Results of an International Survey on the Use of the ISBD

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Background

At the 78th IFLA General Conference in Helsinki, Finland (2012), the ISBD Review Group decided to conduct a survey on the use of the ISBD and expectations for its future. A task group was set up to prepare the survey and its results. It was originally planned that the text of the survey would be ready for approval at the next WLIC in order to be distributed at the beginning of 2014. For various reasons, distribution was delayed until March 2014.

The survey

The survey, available online,[1] was sent to several IFLA groups and many mailing lists for immediate release, and was also put out on the IFLA website. After preliminary results were drafted, several other national libraries were contacted, with requests sent out in other languages than English because it was noticed that there were few responses from some parts of the world.

The survey was primarily intended for national cataloguing committees, national libraries, and national, regional, or multinational rule-making bodies. The Survey Study Group intended that the responders should be institutions involved in creating cataloguing rules or in defining national profiles or procedures for their application. Probably the words "other interested groups" in the text of the distribution generated some misunderstanding since many responses came from other types of institutions such as university, special and even public libraries. Their responses are also included in the results.

After a few questions about the responding institution, the survey is divided into four sections (Use of the ISBD, Translations, Problems and Expectations, Other comments) for a total of 30 questions.

The results

There are some inconsistencies in the answers. Despite this, the results are very useful in order to draw a broad picture about the use of the ISBD and other rules or standards, and also about future directions.

The survey has been launched in a period of transition; therefore it shows both recent choices and some uncertainties.

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[1] <tinyurl.com/isbdsurvey>

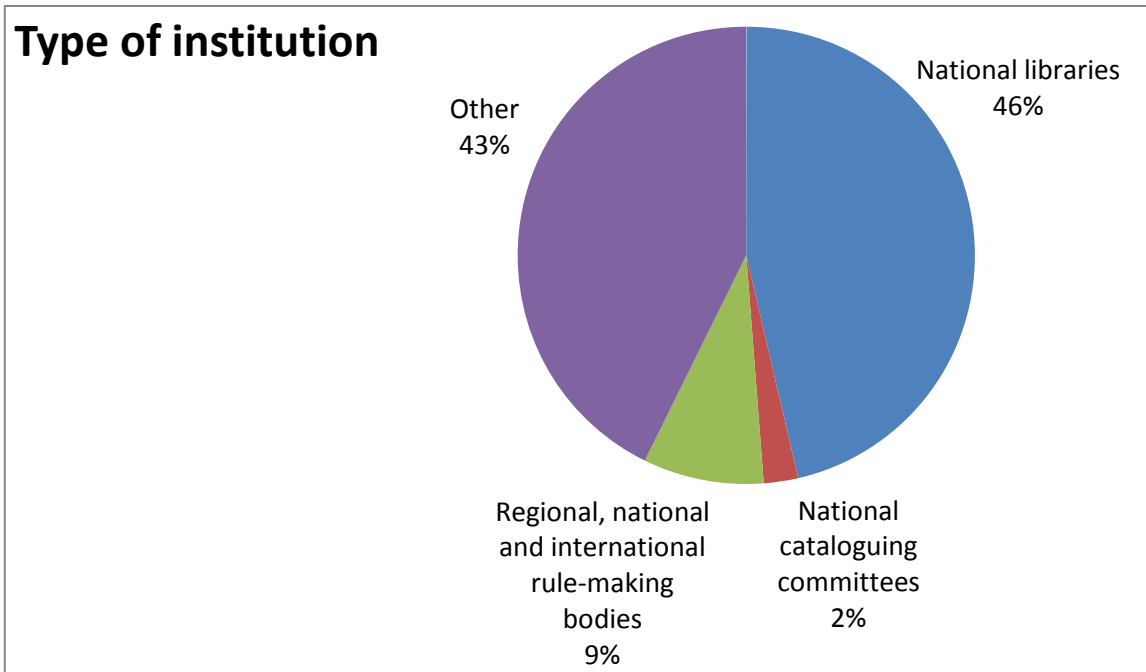We received 82 responses from a variety of institutions (see Figure 1).

Type of institution

- Other 43%
- National libraries 46%
- Regional, national and international rule-making bodies 9%
- National cataloguing committees 2%

Figure 1 (n=82)

The ISBD is used directly for at least some types of resources by a majority of respondents (see Figure 2).

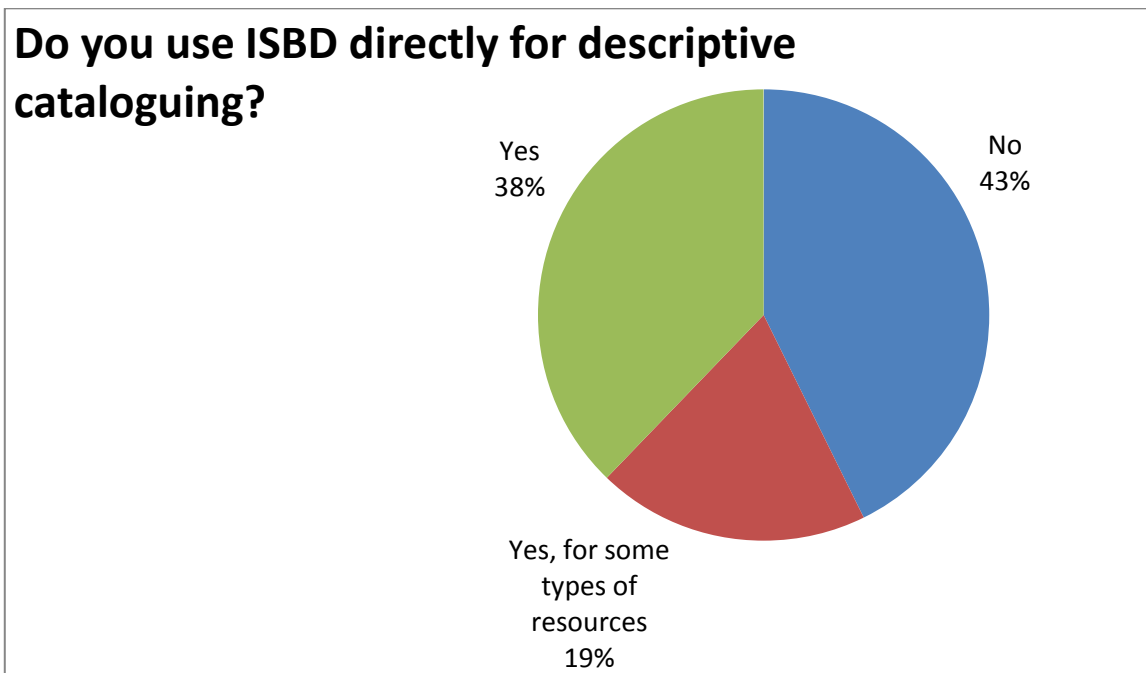**Do you use ISBD directly for descriptive cataloguing?**

- Yes 38%
- No 43%
- Yes, for some types of resources 19%

Figure 2 (n=82)

The version most used is the consolidated edition (see Figure 3).

