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Framing the Past, Shaping the Future:
Memory, Identity, and the Making of
Europe in Digital Cultural Heritage

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Abstract

What we remember, and the stories we tell, are always shaped by what we forget and leave out – Europe is no exception. While it once told its story and commemorated its past through physical museums and memorial sites, the European Union (EU) has now translated these efforts into the digital realm, where platforms like *Europeana* curate narratives of identity, culture and history. This thesis critically examines how EU-funded digital heritage platforms, particularly Europeana, construct and perform narratives of memory under the guise of community engagement and participation. Its central argument is that Europeana operates as a hybrid memory space: it both remembers and forgets, includes and excludes. It invites users to co-create memory while simultaneously reinforcing institutional myths and selectively silencing contested histories.

This thesis strives to identify the most significant memory narratives through an analysis of EU cultural and digital policy documents and four Europeana exhibitions. These narratives, this study finds, legitimize the EU's present identity by anchoring themselves in a coherent, constructed and celebratory past – one that overlooks difficult realities, such as histories of colonialism, war, and division.

Using Brockmeier's theory of narrative orders in tandem with memory and myth theories, the analysis reveals how EU digital heritage and Europeana's digital curation narrate European memory through linguistic, visual and performative strategies. While digital heritage invites the audience to co-author in the process of memory creation, this only happens within the bounds of a pre-scripted European story.

This thesis contributes to debates on EU cultural policy, memory scholarship and digital heritage by exposing the tension between participation and control, remembering and forgetting in the EU's digital memory landscape.

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1. Introduction

The emergence of digital technologies, online platforms and new media communications has datafied our very existence. Digital data has become omnipresent in our everyday lives, and technology has fundamentally reshaped cultural exchanges, how we access information, and learn about ourselves and others. Cultural heritage institutions, once bound by national borders and physical archives, now operate in a global digital landscape. (Grincheva 2020: 34). Museums and archives have embraced this shift, not only expanding access to collections but shaping history and cultural artefacts. *Digital cultural heritage* is conceived as materials in digital form that have lasting cultural value to be protected and preserved for future generations (Cameron 2021: 27). This reflects a long-term shift inaugurated by UNESCO's 2003 recognition of a **digital-born heritage** (Cameron 2021: 31). We are now witnessing this materialize through large-scale digital cultural heritage initiatives launched worldwide – such as *The Smithsonian Institution's Online Portals*, *Europeana*, *Google Arts & Culture*, and *the National Cultural Information Resources Sharing Project* in China. (Tang et al 2017: 59). As museums and archives move online, digitization is not only a neutral act of preservation, but also serves political purposes. For instance, the *Smithsonian Institution's Latino Virtual Museum* is an avatar-based 3D virtual world that elevates stories of U.S Latinos within the national narrative (Grincheva 2013: 1), whilst *UNESCO's* universal digital heritage assumes the existence of global citizenship of common interests and beliefs (Cameron 2021: 9).

The European Union (EU) has emerged as a key player in this shift, actively digitizing its cultural sector. Its flagship initiative, *Europeana.eu*, exemplifies how the EU mobilizes digital heritage to pursue its cultural agenda (Capurro et al. 2021: 304). The EU is not only promoting its cultural heritage online; it is actively constructing it – shaping the way history is remembered and European memory is defined (Capurro & Plets 2021: 164). The Union has long sought to construct a shared sense of European identity and memory through culture. Since the 1992 Maastricht Treaty formally introduced 'culture' into the EU's sphere of competence, cultural policy continues to be a key area through which integration and identity are advanced. Its digital transformation of culture became concrete in 2005 when the European Commission (EC) launched its i2020 strategy on digital libraries. *Europeana*, as the central project, now houses over 60 million digitized objects from more than 4,000 cultural heritage institutions – including libraries, archives, museums and audio-visual collections (Capurro et al. 2021; Capurro & Plets 2021; Grincheva 2020). As such, Europeana offers a compelling case for this thesis to explore

\\how the EU's digital heritage initiatives operate within the framework of official EU memory and identity.

Previous research has extensively discussed the unfolding of EU memory narratives in traditional heritage institutions – e.g, House of European History, the EU Parliamentarium (Lähdesmaki 2014, 2016; De Cesari 2017; Settelle 2015), yet less attention has been paid to how these narratives play out in digital heritage platforms like Europeana. While the digital turn of memory institutions seems democratizing and empowering (Berkey 2021: 188), questions remain about **participation** and **control**. Though Europeana promises engagement and openness, it has been widely critiqued as a top-down instrument of EU identity formation and integration (Capurro et al. 2021; Thylstrup 2011, Valtysson 2012). However, less has been said about the tensions between **co-creation** and **curation**, and the narrative strategies embedded in Europeana's exhibitions – what is made visible, selectively curated and strategically left out. This thesis addresses that gap by asking:

How do EU-funded digital cultural heritage platforms such as Europeana construct and perform narratives of memory and identity?

Answering this allows us to further unpack questions on how memory is constructed in the EU's digital cultural sphere, and what these memory narratives reveal about the dynamics on identity, belonging and forgetting in contemporary Europe.

Investigating both institutional policy documents and selected Europeana exhibitions, this study understands Europeana and EU digital heritage as a **hybrid space of digital memory**: it balances institutional control and participatory rhetoric. Participation is strategically used to project openness, yet remains ultimately constrained by institutional priorities. Participation, I argue, is thus largely an **illusion**: users can explore and navigate the platform, but the materials they engage with and those digitally preserved are curated to align with EU narratives. As such, the EU's digital heritage constructs dynamic narratives that invite users to “co-create” memory, positioning the audience as active participants in a European story; yet this story is already predefined by institutional agendas (Lähdesmaki 2017: 57).

Due to the widespread use of cultural heritage data, it becomes crucial to approach these platforms critically, paying close attention to their inherent politics and curational nature (Capurro et Plets 2021: 2). Through selective digitization and thematic curation, Europeana constructs narratives that reiterate EU founding **myths** – **peace, unity** and **shared cultural origin** – while sidelining contesting histories that complicate this self-image. These narratives, while promising agency, are far from neutral and are both **inclusive** and **exclusive**. As such, Europeana operates not only as a heritage repository, but participates in the EU's broader

project in fostering identity, community and historical consciousness (Capurro et al 2024: 206). It presents itself as an open platform that provides visibility of European cultural history, yet as I shall argue, the selective digitization and curation inherent in the platform reinforces dominant narratives of EU identity, while obfuscating contested and alternative perspectives that complicate this image.

This research draws on three strands of literature: **narrative theory**, **memory studies**, and **EU myth-making**. Brockmeier's (2002) theory of narrative as the structure of memory guides the analysis, uncovering how mnemonic narratives of Europe are constructed through language, visuals and institutional discourse. This is complemented by the scholarship on political myths (Della Sala 2016; Lähdesmaki 2017; Bottici and Challand 2013), to evaluate how the EU's foundational narratives are repackaged in digital formats. Finally, theories on memory (Rigney 2012; Hoskins 2011; Connerton 2008) reveal how digital media allows memory to move across time and space, enabling what is remembered, what is forgotten and why.

The contribution of this study is therefore twofold: first, it conceptualizes Europeana as a digital memory platform that facilitates participatory memory – only insofar as it aligns with the EU's goals of a shared European identity. Second, it demonstrates how EU digital heritage reproduces foundational narratives while marginalizing alternate and plural memory practices – demonstrating how European memory is as much about forgetting as it is about remembrance. In doing so, the EU and Europeana are carving a niche in the cultural sector, actively redefining the function of traditional museums as **memory-making institutions**.

The structure of this thesis is as follows: Chapter 2 reviews literature on **EU cultural policy**, **memory studies** and **(digital) heritage**, organically informing the theoretical framework in Chapter 3 on the functions of memory narratives in recounting the story of Europe. Chapter 4 outlines the methodology, research design, narrative analysis tools and data selection. Chapter 5 presents the analysis of EU institutional discourse and Europeana exhibitions, structured around three key metanarratives and examining how they narrate Europe and reflect institutional framings of values and identity, address contested pasts and perspectives, and articulate the EU's ethos of unity and diversity.

2. Europe's Memoryscapes: Academic Approaches to EU Identity & Heritage

This section reviews the key debates of EU cultural heritage and memory studies to ground my analysis of *Europeana* as a **hybrid** digital memory platform within the broader debates around European identity and memory and heritage institutions. The literature is ordered to reflect the same logic and structure as my thesis: from foundational EU concepts, to how they materialize in institutional narratives and digital mediation.

2.1. EU Cultural Policy and Identity

To understand the EU's investment in digital heritage initiatives like Europeana, it is necessary to trace developments and scholarly critique of EU cultural policy. Culture has long been an increasingly important domain for identity-building and integration, solidifying in **Article 128** of the **Maastricht Treaty**, providing a legal basis for European cultural policy – rooted in a shared legacy and history, where culture became a tool to foster cohesion amongst member states. (Lähdesmaki 2014: 76). Since then, scholars have been apprehensive about the idea of a shared European identity (Sassatelli 2002; Cram 2009; Rosamond 2013; Calligaro 2014; Sierp 2023), acknowledging its complexity in reconciling multiple, distinct national identities with a shared collective understanding. Shore (1993) offered one of the earliest and most foundational critiques of EU cultural policy, warning that the coexistence of “multiple” identities, assumes a harmonious shared identity under a single “European culture” (Shore 1993: 794). This assumption, he argues, privileges a “static, bounded, and exclusivist” European identity, where attempts at creating a unified Europe can be considered an “**imagined community**” constructed through symbolic organizations and the invention of history (Shore 1993: 781; Sassatelli 2002: 436).

This ambiguity in the EU's identity project continues to spark scholarly contention, as debates remain unsettled on whether openness is a strength or is a source of instability. EU scholars such as Lähdesmaki (2014) and Rigney (2012) argue that identities such as European identity are inherently fluid and continuously negotiated, instead of ‘monolithic’. Europe's identity then, is not fixed but rather in an “ongoing state of becoming”, where its ambiguity is not a weakness but part of its **evolving** character (Lähdesmaki 2014: 79; Rigney 2012: 619). Countering this, McNamara (2015) questions the EU's **banal authority**, and the vagueness of the official rhetoric of **Unity in Diversity**, problematizing its function as an “empty frame” that is flexible enough to accommodate multiple readings, yet remains strategically deployed

to maintain cohesion (McNamara 2015: 30). More recent research situates Europe's formed identity within current political realities, Meijen (2020) highlights the EC's cultural policy promotes EU values to reinforce a state-like identity based on shared values and experiences "while obfuscating crucial differences between the historical experiences of European countries" (Meijen 2020: 942). These help reassert common values to major threats affecting European democracy, such as the refugee crisis and the rise of nationalism (ibid.). These tensions become particularly visible in the EU's digital cultural initiatives, which is now central to cultural policy debates as it facilitates this process of Europeanization. The literature's main fascination is the *Europeana* initiative to develop the EU's digital agenda, which scholars critique for offering the promise of participatory engagement and the reality of institutional control (Capurro and Severo 2022; Stainforth 2016; Thylstrup 2018; Valtysson 2020). A central point which this study will investigate through memory narratives and silences in *Europeana* and related digital heritage documents.

Tracing these scholarly debates demonstrate how the EU's foundational concern with constructing a shared identity continues to shape its present-day initiatives. However, the tensions between ambiguity and cohesion, openness and obfuscation in EU cultural policy and identity remain underexplored in the context of the EU's digital sphere – through platforms like *Europeana*, which this study takes as its point of departure. As it adapts its identity-building efforts to the digital age, questions arise about which narratives emerge, what is remembered and what is silenced. This gap is central to this study in exploring how digital heritage is a tool of promoting cultural identity but also of narrative control, where co-creation and participation of memory is encouraged but institutional priorities prevail.

2.2.Remembering Europe: Between Memory and Forgetting

European memory and its relationship with the past has a special place in EU self-understandings and remains a key concern in memory studies. Narratives of the past are not just about remembering, they are crucial to how the EU legitimized its present and future identity (Rigney 2012; Stainforth 2016; Della Sala 2016; Sierp 2023). The EU actively promotes a shared understanding of the past, especially on events leading to and during World War II, which serves as the common point of reference for Europe's identity of today (Assman 2007; Sassatelli 2002; Capurro et al. 2021; Mälksoo 2009). This understanding of past memory as a tool for fostering shared identity guides this study's examination of how the EU's present-day efforts in digital heritage craft memory narratives of the past.

Assman's (2008) *cultural memory* is seminal here, a form of collective memory that conveys a collective and cultural identity – this memory is “situation-transcendent” and transmitted across generations and spaces (Assman 2008: 111). Later reconceptualizations, such as Rigney's (2012) concept of *travelling memory*, is better suited for this study and accounts for contemporary dynamics where memory circulates across media, borders and cultural contexts to “generate new versions, mutate and migrate in different media and formats” (Rigney 2012: 618). This addresses current global dynamics and potential for memory narratives to *travel* due to the mobility of media and people – directly applicable to how the EU narrates a cohesive European past through its digital initiatives. Memory is then not static, but can be continually reinterpreted and re-remembered in light of changing circumstances. Mirroring earlier understandings of Europe as “ongoing”, this study builds on this literature to examine how the EU facilitates the circulation of specific past narratives into the future through digital platforms like Europeana, to legitimize its present-day identity.

Another strand of the scholarship points out that the selectivity of the EU's memory practices and remembering often result in a simplified, one-dimensional narrative of Europe (Sierp 2023; Toth 2019; Mälksoo 2009). Crucial to memory politics are processes of *forgetting* and *selective remembrance* (Minarova-Banjac 2018; Errera & Deluliis 2023; Connerton 2008). Understanding what is omitted and deemed as not worth remembering is essential to understanding how groups define their histories and identities. Though no agreed-upon framework of *forgetting* exists, scholars purport it is essential for “unity to be established” and new group identities and memories to be “reproduced and transformed” (Minarova-Banjac 2018: 21; Errera & Deluliis 2023: 54). The literature has been attentive to practises of forgetting equally penetrating the EU's memory efforts – highlighting the ‘blank spots’ in the development of a shared European consciousness of the past that silence its more contested histories (Sierp 2020; Pace and Roccu 2020; Nicolaïdis 2015; Khakee 2022). Sierp (2023) notes, the ‘Europeanization’ of memories accounted for the initial focus on the Holocaust and shifted towards all totalitarian regimes, excluding other elements of collective memory, such as colonialism (Sierp 2023: 81). De Cesari (2017) argues that this selective memory legitimizes a sense of “European moral high ground” made possible by *fundamental amnesia* (De Cesari 2017: 20).

Reiterating Rigney (2012), memory serves as points of references across time and space (Rigney 2012: 617). In the EU context, there seems to be only one past that serves as reference – the **Holocaust** and **World War's** (Assman 2009: 13). Consequently any construction of European identity, as Assman (2009) asserts, must acknowledge it as a point of

departure (ibid.). Furthermore, Khakee (2022) argues that the EU's silences of its past through its "democracy-promoting present" not only signals a 'break' from the past, but also the continuity of colonial discourses of Europe as 'democratic' and 'civilised' (Khakee 2022: 103). Other scholars (Mälksoo 2009; Toth 2019) have problematized this in relation to the Eastern and Western divide, and how the Eastern European memories of World War II – such as the crimes of the communist regimes – form less part of the officially endorsed collective European remembrance of the war (Mälksoo 2009: 654).

