Meeting of Specialists of Dutch Cultural Heritage Institutions with IT specialists

P. Wittenburg
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Cultural Heritage Institutions represented: Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, National Archives, National Library, Institute for Cultural Heritage, Institute for Sound and Vision, Digital Heritage Association
IT institutions represented: TU Eindhoven, U Maastricht, U Groningen, U Tilburg, VU Amsterdam, Telematica Institute, Max-Planck-Institute
Further participants: NWO, U Leiden,

The meeting at May 20th was meant to be a first broad brainstorming meeting within the Dutch "Digital Production Line" Initiative where MPI Nijmegen will maintain the link to the ECHO activities. The intention was to describe a number of technological topics and investigate whether these topics are relevant for the institutions in the Cultural Heritage sector. A representative of the MPI was invited to participate due to its broad knowledge in particular in metadata, property rights questions and its involvement in the ECHO project and its derived expertise.

Technological Topics
6 partly overlapping areas of technology potentially relevant for CH institutions to pave the way into the future of digital collections were presented and discussed:

1. General Infrastructure for the CH sector - basic mechanisms
2. Metadata - its generation and its usage[1]
3. Interoperability - the way to achieve institution and discipline crossing solutions
4. Knowledge disclosure - how to automatically extract metadata and annotations from images, sound and movies
5. Navigation and Presentation - how to optimally navigate in complex info spaces and how to present the results dependent on dynamic user profiles
6. Knowledge enrichment - how to add knowledge to existing cultural heritage information

Further, two side actions were presented and discussed: durability and IPR issues.

Interest by CH institutions
With respect to the side actions it was made clear that both issues are of enormous relevance and not at all solved. Measures to ensure durability of digital collections are necessary on national and European level. Huge investments will be necessary to transform all existing

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[1] The term "metadata" was used here in its restricted sense as a type of keyword like structured description of the digital object to allow management and discovery. The broader term of metadata (including annotations) was mentioned under topic 6.

collections into digital ones and to enrich them with proper descriptions. This material is stored on mediums that have a lifetime of not more than 5 years. Suitable and stable ways have to be defined to guarantee survival of these collections for much longer periods.

The IPR problem is so virulent for all museums and archives from a layered set of reasons and it is not at all clear yet how IPR questions can be dealt with in a satisfying manner for digital collections present in the Web. The museums have to realize part of their budget by own revenues. How can they protect their collections against commercial misuse? Partly, the museums are not owners of the objects they have in their collections. Are they allowed to present digital versions in the Web? How can museums promote their name, since they are the institutions that have to maintain the collections? Many problems thus that are not yet tackled.

In both cases it is recommended to synchronize between the efforts in the Dutch CH community with initiatives such as ECHO.

With respect to the 6 major technical topics it turned out that all are seen as relevant for the CH institutions. However, given that currently much digitization work is carried out with steadily growing digital collections as a result the most relevant problems are seen in a suitable metadata description of the digital objects to allow efficient management and discovery. So, topics 2 and 3 were indicated as the next major steps of concern. The participating institutions have holdings with several hundred thousand of objects. It is this huge number that requires efficient and where possible automatic solutions to generate and maintain descriptive metadata. Currently, some institutions already use metadata sets, but others have still to decide about this.

All institutions see the advanced possibilities introduced by the Internet to combine existing distributed holdings to new ones. To achieve this the interoperability problem has to be tackled at various levels. The hardest to solve is the semantic level. Several possible schemes similar to those that were suggested by the MPI Nijmegen in the ECHO framework were presented and discussed. In particular in this area the MPI Nijmegen will contribute in both directions to take maximal profit from the efforts.

Summary
MPI Nijmegen will continue to maintain close connections between ECHO and the Dutch initiative, contribute in particular with technologies that are directed towards the Semantic Web (metadata, interoperability and intelligent navigation) and will take care of mutual fertilization in all possible aspects.