

RDA at German Academic Libraries: First Contact and Initial Reactions

Results from Focus Group Interviews with Catalogers

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This is a slightly shortened version in English, with some additional comments for readers from an Anglo-American background.

Summary:

Several months after the introduction of the new cataloging standard “Resource Description and Access” (RDA), focus-group interviews with catalogers were conducted at 18 large academic and state libraries in Germany. Among other things, the catalogers were asked how confident they feel in applying RDA, which aspects of the new cataloging code they like or do not like, how they estimate the expenditure of time in comparison to the former cataloging code RAK, which resources they use to get help or information, and what they think about the frequent changes to the new standard. The paper presents the results of these interviews.

1. Introduction

At the end of 2015 or, respectively, the beginning of 2016, RDA was introduced in all German library networks, replacing the former German cataloging standard RAK (Rules for alphabetical cataloging). A couple of months later, a research project was conducted to find out how German catalogers cope with the new cataloging standard and how they feel about various aspects. The method chosen was a qualitative approach, namely focus-group interviews with catalogers. It was felt that this would lead to more differentiated and meaningful results than a simple online survey. New aspects may come up in a talk which wouldn't have arisen in an online survey, and it's also possible to ask participants to clarify their statements. The disadvantages of this method are that the evaluation is complex and laborious, and that it is difficult to arrive at quantitative statements.

2. Procedure and Evaluation of the Interviews

For the group interviews, 18 large academic libraries (university or state libraries) from the six German regional library networks were visited in spring and early summer 2016. Every library network was represented by at least two libraries. The table shows the libraries visited, ordered by library network:

University Library Erlangen-Nuremberg	Bavarian Library Network (BVB)
Bavarian State Library, Munich	Bavarian Library Network (BVB)
University Library of the Ludwig Maximilians University Munich	Bavarian Library Network (BVB)
Berlin State Library	Common Library Network (GBV)
Göttingen State and University Library	Common Library Network (GBV)

German National Library of Science and Technology, Hannover	Common Library Network (GBV)
University and State Library Bonn	University Library Centre of North Rhine-Westphalia (hbz)
University and State Library Düsseldorf	University Library Centre of North Rhine-Westphalia (hbz)
University and State Library Cologne	University Library Centre of North Rhine-Westphalia (hbz)
University and State Library Darmstadt	Hessian Library Information System (HeBIS)
University Library Frankfurt	Hessian Library Information System (HeBIS)
University Library Mainz	Hessian Library Information System (HeBIS)
University Library of the Freie Universität Berlin	Cooperative Library Network Berlin-Brandenburg (KOBV)
University Library of the Humboldt University Berlin	Cooperative Library Network Berlin-Brandenburg (KOBV)
Library and IT of the University of Hohenheim	South West German Union Catalog (SWB)
Communication, Information, Media Centre Konstanz	South West German Union Catalog (SWB)
University Library Stuttgart	South West German Union Catalog (SWB)
Württemberg State Library, Stuttgart	South West German Union Catalog (SWB)

The size of the groups was between six and twelve catalogers. All in all, 149 catalogers participated in the interviews. According to the requirements stated beforehand, the groups were made up from colleagues from different age groups and also from different areas of cataloging (monograph catalogers, serial catalogers, sometimes also special fields like maps or rare materials).

At the beginning of each interview the aims and the procedure were explained, then there was a short introductory round. To help with the structure, there was a list of set questions, but these weren't necessarily always asked in the same order. Rather, the interviewer tried to create a conversational atmosphere and treat the aspects where they fitted best. The interviewer tried to ask the questions in as neutral a way as possible, so as not to influence the catalogers.

On average, the interviews took 81.5 minutes, with a range from 53 to 105 minutes. The talks were recorded with a voice recorder. Full anonymity was guaranteed. Afterwards, all recordings were replayed, the statements documented verbally or paraphrased, and ordered by topic. Obviously, not everything which was mentioned in the interviews could be incorporated in the present paper.

3. Introductory Questions

3.1 Training

As an icebreaker, the participants were asked to describe their impressions from the training sessions. Feedback was mainly positive. However, it was often emphasized that the very extensive material to be covered was conveyed in an extremely short time-span. Several groups discussed that RDA was supposed to be taught in a matter of mere days, whereas the teaching of RAK at library school had extended over several years. This was felt to be a strong discrepancy.

Although there was a national concept for the training, it became obvious that it was sometimes differently implemented in the library networks. Usually, training took five days. But in one network, only three days were made available for the training. In another network, training took 21 half days, with every second day used for e-learning. Sometimes, hands-on work was integrated in the training, which was welcomed by the participants. This was not always possible. For example, in one library there was a huge number of catalogers to be trained, but only a small training classroom. Some of the interviewees would have liked to have more time for their training, some would have welcomed more examples and better didactics. The interviewees mostly coped well with the training situation, although this was usually a teacher-centred approach.

3.2 Confidence in the Application of RDA

The participants were also asked how confident they now felt in applying RDA. The most frequent answer was that a certain level of routine had already been reached for simple materials and standard situations. For more difficult situations, however, the catalogers still felt uncertain and said they had to do a lot of looking up. In contrast, some of the interviewees felt to be still mere beginners who hadn't reached any level of routine yet. As one colleague stated: "Being confident feels different".

On the one hand, the level of confidence depends on how much cataloging is done in the interviewees' everyday work. As was stated in one interview: "In our department, people have so many other tasks in the subject teams that cataloging plays only a small part. This makes it difficult to become acquainted with a new system." On the other hand, confidence clearly depends on how much original cataloging in RDA the interviewees had already done. For example, in serials cataloging, the number of new records is naturally limited. Also, some of the participants mostly work with older materials, for which usually an existing RAK record can be found and reused. And in some libraries, acquisitions aren't large or specific enough to require much original cataloging.

However, some interviewees reported that, for various reasons, they had already been able to do a lot of original cataloging in RDA, which had boosted their confidence. One colleague, who had missed the original training sessions due to parental leave, explained that she was given materials for original cataloging (a set of donated books) especially for training purposes, which had been very helpful.

As was sometimes pointed out during the course of the interviews, catalogers still have to do a considerable part of their work using the former RAK rules. This is due to the fact that, in order to save time and effort, existing RAK records can still be used for copy-cataloging¹ and do not need

¹ Note that although I use the term "copy-cataloging", this is not exactly the same concept as in the Anglo-American world. In Germany, all members of a library network use the same master record, stored in the union catalog, without making individual changes to the bibliographic record. Local information can only be recorded in the holdings area of the record. Whenever the master record is changed in the union catalog, every library which owns the item automatically gets a copy of the updated record for their local catalog. If another member of the library network has already added a record to the union catalog, "copy-cataloging" basically means adding the library's call number (and perhaps other local information) to the master record (in the holdings section). Of course, the bibliographic record should also be

to be upgraded to RDA (which means they cannot be used for RDA training). Switching between the two cataloging standards was generally felt to be difficult, e.g.: “At present, I do more work in RAK than in RDA, and sometimes I get confused.”

