

Introduction to the Culture Grid

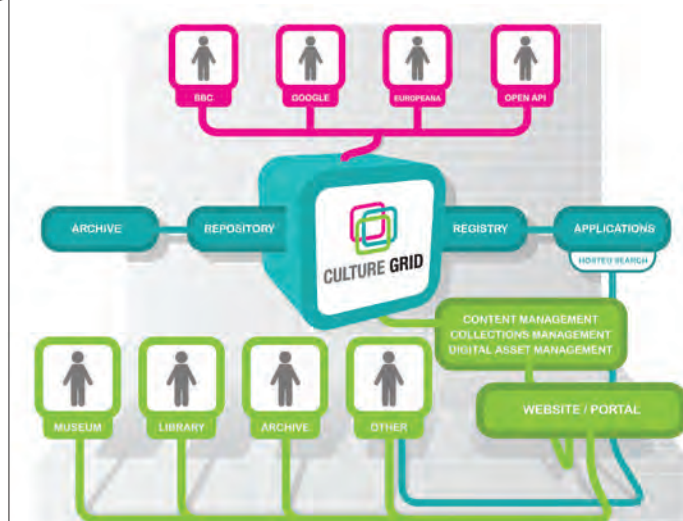
The Culture Grid is a key service being developed by the Collections Trust to support its mission to ensure that cultural collections are available for use and enjoyment by everyone, now and for the future¹. It combines with other digital service offers from Collections Trust, such as Collections Link, for collection management communities², and SSN Connects, for subject specialists to offer a powerful set of online services supporting the cultural sector in all its digital activities, from content creation and management to audience development.

What is the Culture Grid and what are its benefits for the public, sector and funders?

The Culture Grid principally joins up information about objects in museum and other heritage collections, referencing images or other types of digital content that are online, so that more people can more easily access collections in new and interesting ways. The Culture Grid is built on an open source technology base, developed by Collections Trust technical partners Knowledge Integration Ltd⁴.

Benefits include an easy route to a myriad of content for different services to be built more efficiently; and a better return on investment for the sector and funders from increased use and reach of the outputs from digital programmes and projects.

The Culture Grid is funded by a mix of sources. It is part of core funding to Collections Trust from the Museum Library and Archive Council /Arts Council England to support the sector's digital agendas and activity⁵ and also receives project funding from a range of diverse sources. Current projects include investigations into the use of collection records within aggregators of "open data" for

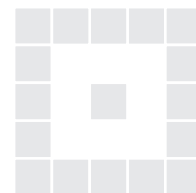


Caption:
Culture Grid
schematic

Higher Education use; led by the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge⁶.

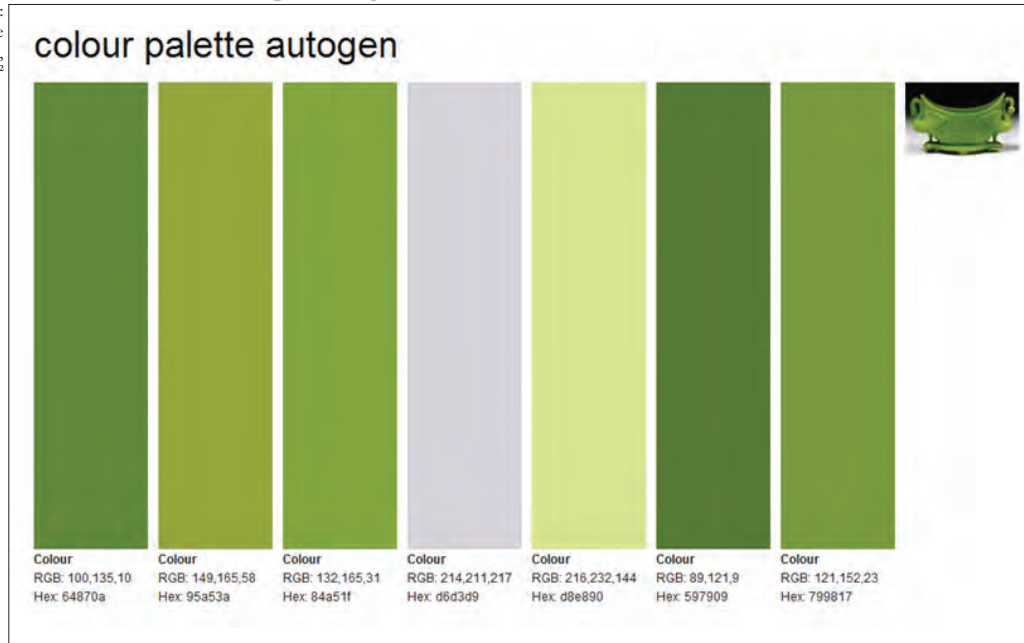
What's in the Culture Grid?

