

Jewish History Tours | 2023

# EUROPEANA-CULTURAL ROUTES COOPERATION RECOMMENDATIONS AND BEST PRACTICES



## Introduction

The cultural tourism industry has become increasingly data-driven, with various types of data (digital collections, audiovisual content, location-based information and stories) playing a critical role in improving and enhancing visitor experiences, especially when these experiences have a digital component. As organisations, projects and networks promoting European cultural and heritage tourism, the members of the Cultural Routes of Europe have access to a wealth of valuable heritage, historic, educational and other sources of data that can be used to enhance tourism offerings, drive innovation, and reach new audiences. One of the best ways to make the most of this data is to share it with the Europeana Initiative, which is at the heart of the common European data space for cultural heritage. The latter aims to accelerate the digital transformation of Europe's cultural sector, to promote Europe's cultural collections and foster their reuse in the cultural and creative sectors.

The Jewish History Tours project<sup>1</sup> leverages the digital data and infrastructure capabilities of the Europeana Initiative, the advanced technological expertise of several partners as well as the outreach of the Cultural Routes of Europe initiative to enable players in the intersection of culture and tourism to develop engaging touristic offerings. More specifically, in this Action the project partners applied innovative approaches for data enrichment and AI-facilitated tour production, created multilingual digital tours with Jewish cultural content and worked together with tourism operators on their promotion.

We reviewed and summarised our experiences and learnings during the Action into a set of recommendations presented in this document. These recommendations are tailored specifically to senior stakeholders in organisations, projects, events and network coordinators, such as project managers, coordinators, project officers and digital leads in cultural heritage and tourism. The recommendations offer them easy to understand guidance on how to unlock the full potential of their data by sharing it through Europeana.eu, and how to leverage the heritage data and the innovations of the Action for high-quality tourism offerings, therefore contributing to a more sustainable and successful tourism industry in the long run.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://pro.europeana.eu/project/jewish-history-tours>

## Recommendations

The recommendations are divided into two strands: data and touristic experiences.

The **Data strand** introduces practical steps and best practices regarding data storage, enrichment, quality and copyright, particularly in the context of sharing data through Europeana.eu.

The **Touristic Experiences strand** focuses on efficient ways (do's and don'ts) to create engaging and sustainable touristic experiences, including storytelling tips, advice on distribution and promotion, and more.

### Data strand

Sharing data is critical for organisations and networks promoting travel and the discovery of the rich and diverse heritage of Europe. By collaborating and sharing data, these organisations can enhance the quality of tourism experiences, make them more accessible and personalised to specific audiences, invite new audiences (for example online tourists or young audiences with a strong preference for digital experiences), and eventually benefit from increased interest and recognition.

Below a list of general recommendations on content publishable on Europeana.eu with specific emphasis on tourism-related sources:

#### 1. Use sustainable storage for digital content

Digital content should be stored and hosted on accessible and sustainable platforms that allow for the submission of content to public and private platforms, such as Europeana.eu. This is crucial to ensure that content is continuously accessible for other platforms and applications to build on in the long term.

#### 2. Provide rich, descriptive data

Metadata should be added to all digital assets to make them easily discoverable and searchable. When adding metadata, it is important to consider who would find your collection interesting and how they would look for it. This will help to ensure that the metadata is structured in a way that makes it easy for users to locate and access relevant content.

A smaller organisation could find it helpful to identify similar collections in other institutions and replicate their metadata structure where appropriate to maintain consistency and improve discoverability. When adding metadata, it is crucial to think both generally and specifically about the metadata. This means including general information such as title, creator, and date, as well as specific

details that will appeal to the narrower target audience. For more information, consult the Europeana Publishing Guide<sup>2</sup>.

### **3. Provide precise geographical location, where possible**

In the context of touristic data and experiences, the importance of geo-located data cannot be overstated. The more precise the geo-location information provided in the data, the better the chances of building engaging and interactive digital experiences with it. Therefore, it is crucial to invest time in increasing the accuracy of geo-location data. For instance, providing specific addresses or names of streets and squares can significantly enhance the precision of the data. In situations where specific coordinates cannot be provided, it is recommended to identify the location in another way, such as an address or proximity to another object. This will allow for the provision of coordinates in the future by tools or users, further enhancing the usefulness and accuracy of the data.

