

Digital Repository of Ireland<https://repository.dri.ie/>

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The Digital Repository of Ireland (DRI) is a consortial project founded by six academic institutions “to preserve Ireland’s digital heritage for the long term, and to provide . . . the user with access to that heritage.”¹ In addition to the six founding partners (project lead Royal Irish Academy, Maynooth University, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin Institute of Technology, National University of Ireland, Galway, and National College of Art and Design), the organization has added members that include libraries, galleries, museums, and other data and cultural heritage centers. The site makes available scanned documents and images, as well as video and audio files. Nearly 25,000 items are open for research, with more being added on a regular basis. The DRI launched on June 24, 2015.

The material available represents a wide range of Irish history and touches on many parts of the country. It seems strongest in twentieth-century history, but some earlier items are also included. The presence of data-focused institutions, such as Maynooth University’s Irish Qualitative Data Archive, in DRI’s membership is an especially welcome aspect to this project. The Irish Qualitative Data Archive specializes in “qualitative social science datasets including qualitative research datasets, images and administrative datasets,”² information that is not always found in cultural heritage institutions. In all, DRI brings together a wealth of information about Ireland in one place for researchers to find easily. DRI is open to the public, but its intended audience seems to be students or serious researchers rather than the general public.³

The site is a strong example of institutional cooperation, and one of its strengths, from an information professional’s point of view, is its extensive documentation.⁴ A great deal of information exists about how members contribute material, who those members are, how the organization came about, and the DRI’s external programs

¹ Digital Repository of Ireland, “About the Repository,” accessed April 19, 2017, <https://repository.dri.ie/pages/about-us>.

² Jane Gray, “Irish Qualitative Data Archive (IQDA),” accessed April 19, 2017, <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/social-sciences-institute/research/iqda>.

³ The Digital Repository of Ireland, “General FAQ,” accessed April 19, 2017, <https://repository.dri.ie/pages/about-faq>.

⁴ For detailed documentation, please see: <https://repository.dri.ie/pages/about-lifecycle>, <http://dri.ie/sites/default/files/files/DRI-membership-policy-nov2014.pdf>, <http://dri.ie/>

and projects. Any consortium looking to build a similar portal could learn from this robust documentation.

When first arriving at the site, an end-user agreement pops up giving information about a user's responsibilities to copyright, licensing, and other laws when using material from the repository.⁵ The viewer must click through the pop-up before entering the site. This is a bit startling and could discourage or intimidate users from accessing the site. When returning to the site on the same computer in a separate visit, however, the user does not have to agree to the pop up again. While this made for a more welcome entry to the site, it seems to weaken the copyright alert stance since it is only given once. A permanent link to the agreement appears in the footer of the site, so it is always accessible again.

Member institutions ingest digital materials, which are organized in collections and sub-collections. This allows contributing institutions to maintain provenance and present information in its full context. Some highlighted collections include the Dublin City Electoral Lists from the Dublin City Library and Archive and The Capuchins and the Irish Revolution from the Irish Capuchin Provincial Archives.

The website is structured with three main tabs below the title banner: "Home," "Discover," and "Organisations." "Home" provides general information about the site and highlights particular collections. "Discover" allows faceted searching. "Organisations" provides a list of member institutions and the items and collections each has contributed.

The "Discover" page has three tabs below the main menu: "Collections," "Sub-Collections," and "Objects." When first arriving on the "Discover" page, the default search setting is to search by these prescribed collections. Unfortunately, this default setting seems to miss the point of a consortial portal like this: to be able to search across institutions for items related to a similar theme or event. It is possible to search across institutions by switching from the "Collections" tab to the "Objects" tab, but it is not immediately obvious and makes it difficult to navigate your initial, collection-level results. These collection-level results do cross institutions, but depending on the size of these collections, it is difficult to drill down to find those items that pinged the term. The "Sub-Collections" tab does not seem very useful, nor is it clear what constitutes a "Sub-Collection."

There is a keyword search box, which is, perhaps, the way most users will access the material. When using this search box from any page other than "Discover," it defaults to searching the items, which seems the strongest use of this portal. It is possible, though, once the results are returned, to zoom out by clicking on the "Sub-Collections" or "Collections" tab, with the selected facet or searched term remaining.

⁵ The Digital Repository of Ireland, "Terms" accessed April 19, 2017, <https://repository.dri.ie/pages/terms>.

While the underlying infrastructure positively allows for large amounts of metadata to be imported, the faceted browsing that results is not as easy to use as it could be. Once you are on the “Objects” tab, the list of subject terms is long and unwieldy. Using a dropdown menu or a search box within the facet might help.

A user can download an item, but the language used for the different download options is difficult to understand. The choices are “Download 1st,” and “Download master asset.” It’s not clear what the difference is or even that there are two options, especially to a lay user. There is an option to sign up for an account, which apparently allows one to “gain access, or apply for access, to more restricted collections.”⁶

Overall, the site seems to suffer slightly from being built with more attention paid to the back end users’ interests than the front end users’ interests. That said, with a little practice, an invested researcher could easily get the hang of the system, and the material available is well worth the effort. That careful attention paid to the back end, and the documentation to support it, will also certainly help other cultural heritage consortia build similar projects and portals for the world to use. Watch as this resource and organization continue to grow.

⁶ The Digital Repository of Ireland, “General FAQ,” accessed April 19, 2017, https://repository.dri.ie/pages/about_faq.