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Typical Londonderry Shirt-Making Factory
From the book *Ireland industrial and agricultural*,
Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland,
Browne and Nolan Ltd., 1902

Digitisation policies and emerging initiatives

Cultural content has been identified as a driver for Internet take-up in Ireland (`http://www.isc.ie` and `http://www.askaboutireland.ie`). Some 40% of the Irish population now have access to, and use, the Internet (Commissioner for Communications Regulation, December 2002). This reflects the wide availability of the Internet in the workplace and its popularity in the residential market. While new delivery mechanisms, such as ADSL and Wireless Broadband, have become considerably more economical in 2003, take-up to date has been slower than anticipated. This indicates that the number of Irish users of the Internet is stabilising and that the large majority of those who are interested in the Internet for its own sake are now online. Content that is local in nature and of specific interest to the inhabitants of a particular region acts as an important stimulus to attract new users to the online medium. The digitisation of large amounts of local content in all parts of the country will have a nationally significant impact on the take-up of the Information Society. This would not be restricted to adding value to library or museum collections, but would have wider ramifications for the use of the Internet as a whole, once late adopters were attracted to the Internet using local material. The Cultural Heritage Project (see paragraph below) addresses the requirements for relevant content through the recommendations for a national digitisation strategy for public libraries, which will be established with the following objectives:

- to stimulate the use of and involvement with the Internet by the general public;
- to support the eContent, commercial, creative, tourism and educational sectors;
- to develop local and national history and culture Websites, based on the collections of public libraries;
- to enrich the quality of life of all citizens and to support social inclusion and life-long learning.

The national digitisation strategy is being implemented by a national digitisation programme; a network of autonomous digitisation projects on the history and culture of their county/city with links to a programme portal which will present aspects of the history and culture of Ireland. The programme will implement a central portal Website facility, linked to all the library authority sites. This portal will focus on the provision of end-user services such as programme-wide search and navigation aids, integrated user presentations, contextual and narrative information, databases of projects, digital items online and special collections. The first steps toward the realisation of a national digitisation programme will be realised through the completion of the Cultural Heritage Project, Phase 2, that is now implementing the central portal Web site and investigating the different aspects of the programme (see paragraph The Cultural Heritage Project, Phase 2)

The Cultural Heritage Project
The Cultural Heritage Project has developed the portal Website `http://www.askaboutireland.ie` that showcases the potential for users to access the cultural history of Ireland based on the local studies collections of public libraries, local museums and archives. The project, established by the Branching Out Steering Committee through its Cultural Heritage Panel, was carried out in 2002/2003 under the management of An Chomhairle Leabharlanna (`http://www.librarycouncil.ie`), with the

Ireland

support of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (http://www.environ.ie) and of The Heritage Council (http://www.heritagecouncil.ie). It involved local libraries, museums and archives in the digitisation and online publication of their local studies materials, creating a national Internet resource for culture. The Cultural Heritage Project has demonstrated that a national digitisation strategy supporting local digitisation projects and managed centrally will be a success.

The Cultural Heritage Project, Phase 2
The Cultural Heritage Project, Phase 2 is an extension of the recently completed Cultural Heritage Project. It concentrates on providing access to cultural content and branding it through the creation of a national portal Web site. The project builds upon the success of the Cultural Heritage Project by supporting the creation of large amounts of new online cultural information, involving public libraries, museums, archives and other memory institutions, and working closely with external bodies to enhance the value of the project results. In common with the Cultural Heritage Project, much of the focus of this project is on the selection, digitisation and online publication of cultural and historical information from the local studies and special collections holdings of public libraries. However, this second phase also includes involvement for museums and archives. The same training, facilities and assistance will be provided to all those participants who create and contribute material and content to the project. It is the objective of the project that the portal Website will include local and national material addressing topics for the benefit of the general public, secondary

students and researchers. The project team is working with the Department of Education and Science and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment to develop content that is relevant to the school curriculum. While content creation and integration are central to the project and involve the greatest number of participants, there are a number of other activities, which the project will carry out. These will concentrate on the emerging issues relating to digitisation as described below (see section Emerging issues).

Other initiatives

National cultural institutions continue towards developing their digitisation. Details on their current positions are as follows.

The National Library
The National Library of Ireland continues its digitisation work on the visual collections – photographs and prints. Approximately over 5,000 digital images are now available through the Website http://www.nli.ie. A review of the National Library's digitisation programme and procedures is still in progress.

The National Archives
The National Archives will continue to develop its Website http://www.nationalarchives.ie as the first point of contact for those seeking to access their archival heritage. Informational content will continue to be augmented and remain the core of the service. However, a new focus will be applied to the development of the site as a vehicle for interactive, experiential and transactional services to the public.

White Star Line "Oceanic"
From the book *Ireland industrial and agricultural*,
Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland,
Browne and Nolan Ltd, 1902

The National Museum

The National Museum of Ireland
(`http://www.museum.ie`) was a participant
in the IST funded, fifth framework ORION project
(`http://www.orion-net.org`). The project
addressed the application of 3D technology across
a diverse range of applications in European
archaeological museums. This project ended in July
2003 and the final deliverable was a Research Roadmap
which addressed a broad variety of 3D research areas
according to the results of user requirement survey
within the ORION consortium and beyond. The project's
internal partners in Ireland were a particularly
significant element in the success of the project
especially in the production of the first project report
on current practices and needs in the usage of 3D.
Regional museums were the largest constituency
amongst the internal partners and the National
Museum is hopeful that the ORION consortium,
consisting as it does of both museum and technical
partners, will be in a position to prioritise and pursue
the goals, which it has identified in the course of future
European projects. The ORION experience has been
of great use to the National Museum in helping
to establish new contacts and potential partnerships
with both museum and technical partners with the aim
of producing innovative 3D results for collections
management, Web applications and display as well as
other specialised applications. The National Museum
of Ireland has also developed a partnership relationship
with the An Chomhairle Leabharlanna/The Library
Council of Ireland in relation to digitisation projects
and is considering a number of other partnerships
and project possibilities as a direct result of the
experience gained in the course of the ORION project.
The consortium participants were drawn from
museums, universities, technical companies
and Institutes in France, Spain, Germany, Italy,
Greece and Scotland as well as Ireland.

