European Cultural Commons

Europeana Foundation
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Purpose and scope of this document

A commons is a set of resources, collectively shared by a defined community. The community enjoys mutual goals, interests and values, and establishes the rules and norms by which the community and its resources are managed.

Over the past five years, Europeana has built an infrastructure that connects over 40 million objects from more than 3,500 cultural institutions, making the metadata interoperable and the content as freely available as possible for creative re-use. In delivering its new strategy (2015-2020), Europeana will grow into a digital services platform, bringing together people, institutions and businesses from a variety of sectors, contributing a blend of skills and interests. Their shared vision is to transform the world with culture.

The idea of Europeana as a cultural commons began as a grassroots initiative in 2011 and has been developed through the Europeana Network. This work comes to fruition in the Europeana Strategy 2015-2020, where commons principles are being applied to a reformed governance structure, a cloud-based infrastructure and end-user community-based channels.

Europeana commons principles

The outcome of the work done by the Cultural Commons Advisory Board was a set of commons principles, which were adopted by the Europeana Network at the AGM at the end of 2012:

Mutuality - Create a community of organizations and individuals, based on the principle of achieving mutual benefit, acting in good faith and presuming it on behalf of others

Access - Provide a set of high-quality re-usable content, tools and services to enable creativity and innovation

Attribution - Commit to the principle of respecting rights through acknowledgement and attribution

Consistency - Build on the existing values and principles of our sector

Engagement - Commit, as members of the community, proactively to use the commons and to contribute to it

Implementation

Culture is a shared resource of a community or group, which grows in value as people adopt it. In the cultural heritage sector, we are evolving from an analogue world, where the production of works is highly centralised, to a digital world of constantly changing output that can be reproduced and distributed easily. This has led to the growth of online collaborative platforms, where people gather around shared values and interests, and physical distance is no longer a barrier. It is no longer traditionally top-down, but rather a bottom-up, freer movement that is non-hierarchical and decentralised.

Cultural heritage institutions can facilitate and be part of this process. However, the challenge is to build bridges with these new and dynamic communities, establishing trust and being part of the co-creation process. At the same time, we need to be aware that new technologies can pose a risk to the commons, through the imposition of intellectual property controls. Even a cloudbased infrastructure can be a form of anti-commons if ownership of its design and management is highly centralized. We should think instead of a broad-based movement of user-innovator communities, with cultural institutions and Europeana acting as catalysts.

The Europeana Network Association can help to build commons-like thinking through trust, reciprocity, voluntary collective action, and commitment. The result is a culturally-connected Europe. A cultural commons.

Help us transform the world with culture.

For more information about European Cultural Commons and to send us your feedback on this paper, please contact Ylva Klaassen: Ylva.Klaasen@Europeana.eu

Connecting Europe Facility