University of British Columbia Library, Rare Books and Special Collections & University of Alberta, School of Library and Information Studies

Subject Access Points: Friend or Foe?

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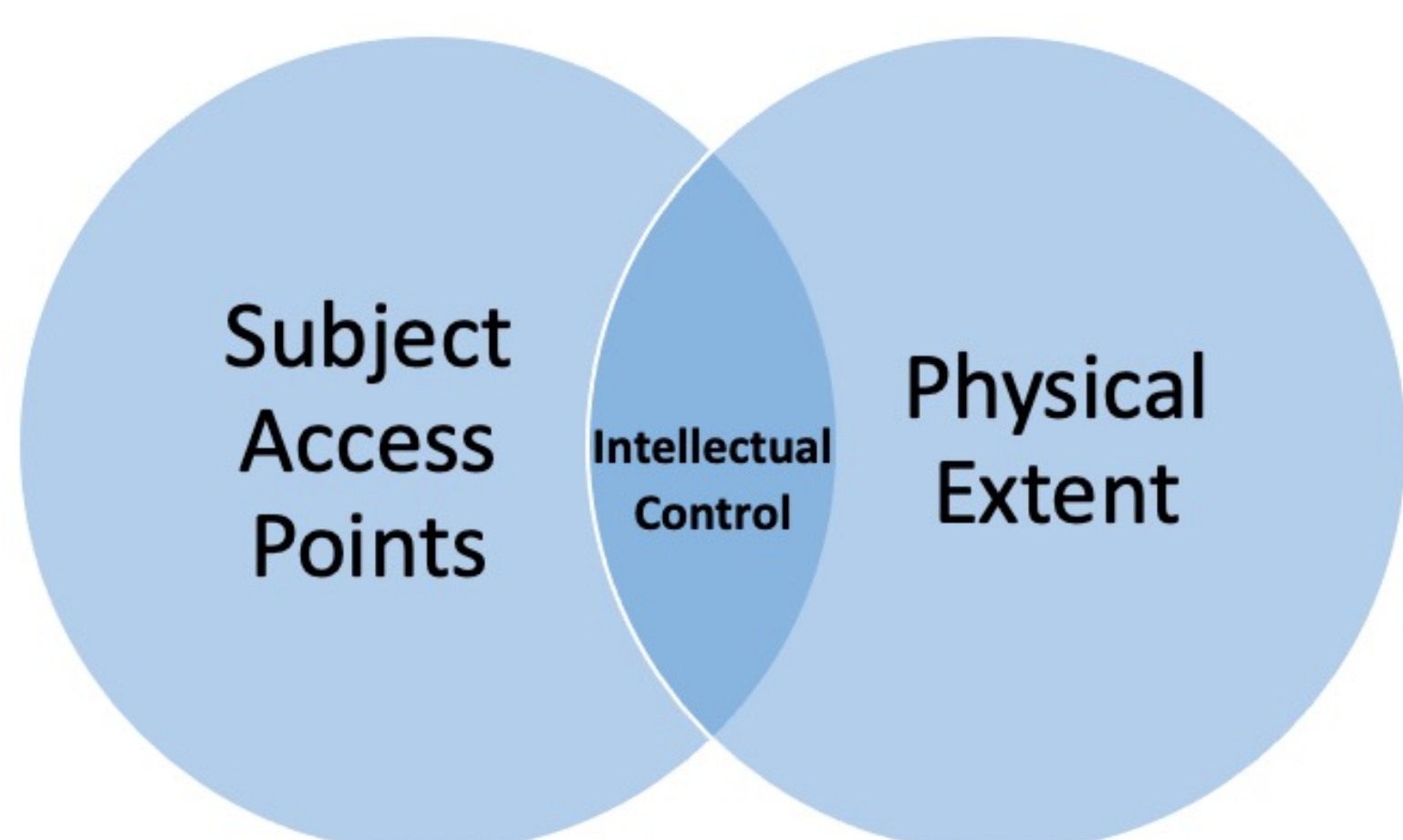
Why Subject Access Points (SAP)?

A few months after transitioning to remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic, University of British Columbia Library's Rare Books and Special Collections (RBSC) unit initiated a project as an effort to increase the discovery of archival holdings in its AtoM database by adapting existing subject access points used by MemoryBC (a portal which provides access to over 200 BC archival repositories) and assigning subject access points to fonds/collection-level descriptions.

"SAPs are fundamental to any kind of document retrieval" (Hjørland & Nielsen, 2001, p. 249).

Physical Extent and SAP

In addition to assigning SAP, information related to physical extent was captured and recorded in a systematic way to increase intellectual control which enables statistics such as the number of meters of records which relate to Chinese Canadian history or records created by or about women. This type of information can be very valuable when:

