



## Economic and Social Impact of the Public Domain

### Project Announcement

This project (commissioned by the Digital Libraries Initiative of the European Commission DG Information Society and Media) aims to analyse the economic and social impact of the public domain and to gauge its potential benefits to citizens and the economy. This is the first study to assemble quantitative and qualitative data about the scope and nature of the public domain in Europe. It will also produce a methodology for measuring the public domain which can be used and refined for future studies both within Europe and further afield.

Public domain content is material that is not or is no longer protected by intellectual property rights and includes resources which can be freely accessed and used and re-used by all. The public domain contains published works, such as literary or artistic works, music and audiovisual material for which copyright has expired, material that has been assigned to the public domain by the right holders or by law, and raw data, such as facts and numbers.

A rich public domain has the potential to stimulate the further development of the information society. The development of the World Wide Web and the ability to digitise almost all text, image, sound and audio-visual material knowledge has resulted in an explosion of the citizen' s ability to store, and more importantly, share access to that information and knowledge. Public domain material has a considerable potential for re-use – both by citizens for information, education and entertainment, and for new creative expressions that build on Europe' s rich culture.

As well as the public domain itself, the study will also cover material that, although copyright protected, is generally available for all. The study will investigate the various voluntary sharing schemes which copyright holders use to grant broad rights to enable use and re-use of their creations. These include the various flavours of Creative Commons or the GNU Free Documentation Licence.

This study will also assess the role of the EU Directive on the re-use of public sector information. It will seek to establish, by collaborative engagement with organisations such as national libraries, museums, research facilities, archives and public broadcasters their readiness and ability to meet the terms of the Directive and thus significantly widen access to cultural holdings in digital form. This may help to make available a whole range of public domain material on which creators may build.

The project partners are developing their methodology and identifying the data sources that they will need to use to meet the project objectives. The outcome will provide the Digital Libraries Initiative with the information it needs to understand the value of the public domain and how it can be used.

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