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The library as a valued partner in Digital Humanities projects: The example of EuropeanaPhotography

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A wide selection of recent articles argues for an active involvement of libraries in Digital Humanities. This engagement would not only reflect the traditional role of libraries to support ongoing research, but would also provide the opportunity to re-envision their responsibilities and to create a space for research and development within their organisation. In our opinion, such an implementation of R&D in academic libraries is indeed essential to provide adequate support to digital scholarship. Digital projects also benefit greatly when they welcome the library as a full and valued partner. This point is illustrated through a discussion of EuropeanaPhotography, in which the KU Leuven (Belgium) acted as the coordinating partner.

The role of libraries in Digital Humanities (DH) has been discussed extensively in recent times. The weblog *dh+lib*, hosted by the *Association of College and Research Libraries* since 2012, offers reflections on this topic on an almost daily basis and the dedicated bibliography of Miriam Posner already listed more than 80 relevant publications when it was last updated in April 2013.[1] From this literature, it is clear that the question in most people's minds is not *whether* the library needs to join in the work of DH, but rather *how* the library should join.[2] The advice of Micah Vandegrift, Scholarly Communication Librarian at Florida State University, is therefore straightforward:

> Stop asking if the library has a role, or what it is, and start getting involved in digital projects that are already happening. Advocate for new expanded roles and responsibilities to be able to do this. Become producers/creators in collaboration with scholars rather than servants to them.[3]

This quote also illustrates another piece of advice offered in many publications concerning the role of libraries in DH, namely to be weary of narrowing the library's involvement to the provision of a service.[4] Instead, efforts should be made to create space, within the structure and workings of the library itself, for staff members to pursue their own digital research questions and to lead their own DH initiatives and projects (besides supporting those of academic staff). Perhaps the most vocal defender of this approach is Bethany Nowviskie, Director of Digital Research & Scholarship at the University of Virginia, who offers very convincing arguments for the creation of library-based DH "skunkworks" – i.e. semi-independent research-and-development labs staffed with librarians who act as scholar-practitioners.[5] Such a set-up is realized at the Scholars' Lab within the University of Virginia Library, which is committed to 'encourage tinkering and experimentation' and to 'foster a culture of R&D ... by providing and protecting time for staff to explore, experiment, and share'.[6] However, this should not be confused with unconditional freedom of research: staff members need to be able at all times to articulate the interest and value of their R&D activities and how these relate to the missions of their division, the library, and the university at large.

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In our opinion, R&D and service are complementary, rather than exclusive, in a library setting. Researchers frequently turn to the library for support in digital scholarship. If libraries want to avoid having to turn away most of these researchers, then they need to proactively garner competence, develop workflows, and prepare a (at the very least basic) digital infrastructure, which are thus already in place before a specific demand is expressed. In other words: the best way to prepare for future needs of research is by becoming forerunners in it, instead of lagging behind and desperately trying to keep up. In this way, libraries will – to use the words of Bethany Nowviskie again – 'set the conditions for the advancement of knowledge itself, through the fulfilment of research desires yet unknown, un-expressed'[7], which seems to us the best service which can be done to research.

Obviously, few libraries have money and staff to spare to set up full-blown R&D departments, but good will (both from the library's administration and from the researchers themselves) goes a long way to providing a context in which library staff feels encouraged and empowered to get actively involved in projects by accepting responsibility for work packages devoted to tasks which are traditionally expected of libraries and information professionals anyway, such as preservation, curation, discovery, dissemination and/or digitization.[8] These projects might be based on temporary funding, but they still enable libraries to make the necessary initial investment in a digital infrastructure and to support its staff in developing new competences, which remain available within the library after the project has come to an end.

Of course, reality still tends to cast its shadow. Miriam Posner, coordinator of the Digital Humanities programme at the University of California, discussed the various challenges to doing or supporting DH within the library and listed, as only some of the many hurdles, the "too many tasks, too little time" conundrum, lack of support for librarian-conceived initiatives, inflexible infrastructure, and a lack of incentive.[9] At the same time, however, she presented a heartening array of concrete examples of libraries and/or information professionals successfully facing these challenges.



Fig. 1. Holger Damgaard | 01/01/1908 The first image ever published in a Danish newspaper by a staff photographer (Holger Damgaard for the newspaper Politiken). © POLFOTO

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In what follows, we want to provide an additional example of a library's involvement in a specific DH endeavour, namely the contribution of KU Leuven (and its library) to EuropeanaPhotography.[10] The specific involvement of the library in this particular project may have been relatively modest (also because the consortium behind the project was extensive), but it still allowed the library to expand its digitization infrastructure and to deepen and broaden the skills of the staff members involved, and thus also enabled it to prepare for an even better service in the future.