These silences are not erasures, but rather serve to construct the peace-promoting European identity of today. Highlighted extensively in the literature, is the foundational narrative of Europe as a teleological story and upward movement "**from war to peace**" (Rigney 2012; Sierp 2023; Della Sala 2013; Lähdesmaki 2019; De Cesari 2017). This recounts Europe as a peace project rising from the ashes of WWII and dictatorship – where past atrocities are narrated as a turning point in history (De Cesari 2017: 20). Hence, Europe finds itself in a paradox, it seeks to 'forget' its violent past while grounding its present identity in the lessons from it – underscoring that **selective remembrance** simultaneously implies **forgetting**. However, how these practises of selective remembrance and silences are mediated through digital platforms remained largely underexplored by the literature. As this study shows, these dynamic spaces between remembering and forgetting are further shaped and heightened within Europeana, by the platform's selective curation of content and digital infrastructure.

2.3 (Digital) Museums and Memory: Whose memory? Whose narratives?

As sites where narratives materialize, museums as '**memory-making institutions**' have emerged as the retainers of collective memory. It is thus important to study them through narratives of memory, as they provide a "tangible anchor for existing notions about the past" and present unexpected narratives that can "motivate visitors to rethink ideas about history and their relationship to the past" (Robinson 2012: 421). Museums facilitate this through generating representations and consciousness of the past through the selection of sites, texts, and artefacts of remembrance (idem: 420). Within Europe specifically, remembering and a politics of **regret** marks the current "museum boom" in Europe, commonly called the "European memory complex" (De Cesari 2017: 20). Scholars believe there is an increase in national commemoration sites in Europe, reflecting not only a growing trend towards globalisation but also the EU's desire to forge a **common European identity** based on a shared historical

consciousness (Settelle 2015: 405). As such, how Europe narrates itself across these memory institutions, has been a key area of study across physical European museums such as the *Musee de l'Europe* and the *House of European History (HEH)* in Brussels (Cadot 2010; De Cesari 2017; Lähdesmak 2017).

Scholarly consensus shows that these museums tend to reproduce a master-narrative of a success and teleological story which has “deeply divisive implications in spite of well meaning inclusionary goals” (De Cesari 2017: 19). These have been criticized for the discriminatory character, depicting an EU with a clear “Christian origin and past, dominated by powerful elites and an essentially homogeneous citizenry” (ibid.). Similarly, Lähdesmaki (2017) explores how the EUs founding myths of salvation from destruction and founding figures are produced in the EU *Parlamentarium*, fostering community and identity through narrating selected cultural events, monuments and symbols as ‘European’ (Lähdesmaki 2017: 69). Thus, EU narration as a success story within these museums works through a process of inclusion and exclusion, emphasizing certain histories while downplaying others. In her study of *HEH*, Settele (2015) argues that the institution’s aim is to include “**exclusion**” of migrant voices that appears diverse, yet this remains limited by the top-down nature of the project (Settelle 2015: 413). Even while employing “unity in diversity”, EU memory institutions presuppose an ‘imagined community’ under the guise of pluralism, and museum narratives function to persuade Europeans to this community (Lähdesmaki 2017: 70). However, how these teleological narratives of Europe are reproduced and curated in *digital* memory institutions, rather than physical museums, remains largely unattended in existing literature.

With the increasing digitization of cultural heritage, memory scholarship has begun to explore how cultural memory is mediated through digital infrastructures and reshapes who curates, controls and participates in memory-making. Yet the literature remains divided on whether the digitization of memory allows for more participatory practices than traditional heritage institutions. Hoskins (2009) and Van Dijck (2010) champion *networked* and *connective memory* where memory is not made through **spectatorship**, but rather **participation** made available through digital infrastructures. They describe this memory as mixing the individual and the collective, the private and the public, but also the past and future into “a permanent stream of visual ‘present’ (van Dijck 2010: 2). The connective turn in memory implies boundaries between these dimensions are no longer given – they all coexist and co-evolve within cultural memory (idem: 4). Other scholars such as Mandolessi (2023) and Burkey (2021) apply this to the digitization of heritage, claiming that digital domains allow users to contribute, participate

and share their own memories of the past (Burkey 2021: 189). Instead of relying on cultural institutions to designate what is significant to remember (ibid.).

However, this logic gets further complicated in the landscape of the EU, where its memory institutions seek to construct a unifying narrative of the past through selective remembrance. The questions of openness and control have become central in debates about the EU's digital agenda and the key focus of this study, *Europeana* – as the database that provides citizens with online access to objects, exhibitions, images and texts that make up the country's heritage (Mandolessi 2023: 1519). Highlighted in the literature is the inherent politics of *Europeana*, Capurro et al. (2023) argue how the processes of collecting, ordering and curating digital heritage are subject to cultural, social and political biases (Capurro et al. 2023: 316). Similarly, Thylstrup (2011) and Valtysson (2012) emphasize the role of metadata structures, institutional control and economic priorities in *Europeana*. Thylstrup (2011) calls it a “digital heritage aggregator” that aligns with neoliberal values and operates within a framework of institutional control that prioritizes private and institutional interests over public engagement (Thylstrup 2011: 318). She argues that while digital initiatives promise democratization and enhance cultural accessibility, they also expose tensions between national and supranational control over digital heritage, determining what narratives are included in digital cultural spaces (ibid.). These tensions complicate contemporary memory scholarship, highlighting that digital memory practices are not as participatory and pluralistic as often portrayed. Valtysson (2020) concludes that *Europeana* fails to be a place of **co-creation**, arguing that the platform positions itself as the authoritative source of knowledge. This serves to enhance the visibility of Europe's superior cultural heritage and promote the notion of a European identity and integration – while limiting the participatory opportunities within the platform (Valtysson 2020: 163).

Existing scholarship offers strong critiques of EU identity and memory politics, yet how these remembrances – and their silences are transmitted in digital memory institutions remains largely understudied. Furthermore, current literature also critiques traditional EU heritage institutions such as the *HEH* for perpetuating exclusionary and identity-building narratives, yet less attention has been paid to how these same narrative strategies and selective exclusions unfold in *Europeana*. These tensions about inclusion and exclusion, remembering and forgetting prompt further questions about EU digital heritage initiatives and the possibilities of participation and control. The literature on digital memory is currently caught in the debate around whether digital heritage is participatory or governed by curational institutions. This study addresses that debate by analyzing *Europeana* as a **hybrid** platform, one that is both inclusive and exclusive, pluralistic but carefully curated. As this study will show, I consider how diversity and openness in

EU (digital) memory is but an **illusion**, made possible by promoting certain versions of the past, silencing and forgetting others, under the guise of pluralism and participation.

3. Theoretical Framework

This section provides the theoretical foundation for investigating how the EU constructs cultural memory and identity through its digital heritage initiatives like *Europeana*. To examine discursive and narrative strategies, the framework bridges **narrative theory, political myth-making and memory politics**. These concepts elucidate *how* memory is shaped and *why* it matters as an instrument of EU identity and legitimation. It guides the analysis by showing that Europeana is a site of top-down narrative production, where cultural memory is curated as participatory, and remembrance inherently involves forgetting.

3.1. Narrative as the Structure of Memory

This study also adopts a narrative perspective on memory, drawing on Brockmeier's (2002) conception of narrative as a **process** and **telling** through symbolic systems. Narratives are central to this study as narrating the past through storytelling inevitably involves a **selection** of events, characters and viewpoints, and can thereby serve as a powerful mechanism for shaping how the past is remembered, silenced and forgotten (Shenhav 2015: 24). In a historical narrative, temporal continuity and a causal relationship can be produced between fragmented events – which is crucial when analyzing the constitutive narratives of the EU (Lähdesmaki 2017: 785). In this process, complex historical events are simplified and certain events are prioritized (ibid.)

I align with Brockmeier's core assumption that narratives make memory intelligible, and memory is embedded in language, where oral, written or performative. (Brockmeier 2002: 15). He presents three narrative orders – **linguistic, semiotic discursive/performative** – that constitute forms of meaning construction. Together, these compose a 'mnemonic system' and a symbolic space of remembering and forgetting in which the "past and the present are continuously combined" (idem: 33). It embeds events, temporality and various actors as

part of this system. For this reason, his model is particularly well-suited for my data material – EU policy documents and Europeana's curated exhibitions.

This framework will guide the analysis by dissecting how narratives are not only constructed but circulated and reconstituted across multiple texts and highlighting what is actively remembered in these narratives and also what is omitted. Furthermore, this study is

concerned with Brockmeier's model of narratives as a **malleable** structure, and a process of **co-narration** where memory is constructed in dialogue between the teller and the listener (idem: 36). This premise aligns with this study's constructivist perspective, where it looks at narratives not only the story itself as it is recounted or written, but taking into account the broader social construction of that story. (Esin 2014: 21).

In the EU context, narrations of the past function as building blocks through which the EU creates a particular image and understanding of itself and its citizens (Lähdesmaki 2017: 68). The analysis will thus investigate how the following narrative orders function in the construction of official European memory in EU digital heritage:

- The **linguistic order** refers to the elements of scene, agents, action, intentionality, predicament, and solution, which constitute a narrative and encapsulate the **plot** of the story (Brockmeier 2002: 33). In this study, it will help identify how policy documents and exhibitions plot culture and cultural memory – e.g, as a 'solution' to Europe's fragmentation.
- The **semiotic order** refers to the broader narrative contexts as 'sign' systems through which narratives derive meanings, such as myths. They set the limit to the way the past is remembered in memory texts. (Lähdesmaki 2017: 65). In the context of this study, these 'signs' are operationalized as the appearance and recurrence of themes, including non-verbal signs and visual and symbolic motifs. Such semiotic markers include war, peace, exemplary forefathers and symbolic monuments (ibid.)
- The **performative/discursive order** concerns how narratives are not just a story, but a **process** of telling and a **performance** of meaning. In this study, this order focuses on the broader context in which the narrative is situated. This can be a context of a particular social or political situation, or formalized institutional framework (Brockmeier 2002: 35). The notion of narrative *performance* refers to the social process of telling in which the teller and receiver are not stable, but they interact (idem: 36).

Applying these dimensions in the analysis of the EU's digital heritage, Brockmeier's framework captures not just *what* stories are told, but *how* they are told, symbolized and situated across multiple mediums. It uniquely suits my study as memory and identity are communicated not only in words, but visualized, mediated and reconstructed through policy discourses and digital interaction in curated exhibitions, taking on different meanings. Brockmeier's framework allows all forms of memory narration to be interpreted in tandem, offering a more comprehensive picture depiction on how cultural memory is **constructed** and **circulated** across mediums. This framework supports the analysis of Europeana and EU digital

heritage as a **hybrid** space of memory, revealing the tensions and negotiations of memory in institutional narratives constructing a coherent past while balancing participatory openness and narrative control.

3.2. Political Myths

Building on Brockmeier's conception of narratives as constructing the meaning of memory, this study extends his theoretical scope by employing the concept of **political myths**, to explain how certain versions of the past are sustained and rendered meaningful across time and space. Political myths are crucial for identifying how the EU constructs collective memory, by elevating certain narratives into symbolic myths that are presented as truths; strategically emphasizing certain aspects of European identity and past while omitting others. Myths as defined by Della Sala (2016), are what society uses to "describe its origins, its reasons for being and definitions of belonging" (Della Sala 2016: 4). Political myths are thus "sacred" narratives that help a political community define *who*, more than *what* is, flattening complexities and making the evolution of that community simple and comprehensible (Della Sala 2010: 4). As Bottici and Challand (2013: 168) note, narratives of the past are actively used in the realm of politics to create political myths, however, only when the past is mobilized to create exclusive distinctions between 'us' and 'them', does the narrative turn into a political myth. A myth must then, "respond to a need for significance that changes over time" (Bottici and Challand 2010: 15).

Political myths in this study are best understood as a *process* rather than an *object*, providing this significance within changing circumstances, and whose power relies on a simplifying process. Implicit in this *processual* idea is the existence of variants. Bottici and Challand's (2010) concept of 'work on myth' is particularly useful as they state that myths do not aim to describe the world, it aims to *create* its own world (idem: 92). Through this process of creation and selectivity, myths emphasize not only what is meaningful, but how it is made significant and politically resonant. This dynamic quality is central to this study and especially relevant in the context of digital heritage, where myths are constantly mediated through new mediums, actors and interpretations. They are not static, but respond to the political needs of a community and evolve through time. Three conditions are needed for a political myth to arise out of a narrative: (a) it solidifies and reproduces significance, (b) they are shared amongst a group, (c) addresses the political conditions and realities of that group (ibid.).

In the EU's context, political myths take the form of **foundational stories** of Europe's origins that help forge a sense of unity and shared identity across diverse nations. Della Sala (2016) and Lähdesmaki (2017) outline three dominant myths within the EU imaginary: (1) temporal continuity, shared cultural roots and the preservation of a common legacy (Lähdesmaki 2017: 793), (2) temporal break and rebirth of a civil/political community – post-WWII reconciliation (idem: 789; Della Sala 2016 532), (3) the myth of unity – bridging national divisions on the basis of shared norms and values that are universal (Lähdesmaki 2017: 786). These narratives, however, are not exempt from selective representations and strategic remembrance and silences, which will be tended to in the analysis.

In this study, myths are necessary alongside narratives because these foundational myths of **peace**, **unity** and **common origin** will serve as the interpretive tools of my analysis.

They are not treated as the predetermined mythical narratives this study sets out to find, but rather help me contextualize the dominant themes identified during the narrative analysis. These myths helped me explain why certain narrative patterns and recurring themes emerged from the data and how they resonate with the EU's *raison d'être* and broader project for memory and identity creation in the context of digital heritage. They will provide both the analytical categories to identify recurring memory tropes in EU discourse and exhibitions, and conceptual framework to discern how the EU's digital heritage constructs memory based on shared stories, while marginalizing those who do not fit into these coherent narratives.

While Brockmeier's narrative orders capture how memory is structured and communicated through language, plot and symbols, **political myths** illuminate how these narratives are elevated and take shape over time to contribute to the EU's identity of today. One cannot be studied without the other as they are both paramount to this study: narratives explain *how* the EU forms a story about itself and its history, and political myths reveal *why* those stories matter and how they are repeatedly deployed to articulate the EU's values, history and imagined community.

3.3. Memory as Forgetting

Myths and narratives are not neutral; memories are formed through mythical narratives that make up a "usable past" and therefore involve decisions on what to remember and what to omit (Minarova-Banjac 2018: 15). Although past events in EU myths may have happened, the memories that stay are there to serve a purpose: to legitimize a political community and render it meaning (ibid.). This study therefore complements narratives and myths, with a specific subfield in memory politics, particularly theories of **forgetting**. Forgetting in this study can be understood

as “selective remembering, misremembering or disremembering” (idem: 24). It is through this selectivity that the EU is able to create its cultural memory and identity as a peaceful, progressive and unification project; these ways of forgetting must be paid close attention to.

