

# IFLA Survey on Rare Materials Cataloguing with RDA: Analysis

Rare Books and Special Collections Section

## Preliminary matters

### **Introduction and goals**

In recent years an increasing number of libraries are adopting RDA as a cataloguing standard. Still, what happens to their rare materials? Is RDA fit for the description of rare materials such as books, manuscripts, graphic and cartographic materials and music? Will it be able to overtake extremely detailed rules such as DCRM or ISBD? Probably not by itself, although the RSC, aware of the complexity of the situation, already has a Rare Materials Working Group managing some of the points where RDA collides with the needs of the description of rare materials. But it could very well accomplish it thanks to policy statements such as the forthcoming RBMS ones for rare books.

What are libraries with special collections planning to do? Will they refuse to adopt RDA for rare materials if it does not suit them? Will they decide to make simple records using RDA proper? Will they develop detailed policy statements of their own? Or maybe align with those of other institutions? To get an accurate and worldwide overview of the plans institutions have regarding these matters, the Rare Books and Special Collections Section developed a survey on the implementation of RDA in rare materials cataloguing. Its aim has been to reach as many institutions all around the world as possible in order to get the most precise overview.

The survey was open for two months (from April the 6<sup>th</sup> until June the 6<sup>th</sup> 2018) and its results are now available at the Section's web page.

At the time the survey was open, the RBMS Descriptive Cataloguing of Rare Materials Task Force had completed an initial draft of the RBMS Policy Statement to RDA, but final completion and publication of the RBMS PS is paused during the RDA Toolkit Restructure and Redesign Project (3R Project). For more information about the history and development of the RBMS Policy Statements, see <http://rbms.info/dcrm/rda/#RBMSPS>. For information about the RDA RSC Rare Materials Working Group, see <http://www.rda-rsc.org/workinggroups>.

### **Survey structure**

The survey was conceived with a very simple structure and consists of 10 questions. Only the first (Are you cataloguing or planning to catalogue your rare materials with RDA?) and last (If there was an international, IFLA-endorsed, set of recommendations to catalogue rare materials with RDA, would you align with it?) were required. Most of the questions were framed as multiple choice and just in question 9 (If you are planning to align with other institution's policy statements, have you already decided which institution would you align with?) we asked for free text. Questions 2 (If you are not planning to catalogue your rare materials with RDA, which was the main reason for your decision?) and 3 (If you are not planning to catalogue your rare materials with RDA, which standard are you going to use?) were framed as multiple choice with an option ("Others") that required free text.

## **Scope and languages**

The survey was conceived to be answered by all kinds of institutions with library heritage and special collections: national libraries, university libraries, union catalogues, etc. The possibility of publishing the survey in the seven official IFLA languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Russian and Spanish) was considered but, due to the challenges of translating the questions and interpreting the results, it was finally published in English.

## **Publicizing the survey**

The information about the survey, as well as the link to access it, was published in the website of the Rare Books and Special Collections Section (<https://www.ifla.org/node/40422?og=59>). We also published a post with the same content at the Section's blog, *Rare & Special* (<https://iflarbscs.hypotheses.org/520>) and circulated it in our social media. As our main goal was to reach as many institutions around the world as possible, we contacted IFLA's Regional Sections (Africa, Asia and Oceania and Latin America and the Caribbean) to inform about the survey and ask them to help with its circulation. A particularly kind response was received from the Africa section. All the Committee Members distributed it within their milieus and the Cataloguing Section was also contacted with the same purpose.

## **Analysis of the results**

### **Number of responses and geographical distribution**

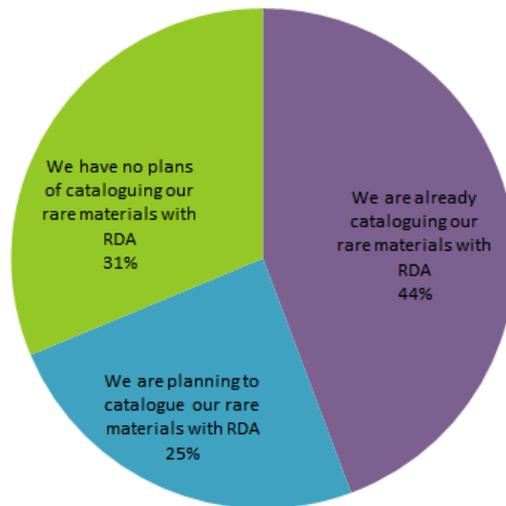
We received 131 responses, excluding incomplete ones, which were not considered for the results and subsequent analysis. Despite the efforts in contacting the Regional Sections and the circulation of the survey by Committee members from Africa, Asia and Latin America within their regions, most of the responses came from Europe and North America, having received 5 responses from Africa, 7 from Asia, 65 from Europe, 12 from Latin America and the Caribbean, 37 from North America and 7 from Oceania. The fact that the responses from Africa and Asia were sparse makes the results less trustworthy for these regions.

