



## Creating a Renaissance for the Library in the Digital Era

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### Abstract

This paper provides a history of European Union Digital Library programmes from the 1990s to 2015 and illustrates the key role played by Pat Manson. A series of major initiatives such as GABRIEL, TEL and DELOS as well as the Europeana Project are fully described. The paper focuses on policy issues and also explores how thinking was translated into other cultural heritage sectors.

**Key Words:** Digital Libraries; Europeana; TEL; DELOS; cultural heritage

### 1. Introduction

The grand dame of digital libraries, the muse for The European Library and the begetter of Europeana, Pat Manson was enormously influential on the development of joined up digital heritage in Europe. She can take the credit for Europe being way ahead of its continental counterparts in usable, multi-lingual digital libraries and for the promotion of the need for interoperable, high quality data. Working within the Commission she created a work programme that gave funding possibilities for change and modernisation across libraries, archives, museums and audio-visual collections. Her vision that this material be properly represented in the world of the internet has given Europe a global advantage in the exposure and use of its cultural heritage to the 21<sup>st</sup> century generations.

Fig. 1: *Beyond the Beginning, The Global Digital Library, UKOLN, 1997.*

## **Beyond the Beginning: The Global Digital Library**

**AN INTERNATIONAL conference organised by UKOLN  
ON BEHALF OF  
JISC, CNI, BLRIC, CAUSE and CAUL**

**16th and 17th JUNE 1997 at THE Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, London, UK**



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The early career of Pat at the Commission is reflected in the projects she advocated to get libraries to speak to each other and to find funding to turn ideas into reality.

In her own words (Manson, 1997) from the Beyond the Beginning conference in 1997 (Figure 1), when talking about the previous 10 years and what was to come, it had been an uphill task:

*“Beyond the Beginning is an apposite label for the status of these actions which now have a history of over 10 years, starting at a time when the words “digital library” were rarely heard and where the concept of a single “European library” — far less a global one, was more often judged hallucinatory than visionary.”*

In this paper she recalled the four areas that had been targeted over the previous decade, Interconnecting, improvement of resource, pilot services and

imaging or digitising library materials. These remained targets, albeit with different names for the following two decades and the programmes that she promoted and “sponsored”.

This section of the Festschrift charts a history of the Development of the Digital Library from Gabriel to Europeana. A history that would have been very different without the championship of Pat Manson.

## **2. Stage 1: Creating the European Library**

The first project that joined up National Libraries, was not actually of Pat’s making but came from the National Libraries themselves. GABRIEL—The name recalls Gabriel Naudé, whose *Advis pour dresser une Bibliothèque* (Naudé, 1627) is one of the earliest theoretical works about libraries in any European language, as explained by Graham Jefcoate (1996), in his article “Gabriel: Gateway to Europe’s National Libraries”:

*“Gabriel is the World Wide Web server for those European national libraries represented in the Conference of European National Librarians (CENL), providing a single point of access on the Internet for the retrieval of information about their functions, services and collections. Above all, it serves as a gateway to their online services. The service has been developed through an international project involving the national libraries of the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Finland and Germany. Gabriel has the potential of becoming a model for collaboration in the networking field across a wide geographical area and among diverse institutions.”*

GABRIEL (Figure 2) was a guide to and showcase for the collections of the national libraries and did not receive any EU funding. It was entirely financed by CENL, but it owed some of its underlying concepts to a series of EU funded metadata conversion projects, that brought specialists and programmers together to solve library related issues. GABRIEL was also a model for cooperation and networking which was to serve both national libraries and the broader field of cultural heritage in the years that followed. To move on from the gateway to collections that GABRIEL presented, Pat Manson helped secure the funding, under the Fifth Framework Programme of the European Commission, for what became The European Library; building a

Fig. 2: GABRIEL Portal.



search engine across the library collections. The search engine was the logical step forward for GABRIEL, but it needed finance that CENL was not able to find. Running from 2001–2004, the libraries involved in the TEL project were Finland, Germany, Italy (Florence), Italy (Rome), Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Switzerland and United Kingdom. This led to the launch of the first portal under the web address [www.theeuropeanlibrary.org](http://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org) in 2005.

