

Scientific Collections International (SciColl) Conference: International and Interdisciplinary Coordination of a Global Research Infrastructure

Belgian Royal Institute of Natural Science, Brussels, 8-9 February 2010

Object-based scientific collections are the essential infrastructure for research in many fields of science. Fields such as biology, earth and space science, anthropology, and biomedicine rely on the specimens in permanent collections that are held in museums, herbaria, culture collections, tissue banks and other institutions around the world. International cooperation within each discipline has developed to great degrees in some cases such as biology, in which a Global Biodiversity Information Facility has been established. In contrast, very little collaboration and coordination has developed across disciplinary boundaries, despite the importance of interdisciplinary research. The OECD's Global Science Forum has catalyzed the development of Scientific Collections International (SciColl), an international and interdisciplinary coordinating mechanism. SciColl has a dual mission to increase the scientific impact of collections and to improve their organizational management and efficiency.

The Belgian Royal Institute of Natural Science proposes to host the first SciColl conference in Brussels on 8-9 February 2009. The European Science Foundation has already awarded €15,000 for the conference. This conference will bring together 60-80 researchers and representatives of diverse scientific collections, their parent institutions, government agencies that support them, and other stakeholders concerned with scientific collections. Participants will be selected to ensure balanced representation of geographic regions and scientific disciplines. The goals of the conference are to:

- Raise awareness of the potential benefits to science and society of greater international and interdisciplinary coordination of scientific collections;
- Present and discuss the proposed SciColl mission, governance, and work programme;
- Discuss potential SciColl activities that will provide benefits to collections in the form of higher efficiency, standards based on best practices, and improved workforce training;
- Explore potential interdisciplinary research initiatives that rely on access to scientific collections;
- Participate in a Science Symposium that focuses on SciColl's 'pioneer' research initiative: "Collection-based Research on Global Change since the Dawn of Humanity"; and
- Disseminate information on the benefits and obligations of SciColl membership, and to encourage institutional membership in SciColl.

Conference Agenda

Sunday, 7 February 2010: Evening welcome reception (to be confirmed)

Monday, 8 February 2010:

9:00 – 10:00 Session 1: Welcome and Overview

- Welcome by host organization, European Science Foundation representatives
- SciColl: Overview of the concept
Dr. Richard Lane, Natural History Museum, London, UK
- The global landscape of scientific collections
Dr. Scott Miller, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, USA

10:00- 10:30: Coffee break

10:30 – 12:30: Session 2: The role of collections in global research: What are limits of current information and what new information is needed for breakthroughs?

- Introduction of proposed SciColl research programme on Environmental Change
Dr. David Schindel, Consortium for the Barcode of Life, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, USA
- Paleotemperature evidence of global change from earth science collections
- Epidemiological evidence from biomedical and natural history collections
- Evidence of global change and biotic distributions from natural history collections
- Earth Observation, GEOSS, and the need for data integration

12:30 – 1:30 Lunch

1:30 – 2:30 Visit to research collections

2:30-3:30 Session 3: Breakout discussion groups. Each group will have co-chairs of one speaker from session 2 and a SciColl Steering Committee member. Each group will discuss:

- Interdisciplinary solutions to research bottlenecks using collections
- Other opportunities for interdisciplinary research based on collections
- SciColl's proposed research programme on global change

3:30 – 4:00 Coffee break

4:00 – 5:30: Session 4: Presentation and discussion of breakout discussion groups

- Rapporteur reports on obstacles and opportunities
- Moderated discussion to identify priorities

Adjourn

Tuesday, 9 February 2010:

9:00 Session 5: Improving scientific collections

Presentations of 3 initiatives to improve collections and their management:

- SciColl's proposed programme of work to improve collection management
Dr. Christoph L. Häuser, Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin, Germany
- Global Biological Resource Centre Network
Dr. David Smith, Director of Biological Resources, World Federation of Culture Collections
- Korean National Research Resources Center
Prof. Yeonhee Lee, Director General,
- SYNTHESYS: Network activities involving natural history collection management assessment
Dr. Rob Huxley, Natural History Museum, London, UK

Coffee Break

Session 6: Plenary discussion

Christoph Häuser, Moderator

- Proposed SciColl Programme of Work
- Identification of priorities
- SciColl membership
- Next steps in the development of SciColl

12:30pm: Conference adjourns