A LOCAL COLLABORATION...

The story of the implementation of the Art and Architecture Thesaurus® (AAT) in Anet starts in 2012, when the Rubenianum, the research institute for the Flemish art of the 16th and 17th century, joined the library network. Along with their bibliographical metadata the Rubenianum brought along an extensive set of subject indexes used to catalog their collection on renaissance and baroque art. It was a structured, but locally grown vocabulary, built through years of cataloging art historical publications.

Until that moment none of the art libraries in the Anet network had been using this kind of specific subjects. Most of them were only using a very limited set of broad UDC-categories, such as “art”, “painting”, “drawing”, “sculpture” to categorize their books. For an art library with a very specialized collection, this didn’t suffice. So, luckily, when the Rubenianum joined the network a new type of authority record was created: the STRUCTURED MUSEUM THESAURUS (SMT). The data format allowed to not only preserve the existing concepts and associated terms (translations, synonyms), but also the hierarchical and associative relationships between them.

After the integration of the metadata of the Rubenianum, in 2013 other libraries of the museums of Antwerp joined the library network: first came the library of the Middelheimmuseum, with their documentation on modern and contemporary sculpture. Then the libraries of the MAS followed, being the library of the former Scheepvaartmuseum, with a collection on marine history and maritime transport and the library collection of the former Ethnographical museum with publications on ethnography and ethnic art. These libraries too brought along their own vocabularies. These were added to the SMT.
After processes of merging and matching these terminologies, the **Structured Museum Thesaurus (SMT)** ended up being a vocabulary of around 8,000 concepts. Unfortunately, there no longer was a genuine logic or a founding principle behind the thesaurus - it was just a compilation of terms without any intrinsic coherence. Some concepts were hierarchically associated, others were just floating around.

At first we did try to remediate the problems by editing and deleting concepts and adding relations. But the efforts seemed so in vain. Why develop and maintain a local vocabulary when there were established, standard vocabularies available? Moreover, six other libraries in the network were interested in using a more specialized vocabulary to catalog their research collections on art. The library network thus chose to initiate a one year research project, starting in 2014. The project employee did research on subject indexing, thesauri available around the world and implementation schemes to draw up a plan that matched our needs:

1. Anet decides to incorporate the full Art and Architecture Thesaurus® for their subject indexing, and not just the concepts matching the terminology we were already using. A new authority type “**Anet-AAT**” would be created, and 43,000 concepts of Getty’s AAT would be imported into our database. A yearly updating procedure would allow to keep the thesaurus up to date. Also an ad hoc updating mechanism would be installed, so when a new concept is added to the Getty database, its concept ID can be used to add it to the local Anet-AAT authority file.

2. For the 8,000 SMT-concepts that were already in use a **data conversion** would be in order.

   - **58%** → For the majority of these SMT-subjects a one-on-one match with a concept in **AAT** was found.
   - **15%** → When our own concepts were AAT-compliant, but we couldn’t find a perfect match in the Getty database, the SMT-concepts were temporarily preserved in the local Anet-AAT terminology as **AAT-to-be terms**. → see also: **EDITORIAL WORK**
   - **27%** → Existing SMT-concepts that didn’t fit the AAT, were preserved in a separate terminology : the **Unique Concepts Terminology (UCT)**. Since the AAT contains only generic terms, the UCT contains the concepts concerning iconographical subjects, names of buildings, artworks and places, specific historical events, etc. and will ideally be standardized in a later stadium.
The Art and Architecture Thesaurus in Anet: REASONS WHY...

Anet was the first library network to make use of the Art and Architecture Thesaurus for the indexing of the art libraries and collections on art.

**CONTENT.** As one of the structured vocabularies of the Getty Research Institute, the Art and Architecture Thesaurus today contains around 45,000 concepts. These are all generic concepts related to art, architecture, conservation, archaeology, and other cultural heritage and material culture. This scope matches the contents of our library collections on art perfectly.

