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Digital Preservation
EUscreen Report
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Television has played a profound role in shaping world cultures in the past sixty-five years, but the extraordinary quantity of content produced to fill airtime has not always been viewed with an eye toward posterity; much of it was never recorded at all, and much that was has been discarded, destroyed, or lost. And of the portions that have endured, much is difficult to distribute commercially today due to its ephemeral nature, its estrangement from lost related programs, or simply the tininess of the market for dated TV shows. Individual archives that hold old telerecordings often have limited power to distribute them – even where intellectual property concerns do not stand in the way, the promotional power of a single archive is relatively tiny compared to larger distributors. A program that might to admirably big business on Netflix could go largely unnoticed on the website of a local cultural institution.

In Europe, EUscreen seeks to overcome these problems with a centralized web portal of historic European television content. Spun off from Europeana – Europe's answer, so they say, to Google Books – it is a non-commercial cooperative endeavour by European archives to distribute their content to wider audiences than they ever could on their own. With this centralized model, the group aims to promote the heritage of European small-screen culture and make it available for research, education, leisure, and creative reuse. The initial project ran over three years, from 2009-2012, and made half a million videos available; a second three-year phase (EUscreenXL) is now underway to double that number.

During the initial phase, the EUscreen Consortium was composed of twenty-eight "core partner" and eight "associate partner" organizations, with these groups representing nineteen European states (the figures currently cited for the present project are "30 partners from 21 EU member states"). These partners include technology providers, archives, research organizations, and other groups with an interest in the project, including the BBC, FIAT/IFTA, and Europeana itself. Considerable challenges need to be faced in order to unify these diverse partners' efforts and execute EUscreen's vision.

Since EUscreen takes video *already digitized* by its member archives, rather than performing broad-based digitization itself, differing metadata structures between contributing institutions could easily put the kibosh on the whole job. To overcome this problem, the consortium promotes a unified schema built around the EBUCore, and compliant with standing specifications promulgated by Europeana. However, since every archive has its own needs and cannot be expected in its day-to-day operations to conform to every standard of one program with which they participate, EUscreen makes provisions for standardizing metadata initially recorded in non-interoperable formats into the EUscreen schema. Mainly, users are provided with a complex crosswalk tool with which to translate their own metadata into the EUscreen format. To overcome the challenge of adequately describing such a large body of content in

such a diversity of languages, the portal seeks to better describe its videos through information gleaned from query logs, and through a system which allows users to tag video content.

Another major (and obvious) encumbrance to such a project as this is intellectual property law. If a show's only surviving copies lie forgotten and ignored in an archive, that doesn't mean there isn't a long-ago producer who still owns rights to it. And once a project like EUscreen exists to bring old TV to new audiences, those rightsholders may begin to perceive a market value never previously conceived of for their shows, and hesitate to sign over rights to the content. EUscreen has recognized these hurdles, and formed a working group to address them and develop strategies to overcome them, but a perusal of the portal's "holdings" shows a prevalance of clips, segments, and one-off programs of minimal commercial value, and virtually no whole episodes of recognizable programs. The IPR Working Group is still hard at work, however, advocating and strategizing for access.

When content is deemed free of IP issues, it is uploaded directly by the providing archive. Videos are required to be submitted in MPEG-4 Part 10 (also known as H.264) format, with a recommended bit rate of 500 - 1000 kb/sec, "as this resembles SD quality video"[1]. It must not go unsaid, though, that when playing back videos on the site, especially in fullscreen mode, notable digital artifacts were observed. Whether this is a result of the files provided by the archives', or of EUscreen's transcoding process, is unclear.

The project does have content selection guidelines, broad though they may be. Video for the portal must address certain historical topics (broad enough to encompass nearly anything, they are: "Arts and Culture", "Disasters", "Education", "Environment and Nature", "Health", "Lifestyle and Consumerism", "The Media", "National Holidays, Festivals, Anniversaries, Annual Events", "Politics and Economics", "Religion and Belief", "Society and Social Issues", "Transportation, Science and Technology", "Wars and Conflict", and "Work and Production"), be a part of a "comparative virtual exhibition" on the "History of European Television" or the subject of "Being European", or be part of a "Content Provider Virtual Exhibitions" curated by the provider archive.

The EUscreen Consortium maintains a blog (http://blog.euscreen.eu) to keep the public abreast of its work. It features lots of articles on conferences hosted or participated in by the organization, as well as coverage of research and development performed by the consortium. An April 2014 article reports on a conference between EUscreen and the Europeana Aggregation Team to discuss how better to work with institutions to get higher quality metadata with incoming video content. Another particularly interesting piece from March discusses efforts to improve the portal interface as EUscreenXL develops: efforts are underway to provide translations of videos, to more clearly and effectively connect and contextualize the portal's content, and to use data

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[1] EUscreen Second Annual Report, http://pro.europeana.eu/documents/864473/1977122/EUscreen+D1.3.2+AnnualPublicReport2011.pdf?version=1.0

gathered about user habits to optimize the portal interface based on the ways that people actually use it.

What EUscreen has accomplished so far in providing access to so much content has been a rather extraordinary start. If practical IP issues stand in the way of the dream of the portal as one-stop shop for all of European television history, it is nevertheless providing points of connection for a great deal of content that users might otherwise never know even exists. With two years to go on the second phrase of the project, the interface stands to improve greatly (though it is already quite serviceable), and the content is sure to expand to include more and more fascinating history.

Webography

- EUscreen. http://www.euscreen.eu/index.html
- Europeana Professional: EUscreen. http://pro.europeana.eu/web/euscreen
- EUscreen Virtual Exhibitions.
  http://heritageinmotion.eu/project/euscreen-virtual-exhibitions/
- British Universities Film & Video Council, "Latest on: EUscreen".
  http://bufvc.ac.uk/category/euscreen
- EUscreen on Twitter. https://twitter.com/EUscreen
- EUscreen Blog. http://blog.euscreen.eu/
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