1.1. Directory to support the collections community (USE)

dhobern #1 March 27, 2020, 9:00am

> This is topic 1.1. in the *Uses* section of the ***Advancing the Catalogue of the World's Natural History Collections*** consultation. Use this topic to discuss the questions listed below.

Background
Collections staff and taxonomists collaborate as a truly global community. Valuable specimens are distributed between institutions in all parts of the world. Researchers visit these collections or borrow specimens as part of their work. **Index Herbariorum** (IH) is the directory of information on the world's herbaria (addresses, contacts, specialties, size, etc.). It is a well-managed resource and highly regarded as a tool by the botanical community. No full equivalent exists globally for other natural history collections, although national/regional infrastructures such as the Atlas of Living Australia (ALA) **Collectory**, the **iDigBio US Collections List**, and the **CETAF Registry and Profiles** serve similar roles. **GBIF** has recently integrated the **Global Registry of Scientific Collections** (GRSciColl) into its registry as a framework that can be extended with richer information curated by collections communities.

Other materials

The following contributed materials are particularly relevant to this topic:

- **Presentation: Index Herbariorum - Perspectives of a Long-Standing Collection Catalog**
- **Presentation: CETAF and DiSSCo Collections Registry**
- **Presentation: ALA Collectory**
- **Presentation: ALA Collectory**
- **Presentation: The Specifications of Earth Science Collections (CETAF)**

Questions
The focus here is on the catalogue as a directory of known institutions and information required to contact them.

- Would the collections community benefit from a comprehensive directory of all natural history collections?
- Who would make use of such a directory?

Presentation: Index Herbariorum - Perspectives of a Long-Standing Collection Catalog

Presentation: The Specifications of Earth Science Collections (CETAF)

Presentation: ALA Collectory

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Presentation: CETAF and DiSSCo Collections Registry

Advancing the Catalogue of the World's Natural History Collections

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

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Document: GBIF Services and Support for the Collections Catalogue

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dshorthouse #6 April 16, 2020, 2:46pm

At the risk of distracting from the intent of these questions, what is *the collections community*?

If the answer to the first question is a resounding **no** from some members of the community but not others, what then? Comprehensiveness is a noble goal for the administrators of the registry, useful for someone looking to request a loan, but largely meaningless to a collection manager.

1 Like

Debbie #7 April 16, 2020, 7:47pm

Great point, both to "what is the collections community" and the implied, what do we mean by a collection. For starters anyway, the ideas paper does discuss this somewhat. It seems our intent to start with natural science collections, then broaden the scope from there (living collections, zooarchaeological collections, …). Certainly, in many (most) cases the data for such a catalog is going to come from those working in the collections like the collection manager you reference. They will have an interest in the data they need for their work, but what other data might they be able to supply (if they had incentive/time)? And who would make use of that data?

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dshorthouse #8 April 16, 2020, 8:16pm

Surely all this is known through the enduring efforts of IH and the hard lessons learned from GRBio. In start-up mode until there's a sustainable model, is it not more about the champion in the community who (with a small team) has the drive to see it through than it is about the feature-set, incentives, or who will use the data? Those latter considerations are all nice-to-haves but I expect *most* of it can be accomplished through responsive, agile development than fleshing out the requirements upfront only to later find or nominate the right team to build it.

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Hongfeng-Wang #9 April 18, 2020, 12:07am

非常能受益。机构管理者在制定发展方向、申请资助、说服公众此机构的重要性、制定吸引研究者等工作中都非常需要此信息。

3 Likes

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Debbie #10 April 18, 2020, 1:14am

欢迎 Welcome Honfeng-Wang. Thanks for your insights about who will benefit and the use cases for those stakeholders.

qgroom #11 April 18, 2020, 8:10am

> dhobern:
>
> Who would make use of such a directory?

It has recognized for a long time that there is a need to develop knowledge on biodiversity in biodiverse countries, particularly in the tropics. Their collections are an important component of that. Yet these collections could remain invisible to the rest of the scientific world; unused and likely to be lost. Being part of such a directory is just one of the many things we can do to make all collections useful to science. It makes it clear that they are part of global biodiversity infrastructure.

Along the same lines one would hope that the directory would be a hub for communication about collections, such as best practices, events, funding etc.

4 Likes

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Maofang #12 April 18, 2020, 4:35pm

In Hongfeng Wang's post, he said:

The catalogue would be very beneficial for collections community, especially for policy-makers from institutions, who will need it to formulate the directions of development, to apply for funding, to convince the public of the importance of the institution, and to develop ways to attract researchers, etc.