Another problem with the switchover was discussed in several interview groups: There was no time for the catalogers to recapitulate the material covered in the training sessions. As one colleague put it: “It just wasn’t possible during our everyday work. It’s an illusion to think you’d find the time, when there are heaps of items waiting to be processed.” This shows that in planning the migration process, some managers failed to allow catalogers a phase in period which they could have deepened their newly acquired skills. Some participants were also amazed to find how much they had forgotten after an interval of not using RDA (e.g., due to vacation), because the “foundation isn’t solid enough yet.”

Two interview groups discussed whether it’s possible to reach the same level of proficiency in a second cataloging code as in the first. “It’s just like your first language, this also means learning a certain internal logic.” Or, as another participant put it: “Using RAK for several decades shapes the way you’re thinking. I can’t simply let go and say: Now I’m thinking RDA. Instead, I’m still thinking RAK, and then I contemplate: What do I have to do differently?”

3.3 General Opinions on RDA

Before getting to the details, the interviewees were asked for a very general, overall assessment of RDA. Often participants stated that the switchover hadn’t been as bad as they had expected. Apart from that, opinions on the new cataloging code differed widely. Some interviewees found RDA “basically positive”, “likeable”, or “almost better than RAK”. For others, advantages and disadvantages were roughly equal: “In many aspects, RDA is clearly better than RAK, in many other aspects, it’s clearly worse.” Completely negative statements were rare, e.g.: “I do not see any advantage in changing to the new standard.” It was often stated that RDA isn’t as different from RAK as people had expected, e.g.: “I was surprised how many things have stayed the same.”

Many interviewees expressed disappointment that the changes weren’t more radical, e.g.: “I had hoped for a real break, that cataloging would become truly innovative and modern.” In particular, participants had expected more streamlining. As one colleague put it: “Beforehand, we were told that things will get simpler and more generalized, but now I don’t see that at all.” Another interviewee showed himself “surprised that the standard still has an extent of more than, say, 70 pages”. RDA was often characterized as “cumbersome”, “hairsplitting”, “long-winded”, “detailed”, “complicated” or “nitpicking”.

RDA claims to be adapted to modern times. But in the interviews, RDA was sometimes called “old-fashioned” or “vintage”. For some, it even brought to mind the first German national cataloging standard, the Prussian Instructions (PI).² This association is mainly due to the conventional collective titles in RDA. PI had a very similar concept, whereas in RAK, conventional collective titles were almost non-existent. Another point of criticism was that RDA still makes use of the concept of main versus added entry (at least implicitly). However, other participants argued that RDA was the more up-to-date cataloging standard.

Another important aspect was the question of internationality. One interviewee argued that the use of the language of the agency was a contradiction to the aim of internationality: Using “...” as a mark of omission can be understood internationally, unlike “[und sechs andere]” (and six others).

checked for correctness during this process. In other cases, “copy-cataloging” means basing a record on data from other suppliers, e.g. the German National Library. This is also done directly in the union catalog.

² The so-called ‘Prussian instructions’ (PI) were the common cataloging standard in Germany between the late 19th century and the 1980s, when RAK was introduced.

One interview group would have preferred to record coded information (which could be displayed in any language) instead of language-bound words like “Illustrationen” (illustrations) or “Seiten” (pages). Some participants also criticized the differing policy statements of the various communities, as these would hinder the international uniformity of the data. It was also sometimes mentioned that RDA wasn't truly international, but still had an Anglo-American bias.

On the positive side, many interviewees had the impression that one can do a lot more with RDA than with RAK, e.g., include more persons or give additional information in the records. Also, non-sensical restrictions like the rule of three had been abolished. The more exact transcription of the source of information was also seen as an advantage. Some participants also called RDA “logical” and “more consistent”. However, there was also the criticism that RDA was too “heavy” and showed an “inflated theory”. The main problem here seems to be that theory and practice are “experienced like two different worlds” as the bibliographic format doesn't represent the theory and there is hardly any FRBR to be seen in the catalogs.

4. Individual Aspects of RDA

In the course of the interviews, a multitude of individual aspects were discussed. Partly, these came up as answers to the general questions “Which aspects of RDA do/don't you like?”, partly the interviewer asked specifically for certain points, if these hadn't come up otherwise.

4.1 General Aspects

The terminology of RDA and FRBR often differs from the terms which were used in RAK. Using a technical language with terms like “entity” was felt to be difficult by a number of interviewees. The switchover to RDA also meant some changes in prescribed punctuation, which some participants called “perplexing”. However, this is in fact a problem of the former RAK rules, which sometimes did not faithfully apply ISBD punctuation.

Among the positive aspects mentioned in the interviews was that “at last all materials are covered by the same code of rules”, i.e., there are now no more additional sets of rules for certain kinds of materials.³ The new content, media and carrier types were also generally welcomed.

According to the German policy statements, a list of more than 100 form aspects (e.g., “Bibliography”, “Conference proceedings”, “Audiobook”, “Pictorial work”, “Cookery book”) has been defined to be used in RDA 7.2 (Nature of Content). This was also sometimes mentioned as a very positive feature, especially for materials which do not get full subject headings.

Notes play a much larger part in RDA than they used to in RAK.⁴ In RDA, it is always possible to give additional information in the form of a note, and the wording is not prescribed. This new method was generally seen as an improvement, e.g.: “The notes are nice, especially as they can be freely phrased. This is a good way of providing additional information for our users, which cannot be accommodated elsewhere.”

The introduction of RDA has also changed how catalogers view multipart monographs. Up to now, these were described hierarchically (i.e., with one record for the whole and linked records for the individual parts) in all German library networks. However, RDA allows for other methods as well. In one library, the interview group reported that they now use a comprehensive description for kits which can only be borrowed as a whole (e.g., language courses consisting of a book and compact discs): “We think this is really great, it makes the record much easier to read.”

³ Unlike AACR2, the main RAK rules covered only print materials. For other kinds of materials, e.g., non-book materials, maps or music, there were additional sets of rules.

⁴ In RAK, notes were (mostly) limited to a number of predefined situations, and it was normal to use prescribed wording.