Which version of ISBD do you use?

Preliminary consolidated edition (2007) 18%

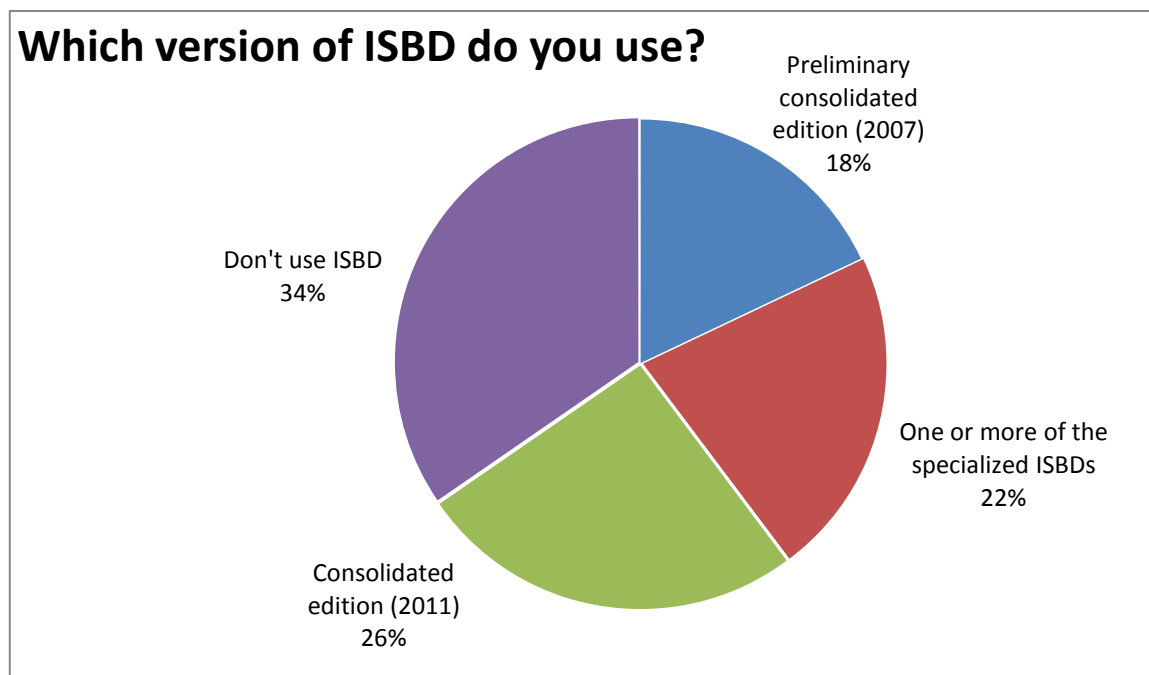One or more of the specialized ISBDs 22%

Consolidated edition (2011) 26%

Don't use ISBD 34%

Figure 3 (n=78)

ISBD is widely used for display of records both in catalogues and in national bibliographies (see Figure 4).

Does your institution use the ISBD for display of records in its catalogue or in its national bibliography?
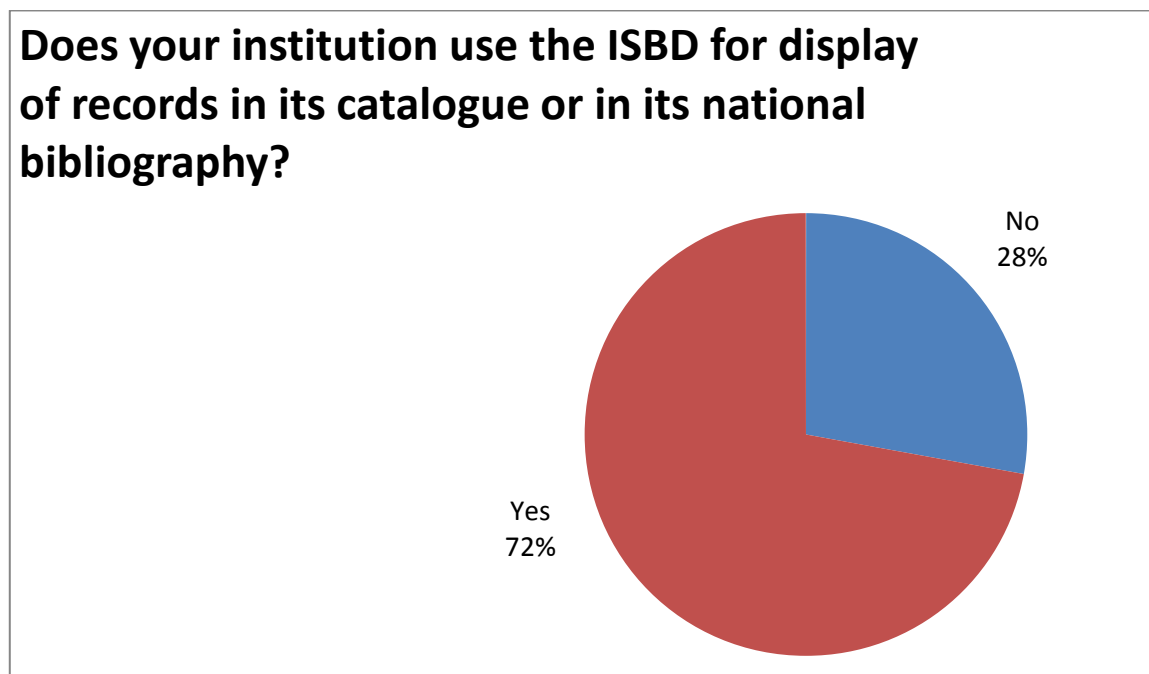
No 28%

Yes 72%

Figure 4   (n=79)

Whether together with ISBD (see Figure 2) or exclusively, national cataloguing codes are used in Bulgaria, China, Croatia, France, Germany, Ghana, Italy, Japan, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, and Vatican City, while other countries use AACR (sometimes in translation) or RDA.

