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MS15: Guidelines for Europeana users interested in pursuing local or family history themes

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Revision History

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1 Introduction

1.1 Context, within Europeana Awareness

Workpackage 3 of Europeana Awareness, Developing New Partnerships, addresses several key stakeholder sectors which are not yet optimally exploited by Europeana and is taking action to raise awareness among them of the potential benefits of developing such a relationship.

The four key sectors identified are:

- Public libraries
- Local archival collections
- Broadcasters
- Open Culture re-users

This approach to them, in each case, entails – with modifications adapted to the various starting points:

- a relatively brief phase of inputs from and discussion with the participating stakeholders, based on the state-of-the-art examples and previous work followed by more structured assessment and negotiation of the possibilities;
- piloting and testing of joint activities with the sector or cultural domain, utilising available tools and processes;
- a period of dissemination and mainstreaming with the sector, conducted via appropriate cooperation with the public media campaign in WP1;
- accompanied by identification of processes for operationalisation of promising services, through the appropriate project or other instrument within the Europeana ‘ecosystem’.

Task 3.2 tackles local archival collections and is potentially the most complex of the four target sectors to address. As the New Renaissance report¹ points out: *‘we have specifically excluded from the scope of our calculations:*

- *Business Archives*
- *Community Archives*
- *Church Archives*
- *Private Archives*
- *Other ‘Special’ archives*

.... These have been excluded on the basis that (a) insufficient data is available to quantify their number or the scope of their collections and (b) they are likely in any case to adopt different approaches to digitisation, based on funding support from other sources’

The report on the Cost of Digitising Europe’s Cultural Heritage² provides estimates of the proportion of archival content which remains to be digitised in Europe, among estimates for other institutional domains. However, this relates solely or mainly to National Archives and

¹ *The New Renaissance*, Report of the ‘Comité des Sages’, Reflection Group on bringing Europe’s cultural heritage online, January, 2011, available at

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/digital_libraries/doc/refgroup/final_report_cds.pdf

² *The Cost of Digitising Europe’s Cultural Heritage*, a Report for the Comité des Sages of the European Commission prepared by Nick Poole, the Collections Trust, November 2010, page 57-63, available at http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/digital_libraries/doc/refgroup/annexes/digiti_report.pdf

specifically excludes from its scope Business Archives, Community Archives, Church Archives, Private Archives and other 'Special' archives.

The same report makes the point that *'the exponential increase in the proportion of new material that is born-digital is having a profound impact on future Digitisation activity in the archives sector. The majority of new material is born-digital, with the result that Digitisation is primarily a legacy concern in archives, focussing on the conversion, management and description of paper materials acquired during the previous century.'*

Nevertheless legacy content held by archives is likely to be an important concern for Europeana as it seeks to represent Europe's cultural heritage.

There are numerous potential target audiences for the rich data held by local archives including, researchers, local historians, genealogists/those conducting family research and tourists. WP3 will seek to work specifically with some private online genealogy companies to place Europeana related information on their sites worldwide

Europeana Awareness essentially begins a process, which is potentially of very large proportions, of making the best possible use of this rich and highly important record of Europe's cultural heritage within Europeana. It is expected that the work will need to encompass the full three years of Europeana Awareness.

The envisaged sequence of related tasks from the workplan is as follows:

3.2.1 MDR, Kulturrad, Provincie Limburg and AAKB will carry out a structured assessment of the potential role of locally-based archives and other local collection holders (such as church councils or historical associations) to provide digital content of relevance to Europeana using literature and data review, online survey and other techniques as appropriate by Month 12 (D3.2).

3.2.2 Drawing on this knowledge, EF will conduct a further analysis of its own content to assess whether and in what form Europeana might develop services of relevance and interest to Europe's genealogy and local history markets either a) through its own portal or b) in partnership with commercial services by Month 18 (D3.3).

3.2.3 Provincie Limburg, working with Kulturrad and EF, will produce a set of guidelines for Europeana users interested in pursuing local or family history themes by Month 24 (MS15).

3.2.4 In conjunction with WP1 and WP2, an appropriate set of awareness-raising activities, will be directed towards Europe's local archives, through the national PR campaigns by Month 30.

3.2.5 EF, supported as necessary by MDR, will conduct discussions with a range of commercial suppliers of online services to the genealogy and local history sectors, with a view to delineating sustainable partnership arrangement by Month 32 (MS20).

1.2 This document

This document represents MS15, outcome of task 3.2.3.