4.2 Bibliographic Description

With respect to the bibliographic description, the switchover to RDA has brought about considerable changes. The most important innovation is the exact copying of data from the source of information, the so-called transcribing. On principle, this vital principle of RDA was rated positively by all interview groups. It was seen as an improvement that the resource is now represented more faithfully, and that one no longer has to ponder whether something must be abbreviated or left out. When asked for positive aspects of RDA, the abolition of abbreviations was one of the points most often mentioned.⁵

The exact transcription was seen as especially advantageous for publishers' names. "That used to be a really difficult instruction in RAK!" Among other things, one had to judge whether the publisher's name included the family name of the founder or owner,⁶ which is now completely irrelevant. The transcription of statements of responsibility, however, was felt to be more problematic. Interviewees criticized that due to the transcription of academic titles, affiliations, etc., these statements can become very extensive and confusing, "e.g., if the statement of responsibility gets five times longer than the title proper." In such cases, many interviewees prefer to use the optional omission.

But the main point of criticism was that the principle of exact transcription wasn't exercised consequently enough in RDA: "One had hoped one would no longer be confronted with the question: What do I have to write in which form? But in fact it isn't so easy, because in some cases one isn't allowed to transcribe." An example quoted were Roman numerals in the element "Numbering within series", which have to be changed to Arabic numerals.⁷ Another example mentioned was the rendering of square to round brackets.⁸ Capitalization was another case in point, as this must often be changed.

According to RAK, square brackets had to be used in many situations (e.g., for statements of responsibility which were not taken from the preferred source of information), where they are no longer required in RDA. This was generally welcomed. However, square brackets now have to be used whenever there is no explicitly given date of publication, but only a copyright date. This happens fairly often ("In the past, I never noticed that about two thirds of all books only have a copyright date.") and was universally judged as a setback: The bracketed date was "annoying", "gets on one's nerves", "seems to be completely unnecessary", and no user "can make head or tail of it". But in another situation, the square brackets are sadly missed: It is no longer possible to record information not given on the title page (e.g., an indication of an exhibition) as other title information in square brackets. According to RDA, such statements can only be recorded as a variant title or a note on title, which means that they are displayed in the note area. Several participants named this as a disadvantage.

⁵ In addition to what was common in AACR2, RAK also used abbreviations in statements of responsibility.

⁶ The RAK rule for publishers' names differed somewhat from AACR2 and included a number of difficult details. The basic rule was to shorten the statement to the nominative of the family name of the founder or owner (if present), e.g., "Peter Lang Verlag GmbH" became "Lang", or "Schlütersche Verlagsbuchhandlung" became "Schlüter".

⁷ According to the basic rule in RDA 1.8.2.

⁸ This is determined by the German policy statements in order to avoid mix-ups with supplied information.

4.3 Bibliographic Description of Serials

Serials (e.g., journals) are treated separately here, because they are affected in a different way than monographs. Records for serials aren't static, but must typically be regularly updated.⁹ Consequently, it's not possible to make a clear break between the old and the new cataloging code.

In Germany, it was decided that whenever an existing RAK record is revisited, it won't be fully upgraded to RDA. Instead, only the new or modified information is recorded according to RDA. So, there will be a coexistence of RAK and RDA not only in the short and medium, but also in the long term. As was discussed in several interview groups, this can lead to "weird mixtures", where the various bits of information do not fit together well—e.g., if the numbering of the first issue was recorded in RAK-style, but the numbering of the last issue must be recorded in RDA-style. Such compatibility problems can also arise within larger contexts, e.g., if new subseries are treated different from older ones, because they now follow the RDA rules. A general problem is that serials catalogers "will have to keep the RAK rules at the back of their mind for decades".

Heavily criticized was the recording of numbering according to RDA. Whereas this kind of information was recorded in a standardized way in RAK, it is now transcribed. However, this does not mean that the whole statement is simply copied down as a string. Rather, only the elements themselves are transcribed, and must in turn be combined according to certain rules. Therefore, the components of the numbering must first be correctly identified. RDA distinguishes between alpha-numerical and chronological designations, which in turn must be distinguished from the date of publication.

In all interview groups which included serials catalogers, the new rules were characterized as difficult, complicated and time-consuming. It was claimed that formerly, catalogers would have been able to find out the numbering "at a single glance", whereas now the training materials for this topic alone "covered more than 40 pages". Many details were to be taken into account, and one had to "look much more closely, e.g.: Is it really a date of publication or a part of the numbering? Interviewees were also dissatisfied with the results: The numbering statement was viewed as "getting out of hand", "confusing" and sometimes also "non-transparent". As one colleague explained: "When I record "16-", this can stand for "2016-", but it might also stand for "Volume 16-". Another example for an opaque statement of numbering given in the discussions was "1.1962-30", where the first part "1.1962" was recorded in standardized form according to RAK (consisting of the number and year of the first issue) and the second transcribed according to RDA (without a year, as the last issue doesn't happen to have a chronological designation).

The transcription of numbering was felt to be especially difficult in less common languages, because not only numbers must be identified, but also words for "volume", etc.¹⁰ The principle of transcription also means that it's essential to always have the issue in hand. One participant complained: "When I'm asked to terminate a record in the central system, I don't normally see the last issue. Now I always have to order it from the stacks." Participants' comments on this aspect were overall critical. The new instructions were called "no longer feasible", "terrible", or even "a catastrophe".

⁹ Note that the German community follows the principle of "latest issue" in serials cataloging, i.e., if a small change occurs (e.g., a change of publisher or a small difference in the title), the main fields are updated to reflect the present situation.

¹⁰ These used to be ignored according to RAK, only numbers and dates were recorded.

4.4 Work Level Information

The work level is very important for RDA. From every record it should be clearly apparent to which work the resource described belongs. For the reliable identification of a work, RDA uses the first creator (if present) and the preferred title of the work. If necessary, one or more additional attributes must be recorded to distinguish the work from other, similar works. In the interviews, the work level was often characterized as “difficult” or “hard to understand”. Positive statements were rare, e.g.: “Looking at the background, I like the work titles better than the former uniform titles.”

As became obvious in the interviews, the main difficulty lies in remembering to think about work titles in the first place.¹¹ This is no problem for situations which called for uniform titles under RAK, such as translations. The interviewees were also well aware that work titles must be recorded when the title changes in a later edition. But mistakes are often made when there is no creator (e.g., for an edited collection) and the title is a fairly common one. In these cases the cataloger needs to check whether there is another work (also without a creator) with the same title and, if so, record the work title explicitly together with one or more distinguishing elements. As the answers to the interviewer’s questions indicated, this is often neglected in practice.

In the German data model for RDA, it is also possible to link the bibliographic record to an authority record for the work. But as this was only discussed in two interview groups, it seems that this method wasn’t yet widespread (at least at the time of the study).

