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IIIF collections as research data - an integrated approach by the Zentralbibliothek Zürich

The IIIF (International Image Interoperability Framework) standard allows us to gather digital collections of manuscripts and artworks in libraries, archives and museums from around the world, create scholarly annotations or highlight evidence by creating contextualized and interactive displays. So far, hundreds of libraries, archives and museums have implemented IIIF protocols and thus over 1 bn images of cultural heritage are freely and interoperably available and reusable.

Unfortunately, working with IIIF manifests has not been straightforward up until now. There is a plethora of open source tools allowing scholars to pursue specific research activities. These tools often do not integrate well, however. In many cases, considerable IT skills are required to get started. This is where our ambition comes into play. We intend to lower the hurdle: to integrate existing tools into an intrinsically open and seamless research environment.

We identified one central element that was missing: a storage component for Mirador Viewer - the most widely used digital media viewer for IIIF resources. Our first idea was to create a new data store at the Zentralbibliothek Zürich. We then realized that storing these resources locally was actually not an option, since IIIF is based on linked data. We decided to integrate a storage function with GitHub. On GitHub saved collections can be addressed via the internet and thus be shared with others or reused in any other IIIF compatible tool.

Why should working with IIIF be considered as a practice of Open Science? In a way, the IIIF protocol makes open content even more open. Every single page of a manuscript can be addressed and reused in a simple and direct way. Thanks to a standardized API, content and software functions for any archive providing IIIF access are delivered in the same way. There are reasons to hope for a positive enforcement of Open Science by facilitating the use of open data as well as open tools to create open and reusable research data.

As part of our poster we would like to present our software development, which is still in progress, and address at the same time the question of scholarly best practice. Drawing on examples of current research using IIIF resources and bearing in mind the research environment we are working on, we would like to offer some ideas of how such best practice should, in our opinion, look like in the future.