

The Political Background of Europeana.eu Portal¹

Abstract: *This paper examines the political background of the European cross-domain cultural and scientific heritage portal Europeana.eu from multiple perspectives, as it is simultaneously a reaction to the Google Books projects that is deemed a threat to European cultural influence, and a part of the EU's identity-forging strategies. While examining Europeana's format, the paper goes on to suggest that this website is not a regular digitized heritage portal, arguing that a new kind of supra-national identity requires a new kind of cultural institution to support it. The last part of the paper finds that in fulfilling its two major tasks – promoting cultures of European nation-state and bringing their common cultural heritage to fore – Europeana treats the later as a higher priority.*

Keywords: *Europeana, Politics, Culture, Heritage, Identity*

Culture, identity and politics rarely exist as separate, independent spheres. More often they form an interwoven web of influences and support and reinforce each other, to an extent that sometimes it is hard to tell where one ends and the other begins. Culture played a significant role in formation of identities of newly formed nation-states during the nineteenth century, and the European Union recognizes culture as a key element which is necessary for successful European integration. Most of its cultural projects have a prominent identity-forging and cultural cohesion dimension, and Europeana is not an exception to that rule. Even though it's clearly stated political agenda is often mentioned in the works dealing with this portal, it is rarely elaborated. Given the significance of the role Europeana plays in preserving cultural influences of the European Union member-states and in the forging of the supra-national European identity, the political background of this pan-European portal definitely deserves a closer look.

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Europeana.eu is the European cross-domain cultural and scientific heritage portal which connects the digital resources of Europe's museums, libraries, archives and audio-visual collections. At the moment, more than fifteen million digitalized public domain texts, images, sounds, and videos can be accessed via this portal, as these are provided by around 1500 cultural institutions that directly or indirectly contribute to Europeana.² Content providers of this portal include not only libraries, but also museums, cinetheques, historical, television and radio archives and other holders of digitized heritage material.³

It should be made clear that Europeana is not a digital museum or a library, but a searchable database of what European cultural institution offer online, somewhat, technology-wise, resembling what Yahoo was in the late nineties of the twentieth century. Europeana.eu does not host available items directly on its website, but only their surrogates comprising of object's set of metadata, thumbnail, and a link that leads to the full resolution digital object which is actually hosted on the website of a European cultural institution that enlisted it to the Europeana's database.⁴ Beside the technical advantages of not being responsible for object's hosting and preservation, the technique of object surrogacy also enables the content provider's identity and branding to be visible to the user, which reinforces provenance and authenticity of the object.⁵

The official mission statement of the portal is to enable people to explore and be inspired by Europe's rich cultural and scientific heritage in a multilingual space, which would also provide them with additional networking opportunities.⁶ Still, it is also clear, as it shall be explained, that Europeana has a political mandate and substantial financial support through the European Commission's eContent-plus program⁷ and within the Digital Libraries Initiative which, as a goal within the European Information Society i2010 Initiative, aims to support the information society and media industries.⁸

² "About us," Europeana.eu, <http://europeana.eu/portal/aboutus.html>

³ Susanne Bjørner, "Building a European Digital Library: A Challenge in the Culture Wars," *Searcher* 14, no. 3 (March 2006). *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost, hypertext.

⁴ Jon Purday, "Think culture: Europeana.eu: from concept to construction," *DigItalia* 4, no. 1 (June 2009): 116.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ "About us," Europeana.eu, hypertext.

⁷ Ricky Erway, "A view on Europeana from the US perspective," *Liber Quarterly: The Journal of European Research Libraries* 19, no. 2 (September 2009): 106, *Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts*, EBSCOhost.

⁸ Purday, "Think Culture," 106.