4.5 Relationships and Relationship Designators

When talking about relationships between a resource and the entities of the FRBR group 2 (persons, families and corporate bodies), interviewees stressed the new liberty “to record all persons who the cataloger feels to be important.” For example, a professor of one’s own university can now be recorded even if he or she is only named at the 15th position in a statement of responsibility.

Another aspect often discussed in this subject area was the question when a corporate body is considered to be the creator of a work. The RDA instructions differ considerably from those of RAK: According to RAK, the decision was based on formal criteria only, whereas under RDA, the content of the resource must be taken into account. Positive and negative opinions were roughly equally balanced. Some participants were critical of the new rules, e.g.: “It used to be so easy, but now one has to examine every single case.” Others approved of the RDA rules: They judged the former RAK principles as “meaningless” and viewed it as “much more logical to consider the content than only check formally.”

RAK only provided a small number of designators for roles like editor or illustrator. RDA, on the other hand, offers long lists of so-called relationship designators which can be used to specify, in considerable detail, the relationship between a person, family or corporate body and the resource in question. On principle, almost all interviewees looked upon this favorably (e.g., “a good thing”, “nice”, or “picking one is almost fun”), once they had become accustomed to the relationship designators.

However, as participants pointed out, it is often difficult to apply the relationship designators correctly. For example, one must make sure to choose a designator on the correct FRBR level, and sometimes it is challenging to find a suitable relationship designator in the first place. Relationships for corporate bodies were often mentioned as being an especially difficult area, as well as certain non-book materials (e.g., finding an appropriate relationship designator for the person who demonstrates exercises on a fitness CD). Foreign language resources can also pose problems, e.g., “if I

¹¹ In the German implementation, a preferred work title is only explicitly recorded in the bibliographic record if it either differs from the title proper or if one or more distinguishing elements are needed. In all other cases, it is assumed that the preferred title of the work is identical to the title proper.

have a book in Russian or Hungarian (which I cannot read), then I wonder: What role might this person have had?”. But the main point of criticism was that not all desired relationship designators can be found in RDA: “The ones you need are never there!” On the other hand, the large number of existing relationship designators can turn into a problem, too: “My feeling is that by now there are just too many of them.” Participants also complained that for some relationship designators it wasn’t clear in which cases they should be applied: “Sometimes I can’t even tell what it’s supposed to mean.”

In some library networks, gender-neutral spelling¹² is used for the relationship designators (instead of the generic masculine), which was criticized by some interviewees (“odd-looking”, “crazy”). But mainly, this seems to be a question of getting used to it: “In the beginning, it was an eye-catcher, but now one doesn’t look at it anymore.”

With regard to the relationships between several FRBR group 1 entities (work, expression, manifestation, item), one library network stood out in the interviews: Simultaneously with the adoption of RDA, this library network abandoned the practice of linking the volumes of a (numbered) monographic series to the record for the monographic series as a whole.¹³ This was possible as there is no need for a hierarchical description of monographic series under RDA, although it can still be done. In all three libraries of this network which were visited for an interview, the decision was fiercely criticized. Doing away with the links between the individual volumes and the series as a whole was “simply stupid”, “really awful” and “very, very bad for the daily work.” It was not only seen as a disadvantage for retrieval, but also for acquisitions. In addition, interviewees complained that in fact the new method did not mean less work (as had been intended), but rather more work, because now the ISSN must be recorded for every volume—whereas “formerly, it was only one click”. Several other interview groups in different library networks also expressed concerns that the linking of volumes to series might in the future be done less consistently or even given up completely.

4.6 Specific types of publications

Conference proceedings were among the publication types most often mentioned in the interviews. It was rated as positive that the conference is now always treated as the creator (independent of the presentation on the title page), so that these publications are cataloged homogeneously.¹⁴ However, the considerably broader concept of conferences as corporate bodies was seen as difficult. RDA allows to record a conference as a corporate body even if its name does not contain a word like “symposium” or “conference”.¹⁵ Sometimes only the preface gives a clue that a conference is involved. Participants stressed that they are often unsure whether a conference should be treated as a corporate body, and, if so, what they should record as the preferred name.

¹² Whereas a word like English “editor” can be used for men and women alike, in German two different grammatical forms must be used (“Herausgeber” and “Herausgeberin”). This was no problem under RAK because the role designators were used in an abbreviated form (“Hrsg.”). For the RDA relationship designators there are two options: Either to use the so-called generic masculine (i.e., the masculine form is supposed to cover men and women alike), or some form of gender-neutral spelling. Several German library networks make use of a gender-neutral spelling with a capital “I” (“HerausgeberIn”).

¹³ This is another example for the hierarchical description, which has a long tradition in Germany. In a catalog, users can search for the series as a whole and then click on a link to get a complete list of the volumes in the series. Vice versa, they can navigate from the record for an individual volume to the monographic series. Note that the records for the monographic series are not authority records, but bibliographic records.

¹⁴ According to RAK, conference proceedings were only entered under the conference if its name was a part of the title proper.

¹⁵ According to RAK, only conferences whose names met certain criteria were recorded as corporate bodies. A name in the form of a mere topic would not have met the requirements.

With respect to exhibition catalogs, it was seen as an advantage that (following the Anglo-American practice) most individual exhibitions are no longer treated as corporate bodies in their own right. Interviewees did not view this as a disadvantage for retrieval, as the date and place of the exhibition can be recorded instead in a well structured form in a different data field.¹⁶

Coffee table books were sometimes named among the particularly difficult publication types. As became clear in the course of the interviews, the main problem here is to decide whether a resource should be treated as a pictorial work or not. According to RAK, the only criterion was a quantitative one, i.e., the percentage of the pictures. But now it must also be taken into account whether these pictures are a vital component of the resource (i.e., primary content), or only illustrative.

The cataloging of compilations was uniformly felt to be especially difficult. On the one hand, a distinction is made between compilations of works by the same creator and compilations of works by different creators. On the other hand, compilations with a collective title must be treated differently from those without such a title. One interviewee commented: "I find myself looking up again and again how these four situations are handled and how this is transferred to our format."

4.7 Cataloger's Judgment

With the switchover to RDA, German catalogers have to get used to the so-called cataloger's judgment as a characteristic feature of the Anglo-American cataloging tradition. Not everything is exactly prescribed. Instead, many decisions are at the discretion of the cataloger.

In the interview groups, the positive assessments were slightly predominant ("I like it", "actually quite pleasant", "vague in a positive way"). Interviewees stated that cataloger's judgment made it easier to come to a decision. Especially in a difficult situation one could now "make a decision with a clear conscience and say, I'll just do it like this." It also leads to less discussions among catalogers within the same library network.¹⁷ One colleague stated that she now finds it easier to accept another library's solution, even if it wasn't the one she herself would have preferred ("because at least it isn't wrong").

