

Discussion paper submitted by Elena Escolano, with comments and response by Barbara Tillett, August 5, 2009 (shown by indentation and red colour)

The IFLA Statutes 2008 retain its role as a standards developer and promoter as a primary means to fulfil its purpose (article 2.2.1 <http://www.ifla.org/files/hq/ifla-statutes-en.pdf>) and among the core values for which IFLA pursues its purpose is "universal and equitable access to information". This is also the raison d'être of the Cataloguing Section.

But this is not accompanied by corresponding action.

In 2003 ICABS was created as the IFLA-CDNL Alliance for Bibliographic Standards to continue and expand the coordination work formerly done by the IFLA UBCIM (Universal Bibliographic Control and International Marc) and UDT (Universal Dataflow and Telecommunications) Core Programme offices.

This was a result of the Deutsche Bibliothek (now Deutsche nationalbibliothek) no longer funding a UBCIM office (Universal Bibliographic Control/International MARC). In order to cover some of the support that office provided, several of the national libraries in CDNL agreed to join forces to continue support, and formed ICABS. There was no communication with the Cataloguing Section about this change until it was a fait accompli. ICABS was not exactly within the IFLA umbrella, and several meetings were held with the Governing Board/Professional Committee to clarify the relationship). However, in order to make the best of the situation, specific liaison roles were made between ICABS and ongoing Cataloguing Section activities, namely ISBD support (from the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek) and the FRBR/FRAD support (from the British Library). Budget requests were submitted each year to continue funding the respective review groups and working group. IFLA also entertained budget requests, and eventually ICABS made it clear they felt it was more appropriate to request funds from IFLA than directly from ICABS.

It should be noted that the IM part of UBCIM for UNIMARC was carried on through the financial support of the National Library of Portugal.

The UBC system existed from 1970, formally following the International Meeting of Cataloguing Experts held in Copenhagen in 1969 at which was established the basis for creating a system for the international exchange of information.

The rationale of UBC was very well explained by the director of the IFLA International Office for UBC, Dorothy Anderson, in 1974, which in spite of the passage of time is still relevant: "In a world which is unevenly composed of over-privileged and under-privileged countries, where economic resources rest unequally and what in one country seems commonplace - computers, typewriters, copying machines - in another may seem a far distant and impossible dream, yet the objective of international standards rests firm with or without computers. All countries can participate as the component parts of a world wide UBC system if their contribution follows patterns and standards that are universal; and equally can receive." This is very consistent with the purpose of IFLA.

This world view from the 1970's was challenged in the 1990's as the work of the FSCH group and subsequently also the MLAR, GARR, and FRBR/FRAD groups realized the importance of enabling cultural and language/script variations to best meet local user needs, so a new view of UBC emerged (Ton Heiligers, et al.) whereby standards were stated with the understanding that the specific language/script used, would meet local needs. This carried through to the work of the IME ICC, where from the first regional meeting, the importance of keeping the user foremost in mind was reaffirmed.

The proposals from the FSCH, MLAR, GARR, and ICP, and FRAD continued to make it clear that a new view of UBC had emerged within IFLA, where the cultural variations were respected while still maintaining standards and linking data for global sharing (as eventually emerged with the Virtual International Authority File concept).

The effectiveness of the UBC system was dependent on the maximum standardization of bibliographic description. The main goal was to offer consistency when sharing bibliographic information. In the promulgation of the UBC program three international organizations played a major part: IFLA; the UNESCO General Information Program (PGI); and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). The international office for UBC was created, and it gave support at a variety of levels to projects directed towards its development. In so doing it provided support to IFLA working groups and to experts engaged in particular bibliographic projects.

As noted above, a new view of UBC emerged in the 1990's, that reaffirmed the importance of standards but not requiring everyone worldwide to use the same form of headings/access points and recognizing that new metadata structures are emerging.

The support in IFLA for UBCIM was completely dependent on the funds from the Deutsche Bibliothek, which no longer is willing to fund it. Can another source for funding be found?