### **4. Translate textual data to ensure multilingual coverage**

Prioritise the delivery of metadata in various languages, especially those spoken by your main touristic audiences. It is strongly advised to include English metadata as well. This will allow your content and experiences based on it to reach a wider audience and provide a more personal and engaging experience.

### **5. Select the relevant licensing and rights statement**

You always need to provide information about how your collections on Europeana.eu can be used. Consult the Europeana Initiative's resources on that subject<sup>3</sup> and choose a rights statement that correctly reflects the permitted use of the cultural item and that can support its wide reuse. It is recommended to choose cultural content available under open licences, such as Public Domain Mark (PDM), CC0, CC BY and CC BY-SA for the touristic and other experiences you'd like to be developed using your data (e.g. paid tours).

## **Touristic experiences**

The Europeana Initiative is a trusted partner of European cultural heritage organisations, and, in particular, those promoting heritage tourism, for publishing digital collections that showcase the history and culture of their regions and sites. With regards to digital heritage storytelling in cultural route creation, there has been no cluster of those working extensively in Jewish digital heritage and in digital participation, other than those around the Jewish History Network (JHN). JHN is thus expanding and strengthening this sub-sector of a wider ecosystem, and the Europeana Initiative is central to further activity relating to digital heritage collections.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://europeana.atlassian.net/wiki/spaces/EF/pages/2059763713/EPF+-+Publishing+guide>

<sup>3</sup> <https://pro.europeana.eu/share-your-data/copyright>

Cultural collections on Europeana.eu can be accessed by third-party platforms, start-ups and projects through Europeana's APIs and can be leveraged for developing innovative touristic experiences, such as mobile and virtual tours, by both the organisation's staff and external contributors. Thus, publishing digital content on Europeana.eu and encouraging partners to develop such experiences with this data is strongly recommended in order to increase the engagement of touristic audiences. However, since working with platforms requires resources (and different platforms have different requirements), the project offers several recommendations based on its experience:

### **1. Strive for sustainability**

When collaborating with third-party platforms to create, publish, and promote your experience, it's crucial to pay close attention to the sustainability of the platform and its business model. Unfortunately, many apps and platforms in the heritage sphere cease to exist after the initial funding period. Therefore, it's essential to ask about the "exit scenario" of the platform in case it can no longer be maintained. This includes how your assets will be transferred, how much advance notice you will receive, and how much time you will have to find an alternative solution and transfer your assets and activities. Additionally, you should look for clear data export options, usage terms, service level agreements (SLAs), and licences to ensure that your content can be easily transferred to another platform if necessary.

### **2. Avoid content duplication**

Frequently, the same content can be published on different platforms with minimal changes. While this approach can cater to different audiences, publishing the same content or elements (such as texts or images) on multiple platforms creates content duplication and data silos, resulting in significant resource consumption for maintenance in the long term. Updating content on various platforms can lead to scattered versions across different locations, ultimately resulting in the loss of control over the original content. To avoid this, always keep the original copy and avoid making changes elsewhere without reflecting them at the source. Instead of manually uploading various artefacts to the platform, look for automated publishing scenarios that can work with your local copy or a single export. Prioritise platforms that work with interoperable formats, such as TourML.

### **3. Use persistent identifiers**

When integrating digital assets, such as images or audio-visual resources, into your experiences, make sure to identify these resources using persistent identifiers<sup>4</sup>, whether on Europeana.eu, another platform, or your in-house solution. This will ensure that if the experience is transferred to another platform or exported, the links remain functional and usable. By using persistent

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<sup>4</sup> A Persistent Identifier (PID) is a globally unique and long-lasting reference to potentially any sort of digital or non-digital entity, providing the information required to reliably identify, verify, locate and access it. They ensure that the digital entity is 'set in stone' and can always be findable through that identifier. See more on <https://pro.europeana.eu/post/help-us-to-make-cultural-heritage-data-more-persistent>

identifiers, you can guarantee that your digital assets will remain accessible, enhancing the longevity and usability of your experiences.