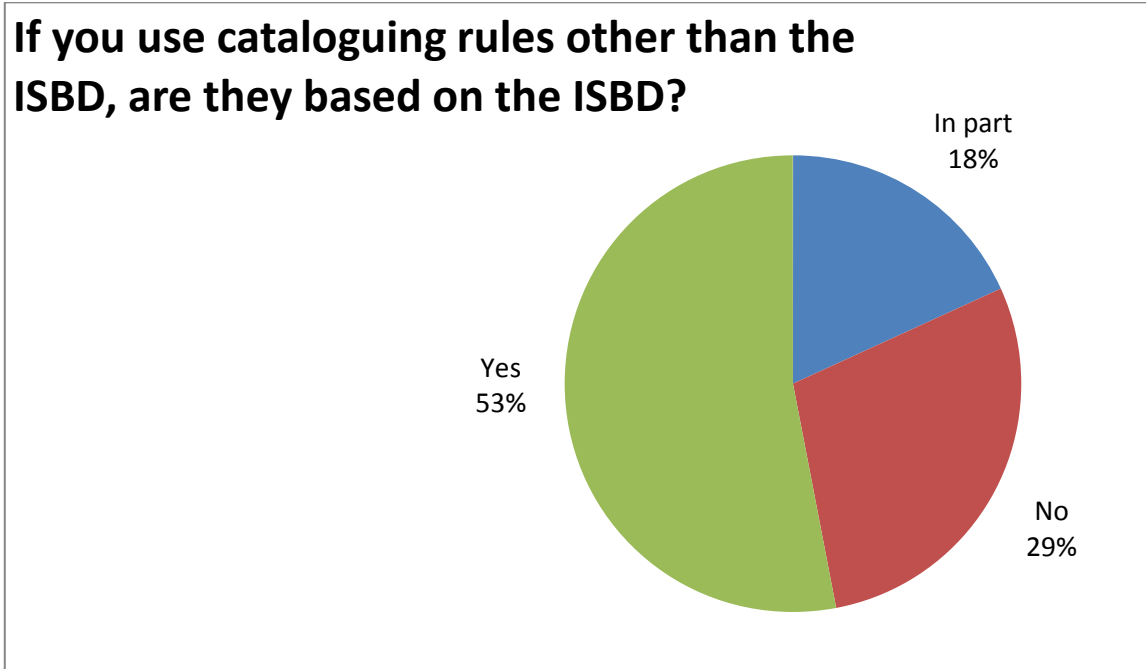Half of the national codes are based on ISBD (see Figure 5).

If you use cataloguing rules other than the ISBD, are they based on the ISBD?

In part
18%

No
29%

Yes
53%

Figure 5 (n=66)

A high percentage of institutions has not changed cataloguing rules in the last ten years (see Figure 6).

How long have your current cataloguing rules been in use?

Less than one year 8%

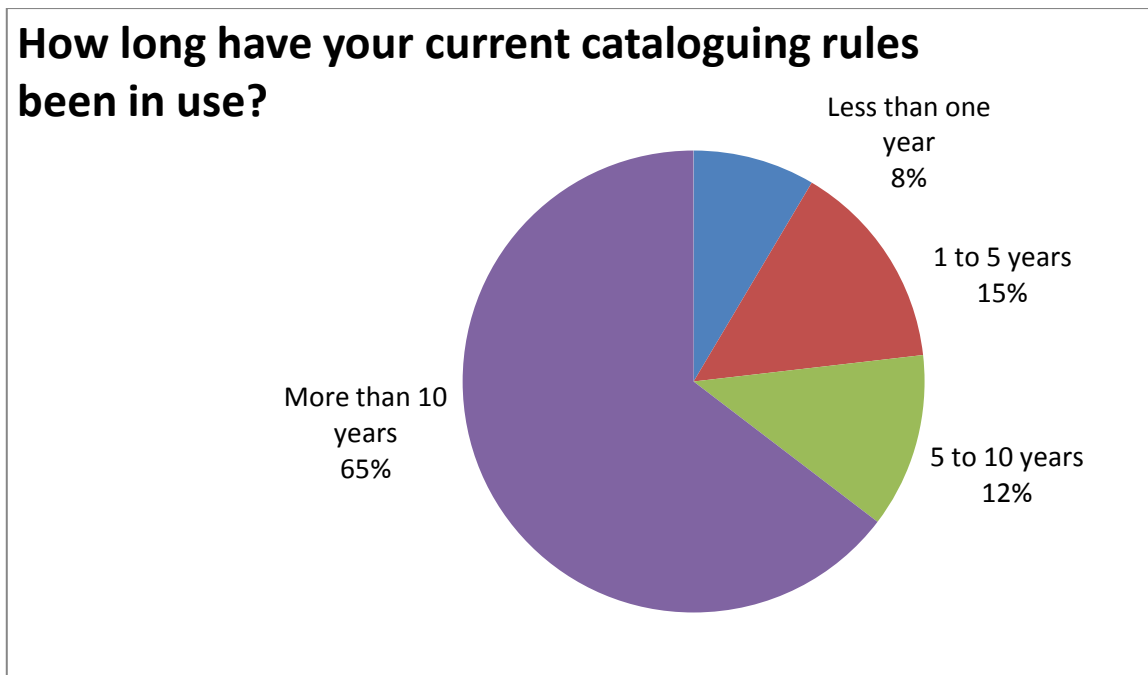1 to 5 years 15%

5 to 10 years 12%

More than 10 years 65%

Figure 6 (n=82)

Those institutions that have changed cataloguing rules previously used specialized ISBDs or AACR2.

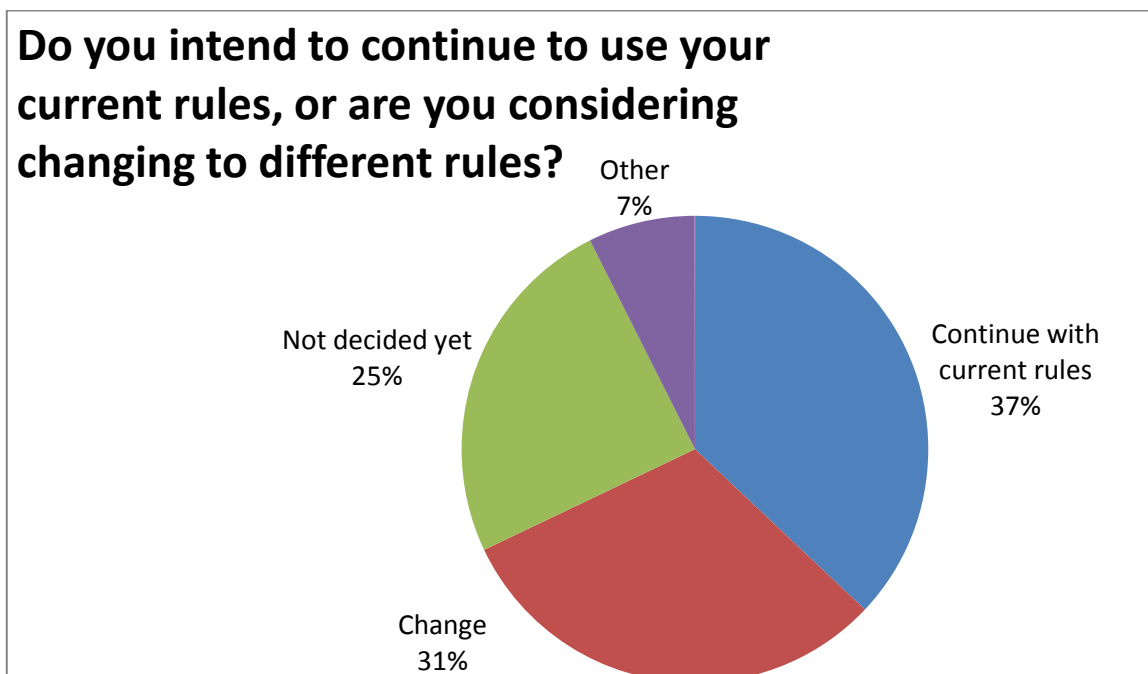Some institutions are considering changing to different rules (see Figure 7).