The political mandate of the project is clearly visible from its very inception. The story about Europeana actually has its beginning outside of Europe. On 14th December 2004 American search giant Google announced its plans to digitize fifteen million printed volumes, or around 4.5 billion pages, over a six-year period.⁹ At the same time, the libraries of Harvard, Stanford, the University of Michigan, the University of Oxford and The New York Public Library were announced as the main partners in this pharaonic project.¹⁰

This announcement soon triggered a series of events on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. The first to react was the director of the French National Library, Jean-Noël Jeanneney, who expressed his concerns about Google's project, and a call to counter-action in the article "Quand Google défie l'Europe", published in the French daily *Le Monde* on the 22nd January 2005.¹¹ In March French president Jacques Chirac invited Jeanneney to talk about the issue, afterwards announcing that he would sponsor the initiative and requesting the support of several European partner countries.¹² The following month presidents and prime ministers of France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Poland and Hungary sent an open letter to the president of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, requesting the creation of a virtual European library that would make European cultural heritage accessible for all.¹³ Already in June the European Commission responded by making digital libraries a strategic goal in its European Information Society i2010 Initiative.¹⁴ The Council of Ministers of the European Union also showed sympathy for the project, endorsing it in November 2006, while in September 2007 the overwhelming majority adopted the Commission's plan in the European Parliament.¹⁵

The project developed quite quickly, and it had a very good antecedent – The European Library (TEL) developed by the Conference for European National Librarians (CENL), which was heavily involved in the construction of the Europeana.eu portal.¹⁶ The relationship between the two projects needs some clarification since both Europeana and TEL share of the same goals, personnel, working space in the National Library of the Netherlands, and Jill Cousins as the program director, but, in short, TEL is a portal primarily aimed

⁹ Jean-Noël Jeanneney, *Google and the Myth of Universal Knowledge: A View from Europe*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 3.

¹⁰ "Google Checks Out Library Books," Google Inc., http://www.google.com/press/pressrel/print_library.html

¹¹ Jeanneney, *Google and the Myth of Universal Knowledge*, 8.

¹² *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³ Purday, "Think Culture," 105.

¹⁴ Bjørner, "Building a European Digital Library," hypertext.

¹⁵ Purday, "Think Culture," 106.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

at academic audience enabling it to search the digital and non-digital collections of 46 national libraries of Europe, while Europeana.eu is a cross-domain cultural and scientific heritage portal that also has general audience in mind.¹⁷ Nevertheless, TEL's involvement in the project has certainly contributed to its fast development. Already in November 2008 the first functional prototype of Europeana was ready for the public launch, having already indexed 4.5 million digital objects in its database – more than twice than initially planned – from over 1.000 contributing museums, libraries, archives and other cultural institutions.¹⁸ On the very same day the development site was so heavily visited that it had to be taken down with its underlying infrastructure reconstructed and reconfigured.¹⁹ The site was back online in mid-December 2008, and today, while still in the “beta” phase, with 15 million of already indexed items,²⁰ it has reached its goal of 10 million indexed items in 2010, and is progressing towards the 25 million targets for the year 2012.

Coming back to the beforehand mentioned Jeanneney's article in *Le monde*, it has also experienced fast evolution. Already in April 2005 he further developed his arguments from the article into a book bearing the same title.²¹ The book was soon translated into many languages, including German, Arabic and Chinese,²² while its English language edition, under the title “Google and the Myth of Universal Knowledge: A View from Europe”, appeared in October 2007. Jeanneney is quite open and frank about his intentions expressed in the book. He explicitly states that building European cultural portal would be a political project,²³ highlighting that he wrote the book “(...) as the head of The Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), as a historian, as a citizen and as a European.”²⁴ This book offers the earliest blueprints of what was to become Europeana, and given Jeanneney's heavy involvement in the earliest phases of the project, his book should be considered its manifesto.

Offering political rather than professional arguments, Jeanneney asserts his concerns regarding Google's project and draws a proposal for a ‘counter attack’. The ‘gondola end’ principle seems to be the mother of all his fears. Essentially, it is a marketing principle saying that goods offered in a store are

¹⁷ Susanne Bjørner, “Thinking About Culture and Language,” *Searcher* 17, no. 6 (June 2009), *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost, hypertext.

¹⁸ Purday, “Think Culture”, 119.

¹⁹ Angelique Chrisafis, “Dante to dialects: EU's online renaissance,” *Guardian*, November 21, 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/nov/21/eu>.

²⁰ “Aabout us,” Europeana.eu, hypertext.

²¹ Jeanneney, *Google and the Myth of Universal Knowledge*, 9.

²² *Ibid.*, 10.

