

# EuropeanaLocal – its role in improving access to Europe’s cultural heritage through the European Digital Library

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**Abstract:** This paper explains the role and approach of the EuropeanaLocal project in helping to build the European Digital Library (Europeana). The project seeks to enhance the position of regional and local cultural institutions wishing to make their content accessible through the Europeana by putting in place and testing an infrastructure built on common metadata standards and tools supported by Europeana.

**Keywords:** European Digital Library; Europeana; EuropeanaLocal; digital libraries; local and regional content; local and regional cultural heritage; digital cultural heritage; best practice network.

## 1 Introduction: Europeana and the European policy environment

The European Commission is supporting the development of Europeana to serve as a multilingual internet access point to cultural collections from all Member States as part of its Digital Libraries Initiative (DLI). Europeana aims to make Europe's diverse cultural and scientific heritage easier and more interesting to use online for work, leisure and/or study.

There is a pressing need, not least in order to achieve Europeana’s 2010 content targets, to also make available the enormous amount of digital content provided by Europe’s cultural institutions at local and regional level alongside that held at national level and by doing so, to extend the institutional base of content providers to involve more extensively Europe’s network of museums and archives as well as libraries.

EuropeanaLocal is one of a number of projects which have been funded to help develop Europeana. It has a special focus on digital content provided by institutions at the local and regional levels. Over the course of the next three years, the EuropeanaLocal partners aim to make available some 20 million items, held across 27 countries to Europeana. At the same time they are committed to exploring and developing efficient and sustainable processes and governance procedures so that growing numbers of local and regional institutions can easily make their content available to Europeana into the future by adopting and promoting the use of its infrastructure, tools and standards.

For the Europeana interface to be fully usable and to offer an attractive range of services, the data that cultural heritage institutions currently often hold in proprietary databases needs to be made available for harvesting via the OAI-PMH protocol. This will be the main line of approach of EuropeanaLocal. To this extent, a number of the local/regional content providers participating in EuropeanaLocal have already begun to implement this model.

For 2008, the focus is upon open access, digital, freely available and public domain material — in order to minimise copyright issues in the early stages of development. However, all freely available content and metadata should be covered by a suitable licence clearly specifying the respective rights and use conditions.

## **2 Europeana and EuropeanaLocal**

The work of EuropeanaLocal is intended to contribute greatly to improving the interoperability of digital libraries held by local and regional museums, archives and other institutions of all EU Member States and to help make their content accessible through the common user interface of Europeana. Working closely with key initiatives such as Europeana.Net and successor activities to implement the proposed infrastructures and standards in the context of the provision of an enormous amount of new digital content held at local/regional level (or aggregations of this content), EuropeanaLocal will contribute powerfully to the growth of Europeana and to understanding and addressing in practical terms, the issues relating to standards-based interoperability between digital objects and collections by:

- implementing the production standards, specifications and tools which will enable cross-domain search, retrieval and use of the digital content held by cultural institutions in all member states, involving the professional domains (libraries, museums and archives);
- establishing and promoting straightforward methods by which cultural institutions and aggregators may join Europeana and provide their content to its services.

By working so closely with Europeana, both through the involvement of its newly-formed EDL Foundation as a key player in the EuropeanaLocal network consortium and through active participation in Europeana.Net, EuropeanaLocal will support the establishment of a cooperation structure which benefits cultural institutions of all types and levels in every Member State

This process will add substantial added value to Europeana and its users, by:

- greatly expanding and enriching the freely available and accessible content to be found by users systematically and easily through Europeana interface itself, as new services come on stream;
- making available for harvesting locally-relevant Europeana-branded cultural content to other service providers working in sectors such as tourism, education, family history, humanities research, the publishing/media industries and through other search engines and services on the Web. This will serve to enhance the interoperation of Europeana with other services and assist with its intention to work with such services to improve results mutually over the longer term.

Key content types to be made available through EuropeanaLocal include items and collections of high cultural value ('treasures') held at local or regional level, specific local collections held by libraries, museums and archives, local sound and film archives, public records held by archives etc. The number of content items available from the limited sample of institutions involved in EuropeanaLocal, at more than 20 million, is already very large in the context of the targets for and content currently available to Europeana. The potential of local/regional sources may be appreciated when these data are extrapolated to all cultural institutions in Europe and by taking into account the likelihood of a continued growth of digitisation at local and regional level in the years to come. EuropeanaLocal will put in place an infrastructure that will continue to increase the content available to Europeana, at the same time enhancing the skills, expertise and motivation required to support local institutions throughout Europe.

## **3 Standards, tools and infrastructure**

EuropeanaLocal will ensure that the approaches, standards and tools developed by Europeana are widely adopted, thereby supporting the interoperability of content. In brief this will involve the establishment of a harvestable network of OAI-PMH compliant metadata repositories, which will aggregate local content and which will complement the developing Europeana network. In addition tools, such as such as Europeana's metadata 'installer' and automated metadata conversion tools, will be made available for EuropeanaLocal partners to use.

EuropeanaLocal will encourage more digitisation activity at regional and local level by promoting best practice guidelines and working through competence centres. An important part of its work will be to ensure the sustainability of repositories and aggregations of metadata in each country by

negotiating and agreeing with other players in the national framework a rational, scalable and maintainable solution to long-term aggregation of digital cultural content and its metadata.

This is an important goal. Aggregations of harvestable metadata built on common, cross-domain Europeana standards and infrastructure will provide potentially a huge benefit not only to the Europeana service itself but also to suppliers and users of other services at European, national and regional levels in fields such as education, tourism and family history.

There is a further and possibly greater prize in view for local cultural institutions as they seek to transform their role as active service providers in the modern era, using the power of the Web to extend both remote and location based activities to provide informal and highly personalised learning and knowledge-seeking opportunities.

The semantic enrichment of metadata (geospatial, time, multilingual matching, user annotation etc) which will take place as part of the Europeana development process can provide almost unimagined opportunities for local institutions, online service providers and end users operating in a local and regional context, enabling people to ‘mashup’ content, data and information to meet a wide variety of needs and interests. The Europeana plan to provide reciprocal access for its suppliers to semantically-enriched content via APIs has enormous potential power, alongside the future deployment of technologies such as microformats, RDFa, ORE, RSS-Atom.

#### **4 Conclusion**

By supporting the widespread adoption of the basic ingredients– standardized, high quality metadata and a common harvesting infrastructure - across the cultural domains throughout Europe, EuropeanaLocal will seek to play an important role in the creation of a prominent future for the citizens of Europe in accessing and using their cultural record. The Europeana and EuropeanaLocal websites contain the most current information which could be found at [www.europeana.eu](http://www.europeana.eu) and [www.europeanalocal.eu](http://www.europeanalocal.eu).

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Creating Cross-Domain Consensus for the European Digital Library  
<http://www.blueconsultants.com/edlnet/>

Europeana: connecting cultural heritage  
<http://www.europeana.eu/>

Europeana demo version  
[http://www.europeana.eu/europeana\\_demo/welcome.php](http://www.europeana.eu/europeana_demo/welcome.php)

Digital Libraries Initiative Homepage,  
[http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/activities/digital\\_libraries/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/digital_libraries/index_en.htm)

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