Panel 4: National Bibliographies

Insights from IFLA's Register of National Bibliographies

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Hello, I’m Pat Riva, a member of the IFLA Bibliography Section.

Today I’d like to tell you about a resource from the Bibliography Section called the National Bibliographic Register. The Register (or NBR) was created in 2009 and offers profiles of national bibliographies, as described by those responsible for them. The Register takes a broad view of what constitutes a national bibliography, welcoming both traditional publications, and cumulative databases.

The Register is available on the IFLA Bibliography website. (figure 1)
The year of last update of each profile is indicated after the country name. New profiles and updates to existing profiles are always welcome.

Each profile is in 7 sections, covering:
Identification, publishing history and current size,
Collecting scope,
Organisation and administration,
Services offered and uses supported,
Business models for metadata reuse,
Standards used in the creation of the metadata,
and Information about the respondent.

Reading each profile gives a good overview of a bibliography. But sometimes we want to answer more comparative questions and benchmark our own bibliography. We might also want to look at trends, or get a sense of the variations that have been implemented elsewhere.

To help answer these questions, the Section has been analysing and categorizing the responses—preparing relevant statistics, graphs and charts. These are available from the bottom of the NBR page. The tables permit reference back to the full profiles, by indicating which countries were included in each response category for the graphics.

The Register includes 48 entries, from around the world. All the analysis is based on those responses. Any oversimplification or misunderstanding of the profile responses is my own.

[Figure 2. Map of national bibliographies in the Register]

To give a flavour of the insights possible from the comparative analysis, let’s look at some questions that highlight selection policies for resources described in national
bibliographies, and then some aspects of their organization and cooperative relationships.

2b – General Selection Criteria

By definition all bibliographies include the national output. Usually this is defined by place of publication, but it can also be the place of printing or also distribution. It was frequently described in terms of legal deposit laws. Additionally, more than half also include extra-territorial materials. The selection criteria for “related” materials are one or more of:

- Related (not further specified)
- About the country (or its nationals or culture)
- By national creators
- In the national language
- Translations of the national literature
- Using the country as a setting in literature and film.

![Inclusion Criteria for Publications from Outside the Territory](image)

[Figure 3. Inclusion criteria for publications from outside the Territory]

2c – eResource inclusion

Including, and indeed collecting, electronic resources has seen great change in the past 15 years, and there is still little consensus in the policies reported. Just under a quarter reported that no digital resources were included in the national bibliography, another quarter reported including only offline digital resources (those distributed on media), while the remaining half do include online resources to some degree.
The inclusion policies vary widely, from limited selection to attempts at comprehensive collecting via web harvesting. Many reported applying a combination of selection criteria, along different dimensions. A few focused on the file format of the resource and its preservation potential, such as collecting only print-analogue formats like PDF files. More considered that the form of publication was key. The most frequent form collected is ebooks, closely followed by eserials. A few specifically mentioned government publications, theses, and audiovisual material. But 9 specified that websites are included.

A smaller group framed their inclusion policy by the content of the online publication.
The most frequent statement being that the same content criteria are used for online publications as for other materials. Others were selective, saying only specific selected resources are included, with no further details. Others stated that selection is based on considering the contents of national interest, or of cultural or scientific significance.

![Figure 6. Inclusion criteria relating to content](image)

3c – Cooperative Networks

National Bibliographic Agencies (almost always the National Library) frequently draw on a range of other agencies to support production of the national bibliography. The most frequent collaboration is with actors in the book trade: publishers, distributors, printers, or their associations. National agencies for standard number assignment, when external to the NBA, are important collaborators, as are other legal deposit libraries, national bibliographic services, and other libraries in general. Over a third go it alone, probably because some of these functions are housed within the NBA itself.
3e – Sources of metadata

All respondents create bibliographic data for the national bibliography within the national library or NBA; over half do not use any other sources. The rest draw on external sources to supplement their in-house data creation, which is always the most significant source. Deriving from other libraries (either libraries with specific cooperating relationships or in general) may be direct or through a national union catalogue or national database. Commercial sources of metadata are used by 5 respondents, and 4 use publisher data. Re-use of CIP data was only mentioned by 6 respondents, likely because CIP was considered part of in-house data creation by other NBAs.
We can’t cover all of the NBR today, but a series of articles from the *IFLA Metadata Newsletter* provide a complete review.

In conclusion, I hope you will make use of this resource, and that if your country is not yet represented that you are inspired to submit a profile.

**Bibliography:**

“National Bibliographic Register.” *IFLA Metadata Newsletter*, v.3, no.1 (June 2017), p.18-19. (section 1)


“The National Bibliographic Register, putting national bibliographies in context.” *IFLA Metadata Newsletter*, v.7, no.1 (June 2021), p.5-12. (covers sections 3, 4 (part), and 5)

“National Bibliographies revealed in the National Bibliographic Register.” *IFLA Metadata Newsletter*, v.7, no.2 (December 2021), [forthcoming]. (covers sections 2, 4 (remainder))