3 Likes

JessUtrup #13 April 20, 2020, 1:29pm

It would also be useful, I think, to have the acronyms for these institutions and their collections included.

3 Likes

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tkarim #14 April 20, 2020, 3:59pm

Yes! We don't have a good way to leverage our collective resources right now in terms of policy, funding, etc. A catalogue is the obvious first place to start.

1 Like

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dhobern #15 April 20, 2020, 11:32pm

Thanks **@JessUtrup** - Sorry if some of those acronyms were unclear - the text at the start of this page comes from the **Ideas Paper** where they are all spelled out and there are links to the relevant sites. I have edited this page so it expands some of these abbreviations and links either to presentations on this site or to the relevant project sites. I hope this helps.

JessUtrup #16 April 21, 2020, 12:21am

Sorry, I was unclear. I thought it would be useful in a directory of institutions to also include their acronym. I have struggled when working with museum specimens sometimes to determine what other museums may have related material if the label only has an acronym. I would love to see a central listing of the acronyms for all institutions. For example, I work in invertebrate paleontology at the Yale Peabody Museum, so we're YPM or YPM-IP.

1 Like

dhobern #17 April 21, 2020, 12:52am

My mistake! Of course, you are most definitely correct. This has traditionally been one of the places where cataloguing efforts start as it helps curators and taxonomists make and use references to collections. It has become even more important in the digital age with such acronyms being offered as pseudo-stable identifiers in specimen records, etc.

1 Like

abentley #18 April 22, 2020, 9:37pm

Such a catalogue would benefit the collections community by providing us with a sense of community and an ability to articulate that community for all sorts of reasons - funding, scope, governance, metrics, etc. It will also provide us with a much needed articulation of the non-digitized components of collections that are otherwise not articulated through digitized catalogs published to aggregators. It will also allow individual collections to contact each other and collaborate in new and exciting ways.

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abentley #19 April 22, 2020, 9:53pm

Should have both institutional and collection (and maybe even dataset) acronyms as well as a synonymy system to include old/orphan/unused codes. This would be useful to the collections and research communities if it provided an easy to use lookup system for acronyms to be used in publication - or even an automated system of populating a publication with a list.

elyw #20 April 24, 2020, 5:38am

Getting back to the original issue: "focus here is on the catalogue as a directory of known institutions and information required to contact them"
Having a directory of known institutions including contact details is certainly worth achieving, and has been done with Index Herbariorum. We can't dismiss the worth of such a directory as 'only being good for those who want to borrow material'. Managing loans, exchanges and sending specimens for destructive testing is a significant part of any collection manager's duties.
The two points I'd like to add:

- users need to be able to manage their own institution's information (i.e. the directory needs to be editable)
- if a key use case for the structure of the directory is to support collection managers then ensuring that they are involved making sure that the directory has the fields they need will be important.

3 Likes

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clauden #21 April 24, 2020, 12:59pm

Sounds similar to @elyw comment, on IT compared to collections people for choosing/using data identifiers.

Some users might not know to do directory edits, or how to choose their institutions info., acronym, etc., or it may already be done (and in differing versions/places) by others. Collections people need to be involved with data people, to report and modify (including updates and corrections) directories.

1 Like

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waddink #22 April 24, 2020, 2:06pm

@elyw would it not make more sense to just use an existing directory like ROR/GRID? That has almost 100.000 research organisations and most institutes are in there already. Then all you need to do is adding the institute identifier (ROR ID) to the collection descriptions and you have a list of institutes with their collections. Up to date information like the institute name, acronym, location and website is then provided as well as links to e.g. wikidata and wikipedia that can provide additional information about the institute.

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trobertson #23 April 24, 2020, 3:22pm

> waddink:
>
> would it not make more sense to just use an existing directory like ROR/GRID?

Registries like ROR will surely be the future or at least part of it. Is it ready to use now as *the authority* do you know? I ask because **their own information** suggests they are still exploring the processes around data curation and the subsequent lifecycle and we'd need to assess if the content is there now to support our needs. For example, Copenhagen Zoology Museum seemingly not registered but perhaps there are legal aspects and it falls under the university. We may need to consider if it will be accepted/adopted globally in time.

1 Like

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waddink #24 April 24, 2020, 4:27pm

@trobertson that is a good question. I would say yes, if you take both ROR and Grid into account. See also my blog post **https://dissco.tech/2020/04/11/identifiers-for-our-institutes-grid-and-ror/**

ROR on its own is indeed not yet fully developed. It also does not yet have all the metadata that Grid has, but they are working on that. It does have all the records though and they keep the two in sync, at least for now. so there is a 1:1 relationship. The metadata is public domain in both. Grid is the mature brother that has the processes around data curation in place. However it is provided by a company, and may therefore not something to rely on in the long term. Therefore Ror was established, which is community driven and has a pretty strong support from the scholarly research community. I am not entirely confident about their business model though. But even if they fail or do not grow beyond providing an API on top of Grid, you can always fall back on Grid.