But some participants pointed out that quite a lot of detail was prescribed after all, due to the extensive German policy statements and certain additional agreements within the library network: "We don't really get the feeling that there is so much which we can freely decide"; this was rather "an empty promise." Some interviewees also noted that cataloger's judgment wasn't such a new concept: "Now something has been officially permitted which some people had already done before and other people didn't have the heart to do."

Those participants who were rather sceptical of the cataloger's judgment focussed their criticism on two areas. On the one hand, it can be difficult or unsatisfactory not to have a clear rule: "There are so many discretionary provisions leading to grey areas that I find it difficult to keep my focus", or "I prefer to have a clear rule, otherwise I feel insecure." As one colleague put it: "A 'can' rule isn't really a rule at all." It was also criticized that cataloger's judgment can lead to a certain "arbitrariness" and a dependance on how the cataloger feels that day.

On the other hand, interviewees criticized the growing heterogeneity and varying quality of data in the catalog. "It's good to have so much freedom to make decisions, but if you look at certain records in the union catalog, then you think: Sometimes the freedom to make decisions isn't such a good thing after all." During a similar discussion in another group, one colleague commented: "One

¹⁶ Namely, as additions to the term "Exhibition catalog" recorded as a form aspect according to RDA 7.2 Nature of Content (cf. chapter 4.1).

¹⁷ Remember that all libraries working in the same union catalog must use the same record and are not allowed to adapt it locally, cf. note 1.

must learn to cope with the new freedom. This also means that you have to accept that another cataloger has decided: Recording three persons is enough for me.”

Several times participants pointed out negative consequences for the users (cf. chapter 4.8)—for example, if there are several editions of the same work, but they are differently cataloged. Importing data into reference management software is made more complicated by the new diversity. Interviewees saw disadvantages for retrieval, as well, as users can no longer be sure which information they can reliably search for. Staff in information services must also get used to the fact that it might now be possible to find a person named in 13th position, but that you cannot count on it.

As one participant pointed out, more cataloger’s judgment also means higher demands on catalogers: “If the instruction says, this and that is at your discretion, then you want to live up to your own standards: Have I taken everything into account?” A colleague from another library commented: “Cataloger’s judgment requires a certain sovereignty in applying the rules, and I’ve not yet reached that point.”

4.8 User friendliness

RDA claims to be especially user friendly. The “responsiveness to user needs” is named first among the objectives of RDA (RDA 0.4.2.1). Consequently, interviewees were asked how they assessed the user friendliness of the new cataloging standard. This question was often answered somewhat hesitantly, which may be due to the fact that not all participants are regularly in direct contact with users.

Some interviewees were highly sceptical, e.g.: “In talks about RDA, user friendliness was always emphasized, but I really couldn’t tell in which places,” or “I don’t see any advantage for our users.” One colleague commented: “I do my work for our users, but here, the advantages of RDA are not yet evident to me—apart from the fact that we can now record more persons and that our professors are no longer distressed when they have been omitted from the record.”

Additional entries, especially for persons, were among the things most often mentioned as an advantage: “That a user can now also find the fourth author or the second or third editor.”¹⁸ The relationship designators, which provide more detailed information about roles, were also seen as user friendly. However, some participants pointed out that searching for persons has become less reliable because of potentially different decisions by the catalogers (cf. chapter 4.7).

Getting rid of the abbreviations (cf. chapter 4.2) was seen as the second biggest gain in user friendliness. In addition to that, some more aspects were named as being advantageous for users in the area of bibliographic description: the exact transcription of publishers’ names, which is good for retrieval; the keeping of academic titles and affiliations in statements of responsibility; the option to use a country as the supplied place of publication; reducing the number of square brackets, which interviewees assumed must have been puzzling for users. An exception is the date of publication, which must now be bracketed much more often (cf. chapter 4.2). This was uniformly rated as not being user friendly.

With respect to the numbering of serials (cf. chapter 4.3), many interviewees thought that the new rules brought a change for the worse for users. This was felt to be especially problematic if the numbering consists only of alphabetic and numeric characters and doesn’t include a year (e.g., “A-” or “Volume 1-”). Redundancies were criticized (e.g., when the word “Jahrgang” appears before and after the hyphen) as well as the exact transcription of accompanying captions¹⁹: “Publishers are very creative with respect to numbering. It’s completely irrelevant to users whether the title

¹⁸ According to RAK, only the first editor was recorded (unlike AACR2, which stipulated to record up to three editors).

¹⁹ According to RAK, accompanying captions were omitted on principle.

page says “volume”, “Band” or “Jahrgang”, but now we have to record this exactly.” Users might also be confused by statements which seem to be inconsistent, e.g., when the word “Jahrgang” is recorded in full for the first issue, but abbreviated for the last (according to the different presentation on the title pages of these issues). There were also complaints that the information recorded according to RDA was “bulky” and “unclearly presented”, and one colleague commented: “Users probably don’t want all that detail.”

There are also other situations where RDA’s principle of transcription can come into conflict with users’ needs. An example mentioned in the interviews was the exact copying of typos in titles, which is probably confusing for users.

A colleague who works with early printed books also reported negative responses to extent statements, which under RDA can easily take up a whole paragraph: “Sometimes puzzled users come and ask: What’s that supposed to be?”

On the other hand, notes were rated as an advantage for users, as they provide an option to give additional information in a very flexible way (cf. chapter 4.1). The form aspects according to RDA 7.2 (cf. chapter 4.1) were also seen as being potentially useful: “If they were recorded consistently and made available for retrieval, users would indeed benefit.”

Another thought which often came up in the interviews was that the increased information, combined with the abolishment of abbreviations, might turn into a problem for users, e.g.: “I’m not sure whether it’s really an advantage for our users if the records are getting so long, and whether they want to read all that—sometimes it’s quite overwhelming.” Particularly mentioned were longish statements of responsibility, where users can easily lose track. However, catalogers can counteract this problem by using the optional omissions.

Some interview groups discussed the general problem of data heterogeneity, which they felt was increased even more due to the change from RAK to RDA: “Our catalog now shows such a hodgepodge of records from different eras of cataloging standards; there is no uniformity at all.”

Among the negative points for users mentioned in the interviews were also the abandoning of the links between monographic series and the individual volumes (cf. chapter 4.5) as well as certain changes in the treatment of reproductions in some library networks. In the record for the reproduction, information about the original is stored as a relationship only. This means that a digitized version of, e.g., an 18th century book is shown in the catalog with 2016 as the date of publication. Under RAK, these situations were handled differently: A so-called secondary edition would have been produced, which was basically a description of the original with additional information about the reproduction (in secondary data fields). As one participant stated, the RAK practice was “better for users.”

