

To: Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA  
From: Christine Frodl, DNB Representative  
Subject: Proposals for Subject Relationships

DNB thanks Dr. Barbara Tillett, JSC Chair, for preparing this proposal. The German experts groups on descriptive and subject cataloguing think, that this Proposal should also be discussed in combination with the Discussion paper 6JSC/ALA/Discussion/2. Both papers should be proofed regarding their applicability to linked data applications. Although the German experts groups on descriptive and subject cataloguing prefer the approach described in 6JSC/ALA/Discussion/2, the members would recommend waiting until the consolidation of the IFLA FR models has been achieved. Therefore we consider it premature to decide upon both papers within this response and would welcome a comprehensive discussion at the JSC meeting regarding further steps.

#### **General Remarks:**

The German Expert Group on Subject Cataloguing has discussed this proposal in connection with ALA's discussion paper on "Treatment of Subjects in RDA" (see our response to 6JSC/ALA/Discussion/2), as the Chair's proposal and ALA's discussion paper can be seen as two different answers to the same problem.

It follows the statement of the Expert Group:

In our opinion, RDA should provide a general framework for subject cataloguing. This framework should, however, be flexible enough to accommodate various kinds of subject cataloguing systems. Therefore, we regret to say that we cannot agree with the Chair's proposal. Instead, we propose to follow the strategy as outlined in ALA's discussion paper.

The main problem we see in the Chair's proposal is that it remains firmly rooted in the treatment of subjects according to the FRBR model. The "spirit of FRSAD" is mentioned in the proposed revision of RDA 0.3.1, but there is almost no evidence of this in the actual proposal. Although the FRSAD Working Group has convincingly shown that the group 3 entities of FRBR are not suitable as a universal matrix for dealing with subjects, they are nonetheless kept as basic subject entities in the Chair's proposal.

Although some kind of faceting of subject entities is a common (although not universal) approach in subject indexing, different subject indexing systems have arrived at very different results in this matter. As the FRSAD Working Group has shown, it is simply not possible to find one categorization which fits all subject cataloguing systems. If RDA were to insist on FRBR's rather simplistic view on subject cataloguing, the users of all existing and future systems of subject indexing would either have to somehow cram their facets into the rigid and rather arbitrary framework of the FRBR

entities, or they would have to draw the conclusion that it is simply not possible to find a “hook” in RDA to which their own system could be linked. This would be very unfortunate as it would make RDA less relevant to many people and also weaken its position within the field of international standards.

There are also a number of additional problems connected to the group 3 entities, e.g. whether the dimension of time can be satisfactorily expressed by the “event” entity. It should also be noted that the results of the FRSAD Working Group are quite in accordance with thesaurus theory (cf. ISO 25964-1). With good reason, thesaurus theory refrains from any categorization of thesaurus terms (apart from very general distinctions, e.g. “classes of one”). We would also like to stress that it is very difficult to see how one could work with the group 3 entities in the area of classification. For example, preferred and variant access points do not really make sense in a classification system.

If JSC should decide to keep the group 3 entities according to the Chair’s proposal, we think there would at least have to be some alternative, saying that other kinds of subject entities may be defined according to the needs of the agency creating the data. But in our opinion, this would not be a very satisfactory solution. It would be much better to accept the FRSAD model and define only one subject entity, as proposed in ALA’s discussion paper.

### **III. Purpose of this Series of Proposals**

It is not clear if a subject relationship is mandatory or optional.

### **IV. General Changes**

#### **General PROPOSAL 1 – Remove the placeholder phrases**

We agree that the placeholder phrases must be removed, but we suggest introducing a new structure along the lines suggested in ALA’s discussion paper.

#### **General PROPOSAL 2 – Authoritative subject system term**

We prefer the shorter version, but the longer version might be given in a footnote when it first occurs. Here, we would prefer to have an “or” instead of an “and”, i.e. “(e.g., the standard for subject access points or classification numbers)”. This also applies to other cases where this phrase occurs.

