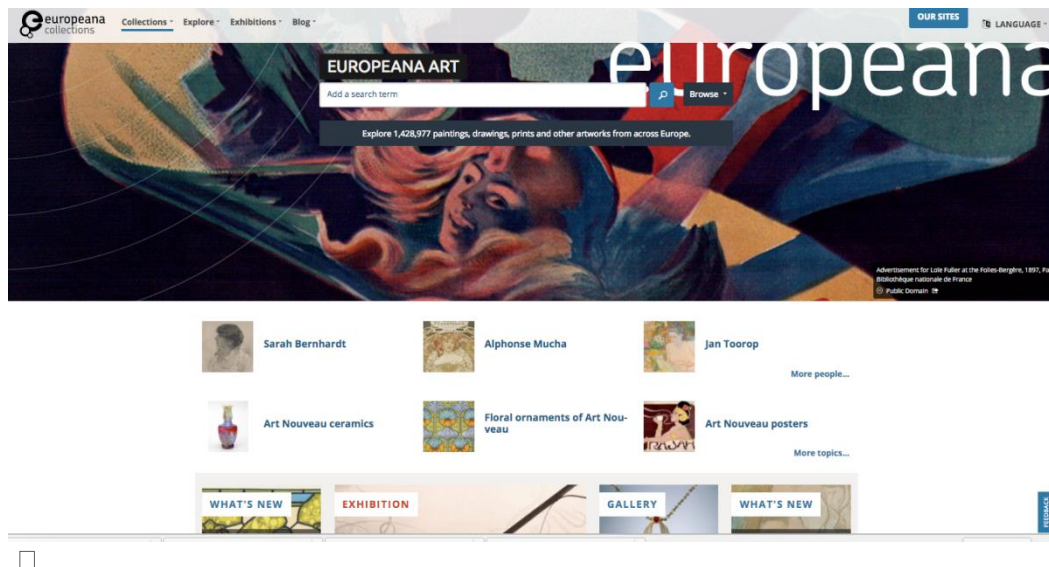




Europeana Foundation Governing Board Meeting

15 June 2017
16h30 – 18h00 CEST
Teleconference

A proposal to deliver non-curated and multiple thematic collections
Action proposed: For information and discussion



1. Executive Summary

- Thematic collections as currently conceived are labour intensive and burden the shrinking funding for Europeana
- Advisory Boards work on a voluntary basis as do joint exhibitions but full curation by external partners requires funding in addition to the coordination role played by Europeana Foundation.
- A change to automatically generated collections will increase exponentially the numbers we can produce. It will also:
 - improve user traction, search engine indexing, perception of relevance
 - Attract more and better content from CHI's





- Increase the ability for CHI's to use their curation skills on very specific areas without overburdening them.
- A change in the concept of generic collections from fully curated experiences to partially or voluntarily curated is required for sustainability.
- The delivery of pan-European collections is rarely part of the mission of Cultural Heritage Institutions or Member States and therefore not funded.
- There is a need to show cross border collaboration in the spirit of Europeana but within specific subjects that have known actual and potential audiences.
- Support for domain thematic collections should be reduced to platform technology provision, curation should be voluntary.

2. Introduction

Just over a year after publishing the new Europeana Collections platform with two thematic collections (Art and Music) we have only been able to grow the number of thematic collections to three. In themselves they have been successful, attracting and retaining new audiences and are building better traffic statistics than the full Europeana Collections can or will. However scalability is an issue and with current planning we should reach 6 by the beginning of 2018 at which point resource constraints will prohibit further growth.

The idea of dedicated, funded, curatorial/editorial resources managed by institutions outside of the Europeana Foundation is not working. Once projects funding the thematic collection end the burden to support them falls on the core service. Examples of this include Europeana Fashion, Sounds and Photography. New propositions are not forthcoming from MS. Additionally, in the last Generic Services call the response was poor from CHI or MS to deliver pan European Collections.

We can solve many of these issues by moving to more automated generation of collections while continuing to work on lighter levels of MS and Cultural Heritage Institution participation.

3. Analysis of current positioning

The implicit and explicit principles of the current positioning that are problematic are:

- A thematic collection can only be created if there are dedicated resources (=staff, money) to create curated content that matches the theme
- A thematic collection can only be created if there are dedicated resources (editorial marketing, promotion) to update the thematic collections landing pages and plan and perform promotion and marketing campaigns
- A thematic collection can only be created if the above two activities can be funded and sustained for multiple years
- Creating pan-European collections is not in the missions of either Cultural Heritage Institutions or MS.
- Institutions do (and are happy to) help in the curation of exhibitions and we have some strong Advisory Boards in place that contribute time and energy to the attracting of relevant audiences and encouraging high quality content.



3.1 Consequences

Given shrinking DSI-resources and the already proven lack of partner willingness to curate thematic collections without getting funding to do so the likely consequence of this will be that in 2020 Europeana will have exactly as many thematic collections as it can pay for via DSI money. We estimate this to be at maximum of 9 or 10 collections with further consequences on our end-user and PR/marketing teams who will not have organisational bandwidth to do anything else.