These guidelines build further on EAwareness deliverables D3.2³ and D3.3⁴. The survey of D3.2 concludes that availability of digital archival content remains very low, in particular from local archives. The enquiry of D3.3 indicates that the scope and content of Europeana are currently not particularly geared towards local or family history themes, and the possibilities of usage for these ‘thematic’ areas are limited. Therefore, these guidelines are inevitably not final, but point users in directions suggested by potential future content and features of Europeana.

The issues involved are open-ended in many directions. The target group ‘Europeana users’ must therefore be interpreted in the broadest sense:

- the end-users: as readers as well as contributors, within contexts of crowd-sourcing and UGC,
- the data providers and aggregators, making data available to Europeana,
- the Europeana Office.

It is not the intention to provide a thorough scientific analysis of the themes involved. External references are certainly not exhaustive, but are included to provide a background for further exploration.

No further version of this document (MS15) is planned. However, the options indicated here will be useful for guiding further work in this context within WP3 of the Europeana Awareness project.

³ Rob Davies, Carol Usher, *Assessment of the role of local archival collections*, Europeana Awareness deliverable D3.2, 2013

⁴ Marie-Claire Dangerfield, Hans de Haan, *Analysis of Europeana Content for local history and genealogy users/re-users*, Europeana Awareness deliverable D3.3, 2013

2 The theme

2.1 Local history

*Wikipedia: "Local history is the study of history in a geographically local context and it often concentrates on the local community. It incorporates cultural and social aspects of history. Historic plaques are one form of documentation of significant occurrences in the past and oral histories are another. Local history is often documented by local historical societies or groups that form to preserve a local historic building or other historic site. Many works of local history are compiled by amateur historians working independently or archivists employed by various organizations. An important aspect of local history is the publication and cataloguing of documents preserved in local or national records which relate to particular areas."*⁵

In this definition, 'local history' is understood as the history of a certain place. However, it is also often considered as a 'localisation' of history, a way of presenting history⁶, thus perhaps making it more accessible. These interpretations are not in conflict, but rather complementary.

Significant keywords:

- Geographically local context
- Local community
- Oral histories
- Local historical societies
- Preserve a local historic building or other historic site
- Amateur historians
- Publication and cataloguing of documents ... which relate to particular areas

2.2 Genealogy

Wikipedia: "Genealogy, also known as family history, is the study of families and the tracing of their lineages and history. Genealogists use oral traditions, historical records, genetic analysis, and other records to obtain information about a family and to demonstrate kinship and pedigrees of its members. The results are often displayed in charts or written as narratives.

*The pursuit of family history and origins tends to be shaped by several motivations, including the desire to carve out a place for one's family in the larger historical picture, a sense of responsibility to preserve the past for future generations, and a sense of self-satisfaction in accurate storytelling."*⁷

One of the world's largest initiatives in the area of genealogy, FamilySearch, the non-profit family history organisation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormon Church) states its vision as:

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Local_history, accessed at 2013/10/04

⁶ Quinto Antonelli, Luigi Dappiano, *Storia locale e spazi di cittadinanza*, ECIT – Educazione alla cittadinanza e interculturalità, Deliverable n. 9, 2006,

<http://www.storiairreer.it/Materiali/Materiali/Storia%20locale/n.9storialocale.pdf>, accessed at 2013/10/04

⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genealogy>, accessed at 2013/10/04

“Learning about our ancestors helps us better understand who we are — creating a family bond, linking the present to the past, and building a bridge to the future.”⁸

Significant keywords:

- Family history
- Oral traditions
- Historical records
- Written narratives
- Place of a family in the larger historical picture
- Sense of responsibility to preserve the past for future generations
- Accurate storytelling

2.3 Common elements

The emphasis with local history seems to be on historic places, while for genealogy the focus is on the family, i.e. the persons. However, there are many overlaps. Persons or communities are of course important to local history, because they determine evolution and interpretation. Places are a fundamental aspect for genealogy, because they are part of the identities of the persons, and are the subject of migration. Sources for both domains are very similar. They include local archives and oral histories, among many others. Stories or narratives are favourite products of both ‘disciplines’. Both attempt to find a place of local events, locations or persons in the broader historical picture.