Drawing Connerton’s (2008) **seven types of forgetting**, this section identified which strategies are crucially at play in the EU’s narratives. I have identified the following, which will inform the analysis on what is silenced and how in EU’s digital heritage. First is *prescriptive forgetting* which is forgetting past wrongs in the interests of all parties involved and to ‘keep the peace’ (Connerton 2008: 62); second is *forgetting as constitutive of identity formation* which is the process by which newly shared memories are constructed on the basis of **shared silences** (idem: 63). Implied here is that forgetting is not a failure or denial but strategic.

Similarly, Nicolaïdis (2015) devised the framework of *amnesia, redirection and atonement* which constitute the strategies for the idea of “Europe as a model” (Nicolaïdis 2015: 3). Where *amnesia* is the “process of great forgetting” of its colonial past, war and nationalism; *redirection* is where “European nations learned to redirect their ambition from without to within” through integration and territorial expansion of new member states and *atonement* is a way of dealing with its past through “assumed” forgiveness (Nicolaïdis 2015: 7).

Theories of forgetting are essential for understanding how the EU constructs its cultural memory and identity not only through commemorative narratives but also through strategic silences. These narratives work and are reinforced by omitting what contesting pasts that challenge the EU’s unified, continuous identity – therefore memory and narratives are inseparable to what is forgotten and they must be studied in tandem. Applied to Europeana, these theories highlight how digital heritage is as much about what is forgotten as what is remembered, allowing the analysis to examine the tensions of pluralism and participation within institutional narratives.

4. Research Design

4.1. Research Approach and Epistemological Position

This study adopts a qualitative **interpretive** and **constructivist** approach grounded in the ontological assumption that reality is not objective or fixed, but rather that multiple realities exist and are socially constructed through individuals and interactions (Esin et al 2013: 20). This perspective is useful to approach the study of memory, narrative identities which were previously identified as not fixed categories but *processes* that emerge through interaction and

performance in common cultural spaces (ibid.) Using the interpretive method means that there are many “truths” to be found in certain events, and their understandings can only be co-generated through interactions between the researcher and the researched (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012: 4). This stance allows me to engage critically with the cultural framings and narratives by the EU, while acknowledging that my interpretations are generated in tandem with the institutional narratives by the EU as I am a part of the shared community they seek to produce.

This approach is in alignment with this study’s employment of narratives, as Herman and Vearveck (2019) note, narratives are a product of *negotiation* and they gain meaning by the interaction between the “interpretative frames imposed by the reader and those suggested by the text itself” (Herman and Vearveck 2019: 269) This understanding is important given this study’s interest in how narratives are *discursive* of a process co-production between institutional intention and how the audience is involved in the story. This premise is central to how memory is mediated through digital heritage platforms like Europeana. Furthermore, the constructivist lens that informs this study conceptualizes memory, identity and European heritage as socially constructed, by the social and cultural – such as the EU’s cultural policy – frameworks that dictate the remembrance of history, and how it is mediated and curated in digital formats. Rather than viewing reality as an objective representation with a single meaning (Esin 2014: 21). The interpretive research design therefore provides discernment when approaching the multifaceted nature of memory practices within Europeana and related institutional documents.

3. Case Selection: Europeana

Europeana is situated as the central case study due to its dual function as an EU-funded digital platform and participatory cultural archive. Europeana is a strategic Digital Service Infrastructure (DSI) controlled by the EC and member states to develop the EU’s digital agenda and facilitate the cultural sector’s digital transformation (Capurro et al. 2021: 311). Metadata is at the core of the *Europeana* initiative, where it developed the European Data Model (EDM) to increase interoperability between digital collections as the project relied on the collaboration of museums, libraries and archives (Stainforth 2017: 329). Later on, expanding to include multiple user bases such as creative enterprises and individual professionals (ibid). As a metadata aggregator, Europeana has amassed a large volume of digital content about European digital heritage from its member states and public institutions – as of 2024, providing access to over 55 million books, artworks and more – with the aim of being a comprehensive and representative source

of Europe's cultural heritage (ibid.). The financing of new projects to enlarge the collection relies on the themes selected by the Europeana Foundation (Capurro and Plets 2021: 171).

Holding such vast collections, a selective approach has been required to make the content digestible. Since 2014, Europeana has more actively curated its database with virtual exhibitions including digitized heritage objects that embody key European themes such as the First World War, the fall of the Berlin Wall or Migration (Capurro and Plets 2021: 171). These exhibitions consist of images grouped under thematic headings and descriptive texts that highlight shared cultural and historical themes, including depictions of monuments, artistic movements and historical events (Stainforth 2017: 329). Four Europeana curated exhibitions will be utilized in my analysis – on World War I, Migration, European Democracy and the Jean Monnet House – selected for their thematic relevance to foundational EU stories and identity construction. These exhibitions offer insight into how Europeana curates and visually presents European history as part of its unifying cultural project.

Europeana therefore is not just a cultural repository but is also imbued with political ambitions as it works to preserve artworks and archives, and embodies the EU's agenda to promote a shared European identity. It offers a substantive case allowing this study to investigate how political myths and memory narratives are constructed, circulated and reconceptualized within a digital context.

4.2. Narrative analysis

This research adopts a narrative analysis as its primary methodological approach to answering the research question. Storytellers (the EU) *interpret* the world and their experience in it, they also create “moral tales” on how the world should be, narratives thus represent the storied ways of knowing and communicating (Reissman 2005: 1). One premise that guides a narrative analysis is a “narrative identity” (Shenhav 2015: 3), which is the understanding that narratives can shape the human experience and emerges from our “narrative memories yielding a story schema that provides a causal, temporal and thematic coherence to an overall sense of identity” (ibid.). For this reason, **narrative analysis** is essential to this study's focus on memory reproduction through Europeana and institutional discourse and their attempts at a European identity. Narratives in this context are structured by memory and the recounting of events through which actors understand identities, values and historical trajectories.

To guide the analysis, this study draws on Shenhav's (2015) narrative tools to identify elements to look for in a narrative, such as: the text in various physical formats and mediums; the story as well as the characters involved in it; the master narrative and leading principles; plot

type and structural elements used to support the narrative (Shenhav 2015: 36). Furthermore, investigation of the texts involves various tools from the field of narrative study such as identifying the focalisation or viewpoints of the texts, the emplotment, *kernels* – events that open up new possibilities, *catalysts* – events that amplify or maintain previous events, the order, and repetition or absence of events within it (idem: 2015: 34). The narratological framework of Herman and Vearveck (2019) as well as Shenhav (2015) provided a set of guiding tools that guided the open-ended inductive coding process focusing key elements as **temporality, characterization, focalization and repetition** to understand how the narratives were constructed. These tools were used systematically to identify dominant themes, topics and repeated motifs, and guide the coding process policy documents and Europeana exhibitions, treating the two as memory texts.

Many themes emerged, some including narrating culture as a bridge builder and digital preservation fostering belonging and cohesion (Appendix A). However, as the coding process progressed and themes were refined into broader categories, three dominant patterns appeared consistently across the data: unity, shared heritage and future-facing continuity. These themes were not deductively imposed, nor did my analysis set out to trace the EU's foundational myths a priori. Instead, only after the dominant themes had emerged inductively from the data their alignment with the well-documented EU founding myths became evident (Dela Sala 2010; Lähdesmaki 2017). These myths did not serve as the predefined categories of my coding process, instead they provided a theoretical lens through which I interpreted and contextualized the narratives that surfaced in the data. This conceptual backing provided depth to the findings and helped explain how the EU's digital heritage narrates memory in a way that serves their institutional agenda and legitimacy. Based on this process, the following three metanarratives were identified in the context of digital heritage:

- 1. Europe as a future-facing, ongoing project**
- 2. Europe as a Space of Peace and Unity in Diversity**
- 3. Europe as Cultural Guardian and Shared Cultural Space**

These identified metanarratives represent specific configurations of foundational myths that are mobilized, adapted and narrated across institutional and public Europeana exhibitions. To further supplement the narrative analysis, this study utilized Brockmeier's (2002) narrative orders, outlined in the theoretical framework. These orders allow an examination of both policy documents and Europeana exhibitions by examining their linguistic structure (actors, intentions, temporality), semiotic elements (symbols, motifs) and performativity (institutional and social contexts that the narratives occur). This framework enabled a close reading of how memory

narratives are constructed and mediated in EU digital cultural initiatives, identifying what is emphasized and also what is obscured. Given that Europeana has both institutional and individual-submitted material, narrative analysis allowed me to additionally trace the tensions between top-down narrative stories and more participatory rhetoric.

4. Data Collected

EU cultural policy documents

The first dataset consists of EU and EC cultural policy documents (e.g., Council Work Plan for Culture 2023–2026, New European Agenda for Culture). These were selected through purposive sampling based on their relevance and outlining of the digital preservation of assets, yielding appropriate and useful information on the EU's digital heritage agenda (Cameron et al 2020: 654). These policy documents do not present a separate case study, but set the backdrop for the priorities and narrative possibilities within Europeana as a platform. The documents included funding calls and proposals for a range of digital heritage initiatives and museums beyond Europeana, but these were not publicly available or accessible to account for them in the analysis. Nonetheless, only their policy proposals were included to contextualize the development of digital heritage and position Europeana within the EU's broader digital heritage agenda. Both general cultural policy documents and Europeana-specific texts provide the context of the EU's memory and identity project needed to understand Europeana and its narratives. Documents were sourced from the EU Funding & Tenders Portal and EUR-lex, through keywords of “identity”, “shared identity”, “unity”, “diversity”, “history”, among others, particularly the linguistic features aligned with foundational EU myths. They were collected, organised and annotated using ATLAS.ti. Codes were then organized by theme, characters, temporal and mythic references to identify narrative tropes (Appendix A). The selected documents span from 2011 to 2025, scoping the shift in EU cultural policy from the establishment of a cultural agenda in the EU's international diplomatic relations toward the recognition of digitization and digital preservation through the launch of Europeana.

Europeana Digital Exhibitions

The second dataset consisted of four curated digital exhibitions on Europeana.eu. These exhibitions were also purposely sampled based on their content relevance to European memory, history and identity, covering themes such as World War I, migration, democracy and the Jean Monnet House. Images, artefacts and descriptive captions construct a storyline about an aspect of Europe's past or virtues. Each exhibition was treated as a **narrative text**, as long as a text

designates a story it can be regarded as one, and as Shenhav (2015) suggests, these can be “pixels on a screen and visual images” (Shenhav 2015: 38). Therefore, exhibitions were coded using the same narrative tools applied to the policy documents (Shenhav 2015; Herman and Vervaeck 2019), with attention to which common themes that appeared in the documents (shared identity, values, unity) also translated into the exhibition content. The themes found most prominently in the exhibitions (Appendix B-E) were also the most dominant across the EU policy documents, which in tandem informed the creation of the three overarching metanarratives.

4.5. Limitations & Reflexivity

This methodological approach, although enabling an in-depth analysis into narratives constructed by Europeana through digital heritage, is not exempt from limitations. Firstly, the analysis relied on a relatively limited scope of EU policy documents and Europeana exhibitions. Since these were pre-selected and funded by the EU and EC, this study cannot account for those proposals and projects that were unfunded; thus they inherently reflect institutional priorities. As such, the narrative analysis has the methodological constraint of overemphasizing coherence and bias, both in the story of Europe itself and the narratives present for dissemination to the public. Additionally, the focus on Europeana as a case study may be suggestive of dynamics in similar digital heritage platforms, but further research is necessary to verify whether these findings can be generalized to other contexts (Simon 2010: 58). This study also did not take into account the insights of users of Europeana and platform curators and policymakers, which could have further enriched the findings. This narrow data scope restricts representativeness, especially in the construction of memory, yet it supports this study’s focus on analysing the institutional narratives within European and EU digital heritage frameworks (Shenhav and Robert 2014: 10).

However, given the interpretivist and constructivist nature of the research and its uncovering of social and political phenomena, this scope is enough to encapsulate the EU’s cultural policy aims and narratives. The identification of dominant narratives is affected by my own **interpretation** and positionality as the researcher. Which risks being embedded in my own belief system, ways of thinking, and social norms – reflected in the co-construction between myself and the texts. Subjectivity can also bring selective attention to certain narrative patterns while overlooking others (Esin 2013:17; Pham 2018:11). This subjectivity, while a limitation, aligns with the study’s ontological premise that narratives are socially constructed, and multiple truths can exist and can be negotiated (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012: 20; Esin 2014: 12).

To mitigate this bias and subjectivity, various measures were taken to strengthen the analysis. This included a coding process combining inductive coding and theoretical backing, triangulation across multiple data sources (policy documents, digital exhibitions), and engagement with concepts that take into account narratives, myth, memories and the workings of power. This study does not seek generalizability given the inherent nature of the interpretative research design, instead it aims to provide a nuanced interpretation of how EU memory narratives are produced and transmitted within digital heritage infrastructures, including how those narratives are made salient and are omitted.

5. Narrating Europe: An Analysis

This chapter analyses how the EU constructs and communicates memory narratives through Europeana as its digital cultural initiative, and related cultural and digital policy texts. The analysis is structured around the three dominant narratives that emerged from the data and the representation forms across each medium. The aim of the analysis was not only to identify dominant narratives, but how they are constructed and what silences or exclusions they entail. Each section applies Brockmeier's narrative orders – *linguistic*, *semiotic* and *performative* – to uncover how stories are constructed and mediated, followed by a critical synthesis that links them to the broader political and memory goals of the EU and the contending histories they obfuscate

5.1. Europe as a future-facing, ongoing project

5.1.2 Institutional Discourse

One of the most common strategies of narrating the progressive nature of Europe, also underpinning the rationale for digital and cultural heritage initiatives across policy documents, was to emphasize the idea of 'Europe' as a continuous, open-ended, and future-oriented project (Appendix A). This narrative implies a rhetoric of linear progression from the past, one that aligns with Lähdesmäki's (2017) founding EU myth 'continuity' and popular conceptions of the EU as 'ongoing' and 'continuous' (Rigney 2012). This myth frames Europe as linear and progressively emerging from a common cultural past towards a shared future. This is conveyed through positioning digital heritage preservation as the key building block and **temporal bridge** to Europe's future, fostering a shared sense of belonging rooted in a common past across

generations. This foregrounding points to the importance of the past of the European project and progressing from it.

