

# 33 million objects and counting: a conversation about the Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek

**Cosmina Berta - Gerke Dunkhase**  
*Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek (DDB)*

Since 2014, the year when the Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek (DDB) was officially launched, the number of digital objects offered on [www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de](http://www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de) grew from 8 million records to 33 million.

We would like to talk a bit about the development of the DDB, its structure, and what is next in store. Cosmina Berta (Servicestelle and Data Management) and Gerke Dunkhase (Head of Technology, Development and Service) answer Digitalia's questions.

## **Digitalia: What is the goal of the Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek?**

**Cosmina Berta:** The goal of the Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek (DDB) is to offer everyone unrestricted access to Germany's cultural and scientific heritage, to make it possible for anyone to access its unique cultural heritage and knowledge conveniently via one central point of entry. That means millions of books, archival items, images, music, films and scores, from all over Germany.

In the present day, more than ever, having this entire wealth of information at our fingertips, centrally accessible from anywhere in the world, independent of time and location, is a fundamental improvement of our opportunities regarding research, education, use of creativity. It is also a wonderful possibility to stay connected with the world of cultural heritage. This vision is continuously developing, and we have some way to go until it is realized in its full potential.

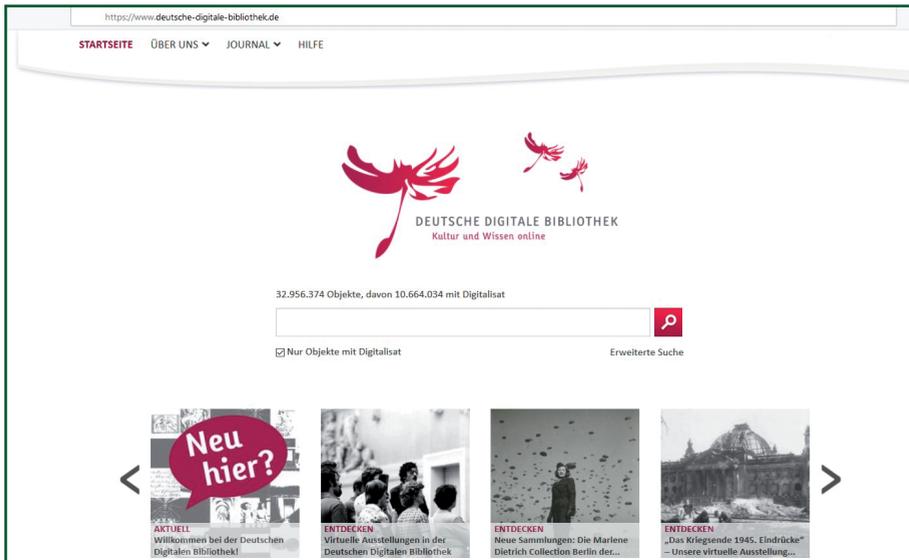
## **Digitalia: How is the network built?**

**Cosmina Berta:** Culture connects, culture contributes to growth, culture inspires, culture makes the world a better place – and the DDB aims to provide access to massive amounts of cultural data, in order to make our heritage widely available for everyone. But it's not only data! The DDB also provides innovation and interoperability, because we live in a world where the technical landscape keeps evolving. These are strategic tasks that need to be built on a solid foundation, and that is why the underpinning foundation of the DDB is a competence network of cultural and scientific institutions, financially supported by federal, state and local authorities, all contributing to the joint task of developing, advancing the DDB.

The support of the network institutions and their work together brought the DDB to where it is today. 33 million objects and counting! We know our tasks are not easy, we try to keep learning from the pain points and we know that recognising and addressing challenges will allow us to move forward.

## **Digitalia: How are the partner institutions organized?**

**Cosmina Berta:** The administrative office of the DDB competence network is located at the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation) in Berlin and the DDB technical development and service desk are located in the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek in Frankfurt.



Bringing together and linking up content from cultural and scientific institutions and also earning their trust to store and manage their metadata is an enormous technical and logistic undertaking.

The communities play a very important role in the cultural sector, so for a cross domain national aggregator like the DDB it is crucial to win their support and get them involved. So how have we done this? It is all about the specialized domain desks or the “Fachstellen” in German.

In order to ensure the best possible support for our data partners, the DDB set up domain-specific desks. You are an archivist? Then you can turn for support to our Archive domain desk in the Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg. For a curator in a museum, our Museum domain desk at the Institute for Museum Research is ready to assist.

