

PHOTOCONSORTIUM: International Consortium for promoting and valuing Photographic Heritage

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Published on Uncommon Culture, Vol. 5, Issue 1/2

ISSN: 2082-6923

Great success for a project is not only successfully delivering all its expected results, but also going beyond the planned activities and transforming its outcomes into a “new life” beyond the end of the project. This is the case of EuropeanaPhotography¹, the CIP ICT PSP pilot B project about early photography, funded by the European Commission within the Competitiveness and Innovation framework programme, officially ended in January 2015. During the project, sixteen archives from all over Europe digitised hundreds of thousands of pictures from the first one hundred years of photography and contributed this content to Europeana, the European portal of cultural heritage. Its partners, after a rich and successful collaboration experience in the project, decided to establish a **long-term strategy** and to transform **cooperation synergies** into a **new Association called PHOTOCONSORTIUM, the International Consortium for Photographic Heritage**².

The PHOTOCONSORTIUM association was established on the 29th of October 2014 and its first General Assembly took place in Bratislava on the 6th of November 2014 where President Prof. Fred Truyen and Vice-president Dr. Antonella Fresa were elected together with the nomination of the members of the Steering Committee and of the Executive Council. The aim of the association is to **expand and enlarge the results of EuropeanaPhotography**, providing a sustainability model to ensure the long-term maintenance of the project results and to continue to cope with its original aims.

The EuropeanaPhotography project produced excellent results. First of all, it digitised and delivered to the European portal of cultural heritage Europeana³ about 430,000 of the finest examples of early photography (1839-1939), increasing the value of the digitized photographic heritage retrievable via Europeana and accessible to everybody. These photographs provide a unique insight into the evolution of European society and the art of photography between the 19th and 20th centuries, which is a valuable source for understanding our history from multiple approaches (history, economics, sociology, anthropology, politics, art...). This extremely valuable source of information will be promoted by PHOTOCONSORTIUM through narratives able to attract the attention of the general public and to contribute with novel information to the research.

Then, the consortium, which includes both public and private bodies with complementary backgrounds, produced a set of useful guidelines about digitization and cataloguing of early photography items. It also released a multilingual vocabulary specifically tailored for photography in 16 languages⁴ and produced an extremely valuable contribution to the very lively discussion of IPR management and rights labelling of digital cultural content. These knowledge resources will continue to be available and to be maintained and updated by the PHOTOCONSORTIUM associates.

Finally, the project has built a network of excellence on digitization and photographic heritage, which will continue to be active in the framework of the PHOTOCONSORTIUM association. All the relevant results produced by the EuropeanaPhotography project need to be kept updated in order to offer valuable solutions to the sector's needs and to prepare to face new challenges. The members of the PHOTOCONSORTIUM

association represent a real aggregation of competences able to take care of updating technical documentation and guidelines, taking into account the latest research and technical advances, and promoting best practices and disseminating success stories. Other parties interested in participating and contributing to the network will find in the new association the right place to meet experts and share experiences.

The **purpose of the association is the promotion and enhancement of the culture of photography and the photographic heritage**. To achieve its statutory goals, PHOTOCONSORTIUM aims to promote, organize and manage conferences, exhibitions, awards and training courses as well as to carry out publishing activities. The association will participate – and promote the participation of its members – in new projects and initiatives also in collaboration with third parties, including but not limited to participation in the Programmes of the European Commission. All the initiatives of the association will be primarily devoted to serving the interests of its members. In this light, it plans to carry out and to encourage research and studies on the themes of the valorising and discovering photographic heritage, digitising early photographic content, communicating and sharing photographic collections. The association will also continue to collect data and information of interest for the activities of the members. Through the expertise of its members, the association will provide consultancy and personalised services both to its members and to third parties.

Digital cultural heritage is considered by the EU one of the key drivers of **economic growth and social innovation**. The association will be actively involved in European initiatives and projects. PHOTOCONSORTIUM represents a centre of expertise and knowledge on digitization, aggregation of content to Europeana and other portals, metadata standards, indexing, cataloguing and controlled vocabularies, best practices for the management of digital archives, and much more. This expertise and knowledge will be the core to generate activities, provide services, organise training programs and seminars and participate in new research.

