



# → Report on the results of the UGC Thematic Task Force

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## Scope

The Europeana UGC Thematic Task Force was instigated as an initiative of Europeana network members to provide a deeper understanding about the current practices of user generated content (UGC) and to identify inter-project services and practices that could become shared building blocks for the creation of a Europeana UGC ecosystem.

To fulfil this ambitious goal we identified three domains of action:

1. The Identification and benchmarking of services and best-practices as building blocks for the creation of a Europeana UGC ecosystem
2. The creation of a point of contact for all projects that want to apply UGC approaches within the Europeana network in order to encourage cross-fertilization of ideas between projects and to identify potential duplication of effort
3. To provide policy recommendations for the Europeana Network regarding the role that UGC can play in the context of Europeana.

## Approach

The task force went through two distinct phases during its lifetime. During phase I (Q3&Q4 2012), the task force aimed to mobilize a critical mass of experts and institutions within the Europeana network already experienced in applying UGC and to advocate itself as a point of contact. This approach did not lead to the expected results as experts as those institutions who were using an UGC approach either were not available or the projects that addressed user-generated content in their mission were not yet operating. For phase II of the project (Q1-Q4 2013) the task-force leaders decided to move on and to work with a core group of motivated Europeana network members on the first task: the identification and benchmarking of services and best-practices. The members of the task force included: Ad Pollé, Christian Bajomi, Christine Sauter, Johan Oomen, Marie-hélène Serra, Märta Molin, Nikolaos Maniatis, Lars Wienke and Susan Hazan (co-leaders of the task force).

During the kick-off meeting at the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision in Hilversum on April 3 2013 the members of the task force developed an initial action plan to review current practices. The original plan consisted of three steps of which the first two were executed:

- **Step 1: Identification of UGC practices within the Europeana network and beyond** by means of a questionnaire. This questionnaire was in turn disseminated through the Europeana mailing list and other museum and cultural heritage related mailing lists as well as through the Europeana linked-in account.
- **Step 2: Understanding UGC practices in the Europeana network.** Based on the results of the questionnaire different actors were identified that showed promising, new or very successful approaches to UGC. Actors that declared their willingness in the questionnaire to be contacted were interviewed by telephone or Skype to understand their approach and the challenges they faced.

After step 2 it became apparent that an additional iteration with further in-depth interviews as planned during the kick-off wouldn't have led to further insights. Instead the task force decided to contrast the findings of step 1 and 2 with the work of other researchers and practitioners in- and outside of the Europeana network during a workshop at Digital Heritage 2013 in Marseille. This step enabled the task force to extend its view on UGC to a much broader basis and to include the scientific community in the discussion.

## Results of the questionnaire

Between May 2 and June 17 2013 about 45 different institutions replied to the questionnaire and provided an insight into current practices and attitudes to UGC in the cultural heritage community. Detailed information about the questionnaire can be found in the accompanying source material as well as the responses of the different institutions<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> We provide the full source material and the replies of the institutions to Europeana for potential re-use in the future. We'd like to point out that the replies themselves can be used but should not be published in their current form as they contain person related information, such as contact addresses.