Finally, it was sometimes stated that user friendliness is “less a question of the cataloging code, but rather of the presentation in the catalog.” Here, a certain disillusionment was prevalent. Several catalogers expressed the feeling that their investment didn’t fully arrive in the catalog, e.g.: “Our OPAC is far from exhausting what RDA is offering.” One participant wondered: “We’ve been told that someday there will be OPACs which will truly represent the bibliographic universe, but our OPAC carries out precious little FRBR. When will these wonderful OPACs finally arrive?” Interviewees seemed to expect a convenient navigation along the lines of FRBR only for a distant future, e.g.: “I would love to see all those relationships implemented and the data linked in such a way that you can really navigate between them... what might the benefit be? But I won’t get to see that before I retire.”

Talking about the FRBRization of the catalogs, it should be kept in mind that this would have to extend to the old RAK records as well, as these will make up the majority of records in German

catalogs for a long time. However, some retrieval systems (mainly resource discovery systems) have already implemented a mechanism for clustering all manifestations of a work, independently of the cataloging code used.

5. Practical work with RDA

5.1 Time and Effort

Another main focus of the interviews was put on practical work. Here, the time and effort needed for cataloging with RDA (in comparison to RAK) was of particular interest. In May 2012, the Committee for Standardization²⁰ had set the objective to reach, in the end, a status without any additional costs. This was a rather ambitious target, given that cataloging in the Anglo-American world is traditionally done with considerably more effort than in the German-speaking countries.

It had to be taken into account, though, that the participants had had only a couple of months' practical experience with the new cataloging standard at the time of the interviews (at most, a little over six months). The cataloging process would naturally be slower in this initial phase, as catalogers would still need to think about many things and do a lot of looking up. To balance this out, interviewees were asked to rate the time needed primarily for standard situations in their respective areas, i.e., for resources which didn't pose any special problems. They were also asked to express their expectations for the future: Once they would have reached a stage when they could use RDA as confidently as RAK, did they expect the output to be larger, smaller or roughly equal?

The more pessimistic and the more optimistic views were distributed fairly equally. Many colleagues were convinced that cataloging with RDA will "always take a little longer" than beforehand. In contrast, it was also stated quite often that, at least for standard situations, the effort needed was no greater than under RAK: "For these resources, we've already reached the same rate." The latter group of interviewees also assumed that the overall effort would be identical in the future, e.g.: "My gut feeling is that at some point the output will be the same." Only very rarely did somebody say that RDA had brought a decrease in time and effort. One colleague commented: "Working has become easier and faster." And some interviewees noted that the cataloging of ebooks had sped up, as much could now be done by simple copying and pasting, without having to modify the statements.

According to RDA, abbreviations are no longer used, nothing is omitted, and there are also some additional data fields to fill in. This leads to a larger amount of typing, which was mentioned again and again, e.g.: "You simply have to type much, much more." However, some interviewees felt that the additional typing was of little significance: "It doesn't really matter whether you've got to type ten characters more or less... after all, we can all type very fast." As the interviews showed, it makes a lot of difference whether the cataloging systems offer special operating comfort (e.g., by adding RDA categories automatically or by providing drop-down lists for the selection of terms). Some participants also reported that they were saving time with self-made templates or boilerplates (e.g., for the recording of illustrative content or the places of publication of frequently occurring publishers). It was also stated several times that the additional effort for typing was compensated by the fact that one did no longer have to think about abbreviations, etc. Some participants explained that they were using the optional omissions for statements of responsibility in order to limit the typing effort.

An interesting question is whether German catalogers tend to record more information under RDA than they did under RAK. Indeed, the overwhelming majority said they did, e.g.: "I certainly record

²⁰ The Committee for Standardization (Standardisierungsausschuss) is a board representing library networks and very large libraries (e.g., the German National Library or the Berlin State Library) in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, which decides on strategic questions in cataloging.

more, as far as it is possible in terms of time and effort, and when I think it really makes sense.” In particular, the recording of more persons was mentioned, as this is felt to be especially helpful to users (cf. chapter 4.8). The same goes for notes, which can be used very flexibly under RDA (cf. chapter 4.1). A typical statement was: “I record many more notes than I used to, because I think that users really benefit from this kind of information.” Also mentioned were more places of publication, corporate bodies and terms for form aspects.

It was interesting to see that catalogers tend to be very pragmatic. For example, in deciding to record an additional person or not, it is important for them whether the authority record for the person is already there. Because, naturally, the expenditure of time for a mere link to an existing authority record is far less than for creating the authority record in the first place. Several interviewees pointed out that the extent of information recorded also depends upon the current workload. If more time is available, then more information can be recorded.

As was discussed in one interview group, the tendency to record more information might be connected to the way the training sessions were conducted. These concentrated on demonstrating everything that is possible and can be recorded under RDA. One colleague commented: “Lots of things are optional, as was explained by the instructors. But as a librarian, one tends to record everything as detailed as possible, and then it’s easy to forget about the “optional” bit.” As another participant pointed out, there were different kinds of catalogers: Some had always wanted to record as much as possible, whereas others were satisfied with much less. Due to the switchover to RDA, catalogers of the first kind had much more possibilities for recording more information, and “some now tend to get sidetracked and lost in minutiae.” In two interview groups, participants wondered whether the large number of information recorded might only be a transitional phenomenon: “I don’t know whether we’ll still be doing this in two or three years’ time.”

Interestingly, the so-called set of standard elements, which was defined as part of the German-speaking policy statements, seems to be almost irrelevant in everyday cataloging. This set of standard elements covers not only the core elements of RDA, but also additional elements which should always be recorded (i.e., be treated as a core element). Thus, a minimum cataloging level is set, which should be met whenever a resource is manually cataloged in a German-speaking library. Preparing this set of standard elements took up a lot of time and effort, and at times there were controversial discussions until a consensus could be found. Yet the interviewees stated almost without exception that they never or only very rarely looked at the list of standard elements, e.g.: “I can’t think of anybody who has the standard elements list on their desk.” Rather, catalogers use ready-made templates of data fields for various types of resources. “We work with templates for the most important fields. And if these have been filled in, I just assume that the standard elements have been met.” Also stressed was the importance of individual decisions: “I record what is there and what I believe makes sense.”

When asked which aspects are especially time-consuming, interviewees often pointed to the fact that under RDA, catalogers often have to look at the content of a resource whereas under RAK, the decision was usually based on formal criteria only. One example is when to treat a corporate body as the creator (cf. chapter 4.5). Consequently, it’s no longer enough to look at the title pages, but one also needs to read the preface, etc. One participant commented: “This isn’t really possible in day-to-day work.”

