Documentary standards in the digital environment

Dutch museums: 50 year trajectory

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Today

• My context
  – Theory = Art History, IS, Cultural Economics
  – Becoming Digital = process to renew oneself
  – Stats = EGMUS, Eurostat, Enumerate

• The adoption of standards NL
  – The Start / Wide Adoption / New Frontiers
  – Stages, dynamics, finances
  – Big picture *ALWAYS* in sight

• One thought to take home
The start

• Once upon a time ... in the Netherlands ...

  – **1950s** post was period of reconstruction.
  – Museums realized importance of documentation
    • To register and account for (lost) objects
    • To increase efficiency of collection management
    • CIDOC was founded
  – *White Book* was published with general acquisition process.
  – Iconclass index system started

ObjectId started in 1997
The start

- Bottom up formation of standards
  - 1969 Start
    - Sea Water Fishing Museum library received grant to explore the use of computers for the registration of collections.
  - International efforts served to advocate
    - ICOM conference + ICOM magazine about computers 1967
  - 1974 first national standards were developed
    - Build from international standards
    - Section on registration and documentation
    - Stressed use of unified terminology
The start

• Joint efforts to advance

  – 1977 Association formed to coordinate, advise and advance documentation.
    • Development of standards for images, objects / by topic
    • Advocated for funding (adoption of computers, training)
    • Developed software for museums
    • First remote access to joint collections

  – First stats:
    • Registration of collections= 1,600 objects
    • Museums using standard card= 22 (25 cards)

Standards not yet adopted
Wide adoption

• All museums to get a computer
  – Government supported adoption and training
  – 1986 Software developed for (basic) registration, books and references, natural history
  – Museums with computers: 25 in 1987 and 122 in 1990
  – Slow adoption for registration
    • Seen as impoverishment of paper documentation records
  – Still, work continued as usual
    • Kept work / organizational structure
    • Information distribution remained closed
Wide adoption

• Resources remained scarce

  – Imaging was too expensive
  – Digitization project were limited in scope
  – Museums with website: 5 in 1995 and 670 in 2002
  – The Internet provided potential ... but

    • The network was not yet strong
    • Few images were available for online publication
    • The use of the Internet for communication would emerge later....

More stats
New frontiers

• The web makes sense

  – 2000s ...
  – The isolated, task oriented, data input hid the goal of it all
    • to improve access and enhance museum work
    • The Internet reminded everybody of the reachable joys
  – Further coordination was needed
    • National efforts divided tasks / expertise
    • New resources were (initially) made available
New frontiers

- Does it make sense ... ?
  - 2010s...
  - Top down funding, policy, approach
  - Isolated solutions
    - (large) Research (project) base
    - Appears disconnected from museum reality
New frontiers

• Back to the basics

  – 2020s...
  – Global pressing issues shift focus of work
    • Preservation of collections
    • To deliver a social return (sustainable development goals 11.4)
  – Solutions require long-term approach
    • Standards for definitions, relations, processes
1950
Post war reconstruction
First scattered efforts
National advocacy association
Continuous effort
Development of standards
Slow adoption of computers

1977 - 1985
The start
National policies
Wide adoption
First explorations online
Slow adoption of standards
Wide adoption

1986 - 1995
The web makes sense
Remote and wider access

1996 - 2005
Interoperability ...
(what is that ...?)

2006 - 2010
New frontiers

2020 -
Back to basics
Mixed Realities
Take home

• Join the digital

  – Using (existing) standards allows:
    • Reuse past effort
    • Harmonization / interoperability / benchmarking

Thank you!