



Cultural heritage and the social sciences: the European perspective

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Abstract:

The European library landscape is evolving within the context of a Europe of many languages, cultures, religions, political and economic systems. There is a growing trend for European researchers within the social sciences to collaborate at a pan-European level, using new approaches and participating in larger, more interdisciplinary teams. Surveys are increasingly international and cross-national data is now being collected across the European continent, for example.

The paper outlines two pan-European cultural heritage projects, The European Library and Europeana, within the context of a growing pan-European research focus of social science communities.

European social science landscape

European research programmes and projects in the social sciences may be based within the European Union¹ of 27 countries or the wider Council of Europe². The Council of Europe is based in Strasbourg in France, covers virtually the entire European continent and has 47 member countries. Founded in 1949 by 10 countries, the Council is active in the areas of development of Europe's cultural identity and diversity, to protect human rights, pluralist democracy and the rule of law.

Sir Alan Wilson, author of a British Academy report *Punching our weight: the humanities and social sciences in public policy making*³, argues for a "CERN for social scientists" – "large numbers of researchers, with access to huge databases, cooperating to solve policy

¹ http://europa.eu/index_en.htm

² <http://www.coe.int/>

³ *Punching our weight: the humanities and the social sciences in public policy making*, British Academy, 2008 (<http://www.britac.ac.uk/reports/wilson/contents.cfm>)

problems”⁴. However, the current landscape is often one of fragmentation and a myriad of different initiatives. There are many groups and programmes active in the area of European social sciences and a few are mentioned here, some strategic and visionary, others focused on practical projects such as the creation of pan-European datasets.

The role of the European Science Foundation⁵ is to expand the capacity of European research to provide answers to issues raised by rapid social change. It is an association of 80 member organisations undertaking scientific research in 30 European countries, founded in 1974. Its core purpose is to promote quality science at a European level and to coordinate a wide range of pan-European scientific initiatives. The social sciences take part in European Collaborative Research Programmes⁶, which support research synergies across a number of countries. The ESF Research Networking Programmes⁷ organise and support networking activities to bring together key research groups at European level to share knowledge and expertise, develop new techniques and train young researchers.

GlobalEuroNet⁸ (Globalizing Europe Economic History Network) is an example of a research programme supported by the ESF and will run until 2010. Economic historians are working together on issues with a Europe-wide, comparative perspective. The programme is based on the cooperation of research teams from 14 European countries (Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Portugal and Turkey).

The European Research Area⁹ was established in 2000 by the European Commission. Its aim was to enable researchers to move and interact seamlessly, to benefit from the highest-quality infrastructures and to work with networks of first-class research institutions. The intention was very much to foster strong links with partners around the world so that Europe might also benefit from the worldwide progress of knowledge and could take an international role in initiatives to solve global issues. The European Research Council¹⁰ supports and funds research across all fields of scholarship, including the social sciences and humanities.

The European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI)¹¹ seeks to develop high quality European research infrastructures. Its 2008 Roadmap summarises the major challenge as harmonising the production and access to data, based on shared standards:

Yesterday’s answer to these challenges [of nation-specific data and access] would probably have been formulated in terms of centralisation and the establishment of large-scale European-wide institutions. Today’s answers should rather focus on standardisation, the power of emerging information and communication technologies, harmonisation of data access restrictions and strengthening of and collaboration among already established groups and organisations engaged in the development of the European Research Area. Concerted efforts on a European scale are needed to bring about necessary changes. The project Europeana can be seen as an example in this context¹².

⁴ Wanted: a CERN for social scientists, The Guardian, 16th September 2008 (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/sep/16/cribsheet?gusrc=rss>)

⁵ <http://www.esf.org/>

⁶ <http://www.esf.org/activities/eurocores.html>

⁷ <http://www.esf.org/activities/research-networking-programmes.html>

⁸ <http://www.esf-globaleuronet.org/>

⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/index_en.html

¹⁰ <http://erc.europa.eu/>

¹¹ <http://cordis.europa.eu/esfri/>

¹² ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/esfri/docs/esfri_roadmap_2008_update_20090123.pdf

There are examples of national research centres working together on European social science initiatives. ECASS (The European Centre for Analysis in the Social Sciences)¹³ is a research infrastructure for European research and data analysis. NESSIE¹⁴ (Network of Economic and Social Science Infrastructures in Europe), is a cooperation network of four major European social science research centres, in the UK, German, Norway and Luxembourg. It was launched in 2001, with the aim of addressing some of the barriers that exist within Europe to undertaking comparative research.

