

Digitisation Coordination Initiative

“Europe’s cultural and scientific knowledge resources are a unique public asset forming the collective and evolving memory of our diverse societies and providing a knowledge basis for the development of our content industries in a sustainable knowledge society.”
Lund Principles

Introduction

This report presents an overview of the initiative to “Coordinate National Digitisation Policies and Programmes”, undertaken jointly by the Member States and by the Commission within the framework of the eEurope 2002 Action Plan. Then the initiative itself is described in more detail, covering also the historical development and a timeline of ‘key steps 2001-2003’. Each Member State has produced a report on its digitisation policies, programmes and coordination activities in this field, up to December 2002. These national reports are preceded by an introductory section which provides a European perspective on digitisation and a summary of the progress and achievements so far.

Digitisation of content

The cultural and scientific heritage of Europe is a uniquely valuable intellectual asset, which for centuries has been instrumental in the social and economic development of our communities. Digitisation is an essential first step to generate digital content that will underpin a fully digital Europe. It is a vital activity in preserving Europe’s collective cultural heritage and diversity, and providing improved access for the citizen to that heritage. Europe’s digitised cultural content also contributes significantly to education, enhancing both formal and lifelong learning; and it supports tourism and contributes to the development of eContent industries. In the emerging knowledge society, there will be an increasing demand for high quality, enriched digital content as life-long learning is no longer a buzz word and continuing education becomes a reality. Cultural heritage institutions are in a key position to deliver the kind of unique learning resources that are needed at all educational levels. At a general level, archives, libraries and museums face similar challenges as they try to take advantage of the enormous potential the use of information and communication technologies promises for memory institutions. These challenges are not only technical in nature, but affect also cultural heritage institutions at their very core. The evolution imposes to re-think basic paradigms, concepts and the internal workflow of memory institutions in order to

adopt the right technologies, exploit commercial opportunities, ensure long-term sustainability and embed the skills needed to manage the process.

Why co-ordinate?

There is considerable financial and human effort invested in projects and in a variety of digitisation campaigns across Europe. But these activities are fragmented and there is a strong need for political and institutional strategies to make such initiatives successful, economic and sustainable over time. There is, therefore, a need for a better awareness of what is going on in other countries (and within countries) at both policy and project level. Guidelines, development of best practice, promoting the use of standards which support interoperability – these all contribute to providing better access to digitised resources and to improving the efficiency of digitisation initiatives. However if the value of this investment is to be maximised, there are still fundamental obstacles to be overcome, namely:

- lack of visibility of on-going activities in Member States and a lack of coordination across different sectors and countries;
- lack of widely accepted standards and good practices guidelines;
- the need to reinforce the activities and offers of Europe’s centres of expertise and their advice on digitisation;
- a need for improved collection interoperability for distributed access and service implementation;
- insufficient development of multilingual access;
- insufficient co-operation between educational, research and cultural institutions and the content industry;
- lack of a systematic approach for the recognition of the quality of cultural content and access sites;
- lack of a convincing approach to the long-term preservation of digital assets.

First steps to overcome these constraints have already been taken by the European Commission and the Member States.

European Commission

The critical role of the digitisation of cultural and scientific content was recognised in the eEurope 2002 Action Plan (http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/index_en.htm), endorsed by the EU Member States at the Feira European Council in June 2000. Amongst the objectives of the Action Plan is that of stimulating European content in global networks, objective 3(d), in order fully to exploit the opportunities created by the advent of digital technologies. One specific action invited Member States and the Commission to jointly “create a co-ordination mechanism for digitisation policies and programmes” across Member States.

The Commission convened a meeting in Lund, in cooperation with the Swedish Presidency, asking Member States to nominate representatives and started collecting information on existing experiences and programmes in Europe, USA, Australia, and Canada. The collected data has been instrumental to two main tasks in preparing the initiative: producing a questionnaire to ask Member States about the current situation and preparing a benchmarking model to measure and improve national practices on digitisation initiatives.

Questionnaire on digitisation

In January 2001 a “Questionnaire on national/regional policies and programmes on digitisation of cultural and scientific content” was sent by the Commission to the Member States through the Permanent Representations. Analysis of the responses of the Member States indicated that there was a need for:

- access to information about ongoing projects and activities;
- a reference basis of ‘good practices’;
- a mechanism for benchmarking digitisation activity and providing adequate comparisons between projects and activities across the Member States;
- support for coordination of activity.

A benchmarking model for digitisation policies

The Commission started the development of an open framework that would enable the benchmarking of digitisation policies, in line with the eEurope approach. The approach is aimed at identifying areas where improvements are needed and how good practices can be identified and implemented. It has been widely used in commercial and public sector organisations to enhance performance. But its application in the area of cultural and scientific heritage was innovative. The proposed benchmarking model describes 7 main themes, extracted from good practices all over the world, for digitisation policies in a general purpose approach to suit different user contexts and priorities. The model may be implemented through data collections strategies (e.g. questionnaires) in a continuous exercise by each Member State. It should help responsible persons and institutions to better prepare, analyse, develop and evaluate digitisation strategies and projects on institutional and national level. <http://www.cordis.lu/ist/ka3/digit/ benchmarking.htm>

Lund Meeting

Representatives and experts from the Member States gathered in Lund on the 4th of April 2001, organised by the European Commission and hosted under the auspices of the Swedish Presidency. The objective of the meeting was

to identify ways in which “a coordination mechanism for digitisation programmes across the Member States” could be put in place to stimulate European content on global networks. A framework to exchange of experience and good practice was suggested by the experts as a valuable first step.

