

# The One and the Many

Standards and European Union Access to Archival Records

# Overview

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- Accessibility and Usability
- Cultural Heritage descriptive standards
- Union access through description of artifacts
- Union access through the descriptions of the creators
- Conclusion

# Accessibility

- Ability to Access
- Access to what?: LAMMS
- Libraries, Archives, Museums, Monuments, and Sites:  
Artifacts
- Artifacts includes objects in natural history museums,  
artifacts by virtue of being collected

# Accessibility

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- Kinds of access
- Access to the original artifact
- Access to a description of the artifact (surrogate)
- Access to a digital representation of the artifact
- Many ways to digitally represent an artifact
- Many intellectual and technological challenges

# Accessibility

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- For whom?
- The public
- Life-long learners, teachers, students, scholars, the cultural heritage professionals
- One access for all?
- Many intellectual and technological issues

# Usability

- Ability to use
- Open or restricted use of the original
- Open or restricted use of digital representations
- Intellectual use of either the original or a digital representation
- Property rights and Intellectual property rights
- Many intellectual and technological challenges
- And legal and political challenges as well

# Intellectual Access

- Descriptions of artifacts: buildings, monuments, books, photographs, records (of many sorts) ...
- Libraries, Archives, and Museums
- Shared responsibility for remembering on behalf of mankind!
- Understatement: A fundamental and essential responsibility!

# Methods of Remembering

- Libraries, archives, and museum are responsible for remembering different kinds of artifacts
- A primary method of remembering is through a disciplined, precise description of the artifacts
- While much in common, the methods of remembering through description vary
- Each profession describes (remembers) in the way it prescribes as appropriate to its responsibility
- This is a matter of principle, or in this case, principles

# Methods of Remembering

- Libraries, one descriptive record for each discrete artifact
- Museums, one descriptive record for each discrete artifact
- Archives, one descriptive record (or finding aid) for many artifacts related by a common provenance
- Of course identifying a discrete artifact presents metaphysical and epistemological challenges
- The cultural heritage communities, though, are ultimately practical, and methods of circumscribing the artifact are articulated

# Union Access: Artifact Description

- Union access to cultural heritage
- A grand and longstanding human quest
- How do we realize this objective?
- The technology is there or almost there
- Find a “common denominator,” that is, map common descriptive elements into a shared apparatus, and then collect and use these descriptions to provide unified access

# Union Access: Artifact Description

- Many intellectual and technological challenges
- Many political challenges
- Methods of reducing the many descriptions to one reasonably favor a model based on one description-one object
- Archivists find this discomfiting, as it violates a fundamental principle
- Archivists also share the quest, and so are open to finding a way

# Union Access: Artifact Description

- Compromise in the near term
- Long term
- Work through international standards bodies that represent the communities to find common ground and common methods: ICA, IFLA, CIDOC, and others
- Work through ongoing technological development to find methods of integrating description that respects and preserves the distinct methods of description
- Integrated (interoperable?) description is a very worthwhile quest, but it will require patience and goodwill, not to mention, great intelligence to succeed

# Union Access: Creator Description

- All artifacts have a common provenance
- All artifacts are the products or by-products of people engaged in working, creating, living
- One promising method of union access is through the description of creators in turn linked to descriptions of artifacts
- Virtual International Authority File
- Encoded Archival Context-Corporate Bodies, Persons, and Families (EAC-CPF)
- Many intellectual, technological, and political challenges

# Union Access: Controlled Vocabularies and Values

- Artifacts all have in common that they are created in and used in particular times and places
- Time and place is thus another promising method of providing union access
- Subject Thesauri also provide another promising method of providing union access
- Much going on in Semantic Web community for representing and interrelating diverse thesauri and subject lists
- Many intellectual, technological, and political challenges
- Not to mention cultural and linguistic challenges

# Conclusion

- Many intellectual, technological, political, legal, ethical, cultural, and linguistic challenges
- Europeana is to be applauded for taking on the many, daunting challenges of providing Union Access to the Cultural Heritage of Europe
- The European cultural heritage communities should be cooperative and patient as the planning and development of Europeana moves forward
- The Europeana community should be cooperative and patient with the library, archive, and museum communities
- And mutual respect, goodwill, and trust as well
- The European cultural heritage communities should also, through international professional organizations, work towards finding common ground and that will serve both their professional communities and the shared quest embodied in Europeana of serving the public of Europe and indeed, the World