"Digitales SchauDepot" - Digital curation of cultural heritage

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Fig. 1. Objects from the Museum of Antiquities, Basel

Due to the growing pressure of digitization and open access demands, cultural institutions are increasingly presenting their collections in digital space. Dealing with this constantly growing amount of data poses a major challenge, especially with regard to data quality, long-term storage and digital storytelling.

Basel represents one of the densest museum landscapes in Central Europe, but less than half of the renowned institutions present their collections in virtual space. In order to secure the cultural significance of Basel's collections over time and space, the project "Digitales SchauDepot" aims to transfer the collections into the digital realm. I will discuss the necessary strategies for a digital collection, particularly in regard to curation over time and space.

Curation involves maintaining, recording and exhibiting collections. Once collections are digitized, they also need to be curated as streams of data. Digital curation, as defined by the Digital Curation Center, involves the practice of maintaining and managing data over its lifecycle, addressing the technical aspects of cultural heritage data. This allows for computational methods to be applied, and State-of-the-Art projects already showcase these methods. Furthermore, video games display how storytelling mediates cultural heritage in an engaging manner to a vast demographic. On the other hand, state-funded institutions don't seem to adapt as quickly to the new opportunities. The project Digitales SchauDepot aims to mediate within this context by creating prototypes tailored to the needs of each collection while having a foundation of standardized and interoperable data.

1 INTRODUCTION

Due to the growing pressure of digitization and open access demands, cultural institutions are increasingly presenting their collections in digital space. Dealing with this constantly growing amount of data poses a major challenge, especially with regard to data quality, long-term storage and digital storytelling.

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Basel represents one of the densest museum landscapes in Central Europe, but less than half of the renowned institutions present their collections in virtual space. In order to secure the cultural significance of the Basel collections over time and space, as well as to create international visibility, the project "Digitales SchauDepot" aims to transfer the collections into the digital space. I will discuss the necessary strategies for a digital collection, particularly in regard to curation over time and space.

2   CURATION OVER TIME AND SPACE

Curation involves collecting, tending to and exhibiting objects [4]. To discuss necessary strategies for digital collections, a historical overview of analog curation is first needed. I will briefly outline its origins and transformation in the digital space, followed by an analysis of how digitized cultural heritage is presented today. This aims to set best-practices for the project Digitales SchauDepot.

2.1   Origins of curation

The role of a curator can be traced back to Ancient Rome, when Augustus named a curator to be in charge of the public works, buildings and shrines. This resulted in very early collection catalogs. The application to a professional field occurred in the 19th century with the emergence and institutionalization of public museums [4]. It was not until the beginning of the 21st century, when cultural institutions increasingly transferred their analog archives into digital databases [2]. Initially done as means of preservation, it also induced a new mindset to recognize digitized objects as streams of data [3] State-of-the-Art projects already apply computational methods to gain a deeper knowledge. Furthermore, video games showcase how storytelling mediates cultural heritage in an engaging manner to a vast demographic. On the other hand, state-funded institutions don't seem to adapt as quickly to the new opportunities.

2.2   Digital curation

Digitized cultural heritage, as all data, needs to be stored, shared and eventually terminated, which is addressed by digital curation. Digital curation is a term coined by the Digital Curation Center and includes activities from the point of planning up to the creation of data, but also best practices in digitization and documentation. It secures access, permits preservation for research and the reusability of the data. It also means managing large amounts of data to ensure that they remain searchable and readable.[1]

Digital curation addresses the technical challenges of data, which is a very important factor when digitizing cultural heritage. On the other hand, it doesn't involve mediating knowledge, storytelling and long-term interest in data.

2.3   Curation in digital space

The aim of the Digitales SchauDepot is to combine these models of curation; to have standardized open data combined with lifecycle management, as well as compelling means of storytelling.

Looking at state-funded institutions in Basel, only half show an online collection to the public, with rarely any opportunity to interact with the data.

Most online collections are digitized archives, mere translations of collection catalogs into the digital space without accounting for the new media [1, 3].

