Europeana – Europe's digital library: frequently asked questions

(see also IP/10/539)

What is *Europeana*?

Europeana is a multimedia library, museum and archive gateway website with Web 2.0 features. It offers direct access to digitised books, audio and film material, photos, paintings, maps, manuscripts, newspapers and archival documents that are Europe's cultural heritage. Visitors to www.europeana.eu can search and explore different collections in Europe's cultural institutions in their own language in virtual form, without having to visit multiple sites or countries.

Europeana was launched by the European Commission and the EU's culture ministers in Brussels on 20 November 2008 (IP/08/1747).

Who is *Europeana* aimed at?

Europeana offers anyone interested in literature, history, art or cinema a simple route to access European cultural resources. For every citizen, it offers a simple way to find cultural material from across Europe in digitised format. *Europeana* is also expected to attract students and researchers with its vast virtual collection of material from all disciplines. That said, it is just as easy for school children to use it, for homework or for fun.

How does *Europeana* work?

Europeana functions like a multimedia internet portal with content from different sources. The digital objects that users can find on *Europeana* are not stored on a central computer, but remain with the cultural institution and are hosted on their network. *Europeana* collects contextual information about the items, including a small picture. Users can search this contextual information. Once they find what they are looking for, a simple click provides them with access to the full content – inviting them to read a book, play a video or listen to an audio recording that is stored on the servers of the respective content contributing institutions. Cultural institutions collaborating with *Europeana* organise their digitised content in such a way that this search is possible. At the same time they keep full control over their content.

How does a cultural digital object (book, video, etc.) end up in *Europeana*?

First, the cultural object has to be digitised. Digitisation is the transformation into digital format of text and photos from paper, films from reels, music from vinyl or videos from tape, so it can be (dis)played and used from a computer. For text and photos this involves scanning. Then the cultural institution that has digitised the object has to make it available for search and retrieval through *Europeana*. To make it searchable from a single entry point, the institution has to add the right contextual information to the digital object, such as the name of the author/creator, the place and date of creation, etc. The selection of content to be digitised and brought into *Europeana* is determined by EU countries and their cultural institutions in line with their cultural and/or information policies.

What does the European Parliament Resolution on 'Europeana – the next steps' say?

The Parliament's Resolution welcomes the creation of Europeana as a key step in preserving and disseminating Europe's cultural heritage while emphasising the potential economic cultural, educational and economic benefits of digitisation.

It calls for Europeana to give access to at least 15 million digitised objects by 2015, and states that all Member States should make their digitised heritage available to redress the present unbalance between the contributions. The Resolution also encourages content providers to increase the diversity of the types of content, especially audio and video content.

The European Parliament also stresses that solutions should be found for Europeana to offer access to in-copyright works, in particular to out-of-print and orphan works (works for which it is impossible to locate the copyright holders). It calls on the Commission to submit a legislative proposal to deal with the preservation and dissemination of orphan works.

The Parliament also underlines that creating a sustainable financing and governance model is crucial to Europeana's development, and call for an awareness-raising campaign on Europeana.

How many digital objects are available through *Europeana* and where do they come from?

The *Europeana* prototype gives direct access to 7 million digitised items from museums, libraries, audiovisual and other archives across Europe. Over 1,000 cultural organisations from across Europe have provided material to *Europeana*. The digitised objects come from all 27 EU countries, although for some of them content is very limited at this stage.

Overview of the contribution of EU countries to Europeana in % of the total number of objects (situation April 2010):

EU countries	
France	37.4%
Spain	13.2%
Germany	11.4%
United Kingdom	10.6%
Netherlands	5.6%
Poland	4.6%
Sweden	3.4%
Finland	2.8%
Slovenia	1.5%
Italy	1.4%
Greece	1.1%
Belgium	0.8%
Luxembourg	0.5%
Austria	0.4%
Estonia	0.3%
Romania	0.2%
Portugal	0.15%
Hungary	0.1%
Ireland	<0.1%
Latvia	<0.1%
Cyprus	<0.1%
Bulgaria	<0.1%
Czech Republic	<0.1%
Denmark	<0.1%
Lithuania	<0.1%

Malta	<0.1%
Slovakia	<0.1%
Non EU countries	
Norway	4%
Switzerland	0.4%

Are 7 million objects enough or are they a drop in the ocean?

7 million objects is a very respectable number, but this is only the beginning. To attract more users and to ensure that users come back to the site, the amount of objects searchable through *Europeana* should significantly grow over the coming years. The speed of this growth depends largely on the pace of digitisation in EU countries.

The European Commission's target is 10 million digitised works available online through *Europeana* by the end of 2010.

Why can't I find my favourite author/painter in *Europeana*?

Europeana opened on 20 November 2008 and is just at its beginning. 7 million digital items are certainly a lot, but not much if compared with the vast and rich European cultural heritage. Currently there are around 2 million digitised books in the libraries and cultural institutions of EU countries. However, only about 13% of these are currently available through *Europeana*.

