

Europeana: Towards The European Digital Library

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Abstract. This paper briefly describes the process that will lead to Europeana, the European Digital Library. This process is currently running, so that it is possible to give only an account of its inception, involved actors and projects, and current status. The paper concludes by quickly outlining the role that CNR has in the making of Europeana.

1 Europeana: the inception

In October 2004 Google launched Book Search a tool that searches the full text of books. The service was formerly known as Google Print when it was introduced at the Frankfurt Book Fair. In reaction to that, in 2005 Jacques Chirac called for a European Digital Library in order to affirm the ‘cultural identity’ of Europe and to spread its heritage.

In 2006, The European Commission takes on board the duty of creating the European Information space (i2010) and in particular elaborates a plan to bring on-line the European Culture on 24 August 2006, the European Commission presented its vision about the European Digital Library:

A common multilingual access point would make it possible to search Europe’s distributed – that is to say, held in different places by different organisations – digital cultural heritage online. Such an access point would increase its visibility and underline common features. The access point should build on existing initiatives such as The European Library (TEL), in which Europe’s libraries already cooperate. It should where possible closely associate private holders of rights in cultural material and all interested stakeholders. A strong commitment by the Member states and cultural institutions to arrive at such an access point should be encouraged [2].

2 Building Europeana: actors

Several actors are involved in building the Europeana Digital Library: stakeholders, experts in the various scientific/technological areas, system developers, business developers, and managers. Stakeholders are the institutions who provide content, such as libraries, archives, museums, audiovisual archives, and others; they have two main goals: to provide metadata to the Europeana Digital Library about their artifacts, and to help in defining standards for interoperability. Scientific actors have as main goal to define the interoperability framework, and to specify the functionality of Europeana. System developers have the task of designing and implementing the Digital Library System (DLS) [1], based on the functional specifications. Business developers have the task of ensuring the long-term sustainability of Europeana.

3 Building Europeana: the projects cluster

The Europeana Digital Library will be the result of a number of projects run by different cultural heritage institutions; amongst these projects, we have:

- Athena, an aggregator that helps museums bringing their content to Europeana.
- APENet, a Best Practice Network whose objective is to build an Internet Gateway for Documents and Archives in Europe.
- EuropeanaLocal, aiming at improving the interoperability of the digital content held by regional and local institutions.
- European Film Gateway, whose goal is to find solutions for providing integrated access to the Europe's cinematographic heritage.
- Judeica, whose aim is to establish a comprehensive map of European Jewish Cultural Heritage.
- EuropeanaConnect, that will provide the technologies and resources to semantically enrich the digital content in Europeana.
- Europeana V1.0 that will implement the technological platform.

All projects are part-funded by the European Commission's eContentplus program. The full implementation of the Europeana Digital Library System is the goal of the two "core" projects: EuropeanaConnect and Europeana V1.0. The complete list of the projects contributing to Europeana is at the URL: <http://group.europeana.eu/>.

4 Building Europeana: the EDLNet

The EDLnet Thematic Network is an eContentPlus program recently concluded, that has prepared the ground for the European Digital Library. The project main topic was to improve the cross-domain accessibility to cultural content, a pillar of the European Commission's i2010 Digital Libraries initiative. EDLnet Thematic Network has brought on board the key European stakeholders to build consensus on creating the European Digital Library. EDLnet project main results are:

- The creation of a large visible community of archivists, librarians and museum people committed to making content available in an interoperable way.
- The production of clear and usable summary reports and recommendations on each of the main areas of interoperability addressed in the EDLnet.
- The definition of a roadmap showing how the component parts interlink and what needs to be achieved when to realise the aim of the European Digital Library.
- The implementation of a fully working prototype, with interoperable multilingual access, covering over 4,5 million digital items.
- The definition of a proposal for funding to create a fully operational European Digital Library service.

As of April 09 the Europeana prototype (www.europeana.eu) contains data from 54 cultural institutions from 24 countries.

5 The System View

In the wide public, Europeana is primarily perceived as a Portal exposing a great amount of cultural heritage information. Even though this perception is not entirely misleading, one of the goals of Europeana is to build an open services platform enabling users and cultural institutions to create and access a large collection of objects representing digital and digitised content via an Application Program Interface (API). Europeana API will enable cultural institutions and users to:

- Access Europeana content
- Provide content to Europeana
- Build applications using Europeana functionalities for their own use.
- Use Europeana services for their own Digital libraries

From this more general point of view, the Europeana Portal is just a component of the system, more specifically it can be viewed as a web application using the Europeana API to offer services, in particular discovery-based access to, the Europeana Digital Library.

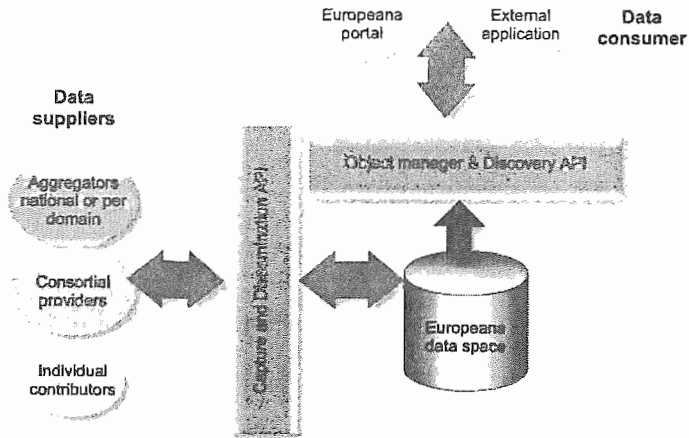


Fig.1 the data flow in Europeana

6 ISTI and Europeana

The CNR-ISTI has been invited to join the EDLnet in July 2007 as a bridge between the DELOS community and Europeana, and also based on the significant previous experience of the Institute in digital library projects. In EDLnet, CNR-ISTI had a key role in the definition of the functional architecture of Europeana [3], in the design and development of the advanced search functionalities of the Europeana prototype and in the implementation of the data ingestion functionality for populating the Europeana data space. Moreover the development tools and test servers has been hosted on ISTI computers. The ISTI-CNR is currently a partner of the Europeana V1.0 project, the main tasks in which is involved are: the definition of a data model for Europeana, the implementation of the search functionalities of the DLS and the set-up and management of EuropeanaLabs, which will play to Europeana the role that GoogleLabs plays to Googleand; as it has been for EDLNet the ISTI will provide technical support to the development infrastructure by hosting test servers and tools for distributed team management.

References

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3. Dekkers M., Gradmann S., Meghini C.: D2.5 Europeana Outline Functional Specification, March 2009