

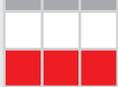


I Introduction

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This issue of *Uncommon Culture* shows how diverse the ways of digital are in our memory organisations. Our contributors take us along the route from the online union catalogue to the open data hackathon. On the journey they share their views of the crucial waymarks - the vision of interoperability, the embedding of common standards, the integration of multiple formats. Throughout the articles, the inestimable value of collaboration and partnership is repeatedly remarked.

We are all digitising for many reasons: to share our patrimony with the wider world; to bring hidden items out of our basements and into the light; to preserve our most fragile treasures; to re-unite dispersed collections. We digitise to democratize access and connect with a new audience, the digital natives who will swiftly find a substitute if they don't find us online. We digitise to serve scholarship, bringing together primary sources for new investigation, facilitating the research process and saving on the travel.

A more recent addition to this list is that to digitise is to create potential economic value for our society. That is the central message of the Foreword by the Vice President of the Commission, who suggests that "*cultural material can contribute to innovation... and become the driver of new developments*". Lately this message has given new impetus to many of our leading information organisations. It aligns them with the Commission's Digital Agenda 2020, the strategic programme that frames most of the projects in which European cultural heritage organisations are engaged.

The title of this issue, *From Closed Doors to Open Gates*, is a reference not only to the wider access that digitisation makes possible, but also to the principles of open data. Open licences are increasingly applied to our digital data in order that it can be freely used in the development of new services and mobile applications, distributed via APIs, and act as the authoritative cultural reference resource in Linked Open Data initiatives.

This new impetus resonates with the public mandate under which our memory organisations were established. The founding covenant of many a great museum was

to provide a display of the best work from the past so it could be re-interpreted for practical application in the present. To allow free access to the sum of written knowledge in order that it could inspire the next wave of ideas was a fundamental principle of the library movement. So in opening the doors of our cultural heritage institutions to innovative use of metadata or encouraging new applications to make use of our digital files, we re-invigorate our founding principles for this millennium.

Our founders would certainly have been inspired by the testimony in this issue to the enthusiasm, vision and drive shown by organisations in so many countries. In shaping online services to meet the rapidly evolving expectations of users, each demonstrates the best use of the resources, technology and expertise available. These experiences are shared not only in these pages, but also in the cooperative networks that have become central to our progress in digitising and opening up access to European heritage. Participating in this knowledge-sharing is enabling all of us to raise our game, and many of the articles herein give us valuable and detailed insight into establishing good practice, embedding common standards and streamlining digital processes so that we might replicate them in our own environments.

In the hackathons that are being run by growing numbers of cultural organisations, the majority of developers work on applications that are designed for mobile platforms. An increasing proportion of our audience wants to access our online offerings using smartphones and tablets - particularly the latter because cultural content displays so well on an iPad, for example. It's an audience that is on the move, and at the younger end of our demographic. Clearly, then, it's appropriate to address this audience with applications shaped around travel and cultural tourism, and with services whose intent is educational and informative. This circle is completed when the virtual object acts as an advert for the real one, and the cultural tourist or the student visits and spends time engaging in the *echt* experience in the actual world of the memory organisation.

In a sense, when we licence digital resources openly to (re)-users and developers we access their abilities and harness their enthusiasm to promote our cause: theirs is an expertise and a user-perspective that we don't always have in our skill-set. Such transfer becomes more valuable as the digital imperative becomes established at the heart of our organisations. As several contributors demonstrate, online presentation is no longer marginal but is increasingly central to what museums, libraries and archives have to offer.

Our communities fund us to maintain the vast collections of their heritage on their behalf. In an online world they assume, with justification, that our doors will always be open, our resources always on display. Access to cultural heritage online may be as much of an expectation of twenty-first century civilisation as water on tap and electric at the flick of a switch were to the twentieth. It's a standard requirement of the information-literate, and they believe their right to admire, share, re-interpret and re-use those resources, when out of copyright, is part of the deal.