There are also examples of European research data aggregation. CESSDA¹⁵ (Council of Europe Social Science Data Archive) is an umbrella organisation for social science data archives across Europe. Since the 1970s, members have worked together to improve access to data for researchers. CESSDA serves more than 30,000 social science and humanities researchers and students within the European Research Area each year, providing access to 25,000 data collections, delivering over 70,000 data collections per annum and acquiring a further 1,000 data collections each year. The CESSDA Catalogue¹⁶ enables users to locate datasets, as well as questions or variables within datasets, stored at CESSDA archives throughout Europe. Data collections include sociological surveys, election studies, longitudinal studies, opinion polls and census data. Among the materials are international and European data such as the European Social Survey¹⁷, the Eurobarometers¹⁸, and the International Social Survey Programme¹⁹.

CLARIN (Common Language Resources and Technology Infrastructure)²⁰ aims to provide a gateway to language resources and language issues related to migration. The tools and resources will be interoperable across languages and domains. The project will contribute to preserving and supporting multilingual European heritage.

There is interesting work on e-research in the humanities and social sciences under way in Europe. One excellent example is the Virtual Knowledge Studio of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences²¹, which “supports researchers in the humanities and social sciences in the Netherlands in the creation of new scholarly practices and in their reflection on e-research in relation to their fields”.

Let us now turn to European initiatives in the library and cultural heritage domains.

The European Library: gateway to Europe’s national libraries

The European Library²² is a success story of how Europe’s national libraries have worked together to provide a single gateway to their catalogues and digital collections. It is a completely free service that offers access to the resources of 48 national libraries in Europe. Resources can be both digital (they include books, posters, maps, sound recordings, videos and more) and bibliographical.

The European Library service has a global audience and is for anyone worldwide seeking library material. It provides a vast virtual collection of materials from all disciplines and offers visitors ease of access to European cultural and scientific resources.

¹³ <http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/research/ecass>

¹⁴ <http://www.nessie-essex.co.uk/>

¹⁵ <http://www.cessda.org/>

¹⁶ <http://www.cessda.org/accessing/catalogue/>

¹⁷ <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>

¹⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm

¹⁹ <http://www.issp.org/>

²⁰ <http://www.clarin.eu/>

²¹ <http://www.virtualknowledgestudio.nl/index.php>

²² <http://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org>

The 48 European national libraries participating in The European Library are all members of the Conference of European National Librarians (CENL)²³, a foundation aimed at increasing and reinforcing the role of national libraries in Europe. All libraries are member-states of the Council of Europe.

The European Library service was developed with funding from the European Commission²⁴ and went live in March 2005. Since then, a number of innovation projects have been co-funded by the Commission and CENL.

The main objective for The European Library was that partners would gain a significant new route to end users and an additional showcase for their collections, products and services. The European Library enabled integrated search and discovery of resources across multiple European national libraries. A further benefit was that The European Library would provide a co-operative framework for innovation in metadata, interoperability and other technical areas.

The European Library is multilingual. It is now available in over 30 languages of the Council of Europe. Online user guides are available in a number of languages and a video version, currently available in English, will be launched in other European languages. At the same time, there has been significant research into multilingual searching.

The introduction of an online exhibition space²⁵ in July 2007 has been one of the successes of The European Library. It is now the most visited area of the portal. It provides an opportunity for libraries to showcase their collections. The latest exhibition shows maps, manuscripts, images and texts of the Napoleonic Wars from the collections of the national libraries of Spain, Portugal, France, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Denmark, the Netherlands and Serbia.

Innovation is the key to the future of The European Library service. In future, we aim to extend membership to major research libraries in Europe, working closely with LIBER²⁶ and CERL²⁷. The European Library also seeks to offer value-added services to its target user groups, specifically, the academic and research communities. The European Library has now become the libraries aggregator for Europeana.

