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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE
COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**Final evaluation
of the implementation of the multiannual Community Programme to make digital
content in Europe more accessible, usable and exploitable**

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Report concerns the final evaluation of the eContentplus Programme (2005-2008) referred to in this document as ‘the Programme’¹.

The Programme ran for a period of 4 years from 1 January 2005 to 31 December 2008 with a budget of EUR 149 million, of which 100% has been fully committed to projects, studies and administration (cost related to the organisation of evaluations of proposals and project reviews).

The objective of the Programme was to make digital content in Europe more accessible, usable and exploitable, facilitating the creation and diffusion of information, in areas of public interest, at Community level.

The Programme was part of the Commission’s policy announced in ‘i2010 — A European Information Society for growth and employment’. In aiming to facilitate content access, use and exploitation and to stimulate content enrichment, the eContentplus Programme addressed two of the four main challenges posed by digital convergence for the creation of a single European Information Space, as identified by i2010, namely ‘interoperability’ and ‘rich content’. More specifically, it set out to help achieve Objective 1 of i2010: A Single European Information Space offering affordable and secure high bandwidth communications, rich and diverse content and digital services.

In order to achieve the overall aim of the Programme, the following lines of action were addressed:

- (a) facilitating at Community level access to digital content, its use and exploitation;
- (b) improving quality and enhancing best practice related to digital content between content providers and users, and across sectors;
- (c) reinforcing cooperation between digital content stakeholders and awareness.

Via those lines of action, the Programme targeted areas which had a public interest and which would not have developed, or would have developed at a slower pace, if left to the market:

¹ Decision No 456/2005/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, OJ L 79 of 24.3.2005, p.1.

- **Geographic information:** The objective of eContentplus is to contribute to the wider use of geographic information (i.e. any data that directly refer to a specific location or geographic area) by public sector bodies, private companies, including small and medium-sized enterprises, and citizens in line with the PSI Directive² on the re-use of public sector information as well as the INSPIRE Directive³ which aims to make available relevant, harmonised and quality geographic information for the purpose of formulating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating Community policy-making. In this context the programme has funded projects applying the following INSPIRE principles which are particularly relevant for increasing reuse, whereby it should be easy to discover which spatial data are available, to evaluate their fitness for purpose and to know which conditions apply for their use and it should be possible to combine seamlessly spatial data from different sources and share it between many users and applications.

- **Educational content:** Educational digital content is content that can be used for learning in different contexts: in formal education and training programmes, in non-formal general education, in vocational training courses, as well as for self-learning. eContentplus aims to foster the efficient use of pedagogically sound digital educational content across borders and to complement other Community initiatives like Decision No. 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning which includes among its objectives support to the development of innovative ICT-based content, services, pedagogies and practice for lifelong learning.

- **Cultural and scientific/scholarly content digital libraries:** Digital libraries are organised collections of digital content made available to the public by cultural and scientific institutions (libraries, archives and museums) and private content holders (e.g. publishers) in the EU Member States or other countries participating in the programme. eContentplus aims at leveraging the multilingual availability of significant assets of digital cultural, scientific and scholarly content by supporting the development of interoperable collections and objects - on which multilingual and cross-border services can be built - and by supporting solutions to facilitate exposure, discovery and retrieval of these resources⁴. On 30 September 2005, the Commission adopted a Communication outlining the vision of the «i2010: Digital Libraries» initiative, which aims to make European cultural heritage easier to access and use in an online environment. Within this initiative, the Commission has supported the creation of the European Digital Library (europeana.eu) which is expected to make available online at least ten million books, documents and other cultural works by 2010.

The eContentplus Programme was implemented by means of annual calls for proposals. Their specific objectives and priorities were set out in annual work programmes, which also provided the available budget as well as an indicative timetable for the evaluation and selection of project proposals submitted in response to the calls. Funding was allocated to 67 projects for a total of EUR 146.9 million with more than 800 European organisations participating directly in the projects.

² Directive 2003/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, OJ L345 of 31.12.2003, p. 90.

³ Directive 2007/2/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, OJ L 108, 25.4.2007, p.1.