EuropeanaPhotography was a Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP) EC funded project that aimed to provide at least 430,000 high-quality images of early photography to Europeana.[11] It ran from 1 February 2012 to 31 January 2015. The consortium consisted of 19 partner institutions, of which 4 had technical roles (technical coordinator Promoter S.r.l. for the administrative management, KMKG for metadata, NTUA for technical infrastructure and CRDI for digitization expertise), and 15 content providers, of which KU Leuven was the overall project coordinator.[12] The project was a typical digitization project, with core work packages devoted to digitization, metadata and ingestion. But there was also an important work package on content selection led by KU Leuven. The fact that the consortium hosted the most representative known collections on European early photography gave us the unique opportunity to grow a common understanding of what early photography is. This level of access would never be obtainable by an individual researcher. Of course, now that at least 430,000 images have been uploaded to Europeana, also the research community now has the means to have a more comprehensive overview.

The first effort involved set-up procedures for content selection. It centred around the notion of "masterpieces" in photography. Those could be single photographs, but also unique collections. Good examples of the latter are the works of Karl Heinrich Lämmel,[13] a hitherto unknown German photographer whose works were discovered by partner United Archives and digitized for the project,[14] and KU Leuven's own "educational" collection of photo reproductions of artworks, which shows, when taken as a whole, a definition of what was then considered to be the art canon.

A broad notion of Europe was used as well as, for example, testimonies to the European colonial era. The timeframe was set at the first hundred years of photography, 1839 (which is the invention of the Talbot and Daguerreotype process) to 1939. Of course, also the works of famous photographers and those who helped photography move on were eligible. But the first and foremost criterion was "the eye of the beholder": it had to be a good photograph.

As said, the project involved a lot of ICT expertise as well; more particularly concerning the digitization process, the metadata enrichment and finally the ingestion into Europeana. Digitization was a main effort calculated at about 6 Euros/image. Workshops were run to set-up correct procedures, acquire the necessary hardware and to define protocols. Those were published in publicly available factsheets.[15] For the metadata enrichment, the consortium first selected those metadata of the Europeana data model that would be used by the consortium. Then, we developed a multilingual thesaurus of photographic terms that we could use to describe the photos. Partners had to map their in-house metadata to the EuropeanaPhotography metadata scheme. This was done with the Mapping Internationalization (MINT) tool, which uses a Lightweight Information Describing Objects (LIDO) intermediate metadata scheme that then is translated to the Europeana EDM.[16] Finally, the ingestion process into Europeana proved cumbersome, and involves a lot of manual interventions. This slowed down our publication rate, but we were able nonetheless to reach our goals. During ingestion Europeana performs a lot of useful checks on the data to assess their quality and consistence.

Besides these relatively obvious tasks, EuropeanaPhotography also addressed a number of topics which typically involve libraries and/or archives.

Preservation

Many archives and libraries struggle with a wealth of donations and legacies, which are stored but require extensive cataloguing work before they can be accessed by researchers and enter a correct preservation roadmap. Since EuropeanaPhotography was eager to unearth hitherto unavailable material, many of the collections digitized were in this pre-processing state. This meant that the consortium set up correct procedures from the start for preservation to make sure that the original prints and glass plates were stored adequately once the digitization work for EuropeanaPhotography was completed.

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Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)

During the course of the project EuropeanaPhotography, Europeana shifted its attitude towards rights labels, which created new IPR and sustainability challenges for the project. In the second semester of 2013, Europeana launched its *Rights labelling campaign*, seeking to enforce rights statements on all ingested images.[17] Europeana typically provides a list of available labels, in part based on Creative Commons licenses and supposed to address all situations with regards to copyright & reuse of the images. Together with Creative Commons, it also developed the Public Domain Mark for works that are considered to be in the Public Domain.[18] The motivation for this program is a shift in Europeana's mission: it wants to become a self-sufficient reuse platform rather than a simple display portal. The platform should encourage new creative reuse of the content accessed through Europeana. In scenarios where this access and reuse is partly automated, such as in applications that would integrate this content, it is important that software developers have an easy way to determine which content is freely available for (commercial) reuse. Since many of the existing items in Europeana were indeed mislabelled in respect to their rights status, and therefore could not be easily integrated into re-use programs, Europeana decided to enforce a control on the labelling at the input side.