²³ *Ibid.*, 75.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

not placed haphazardly, but in a way which encourages specific behavior of a costumer. Jeanneney applies it to the debate on the Google Books project, drawing conclusions that that a list generated by Google would likely weigh in favor of Anglo-Saxon culture, so the dominance of work from the United States would be further increased in the academic realm, and the use of English would become ever more prevalent at the expense of all other European languages, thus European cultures would become marginalized.²⁵ Therefore he calls the entire Europe to join “(...) collective resistance against the perils of a forced homogenization of cultures”,²⁶ because none of the European nations is neither strong nor wealthy enough to undertake such an initiative alone.²⁷ Since Google is not a public institution of the United States of America but a private company, in order to justify his cause, Jeanneney borrows De Gaulle’s argument that if the market is to rule the world, it would be the Americans who ruled as masters over the market. Later on, he denies the notion that America’s triumph is fundamentally the triumph of Europe as well, asserting that in the powerful melting pot of the United States various European influences gave birth to a fundamentally different culture.²⁸

Protectionism is nothing new in Europe, especially in the sphere of culture. For instance, following the advent of American culture after the World War II, France has introduced a number of measures to protect its own cultural production from the competition coming from the States. The best known of which is probably the restriction of import of American films that allows the quota of only 121 American films per year, while obliging movie theaters to show French films for at least five weeks in every three-month period.²⁹

Similarly, in the realms of economy and politics, it is also argued that the European Union is not a cosmopolitan, internationalist project, but the European nation-state’s attempt to rescue itself from collapse and to reassert itself as the fundamental unit of political organization.³⁰ Rather than its enemy, the European Union is in fact a condition of nation-state’s possibility.³¹ During the 1980s and early 1990 the Fortress Europe metaphor was widely used, especially in the United States of America, to describe the fear that in the process of freeing the trade and movement of people and goods within the internal

²⁵ Ibid., 5-7.

²⁶ Ibid., 86.

²⁷ Bjørner, “Building a European Digital Library,” hypertext.

²⁸ Ibid., 41.

²⁹ Ibid., 29.

³⁰ Alan S. Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State* (London: Routledge, 2000), 429, Kindle edition.

³¹ Gerard Delanty, *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 1995), 8.

borders, the European Union would strengthen its external borders to shield itself from the effects of globalization.³² Still, while European nation-states did agree to combine their economies, deemed as inadequate in the modern world, forming a common market,³³ integration has always been particularly difficult in the realm of culture.³⁴ The Article 128 of the Maastricht Treaty³⁵ makes it clear the competence in this area still lays mostly within individual member states, while the European Union is allowed only to encourage cooperation between member states, support and supplement their action if necessary.³⁶

Still, especially in the later part of its being, the European Union has managed to sponsor a number of cultural projects as part of pan-European 'nation-building' project. However, one having as defensive background as Europeana is hard, if not impossible to find. It should be also emphasized that Europeana came into consideration in the time when the advancements in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), especially the Internet, made cultural protectionism arguably impossible without the degradation of some of the fundamental citizen right. Now a French teenager can easily download as many American films as he or she wishes legally, and even more easily illegally and there is almost nothing the state can do about that. Indeed, Jeanneney does not propose filtering out Google Books in Europe, but an alternative solution - collaboration between the European nation-states and public subsidies. Even the name of the newest proposed "European agenda for culture *in a globalizing world*,"³⁷ suggests that the European Union is attempting to make a shift towards more defensive, though still primarily constructive approach in the realm of culture. Besides planning to intensify cultural cooperation and blossom of creativity in the European Union, the European Commission plans to introduce cultural diplomacy measures to enhance the global position of not only European, but of the developing world's cultures as well by promoting access to global markets for their cultural goods and services, enhancing cultural exchanges between the EU and non-EU countries, and so

³² A Dictionary of the European Union, 2nd ed., s.v. "Fortress Europe."

³³ Stephen George and Ian Bache, *Politics in the European union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 8.

³⁴ Jeanneney, *Google and the Myth of Universal Knowledge*, 29.

³⁵ Later incorporated in the Lisbon Treaty as the Article 167.

³⁶ European Union, Treaty of Lisbon Amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty Establishing the European Community, December 13, (Brussels: The Publications Office of the European Union, 2008), <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:115:0001:01:EN:HTML>.