The following excerpts reflect Brockmeier's *linguistic* order of narrative, the temporal framings and processual language naturalize the plot of the story and positioning the EU and its digitization of culture as **catalysts** in this continuous progression from the past and a shared culture for its citizens as characters in the narrative. For example, the Horizon Europe Work Programme 2023-2025 outlines:

"Europe's rich cultural heritage and strong creative tradition not only reflect our past, but also shape our future" (European Commission, 2021),

"Cultural heritage is a common good passed from previous generations as a legacy for those to come" – European Framework on Action on Cultural Heritage (European Commission, 2018)

Although this narrative emphasizes Europe's past origins, its *intentionality* is to tell it in terms of the present or even the future, through its consistent processual language. The future framing of Europe within this narrative is not uncontested within academic literature and also aligns with Lähdesmäki's 'common origin' myth, where the cultural values of present-day Europe are based on cultural phenomena reaching far back into the past, and "values and heritage are narrated as shared and originating from a common European history" (Lähdesmäki 2017: 794). This progressive character has been widely discussed by scholars Sassatelli (2009) and Rigney (2012), terming the EU as continuously "under construction" and taking on an ongoing language of "becoming". Rigney states that "memory is invoked at the top echelons of the EU as a foundation to a more democratic future." (Rigney 2012: 341; Sassatelli 2009: 14). This similar dynamic is evident in the decision to **digitally preserve** cultural heritage.

This narrative also operates at a *discursive* level of Brockmeier's orders – which serves more of a strategic and instrumental use of culture. This narrative frames culture and its preservation as a tool that is continually repositioned to meet the EU's future integrative ambitions: to generate a sense of a common past and collective identity. Thereby, affirming the open-ended, continuous nature of both the European project and the narrative itself (Rigney 2012: 341; Bottici and Challand 2013: 12). This is evident in the Council Conclusions on the Role of Europeana, which state:

"This will support the emergence of a sense of belonging and building a European identity based on the common roots of the diversity of European cultural heritage while opening up new perspectives and dimensions for the future" (European Council, 2016)

The discursive framing in this narrative emphasizes intangible heritage as a driver of belonging of collective identity – it is not a static entity, but continuously reimagined and contributed by with differing perspectives that constitute this identity. Showing how participatory rhetoric is continuously evoked for working towards a common future “while reinforcing the sense of a common past” (Rigney 2012: 611). As Rigney puts it, creating a European memory has been mainly about *transmuting* memory narratives (idem: 613), and learning to remember differently in new social contexts. While this is progressive indeed, this also constitutes an important strategy of *forgetting* (Connerton 2008: 61). This discursive level of narrative points to the EU’s broader institutional framework of establishing a common past and present identity, yet, it is exactly this “shared” aspect that defines its processual nature – identity is something that can be co-constructed. Therefore, due to the processual nature of this narrative, European memory and identity is always in the making and increasingly takes on a language of becoming (Sassatelli 2009: 14; Lähdesmaki 2014: 89).

Taking these two orders, Europe as ongoing and future-facing is exactly why Rigney (2012) argued for ‘travelling memory’. It provides a better model for looking at Europe as it is less “monolithic” and more an entity that can be “continuously displaced and whose boundaries are subject to configuration” (Rigney 2012: 352), this understanding is more in tune with the changing material realities – especially in the face of digital technologies. It is precisely this forward-carrying aspect of the digitization of cultural heritage by the EU that contributes to the *shared* and *circulating* quality of memory that is argued by ‘digital memory’. As digitization and memory allow the broader participation of communities in this collective identity and allows the past to be reconfigured (Hoskins 2011: 79). Yet, the institutional grip on this memory challenges this conception and shows that it is not as participatory as it seems.

A key element in this narrative and its conceptual backdrop of the **linear continuity and progression** myth is the implications it has for overlooking contested aspects of Europe’s past (Lähdesmaki 2019: 786). Yet, the policy data also includes recognition of Europe’s awareness of its past, and its potential to foster new beginnings unleashed by its digital cultural initiatives (Appendix A). This recognition does not necessarily complicate this narrative, but instead, extends its performativity by including tropes of the **temporal break and rebirth** myth Lähdesmaki (2019) argues for. Where Europe’s past is seen as the “impetus” for its

development for future memory-making, and thus, this constant state of progression is extended within this narrative (Lähdesmaki 2017: 789). This momentum of European integration despite its troubled past, as noted by Rigney (2012), is linked to the desire for reconciliation and the possibility of generating new alliances and identities (Rigney 2012: 612). Affirmingly, the Europeana Strategy 2020-2025 states that:

“Respecting cultural diversity is important. There is increasing global awareness that institutions need to recognise different framings of the past and repatriate heritage that was brought to Europe as part of colonial infrastructures. This has implications for digitised cultural heritage” (European Commission, 2020).

This desire to transcend the past through progress while simultaneously anchoring present identity in the lessons drawn from it – through digitization of heritage – presents an interesting conundrum. Digital cultural heritage allows the past to be reframed in ways that promote both historical continuity and progression. However, as Connerton (2008) notes, a way of **forgetting** is the forging of new and identities beginnings, yielded by this linear continuity (Connerton 2008: 62). Thus, this narrative operates in a limbo between remembering the past and leaving it behind. Revealing the inherent tensions between visibility and control, and ambiguity of Europe’s identity and memory, which later materialize in Europeana’s digital exhibitions.

Taken together, this narrative of Europe as an ongoing, future-facing project relies on various orders of narrative structuring. Linguistically, it constructs the plot of Europe stemming from a common origin with the past linearly leading into the future; discursively, it supports the EU’s integrative ambitions of social cohesion and shared community that is continuously reconfigured by European society. Additionally, the **continuity** and **temporal break** references that are constantly evoked under this narrative align with the founding EU myths identified by Lähdesmaki (2017), and together, these myths form this metanarrative and legitimize the EU’s digital heritage as tools for future generations and socio-economic cohesion and belonging, aimed to sustain the continuous and open-ended nature of the European project. These features and founding myths imbued in this narrative allows the EU to claim itself and its cultural and digital integration as a teleological process from fragmentation to growth and frames itself as resilient and forward-looking. However, the dynamic character of Europe under this narrative is paradoxing: it seeks to progress from the past, while simultaneously evoking that very past to legitimize and collectivize its future identity. These contradictions and ambivalence set the stage for the tensions surrounding the promotion of linear continuity from the past and balancing

between and more fragmented historical narratives. It also reveals the EU's dual ambition with its digital cultural efforts, to foster a forward-looking and fluid identity, while **reparatively** referencing a common past.

5.1.3 Europeana's Narratives: Becoming Europe

The Europeana exhibitions reinforce this narrative thread both visually and semiotically. These exhibitions rely on **continuity** and **history** to foreground a dynamic culture and identity anchored in progress. This narrative is most prominently conveyed in the exhibitions *70 Years of Democracy in Action* and in the various sections of the *Jean Monnet House*, where the EU is enveloped in temporal framings which narrate it as a living organism that is malleable, evolves over time and is forward-looking,

This ongoing and progress-centered narrative appears visually and discursively through this first exhibition – like the unfinished Strasbourg Parliament rooftop – to signify the European project's malleability and open-ended nature. This photograph is captioned with “open”, “transparency”, and “democracy” constitutes a metaphorical characterization of institutional EU as an agent and catalyst of continuous change (Figure 9, Appendix H). Similarly, it visualizes the EU's open-ended nature through images of protests, images and photographs from activism from young citizens and disabled peoples further emphasizes this democratic renewal and a temporal break from the “democratic deficit” and authoritative past (Figures 10,17,18, Appendix H). Now leveraging civil society as agents and emphasizing the degree of fluidity of the EU, constantly in dialogue with its people and shaped through institutional and audience interactions. Democratic participation is narrated as a form of **co-construction**, where citizens become the co-authors of Europe's identity and evolving story. This continuous character of Europe narrated in this exhibition is one that is co-constructed by citizens and encourages participatory memory and identity making, which aligns with earlier stated EU goals of fostering social cohesion and belonging stated in the institutional section. These images function *semiotically* as their canonization in this exhibition coincide and mutually reinforce the institutional narratives. In accordance with Brockmeier's *semiotic* order, these images turn into a visual token or a “mnemonic” that stands for a series or events as a whole (Lähdesmaki 2017: 66). The images in this exhibition thus have a symbolic function in this narrative: they signify the flexibility and evolutionary nature and story of Europe and signify its founding myth of **continuity** (Lähdesmaki 2017: 786), as it foregrounds Europe's democratic and plural values as catalysts for future progress through visual symbolization.

This narrative is further carried through the historical storytelling done by the *Jean Monnet House* Europeana exhibition. In the section “A Renewed Future for Europe’s Meeting Place,” the story is told on how the house is turned into a symbolic place where citizens can learn and explore Europe’s founding values and future ideas (Figure 11 & 13, Appendix I). As such, the house itself becomes a *lieux de memoire* – a site of memory (Nora 1989: 2) where the house is not only a historical site, but a symbolic anchor of the “ongoing” narrative where the past, present and future are converged. Similarly, visitors – both of the site and Europeana – are not passive consumers of this history but are cast as **participants** that continue to shape Europe: images show people attending workshops, political leaders engaging in dialogue and the space being used for “education, connection and mediation and solidarity across citizens” (Figures 11,16,19, Appendix I).

The exhibition language “Europe’s future” and “future generations” further conveys this idea of ongoing continuity and teleological logic. Here, the figure of Monnet is mythologized and characterized as the main *agent* in the salvation story of Europe, positioning him as a narrative bridge transmitting the values and legacy of the past – peace, democracy, freedom. This heroification strategy as Lähdesmaki (2017) argues, is a way of dealing with complex and sensitive storylines – particularly about colonialism and imperialism – that the data shows to be omitted from this exhibition (See Appendix D). The exhibition under this narrative thus constructs a European memory by highlighting symbolic monuments and exemplary forefathers. This foregrounding of “Great Men”, she continues, is a typical strategy in national narratives to “reinforce self esteem and to create an image of a civilized society” (Lähdesmaki 2017: 65).

Thus, this exhibition invites participation from the audience in the form of engagement with historical memory and active agents in shaping Europe’s future, where shared memory is narrated as a continuous process from the past. This exhibition also reiterates the **continuity** myth but not in the sense that it wants to break away from its past and learn from its troubles, but rather it grounds itself into aspects of its past that justify Europe’s values of today. The Jean Monnet house as both a historical site and Europeana exhibition does this by linking a past democratic figure to the present, specifically through digitization as a means to make this historical continuity possible. However, because the exhibition narrative frames continuity specifically in terms of cultural and phenomena stemming from the past, it is inevitably simplifying the history of European democracy, prioritizing and celebrating certain events and figures (such as Jean Monnet), while containing little acknowledgement of other aspects of Europe’s history – which will be tended to in the next section.

Hoskin's (2011) *digital memory* manifests itself within Europeana's networked structure as the platform allows users to interact with, contribute to and reinterpret European cultural heritage, positioning the audience as co-authors in the story of Europe. However, this dynamic quality is still highly curated, as Europeana acts as an arbiter of what should be historically significant. While the digital heritage initiatives hint at openness and plurality, they still operate within institutional boundaries and narratives. This exhibition and narratives present are underpinned by the same foundational myth present in the institutional documents and that has carried the European project since its inception: a brighter and better future emerging from fragmentation. In it, the EU and its founding fathers advocate for core values of the union which brings all Europeans together. What Rigney (2012) and Hoskin's (2011) deem as *travel* and *connective* memory is nonetheless still imposed strategically, memory is allowed to move, yet only under institutional vision.

5.1.4 Narrative Silences and Omissions

The duality between **participatory potential** and **narrative constraint** is especially visible in the strategic silences present in these digital representations. These silences aim to create consensus around the European project and its shared identity construction. By selectively remembering Europe's past – through portrayals of democracy and plurality – the EU constructs a future-oriented identity that appears natural and legitimate by smoothing over contested historical memories and injustices. However, this commemorative focus on progression from the past in defining Europe's identity comes at the cost of marginalizing alternative pasts, particularly remaining conspicuously quiet about Europe's long and violent entanglements with colonialism and imperialism (Lähdesmäki 2017: 789). There appears to be only one past relevant in this narrative – the birth of democracy and the coherent story of European progress – whereas Europe's other past entanglements with the rest of the world, its history of colonial conquest, does not figure in this narrative (Nicolaidis 2015: 3).

The EU's digital heritage framework scantily, if ever, acknowledges these other past relations. When it does, they are only framed as catalysts for Europe's internal progression and affirm its ethos of diversity. These exclusions are a strategy of dealing with the memories of its more difficult pasts and are a product of *amnesia* as described by Nicolaïdis (2015), specifically for dealing with its colonial past. This *amnesia* manifests itself through the EU's digital heritage initiatives through the projection of peace, democracy and collectivism through the digital heritage and Europeana exhibitions. The digital preservation of heritage becomes not only the oft-noted break with the past, but also allows for a **continuity** with colonial discourses of

Europeans as ‘democratic’, ‘civilized’ and ‘peaceful’. (Khakee 2022; 103 Nicolaïdis 2015:12). Therefore, the continuous and progressive character of the EU constantly evoked through digital heritage as, Khakee (2022) argues, actively silences colonialism and perpetuates past discourses by European colonial powers through “implicitly maintaining a civilizational hierarchy” (Khakee 2022: 104). Here, the narratives of the colonial pasts are juxtaposed with the peaceful and continuous present without any seeming contradiction (idem: 112).

Absent is any trace of coercion or use of force, specifically the extreme violence that characterized the European powers and their colonial vessels. Under this narrative, the historical groundings of progression, democracy and peace within the European project are “points of legitimation” that are promoted through digitization and digital exhibitions, where claims that seem “evident, natural and indisputable” (ibid.). The foundational story of “continuity” and “temporal break” (Lähdesmaki 2014, Della Sala 2010) is made more irrefutable by the silence on certain facts, specifically colonialism. In this way, the EU’s digital cultural initiatives do more than preserve memory, they construct it strategically by silencing contested histories – in doing so they stabilize a moral vision of Europe that is unquestioningly progressing.

5.2 Europe as a Space of Unity and Diversity

A second metanarrative most frequently cited in the data – in line with the official slogan of the EU – is both **unity** and **diversity** as the main features of European identity. Europe’s cultural heritage, mapped on to the digital realm, is seen as characterized both by shared cultural roots and as “distinct cultural units” (Lähdesmaki 2014: 81). In the data, the narration of the digital heritage initiatives is underscored by the idea of “unity in diversity” where Europe thrives because of, not despite, its cultural differences (See Appendix A). In this narrative, diversity is leveraged and digital cultural initiatives are positioned as a meeting point and vital tool in the bringing together of diverse peoples, nations and ethnic and religious groups. Where Europe thrives because of, not despite its cultural differences and they are worth being digitally preserved as they have the power to foster development, reconciliation and understanding.

5.2.1 Institutional narratives

Linguistically, the narrative of *unity in diversity* in EU policy documents further extends the foundational narrative of Europe. Culture – and more importantly its digital preservation – is positioned as a *solution* in the plot of the story. This narrative through policy language is therefore based around a problem-solving logic. Under this narrative cultural heritage, and its

preservation through digitisation, is framed as the **agent** of change and development. The the EC's New European Agenda for Culture states the following:

"it is in the shared interest of all Member States to harness the full potential of education and culture as drivers for jobs, economic growth, social fairness, active citizenship as well as a means to experience European identity in all its diversity." (European Commission, 2018).

