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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND
THE COUNCIL**

on the evaluation of Europeana and the way forward

{SWD(2018) 398 final}

1. INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the results of the independent evaluation of Europeana as a European cultural and digital innovation project as well as the Commission's vision on the way forward for the future development of Europeana.

It is accompanied by the Commission Staff Working Document SWD(2018)398 providing details on the evaluation of Europeana.

1.1. Europeana

Europeana was launched in 2008 as 'The European Digital Library, to make Europe's cultural heritage accessible to all through a single access point. Its creation was initiated by a letter from six Heads of State and Government to the Commission in 2005.

The Commission's financial and political support has continued ever since¹, for the coordination and integration of EU Member States' efforts to digitise and make cultural material accessible online. These include standardisation, interoperability and cooperation among cultural heritage institutions across Europe. Europeana contributes to the implementation of a number of intertwined policies, including the Digital Single Market and the Commission Recommendation (2011/711/EU)² and related Council Conclusions³, calling on Member States to get more material online and ensure the long-term preservation of digital material.

Today, Europeana is **Europe's digital platform for cultural heritage**, funded as a well-established Digital Service Infrastructure under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)⁴, to:

- bring Europe's digitised cultural heritage material online and to promote its cross-border visibility and use across Europe;
- offer solutions for the trans-European interoperability and accessibility of digital resources of European heritage;
- further improve the conditions for re-use and facilitate take-up of digital cultural content and metadata in other sectors, e.g. research, education, tourism or the creative industries; and

¹ The [timeline of the digitisation and online accessibility of cultural heritage](#) outlines all relevant initiatives and policy documents since 2005.

² Commission Recommendation of 27 October 2011 on the digitisation and online accessibility of cultural material and digital preservation (2011/711/EU) (OJ L 283. 29.10.2011, p. 39).

³ Council Conclusions of 10 May 2012 on the digitisation and online accessibility of cultural material and digital preservation (OJ C 169, 15.6.2012, p. 5).

⁴ Regulation No 1316/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing the Connecting Europe Facility, amending Regulation No 913/2010 and repealing Regulations No 680/2007 and No 67/2010 (OJ L 348, 20.12.2013, p. 129-171).

- provide a multilingual, user-friendly access point to Europe's rich and diverse heritage.

Europeana currently provides access to over 51 million items from the collections of over 3 700 libraries, archives, museums, galleries and audio-visual collections across Europe, through its main portal 'Europeana Collections' (europeana.eu) and through the platform's application programming interfaces (APIs). Europeana offers services to different user groups, such as:

- data partners (contributing cultural institutions) and cultural heritage professionals;
- end-users (anyone with an interest in culture); and
- re-users (education, research, education and creative sector professionals).

The Europeana Network Association, with over 1 700 cultural heritage, creative and technology professionals, supports the values and work of Europeana, exchanges and promotes best practice on digitisation and metadata standardisation and stimulates capacity building in the cultural heritage community.

Europeana contributes to preserving and fostering European culture in the digital age and involves all EU Member States. It supports the objectives of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 to encourage the sharing and appreciation of Europe's cultural heritage, raise awareness of common history and values, and strengthen a sense of belonging to a common European space. Europeana is the only digital cultural heritage partner of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018.

1.2. A New European Agenda For Culture

In its Communication published on 22 May 2018⁵, the Commission announced '**next steps for Europeana**, Europe's digital platform for cultural heritage by 2018' aiming to take it forward as a pan-European enabler of the digital transformation of cultural heritage and a key initiative on democratic access to culture. Together with other announced initiatives such as the **network of competence centres** to safeguard knowledge about endangered heritage monuments through large-scale **digitisation**, the upcoming creation of an **online directory of European films** and the pan-European network of **Digital Creative and Innovation Hubs**, Europeana will contribute to the further promotion, diffusion and accessibility of European culture and cultural heritage.

This report outlines the results of the independent evaluation requested by the **Council Conclusions of 31 May 2016 on the role of Europeana for the digital access, visibility and use of European cultural heritage**⁶ as well as the Commission's vision on the way forward for Europeana.

In response to the Council's request, the Commission carried out:

- (a) An **evaluation of Europeana** based on the five mandatory criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, EU added value) of the Better Regulation

⁵ A New European Agenda for Culture: COM(2018) 267 final, SWD(2018) 167 final.

⁶ Council conclusions on the role of Europeana for the digital access, visibility and use of European cultural heritage (OJ C 212, 14.6.2016 p. 9.).