⁴ Some of these activities were complemented by the MEDIA 2007 programme which comprises a scheme supporting video on demand platforms and digitisation of cinemas. Decision No 1718/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006

The Commission also offered contracts for studies to improve understanding of the economic importance of the activities covered by the Programme and provide input for defining the priorities of future research and non-research activities developed at EU level. These included: a study on socio-economic drivers and the impact of longer-term preservation of digital resources, the first systematic attempt to map or measure the social and economic impact of the public domain in the information society and, following the 2008 review of the Directive on the re-use of Public Sector Information (PSI), a study to establish a European PSI central platform to further stimulate action and monitor progress towards a stronger and more transparent environment for the growth of national and European markets in PSI re-use.

2. EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

Pursuant to Article 5(3) of the Programme Decision, the Commission was to submit a final evaluation report at the end of the Programme. This evaluation has been carried out with the assistance of a panel of external experts who evaluated the effectiveness of the Programme, its achievements, its impact, its sustainability and its complementarity with other initiatives within and beyond the European Union, as well as with national initiatives.

The findings of this final evaluation are based on available documentation, Commission data, a survey questionnaire, and follow-up interviews with selected project participants.

3. EVALUATION FINDINGS

The evaluators found that the Programme has been successful in achieving the objectives set out in the Programme Decision and in the annual work programmes adopted for its implementation. It has contributed to making digital content in Europe more accessible, usable and exploitable, facilitating the creation and diffusion of information, in areas of public interest. More specifically, the evaluation gave rise to the following conclusions:

The enabling role of the Programme and Programme achievements

The Programme achievements are in line with the objectives of the Programme. The Programme succeeded in creating better conditions for accessing, using, re-using and exploiting digital material, thus making it possible to build added-value products and services across Europe in the target areas selected. It helped content stakeholders (providers and users) realise the full potential of digital content. Content providers, i.e. public and private organisations and institutions that create, collect or own digital content, were able to increase the visibility of their digital material, not only in their own country, but also in other EU Member States and countries participating in the programme. Content users, including European citizens, students and researchers as well as organisations and enterprises, in turn, are now able to find and use such content, irrespective of location or language.

By bringing together Europe-wide consortia and contributing to the creation of cross-border datasets and services, the eContentplus programme has contributed to making content more accessible, usable and exploitable in the above-mentioned target areas. As the survey and interviews confirmed, most projects would not have been realised without financial support from the eContentplus Programme, underlining the usefulness of such financial mechanisms at European level.

At project level, results such as the establishment of the European Digital Library Europeana, the common multilingual access point to Europe's digital cultural heritage, would not have been achieved. The creation of this flagship project, around which some 20 'feeder' projects cluster, providing access to around 17 million cultural items from more than 1500 European cultural institutions (directly or indirectly through aggregators), is a significant achievement. Participation in this initiative has heightened the visibility of the project partners and given them a much greater incentive to maintain the service once the funding cycle is complete. As regards educational content, there have been major achievements thanks to more intensive networking and collaboration. The MELT project, for instance, provides the Learning Resource Exchange portal for schools (lreforschools.eun.org) where you can find more than 130,000 open educational resources and assets from many different countries and providers, including 17 Ministries of Education. In the area of geographic information, the Programme has brought together data providers, technology providers, users and other stakeholders, creating networks that will carry on providing a platform for sharing information, state-of-the-art technology and lowering interoperability barriers in the EU. Thus, the project EURADIN will implement, test and validate a pilot solution for a European infrastructure to be used as a reference for all Member States to fulfil the INSPIRE recommendations with respect to addresses.

Programme efficiency

The Programme was managed efficiently. Both applicants and project participants were pleased with the quality of information provided by the Commission, although some newcomers and organisations not familiar with EU-funded projects initially raised some minor issues relating to the clarity of programme objectives and funding schemes.

The publication of clear programme objectives and award criteria on the one hand and the two-stage evaluation process on the other had very positive effects on the submission and selection of high-quality proposals.

Simplifications introduced in the eContentplus grant agreement have accelerated the procedures for claiming project costs and receiving payments.

Best Practice Networks were introduced as a new project type to promote the adoption of standards and specifications for making digital content in Europe more accessible and usable. This was achieved by combining the consensus-building and awareness-raising functions of a network with the large-scale implementation, in a real-life context, of one or more concrete solutions by its members.