The long-term, by 2020, consequence of having such a small number of thematic collections will be that:

- The perception of Europeana in our markets and among our stakeholders will change from that of Europeana being a broad collection of all types of cultural heritage to one that is only about the 9 themes. We are already suffering a bit with the idea that Europeana is 1914-1918 or Art. That means:
 - Users, coming in via Search Engine Results Pages and referrals, interested in other themes than the ones on the menu will not see their interest reflected in Europeana and will to a lesser degree convert to returning direct users.
 - Data partners whose collections don't match well with any of the 9 themes will not be motivated to:
 - Upgrade their data in Europeana to Tier 2+ as Europeana won't be featuring/surfacing their content anyway
 - Or possibly to provide data at all, whatever the Tier. Why should e.g. a Science and Technology Museum provide data to Europeana when Europeana is not featuring that type of content? Or a library that does not have newspaper collections? Etc.
- We will be operating a platform designed and developed to quickly and in a scalable manner create multiple vertical search portals and thus improve the user top task of discovery (ie search and browse), but not actually using it to do so or gain any economies of scale.

3.2 SWOT-analysis

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Integrates search with curation and curation with search• Rates well with users (stickiness, satisfaction)*<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Search within the thematic collections has a better search experience (relevancy, quality of results)*• Has (for Art) worked well in recruiting new data partners who match the themes and for data partners to upgrade existing data to Tier 2*	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Generic services call a potential funding source for very ambitious curation of content that could be completely focused on real curation: exhibitions, galleries, playlists, etc.• We have external partners who say they want to help curate thematic collections
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Weaknesses	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scales very poorly and only with great effort/cost* - a thematic collection can be created in hours but takes years to actually publish and we can't afford more than about 7• Due to the small number of themes they do not showcase well the unique breadth of coverage (topical, geographical, domain) that Europeana has*• Due to the small number of themes many data partners don't see their own collections having a match in the small number of themes we have/plan and thus see little point in going to Tier 2*. The thematic collections thus do not contribute to the 2020 strategic goal of 80% Tier 2 content as much as they could• Landing page "curation" does not enthuse or play to intrinsic motivation of data partners*• Generic service response to creating thematic collections was very low	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Users can get the wrong impression of the topical/thematic coverage of Europeana: they see 3(-5) collections and there's a risk they think that's all there is*• Partners with their own portals feel constrained by having to follow shared templates and being limited to shared features

*SWOT-analysis of current thematic collections policy in practice. The Strengths marked with * will all be further reinforced by having more thematic collections available to users. The weaknesses and threats marked with a * are the ones the semi-automated landing page feature aims to mitigate or eliminate.*

4. Proposed solution

Return to the original product concept of thematic collections as primarily being tools to improve discovery.

Enthusiasm for the concept of Thematic Collections and the drive to create the Art Collection, to encourage more and greater participation by Art Galleries and Museums together with articles 14 and 18 of [Council Conclusions](#):

14. to better reach and engage end-users, content shared through Europeana needs to be presented in attractive and diverse ways, in particular by involving cultural heritage institutions and third parties as multiple entry and dissemination points, for example through cultural transEuropean projects such as the projects on World War I (1914-1918) and the fall of the Iron Curtain and other revolutionary events of 1989;

18. [...] It should also be strengthened through the realisation of cultural and user-oriented projects that build on the Europeana infrastructure, and which are to be co-financed under the CEF as generic services with the involvement of cultural heritage institutions and other public and private parties;

led to Europeana Thematic Collections being implemented with heavier editorial input than originally intended and a belief that MS could be more active in their development.



We therefore think that to improve the quality of user experience for more users and to make ourselves an attractive publication platform to more data partners we should return to the original automated discovery-centric concept of the thematic collections that positioned *curated content and dedicated promotion as desirable, but not mandatory*. This will require some more development resources to perfect the automatic generation of tiles, news, galleries and browse entry points that can be multiplied across the collections allowing the “editorial” input to be much less.

The following benefits can be foreseen:

1. With more thematic collections a wider group of and thus more users will gain the benefits of searching and browsing within themes that have been curated to contain the best of our objects within them. Having them will make it easier for users to understand in the first place that Europeana has content that matches their thematic interest and the perceived search relevancy will go up.
2. With more thematic collections a wider group of and thus more data partners will feel motivated to upgrade their datasets to Tier 2+. As they know that their content will be featured in a thematic collection.
3. With more data partners having Tier 2+ content that matches thematic collections, we could encourage CHI's to create pan European virtual exhibitions to compliment their in house physical offerings, making us of the Europeana exhibitions platform.
4. With more data partners with Tier 2+ content we will have more content available for use in Education, Research and Creative Industries. The users from those markets will also benefit from improved discovery (see point 1).

4.1 Projected/Potential 2017 and 2018 outcomes

If we invest in this repositioning we can quickly increase the number of thematic collections we have available.