While genealogists concentrate in the first place on the persons, and have several rather standard archival documents at their disposal as a basis for their research (registers of births, deaths and marriages, census records, passengers lists), local historians may have more diverse interests and themes to research, and a greater variety of sources to consider. However, once the persons are identified, genealogists are also interested in investigating contexts, and their research then turns into a local history theme as well. Local history research will often need to identify specific persons. It will find useful contextual information in the same basic documents used by the genealogists, e.g. information about migration, epidemics, social structure at a certain location, etc.

Therefore, for the purpose of this document, it does not seem very useful to maintain a strict distinction between local historians and genealogists.

2.4 Importance

It is generally recognized that there has been an increasing interest for local history and genealogy over the last decades. Most often the origin is placed in the 1960s and explained as a side effect of increasing globalization⁹. Some indicate the origin back in the 1930s when history started being conceived as a social science¹⁰. For professional historians it is definitely connected to the emergence of ‘microhistory’ (*microstoria*) in the 1970s¹¹. No

⁸ <http://familysearch.org/about>, accessed at 2013/10/04

⁹ G.J. Ashworth, Brian Graham, J.E. Tunbridge, *Pluralising Pasts*, 2007

¹⁰ Giuseppe Serri, *Storia locale, storia generale*, 2005,

<http://ospitiweb.indire.it/~caps0001/risorgimento/serri1.html>, accessed at 2013/10/04

¹¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Microhistory>, accessed at 2013/10/04

matter where the roots lie of the growing interest, it appears to match the development of heritage theory insights concerning the relationships between heritage, identity and place¹².

A research about the users of Polish digital libraries indicates the relevance of online content for local history and genealogy (quoted also in EAwareness D3.3):

*Approximately 60 per cent of users are amateur historians with an interest in the history of their place of residence or genealogists interested in the history of their family. The remaining 40 per cent consist mainly of academic researchers and students. ... There will probably be a significant rise in the number of users in the amateur historians and genealogists category.*¹³

Local history and genealogy relate to the places where people live and to the persons they know. It makes history and heritage more accessible for everybody. It can be inserted easily in the daily communication networks (formal as well as informal) that are carriers for knowledge transfer and agents for social cohesion. Hence, local history is an excellent pedagogical tool for general history education.¹⁴ In extension, local history and genealogy are undoubtedly important levers for education outside of school context, for increasing awareness and thus for raising the public interest and support for history and heritage, beyond the local dimension.

¹² See e.g.: Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 2006 or G.J. Ashworth, Brian Graham, J.E. Tunbridge, *Pluralising Pasts*, 2007

¹³ Mirosław Górny, Jolanta Mazurek, *Key users of Polish digital libraries*, The Electronic Library, Vol. 30 Iss: 4, pp.543 – 556, available at <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/journals.htm?articleid=17047025&show=abstract> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/02640471211252238> (free access to the abstract, the article is available for a fee)

¹⁴ Quinto Antonelli, Luigi Dappiano, *Storia locale e spazi di cittadinanza*, ECIT – Educazione alla cittadinanza e interculturalità, Deliverable n. 9, 2006, <http://www.storiairreer.it/Materiali/Materiali/Storia%20locale/n.9storialocale.pdf>, accessed at 2013/10/04

3 Target groups and processes

3.1 Local historians

Genealogists and local historians are prevalently not professional historians, and perform this activity out of personal interest, on a voluntary basis. They often collaborate in local history or genealogy associations. They may be less rigorous in their methodology than professional historians, but they usually have excellent knowledge about very specific topics.

In 2003-2004 the Dutch 'Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau' (Social and cultural planning bureau of the Dutch Government) conducted a survey about cultural participation in Dutch households. The results were analysed in order to discover the profiles of users of digital heritage. The publication gives a detailed overview, according to gender, age groups, education, etc.¹⁵ In terms of general cultural participation, 38% of the population above 6 years of age visited a museum in the previous 12 months, 45% visited a monument or historic site, 3% visited an archive. 15% visited the website of a museum in the previous 12 months, 9% visited a website of archaeology, of an archive or of a monument, 12% searched on the internet for information about the past, 4% used the internet to contact others about issues from the past. Similar studies in other countries have yielded comparable results. Every heritage user is to a certain extent a potential local historian. Users of digital heritage are mostly the same as the users of the physical heritage resources. They are classified in 5 groups:

- *All-rounders (4% of the population)*
- *Art lovers (8%)*
- *Members of historical associations (5.6%)*
- *Collectors (8%)*
- *Browsers (9%)*

3.2 Sources

About genealogists, Wikipedia says:

*"Genealogists who seek to reconstruct the lives of each ancestor consider all historical information to be "genealogical" information. Traditionally, the basic information needed to ensure correct identification of each person are place names, occupations, family names, first names, and dates. However, modern genealogists greatly expand this list, recognizing the need to place this information in its historical context in order to properly evaluate genealogical evidence and distinguish between same-name individuals."*¹⁶

The primary sources of documents relevant for genealogy are local archives or national archives (often with regional offices). Digitization is under way in many countries, but nowhere complete.

