

Biodiversity Heritage Library: Co-creating global natural history networks

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Abstract:

The vision of the Biodiversity Heritage Library (<http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/>) is to organize, digitize, preserve and serve the legacy literature of biodiversity for free as part of an open access digital library. As much of the legacy literature on biodiversity is available in only a few select libraries in the developed world, this wealth of knowledge had only been available to those few who could gain direct access to these library collections. Especially in the case of developing countries, the literature about the biota existing in these places is often not available within their borders.

Thus the BHL grew out of an identified market need to make the published literature of biodiversity available for free to a global audience. Free, global access to digitized versions of the literature not only repatriates information about the earth's

species to all parts of the world, but makes it available on a large scale for scientists, the general public and citizen scientists. Currently BHL delivers over 35 million digitized pages via the BHL US portal and different data services.

The BHL began as a small consortium of natural history, botanical and research libraries in the US and UK in 2005. Largely driven from the ground up, and without any institutional mandate, the BHL has successfully and organically fostered a model for global expansion. Charged with the vision to bring biodiversity literature to a global audience, partners from all over the world are free to interpret how to achieve this within their own cultural, technical and political contexts. This global BHL business model has the potential to create a sea change in natural history institutions, establishing them networks.

Regional projects have been established in Australia, Brazil, China, Egypt and Europe with other project partners developing elsewhere. The global BHL has expanded quickly because communication flows freely via social media, enabling global community building that fosters excitement and commitment. It is the flexibility of partners, the will to share best practices and re-use technology, the extensive use and encouragement of creative solutions and trial-and-error problem solving that enables the global BHL to remain fresh and continue to expand.

In realizing the vision of the global BHL, regional nodes work autonomously to meet the specific goals and objectives of their local stakeholders and funders as well as serve the needs of their local user groups. BHL US grew from the bottom up, a movement that began as a discussion among librarians and scientists. This idea was taken by European natural history institutions who joined together in the EC eContentplus programme Biodiversity Heritage Library for Europe (BHL-Europe). Funding of the BHL nodes depends on different combinations of foundation grants, institutions and government support. The output criteria differ as well. BHL-Europe for example is going to develop a multilingual portal and its content is served to Europeana. Whereas the BHL US portal focuses on integration of scientific names services. Similarities in workflow have evolved as well. For instance, librarians, technologists, and scientists working at a variety of BHL and BHL-Europe institutions are empowered to make collaborative decisions about collection management, technological development, and other project improvements.

In our session we will elaborate on the global BHL business model by reviewing the ways BHL US and BHL-Europe are managed and funded. As a practical example we will demonstrate the differences and similarities in the regional portals.