



CETAF and DiSSCo - an unprecedented opportunity for natural science collections

CETAF has been central to the design and development of a new overarching research infrastructure (RI) for natural science collections across Europe, the Distributed System of Scientific Collections (DiSSCo). CETAF plays a pivotal role in the mobilization of community engagement for the DiSSCo initiative and underpins the business case for DiSSCo, bringing more than 20 years of experience to the task of constructing the DiSSCo RI. CETAF will continue to play an essential role in DiSSCo as part of mutual efforts to transform a dispersed and fragmented model for providing access to collections and associated data into an integrated data-driven pan-European research infrastructure.

CETAF has been a leading supporter for DiSSCo through the participation of the CETAF Executive Director in the DiSSCo Coordination Team, and by the CETAF Chair's position on the DiSSCo Steering Committee. This has enabled CETAF to build consensus throughout its membership on DiSSCo's overarching scientific, technical and governance vision. CETAF has sought to align the goals of DiSSCo with the strategic position and objectives of the CETAF community. CETAF has worked intensively to inform, disseminate and reach out to stakeholders, acting as a leading advocate for the DiSSCo RI. The long history of collaborative projects, initiatives and outcomes undertaken within CETAF led to the classification of our consortium as a "super-advanced community" by the European Commission. CETAF's participation in the landscape of environmental RIs, like ENVRI+ and the Board of European Environmental RIs (BEERi), has also helped strategically integrate DiSSCo into the biodiversity-geodiversity research landscape.

CETAF will be central to the next phases of the DiSSCo development plan as we strive for the efficient, cohesive and coherent implementation of DiSSCo. For example, by providing the scientific community with relevant and specialised services, and advocating for the DiSSCo RI as well as contributing to outreach activities, the coordination of member data and the alignment of goals and priorities across the community.

CETAF's long-standing record of collaboration and cooperation will support the development of the DiSSCo RI, ensuring both equitable and sustainable engagement of the community. As a legal entity and politically neutral organisation with over 20 years of experience, CETAF's standing could serve for the benefit of DiSSCo's governance model, facilitating the smooth transition between the preparation and later phases. CETAF will contribute to the coordination of the national nodes and act as a representative of institutions/consortia that are too small, or otherwise unable to become full members of the DiSSCo RI, thus playing a key role in ensuring full integration of the community. CETAF's

portfolio of MoU's can also be leveraged to ensure the widest possible participation in DiSSCo, across and beyond Europe.

Many activities are underway within CETAF, via its collaborations, initiatives and working groups. These underpin the proposed areas of interest and service classes in DiSSCo. Technical examples include specimen digitisation (CETAF Digitisation Group), data standardisation, such as the adoption of CETAF specimen identifiers, and data interoperability supporting knowledge graphs and other web services (CETAF Information Science and Technology Commission). Other areas of complementarity include CETAF experience with collection management policies and assessments (CETAF Collections Group), policy harmonization via the unified policy platform (CETAF Legislation and Regulations Group), Earth Science collections (CETAF Earth Sciences Group), e-publishing activities (CETAF e-publishing group and the European Journal of Taxonomy - EJT) and taxonomy training (CETAF training and e-learning Group and the Distributed European School of Taxonomy – DEST) as well as strategic positioning (CETAF Strategy Group, CETAF European Initiatives Group).

CETAF is in a unique and fundamental position to complement DiSSCo, and vice versa. The CETAF and DiSSCo digitisation agendas are interlinked, with DiSSCo addressing the infrastructure ambitions of CETAF, that are beyond the resourcing and technical capacity of individual CETAF members. DiSSCo bridges this critical gap, supporting open access to natural science collections from across Europe, as well as bringing a big-data perspective to their scientific exploitation in previously unimaginable ways. The implementation of DiSSCo for 2025 provides an exciting new opportunity for the scientific community to exploit the new data generated from natural science collections that will be mobilized through the DiSSCo infrastructure, for taxonomic and systematics research, and beyond, giving the potential for us to address some of the key societal issues of our time (invasive and alien species, food security, emerging diseases, pollution monitoring, responses to climate change).

What is CETAF? CETAF is the hub for European knowledge on natural science collections, promoting their value and importance within and across Europe and encouraging scientific research in the natural sciences. CETAF's coverage of domains beyond digitization, centralized open access to collections and infrastructure development, includes the harmonization of collections and biodiversity data policies, development of joint research agendas, training programmes in taxonomy and systematics, capacity building, promotion of scientific research, information dissemination, networking and political representation, community and public outreach, as well as the development of common responses to topics relevant to collections-based research.

The CETAF Executive Committee, 26th September 2018

Chair: Michelle J. Price (Conservatory and Botanical Garden of the City of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland); Vice-Chair: Thierry Bourgoin (National Museum of Natural History, Paris, France); Treasurer: Erik Smets (Naturalis Biodiversity Center, Leiden, Netherlands); Secretary: Jesús Muñoz (Royal Botanic Garden, Madrid, Spain). Ordinary Members: Jiří Kvaček (National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic); Nikolaj Scharff (Natural History Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen, Denmark); Vince Smith (Natural History Museum, London, United Kingdom).

