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Co-Curate: working with schools and communities to add value to Open collections

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Introduction

Co-Curate North East is a cross-disciplinary initiative involving Newcastle University and partner organisations, working with schools and community groups in the North of England. Technologies have been used to support co-production and co-curation, including use of a platform to combine the use of materials from formal museum and archive collections with informal community based resources. The project was funded by the AHRC as part of the Digital Transformations in Community Research Co-Production call of the Connected Communities Programme.

The Website (<https://co-curate.ncl.ac.uk/>) builds on previous JISC-funded work with Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM)^{1,2} and related OER Rapid Innovation projects³. The project also builds on work in Arts and Cultures, such as the Northumbrian Exchanges⁴, and Education Research.

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of Open collections were used in both formal and informal educational contexts and to share initial findings in relation to stakeholders knowledge and perceptions of both using and contributing Open licensed materials.

Methods and Materials

Harvesting Collections

The first phase of work was to harvest information about collections specific to the North East region, using the Application Programme Interface (APIs) of Flickr⁵, Youtube⁶, and Europeana⁷. These included collections from Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums (TWAM), one of the project partners, held in Europeana and in a Flickr album. The information harvested includes the license information, copyright owner and description for each photograph and video. This 'meta information' is stored in a database along with the urls of the photographs, videos and thumbnail images, which are not held directly by Co-

Curate. The process was designed to be automated (regularly refreshed) and extensible (easy to add additional collections using the supported APIs, without requiring software changes). The photographs, videos and thumbnail images are not held directly by Co-Curate, but embedded from the remote source.

Website

Extensive changes were made to the 'base' DLM interface, particularly the grid view to preview images (see Figure 1.) and the introduction of communities. Early in the project it was clear that stakeholders had diverse requirements, therefore preference settings were developed so that communities could be set-up to be either private or open/visible to the wider public. Most pages are public and can be viewed without logging onto the site. Authentication (including social login using Google or Twitter) is required to edit or comment. Over 1,000 topics were added for the main public community; the hierarchical taxonomy being predominantly places (cities, districts, towns, villages etc.), years, and selected historical/cultural topics (e.g. heritage sites, industry and work, music and dance, World War 1, health etc.). The site was designed so that as new pages are added it organically extends the hierarchical taxonomy. Communities in the site can add their own specific taxonomy.