### **V. Chapter by Chapter Changes**

#### **Chapter 0 PROPOSAL 1 – Under 0.3 Conceptual Models Underlying RDA, add text and footnote to 0.3.1**

We agree that FRSAD should be added to the standards in 0.3.1 (including the footnote). However, we do not agree with the second addition under c), as we do not think that the proposed approach of using the FRBR entities of group 3 is feasible.

#### **Chapter 0 PROPOSAL 2 – Under 0.3.3 Alignment with FRAD, add text**

We do not agree with the proposed additions, as we do not think that the proposed approach of using the FRBR entities of group 3 is feasible.

#### **Chapter 0 PROPOSAL 3 – Bring terms in alignment with this proposal, under 0.6.7**

As the proposed change is of a general nature, we agree.

## **Chapter 0 PROPOSAL 4 – Add 0.6.10 Section 10**

We do not agree with the proposed additions, as we do not think that the proposed approach of using the FRBR entities of group 3 is feasible.

## **Section 4 PROPOSAL – Add “and Relationships to” for the title of Section 4 and add comma before ampersand**

Apart from our general objections to the use of the FRBR entities of group 3, we are also not in favor of treating attributes and relationships in the same section. The clear line drawn between attributes and relationships, which leads to a very logical structure, is one of the strengths of RDA (although in some cases one might argue whether some elements, which are now treated as attributes, should not better be viewed as relationships). The distinction between attributes and relationships should not be abandoned without a very good reason. We do not consider concerns about a possible renumbering of chapters in RDA to be such a reason.

## **Chapter 12 PROPOSAL 1 – Change title of this chapter to include relationships**

See our comment above.

## **Chapter 12 PROPOSAL 2 – Add text for ch. 12**

As we cannot agree with the basis for the Chair’s proposal, we cannot agree with the proposed content for chapter 12. We also note that much of the proposed content only makes sense for subject indexing, but not for classification.

In addition to our general objections, we would like to point out the following details:

### 12.2

- We suggest including the FRSAD user task “explore”.
- We think that the aspects covered under “Representation”, “Language preference” and “Common usage or practice” should not be prescribed in RDA, but rather be left to the individual subject systems.

## **Chapter 13 PROPOSAL – Add text for concepts, ch. 13**

As we cannot agree with the basis for the Chair’s proposal, we cannot agree with the proposed content for chapter 13. We also note that much of the proposed content only makes sense for subject indexing, but not for classification.

In addition to our general objection, we would like to point out the following details:

- 13.2.1.2: Not only is it a common practice in subject indexing systems to define which sources are to be used for determining the preferred term (this is covered in 13.2.2.1), but there may also be restrictions on the names which are to be recorded as variant names. For example, in a monolingual thesaurus, equivalents in other languages are not desired, even as variant names. Therefore, RDA should not include an instruction to take names “from any source”.
- 13.2.2.3: We think that this should rather be left to the individual subject system.
- 13.2.2.2-13.2.2.4: We do not understand the relationship between the three instructions. For the authority record, a preferred name must only be chosen and recorded once. If the

authority record already exists, there is no need to record the name again, as seems to be implied by 13.2.2.4. Does this refer to the use of the preferred name when recording a subject relationship? But then again, this wouldn't make sense under the heading "Identifying concepts". We also are not sure what is meant by "determine from the authoritative subject system" in 13.2.2.2.

- 13.3.1.2: We do not understand how "information on identifiers for the concept" could be taken "from any source". In a subject system, identifiers are not found somewhere, but are deliberately assigned. They are then recorded in an authority record, where they can be looked up.

#### **Chapter 14 PROPOSAL – Add text to ch. 14 objects**

#### **Chapter 15 PROPOSAL – Add text to ch. 15 events**

As we cannot agree with the basis for the Chair's proposal, we cannot agree with the proposed content for chapters 14 and 15. We also note that much of the proposed content only makes sense for subject indexing, but not for classification.

