are as follows:
First, the Deutsche Bibliothek has digitized the ISBDs that were not in electronic form and has arranged to have matrices of each area prepared to collocate the same areas from each ISBD, assigning one colour text to each ISBD. Working from that basis, the SG members have refined the matrices to collocate elements within the areas from all of the ISBDs, presenting side-by-side with a column containing suggestions for changes from the published stipulations in addition to those made during the merger of the individual texts.

Primary problems and suggestions were highlighted for the ISBD Review Group to consider. This phase was completed by the end of 2005. This process and resulting tables were made four times, before getting a consolidated draft text.

Next, the Study Group worked on the stipulations, taking into consideration responses from Review Group members, in order to have a text ready for the meeting in April 2006 at the Deutsche Bibliothek. As a result of this meeting there was a text ready for worldwide review from late June until September 2006. The Study Group will then revise the text and forward it to the Review Group for approval. If all goes as currently planned, in late 2006 or early 2007 the consolidated version should go to the Cataloguing Section's Standing Committee for balloting. The question of whether this text will replace the individual ISBDs or will be issued in addition to them has yet to be decided.

From the beginning of the project, agreement was reached on the general outline to be followed for each area. In addition, it was decided to recommend that:
• the structure should be changed to a new restructure of areas where general stipulations that apply to all materials are given first, followed by exceptions or additional stipulations that are needed for specific types of resources.
• present stipulations should fit into the new structure; that is why the order of stipulations has also been modified to make the text more logical and consistent.
• some changes will be made due to the need to generalize wording; so attempts were made
to match wording as much as possible, also taking into account the stipulations that were
considered mandatory, conditional, or optional in the already-revised ISBDs
• the GMD should be moved from after the title proper to another location; the content and
location of the GMD are expected to be changed following recommendations still to be
received from the Material Designations Study Group, so these were left as they had been
previously for this draft.
• published (validated) versions will be used as the basis on which to work at the first stage
but the text has been updated with the ongoing revisions, generalizing wording and
brining all materials description to the same state of conformity with FRBR at the second
stage
• changes to stipulations can be made at a later stage.

Attending to the fourth principle of the Study Group, and looking for interoperability with
other systems and display formats, the punctuation has been slightly changed. The Study
Group recognizes the importance that ISBD punctuation has had in the past and continues
to have in the context of different languages and scripts, in order to get the common
understanding between professionals, and also to represent examples in the professional
literature or rules. However, the Study Group recognizes that the punctuation now does not
fulfil the objective that it had in the past. They are conscious of other metadata systems and
the need for searching and interoperability with other schemas and display formats, in order
to allow consistency in those other displays, so has decided to modify the punctuation
requirement slightly. For example, punctuation may be repeated where an area ends with a
full stop and the following area begins with full stop. Also, if different elements in the same
area are supplied, each is enclosed in its own set of square brackets. Having a consolidated
ISBD will make such changes much easier.

Definitions are very important, so that we all mean the same thing when we use a particular
term. Therefore, some definitions have been brought together in a Glossary put at the end,
including terms now listed in appendices in some of the specialized ISBDs.

Some major changes include:
- Area 3 will be limited to mathematical data for cartographic resources, to music specific
information, and to numbering for serials. Area 3 has been omitted for types of electronic
resources.
- In area 6, the ISSN has been made mandatory for all materials.
- It was decided that the examples generally should exemplify only the stipulation being
considered. Full examples will be published separately in a supplement, rather than being
included in the ISBD itself.

This text does not expect to solve all the problems that are present in today’s cataloguing
processes. However it is intended to serve as a definitive text for description of all kinds of
materials and to make easier the cataloguing of resources that share characteristics in more
than one format, and to facilitate and speed up the work of keeping the ISBD updated and
consistent for the future.
At the 2005 Oslo meeting the ISBD Review Group decided that further work on ISBD(ER) and ISBD(CM) should be postponed until summer 2006 in order to ensure that the Future Directions Study Group is able to focus on its initial task of harmonizing the existing, validated ISBDs and work on updating stipulations. However, the Future Directions Study Group has taken into account provisions of the drafts of these ISBDs during this phase of its work because they have passed the world wide review. It has, however, been difficult for the Study Group to work on this consolidation at the same time that the ISBD(A) has been going through its review process. The SG decided that it would include information for older monographic publications as it existed in the published edition. It is anticipated that following approval of a revised ISBD(A), the information will be changed in the consolidated to match the revised ISBD(A). The chair has also contacted the chair of the International Association of Music Libraries ISBD group for updates that were needed for the music aspects of the ISBDs.

Thus, for nearly four decades, 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 25 languages. In turn, the ISBDs have guided the work of national cataloguing committees in updating their codes to promote internationally accepted practices, a point underscored by the compilations of practices by various rules that was prepared for the 2003 and 2004 meetings of Cataloguing Experts. 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 publication 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, or/and the consolidated ISBD, abreast of current requirements and to pursue doing so in cooperation with national bibliographic agencies and national and multi-national cataloguing committees.

**For the future work** that will be agreed in the next general meetings, are many options and two directions:
- One direction is continuing with the review process: 1) Adaptation of consolidated ISBD to the results coming from Material Designation Study Group, and to the outcomes from ISBD(A) World Wide Review; 2) and to continue reviewing the stipulations for those resources where old ISBDs have not been revised, that is ISBD(PM) and ISBD(NBM).

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Another direction is exploring the interoperability with other models and schemas, for example FRANAR, as there is some authority information now recorded in the bibliographic record.

Since the data elements defined in other schemas are already familiar to the ISBDs, one task will be to develop an ISBD XML DTD and style sheet. We will look for other possibilities as automation continues to offer new applications like ONIX, for example, that may provide opportunities for preparing bibliographic descriptions programmatically using publisher’s metadata. These developments in turn may necessitate a more flexible approach than is currently permitted by the ISBDs.

Surveys comparing existing national and multinational cataloguing codes taken in preparation for these meetings of experts on an international cataloguing code have demonstrated conclusively that the ISBDs are used extensively as the basis for bibliographic description and usually with very little modification.7 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.

Now, if you have not already done so, it is time for you to comment and contribute to the text presented to World Wide Review of International Standard Bibliographic Description (ISBD), consolidated edition at http://www.ifla.org/VII/s13/pubs/ISBD-consolidated-July2006.pdf. This will be very much appreciated and welcomed.

Further developments regarding this initiative as well as other work is announced on the ISBD Review Group's Web page at http://www.ifla.org/VII/s13/isbd-rg.htm.

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