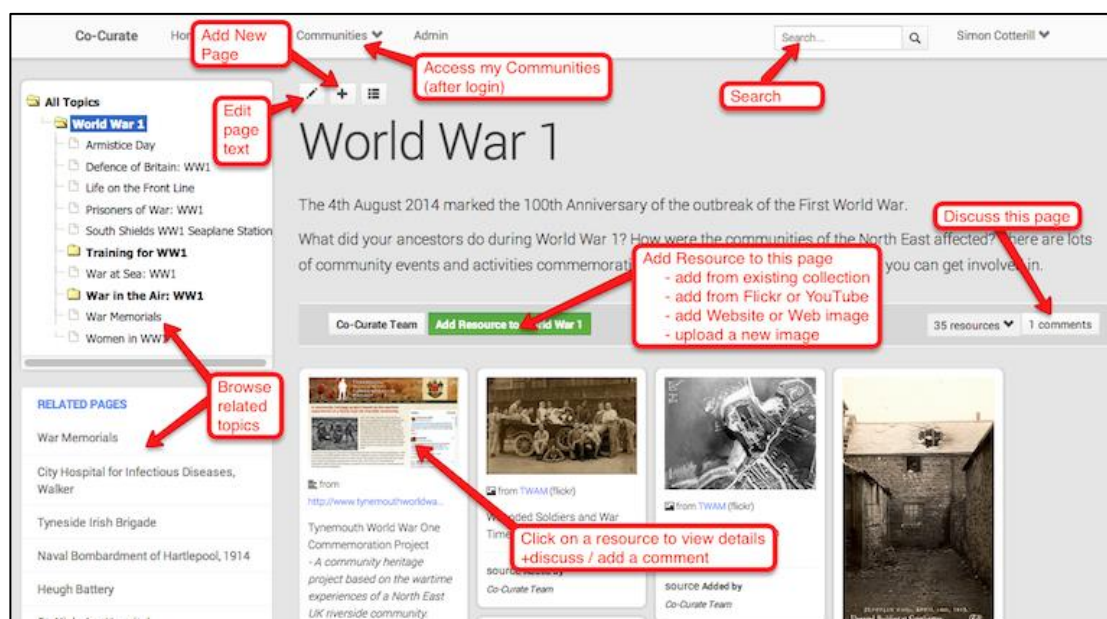


Figure 1. Overview of a page in Co-Curate

When viewing resource details license information is clearly shown (Figure 2). In the case of Creative Commons licenses these link to the appropriate license description on the Creative Commons Website.

To support co-production / co-curation people can:

- Add and edit pages
- Add resources to pages
 - Add resources from the existing collection
 - Add pictures/videos from Flickr/YouTube
 - Add links to external Websites + descriptions

- Upload images
- Comment on pages
- Comment on resources (pictures, videos, Website links etc)
- Tag resources to the Co-Curate taxonomy

People can add pages (aka topics) and edit these, in a Wiki-like fashion. You can add resources from a mixture of sources to public pages. The system also allows you to add ad-hoc resources from the Web or upload your own resources, with a choice of license options, including All Rights Reserved, but with the default set to CC BY-NC 2.0. When images are uploaded these are stored remotely in Flickr, via the API along with the user-specified license.

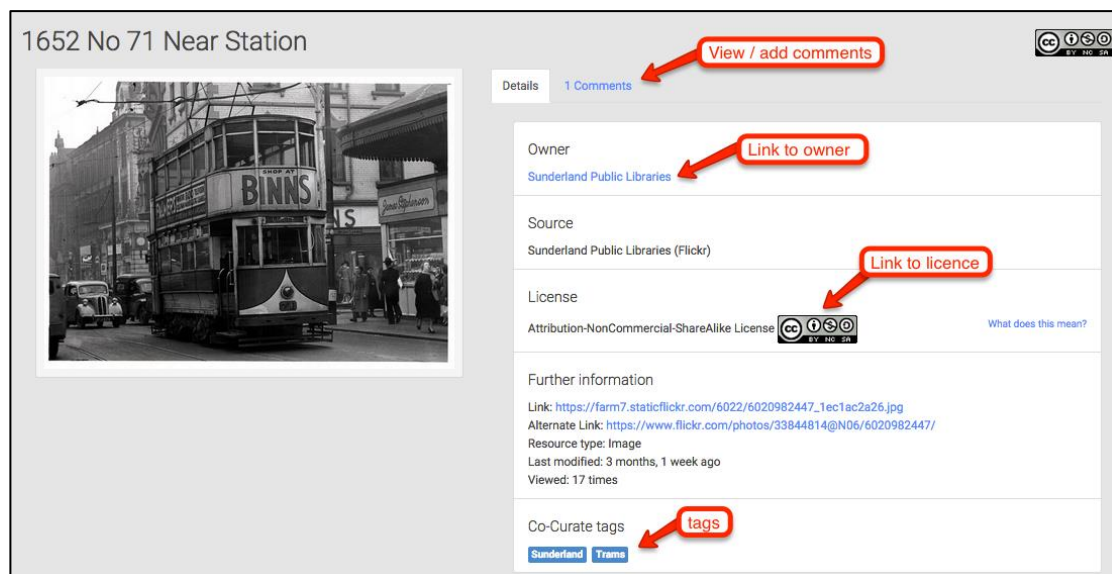


Figure 2. Viewing resource details - including license information

Many enhancements have been made to the Website in response to feedback requests from communities. Google Analytics were applied to the Website from January 2015.