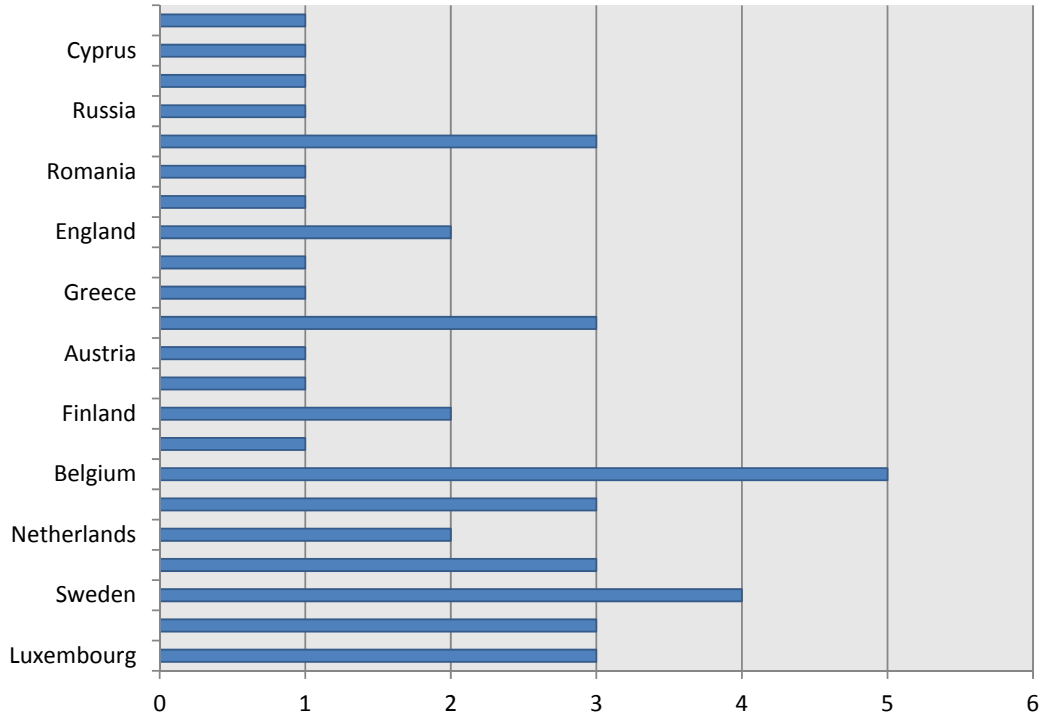


Figure 1: Distribution of institutions that replied to the questionnaire across countries

The institutions originated from 22 different, mainly European countries. In particular institutions from northern Europe showed a higher participation in the survey. This might suggest a higher interest in user generated content within these countries but as the evaluation of a general cultural bias within different countries or regions was not in the scope of the survey the aspect was not followed up during evaluation.

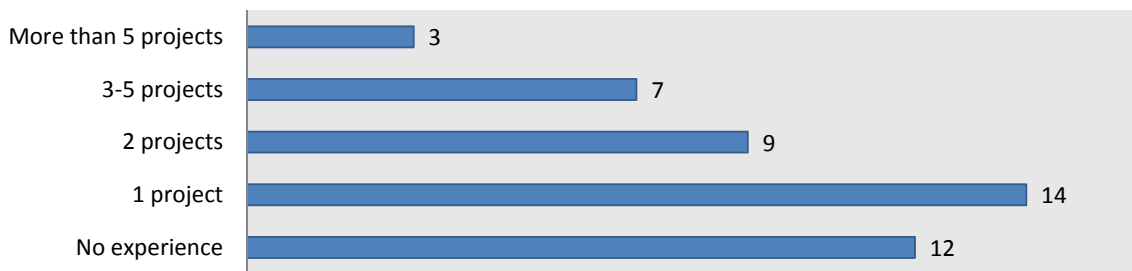
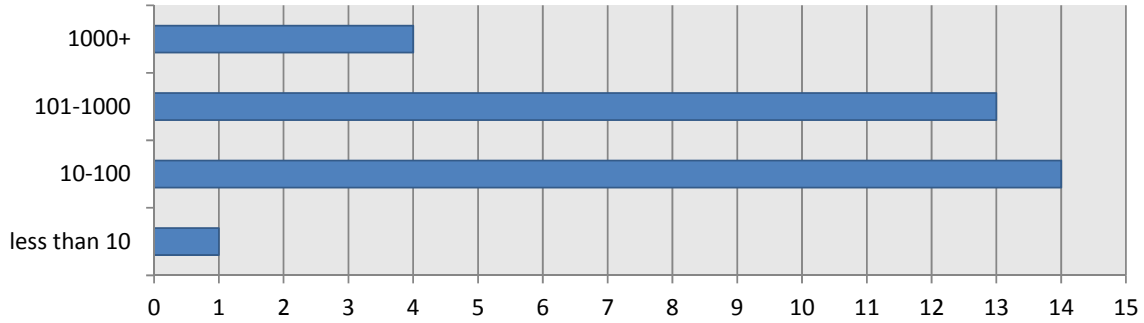