Guidelines of the Commission⁷. The scope of the evaluation covers both the underlying concept and value of Europeana as a European cultural and digital innovation project as well as an in-depth review of the adequacy and viability of the services provided by Europeana as a Digital Service Infrastructure under CEF.

(b) An analysis of possible **options for the mid- and long-term development of Europeana**, based on the outcomes of the evaluation.

A panel of five independent experts, from different fields of relevant expertise, were hired to assist the Commission in the evaluation and the orientations for the future development of Europeana. An independent study was carried out by an external consultancy, to refine the evaluation questions and methodology, gather evidence data (including through desk research, case studies, interviews, benchmarking, technical usability evaluation and analysis of the public online consultation), and assess the evaluation questions with contribution from the experts.

The Commission also carried out a 12-week online public consultation, in all EU official languages. A targeted questionnaire, with more technical questions, addressed to professionals and organisations that had experience with Europeana's infrastructure and professional network was included in the public consultation. The public consultation results (from 1 221 responses) have provided significant input to the evaluation.

2. MAIN FINDINGS OF THE EVALUATION

The main findings of the evaluation, according to the evaluation criteria, can be summarised under the following headings.

2.1. Relevance

Overall, Europeana's relevance is high in terms of EU policies and priorities for the online accessibility and dissemination of European cultural heritage. Europeana is relevant to cultural heritage institutions as a facilitator of professional exchange of cultural and technological expertise.

Europeana has exceeded its objectives in terms of quantity of items, but there is a need to improve the relevance and the quality of its content and metadata.

Europeana has one of the largest digital collections in the world and is the only pan-European platform of its kind to provide access to image, text, sound, video and 3D material from the collections of over 3 700 European libraries, archives, museums, galleries and audio-visual institutions. Europeana further stands out by offering material in a large number of languages (37 languages). Europeana's relevance to EU policies and priorities was rated high.

At least two-thirds of the respondents to the public consultation that provided data to Europeana indicated that Europeana generated value for their organisation by means of

⁷ Evaluation Roadmap: http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/plan_2016_55_europeana_evaluation_en.pdf

audience reach and added value to content, and by facilitating partnerships with other cultural institutions. Two-thirds of respondents indicated that Europeana was important for finding and exploring European cultural heritage. Its collections are perceived to be advancing cultural knowledge and learning and offering trustworthy content sources.

While Europeana has exceeded its objectives in terms of quantity of items, the relevance and quality of its content and metadata is an issue. Although a number of actions have been launched to improve data quality, further open the data and create value for its partners, the key issues are related to the content (e.g. in terms of geographical and thematic coverage, representation of institutions, and the relevance and cultural interest/value of the content) and the metadata (such as the lack of translation, the quality and level of detail, and inconsistencies or broken links).

Issues pertaining to metadata have had a negative impact on the service's overall popularity and have affected the findability of material on Europeana as well as its use. A number of negative responses in the public consultation concerned the lack of relevance of search results. Achieving high-level quality data is therefore a key parameter for Europeana, and cultural heritage institutions play a central role in this field, being ultimately responsible for the quality of the provided content and metadata. Europeana's current strategy is focused on strengthening the quality of data and making the existing (and incoming) content on Europeana more interesting and valuable to end-users and re-users.

2.2. Effectiveness

Europeana fares well in some aspects but there is significant potential for improvement in others.

The provision of common standards, best practices and promotion of open cultural data are considered among its key achievements. Europeana's common solutions and publishing frameworks have been taken up by cultural heritage institutions.

However, the many user groups involved pointed out weaknesses in the technical infrastructure (including the aggregation infrastructure) and in the platform's functionality in terms of multilingualism, search and filtering facilities in the portal and the APIs and the quality of the data.

Europeana targets a wide range of audiences such as cultural heritage institutions and professionals, researchers, education, creative industries professionals as well as the general public. The diversity of users and their different interests in Europeana poses a challenge in satisfying every user group's needs with the appropriate focus.

While the curated content on the platform is able to target one or more user groups, the search functionalities, particularly the lack of sophisticated filtering for refining a search and the lack of relevance of the search results, do not meet its target users' expectations. Another issue is the level of multilingualism of the portal: the lack of translation of metadata and inconsistencies in search results when searching in different languages.

Europeana has not been very effective in reaching out to citizens who in general are not aware of its existence despite successful activities such as the World War I collection days

Despite these shortcomings, one of Europeana's key achievements is that it provides common standards and solutions, in particular, the Europeana Data Model⁸, the International Rights Statements⁹ and the Europeana Publishing Framework¹⁰. These have been taken up widely in the cultural heritage sector in Europe and internationally, for example in the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA).