The major outcome of this meeting was the ‘Lund Principles: Conclusions of Experts Meeting’. The experts decided also to develop from these principles the Lund Action Plan as a practical list of objectives and tasks for implementation.

Lund Principles

The Lund meeting agreed that digitisation provided a key mechanism to exploit Europe’s unique heritage and to support cultural diversity, education and the generation of content industries. Although the Member States were investing in enabling access to their cultural heritage, there were still many obstacles to the long term success of these initiatives. The Lund Principles, available in the Annex, state that the Member States could make progress on the eEurope objective if they:

- established an ongoing forum for coordination of policies for digitisation
- supported the developing of a European view on policies and programmes
- exchanged and promoted good practice, guidelines and consistency of practice and skills development
- worked in a collaborative manner to make visible and accessible the digitised cultural and scientific heritage of Europe.

The Commission could help achieve the eEurope objectives by:

- supporting coordination activities;
- enabling the creation of centres of competence;
- fostering the development of benchmarking tools for digitisation practices;
- encouraging a framework that would enable a shared vision of European content,
- and assisting Member States to improve access and awareness for citizens through enhancing the quality and usability of content and the development of models to enable eCulture enterprises.

The Lund Principles are available in all EU languages. [http://www.cordis.lu/ist/ka3/digit/ lund_pri nci pl es. htm](http://www.cordis.lu/ist/ka3/digit/lund_principles.htm)

Lund Action Plan

The Lund Action Plan established a list of actions to be carried out by Member States, by the Commission, and by Member States and Commission jointly. The Action Plan describes a first set of actions to be launched, and assigns responsibilities for them to Member States or to the European Commission.

The results of the actions will be fed into an evolving plan for a sustainable set of activities in support of the digitisation framework across Europe. The Lund Action Plan takes as its reference the Lund Principles, identifying four main areas where specific actions are needed (for each action it defines objectives, the implementation approach and associated tasks, actors, and results expected).

- Area 1: Improving policies and programmes through co-operation and benchmarking
- Area 2: Discovery of digitised resources
- Area 3: Promotion of good practice
- Area 4: Content framework

The progress and the set of actions are updated every year and revised every 6 months by the group of national representatives. The latest version is the Lund Action Plan progress 2002 - planning 2003, which has been endorsed and is annexed to this document as well as being available on Internet: http://www.cordis.lu/ist/ka3/digital/und_ap_browse.htm.

National Representatives Group

A National Representatives Group (NRG), made up of officially nominated experts from each Member State, was set up to coordinate digitisation policies and programmes and to facilitate the adoption and implementation of the Lund Action Plan. It's stated mission is to monitor progress regarding the objectives encapsulated in the 'Lund Principles', see the Terms of Reference (http://www.cordis.lu/ist/ka3/digital/t_reference.htm). The NRG meets every 6 months, under the chair of each Presidency in turn and supported by EC, to share national experiences and create a common platform for cooperation and coordination of national activities across the European Union, as well as for their follow up at national level. It provides a stable, continuing focus for consensus building between Member States, for promoting good practice, and for encouraging initiatives to support the visibility of quality cultural sites. In line with the Lund Action Plan, the NRG has launched experts workgroups on strategic issues with the support of the Minerva project (see below). <http://www.cordis.lu/ist/ka3/digital/nrg.htm>

National policy profiles

National policy profiles have been created to exchange information and good practice on digitisation policies and practices. The basic idea is not to duplicate information already available on digitisation but to give a survey on the current situation, to offer some contact points and to make an 'entry-point' to resources on other Web sites. A network of national profiles is expected to be completed in early 2003: most Member States have already made exemplars available via the EC Web pages. http://www.cordis.lu/ist/ka3/digital/national_prof.htm
<http://www.minervaeurope.org>

An evolving agenda

Since Lund, work has progressed through a series of meetings and workgroups, involving national experts from Member States. The expert working groups, focussing on national policy profiles, on sharing national inventories and on metadata, on benchmarking, and on quality in cultural Web sites, have carried on the activity under the supervision of the NRG. Thanks to the efforts of the Belgian Presidency, these activities have been further supported by recent Council Resolutions of 21st January 2002 on "Culture in the knowledge society" (2002/C 32/01) and "Role of culture in the development of the European Union" (OJ, 2002/C 32/01). The impetus and will to cooperate among Member States is promising important development for communities across Europe. At European level, strong support has been given to the initiative by the Presidencies in turn:

France

The French Presidency was instrumental in identifying specific objectives, included in eEurope Action Plan, that aimed at making digitised resources more visible and commonly accessible.

