

New Opportunities for Benchmarking the Digitisation of Cultural Heritage in Europe

How to find good practices in digitisation? How and where to find benchmarking partners for digitisation projects and programmes? These were the key guidelines in the work accomplished by the Minerva Benchmarking Working Package, which produced the online benchmarking database for the digitisation initiatives of cultural heritage. The system currently includes the data of about a hundred European initiatives.

The Benchmarking Report – Second Edition was published on the website of Minerva at the beginning of October 2003. The report is based on the work carried out by the Benchmarking Framework Working Package of the Minerva project since spring 2002, the related online benchmarking campaign in Europe in spring/summer 2003 and the summary of the results. The first preliminary edition of the report was presented at the NRG meeting in Corfu in June 2003.

Benchmarking?

Benchmarking means an on-going search for best practices that produce superior performance when adapted and implemented in your own organisation (Bogan-English 1994). Your own performance can be improved by comparing yourself with others and by learning from the good practices of others - although this means that first you have to admit that someone else can do things better than you can. Benchmarking has five phases:

1. describe the current situation: choose the process to be benchmarked
2. find a benchmarking partner and compare experiences
3. analyse the differences in performance
4. set a new goal
5. implement, evaluate and develop

Benchmarking is not a throw-away quality management tool but has inherent the idea of continuity and the improvement of performance over the long term. Good practices are tightly connected with benchmarking. The benchmarking partners chosen should be organisations which are on a slightly higher performance level than yours. In addition they should employ good practices. By implementing in your own organisation what you have learnt in the benchmarking process you create good practices, yourself. Learning and implementation are essential. Benchmarking is an active process and not just comparing benchmarks: facts and measurements.

The Minerva Benchmarking Database Facilitates Initiatives

In order to facilitate the work of project, programme and policy managers working on digitisation initiatives, the Minerva benchmarking online database was launched on 14th

April in 2003. The online benchmarking tool created by the Working Group has a dynamic and on-going character. The online forms can be filled in continuously. You are invited to get acquainted with the system.

The Index page of the database shows 3 levels of initiatives. You can fill in information about your projects, your programmes or your policies. The questions chosen are key questions for benchmarking and good practices. The online benchmarking database additionally includes links to good practices in connection with the questions. For instance, if you are interested in Intellectual Property Rights you can click on a website address with more information on the good practices regarding the subject. It is also essential in the benchmarking process that good practice is defined by the institution, what it considers worth implementing in its own activities.

The actual online forms in the benchmarking tool have been divided into two parts: general information and self assessment. General information has quantitative questions about funding, productivity, user statistics and so on. Self assessment is further divided into the management of digitisation initiatives and the digitisation process. In the qualitative self assessment part you evaluate your performance against three statements. They represent basic, good and best practice. Based on your answers the programme will afterwards provide you with information about your performance in different fields of digitisation.

Interesting Quantitative Summaries

The number of answers and registrations in the benchmarking online system at the moment is over a hundred. The respondents include national institutions, universities and other institutions in the cultural heritage sector in almost all the Member States of the European Union.

It is evident that institutions have been interested in the exercise and have actively contacted the administrator to ask questions or to express their views. As 85,7 % of the respondents are willing to share their experience and information of their projects / programmes / policies publicly there should be a positive atmosphere in Europe to promote benchmarking. It can be constructed a valuable tool to enhance digitisation activities in Europe.

The summaries of the online answers are presented via the website <http://www.minervaeurope.org/structure/workinggroups/benchmarking/digitquestion.htm> in the form of dynamic, updating reports. There are many possibilities for searching information in them. You can choose a filter straight away, at the beginning of the search and limit your results to your own country or sector (museums, archives, libraries...) or both. You can also look at the results question by question and choose different search elements: a country/countries or a sector/s or combine these two categories. Certain questions have also been linked.

At the moment the quantitative part, the general information, tells more to the user of the database than the qualitative self assessment part. In the self assessment section the answers of the digitisation initiatives are subjective and cannot provide a scientific or an all-embracing picture of the situation in the Member States. The information collected should be analysed further as well as the content of the statements in each question. The benchmarking of the digitisation of cultural heritage in Europe could thus develop.

Novelty: Benchmarking Partners Available

The Minerva Benchmarking Working Group produced the first part of the Minerva knowledge base and collected information on digitisation initiatives. In the next phase of Minerva in 2003-2004 the knowledge base will be extended. It will include the accomplishments of the other working groups: inventories of digitisation projects, website quality issues, more good practices and competence centres. The responsible partner for the further technical development is Italy.

The knowledge base will provide a unique opportunity to look into the digitisation practices in the European Union. Good practices will spread more easily and detailed information about projects, programmes and policies will be available to the users of the knowledge base. The becoming opportunity to browse and to search the initiatives in order to learn about good practices and to find benchmarking partners will enhance the success of new projects and programmes by improving the quality of end products for digitisation.

Institutions and Ministries will benefit from the various possibilities to exert data from projects / programmes / policies. The general information gathered is probably the most important tool for follow-up. The statistical analysis would give even more possibilities for the use of the data. The self assessment part is also important for each participating body.

Those Involved in the Work (THIS TEXT CAN BE PUT IN E.G. A BOX ALONGSIDE THE ACTUAL ARTICLE)

The responsible partner for the work of the Benchmarking Working Package has been Centre for Microfilming and Conservation/National Library of Finland - Helsinki University Library. The Centre is responsible for the digitisation activities and programmes in the National Library, for coordinating the National Digitisation Programme for Library Material and the digitisation cooperation of Finnish memory organisations.

The European Benchmarking Group was created in autumn 2002. It has provided the network for the Benchmarking Working Package of the Minerva project together with the NRG representatives. There have also been national benchmarking groups. The Finnish national group with members from the National Library, the National Board of Antiquities and the National Archives has been active. Swedish National Archives (Riksarkivet) has been responsible for the Good Practices Working Package within Minerva. Since benchmarking and good practices are two sides of the same coin, Finland and Sweden

had a joint organisation, especially in summer-early autumn 2002. The co-operation of all the Minerva partners and other participating persons and institutions has been valuable.

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References

Benchmarking – <http://www.benchmarking-in-europe.com>

Minerva Benchmarking – online forms and automatic reports

<http://www.minervaeurope.org/structure/workinggroups/benchmarking/digitquestion.htm>

Benchmarking Report – http://www.minervaeurope.org/intranet/reports/D2_2.pdf

The benchmarking database can be used for comparing yourself with good practices or for looking for benchmarking partners. Learning and implementation are essential in the active benchmarking process.