#### 4. Tell engaging stories

Narratives connect digital content and technological solutions and transform them into engaging experiences. There are various methods and formats for storytelling. The 'Seven tips for digital storytelling' (developed by the Europeana Initiative) offer useful guidance.<sup>5</sup>

1. **Be personal:** Personal stories can bring the past to life and help people relate to history on an emotional level. Consider the human significance of cultural artefacts and sites. Help people imagine themselves in someone else's shoes.
2. **Be informal but expert:** People want to learn from experts, but it shouldn't be a chore. As long as the content is well-informed, the format and tone of your story can be experimental and playful. Finding the right balance is important.
3. **Tell those hidden stories:** So much cultural history remains untold. When choosing subjects, consider who is missing from the picture, and try to give a voice to a range of people and communities.
4. **Illustrate your points:** A key strength of the cultural heritage sector is its wealth of visual imagery. Long written or spoken narratives can be hard to engage with. Breaking up the story with visual (or audio) material, and building in time to reflect on it, can enrich the experience.
5. **Signpost your journey:** The best stories take people on a clear journey. In digital storytelling - particularly on complex or experimental platforms - clear narrative structure is essential. Keep the navigation simple, so the visitor always knows where they are.
6. **Be specific:** Specific topics can still engage a broad audience. Start from a particular detail that lies at the heart of your story, then move to the bigger picture. Personal stories and well-chosen images can help keep your focus.
7. **Be evocative:** Cultural history stories need to be based in fact, but the facts don't need to be dry. Don't be afraid to use descriptive and evocative imagery and approaches and invite the viewer to place themselves within the scene.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://pro.europeana.eu/page/seven-tips-for-digital-storytelling>

## **The way ahead: collaboration in the data spaces ecosystem**

The above recommendations aim to serve as a starter kit for collaboration between the organisations from cultural heritage and tourism domains. In the future, the evolution of the ecosystem, namely the deployment of the data space for cultural heritage and the establishment of the data space for tourism, as well as the interoperability between the two, will open up new opportunities for outreach and partnerships scale, technological innovation, and, as a result, enhanced services for tourism audiences and deeper engagement.

The data space for cultural heritage is being implemented by the Europeana Initiative in collaboration with 18 other partners from across Europe. The data space for tourism is in its preparatory stage, with two consortia collaborating on its initiation stage. The next phase of its development is expected to start in 2024.

The initial steps of the data space for tourism focus on identifying its use cases. Some of these, situated at the intersection of tourism with cultural heritage, are concerned with enhancing the overall service to tourists by the development of customised experiences based on heritage data. Such experiences can cater to the growing demand for 'hyper-personalisation' in travel and address the needs of tourists from different generations. To answer the needs of the emerging consumer base, particularly digital natives, Millennials, and Generations Z and Y, it is important to acknowledge that they will become the primary consumers of tourism in the near future (by 2030) and the dominant consumers in the long run (by 2050). These technologically adept tourists will likely seek more inclusive and interconnected digital solutions. They crave 'transformative experiences' that deeply engage their minds and are tailored to their current mindset, life stage and interests.

Digital heritage can be leveraged to provide solutions such as extended reality (XR) experiences, guided tours and art installations. By utilising customer data, personalised experiences can be offered. Through data on visitors' preferences, past visits, interests, and even demographic factors like age, experiences can be dynamically tailored in real time.

However, realising this solution requires the availability of various high-quality cultural heritage datasets, including 3D models, alongside data about tourists' habits, preferences and behaviours. Creation, enhancement, maintenance, and preservation of such datasets will play a crucial role in developing new experiences relevant to the identified use cases. As a final recommendation, stakeholders from both sectors are encouraged to get involved with the two data spaces and, especially, to prioritise the establishment of such datasets in order to reap the benefits when the two data spaces are fully operational.

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