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**MINERVA: IMPROVING THE PRODUCTION OF
DIGITAL CULTURAL HERITAGE IN EUROPE.**

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Abstract

The MINERVA project is a network of the ministries of culture of the Member States of the European Union. The consortium acts both on political and technical level and aims at harmonising the activities carried out in the digitisation field and valorising the good practices across Europe.

Keywords Europe, digitisation, benchmarking, inventories, metadata, IPR, quality framework, best practices.

The objectives

The MINERVA project is the operative section of a wider framework made up of the Lund Principles, the Lund Action Plan and the National Representatives Group (NRG).

In particular, in April 2001, during a meeting held in Lund, representatives and experts have discussed on coordination mechanisms for digitisation programmes across European Member States and how to stimulate a European content on global networks. Subsequently the NRG was born: composed by officially appointed experts from each Member State, the aim of the NRG is to coordinate digitisation policies and programmes, to facilitate the adoption and implementation of the Lund Action Plan and to monitor progress in reaching the objectives outlined in the Lund Principles. The NRG meets every 6 months to share national experiences under the aegis of the presidency in turn.

The project has built a network of Member States' ministries - coordinated by the Italian Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Activities - to discuss, compare and harmonise activities carried out in the field of digitisation of cultural and scientific content.

Since the main problems encountered in this sector are linked to the fragmentation of approaches and lack of synergies between skills achieved in the fifteen countries, the final goal is to create an agreed European common platform – through recommendations and guidelines – about digitisation, metadata, long-term accessibility and preservation.

Another issue to highlight is that MINERVA can be considered as an occasion for a concrete collaboration, at national and European level, between memory institutions acting within different sectors of the cultural heritage field.

The project is funded by the European Commission within the IST programme - Fifth Framework Programme of Research and Technological Development.

By the political point of view, MINERVA aim at ensuring a strict cooperation between Member States – and with the European Commission – and at giving visibility to national initiatives, promoting exchange of good practices and diffusing European Commission politics and programmes.

The technical activities are carried out in order to create a common European platform as a precondition to enable on line accessibility to cultural and scientific heritage: within MINERVA some technical working groups have been set up on specific issues. The results achieved by the different working groups are analysed by the NRG for validation and diffusion.

The activities

MINERVA has contributed to the creation of a broad consensus on the European framework derived from the e-Europe initiative; in many countries, thanks to the project, many new national programmes of digitisation of cultural heritage started up. Moreover, MINERVA has contributed to create a process of institutional collaboration among the various presidencies of the European Union.

The MINERVA technical working groups are listed below:

benchmarking and good practices, to exchange comparable information between Member States on digitisation programmes and policies and give visibility to national activities. An important objective is to promote the adoption of a benchmarking framework as a key tool for co-ordination and harmonisation of national activities as well as to develop measures to show progress and improvement;

Identification of good practises and competence centres, to support the improvement of skills and raise efficiency in digitisation by encouraging take-up of good practices.

Interoperability and service provision, to support interoperability and the delivery of shared services, by examining, identifying and evaluating activities on metadata, registries and schemes;

Workgroup on problems connected to data protection and intellectual property rights in relation to the accessibility of cultural heritage via web;

Inventories, discovery of digitised content, multilingualism issues: to give visibility and accessibility to European cultural and scientific content through inventories of past, on-going and planned digitisation projects based on national observatories; to define a sustainable technical infrastructure for coordinated discovery of European digitised cultural and scientific content, including a common set of metadata for description; to analyse solutions to technical and cultural constraints deriving from multilingual problems; to propose a common platform (XML and open source) for accessing distributed information in Europe, to be proposed for application at European level.

Identification of user needs, content and quality framework for common access points, to encourage the use of quality framework in cultural web sites by implementation and dissemination of quality criteria. In particular the working group at the moment is working to produce a Handbook - expected by end of 2003 - on quality for public cultural web applications (both for users and developers)

MINERVA EDITORIAL PRODUCTS

MINERVA publishes handbooks and guidelines on digitisation, edited by its working groups, and an annual NRG progress report. All the products are characterised by a practical approach to provide clear and exhaustive information on digitisation in Europe.

At the moment the first Progress report of the National Representatives Group 2002 is already available, while soon will be published Good practice handbook with the collection of the existing guidelines on digitisation, Quality framework for the development of cultural Web sites, Collection of the existing laws on IPR, Progress report of the National Representatives Group 2003.

MINERVA also experimented other tools to communicate its activities: the Newsletter, that provides constant updating about the MINERVA news - the subscription is possible through the MINERVA web site – and The MINERVA mailing list to distribute information to users interested in the digitisation issues.

