Digital Collection building at local and European level

Perspectives from Flanders and the Europeana project

Mel Collier, K.U.Leuven

11th Fiesole retreat, Strathclyde 2009

KATHOLIEKE UNIVERSITEIT LEUVEN
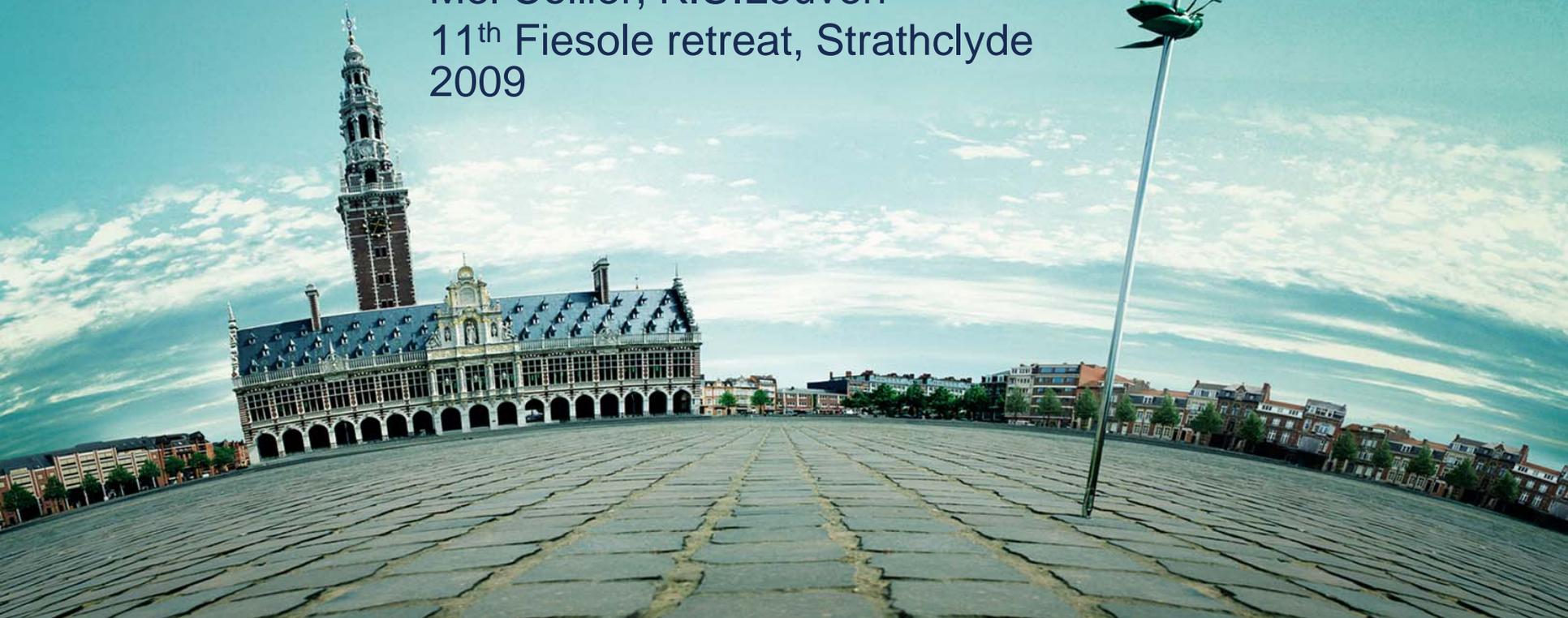
Basic issues -born digital

- Endless task and almost immeasurable scope
- What to select?
- How to select?
- Allocation/acceptance of responsibility
- Inevitable that much more socio-historical material and ephemera will be lost than in the print era

Basic issues - digitisation

- Scale definable – can be determined at institutional, local regional, national and international level
- Rights management may be more manageable
- Is public-private partnership applicable and desirable?
- How to select
  - Collaborative decision-making increases validity
  - National/regional heritage
  - Scientific heritage
  - Avoidance of duplication

Basic issues-distribution and access

- Distributors/agents/aggregators – portals – who are not rights holders must find other income streams

- Unless a compelling social/cultural justification must compete with other web products for visibility

- Visibility is key for sponsorship and for commercial income streams

- Value-add from additional services

Is there a difference?

- Universities have a clear user community
- Collection development follows the disciplines

Whereas

- Many cultural sectors have a broader user community
- Even more so at national level
- What is the cultural heritage of a region anyway?
  - Holdings or production?