With a relatively small number of respondents, the survey does not break down responses by type of library, and does not break down responses geographically beyond the level of IFLA regions. There may be value in further work being undertaken to identify whether particular kinds of library have particular needs or patterns of adoption of standards.

As the comparison of the results between regions was of particular interest for the purpose of the survey, we have elaborated compared results for each question in the different world regions that are also available at the Section's web site.

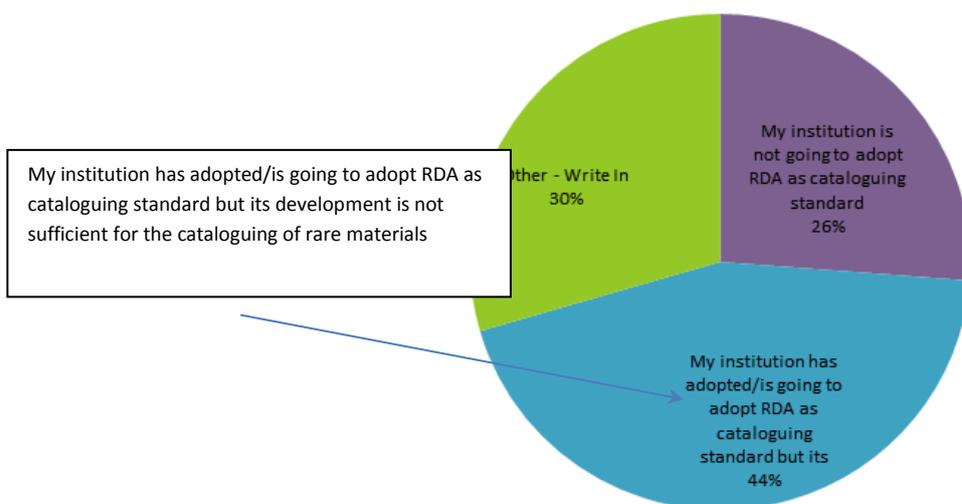
## **Survey results**

**Question 1: Are you cataloguing or planning to catalogue your rare materials with RDA?**



Almost half the institutions that answered the survey stated that they are already cataloguing their rare materials with RDA, a rate that decreases in Africa (20%), Latin America (25%) and Europe (30%) and is higher in Asia (57%), North America (68%) and Oceania (86%). Consistently, among the institutions that have no plans at all of cataloguing rare materials with RDA the higher rates are in Africa (60%), followed by Europe (40%), Latin America (33%) and Asia (29%), whereas the lower rates are in Oceania (14%) and North America (16%).

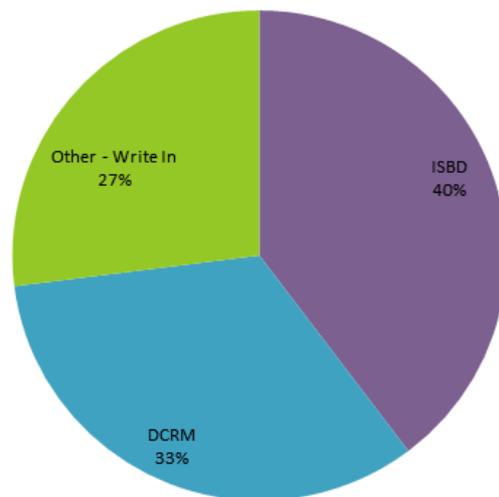
**Question 2: If you are not planning to catalogue your rare materials with RDA, which was the main reason for your decision?**



44% of the responses mentioned the fact that RDA’s development for the cataloguing of rare materials is insufficient as a reason not to adopt it for its cataloguing. And even some