Digitization alone is not sufficient. Suitable metadata must be available to identify each digital object. The archive documents commonly have metadata indicating what kind of document they are, where and when they were made. However, family and local history are usually not so much searching for the documents themselves, but rather for the information that they contain. Transcriptions or indexing of such documents are therefore often much more useful

¹⁵ Henrieke Wubs, Frank Huysmans, *Klik naar het verleden*, 2006, available at http://www.scp.nl/Publicaties/Alle_publicaties/Publicaties_2006/Klik_naar_het_verleden

¹⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genealogy>, accessed at 2013/10/04

than the documents themselves. They require a much larger effort than the digitization. Often this work is not done by the keepers of the documents (the archives), but rather by volunteers. Local historians and genealogists organize themselves to provide these data and to make them available to their colleagues. Such rich, searchable data could be considered as rich metadata to the scanned documents. However, they are made in another environment, and are usually made available separately. Fortunately the archives working on the digitization are aware of the tremendous added value of linking the documents with the indexes, and try to combine them on their websites. The way in which the documents are presented and searchable on the websites varies, as well as the ease with which the links can be discovered. Here are three cases, as examples:

- In the Belgian National Archives¹⁷, the documents are published with their own standard metadata. A database with names of persons (and roles, dates and places) can be queried separately. The user can then discover from which document (type, location and date) the index information originates and can then search the digital scan in the documents list, sorted by type, place (parish) and date. So far there are only parish registers available. Use of the databases on-line is free but registration is required. The data can be queried in French or in Dutch.
- In the Norwegian National Archive¹⁸, the searching is directly linked to the documents. The metadata does not go down to the level of person names. Names of locations, periods and type of documents can be searched in the metadata database, and the links to the scans are then available in result lists. There are parish registers, real estate registers, probate records. The database and documents are freely accessible. The data can be queried in three Norwegian languages Bokmål, Nynorsk and Davvisámegiella (Northern Sami language), and some in English.
- The Irish National Archive¹⁹ has put census records on line from 1901 and 1911. The database can be directly searched on the data contained in the records, including names of persons, roles, occupation, religion, etc. The result shows a transcription together with the scanned record. The data and documents are freely accessible. Searching is in English only. The 1911 records are also visible in Europeana, with limited metadata (location and date only). This is the only collection of 'genealogical' records available in Europeana at this time.

Local archives have a wide range of other documents relevant for the purpose of general local history, and very often also local public libraries keep significant collections. Frequently the libraries feel a responsibility towards the local community, to collect copies of locally published documents or publications related to the local history or heritage. Digitization of these collections or documents is usually much less organized or advanced than those useful for family history. This role of (local) public libraries was a prominent topic at the 6th Spanish Public Libraries Conference in Burgos, Spain, 9-11 October 2012²⁰, organized jointly with Europeana (and within the context of Europeana Awareness WP3, Task 3.1).

3.3 Genealogy websites

Specialized websites offer access to sources for genealogists, where users can search for names related to places and dates in documents such as birth, death and marriage registers,

¹⁷ <http://www.arch.be/>, <http://search.arch.be/>

¹⁸ <http://www.arkivverket.no/>, <http://www.arkivverket.no/eng/Using-the-Archives/Genealogical-Research>

¹⁹ <http://www.nationalarchives.ie/>, <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/search/>

²⁰ Europeana Conference / VI Congreso Nacional de Bibliotecas Públicas - Public Libraries: Individual Memory, Global Heritage, <http://www.mcu.es/bibliotecas/MC/2012/CongresoBP/index.html> accessed at 2013/12/23

census records, ship passengers lists, but also social security indexes, historical newspaper articles, school yearbooks, etc. In the first place genealogists will certainly try to build on each other's work, re-using information from other family trees and connecting their own findings. They will produce their own products, family trees or family histories. Many are also involved as volunteers in transcribing hand-written records, so that they can be searched more easily by others.