Europeana²⁸: “think culture”

In April 2005, the premiers of France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Poland and Hungary sent a letter to José Barroso, President of the European Commission, recommending the creation of a virtual European library that would make Europe’s cultural heritage accessible to all:

The heritage held in Europe’s libraries is of unequalled richness and diversity. It exemplifies the universal outlook of a continent which, throughout its long history, has been in constant dialogue with the wider world. However, if it is not digitised and made accessible online, this heritage will not occupy its rightful place in the future knowledge landscape²⁹.

Since Google and Microsoft had announced a programme to digitise the printed word, in partnership with a number of libraries, there was concern in many parts of Europe that the project would be directed towards Anglophone content and that the large-scale digitisation

²³ <http://www.cenl.org/>

²⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/index_en.htm

²⁵ <http://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/exhibition/>

²⁶ <http://www.libereurope.eu/>

²⁷ <http://www.cerl.org/web/>

²⁸ <http://www.europeana.eu/portal/>

²⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/digital_libraries/doc/letter_1/index_en.htm

plans of the commercial companies would transfer significant amounts of public-domain resources into the private sector.

The European Commission's strategy, *i2010: communication on digital libraries*³⁰, was published in September 2005. The strategy announced the creation of a European digital library as a key goal of the European *Information Society i2010* initiative³¹, which aimed to foster the growth of the information society and media industries. This received support from the Council of Ministers³² and European Parliament³³.

The heritage organisations of Europe digitised tens of millions of significant images, films, photographs, sounds, newspapers, manuscripts, texts and archival records. Europeana sets out to be a single gateway to these digitised resources held in collections across Europe. The idea was to create a space in which Europe's cultural and scientific heritage could be connected and integrated within a single, multilingual portal. It would include resources from museums, libraries, archives and audio-visual collections.

In order to take things forward, the Conference of European National Libraries, through its service, The European Library, applied for project funding. The experience of pan-European working, the international team, the proven infrastructure and the base in the National Library of the Netherlands, gave it the foundation on which to develop the European digital library project.

The project that would begin the building of Europeana was called EDLnet, funded with €1.3million from the European Commission.

The project's first tasks were to create a legal entity, called EDL Foundation³⁴, under which to develop the service and employ staff. The board of EDL Foundation included international associations across the major domains. Cross-domain interoperability across libraries, museums, archives and audio-visual collections was a founding principle.

The remit of the project was to build a proof-of-concept prototype of a cross-border, cross-domain user-centred service. This had to be launched by November 2008 and provide access to at least 2 million digital items. The interface had to be available in the 23 official languages of the European Union, plus Catalan and Icelandic.

One of the important decisions that was taken early in Europeana's development was to create a surrogate of the digital object that would comprise, in its simplest form, a set of metadata, a small image or thumbnail of the digital object and a URI, a persistent identifier that would link to the full resolution digital object on the provider's web site. This means that within Europeana, users explore the surrogate only.

Europeana.eu went live on 20 November 2008, launched by Viviane Reding, European Commissioner for Information Society and Media.

Europeana will receive €2 million a year in 2009-2011, with member states, cultural institutions and the private sector gradually increasing their share of the funding as the project develops. In addition, a cluster of projects has been funded to develop technology and services for Europeana and to digitise and provide content to the portal. This is mainly done through domain aggregators that collect content in museums, archives, libraries and

³⁰ http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/information_society/l24226i_en.htm

³¹ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/eeurope/i2010/index_en.htm

³² <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/>

³³ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/>

³⁴ http://dev.europeana.eu/edlnet/edl_foundation/purpose.php

the audio-visual sector. Some will create their own portals. Between them, these aggregators will help Europeana reach its targets of 10 million items by 2010 and 25 million by 2012.

Europeana builds on the success of The European Library. Both projects are based at the National Library of the Netherlands³⁵. Europeana builds on the project management and technical expertise developed by The European Library.

Interoperability is at the heart of what Europeana is doing: integrating format types across national boundaries, across domains and between institutions. Delivering content into a shared online space requires a commitment to collaborative working and sharing knowledge across long-established professional boundaries.

Europeana will give people the opportunity to tag books, paintings, films and sounds. There will be specific fields in which people can add terms to the metadata. This social tagging will complement the structured and standardised metadata.

