

Collection-level metadata: needs and solutions

Discussion paper by Maja Žumer

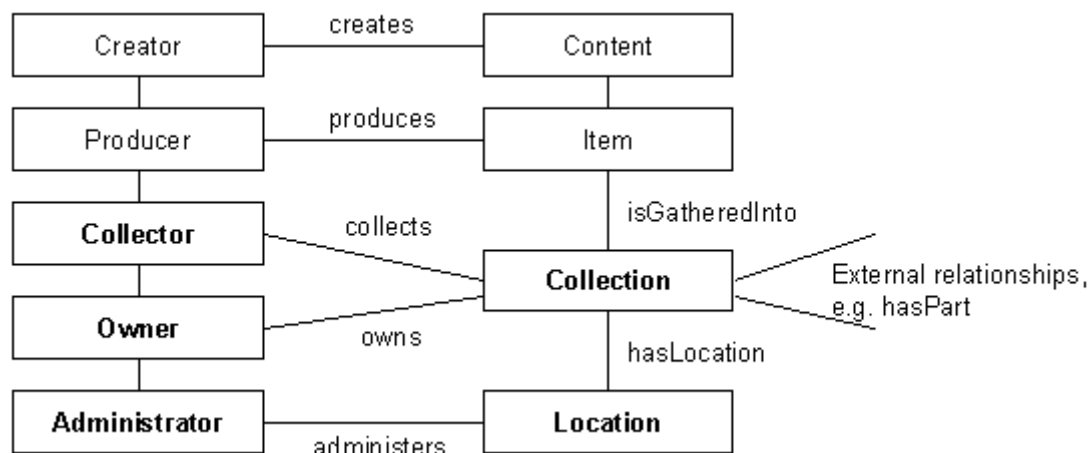
Collection description is becoming increasingly important in the context of networked information services of libraries, but also crossing the boundaries between different cultural heritage institutions.

What are collections?

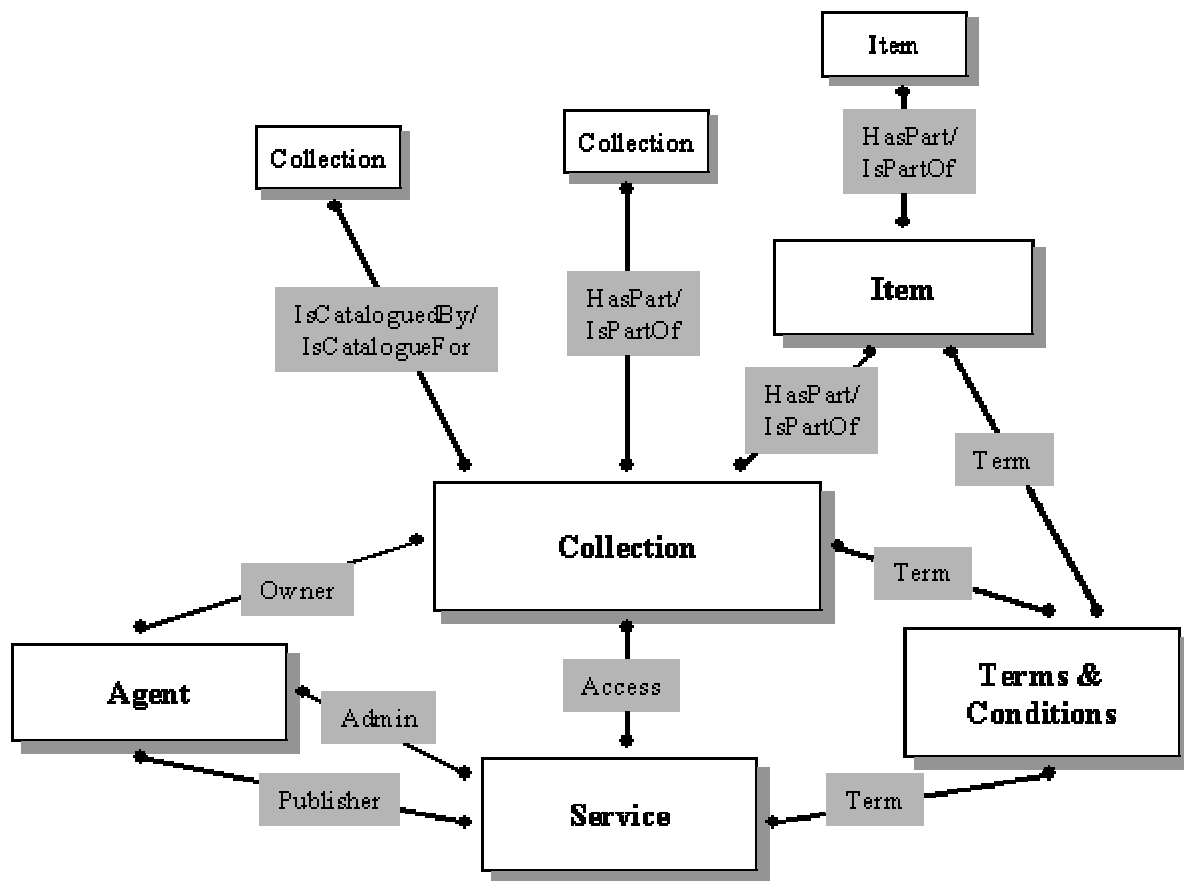
The term 'collection' can be applied to any aggregation of physical or digital items. It is typically used to refer to collections of physical items, collections of digital surrogates of physical items, and collections of 'born-digital' items. Items of a collection may not be physically in the same location. We may also have collections of collections.

