Implementation of Commission Recommendation 2011/711/EU

PPPs for digitisation:

The Recommendation considers that the costs of digitising the whole of Europe’s cultural heritage (CH) cannot be covered by public funding alone and encourages private sponsoring and public-private partnerships (PPPs) as a way to complement that funding. Such PPPs should be fair and comply with a number of key principles set out in its Annex 1, such as compliance with copyright and competition rules, non-exclusivity and limited duration of any preferential rights (max. 7 years). Agreements for digitisation of CH collections should be awarded after open competitions, its content made public and their conclusion should be conditional on the accessibility of the digitised content through Europeana.

The way private partners can be involved in digitisation is manifold, from
(1) simple sponsorship or donations to
(2) more sophisticated intermediation of trusts, foundations or other bodies vested with the mission of managing the digitisation and/or use of the digitised material, normally against charging for the digitisation itself or the further use of the digitised materials (or both), to
(3) taking over the digitisation and making available of the CH without costs for the cultural institution hosting the material, against some exclusive or preferential rights on the further use, including commercial use, of the digitised items.

Examples of the first kind of private parties’ involvement are the agreements between Telefónica and the Spanish Ministry of Education to digitise 25 million pages from 200,000 works in the Spanish National Library (1st link) and the “generous donations” that have funded the digitisation of over 1,000 original documents from the world’s most famous composers by the Austrian National Library (2nd link).

Examples of the second kind of private involvement in the digitisation of CH are the UK Public Catalogue Foundation and Collections Trust (4th and 5th links), the ProQuest agreements to digitise manuscripts, rare books and other holdings of the Danish, Dutch and Italian (Florence) National libraries (6th, 7th and 8th links) or the Spanish Fundación Biblioteca Virtual Miguel Cervantes founded in 1999 by the University of Alicante, Banco Santander and Fundación Marcelino Botín which are also the main fund providers (alongside the Prisma Group and the Generalitat Valenciana, 3rd link). Most recently, the French national library (BnF) signed agreements with ProQuest for the digitisation of 70,000 ancient books and with Believe Digital and Memnon Archiving Services for the digitisation of 200,000 vinyl discs of all musical genres contained in its collections, following a public call for partnerships launched in 2011 in the framework of the Grand Emprunt aka 'Investissement d’avenir'. These arrangements have normally the drawback that either the access to the digitised materials is subject to a fee, at least outside the borders of the hosting cultural institution’s premises or country (ProQuest), or it is limited in terms of size and resolution of the digitised images (PCF Collection Cataloguing Agreement - 9th link) or in terms of their discoverability, interoperability, possibility to
download or further dissemination and use (Miguel Cervantes Virtual library – 14th link). The recent BnF agreements have also been criticized for lack of transparency, asymmetric access by libraries to the digitised cultural heritage and long duration of exclusivity/preferential rights granted (17th link).

The best known of the third kind of private involvement are the Google agreements with libraries to digitise entire public domain collections without costs for the cultural institutions involved. According to data collected from the website of the Austrian National Library (10th link), there are 12 European libraries participating in the Google Libraries program:

- Bodleian Library (Oxford)
- Bavarian State Library (Munich)
- Library of the Complutense University (Madrid)
- Library of Catalonia (Barcelona)
- Cantonal and University Library (Lausanne)
- University Library (Ghent)
- Municipal Library (Lyon)
- Italian Ministry of Culture with National Library (Rome) and National Library (Florence)
- Austrian National Library Vienna
- National Library of the Netherlands, and
- National Library of the Czech Republic
- British Library (attached, marked "Google confidential").

Though without costs for the cultural institutions or online access, none of these agreements would fulfil the conditions set out in the Recommendation for PPPs, as they provide i.a. for preferential periods well beyond 7 years (from 25 years to the more recent 15 years, e.g. the British Library one), are not made public or awarded following open competitions. However, some of them at least (UK, Ghent and Austrian National Library) provide for an access through Europeana, one of the conditions recommended for awarding digitisation agreements under Annex 1 to the Recommendation and the sites of these libraries announce that such access is planned (British Library, Austrian National Library) or already materialised (Ghent University Library, 15th link).

More recently, Google has partnered with museums around the world under the Google Art project, to enable virtual visits to parts of their collections as an extension of its Google Street View project. Over 150 museums have partnered with Google, including some of the most well-known in Europe (Tate Gallery, Uffizi, Rijksmuseum, Musée d'Orsay…) and can now be visited online, as can the White House, though the system still presents some difficulties (11th, 12th and 13th links).

Another example of mass-digitisation involving ICT and libraries is the partnership between the British Library, Microsoft and the German CCS (Content Conversion Specialists) to digitise over 100,000 out-of-copyright books. The digitised material could be used to develop apps for tablets and other mobile appliances with the help of software/media companies like Biblio Labs, LLC, thus enabling user-friendly and un-precedent access to rare and historical books and thematic topics, one of which was awarded the Publishers Innovation Award in 2012 and is used in more than 160 countries (16th link).

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1) http://sociedaddelainformacion.wordpress.com/2008/02/01/ministerio-de-cultura-y-telefonica-firman-un-acuerdo-para-digitalizar-los-fondos-de-la-biblioteca-nacional/

2) http://www.onb.ac.at/services/presse_21319.htm

3) http://www.fundacionbancosantander.com/actividades_ficha.cfm?idArticulo=454

4) http://www.thepcf.org.uk/

5) http://www.collectionntrust.org.uk/


9) http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/collection_cataloguing_agreement_nov08.pdf

10) http://www.onb.ac.at/ev/files/ABO_FAQ_en_201103.pdf

11) http://blogs.afp.com/cross-culture/?post/2012/05/07/Google-Art-Project-monte-en-puissance

12) http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/12/arts/design/google-art-projects-expanded-offerings.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

13) http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/inside-white-house/google-art

14) http://librodenotas.com/textosdelcuervo/21549/procomun-y-biblioteca-virtual-miguel-de-cervantes

15) http://lib.ugent.be/europeana


17) http://blog.wikimedia.fr/numerisation-de-fonds-anciens-de-la-bnf-avec-exclusivite-pour-le-prestataire-prive-5284