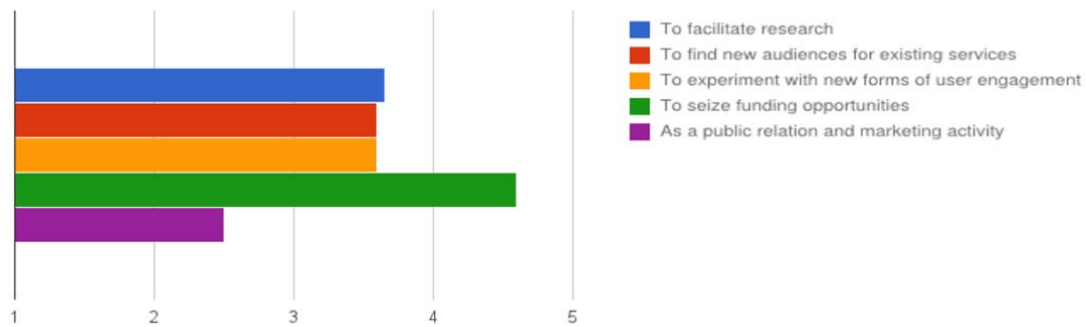
Figure 2: Number of UGC projects per country

Figure 2 shows the number of UGC projects that the participants to the questionnaire have executed. The questionnaire aimed specifically at institutions that already applied UGC in one of their projects but encouraged institutions that haven't applied it so far to participate as well in order to identify potential blocking issues on an institutional level.



**Figure 3: Distribution of total user numbers for different UGC projects**

According to the results of our survey (see Figure 3) the majority of UGC projects managed to gather contributions from more than 100 users. Nevertheless the survey results don't give an indication on how much marketing effort had to be invested to gather these participation numbers. The issue will be further discussed for the challenges of UGC below.



**Figure 4: Average motivation of institutions to start UGC projects on a scale of one to five**

Survey participants were asked to indicate their motivation for conducting UGC projects by ranking different types of motivations on a scale of one to five (see Figure 4). Judging from the results, the ability to seize funding opportunities was considered as the most important motivation while the potential of UGC as a public relation or marketing activity yielded lower results.

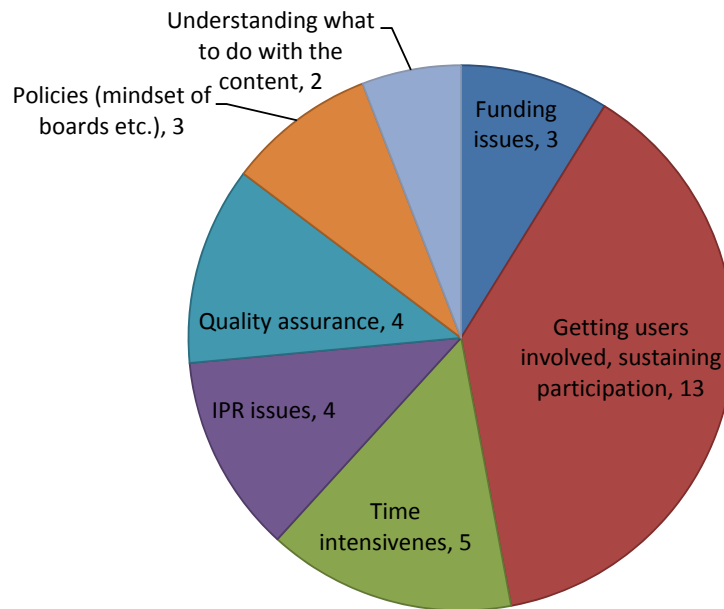


Figure 5: Challenges of UGC projects

The questionnaire offered participants the opportunity to describe the particular challenges that they faced in the execution of UGC projects in a free text field. The replies were collected and clustered to enable a comparison (see Figure 5). According to this clustering the most severe issue that projects faced lies in the motivation of users to participate and to sustain this motivation over time. Furthermore the investment of time to keep the project running showed to be challenging as institutions underestimated the effort needed to maintain a UGC project. Other issues relate to questions of IPR, concerning the unclear state of the intellectual property rights of the contributions as well as questions of quality assurance that emerged in environments that face a broad range of different types of user contributions with different levels of quality.