The association will be the framework for participation in **new initiatives and experimentation activities involving photographic heritage at the European level**. As an example, the digitized materials provided to Europeana through the EuropeanaPhotography project will be the basis for the pilot activities in the Europeana Space⁵ project. Europeana Space, Spaces of possibility for the creative re-use of digital cultural content, is a Best Practice Network project funded by the European Union under the ICT Policy Support Programme that aims to increase and enhance the creative industries' use of Europeana and other digital collections. Multiple themed pilots will present innovative models of content use in interactive TV, dance, games, publishing, museums, and photography.

PHOTOCONSORTIUM will cooperate in this last pilot of Europeana Space.

The pilot on photography will experiment with the content aggregated through EuropeanaPhotography and demonstrate a range of possibilities offered by apps, the Europeana API⁶, and a multitude of tools developed by the open source community, to come up with innovative models involving photography. The experimentation activities include a hackathon, where developers of novel museum applications, storytelling and augmented reality apps will meet and propose their projects. The best ideas will be then tunnelled through a monetization event in London and eventually incubated to prepare for launch on the market.

At the same time, the new association will cooperate with crowdsourcing and citizen science initiatives. Photographic heritage is everywhere around us and helps us to enlighten personal and community stories, by visually transmitting ways of life and all kinds of experiences. The citizens' involvement in photographic heritage activities will be a key element for the new association, not only as audience but also as an active actor in the activities promoted by PHOTOCONSORTIUM. An example of how to activate public participation

in photographic heritage projects has been the public digitisation activities carried out in the framework of “All Our Yesterdays”⁷, the important photographic and multimedia travelling exhibition which showcases the best examples of the photographs digitised in EuropeanaPhotography. The first round of this exhibition, which was held in April-June 2014 in Pisa (Italy), included as a side element a digitisation station: a dedicated space provided with advanced digitisation technology and curated by professionals of photography, where visitors of the exhibition could bring their own vintage photos to be digitised. In fact, a large part of our photographic cultural heritage is preserved and hidden in family albums, which not only include wedding pictures and grandfathers’ portraits, but also reveal photographs of great historical and societal interest. It is of the utmost importance that citizens are encouraged to share this wealth of cultural heritage with the whole community. To explore more in depth how to address this participatory research, the association will establish a cooperation agreement with Civic Epistemologies⁸, a European project working on a roadmap for citizen researchers in digital culture, to activate citizen involvement in photographic heritage research.

The association’s **commitment to photographic culture and heritage** will bring its members to proactively lead initiatives to value and transmit this rich heritage. The association’s activities will create specific programs to reach all target audiences, including cultural institutions, photographic archives, specific research communities, the educational sector, younger and elder generations, the public, activists and amateurs in general.

As an initial example of activities targeting the general public, the association will take care of the exploitation at international level of the “All Our Yesterdays” exhibition, conceived in the framework of EuropeanaPhotography project as a travelling exhibition. Furthermore, PHOTOCONSORTIUM will organize and coordinate future exhibitions on specific themes, possibly linked with territorial characteristics and features. The promotion and enhancement of photographic heritage will have in the association a valuable tool to reach its objectives: a dedicated website giving visibility to all the digitised materials. Complementary to the website, a dedicated showcase will be established in the *digitalmeetsculture* magazine edited by Promoter S.r.l., one of the founder members of PHOTOCONSORTIUM.

PHOTOCONSORTIUM has been established as a non-profit association with a democratic structure, political independence, and unlimited duration. PHOTOCONSORTIUM allows membership to both natural and legal persons, public or private bodies, companies, and associations. Founded by the partners of the EuropeanaPhotography project, the association aims to enlarge its network internationally and welcomes new members sharing its aims.

More details about PHOTOCONSORTIUM and its future activities will be available online at: www.photoconsortium.net

Join our community by contacting info@photoconsortium.net

¹ <http://www.europeana-photography.eu/>

² www.photoconsortium.org

³ <http://www.europeana.eu/>, the European digital library

⁴ English, French, German, Dutch, Danish, Bulgarian, Slovak, Lithuanian, Polish, Spanish, Catalan, Italian, Russian, Ukrainian, Chinese and Hebrew.

⁵ <http://www.europeana-space.eu/>

⁶ Application Program Interface

⁷ <http://www.earlyphotography.eu/>