Do you intend to continue to use your current rules, or are you considering changing to different rules?

Other 7%

Not decided yet 25%

Continue with current rules 37%

Change 31%

Figure 7 (n=81)

Another question – for the institutions that are considering changing – investigated which rules they are taking into consideration. The question (number 16 in the survey) was a free text one. The respondents had the opportunity to share their intentions and expectations. Although the results are not useful for a quantitative evaluation of the topic (in some cases, many institutions from the same country answered, not referring to an official position but giving many individual positions), they are indicative of the general situation. A large number of institutions answered they are changing to RDA or they are evaluating using it. A good number of institutions are changing to ISBD consolidated or to a national code based on it.

The next question was addressed to the institutions that have indicated they intend to continue with the current rules in use. The question (survey number 17) asked if the changes in the ISBD consolidated edition will be incorporated into their rules. Despite the results showing some inconsistencies (the number of respondents is higher than expected from the results shown in chart 7) it is interesting to note that more than 40% declare that the ISBD consolidated edition will be taken into account. Half of the responses say that it has not been decided yet.

The next four questions were about ISBD namespaces. This section sought to investigate the respondents' general knowledge of the topic and its applications.

First of all, the ISBD namespace seems not to be well known (see Figure 8). Besides a small group of experts (15%), more than 40% of respondents declare they have no knowledge at all or just a little and 32% of respondents claim average knowledge.
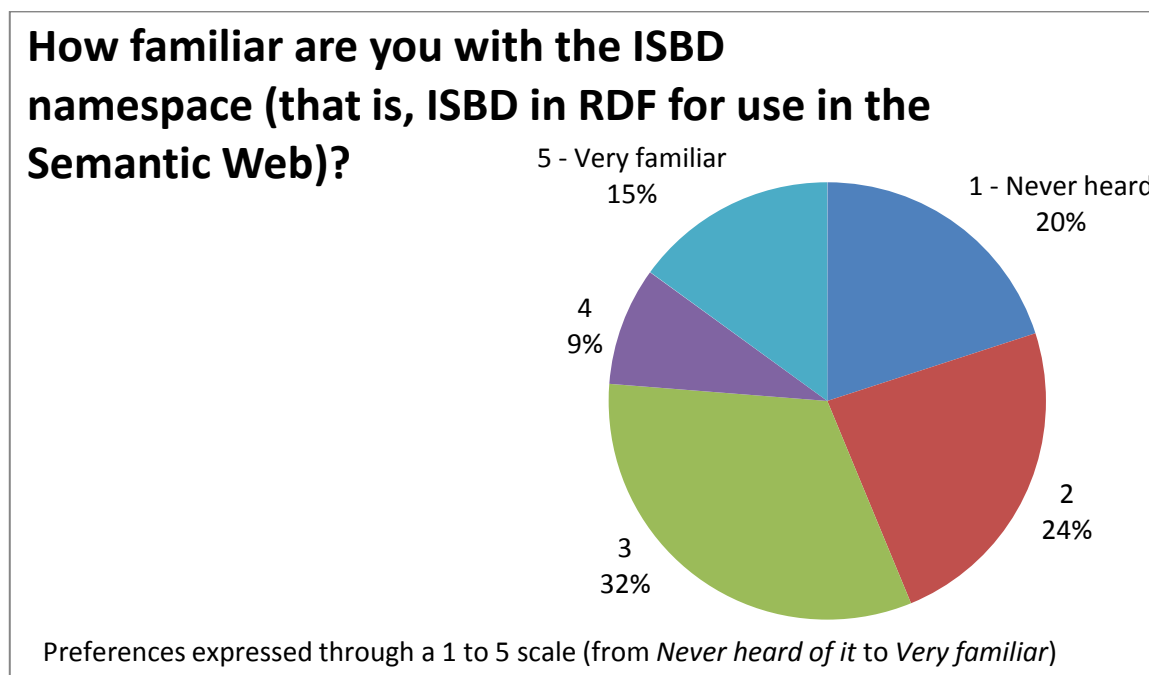

Preferences expressed through a 1 to 5 scale (from *Never heard of it* to *Very familiar*)

Figure 8 (n=80)

These results influence the responses to the next question. Just 16 respondents of 80 (two institutions didn't answer this question) state an intention to use the ISBD namespace (see Figure 9).

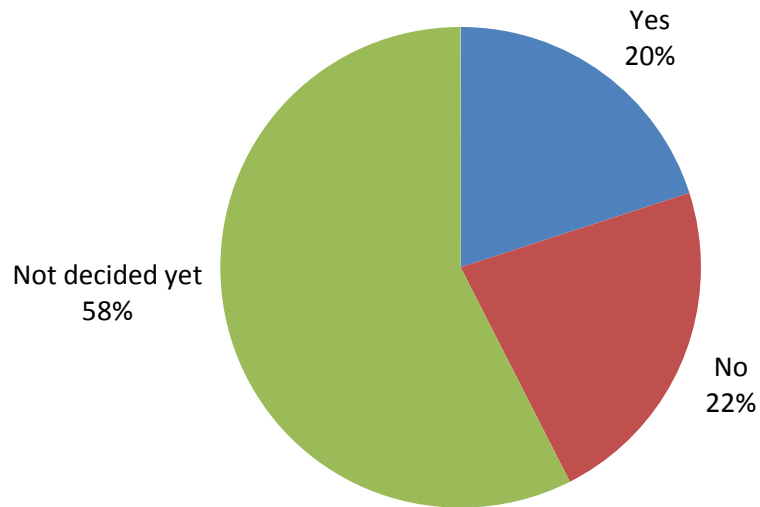## Do you use or do you intend to use the ISBD namespace?

Yes
20%

No
22%

Not decided yet
58%

Figure 9 (n=80)

Even a knowledge of projects involving the ISBD namespace is low (see Figure 10).

