Europeana

Netherlands
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Poland
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Interview with Jill Cousins, Europeana Director, The Hague, Netherlands, by Maria Śliwińska

Jill, you are the Executive Director of Europeana. Can you tell us how you arrived here? You started with the national library network, which could be compared to one of the Europeana related projects. Can you tell us about the beginning?

In 2004, I was invited by the National Library of the Netherlands (KB) to take up the position as Head of The European Library Office, having met one of the Directors when negotiating an archiving deal, in the KB's eDepot, for the e-journals of Blackwell Publishing (now Wiley-Blackwell). To make a long story short, I accepted and moved to the Netherlands to take up the job.

The European Library Office consisted of 3 people at that time. It had been set up by the Conference of European National Librarians (CENL), with funds from 9 national libraries, to create an operational service based on the results of the EU funded TEL project[1]. This was accomplished in the following 3 years, expanding from 9 to 48 national libraries in this time period, accessing the digitized metadata of full text and catalogues, to create a service aimed

largely at researchers. The funds came partly from subscriptions of the libraries themselves and partly through other projects such as TEL-ME-MOR[2], TELplus and FUMAGABA[3]. The EDL Project[4], which started in September 2006, was a direct response to the request of Viviane Reding (then Commissioner for Information Society and Media) made at the CENL conference in Luxembourg on 29 September 2005. She requested that national libraries use their influence in the debate on the digitisation of European content for access through the Web. The aim was to create a new service, building on the European Library, but covering the other domains of Museums, Archives and Audio Visual collections. Under the aegis of the German National Library, the European Library office submitted a project to start this process and create a road-map for a European Digital Library. This was followed by a project to create an operational service "EDLnet". This delivered a prototype to considerable acclaim and with too much traffic, leading to it crashing on November 20, 2008. The Europeana v1.0 project began in January 2009 with eight staff members. On 11 June 2010 the project passed its Mid-term Review and staff numbers had increased to 32. The reviewers commented appreciatively on how much had been achieved across such a complex set of tasks in a short time, while maintaining the backing of such a diversity of stakeholder groups.

The European Library Office has expanded to 8 people and sits alongside the Europeana Office of 32 people in the KB, in The Hague. These people are responsible for the business and technical development of Europeana and its marketing to end users as well as coordinating the relationships with 15 projects that contribute content and technology to Europeana.eu.
Our progress is in tune with the positive commentary about Europeana being heard from the European Commission, the Council of Ministers, the European Parliament and Neelie Kroes, Commission Vice President and new Commissioner for the Digital Agenda.

This mood of approval has been growing since the Commission launched its consultation, Europeana Next Steps in August of last year. Responses were informed, thoughtful and positive, coming in from 118 organisations. They formed the basis of a report by Helga Trupel, Vice-Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education. Her report notes that "Europeana is a very important project, because it gives people easy access to European culture and heritage worldwide. Furthermore, it is of high importance for the development of a knowledge-based society and the fostering of cultural diversity".

The Report was adopted by the European Parliament as a Resolution on 5 May 2010. The Resolution "stresses that Europeana should become one of the main reference points for education and research purposes" and suggests it should be "integrated into education systems" in order 'to contribute towards transcultural coherence in the EU'. It also "emphasises that creating a sustainable financing and governance model is crucial to Europeana's long-term existence", and that "a substantial part of the financing should come from public contributions" and "calls for the next Multiannual Financial Framework to provide several times more funding than that available to Europeana hitherto".

Following the Resolution, Commissioner Kroes said, *We very much welcome the European Parliament's strong support for our drive to make Europe's rich and diverse cultural heritage available on-line. Together, we have an obligation to ensure that our citizens, children and grandchildren can have access to our cultural heritage.*

How did it happen that you decided to undertake a project dealing with all the sectors?

As I say above, we were asked to create such a project proposal and had considerable political impetus from a letter[5] sent by the 6 heads of state of France, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Spain and Italy to the President of the European Commission, Jose Barroso, requesting that the European Commission help in the digitization of its cultural heritage.

The Commission thought it would be good to create a flagship project that would create access to digitized material across all the sectors, thereby encouraging further digitization.

Can you tell us about Europeana's goals?

The goals of Europeana are to:
- aggregate content from the cultural and scientific heritage institutions of Europe for exploration and discovery by users;
- act as a distributor of enriched metadata via the use of an API;
- be a facilitator of open source software and open access;
- innovate in the use of the provided content.