The needed standardization referred to by Pat in her *Beyond the Beginning* speech and the required common technological frameworks and retrieval

mechanisms, were delivered under this project and are best expressed in the 2004 D-LIB paper of Van Veen and Oldroyd (2004).

The objective of The European Library (TEL) project was to set up a co-operative framework and specify a system for integrated access to the major collections of the European national libraries. This has been achieved by successfully applying a new approach for search and retrieval via URLs (SRU) [ZiNG] combined with a new metadata paradigm. One aim of the TEL approach is to have a low barrier of entry into TEL, and this has driven our choice for the technical solution described here. The solution comprises portal and client functionality running completely in the browser, resulting in a low implementation barrier and maximum scalability, as well as giving users control over the search interface and what collections to search. In this article we will describe, step by step, the development of both the search and retrieval architecture and the metadata infrastructure in the European Library project. We will show that SRU is a good alternative to the Z39.50 protocol and can be implemented without losing investments in current Z39.50 implementations.

This approach was successful given the state of search and retrieval in the early part of the 20th century and built very much upon the work of the previous digital library projects.

Further money was made available by the European Commission, through the auspices of Pat, for expansion of the standardization and search capabilities between 2005 and 2007, with the TEL-ME-MOR project. This helped to incorporate 10 more national libraries from new European Union member states as full partners of The European Library. By the beginning of 2008, a further nine national libraries within the European Union and the European Free Trade Association had joined the service. The project also created interfaces in the local languages and had support from DELOS, a Network of Excellence looking at long-term issues in digital library research.

This was followed by FUMAGABA (2008–2009), which aimed at integrating the collections of national libraries in eastern Europe with the financial support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Lastly under eContentplus Programme TELPlus was initiated as a project, coordinated by the National Library of Estonia.

The project, which began in October 2007, was another building brick in the creation of what became Europeana, the *European digital library, museum and archive*, and was aimed at strengthening, extending and improving The European Library service. Again addressing issues that Pat had been pushing via research and funding for solutions, including improving access through OAI compliancy, making more than 20 million pages from the European National Libraries' digital content available with OCR, improving multilingual search and retrieval and adding services for the manipulation and use of content.

### **3. Stage 2: Expanding from Libraries to Other Cultural Heritage Institutions**

With the increasing anglicisation of the web and poor representation of other European cultures and languages, 2005 saw the call by 6 heads of state for more European investment in an April 28 letter signed by French President Jacques Chirac, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski, and Hungarian Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány. They asked European Union officials to support the project (Figure 3). The national libraries of 19 European nations have agreed to back the plan.

“The heritage of European libraries is unequalled in richness and diversity,” the letter read. “But if it is not digitalized and made accessible online, this heritage could, tomorrow, not fill its just place in the future geography of knowledge.

On 7 July—José Manuel Barroso (2005), President of the European Commission, replied to the letter from 6 Heads of State and Government and welcomes the digital libraries initiative. And by 30 September—The European Commission (2005) adopted a Communication “i2010: Digital Libraries” which outlines the vision underlying the digital libraries initiative and deals with Europe’s cultural heritage.

Under the strategy of Digital Libraries I2010 (Figure 4), presented by the then Commissioner of Information Society and Media, Viviane Reding, Pat and colleagues from her unit, set out the work of the Digital Libraries Initiative

Fig. 3: Letter from six heads of state calling for a European Digital Library and increased investment in digitization of the European patrimony.

Paris, Varsovie, Berlin, Rome, Madrid, Budapest,  
le 28 avril 2005

Monsieur le Président,

Le patrimoine des bibliothèques européennes est d'une richesse et d'une diversité sans égales. Il exprime l'universalisme d'un continent qui, tout au long de son histoire, a dialogué avec le reste du monde. Pourtant, s'il n'est pas numérisé et rendu accessible en ligne, ce patrimoine pourrait, demain, ne pas occuper toute sa place dans la future géographie des savoirs.

