

Linked Environment Data for the Life Sciences

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Abstract. Environment Agencies from Europe and the US are setting up a network of Linked Environment Data and are looking to crosslink it with Linked Data contributions from the life sciences.

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1 Introduction

In 2006, Tim Berners-Lee initially formulated the principles of linking data on the Web¹. Since then, the published Linked Data “cloud” has grown rapidly year by year. Currently, there are 216 datasets which fulfill all the requirements², and there are many more on their way. Of specific interest within the environmental domain is a sub-cloud from the life sciences named *Linking Open Drug Data* (LODD)³, which gave birth to the idea of linking environment data in an international context of cooperating governmental authorities⁴.

This idea was discussed in 2009 at Workshop V of the Ecoterm Group⁵ with members from many European countries and the US. During 2010 the first two contributions have been published by the European Environment Agency (EEA) and several others are under development or in final test phase. The German agency will initially publish the some key instruments in the field of environmental observation that enable the long-term analysis of substance exposure of humans, species and the environment in Germany. Further on, it is envisioned to include partners from the International Environmental Specimen Bank Group (IESB).

¹ <http://www.w3.org/DesignIssues/LinkedData.html>

² <http://lod-cloud.net/>

³ <http://esw.w3.org/HCLSIG/LODD>

⁴ http://www.w3.org/egov/wiki/Linked_Environment_Data

⁵ <http://ecoterm.infointl.com>

2 Brief Profiles of the Contributing Databases

The following profiles are based on the structure of the Comprehensive Knowledge Archive Network (CKAN)⁶. The RDF schemas mentioned in this section are listed with short descriptions in section 3.

2.1 Contributions of the European Environment Agency (EEA)

- General Multilingual Environment Thesaurus (GEMET)

Content Thesaurus for terms related to the environment and environmental data in 28 languages
URL <http://www.eionet.europa.eu/gemet>
Size > 5,000 terms; 200,000 RDF triples
Links national and domain specific thesauri (planned)
Schema SKOS with extensions
License Creative commons
State published

- European Nature Information System (EUNIS)

Content species, habitats and sites across Europe
URL <http://eunis.eea.europa.eu/>
Size 7,000,000 RDF triples
Links dbpedia, geospecies
Schema Darwin Core with extensions
License Creative commons
State published

- Further Plans of the EEA

Data on river basin districts, ground water bodies, airbase stations, NUT codes, Eurostat country codes and more.

2.2 Contributions of the Federal Environment Agency, Germany

After some early experiences with thesaurus-based indexing, in 2001 the Federal Environment Agency (Umweltbundesamt, UBA) started the Semantic Network Service (SNS)⁷ research project. The intention was to implement the handling of vocabularies in a specialized Web service that would serve not only one information system but the environmental community in whole. SNS provides a complex, bilingual vocabulary (thesaurus, gazetteer, and chronicle) structured in form of a

⁶ <http://ckan.net/>

⁷ <http://www.semantic-network.de>

Topic Map (ISO 13250). Currently we are moving towards RDF/OWL representations. Up to now, only the thesaurus part of SNS (UMTHES) has been implemented in RDF. SNS is complemented by a species reference catalogue. The first contribution of observation data is the Environmental Specimen Bank.

- Semantic Network Service (SNS) – UMTHES® Thesaurus

Content Environmental Thesaurus in German with English translations
URL t.b.d.
Size > 50,000 terms
Links GEMET, Chronicle, Gazetteer
Schema SKOS-XL with extensions
License t.b.d.
State in final test

- Semantic Network Service (SNS) – Gazetteer

Content Named locations in Germany and their spatial intersections
URL t.b.d.
Size > 25,000 terms
Links UMTHES, Chronicle
Schema Geonames with extensions
License t.b.d.
State planned

- Semantic Network Service (SNS) – Chronicle

Content Historical and contemporary events that significantly affected the state of the environment
URL t.b.d.
Size > 1,000 events
Links UMTHES, Gazetteer
Schema Linked Events Ontology with extensions
License t.b.d.
State planned

- Species Catalog

Content Organisms that have been relevant to the work of Division IV “Chemical and Biological Safety” of the UBA
URL t.b.d.
Size > 1,000 taxa
Links EUNIS, ESB
Schema SKOS, Darwin Core
License t.b.d.
State in final test

- Environmental Specimen Bank (ESB)

<i>Content</i>	Archive of human and environmental samples including time trends and spatial data from chemical and biological analyses since the 1980s.
<i>URL</i>	http://www.umweltprobenbank.de/
<i>Size</i>	> 1.000.000 measurement data sets
<i>Links</i>	EUNIS, Species Catalogue, Gazetteer, Chronicle
<i>Schema</i>	SKOS, SCOVO with extensions
<i>License</i>	t.b.d.
<i>State</i>	in final test

3 RDF Vocabularies in Use

It has been our intention to reuse existing RDF vocabularies as far as possible. The most important are listed below (in alphabetical order).

- **Darwing Core Terms**, maintained by the Taxonomy Database Working Group (TDWG)⁸. Till today, there is no canonical form of expressing Darwin Core in RDF. We have contributed our solution to the TDWG discussion as a “Simple Darwin Core” proposal (see footnote 4).
- **Geonames Ontology**⁹: add geospatial semantic information to the World Wide Web.
- **Linked Events Ontology**¹⁰, which itself is an extension of the „An Ontology of Time for the Semantic Web“¹¹. Under development.
- **SKOS(XL)**: Simple Knowledge Organization System. W3C Recommendation¹². The XL (“extension for labels”) provides means for expressing any complexity of nomenclature.
- **SCOVO**: Statistical Core Vocabulary¹³. We have proposed some extensions and specializations in order to represent the domain-specific dimensions (specimen type, analytes, sampling area, see footnote 4). In parallel, SCOVO has been further developed as the RDF Data Cube vocabulary¹⁴, and we will synchronise with this development.

⁸ <http://www.tdwg.org/>

⁹ <http://www.geonames.org/ontology/>

¹⁰ <http://linkedevents.org/ontology>

¹¹ <http://www.w3.org/2006/time>

¹² <http://www.w3.org/TR/skos-reference/>

¹³ <http://sw.joanneum.at/scovo/schema.html>

¹⁴ <http://publishing-statistical-data.googlecode.com/svn/trunk/specs/src/main/html/cube.html>