South-Eastern European Digitization Initiative – SEEDI

Zoran Ognjanović[1], Milena Dobreva[2], Nikola Ikonomov[2]

1 – Institute of Mathematics, Serbian Academy of Science and Art, Belgrade. Serbia
2 - Institute of Mathematics and Informatics, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, Bulgaria
zorano@turing.mi.sanu.ac.yu, dobreva@math.bas.bg, nikonomov@ibl.bas.bg

The availability of high quality digital content is in the basis of humanitarian and social research. Smaller countries from the South-Eastern Europe are still far from moving in line with the European Commission guidelines. The **European Commission Recommendation** [1a] **of 24 August 2006 on the digitization and online accessibility of cultural material and digital preservation** recommends setting up of large and sustained digitization facilities, encouraging partnerships between cultural institutions and the private sector, solving the problems around orphan works as well as developing clear quantitative targets for digitization efforts. In her speech [2] "The Role of Libraries in the Information Society" Mrs. Viviane Reding, EU Commissioner on IS & Media stressed that to make "valuable cultural heritage more visible and accessible" is a higher priority in the EU. The importance of libraries in our society and the i2010 context were also discussed. The three flagship initiatives of i2010 are first, caring for people in an ageing society, second, the intelligent car and third, digital libraries. Amongst the basic aims are to *avoid duplication*, to *cooperate in networking and standards*, as well as in *developing common and more cost-effective solutions*.

The practices in South-Eastern Europe are still not matching the priorities communicated on the top EC level. Even more worrying is the difference with the gap between local activities and the most recent action plan of the EU according to the ***Council Conclusions on the Digitisation and Online Accessibility of Cultural Material, and Digital Preservation*** [1b]. In this region we have new member states and West Balkan countries which have rich cultural content still underrepresented in the electronic space. Another concern of the cultural heritage institutions on the global scale nowadays is the adoption of brand-new IT in the sector [3].

To help the development of joint activities of international teams from the region and increase local capacities, a group of professionals decided to launch the South-Eastern European Digitization Initiative (SEEDI). It is an international effort to develop awareness about digitization of cultural and scientific heritage in the South-Eastern Europe (SEE) and to bring together:

- archivists, librarians and curators responsible for the preservation of and permanent access to cultural and scientific heritage;

- information technology researchers developing projects on digitization of cultural and scientific heritage,

- scholars in the arts and humanities, social sciences, history and computer science, students and all the other interested in digitization of cultural and scientific heritage

from regional, European and other centres having similar scientific and practical interest in digitization of scientific and cultural heritage, and to support cooperation between them.

SEEDI was initiated by the participants of the Third International Conference "New Technologies and Standards: Digitization of National Heritage 2004" (June, 3-5, 2004, Mathematical Faculty Belgrade, Serbia), after the round table organized to facilitate the future cooperation, and

following the Borovetz declaration [4] on the development of digitization of scientific and cultural heritage in SEE (which formalized the cooperation between researchers from Belgrade, Serbia and Montenegro, and Sofia, Bulgaria).

Goals and implementation activities

The main goals of SEEDI are:

- To build awareness of the need for digitization of cultural and scientific heritage in the region of SEE;

- To mobilize the human and material resources existing in the region;

- To mobilize SEE countries to participate in the SEEDI;

- To prepare guidelines for national strategies in the field of digitization of cultural and scientific heritage, as a recommendation for the SEE-countries;

- To improve the communication between centres and people having an interest in digitization of cultural and scientific heritage and to disseminate scientific and practical information in the field;

- To create core groups of specialists, which would be able to consult, assist, monitor and develop innovative technologies and digitization projects collaborating with the local cultural and scientific heritage institutions;

- To facilitate the formation of projects in the field of digitization of cultural and scientific heritage that would include partners from the South-Eastern Europe;

- To foster collaboration between the EU and South-Eastern Europe countries.

These goals shall be implemented through several channels:

- conferences, workshops and other types of meetings,

- the journal "Review of the National Centre for Digitization", published on paper and in electronic form [5], with nine issues published so far,

- the web–site [6], the mailing list, etc.

SEEDI-conferences

So far the following SEEDI-conferences were held:

- Regional Meeting of the SEEDI South-East European Digitization Initiative: Methodology and Applications 11-13 June 2006, Sofia, Bulgaria,

- The First SEEDI Conference DIGITAL (re-)DISCOVERY of CULTURE (PHYSICALITY OF SOUL), September, 2005, Ohrid, Macedonia,

- The Third International Conference "New Technologies and Standards: Digitization of National Heritage 2004" June, 3-5, 2004, Belgrade, Serbia.

In September 2007, the next SEEDI conference will be organized in Cetinje, Montenegro[1].

SEEDI-board

At the last SEEDI meeting in Sofia, a proposal for the statute was considered and the Executive board was elected. The board contains the following members: Dženana Alađuz (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Umit Atabek (Turkey), Boris Badurina (Croatia), Nikola Ikonomov (Bulgaria, chair), Smile Markovski (Macedonia), Žarko Mijajlović (Serbia), Anca Rapeanu (Romania).

---

[1] http://www.ncd.matf.bg.ac.yu/seedi/events/secondCall2007.html

SEEDI: vision for the future

For the three years of its existence so far, SEEDI succeeded to run annual events, to publish regularly a journal and thus played a successful role in promoting digitization practices and consolidating the professional community in the region. It also widens its coverage attracting new members with every new event.

Important next steps would be to identify candidates for best practices in the region and to look for ways to develop existing digitization infrastructures as competence centres.

One important activity is the dissemination of results from projects where SEEDI members take part to the rest of the SEEDI community. Such are the cases of the projects DIGMAP (Discovering our Past World with Digitised Maps) which is supported through the eCONTENT*plus* programme. It proposes to develop solutions for geo-referenced digital libraries, especially focused on historical materials and in the promoting of our cultural scientific heritage. The final results of the project will consist in a set of service available in the Internet, and in open-source software solutions that will be able to be reused in other services. IMI BAS is one of the project participants. Another example is the project *Unified Solution for the Use of Cyrillic Alphabet* supported by the National Science Fund of the Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria which findings are potentially of interest to SEEDI members outside of Bulgaria.

The last meeting of the initiative in Sofia showed a new consolidation level – and a strong desire for real cooperation on a project basis. We are looking for possibilities to launch such regional programmes for training and digitization of the regional cultural heritage resources.

Acknowledgment

References

1. a. Commission Recommendation of 24 August 2006 on the digitisation and online accessibility of cultural material and digital preservation (2006/585/EC), http://europa.eu.int/information_society/activities/digital_libraries/doc/recommendation/recommendation/en.pdf

   b. Council Conclusions on the Digitisation and Online Accessibility of Cultural Material, and Digital Preservation 2006/C 297/01), Official Journal of the European Union, 7.12.2006, http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/digital_libraries/doc/culture_council/council_conclusions_nov_2006.pdf

2. REDING V, Member of the European Commission responsible for Information Society and Media, The role of libraries in the information society, CENL Conference, Luxembourg, 29 September 2005, http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/05/566

3. ROSS S., M. Donnelly, M. Dobreva, *Core Technologies for the Cultural and Scientific Heritage Sector* (Technology Watch Report 3), ISBN 92-894-5276-5, European Commission, 2005, http://www.digicult.info

4. Borovetz declaration, http://elib.mi.sanu.ac.yu/files/journals/ncd/4/d015download.pdf

5. Review of the National Centre for Digitization, http://elib.mi.sanu.ac.yu/pages/browse_journals.php

6. SEEDI-web-site, http://www.ncd.matf.bg.ac.yu/seedi/