CO-ORDINATION MECHANISMS FOR DIGITISATION POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES: NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVES GROUP (NRG)

SUMMARY REPORT AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE MEETING OF 10 DECEMBER 2002

The third meeting of the NRG was held in Copenhagen on 10 December under the chairmanship of the Danish Presidency, hosted by the Danish Culture Ministry on the premises of the Royal Library.

OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING

The NRG is established, according to its terms of reference, to monitor, implement and coordinate actions in respect of digitisation programmes and policies in Europe. Formal adoption or endorsement of the Terms of Reference by the participating Member States is ongoing and progress is reported regularly to the NRG. The specific objectives of the meeting in Copenhagen were to:

- report on progress in the Member States in meeting the objectives outlined in the Lund Principles, through the production by each :Member State of **a report on NRG-related activities** it has carried out over the previous 12 months; and to present a summary of how these will be integrated in a single comprehensive report drafted by the Danish Presidency and the European Commission, for publication by the European Commission;

- review ongoing co-operative actions at European level, including those carried out by MINERVA, and recommend and endorse strategies for the further take-up at national level of these actions;

- identify and prioritise emerging issues affecting work in this area and make recommendations about how to take these forward through the Lund Action Plan and other relevant ongoing initiatives.

The Lund Action Plan will be updated with progress and planning on a 6-monthly cycle, using as input the outcomes of MINERVA, the actions agreed at NRG meetings, and the progress and achievements in the Member States and validated by the NRG.

Follow-up of activities from Alicante meeting: The overall summary of progress and actions agreed at the previous meeting under the Spanish Presidency in Alicante noted that good progress had been made, particularly in the production of substantive national reports, but that this was uneven with some activities not yet embarked upon. Regarding the reports, the Commission would publish these as early in 2003 as possible.

MAIN FEATURES OF WORK IN 2002

Policies and programmes for digitisation:

- **Policy initiatives** being undertaken in the Member States cover both the introduction of new policies for digitisation and the further development or expansion of existing policies. Practices range from bottom-up approaches, focused on institutional policies (with no over-arching national one) to regional, sectoral (ie library specific, archive specific etc) or national programmes and policies. An emerging policy dimension is the positioning of digitisation policies as an element in wider information or knowledge society activities. In this context, issues of access, service delivery and interoperability are emerging as key drivers. Also emerging as important is the role of institutions with a national, archival mandate (major libraries, archives or major museums).

- **Policy profiles**: in countries where they have been published they have been beneficial in raising initial awareness; future work in these countries is now moving to considering how to "drill-down" to information (in addition to the baseline profile) and in keeping this up to date. To ensure the information is usable, there is also a need to review what target audience is and to redefine the functionality required from the policy and programme information on digitisation. However, given the diversity of policy initiatives in place, there is still need to continue to provide generally accessible and understood baseline information at international level, as well as detailed information in national languages for national audiences.

- **Coordination** is essential in these environments and the national NRG representative has continued to be instrumental in fostering and in many cases taking the lead on developing, at national level, co-operative networks which now exist in almost all

Member States. Issues remaining: competence and responsibility; cross-sectoral cooperation; and promoting visibility. Activities at national level also yield examples of good practice that can be adopted in other contexts.

▪ A **practical manifestation of this coordination** is the establishment of national portals, either specific to the cultural sector or including culture in wider Information Society or government portals.

BENCHMARKING

- The **benchmarking model** for qualitative benchmarking of policies and programmes has been adopted and is being implemented, according to national requirements, in a number of Member States. In some cases, it is being used directly to develop criteria for projects within funding programmes.

- The next step of **collecting quantitative data** moves the focus of the exercise from the policy holders and programme funders to the cultural institutions themselves.

- At **European level, the working group on benchmarking** is concentrating on developing review processes based on the implementations of the model to date, and on defining quantitative data to be collected. A key issue is to ensure the collection of compatible and comparable data, both qualitative and quantitative.

INVENTORIES AND RESOURCE DISCOVERY

- National cultural portals, culture-nets, or listings of projects exist in at least 10 Member States, but not all provide comprehensive or even systematic overviews at national level. Different initiatives are also at different stages, from scoping studies and surveys to developing services for access and delivery.