C'est la raison pour laquelle nous souhaitons prendre appui sur les actions de numérisation déjà engagées par nombre de bibliothèques européennes pour les mettre en réseau et constituer ainsi ce qu'on pourrait appeler une *bibliothèque numérique européenne*, c'est-à-dire une action concertée de mise à disposition large et organisée de notre patrimoine culturel et scientifique sur les réseaux informatiques mondiaux.

Il s'agit de coordonner et de soutenir des initiatives aujourd'hui dispersées afin de les mettre en cohérence et de les amplifier. L'Union pourrait à la fois fournir le cadre d'une concertation entre les institutions concernées, et apporter sa contribution à la solution des problèmes à surmonter : sélection des fonds numérisés de manière à éviter les redondances, mise au point des outils de recherche et de présentation les plus performants, actions de recherche-développement dans le domaine des techniques de numérisation à mettre en œuvre, réflexion à engager sur les attentes et les besoins des utilisateurs, etc.

Afin de progresser dans l'examen de la faisabilité et des modalités de mise en œuvre d'un tel projet, il nous semblerait opportun que celui-ci puisse, à brève échéance, faire l'objet d'un débat entre les ministres de la Culture d'une part, de la Recherche d'autre part, à la lumière d'une première communication de la Commission et des témoignages et propositions que pourraient soumettre les Etats dont les institutions compétentes sont d'ores et déjà engagées dans cette direction.

Monsieur José Manuel Durão Barroso  
Président de la Commission européenne

where many technological and network projects were launched for the advancement of the vision of a digital library at that gave "Europe's knowledge at the Click of a Mouse" with three key areas for action:

Fig. 4: i2010 Digital Libraries.



- Digitisation of analogue collections for their wider use in the information society.
- Online accessibility, a precondition for maximising the benefits that citizens, researchers and companies can draw from the information.
- Preservation and storage to ensure that future generations can access the digital material and to prevent precious content being lost.

This was followed by the setting up on 27 February 2006 of a High Level Expert Group on Digital Libraries in accordance with a European Commission (2006a) decision<sup>1</sup>. This led directly to the adoption of the Recommendation on the digitisation and online accessibility of cultural material and digital preservation (European Commission, 2006b).

This text informed the Council conclusions (European Commission, 2006c) on the Digitisation and Online Accessibility of Cultural Material and Digital Preservation of 13 November 2006 under the presidency of Finland, where the Commission was invited to:

*“stimulate and co-ordinate work towards a European digital library as a common multilingual access point to Europe’s distributed digital cultural heritage;”*

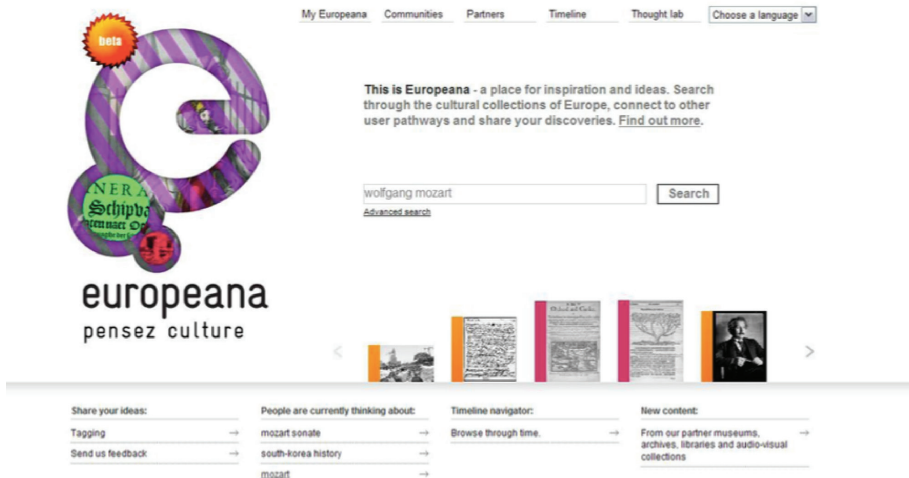


The document explicitly underlined the work as follows:

- “- the instrumental work done at European level by CENL (the Conference of European National Librarians);
  - in organising and creating The European Library (TEL) as a gateway to the collective resources of national libraries across Europe
  - in carrying this work forward towards the creation of the European Digital Library
- the work ongoing in the Michael and Michael Plus projects in describing and linking digital collections of museums, libraries and archives from different Member States and providing access to these collections;”

In 2007 EDLnet was set up as a project under the eContentPlus programme with the explicit aim of developing a prototype for what became Europeana, building the technology and the network, leading in November 2007 to the Creation the European Digital Library Foundation which formalised the agreement of European archives, museums, audiovisual archives and libraries to work together and to provide a common access point to Europe’s cultural heritage online. This led to the launch of Europeana on 20 November 2008 (Figure 5).