The announcement of the change from ICABS to ICADS was made last year during the IFLA General Conference in Quebec, 2008. At its presentation some questions arose about what was going to happen with the IFLA standards and no clear response was made. At present, with the information that is in its website, and the letter of response to a direct question which is copied below, it can clearly be deduced that the bibliographic standards have lost the full support they used to receive in the past from the UBC program: the emphasis is on their application to digital libraries as a component.

This change reflects the changing interests of the supporting national libraries and is somewhat apart from IFLA, as noted above. Many attempts were made at the Professional Committee and Governing Board levels during the course of these changes to reaffirm the essential importance of bibliographic standards to IFLA's long-term mission. With the restructuring of IFLA and change in core activities, it has been a most frustrating experience to observe the abandonment of the bibliographic control aspects as a core activity for the organization (loss of the Division on Bibliographic Control and loss of the UBC/IM core activity). It will take ongoing diligence of the respective Sections (Bibliography, Cataloguing, and Classification & Indexing) to speak up for funding and to

continue through their good actions to keep bibliographic control at the forefront of IFLA accomplishments. Even more, it would be important to gain the support of the Governing Board and some third party funding agency to turn around the past decisions that abandoned UBCIM and to start anew with the new view of UBC.

ICADS response of June 17th, 2009:

"The relationship between ICADS and the Cataloguing Section would be a less direct one under the new focus for ICADS, compared to the former focus for ICABS. The ICADS focus is on digital library strategy and development, so while metadata developments will obviously be a component of that it is not the sole focus of the work.

As each of the ICADS national library members also separately funds additional core activities for IFLA, the Advisory Committee last year felt that they would rather have core bibliographic standards activities funded through that route rather than requests being made in addition to ICADS. We would not expect therefore to routinely fund core bibliographic standards work. However, where there is an overlap between IFLA work on digital metadata and the focus of ICADS, there may be opportunities for joint development or collaborative working. The work of ICADS is done as 'contribution in kind' i.e. the libraries do work on behalf of ICADS themselves, rather than paying money into a central fund to pay others to do it. There is therefore no central fund to which we can bid. It would be up to each individual member library to decide depending on the relevance of the work to its own plans and that of ICADS as a whole.

There is, of course, the possibility for libraries who have member representatives on Section Committees to consider funding special activities which they consider essential but which cannot get agreement from IFLA or from another route for funding or support. However, that would be up to the individual representative and their library management and not an issue for ICADS as a group.

I hope this is useful. Please let me know if any of this is unclear or if you would like to discuss further.

With best wishes

Caroline Brazier

Associate Director Operations and Services, The British Library"

Nowadays UNIMARC has its own Core Activity but what happens with the rest of the standards, models, guidelines, etc. from the Cataloguing Section?

UNIMARC has its own, because the National Library of Portugal stepped up to fund it and provide staff.

On the IFLA website information about the Profession Pillar, one of the three Pillars of IFLA, focuses on "long established Core Activities", where ALP, ICADS, PAC, UNIMARC are mentioned. It is true it adds "and Sections and Divisions" (<http://www.ifla.org/en/three-pillars>) but it would be more helpful if the long established UBC is mentioned.

Bibliographic control is seen as one of the pillars. The listing of those core activities identifies those present at the time of the writing of that document and reflects the reality of the loss of funding for the UBCIM office.

Because of this lack of consideration by IFLA, it is not surprising to find that some of its important standards were not fully considered during important initiatives such as the RDA-ONIX working group meetings which have much influenced subsequent developments; or wouldn't have been considered in an important project for mapping standards for a semantic web Vocabulary Mapping Framework (VMF) Project (see <http://cdlr.strath.ac.uk/VMF> and the project announcement at http://www.doi.org/news/VMF_project_announcement_090615.pdf). The standards formally included are: CIDOC CRM; DCMI; DDEX; DOI; FRBR; MARC21; LOM; ONIX; RDA.

IFLA groups can ask to be part of any of those groups - as was done for example with the harmonization meetings of ISBD, ISSN, and AACR2 for serials/continuing resources in the 1990's. The Cataloguing Section has a long history of engaging in liaison work with outside organizations, such as ICA and the CIDOC/CRM work with FRBR. The Section might ask to be involved with VMF in a similar manner.

