

Horst Forster

Director

Digital Content & Cognitive Systems

Information Society and Media Directorate-General

European Commission

**BUILDING THE EUROPEAN DIGITAL LIBRARY
— OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME**

EUROPE'S CULTURAL AND SCIENTIFIC HERITAGE IN A DIGITAL WORLD

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE, BERLIN

21-22 FEBRUARY 2007

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the context of our i2010 - Digital Libraries initiative the European Commission envisages the creation of a European Digital Library: a unique resource to Europe's distributed cultural heritage, ensuring a common access to millions of great paintings, historical writings, ancient manuscripts, diaries of the famous and not so famous, personal photos, and important national documents from Europe's libraries, archives and museums.

Digitisation of these objects and making them available electronically not only creates easier access to them for students, researchers and citizens at large, but can also considerably increase their economic impact and boost innovation and creativity in Europe.

The European Digital Library — and particularly the digital content behind it — will be the starting point to this. It will ensure that Europe's heritage will become better available, valuable and usable. And it will facilitate new added value services in education, media and entertainment.

In my talk I will address three critical areas of action where stakeholders are working hard and the Commission is supporting various activities to make this a reality.

1. cross-domain collaboration

To begin with, digitisation has benefits beyond improved accessibility. Collaboration between institutions and the various cultural domains leads to reunification of dispersed collections or the linking of seemingly disconnected documents and artefacts. It provides both a convenience to the user and a more complete picture of the heritage memorialised in the collections all over Europe.

Take for example the works of Hans Holbein the Younger. They can now be seen in more than fifteen different museums in Europe, from the Louvre in Paris, the National Gallery in London, the Palazzo Barberini in Rome, Uffizi in Florence, the Maurice House in The Hague, to the Basel Art Museum and the Gemaldegalerie here in Berlin.

Or think of the traces Holbein left in the many public records while travelling through Europe, the books he illustrated for close friends, the stained-glass windows he designed, the personal correspondence he held with the Erasmus of Rotterdam which he met in Basel, or the robes he created for King Henry the VIII while staying in London.

The scattered whereabouts of Holbein's works clearly show how the richness of Europe's heritage has been dynamically created, collected and moved and traded from place to place over the centuries, to only finally come to

reside or leave important traces in our national, regional and local archives, libraries, galleries and museums as we know them today. Therefore, the very basis of a European Digital Library is cross-domain and cross-border, and when it comes to digitisation we need collaboration between these domains all over Europe to create — or re-create — the connections between these objects and collections and make them available and useful again to ourselves and our children. It will then be possible to have a permanent exhibition of all the main works of, say, Holbein or Memling — the latter also leaving traces in Florence without even having been there — rather than organising major exhibitions every 20 or 50 years, as was done in the past.

This may be an easy thing to say but, as we know, such collaboration does not start just by the goodwill of a few organisations. It involves much wider, long term and strategic arrangements that — on their turn — impact on the governance model and business model possibilities for the European Digital Library that we need to come up with very soon.

CENL and the TEL office are preparing the organisational grounds for implementing the European Digital Library in line with the Council conclusions of last November. They will take governance and associated organisational models as a first priority, ensuring to include archives and

museums — I want to make clear again that the European Digital Library is not at all a purely library-led initiative. And involvement in the European Digital Library will strengthen the visibility and service level of archives and museums alike. Equal participation and a fair contribution by all participants is a prerequisite.

Finally, the aim is also to create a model that attracts *private* content holders to make their content accessible online. The latter is especially important, as Europe needs private cooperation to also make more modern works searchable and discoverable through the European Digital Library. Early involvement by, for example, publishers should take away the possible suspicion that the European Digital Library is intended to exclude them or somehow to subvert their rights.

2. interoperability and multilingual access

It is not yet always understood that the European Digital Library will be an *access* point to cultural content and not just a *discovery* point or portal redirecting users. The European Digital Library must offer deep and cross-search possibilities to be able to make a difference. This will enable functionalities which make it easier to use and re-use the many different works of Holbein and all the others that left their important traces scattered over Europe. The European Digital Library will make it possible to link them and add value to them.

To be able to do so, we need to tackle many issues of interoperability still. The European Digital Library will need to encompass many metadata formats and be able to display text, pictures, video, sound and 3D objects effectively. It needs a model that can deal with different technical and logical architectures, that can encompass harvesting and crawling, that can deal with various protocols and standards, and is able to deal with full text and metadata.

Improvements still need to be made in multilingual search and retrieval, use of controlled vocabularies to create more structured and cross-domain searching.

