



Portugal
Iceland

Topic:
Mobility Innovation

Achievement:
Cross- Sectoral
Pioneers Bridging
Sectors

Sector:
All CCS and Cross-
sectoral

From Missing Data to Meaning: When Cultural Collections Become Sites of Making

Expanding Collections began with a simple but urgent question: what remains invisible in cultural datasets, and how can we make it visible? What emerged from this inquiry is not just a prototype but a shift in perspective: cultural collections are not fixed repositories of knowledge but active sites of making, where gaps, inconsistencies, and absences can generate new forms of understanding.



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Challenge

Cultural datasets often contain gaps, inconsistencies, and hidden biases that make collections difficult to access, interpret, and reuse. Many digital systems treat data as neutral and complete, masking structural blind spots shaped by uneven institutional practices and metadata standards. Expanding Collections set out to explore how these absences could become visible, meaningful, and productive for cultural research and collaboration.

Solution

Expanding Collections developed a custom prototype using Europeana as a testbed to expose gaps and irregularities in cultural datasets rather than conceal them. Through collaborative workshops, coding sessions, and public testing, the project combined artistic, curatorial, and technical perspectives to rethink how cultural data is organised, interpreted, and improved through flexible, practice-based experimentation.

Impact

The project shifted perspectives on cultural collections, presenting them as active sites of making rather than static repositories. By exposing hidden biases and infrastructural gaps, Expanding Collections encouraged more transparent and collaborative approaches to cultural data. It also strengthened cross-sector cooperation between artists, researchers, developers, and heritage institutions while laying the groundwork for more accessible and reusable cultural datasets.

Milestones & Learnings

Europeana was used as a testbed for building a critical search and data exploration tool.

A five-day workathon in Lisbon enabled live testing, coding, and iterative development.

The project highlighted how metadata gaps reflect systemic and institutional conditions.

Public testing at Makers in Little Lisbon (MILL) brought feedback from museum professionals, developers, and creatives.

Participants gained cross-disciplinary skills in museology, open data infrastructures, and computational methods.

The process showed that cultural data tools should embrace complexity instead of simplifying it.

The initiative established a shared methodology for improving FAIR cultural data practices.

Key Takeaways

- Cultural datasets are not neutral; their gaps and inconsistencies reveal structural and systemic conditions.
- Working “through making” enables critical reflection on data standards and infrastructures in real time.
- Cross-sector collaboration enriches both technical development and institutional understanding.
- Effective tools for cultural data must embrace complexity rather than hide it, making it visible and actionable.

Learn more [here](#) and on PdBA's [official website](#).



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