



Astronomy: figures observing a meteor or comet, G. Freman, Wellcome Collection, United Kingdom, CC BY

SLOVENIAN PRESIDENCY EVENT 2021

Summary, March 2022



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Introduction

On 2 and 3 December 2021 at 'Driving engagement – participatory approaches to digital cultural heritage', an event accompanying Slovenia's Presidency of the Council of the European Union, participants and attendees explored how cultural heritage institutions are embracing digital participation and how they are engaging online communities with digital cultural heritage.

Highlights

Speakers at the event presented a wide range of approaches to participation, from developing content collaboratively within the Wikimedia projects, to driving engagement with open access policy at Nationalmuseum Sweden.

Dr. Ignacija Fridl Jarc, State Secretary at the Ministry of Culture of Slovenia, emphasised the importance of digitisation of culture and how it connects Europeans and European societies. Her perspective reinforced the idea that participation is only possible when cultural heritage institutions preserve heritage via digitisation.

Rehana Schwinniger-Ladak, Head of Unit Interactive Technologies, Digital for Culture and Education, DG CONNECT, stressed the importance of participation in European policies, in the peace, prosperity and stability of Europe, and the drive for engagement in the European project. The European Commission approach to policy making is engaging all stakeholders. Through communication and consultation, the European Commission aims to allow wider public participation in the way policies are shaped.

Two of the most recent EU initiatives—the New European Bauhaus and The Conference of Europe—have been designed to use participatory approaches as their launchpad. Engagement and participation have been crucial in nurturing the Europeana community of institutions, aggregators, and professionals. Engagement has been instrumental in developing community led standards and frameworks at Europeana. Some of the most important provisions in the European Commission's Recommendation on the creation of Common European Data Space for Cultural Heritage rely on participation and engagement. Comprehensive digital strategies in the Member States will require driving engagement with all cultural heritage constituencies: institutions, networks, cultural and creative industries, small and medium-sized enterprises, and authorities. Aggregators are drivers of engagement to channel the needs of institutions. Further, she stressed that engagement is a two way street where we need the engagement of the institutions to provide content and to engage with them to understand their needs. She also pointed out that multilingualism ensures participation of institutions from across the



EU. She underlined an important question: how do we secure participation and engagement at all levels, not only with the public but also with institutions?

George Oates, Executive Director of the Flickr Foundation, shared her reflections on the legacy and current renewal of Flickr Commons, the digital repository where cultural institutions have been sharing collections since 2008, and how Flickr Foundation is working to reinvigorate historic member organisations and recruit new members—with deep, meaningful connections happening one-on-one. She talked about nurturing communities of special interest, meaningful connections and measuring engagement at scale.

Dr. Karin Glasemann, Deputy Head of Collection at ArkDes, The Swedish Centre for Architecture and Design, talked about turning digital access into visitor engagement at the National Museum Sweden. She described how crucial it is to put content where users are, underscoring empathy and the importance of user research and feedback in the process of gaining participation. She emphasised the importance of ensuring that any tools provided are easy to use.

Jolan Wuyts from Europeana Foundation and **Dr. Eirini Kaldeli** from the National Technical University of Athens talked about engaging citizens for improving the quality of cultural heritage metadata, and the CRAFTED project on intangible cultural heritage. By creating rich metadata so people can find the information, participation increases. They showed the benefits and challenges of using a tool which combines AI and human intelligence.

Giovanna Fontenelle of the Wikimedia Foundation, an important partner for cultural heritage institutions and host of the fourth most visited website in the world, Wikipedia, focused her comments on the preservation of cultural heritage and sharing it with the world.

Frank Draushke of Facts and Files, presenting with Europeana Foundation's **Ad Pollé**, reflected on a decade's work running public history crowdsourcing campaigns such as Europeana 1914-1918, Europeana 1989, and Europeana Transcribe. They explained how crowdsourcing can play a valuable role in collecting and documenting personal accounts and source materials from European citizens, and how user-sourced content can complement local institutional collections.

Medhavi Gandhi, founder of The Heritage Lab, and Europeana Foundation's **Aleksandra Strzelichowska** highlighted the power of digital storytelling and how it brings people together and inspires them.



