

Kim H. Veltman

MMI Mission

Annual Report, MMI, 1999, Maastricht: Universiteit Maastricht, 1999.

1. Global Accessibility
 2. Research in Digital Culture
 3. Learning Lab
 4. Competence Centre
 5. Founders
 6. Knowledge Networks
-

The mission of the Maastricht McLuhan Institute (MMI) is to study and develop methods for knowledge organisation and knowledge management in a digital, distributed, multimedia world. These methods will be applied to cultural heritage, the design of learning technologies and new electronic services for business. Research will also explore the implications thereof.

The quest is to create comprehensive strategies for searching, structuring, using and presenting digital resources more coherently and efficiently; to integrate past knowledge and to produce ordered knowledge that leads to new understanding and insights.

Global Accessibility

All over the world, the titles and contents of the great libraries, museums and art galleries are becoming available on-line. While interoperable, technological standards are emerging, problems of interoperable applications, tools, interfaces and usability remain. MMI is dedicated to study the implications thereof for culture, knowledge, and learning. Practically, MMI is focussed on creating usable tools with coherent interfaces reflecting changing knowledge structures, historically and conceptually, for which cultural heritage will serve as a test case.

The late Marshall McLuhan studied how new media such as printing brought fundamental shifts in emphasis on the structure (grammar), logic (dialectic) or effects (rhetoric) of language. He offered tantalising insights as to how radio and television were introducing new shifts. His student, Walter Ong, explored how these shifts also affected classification and presentation of knowledge. MMI is concerned with how Information and Communication Technology (ICT) will affect these shifts: how it is transforming our knowledge organisation and knowledge management, as well as its implications for culture and learning. MMI has three basic units: Research; a Learning Lab and Competence Centre.

Research in Digital Culture

Existing tools provide insufficient access to the enormous potential resources of a distributed, world-wide, multimedia knowledge network for several reasons. Search

engines are typically limited to meta-data in combination with natural language. They focus on contemporary knowledge, out of context, and do not address the complexities of changing structures in earlier historical knowledge. Interfaces change with software functions (e.g. writing, drawing), and collections, but do not adapt to different needs, levels of education or degrees of experience.

To address these challenges, MMI departs from a simple premise. Reference rooms are the traditional equivalents of search engines and structuring tools. Indeed the reference rooms of libraries have served as civilisation's cumulative memory concerning search and structure methods through classification systems, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, book catalogues, citation indexes, abstracts and reviews. Digital reference rooms thus offer keys to more comprehensive tools.

MMI will combine the idea of a digital reference room with a new interface called a System for Universal Multi Media Access (SUMMA), a prototype of which is part of the European Commission's Museums Over States in Virtual Culture (MOSAIC) and G8's pilot project 5: Multimedia Access to World Cultural Heritage. Cultural applications will thus serve as a test case for a full scale digital reference room, which will eventually help to transform our methods of searching, structuring, using and presenting knowledge. A basis for research is provided by the library of the International Society for Knowledge Organisation. In collaboration with faculties of the founding partners (e.g. Faculty of Arts and Culture) MMI offers scholarships for post-graduate multimedia education. In addition in the context of the European Network of Centres of Excellence, it is foreseen that MMI will eventually offer its own MA and PhD degrees.

Learning Lab

A Learning Lab, embedded in MMI, will conduct research on the development and evaluation of electronic learning environments that support teaching and learning in higher education. These environments combine a wide range of tools that support learning activities in the context of self directed and collaborative learning in which students "learn to learn". Handling multiple information sources as well as exchanging information and knowledge between peers and experts requires integrative, adaptive and flexible tool support. The tools developed will not only be applied in regular curricula but also in life-long-learning and international courses. The mission of the Learning Lab is to develop and evaluate tools for learning in collaboration with staff and students, with other educational institutions and business.

Competence Centre

Parallel with the above, a Competence Centre will maintain links with industry and SME's and explore commercial aspects. The Competence Centre will link MMI with potential users to solve project-related problems: in a first instance, multi-media firms within the Euregion-Meuse-Rhine. Tools generated by MMI will be shared with or licensed to organisations, such as schools, libraries, museums, and exhibitors, which deal with acquisition, organisation and dissemination of knowledge. The Competence Centre will serve as a receptor of ideas originating from user groups, endeavor to give some of these ideas a concrete form and make others the basis of contract research.

Founders

MMI was established by the Maastricht McLuhan Foundation, with six founding members consisting of the Universiteit Maastricht, Limburgs Universitair Centrum (Diepenbeek), the Hogeschool Maastricht, de Hogeschool Limburg (Heerlen), the Limburg Investment Bank (LIOF) and the Province of Limburg.

Knowledge Networks

These founding institutions provide MMI with access to a series of related research centres including the Research Institute on Knowledge Systems (RIKS), the International Centre for Integrative Studies (ICIS), the Maastricht Economic Research Institute on Technology (MERIT), the Expertise Centre for Digital Media (EDM) as well as the European Consortium of Student Centred Universities (UNISCENE). As part of the Museums Over States in Virtual Culture (MOSAIC) and a founding member of the MEDICI framework, MMI has been invited to become the initial node of a new European Network of Centres of Excellence in Digital Cultural Heritage. This will lead to further partners at the national and the international level to create new knowledge networks.