NRG/MINERVA spin-off

MICHAEL

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MICHAEL (Multilingual Inventory of Cultural Heritage in Europe) was born from the joint efforts of the working groups on interoperability and inventories of digitised cultural content in MINERVA and the enthusiasm of France, Italy and the United Kingdom.
The MICHAEL project aims to define a common approach and a model for digital cultural heritage inventories that will be applied across the participating nations. The project focuses on the integration of national initiatives in the digital cultural heritage sector. It will deliver interoperability between national cultural portals and a high-quality end-user service. Its objective is to promote the use of European digital cultural content and resources. With the support and endorsement of the national governments and agencies responsible for cultural heritage, MICHAEL is establishing an international online service that will allow its users to search, browse and examine separate national cultural inventories from a single point of access. This service is implementing pan-European standards and guidelines for digital cultural heritage initiatives, approved by the National Representative Group (NRG). It will be based on open-source technologies and an existing technical platform, and it will be flexible to allow for extension to national inventories in future.
The MICHAEL project builds upon the following existing assets:

• the resources developed by the MINERVA project, and the progress that has been achieved in supporting the development of a European vision for the digitisation of culture heritage set out in the Lund Action Plan
• the metadata standard for national inventories of digitised cultural content, approved by the National Representatives Group
• the technical platform used in the French inventory project, also used to develop a French-Italian prototype for a pan-European inventory.

The services offered by MICHAEL will enable European citizens (students, researchers, tourists and other end users) to find and exploit European digital cultural heritage material, which will be accessible, on a multilingual basis, over the Internet.
The MICHAEL consortium is made up of the ministries of culture of France and Italy, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council of the United Kingdom, supported by the private bodies Dedale, AJLSM and Amitié for technological and administrative aspects. A proposal for the extension of the project to nine other EU countries has been submitted to the European Commission.

Objectives
The goal of MICHAEL is to launch a pan-European online service to enable European cultural heritage to be promoted to a worldwide audience. Within its 36 month span, MICHAEL will contribute to the objectives of the eEurope 2005 Action Plan by implementing a common approach and a model for cultural heritage inventories in France, Italy and UK. These inventories, set up by governmental institutions, will use a distributed and Open Source platform suitable to be extended to other countries and suitable for integration into existing and future national and pan-European portals of culture. The cultural sector is attracting more and more new partnerships and interest, as a direct result of its strategic importance for education, economic development and technological innovation in the development of digital services. The growing interest in archaeological and cultural sites demonstrates the economic value of cultural tourism, and huge public interest in family history is creating a new market segment of 'genealogical tourism'. MICHAEL will contribute to both cultural and economic development by promoting access to digital cultural heritage resources that can easily be transformed into new cultural and tourist products.

Achievements
MICHAEL has five main activities to achieve these objectives. These are:

• defining the architecture of a common open source platform and its localisation in national instances
• collecting digital cultural heritage data, by harvesting existing data and entering new data onto the system
• preparing a communication and marketing plan to promote the service to key target groups: education, research, cultural tourism and the creative industries
• organising the technical infrastructure to manage the system, update its content, maintain the software and training staff
• designing and implementing the delivery system and management structure to run the pan-European services, including the creation of a European Economic Interest Group.

The project has now completed the first milestone; the development of a stable instance of the MICHAEL platform. This platform is now ready for collection of data on digital cultural collections and user testing in the next phase of the project. For more information about MICHAEL see:
www.michael-culture.org

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