In addition to our general objection, we would like to point out the following detail:

- At 14.0 and 15.0 there are references to 14.3 and 15.3, indicating that their guidance about other identifying attributes of concepts and events can be found in these chapters. However, 14.3 and 15.3 only deal with identifiers for concepts and events.

#### **Chapter 16 PROPOSAL 1 – Add text to second paragraph and remove parts of final paragraph under 16.0 Purpose and Scope**

The proposal adds "places as the subject of works" to the coverage of chapter 16, but explicitly excludes using places to indicate "geographic coverage" (last sentence).

We find this a highly problematic distinction, as it is certainly not universal to all subject indexing systems. In LCSH, it may be possible to distinguish between "a place as the subject of a work" (when the place name is used as a main heading) and "geographic coverage" (when the place name is used as a geographic subdivision), although we would still argue that a geographic subdivision in LCSH nonetheless is part of the subject of the work.

In other subject indexing systems it is not possible to distinguish between the two cases at all: According to the German rules for subject catalogs (RSWK), a geographic heading is used as a part of the subject headings string regardless of whether the place is seen as the most important aspect of the subject or only a minor aspect. This is due to the fact that the concept of "main heading" vs. "subdivision" is not applicable to RSWK. A subject is always expressed as a string of one or more headings, which are combined according to a fixed citation order. In this citation order, geographic headings are either placed first, or, if a person heading exists, second after the person heading

This is also a good example of how different the structures of subject entities can be, in a global perspective. In RSWK, we have two levels of granularity: The subject can be seen as being the subject headings string as a whole, which in turn is made up from smaller entities (the individual headings). The group 3 entities of FRBR can – if at all – only be applied to the individual headings within a string, but not to the string as a whole. This would be highly unsatisfactory. The FRSAD approach, on the other hand, which puts no restrictions on the structure of a subject indexing system, would make it possible to account for both levels of granularity.

**Chapter 16 PROPOSAL 2 – Add text to ‘16.1.2 Using Access Points to Identify Places’ under ‘General Guidelines on Identifying Places’**

**Chapter 16 PROPOSAL 3– Add final paragraph to ‘16.2.2.2 Sources of Information’ under ‘Preferred Name for the Place’**

**Chapter 16 PROPOSAL 4– Add final paragraph to ‘16.2.2.3 Choosing the Preferred Name’**

These proposals acknowledge the fact that the use of place names in subject indexing might be governed by different rules than their use in descriptive cataloguing. We appreciate this very much.

On the other hand, these changes do not seem logical to us in comparison to the proposed new chapters. Why are there no general rules proposed for places as subjects, similarly to those set up e.g. for concepts? For place, everything is left to the authoritative subject system. In other cases, however, the proposal includes rules like a language preference for the preferred name of a concept (13.2.2.3). Generally, RDA should not include instructions which limit the choices made by the individual subject system. So the approach taken for “place” is certainly preferable to the one taken e.g. for concepts.

In addition to that, we would like to use place as a case in point for a general problem: On the basis of the Chair’s proposal, how should one decide which subjects fall under chapter 16? In LCSH, it might be possible to class every heading which goes into MARC 651 as an access point for a place according to 16.1.2. Yet it is difficult to see how the subject content of subheadings could be accounted for by the model proposed by the Chair. Should something like “Berlin (Germany)—Politics and government—1945-1990” as a whole be classed as a “place”? Or would the subdivisions be completely disregarded? Or would the heading have to be split up, with “Politics and government” being treated under chapter 13 (concepts); and the chronological subdivision falling under chapter 15 (events)? So we feel that the proposal does not work particularly well with LCSH.

