

The South Atlantic metadata catalogue online as source of information for two Swiss MSc students.

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When the IMS-GIS data centre started its activities in October 2013, data collected by individuals or groups working in the South Atlantic UKOTs were rarely documented. Data management was a concept that was considered as necessary, but it was not realised or implemented. As a consequence, it was common to have duplicated data or to lose data because of lack of proper backup procedures. The main priority of the data centre was, therefore, to start documenting data using standard metadata. As such, having these standards ensures that the documentation could be transferable to other systems, organisations and individuals.

After 2 years of activity, the online metadata catalogue is populated with more than 630 records describing data from Ascension Island, Saint Helena and the Falkland Islands. The achievement was possible thanks to the work of the data managers on the three islands and all the stakeholders involved in the process.

One of the reasons for documenting data through the standard metadata form is so that data can be discovered in an easier and quicker way. It also ensures data longevity and increases awareness of the data that can bring opportunities for collaborative works.

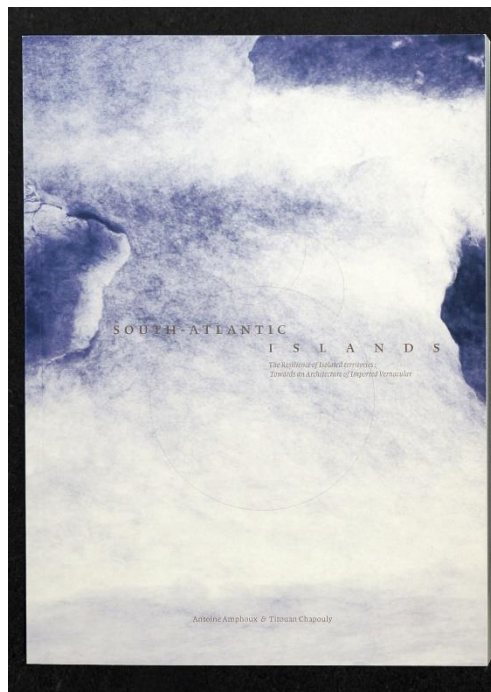


Antoine Amphoux & Titouan Chapouly are two master students at the Swiss Federal Institute of technology of Lausanne. They discovered the data through the online metadata catalogue, approached the data managers of the islands, used the data request form to obtain the data and sent back their final result, which is their Master thesis. The document has the taste of victory for the data managers as is the tangible

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evidence that the effort, put into harvesting metadata and persuading people that metadata are essential part of the data, it is worth.

Antoine & Titouan were asked few questions after sending their thesis entitled "South Atlantic Islands. The resilience of isolated territories: toward an architecture of imported vernacular".



Q: Why did you decide to embark a research project on the South Atlantic islands?

A: One of the starting points in our choice of this research topic lies in the observation of territories and human settlements on it. Indeed, societies have been created at an increasing pace, on wider and larger territories following an exponential and global culture development. By doing so, societies have created buildings, landscapes and machines that deny collective reality and natural conditions.

In opposition of this spread, Islands territories are enclosed geographical spaces where human expansion is very limited. And the particular case of the South Atlantic Ocean islands question this logic of goods, materials and culture model importation due to their radical remoteness. Thus, if we consider this increasing development as a vehicular culture, what becomes a more specific culture, a vernacular culture that emerges from a place?

Through these first observations, we decided to launch this project, first, curious about the strong persistence of the islander settlements, then strongly interested in very particular aesthetic expression of these cultures.

Q: What is in brief the research thesis about?

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Q: Are you planning to visit the territories you studied during your Masters?

A: The difficulty to reach the places is an essential fact. However, after these series of observations and analysis, our desire to visit the three islands increases even more. The new airport in Saint Helena is indeed a factor that potentially allows us to reach both Ascension Island and Saint Helena Island, but Tristan da Cunha remains remote as the long journey by boat has just a few places opened to visitors.

Moreover, our particular interest and the work we produced about Tristan da Cunha make this island a place we would like to visit. The University's schedule don't give us time to plan a visit before this summer, but we still plan to do it after the academic year as a continuity of our study. We're actually looking for any support from scientific, architectural or governmental institutions. Indeed, our wish would be to present the final architectural project to the administrator of Tristan da Cunha and also share our ideas with the islanders.

Q: Is there anything you want to suggest to improve the accessibility to data?

A: The centralization of the data would be a fundamental point to set up regarding the large catalogue of metadata available. Currently, the requests have to be done and sent to the owner and manager of the data, and potentially, it would allow a considerable gain of time to send to a main system, or a common request file.

Although data from the Falkland Islands were requested and obtained, unfortunately the thesis did not include them. Antoine & Titouan explained that the climate condition and the size of Falklands are too different to compare it with Saint-Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha. Also, the geopolitical issues of the Falklands deserve to be treated in one full study. Perhaps in the future there will be another opportunity, nevertheless the work by the two master students proved that metadata and the online catalogue are valuable and the online catalogue is working and data request system can be improved further. Overall, for everybody in the South Atlantic UKOTs this is a great achievement after 2 years of hard work.