Engagement with Schools and Community Groups

The project team worked with a diverse range of community and school groups on co-curation activities, which included variable use of the Website and other technologies (notably 3D scanning/printing). Copyright and licensing were 'hot topics' for most groups and the project ran a workshop on this with an external specialist.⁸ One of the largest pilots was with George Stephenson High School, involving over 200 students in a scheme of work, with enquiry-based learning involving use of the Website. Each class produced a display including photographs from the collections, for an exhibition in a prominent public gallery. In addition to training on using the Website students received guidance on copyright and images used for the displays were strictly limited to those that were Openly licensed or for which permission was granted. Students also had specific assignments; one of which was interviewing a relative from another generation about a cultural/historical topic and recoding this on a related resource in Co-Curate.

Results

The site currently includes over 20,800 resources (summary in Appendix 1) and 1,124 topic pages. Of the resources, 18,119 are harvested from 16 collections (not all Openly licensed). Community added content and resources (excluding those added by the project team) are summarized in Figure 3. For the first 3 months of 2015 there were 40,293 page views by 2,666 individuals. There were 3,949 sessions in which an average of 10.2 pages were viewed per session over an average of 8 minutes per session. 92% of users were from the UK, with approximately 85% being from locations in the North East region. In addition to access via login accounts created for community members, 24 'unknown' people logged on using social authentication (via Google or Twitter).

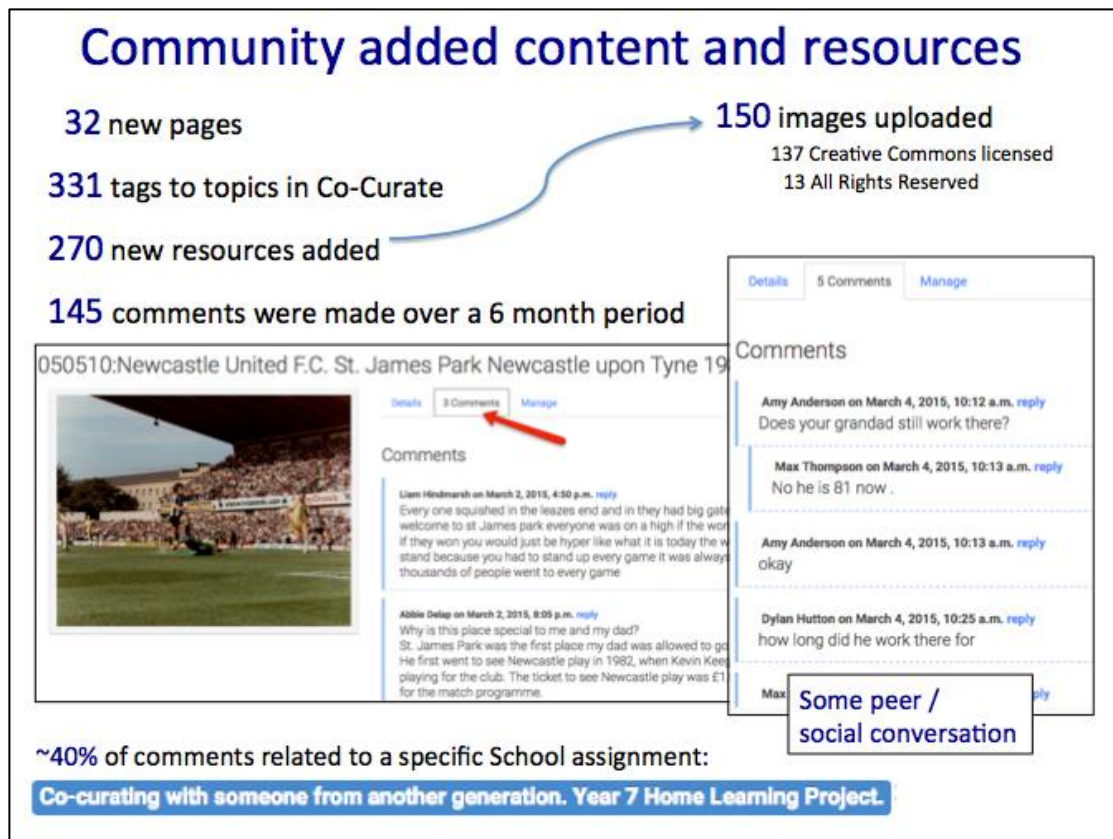


Figure 3. Summary of community added content (excluding project team)

