Presentation

The Dutch Art & Architecture Thesaurus® Put into Practice: The Example of Anet, Antwerp

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Abstract

Anet is a network of scientific libraries located in Antwerp, Belgium. Among the connected institutions are research, higher education and museum libraries. They share common software (Brocade, developed at the Antwerp University since 1998) and cataloging practices. In 2014 was decided to adopt a new subject heading system for cataloging the library collections with an art or heritage scope. The Art & Architecture Thesaurus® (maintained by the Getty Research Institute) was eventually selected, under the express condition that it can be used in a flexible way by the libraries. This includes, if needed, the usage of non-AAT compatible subject terms.

AAT was chosen because of software compatibility, extensiveness of its content and multilingualism. The thesaurus is being fully translated into Spanish, Dutch, German, Chinese, and partly in other languages, such as Italian and French.

The local subject heading systems (terminologies) were converted to the new authority environment (Anet-AAT). Automatic mapping via tools was considered. However, manual mapping was performed because of the different application as subject heading system and the opportunity to acquaint the librarians with AAT.

Future challenges for the Anet-AAT vocabulary consist of staying updated with changes that occur in the 'Mother AAT' (Getty Vocabularies) and adding to its content to create more library specific subjects - AAT is presently quite focused on the description of (museum) objects.- But, since Anet is using AAT, it's been noticed that the content is quite well suited for indexing the special libraries. Nevertheless, the usage by the network did bring to light issues in the structure of AAT, particularly some concerning the Dutch translation. The necessity to address these issues has resulted in regular contacts between Anet and the RKD-Netherlands Institute for Art History that manages the Dutch translation of the AAT.

The AAT has a long history of development. The original AAT by Getty already started in the late seventies in the United States. The RKD manages the Dutch AAT, or 'AAT-Ned' since the mid-nineties. Work on the expansion and improvement of the Thesaurus is an ongoing process. Being a 'living terminology', this has impact on the usage as a standard by others. The publication of the Getty Vocabularies as Linked Open Data only made this more apparent. Together with user communities such as Anet the RKD tries to adapt the content of the AAT for the better. Particularly concerning the Dutch translation, but it also tackles other issues concerning scope notes (definitions), or hierarchical relations that are not compatible with the views of the Dutch-speaking heritage community. Because of the scope and size of the content of AAT The RKD cannot discover all the issues by itself, and needs the input of users from the heritage community to improve the system. In this manner, Anet contributes to the improvement of the Dutch translation as well as the 'mother- AAT'. The adaptation of AAT by Anet has proven to be a promising showcase for the potential of this 'museum thesaurus' as a subject heading system for libraries as well.

Keywords: metadata; thesaurus; subject headings; libraries; art libraries; Art & Architecture Thesaurus®; Brocade Library Services; authority control"