

Vision Swiss Performing Arts Platform

V1.0, September 13, 2017

Manifold perspectives on performing arts.

The Swiss Performing Arts Platform is going to be a web-based database of the recently established Swiss Archive of the Performing Arts (SAPA) and will consolidate the legacy databases of SAPA's predecessors, the Swiss Dance Collection and the Swiss Theater Collection.

The Platform will aggregate information about people, institutions, productions, and a wide range of archival material. Its principal aim is to document performing arts in respect of their inherent complexity and ephemerality. A documentation of the collections in regard to subjects and genres with the help of thesauri is a desired endeavour once all existing data is consolidated and reconciled against authority files within the Platform.

Despite of the complexity of its subject, the Platform aims at providing users with discrete backgrounds and individual concerns with an intuitive access to the richness of our collections. The first step herein is to give users an overview over what they can expect to find. This can be achieved through textual indices, media galleries, data visualization or combinations of these. The underlying linked data structure provides interconnections between single entities and thus allows multiple perspectives on the holdings. Works, persons, places and in the future also descriptors/subjects are central concepts that enable users to move quickly and intuitively. Wherever useful, the Platform points users to third party information.

Options to search likewise make allowance for various types of users. Search activities should need as few steps as possible but allow as many, iterative refinements as required to find an answer. Herein, both textual and visual representations are ways to navigate. Search, as much as the interface of the website, is multilingual to the degree that content is available in different languages. It provides the user help by means of suggestions and tolerates ambiguous spellings. Interlinking and visual navigation offer chances for fuzzy queries and serendipitous findings. Finally, a standardized API (SPARQL) allows advanced users, institutional partners and software clients to perform more specific and complex queries than a graphical interface may permit.

Individual search results are the essential value a database can provide and visitors of the website should be able to interact with them by means of refining, sorting, collecting, sharing, returning to them later or taking them along for later use within personal workflows. Found information is structured in a way that the most relevant elements are easily identified. The most common concerns users may have – such as requesting found material for on site consultation or possibly download, raising questions or contributing further information – are supported by structured dialog options.

The linked data backbone of the Platform is also supposed to offer work simplification for the staff as information that already exists does not have to be entered again and is instead linked to. The enrichment of dataset is also done by importing external knowledge from sites such as Wikidata. The most common activities of the staff will be identified in the course of development and supported by means of custom forms or workflows.

SAPA believes in sharing not only information but also the data model and software that are needed to preserve it. Thus, we are interested in cooperating with other performing arts archives in order to share knowledge and resources. For developers we see a chance here to contribute to vital issues of linked data systems and to work with an interesting and international community.