

# EUROPEANAPHOTOGRAPHY: EARLY PHOTOGRAPHY ACCESSIBLE IN EUROPEANA

**Authors:** Antonella Fresa, Valentina Bachi, Promoter SRL

e-mails: [fresa@promoter.it](mailto:fresa@promoter.it), [bachi@promoter.it](mailto:bachi@promoter.it),

Andrea de Polo (consultant) for Fratelli Alinari, Fondazione per la Storia della Fotografia

e-mail: [andrea@andrea.it](mailto:andrea@andrea.it),

Marzia Piccininno, Istituto centrale per il catalogo unico delle biblioteche italiane

e-mail: [marzia.piccininno@beniculturali.it](mailto:marzia.piccininno@beniculturali.it)

Frederik Truyen, Sofie Taes, KU Leuven

emails: [fred.truyen@arts.kuleuven.be](mailto:fred.truyen@arts.kuleuven.be), [sofie.taes@arts.kuleuven.be](mailto:sofie.taes@arts.kuleuven.be)

**Abstract** – EuropeanaPhotography is an EU-funded digitization project that will provide Europeana with over 430.000 of the finest examples of early photography, for an impressive increase in the number of photos available in the Europeana. These photographs provide a unique insight into the evolution of European society and of the art of photography between the 19th and 20th century, which is a valuable source for research in many fields (history, economics, sociology...). EuropeanaPhotography will also enrich Europeana with materials from countries with a currently limited display, for a wider overview of European history.

## INTRODUCTION

EuropeanaPhotography is a CIP ICT PSP pilot B project with the principal objective to select, enrich and digitize masterpieces of early photography, and to contribute the relative metadata and thumbnails to Europeana, the European digital library ([www.europeana.eu](http://www.europeana.eu)). The consortium includes both public and private bodies with very different backgrounds, thus providing a variety and richness of content. Moreover, several partners come for the first time in a Europeana-feeder project, also belonging to those European countries - such as Bulgaria, Slovakia, Lithuania and Denmark - that are still under-represented in Europeana. They will contribute original content for the first time ever, thus enlarging and enriching the pan-European approach of Europeana. The General Coordinator of EuropeanaPhotography is the Institute for Cultural Studies of the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven; Promoter S.r.l. provides the Technical Coordination.

## Project objectives

EuropeanaPhotography will digitize, enrich and then contribute to Europeana over 430.000 early photographs. Content selection and digitization form the basis of the project. Further steps are: the multilingual enrichment (through the EuropeanaPhotography vocabulary, especially designed for the needs and specifics of the EuropeanaPhotography consortium), and the aggregation of metadata via the MINT system[1], which allows the metadata mapping and the final ingestion of the digital content into the Europeana system. To support the consortium and to develop a safe and valuable environment for both public and private bodies, the project foresees very strong functions related to IPR issues and sustainability. Within the project, moreover, the commercial benefits of working with Europeana will be highlighted and clarified, in order to attract new content providers from the private sector in the future.

## Work done so far

The project has just successfully closed its first year of activities, achieving very good results. A dedicated work-package was focused on the content of this project's contribution to Europeana: digitized photographic images, tracing the evolution of European society and the

art of photography, from 1839 (first images by Niepce in France) to 1939 (start of the WWII). The tasks constituting this work package were directed to the selection of images to be delivered to Europeana's database. The process was coordinated by KU Leuven, but the actual selection was carried out by each of the content providers. They were guided by the following criteria: Masterpiece quality and impact; General interest and appeal; Complementarity with existing material in Europeana; Synergy with content from other providers. As a result of this process, a deeper understanding of the richness and true value of the EuropeanaPhotography collections has come up. Since the partners had the opportunity to explore their collections, hidden treasures have been – and will keep on being – discovered throughout the project period.

As EuropeanaPhotography is a digitization project, another of the main objectives for year one consisted in establishing and preparing standards for digitization and image quality, so as to align the content providers to the most recent technologies and procedures for preparation of early photos and digitization techniques. A particularly important achievement so far is the development of a multilingual vocabulary for early photography, which currently consists of over 500 concepts in three facets – photographic technique, photographic practice and keywords – structured hierarchically. This vocabulary is completed in 12 languages and it will be used in the annotation, translation and semantic enrichment of the metadata. Discussions with other projects, in particular Linked Heritage[2], are on-going, to improve the EuropeanaPhotography Vocabulary as a starting point for other useful multilingual tools to enrich digitization activities (both for photography and for other types of cultural heritage). The technology at the base of the mapping and ingestion process is the MINT platform, a web-based software for the aggregation of metadata that is currently used by Europeana and other projects of the Europeana ecosystem. The tool, customized according to EuropeanaPhotography requirements and including the already mentioned photography-specific multilingual vocabulary, is ready and fully working and helped in preparing the initial slot of about 12.000 images, ready to be published in Europeana.