Of the top 10 most frequently media (Figure 4) 5 were images from Museum/Library collections, 4 images were community added, and 1 video was added by the project team.

Copyright

Levels of knowledge of copyright and licensing varied amongst the different communities, but were generally low. Community groups were almost universally keen to use Openly Licensed from collections, but some were reluctant to make their materials Openly Licensed, or in some cases even publically accessible. On the other hand some groups were keen on making their materials Open Access from the onset.

Issues around copyright and licenses were a major component of ongoing discussion with virtually all groups as part of the co-curation process. A workshop on copyright organized for the project was well attended. A recurring theme was that sets of physical photographs/materials had been collected over many years, which community groups want to digitize, but these are problematic in that many resources are 'orphaned' in the sense that their owner cannot be readily identified.

Most of the school-based students had a good awareness about not automatically trusting all Web-based sources, but few had any prior understanding of copyright and issues relating to re-use of digital materials.

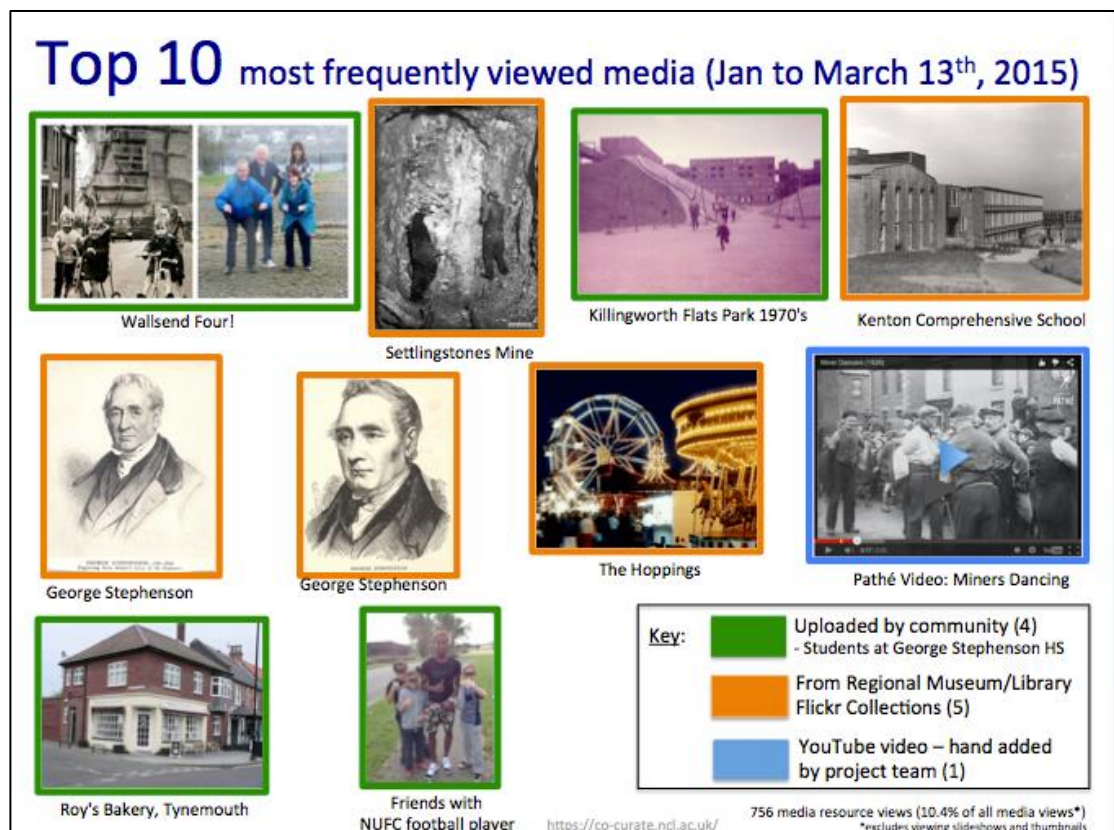


Figure 4. Most frequently viewed media on Co-Curate North East

Discussion

The Co-Curate North East project aims to support co-production and co-curation, including use of materials from museum and archive collections mixed with informal community input. The process can added value to OA collections; for example the addition of personal narratives to historical photographs adds rich contextual information. The tagging and linking between related topics and resources also adds value. The creation of 'mashups' can mix content from different collections and can include community added content. Regardless of academic value, personal comment and social discussion may increase perceived relevance and interest in the collections, encouraging their use by a wider audience.

Co-Curate makes extensive use of openly licensed photographs and videos. Many of the historical photographs and film clips from the formal collections have annotations explaining context and history, which enhance their value as educational materials. These are very granular compared to OERs, which can be entire modules, including structure and pedagogy. The lack of intrinsic pedagogy means the resources are very flexible and easy to re-use by teachers for different purposes and suitable for independent learning activities and even unstructured 'self-organised learning'.⁹ The Co-Curate platform itself has features that can support independent discovery and 'serendipitous learning' – with links between topics providing different pathways taken according to personal interest.

Co-Curate has helped raise awareness and understanding of copyright and Open Licenses with the communities. Hopefully this will translate into many of the students and community practitioners openly licensing their photographs and composite educational materials in the future. It was notable in the High School pilot that a student contacted a collection owner to seek permission to use an image, purely under their own initiative. Other students then followed suite.