This is difficult to understand, if the intention is to research the interoperability of standards, when it is a fact that the IFLA standards are accepted and used world-wide, that ISBD, for example, might not be considered by this project. It would have been a very important omission as the project work will result in "a mapping of vocabularies from the source standards to support the building of crosswalks and transformations between any of them; a definitive reference set which editors can draw on when creating and developing standards;..."

The inclusion or omission of IFLA representation per se has more to do with personal contacts than any formal international allocation of responsibility. Having Gordon Dunsire as a liaison is completely appropriate and similar to how the Cataloguing Section got involved in earlier collaborative endeavors.

This has been resolved as indicated in the report by Gordon Dunsire below, but there is no guarantee that similar omissions could happen again with other projects.

This situation is not convenient for IFLA, and moreover is not convenient for the majority of libraries in the world.

So I think the Cataloguing Section should consider the following questions:

- Is the role of IFLA as a standards developer and promoter at risk?

No, as long as IFLA maintains the important communication channels with the rest of the information community and the national libraries and other organizations responsible for bibliographic control standards in their countries or regions. There is a wonderful opportunity to engage in collaboration with the Committee of Principals as they begin to discuss future governance for RDA: Resource Description and Access, to assure

IFLA has a role in the development of that international cataloguing code, and likewise to stay in touch with other rule making bodies worldwide to collaborate on standards.

- What happens with the support of IFLA to their standards and formats?

Presumably IFLA support would continue as now, with specific funding requests continuing to go to the Governing Board and Professional Committee - IFLA has been very generous in the past and there is no reason to believe that would diminish, as long as the bibliographic control sections maintain a voice on that Professional Committee. The new structure of IFLA should indeed be challenged in that regard - to reaffirm the importance of bibliographic control. But if the national libraries or other agencies are not willing to fund our efforts, then we need to re-evaluate what we do and discover how better to build an appreciation of the importance of bibliographic control worldwide.

- What happened with the traditional UBC Program that was the core which other programs were focused on, the reason why it was managed under the auspices of ICABS (<http://archive.ifla.org/VI/7/icabs.htm>), resulting in the disappearance of the UBC program? Today there appears to be no overall program for bibliographic standards in the core activities of IFLA: it is not mentioned in the descriptions of three pillars; it is not a primary focus of ICADS (and it is clear that any references in ICABS information are historical); and the Cataloguing Section activity is beyond the scope of ICADS (<http://www.ifla.org/about-the-ifla-cdnl-alliance-for-digital-strategies>).

See explanations above. UBC was not managed under the auspices of ICABS - only bits that the respective national libraries were interested in supporting - ISBD by Deutsche Nationalbibliothek and FRRB/FRAD by the British Library. Perhaps the Section could provide wording for the IFLA mission and pillars to emphasize bibliographic control and send a strong message to the Professional Committee and Governing Board to reinstate this essential component of the organization to a core activity (and suggest who might fund it).

The Cataloguing Section might also consider the questions posed by Gordon Dunsire (again below) in relation to IFLA's engagement with the semantic web. This discussion document has been sent to the FRBR Review Group as an appendix to a report on its namespace project, and it is hoped that it will be made available to other relevant IFLA groups.

Proposals:

It would be useful if the issue could be referred upwards to IFLA from the Cataloguing and Classification and Indexing. The desired response from IFLA would be any necessary action that could result in a renewal of the UBC program's aims and objectives, and inclusion of the standards as core activities in the three pillars.

The aims and objectives remain with the Cataloguing, Bibliography, and Classification & Indexing Sections, so IFLA Professional Committee and Governing Board must be convinced of

the value of seeking funding to re-establish an office for UBC - a strong case needs to be made, as some work needs to be done to find a funding source, to make it an easy decision for the IFLA governing bodies.

We should consider other actions to re-establish the role and promotion of IFLA standards and their importance, and to ensure that this situation does not evolve again. One possibility is to create an Observatory to monitor new and existing projects to identify relevance to IFLA standards provide relevant advice.