Do you personally know of any project involving the ISBD namespace in your country?
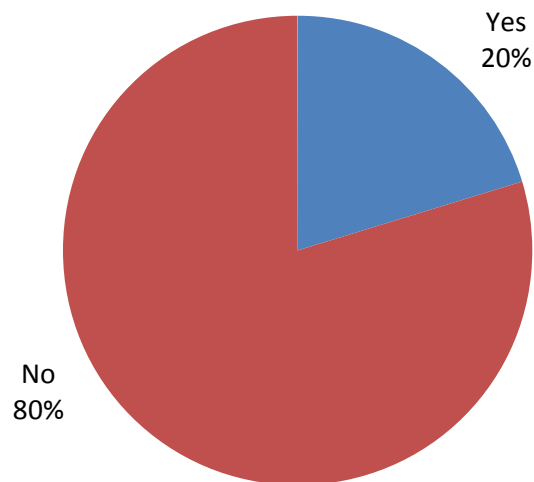
Yes
20%

No
80%

Figure 10 (n=79)

The countries involved in ISBD namespace projects are Canada (Out of the Trenches), Costa Rica, Denmark, France (Hub de métadonnées de l'Abes), Germany (Linked Data Service), Italy, Peru, Spain (datos.bne.es), and the United Kingdom (Linked Open Data British National Bibliography).

The next five questions were about translations.

Since almost all the respondents state they use their national language as their working language, the availability of a translation of ISBD consolidated is crucial (see Figures 11-12).

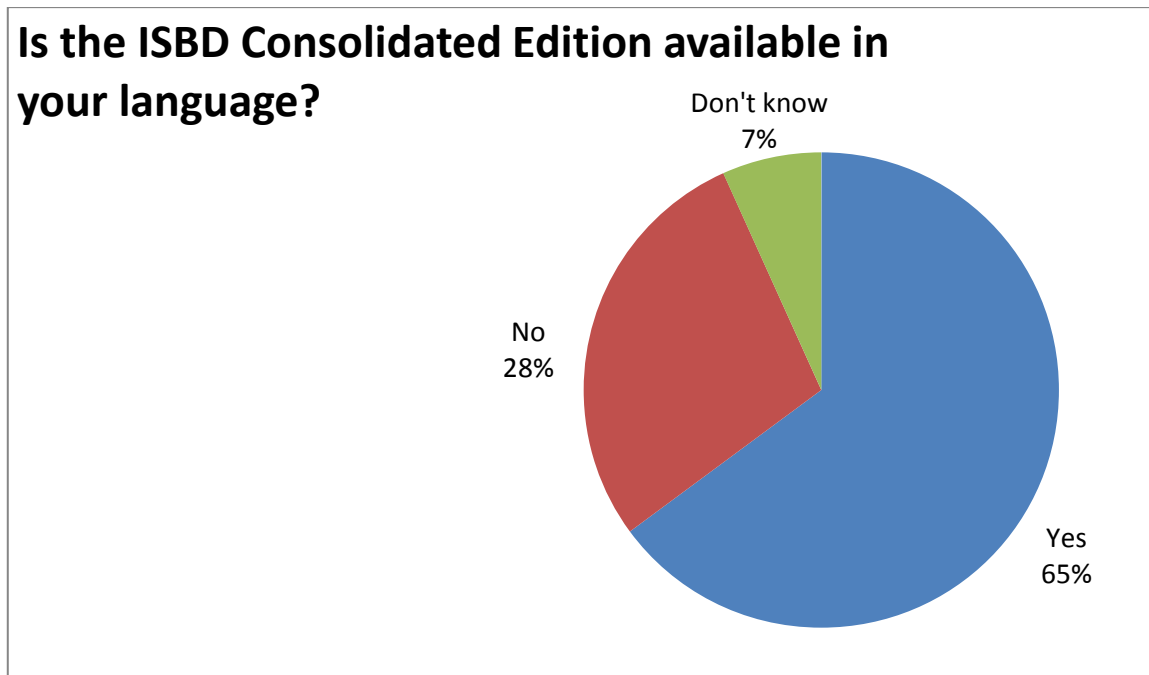## Is the ISBD Consolidated Edition available in your language?

Figure 11 (n=74)

Incongruously, some answers in Figure 12 come from responders who answered yes to the previous question "Is the ISBD Consolidated edition available in your language".

If the ISBD Consolidated Edition is not available in your language, has anyone planned a translation?
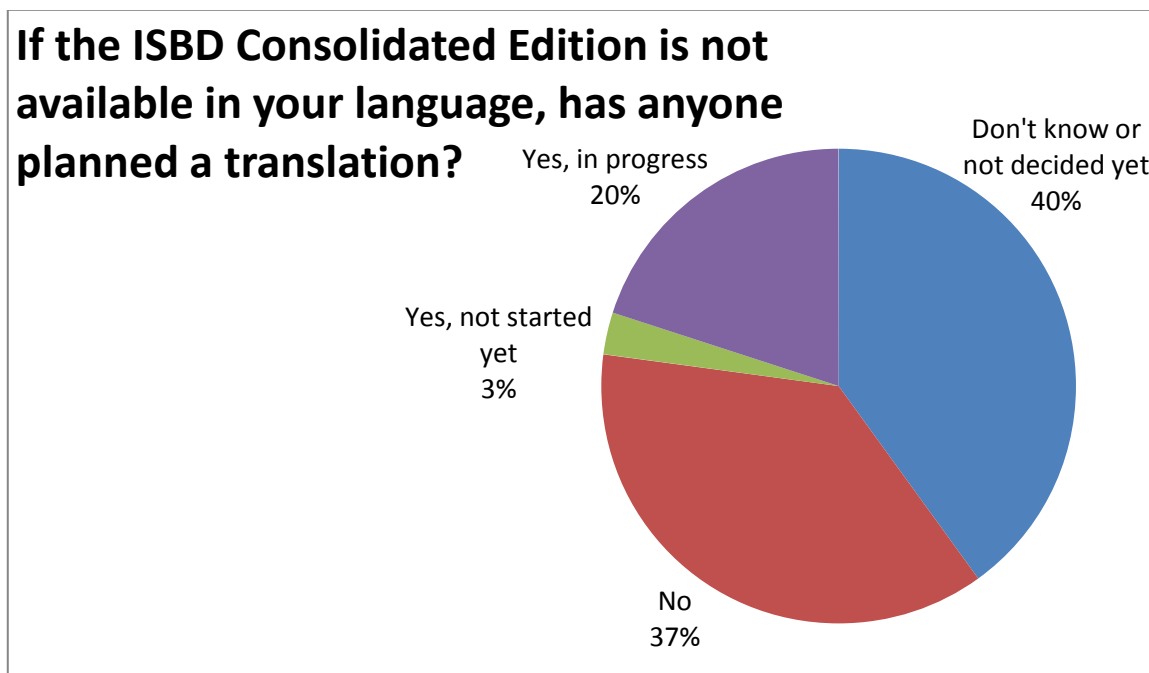

Figure 12 (n=35)

When a translation is not planned, the reasons vary. In this group, 35% state the translation is not needed; the real motivations are unknown but it can be supposed that a national version is not as necessary in the countries not using ISBD consolidated directly for cataloguing. The cataloguers probably use other rules and standards written in the national language (we can infer this by comparing these data with those about the use of ISBD as the basis for the national codes in Figure 5).

