

## European Networks of Excellence and Global Digital Culture

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A European Network of Centres of Excellence in Digital Cultural Heritage, Euro E-CultureNet, has been formed. At this stage, the consortium consists of 6 European Networks, and 28 members, which include important memory institutions (e.g. British Library, Centre Georges Pompidou), leading universities (e.g. Bologna, Madrid, Oxford, Vienna), the national supercomputing facilities of Italy and Spain and a number of leading research institutes. The Euro E-CultureNet has links with two international networks (namely the Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN) and the Asian Network of Excellence in Digital Silk Roads<sup>1</sup> (led by the National Institute of Informatics, Tokyo, in conjunction with UNESCO). There are further links with UNESCO through the Italian Virtual Heritage Network,<sup>2</sup> which is maintained by one of our members.

The idea of linking work of cultural institutions is not new. For instance, the Research Laboratory of the Museums of France (LRMF) was founded in 1931. It was a human network before the Internet. CHIN (Canada) was founded in 1972. Experiments in linking digital content from different museums and memory institutions by electronic networks began seriously during the 1990s (e.g. RAMA, AQUARELLE, MENHIR).

Euro E-CultureNet goes further in five respects:

1) It aims to achieve a coherent approach to research and to teaching programmes in digital culture at the Masters and Doctoral level. These are essential in order to create a methodological basis for the new field, which can help with scientific guidance and monitoring; to propose

research programmes; promote e-learning; to inspire e-creativity, and to help achieve an European Research Area (ERA) in this field.

2) In order to achieve the above, the network aims at new connectivities between content (memory institutions), context (language: i.e. terminology, multilingualism, metadata, semantic web, annotation and editing) and communication (e-learning, interfaces, agents, interactive and mobile technologies). By gradually integrating emerging national networks into the NCE, the consortium aims to achieve new combinations of memory institutions, universities/ research centres and industry at a European level. In these new combinations lie new potentials for research.

3) The Network aims to provide a big picture and guidelines with respect to both established fields such as tourism and e-publishing and to establish new paradigms for e-work and e-business, which are then carried out by national networks and adopted in turn by regional and local projects. Implicit here is a new integration of knowledge at local, regional, national and international levels which ensures that multi-cultural, multi-lingual and historical dimensions are maintained and developed.

4) It aims to use broadband to create a grid for culture similar to that in high-energy physics.

5) While based in Europe, the vision of the new network is international. Most of our histories of culture are Euro-Centric or Asian Centric. We need new models of culture, which duly reflect the great contributions of all the world's cultures. For this reason Euro E-Culture Net is particularly interested in working together with China, one of the oldest and deepest cultures of the world. We need to work together in arriving at a vision of global digital culture, which goes beyond a uni-lingual information highway, and takes us ever further in the direction of a multi-lingual and multi-cultural knowledge society.

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<sup>1</sup> "European Networks of Excellence and Japanese/UNESCO Silk Roads," *Tokyo Symposium for Digital Silk Roads, UNESCO, National Institute of Informatics, National Center of Sciences, Tokyo, 11-13 December, 2001*, Tokyo: National Institute for Informatics, 2002 (in press).

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.mediadigitali.polimi.it/VH\\_network/](http://www.mediadigitali.polimi.it/VH_network/)