Also see suggestions above about connections with rule making bodies (including groups like ISSN in addition to the traditional cataloguing rule makers) and with emerging metadata and other information communities to share IFLA's good work - not force it on people. Others must see the value of the international standards before they will be willing to follow them.

Madrid, August 4, 2009
Elena Escolano

Gordon Dunsire email from 2009-07-27:

Elena

I note your intention to present some issues to the Standing Committee of the Cataloguing Section concerning IFLA standards, models and formats, including the need to support these standards as a group as well as individually, which is more difficult since the end of the UBC program.

I ... [wish to] raise some specific issues with you, to strengthen your presentation to the Section, ... as far in advance as possible, as it will be (of course) chaotic and we will all be very busy during IFLA.

So I hope you will indulge this long email.

1. I have a specific role on the Standing Committee of the Classification and Indexing Section to liaise between the Section and external projects and initiatives which are relevant to the project to declare FRBR(er) namespaces for compatibility with the Semantic Web. This project itself was stimulated by the use of FRBR(er) elements in RDA, which itself is being declared in namespaces by the DCMI RDA Task Group. The RDA namespaces are now being incorporated directly into the forthcoming RDA online product.

Gordon is also a liaison for the JSC in their outreach efforts. His personal connections have proven to be extremely valuable in assuring communication among the various groups.

2. RDA also uses elements of FRBR(oo) and FRAD. At IFLA 2008, there was general agreement from the FRBR and FRANAR groups that the initial FRBR(er) namespace project should be extended, when suitable, to include FRBR(oo) and FRAD. In fact, the RDA work mentioned in 1. has required the registration of minor parts of FRBR(oo) and FRAD already. RDA has had to do this work without formal liaison with FRBR(oo) and FRAD, although I have done my best with informal liaison.

3. Recently, after the publication of FRAD, there has been discussion about developing a group to oversee, maintain, develop and promote the <FR> family of models. I have suggested that this is necessary from the point-of-view of Semantic Web developments, as the family of models cross-reference each other, and external developments such as RDA use elements from each member of the family. I also pointed out that the VMF project, and future similar projects, would find it easier to liaise formally with one group rather than several.

The incorporation of FRAD and also FRSAD into FRBR was part of the original plan for extending FRBR. We must not lose sight of that, as a single conceptual model is what IFLA should be presenting to the world.

4. I also said that there is a need for space on the IFLA website to provide tools for developers who may wish to use the IFLA standards and models. These tools would consist of the namespaces themselves, contact details, supporting documentation, code samples, etc. - currently, it is very difficult to find everything that IFLA has

already published because it is dispersed between IFLA committee structures and the archive ...

Working with the new IFLA Webmaster is an ongoing goal to suggest how to make the bibliographic standards and documents more easily accessible. The Cataloguing Section information officer can play a major role here with the help of the chair through contacts with the IFLA Headquarters and the IFLANET staff.

4. At IFLA 2008 I also discussed Semantic Web compatibility with UNIMARC. The outcome was to wait-and-see what happens.

5. I have asked my VMF colleagues to include UNIMARC in the project as well as ISBD. I have not formally approached PUM about this (as I did with ISBD), but Mirna [Willer] is aware of what is going on. My colleagues have not indicated that they cannot include these other IFLA standards, so I think it is safe to say the VMF now covers FRBR(er), FRBR(oo), FRAD, FRSAD (draft), ISBD and UNIMARC (but only the relationship elements of these, of course). Work on VMF has been slow until now because of vacations, but I intend to contact PUM formally within the next few days, and I will be asking my VMF colleagues for progress reports so that I can report back at IFLA next month.

This is an important connection to make and have IFLA represented at this and related groups. The Section members are the best means to keep updated and watchful for other emerging groups to which the Section should liaise.

6. I was talking with Marie-France Plassard a couple of weeks ago. When she asked what I was currently involved with, I realised that I could express it as "resurrecting UBC, but from the bottom-up (via the Semantic Web) rather than top-down (as IFLA previously attempted to do)". So of course it was very interesting when you indicated concerns about the need for IFLA (via ICADS or another mechanism) to ensure that UBC goals were still being addressed. I hope I have presented evidence above that it is still very important that IFLA is aware of these concerns and issues, and that there is still a good chance to promote UBC, even under a different name.