2.3. Efficiency

Overall, Europeana shows potential for improving its efficiency.

While the initiative has been successful in building a wide ecosystem of aggregators and cultural heritage institutions, the biggest challenge lies in the efficiency of the complex aggregation process.

The **current aggregation structure** is based on domain and national aggregators which bring in data from 3 700 institutions. Specifically, contributing institutions partner with aggregators that harmonise their data and submit it to Europeana. However, this involves a complex workflow where, in many cases, the publication and update of data are affected by delays or by communication issues between the parties concerned. The lack of tools for updating the metadata results in increased overall efforts needed to provide quality data. There are also cases where institutions that contributed through EU-funded projects which have now finished have limited means of updating their data, especially in countries where there are no national aggregators.

The **funding scheme** has also faced challenges in terms of efficiency. Despite the efforts of the Commission, the Member States and the Europeana Foundation (operator of the core service platform), the funding model based on grants (which required co-funding) proved to be unsuitable for sustaining the core services. In the 2016 Council Conclusions, Member States were invited to continue their financial contributions to Europeana until the Commission progressively converted its support scheme from a grant model into a procurement model that could cover all core service costs. This shift took place in September 2017.

Despite the above-mentioned limitations, Europeana notably managed to build a wide **ecosystem** or network of domain and national aggregators and cultural heritage institutions that have played a key role in fostering access to Europe's digital cultural heritage.

⁸ <https://pro.europeana.eu/resources/standardisation-tools/edm-documentation>

⁹ <http://rightsstatements.org/en/>

¹⁰ <https://pro.europeana.eu/post/publishing-framework>

2.4. Coherence

Europeana is coherent and well aligned with wider EU policy and priorities while being at the same time coherent with the national strategies of EU Member States.

The evaluation confirms the coherence of Europeana as regards EU policy, in line with the Gothenburg communication of November 2017¹¹. The European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 is designated as the occasion to show how digital tools can broaden access to cultural material and opportunities, and shed light on initiatives such as Europeana, which fosters digital access to cultural heritage material held by libraries, archives and museums. It is also coherent with the national strategies for the digitisation and online accessibility of cultural heritage material of EU Member States. Europeana, to a certain extent, addresses challenges that the EU Member States face in digitising cultural heritage and in transforming access to culture. Europeana's work, for instance, on standards, tools and open access is seen as useful across all sectors influenced by digital transformations, even if not all stakeholders agree to the specific solutions promoted.

2.5. EU added value:

Europeana has brought added value by playing a significant role in the digital development of the cultural heritage sector in Europe. In addition, Europeana has contributed to underpinning a sense of shared history and identity among Europeans.

The Europeana initiative has been key in strengthening cooperation and standardisation activities across borders with the overarching goal of increasing the use of standards in digitising and sharing digitised cultural material throughout Europe. National level initiatives related to standardisation of metadata or the creation of national portals in a number of Member States would not have happened without Europeana. Europeana's involvement has also been vital for promoting open cultural data. In the replies to the public consultation, Europeana's involvement to push forward open culture/metadata is considered to be the activity that has contributed the most (82 %) to advancing and facilitating the work of the cultural heritage institutions.

Europeana has also contributed to diffusing a sense of shared history and identity through its thematic collections and participatory campaigns, such as the World War 1 campaign, linking together individual stories in a larger European context, and more recently the Migration campaign.

3. ORIENTATIONS FOR THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF EUROPEANA

Taking into account the results of the evaluation study and the analysis of future options by the panel of experts in relation to Europeana's future value proposition¹², the

¹¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture The European Commission's contribution to the Leaders' meeting in Gothenburg, 17 November 2017 (COM/2017/0673 final).

¹² EU Bookshop: Study on the 'Evaluation of Europeana and orientations for its future development, following adoption of Council Conclusions by EYCS Council on 31/05/2016' (SMART no. 2016/0100).

European Commission will endeavour to transform Europeana into a key player in the pan-European network of Digital Creative and Innovation Hubs for the digital transformation of cultural heritage institutions.

The Commission's analysis builds on the key strengths shown by Europeana as well as the need to fix its shortcomings that were highlighted in the evaluation, while taking into account the emerging trends and developments in the digital cultural heritage sector.