A dedicated work-package in the project is devoted to the analysis of IPR issues and sustainability solutions. An IPR Committee is reflecting upon the requirements and needs of all partners - both private companies and public bodies - in order to define the priorities and a valid strategy to comply with the Europeana standards. On the side of sustainability, the project will reflect upon the benefits for private and public partners from the presence of their photos in Europeana, in order to establish a viable ongoing service with commercial potential or another workable funding model.

## **The EuropeanaPhotography collection**

Within the project consortium 16 partners can be designated as content providers. Some are public institutions or institutions with a public mission, such as museums, archives and universities (KU Leuven, ICCU/SGI, Polfoto, CRDI Ajuntament de Girona, GenCat Cultura, Nalis, MHF, Arbejdsmuseet, Divadelny Ustav, ICIMSS, Lithuanian Museums), others are privately funded photo agencies (TopFoto, Imagno, Parisienne de Photographie, United Archives, Alinari). This unique blend has not only given rise to spirited discussions on the shared responsibility towards the preservation of European heritage - a valuable contribution towards Europeana - but also to a better understanding of early photography. At a seminar in Leuven, Belgium (12-13 April 2012), where content providers showcased their collections, a wide array of images was unveiled: a combination of treasures of early photography never before disclosed to the public. Also at the seminar, the consortium agreed upon a definition of “photographic masterpiece”, that has served as a guideline throughout the establishment of what might be called “the EuropeanaPhotography Collection”.

This collection, which will eventually be fully available through Europeana, counts no less than 430.000 images and spans the period 1839-1939, capturing city and family life, sports, portraits, landscapes, politics, colonial and war history, and thus reviving the history of

Europe through prosperous as well as difficult times. Besides top images from valuable collections and renowned photographers, it boasts the photographic heritage of Europe's newest member states, offering a fascinating view on a chapter in the canonical common European historical narrative that hasn't even fully been written yet. Each of the project partners has managed to bring a distinctive and superior selection to the EuropeanaPhotography Collection. KU Leuven's choice from its university library archives sheds light on 19th and 20th century educational usage of images. Alinari draws from the archives of Alinari24Ore and Fondazione Alinari, offering a "Grand Tour" across Italy. The image selection of Central News, Alfieri, Planet News and John Topham collections (TopFoto) and the Agentur Schostaland Christian Brandstätter collections (Imagno) each contain exceptional and high-quality images. At Parisienne de Photographie, images from the Maurice Louis Branger archive, portraits by Boris Lipnitzki and Parisian scenes by Gaston Paris are the undisputed highlights. United-Archives will add a.o. the Carl Simon archive, the KPA collection, the Andres and IFTN archives and a film still collection. ICCU offers a selection from the Historical Fund of the Photographical Archive of the Italian Geographical Society (SGI), containing ca. 30.000 photographs acquired from 1867 until the 1930's. Polfoto contributes images by press photographers Holger Damgaard and Tage Christensen. Provided by CRDI are images related to the Rif War and portraits of cinema stars, utilizing a great variety of early photographic print processes. Gencat Cultura and Catalan Cultural Institutions have selected images of great aesthetic value and historical importance, as well as photographs documenting changes in society, culture, economy, etc. Krakow's Museum of History of Photography chose images that offer a panoramic view on its entire collection and include almost every type of early photography practice. The Arbejdsmuseet collections document the formation of modern society focusing on everyday life, while Theatre Institute Bratislava's pick discloses a visually attractive story of the Central European theatre and theatricality. Two project partners are breaking ground in exploring unknown treasures of their photographic holdings. ICIMSS collections will present material that has remained hidden up till now and will enrich the documentation of Polish history. The contribution of NALIS explicitly aims at the exploration of unknown collections as well: as a knowledge broker, NALIS will build bridges between the content owners, the consortium and Europeana, at the same time granting local museums and archives access to the professional knowledge of the EuropeanaPhotography consortium. This dynamic "treasure hunt" will undoubtedly prove to be a fruitful venture and has a clear added value for the project as a whole.