All in all, there are seven domain desks supporting the DDB, established within prestigious institutions in the respective sectors, offering professional support for institutions from all cultural areas on their way to participate in the DDB: Museum (at the Institute for Museum Research in Berlin), Media-Audio, Media-Image (both at the Saxon State and

University Library in Dresden), Media-Film (at the German Film Institute and Film Museum), Archive (Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg), Library (at the Göttingen State and University Library).

An important point to make here is that the domain desks not only answer data related questions or explain workflows. They also offer all institutions, big or small, the opportunity to work with and learn from leading specialists, they enable them to learn new things and get inspired through community work at conferences, workshops and fairs.

And there is the Servicestelle or the service desk. I would like to use a metaphor here: If the cultural institutions that make their data available in our portal are the lifeblood of the DDB, I like to call the Servicestelle the heart of the DDB. That is because it has the central roles of coordinating the work of the domain desks, and to further the development of all data processes, establishing requirements for data processing tools. It also acts as first point of contact and consults and supports new and existing data partners. Not an easy task in innovative and often unstructured fields like the cultural and scientific sectors! We need to permanently step up our game, to

The screenshot shows the DDB website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'HOME PAGE', 'ABOUT US', 'JOURNAL', and 'HELP'. A search bar is visible on the right. The main content area displays a search result for 'One fine day : from "Madam Butterfly" / Puccini'. The result includes a thumbnail image of a vinyl record and a list of metadata fields such as 'Alternative title', 'Objekt type', 'Description', 'Material/Technique', 'Measurements', 'Event', 'Subject', and 'Classification'. The 'Event' field lists the composer (Puccini), the performer (Grace Moore), and the conductor (Joseph Pasternack).

stay in contact with the latest developments in the cultural sector, to be able to deal with new and challenging tasks.

### Digitalia: What future developments are planned for the DDB?

**Gerke Dunkhase:** On the content level, the DDB is busy preparing a new strategy process. One main point to be addressed is: How does the DDB react to new developments in the field of digitisation of cultural assets or in the field of artificial intelligence? These are questions that our teams in Frankfurt and Berlin will be dealing with this year. The aim is to develop a five year strategy for the DDB by the end of the year.

A second important point is to conduct user and usability studies. We have just conducted a large-scale online survey via the DDB portal, and the market research institute we commissioned to do this is currently conducting individual interviews and usability tests with selected users. We want to use the results to consistently align the products and development projects of the DDB with the requirements and expectations of our users.

Also, one of the DDB's most important projects this year is the Newspaper Portal. The project, which is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), aims to make digitized historical newspapers from the 17th to the 20th century accessible via a separate section within the DDB. There will be full texts for most of the historical newspapers. This means that not only the meta-data but also, in contrast to the DDB, the full text contents of the newspapers can be searched. In the medium term, regional newspaper portals are also to be integrated into the DDB Newspaper Portal, so that in the future there will be a uniform access point for historical newspapers throughout Germany. In short: a national newspaper portal. With its corpus of historical newspapers, the Newspaper Portal is also an important service for the sciences. The public release of the Newspaper Portal is planned for December 2020.

Another important future topic for the DDB is authority files or vocabularies. The entity pages for persons and organizations in the DDB are already based on the Gemeinsame

Normdatei (Integrated Authority File), GND for short. Currently, authority files are primarily used in libraries and partly in archives. The project GND4C - GND for culture data, in which the DDB is a project partner, aims to win over cultural institutions from other sectors for the use of authority data. By enriching metadata with GND data, the appeal of the DDB can be significantly increased, either by linking object pages with each other or by improving the search quality.

Of course, it is an important goal to further increase the number of data partners and data sets in the DDB. In the past, the ingest - or data import - was a bit of a bottleneck at times, high demand of data ingestion simply prevented data from being published on the main portal. By switching to a new architecture, optimizing the data processing workflows and developing the administration com-

ponent DDBdash, we were able to significantly increase the data flow. To further boost the efficiency of our data supply processes, the Aggregator Fachstelle (aggregator desk) was set up in October 2019. With this specialized unit, we want to increasingly address aggregators as data providers and win them over for the DDB.

Improving the quality of the data is just as important as increasing the quantity. One way of doing this is having the domain desks and the service desk preprocess the data, for example by enriching it with authority data.

The DDB is to become the central point for researching digitised cultural assets while at the same time establishing references and linking together objects of different cultural institutions. Above all, the DDB should be a tool that can be used and worked with. These are the goals we are working towards.