Country Content Contribution, 15 Million objects by December 2010

Legend:
- France
- Germany
- Sweden
- Spain
- Italy
- Netherlands
- Ireland
- Norway
- UK
- Poland
- PanEuropeanProviders
- Belgium
- Finland
- Greece
- Slovenia
- Other countries providing each less 1%

Pie chart values: 18%, 17%, 9%, 9%, 8%, 8%, 6%, 6%, 6%, 3%, 3%, 1%, 1%, 1%, 1%, 3%
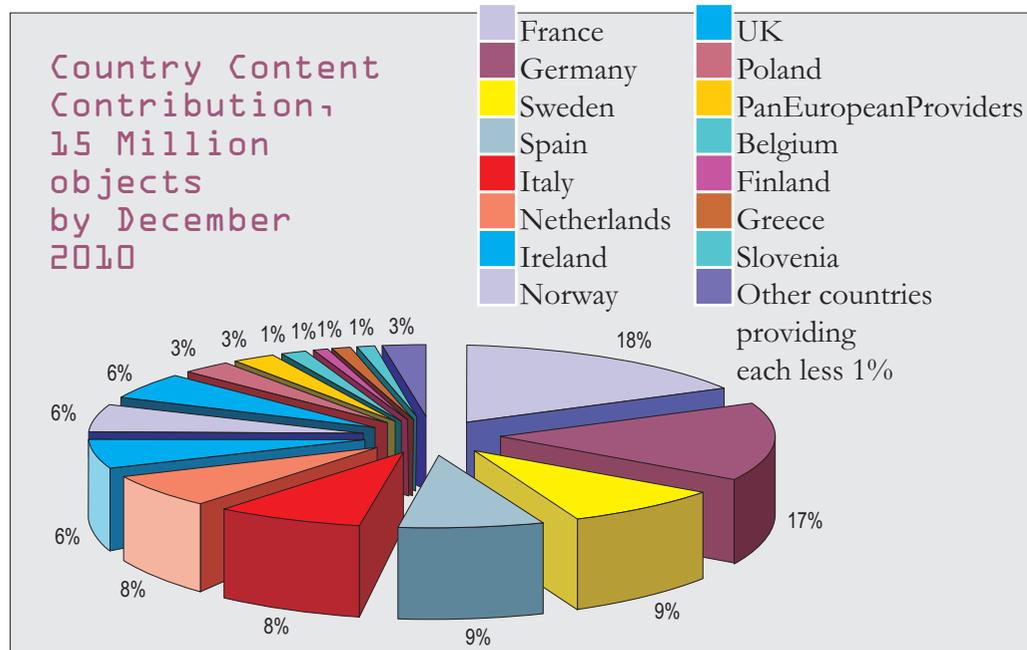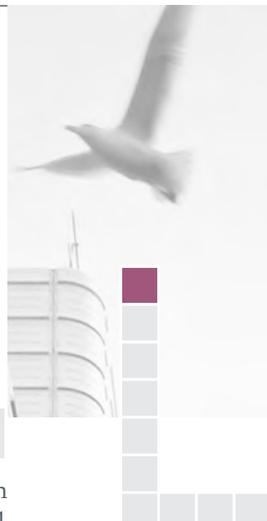
What are the achievements of the project?

The most significant external achievement is fulfilling the goals of the European Commission and the expectations for Europeana so that by July 2010 we have a fully operational site with 11 million items from all countries of Europe.

Other very significant achievements include the development and promotion of standards, the development of a data model that answers the needs of the domains involved in Europeana, the creation of policies such as the Public Domain Charter and its follow-up with rights statements and standardized symbols and usage guidelines.

On the technical side it is the development of EuropeanaLabs and the Open Source environment, which is being used by other providers of portals throughout Europe. This has huge significance for the future of cultural heritage on the Web, allowing new and creative development to be made on a solid, innovative, shared base.

I think one of the most lasting achievements will be the broad and inclusive networking. The Europeana network encompasses over 15 projects and all of these are working to improve Europeana's content and technology, coordinating work and direction, agreeing on standards.

Which one of these do you find are the most important?

I think this is quite difficult to answer as it depends on the area and the user. All are important for access to cultural heritage on the Web.

Europeana deals with single institutions, the projects, and the aggregators. Is there a problem of getting the same content through different channels?

This is a luxury problem for us at the moment. The amount of duplication is slight and the introduction of persistent identifiers will help resolve this problem for the future.

How would you evaluate the relationship with the projects that contribute to Europeana?

Overall this is excellent. The projects work towards their own goals such as EFG delivering a film gateway and APEnet in creating a working relationship and standard across Archives in Europe while at the same time delivering content to Europeana.eu. The coordination of the work of the projects in Europeana does lead to an increase in management overhead in the Europeana Office and to some level of duplication, but without the projects much of the work being done would not be affordable. The distribution of responsibility over many projects is also an advantage as Europeana.eu becomes owned by all the projects and contributors. Some of the technology projects are real enablers for Europeana such as EuropeanaConnect and Assets, but also others such as PrestoPrime working on preservation of audio-visual material contribute enormously to the long term access of such content.

National Library
of the Netherlands
(KB).
Picture by
Maria Śliwińska

How sustainable is Europeana? Content comes from the projects, and a percentage of the costs of the office are covered by the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, but you need funds for operational activities and to assure its future. The Commission positions Europeana as its flagship initiative, but still has not made a decision on how to secure future funds for this initiative, and ones that are available have to be fought for in competition with other projects. Is there good news for the future?