The Europeana metadata standard builds on the Dublin Core standardisation efforts. We are compiling guidelines to help contributors make their metadata Europeana-compliant. This usually implies mapping the institution's metadata to Europeana's broad schema. Europeana harvests the contributor's metadata using the OAI-PMH protocol, along with a uniform resource identifier (URI). This is a link to the digital object which must remain persistent over time. We require this URI to link to the object on the holding institution's website. Europeana works by creating a central index of all harvested metadata.

Content providers to Europeana include:

- **Archives Portal Europe**³⁶: a central reference point for the national archives of Europe, which will bring together 16 million multilevel descriptions of archival fonds and documents, together with 31 million digitised archival objects
- **Athena**³⁷: an aggregator for museum content
- **Biodiversity Heritage Library Europe**: this will bring together museums, botanical gardens and other natural history collections
- **EU Screen**: focusing on television collections, stills and associated documentation
- **European Film Gateway**³⁸: creating access to film, posters, scores, scripts and stills
- **Europeana Local**³⁹: focusing on regional libraries, museums and archives

More about The European Library, Europeana and the social sciences

The European Library and the National Library of Serbia are collaborating on an ambitious project that aims at creating a pan-European bibliography of Romani language publications and a virtual collection of Romani digitised materials from across Europe⁴⁰. The aims of the European Romani Digital Collection are to provide free access to Romani language resources as part of the European written heritage, to contribute to knowledge of the language of Europe's biggest minority group and to promote multilingualism and understanding of the diversity of European life and culture. In September 2009, an online exhibition will showcase this digital content and provide context from an expert curator, alongside a physical exhibition at the National Library of Serbia.

³⁵ <http://www.kb.nl/index-en.html>

³⁶ <http://www.apenet.eu/index.php>

³⁷ <http://www.athenaeurope.org/index.php?en/1/home>

³⁸ <http://www.europeanfilmgateway.eu/>

³⁹ <http://www.europeanalocal.eu/>

⁴⁰ <http://romi.nb.rs/>

JUDAICA (Jewish Urban Digital European Integrated Cultural Archive) has as its main goal to document the Jewish presence in European cities and the contribution of Jews to European urban civilisation and culture. JUDAICA will work with European cultural institutions to identify content demonstrating the Jewish contribution to the cities of Europe. It will digitise 10,500 photos, 1,500 postcards and 7,150 recordings as well as several million pages from books, newspapers, archives and press clippings.

EuropeanaTravel⁴¹ will digitise over a million resources, including maps, manuscripts, photographs, films, books and postcards on the themes of travel, tourism, trade routes and exploration. It will digitise rich collections from many national and research libraries in Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

Some examples of material to be digitised under EuropeanaTravel include the collections of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies Library at University College London⁴², which includes nearly 300 printed travel accounts dating from 1557 to 1860 and over 200 historic maps, some dating back to the 16th century.

Trinity College Library Dublin⁴³ is contributing two collections. The first is travel journals from the late 18th to mid-19th centuries, documenting the travels of individuals and families. The other is the papers of Major Richard William George Hingston (1887-1966), with records of his scientific trips to Greenland and Pamir, his trips to Africa for the preservation of African fauna and information on the ill-fated 1924 Everest expedition.

The National Library of Wales⁴⁴ is digitising its fine collection of over 500 drawing volumes, which contain a wide variety of material and include landscapes of Wales, as well as pictures of Britain, Europe and Asia. There are numerous examples of drawings of castles, great houses, ruins and churches that give us an accurate record of how an area looked at a particular point in time.

By uniting travel materials from different European countries, the social and cultural atlas of Europe will be greatly augmented. EuropeanaTravel allows researchers access to materials showing economic migration, ancient trade routes and population movements.

The future

A prime objective of The European Library is to maximise the value of its services to Europe's research communities, as well as global research teams working on European issues. As well as the discovery and sharing of content, it should enable scholars to collaborate throughout the research cycle, linking content and collections to research activities in Europe. The services will facilitate European-wide research, beyond national and institutional boundaries, through the development of common standards for shared content, tools and services. The role of e-research and e-social sciences will therefore become increasingly important to the development of The European Library and of Europeana.

⁴¹ <http://www.europeanatravel.eu/>

⁴² <http://www.ssees.ac.uk/libarch.htm>

⁴³ <http://www.tcd.ie/Library/>

⁴⁴ <http://www.llgc.org.uk/>