7. Finally, I think this is something that needs to be discussed at Division level as well as Section level within IFLA. Patrice Landry is aware of some of the issues I have raised, but there have been so many recent developments that we need to appraise him of the overall picture.

And as the Section's representative with the Professional Committee, Patrice is our key spokesperson in promoting these initiatives.

I would be happy to assist with your proposal to the Cataloguing Section, etc. Let me know if you want me to do anything. My IFLA diary is already very full, but I will shortly be working out what reports I should prepare to ISBD, FRBR Review Group, etc. and there will be opportunity to format such reports so that they can be re-used in other contexts (e.g. UNIMARC session).

Identification of potential requirements for managing IFLA namespaces

The FRBR Review Group has initiated a project to develop appropriate namespaces for allowing other communities to use the FRBR(er) model in a semantic web environment. The ISBD Review Group has initiated a project to develop an XML representation of ISBD; certain elements may be more usefully expressed in an XML syntax compatible with the semantic web. Informal interest in these initiatives, and interaction with the semantic web in general, has been expressed by a number of other IFLA standards groups, including FRANAR (for FRAD) and the Permanent UNIMARC Committee. The term “namespace” is used hereafter as a synecdoche for a namespace itself (which assigns a machine-processable identifier to metadata structural and value components expressed in the semantic web’s Resource Description Framework (RDF)) together with XML representations of its whole and parts and associated structural components.

Question: Are all or most IFLA groups responsible for the development and maintenance of bibliographic standards likely to develop namespaces?

The IFLA standards, like ISBD, identify specific elements that could be made available in a namespace to be used for labels in displays. For example, the element of Title (and its translations in all the IFLA supported languages) could be given a URI that could be used by online systems to display the word “Title” as the label for a specific title in a bibliographic description - presumably the specific title (a single value form something being cataloged) would be identified as a title through an XML (or other) syntax that could then be displayed for a human being with words in the language they wish.

So, IFLA’s terms would be the labels for the entities and attributes declared in the IFLA standards.

Looking beyond just the namespace declarations, another possible Web service would be for IFLA to also provide the “rules” and guidelines of other standards for machine manipulation.

Another option would be for a third-party to take on this work on IFLA’s behalf.

After a namespace has been created and metadata elements declared within it, there are a number of issues associated with the management and deployment of RDF and XML representations of the namespace.

The simplest approach is to make those representations available to other communities and individuals in an open environment. This can be achieved by storing the files on a web server with open access. The representation files can be copied for local processing in third-party services; such services might include the generation of display lists of vocabulary terms, for example the FRBR(er) Group 1 entities, construction of entity-relationship diagrams, translations between machine-readable identifiers and human-readable terms and between different language versions of terms, etc.

One of the more important services is dereferencing (see the Wikipedia article at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dereferenceable_Uniform_Resource_Identifier). The most effective use of namespaces in the Semantic Web is the substitution of machine-readable identifiers (URIs) for text values in metadata structures and record instances. This speeds machine-processing and removes the ambiguity in labels such as FRBR’s

“Work”. However, at some point it may be necessary to replace the identifiers with human-readable labels through a dereferencing service; the URI is passed to the service, and the appropriate label returned.

Conversations with DCMI communities have raised the problem of rogue dereferencing requests, caused by improperly constructed link resolvers and crawlers. These may misinterpret a URI to be a URL and attempt to harvest the linked document (which is actually the namespace representation) for further automatic link checking. This can result in overloading the server containing the namespace representation. For this reason, it is highly recommended that such servers be isolated from other organisational web servers and use a different domain so that, for example, document services (such as the current IFLA website) can continue to operate satisfactorily.

Question: Do IFLA standards bodies wish to provide dereferencing and other terminology services based on their namespaces?