## **The digitization activity**

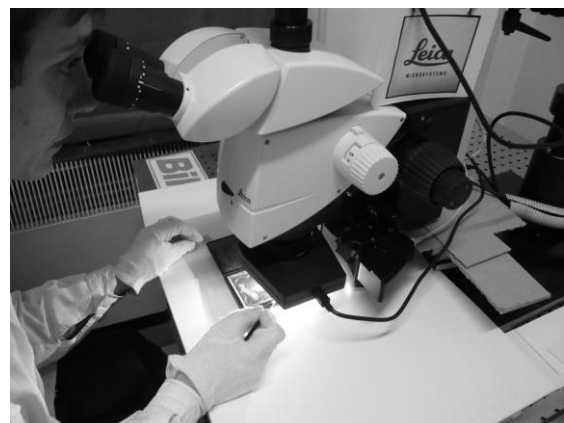
During year 1, the consortium organized specific workshops for the content providers, to deeply discuss and agree upon methodologies for digitization and metadata usage. First, in Leuven (April 2012), the consortium agreed on the digitization standards (resolution, image format, colour depth, etc.). At the same occasion, there was a review of the metadata schemes used by each content provider, an analysis of requirements for any extra metadata fields on a provider-by-provider basis, and an assessment of the need for support to generate metadata in XML format, again for each provider.

The content providers then met in Girona in May, for a 14-hours workshop intended to provide an overview of the available systems for original photographic materials digitization as well as the procedures, in order to obtain the best results in terms of image quality and fidelity to the original. The teachers for this workshop were professors from the Polytechnics University in Catalonia (UPC). The workshop provided content providers with several recommendations and hints for a good practice, resulting in a digitization workflow that can be briefly summarized as follows:

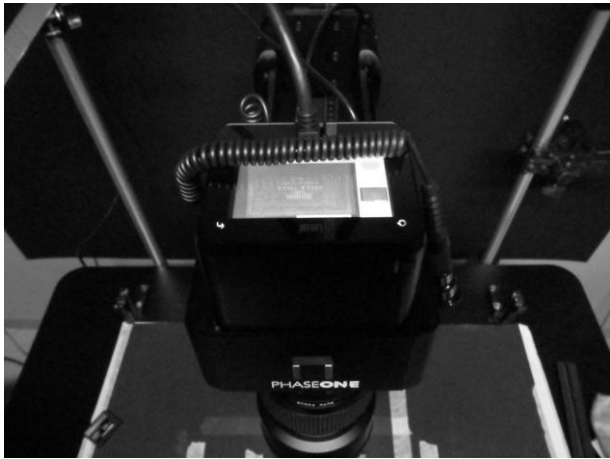
- 1. Digitization should be done by camera better than by scanner. The use of camera avoids physical contact with the original and has virtually no limits in terms of original properties and sizes.*
- 2. Lighting for digitization with camera should be provided by electronic flash strobes. It allows for very short exposure times that prevent the camera from shaking at large magnifications and provide better sensor response.*
- 3. The camera lens must be as good as free of distortion (best options below 1%); this is not possible with zoom lenses.*
- 4. The camera lens resolution must be tested in order to find a useful aperture range, thereby avoiding aberrations when fully opening, and diffraction effects when closing the diaphragm.*
- 5. Depending on the resolution needed for a given application, the more pixels on the sensor, the lower the diffraction limit will be at smaller apertures. A possible solution is to increase the physical sensor size.*
- 6. Sensors without anti-aliasing filter (optical low pass filter or OLPF) can produce image artifacts taking pictures from textures with small details periodically structured*
- 7. Screens must be calibrated in order to visualize image colors accurately and to process images correctly. It is important to know the color space of the screen and avoid the visualization of images with wider color spaces; working with ProPhotoRGB is not recommendable to visualize images.*
- 8. When applying a new ICC profile (or standard color space) it is important to know the difference between Assigning and Converting, as the result is different.*
- 9. Working with RGB color spaces is the recommended option to process and archive images, because it has a higher bit depth than grey scale images and wider color ranges than CMYK color spaces.*