In the light of these results the following conclusions were drawn

- Despite the relevance that user generated content has acquired in the wider ecosystem of the Internet through services like Wikipedia, Youtube or Pinterest its impact on the cultural heritage community is still relatively low and motivated mainly by (funded) experiments and curiosity. Successful projects like Europeana 1914-18<sup>2</sup> or Europeana 1989<sup>3</sup> could serve as documented case studies to demonstrate the benefit of user generated content. In particular the value of UGC as a marketing tool for museums and cultural heritage sites seems to be undervalued at the moment.
- The motivation of users to participate and to sustain their involvement is an issue that could be addressed on a network level by providing best practices. As the term UGC covers a very diverse set of approaches, technologies and target audiences it will become hard to formalize general guidelines. From this point of view a forum that encourages practitioners

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.europeana1914-1918.eu>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.europeana1989.eu>

of UGC to exchange their experiences and to share proven approaches could be beneficial for all members of the network.

## Analysis of the interviews

Following the evaluation of the questionnaires, different actors were identified who either indicated particularly interesting projects or mentioned experiences that could offer further insight into the practical application of UGC. In the following section the results of remote interviews with four institutions (The National Archives of Estonia, The House of Alijn in Belgium, the Jara, Institute for library development in Slovenia and the Norwegian University of Life Sciences) shall be discussed and analysed<sup>4</sup>.

The National Archives of Estonia reported on two on-going projects with different target groups and approaches: one related to the transcription of parish books in the context of a genealogy project and another project about places and names. While the genealogy project provided a dedicated platform for the transcription task and focused on expert users, which were mainly recruited from members of genealogy associations, the places and names project was directed to the general Estonian population and took place over Facebook. The latter approach yielded in highly intense discussions encouraging a lot of users but also posed additional problems in transferring the user contributions to the archives. Based on their experience the National Archives saw two future development paths: first to intensify the relationship with highly productive users by providing them with simple archiving tools and second an API or other technical support that would ease the effort of integrating user generated data into the internal storage systems of the archive.

**The House of Alijn** followed a different approach in its UGC strategy with two experiments in image tagging. In the first image collection '**Proud of my car**'<sup>5</sup> the public was asked to add additional information to existing metadata (e.g. about the type of car depicted in an image). In the exhibition computers were available to tag or comment the images. Unlabelled pictures were presented next to labelled ones to highlight missing information and the museum focussed on addressing auto-experts and enthusiasts by reviewing car related blogs and vintage car clubs to provide appropriate tags. During this phase a user registration was required so that taggers had to create a profile on [www.huisvanalijn.be](http://www.huisvanalijn.be) in order to contribute.

In the second phase a collection of '**Anonymous snapshots**'<sup>6</sup> without any metadata was published on the website. The museum staff did not index this collection before so the images (slides, photographs) were published without any contextual information. Online visitors were invited to tag the images with the purpose of making the collection searchable. As this collection was not presented in an exhibition in the physical museum space the museum developed a specific campaign for *Supertaggers* to recruit contributors. As such, they promoted the project with a logo, flyer and

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<sup>4</sup> Further details about the interviews and the different projects of the interviewed institutions are provided with this report in the file *Europeana TF UGC presentation Marseille 2013.ppt*

<sup>5</sup> [www.huisvanalijn.be/collection/uit-het-fotoalbum-afl-4-trots-op-mijn-auto](http://www.huisvanalijn.be/collection/uit-het-fotoalbum-afl-4-trots-op-mijn-auto)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.huisvanalijn.be/collection/het-huis-van-alijn-zoekt-taggers>

poster and explained the goals of the project via a press release and on the museum blog and the Facebook subsite.

Overall the experiments showed that many visitors were unfamiliar with the concept of 'tagging' and required training sessions. Nevertheless the interest in the activity was in particular high from visitors of an older age who while often unfamiliar with computers were eager to participate.

The interviewee also highlighted that engaging the public to describe or tag a collection online is a logical extension to their daily work, in particular for a museum about the culture of everyday life that strives to be an exchange platform as well as a working and meeting space. As a lesson learned it was pointed out that it would be helpful if tools were available on a larger scale. At the moment, the House of Alijn runs a new UGC project [www.tijdvoor80.be](http://www.tijdvoor80.be) in which a generic social media platform is used and expects "that the best is yet to come".