This gets to whether IFLA is the best organization to provide such ongoing maintenance – perhaps a third party could be convinced to do this work on IFLA’s behalf? The technology infrastructure for this sort of service has not traditionally been in IFLA’s purview.

Conversations with colleagues working on the development of the RDA online product have raised a number of issues related to maintenance of namespaces, including:

- Version control. Even small, relatively static vocabularies require occasional amendment, and it is important that users of those vocabularies can be certain of the version they are employing, and of the existence of later versions.
- Change alerts. A method of alerting vocabulary users to new amendments and versions, for example via RSS, can help promote usage.
- Translations. The NSDL Metadata Registry service, currently used for the FRBR namespace project, has the capability of maintaining controlled vocabularies in translation. An example of this can be seen in the RDA content type vocabulary at <http://metadataregistry.org/vocabulary/show/id/45.html>. The service supports any number of languages, and in any script. It is highly likely that non-English communities will be interested in authoritative translations of vocabulary entries; note that the URI for the term remains the same, thus ensuring automatic interoperability between metadata records created in different countries.
- Feedback and constituency involvement. Social networking space for providing a means to manage comments, suggestions and queries from users, user groups, and constituencies is now becoming an expected feature of open standards administration.

Question: Do IFLA standards bodies wish to offer or utilise any of these functions, or others to be identified, as part of their management of existing and future namespaces?

This begs the question above of whether IFLA should be getting into this business at all or should have a third-party do it.

Another set of issues is associated with promotion and utilisation of the namespace. These include:

- Provision of an Application Programming Interface (API). This would allow external developers to incorporate IFLA namespace entities using simple programming structures, rather than download the namespace files for local program integration. It would also improve control and co-ordination of use of the namespace, as well as potentially incorporating the version control and translations issues raised above.
- Exposure of the namespace as linked data (see the Wikipedia article at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linked_data). This overlaps with the dereferencing issues raised above. Adding IFLA data to the linked data universe will ensure maximum re-use, and potentially have a very significant impact on the development of the semantic web.
- Provision of (authoritative) mappings between namespaces. These namespaces may be IFLA ones, or external, such as the outputs of the Vocabulary Mapping Framework (VMF) (<http://cdlr.strath.ac.uk/VMF/>) project.
- Provision of links to (authoritative) RDF schema using IFLA namespace entities. This is similar to the idea behind the bibliographies maintained to track the interest and take-up of IFLA standards, by acting as a showcase for standards' utility, but could also be part of a clearing-house or directory of external services which have made use of a specific IFLA standard.

Question: Do IFLA standards bodies wish to employ some or all of these methods of promoting their standards to semantic web developers, with the secondary result of improving bibliographic control at a global level?

There is a giant leap here to get to specific applications that improve global bibliographic control, but certainly having IFLA help build the building blocks for such a future, would be wonderful. But, whether IFLA needs to provide the services, or just the standards that would be presented through such services depends on the ongoing support IFLA can provide. Is it a realistic task for an organization run by volunteers that rotate membership frequently?

Need for an IFLA standards namespaces framework

There are number of reasons why IFLA might consider developing an overarching framework for promoting and disseminating its standards.

There is a current framework implicit in the structure of IFLA divisions, sections and special interest groups. Standards produced by IFLA are constructed for a print-based environment, and most are made available in digital format as electronic surrogates of the print-based originals. There is no single place on the IFLA website where all standards are listed. Instead, retrieval requires knowledge of which area of the IFLA organisational structure is responsible, or enough of a citation to carry out a keyword search.

Question: Does IFLA wish to improve the identification and retrieval of its published standards?

This can be done in many ways, only one of which is converting the elements of the standards into controlled vocabularies in namespaces. A first step can be as noted above to improve the communication with the IFLANET staff and work together to see

how much IFLA is willing to support and then seeking third-party support for what else may need to be done.

However, the world in which libraries increasingly operate is digital. Non-IFLA communities and individuals expect a global information management community to present its outputs in formats that can be exploited more effectively by digital tools and techniques. One of the most significant developments in the digital environment is the creation of the semantic web, which offers huge potential for the utilisation of the standards and expertise of professional librarianship.

