

Gaia archive

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The Gaia archive is being designed and implemented by the DPAC Consortium. The purpose of the archive is to maximize the scientific exploitation of the Gaia data by the astronomical community. Thus, it is crucial to gather and discuss with the community the features of the Gaia archive as much as possible. It is especially important from the point of view of the GENIUS project to gather the feedback and potential use cases for the archive. This paper presents very briefly the general ideas behind the Gaia archive and presents which tools are already provided to the community.

1 Introduction

Gaia is an ambitious mission of ESA. Its goal is to chart a three-dimensional map of the Galaxy (Lindegren et al., 2008). It will provide extraordinarily precise measurements for over one billion stars in the Milky Way including astrometry: stellar positions, parallaxes, and proper motions; photometry: photometric magnitudes in different spectral bands and at each epoch; spectroscopy: radial velocities and astrophysical parameters. Additionally, it will observe hundreds of thousands of solar system bodies, extragalactic sources, distant quasars and much more. Gaia will provide unprecedented positional and radial velocity measurements with the accuracies needed to produce a stereoscopic and kinematic census of about one billion stars in our Galaxy and throughout the Local Group. This is by far the most advanced astrometric mission ever launched.

The GENIUS project is an international effort to support ESA to design and develop the Gaia archive taking into account the needs of the user community and to maximize the scientific return from the Gaia mission. The Gaia data processing, of which final result will be the Gaia archive, is the responsibility of the DPAC consortium — a multinational European group of scientists and engineers. The design and implementation of this archive was opened by ESA to participation by the European community. GENIUS aims to significantly contribute to the development of the Gaia archive. It takes into account the input from the astronomical community, the interoperability with already existing and coming astronomical missions, and the cooperation with nanoJASMINE and JASMINE — the only other astrometric missions under development.

The typical use cases of astronomical problems which researchers would like to solve using Gaia archive were already gathered – long before the Gaia launch. However, feedback from the researchers and discussion about already implemented tools for the Gaia archive is still very important. It helps to choose next goals and tweak the current software developments plans in order to make the Gaia archive even more useful and more accessible for a broader range of users.

2 Tools for the Gaia archive

There is already available a number of tools which are connected to the Gaia archive, fully working and ready to serve real scientific data (currently Gaia archive contains only measurements generated from a numerical model of the Milky Way).

The main interface to access the Gaia archive is GACS – Gaia Archive Core Systems¹. It is a web portal which allows users to specify a query, run it within the European Space Astronomy Centre (ESAC) infrastructure and after completion view the results. The query language is called ADQL, which stands for Astronomical Dataset Query Language (Plante, 2007). It is an SQL-like language designed to search and join astronomical data sets, adopted as a standard and widely used across the whole Virtual Observatory initiative² – an international effort to make various astronomical data sets and other resources accessible in a standardized way. The Gaia archive implements all needed protocols (TAP, SAMP) which makes it fully accessible from any VO compatible tool.

Other interesting tools which are already connected to Gaia archive and allow to exploit the Gaia data are Topcat³ (Taylor, 2005) and Vaex⁴. Topcat is a graphical tool which allows to view and edit a tabular data. It is especially designed to help astronomers to analyse and manipulate the source catalogues. It has implemented all the major formats and protocols widely used in astronomy, like FITS files, VOTable and thus it is seamlessly connected to the Gaia archive. Vaex is a graphical tool to visualize and explore large tabular datasets. It handles tables with the number of rows of the order 10^9 in seconds, thus it is suitable to explore the Gaia archive. Moreover, Vaex, also implements the VOTable protocol which makes it integrated with the Gaia archive out-of-the-box.

Within the GENIUS project there are also designed and implemented tools able to handle really huge datasets (\sim PBs of data) in order to compare them against the whole or a large fraction of the Gaia archive. Simple bash/python scripts for data analysis of such huge datasets are not a reasonable solution here. There is a need to have a more advanced tool. One of such tools is the software called BEANS⁵. It allows to query, aggregate and visualize huge data sets much easier and faster. It uses Apache Cassandra⁶ as a database (one of the best solutions from emerging NoSQL technology movement), PigLatin⁷ as a scripting language to deal with distributed data analysis, and the library called D3⁸ which is an example on how computer sciences and art sciences can work together creating non-standard plots which at once are powerful, interactive, clean and easy to read. The BEANS software is one of the first attempts to adopt NoSQL data analysis techniques to astrophysics. It is written in a very general form, so it can be used in any field of research (economy, physics, biology etc.), commercial companies or other open source projects. All the necessary code which connects BEANS with the GACS portal is already implemented as a plugin. It allows to write an ADQL query which later one one can compare within BEANS with e.g. numerical simulations of Milky Way or globular star clusters. The first public version of the BEANS software, together with GACS plugin, is planned for release

¹<http://gaia.esac.esa.int/archive/>

²<http://www.ivoa.net/>

³<http://www.star.bris.ac.uk/~mbt/topcat/>

⁴<http://www.astro.rug.nl/~breddels/vaex/>

⁵<http://beanscode.net>

⁶<http://cassandra.apache.org>

⁷<http://pig.apache.org>

⁸<http://d3js.org>

in early 2016. Then, the software will be constantly improved taking into account feedback from users.

The discussion on already existing features of the implemented software and presenting a new use case scenarios for the Gaia archive is still possible. The list of the current use cases gathered in the community one can find in the document “Gaia data access scenarios summary”⁹ (GAIA-C9-TN-LEI-AB-026). On the Gaia Research for European Astronomy Training (GREAT) wiki pages¹⁰ one can find the information on how to suggest more use cases.

3 Summary

The first public data release of Gaia data is planned for Summer 2016. In order to maximize the scientific output of the Gaia mission it is crucial to put a lot of effort to create and implement a set of tools ready to allow scientists to analyze the Gaia data. That is the main goal of the GENIUS project – take the input from the community and help to implement software which would support scientific research as much as possible. The Gaia archive is accessible through the Virtual Observatory, which in the recent years became a standard way to distribute astronomical catalogues. There is already a number of tools connected to the Gaia archive (Topcat, Vaex) and there are even more tools to come (BEANS, GAVIP¹¹). The first Gaia data are just around the corner and it is crucial to provide to the community along the data the software which would allow to analyse the data easier.

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⁹http://www.rssd.esa.int/doc_fetch.php?id=3125400

¹⁰<http://great.ast.cam.ac.uk/Greatwiki/GaiaDataAccess/GdaScenariosFeedback>

¹¹<http://docs.gavip.science/#section2>