The Jara, institute for library development in Slovenia participated to the **Europeana 1914-18** project and organized five collection days in public libraries. The events were highly appreciated both by users and the public and lead to the decision to implement a new module of their existing local cultural heritage web site Kamra, called **Album of Slovenia**. The album was launched in September 2013 and invites users to upload their stories. A network of Kamra editors in 10 Slovenian regions organises thematic events and invites visitors to bring their photos, documents etc. to the local library. The librarians will help users to upload objects and stories and provide them with a short training session on using the tool. Each entry has to be confirmed by editors and the libraries edit content to a certain level but do not interfere in the stories themselves. At the time of the interview Jara decided to not share this content with Europeana as it was not clear to them if this content should be part of Europeana or not.

The project **Akerselva Digitalt** is a collaborative project between the Norwegian Museum of Science, Technology and Medicine and the Oslo Museum. The project concentrated on developing mobile services for communicating the city's industrial history and explored a variety of participatory design methods with youth and community groups. The use of iPods and maps as cultural probes for place-making, the use of Instagram<sup>7</sup> for engaging followers with archive photos helped to discuss the challenges faced when working with young people in collaborative projects. The project was part of a research project related to a museum development project and explored methods of participant inclusion in distributed museum contexts. Our interviewee estimated that there great potential in UGC - but argues that museums have to explore these more closely to find good and relevant solutions for UGC. It is important to find a fit between museums interest and the interests for users. So overall it was suggested to frame UGC as a collaborative project.

The integration of UGC content is time consuming both on the production and on the integration into museum platforms. Being asked about a potential *Scandinavia angle* that showed up in the participation to the questionnaire, the interviewee supposed that the discussion in Scandinavia is more concerned about the democratic sides and effects of these media - but on the other hand several museums in USA integrate parts of user generated content in their outreach programmes.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://instagram.com/>

The following conclusions were drawn from the interviews

- UGC takes place in many different forms using different tools and platforms while addressing different types of users.
- Interviewees complained about the lack of generic tools that enable an easy integration of user-generated content into museum platforms.
- UGC can provide a rewarding activity in itself that might attract target audiences, but it isn't self-promoting and a successful application requires sufficient backup and support through marketing.
- Good practices and their success can be motivating for museums to tap into user-generated content and to find new ways of interacting with their audiences.
- Is there a place for user-generated content in Europeana? Should it be indicated as such?
- Depending on cultural back-ground and social traditions UGC is often seen to encourage democratic participation

### **Workshop at Digital Heritage 2013, Marseille**

While the questionnaire and the interviews provided a certain insight into on-going practices the task force decided that an additional workshop focussing on *Strategies for user generated content and crowdsourcing in museums and cultural heritage* would be highly beneficial to include a broader perspective and to integrate scientific perspectives on UGC as well.

The workshop took place on November 1 2013 during the last day of Digital Heritage 2013 in Marseille and was organized and supported by the Europeana task force on UGC. Overall the workshop was very well received and provided contributions from eight practitioners and researchers from within and outside of the Europeana network. A publication is planned an forthcoming and will include the following contributions:

#### **A tale of three terms: User Generated Content, Crowd-Sourcing and Engagement: from prescription to process**

*Stuart Dunn (King's College London) and Marion Dupeyrat (Ina, Paris)*

This paper will explore a series of mappings between different terms: User-Generated Content (UGC), crowd-sourcing and public engagement on the one hand; and the notions of 'expert' and 'amateur' on the other. These terms, all critical to various aspects of the collection, management and presentation of cultural heritage, share a common feature: their meanings have become blurred by the rapid uptake of digital technology in so-called 'memory institutions, especially national museums, libraries and archives. Time and time again for example, the notions of expert and amateur get lost in the larger term 'citizen', as in citizen science, or citizen history. The implied superiority of the one over the other has no meaning when a shared task (whether that task be mechanical, critical or complex) cannot be achieved without collaboration between the two. Similarly, any attempts to define UGC have been overwhelmed by public perceptions informed by Facebook, blogging, Twitter etc, to the point where UGC is assumed to be anything posted online through a web browser in the post-Web 2.0 world. Such un-nuanced terminology is a hindrance to a critical understanding of the role of digital technology in cultural heritage. As cultural collections share more and more content online, and engage with social media, more and more opportunities emerge for the public to engage in more and more sophisticated ways. We tackle this in this paper.