The work of students in selecting and creating collections is an educational process, but the outputs themselves (including annotations added by the students, any uploads of new materials, the overall collection itself) could itself be considered an educational resource. This brings challenges because a collection, which includes a 'mashup' is likely to have components with a range of different licenses. – as such granting an overarching open license needs careful consideration. There may be complex layers of permissions/licenses as mashups and composite objects are included in other mashups.

In the project we were highly selective in use of collections in order to maintain relevance and specificity to the North East region. A key limitation was that many other excellent collections in the region were only partially online and many on platforms that aren't easily 'discoverable' in the sense that they don't have an API. Initial investigation into harvesting from wider sources using search terms from the taxonomy weren't taken forward because search results included many non-region-specific resources and sometimes inappropriate resources. For example, a YouTube search for "Newcastle+ship building" included videos relating to Newcastle in Australia and searching for "Durham+history" in Flickr included many results for Durham, Ohio. Selection based on geo-tagging was also avoided because results occasionally included inappropriate results, such as nude/semi-nude images. However, the regional specificity of collections did create tensions during the project because national and international events (e.g. World War 1) and phenomena (e.g 1960's fashion) are of strong relevance to the regions history and culture. Therefore, later in the project we added some non-region-specific collections and extended the search facility to be able to differentiate between regional and national/international collections. Another limitation is that we only looked at a limited number of APIs because of the limited duration of the project (18 months). Other APIs, such as those for MemoryBox and Vimeo would have been useful – the main mitigation for this being that people can use embed code to include external resources in their pages.

To date there haven't been any issues with upload of inappropriate content or known/reported copyright violations. The risk management includes the use of an explicit takedown policy. To date there haven't been inappropriate comments or 'wiki vandalism' to publically editable text – however, this was a worry that came up in some discussions with communities. There were 2 cases where students added content on the 'wrong' topic page (non-malicious). Therefore we did bring in the ability to protect pages to make core pages (help information, pages about the project etc) non editable. There was also an administrative function to roll-back content.