Interviewees also emphasized the additional effort with respect to authority records for corporate bodies, in particular for conferences. This is due to the fact that according to RDA, many more things are considered to be corporate bodies (cf. chapter 4.6). There is also a considerable increase of work in map cataloging, as now quite often the publisher is considered to be the creator—and, consequently, must get an authority record. Another time consuming factor for authority work, which was identified in the interviews, is the treatment of pseudonyms: “One authority record

for every pseudonym—what an incredible effort!”²¹ There was only one positive exception, namely the abolition of authority records for the majority of individual exhibitions.

As for serials, the vast majority of interviewees expected the effort to be permanently greater. In addition to the problems with the RDA rules for numbering (cf. chapter 4.3), a particular problem lies in the long-term necessity to work with both the old and the new cataloging standards.

5.2 Reuse of Anglo-American Data

Naturally, there is hope that possible additional efforts could be compensated by an easier reuse of Anglo-American records. Therefore, interviewees were asked for their experiences in this respect. Unfortunately, only a small number of the participants had already used Anglo-American data more frequently. It also appeared that, at the time of the interviews, some of the converters had not yet been adapted to the new situation. For example, interviewees in one library reported that existing content, media and carrier types were not transferred to their own system when importing Anglo-American records. Consequently, the following evidence needs to be judged with caution. It will probably take still more time until reliable data is available.

Positive feedback was only given in four of the libraries visited. Especially mentioned were records from the Library of Congress, which could be reused “almost without corrections”, as well as publishers’ records for ebooks. For the latter, it was stated that the time and effort needed for the adaptation to RDA was much less than before, “and there is a lot of upward potential, once the publishers provide really good RDA records.” One colleague called Anglo-American records “rather nice, because now one doesn’t have to change a lot.” Among the advantages listed were the content, media and carrier types, persons (often with dates, which can be reused for one’s own authority work), including relationship designators, statements for the extent and illustrative content, as well as statements of responsibility: “That does save quite a lot of time.” Interestingly, there are different methods of treating English-language information (e.g., “pages” instead of German “Seiten” or notes in English): Some catalogers leave the information as it is, while others translate it to German.

However, in most interview groups the participants were of the opinion that the time and effort for reusing Anglo-American records hasn’t noticeably changed after the switchover, e.g.: “It didn’t strike me that it’s supposedly easier now.” Interviewees criticized the low quality of externally available records. They stated that for current resources, only “rudimentary” records were available from the British Library or WorldCat, which had to be “highly reworked”, so that reusing was more time-consuming than starting from scratch. When using WorldCat there was also the problem “that you always get 200 hits—then people rather leave it.” Of course, this is not a problem specific to RDA, but it still hinders the reuse of Anglo-American records.

5.3 Resources for Information and Support

Interviewees were also asked which resources they use for information and support in everyday cataloging and how they cope with questions and problems. The RDA Toolkit is definitely not the first choice. A high number of the participants use it only rarely or not at all, e.g.: “I try to use it as little as possible.” Only a few of the interviewees said they used the Toolkit regularly.

Almost unanimously, interviewees stated that the RDA Toolkit was very difficult to use. Finding the correct instruction was felt to be cumbersome and interminable. Participants complained that the table of contents only helps if one is already quite familiar with RDA. The simple search either retrieves too many hits or none, e.g., due to the use of obsolete RAK terms or the fact that important

²¹ According to RAK, the rule was to have only one authority record covering the real name and all pseudonyms, with the best-known name as the preferred name.

terms like “compilation” or “monographic series” appear only rarely in the instructions. An index was sadly missed. Also, the multitude of links pose problems: “You’re permanently clicking.” Many interviewees stated that one could easily get lost, e.g.: “You keep jumping from one instruction to another, and at some point you’ve completely lost sight of what you had started out to look for.” A rare exception was one colleague who explained that he didn’t have problems to find his way in the Toolkit as he works a lot with personal bookmarks.

The style of RDA is generally felt to be difficult to understand: “It’s like the Civil Code,” or, “You must read it five, ten, fifteen times to really understand it.” The interaction between the RDA instructions and the German policy statements (D-A-CH) is perceived as complicated, as well: “First you read the instruction, then you notice the D-A-CH button and click on it—and then, everything’s different again.” Also, policy statements like “Apply the alternative” are not considered to be very helpful.

Quite often, interviewees complained that there is no connection between the abstract rule in the Toolkit and the concrete implementation in the data format of the respective library network²², e.g.: “I find it difficult because I expect to be instructed what, how and in which field I’m supposed to input the information—and that’s not part of the instruction in the Toolkit.” This is certainly one of the reasons why documentations of the library networks (e.g., cataloging guidelines or handbooks, format documentations, and the help functions for data fields) are heavily used instead. For serials catalogers, the main information resource is the format documentation of the national Serials Database (ZDB).²³ Again and again, this was praised in the interviews (“We’re really spoilt there.”). The description of the ZDB data fields includes links to the relevant RDA instructions and D-A-CH policy statements.

Besides this, the cooperatively prepared national training materials for the introduction of RDA²⁴ are of prime importance. Catalogers mostly use the version adapted for their own library network. Unlike the RDA Toolkit, the training materials cover certain topics in context (e.g., multipart monographs, reproductions, conference proceedings): “In the training materials, the rules are coherently presented for certain areas, which I find very helpful.” Favorably mentioned were also the many examples included, and the fact that the relevant RDA instructions and policy statements are listed as well. Some interviewees work with printouts, but the majority prefers the electronic versions. It was seen as problematic that in some library networks, the adapted training materials are no longer updated. The participants were very keen on having permanent access to up-to-date training materials adapted to their own situation.

Furthermore, the German textbook “Basiswissen RDA” and its accompanying website²⁵ were mentioned as resources for support, as well as certain additional information on the websites of the library networks (e.g., wikis and e-learning courses). It was sometimes criticized that the multitude of possible information resources has made it more difficult to find the information needed: “Often I find myself wondering: Where do I find the information I need quickest or best summarized? That can be time-consuming, too.”

However, as became obvious from the interviews, the first port of call are not written information resources, but rather people: on the one hand, colleagues working in the same office or on the same corridor; on the other hand those who are considered to be especially ‘RDA savvy’ (in particular, the so-called multipliers, i.e., catalogers from one’s own library who acted as instructors). “At first, we discuss it among ourselves: How do you interpret this? But the multipliers are always will-

²² It should be noted that in Germany, MARC 21 is only used for data transfer, but not for inputting data. There are several different systems in usage, which all have different inputting formats.

²³ <http://www.zeitschriftendatenbank.de/erschliessung/zdbformat/>

²⁴ <https://wiki.dnb.de/display/RDAINFO/Schulungsunterlagen+der+AG+RDA>

²⁵ <https://www.basiswissen-rda.de/>

ing to answer questions, and that's the main thing: That you don't get the feeling that you're completely on your own." It should be noted, however, that all interviews took place in fairly large libraries, where catalogers will always be able to find somebody they can ask. This may be rather different in small libraries.