Currently the Culture Grid contains over 1.2 million records from hundreds of different collections of national, regional and local scope, covering all periods and topics. This includes over a million records about the items in collections and tens of thousands of records about the scope of collections as a whole and the cultural organisations that hold them. Item records come from all kinds and sizes of cultural institutions, such as English Heritage; The British Library; Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums; Lambeth Archives and Leeds City Libraries. Over half of the records in Culture Grid reference images and there is a growing amount of audio and video content too. All of this is harvested by Europeana⁷ for greater audience reach, enhancements and value.



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Caption:
Colour Palette
Generator,
by Mike Hirst²²



The range and depth of digital material available via the Culture Grid is set to grow through join up with programmes, such as Renaissance in the Regions⁸ and Designation⁹ and projects, such as those of University Museums in Scotland¹⁰ and the Public Catalogue Foundation¹¹; as well as from Collection Trusts involvement in Europeana Local and Athena projects, and its many networking activities.

Records can easily be added to Culture Grid¹² through OAI-PMH; file upload and even on-line data entry for small numbers of records. In the near future cultural organisations will be able to have images and other media files delivered via Culture Grid. New content due from April 2011 includes item records from the National Museum for Science and Industry; the Government Art Collection; Sheffield Libraries and Lincolnshire Museums and Heritage service.

How is Culture Grid used?

Culture Grid is essentially an open data-store that can be accessed in a number of ways, including search based API (SRU/SOLR); data feed (OAI-PMH) and a simple "search box builder" for easily embedding searches into any Web-page¹³.

As well as supplying Europeana, the Culture Grid currently powers and supports a range of different services¹⁴ including the time and place based "Exploring 20th Century London¹⁵" and a pilot online public library service "People's Network Discover¹⁶". Culture Grid also publishes its records so that each one can be easily indexed by search engines such as Google.

Culture Grid is also increasingly engaged with Developer Hack Days such as Culture Hack¹⁷; History Hack¹⁸; WAG Hack Day¹⁹ and the Europeana Hackathon²⁰, where independent developers and small to medium sized busi-

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nesses explore the possibilities of working with collections information via the Culture Grid. These developer days have produced prototypes for innovative uses of collections information on all platforms, including mobile searches; map-based services and iPad applications. The Culture Grid's own Hack Day²¹, organised with the North East England Museum Hub resulted in many creative approaches to engaging people with collections, including a QR Code producer that museums could use to create QR codes for items in Culture Grid and a Colour Palette generator that produces

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Caption:
Find a Library service,
design by Gooii Ltd²⁴

colour swatches from images in Culture Grid for design inspiration.

Future applications for the Culture Grid include a "Find a Library" service optimised for GPS enabled mobile devices, which is to be launched at Open Culture 2011²³. This new service will allow people to find public libraries, see details of what services and collections they offer and feedback updates.

The aim of all this activity is to bring UK collections information to new audiences to inform visits; learning, creativity and research. The development phase for the Culture Grid began in earnest in August 2009, building on earlier digital projects from Collections Trust and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and the service went online at www.culturegrid.org.uk in July 2010.

As well as a search of all the collections within Culture Grid, the website offers lots of information about the Culture Grid for people who wish to find out more about it; how to contribute collections information, and how to use collections information from it.

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2. www.collectionslink.org.uk [viewed 1 February 2011]
3. www.collectionstrust.org.uk/ssnconnects
4. www.k-int.com/ [viewed 1 February 2011]
5. www.mla.gov.uk/what/programmes/digital [viewed 1 February 2011]
6. www.context.collectionstrustblogs.org.uk/ [viewed 1 February 2011]
7. www.europeana.eu [viewed 1 February 2011]
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