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DL.org - Digital Library Interoperability, Best Practices and Modelling Foundations: A Common Journey to New Frontiers

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Mining the vast array of digital content that is being made available offers enormous value for Europe, underpinning the work of cultural, educational and research institutions from diverse disciplines and opening up new windows of opportunity for co-operation on a global scale. Truly effective access to digital data is only feasible with interoperable systems, which enable organizations to maximize the value and reuse potential of information, and exchange information across organizational and geographical boundaries to generate new knowledge from previously isolated data sets.

The availability of increased resources brings huge benefits to diverse user groups. However, making systems interoperable is a complex process that needs to take into consideration core requirements for digital library architecture, content, functionality, policy, quality and user perspectives. DL.org is a recently funded EC project spearheading the important drive towards interoperability as key to ensuring that the development of digital libraries is catered to the specific needs of a broad spectrum of user communities. DL.org aims to forge strong alliances with major stakeholders and the wider digital library community to harness the global expertise and knowledge that exists and maximize opportunities for the enhanced development of digital systems, which can be shaped by all DL actors.

To this end, DL.org will foster an effective two-way dialogue with representatives from DL initiatives, with the aim of addressing the on-going needs of the community, capturing best practices and promoting shared standards. DL.org provides a forum for knowledge exchange and the deliberation of key issues and new directions supported by eTraining courses designed to enable the next generation of DL professionals. DL.org will support and inform the cross-domain community through workshops, synergies and advocacy with a variety of DL initiatives.

The DELOS Digital Library Reference Model serves as the starting point to define and respond to the specific needs of diverse user groups with domain scientists and DL representatives, playing a fundamental role in encapsulating advanced perspectives and providing updated specifications on the DELOS concept. Focused investigations into DL architecture, content, functionality, policy, quality and user perspectives are thus expected to foster common understanding on interoperability solutions.

"Today, no single institution or platform can reasonably claim to offer substantial value without co-operating, and uniform technical approaches can neither be expected nor strived for! New and increasingly complex distributed platforms are built around key concepts like 'co-operation', 'federation' and 'virtual aggregation' of services and resources. Such DL architectures fundamentally rely on interoperability which in turn has its foundations in standards, especially in settings such as Europeana which are built on multilateral interoperability of many independent partners and platforms. One of the first steps the Commission took for preparing Europeana was to create a working group on 'Interoperability of Digital Libraries'. The DELOS Reference Model was very useful for this group and I strongly believe that the same will be true for the work of DL.org for the DL community as a whole!", says Prof. Dr. Stefan Gradmann, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Berlin School of Library and Information Science and Leading Europeana.net WP2 ("Technical and Semantic Interoperability").

"The key challenge for digital libraries is intelligent, seamless integration of information search, use, and production into user activities and tasks. DLs must use a task-centric as opposed to an application-centric approach. DL.org provides a forum to shape these ideas, among others, and to systematise them in the Digital Library Reference Model for wide communication. Along the way, DL.org will foster consensus and mutual understanding among stakeholders, thus moving

the field forward in both theory and practice. I am looking forward to participating in the common journey to new frontiers", remarks Professor Dagobert Soergel, University of Maryland, USA.

Geneva Henry from Rice University, USA, sees the launch of DL.org as both timely and much needed, providing an umbrella for existing and future digital library projects, thus avoiding fragmentation and duplication in functionally. "The community has grown significantly in the last decade, with many experiments launched and lessons-learned. The current landscape is now in need of co-ordination to harness the global expertise that exists. Building from the Digital Library Reference Model work, DL.org brings together a team of researchers with a proven track record that is recognised worldwide for their expertise in the digital library community. They recognise that interoperable systems are the key to ensuring that digital libraries continue to grow in a way that meets the needs of users across the Web. The core work within DL.org will therefore fill crucial needs for the global digital library community", comments Geneva Henry.

IMPACT: Improving Access to Text

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In the i2010 vision of a European Digital Library, the EU launched an ambitious plan for large scale digitisation projects transforming Europe's printed heritage into digitally available resources. The aim of fully integrating intellectual content into the modern information and communication technologies environment can only be achieved by full-text digitisation: transforming digital images of scanned books into electronic text. At the moment digitised material is still becoming available too slowly, in too small quantities and from too few sources. This is due to the high costs of digitisation, the unsatisfactory results of Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software for historical documents, and the lack of institutional knowledge and expertise, which causes inefficiency and 're-inventing the wheel'.

The IMPACT project, coordinated by the National Library of the Netherlands, aims to speed up the process and enhance the quality of mass digitisation in Europe. The fifteen partners (seven libraries, six research institutes and two private sector companies) collectively constitute a Centre of Competence that will share best practice and expertise with the cultural heritage communities in Europe. The IMPACT research programme will significantly improve digital access to historical printed text through the development and use of innovative Optical Character Recognition software and linguistic technologies.

On 6-7 April 2009, the IMPACT project will organise a two-day conference on "OCR in Mass Digitisation: Challenges between Full Text, Imaging and Language". Experts from the IMPACT consortium will be present to discuss some preliminary results from the first year of the project, while key speakers from outside the project will provide the opportunity to exchange views with other researchers and suppliers in the OCR field.

The first key speakers are now confirmed: Rose Holley from the National Library of Australia will talk about online user participation in their historical newspaper digitisation project, Simon Tanner from King's College London will discuss the analysis of OCR accuracy and from the supplier side, Claus Gravenhorst from CCS will focus on future challenges facing OCR technology. Furthermore, experts from IMPACT will talk about the online Collaborative Correction module, through which volunteers can correct the OCR results and in this way improve the adaptive OCR engine, and the various linguistic issues that come up when digitising historical text material. The conference will be held at the Koninklijke Bibliotheek (KB - National Library of the Netherlands) in The Hague; registration is limited to 150 participants.

For more information about IMPACT please visit the project website: <http://www.impact-project.eu>.

To stay updated on the latest IMPACT news and events, please send an email to <impact@kb.nl> to subscribe to the IMPACT mailing list.