- Developing outreach programs,
- Communicating with stakeholders and donors
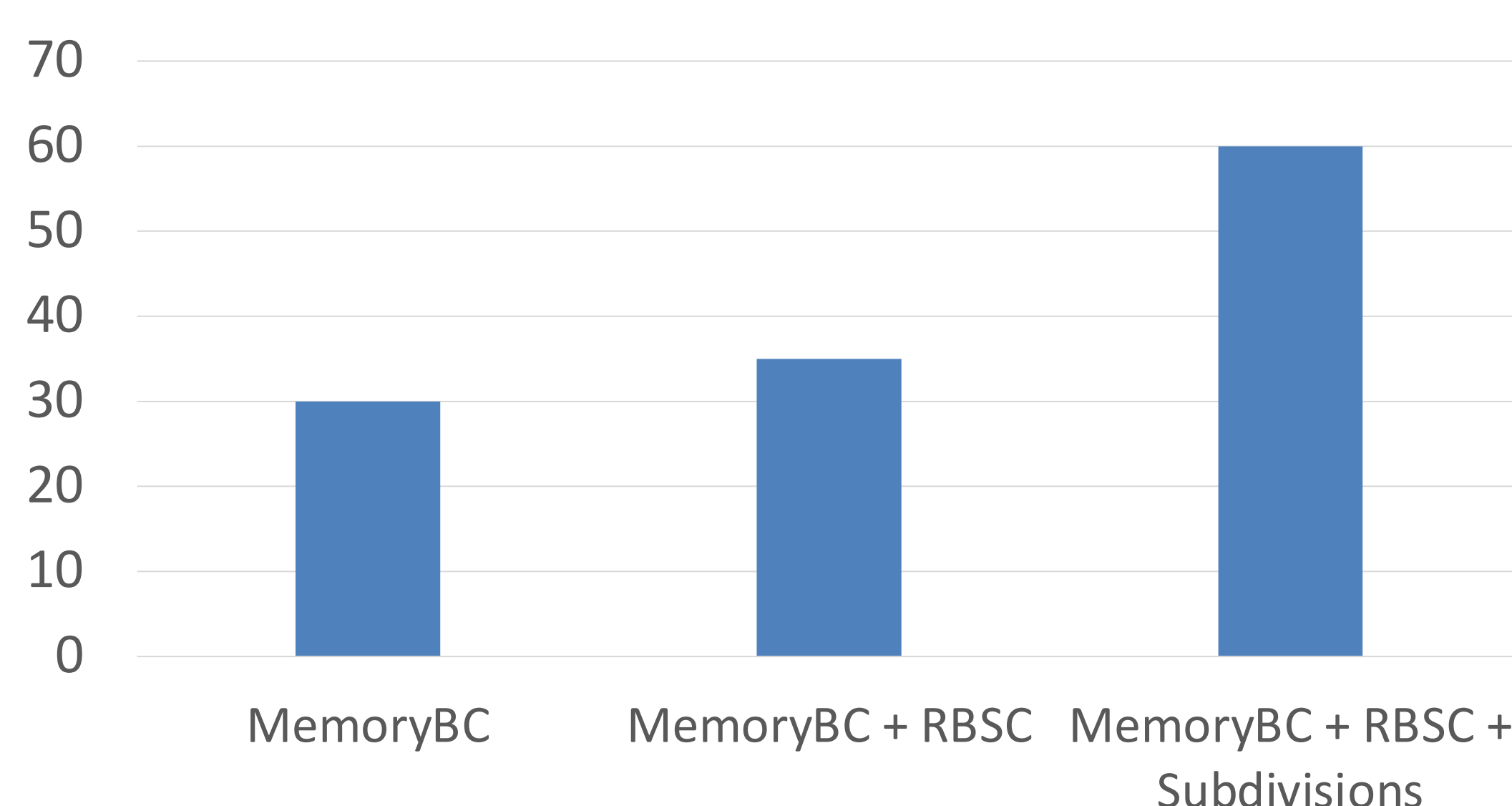- Identifying strengths and weaknesses of archival holdings

Opportunities

- Increase discovery of holdings
- Generate up-to-date statistics
- Description clean up
- Identify discrepancies
- Standardize data entry workflows
- Simplify the process when creating LibGuides

Challenges

- How many SAPs is too many?
- Small fonds/collections covering many subject areas
- Limitations of using existing SAPs from MemoryBC
- When to add subdivisions?
- Creating new SAPs - Vocabulary
- Defining scope of SAPs
- Using two sets of SAPs for RBSC AtoM and MemoryBC

Number of MemoryBC and RBSC Subject Access Points/Subdivisions

During the early stages of this project a decision was made to create subdivisions for SAPs which highlight the strengths of RBSC archival holdings. These include various cultural groups such as Japanese and Chinese, as well as mining and forestry for natural resources and industries.

SAPs vs LibGuides

The purpose of SAPs is to draw out major themes of fonds and collections. If there is one or a few item/files which should be highlighted but they are not a part of the major theme(s) identified in SAPs, then these items/files are highlighted in LibGuides.

Creating New SAPs

Some MemoryBC SAPs cover a broad range of themes which may false positives when browsing descriptions via SAPs. New SAPs and subdivisions are created to increase the level of granularity.

Family and personal life (MemoryBC)

- Individuals (all ages), families
- Friendships, personal relationships, home life
- Generational records
- Genealogical records
- ==Sexuality==
- Support and charitable organizations for the private lives of families and individuals

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==Sexuality and gender== *(RBSC)*

- Use for records about human sexuality and gender identity/expression, including materials created by or about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, intersex, pansexual, two-spirit, androgynous and asexual individuals and groups. Also use for interpersonal romantic content created by or about all sexual orientations and gender identities.

Cultural groups (MemoryBC)

- Individuals / groups working towards preservation of a particular cultural group or cultural community
- Activities / events promoting life / values of cultural group/s
- Movements, initiatives, legislation etc. that promotes the existence and participation of diverse ethnic, racial, religious or social groups within the larger community

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Cultural groups--Chinese (RBSC)

Chinese Canadian history (RBSC)

Hate groups (RBSC)

Next Steps…

- Convert existing legacy RBSC SAPs created from other projects at lower levels (series/subseries/file/item) to current SAPs and subdivisions

Legacy SAPs	Current SAPs
Totem Poles	First Nations--Totem Poles
Boats	Transportation and utilities--Boats
Festivals	Events and celebrations--Festivals
Mining	Industries--Mining

- Create instructional videos to promote the use of SAPs as a discovery tool
- Connect AtoM to Tableau (data visualization software) for gathering complex statistics

Acknowledgements

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