If no translation is planned, why not?

Other
11%

We use the
English version
(even if we have
a different
national
language)
27%

Not needed
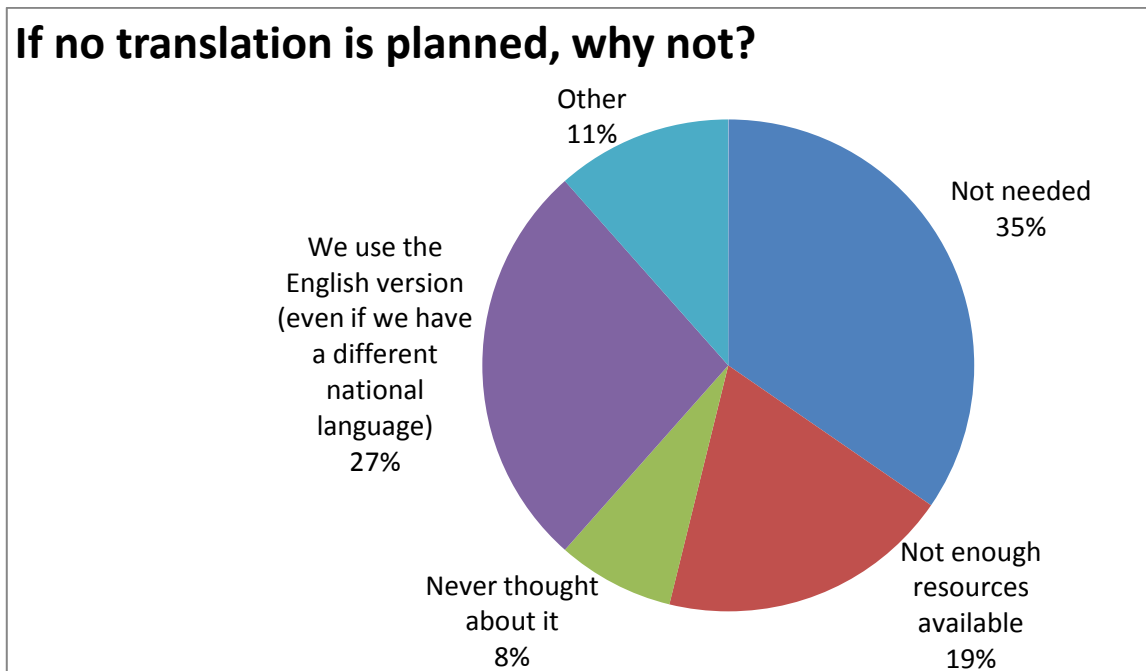35%

Never thought
about it
8%

Not enough
resources
available
19%

Figure 13 (n=26)

Considerably less common are translations of the ISBD namespace (see Figure 14).

Is a translation of the ISBD namespace into your language planned?

Yes, in progress
12%

Yes, not started
yet
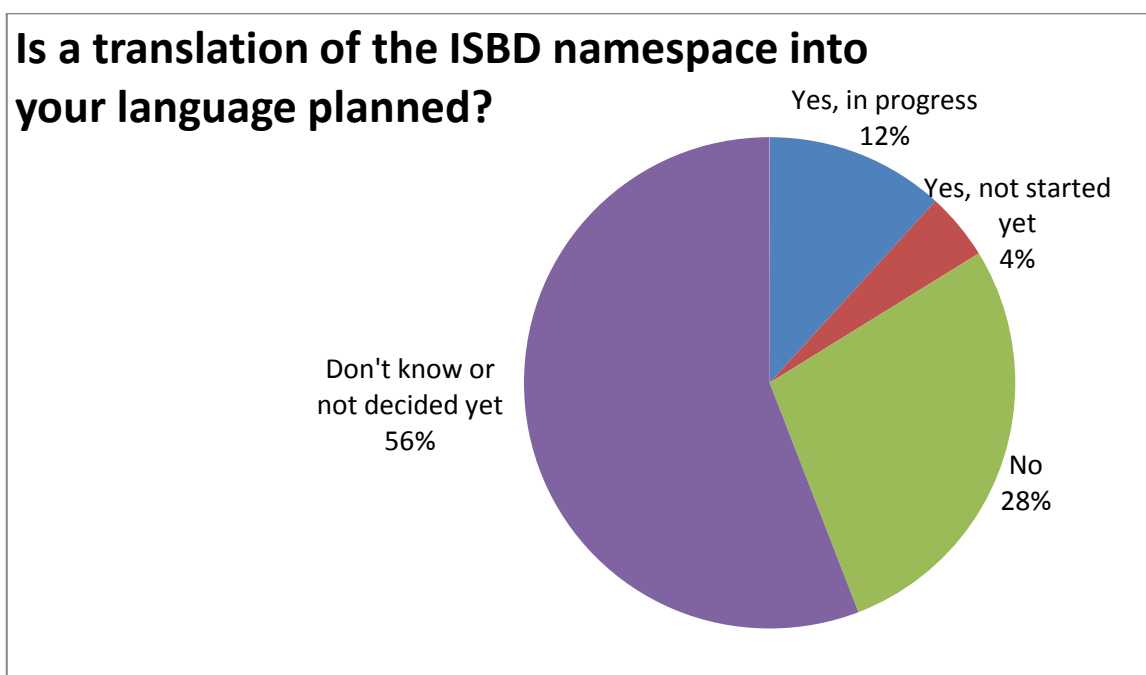4%

Don't know or
not decided yet
56%

No
28%

Figure 14 (n=68)

The last section of the ISBD survey was about problems with the ISBD and expectations about the standard.

