

Report of a World-wide Survey on Metadata Decisions for Digital Libraries

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Abstract

The IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions) Working Group on Digital Library Guidelines is one of four working groups established at the conclusion of the UNESCO experts' meeting on the World Digital Library¹ which was held on December 1, 2006. IFLA is the leading international body representing the interests of library and information services and their users. It has 1600 Members, including national library associations, libraries of all types (national, academic, public, special libraries), library and information educational institutions, and individual members, in approximately 150 countries around the world.²

The IFLA Working Group on Digital Library Guidelines was coordinated by IFLA president Claudia Lux to develop the *IFLA Guidelines for Digital Libraries* for use by libraries and other cultural institutions around the world. Being responsible for the metadata chapter of the *Guidelines*, we created a questionnaire aiming to identify the major issues and concerns regarding metadata and controlled vocabularies that should be addressed in the *Guidelines*. The questionnaire included:

- (1) a question of the roles responders may have, and
- (2) five main questions of major concern in any project that relates to metadata, regarding:
 - design and planning of digital projects
 - element set standards (data structure decision)
 - data content in a record (data content decision)
 - authority files and controlled vocabularies (data value decision), and
 - metadata encoding (data format/technical interchange decision).

A letter seeking respondents was sent through the IFLA listserv and further forwarded by IFLA members to the professional listservs in their respective countries and communities. During a one month period (from October to November of 2007) we received over 400 responses from 49 countries in Asia, Africa, North America, South America, Europe, and Australia. These include responses from individual professionals and collective responses from various kinds of institutions and many national libraries. In addition to responders from the countries who are active members of IFLA Division IV (Bibliographic Control), there were encouraging responses from countries such as Albania, Azerbaijan, Cameroon, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Lithuania, Malta, Moldova, Mongolia, and Nigeria.

IFLA has been the global voice of the library and information profession. The survey provided a common consensus to metadata-related issues and concerns. The feedback reflected the changing and challenging nature of current metadata-creation work that differs from conventional cataloging work, which has followed a few established rules and formats for a long time. This poster presents the survey results related to the detailed questions covered by the above main questions. Additionally, for the open-ended questions, the responders raised additional questions

¹ World Digital Library Project Home page. Retrieved July 25, 2009, from <http://project.wdl.org/project/english/>.

² IFLA for: The Press. Retrieved July 25, 2009, from <http://www.ifla.org/en/for-the-press>.

and concerns that could be found at different stages of a digital library project, impacting different parts of the collaborative efforts, and relating to various processes. These covered some significant issues crossing all survey questions such as standardization and interoperability, extensibility, multilingualism, quality vs. efficiency, staffing and training, etc., as well as issues beyond metadata communities.

Reflecting these results, the first draft on metadata in the Guidelines was prepared before the IFLA 2008 Conference and further comments on the draft were sought-after through an open session. There were significant suggestions for the metadata chapter to address issues of cost effectiveness and using automatically generated metadata. Consequently, we finalized an all-inclusive metadata workflow and process from which digital library developers can get a glimpse into the metadata decision.

Although the data was collected in the later months of 2007, our continual monitoring of the issues and trends has indicated consistency of these main concerns, especially with the growth of the digital collections and digital libraries around the world. The survey results helped us to generate a concise chapter on metadata for the *IFLA Guidelines for Digital Libraries* that is to be released in 2010. A full paper based on the survey results will be published in a special issue of the *Journal of Library Metadata*.