As digital technologies have become more prominent, Horizon Europe the EU's programme for **innovation**, states:

"The EU stands for a unique way of combining economic growth with high levels of social protection and inclusion, shared values including democracy, human rights, gender equality and the richness of diversity" (European Commission, 2021).

Furthermore the Council Conclusions on the role of Europeana states that digital heritage collections give a wide range of audiences "access to the richness and diversity of European cultures" (European Council, 2016). These texts construct an intentional plotline under the *linguistic* order. The constitutive arc under this narrative is as follows: the **agent** (culture/digital heritage projects) is instrumentalized to resolve a **problem** (division) through **action** (digitization, preservation, promotion), with the intended **goal/intention** of fostering social and economic cohesion and European integration. Europe's cultural diversity is positioned as a powerful asset and cohesive force that is worth preserving digitally and strengthens European identity, rather than challenges it. The transformative potential of (digital) culture and its mobilizing effects are key *linguistic* plots element of the story being told. These narrations align with Meijen's (2020) conception of the **diversity** myth, where "cultural diversity forms the basis of a common European identity that is based on the peaceful co-existence of different groups and people" (Meijen 2020: 947). While also referencing the **common origin** myth Lähdesmaki (2017) notes that this identity is based on a shared origin and values (Lähdesmaki 2017: 788). However, the simplicity of this narrative structure – *problem, solution, cohesion* – risks flattening out complexities and nuanced realities, limiting digital cultural initiatives to a simplified portrayal of Europe's pluralism that reinforces a narrow image of cohesion and mutual understanding. The data reveals a tendency to overemphasize the positive aspects of diverse cultural heritage, despite the emphasis on inclusion, pluralism and

participation, the narrative remains anchored in a sustained pursuit of coherence – which will be problematized in later sections (Appendix A).

At the *discursive* level, while policy documents predominantly present a vision of culture as a *solution* to internal divisions, certain discursive articulations acknowledge plural and contesting narratives within Europe itself. More than just narrating the “story”, the discursive level adopts a more attentive stance towards the coexistence of multiple narratives and even countering ones. Highlighting the broader socio-political framework, particularly related to cultural diversity leading to mutual dialogue and understanding. Instead of narrating a linear story that aligns neatly with the EU’s project of peace and unity, the discursive order – at least rhetorically – recognizes the coexistence of multiple narratives and even countering ones. For example, the EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations asserts that:

“Inter-cultural dialogue, including inter-religious dialogue, can help promote the building of fair, peaceful and inclusive societies that value cultural diversity and respect for human rights. intercultural dialogue can defuse tensions, prevent crises from escalating, promote national reconciliation, and encourage new narratives to counter radicalisation.” (European Commission, 2016).

In this sense, the *Unity in Diversity* rhetoric is slightly expanded to accommodate for a plurality of narratives, acknowledging that this diversity does not come without its contestation. This framing suggests the potential of digital heritage to expand the scope of histories and narratives, where the Council Resolution for the role of Europeana claims that the platform can give audiences access to the world and “Europe’s rich and diverse cultural heritage” (European Council, 2016). The language here shifts beyond its quasi-celebratory and optimistic rhetoric towards recognizing diversity as a dynamic field where new stories from different perspectives/nationalities can emerge. This openness and fluidity does not negate the EU’s institutional logic, but instead rearticulates the Union’s “Unity in Diversity” rhetoric as deliberately ambiguous, which is what the EU aims for – a framework broad enough for diverse citizens to identify with. (Sassatelli 2002: 436) These framings also echo broader understandings of European identity, not as a stable monolithic being, but as discursive spaces where its meanings can be continually negotiated introducing varying cultural understandings, increasingly taking a “language of becoming” (Lähdesmaki 2014: 79).

The processual nature of this narrative as well as European identity is also reflective of what Bottici and Challand (2010) call a ‘work on myth’: a narrative process that must respond to

changing circumstances. In the policy documents, we see a similar logic play out, what began in early EU council resolutions as a simple commitment to culture and diversity set the stage for more complex cultural strategies later with digital technologies in Horizon Europe and Europeana initiatives. This shift reflects the changing socio-technological landscape that the EU has needed to adapt to by grounding the *Unity in Diversity* narrative into new efforts and frameworks.

5.2.2 Europeana's Narratives: Unity in Diversity?

Across the Europeana exhibitions, the core narrative of diversity is vibrantly pervasive in the exhibition data. In sections such as *Mixing Traditions* and *Defending the Values of the European Union*, diversity identities are uncritically celebrated as a cultural strength and serves to consolidate the EU's open, pluralistic democracy. Just like the institutional narratives, the exhibitions visualize Europe's multiplicity as a strength. Exhibitions highlight how culture travels and blends across borders, but at the same time glosses over national differences and packaging diversity as harmonious (Appendix G&H).

The exhibition *People on the Move* (particularly sections: "Vibrant Communities", and "Itinerant Artists") is the most emblematic of this narrative with the visualisation of diasporic communities through imagery of traditional clothing, artistic expression and everyday life (Figure 4 & 6, Appendix G). Other exhibitions such as *Untold Stories of the First World War* (section: "News from the Front") also subtly reinforce this through bottom-up and diverse soldier stories from the battlefield. Diversity in this narrative is not given the same instrumental function as a cultural unifier and fostering of European integration like in section 5.2. Instead, it's an identity in itself and an aspect of 'Europeanness' like various scholars have pointed out (Delanty 1995; Lähdesmäki 2011). Cultural diversity is leveraged as a marker and symbol of European identity, this identity is grounded in inclusivity and the peaceful co-existence of differing communities and viewpoints (Meijen 2020: 947). This identity-formation through the Europeana exhibitions places the European diaspora at the center of constituting this diversity through their own rituals, rather than the EU as an institution promoting this diversity as a moral obligation. This showcases popular notions on memory and narrative outlined in the theoretical framework, which position the audience as co-authors of the story and the process of narration and memory remains fluid and dynamic (Brockmeier 2002; Bottici and Challand 2010; Rigney 2012). However, this only functions within institutional boundaries as cultural diversity and difference are unwaveringly celebrated only insofar as it contributes to a cohesive image of European identity, while the complexities of overlapping identities remain largely absent

In *Defending the Values of the European Union*, LGBT+ rights, gender and race equality are visually emphasized through imagery – visual rhetoric, inclusivity campaigns (Figure 8, Appendix H). These are powerful *semiotic* markers which give ‘truthfulness’ to the exhibition narrative and function in tandem with the *linguistic* elements of diversity in section 5.2, their intertextuality creates “blindness” to the constructed nature of the exhibition narrative and conditions to “perceiving the world in a particular way” (Lähdesmaki 2017: 66). These images turn into visual signs of the narrative, which responds to the EU’s ‘need for legitimacy’ and acts as a weapon against homogenizing and nationalist narratives and cultural fragmentation ascending in Europe. Instead, framing tolerance and diversity as core values and a common good of European identity in the face of external threats (Meijen 2020: 942). They serve a symbolic function: they signify the EU’s attempt to confirm and protect its values on the world stage. Through the curated and celebratory visuals of diversity, this Europeana exhibition also rearticulates the **diversity** myth and the **common origin** myth, by portraying cultural different solely in a positive light, and as assets that validate the EU’s common identity of shared values (Meijen 2020; Lähdesmaki 2017). Although this narrative foregrounds inclusion, the exhibition data revealed absences of tensions around nationalism, discrimination and racism that come with foreign migration – privileging depictions of Europe as harmonious and unified Appendix E).

In line with Europeana’s broader narratives, it exposes a **hybrid nature** of the diversity narrative and Europeana itself, as it both includes and excludes. Migration and plural backgrounds are incorporated into European history and identity, but representation is limited to stories of celebrations and intercultural harmony. This blends bottom-up participation with top-down institutional storytelling – through lived experiences, symbolic visuals (LGBT+ and anti-racism campaigns, and cross-cultural mobility) (See Appendix C). It creates the appearance of co-authorship, yet participation is permitted only when it aligns with the EU’s identity-building agenda.

5.2.3 Silences: Harmonizing Diversity, Erasing Divisions

These tensions between openness and control reflect the paradoxical logic and ambiguity underpinning EU cultural narratives, operating between selective remembrance and forgetting. The linguistic and visual strategies in policy and Europeana package cultural differences under a unifying umbrella that privileges celebration and consensus, yet these same sentiments distort the historical experience of diversity and multiculturalism across Europe into a single experience shared among EU member states. The ‘diversity’ narrative here largely

obfuscates current and past cross-cultural crises, particularly regarding the divisions between the East and the West surrounding migration precisely, the refugee crisis and the resurgence of nationalist trends – a major source of tension and division within Europe and openly challenges cultural diversity (Meijen 2020: 948). The refugee situation has highlighted the starkly different historical experience of diversity, tolerance and nationalism in Western Europe versus the Balkan countries, exposing a clear nationalist and centrist-moderate divide in the continent (Gyori 2016: 9). In this, Hungary's vocal rejection of EU migration policy and the Balkan countries being united in their total rejection of letting in refugees has only exacerbated the situation (Meijen 2020: 948). Yet, these cross-content divisions, realities and nationalist tendencies are absent from the curated digital narratives.

These silences can be understood through Nicolaïdis' concept of *atonement*, which is dealing with the past through assumed forgiveness (Pace and Roccu 2020: 676). Here, past atrocities like totalitarian communist regimes and facism act as the basis for the EU's values of tolerance, pluralism and multiculturalism (Meijen: 948). Where it leads to Europe having the moral responsibility to protect minorities and promote cultural diversity, yet marginalizing the very peripheral "minority memories" it seeks to include under the unifying narrative – particularly those experiences of Eastern Europe (Mälksoo 2009: 627). This move aligns with a type of collective 'forgetting' identified by Connerton (2008) which is *constitutive in the formation of a new identity*, on the basis of "shared silences" (Connerton 2008: 63). The EU's articulation of itself as tolerant, inclusive and diverse reflects this logic as it actively foregrounds the unity and seemingly peaceful co-existence of differing identities while silencing "negative or disturbing subjects" (Mälksoo 2009: 627). It risks smoothing over tensions and exclusions that are persistent in the continent, entrenching this newly constructed European identity that is anchored in silences more than lived realities. These lived realities, such as the experience of migrants, are explicitly emphasized and centered as the main agents in the Europeana exhibitions. So much so that this process of memory-making and forgetting is reframed as dynamic and participatory as it includes the audience through digital storytelling.

Europeana as a digital heritage initiative therefore exemplifies how memories, travel, shift meaning and are recontextualized across time across time and space to forge a new type of unitary identity that enables co-authorship. This essentially exemplifies what Hoskins (2011) describes as **digital networked memory**, where memory is constructed by dynamic communities that perform rather than represent the past, yet these same initiatives expose the limits of participation and bottom-up contribution. While digital infrastructures such as Europeana allow for broader participation, they highlight a core tension in the EU's narrative

strategies: audiences may be invited as active agents of this European memory narrative, but only when it aligns with the EU's vision of multicultural harmony and affirms the *Unity in Diversity* narrative. What gets digitized and what narratives on multiculturalism are elevated still reflect an institutional framing that privileges cohesion and consensus.

5.3 Europe as Cultural Guardian and Shared Cultural Space

A third meta-narrative emerging from the data is the idea of Europe as a *shared cultural space* while also being a *cultural guardian*. This framing deviates slightly from its progressive and ongoing nature presented in the previous narratives, while still maintaining its dynamic character. Instead of having a forward-facing temporal logic, it is rooted in what digital culture can do for the present and is anchored in the past. Here, Europe is narrated as a place of common cultural origin and a normative actor responsible for safeguarding its past through digital heritage, constructing a common cultural space (Appendix A).

5.3.1 Institutional Narratives

At the *linguistic* level, the EU is portrayed as a principal **agent** of cultural preservation. Through the digital heritage initiatives – narrated as the **action** of Europe, it defines itself as a protector and promoter of European identity and values. The EU's shared values and culture which are also narrated as universal, transnational, and shared. As the EU's Strategy Towards International Cultural Relations and the Proposal for Establishing the Creative Europe Programme states:

"EU's international cultural relations in order to advance the Union's objectives to promote international peace and stability, safeguard diversity, and stimulate jobs and growth" (European Commission, 2016)

"Union's aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its people [...] it shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced" (European Commission, 2018)

Preservation of heritage is not merely about conservation, but an act of the EU defining the values and aspects (democracy, freedom, peace) that are worth preserving. The plot that

emerges from Brockmeier's linguistic order is as follows: Europe is set as the *scene* as a cultural space and *actor* as a cultural guardian, where the EU institutions and people are *agents* of change in promoting such values (*action*), for internal cohesion and global cultural engagement (*intentionality*). Additionally, this narrative in policy documents reiterates the **myth of exceptionalism** and **common origin** myth, where culture and shared universal values, particularly having its roots in movements such as the Enlightenment and Renaissance "serve the bonds of a common European space" (Della Sala 2016: 535). These norms and values that have universal export and emerged from these movements form the basis for Europe's social and political order of today, and a way to demarcate the continent from its Southern and Eastern neighbours (ibid.). Yet this desire to carve out a clear European cultural space allows the EU to define insiders and outsiders – which will be tended to in later sections.

This narrative extends further when the turn to digitization is introduced. There is a new *predicament* or *problem* that emerges – the environmental and geopolitical threats to Europe's cultural heritage. The Horizon Europe Work Programme (2023-2025) states:

"R&I actions will foment the development of new environmentally friendly technologies and methods to manage, restore and preserve cultural heritage. R&I will also strengthen our capacity to manage anthropogenic threats." (European Commission, 2024)

The data names both natural and man-made dangers such as "looting and illicit trafficking" and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, where the EU Work Plan for Culture (2023-2026) states that:

"Against this background, cultural digitisation can authentically underpin and credibly communicate our European values, including artistic liberties and cultural rights, and thus help contain the reach of authoritarian systems." (European Council, 2022)

Such urges elevate the EU's role beyond a cultural actor but as **guardian** with global stewardship – holding the responsibility in upholding its normative values while also constructing Europe's shared identity through digital preservation. In line with Bottici and Challand (2010), this evolving narrative changes in response to shifting circumstances over time. The narrative of Europe as a cultural guardian remains, yet its scope shifts: the preservation of culture through digitization is not only a matter of internal cohesive identity, but reflects the EU's responsiveness to changing global dynamics.