Sweden

The main results of the Swedish Presidency were the Lund Principles & Action Plan. In Lund expert representatives from Member States agreed on basic issues and first steps towards a coordination framework based on the benchmarking model.

Belgium

The Resolutions on "Culture in the knowledge society" and on "The role of culture in the development of the European Union", adopted by the Culture Council under the Belgian Presidency, and the results of the informal Council held in Bruges on 4/5 December 2001 endorsed the importance of encouraging the visibility and diversity of the common European heritage, and of providing quality and equality of access for all citizens to this heritage through the use of new technologies. Experts meetings, convened under the Presidency, resulted in the launch of a specific initiative: the "Brussels Quality Framework" on accessibility and quality of Web sites for cultural content. On 11 December 2001, the National Representatives Group (NRG) was set up, establishing its mission in the Terms of Reference (ToR).

Spain

During the Spanish Presidency, a Council Resolution by the European Council on the preservation of the digital memory was adopted (2002/C 162/02). This recognised the importance of sustainable approaches to safeguarding both born-digital and digitised resources and the role of the memory institutions in this process. The Presidency also hosted a workshop on "Digitisation good practises", which provided an exchange of experience forum for 42 examples from different Member States.

Key steps 2001 - 2003

January 2001
Questionnaire on national/regional policies and programmes on digitisation of cultural and scientific content

March 2001
"An open method for benchmarking digitisation policies - objectives, methodology and indicators"

4 April 2001
Lund Principles & Action Plan.

17 July 2001
Workshop on "Internet & culture, experts meeting on European Cultural Heritage on the Web"

September 2001
EC Communication on "Accessibility of Public Web Sites" COM(2001) 529, Brussels, 25.09.2001

10 December 2001
The enchmarking Workgroup agreed the proposed model and launched the first data collection

11 December 2001
1st National Representatives Group (NRG) meeting in Brussels, in cooperation with the Belgian Presidency. Brussels Quality Framework, for accessibility and quality of Web sites for cultural content, developed

January 2002
Council Resolutions 2002/C C32/01 e C32/02 on "Culture in the knowledge society" and "Role of culture in the development of the European Union"

March 2002
Minerva Thematic Network Project started

16 May 2002
2nd NRG meeting in Alicante, under the Spanish Presidency

17 May 2002
Workshop on "Digitisation good practices" in Alicante, organised by the Spanish Presidency and Minerva project

September 2002
Council Resolution 2002/C 162/02 on "Preserving tomorrow's memory - preserving digital content for future generations"

17 October 2002
Workshop on "The Quality in Cultural Web Sites" in Rome at the Bibliocom Conference, organised by the Minerva Project

10 December 2002
3rd NRG meeting in Copenhagen, under the Danish Presidency

11 December 2002
Workshop on "Preservation of digital memory" in Copenhagen, organised by the Danish Presidency

26 June 2003
4th NRG meeting in Corfu, under coordination of the Greek Presidency

27-28 June 2003
Workshop on "Digitisation of Cultural Content" in Corfu, organised by the Greek Presidency

16-17 October 2003
International conference on "Long Term Preservation of Digital Memories" in Florence, organised by the Italian Presidency

19-20 November 2003
International congress on Web Quality for Culture, in Parma, organised by the Italian Presidency and the Minerva project

21 November 2003
5th NRG meetings in Parma, under coordination of the Italian Presidency

Denmark

The NRG meeting under the Danish Presidency primarily focused on the National Reports, produced by each representative and presented in the following chapters, as well as future strategies of the NRG to carry on the coordination efforts. A workshop on "Preservation of the digital memory" was attended by a series of experts from both Member States and other countries.

For a detailed sequence of events, please refer to the "key steps 2001-2003" section. For full information, please refer to the reports and documents on the following site:
<http://www.cordis.lu/ist/ka3/digital/reports.htm>
<http://www.minervaeurope.org>

Minerva

MINERVA, MINisterial NETwork for Valorising Activities in digitisation, funded under the IST Programme and coordinated by the Italian Ministry of Culture, acts as a secretariate for NRG meetings and for implementing the Lund Action Plan. It coordinates 5 experts workgroups on: benchmarking of digitisation policies, metadata and resource discovery, interoperability, good practice and competence centre, and quality and accessibility of Web sites. Minerva started with 7 countries and plans to extend the network to all Member States to provide a collaborative European framework for the Lund Action Plan and its working groups.

- Minerva activities include:
- experts work groups to provide the political and technical framework for improving digitisation activities and defining a common platform;
 - international forum and publications to exchange information about national digitisation policies;
 - implementing a benchmarking framework for digitisation, so that national approaches can be compared in order to promote best practices across Europe;
 - organising meetings, workshops and training activities to exchange experiences, identify priorities and plan work programmes.

- Minerva main expected results are:
- contribution to the co-ordination of national programmes and activities in the Member States;
 - identification of good practice & competence centres;
 - recommendations and guidelines on digitisation management; benchmarking methodology; resource discovery and multilingualism; rights management; interoperability; users' needs and quality for Web sites; and long-term accessibility.

The latest Progress Report produced by the Minerva consortium is annexed.
<http://www.minervaeurope.org>