- The strategic challenges cover maintaining the tools, overcoming the fragmentation of coverage, developing coordination with other activities, and building up services.

- Standards for **collection level descriptions** (which would be a major component in supporting interoperability) are beginning to be investigated, including OAi and EAD. Making these interoperable in a cross-domain environment and at European level remains a major challenge. Work is needed to promote XML-based metadata

standards to support this interoperability, as a precursor to developing semantic interoperability and new access services.

PROMOTION OF GOOD PRACTICE

- **Benchmarking supports self-evaluation** in the development of good practice. However, further visibility to and promotion of the model for this purpose is needed.

- **Advisory centres** and associated practical competence in different areas of digitisation exist in a number of Member States and these are often producers of guidelines. However, such sources of expertise are highly specialised but fragmented and, in most cases, the result of bottom-up, hands on experience gained by the institutions themselves and specific to particular sectors (libraries) or source material types (published text, film, sound, photographs etc).

- **Candidate projects** have been identified, but these need to be contextualised by clear references to the specific good practice areas and guidelines they illustrate.

EUROPEAN ADDED-VALUE & CONTENT FRAMEWORK

- **Quality** is a critical and timely issue. The W3C-WAI guidelines are recognised explicitly by a growing number of MS (though not yet necessarily implemented). In line with this it is also recognised that a quality framework with associated criteria that are specific to the cultural domain need to be promoted rapidly, together with work on mechanisms for its adoption. Endorsement of the **Brussels Quality Framework** and associated recommendations from the Quality Working Group for the implementation and use of the Framework, are a key step in this process.

- **Sustainability** is most actively addressed through the recognition of the importance of and need to address long term preservation, both at national/institutional policy level and through the development of research actions, in European and national programmes. There is strong commitment to taking forward the work of the Spanish Presidency on Preserving Tomorrow's Memory from the Danish Presidency (conference on 11 December) and the future Greek and Italian Presidencies.

- Longer term and **sustainable development** of a more integrated European content framework, however, also needs to develop focus on the following issues: multilingualism and cultural diversity; accessibility, exploitation and delivery of digitised cultural content, including its integration into other information/knowledge society based services for citizens.

- Links with **research** initiatives need to be pursued, to support partnerships between technology and industry and the institutions, and to structure the European digitised content space. Priority topics for research are interoperability, semantic web and long-term preservation. The issues generally fall into the following clusters:: technical topics (middleware for searching distributed content, visualisation and 3D); content issues, including the role of cultural institutions to support research; access strategies and policies, including end-user research and business models; organisational and policy issues.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS (JANUARY – JUNE 2003)

The meeting agreed that the NRG members at national level would undertake and support the following actions, in addition to the ongoing support for the workgroups coordinated through MINERVA.

- Finalise national reports and validate the overview report, by the beginning of January 2003. The Commission will publish these with the support of MINERVA by 21 February 2003.

- Exploit the emerging body of information on policies and programmes, and the associated coordination and sources of advice in the Member States by producing an **NRG Handbook**. This should be easily maintainable and should consolidate the factual information produced from the following actions:

  o **National policy profiles and web pages**: with the aid of MINERVA, revisit the definition of the functionalities of the profile and revise the guidelines to the questionnaire in this light. This would have the dual objective: create a functional specification for Member States to implement as they require and to endorse the proposed "light profile" for compatible access to the information by a multilingual audience at European Level.

  o **exchange information on the coordination groups** set up in their countries, including fuller information on membership, status, mandates and working methods. Investigate practical mechanisms for ongoing interactions between the groups and create a forum for bringing these national networks together in a dedicated NRG workshop or on topic approach linked to existing national conferences. This would add visibility to the activities and role of the NRG.

- o support MINERVA working group on good practice in providing the information it requests and provide input from national inventories of **practical advisory centres and guidelines**.

- **MINERVA benchmarking workgroup** should come back to the NRG with a clear position paper and recommendations on the model and its implementation as result of ongoing experiments on policy benchmarking, and a strategy for developing approaches to collecting quantitative data.

