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Collaboration – key to success of a European digital library

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The TEL-ME-MOR policy conference *Digital Future of Cultural and Scientific Heritage* in Tallinn, Estonia, 19–20 October saw policy makers from museums, archives, libraries, publishing and the European Commission call for collaboration at all levels to create a European digital library. From ensuring that established standards are used, intellectual property issues are solved to the development of a workable governance model, collaboration will be extremely important.

The opening statement of the Estonian Minister of Culture Raivo Palmaru set the scene for the conference to discuss in his words, ‘the possibilities of cooperation and setting common goals on our way towards a digital future.’ Representatives came together from most of the cultural and scientific heritage associations and networks. These included: [CENL](#), [BRICKS](#), [EiFL](#), [FEP](#), [DELOS](#), [IFLA](#), [LIBER](#), [MICHAEL](#), [UNESCO](#) and other bodies who have a stake in creating a European digital library. The 2 day conference discussed how the successful inclusion of the New Member States into The European Library, via the [TEL-ME-MOR](#) project, could be put to good use in bringing together the stakeholders of a European digital library.

The discoveries made during the project in multilingualism and the harvesting of library material for better user access are good building blocks but the project’s strongest attribute was its enormous collaborative spirit. This spirit was reflected in areas such as content development with the active translation of each others collection descriptions to promote multilingual searching. Such collaboration can lead to cultural integration, the break down of barriers and the building of trust communities within and across national boundaries. CENL is acknowledged to have had considerable experience in collaboration, witnessed by The European Library and therefore aims to try to catalyse collaboration with other cultural, scientific and educational players, both at national and European levels. Dr. Elisabeth Niggemann of the German National Library and Chair of CENL also spoke of the need for CENL ‘to promote new models of collaboration with private sector partners, publishers and rights holders.’

The conference produced a set of recommendations that can be found at: <http://telmemor.net/>. As well as emphasizing the importance of collaboration these recommendations also called upon National Governments and the EU to promote and commit to large scale digitisation and digital preservation programmes to provide the content users are seeking online. Any European digital library must have all cylinders of access, digitisation and preservation firing and to date there is a lack of digitised content from Europe’s cultural institutions. Throughout his keynote speech, Dr. Horst Forster, Director Content in the Directorate General of Information Society and Media, European Commission, re-enforced the concept of collaboration including the need to ‘unite strengths and expertise in collaboration with the TEL ([The European Library](#)) service’ and that such collaboration should ‘avoid fragmentation of scarce resources.’ He emphasised the Commission’s idea that we should build on what is already established such as The European Library and look to create centres of competence in digitisation and preservation to create the content for permanent access.

The Director of [The European Library](#), Dr. Jill Cousins, welcomed the idea of all stakeholders being involved and underlined the need for strong collaboration in these areas and the creation of technological solutions that reflect both the organisational and user needs ‘to realise a cross cultural content rich European digital library by 2010.’

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Acronym key:

CENL – Conference of European National Librarians
BRICKS – Building Resources for Integrated Cultural Knowledge Services
DELOS – Network of Excellence on Digital Libraries
EiFL – Electronic Information for Libraries
FEP – Federation of European Publishers
IFLA – International Federation of Library Associations
LIBER – Ligue des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche
MICHAEL – Multilingual Inventory of Cultural Heritage in Europe
TEL – The European Library
UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Notes for Editors:

TEL-ME-MOR is an EU funded project under the IST technologies FP6 programme. TEL-ME-MOR is supporting the 10 national libraries from the New Member States, which are partners in the project, in becoming full members of [The European Library](#), an initiative, established under the aegis of the Conference of European National Librarians ([CENL](#)), providing unified access to the electronic resources of the main European national libraries as well as to other library services.

The European Library is a service of the Conference of European Librarians. It is a portal offering multilingual federated searching across and within the collections of the national libraries of Europe. It will be the starting point organisationally and technically for a European digital library encompasses museums, archives and other holders of digitised and digital cultural heritage material.

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