By end of 2017 Europeana Collections has the following thematic collections published: Music, Art, Fashion, [Photography](#), [WW1](#), [Performing arts](#), [Natural history](#), [Maps & Cartography](#), [Indian arts and culture](#), [Chinese arts and culture](#), [Japanese arts and culture](#), [Migration](#), [Newspapers](#), [Open Collections/Educational Collections](#) and [Judaica](#) for a total of 15.

To be followed in 2018 by Archaeology and Ancient Cultures, Architecture and Built heritage, Religion, Science and Technology, Literature, [Food and Drink](#) and Sport for a total of 21. Islamic arts and culture, African arts and culture, and Native American arts and culture, may also be added which would bring the total to 25.

Thematic collections for [Film](#) and TV would be goals for 2018 but this is dependent on reaching agreements with EUScreen and EFG. Folding them in would bring the total to 27.

In parallel all the thematic collections performance will be monitored with possible modifications and even de-publication following the performance analysis.

With up to 27 thematic collections (if they all pass evaluation) the incentive for all Europeana data partners to upgrade to minimum Tier 2 would be much greater as



a larger proportion of users would be likely to search and browse within a theme than in Collections overall.

4.2 Thematic Collections Evaluation Framework

To grow the number of thematic collections we need to become more agile and user-centric in creating and publishing them. The iteration loops must be tighter with a quicker feedback loop from the user market (demand) and CHI market (supply). Pre-release market and user should not stop, but we need to learn from current product design principles that no amount of pre-release research can give as relevant and representative feedback as real use.

This type of product thinking is intrinsic to the most successful content platforms - they quickly put minimum viable products on the market and adapt based on the market response. Launching multiple features and adapting or even withdrawing them based on the response - the outcome of which is that the feature set becomes optimised by market selection.

We must prepare for the failure of individual thematic collections on first release which then need to be modified or even de-published - failure is a learning event. This can be contrasted with the current positioning where it takes 1-2 years and large amounts of money to publish just one thematic collection - each of them becomes “too big to fail” leading to inertia, analysis-paralysis and high risk to throw good money after bad. We could evaluate using a Europeana specific implementation of the [HEART framework](#) which takes a holistic - quantitative and qualitative - approach to evaluating product. The outcomes of the evaluations would be continuously published on a dashboard and analysed to better inform us on how to adapt, modify or even deprecate a thematic collection.

5. Suggestion for the first 5 pilot “non-curated” thematic collections

We have decided that the best test of the switch from human to automatically curated collections will be to introduce a small number of non-curated thematic collections from September 2017 onwards . Their release would be monitored and evaluated closely - their reception by users not only in isolation but in relation to the curated thematic collections - before deciding to scale up their number further.

By September we will have 5 curated thematic collections: Art, Music, Fashion, Photography and 1914-1918. Therefore it is here suggested, for the sake of balance, to make 5 “non-curated” thematic collections available in the late summer and autumn of 2017. In the below 5 collections are suggested with a brief motivation. All suggested “non-curated” collections already exist as working proof of concepts in the acceptance version and will require only a day or two of editorial work to be ready for publication.

Japanese arts and culture

This theme overlaps and/or intersects with Art, Music and Fashion. Even 14-18 and Photography - all other themes in fact! Thus it shares some existing curated content already and with great potential to create more (e.g. Japonisme as aspect of Art Nouveau).



If this thematic collection works out well publishing the similar China and India collections could follow in quick order.

Numbers: Would start off with c. 75 000 items.

Performing arts

This theme overlaps with Music and so shares some curated content and potential to create more “on the cheap”. The theatre texts and images of theatre performance can be conceivable have dual use within the #AllezLiterature campaign.

There is great potential for upgrading more content by convincing eClap upgrading to Tier 2.

Numbers: Would start off with c. 350 000 items.

Natural history

Excellent content - this is the theme with the most Tier 2+ content. It has existing partner curated content (BHL created exhibitions) and has some intersection with Art and Photography (photographs and visual art with plant and animal motifs).

Natural History is a very distinct type of content in Europeana with a distinct professional target group whose content interests do not overlap very much with our other audiences. Therefore there is great potential in giving it its own “entry point”.

Numbers: Would start off with c. 3 000 000 items.

Jewish arts and culture

Just as Japanese arts and culture this theme overlaps and/or intersects with e.g. Photography, Music, Art and Fashion and so shares some curated content (existing and potential) with other themes.

Numbers: Would start off with c. 75 000 items.

Maps and Geography

Including also the history of travel and exploration.

This is a theme with almost no curated content at all, to contrast starkly with the others suggested above. Maps are otherwise a popular type of content. In our user surveys maps has been ranked as the third most wanted theme in two consecutive large-scale user surveys (art and photography have always been 1 and 2 respectively).

Numbers: Would start off with c. 200 000 items.

Additionally the two generic service projects will enter into the mix: Migration in the Arts and Sciences and the Rise of Literacy in Europe. Both these should be meliorated to address the lessons we have already learnt on Thematic Collection production.



Circulation:

Europeana Foundation Governing Board Members & Observers

Classification:

Public