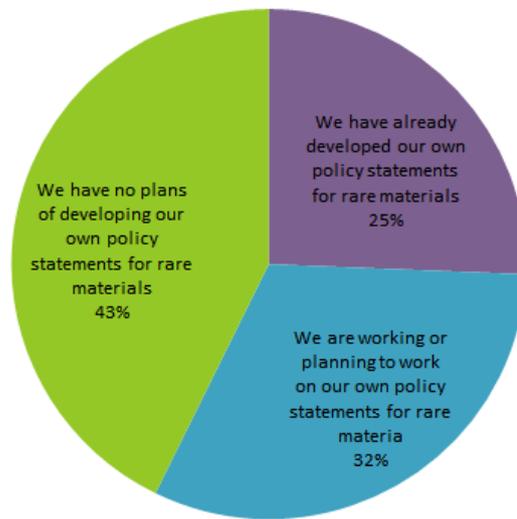
institutions that have actually adopted it agreed with the idea. This rate also varied from region to region: Africa, for instance, had other reasons not included in the survey (lack of training in cataloguing rare materials with RDA and no facilities to support it) and Oceania gave as a reason the fact that DCRM provides a more thorough description. In the rest of the regions, the percentage also changed from 42% in Europe and 38% in Latin America and the Caribbean to 64% in North America and 60% in Asia.

**Question 3: If you are not planning to catalogue your rare materials with RDA, which standard are you going to use?**



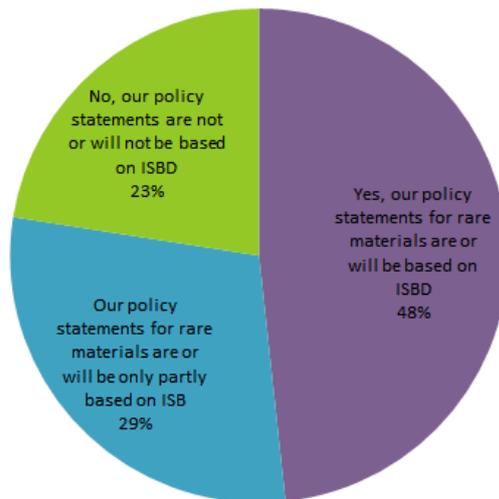
This was a particularly important question for IFLA, as it affects directly its standard for bibliographic description, ISBD, which is going under a thorough review to align its elements with the Library Reference Model. 40% of the responses chose ISBD as the preferred standard to catalogue rare materials, followed by DCRM (33%). The percentages also changed in the different regions: Africa 33% ISBD and 66% other standards, that have not been specified; Asia 75% ISBD and 25% other standards (RDA); Europe 52% ISBD, 31% DCRM and 17% other standards (mostly national standards); Latin America and the Caribbean 50% ISBD, 10% DCRM and 40% other standards (mostly AACR2); North America 63% DCRM, 6% ISBD and 31% other standards (most of them related to DCRM); Oceania 100% DCRM.

**Question 4: If you are cataloguing or planning to catalogue your rare materials with RDA, have you developed or are you planning to develop your own policy statements?**



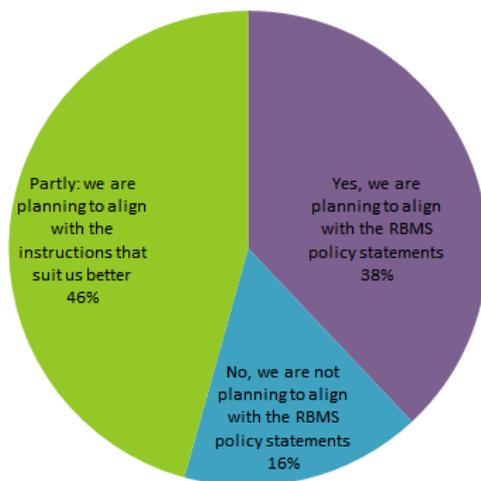
Only 25% of the institutions have already developed their own policy statements, although 32% of the rest is working (or planning to work) on them. The results differ again: in Africa 40% is planning to work on them and 60% have no plans at all to develop them; in Asia 50% have already developed their policy statements (almost the highest rate, followed by Oceania, where 57% have already done it and 14% more are working on it); Europe has the same percentage of institutions that have already developed them than of the ones that will not do it (37% each); Latin America and the Caribbean have little institutions that have already developed them (17%), but many that are working on it (58%); whereas in North America 61% of the institutions are not planning to work on their own policy statements (a high percentage that could be explained by the fact that they are waiting for the RBMS PS to be published).

**Question 5: If you have developed, are developing or are planning to develop your own policy statements for rare materials, are they or will they be based on ISBD?**



Also this question was a key question for IFLA, regarding again its standard ISBD. 48% of the institutions plan to develop policy statements based on ISBD and 29% more will partially base them on it. The responses varied again in the different regions: some have lower intention to base them on ISBD (such as Oceania, with 20%; Africa, with 33%; or North America, with 41%) and some showed high rates (Asia, with 83%; Europe and Latin America, both with 50%).