In every country there are associations of genealogists that usually have their own websites for assisting their colleagues, sharing their information and providing a communication platform. The tendency is for these associations to connect with larger international initiatives. This allows them to reduce costs by using the services offered by the larger organizations. However there clearly is also an advantage of scale concerning the content: the larger and more international a body of published data, the more useful and efficient it can be for researchers.

The largest and best known international initiatives are

- Geneanet.org (origin: Europe), <http://www.geneanet.org>,
- Ancestry.com (origin: American), <http://www.ancestry.com>,
- FamilySearch.com (origin: American, Mormons), <http://www.familysearch.com> and
- MyHeritage.com (origin: Israel), <http://www.myheritage.com> .

Note that the American initiatives contain large amounts of European information, because the origin of genealogical research in North America is often inspired by the desire to discover the historical European roots of families. The organizations mentioned have offices and/or websites in several European countries (and languages), by which they maintain their network of local genealogical communities.

They provide genealogists with all kinds of tools and advice: guidelines, links, specialized software as well as content in the form of family trees, transcribed lists, photographs, etc. There is a *de facto* standard data format for genealogical information, GEDCOM (Genealogical Data Communication), which is used by all to publish and exchange database information. Users usually can upload their own genealogical database (family tree) in this format, so that it is included in the search capabilities of the website, or they can publish a set of html webpages about their family.

Genealogy websites usually provide a discussion forum, where the users community can ask questions and find support from colleagues. The most frequent requests concern help with translations, reading ancient handwriting, interpretation, identification of persons or locations, dead ends (e.g.: 'did anyone meet information about person x...?').

To make full use of the features, services and all available data, registration is normally required. In some cases a subscription fee is requested, in particular to have full access to databases or transcriptions of documents.

3.4 Processes

The British Local History Magazine suggests following steps for getting started²¹:

- *Look on the web*
- *Visit your local studies library*
- *Visit your local museum*
- *Visit your local archives*

²¹ <http://www.local-history.co.uk/gettingstarted.html>, accessed at 2013/10/27

- *Join a local history society*
- *Join an adult education course*
- *Go for a walk!*

Heritage is the key element throughout the process. The internet seems to be a good starting point. However, the 2003-2004 Dutch study²² shows that the internet can do more for local historians. It recognizes following purposes for using the internet in general, but this can easily be extrapolated towards heritage information:

- *Source of information*: the internet is nearly always a secondary source, primary sources (such as the real archive) may be accessed later, depending on the purpose of the research;
- *Communication*: exchanging experience, asking questions through e-mail or messenger;
- *Entertainment*: local history or genealogy is mostly a hobby, searching and finding information must be a pleasure;
- *Transactions*: buying or exchanging information, making appointments;
- *Socialisation*: learning about specific topics, environments or institutions, participating in virtual communities;
- *Spreading of information*: distribution of own research or knowledge through a website.

The study also indicates the motives for using the internet instead of other channels for information gathering:

- *Access from home*
- *24/24 hrs. availability*
- *Timesaving*
- *Freedom of selection*
- *Access to rare sources*
- *Explanation of objects*

3.5 Use of Europeana

From the Europeana FAQ:²³
What is Europeana?

Europeana represents both Europe's cultural and scientific history, collected and curated for all to enjoy, and the achievements that are possible when organisations across an entire continent choose to work together with a common goal.

- *For users:*

Europeana is a single access point to millions of books, paintings, films, museum objects and archival records that have been digitised throughout Europe. It is an authoritative source of information coming from European cultural and scientific institutions.

- *For heritage institutions:*

Europeana is an opportunity to reach out to more users, increase their web traffic, enhance their users' experience and build new partnerships. By integrating the

²² Henrieke Wubs, Frank Huysmans, *Klik naar het verleden*, 2006, available at

http://www.scp.nl/Publicaties/Alle_publicaties/Publicaties_2006/Klik_naar_het_verleden

²³ Europeana FAQ, <http://pro.europeana.eu/web/guest/europeana-faq>, accessed at 2013/12/23

Europeana API, organisations can give users access to an unparalleled source of rich content.

- *For professionals in the heritage sector:*

Europeana is a platform for knowledge exchange between librarians, curators, archivists and the creative industries.

- *For policy-makers and funders:*

Europeana is a prestigious initiative endorsed by the European Commission, and is a means to stimulate the creative economy and promote cultural tourism.