At the *discursive* level, this narrative expands Europe as having sole institutional responsibility and places the focus on citizens and communities. EU policy frames cultural

heritage as a shared domain that is constituted by its people and places civil society at the core. While the linguistic order *focalizes* the EU as the responsible actor – tasked as responsive to crises and cultural degradation – the discursive level reveals a broader, more bottom-up understanding of cultural safeguarding. This expansion narrates culture not only as a fixed good to be protected and preserved, but as a process to be shaped and contributed to by citizens. This logic is articulated in the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage, asserting:

“It also looks at cultural heritage as a resource for the future, to be safeguarded, enhanced, and promoted, also by encouraging synergies with contemporary creation. It puts people at its heart, stimulating access and engagement and promoting audience development, with a focus on local communities, children and young people” (European Commission, 2018)

“it also takes place in the social sphere [...] A more participative approach in the safeguarding and management of cultural heritage is called for. There is a need for new models that engage local communities, and a wide range of stakeholders through open, participatory and inclusive processes” (European Commission, 2018)

Important here is the fact that innovation is not framed as only to be managed by governing bodies, but is rather contributory and citizen-led – this reflects a reconceptualized understanding on who holds agency in shaping and performing Europe’s cultural identity. This co-contribution aligns with Brockmeier’s notion of blurred narrative roles. The EU still initiates and sustains the narrative and cultural space, but citizens become active participants – both merging to contribute to this **shared identity**. This is also heightened in the digital sphere and resonates with Hoskin’s digital memory which allows for broader participation in this shared culture and “dynamic communities” that also represent rather than present cultural memory (Mandolessi 2023: 514).

This understanding does not negate the EU’s institutional role, but instead it reinforces the **hybrid** nature of digital heritage: both Europe as a cultural authority and a dynamic and shared space of cultural identity – echoing myths of **shared origin** and **exceptionalism**.

5.3.2 Europeana: Narratives from Below

Across the Europeana exhibitions, this narrative follows a similar community-centered logic, focusing on the intimate experiences that contribute to cultural memory. This happens through taking pivotal historical events and instead focusing on the lived experiences anecdotes from ordinary citizens and participants, taking the focus off EU institutions as the primary actor in these periods of time (Appendix F&H) Yet this focus on shared cultural roots

overlooks the violent ruptures and exclusions that shaped Europe's trajectory – namely totalitarian regimes and communist crimes during war (Mälksoo 2009; Della Sala 2016).

In the *Untold Stories of the First World War exhibit* – including “News from the Front”, “Family Stories”, and a “A Soldier's Toolkit” aim to humanize the war by focusing on the individual's experiences, emotions and acts of kindness and solidarity – rather than engaging directly with the devastation and violence of the war. Artefacts like handwritten postcards, personal tools, matchboxes and drawings humanize the conflict and focus on the interpersonal linkages rather than the military or political outcomes (Figure 1,2,3, Appendix F) One story depicts a Slovenian soldier marrying a Polish refugee to avoid imprisonment: “*Polish WW1 refugee Janina Elizabeta Mazurkiewicz saved young Slovenian soldier Michael Drašček from prison – by insisting the couple marry*” (Europeana Pro). Another includes a postcard from Hitler to a friend as a young soldier. Rather than focusing on war as a political catastrophe and its atrocities, these instances aim to humanize it by foregrounding the individuals' emotions and acts of humanity on the battlefronts. These, along with the visual artefacts are as Brockmeier noted, **semiotic markers** that sustain the institutional narrative of *Europe as Shared Cultural Space*. This humanization of wartime actors aligns with Lähdesmaki's (2017) view that dramatic events – such as war – are difficult to recount without casting some characters as heroes, victims and villains of the story, this narration aims to build consensus within the present community (Lähdesmaki 2017: 66). This exhibition articulates the institutional narrative in section 5.3 by presenting European cultural memory and identity, as beyond the supranational state and places the agency on war participants and citizens themselves as main agents in composing Europe's cultural fabric.

However, this people-centered mode of narrativizing does not mean that it is an entirely bottom-up process, and attention must be paid to the selective representation of war. In doing so, this narrative echoes Lähdesmaki's (2018) founding EU myth of **Temporal Break & Rebirth** by following the logic of putting the past behind, done through this exhibition by juxtaposing violence with the transformative potential of war. Additionally, this narrative in this exhibition also shows signs of the myth of **exceptionalism**, where Della Sala (2016) pointed out that it reiterates the idea of “Europeanness” and shared values by foregrounding reason and dialogue to renounce violence in war (Della Sala 2016: 536). The EU through Europeana only acknowledges and includes its violent past by presenting a uniting front of it, otherwise violence “wins out” (Della Sala 2016: 536). This digital preservation is thus highly curated as it shifts

attention away from the historical injustices of war towards the war communities, reconciliation and amity, illustrating a recalibration of historical war memory. Yet this emphasis on harmony and resilience during wartime serves to bolster EU legitimacy through Europeana by presenting itself as the omnipresent force behind these positive experiences, despite the focus being on the communities. This exhibition exemplifies the **hybrid nature** of Europeana: personal stories appear to offer co-contribution to a shared European memory, yet they are carefully told within top-down control on *what* and *who's* (hi)story is shown – offering a controlled and selective memory of war.

5.3.3 Silences: One-Sided History

While the exhibitions affirm participation from below and highlight individual perspectives on war, they also reveal a significant sanitization and moral reparation of history. War is remembered through compassion and solidarity through acts of kindness, focusing on WWI and its aftermath. Yet key histories of Soviet Communism and Eastern European experiences of war remain noticeably absent, highlighting the East-West mnemonic divide in EU memory (Törnquist-Plewa 2024: 1081). The digital dimension of this memory, initially appears to align with Hoskin's (2011) conception in creating new forms of participation. Memory and experiences of Polish and Slovenian soldiers are included, yet are remediated into romanticized anecdotes in a way that silences and transforms historical contestation of occupation and repression that constitute Eastern European memory (ibid). This portrayal and bottom up story-telling remains one-sided: it privileges one dimension of war, the unifying and redemptive potential is leveraged and its divisive realities are **forgotten**, reinforcing a homogenizing Western-centric narrative of European memory.

This narrative of a cultural space is only made possible by the EU positioning itself as the guardian and facilitator of the bonds and solidarity the war participants experienced, while obfuscating the more difficult realities. The silences turn the legacy of WWI into a positive ethos of conquering the negative extremes of violence (particularly those of communism and totalitarianism) by focusing on its positive opposites: humanism, peace and solidarity (Lähdesmaki 2017: 789). Hence why war in the Europeana exhibitions is portrayed less as fragmentation but as a catalyst for unity and fellowship. In doing so, Europe is seeking a 'fresh start' and a 'break from the past' through mythical narratives and silences. This is indicative once again of the **temporal break** and **rebirth** myth, yet also contains elements of *atonement* as presented by Nicolaïdis (2015), where European unity and its shared cultural arena is

constructed through *atonement* of its internecine warfare through “inverting exploitative tropes” particularly of the World War’s (Nicolaidis 2015: 13).

This strategic forgetting is not only necessary for memory of a common past, but also flattens out diverse wartime experiences – particularly from the East – or romanticizes them into simplified stories that overcome divisions (Connerton 2008: 60). Forgetting, therefore, becomes a symptom of the larger **Eastern-Western mnemonic divide** in Europe. These acts of selective remembrance also align directly with Connerton’s (2008) concept of **prescriptive forgetting** – where forgetting is in the service of all parties and social harmony (Connerton 2008: 61). Here the EU’s cultural narrative downplays divisions – as the acknowledgement of war and conflict is still there – yet this selectivity and focus on World War and its unifying aspects, without confronting Eastern memory culture, only reinforces Europe’s success story (Törnquist-Plewa 2024: 1080).

This logic is also embedded in the institutional discourse as they emphasize cultural participation, shared heritage and the EU’s self-image as ‘civil’, ‘benign’ and a ‘transformative’ global actor (Nicolaidis 2015: 8). By perceiving itself as a community of memory and shared culture, the EU in good conscience avoids the parts of its past and present that are most difficult to overcome – underrepresenting controversial aspects of history, especially from the East (ibid.). Reiterating Lähdesmaki (2017), the silencing of difficult memories is a strategy to construct consensus and commonality: “uncontroversial remembering creates an impression on the unity of the community and its shared experiences” (Lähdesmaki 2017: 66). This lack of confrontation creates the basis for Europe’s shared identity based on silences and one part of history. Europeana’s exhibitions, in tandem with institutional digital policy, commemorates the past and curates it into a resource for unity – placing citizens in the center of the shared European culture, but the visibility of *what* history to share remains under tight control.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how the EU constructs, performs and circulates cultural memory and narratives of Europe through *Europeana* as the leading initiative of the EU’s digital cultural infrastructure. Through an analysis of institutional policy documents and curated Europeana exhibitions, it traced how EU memory, identity and history are visually and discursively narrated.

The central argument of this study is that EU digital heritage and Europeana function as **hybrid** spaces of digital memory: they produce institutional narratives and founding stories of Europe, yet their digital and networked structure invites more plural, contributory and malleable memory practices. These digital heritage narratives are performative, they do not simply describe a shared European past in a particular way, but also position the audience as active agents in its

story. Digital heritage is thus a top-down attempt to active bottom-up participation in an ongoing creation of the European project. However, this effort ultimately remains embedded in the EU's institutional strategy to foster a common European identity and deepen cultural integration (Lähdesmaki 2017: 86). This **dual function** creates tensions, where historical silences are present, differences are smoothed and celebrated and sustains unifying narratives.

A central aim of this study was also to examine how foundation EU stories– ideas of a common origins, break from the past, and unity – are rearticulated in the digital sphere. The analysis shows that Europeana, while seemingly pluralistic and participatory, still reinforces these mythic narratives. In this way, the EU repackages long-standing identity tropes through digital formats, to subtly reinforce the legitimacy and coherence of the European project. This finding aligns with critiques of physical EU memory institutions– such as Settele's (2015) analysis of the HEH and Lähdesmaki's (2017) study of EU identity narratives in the Parlamentarium – where curators gesture towards diversity, but it remains ultimately performative and constrained by institutional memory. This thesis extends those insights into the digital realm, by critically examining what is shown, selectively included and omitted in Europeana's exhibitions.

While scholars like Burkey (2021), Van Dijck (2011), and Mandolessi (2023) suggest that digital heritage can enable more democratic and plural versions of remembering, including user perspectives, this study offers a more critical view. Europeana, despite its participatory and user-centered infrastructure, maintains institutional control over what content is visible and how memory is created. Participation is thus an **illusion**, users can click, browse and explore the platform, but only engage with the materials that are selected and shown. This research thus contributes to the growing field of digital heritage and digital memory studies by exploring the tensions between user contribution and institutional control on EU-funded platforms like Europeana. It calls for greater scrutiny on what is remembered and what is left out, a novel perspective increasingly necessary as digital memory infrastructures beyond the EU expand globally.

Through narrative analysis, this study identified and interpreted three metanarratives that align with EU founding myths: (1) Europe as a future-facing, ongoing project; (2) Europe as a space of unity in diversity; (3) Europe as a shared cultural space. These were reflected in linguistic framings and visual motifs that frame digital cultural heritage as the “solution” to strengthening EU identity and belonging.

In Europeana, narratives are constructed through curational selection of what is visible and which stories are exhibited (e.g, democracy, migration, WWI) and visual motifs (e.g, personal artefacts, anecdotes and letters). Citizens and bottom-up perspectives play a crucial role within Europeana: their stories are part of the design of the platform, inviting their contributions to

articulate a shared European memory and present identity. Yet, the exhibitions and institutional narratives omit more divisive and difficult aspects of the European past – particularly war, colonialism and Eastern Europe. Such silences serve to reinforce the foundational EU myth of breaking away from the past, constructing an ongoing trajectory of progress that supports the “imagined” community of Europe. These silences also contradict the notion of both Europe and digital memory as participatory and pluralistic.

This logic reflects Rigney’s (2012) notion of Europe as a project “under reconstruction”, constantly reimagined and redefined (Rigney 2012: 619). Yet as Connerton (2008) argues, such notions of reconstruction are also underpinned by forms of *prescriptive forgetting* and *amnesia*, which are necessary for forming new identities. The EU thus continually reframes, forgets and leaves its past behind to advance its present and future ambitions (Connerton 2008; Nicolaïdis 2015; Sierp 2020; Pace and Roccu 2020). However, this ambivalence between remembering and forgetting, is paradoxical: Europe selectively remembers and instrumentalizes aspects of the very past it seeks to break from, anchoring its present-day identity in it. This reveals the fragility and ambiguity of a project built on the pursuit of cohesive identity (Shore 1993: 782)

This finding raises important implications for the politics of digital memory curation and opens up paths for future research. Europeana presents a compelling case of how memory infrastructures operate between openness and control, participation and exclusion. These tensions warrant further exploration in non-EU contexts – such as *China’s national digital archives* and digitization initiatives like *Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek* or the *Smithsonian Libraries* (Tang 2017; Biederman 2017; Cameron 2003). Applying a similar narrative approach to selective remembering can yield valuable insights for the field of digital heritage on how initiatives shape collective understandings of cultural memory, and the politics of cultural participation in the digital age.

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Appendices

Appendix A — Coding Framework: EU Policy Documents

A New European Agenda for Culture (2018)

Year	Key Themes	Narrative References	Characters/Actors	Temporal Framing	Symbols/Imagery	Gaps/Omissions	Notes/Quotes
2018	Culture as a Bridge; Unity/Diversity	Unity/Diversity	Member States EU as an Actor	Future-oriented; digital as essential	Shared identity	No gaps	<p>“it is in the shared interest of all Member States to harness the full potential of education and culture as drivers for jobs, economic growth, social fairness, active citizenship as well as a means to experience European identity in all its diversity.”</p> <p>“Protect and promote Europe's cultural heritage as a shared resource, to raise awareness of our common history and values and reinforce a sense of common European identity”</p> <p>“Cultural participation brings people together. Culture is an ideal means of communicating across language barriers, empowering people and facilitating social cohesion, including among refugees, other migrants and host populations. ”</p>

Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations (2016)

Year	Key Themes	Myth References	Characters/ Actors	Temporal Framing	Symbols/ Imagery	Gaps/ Omissions	Notes/Quotes
2016	Culture as a Bridge; Unity/Diversity	Europe as a Peace Project	Member States, Latin America, Eastern Europe, Youth	Forward looking; culture as a tool for future peace and development	Dialogue	Limited engagement with internal EU diversity tensions; no mention of Europe's past	<p>'Culture...provides important support for democratisation processes and socio-economic development.'</p> <p>The respect for cultural diversity and freedom of expression that is fostered by culture provides important support for democratisation processes and socio-economic development.</p> <p>Inter-cultural dialogue, including inter-religious dialogue, can help promote the building of fair, peaceful and inclusive societies that value cultural diversity and respect for human rights. By establishing common ground and a favourable environment for further exchanges, intercultural dialogue can defuse tensions, prevent crises from escalating.</p>

Commission Recommendation on a common European data space for cultural heritage

Year	2021
Key Themes	European integration; Preservation of values; Shared identity
Narrative References	Emphasis of historical continuity through preservation; Europe as a unified digital cultural space; heritage as a shared legacy; emphasis on collective memory and identity; Heritage as a shared legacy;
Characters/Actors	N/A
Temporal Framing	Future-oriented: aiming for comprehensive digitization by 2030; proactive preservation for future generations; Temporal Framing
Symbols/Imagery	"European cultural jewels"; "common European data space"; "unlock the full economic and cultural potential"
Gaps/Omissions	Limited discussion on contested histories or diverse narratives within Europe; potential overemphasis on technological aspects over cultural sensitivities
Notes/Quotes	"Member States should digitise by 2030 all monuments and sites that are at risk of degradation and 50% of the most physically visited cultural and heritage monuments, buildings and sites."