Interestingly, quite a few catalogers said that they were actively building their own documentation. It's particularly common to collect examples, either for personal use only or for the use of a larger group (e.g., a cataloging team or a library's complete technical services department). Usually, examples for special or difficult cases are collected, which have been solved individually or as a group and been approved by an 'RDA savvy' person. The examples are typically printed out, perhaps commented on, and then filed according to certain key words. But there are also digital collections, e.g., in a wiki.

It was often pointed out that examples are very important for practical work: "Following an example is much quicker than having to read up all the instructions." Consequently, many interviewees would like to see an increase in the publicly available collections of examples, like the one of the University Library Regensburg.²⁶ It might also be worth thinking about bringing together the many individual collections in the form of a cooperatively maintained online platform.

5.4 Coping with Changes to RDA

The former German cataloging code RAK had been virtually 'frozen' over many years. Of course, there had still been certain changes to cataloging practice over the years (e.g., due to agreements in the library networks), and the launch of the Integrated Authority File (GND) in 2012 led to considerable innovations. However, this pales in comparison to the dynamics of RDA. In the course of the regular revision procedure, there are four updates of the RDA Toolkit per year (with smaller changes included in every update and larger ones once a year). For example, the update summary for 2015 lists no less than 453 "significant" changes. Modifications to the RDA instructions often lead to changes in the D-A-CH policy statements, too. Additionally, a fair number of adaptations to the D-A-CH became necessary in the initial phase after the introduction of RDA.

Against this background, interviewees were asked what they thought about the many changes in RDA—was that seen as a good or a bad thing? The predominant opinion was that changes are only natural: "That's life. We must stay flexible in our profession." That RDA kept developing was seen as positive, especially if the changes were comprehensible and led to improvements. As one colleague commented: "A static cataloging code doesn't help. It should be a living thing and reflect necessary changes." However, there was also some criticism: It was felt to be "difficult to be in a constant state of flux," or, "One is always slowed down by a change, so it would be nice if the rules stayed constant at least for a little while." Major changes in rules were unsettling to catalogers, and, what's more, every change would lead to "new legacy data".

But the biggest problem was seen in communicating the changes: "One's got to find a way to bring the information even to the last employee." One colleague pointed out that it made a huge difference whether there was a push or pull principle. The optimum would be "if I start the computer and it says: 'Look here, there has been a change'." At present there is no standard procedure for communicating the changes. The variety of information channels (e.g., various blogs and mailing lists) and the sheer amount of new information were seen as problematic by some interviewees: "At the moment, one's literally bombarded with emails, and it's hard to keep up-to-date." Finding the time to stay informed, in addition to one's ordinary work, was seen as a problem—particularly as the information had to be reviewed first and "those things identified which you really need." This was felt to be especially difficult if cataloging was only a small part of somebody's assigned tasks. One

²⁶ <http://www.bib-bvb.de/web/kkb-online/rda-beispielsammlung-ubr>

colleague explained her situation like this: "Considering that I don't do much cataloging, the time and effort needed for reading all those mails and noting the changes is much too high. I simply don't get around to it."

In some libraries, certain persons are charged with filtering the information: They select the most important information, brief the catalogers centrally (e.g., at catalogers' meetings), and provide specialized information for individual catalogers according to their area of expertise. Such systems seem to work fairly well. An interesting point noted in one of the interviews was that a one-time communication might not be enough: "If the change concerns something which I do daily, then it's no problem. But if it's related to a situation which comes up only rarely, then at best I can remember: Wasn't there something? But at worst, I haven't registered it at all."

When considering these statements it should be taken into account that the group interviews took place in a phase with a lot of changes, especially to the D-A-CH. However, it is to be expected that regular changes will be a permanent feature of RDA. Up to now, ad hoc solutions, which work more or less satisfactorily, have been used for communicating the changes. In the future, a sustainable strategy should be designed, which might also entail the development of new tools. The aim should be to limit the time and effort needed to process the information, and, at the same time, make sure that the changes to RDA and the D-A-CH are truly absorbed by as many catalogers as possible.

6. Conclusion

Naturally, the results of the focus group interviews can only be a snap-shot. They were conducted fairly early after the introduction of RDA, and perhaps some of the things identified as a problem then will be judged differently in one or two years' time. It should also be noted that only catalogers at large academic libraries were interviewed. Still, the analysis of the interviews has led to a number of smaller and larger insights.

As became clear, German catalogers are quite open minded to the new cataloging code. The assumption that catalogers are always resistant to change was definitely not confirmed. Rather, quite a few of the interviewees had hoped for a more profound modernization. Advantages and disadvantages of RDA were judged matter-of-factly. Aspects of RDA considered to be an asset were gladly accepted. And when features of the new cataloging standard were criticized, the interviewees always gave objective reasons.

Overall, there was considerably more approval of RDA than the interviewer had expected. What came as a surprise, however, was the universal dissatisfaction with the new rules for the numbering of serials. In the face of the strong criticism, the author recommends to review the new practice critically. The interviews also uncovered certain problematic areas (e.g., the recording of work level information), which may have been somewhat neglected in the training sessions.

It is still difficult to judge how costly cataloging with RDA is compared to the former cataloging rules RAK. However, it became clear that RDA leads to additional expenditures at a number of places. This makes it even more commendable that quite a few of the catalogers were confident to reach an output comparable to RAK in the medium term. The central offices of the library networks should aim at supporting the cataloging process as much as possible, e.g., by implementing intelligent tools for data recording and mature converters for importing Anglo-American records.

Another important result was that the RDA Toolkit in its present condition is not suited to play the role of a pivotal information resource. Whether this will change after the Toolkit relaunch in 2018 remains to be seen. For the time being, the national training materials are a core information resource and should be diligently kept up-to-date. Simultaneously, strategies must be found in order

to control the inherent dynamics of RDA. This includes developing tools for keeping catalogers informed quickly and efficiently.

The introduction of RDA has brought considerable changes to the 'cataloging culture' in Germany. In character with the Anglo-American tradition, cataloger's judgment now plays a major role, and many decisions must be taken with regard to contents and no longer according to formal criteria. Original cataloging has become more complex and challenging.

The change from RAK to RDA in the German-speaking countries has been a huge project and taken up extensive resources. At the time of publication of this article (in the original German version, in late March 2017), catalogers will have up to 18 months of practical experience with the new cataloging code. It would be very desirable to conduct a detailed evaluation in due course, in order to find out whether and to what extent the targets of the project have been met.