



EUDICO International Conference Berlin 21/22 February 2007

Europe's cultural and scientific in a digital world

Digitisation of cultural assets is an increasingly important topic for all cultural institutions, libraries, archives, museums, universities and others. For this reason, digitisation has been placed on Europe's cultural agenda. Online access to objects from Europe's cultures and language areas facilitates the appreciation of culture, promoting European integration. The final vision is a European Digital Library which contains all Europe's heritage of libraries, archives, museums etc.

In the context of each EU presidency, since 2001, each member state sponsors a conference on specific aspects of digitisation of culture. This conference took place in Berlin in context with Germany's EU Council Presidency during the first half of 2007. It was hosted by the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz and organised by Monika Hagedorn-Saupe and her team of the Institut für Museumskunde.

30 lectures (ca 20 min each) divided in the 4 big subject areas were given during these two days:

- Internet portals,
- Networks,
- Standards,
- Plurality

All lectures were supported by power point presentations in English. The PDFs of these presentations are all online at <http://www.eudico.de/index.php?ln=en&to=downloads> .

The operator of this conference proclaimed their target as: "Accessibility and usability emerge as important considerations. This conference will address these and other issues through exploration of innovative online portals and networks. In particular, we will address the need for common standards in collecting and presenting Europe's diverse cultural heritage. The conference will raise at last the diversity of European cultural heritage as an issue."

Each of the speakers informed the audience how much they intend to digitise cultural heritage, but it is still a work in progress. The problems were less clearly mentioned, but as a result one can say that a lot of different initiatives exist to digitise culture heritage but each organisation up to now has tried to find its own way. Until now, real standards haven't existed, and retrieval wasn't a discussion point. A few speakers remarked casually that multilingualism should be considered, too, but nothing on how to achieve this was mentioned more intensively.

Several of the presented projects have no long-term assured financial basis (mainly the German ones), therefore there is a high risk that they will have to be given up as soon the funding stops.

There is no real agreement about the following questions; what, when, where, and by whom?



Libraries seem to tend to digitise books completely, but it wasn't mentioned which tools for retrieval were implemented, for example, free text search or subject headers. And in the lectures it wasn't pointed out how to avoid the same title being digitised by different libraries.

Archives tend to digitise first the finding aids so that the user can check online if it is worth to visit the archive to look through the original files.

In Germany each museum decides itself which management system it uses and how it arranges its metadata. In more centralised countries like Spain and Portugal more museums use the same system, developed by the ministry of Culture or the National Institute of Museums, so that the metadata is interoperable. MatrizNet – the Web Search Engine on the Collections of Portuguese National Museums – is a fine example of this; see <http://www.matriznet.ipmuseus.pt/ipm/MWBINT/MWBINT02.asp>, which shows c.30,000 items. In reality, Matriz is a museum management system, and the speaker mentioned that The Portuguese Institute for Museums has developed some thesauri which are used for the metadata of the images shown on MatrizNet. It might be worth to get more info about it. Paulo Costa, the speaker, spoke understandable English.

From the perspective of MILE, the lecture about the Spanish museum management system DOMUS was very interesting. Please see the presentation PDFs at <http://www.eudico.de/index.php?ln=en&to=downloads>. The only problem with this lecture was that the speaker, a young lady, spoke in terrible French! (It might be worth inviting a speaker to the MILE seminar at the ICOM Conference in August, or to ask AISA to get in touch with these people and make a report about DOMUS.)

A presentation was made on the website Erfgoed.be, a Dutch cultural site commissioned by the ministry of Flanders for the Flanders region. This site was created to raise cultural interest in an audience which doesn't normally have much to do with culture. A diversity of subjects are presented under four headings concerning the cultural heritage of Flanders; People, Places, Things, and Stories. Info about museums, theatres, music etc is published under each of the relevant headings. The main problem was obviously keeping it updated; in addition to this, the search functions weren't satisfactory and further funding isn't assured.

The BAM-Portal is a real internet portal to which several libraries, archives and museums contribute. During the lecture it was celebrated as a wonderful database which allows access to all the data contributed by the partners. However, some discussions in the coffee break brought up the main problem of this portal. It is based on free text search and depends on the quality of the metadata of its contributors, which isn't always satisfactory. For example, it isn't possible to search only for the medium "image", and the only possible grid is a selection by the contributing library, archive, museum or other sources. Owing to financial restrictions, the portal operator can't add other, better, retrieval tools. So in reality the user is overwhelmed with results and has to narrow his research by adding further items, with the risk that he excludes exactly what he is searching for because the keyword doesn't come up in the metadata.

The technical problems to integrate data from different digital collections were shortly but concisely mentioned by Patrick Sahle from the AG SDD, as: 'Data analysis, mapping, integration, homogenization, data enrichment, quality assurance'.



The lecture about GBIF (The Global Biodiversity Information Facility) made evident that it seems to be much easier to find scientific controlled vocabularies in common than in academic branches of study.

Some of the lectures demanded open access to all cultural heritage. For example, Kenneth Hamma pronounced this (at least, I remember this part of his speech but nothing about real standards). And he finished his lecture with showing Artstore as an excellent example of Open Access.

Two projects were presented for assuring certain standards to transfer subject information in the metadata, or to make this info interoperable: HILT (Dennis Nicholson) and CIDOC. Both were very technical and to be honest, I didn't understand a lot. Maybe it would be worth looking at the power point presentations?

Résumé: In reality you've missed nothing ... neither technical standards like EAD, METS etc were discussed, nor subject standards. The 20 minute lectures were quite cursory and not deeply impressive. From the MILE perspective, the two lectures about the Portuguese and Spanish museum system were the most relevant.

In the breaks, multilingual thesauri were a discussion point, mainly with one of the operators of the BAM-portal but no really suitable seems to exist for this broad range of cultural subjects.

What became clear from nearly all the websites and systems etc. presented at these lectures was that they were not interoperable, and had been constructed mainly for academic users.

How far HILT and CIDOC – which come both from the linguistic side – can offer help I can't estimate.

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