³⁷ Emphasis added.

on.³⁸ This proposal might suggest what is clearly obvious in the Jeanneney's book – that Anglo-Saxon, especially North American influences are the major threat from which European and other cultures of the world need to defend themselves.

In order to gain better understanding of Europeana.eu, the concepts European culture(s) and identity need to be taken into account as well. Even though beforehand mentioned article 167 of the Lisbon Treaty explicitly speaks about cultures of the member-states (in plural) that have some common cultural heritage,³⁹ there is, as Milward puts it:

(...) an assumption that all of Europe is a common culture formed at first by the influences of classical Greece and Roman Empire and reshaped by the common experience of Christianity, so that national differentiation was never more than a temporary aberration imposed by the localization of secular power.⁴⁰

European identity, on the other hand, was definitely designed and decided at the Copenhagen EC summit in December 1973, in the time of an unexpected crisis,⁴¹ to give the European Community new confidence and to define its new role in the international order.⁴² Repeatedly stated view of the European Commission is that individuals possess multiple complementary and segmentary identities, which makes the construction of an over-arching European identity a simple task of adding higher collective identity on to and above existing regional or national identities.⁴³ However, the truth is that the European Union conspicuously lacks a common culture around which Europeans could unite.⁴⁴ Therefore, identity-formation and 'culture-building' have become explicit political objectives, and a number of agents of European consciousness have come to fore: EU institutions and civil servants, the single market, the Euro, the metric system, EC laws and regulations, educational exchanges, town-twinning programs, invented Euro-symbols and traditions,

³⁸ European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 10 May 2007 on a European agenda for culture in a globalizing world* [COM(2007) 242 final – Not published in the Official Journal], <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2007:0242:FIN:CS:PDF>.

³⁹ European Union, Treaty of Lisbon.

⁴⁰ Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State*, 479.

⁴¹ Bo Stråth, "A European Identity: To the Historical Limits of a Concept," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 4 (November 2002): 388.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 390.

⁴³ Cris Shore, *Building Europe: the cultural politics of European integration* (London: Routledge, 2000), 50-51.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

EU historiography and the harmonization of the European statistics by the Eurostat office.⁴⁵

Museums themselves are very important national institutions since these are the places where nation gives itself perpetual homage by celebrating every single aspect of its past.⁴⁶ According to Krzysztof Pomian, museum pieces are the *semiophores* – objects of absolutely no functional use which, being impregnated with meaning, represent the indivisible to which visible is subordinated.⁴⁷ In the case of a nation-state, the invisible is the future since objects in museum collections are not only displayed to present, but also to future generations, just as they were presented to the gods in the past.⁴⁸ Pomian further argues that, in order to communicate with each other, various subsets of society must be given the potential access to the semiophores of the same kind and the same semiophores must be given the same interpretations, meaning that everyone must agree on the nature of the particular invisible world held to be reality.⁴⁹ That way, the museum becomes consensus-forming institution on the technique of opposing the visible and the invisible, and a place where all member of a given society can participate in the same form of worship, nation being both the subject and the object of the new national cult.⁵⁰

Pomian's theory can be applied to Europeana, though some further explanation might be necessary. First of all, the European Union is not a nation, but this is not a major problem in this regard since cohesionist and essentialist concepts were chosen for European culture and its supra-national identity.⁵¹ Much bigger problem is, lacking a better term, the very physical nature of Europeana.eu portal. Krzysztof Pomian defines the collection as “(...) a set of natural or artificial objects kept temporarily or permanently out of the economic circuit, afforded a special protection in enclosed places adapted specifically for that purpose and put on display.”⁵² At first glance, this definition needs only a bit of terminological modernization to suite the reality of the twenty-first century. A specialized website can easily be interpreted as a repository of digital objects put on display and protected by firewalls and other Internet security measures. Indeed, that would be enough in the case of the World Digital Library and the similar cultural heritage portals that actually

⁴⁵ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁶ Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500-1800* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 44.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 27-30.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 44.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 43.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 43-44.

⁵¹ Stråth, “A European Identity”, 398.