It may be useful to see a collection as a set. In set theory it is always obvious whether an item is an element of the set or not. A set is defined as a list of elements or by a rule.

But should a catalogue (i.e. metadata of a collection) be seen as a collection on its own, too?



Model of collection (Powell et al, 2000)



Content model from Simple Collection description
<http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/metadata/cld/simple/>)

Why is collection description useful/necessary?

Collection descriptions allow the owners of collections to provide information about their existence and availability to interested users. Libraries, for example, have traditionally described their materials (i.e. collections) in the form of unstructured text. It is now very common to find information about library collections on Web pages, including opening hours and terms of availability.

In some cases collection description can be seen as a substitute for individual item descriptions when those are not available or would not be practical (well known practice for ephemera, e.g.)

But usually we think of collection descriptions as structured machine readable and processable information, which enables:

- users to discover and locate collections of interest,
- users to perform searches across multiple collections in a controlled way,

- software to perform such tasks on behalf of users, based on known user preferences.

In some cases collection description can be seen as a substitute for individual item descriptions when those are not available or would not be practical (well known practice for ephemera, e.g.)

The users and 'users' of collection descriptions:

Both end-users and software agents can be seen as users. Specific needs for both cases will be discussed.

Functional requirements for collection description

Starting from FRBR, we may define the functions of collection description:

To find

to provide access points by which collection(s) can be found.

To identify

to describe collections in a way to enable users correctly to interpret records retrieved (e.g. to distinguish between two similar collections)

To select

to provide a means for users to choose from among the identified collections.

To obtain

to obtain access to the identified collections

Which attributes and relationships are needed to perform the four functions?

Examples of existing schemas/models

- E-Lib Simple Collection Description (<http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/metadata/cld/simple/>)
- RSLP (<http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/metadata/rslp/>)
- DC CD (<http://dublincore.org/groups/collections/>)
- TEL
(http://www.europeanlibrary.org/tel_handbook/metadata_handbook/metadata_handbook.html)

These examples (and others, brought to the workshop by participants) will be discussed, compared and evaluated.

What still needs to be done?

Literature:

Powell, A. et al. (2000): RSLP Collection Description. *D-Lib Magazine*, vol. 6, no. 9 (September 2000) <http://www.dlib.org/dlib/september00/powell/09powell.html>

<http://dublincore.org/groups/collections/>

<http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/metadata/cld/simple/>

<http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/metadata/rslp/>

http://www.europeanlibrary.org/tel_handbook/metadata_handbook/metadata_handbook.html

D-Lib Magazine, vol. 6, no. 9 (September 2000)