



## The View from North America

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### Abstract

The European Commission worked closely with North American colleagues in joint projects and developments. This paper describes developments with the National Science Foundation.

**Key Words:** Pat Manson; European Commission; Library Research; Digital Libraries Initiative; DELOS

I had the pleasure of working with Pat and her predecessor Bernard Smith during the time that I was Program Director for the National Science Foundation—led Digital Libraries Initiative (DLI) and for a number of years beyond in related efforts. Pat and Bernard were instrumental in funding seminal work in digital libraries research, content development, infrastructure and importantly, in stimulating community-led planning processes. During that same period all things related to computing and communications technologies were undergoing exponential change and the global information environment was rapidly changing. The cost of digital components plummeted and digital content conversion and creation proliferated and eventually surpassed storage availability. Keeping up with the changes was a considerable challenge for funding managers.

Pat became Head of Unit at a particularly auspicious time in digital libraries development. Technologies had advanced to the stage that complex information entities, such as those associated with digital representation of material

cultural, could be economically created, analyzed and managed for long-term preservation and use. Semantic properties were also being added to web-based collections allowing for altogether higher functionality for establishing relationships among complex data entities. The Cultural Heritage unit led by Pat was at the leading edge in supporting many of the projects that explored and exploited new possibilities.

Early on, the Digital Libraries Initiative and the European Commission funded working groups to jointly explore technical, social and economic issues, plan common research agendas, share research results, and explore national, technical, and social goals for digital libraries research, content development and infrastructure.

The first group was organized by Dan Atkins from the University of Michigan School of Information and Costantino Thanos from ISTI—CNR and head of the DELOS Working Group. Each working group was assigned two leaders—one from Europe and one from the USA. Altogether more than 60 prominent researchers and practitioners participated. The topics were:

- Intellectual Property and Economics, Co-leaders: Christos Nikolaou, University of Crete and ICS-FORTH, Greece, Michael Wellman, University of Michigan, USA
- Interoperability, Co-leaders: Hans-Jörg Schek, ETHZ, Switzerland. Bill Birmingham, University of Michigan, USA
- Metadata, Co-leaders: Thomas Baker, GMD, Germany and Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand. Clifford A. Lynch, CNI, USA
- Multilingual Information Access, Co-leaders: Peter Schäuble, ETHZ, Switzerland. Judith Klavans, Columbia University, USA
- Global Resource Discovery, Co-leaders: Carl Lagoze, Cornell University, USA. Norbert Fuhr, University of Dortmund, Germany

A report was produced, edited by Peter Schäuble and Alan F. Smeaton (Schäuble & Smeaton, 1998). Presentations summarizing findings and recommendations were given at a meeting in Brussels on October 12, 1998. (available on request from this writer)

DELOS was funded as a Network of Excellence and a second set of DELOS/NSF working groups was established in 2002. Each group met over several years in the USA and Europe. The aim was to determine priorities for digital

libraries research and infrastructure development and to identify specific areas and activities for cooperation between EU and US researchers. The joint working groups were:

- Spoken-Word Digital Audio Collections Co-leaders: Steve Renals (University of Sheffield)—Jerry Goldman (Northwestern University)
- Digital Libraries Information Infrastructures Co-leaders: Yannis Ioannidis (University of Athens)—David Maier (Oregon Health and Science University)
- Personalization and Recommender Systems in Digital Libraries Co-leaders: Alan Smeaton (Dublin City University)—Janie Callan (Carnegie Mellon University)
- ePhilology: Emerging Language Technologies and Rediscovery of the Past Co-leaders: Susan Hockey (University College London)—Gregory Crane (Tufts University)
- Digital Imaging for Significant Cultural and Historical Materials Co-leaders: Alberto del Bimbo (University of Florence)—Ching-chih Chen (Simmons College)
- Digital Archiving and Preservation Co-leaders: Seamus Ross (University of Glasgow)—Margaret Hedstrom (University of Michigan)
- Actors in Digital Libraries Co-leaders: Jose Borbinha (National Library of Portugal)—John Kunze (University of California, San Francisco)
- Test Collections and Performance Evaluation Methodologies Co-leaders: Norbert Fuhr (University of Duisburg)—Ron Larsen (University of Maryland)

Together, the group reports articulated the needs and opportunities for the broad community of digital libraries researchers and users and ways in which organizations could transition to meet these. (reports and presentations from the working groups are available on request from this writer)

Informed leadership in funding organizations was paramount. Although projects funded by the Digital Libraries Initiative (DLI) had demonstrated impressive results, the scope of the program was limited. The projects focused primarily on basic research, performed at academic institutions. The DLI was not to fund content conversion. Research on collections development, content representation, structure, metadata and preservation was limited. The

European Commission, the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) of the United Kingdom, the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) of Germany and a number of private foundations, notable the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, were able to fund a very broad set of efforts to support development of digital content in all of its forms, repositories, and resources and services to support scholarly work across all workflow stages. These organizations and others played a crucial role in the evolution of digital libraries in the early 2000s. This was especially important as at the same time a third Digital Libraries Initiative providing a clear mechanism for international collaboration was terminated. Modest funding of digital libraries research was continued, but without programmatic status and a separate budget line.

A vibrant dialogue within the digital libraries community and the program managers continued and led to coordinated funding of complementary projects. Pat was a prime mover and a champion of collaboration across national boundaries. Cultural heritage informatics and digital libraries research and infrastructure flourished during the time of her leadership as Head of Unit at the EC. We can only hope that it will continue into the future.

## **Reference**

Schäuble, P., & Smeaton, A.F. (1998). *An international research agenda for digital libraries – Summary report of the series of joint NSF-EU working groups on future directions for digital libraries*. Retrieved November 28, 2016, from [http://www.ercim.eu/publication/ws-proceedings/DELOS-B/dl\\_sum\\_report.pdf](http://www.ercim.eu/publication/ws-proceedings/DELOS-B/dl_sum_report.pdf).