Without the project set up we would not have had the ability to prove whether Europeana is worth it or not. Such an approach has similarities with investment funding: prove it works and the next stage will be funded. The ability to provide long term funding must rest on whether the user the taxpayer providing the funding thinks it's worthwhile, so at the same time as looking at ways to provide such funding the Commission should also consider the return on its investment. We are therefore working on the value propositions to the various stakeholders, from users to ministries, to show the worth of Europeana and therefore prove the case for future investment. Meanwhile the EU is looking at ways to provide such funding. We do know that we are assured of project funding through the end of 2013 based on winning funds in open competition. This I think is an achievement in itself.

As we said, Europeana gets content from the projects. Who decides what projects are important for Europeana and are funded?

This is done entirely by the European Commission, according to their established procedures. Europeana has no influence over the procedures of deciding what is funded or not. It can only suggest areas that the Commission might incorporate before it launches the call but it is up to the Commission to decide what is included. This can cause problems for strategy as projects that contribute to turning strategy into practice are not always funded, requiring Europeana to rethink how it can achieve certain goals.

What new projects would you like to see contributing to Europeana?

We really need some good User Generated Content pilots. This is difficult to manage at a European level with the multiplicity of languages involved. The other major area that needs development is redistribution of content. Europeana has spent the last 2 years ingesting content; the coming years should be about making enriched versions of that content available for reuse, particularly in educational areas.

And what about the old ones who contributed successfully, but completed the work funded by the EC? Do you have any ideas on how to convince the project coordinators to continue the work, and keep the network alive? And do you have any plans on how to convince the Commission to secure funds for that work?

Visit Europeana's Art Nouveau Virtual Exhibition
www.europeana.eu/exhibitions
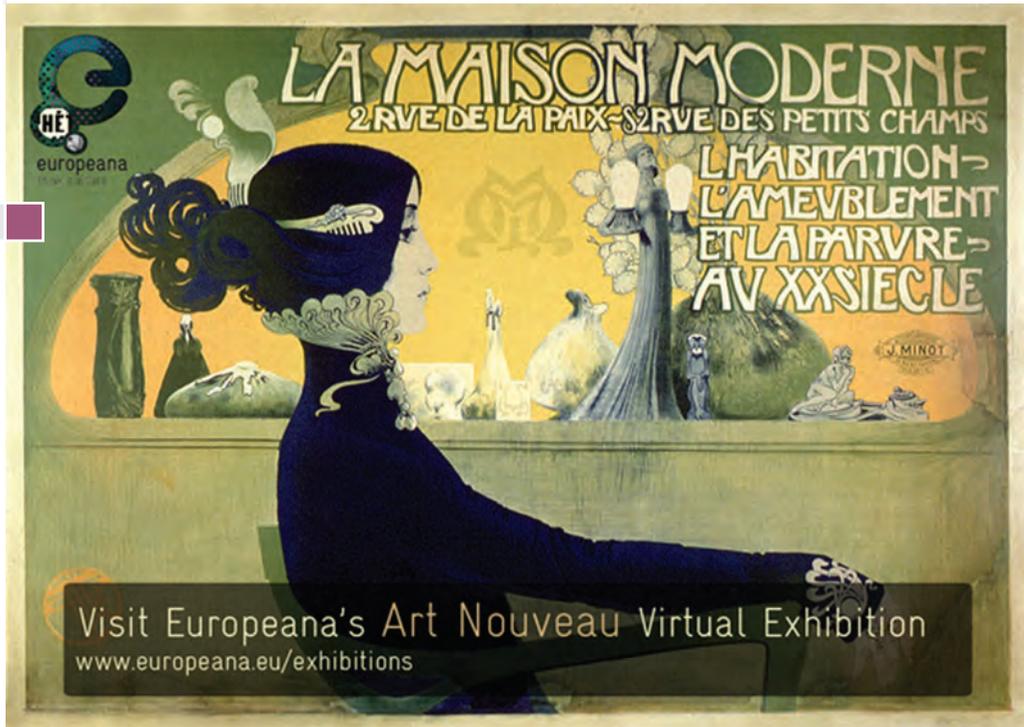
We are looking at creating a project that coordinates at national levels the long term sustainability of such content for the future. Meanwhile most content can find a home through the burgeoning network of national portals.

How do you see the future of Europeana?

As a fully distributed service, utilized by users in the context of their work or research and part of a family of service and information providers across Europe.

Thank you for this valuable information, congratulations on your achievements, and good luck with all further plans.

Maria Śliwińska

1. www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/portal/organisation/cooperation_old/archive/telproject_archive/telproject_archive.html
2. www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/portal/organisation/cooperation_old/archive/telproject_archive/telproject_archive.html
3. www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/portal/organisation/cooperation/fumagaba/
4. www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/portal/organisation/cooperation/archive/edlproject/
5. ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/digital_libraries/doc/letter_1/index_en.htm