As we’ve already explained in our comment above, the rules would be even more difficult to apply in our German system, as the concept of “main heading” is unknown to RSWK. In a subject headings string, it is not possible to identify a “most important” heading; all of them play a part in conveying a complex subject content. Does that mean that any subject headings string which contains a geographic heading should be a case for chapter 16? In most cases, the string will also contain other headings which – if at all – would be seen as a different group 3 entity. Again we find that the proposed structure could – if at all - only be applied to the level of the individual subject headings, but not on the string as a whole.

**Chapter 16 PROPOSAL 5– Add text to ‘16.3 Identifier for the Place’**

We note that a place can also have an identifier when it is not used as a subject. Shouldn’t there be a reference to chapter 11?

**Chapter 16 PROPOSAL 6 – Insert standard statement at ‘16.4.1 Authorized Access Point for the Place’**

**Chapter 16 PROPOSAL 7 – Insert standard statement at ‘16.4.2 Variant Access Point for the Place’**

Our general objections to the use of the FRBR entities of group 3 apply to these proposals.

**Chapter 17 PROPOSAL – Add reference to ch. 23 at the end of ‘17.0 Purpose and Scope’**

**Chapter 18 PROPOSAL - Add reference to ch. 23 at the end of '18.0 Scope'**

**Chapter 19 PROPOSAL 1 – Add text to '19.0 Purpose and Scope' to refer to chapter 23**

**Chapter 19 PROPOSAL 2 – Add text to '19.1.2 Recording Persons, Families, and Corporate Bodies Associated with a Work' to refer to subject relationships in chapter 23**

**Chapter 19 PROPOSAL 3 – Add text to '19.2.1.1 Scope' to refer to ch.23 for subject relationships for a creator**

**Chapter 19 PROPOSAL 4 – Add text to '19.3.1.1 Scope' to alert readers that we are making a distinction between "associated with a work" and "is the subject of a work":**

**Section 7 PROPOSAL – In keeping with 0.6.7, rename 'Section 7: Recording Relationships to Concepts, Objects, Events, & Places'**

We agree with the proposals listed above.

**Chapter 23 PROPOSAL – Add the following text (subject relationships)**

Our general objections to the use of the FRBR entities of group 3 apply. Apart from that, we agree with the general content of the proposal.

Note: The numbering doesn't seem to be consistent (23.5 is missing)

**Chapter 23 General Guidelines On Recording The Subject Of Work**

**Chapter 33 PROPOSAL – Add the following text (general guidelines on relationships group 3)**

Our general objections to the use of the FRBR entities of group 3 apply. Apart from that, we also strongly object to the fact that the proposal only recognizes relationships of the type "two of a kind", e.g. concept/concept, event/event, etc., but not crosswise relationships such as event/place. In the German authority file, we have numerous links between entities of different kinds. RDA should not limit the choices of the individual subject systems in this regard.

We also believe RDA needs to re-appraise the question of places as attributes of persons and corporate bodies. It would be much more sensible to e.g. treat "place of birth" of a person or affiliation as a relationship instead of an attribute.

33.2 says to include "all significant bibliographical relationships". We wonder what is meant by "bibliographical relationships" here.

**Chapter 33: General Guidelines On Recording Relationships Between Concepts, Objects, Events, And Places**

**Chapter 34 PROPOSAL – Add the following text (related concepts)**

**Chapter 35 PROPOSAL – Add the following text (related objects)**

**Chapter 36 PROPOSAL – Add the following text (related events)**

**Chapter 37 PROPOSAL – Add the following text (related places)**

As already mentioned above, we strongly object to the fact that these proposals only recognizes relationships of the type “two of a kind”, e.g. concept/concept, event/event, etc., but not crosswise relationships such as event/place.

**Appendix L PROPOSAL – Add text for a new Appendix L**

We agree with this proposal.

**Glossary PROPOSAL – Add the terms to the Glossary and online registry of RDA vocabulary**

Our general objections to the use of the FRBR entities of group 3 apply.