Where have all the atlases gone? Developing data structures for a virtual research environment.

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Extended Abstract

Please Many atlas projects have been facing serious threats over the last decade. Not only that technological progress challenges traditional atlas forms and can lead to financial difficulties in realizing new editions of atlases currently in circulation. Moreover, changes in the founding of atlas projects, new scientific approaches to fundamental spatial issues and a transformation of user requirements are setting the new stage. Not to mention the innumerable atlases that were published on the internet but subsequently disappeared because of funding shortages/cuts, changes in staff, or technical and maintenance issues. The current challenges facing atlas projects bring into focus the problems for future investigations of historical atlases. In general the research on a specific atlas project or a single edition faces two fundamental questions, namely, where can I find a copy to work with and where can I find in-depth information on the respective subject. Today, we normally consult (online) public access catalogs ((O)PACs) which are nowadays often included within the scope of multi-institutional search engines or are thoroughly checked by googlebots. Although providing basic information on library holdings necessitates a visit to the physical archive, these search engines are often inadequate when it comes to serious research on atlases for two reasons:

First, a large number of Atlases are yet to be indexed in online search machines since cataloging atlases is often a pain in the librarians back - not only for weight reasons. Therefore, libraries tend to keep their own individual printed records of more exotic holdings like atlas collections, which causes problems for researchers.

Second, when available, the records often contain only basic bibliographic information following the bibliographic standards of MARC21 (MAchine Readable Cataloging) or cataloging standards such as the AACR (Anglo-

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American Cataloging Rules). Although these standards are of great importance for sustainable development and maintenance of the aforementioned archival and bibliographical search engines and have been developed over decades, they still lack vital description categories for atlaslike items.

This paper reports on a project to build up a comprehensive archive of information on national atlases and national atlas projects since 2013. By analyzing the records of a selection of national atlases in the most common "entry" search engines (e.g. WorldCat, AMICUS, David Rumsey Map Collection Database, IKAR), an average topic density has been defined and taken as an index for a second round of search in map/atlas related OPACs and specialized Archive/Library Databases (e.g. Newberry Library, Perry Castaneda Library Map Collection, Central Geographic Library). The overall results can be described as "unpretentious", since they essentially reflect the bibliographic standards implemented by the respective libraries.

To identify the information density provided by the OPACs and the search engines mentioned above a student experiment was launched as part of several seminars on the history of cartography held at the Global Studies Institute (University of Leipzig). Part of the seminar task was to collect as much information as possible on a specific national atlas/national atlas projects by using all possible sources. The goal was a comprehensive documentation of the respective atlas. The final papers revealed a low density of research related information in the aforementioned OPACs and databases. Instead, other sources such as JSTOR.org and archive.org provided substantial information by simply recording articles, reviews and research reports on the atlases/atlas projects.

With regards to the ongoing introduction of the new unified cataloging standard RDA (Research Description and Access) it might be now possible to considerate cartographic research demands. Considering some of the results of the aforementioned investigations may provide indispensable input to accomplish an archival/bibliographical Metadata set that meets international standards as well as the research requirements of a self-reflexive cartographic community.

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