For a consortium as diverse as EuropeanaPhotography, of which one of the strengths is that it gathers organizations of very different forms and with a range of differing core missions such as universities, photo agencies, museums and archives, united by the common goal of caring for photographic heritage, it was not possible to have a one-fits-all solution for the rights. It was decided accordingly that the choice of the rights labels would remain with every partner, and would not be made or enforced at the consortium level. Some of the core issues were:

(1) The PDM mark. The Public Domain Mark developed jointly by Europeana and Creative Commons is a label meant to identify works that are established to be in the Public Domain. This is a radical departure of "classic" creative commons labels, such as CC0, which always involves a dedication by the author.[19] In the case of using a classic Creative Commons label, the author or rights holder gives to others a license for use, or dedicates the work to the Public Domain. In the case of the PDM Mark however, we are in a situation that no one holds the rights, since the work is considered to be in the Public Domain already. There are publicly available tools provided, such as outofcopyright.eu, to try to assess whether a work is in the Public Domain.[20] However, legal complexities and differences in jurisdictions mean these tools have to be used with great care and reservation.

While many providers are reluctant to use the PDM mark – in some cases while the original donors of the materials stipulated that no commercial reuse should be made – the beneficial effects of an 'Open' policy were notable as in the case of the Lithuanian Arts Museums.

(2) OOC-NC.[21] Simultaneously with the launch of the rights labelling campaign, Europeana introduced, a new label, tagged OOC-NC, for Out Of Copyright – No Commercial Reuse. As it happens, this is a solution for those libraries and archives that have made an agreement with private groups, which gives the private partner an exclusive copyright for a specific duration in exchange for making the digitization investment. In effect, this deal structure was mostly used over the past few years by Google.

In our many contacts with (smaller) archives we notice a great willingness to share content with Europeana, but on condition there would not be any commercial reuse. Many archives contain donations of private collections, where the owner wanted to keep family heritage preserved for the community, but where they would absolutely not want to see the photos of their grandparents used in commercial advertising or other business activities.

(3) Orphan works. The European Orphan Works directive just does not provide sufficient legal cover for handling Orphan Works, and at the time of the project was not yet implemented or at least implemented very differently in the member states.[22] It also does not apply to individual images, focusing rather on images in books. Having no protection for the publishing of works without a known author exposes Europeana contributors in some countries to claims by collecting societies that want to represent the unknown author and charge copyrights. Since contributions to Europeana remain on the infrastructure of the provider, it is the contributing provider who faces all risks. The fact that it becomes possible, through the rights labels, to search for such works on Europeana increases the risk, since the research work of the collecting societies is greatly simplified.

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Exhibitions

From the more than 430,000 images uploaded to Europeana, a sample was used to make a travelling exhibition of reprints. We selected about 120 images under the theme *The City Lives/The Living City*, focussing more on aesthetics than on historical relevance or completeness, since we wanted it to be first and foremost a *photography* exhibition, not a *history of* photography exhibition. The exhibition ran in the spring of 2014 at the Palazzo Lanfranchi in Pisa – where it attracted over 5000 visitors –, then in the winter of 2015 in Leuven, Belgium, to move to Copenhagen in the early summer of 2015.[23]

In the exhibition, we show large reprints, mostly based on the glass plate when it was available, rather than on the vintage print. In the case of the exhibition, most of the selected images were silver gelatine dry plates. These contain such a depth of information that we were able to produce razor-sharp, exceptionally crisp images with a very wide dynamic range. We printed on cotton paper, in several large formats such as 70x60cm or 100x90cm. It should be noted that these reprints largely exceed the print quality available at that time, whether it was albumen print or silver gelatine print, although certainly the latter already provided an excellent quality level. The magnification also alters the experience of the photo, and brings the people pictured eerily alive. While this approach could place us at odds with historians and purists who for very understandable and defensible reasons would prefer to see the "real" historic prints, it allows us to show the impact of digitization: the glass plate holds, from an information theoretic point of view, much more information than the original print.

The exhibitions also stress the importance of "going live" with digital products and not to limit their presence to the online environment. The fact that a travelling exhibition comes to a museum near you certainly adds a directness to Europeana.

Longevity beyond the project

EuropeanaPhotography will live on through Photoconsortium, a membership association for the promotion and enhancement of the culture of photography and photographic heritage.[24] To achieve its statutory goals, Photoconsortium aims to promote, organize and manage conferences, exhibitions, awards and training courses as well as to carry out publishing activities.

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