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EUROPEANA: Think Culture
Review of Multi-Institutional Repository

Launched on November 2008 as the thematic network and the prototype for a public European Digital Library, Europeana (http://www.europeana.eu) is performing the role of a search platform for digitized collections from many archival institutions all over the Europe. The idea about the creation of virtual European Library was initiated by six Heads of State and Government on April 2005.

What It's About

Europeana.eu states that it provides access to approximately 10 million digital items from 109 partners in total:12 archives such as National Archives of the Netherlands, 7 audio-visual collections such as Institute National L'audiovisuel, 12 cross-domain associations such as Museums, Libraries and Archives Council UK, 15 libraries such as Biblioteca de Catalunya, 11 museums such as Cermanisches Nationalmuseum, 25 national representatives such as National Library of Spain, 13 project contributors such as DRIVER, 12 research institutions such as German Social Science Infrastructure Sciences, and 2 others. The scope of materials in Europeana covers all kinds of images (paintings, drawings, maps, photos, and pictures of objects in museums), texts (books, newspapers, letters, diaries, and archival papers), and audio-visual materials (music and spoken word in various formats, films, newsreels, and television broadcastings). As it is an access repository, not preservation repository, actual files of digitized items are not sitting in the server of Europeana—only the metadata of materials are.

Although individual institutions can provide the access to digitized materials to Europeana, many cases were done by aggregators. Aggregators are national, regional or thematic online initiatives which could be either a project or an organization—e.g., culture.fr, Europeana Local, Judaica Europeana, and European Film Gateway. If individual institutions intend to offer their collections, they will first fill the primary online form, addressing the

given content's country, sector, scope, geographic level, and type of institution.[1] Once the submission request is completed, Europeana decides if the contribution will be done indirectly (through the aggregator) or directly. If the case is the latter, it takes one month for Europeana to review and process the official submission form, which includes agreements, description of the submission, and detailed metadata. This fairly cautious process of provision implies two things—its well-controlled collection policy and its thorough data flow.

While accomplishing the stated aim—to provide access to 10 million contents[2] by 2010, it seems to be critical to ensure that a wide variety of contents are ingested in terms of its genre, nationality, and period of times. Europeana Content Strategy, a document delivered on August 2009[3] identifies its priority on aggregators to single institution, tier 1 countries to tier 2 and 3 countries[4], audiovisual to image/text, etc. All of these preferences show that diversity is one of the crucial factor in Europeana. Another important issue regarding reviewing the potential contents for Europeana is whether or not it is under the public domain—to be more specific, whether it may allow users to share, download, and transform the given content under the condition of addressing a proper attribution and non-commercial use.[5]

How It's Storing

Through the Europeana website, a user is provided with either the actual file of digitized materials in a dumbed-down format, or the link where a user can access and/or obtain a specific digitized work. For enabling this function, Europeana seems to take heavy account of the proper data flow by delivering a big number of documents explaining this in many levels. Content providers should submit specific metadata sets describing their objects following the ESE (the Europeana Semantic Elements) specifications, which is a DublinCore-based application.[6] Users can find these data as the default information with thumbnails on individual page for each item.

Even though it is not a preservation repository, Europeana treats its metadata

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[1] Regarding its specific definitions, refer http://version1.europeana.eu/web/guest/providing-content/
[2] However, it states that its content now exceeds 11 million items as of September 2009
http://www.europeanfilmgateway.eu/news.php?area=Newsletter&pag=135
[3] http://version1.europeana.eu/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=b7b24d45-116e-442f-8b85-fbf931ebee72&groupId=10602
[4] Content analysis on its primary 5 million contents in 2009 reveals that its strong non-diversity especially regarding its origin countries—almost 50% of contents from France. To rectify this tendency, Europeana defined the tier for each country. AccorA countries which provides less than 1% of total becomes Tier1, (Tier 1) to countries, more than 5% (Tier 3)
[5] http://www.europeana.eu/portal/termsofservice.html terms of use
[6] Functional specification for Europeana Rhine release.doc

following OAIS standard reference model. In this model, the Producer (e.g. a museum) submits SIP (records formatted in XML) to the Archive (Europeana); Europeana ingests and processes them to AIP, followed by making them available as DIP to Customer.

How It's Working

As you can notice from its addressed mission, "an aggregator of European cultural content to produce a sustainable joint portal and spawn other uses", the overall design of Europeana website is highly incorporated into Web 2.0 environment. Every user can have an account where she can save items (more specifically, the link to items) found in Europeana. Bokmarking and sharing through major social networking sites is also available.

Queries can be performed either by typing a word or phrase into a search box or by browsing the timeline. Keyword search provides Advanced search, Refined search, Phrase search, Exclude words, Auto-completion, and Spelling suggestions. Advanced search gives you an option for searching by title, creator, date, and subject. Any search result can be refined by narrowing the category from the left side column of the search frame—by provider, by language, by country, by year or creation, and by type. Along with this somewhat broad categorization, the user interface and sometimes not-detailed metadata structure of Europeana gives an impression that it is trying to be simple and intuitive enough to become familiar to more general public, even though it might cause ambiguity and unsatisfactory search result. Another important reason of this would be the fact that the metadata structure should be easy enough for any institution to catalog their contents.

What's Next

Several official documents at Europeana site clarify its next steps as such: more participation of new partners, particularly from publishers in the arts and humanities; stronger interoperability with more deeply related institutions; rights management and IPR integration into Europeana as an operational service; and hardware, storage and bandwidth connected with running the service. On top of anything, the ultimate step to be made is multilingual access, which is "scaleable solutions to multilingual search and retrieval."[7] In the mean time, only website's default text can be provided in different European languages by choosing any among 26 languages from "choose a language" box on the top left side.

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7. Description of Work (Thematic Network) Version of 16/01/2009
http://version1.europeana.eu/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=75469328-65e7-4913-88da-4c6697851958&groupId=10602

Multilingual query function operates only in a case in which the metadata provider included certain subjects in a different language than the original language among its descriptive metadata. Allowing individuals to offer content directly has also been addressed as a next level by Europeana.

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