Commission Recommendation on the digitisation and online accessibility of cultural material and digital preservation

Year	2011
Key Themes	Digital Preservation; Digitisation of cultural heritage; European Integration; Europeana Development; online accessibility
Narrative References	Europe as a leader in digital culture; Shared European identity through accessible heritage
Characters/Actors	Europe as a leader in digital culture; Shared European identity through accessible heritage
Temporal Framing	Future-oriented: leveraging digital technologies for cultural preservation and access; Temporal Framing
Symbols/Imagery	"Europe's diverse and multilingual heritage a clear profile on the Internet"; "Unlock the full economic and cultural potential of Europe's cultural heritage"; Symbolic Language
Gaps/Omissions	Limited discussion on the complexities of cultural representation; potential overemphasis on economic benefits
Quotes	<p>"The digitisation and preservation of Europe's cultural memory... is one of the key areas tackled by the Digital Agenda."</p> <p>"If Member States do not step up their investments in this area, there is a risk that the cultural and economic benefits of the digital shift will materialise in other continents and not in Europe; It will give Europe's diverse and multilingual heritage a clear profile on the Internet"</p> <p>"The digitisation and preservation of Europe's cultural memory which includes print (books, journals and newspapers), photographs, museum objects, archival documents"</p>
Notes/Reflections	<p>Emphasizes the economic and cultural benefits of digitisation promotes Europeana as a central platform; may underrepresent challenges related to diverse cultural narratives and inclusivity.</p> <p>promotes Europeana as a central platform</p> <p>may underrepresent challenges related to diverse cultural narratives and inclusivity.</p>

Council Conclusions on the Role of Europeana for the Digital Access, Visibility and Use of European Cultural Heritage

Year	2016
Key Themes	Digital preservation, access and reuse of heritage, audience participation, institutional collaboration; Heritage and historical preservation; Historical continuity through digitization;; Shared European identity
Narrative References	Continuity; Europe as a shared space of cultural heritage; “unity in diversity”; heritage as European inheritance; Unity in diversity; Universality of European values
Characters/Actors	N/A
Temporal Framing	"giving a wide range of audiences access to the richness and diversity of European cultures, as well as to world cultural heritage"; Symbolic Language
Symbols/Imagery	"giving a wide range of audiences access to the richness and diversity of European cultures, as well as to world cultural heritage"; Symbolic Language
Gaps/Omissions	No discussion on institutional selection and curation; little engagement with contested or marginalised histories
Notes/Quotes	"digital cultural material... and since then connects digital collections of cultural heritage from Member States, has become a common European cultural project for accessing and showcasing European cultural heritage"; "promote richness and diversity of European cultural heritage and contribute to the achievement of the digital single market through the increasing offer of new and innovative products and services";

Council Work Plan for Culture 2023–2026

Year	2022; Year
Key Themes	Key Themes
Narrative References	Culture as a unifying force; Europe as a cohesive cultural entity; culture as a unifying force; emphasis on shared values and collective identity; emphasis on shared values and collective identity
Characters/Actors	Future-oriented: addressing contemporary challenges and preparing for future crises; Temporal Framing
Temporal Framing	"Culture for the people"; "Culture for the planet"; "Culture for co-creative partnerships"; Symbolic Language
Symbols/Imagery	Gaps/Omissions; Limited discussion on contested histories or diverse narratives within Europe; potential overemphasis on positive aspects of cultural heritage
Gaps/Omissions	"Culture, including cultural heritage, contributes to the sustainability transformation needed to meet the objectives of the European Green Deal and the 2030 Agenda."
Notes/Quotes	Emphasizes the role of culture in addressing global challenges; promotes digital transformation and sustainability; may underrepresent complexities related to diverse cultural narratives and inclusivity; Most importantly, presents Europe as a cultural grandeur and its role in safeguarding culture, elevating the nation in the process; Against this background, cultural digitisation can authentically underpin and credibly communicate our European values, including artistic liberties and cultural rights, and thus help contain the reach of authoritarian systems.

European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage

Year	2018; Year
Key Themes	Cultural Heritage as a bridge; European Inetegration; Innovation; International Cooperation; Preservation of Values; Resilience; Shared Identity and Common Origin; sustainability
Narrative References	Europe as a shared cultural space; Heritage as a unifying force; Narrative/Narrative References; Shared Identity and Common Origin
Characters/Actors	
Temporal Framing	Future-oriented: ensuring legacy beyond 2018; Temporal Framing
Symbols/Imagery	"Cultural heritage is a common good passed from previous generations as a legacy for those to come"; Innovation is not only technological; it also takes place in the social sphere. The role of communities living with cultural heritage assets is changing. A more participative approach in the safeguarding and management;
Gaps/Omissions	No gaps, document does a great job in addressing everything
Notes/Quotes	"The European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 aimed at celebrating cultural heritage as a shared resource, raising awareness of common history and values, and reinforcing a sense of belonging to a common European cultural and political space."; "Engagement with cultural heritage also fosters a sense of belonging to a European community, based on common cultural legacies, historical experiences and shared values.; Its actions encourage a wider understanding of the ideals, principles and values embedded in Europe's cultural heritage, particularly those underpinning European integration, promoting heritage education and interpretation. "It also looks at cultural heritage as a resource for the future, to be safeguarded, enhanced, and promoted, also by encouraging synergies with contemporary creation. It puts people at its heart, stimulating access and engagement and promoting audience development, with a focus on local communities, children and young people"

Europeana Strategy 2020–2025

Year	2020
Key Themes	Culture as a Bridge; European Integration;; Shared Identity; engagement with past and future
Narrative References	Europe as a unified digital cultural space; cultural heritage as a common good; cultural heritage as a common good
Characters/Actors	N/A
Temporal Framing	Future-oriented: leveraging digital technologies for cultural preservation and access;
Symbols/Imagery	"Empowering digital change"; "Inclusive, resilient digital commons"; "Europeana empowers the cultural heritage sector";
Gaps/Omissions	This document actually engages with contested colonial histories and problematic past.
Notes/Quotes	<p>"Europeana empowers the cultural heritage sector in its digital transformation. We develop expertise, tools and policies to embrace digital change and encourage partnerships that foster innovation."; Europe powered by culture. And a Europe powered by culture is a Europe with a resilient, growing economy, increased employment, improved well-being and a sense of European identity; There is increasing global awareness that institutions need to recognise different framings of the past and repatriate heritage that was brought to Europe as part of colonial infrastructures.</p> <p>"Respecting cultural diversity is important. There is increasing global awareness that institutions need to recognise different framings of the past and repatriate heritage that was brought to Europe as part of colonial infrastructures. This has implications for digitised cultural heritage"</p>

Horizon 2020: Europe in a changing world – Inclusive, Innovative and Reflective Societies

Year	2017;
Key Themes	Connecting the present with the past; Digital cultural heritage, European identity, public engagement, technological innovation; European shared identity and history; Historical continuity through digitization;
Narrative References	Continuity; Europe as a shared cultural space; Narrative/Narrative References; Unity in Diversity
Characters/Actors	N/A
Temporal Framing	Engaged with the past; Future-oriented: leveraging technology to connect past and present; Temporal Framing
Symbols/Imagery	"Empowering reuse of digital cultural heritage"; "It enriches the European identity through understanding of how European cultural heritage continuously evolves over long periods of time"; Symbolic Language
Gaps/Omissions	Limited discussion on contested histories; focus on technological solutions over critical engagement
Notes	Emphasizes a teological or linear relationship from the past to the present in regards to European history; Notes/Reflections; Projects emphasize technology as a means to foster a unified European identity, with less attention to diverse or conflicting historical narratives.
Quotes	"CROSSCULT aims to make reflective history a reality... helping European citizens appreciate their past and present in a holistic manner."; "to greater opportunities for reunification of objects between collections and greater insights into relationships between past societies which can be communicated as coherent narratives to the public through new forms of virtual and tangible display";

Horizon Europe Strategic Plan 2021–2024 (Cluster 2)

Year	2021; Year
Key Themes	Common and unified origin; European normative values; Key Themes; cultural heritage preservation; innovation; shared identity and social cohesion
Narrative References	Europe as a normative actor; Europe as a space of democratic resilience; Historical continuity narrative (Europe building forward from shared past); Unity in diversity
Characters/Actors	N/A
Temporal Framing	Strongly future-oriented: recovery, resilience, transformation;
Symbols/Imagery	"Building a resilient and inclusive society anchored in shared values"; "leveraging culture and heritage for a more cohesive Europe"
Gaps/Omissions	Little engagement with the historical contestation of EU values; memory treated instrumentally rather than reflexively
Quotes	"As a key action, they will improve the protection, enhancement, conservation and more efficient restoration of European cultural heritage. Research activities will increase the quality standards for conservation and restoration of European cultural heritage"; "European sense of belonging is realised through a continuous engagement with society, citizens and economic sectors as well as through better protection, restoration and promotion of cultural heritage"; "The EU stands for a unique way of combining economic growth with high levels of social protection and inclusion, shared values including democracy, human rights, gender equality and the richness of diversity"; "They will bring to the fore common values, traditions, beliefs and the different influences our cultures have been exposed to and have absorbed over time"; "This will support the emergence of a sense of belonging and building a European identity based on the common roots of the diversity of European cultural heritage while opening up new perspectives and dimensions for the future";
Notes	Heritage is explicitly positioned as a driver of European unity and values, embedded in future-oriented innovation and resilience discourse. A lot of emphasis on the power of digitalisation for historical continuity and preservation/restoration.; Notes/Reflections

Horizon Europe Work Programme 2023–2025: Destination – Innovative Research on European Cultural Heritage and Cultural and Creative Industries

Year	2023
Key Themes	Digital transformation; cultural diplomacy; innovation in CCIs
Narrative References	Culture as a unifying force; Elevation of the nation; Europe as a cohesive cultural entity; culture as a unifying force; emphasis on shared values and collective identity; Europe as a cultural guardian; European normative values; Exportation of European Values;
Characters/Actors	N/A
Temporal Framing	Future-oriented; unlocking the possibility of innovation for the future; Reflective and aware of the past; Temporal Framing
Symbols/Imagery	"Building our future from the past"; "Europe's cultural heritage is well alive because it is the result of the interaction between people and their environment"
Gaps/Omissions	Limited discussion on contested and colonial histories or diverse narratives within Europe; potential overemphasis on positive aspects of cultural heritage
Quotes	Cultural heritage has enormous potential in terms of its contribution to improving the quality of life for people, understanding the past and assisting territorial cohesion; Cultural heritage, ranging from the tangible to the intangible, from narratives and practices to monuments, landscapes and objects, is created, developed, destroyed, re-interpreted and re- valued relentlessly; Europe's rich cultural heritage and strong creative tradition not only reflect our past, but also shape our future; Europe's wealth of monuments and sites and its creative diversity of traditions, crafts, arts, architecture, literature, languages, theatre, films, games and music is a unique asset. It enriches our lives, fosters social and cultural cohesion and contributes to a sense of belonging; R&I actions will foment the development of new environmentally friendly technologies and methods to manage, restore and preserve cultural heritage, with a view to making Europe a world leader in sustainable management of cultural heritage. R&I will also strengthen our capacity to manage anthropogenic threats. Support to the New European Bauhaus initiative is part of this area, integrating the core New European Bauhaus values of sustainability, inclusion and aesthetics.

Proposal for a Regulation establishing the Creative Europe Programme (2021–2027)

Year	2021; Year
Key Themes	Cultural diversity; Cultural heritage preservation; Europe as a cultural grandeur; Europe as a normative actor; European shared identity; Exportation of values abroad; Key Themes
Narrative References	Europe as a unified/cohesive cultural space;; Narrative/Narrative References; Unity in diversity; promotion and universality of European values
Characters/Actors	N/A
Temporal Framing	Future-oriented: leveraging cultural heritage for societal cohesion and international influence; Temporal Framing
Symbols/Imagery	"European added value"; "Shared area of cultural diversity"; Symbolic Language
Gaps/Omissions	Limited discussion on contested histories or diverse narratives within Europe; potential overemphasis on positive aspects of cultural heritage
Notes/Quotes	"The Programme should recognise the relevance of culture in international relations and its role in promoting European values by dedicated and targeted actions designed to have a clear Union impact on the global scene."
Notes	Emphasizes the role of culture in fostering European unity and projecting EU values internationally; may underrepresent complexities related to diverse cultural narratives and inclusivity; "Union's aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its people [...] it shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced"

Appendix B — Visual Narrative Analysis, Europeana Exhibition: Untold Stories of the First World War

Exhibition Title	URL	Year / Period Covered	Summary of Narrative	Key Narrative Themes	Visual Elements / Motifs	Representations (Who is shown?)	Analytical Notes / Quotes
Section 1: The unexpected (in Untold Stories of WWI)	https://www.europeana.eu/en/exhibitions/untold-stories-of-the-first-world-war/news-from-the-front	World War I	Bravery/ resilience — people risking their lives during war; humanizing war; personal stories.	Shared European heritage; unity; unlikely friendships; common/shared origin (religion focus).	Photographs of soldiers; artifacts (letters, crosses, helmets); bibles.	Largely men; multiple nationalities (German, British, French); non-Europeans not shown.	‘Two enemies – one English, one German – became lifelong friends...’; ‘Billy’s dry sense of humour...’
Untold Stories of the First World War – News from the Front	https://www.europeana.eu/en/exhibitions/untold-stories-of-the-first-world-war/news-from-the-front	World War I	History from below: bottom-up approach to memory; diversity in storytelling.	Inclusive storytelling; unity; common origin; rebirth.	Letters, postcards, artwork, handmade drawings.	Soldiers; no representation of non-European figures.	‘Postcard from Munich... most reviled dictator’; ‘letters kept Europe united’

Section 3: Family Stories	https://www.europeana.eu/en/exhibitions/untold-stories-of-the-first-world-war/family-stories	World War I	Unity through diverse family experiences and backgrounds.	Common origin; shared identity; European pride.	Postcards, personal drawings, photos of soldiers and families.	Western figures (American, English, French, German); men and women.	'An American officer... gave a girl a spoon'; 'Koepke siblings reflect war patriotism'
Section 4: A soldier's kit – Untold Stories of the First World War	https://www.europeana.eu/en/exhibitions/untold-stories-of-the-first-world-war/a-soldiers-kit	World War I	Unity through love and survival; prisoners' experiences and resilience.	Common values; bravery; tough conditions.	Personal belongings (knapsacks, suitcases); art objects made by prisoners.	Soldiers; mentioned but not shown (e.g., mothers, girlfriends).	'Polish woman saved soldier by marrying him'; 'prisoner made a bottle to trade for bread'

Appendix C: Visual Narrative Analysis – Europeana “People on the Move” Exhibition