- the NRG at national level should validate and approve **good practice guides**, which summarise the ongoing work and results from MINERVA, and distribute these to its cultural institutions and in its national language as needed.

- **interoperability**: support the development of agreements on metadata for **collection level descriptions,** as an aid to the development of common cross-domain and cross-sectoral services. This should be informed by a background study of ongoing initiatives and standards (eg XML, open standards), carried out under the aegis of MINERVA, and delivered to the Greek Presidency for the next NRG meeting.

- respond to the recommendations from the Working Group on quality by identifying strategies and actions that would be necessary for **adoption and implementation of the Quality Framework** at national level, as well as for the practical application of the quality criteria to digitised cultural resources accessible via the Web.

- NL will produce a position paper on EU-added value to be prepared for the next NRG meeting.

EMERGING STRATEGIC ISSUES

- **preparation for potential extension to candidate countries** by proposing to the Commission key experts or actors in these countries, focusing at first stage on those best positioned to enhance the European dimension of the actions.

- promotion of **multilingual access** to essential common information on digitisation policies and programmes and the resources they have created.

- continuing **the contribution to the emerging digital preservation policies** initiatives and **establishing contacts at national level** with policy and stakeholders in this area, eg with broadcast and audiovisual archives, eScience and eGovernment actions.

- **Creating a European area for digitised cultural resources** and defining the EU-added value of the content framework. Emerging issues are those of optimising content creation (eg via linking national memory programmes and projects, collaborative policies for digitisation), open technical infrastructures, IPR, exploitation, business models, multilingualism and service delivery. A 'groupe de réflexion' will be established, chaired by the Commission, to develop an agenda or road map, building on other activities funded through current FP5 RTD projects or national programmes to identify how their results can be applied to digitised resources and to identify remaining research issues. The Groupe will work closely with the NL representative as it develops the position paper. MINERVA should enable this group and create a discussion space for NRG to enter into the debate of the Groupe and of new priorities as they emerge. Candidate names should be forwarded to Commission and to Presidency.

- Links with **research** initiatives need to be pursued, to support partnerships between technology and industry and the institutions, to exploit the enabling cpportunities of advanced technologies; and to structure the European digitised content space.

- **Building expertise** by involving new experts in ongoing work and developing new skills in the cultural institutions. Linked to this is the need to "embed digitisation" in the routine work of the institutions.

CONCLUSION

The NRG agreed that its focus, within its existing Terms of Reference, lay with becoming a platform for pro-active coordination (leaving routine implementation of Lund Action Plan objectives to MINERVA). The NRG should actively promote visibility of its activities, identify emerging priorities, encourage wider cooperation (either to the institutions or to other sectors) and provide a prospective strategy paper on a bi-annual basis, together with a renewal of the national nominations to the NRG. **The troika should work together to ensure continuity of the agenda, development of themes and goals for them, and planning for each NRG meeting.**

The Greek Presidency is holding a major conference on Cultural Heritage, Copyright, Related Rights and New Technologies, 7-8 April. Corfu – date of next NRG meeting, Corfu 26 June 2003, and workshop on "Digitisation of Cultural Heritage and added-value services" on "7-28 June. Under the Italian Presidency the NRG issues on preservation and IPR will be continued with a proposed International Conference on Long Term Preservation of Digital Memories in

Florence, an international congress on Accessibility and Quality Framework on Cultural web site, 19-29 November followed by NRG meeting on 21 November.

The meeting thanked the Danish Presidency for its organisation of and constructive input to the debate of this meeting. The NRG appreciated the Presidency's work in support of the Lund Action Plan and welcomed the widening of the discussions to look at new priorities and the follow-up given to the Spanish Presidency's work on digital preservation through the conference on this topic held on 11 December, 2002.

Discussion

Size and scale of the challenge, scope and need to generate focus through work on specific themes – but there needs to be continuity in the development of the issues, not confined to one Presidency.

Brand definition – more difficult and early days. But visibility can be tackled immediately, eg by brochure outlining what NRG does and what MINERVA does.

Visibility – mobilise the national networks.

Presidency taking active responsibility for follow-up and execution of the actions agreed at the previous meeting – by asking specific Nreps to do certain things.