Comments on this virtual consultation process

dhobern #1 April 6, 2020, 9:47am

We hope that this virtual consultation on *Advancing the Catalogue of the World's Natural History Collections* may serve as a possible model for other open international consultations in future.

We therefore value discussion here on the merits or failings of this process and possible ways to improve it for future consultations.

1 Like

The consultation process

Adelantando el Catálogo de Colecciones de Historia Natural del Mundo

Collections Catalogue - Daily Summaries

Faire Avancer le Catalogue des Collections d'Histoire Naturelle du Monde

Adelantando el Catálogo de Colecciones de Historia Natural del Mundo

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Comments on this consultation process

Adelantando el Catálogo de Colecciones de Historia Natural del Mundo

建立《全球自然历史馆藏名录》

Adelantando el Catálogo de Colecciones de Historia Natural del Mundo

建立《全球自然历史馆藏名录》

Integrated summary from 17 to 30 April 2020

建立《全球自然历史馆藏名录》

Adelantando el Catálogo de Colecciones de Historia Natural del Mundo

Advancing the Catalogue of the World's Natural History Collections

建立《全球自然历史馆藏名录》

pzermoglio #2 April 27, 2020, 7:14pm

I have observed a couple of things during this consultation:

- Summaries have been useful to me to catch up when many topics were discussed in a single day. The summary of yet-untouched-topics was good as well to get some focus.
- Covid-19 has been a factor that altered people's agendas and availability/ability to contribute. One way to deal with this may be to extend the consultation period, but that would not necessarily bring more contributions. I guess it would be worth if we could sense some commitment from key people to get engaged during the X following days.
- The efforts of translations have not rendered significantly increased participation of the target communities (null in the ES case). However, the respective posts have had a considerable amount of views, though not able to see if those where from the coordination team or others already contributing to the EN threads.
- There have been less contributions than I expected from members of key communities across the world. Yet again, many threads had a lot of views.
- The previous two may suggest that people is interested and reading the posts, and maybe agreeing to what has been said, but upon agreement they may feel there's not much more they could add.

For future consultations, some potential actions could be:

- Increase social media promotion of the consultation. There is a risk of pestering people, but I think the gain is worth the risk.
  - Consider not everyone uses the same channels, nor with the same frequency.
  - Have a list of potential venues to promote through from the offset (listserves, FB pages/groups, etc.) and to the extent possible automate posts/messages on those to lower the burden on the coordination team - (maybe this was done by the coordination team).
  - Highlight more the value of everyone's contributions, perhaps in a more personal way "we need *your* input and expertise".
  - Highlight more the benefits of participating (truly my thinking here is "if you don't participate, don't complain later", but I recognize it needs to be more diplomatic).
  - Highlight the deadline.
- Encourage the use of "likes". In the cases where people feel they don't have much to add to what has already been said, this could provide a better grasp on which ideas are shared by many people, as opposed to just proposed by someone in particular.
- Using GBIF Discourse. This is a great resource. But some people may not have participated in it before, don't know how it works, and that could be a discouraging factor. Maybe include in the promotional messages that "you just need a free user account", or "just log in and participate", or the like.

2 Likes

Adelantando el Catálogo de Colecciones de Historia Natural del Mundo

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建立《全球自然历史馆藏名录》

Integrated summary from 17 to 30 April 2020

dhobern #3 April 27, 2020, 11:24pm

Thanks for all of these excellent comments @pzermoglio . I think you are spot on. Here are some of my additional thoughts:

- We conceived this long before COVID-19 with a focus on finding a better way to handle international discussions and consultations. The global context we had in mind was the big need to avoid air travel and the wish to make discussions more open to contributors from all regions. A totally online activity would have been a change of pace for many people from teleconferences, in-person meetings, etc.
- As it has turned out, the world is now split into those privileged enough to be able to work from home and those whose employment is in jeopardy or who have no opportunity to log in to look at something like this. The former group probably has too much virtual activity going on right now. The latter group may be unable to participate or even be reminded it's happening. This may have affected engagement.
- It is also possible that the topic we selected for this consultation is by now relatively uncontentious. We have discussed many aspects in many contexts in the past. We want this consultation to give us a chance to synthesise views and establish some clear directions for GBIF, DiSSCo, national and thematic collection networks, etc. so that they can together deliver something robust and worthwhile. It is possible that much of what needs to be decided was already indicated adequately in some sections of the Ideas Paper and that readers felt less need to state their views.
- I have long been concerned that our English-only activities exclude many who would like to be involved. The studies you shared with me reflect this. So I am very happy to have had yourself and @Maofang helping throughout the last few days, translating summaries and fielding at least some Chinese-language messages. However, I wouldn't want to waste the time and energy of good and enthusiastic people on something that is not worthwhile.
- I propose to send out a short questionnaire after the consultation to get impressions of the value of different aspects of what we have done. This can include questions to explore these ideas.

2 Likes

bsterner #4 April 29, 2020, 2:21pm

I'd like to highlight the importance of directly contacting and soliciting input from collections whose staff are normally least resourced to participate in a project like this. While the best-resourced institutions to lead in building a collections catalog are typically located in the global north, many of the most important gaps in natural history collections research are located in the global south. "An emphasis on access [alone] fails to capture the social and material conditions under which data can be made useable, and the multiplicity of conversion factors required for researchers to engage with data" (Bezuidenhout et al. 2017). A catalog of collections that fails to address variations in situated obstacles, resources, and aims among the global north and south is unlikely to make the biggest impact possible on the most pressing challenges for biodiversity and natural history collections. It's important to recognize that requesting participation in an online consulting process will often privilege those in the know, who feel qualified to speak, have the situated resources in place to participate, and have the authority to make time in their own schedules.

The broader consulting process (i.e. beyond this phase of discussion) should put a priority on actively surveying related efforts in less well-represented countries/regions, including individuals involved in collections, government agencies, and NGOs operating in those areas. Bezuidenhout et al. 2017 provide a useful model for collecting information on situated "conversion factors" that "are the considerations that frustrate or enable individuals' ability to effectively use the resources available to them in order to pursue their sought after 'beings' and 'doings.'" The study focuses specifically on researchers in biochemistry but could usefully inform our understanding or questions on obstacles and enablers for online use of collections information.

Bezuidenhout, Louise M, Sabina Leonelli, Ann H Kelly, and Brian Rappert. 2017. "Beyond the Digital Divide: Towards a Situated Approach to Open Data." Science and Public Policy 44 (4): 464–75. doi:10.1093/scipol/scw036.

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Maofang #5 April 29, 2020, 3:43pm

> pzermoglio:
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> Highlight more the value of everyone's contributions, perhaps in a more personal way "we need *your* input and expertise".

This is a good idea.

It is nearly the end of this consultation, we do not have many feedbacks from our community as I expected. The reasons behind this may be 1) too many issues listed in the Idea Paper, many people even do not read through it. 2) though benefits of joining the discussions are mentioned, some collection owners still feel this is "none of their business" and keep staying in their small circles. 3) some people may be interested of the catalogue, but they just first wait and see, then make further decisions.

Maybe, for the further discussions, some key issues need to be listed, thus to save time for those that are really need more discussions. Also, for different regions, open discussion could still go on but also target at some key people (or acquaintances in this field) who may provide valuable inputs.