

## ABSTRACTS

### PANEL: "Collecting Europe"

**Stefan Krankenhagen (NO):** *Collecting Europe. Together? Strategies and Aporia of Collecting Today*

Does Europe wish to create collections itself? Does it seek to become a curator? Put another way, what kind of collecting strategy is presently suited to the inscription of the idea of Europe and the course of European integration? What scope do European institutions possess, and deploy, in seeking to influence current acquisition strategies; how are these directed, adopted, rejected or transformed by individual national entities? If it is true that, today, diverging forms of cultural representation must be developed, does this also apply to the material foundation of musealisation: to objects, and the manner in which they find their way into museums? As part of a wider process of re-describing the function of collections and objects today, the discourses about a common Europe heritage is suited to inscribe itself into the general movement to renew the definition of prospects and qualities of collections for the twenty-first century.

**Gabriela Nicolescu (RO):** *Europeanness for what? Genealogies of discourses on identity issues in the Museum of the Romanian Peasant*

My presentation discusses mainly discourses on ideas of Europe in a museum which exhibits mainly Romanian ethnographic objects. I am going to talk about the museum's history and describe the artistic setting of the display as it was done in the 90's when the museum received the European Museum of the Year Award (1996).

Horia Bernea, the director and main curator of the Museum of the Romanian Peasant affirmed in 1993, very few years after the fall of communism in Romania, that "The easiest way for Europe to stay united is on the basis of the traditional man (...) The unity of Europe has to be searched backwards rather than in the present administrative basis. " In my presentation I trace the genealogy of this idea in the interwar Romanian nationalism, as well as give the context of his and other similar affirmations in the 90's when Romania was not a member of the European Union. How ethnographic museums focused on national spirit exhibit European identity? The discourse about Europeanness as presented by the museum's curators and critics are to be confronted with the reception of the "exhibitionary complex" as done by the visitors.

**Alexander Badenoch (NL):** *Harmonized spaces, dissonant objects, making Europe? National and local collections in a collaborative digital platform*

With initiatives such as Europeana, the European Union is creating increasing opportunities – even pressure – for cultural heritage institutions to digitize and circulate their content in (European) digital spaces. These forces add to a further range of forces that increasingly destabilize the role of objects in collections. Already Russo and Watkins have noted and increasing shift in mission 'from the exhibition of collections to the remediation of cultural narratives and experiences'. The increased emphasis on user- and experience generated content can further serve to dislodge the knowledge of the collection holder from the foreground of exhibition, and asks further questions of the role of the collection in object interpretation.

This paper will explore these processes and tensions by drawing on the empirical case of the *Making Europe* virtual exhibit, which is currently being developed by the paper author in collaboration with a number of cultural heritage institutions and historical researchers. The exhibit platform combines an object-oriented narrative environment with links to objects from a range of digital heritage collections dynamically fed into the exhibit as related content, which users can then follow back to their original context. The exhibit thus forms what Barry refers to as a harmonized zone of circulation, which allows users to experience objects within three separate contexts: 1) the static narratives of the website, 2) in relation to similar and/or related objects within a range of collections and 3) within the digital exhibition context of their 'home' collection. This paper will analyse two levels of the process. At the level of production, it will look at how museum professionals choose and tag items for inclusion to explore the ways they mobilise their knowledge and their collections into transnational stories. At the level of the text – exhibit development permitting – it will further examine the tensions surrounding the objects within their three contexts to examine how collection contexts are obscured or mobilized.

**Nanna Bonde Thylstrup (DK):** *Europeana and the Differences between Public and Commercial Digitization in Europe*

One of EU's biggest cultural prestige projects is the Internet portal Europeana, which gives online access to European cultural heritage. At first sight the portal appears to be little more than a simple Internet website with a limited scope. But in reality the portal makes for one of the most interesting studies of the creation of European cultural narratives and how these narratives correspond with the economic and political potential of cultural heritage in the digital sphere.

My paper explores *Europeana* as a cultural, political and economic project with particular attention paid to differences between public digitization and commercial digitization:

- 1) terms of access
- 2) selection criteria and the narratives they form ('Googlearchy' vs 'Enlightenment')
- 3) the role of the private citizens in the public sphere

The paper is partly based on qualitative interviews conducted with key actors in 2010.

Most cultural institutions used to contribute to - and serve the needs of - people with a particular interest in the institutional collections. And collection policies were predominantly determined by the individual institutions themselves. But digitization and the Internet have fundamentally redefined the perspectives of these practices.

The key factor in this shift has been the invention of search engines and digital databases turning physically confined specialist sites into digitally omnipresent layman sites. This change has generated new scholarly, political and corporate interest in the formation and governance of institutional collections. The archives of cultural heritage thus embody several political key issues with perspectives extending far beyond the subject matter of the collections, most notably the battles for profitable knowledge, territorial memory, the internet frontiers and what American professor of law, Madhavi Sunder, with an American knack for catchy titles has named 'IP3': Identity Politics, Internet Protocol, and Intellectual Property.

*Europeana* makes a perfect departure point for exploring this development and its consequences for collection policies, institutional practices and the creation of Europe's narratives. For almost a decade, the European Commission has been working on the digitization of, and online accessibility to, European cultural heritage. The process started with co-funded projects meant to facilitate cooperation between Member States and individual art institutions and their efforts to digitize parts of their cultural heritages. It was,

however, not until June 2005 that the project accelerated as a result of the Commission's decision to make the European digital archive, *Europeana*, one of the flagship projects of the EU's i2010 strategy.

My analysis of *Europeana* will address the hitherto rarely discussed differences between private and public digitization with particular attention paid to the consequences for user access, the selection criteria of the digitizers (e.g. physical format vs. scholarly content), the archival narratives of the two different models and the role of internet users as active contributing citizens and active contributing consumers in the digital public sphere.