Virginia Poundstone, Director of Product and Content at Mhz Curationist, spoke about the non-profit project, a nascent platform for sharing and learning about cultural knowledge. Its goal is to deepen cultural awareness by making content from around the world accessible, equitable, and dynamic, expanding open access. She emphasised how tools must be easy to use, and, when building tools, how important it is to know your user.

Dr. Pavel Car, The National Museum of Slovenia, presented the experiences of digitalisation of Slovenian cultural heritage.

Dr. Ines Vodopivec of the National and University Library of Slovenia described the e-learning tools and materials for education, training and research the Library has employed, including quizzes and online games, paired with online classrooms. Their team has worked toward a nationally integrated Europeana user interface, *Sloveniana*. She emphasised how digital transformation has been supported through collaboration and partnership from Slovenia.

Anne Torreggiani of The Audience Agency brought real world data to the audience. All of cultural professionals' work, both analogue and digital, and all the great initiatives in the cultural sector, she suggests, can and should be seen in the wider context of reuse—in media, education, and the like.

Susanna Ânäs of AvoinGLAM reminded us of the importance of open access to cultural heritage through collaboration, as a catalyst and as an enabler of collaboration, engagement, international frameworks and communities of participation.

Eric Peters, Deputy Head of Unit, DG CNECT B2 - Implementation of the Regulatory Framework, shared insights about engagement in the New European Bauhaus (NEB) and its relevance for cultural heritage institutions. He stressed the NEB has engagement—with citizens and communities—at its core. Cultural heritage institutions have a key role in the NEB as physical spaces and as providers for participation, inclusion, transdisciplinarity, and innovative thinking. Ultimately, he said, the NEB will only happen if and when we harness the participation of and co-creation by all actors including our citizens. Culture plays a critical role in nurturing the interest and addressing the needs of citizens to create a greater sense of belonging. The multifaceted involvement of digital cultural heritage and heritage organisations helps engage people and connect communities—linking art, culture, societal changes, across past and future and across disciplines.



Isabel Crespo of the Europeana Foundation gave the audience a comprehensive view of some of the great work happening to cultivate participation through educational ecosystems. Education is fundamentally important—both to the work taking place at museums and memory institutions—and to bringing the material housed in those institutions to life among students. Digital technologies and the growth of the internet provide amazing opportunities for cultural heritage to create educational participation, to foster engagement together with their audience and with other museums and organisations like Europeana.

Maria Drabczyk, Centrum Cyfrowe Poland and EUscreen Foundation, shared her experiences of engaging students through Subtitle-a-thons, where members of the public are invited to create and add subtitles to archival audiovisual clips from European heritage collections. Subtitle-a-thons aim to verify how to integrate multilingual AV digital collections into educational and fun settings and to engage with communities of heritage and language enthusiasts.

Conclusion

The notion of participation of citizens and of professionals is critical to the work of safeguarding and preserving cultural heritage, and ultimately making it findable and usable for subsequent generations. When we think about the common European Data Space for cultural heritage, keeping ‘humans in the loop’ is essential to the Europeana Initiative and directly supports the data space for cultural heritage.

The conference underscored the importance of community participation, as local cultural heritage institutions are typically best positioned to gather local knowledge and exploit local interest in safeguarding that community’s heritage. Another international heritage organisation, ICCROM published a [guidance document](#) discussing people-centred approaches to heritage management in 2015. Cultural heritage management is recommended to be carried out through a community participation process. While we may, in 2022, with a European set of eyes, *assume* that local culture and cultural heritage is always supported by local communities, there is [substantial research](#) comparing non-European countries and emphasising the benefits to local participation.

Continuing to encourage local collaboration and community involvement in institutions and communities across Europe is essential while also acknowledging the challenges of sustaining that participation over time—especially in the resources required of people, time, and funding. Further, continuing to ensure tools for participation are user-centred and user-friendly/simple remain primary considerations.



This event provided Europeana Foundation and our partners and stakeholders with much food for thought. We hope our audience and partners found it just as useful.

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