If you cannot find the object you are looking for, that may be because it has not yet been digitised or the cultural institution that holds it may not yet have brought it into *Europeana*. The likelihood that you will find what you are looking for will become higher as the amount of content on *Europeana* grows. In the meantime, people can search by favourite subject and discover new favourites.

Another reason why the book or painting you are looking for may not ethere, may be related to the fact that the work is in copyright. It may not have been digitised or the rights holder may have decided not to make it available online or to make it available through his own website and not through *Europeana*.

What functions and services does *Europeana* offer me?

Above all, *Europeana* allows you to carry out a single search of thousands of digitised collections. This search can be done by a free text search (typing in a keyword), or by a variety of additional criteria and tools such as a timeline, type of object (image, audio, video, sound). You can also keep a personal MyEuropeana space to store and share saved objects. You can also add tags – descriptive words that help a specific user community find material. In 2010, when the service is further developed, it will have even more interactive zones addressing communities of special interest.

Users also have the opportunity to re-use content that is not covered by intellectual property rights, unless the individual institution that has digitised and holds the content applies restrictions.

How multilingual is *Europeana*?

The *Europeana* interface is available in all official EU languages, so users will be addressed in their own language. For now, searches will trawl the languages in which the objects are stored: searching for 'treaty' will only yield English material. In the years to come, the application of semantic technologies will gradually enable cross-language searches so that searching for "treaty" will lead to results with "treaty", "traité", "trattato", etc.

How is *Europeana* financed?

In its start-up phase *Europeana* is mainly financed by the EU. From 2009-2011, the EU's eContent*plus* programme contributes about 80% of its budget needs (this is €2.5 million per year). EU countries and cultural institutions will pay for the rest.

Moreover, the EU also co-funds other projects directly or indirectly contributing to *Europeana*, as well as research projects that will improve the digitisation and online accessibility of cultural material, as well as its digital preservation. In the period 2009-2010, some €119 million has been earmarked for these actions through the EU's overall research programme (Framework Programme 7) and its Competitiveness and Innovation Programme.

Who decides whether a cultural object goes on *Europeana*?

Whoever holds the material; individual libraries, audiovisual collections, libraries and museums decide what they want to digitise. Their decision will be based on several criteria:

- What are the most beautiful, historic or highly regarded items which they are most keen to share with the world?
- What do users most often want to consult or view?
- Are there hidden treasures – little-known items that could be enormously attractive to users once digitised?
- Are items too fragile for uses to consult, or to be displayed? Digitisation can help both preserve material and make it accessible to users.

Many countries have digitisation strategies in place to make sure that the same works are not digitised twice. On the other hand, it can be valuable to digitise related collections. For example, if a library digitised the papers (letters, diaries, speeches) of a prominent statesman, and an archive in that country chose to digitise papers relating to his political party (records of meetings, manifestoes, correspondence) from the same era, both sets of material would gain in strength from the shared context.

What are EU countries expected to do to help *Europeana*?

Europeana is a project implemented by the EU's leading cultural institutions, fully engaged with the objective of bringing Europe's cultural heritage online. The national Ministers responsible for culture and audiovisual affairs have warmly welcomed the creation of *Europeana*. On 20 November 2008, they adopted Council Conclusions that underline the importance of *Europeana* for making Europe's cultural heritage accessible for all on the Internet (MEMO/08/546).

The Commission has asked EU countries to support *Europeana* in different ways:

- by investing in digitisation, so more content will become accessible through *Europeana*, and by setting up national portals that can serve as aggregators bringing content into *Europeana*.
- by making *Europeana* known to the public
- by making a direct financial contribution to *Europeana* as a sponsor.

How does *Europeana* relate to generic search engines and to digitisation initiatives such as Google book-search?

Europeana is a cultural project and not a commercial undertaking. It creates a multimedia space on the web for everyone interested in European culture.

Europeana brings together, through one single access point, digitised material (books, documents from archives, audiovisual material, paintings) from different types of cultural institutions (archives, museums, audiovisual archives and libraries). Therefore *Europeana* is far more specific than the generic search engines: it will give fewer hits, but more targeted results.

Europeana is notable for strong features like the quality and authenticity of the content, guaranteed by the cultural organisations behind the service, and its openness in terms of cultural institutions that can participate and re-use of its material.

Europeana has a broader remit than a service such as "Google Book Search". *Europeana* gives access to different types of content from different types of cultural institutions, thus making it possible to bring together the works of a painter with relevant archival documents, as well as the books written about his life.

How is *Europeana* organised?

On 8 November 2007, the European Digital Library Foundation was set up formalising the agreement between European archives, museums, audiovisual archives and libraries to work together in the delivery of *Europeana*. The Foundation is open to content holders (individual museums, archives and libraries) and national and European associations of content holders.

The *Europeana* office, where the *Europeana* service is being developed and run, is hosted by the Dutch National Library in The Hague.

How can I access *Europeana*, search cultural content, and learn more about it?

You can visit *Europeana* at www.europeana.eu/