The Global report - Coordinating digitisation in Europe

Its aim is to diffuse MINERVA results to a wide public, offering a general overview on politics, programmes, projects on digitisation of cultural and scientific content in the 15

Member States. This product is available in the MINERVA web site:
<http://www.minervaeurope.org/publications/globalreport.htm>.

The Handbook on quality for cultural web sites

The handbook, accordingly to the regulatory framework on accessibility to contents owned by Public Administrations developed within the e-Europe 2002 Action Plan, proposes methods and criteria to join content quality agreed at European level, with a particular attention to disable people, to ensure an information society for all.

The issue of the web quality applied to the cultural field, the challenge is fascinating: on the one hand, we have the world of culture, which has been defined and classified by centuries of theoretical and practical formulation. On the other, we have a new, revolutionary technology, which is having an extraordinary impact on communication and the spread of information and knowledge.

A draft of the Handbook is available on line:
http://www.minervaeurope.org/publications/qualitycriteria1_0.htm. Comments are welcome before 1st September 2003.

The Handbook will be presented during the Parma Conference (see below).

The Good Practice Handbook

This paper is the result of the MINERVA project's best practice working group and provides useful information to the establishment, execution and management of digitisation projects, with particular focus on the cultural area (libraries, museums, archives). It is a reasoned organisation of the data collected across Europe until may 2002 and is enriched with a selection of the existing guidelines on digitisation.

A draft of the Handbook is available on line:
<http://www.minervaeurope.org/publications/goodhand.htm>. Comments and suggestions can be sent before 15th September 2003. The definitive version will be ready on 29th October 2003.

The International Conference Quality for Cultural Web Sites, Parma, 20th-21st November.

In the ambit of events organised under the Italian Presidency of the European Union, the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali is organising the European Conference “Quality for Cultural Web Sites – Online Cultural Heritage for Research, Education and Cultural Tourism Communities”) in collaboration with the European Commission, the Emilia Romagna Region, the Province of Parma, the Municipality of Parma and the University of Parma, and in the scope of the Minerva project.

The Conference will take place on the 20th and the 21st of November 2003 in the Paganini Auditorium of Parma. The designated representatives of the governments of the fifteen member states of the European Union, of the ten candidate countries, of Israel and Russia will participate in the Conference.

During the event the guidelines regarding the quality of culture Web sites will be presented, fruit of the combined efforts of European experts who have participated in the aforementioned Minerva project, the European Ministries of Culture network, which has as its objective the creation of a common European platform for cultural heritage digitization activities.

The Conference, which represents an occasion of noteworthy importance for experts and sector operators, intends to debate the main themes connected to the aspects of the online accessibility of cultural heritage to facilitate its access to a wider public all over the world, and to promote the development and valorisation of cultural tourism services and will be divided into three sessions dedicated respectively to accessibility and communication, guidelines for quality of culture Web sites, copyright and data protection; and will close with the discussion, during the concluding round table, about future perspectives.

The programme of the Conference is on line:

<http://www.minervaeurope.org/events/parma/parmaconference-i.htm>

There will be also a poster session “Web quality for culture” to present good practice regarding content quality for cultural Web Site, accessibility, IPR issues, communication and language.

Events of the Italian Presidency

During the Italian presidency of the EU, in the second half of 2003 some events will be organised by the Cabinet of the Minister, the general Secretariat and all the General Directorates of Ministry, in cooperation with the Regions, within the Lund principles spreading activities:

- Florence, 16th-17th October: International Conference on Long Term Preservation of Digital Memories (organised by the MiBAC - DG for Libraries, in cooperation with MINERVA)
- Naples, 23rd-24th October: seminar Territorial information systems for the conservation, preservation and management of Cultural Heritage (organised by the MiBAC - DG for Archaeology, in cooperation with MINERVA)
- Rome, 29th October: workshop Digitisation: what to do and how to do it (in cooperation with AIB, the Italian Library Association)

MINERVA training programme.

A programme of training courses using open and distance learning methodologies has been set up in order to diffuse the results of the project, disseminate the Lund principles, improve the awareness between professionals, and create new skills in the cultural sector. The contents provided will include digitisation - process, cataloguing and management, metadata for preservation, legal aspects - IPR/copyright and data protection -, quality – i.e. criteria to plan and develop cultural Web sites, management of projects and services. Training courses will be available on line from the second half of 2003 in English, but each partner will provide national versions, the first pilot experiences will start in 2004.

MINERVAplus

To encourage a quick integration of approaches within the new EU in the field of digitization, the Italian Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Activities presented on the occasion of the last call for proposals of the 6FP (24th April) a Coordination Action, MINERVAplus, aiming at the extension of the current network to the New Accession States; the agreement was subscribed also by Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia,

Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Malta, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia, joined by Israel and Russia. This proposal has been successful.