3.1. Scope

The future scope of Europeana will be mainly focused on **the needs of primary stakeholders in the cultural heritage sector, in particular the cultural heritage institutions**, which the initiative should support and steer in their efforts towards achieving digital transformation. Europeana will strengthen its ties with the cultural heritage institutions by creating value out of the following areas of activity.

i) **A strengthening of the technical core platform** of the initiative, providing a powerful and reliable basis to support cultural heritage institutions, in particular:

- a technical infrastructure and cutting edge tools allowing cultural institutions to easily make content and metadata of high quality accessible to Europeana (aggregation infrastructure and services);
- significantly improving the findability of digital cultural materials;
- strengthening multilingual aspects for users to explore, enjoy and re-use content regardless of the original language of the cultural materials;
- retaining responsibility for the quality of the offered data and services.

ii) Furthermore, the Commission considers that the Europeana initiative should be established around the **empowerment of cultural heritage communities** in Member States. Europeana should provide substantial support to data providers and aggregators for an efficient data ingestion and update. The Commission considers the aggregators — local, national and domain-related — to be essential to the Europeana initiative and considers, that their role as intermediaries between cultural institutions should be actively supported by Member States and the initiative.

iii) The Commission considers that the initiative should showcase the potential of such content through **curated and multilingual collections, exhibitions and virtual galleries based on high quality data**, enabling an array of themes to be created strengthening the European narrative and dimension.

iv) To this effect, Europeana should re-think the infrastructure needed for developing and handling smart content to **improve its digital offering** by making use of various **artificial intelligence-based approaches**, natural language processing and **big data** to automate to the extent possible the creation, management and presentation of content and metadata. Europeana should actively follow and implement the **development of standards, tools and services** to further enrich, refine, and automate digital content. This will enable smart content to be created that can be **re-used in other sectors** such as the education, research or the creative sectors.

v) Europeana should also continue driving **standardisation, common solutions and best practices** in the digital cultural heritage sector and operate as a catalyst and innovator for the digital transformation of the cultural heritage institutions.

It is vital in such a context that Europeana and its network of aggregators, institutions and professionals together shape the digital transformation of the cultural heritage sector, by pushing forward institutional and professional collaboration, which will support the development of related expertise and skills. This will contribute to the **capacity building of cultural heritage institutions**, ensuring that even the smallest institutions have the opportunity to embrace digital transformation.

3.2. Funding

Europeana will continue to be funded under the CEF programme through a mix of grants and procurements until the end of the current multiannual financial framework. While the core services will be funded through procurements in order to assure the stability of the service provided, the financial instruments of grants will be used to support cultural institutions in order to contribute to Europeana.

Under the next Multiannual Financial Framework (COM(2018) 321 final), the Commission has proposed to fund Europeana under the **Digital Europe programme** which will aim to strengthen the capacity building of various sectors and the flagship projects in these sectors making use of this capacity building.

The work carried out under the this programme will be complemented through research and innovation activities in Horizon Europe on digitisation of cultural heritage monuments and sites, automatic interpretation of cultural heritage as well as virtual museums.

3.3. Governance

The governance mechanism will be under the auspices of the Commission Expert Group on ‘Digital Cultural Heritage and Europeana’ (DCHE). The members of this group represent the Member States and cooperate with the Commission in the areas of digitisation, online accessibility of cultural material and digital preservation.

The input of the DCHE to the Europeana strategy will ensure a stronger engagement and an increasingly more active participation of the Member States as well as of cultural institutions.

In addition, the DCHE will be assisted by a sub-group of experts to be selected based on a call for an expression of interest. They will have the task of providing viable, innovative and forward-looking advice and solutions, ensuring that the different needs of Europeana audiences and stakeholders are taken into account.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation has highlighted an **overall appreciation of the European added-value of Europeana by cultural heritage institutions across the EU**. The evaluation also revealed that based on the mixed but passionate feedback of respondents, **Europeana is a relevant initiative not just for the institutions but also for the European citizens**. It has brought together the European cultural institutions, enabling them to collaborate and share their material. This has not only led to the sharing of best practices on common standards but also helped nurture a European network of data partners, aggregators and

of professionals in various fields who have stimulated capacity building and exchange of expertise.

The evaluation represents a turning point, 10 years into Europeana's existence, with a number of achievements as well as shortcomings as described above. **Europeana needs to renew its added value to the cultural heritage sector**, for instance through capacity building, tools for high quality content and metadata supply and enrichment, an efficient infrastructure for data delivery and continuous support. To this end, the Commission will continue to support Europeana and its network of aggregators, institutions and professionals in their efforts to the digital transformation of the cultural heritage sector.