A lot of technical work in these areas is already being carried out by projects like BRICKS, DELOS, MULTIMATCH — and soon the EDL-net and TELplus projects. To set a pragmatic scope, prioritise and put together a first framework for the European Digital Library's interoperability to which these different projects are expected to deliver their parts, the Commission has arranged a working group with stakeholders from libraries, archives and museums. The group will prepare input to a shorter term implementation strategy for legacy systems to which the various actions can align, and identify the elements needed for a longer-term European Digital Library framework that should feed into future actions under the research and eContentPlus programmes.

3. creating a critical mass

The success of the European Digital Library depends not just on the technical infrastructure but — simply enough — on the existence of digital copies. And, as at this time only a very small part of the relevant collections — less than 1 percent — is digitised, we have something else to concentrate on as well: Europe's digital culture lacks a critical mass.

Therefore, organisations engaged in digitisation — both at the national and European level — must collaborate better to digitise more effectively and efficiently, to prevent duplication of efforts and to stop fragmentation of their scarce financial resources.

The investments needed for digitisation are large. Shared strategies are necessary. One way is to mobilise public-private partnerships. Digital libraries are not the sole business of the public sector. Internet media companies, publishers, online bookstores, search engines and technology providers have a crucial role to play — and not necessarily a bad one. Successful collaboration between public and private entities, in particular for digitisation, has shown different forms already, for example the cooperation between Microsoft and the British Library, and between Google and, among others, the Oxford University Library.

Another, interesting approach was taken in The Netherlands. There, 154 million Euros was recently allocated from the national gas returns to a programme for the large scale digitisation of film, video and audio heritage. Even more interesting is the underlying study to this, claiming 176 million Euros of positive economic effects drawn from, inter alia, an increased use of the material and copyrights and a far-going cost-reduction through better handling conditions and professional delivery services.

Fostering new public and private investments in digitisation was one of the measures called for by the Commission to the Member States in November last year to help build the critical mass needed for a truly functioning European Digital Library. Other measures range from setting up large scale digitisation facilities in Member States; stimulating cultural institutions to make their content accessible through the European Digital Library; and improving basic conditions for digitisation and online accessibility, for example by removing barriers for bringing online public domain material.

Member States, through *your* Ministers of culture, have embraced the Commission's approach to the European digital library and to the broader issues of digitisation and online accessibility. They have announced their willingness to work together on the measures called for by the

Commission. And — to regularly report on their implementation progress.

In this context, the Commission has committed to set up a group of Member States' experts that will assist in monitoring the implementation of the Commission Recommendation and the related Council Conclusions.

Scientific information

Before ending my talk, I would like to mention — in the context of this conference — also a little bit more on a related issue we have been working on and that the Commission has very recently brought into perspective. It is about digital libraries of *scientific* and *scholarly* information. In a Communication that was adopted on 14 February, the Commission has addressed issues of access, dissemination and preservation of digital scientific material. The Communication examines how new technologies can be better used to increase digital access to research publications and data as an important driver for innovation. The Communication provides an objective overview of the current state of play in Europe regarding digital publishing and the preservation of research results, aiming to support new ways for promoting better access to scientific information online and to preserve research results digitally for future generations. Commissioners Reding and Potočnik presented the Communication at a major conference in Brussels last week. In terms of concrete measures, the Commission has, at this stage, identified the following:

To improve current and future access to scientific information, we will support experiments with open access in our recently-launched 7th framework programme for

R&D — for example by refunding the project costs of open access publishing.

For 2007-2008 we have also set aside about 50 million Euros to support and help coordinate infrastructures for storing scientific data across Europe, whereas we expect to co-fund about 25 million Euros into research on digital preservation. Through our eContentplus programme we will allocate 10 million Euros to improve interoperability and multilingual access to collections of scientific material.

Conclusions

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We can already see that an increasing number of Member States is actually willing to make an effort and many new digitisation programmes are starting up. To exploit these national efforts also at a European level, cultural content holders need better and affordable methods, technologies and applications allowing them to make available their digitised resources within the European networks and services — especially within the European Digital Library context.

In FP7, the Commission will, therefore, step up the support for research projects creating more large-scale European-wide digital libraries, robust and scalable environments and cost effective digitisation processes.

Through the eContentPlus Programme we will continue reinforcing the networking between museums, archives and libraries — which, for 2007 and 2008, will particularly aim at interoperability issues for linking museums and archives' collections into the European Digital Library's infrastructure.

All together, this should provide Europe with new capacities and skills for digitisation as well as common standards, new harvesting methods and multilingual tools

for linking the various collections of Europe into the European Digital Library. We count on all stakeholders to align to the vision of the European Digital Library.

* * *