Looking at State-of-the-art research project, the VIKUS viewer represents a great example of a computational approach to cultural heritage data; Depending on the choice of the user, it either

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[1]Digital Curation Center. 2021. What is digital curation? | DCC. https://www.dcc.ac.uk/about/digital-curation.

sorts big data by prominent topics in metadata or by color. Users can interact with cultural heritage data and generate new meaning by applying different methods.[2]

Museums in the region Basel	Collection online	Filter (>3 categories)	Creative Commons License	Participation /interaction	Digitorial(s) / Online exhibitions
Kunstmuseum Basel	yes	yes	partially	no	yes (R)
Historisches Museum Basel	yes	yes	yes	no	yes (R)
Naturhistorisches Museum Basel	no	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	yes
Museum der Kulturen Basel	yes	no	no	no	yes (R)
Antikenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig	no	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	yes
Museum Kleines Klingental	no	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	no
Fondation Beyeler	yes	no	no	no	yes
Haus der Elektronischen Künste	yes	no	no	no	yes
Kunsthalle Basel	no	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	yes
Schaulager	no	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	no
Museum Tinguely	yes	no	no	no	yes
Vitra Design Museum	yes	yes	no	yes	no
Kunstmuseum Bern	no	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	no
Kunsthaus Zürich	yes	yes	no	yes	yes (R)
Paul Klee Zentrum	yes	yes	partially	yes	yes
Kunsthalle Zürich	no	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	no

Fig. 2. Analyses of online collections in the region of Basel, 31.5.2021

Also, many games contain and transport cultural heritage in engaging manners, which strengthens the cultural memory of the people. The computer game Never Alone, published by E-Line Media in 2014, is a great example; the game was created in collaboration with the Inuit, who decided to store and preserve their cultural heritage in a game. To spreads and preserves their knowledge, first person narration accompanies the action-adventure gameplay to create an engaging experience that reaches a vast audience.

3 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, collections need to be based on open and interoperable data, which is managed during its lifecycle. To allow for an engaging and long-lasting experience, collections need to adapt to match the new means of the digital space. Strategies and lessons learned can be taken from existing state-funded online collections, state-of-the-art research projects, as well as other forms of digital storytelling, for example game design. The project Digitales SchauDepot will experiment with these strategies, while applying a bottom-up approach.

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[2]Christopher Pietsch. 2021. VIKUS Viewer. https://vikusviewer.fh-potsdam.de/artofthemarch/.

A   ADDITIONAL FIGURES

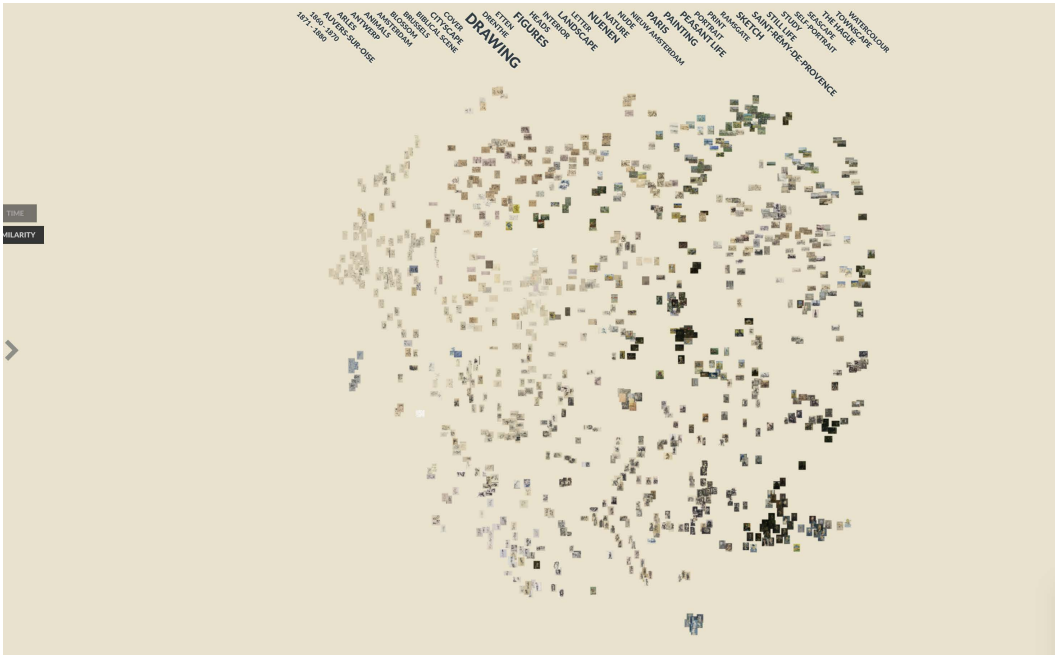Fig. 3. Online collection interface, Museum of Fine Arts Basel

Fig. 4. VIKUS Viewer, created by Christopher Pietsch

Fig. 5. Screenshot of the game Never Alone