Basic questions for digitisation of cultural heritage

- What is the value proposition?

- Is there a USP?

- Who are the target customers and what is the (scale of) the target market?

- What are the key enabling technologies?

- What are the risks?

- Who pays?

Europeana is making us think – seriously – about these questions

- High level expert group – i2010
  - Promotes PPP's
  - Is high level!
  - Relevant/feasible for generality of players?
- Ithaka study (Strategic Content Alliance)
  - Researchers not commercial
  - Impact, benefit and sustainability receive too little attention

Europeana (aka European Digital Library)

An EU project which aims to be

- A collaborative portal giving access to the distributed collections of European heritage

- A broker and aggregator

- With single search access to 25 million digital items by 2014

- From over 100 (+) suppliers and aggregators of content and harvestable partners

- Spread over the 27(+) member states of the EU.

Europeana

Vision

Europeana.eu inspires ideas and understanding by sharing Europe's cultural and scientific heritage with the world online

Mission

Europeana.eu enables people to explore the digital resources of Europe's museums, libraries, archives and audio-visual collections. It promotes discovery and networking opportunities in a multilingual space where users can engage, share in and be inspired by the rich diversity of Europe's cultural and scientific heritage.

Flanders is quite a prominent participant (for a small community)

- Already contributing content (U. Gent, Flemish Art Collection)

- Has formed a steering group co-ordinated by the Ministry, comprising EU project representatives: EuropeanaLocal, ATHENA, Minerva, PACKED, DRIVER

- Has commissioned a study into the feasibility of aggregation at Flemish level

- K.U.Leuven is the Flemish representative and leads the business planning workgroup

The requirements of Europeana business model

- Must address the intentions of the EU
- Must satisfy aspirations of the partners, who are:
  - Heterogeneous (domain)
  - International
  - (Presumably) differing in financial and technical capacities
- Must attract new partners (marketing challenge)
- Must be widely attractive to general public (user interest/attraction challenge)
- Support a budget of several €m

Europeana Value Proposition

- Varies for public sector and private sector clients
- For the EU it contributes to political priorities
- For the private sector:
    - Critical mass and social networking attracts user volume
    - User volume provides channel for advertising
    - User volume provides platform for sponsorship
    - Critical mass offers new views and opportunities for re-use – aggregation, publishing, semantic operators

Model

- Public sector sponsorship with
- (Modest) market dependent income stream rising to 15% over time, based on
- Long tail model
- Large user base which will attract commercial interest

So what about collection building for cultural heritage?

- Inevitably bottom-up – institutions will digitize what they think is important

- Community relevance and validation is important – EuropeanaLocal concept

- This can be moderated by funding programmes where peer review or central priorities are relevant – some evidence of a softening of the EU subsidiarity principle

- Could also be moderated by voluntary co-operation e.g. concept of Flemish Digital Heritage Library

- Concept of topical or thematic aggregation

The proof will be in the viewing

- Content will have to be attractive to a wide audience
  - Thematic?
  - Value-add with educational/informative material
  - Opportunities for re-use and mash-up's (rights owners permitting)
  - Social tagging and networking
- Potential unease of content owners will need to be reconciled with these movements
  - Public sector well placed to address this?
  - Requires a change of mindset among academics and curators?
- Sustainability can be seen as a function of intensity of use – whatever the funding model

- The principles are the same as for traditional collection building – or are they?
- Sure, those responsible for collections have to build according to the disciplines within a budget
- But what about social networking and tagging – are we prepared to let users select, add to and modify _academic_ content?

Anyway:

- The economic challenges are much greater – big deals, restrictive practices etc.

With commercial publishers

- Is it possible within the big deal framework?
  - Restrictive practices on cancellations
  - Squeezing of smaller publishers
  - Is Open Access the/an answer?
- E-book programmes promising if models flexible and allow choice
- Permanent access to e-archive can influence paper collection policy

With own digitization

- Rigorous definition of criteria and selection of projects
- Digitization as conservation
- Co-operate for greater impact

Conclusions

- Planning for sustainability makes for more rigorous collection development, whatever the funding model
- Public-private partnership is still not an obvious solution
- Commercial financing of digitization requires a compelling business case
- Culture is to a large extent expected to be publicly subsidized
- But culture funding bodies not yet made the shift on any scale – nor have most universities?
- Collection building of commercial products and by own digitization are two different things