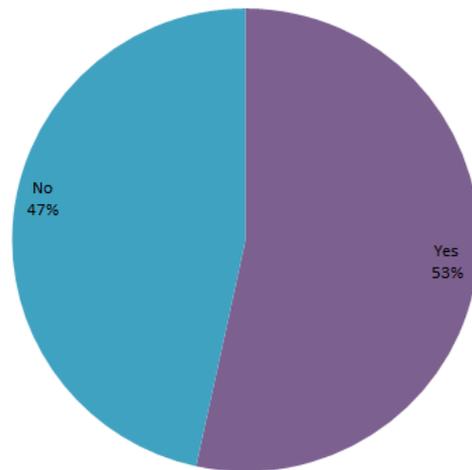
**Question 6: If you have no plans of developing your own policy statements for rare materials, are you planning to align with the future RBMS policy statements?**



The option "Partly: we are planning to align with the instructions that suit us better" attracted the highest number of responses, 46%. Secondly, 38% are planning to fully align with them and only 16% have no plans to do it, neither totally nor partially. As usual, the rates change in the different regions: in Africa 50% plan to align with it partly and 50% not at all, whereas in Asia 60% will align partly with it and 40% fully. Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean and Oceania have high rates of partial alignment (57%, 67% and 33% respectively) but also consider the full alignment (19%, 22%, 33%) or no alignment (24%, 11%, 33%). A different

situation is to be found in North America, where 68% is planning to fully adopt the RBMS PS and only 6% won't align with it.

**Question 7: If you have no plans of developing your own policy statements for rare materials and you are not planning to align with the future RBMS policy statements, are you planning to align with other institution's policy statements for rare materials?**



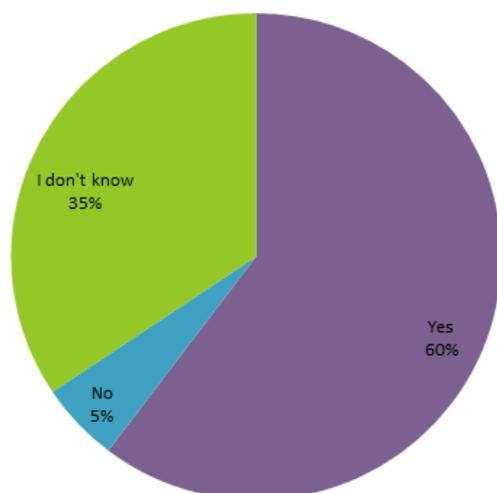
Almost all the regions had approximately 50% intention to align with an other institution's policy statements, with the exception of Asia, where 75% plan to do so, and Oceania, where no institution plans to align with the PS of other institutions.

**Question 8: If you are planning to align with an other institution's policy statements, have you already decided which institution would you align with?**



This question was framed as a free text question. The responses pointed mostly to national libraries, together with some university libraries and international institutions such as IFLA.

**Question 9: If there was an international, IFLA-endorsed, set of recommendations to catalogue rare materials with RDA, would you align with it?**



Also an important question for IFLA, well known for its international standards. 60% of the institutions would align with IFLA recommendations regarding RDA and rare materials. The highest rates are in Africa (100%), Asia (86%) and Latin America and the Caribbean (75%), followed by North America (60%) and Oceania (57%). Europe has the lowest intention of aligning with recommendations endorsed by IFLA (52%, an 46% don't know yet).

### **Conclusions**

The results of the survey show that the cataloguing practices for rare materials are moving towards RDA in many libraries all around the world. Nevertheless, many institutions consider that its development for the description of rare materials is not currently enough to base their own cataloguing solely on its instructions. Some institutions are still cataloguing rare materials with other standards (mainly ISBD and DCRM) or plan to base their policy statements on them, a fact that shows that these older standards haven't lost their validity completely with the arrival of RDA.

Regarding policy statements, not all the libraries are planning to develop their own: many will simply align with the RBMS policy statements (totally or partially) and others with their national agencies or other institutions. This could be related to the lack of resources noted by some institutions. This lack of resources (whether it is a lack of funds to purchase materials or of access to training or training budget) does not enable many libraries to adopt the latest standards for cataloguing rare materials. The answers to this particular question also shows a reliance on other institutions to provide more detailed guidance suited to local materials, whether this is the national library or other national cataloguing agency, or another library seen as a provider of high quality catalogue records and advice.

Finally, a high proportion of institutions stated that they would align with recommendations for rare materials cataloguing using RDA and endorsed by IFLA. This shows how much IFLA's

role as provider of standards is valued, but, can IFLA work on recommendations for a standard that is not its own? The Rare Books and Special Collections Section is working on a position paper regarding RDA for rare materials and what kind of guidance is needed for their cataloguing that will be published next year.