The National Gallery

The National Gallery of Ireland houses the national
collection of Irish art, the Yeats Collection
and the National Portrait Collection, together with
a major collection of European master paintings,
drawings and prints. The NGI Website is available
at `http://www.nationalgallery.ie`, providing
an easy way of accessing information
on the National Gallery under the following headings:

• Gallery Information
• The Collection
• Gallery News
• Calendar of Events
• Exhibitions
• Education
• Gallery Library
• Friends of the Gallery
• Press
• Rights and Reproductions

The Website is designed for use by the general public
who require immediate access to information
on National Gallery events, exhibitions and education
activities, facilities such as the Library, the Print Room,
the Centre for the Study of Irish Art, the shop,
and current news items relevant to the collections.
A review of the National Gallery's Website is currently
in progress with a view to an expansion
and representation of information in the future.
The National Gallery's digitisation project has
concentrated on high resolution imaging and

Courts of Law
From the book *The History of the City of Dublin
from the Earliest Accounts to the Present Times*,
Vol. 1, Warburton J., Whitelaw J. & Walsh R., W. Bulmer & Co., 1818

Aran Children
From the book *Home Life in Ireland*,
Lynd R., Millis and Boon Ltd., London, 1909

transferring images on to the collection management system. A wider development of the National Gallery's digitisation programme is currently in progress.

Heritage Service of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government
(formally Dúchas the Heritage Service)
The Website `http://www.heritagedata.ie` offers major heritage data sets and information is available in digital format. This site provides a simple way of accessing the heritage information relating to the following:

• Sites and Monuments Record
• Recorded Monuments Record
• Monuments in State Care
• Natural Heritage Areas
• Special Areas of Conservation
• Special Protection Areas (Birds' Directive)
• Nature Reserves and National Parks.

As of November 2003 a contract has been agreed with ESRI Ireland to implement an Internet browser to provide widespread access to the datasets listed above. Phase one of this project is due for completion in April 2004. Additionally First Edition (1830s) 6 Inch mapping for the island of Ireland has been scanned and this will be made available through this browser. Phase two of this project will see all core datasets transferred to an Oracle spatial database, which will facilitate full public access to the data.

Cooperation developments

As contribution to the Irish presidency, Ireland is cooperating with Italy on a mid-term assessment of the "Coordinating Digitisation in Europe". The assessment is managed by an assessment steering group, comprised of representatives of the current (Italian), forthcoming (Irish) and subsequent (Netherlands) presidencies and the European Commission. The focus of the assessment and analysis will be on concrete results, which have a demonstrable impact on the cultural landscape and which underline the effect of the work of the initiative on the development of eContent and the contribution of cultural heritage to eEurope. The draft report was circulated for discussion at the NRG meeting in Parma (November 2003). The digitisation initiatives are offering great scope for further cooperation development amongst libraries, museums and archives at local and national level. Small institutions have also been involved. They have acquired the skills and equipment to allow them to include digitisation as standard of their house keeping procedures.
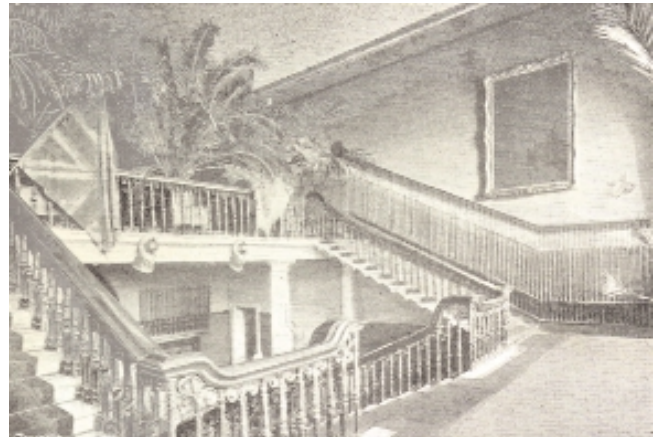
Emerging issues

New issues on digitisation have emerged through the initiatives carried out by the Irish libraries, museums and archives. The Cultural Heritage Project, Phase 2 will concentrate on the following:

• the investigation of the most appropriate, effective and efficient procedure for the creation of an online index for historic newspapers. This will consider various options in terms of outsourcing and carrying out work in-house, including digitisation of microfilm, OCR, originals handling, etc.;
• legal work in the area of copyright, in order to formulate and appropriate approach for dealing with copyright issues in relation to online publication;

Staircase Dublin Castle
From the book *Picturesque Dublin Old and New*,
Gerard F., Hutchinson and Co., London, 1898

• investigation of how the project databases could be
  enabled to interoperate with other online cultural
  resources in Ireland.

Use of NRG/MINERVA results and impact

Ireland continues to participate fully in the NRG
and MINERVA Plus. The Irish presidency will offer
the opportunity to demonstrate the initiatives
to date in the International Conference which
will follow the NRG meeting with the specific theme
of portals and access to European culture
scheduled for June 2004.

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