



I ntroduction

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The idea for the journal *Uncommon Culture* has existed as long as the International Center for Information Management, Systems and Services¹. This idea was converted into reality thanks to Rossella Caffo, the ATHENA project coordinator, who agreed to publication of the first three issues within the project's framework. Thus were we provided with a great opportunity with financial support for this publication to bring together an important network of individuals acting as contributors to this journal.

We are grateful to Professor Jerzy Buzek, President of the European Parliament, whose kind foreword introduces this journal to the world. He demonstrates his interest, and the interest of other Parliament members like Doris Pack and Tadeusz Zwiefka, in the work of the ATHENA and Europeana (European digital library) projects. Europeana at the end of 2010 demonstrated broad cooperation of other projects such as ATHENA, Europeana Local, Judaica, Europeana Travel and many others and offers access to 15 million objects. It is a significant initiative of the European Union, supported by the European Parliament and financed by the European Commission.

The title, *Uncommon Culture*, was first suggested by Ed Valauskas in 2005 to express the diverse content to be found in the pages of this journal. Initially appearing with two combined online issues at the end of 2010, *Uncommon Culture* will be released on a quarterly basis in 2011.

Uncommon Culture is a peer-reviewed journal providing unique perspectives on a rich variety of cultural activities in Europe. Examining cultural institutions and their collections, *Uncommon Culture* provides new and refreshing insight into cultural activities at a time when globalization and information overload affect our lives dramatically. *Uncommon Culture* gives its readers new perspectives on cultural activities, organisations, and collections, perspectives that are truly unique, reflecting traditions both ancient and modern.

The title of the first issue refers to the Europeana slogan, *Think Culture*. This issue is a general introduction to the kinds of cultural topics that will be treated in this journal. The second issue is entitled *Open Gates Instead of Closed Doors* and examines culture relative to rapid technological change. It will demonstrate how technologies have been used to increase access to collections in libraries, museums, and archives collections once inaccessible because of their fragility and rarity. Cultural institutions have used technologies to establish Web sites, portals and gateways to their catalogues as well as objects in their collections. In some cases, individuals can find full-text files online of scarce materials once only accessible to only the most dedicated researchers. The third issue is devoted to *Collections Development* and will examine the ways in which traditional collections are becoming digitized and organized in innovative and dynamic ways.

We are especially proud of the content of the very first issue of *Uncommon Culture*. One of the special features in the first issue *Think Culture* is a poem by Wisława Szymborska, the 1996 Nobel Prize laureate in literature. The poem describes the museum as a symbol of transience, based on careful observations of traditional museums. Today, museums are much more lively institutions, changing their ways of presenting objects from the past. Museum staffs organise performances, offer lectures, and engage visitors in a variety of ways with their collections and traditions. In addition, in the first issue of *Uncommon Culture*, a selection of the works of Ryszard Kapuściński (1932-2007) provides an important introduction to the significant role of culture in a global and information-rich society. Two other articles have a more practical character: Doris Pack, Chair of the European Parliament Committee on Culture and Education, and Piotr Borys examine the European Heritage Label Initiative which was also treated recently by the European Parliament. Barbara Dierickx and Dimitrios K. Tsolis present some of the results of the ATHENA Project related to intellectual property rights, which represent barriers to online access to culture.

Interviews are part of *Uncommon Culture*, providing personal insights into projects and initiatives from a cultural point of view, especially those contributing to Europeana development. In this issue we present interviews with Jill Cousins, Europeana Director, and Rossella Caffo, coordinator of the ATHENA Project.

In this initial issue, readers can find brief articles by partners of the ATHENA Project as well as invited guests from countries outside the ATHENA network. Contributors from 20 countries discuss cultural initiatives on a variety of topics. These subjects include Art Nouveau in Belgium; Bulgarian culture; lectures in museums of the Czech Republic; an Estonian Internet-based museum information system; Finnish national cultural policies; new French portals for education; and, German Museum Night initiatives. In addition, there are descriptions of the strongest points of Greek culture, while from Hungary readers can learn about the Knowledge Centre and Library of the South Transdanubian Region. Other features treat digitisation in Israel; museums in Latvia, Lithuania, Russia and the Slovak Republic; the influence of the Knights of the Order of St. John on culture in Malta; and Moldovan culture. The cultural context of Poland for visitors is examined as well as Ro-



mania's cultural scene. In the United Kingdom, the issues of young audiences in museums are expressed in the *Kids in Museums Manifesto*.

Uncommon Culture also features book reviews and conference reports. Many links to digital resources can be found on the online version of the journal. A description of all of the contributors can be found at the end of each print issue and linked from the individual online articles.

Uncommon Culture began its life online, but it will also appear on paper, a format still welcomed by professionals wanting something solid and visible in their hands. In this format, its high-quality artistic design by Lech-Tadeusz Karczewski is on display to its readers.

We thank all of the contributors to *Uncommon Culture* for their efforts in creating this new and different journal. Their efforts allow *Uncommon Culture* to reveal culture in its many different facets to scholars, students, policy-makers, and many others.

1 The international post-diploma school was established in 1997 and converted into an independent organisation in 2002. This program has been described in a number of articles. See, for example, Maria Śliwińska, *ICIMSS: A new opportunity for Central and Eastern Europe*. In: *Online Information 99. Proceedings. 23rd International Online Information Meeting. London 7-9 December 1999*. Oxford: Learned Information Europe Ltd. 1999, p... 79-85.