

The European Story: ECCO and Initiatives from MINE to EMbaRC

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As early as in 1982, a number of European microbial culture collections founded the European Culture Collections' Organisation (ECCO) as a regional substructure under the WFCC. Their main aims were to foster cooperation across political borders, to support science and to develop services for the then young and booming biotechnology sector. Today, ECCO member collections curate a vast range of eukaryotic (including fungi, algae, plant cell cultures, human and animal cell lines) and prokaryotic (including bacteria, archaea and viruses) material. ECCO provides the necessary continuity and forms an incubator and umbrella for individual projects.

The MINE project was an ambitious, taxonomy based, and database entry orientated start (1986-1989 and 1990-93). The main goals were the harmonisation and digitisation of data on catalogue strains, standardisation of formats and contents of fields, as well as common thesauri.

On this important basis of experience the more user-orientated, internet accessible CABRI project (1996-1999) was built. The great merit of this project was to lay down guidelines for both aspects of culture collections: the handling of the biological material and handling of the related data. Minimal acceptable and recommended data sets were agreed, and recommended procedures for accession, maintenance, preservation and supply for the various types of biological material established. CABRI was later incorporated as a core activity into the EBRCN project (2001-2004) and is still made available today.

Within EBRCN, emphasis was laid on the development of Information Documents concerning the various regulatory issues around collection work, such as CBD, ABS, intellectual property, transport, import and export, quarantine, biosafety and biosecurity.

The most recent initiative, the EMbaRC project continues to improve the coordination and validation of microbial resources delivery and combines the additional aspects of training and research activities. Training opportunities are offered covering preservation and characterisation techniques as well as compliance with regulatory requirements.

All of these initiatives had and have one common goal: that the enormous amount and range of both, the data pertaining to living biological material, and the material itself, are placed at the rapid disposal of researchers in academia and industry (1) under full legal compliance and (2) curated in a pure and authentic form.