

A strategy for improving the use of mBRCs

Erko Stackebrandt, DSMZ

Growing uneasiness can be observed among the providers and the users of microbiological resources and the curators of public collections. Provider consists of researchers and authors. The researcher complains because public collections very often deny acceptance of taxonomically poorly characterized strain assemblages, mostly compiled during after field research. The author, requested to deposit into public collections selected strains included in the scientific literature, are lacking assistance regarding the number and taxon to deposit and they will face a negative response from collections unless the relevant strain ranges within the specific interest of a curator. There is also resistance to deposit strains into public collections, an attitude still in the process of being investigated. The second clientele, the user, is increasingly dissatisfied with the range of resources offered by public collections. While there is excellent coverage for type and reference strains, specific strains of current scientific interest, plasmids, phages and mutants included in research are hardly available. Alongside these issues, public collections are already working at the limits of their financial capacities, restricting expansion of space, equipment, expertise and, obviously expansion of holdings. Collections mainly concentrate either in providing a broad range of biodiversity, often restricted to type and reference strains, or they focus on a specific range of taxa with interest for medicine, agriculture or pharmaceutical and food sectors. There is even a fourth element, the national granting bodies. They slowly recognise the added value of a wide access to those resources for which associated bio-informatics data are already available, either by published sources or by data mining of networked information.

Obviously, this vicious cycle needs to be opened in order to satisfy all stakeholders involved.