⁵² Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities*, 6.

host exhibited files on their servers, but Europeana does not belong to this category. It is actually a searchable database of what the involved European cultural institution offer on the Internet. Europeana.eu hosts only object surrogates and, in order to access the actual digital files, a user is offered a link to a website of an institution that hosts it. Since the supra-national European identity was not designed to replace a plethora of existing national identities in Europe, but to over-arch them, adding another layer of belonging on to existing ones, it can be argued that it needs a different type of cultural institution to celebrate itself and form a consensus of opinion around the technique of opposing the visible and the invisible. Just as the European Union is just another layer added on top of existing member-states that does not replace them, Europeana.eu portal is just another layer overarching and uniting digital national heritage collections, though it has yet to be seen whether Europeana will be able to save European cultures from irrelevance the way the European Union rescued and reasserted its nation-states as fundamental units of political organization. Obviously, a new kind of supra-national identity requires a new kind of institution to support it.

Europeana.eu portal should be viewed as one of the agents of European consciousness as well. Jeanneney also sees it in this light since he is suggesting that a great shared cultural project could give a new hope for the European project after the damage done by the Dutch and French “No” in 2005,⁵³ and that it could foster political cohesion and facilitate the integration of new members into the Union.⁵⁴ One of the problems concerning European integration identified by the European Commission is the lack of awareness of common cultural values and shared European heritage,⁵⁵ and Europeana addresses that issue perfectly.

A closer examination of the existing portal reveals that it is completely in line with the EU cultural policy. Because of the fact that the linguistic/cultural zones are not confined within the borders of the European Union, its cultural action has been open to collaboration with non-EU countries from its earliest days,⁵⁶ and this is why the participation of countries like Russia, Norway, Serbia and others should not surprise us. One of the hallmarks of the European Union is its devotion to multilingualism, so Europeana.eu portal is available in all the official languages of the Union, while the support for the languages of non-EU countries is only partial. For instance, the site is avail-

⁵³ Jeanneney, *Google and the Myth of Universal Knowledge*, 11.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁵⁵ Shore, *Building Europe*, 25.

⁵⁶ Allan Forrest, “A New Start for Cultural Action in the European Community: Genesis and Implications of Article 128 of the Treaty on European Union,” *The European Journal of Cultural Policy* 1, no. 1 (1994/1995): 14.

able in Russian and Icelandic, the languages of the countries that care a lot about their linguistic identities, while languages of the ex-Yugoslav countries (apart from Slovenia, which is an EU member-state) have yet to be supported, which might suggest that the lack of translation reflects the different levels of acceptance of the use of English as an international language, at least on the Internet, in different countries.⁵⁷ Europeana offers its users a possibility to create personal profiles and network with other users, but this section of the portal is still at the very beginning of its development, so it has yet to be seen whether and how will it achieve its purpose.

However, even though Jeanneney argues in his book that a European cultural portal should allow every country to digitize and organize its heritage according to its own criteria,⁵⁸ this does not seem to be a major concern of the existing portal, at least in its current phase of development. Users of Europeana do not have the opportunity to browse cultural and scientific heritage of their countries in a structured, organized way. Instead, they are greeted with a somewhat “googlesque” home page dominated by a search field. Only after a user gets the results of his or her search query, options to filter them by country or language will appear. As a result, the overall impression is that Europeana brings to fore pan-European cultural cohesion at the expense of promotion of national cultures. The exhibitions section of the website is prominently featured on the home page as well, right below the search field, and it also tells a similar story. Having in mind that Europeana.eu is not finished, only one of the four exhibitions currently offered on the web site should be considered here – “Reading Europe: European culture through the book”⁵⁹ exhibition is actually just a link to The European Library’s online exhibition, while “Explore the magic of fairy tales” and “Walk in a winter wonderland”⁶⁰ “exhibitions” are mere search results for the terms appropriate to the topics, without any intelligent organization of items or accompanying commentary. These are present only in the virtual exhibition “Art Nouveau”⁶¹ and, considering the fact that it is hosted under the Exhibitions subdomain of Europeana.eu, it might be reasonable to assume that it shows where this section of the portal is heading. The exhibition depicts Art Nouveau as a common pan-European phenomenon, and the exhibited material cannot be browsed by countries

⁵⁷ Bjørner, „Thinking About Culture and Language,” hypertext.