Among the institutions that use the ISBD consolidated edition, 21% state they have some problems with the standard (for the list of answers see Appendix A).
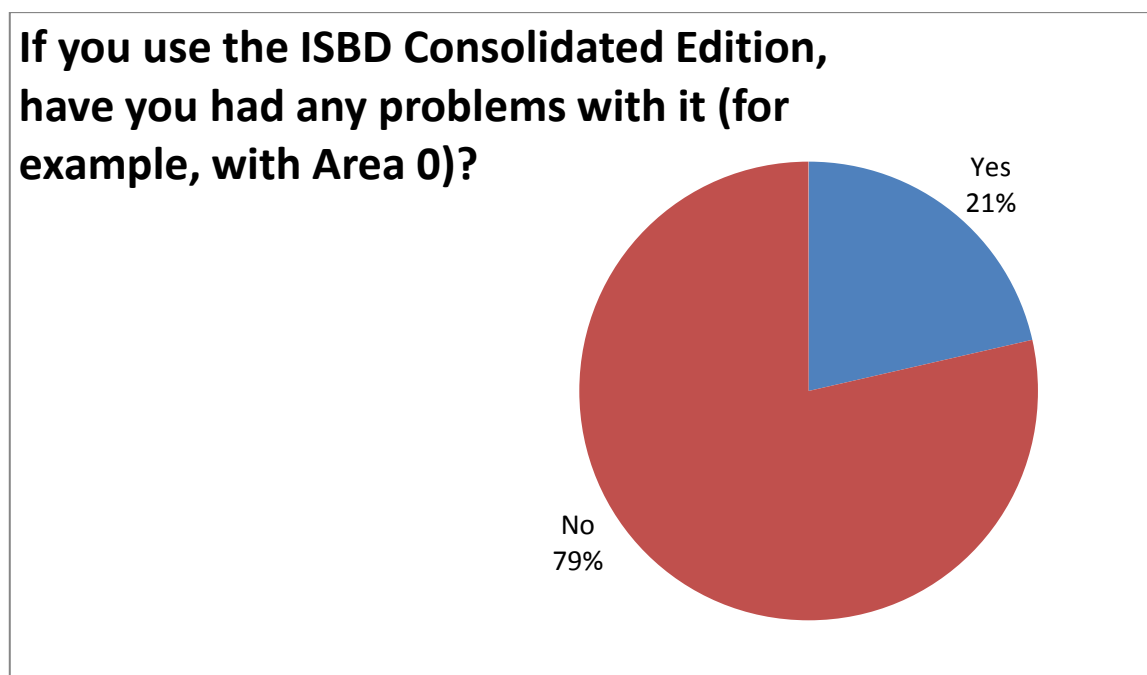
If you use the ISBD Consolidated Edition, have you had any problems with it (for example, with Area 0)?

Yes
21%

No
79%

Figure 15 (n=42)

Many problems are related to Area 0, multi-part publications, or punctuation.

The last two questions were about expectations (see Appendix B) and general comments (see Appendix C). The answers to both questions are connected. The respondents had the opportunity to express freely their opinions about the future of ISBD.

Many institutions have expectations for the ISBD consolidated edition. This implies a high regard for the standard. Some answers cite the ISBD namespace as a way to spread ISBD in a context broader than the library catalogue.

Among the remaining responses:

    a) the majority of the responses (about 90%) are related to the updating of the standard, sometimes broadly speaking, sometimes asking for specific needs to be addressed.

    b) about 33% of the responses concern mapping or harmonization with other rules, standards or models.[2]

Point a

    Many answers specify the library materials that need to be better considered or considered at all in ISBD. The materials listed are digital reproductions, ephemera, unpublished materials, component parts, manuscripts, graphic material, integrating resources, and digital resources.

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[2] The sum of the two percentages (90 and 33) is greater than 100% since many answers talk about both issues.

Sometimes the problems arise from vocabularies (controlled list of carrier terms) and terminology (some inconsistencies in the text).

According to some respondents, the ISBD consolidated edition needs more details and examples and seems less rich than the preliminary consolidated edition.

Some suggest an evolution of ISBD to a content standard, with a clear distinction between contents of the elements and the displaying function (sequence and punctuation).

Point b

According to some institutions, ISBD could be improved by a closer alignment with FRBR. The alignment could be useful, in the opinion of some respondents, both for definitions of the elements and for creating descriptions that could help in FRBRization of the catalogues.

Many answers recommend harmonization with RDA and even with ONIX.

As mentioned previously, the last question invited free comments on ISBD. The tag cloud below gives an idea of the variety of topics proposed by the respondents.

IFLA and the Cataloguing Section can be proud of their history of providing standardization for cataloguing, and of the continued need for the ISBD.

Appendix A

Problems with ISBD Consolidated edition (Question 28)

1. The main problems are related to multi part monographs.
2. No media carrier terms
3. Problems with ISBD area 0

   The area is difficult to understand for the end user: the vocabularies are not very explicit and the combination of different content and/or media types can result in a very complex area. Such information is designed for automated sorting, and ISBD should allow for an icon-based display. ISBD gives no instruction as to whether different content types or not should be recorded – as to when another content type should be mentioned or may be omitted, etc.

   Implementing area 0 requires a huge amount of work for a bibliographic agency: evolution of the working format, training of cataloguers, updating of mappings and conversions to other (exchange) formats.
4. The Area 0 is not yet implemented. The UNIMARC fields to record the data elements of the Area 0 are under study.
5. Area 0, its functions and location
6. We have problems with the punctuation and with some definitions
7. It is not a problem with ISBD, but a problem for encoding formats to recognize the sequence and syntax of repeated elements in area 0, for display. For example: when there are two medium types, each with its content form. As encoding formats are numbered label.
8. Our library automation system is not totally implementated yet to eliminate the general material designation and use tags 33X. Other university libraries aren't using them either. BNE is now using the tags. We expect to be using the tags during 2014.
9. 1.3.4.6. Common title and dependent title. Rules regarding other title information statements relating to common title to be given in Area 6 or Area 7 limit cataloguer's ability to transcribe relevant information as it appears in the source of information, resulting in eventual identification problems. Some other cases (parallel dependent titles, but only one common non-parallel title), are not treated.

   Area 0: Lack of clear provisions about the display of the information. No provision given to different media types and same content form.

   1.1.4.2.2.: Tête-bêche or back-to-back resources: sources of information are treated in a different way than in other related provisions, transcribing only the title.

   6.6.2: It would be desirable to record the series numbering in Area 6 when there is series numbered with subseries

   A.4.2.5 and 1.1.4.2 guidelines need harmonization

   It's not clear where to record the format information of electronic resources

   For those resources to which various types of specifications are applicable (think of an audio serial (for the blind) issued in CD-ROM), preference guidelines in case of doubt of contradiction would be welcomed.

Appendix B

Expectations about ISBD Consolidated edition (Question 29)

1. Me interesaria saber compararlas con RDA [I would be interested to know how it compares with RDA]
2. We would like to see carrier terms introduced, and exact SMD/unit names, e.g., DVD as opposed to videodisc duplicating the RDA carrier term
3. Functions: ISBD's punctuation and display provisions were incorporated into the current ILS AMICUS. The same display provisions are expected to be required in future systems.
   Roles: ISBD has the role of being the internationally recognized foundation of understanding the catalogue record. It provides the foundation data dictionary, definitions of descriptive elements, instructions on transcription. The combination of the display and punctuation constitutes a language-neutral 'data markup.' These important roles endure by tacit support from the international community for the maintenance of an international benchmark.
   Future expectations: to continue to explore compatibility with other cataloguing codes, e.g. RDA; to continue to invest in the ISBD namespace; to explore the opportunities for exposing data on the internet using the ISBD namespace
4. To provide stipulation for all types of library materials such as digital reproductions, ephemera, unpublished materials, component parts, manuscripts.
5. We think the role of ISBD is outdated
6. The ISBD should match with other description standards (RDA, ONIX...) as much as possible.
7. ISBD should evolve towards a real content standard, focusing on a set of elements. The definition of each element, its role for the identification of the resource described, its sources of information, transcription rules, etc., should be the main purpose of ISBD. ISBD should draw a firmer line between content elements and display conventions (order, punctuation). This would also help to bring to light the implicit relationship conveyed by the order of the elements (in area 1 or 4 for example).
   ISBD should also provide an analysis of the bibliographic description in terms of FRBR Group 1 entities (WEMI) in order to have some international guidance for FRBRized cataloguing (what should a manifestation record be? How to bring together elements from records for Work/Expression/Manifestation and Item in order to display or provide an ISBD description?) and to allow for both FRBRized and non-FRBRized cataloguing, depending on the choice made by each country or institution.
8. More harmonization. Complete examples needed including Area 0. The consolidated edition is in my opinion too much simplified (more detail in the preliminary edition for a lot of resources). Area 7 more detailed in the preliminaty edition
9. Clearly state the differences to the previous version. Fully support FRBRisation of the catalogue.
10. Harmonisation with FRBR and/or RDA, otherwise ISBD by itself offers little value for the challenges ahead.
11. Don't have any expectation for future use, we will use RDA instead.