Exhibition Title	URL	Year / Period Covered	Summary of Narrative	Key Narrative Themes	Visual Elements / Motifs	Representations (Who is shown?)	Analytical Notes / Quotes
Section 1: Crossing Frontiers – Science and Technology	https://www.europeana.eu/en/exhibitions/people-on-the-move/science-and-technology	20th century	Europe as a transcultural space where migration drives scientific and cultural progress.	European values as universal; unity in diversity; migration as catalyst for progress.	Portraits; scientific instruments (microscope, electricity); historical images of scientists.	Notable figures such as Einstein, Curie, Tesla, Levi-Montalcini.	‘Einstein fled Nazi Germany’; ‘migration shaped our world’; ‘shared European knowledge’
Section 2: Land of Opportunity – Migrant Workers	https://www.europeana.eu/en/exhibitions/people-on-the-move/migrant-workers	20th century	Europe as an economic hub attracting foreign labour and creating integration through work.	European integration; unity in diversity; multiculturalism through labour migration.	Photos of miners, maps, ‘cités ouvrières’, smiling workers.	Migrant men and women; Italian women in Lancashire; miners from various nationalities.	‘Mining sector employed migrant labour’; ‘mutually beneficial situation’
Section 3: Mixing Traditions – Vibrant Communities	https://www.europeana.eu/en/exhibitions/people-on-the-move/mixing-traditions	19th–20th century	Cultural co-existence through holidays, traditions, and neighbourhoods.	Unity in diversity; multiculturalism; shared identity through ritual.	Traditional costumes, flags, Chinatown, Little Italy, festivals.	Roma, Serbs, Irish, Chinese, Lithuanians, Americans, etc.	‘Roma holidays adapted by Serbs’; ‘cultural landmarks like Irishtown, Little Italy’

Section 4: Itinerant Artists – Everlasting Works	https:// www.europeana. eu/en/ exhibitions/ people-on-the- move/itinerant- artists	19th century	Migration of artists fosters transcultural influence and creative identity.	Historical continuity; common origin; unity in diversity.	Portraits of men/ women; cultural outfits; artistic depictions.	Jewish, Chinese, Turkish, Polish, Russian, Argentinian artists.	'Composer Kagel migrated from Russia to Argentina to Germany'; 'influenced by geography and culture'
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Appendix D: Visual Narrative Analysis – Europeana “The Jean Monnet House” Exhibition

Exhibition Title	URL	Year / Period Covered	Summary of Narrative	Key Narrative Themes	Visual Elements / Motifs	Representations (Who is shown?)	Analytical Notes / Quotes
Houjarray: a place of memory, a place of inspiration	https://www.europeana.eu/en/exhibitions/the-jean-monnet-house/houjarray-a-place-of-memory-a-place-of-inspiration	21st century	Jean Monnet House as the symbolic birthplace of the European vision and values.	Unity in diversity; European integration; European identity; Peace and values; Historical continuity.	Photos of Jean Monnet's house; photos of Jean Monnet himself; wall plaques; magazine covers.	Jean Monnet only.	'This is the place where Jean Monnet's vision of peace and European unity was established.' 'A place to be inspired and consider Europe's future.'
Jean Monnet, a founding father of Europe	https://www.europeana.eu/en/exhibitions/the-jean-monnet-house/jean-monnet-a-founding-father-of-europe	19th century	Monnet's historical role in shaping European unity and democracy through peaceful integration.	Common origin; historical continuity; shared interests; EU normativity; peace.	Pictures of Jean Monnet in various countries; documents; declarations.	Jean Monnet; Robert Schuman; background leaders.	'Monnet proposed the Franco-British Union.' 'Joint pursuit of shared interests.'

Saving Houjarray for future generations	https://www.eurpeana.eu/en/exhibitions/the-jean-monnet-house/saving-houjarray-for-future-generations	20th–21st century	Preservation of European memory and cultural heritage as a collective project for future generations.	European memory; founding fathers; historical continuity; cultural guardianship; unity.	Photos of the house; members of Parliament; museum scenes.	Families and children; members of European Parliament.	'The European Parliament knows how important it is to preserve Europe's heritage.'
A renewed future for Europe's meeting place	https://www.eurpeana.eu/en/exhibitions/the-jean-monnet-house/a-renewed-future-for-europes-meeting-place	21st century	The Monnet House as a dynamic space for education, identity, and collective reflection on Europe's future.	EU normativity; shared values; integration; cultural memory; continuity myth.	Multimedia exhibitions; contracts; photos of visitors; boards; Jean Monnet Academy.	Ursula von der Leyen, David Sassoli, Charles Michel; Parliament members; no Monnet shown.	'Helps give value to common political history.' 'Interactive exhibition presents Monnet's relevance.'

Appendix E: Visual Narrative Analysis – Europeana “The European Parliament” Exhibition

Exhibition Title	URL	Year / Period Covered	Summary of Narrative	Key Narrative Themes	Visual Elements / Motifs	Representations (Who is shown?)	Analytical Notes / Quotes
A transnational space for democracy	https://www.europeana.eu/en/exhibitions/70-years-of-european-democracy-in-action/a-transnational-space-for-democracy	20th century	Europe as a space of democratic unity built on law, equality, values, and equity.	Historical continuity; EU normativity; European integration; unity in diversity.	Photos of EU Parliament, maps, treaties, flags, multilingualism.	Predominantly men; EU officials.	‘Promotes freedom of expression’; ‘Parliament as voice of 450 million people’.
Advancing human rights in Europe and around the world	https://www.europeana.eu/en/exhibitions/70-years-of-european-democracy-in-action/advancing-human-rights-in-europe-and-around-the-world	20th century	EU Parliament upholds and defends human rights domestically and globally.	EU normativity; human rights; European unity; peace; temporal breaks.	Photos of Nelson Mandela, Denis Mukwege, human rights posters.	Non-European figures; male and female leaders.	‘Committed to defending human rights’; ‘Supports equality and global justice’.

Defending the values of the European Union	https://www.europeana.eu/en/exhibitions/70-years-of-european-democracy-in-action/defending-the-values-of-the-european-union	20th century	EU values like democracy, equality, and minority rights underpin European unity.	EU normative power; unity; peace; common origin.	Photos of protests, Nobel Prize ceremony, flags, anti-xenophobia posters.	Underrepresented groups, women, LGBT community.	'Diversity without exclusion'; 'Foundations built on dignity and rights'.
The Voice of EU citizens	https://www.europeana.eu/en/exhibitions/70-years-of-european-democracy-in-action/the-voice-of-eu-citizens	21st century	Parliament amplifies everyday citizens' voices via participatory democracy.	Collective identity; unity; guardian role; participatory democracy.	Photos of youth events, students, children waving EU flags.	Citizens, youth, women.	'Parliament helps voters feel heard'; 'Liaison offices in 27 countries'.

Listening to civil society	https://www.europeana.eu/en/exhibitions/70-years-of-european-democracy-in-action/listening-to-civil-society	21st century	Civil society, including minorities, contributes to EU governance and direction.	Inclusivity; unity; shared identity; temporal breaks from past.	Photos of Simone Veil, citizens, protesters, conference events.	Farmers, disabled persons, youth, women, officials.	'Inclusive dialogue with NGOs'; 'Diversity through participatory Europe'.
70 years presence in Strasbourg	https://www.europeana.eu/en/exhibitions/70-years-of-european-democracy-in-action/70-years-presence-in-strasbourg	20th–21st century	Strasbourg as a symbol of Europe's reconciliation and democratic renewal.	Common origin; reconciliation; shared identity; temporal break.	Photos of parliament buildings, Franco-German images, press headlines.	Officials, men and women.	'Ongoing project symbolized by unfinished roof'; 'peace after conflict'.

A Parliament in action	https://www.europeana.eu/en/exhibitions/70-years-of-european-democracy-in-action/70-years-presence-in-strasbourg	20th–21st century	Parliament takes action in social, economic, and cultural policy areas.	Normativity; protection; integration; diversity; everyday impact.	Photos of frontline workers, leaders, civilians, Pope, Queen.	Historical figures, civilians, frontline workers.	'Real impact on daily life'; 'Cultural diversity and gender equality'.
Celebrating 70 years of European democracy	https://www.europeana.eu/en/exhibitions/70-years-of-european-democracy-in-action/celebrating-70-years-of-european-democracy	21st century	Parliament reflects both continuity and renewal; celebrates diversity.	Unity in diversity; peace; normativity; common future.	Photos of MEPs, selfies, speeches, diverse officials.	Officials from diverse backgrounds (Jewish, LGBT, liberal).	'This House represents the best in us'; 'Diversity is our richness'.

Appendix F – Visual Materials from Europeana Exhibition on WWI

Europeana. "News from the Front." In *Untold Stories of the First World War*. Accessed June 5, 2025. <https://www.europeana.eu/en/exhibitions/untold-stories-of-the-first-world-war/news-from-the-front>.



Figure 1: Bible & Badges carried by British soldier – Section 1: The Unexpected

Hitler's message to his friend

The sentiments in this postcard from Munich seem so ordinary – yet the writer of them went on to become the most reviled dictator of the 20th century.

Adolf Hitler was wounded by shrapnel in October 1916, and had just been discharged from hospital in Beelitz near Berlin, when he sent this message to his regimental comrade, Karl Lanzhammer.

In it, Hitler says he is now with the reserve battalion, was undergoing dental treatment and would be returning to the front line as soon as he could. In fact, he went back as a news runner in March 1917 at the request of his 16th Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment.

The card, which says "Greetings from Nuremberg", with a picture of the castle, was stamped on December 19, 1916. The brief text, penned in German, contains at least one spelling mistake. Hitler spelt immediately (sofort) with "ff".

Lanzhammer, who had served with Hitler in Ypres and the Somme, was killed in a flying accident at Feldmoching on March 15, 1918 during a test flight. He is now buried in his home town of Dingolfing.

The card was contributed to the Munichroadshow by a stamp collector, from Dingolfing. It had been given to him on his 65th birthday by the director of the local savings bank.



Figure 2: Postcard from Adolf Hitler & Passage from Europeana Exhibition – Section: The Unexpected

Figure 3: Letters exchanged during war – Section 2: News from the Front

<p>Serial Number C 79122</p>	
<p>Sloinne } HOPES</p> <p>Surname }</p>	<p>Ainmneacha } Joseph</p> <p>Christian Name }</p>
<p>Sloinne a hAthar } -</p> <p>Maiden Name }</p>	<p>Seoladh } 93 Walsh Road</p> <p>Address } Shannon, Co. Clare</p>
<p>Gairm } Labourer</p> <p>Profession }</p>	<p>Dáta Breithe } 20. 9. 1887</p> <p>Date of Birth }</p>
<p>Síniú an tSealbhora } HOPES</p> <p>Signature of Holder }</p>	<p>Dáta Eisiúna } 13th July 1951</p> <p>Date of Issue }</p>
<p>Ait Bhreithe } Co. Meath</p> <p>Place of Birth }</p>	

Appendix G – Visual Materials from Europeana Exhibition on Migration

Europeana. "Mixing Traditions." In *People on the Move*. Accessed June 5, 2025. <https://www.europeana.eu/en/exhibitions/people-on-the-move/mixing-traditions>.



Figure 4: On the Dance Floor at the Sunset Club– Section 1: Mixing Traditions



Figure 5: Migrant miners – Section 2: Land of Opportunity



Figure 6: Festival celebrations – Section 3: Mixing Traditions

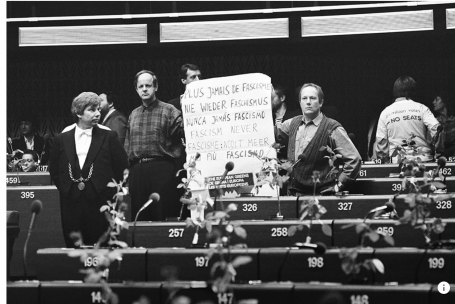
Connected by culture, traditions and language, the Roma people - a traditionally itinerant ethnic group living mostly in Europe and the Americas - form strong communities all over the world, particularly in Eastern Europe.



Appendix H – Visual Materials from Europeana exhibitions: 70 Years of Democracy in Action

Europeana. "Defending the Values of the European Union." In *70 Years of European Democracy in Action*. Accessed June 5, 2025. <https://www.europeana.eu/en/exhibitions/70-years-of-european-democracy-in-action/defending-the-values-of-the-european-union>.

The European Parliament is an important forum for civil society representation. Parliament has rapidly developed spaces for open dialogue with civil society organisations in order to tackle the democratic deficit in a Europe under construction.



In doing so, Parliament is helping to create a public space in Europe. Initially conceived as a way to inform MEPs about society's needs and expectations, public hearings have also helped to improve their expertise. These hearings also contribute to the public debate as they provide a platform to representatives of civil society.



Since 1999, the Louise Weiss building, home to Europe's largest debating chamber, has been the embodiment of Parliament's presence in Strasbourg. Entirely plated in glass and standing on the banks of the river Ill, the building is now part of Strasbourg's architectural landscape. It is the physical expression of an open and transparent democracy. The top of the building, which still looks unfinished, symbolises the ongoing nature of the European project. The new building's tower stands directly in line with Strasbourg Cathedral, as if in conversation with this striking monument, which is also part of the city's historical identity.

Figure 7: Parliament chamber – Section 1: Transnational Democracy

Figure 8: Human rights banners – Section 2: Defending the Values of EU



Figure 9: Unfinished Strasbourg Parliament Rooftop – Section 2: A Parliament in Action

Figure 10: Protest scenes – Section 3: the Voice of EU Citizens



Appendix I – Visual Materials from Europeana Exhibition: The Jean Monnet House

Europeana. "Saving Houjarray for Future Generations." In *The Jean Monnet House*. Accessed June 5, 2025. <https://www.europeana.eu/en/exhibitions/the-jean-monnet-house/saving-houjarray-for-future-generations>.



Figure 11: Opening of Jean Monnet's House – Saving Houjarray for Future Generations



Figure 14: Monnet House Museum Tour– Section 4



Figure 13: Visitors at interactive exhibition Monnet House museum tour –



Figure 15: Jean Monnet at the House in Houjarray- Section : Jean Monnet, A Founding Father of Europe

Figure 16: Dialogue at the Jean Monnet House - Section - A renewed future for Europe's meeting place



All of these initiatives are working with the same objective: to maintain the Jean Monnet House as a place of memory, meetings and inspiration where the European idea is embodied and where citizens can learn about the history, the functioning and the challenges of the European Union. Thanks to the Parliament, the Houjarray house is now preserved for future generations as a place of education, connection and mediation, spreading Monnet's core values of peace and solidarity with citizens across Europe.



Figure 19: The Jean Monnet Academy - Section A renewed future for Europe's meeting place

Appendix H Continued – Visual Materials from Europeana exhibitions: 70 Years of Democracy in Action

Figure 17: Youth & Disabled People Representation - Section: The Voice of EU Citizens



EXHIBITION

The European Parliament: 70 years of European democracy in action

The voice of EU citizens



EXHIBITION

The European Parliament: 70 years of European democracy in action

Listening to civil society



Figure 18- Protests Scenes from the Past - Section Listening to Civil Society