⁵⁸ Jeanneney, *Google and the Myth of Universal Knowledge*, 39.

⁵⁹ See: http://europeana.eu/portal/reading_europe.html

⁶⁰ See: <http://europeana.eu/portal/brief-doc.html?query=%22fairy+tales%22+OR+%22Marchen%22+OR+%22contes+des+fees%22+OR+faba+OR+basn&bt=carousel> and <http://europeana.eu/portal/brief-doc.html?start=1&view=table&query=Sneeuw+OR+vinter+OR+winter&bt=carousel>

⁶¹ See: <http://exhibitions.europeana.eu/exhibits/show/art-nouveau/introduction>.

of origin. Once again identity-formation and cultural cohesion took the upper hand. In this regard, Europeana.eu portal, deviating from original Jeanneney's intentions, essentially does the same thing to European culture(s) the Eurobarometer and Eurostat statistics do to European public opinion(s) – they create a common space where there hardly is any.

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Europeana.eu, the European cross-domain cultural and scientific heritage portal came to fore as a constructive and competitive response to the Google Books project which threatens to diminish European cultural influence and prestige both abroad and at home. As such, Europeana project has the explicitly stated political agenda and enjoys a strong support of virtually all institutions of the European Union, which played a significant role in the astonishingly quick developmental of the portal. Still, even though it has obviously defensive background, it should not be viewed in the context of European protectionism. Europeana is not a typical online cultural heritage repository that actually hosts the material it exhibits, but a searchable database of items offered by a number of European cultural institutions on the Internet. A user actually has to go the external website to access a full-resolution file. As the European Union does not replace, but supplements its member-states, Europeana is not seeking to replace national digitized cultural heritage collections either, and its very form suggest that a new kind of supra-national identity requires a new kind of a cultural institution to support it. However, a closer examination of the current version of the portal reveals that the presentation of material leans in favor of pan-European nation-forging project at the expense of promotion of nation-states' cultures, since it creates a common space where there hardly is any. These two purposes of Europeana.eu portal stand in conflict, but they do not necessarily exclude each other, and it still remains to be seen how this tension will play out in the future.

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Резиме

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Политичка позадина Europeana.eu портала**Кључне речи:** *Europeana, политика, култура, наслеђе, идентитет*

Политика, култура и идентитет нису нужно одвојени и независни домени, већ често формирају испреплетену мрежу међусобних утицаја. Култура је одиграла значајну улогу у формирању националних држава током деветнаестог века, док је данас Европска унија сматра неопходним елементом за постизање успешних европских интеграција. Europeana, као и већина културних пројеката Европске уније тежи постизању културне кохезије и формирању новог европског наднационалног идентитета.

Europeana, портал који омогућава приступ дигитализованом европском културном и научном наслеђу, настала је као одговор на пројекат Гугл Књиге који прети да угрози европски културни утицај и престиж и у свету и код куће. Као такав, пројекат има јасно изражену политичку агенду и ужива подршку готово свих институција Европске уније, што је омогућило његов брз настанак и развитак портала. Ипак, и поред чињенице да Europeana има очигледно дефанзивну позадину, не треба је посматрати у контексту европског протекционизма јер је ипак по среди првенствено конструктиван пројекат.

Europeana се разликује од типичних националних портала која презентују дигитализовано културно наслеђе по томе што она не хостује материја који излаже, већ је заправо претражива база података која индексира садржаје које бројне европске културне институције нуде на Интернету. Да би приступио фајлу у пуној резолуцији, корисник мора пратити понуђени линк ка сајту институције која је надлежна за конкретни фајл. Специфичност концепције Europeane сугерише да нови европски наднационални идентитет захтева нову врсту културне институције која ће га подржавати. Као што Европска унија не замењује, већ потпомаже своје државе чланице, тако ни Europeana не тежи да замени, већ да потпомогне, националне репозиторијуме дигитализованог културног наслеђа.

С друге стране, детаљније испитивање портала сугерише да Europeana у испуњавању својих главних задатака – промоцији култура европских држава и истицању заједничког културног наслеђа – даје примат другом, стварајући заједнички домен тамо где се тешко може говорити да он постоји.