12. The ISBD consolidated ed. needs language revisions. There are inconsistencies in terminology and redundancy.
13. Believe it is necessary to defend a position of ISBD as the main basic international standard for bibliographic description of resources
14. Stipulations for all types of library materials should be included (e.g. unpublished resources, digital reproductions etc.).
15. It must be kept up-to-date for future formats
16. I hope the maintenance and updating of the standard will continue. All national catalogues are [designed] according to ISBD and when consulting or sharing information, we assume that, although there could be different point of views. Its general acceptance establishes, at least, the general accepted minimum level, what is not sufficient according to [some] or too much according to others. It is the only general consensus, even inside at the level of the country.

    If there is not this standard to point at when requiring compliance by software providers, I don't know what would happen in the future, because even with its existance it is a constant struggle.

    The expectation for next revision: the recognition of manuscripts to be described with ISBD, as in fact it is in our libraries.
17. Include provisions regarding manuscripts.

    Include relations of elements to FRBR entities. Organize notes according FRBR entities.

    Some rules or provisions are inferred from examples rather than explicit provisions. It is felt throughout the text a general lack of cases or provisions.

    Development of rules for integrating resources, maybe a comparison with Integrating resources cataloging manual would be desirable.

    Lack of guidelines for analytical description.

    More terms for the glossary (eg., title bar, TEI header...)

    Normalized vocabulary lists would be helpful. (for instance, Specific Material Desgination)

    Avoiding the use of abbreviations
18. Development of the namespace. ISBD should follow the technical change/progress.

    We still need a standard to display and to print our records in our bibliographies.

Appendix C

General comments on ISBD and its use (Question 30)

1. We think a close alignment and cooperation between ISBD and RDA is essential despite their different status in the international society - that would be for the benefit of the libraries in a time where everyone lacks resources.

2. It is important to have ISBD as a standard developed by the library community (and not by a commercial enterprise). ISBD as trend-setter and guide for other rule-making bodies.

3. The survey does not provide precise information about the effective implementation of the ISBD by bibliographic agencies and other institutions: are all mandatory elements present in the records created by the institution? Are some optional elements omitted? If so, which? etc.

4. The harmonization between ISSN and ISBD is important

5. I have been looking for a schematic representation of the different versions of ISBD, how they hang together and what changes [were made] from the previous versions to the new consolidated version.

6. We continue to include ISBD punctuation in our MARC records in conformance with international agreements. We also use ISBD punctuation in the pdf version of the weekly BNB. We use ISBD punctuation in bibliographies supplied to customers of our bibliographic data. However, the range of sources of cataloguing and the range of materials that we collect means that ISBD is not (and could probably never be) the display format for citations in our public catalogue.

7. Guidelines should be given on how to publish the information in linked data with the different options.

8. How can ISBD reconcile the fact that on the one hand it sets very precise rules regarding the choice of the source of information or the transcription rules (for identification purposes) and on the other hand the increasingly widespread practice of re-using metadata originally created by publishers or other communities, without any possibility to check and correct them due to the huge amount of resources to be described? - One can have some doubt about the future of ISBD, because of the re-use of bibliographic (descriptive) metadata and the lesser role of descriptive metadata in comparison to standardized identifiers and to access points and authority data (responsibility access points, subject access points) in a web based environment.

9. Since ISBD does not cover access points or choice of access points, it uses descriptive cataloguing solutions in situations that are really about access– translation notes vs. uniform titles, serial title change/merger/split notes vs. relationship access points. This makes the ISBD seem redundant when followed exactly in a context where bibliographic records also have access points. This is a problem for using the ISBD namespace for relationships.

10. You need to stand a more aggressive fight against FRBR in order to make ISBD's meaning better known inside the cataloguing world.

11. It's kind of confusing … that in the same time that a cataloging area decided to change to RDA, there's also a change on the ISBD, because it causes that: confusion.

12. El problema son los recursos y ademas el idioma que en su mayoría estan en inglés. [The problem is resources and the fact that the majority are in English.]

13. Uso primordial en la institución para la elaboración de la Bibliografía Nacional [used in the institution primarily for the development of the national bibliography]

14. We wish all cataloguing agencies would use ISBD inclusions (e.g. [S.l.], [s.n.]) and media terms (e.g. computer, image (moving)) as opposed to the longer unilingual RDA inclusions and media terms.

15. Inconsistency in extent of description for different types of resources (lack of stipulations for non-print publications). Examples don't always illustrate regarding stipulation – [sometimes] too extensive, [sometimes] lacking at all - sometimes contradicting the stipulation or each other. Regarding serials - maybe taking into account to add "latest issue" as basis for the description as well.

16. In Argentina the use of ISBD standard is poor. Librarians never understood the reasons [for] its procedures so few libraries show ISBD in their OPACs. We [are] sorry.

17. Sería bueno hacer una especie de capacitación. [It would be good to do some kind of training.]

18. We have been working to revise the Nippon Cataloging Rules for some years, as considering FRBR, ICP, ISBD and RDA. And since last year, we have been in collaboration with the National Diet Library, Japan on this work. Between the two, as a basic concept it was confirmed that the new Nippon Cataloging Rules should mainly comply with the RDA and just refer to the ISBD. The reasons why we decided not to adopt the revised rules based on the ISBD are as follows: -Future catalogs should serve to enhance the openness of bibliographic data on the premise of provision on the Internet, in order for users to easily obtain and make use of bibliographic data in various ways. Therefore we need flexible rules that do not predetermine the syntactic structures (i.e. the order of elements and punctuation), and function independently of a specific format or system. -We think the rules divided into "description" and "access points" are not appropriate according to the FRBR. We think the problem is that the ISBD covers only "description". We hope the ISBD will be reviewed to reflect the above.

19. I think ISBD is still necessary. Italian cataloguers are accustomed to it and have a good acquaintance with the standard.