A vast majority of the world's library users are in countries without reliable electricity let alone internet access. However, that said, for the Web-enabled part of the world, such advances to build the infrastructure should lead to improved global bibliographic control.

Question: Does IFLA recognise the potential role of its activities in developing the semantic web, and the potential role of the semantic web in furthering IFLA's aims? Does IFLA wish to engage more fully with the semantic web?

IFLA as a trusted source of information has a great potential for serving the Web community. The question is not recognizing a potential role, but finding a way to sustain such a role within the IFLA organization. Is it realistic?

The semantic web architecture has nothing to say about the veracity of statements expressed in RDF. That is, false statements can be made, and there is no intrinsic way of determining whether a statement is true or false. Instead, extrinsic methods must be used: What is the source of the statement? Is the source trustworthy? Does the source ensure that statements remain true? There are no established protocols for answering these questions, but some assessment of veracity can be made from knowing which body created and maintains the namespaces used in RDF statements. If IFLA namespaces have "IFLA" as part of their URIs, preferably in the base domain used for all URIs in a namespace, then the brand itself can indicate a degree of reliability. Other techniques might involve human-readable background or explanatory documentation associated with a namespace.

Question: Does IFLA wish to capitalise on its brand and standing in the library world by extending it to namespaces for its standards?

Acknowledging IFLA as the source for its bibliographic standards should be part of the re-use of such data - regardless of whether IFLA provides its own namespaces or not. As noted above, namespaces are just one small part of the infrastructure that is needed.

Two major initiatives are underway in non-IFLA communities. These are the development of RDA: Resource Description and Access as a digital publication exploiting the semantic web to express its metadata structure and value vocabularies, and the VMF as a hub-and-spoke approach to improving interoperability between many bibliographic standards in the semantic web. VMF is essentially an extension to the [RDA/ONIX framework for resource description](#). Both initiatives involve IFLA standards: RDA is linked to elements of FRBR(er), FRBR(oo), and FRAD; VMF will include FRBR(er), FRBR(oo) via CIDOC CRM, and elements of FRAD, ISBD and UNIMARC. Both projects need to liaise with the bodies responsible for standards governance and maintenance, to ensure that their work is authoritative and "official".

Also VIAF should be mentioned that links the world's name authority data.

Question: Would liaison between IFLA and such projects be more efficient and effective if there is a single IFLA body to contact, rather than the individual components of the IFLA organisational structure?

The single body now is the specific Section or core activity within IFLA - especially Cataloguing for ISBD and FRBR (and its related models) and UNIMARC.

Many of the IFLA standards have interdependencies with each other, expressed as references and mappings. In addition, many IFLA standards have interdependencies with external standards, and in some cases the same external standard. Such dependencies can be chained together, showing indirect dependencies between pairs of standards (see my WLIC 2009 paper on UNIMARC, RDA and the Semantic Web available at <http://www.ifla.org/files/hq/papers/ifla75/135-dunsire-en.pdf>)

Question: Are the dependencies between IFLA standards, and between specific IFLA standards and external standards, properly understood by IFLA standards bodies, and sufficiently well understood to ensure semantic cohesion and avoid duplication of effort?

Yes, and that is why after each Working Group there are proposals to update earlier "standards".

The potential requirements for managing an IFLA namespace identified above are common to all namespaces.

Question: Is it more effective or efficient for IFLA namespaces to be developed and administered as a whole, or separately by the relevant standards bodies?

See comments above, plus the current IFLA structure has allowed the Cataloguing Section the anomaly of having "Review Groups" for ISBD and FRBR, which were recognized as needing ongoing maintenance (rather than review every 5 or 10 years as was more common in the past). The Cataloguing Section thus is in a unique position within IFLA to play the role of administering the use of its standards (whether through namespaces or other applications), but should be realistic about whether it is able to sustain such a responsibility or should negotiate with a third party to administer such services on its behalf. Any such negotiations would require approval by the Professional Committee/Governing Board and should be discussed with those IFLA bodies well ahead of time to build support for whatever position is proposed..

Gordon Dunsire
4 Aug 2009