**HIERARCHICAL STRUCTURE.** The structure of the AAT matched the initial lay-out of the SMT. The hierarchical structure of the thesaurus is also important to better understand the meaning of the concepts and has an important function in search and retrieval for both catalogers and end users.

**MULTILINGUALISM.** The Art and Architecture Thesaurus is the result of an international collaboration. All concepts are available in English, and a great part of them are already translated to other languages, such as Spanish (71.3%), Chinese (46%), and German (18%). The Dutch outnumbers these languages though, with a translation rate of 84%!

**INTERNATIONAL & EVOLVING STANDARD.** The AAT is a compiled resource, and as such it is also an evolving vocabulary, growing and changing through the joint efforts of colleagues all over the world. When a concept needed for the cataloging process is not yet included in AAT, it doesn’t necessarily mean it doesn’t belong there. With the proper motivation and definition new terminology can indeed be added to it. → EDITORIAL WORK

**APPROACH.** In principle the AAT uses a post-coordinative approach: complex meaning is constructed by bringing together separate AAT terms. However, not every multiple-word concept is necessarily split up in the AAT; some terms must be listed in the AAT as bound terms. This happens when they represent a single concept of which the meaning cannot be simply expressed by combining two descriptors/concepts. → EDITORIAL WORK

**LINKED OPEN DATA STANDARD USED BY ENTIRE GLAM-SECTOR.** The AAT is designed to describe art objects and material culture and can be used in galleries, libraries, archives and museums (GLAM). This opens up possibilities for linking museum objects to art literature and as such create new search strategies in discovery services across collection databases. Since the art libraries are often associated with a museum, the cross-domain possibilities of the AAT are very appealing. A closer cooperation between Antwerp museums and our art libraries is one of the next steps in our project.

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**Anet-AAT partners**

Since 2018 14 art libraries in Anet are using Anet-AAT: 10 art libraries of museums in Antwerp and Malines and 4 of (college) universities in Antwerp and Hasselt. Their collections cover a broad spectrum of subjects: from renaissance to contemporary art, from painting to photography, from European to ethnic art.
GOING GLOBAL…

Part I: EDITORIAL WORK

Subject indexing means maintaining a thesaurus. By choosing for AAT, we aim for a higher sustainability of our editorial processes and invest our time in customizing and improving an international standard rather than to try to perfect a local vocabulary. Because the AAT is used in an international context, we are operating on a different scale. Our editorial work has an impact far beyond our local libraries and could potentially be useful for the broader GLAM-sector all over the globe.

Our 14 art libraries bring varied backgrounds and art historical expertise to the editorial process. Two teams are active:

- Working group Anet-AAT: this is our general editorial team that works on adding new translations, corrections of spelling and new terminology to the Getty database.

- Working group book history: colleagues with large collections of rare books teamed up to specifically focus on the domain of book history.

An example: meat halls

“Meat halls” was one of the SMT-subjects we chose to preserve as an “AAT-to-be” term. In 2018 it was one of the concepts that was processed by the Anet-AAT working group, and was successfully added to the official Getty standard. The following information is needed:

→ **Preferred term** in English and Dutch

(→ **Synonyms** in English and Dutch)

→ **Scope note** in English and Dutch. To define a term is often the hardest part. A definition has to be distinctive but not too detailed. When specialists are working with academic resources, the results are often scope notes with way too much nuance. We’ve had to simplify our carefully crafted descriptions more than once!

→ **Hierarchical position:** you ought to decide the place in the AAT-facet structure and name the broader (and narrower) terms.

→ **Sources:** in order for the English and the Dutch terms to be considered you need references, so a library comes in handy!

For the **translations** of English concepts we work closely together with the RKD – Netherlands Institute for Art History (Den Haag), that maintains de Dutch Art and Architecture Thesaurus.

To **add new concepts** to Getty’s standard we work in close cooperation with Dutch and Belgian institutes in the “AAT-editing group Flanders-Netherlands”.