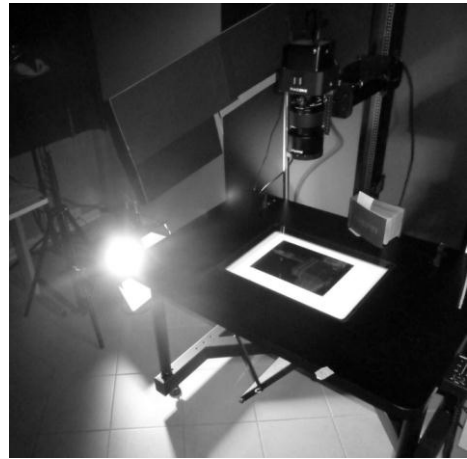
Example of storage room and long term preservation area



The photographic identification process using a 30x microscope



Example of a digital camera back device  
(PhaseOne/Leaf Aptus-II 80 megapixels CCD)



Cambo repro stand

## Expected Outcomes For Year 2

From February 1st, 2013, the project has entered into its second year of activity, in which the objective of 250.000 digitized images (100.000 published in Europeana), has to be achieved. Digitization, metadata mapping and enrichment will be main activities for the content providers. As a consequence, a great effort will be necessary from the digitization supervisors deployed in each content provider to follow the project recommendations produced so far, in order to assure a proper, timely and qualitative content delivery. Furthermore, several dissemination and exploitation activities are planned, and big results are expected within the domains of IPR and Sustainability. With these efforts, EuropeanaPhotography will continue to establish itself as a role-model for any public-private partnership in the field of cultural heritage, and of photography in particular.

## DISSEMINATION

The EuropeanaPhotography project adopted an integrated approach for the dissemination activities using different communication platforms and channels and enjoying the cooperation of the whole consortium. The publics that are targeted reflect the diversified composition of the project consortium, that includes stakeholders both from the public and private sectors.

The EuropeanaPhotography website [3] has an institutional communication approach because it is intended as a window of the project's main outcomes; it collects institutional information related to the project partners, life, events and news about both digital cultural heritage and photography; Europeana, that will benefit from the partner's contributions, has a dedicated section with the main relevant information and a direct access to its database thanks to the integration of a Europeana API. The publics that the project website mainly intends to reach are those working in the Europeana environment: the Europeana Foundation itself, the group of Europeana feeding projects, the experts from cultural institutions working in the field of digital cultural heritage and the European Commission.

On the other hand, EuropeanaPhotography enjoys a dedicate showcase on [digitalmeetsculture.net](http://digitalmeetsculture.net) [3]: an interactive magazine managed by Promoter srl, where culture and digital technology collide. Articles about the EuropeanaPhotography activities, events, and milestones, as well as a dedicated newsletter are published in this showcase; moreover, the partners have the chance to give visibility to their role in the project thanks to interviews and dedicated editorials. This showcase can reach both a specialized public made out of digital cultural heritage experts and photography professionals, as well as a wider public of people interested in these topics thanks to its magazine nature. Digitalmeetsculture.net also hosts the project's internal repository.



Project website  
([www.europeana-photography.eu](http://www.europeana-photography.eu))



EuropeanaPhotography showcase on  
Digitalmeetsculture.net  
(<http://www.digitalmeetsculture.net/heritage-showcases/europeana-photography/>)

Recently, the project opened a Facebook page [3] with a twofold scope: reaching a wider public of people interested in photography (and redirect them to the website) and allow the EuropeanaPhotography partners to have a fast and easy-to-use platform for disseminating the images they are digitizing for the European portal, telling the wonderful stories that those pictures illustrate.

EuropeanaPhotography is present at several national and international events; next main appointment will be from 9 to 11 September in Vilnius, within the framework of the Lithuanian presidency of the European Union, when, besides the project plenary meeting, an early photo exhibition as well as cultural and educational open events will take place.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## References

- [1] The MINT mapping tool system is a web based platform, developed by NTUA (the National Technical University of Athens), that was designed and developed to facilitate aggregation initiatives for cultural heritage content and metadata in Europe.  
<http://mint.image.ece.ntua.gr/redmine/projects/mint/wiki/Introduction>
- [2] Linked Heritage is a best practice network with the main objective to facilitate and deliver large-scale, long-term enhancement of Europeana's content and services.  
<http://www.linkedheritage.org/>
- [3] EuropeanaPhotography main dissemination internet channels:  
Website: <http://www.europeana-photography.eu/>, Facebook page:  
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/EuropeanaPhotography/389351434475298>  
Showcase on Digitalmeetsculture.net: <http://www.digitalmeetsculture.net/heritage-showcases/europeana-photography/>;