
European Museums' Information Institute

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EMII

Introduction- How did EMI start?

The original vision for the establishment of a Pan-European network began to evolve back in April 1998. An informal co-operation between some of the European member states identified the need for the development of a network for the exchange of best practice and standards in cultural information management.

Their thinking was subsequently translated into a project proposal to the DGX Board of Directors of the Museums Charter on multimedia access to the European cultural heritage. It received unanimous support from all European Union member states, and resulted in the establishment of a working group aiming to progress the project on behalf of the Museums Charter Directors.

A proposal for funding for a one-year feasibility study was approved by the DGX Raphaël Programme of the European Commission. The total budget of the 12 month project is €532,220, of which €250,000 has been granted by the Commission. The project runs from August 1999 till September 2000 and was officially launched at the **mda**/CIDOC 99 Conference, in London, UK.

What is EMI?

The original approach to EMI determined from the beginning that, in its initial phase, the project would not establish a bureaucratic structure. The project's strength lies in the creation of

a network between existing relevant national organisations. The role of the national organisations is to ensure that effective exchange of information takes place between the participating member states and the EMI project staff. Each member state will act as a node, part of the connection that will make up the EMI network. The objective of the EMI network is to enable the sharing of information and good practice between member states and other associated countries.

EMI also aims to be a focus point for international museum projects.

Why EMI?

It is a widely acknowledged fact that the use of well-established standards in cultural information management is an essential component when promoting effective means of exchanging information, especially so with digitised information. Within the context of the European Commission funded projects it is vital that these standards are in place and in use if cultural heritage projects are to be seen as the building blocks for further development work. European Commission projects must also fit within the wider international context.

The fifth framework programme of the European Commission supports initiatives on digital heritage and cultural access with the clear objective of improving access to Europe's rich cultural heritage. In particular, further support is anticipated for actions intending to address digital processes, especially those that promote new partnerships through networking and new services for the citizen. Priorities already identified by the European Commission include improved access to networked collections, improving the functionalities of large-scale repositories of content, preservation of

and access to valuable multimedia content from multiple sources.

EMI's ultimate objective is to promote full access to the cultural heritage of museums to citizens throughout Europe. Access to Europe's complete 'virtual collections' will require effective implementation of information standards across all museums. Some of these standards already exist and are being put into practice in one or other of the European states. Others need to be developed or refined. It is vital that the European member states are aware of what is already available so that they can make use of it in a consistent manner. It is equally important to identify what is still needed so that again, the member states can, through collaborative work, play their part in creating it.

The need for a forum for the co-ordination of the work on cultural heritage standards has already been established. It is the intention now that EMI will play a decisive role in enabling this process to develop within the European Union.

EMI's Structure

Three organisations played an important role as project organisers, in the initial development of the project proposal: **mda**, UK, la Direction des musées de France and the Danish Council of Museums.

The project now counts with the collaboration of 10 active partners, and is running under the following organisational structure:

Steering Committee:

- **Denmark** -
Danish National Council of
Museums
- **France** -
Direction des musées de France
- **Germany** -
Institute for Museums Studies
- **Netherlands** -
Bureau IMC
- **Portugal** -
Instituto Português de Museus
- **UK** -
mda

Active Partners:

- **Iceland** -
National Museum of Iceland
- **Italy** -
Ministerio per I Beni e le Attivita
Culturali
- **Norway** -
Norwegian Museum Authority
- **Sweden** -
Swedish National Council for
Cultural Affairs

Supporting Partners:

These are organisations in the remaining countries of the European Union, which for different reasons may not have been able to join the project at its initial phase but, which, nevertheless have indicated their interest and support for the implementation of the project.

Two new positions, the EMII Standards Co-ordinator and Standards Assistant, have been created on behalf of the project. They are co-ordinating the development of EMII, within the parameters of the project proposal and guidelines provided by the EMII Steering Committee. They are based in Cambridge, sharing the offices of the **mda**, which is also fulfilling the project management functions, as part of the requirements of European funded projects.

EMII's Methodology

The national contacts are responsible for the analysis of the use of cultural heritage standards within their own countries. A map of the use of these standards will begin to emerge as the EMII staff interview the national contacts and collate the information they supplied. This process will enable an evaluation of the current use of cultural heritage standards, whilst identifying areas of strengths and weaknesses, within the countries of the European Union. The result of this work will then be documented in a prioritised business plan of issues, and a project proposal will then be submitted to the forthcoming programme 'Culture 2000' of the European Commission.

The information gathered will also be made available via the EMII web site, as a country-by-country standards map. The web site will be the primary means of communicating EMII results. The site will evolve with the project, and will become a focus for information on EU relevant funding programmes, for a project partner finding facility and for comprehensive links to related sites throughout the world.