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GOING GLOBAL…

Part II: VESPER

Working with a Linked Open Data standard as AAT creates opportunities for innovation and cooperation on a global scale. Anet recently developed the platform VESPER, a webbased platform, inspired by the principle of copy cataloging.

The general thought behind this prototype is the moderation of the high costs of the time-consuming practice of subject indexing. VESPER is designed to help art libraries link their library records to AAT subject headings.

The idea behind this database is based on the fact that both AAT-concepts and bibliographical references are to be identified by unique identifiers:

- Bibliographical references by ISBN, ISSN, OCLC-numbers.
- AAT-concepts by Concept Identification number (Concept-ID).

In our library network, 9,367 AAT-concepts are used 284,315 times for subject indexing. All these associations between bibliographical references and matching AAT-codes are made available for reuse in other library systems through VESPER.

The VESPER webplatform is developed on the anet.be-server and is available in two modes:

- via an API: which allowes the integration in other systems
- via an interactive html-webform

A few words on cataloging with AAT

In our network around 35 professional catalogers of 14 art libraries have assigned AAT-concepts to thousands of library records and the number increases continually. On average, every month 1,700 AAT-concepts are added to bibliographical descriptions of art literature.

Do our catalogers see the forest through the trees when working with the dataset of 45.000 subject headings?

In fact, they do. Not all concepts are to be used for cataloging. A great part of the terminology is part of the structure of the thesaurus and recognizable as such. Also, because of the strong hierarchical structure, the domains they are cataloging for are often clustered and easily browsable. Moreover, not all of these AAT-domains are relevant to our collections. Around 21% of all AAT-concepts are in use.

On the other hand, cataloging with AAT allows a much deeper subject indexing than we could have established on our own. In the last six months over 350 extra AAT-concepts were used for indexing our art literature. These were 350 concepts that we did not need to properly define and structure ourselves before doing so… a massive gain of time.

In addition, a series of Anet-AAT cataloging workshops showed that the results of deep indexing with AAT were fairly similar between different catalogers in our network, so the often heard critique about the subjectivity and randomness of subject indexing seems rather exaggerated.

And last but not least: since the meaning of the AAT-concepts is so strictly defined, the Dutch AAT-concepts used in Belgium will stand for the same content when applied to GLAM-collections in the United States, Spain, China, or elsewhere…
An invitation...

Anet invites libraries to make use of the VESPER-database to ease their subject indexing with AAT, but also to add their own metadata to the database.

For that purpose a rather simple exchange format in CSV was created. In essence it should contain information on the universal ID of the bibliographical record (column "id") and the AAT concept ID of the associated AAT-concepts (column "aat").

If more AAT’s are related to one bibliographical record, another line is added to the csv, with the same ID for the bibliographical record (column “id”), and another for the AAT (column “aat”). To offer other metadata is not obligatory, but might be useful to avoid mistakes when cataloging.

Vesper API
When working via API the library system can send out a request to the Vesper database. The tool answers in a JSON-structure.

Example:

Answer:

```
[
  {
    "id": "2-7427-3326-4",
    "idty": "isbn",
    "recno": "c:lvd:6357014",
    "title": "Un art populaire",
    "catlevel": "0",
    "aat": "1000610962",
    "aatref": "a:aat.15159:1",
    "aatlevel": "0",
    "aattitle": "outsider art"
  }
]
```

Vesper HTML
Vesper can also be activated through the following link: https://anet.be/aat/vesper.phtml

Through this webform the user can browse the Vesper database.
AND ANOTHER INVITATION

Vesper is now used for AAT-indexes only. Since our art libraries also make use of other authority files to index our art literature, such as artist names, iconographical subjects, geographic names, historical periods,… we are thinking of linking those files to Linked Open Data datasets too.

Which reference datasets do (or would) you use in your library? If you have any recommendations, please contact me via e-mail: ute.staes@antwerpen.be.

& CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions regarding this poster, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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