



Germany
Monika
Hagedorn
-Saupe

I ntroduction

The focus of this fifth issue of *Uncommon Culture* is on *Collections Development*. Collections are the cornerstone of cultural heritage institutions. It has always been the task of memory institutions to build, to maintain, and to research these collections as well as making them accessible. Object-centred research, which has regained increasing impulse in recent years, has built on these features to a large degree.

A second aspect is the fact that collections held in our cultural heritage institutions - both conventional and digital - are essential for understanding our past and are relevant for teaching and learning. Thus access to them should be possible under many different aspects and in many different ways for many different target groups. This also means that the curators of collections in museums, libraries and archives increasingly pay attention to putting additional work into organising the collections for such learning and teaching use and into researching individual components in the collections in order to provide better and deeper understanding of them.

Collections are the basis upon which all information work builds, and digital information certainly no less. In this, it does not matter whether hitherto analogue collections are being retro-digitized or whether collections are built from the start as fully digital ones. It also does not matter whether these collections are found in libraries, museums, archives, or other memory institutions. However, content and format in the individual collections vary greatly as concerns the complexity of the contents: from pure text collections through sophisticated graphical representations or, e.g., music or the reproduction of three-dimensional objects and complex structures in scientific research. This, obviously, puts great requirements on working with such different collections to give them a good digital representation. Also, along with these requirements, new challenges, but especially also completely new opportunities are there for opening up and bringing to the users' attention many special aspects and components of each collection. There is much more possible today than simple key-word searching in texts - as good as this may be.

Providing access to cultural heritage objects also means - und must necessarily do so - to guide users to the contexts of the objects, which means that much more can be gained from digital collections than just simple item search. In fact, it means that the informational value is much enhanced beyond being only for the individual object but is much enriched by seeing other objects and connections to the given one and enabling to compare various features of objects when seeing them side by side. This is especially so, of course, in some cultural heritage portals where the information e.g. on a museum object can easily be complemented by related information in published works held in a library or by unpublished archival sources. Europeana is a prominent example of such a large over-arching tool.

The digital medium and the digital reproduction of the objects in it open up completely new possibilities for users, both experts and the general public, to work with the digital objects: the digital object representation can be adapted into one's own digital workspace and can be studied, analyzed, commented and to some degree even "changed" (e.g. when working on drawings). In this way, through expert sourcing or crowd-sourcing, both enhancement of the information object for further individual use and also for re-communication to the original provider can take place. This also means that cultural heritage institutions have a lot of potential to take advantage of improvement and correction of the information they provide through their users and through their potentially world-wide virtual network.

Collections have always been developed and will continue to do so. However, entering into the digital age does seriously change our own way of maintaining the collections and working with them and it does include in a stable way broad circles of the professional and general public into the development of the collections, making these circles more integral parts of general collections development.

In this issue of *Uncommon Culture*, a large variety of examples is featured in which these approaches to collections development in the digital sphere are shown and discussed. This issue covers reports from many European countries and examples from museums, libraries and archives. They show the rich variety of uses made possible in today's digital environment and they certainly provide interesting examples for our whole community to build upon in its further work.

The publication of this issue of *Uncommon Culture* has been slightly delayed; however we believe that the contributions have lost nothing of their freshness and do still contribute to orient readers in new and interesting directions. We are grateful to Giuliana De Francesco, Italian Ministry of Culture, for having spent a lot of work in preparing this issue during her stay in Berlin in the framework of the Young Government Executives Exchange programme "Bellevue" by the Robert Bosch Foundation (Stuttgart).