All institutes that are part of a RI or deliver data to a science infrastructure like GBIF can be seen as a research organization and are therefore in scope.

However some institutes do not have an identifier yet because they are part of a university that was then given the identifier. They can however ask for their own identifier and we did not experience any hurdles with that with the Synth+ partners in ELViS. Parent-child relations for organisation's are supported.

The nat hist museum of Copenhagen is here: **https://grid.ac/institutes/grid.507616.3** or **https://ror.org/040ck2b86**

I think Ror id was not yet synchronized back with grid but ror already got the grid id (grid is updated only every three months). They only applied for a grid identifier, a few months ago and already automatically got a Ror id.

Kind regards,

Wouter

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kcopas #25 April 27, 2020, 9:42am

There's also the challenge (quite familiar in the collections setting) of hierarchical relationships among organizations listed in any system like ROR or GRID.

This seems like an area where ROR is still a bit underdeveloped. @trobertson asked about the Zoological Museum; @waddink replied with the Natural History Museum: **https://ror.org/040ck2b86**

That's actually the parent of ZM, one of three institutions (along with the Botanic Garden and Geological Museum). None of those three are in ROR, and the ROR record doesn't appear to note that NHM and its constituent elements fall under the University of Copenhagen, even though GRID does: **https://grid.ac/institutes/grid.507616.3**

This is a simple example that ramps up significantly with, say, the Chinese Academy of Sciences. Compare its entries on **ROR** and **GRID**.

Not judging, just observing.

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waddink #26 April 27, 2020, 10:42am

Hi Kyle, that is correct. We asked ROR about that a few weeks ago and they replied: ROR will include the relationships data (both parent institutes and related institutes) from GRID. The implementation work to incorporate this metadata is still in progress. See also **https://github.com/ror-community/ror-api/issues/59**

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sabaj #27 April 28, 2020, 12:36am

Would the collections community benefit from a comprehensive directory of all natural history collections?

For taxonomists, the answer to this is Yes. Taxonomists spend a lot of time researching names, creating synonymies and assembling classifications and phylogenies. I see collections in a similar light. Some collections (like some scientific names) are relatively stable over time. Other collections are renamed (creating synonyms), internally restructured, transferred whole or in part to other institutions ("new parent(s)") or abandoned. A comprehensive directory would provide an important bench mark. And linking active collections to historical ones increases discoverability for specimens cited in the literature.

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neilcobb #28 April 28, 2020, 2:37pm

In a separate post on community catalogues I provide several reasons, but not exhaustive, why a comprehensive directory would greatly aid in developing a World Index of Arthropod collections **3.2. Community catalogues (TECHNOLOGY)**

1 Like

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pzermoglio #29 April 29, 2020, 5:58am

From **@maperalta** , in the **Spanish thread**:
Yes, we would benefit from it [comprehensive directory of all natural history collections], mostly given the limitations that exist around impediments moving material abroad. Having a directory would facilitate direct contact with institutions and future, potential exchange of material to improve representation of our collections. Researchers who are users of natural history collections would be the most benefited, as they would have a catalogue of collections which they can contact (through email with active staff, phone or website), with basic data about their thematic or taxonomic coverage.

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pzermoglio #30 April 29, 2020, 7:35pm

From @ **ErikaSalazar** in this **Spanish thread**

With the creation of a directory of biological collections, not only those collections are benefited, but also the scientific community as a whole, the environmental authorities and educational institutions.

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pzermoglio #31 April 30, 2020, 7:54am

From **@WUlate** in this **Spanish thread**

Would the collections community benefit from a comprehensive directory of all natural history collections? Who would make use of such a directory?

Yes, if it was kept up to date (which is a laborious activity for those responsible for the Catalogue). Searching in a catalogue is difficult if the information about the collection or institution is incomplete. This would be worse if we don't have a "unique global acronym", or at least a single record by institution that groups all different acronyms.

[related to **2.2. Identifiers for collections (INFORMATION)**, and **1.8. Improvements to citation and visibility for collections (USE)**]

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nfranz #32 July 30, 2021, 4:32pm

Many in our community have seen, are seeing, will see these calls for a centralized system. And I think many will ask, instantly: ok, what is (y)our business model? How are you making money to pay the staff for years and decades to come? How are you earning our trust by being transparent about your sustainability model? And if that model involves us (I think it should), then what do we all need to prepare for?