DATE: March 8, 2013

TO: RDA Subcommittee

FROM: Tony Olson

SUBJECT: Treatment of Subjects in RDA-2

This discussion paper recommends that RDA adopt the FRSAD (Functional Requirements for Subject Authority Data) model proposed by the IFLA Working Group on the Functional Requirements for Subject Authority Records (FRSAR)[[1]](#footnote-1). In this model there are two entities, Thema and Nomen which replace the 4 entities comprising the Group 3 entities of the FRBR model (Concept, Object, Event and Place).

Thema is defined as “any entity used as a subject of work”. Nomen is defined as “any sign or sequence of signs (alphanumeric characters, symbol, sound, etc.) that a thema is known by, referred to or addressed as”. A Thema can be any FRBR Group 1 or Group 2 entity or any other entities that are used as subjects of works (such as the Group 3 entities). The problem with the FRBR Group 3 entities is that they apply to only a few of the possible subject heading systems, thesauri, classification systems, etc. that might be used by catalogers or metadata specialists. As Barbara Tillett points out in her discussion paper[[2]](#footnote-2), RDA should not be used to proscribe the choice and form of terms used to name subjects or other rules that are in the domain of subject heading systems, thesauri, classification systems, etc. This principle should also be extended to categorizing entities that are in the domain of subject systems. The FRSAR report provides numerous examples of subject systems that use entities that differ from the FRBR Group 3 entities.

If the FRSAD model is adopted for RDA, it is also recommended that the model be modified as follows. The FRSAD entity Nomen will be become an attribute of the Thema entity in RDA. Thus there will be only one subject entity in RDA, which at present will be known as Thema. The FRBR Group 3 entities (Concept, Object, Event and Place) would no longer be entities, and there would no longer be a need to define a Time entity.

Possible attributes of Thema in an RDA chapter on identifying subjects:

Type of thema [FRSAD 4.1.1] \* +

(These could be the FRBR Group 1 and Group 2 entities, and in certain implementations the FRBR Group 3 entities. However other subject systems and implementations would require different types.)

Scope Note [FRSAD 4.1.2] +

Nomen of thema \*

--which has the following subtypes

Preferred nomen of thema \*

Variant nomen of thema

--and has the following attributes

Type of Nomen [FRSAD 4.2.1]

--which has the following subtypes

Identifier of nomen (this is a general RDA attribute) \*

Controlled access point (see Preferred nomen of thema) \*

Scheme (LCSH, MeSH, AAT, etc.) [FRSAD 4.2.2] \* +

Source consulted [FRSAD 4.2.3 “Reference source of nomen”] +

(This is a general RDA attribute applicable to any authorized access point)

Representation of nomen [FRSAD 4.2.4] +

Language of nomen [FRSAD 4.2.5] +

Script of nomen [FRSAD 4.2.6] +

Script conversion [FRSAD 4.2.7] +

Form of nomen (e.g., full, abbreviated, formula, etc.) [FRSAD 4.2.8] +

Time validity of nomen [FRSAD 4.2.9]

Audience [FRSAD 4.2.10] +

Status of identification [FRSAD 4.2.11] +

(This is also a general RDA attribute)

\*= Core element/attribute (at least in some cases; may be conditional)

+= Data about data

Issues that need to be discussed and resolved (and there may be others).

1. Should RDA use the term Thema for the subject entity? If not what term should be used? Should RDA use the term Nomen for the name attribute? If not what term should be used?
2. Thema (Subjects) should be related only to works. They should not be related to expressions, manifestations or items. If an expression/manifestation includes subject content that is different from the work on which it is based, it should be treated as a new work.
3. The four user tasks specified by FRSAR (Find, Identify, Select and Explore ) for subject authority data should be listed and explained in RDA. Should the FRSAD user task Explore be extended to FRBR Group 1 and Group 2 entities as well?
4. Which of the FRSAD attributes/elements should be included in RDA? Which of these attributes (if any) should be core elements? Some recommendations for core elements are indicated in the list of attributes above. Most of the FRSAD attributes/elements fall into the category of ‘data about data”; it is not yet clear how these will be accommodated into the RDA data model. However, at this point in the discussion, none of the attributes should be discarded.
5. Most of the placeholder chapters in RDA concerning subjects would be eliminated. Chapter 15 dealing with events and Chapter 16 dealing with places, could be included as special instructions in a single chapter on “General Guidelines on Recording Attributes of Thema (Subjects)”.
6. Thema (Subjects) describe what a work is about. Thema do not specify what a work is (i.e., its form or genre). The form and genre of a work or expression should be treated in a separate chapter of RDA.

1. *Functional Requirements for Subject Authority Data (FRSAD): a Conceptual Model.* (2010). IFLA Working Group on the Functional Requirements of Subject Authority Records (FRSAR). International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. Available at: <http://www.ifla.org/files/assets/classification-and-indexing/functional-requirements-for-subject-authority-data/frsad-final-report.pdf> (accessed 2013-01-21). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Tillett, Barbara. (2011). *Chapters 12-16, 23, 33-37 (Group 3 entities and “subject”).* Discussion paper for the Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA. May 20, 2011. (RDA document series 6JSC/LC/rep/3) p. 5. Available at: <http://www.rda-jsc.org/docs/6JSC-LC-rep-3.pdf> (accessed 2013-01-21). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)