Fig. 5: Europeana at launch 20 November 2008.



Europeana was launched in the presence of José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, Viviane Reding, Commissioner for Information Society and Media, Christine Albanel, French Minister of Culture and Communication, Cultural Ministers from other Member States and representatives of European cultural institutions, in Brussels, Belgium. See the Press release (European Commission, 2008).

This led to the 20 November 2008—Council conclusions on the European digital library EUROPEANA (Council of the European Union, 2008). Its Article 4 is a strong recognition of everything that Pat Manson had fought for in the previous two decades:

*“BELIEVES that the success and sustainability of EUROPEANA and, more generally, the digitisation and online accessibility of cultural material, and digital preservation processes under way in the Member States will require:*

- active sustained support for digitisation and the online accessibility of cultural material and digital preservation, so as to ensure that a diverse and high-quality range of material is available which represents the cultural and linguistic diversity and the richness of intellectual heritage of the Union,*
- pursuing the elaboration of concerted practical solutions respecting copyright and related rights, with a view to contributing to the online accessibility of the widest range of cultural material,*
- the development of technologies to ensure long-term digital preservation, interoperability of the access systems to content, multilingual navigation and availability of content, and diverse and high-quality services to the public,”*

The eContentplus programme expired on 31 December 2008. Funding measures to make digital content in Europe more accessible, usable and exploitable, formerly funded under the eContentplus programme were continued under the Information and Communications Technologies Policy Support Programme (“ICT PSP”), one of three specific programmes implemented through Decision No. 1639/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 2006 establishing a Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (2007–2013) (“CIP”), OJ L310, 9.11.2006, p. 15.

Pat became the acting Director of DG Information Society and Media from December 2009 to February 2011, taking over from Horst Forster, who had also been a driving force behind the set up of Europeana. In this year, the Parliament adopted a Resolution on “Europeana - Next Steps” joining the

*Fig. 6: The New Renaissance.*



Commission in asking EU Member States to step up their efforts to make their cultural heritage available through the European Digital Library (10 May 2010)—And the Council then adopted Conclusions outlining the next steps for Europeana—the European digital library. Member States agreed to continue and strengthen their support for Europeana and the digitisation projects carried out by their cultural institutions, in order to increase the number of objects from libraries, museums, archives and audiovisual collections accessible through the Europeana service.

We lost Pat to eLearning and Safer Internet, their gain. But the work she did to create the European Digital Library continued from the solid roots she had

helped grow. One of the last things she instigated, with Yvo Volman, was the work of the Comité des Sages:

The New Renaissance (Figure 6), authored by Elisabeth Niggemann, Jacques De Decker, and Maurice Lévy (2011) is one of the more influential publications on the cultural heritage sector and the future of Europeana.

Europeana was built on the results and initiatives of projects that ranged from research and development to the creation of a powerful thematic network. These projects were conceived through the auspices of Pat and her ability to create consensus and good work relationships while always keeping her eye very firmly on the vision of the development of digital library for all, across languages and media types and cultures. Not only did she work on Access but promoted the need for digitization and preservation as the other two pillars necessary for long term access to our digital cultural heritage and she was always keen on being able to measure results as can be seen in Enumerate one of the last digital library initiatives she was directly involved in.

For the impressive array of projects<sup>2</sup> that have contributed to access, preservation and digitization of our cultural heritage, Pat Manson was responsible for much of their existence with her drive and determination to create a renaissance of the library in the digital era.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This text annuls and replaces the text published in Official Journal L 46 of 16 February 2006, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/node/77423?page=7>.