From the Europeana Strategic Plan 2011-2015;²⁴:

Build the open trusted source for European cultural heritage content

EAwareness document D3.3²⁵ shows the results of some queries performed in the Europeana content with genealogy-related keywords in several languages. A quick scan of these results indicates that most are documents that remain at a rather abstract, or at the most a statistical level of information. The only documents in Europeana that can have a potential direct relevance for genealogists are the appr. 906,686 records from the Irish 1911 census held by the National Archives of Ireland. These can be searched by location, but the metadata in Europeana do not contain reference to the persons in the documents.

3.6 Content or metadata?

The digital (scanned) documents, often handwritten, that are of interest to local historians and genealogists are usually provided by the archives that keep them. They can have the archivists' metadata, but this goes not further than what type of document it is, who made it, where and when it was made. These archives are mainly public institutions who would not charge (or not much) to users. In some cases they may request users to register (for free) for full access to their website and the search tools (e.g. Belgian State Archives).

Local historians and genealogists would however also like to search the content of the document in some way, e.g. through more rich metadata or direct search in the documents' texts. This means they would need tags or indexes with keywords, person names and place names extracted from the documents, and/or textual transcriptions. Such data are often produced by volunteers, in crowd-sourcing projects, or organized in local associations. They are thus often provided separately from the digital documents themselves, and usually reside in other systems, not directly linked to the documents.

This kind of data is what private genealogical organisations such as Ancestry.com are mostly after. It is also the part of the information that is most valuable, as users would be prepared to pay for it. The data could be interpreted as rich metadata to the documents, but because they mostly originate from different sources and when connections between data and documents are not readily available, it would require quite some work to propose them properly linked in a single user interface. The nature and origin of these data is also somewhat more elaborate and specialized than metadata in general. It would be very hard to obtain that it can be shared under a CC0 licence. The above shows that there is an inversion of value: it's the metadata that would be more valuable than access to the documents themselves.

²⁴ Europeana Strategy 2011-2015, <http://pro.europeana.eu/web/guest/strategy>, accessed at 2013/12/23

²⁵ Marie-Claire Dangerfield, Hans de Haan, *Analysis of Europeana Content for local history and genealogy users/re-users*, Europeana Awareness deliverable D3.3, 2013

4 Practice

A general use case is sketched from the family history point of view. A family history research usually contains also local history elements. Local history that does not depart from family history is normally more open-ended and can have a wide variation of starting points and targets. The use case is mainly written out of personal experience (both from the standpoint of the end-user as that of data provider/aggregator) and results from information from a wide variety of sources.

4.1 Starting a research

A family history search starts with the name of a person or family (with possible variations), a specific locality and a certain time period. Point of departure is usually based on direct personal knowledge, not more than a few generations back. From there the research will move back in time, via names of parents or other family members, and place names as found in the documents.

As apparent from several studies or from the advice from local history associations (see also under 3.4), a good place to start is the Internet. In particular, this can show if some of the relevant data may already have been researched by other persons, and can be available to build on. A quick query in a general search engine (such as Google), will reveal if the name appears in published family trees or other available transcribed documents. It will also provide a clue about the extension of the additional work that is required for the topic of the research.

Next comes a more systematic and thorough search, most often at local archives or libraries. They generally keep local parish registers and/or registry documents. Very often copies are available on microfilm for easier and faster consultation. In many European countries such microfilms have been made on a broad scale through agreements with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons – FamilySearch.com²⁶). Digitization of such records is being undertaken in many countries, sometimes also in collaboration with the Mormons initiative.

The examples in 3.2 (not exhaustive) show that in some countries useful information for genealogists or local historians can be accessed through the internet. They show that digitization is under way, but a lot remains to be done. There is no place where the internet alone can provide all relevant data. There is no single technical solution either for how to organize the databases and retrieve results. Searching genealogical data and presenting the results require specific solutions, that ideally go beyond average navigation or search for digital documents. The digital availability is not a valid alternative yet for a consultation at the physical archive (eventually the microfilms).

In Europeana:

Europeana is currently not very useful in this phase. Comprehensiveness is a key, and the availability of relevant documents is very limited in Europeana. To find data, the metadata must be of a specific 'richness', including names of people, that is not available in Europeana. This is not foreseen in the currently used datamodel (though it may be possible to adapt the use of EDM in this way, and even to map GEDCOM data – this could be verified).

²⁶ FamilySearch.com, <http://www.familysearch.com>

4.2 Framework: who, where and when

The first phase sets a kind of framework, with as many reference points or hooks to connect further discovered information.

