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**Understanding the Past – Shaping the Future:**

**Europe’s Time Machine Project**

* Preparatory (CSA) project´s final conference takes place in Brussels on 17 February 2020
* Over 600 institutions have joined forces to create “Big Data of the Past”
* Precise strategy established to guarantee digitisation of the European cultural heritage for the upcoming years

*Thanks to EU funding leading experts from all over the continent have been working together in the Time Machine project. Next week’s conference held in Brussels will conclude the first phase and see the presentation of a concrete agenda for the future.*

What is now available is unique in European history: Stakeholders from diverse fields and local initiatives, often regional Time Machines, have joined forces to tackle the question of how to bring the European cultural heritage together in the virtual space and make it accessible to anyone. Frédéric Kaplan, professor for Digital Humanities at the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) and president of the Time Machine Organisation (TMO) says, “Time Machine has developed a collective vision and a ten-year plan to make it happen: Europe will build the first 4D mirror world, connecting each place with the depth of its past and giving direct access to unique assets for studying, learning, deciding, creating and inventing a shared future.”

**Bringing initiatives together**

“In the past museums, archives, libraries and private enterprises all worked on their own databases”, explains Thomas Aigner, vice-president of the TMO, the beginnings of the digitisation process. “For the past ten years, Europeana has already been working with close to 4000 museums, libraries and archives towards a common resource and Time Machine can drastically accelerate this process.” Also Harry Verwayen, executive director of Europeana Foundation and vice-president of the TMO, stresses the collaborative nature of the of the project, “Europeana and Time Machine share a vision of how the data that we have gathered about our shared cultural heritage over generations can be used to aid future research and innovation for the good of society. This project combines the very best of our knowledge and expertise to help make that happen. Time Machine builds on Europeana's work on interoperability to help share cultural heritage data, allowing new technologies such as AI to mine information and share new insights. This opens up an exciting new phase in how we develop applications for heritage data.”

**Developing specific AI technologies for Europe’s cultural heritage**

To make the knowledge and plans put down in the Time Machines strategy more tangible, it is best to take a look at a concrete example of the planned AI developments: Imagine standing in front of the Eiffel Tower – interested visitors today may obtain information on the building digitally using Wikipedia or other simple sources. Finding out more still means visiting different sites, such as the National Archives, the Archives of the City of Paris or even the office of the Chamber of Architects. The future will be to see plans, sketches, drawings from different sources all at once on the smartphone – collected by the appropriate AI technology. Each piece of information will be linked with one another. Even the smallest screw on the Eiffel Tower can then be tracked back to its place of production.

**Creating a solid framework**

In order to coordinate this huge project in the coming years last autumn saw the founding of the Time Machine Organisation. Within the last 12 months more than 600 institutions from science, industry, cultural heritage and civil society have joined an unprecedented alliance under the umbrella of the Time Machine Organisation. “Over the coming years, the Time Machine Organisation will coordinate the development of a number of key components through dedicated projects in the Horizon 2020 framework and future EU funding programmes”, says Frédéric Kaplan and adds, “In about three years, we expect to be sufficiently advanced to convince Europe to develop the Time Machine large-scale research initiative which corresponds with a significant investment. There is no doubt that this will be money well invested, as it will put Europe on the leading edge in shaping the future not only of the continent but of the rest of the world as well.” Europe cannot afford missing this opportunity for the future generations.

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