We will draw on two recent studies which have examined this in detail: a 2013 benchmarking study by Ina EXPERT; and a scoping exercise on ‘humanities crowd-sourcing’ published in the same year, and commissioned by the UK’s Arts and Humanities Research Council. These exercises shared a common approach, in that rather than focusing on types of content and engagement, or individual institutions, as previous work in the area have, they sought to define the increasingly complex relationship between the public and organizations (and thus critique those terms themselves) as sets of processes. It is only through processes - and the dynamism that this term implies - that transformations such as audience to participant, data to content and curation to memory can be understood. This is essential, as the digital world enables these processual transformations in new ways. We will stress the importance of process in this paper, and reflect on how a clearer understanding of process in the cultural heritage sector, as viewed through the case studies we have looked at, can help us to better understand the increasing fluidity of terms such as User Generated Content, crowd-sourcing and engagement.

### **Ancient Lives: Creating Digital Texts and New Technology for Editing and Data Mining Ancient Fragments**

*Dr James Brusuelas, Oxford*

Since August 2011, **Ancient Lives** has recorded well over 1.5 million transcriptions of ancient Greek papyri (over 7 million characters), the work of over 250,00 online collaborators. The result was not simply the creation of big data, but the inception of an entirely different way of conceiving and interfacing ancient digital texts. Put simply, Ancient Lives has created something that has never existed before: a database of unedited Greek texts. We have strings of Greek characters without word division or any modern editorial convention. However, to access and make full use of that data, as texts actually read in antiquity, new algorithmic methods and digital tools that merge machine and human intelligence are required. The purpose of this paper is to showcase, first, the **Ancient Lives’** method for data extraction, curating, and producing digital Greek texts from this unique crowd sourced dataset. Then, and perhaps more importantly, to introduce two new **Ancient Lives** grant funded projects, in which new tools are being developed for the digital editing, data mining, and researching Greek and Coptic fragments through an advanced online interface.

### **Museums Visitors’ Generated Content**

*Roei Amit, Head of Digital, RMN-GP*

In recent years the concept and practices of User Generated Content became an important component of our daily lives: Wikipedia, social networks, video platforms, Web 2.0, for example, and the democratization of Smartphones and the vast use of their connectivity and cameras are participating as well in this vast phenomenon.

The RMN-GP (Réunion des Musées Nationaux – Grand Palais) is experiencing these changes and is updating its audience’s strategy and the ways it can interact with them. On the one hand, how can we interact and develop our relations with the public and the content created spontaneously, and on the other hand how we reposition these relations no longer as top down transmission, but as an interactive dialog of exchange.

Over the last year we have changed our visiting regulations to permit photography by the public (unless marked specifically otherwise), we have installed screens in our reception halls and created

dedicated spaces on our web sites to make visible and present our visitors photographic and textual creations. We have greatly accelerated our interactions on our social networks and launched several operations, tools and applications that interact with these practices.

**“Dynamo”**, a thematic show (Grand Palais, Paris, April-July 2013) about the kinetic art of the 20th century, was accompanied with innovative application inviting the public to take pictures and comment on selection of works, publishing them simultaneously and creating a participative **kaleidoscopic eCatalogue** of the exhibition which was presented on the web, in the application and at the museum video wall.

The exhibition **“Grand Atelier de Midi”**, (From Cezanne to Matisse, June – October 2013, Marseille - Aix en Provence), moved to an outdoor experience, inviting the public to geo localize a selection of the master pieces presented at the exhibition, taking pictures from the artist point of view, and then publish the diptych. For the “George Braque’s” retrospective (Grand Palais, Paris, September 2013- January 2014) the application: La fabrique cubiste, teaches cubism in an amusing and pedagogical way, using cubist filters that can be applied on the photos taken by the public and then published on the social networks.