Genealogical research is usually quite easy when the concerned people didn't move, and when the records are still in good order. However people tend to 'disappear from the radar' by moving to another town or emigrating to another country, thus creating loose ends in the research. Their trace cannot be followed by looking in the archival documents normally organized by location. Then broader databases with summary information from many locations are extremely valuable. Also transcriptions of other types of documents, like notary records, censuses or passengers lists will be helpful. Local newspapers, military archives, business archives can provide good clues but those will require full-text searching. Of course, the more centralized and comprehensive of these resources make this research more effective. Access to the original documents remains useful, as they will always contain more detail than the transcribed lists or texts.

Lists and transcriptions are most often made by local historians or genealogical associations. They are usually made available through the channels provided by the large genealogical networks indicated in 3.3.

In Europeana:

Europeana cannot be very useful here either. Even when lists could be made available in the form of metadata to documents, convenient consultation would require a specialized screen layout and possibly also specific indexation. The more general types of documents (e.g. newspapers, local archival material) will be increasingly available through Europeana, but convenient use would need full-text search, which remains hard to implement in the current Europeana setup.

4.3 Context: what, how and why

The two previous phases establish the framework of simple facts: who, where, when. Genealogists use this information to build family trees or to establish family relationships among people. The local history aspect then takes over with the desire to understand better the context: specific (related) events, environments, motivation, thoughts or general background: the what, how and why.

The research broadens considerably its scope. Queried keywords and relevant documents can be of the widest possible variety: all kinds of archival and published documents, photographs and other audio-visual material, not always directly related to the persons or specific locations, but related through all kinds of aspects or concepts, and pertaining to the neighbourhood of the subject of research. The most valuable remain the objects and documents with local relevance, as there must remain a direct link between the established framework and understanding the context.

The purpose or product of such research can be studies focused on any specific aspect of a historical location, biographies of people, objects or places, interpretations of heritage objects, etc. The variety is unlimited.

In Europeana:

This is where a search engine/database like Europeana may be most valuable. In particular studies written by other local historians are most often published in local periodicals and only locally available. They are usually kept in local libraries, but hard to find for people from

outside the specific location and Europeana would be the ideal way to access them. The main features sought after in Europeana would be that of being a trusted source, the connections to where to find and access the original documents and a broad comprehensiveness in a single search point. All the data in Europeana relate to historically relevant material. Europeana only shows data contributed by institutions that have an interest in history and heritage. Europeana knows the contributors. Europeana and its contributors use certain standards and strive to adopt common ways of presentation and interpretation.

4.4 Communication

Genealogists and local historians are often organized in associations or communities where they help each other with their searches. There is a wide range of ways in which they do this. The Internet offers many new possibilities with the increasing use and accessibility of social media. In particular e-mail lists and discussion forums are used for all kinds of communication within or among dedicated communities.

The genealogical websites (the local ones as well as the international ones) usually offer general assistance and Q&A for various levels of genealogical or local history researchers. They also offer social media functionality and infrastructure to host on-line conversations, either moderated or open. These are very effective, because the conversations are focused around very similar and often repeated types of questions. Direct experience shows that most questions concern: translations, palaeographic assistance, retrieving documents from remote locations, specific knowledge about local place names, interpretation of various historic concepts, etc.

In Europeana:

Experience within Europeana and its Network shows that it is very difficult to organize a good communication platform on behalf of a wide variety of disciplines. Each discipline has its own preferred way of communicating and is reluctant to use something that is not as good (or familiar) as their own. The Europeana communication platform focuses on the implementation of Europeana itself, and not on the communication about content in the Europeana database. So far, Europeana has not indicated an intention to set up content-related discussion platforms, and there does not seem to exist a demand for this.

4.5 Contribution

Genealogists and local historians are most often volunteers in this work. They are eager to share the results of their research with colleagues and interested public, without expecting to make profit. They are glad that their work can be available for others to learn from and to develop further, but they expect recognition (attribution) and do not normally permit others to (re-)use it in commercial context.

Traditionally their research results are published in the periodical of their local association. The printed publications are normally distributed at a local scale only. They can often be accessed at local libraries, but remain hard to discover from outside the directly concerned community. Many are now using the possibilities of providing the content of (new) work on their association's or their own personal website, but also these remain scattered and of difficult access for potential users from outside the direct community.