Ethical and legal issues related to working with children and their access and use of such systems are highly complex. There was a great deal of discussion with schools about use of closed vs. open communities. Also, for young children accounts could be limited to teachers who upload on behalf of students. Accounts with display names that are first name only or fully anonymised are possible. However, one school decided to use students full names, emphasising responsibility and accountability, seen as important learning points for students future use of social media. The approach was valued by many parents, who were able to view their childrens' work and even contribute to the wider Co-Curate activities. There are also potential issues of children granting open licenses to images they upload. The publishing of 3D scanned objects produced in the project also raise complex issues. Permissions/license may be needed to make and print a 3D scan, but then the 'copy' can be considered a new object in its own right.

A key challenge of limited duration projects is impact and ongoing use after the end of the formal funded period, particularly as project staff move on to new responsibilities. Sustainability of the Website was considered at the design stage with the intention that many features can be 'self-managed', such as the bulk creation of accounts for schools/communities and the management of resources and page content. The decision to store uploaded images remotely in Flickr provides efficiency and makes resources durable and more accessible to wider audiences - though some community groups focused on private collections were not keen on this. Probably of more importance than the technology is the continuation of practices – curation of existing collections and creating and sharing materials with the wider community. The ongoing project evaluation includes a Theory of Change process and analysis. The 'legacy' will hopefully include learning and practice in relation to copyright and licensing, with greater use of Creative Commons licensing.

Conclusion

Co-Curate is an innovative project using OA collections and other materials in a range of educational and cultural settings. The concepts of 'co-curation' and 'co-production' are rapidly evolving and are applied to a variety of practices. Whilst these practices do not necessarily include a digital element (the output might be a play for example), the Co-Curate project provides an exemplar of how online platforms can be used to mix formal collections with community generated content, including within educational settings. The Co-Curate Website and other online co-curation initiatives are dependent on, and should encourage, open

practice. They also have the potential to add value to and generate increased interest in OA collections.

<https://co-curate.ncl.ac.uk/>

Appendix 1. Current Resources and Sources in Co-Curate

Source	API	Number
Newcastle libraries	Flickr	7,871
TWAM	Europeana	3,825
Beamish Museum	Flickr	3,077
TWAM	Flickr	1,443
British Film Institute	Youtube	584
Newcastle University	Youtube	454
Sunderland Public Libraries	Flickr	309
War Archives - British Pathe	Youtube	104
NorthumberlandTV	Youtube	80
VintageFashions - Brirish Pathe	Youtube	80
Middlesbrough Council	Youtube	75
Beamish Museum	Youtube	74
TWAM	Youtube	70
The Great War - British Pathe footage	Youtube	33
Victoria Sage	Flickr	28
Tyneside Irish Cultural Society	Flickr	12
Total from Collections		18,119
Flickr	Flickr	1815
Youtube	Youtube	408
Local	-	492
Community/Team added		2,715
All Resources		20,834

Table. 1 Resources in Co-Curate at 24/03/15

¹ <https://learning-maps.ncl.ac.uk/>

² Cotterill SJ, Horner P, Peterson J, Skelly et al. Dynamic Learning Maps: fusing curriculum maps with personal learning. Proc. Association for Learning Technology Conference, Leeds, 2011.

³ Hardy S., Cotterill SJ, Outterside J, Peterson J et al. OER in the context of the curriculum: conjuring dynamic richly contextualized OER, with easy aggregation and augmentation, without ever moving from the learning environment... Proc. Association for Learning Technology Conference, Manchester, 2012.

⁴ <http://www.n-ex.org.uk/>

⁵ <https://www.flickr.com/services/api/>

⁶ <https://developers.google.com/youtube/>

⁷ <http://www.europeana.eu/portal/api-introduction.html>

⁸ <http://www.naomikorn.com/>

⁹ Mitra, Sugata and Leat, David and Dolan, Paul and Crawley, Emma (2010) The Self Organised Learning Environment (SOLE) School Support Pack. ALT.