Last autumn we’ve organized two textual creative on-line workshop: for our exhibition about **“Dreams at the Renaissance”** (Musée de Luxembourg, October 2013- January 2014) we asked our twitter community to tell a dream in a twitter format, and for the Felix Vallotton retrospective (Grand Palais, October 2013- January 2014) we asked the We Love Words community to send us short stories inspired by the artist paintings, a selection of ten novels (from the 300 received) were published as an iBook last January.

In this article we will present and discuss these experimentations, trying to portray different ways to develop and interact with the museums visitors’ generated content.

### **User contributions in the Europeana 1914-18 and Europeana 1989 project**

*Ad Pollé, Europeana Foundation*

Europeana is a catalyst for change in the world of cultural heritage. Mission: The Europeana Foundation and its Network create new ways for people to engage with their cultural history, whether it's for work, learning or pleasure. We believe in making cultural heritage openly accessible in a digital way, to promote the exchange of ideas and information. This helps us all to understand our cultural diversity better and contributes to a thriving knowledge economy.

**[www.Europeana1914-1918.eu](http://www.Europeana1914-1918.eu)** and **[www.europeana1989.eu](http://www.europeana1989.eu)** are pan European community collection projects of digitised material across Europe. The projects aim to collect and share the family memories of people from across Europe online and make them available to the world. Europeana 1989 concerns the political and social changes in Central and Eastern Europe in the year 1989, commonly known as the fall of the Iron Curtain. **Europeana 1914-1918** documents our shared European heritage, representing every side of the First World War and from every perspective.

Both initiatives aim to create a vivid and complete picture of these historical events with stories, photos, videos and sound recordings from every country affected. Personal stories, memories and experiences can help others to better understand what it was like and to see events from a different perspective. By collecting personal memorabilia and stories from this period, and combining it with

institutional collections, we aim to create an engaging user experience. All items are shared online. Contributions can be made online via the project websites or at the collection days by bringing the item(s) so that project staff can digitize the items and record the stories that go with them.

**Europeana 1914-1918** and **Europeana 1989** offer unparalleled masses of primary source material, from which new interpretations and understanding can be drawn. The great majority of the material is openly licensed so we're inviting teachers, historians, Wikipedians, researchers, publishers, apps developers to re-use the information we provide in new and compelling ways. It is easily accessible via a search widget and API.

The projects will continue to hold digitisation days in more countries over 2014 and beyond, so that the public can go on contributing their stories and documents, adding information and helping identify the places and people in the photographs and pictures on the site. Information about future events can be found on [www.europeana1914-1918.eu](http://www.europeana1914-1918.eu) as well as [www.europeana1989.eu](http://www.europeana1989.eu).

Furthermore the publication will contain contributions from Julia Fallon of the Europeana Foundation on *Legal Aspects of UGC & Crowdsourcing*, the case study *Waisda? Making videos findable with Crowdsourced annotations* from Erwin Verbruggen (Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision) as well as an introduction and conclusion by the Europeana task-force.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

In a Web 2.0 atmosphere user-generated content is gradually becoming more and more prevalent in the everyday life of museum visitors both during the physical visit as well as online,. However, while these institutions are engaging their audiences over a variety of social network platforms, only a small number of museums and cultural heritage institutions have fully integrated these practices in their own web platforms.. Some institutions are experimenting with different ways approaches to engage users, with impressive success, but those experiments remain at the moment singular events; usually conducted by highly motivated staff.

1. **Europeana could support the adaptation of UGC on a network level** by providing a shared forum where network members can exchange best practices and practical suggestions on how to execute successful projects.
2. On a technical level **Europeana could encourage the creation of new tools for common use cases**, thereby reducing the technical and administrative burden and costs for the network members while simplifying the integration of user-generated content into existing repositories.
3. The connection between practitioners and scientists is essential to understand UGC and its impact. Europeana could shape this exchange by supporting these practices with a distinct domain within its agenda, e.g. through the creation of a **special interest group**.
4. In the light of its experience with the highly successful projects Europeana 1914-18 and Europeana 1989 **the Europeana foundation could provide valuable insight** into the question of user motivation and **offer practical suggestions on how to engage users**.

5. Finally the network needs to discuss whether or not user-generated content should be seen only a tool for audience engagement or if there is also a genuine desire to see content generated by users fully integrated within Europeana itself.