In Europeana:

Europeana has been experimenting with collecting user generated content. In particular, it provides a story-telling platform, which is available for users to construct their own stories,

based on material found in Europeana. The most powerful initiatives involving UGC so far have been the collecting days organized within the Europeana Awareness context, around WWI (www.europeana1914-1918.eu) and the transformation of Eastern Europe in 1989 (www.europeana1989.eu).

The story-telling platform can be useful to assist local historians in publishing the results of local history research in a web-based format. The collecting-day type of application is extremely good at capturing small aspects of stories, e.g. focused around a single object or document. Many local historians still prefer to write more traditional texts, which can be published as such on a website. This would still offer the best guarantee of long-term preservation of their work. Experience with the story-telling platform and the collecting days is not very advanced yet, and there is no standard sustainable way in which the collected information can be kept thus far.

However, Europeana is a good place to collect such study material, because it provides a context which is very much in agreement with the general purposes of local historians. It also warrants a wide availability of their work for a target group which corresponds to their own. This increases the value of each single work considerably.

Specific products, like family trees or genealogical databases, are a bit harder to include in Europeana. Good usability can only be obtained by means of specialized software and dedicated interface layout, which are currently out of reach for Europeana, as it targets a very wide variety of uses and users.

5 Initial conclusions

Research results from a few European countries indicate that there is a significant portion of citizens who are interested participants and active actors in usage of digital information about heritage and history. Genealogy and local history are particularly popular and are good vehicles for increasing the general public interest and support for history and heritage.

Digitisation priorities most often focus on the 'important' objects or 'masterpieces'. However, because of the considerable interest from genealogists to consult registry documents held in (national) archives, there are many initiatives to digitise such lesser documents on a broad scale in several countries. So far the digitisation is nowhere complete, and the digital databases cannot properly replace the physical records yet for research purposes. They show however the added value and potential of digitisation.

One of the largest obstacles is the need for 'rich' metadata, including specific names that are in the documents. Transcriptions and indexes are often made independently of the digitisation projects, and should be properly connected to the primary digital documents (registries, parish records, census records, etc.).

Whether or not Europeana can or wants to play an important role in providing access to such digitised documents is hard to predict at this moment. Many issues need to be considered regarding feasibility and desirability. Making them available in a usable manner in Europeana would require considerable investments in dedicated tools, but first of all, good and comprehensive availability across Europe. Currently it seems that in most countries there are not enough digitized documents available in order for Europeana to justify making large investments towards providing proper access to them.

The area where Europeana can be most useful for local historians, is in providing access to documents held by local archives or libraries, including those produced by local historians themselves. The requirement of completeness is less stringent in this area. Presence of such local archives or libraries is still low in Europeana, but in order to make Europeana relevant for local historians, it is very important that digitization and participation be increased at local level.

Setting up specific communication tools for local or family historians does not seem necessary, nor useful within Europeana. Local historians and genealogists have their own communication tools, which they will continue using for the time being.

The UGC facilities of Europeana have good potential for local history and genealogy. It is certainly worth to further develop and consolidate the available tools, taking into account the requirements from these users.

6 Next steps

Following actions are useful for further investigating and deciding about Europeana's functionality for the domains of local history and genealogy.

- Collect information about local history and genealogy associations in each country:
 - How many are there?
 - Do they have national federative associations?
 - How many members do they have?
 - What is on their website?
 - What international association are they associated with?
- Verify the progress of national archives regarding digitisation of their holdings relevant for local history and genealogy:
 - Do they have specific support for local history/genealogy?
 - Do they have parish records and other registry records, microfilm or digital?
 - Do they have a digitisation plan for these?
 - How far is the plan advanced, when will it be completed?
 - What are conditions of consultation?
 - Are there 'rich' metadata, who made them?
 - How are the digital documents connected to the 'rich' metadata?
- Verify the situation of local history publications:
 - Where are local history texts / publications available?
 - How many public libraries, local archives, ... have this kind of documents?
 - In how far are they digitised / digitally available?
 - To what extent do these institutions participate in aggregation of data?
- Verify the compatibility between genealogical information and +Europeana:
 - Can GEDCOM be mapped to EDM?
 - What modifications to the datamodel would be required?
 - What is required for making genealogical information more accessible in Europeana?
 - What metadata would be desirable / recommended?
- Investigate the requirements from local history and genealogy for improving the Europeana UGC tools:
 - The story-telling platform
 - The collecting days application
 - Verify the opportunity to add other UGC tools.