Programme impacts

The impact on organisations participating in the Programme can only be estimated, since many projects are still running or have just ended. While most organisations expect increased visibility and exploitation of their digital content in the near future, they already recognise that participation in eContentplus projects has increased international and cross-border collaboration and made them more aware of the economic and cultural value of the digital content they own. eContentplus projects, has supported for example the conversion to digital text of more than 20 million pages of scanned books and newspapers held by national libraries. As a result of this effort, in the near future citizens will be able to full-text search such content through European and the various national libraries' portals. European TV broadcasting archives managed to create a portal through which part of their content can be

accessed, allowing citizens to explore the development of television in Europe, but also the televising of cultural and historical events within and across nations.

In the area of digital libraries, the eContentplus Programme is the first programme whose main impact has been to make material directly available to individual citizens on a very large scale. Indeed, rather than influencing stakeholders or making technical adjustments and standards which encourage or permit such availability, europeana.eu has become the access point for European cultural content. The Programme has also highlighted a number of challenges that have to be addressed. Increased public funding is needed to finance large-scale digitisation, alongside initiatives with private partners provided that they allow a general accessibility of Europe's common cultural heritage online. Fragmentation and complexity in the current licensing system also hinders the digitisation of a large part of Europe's recent cultural heritage. Rights clearance must be improved, and the role and responsibilities of private and public organisations for digitising orphan works as well as material that is in-copyright but no longer commercially available should be clarified.

In the area of educational content, a significant increase in the use of the underlying content is expected as a result of programme support. For example the portal reforschools.eun.org enables teachers and pupils to easily find and use educational content from many different countries through one single access point. In addition, the involvement of national Ministries of Education in many of the projects is also likely to have an impact on the inclusion of eLearning in curricula.

With regard to geographic information, programme support is expected to increase interoperability within a number of thematic areas under the INSPIRE Directive with direct and measurable impacts on the implementation rules of INSPIRE.

Sustainability

Long-term sustainability is difficult to assess at this stage. However, projects report a strong link to national policy makers and most are optimistic that projects will carry on based on funding from public and/or private institutions involved in the project.

4. MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

There is an increasing demand for quality digital content in Europe from citizens, students, researchers, SMEs and other business users or re-users wishing to exploit digital content resources to create services. This calls for continued support at European level to increase the availability of European digital content, in particular in areas of public interest where progress is likely to be slow and where access to content is limited by language and cultural barriers in particular.

A number of general points have emerged during this evaluation that could be indicative for future actions:

- (1) Funding should be linked to clear and defined policy objectives. Even if funding actions in other areas have positive outcomes and effects, focusing on areas where the EU has clear and defined policy objectives is likely to produce more sustainable outputs with a higher impact. The link between the target area of cultural

content/digital libraries and the i2010 digital library initiative is a particularly good example of this.

- (2) The Digital Libraries Initiative should continue to receive economic support from the European Commission to ensure the continued development of Europeana and similar services at European level.
- (3) Although Public Sector Information (PSI) has enormous economic value, it is still not extensively exploited. The implementation of the PSI Directive should continue to be supported by activities that maximise the re-use of PSI in Europe and unlock its full economic potential. This is particularly evident in the area of geographic information where the fragmentation of datasets hampers cross-border use and prevents their exploitation for scientific and commercial purposes.
- (4) In order to continue boosting the sharing of spatial information between public sector organisations and citizens, eContentplus follow-on activities should support projects helping to create a more standardised electronic environment for storing and harmonising spatial datasets covering one or more of the topics mentioned in Annex I-III of the INSPIRE Directive. Projects such as EURADIN, the European Addresses Infrastructure, and EGN (EuroGeoNames) are showcases in this respect.
- (5) Both the multilingual and the multicultural dimensions of the Programme have been highly appreciated and the European Commission should continue to emphasise such aspects.
- (6) Simplifications in the eContentplus grant agreement have been perceived to be very efficient, in particular the introduction of a flat rate for overheads and the payment of the Community contribution as pre-financing in instalments. The publication of a clear mapping of programme objectives and award criteria as well as the two-stage evaluation process have had very positive effects on the submission and selection of high-quality proposals. They should be considered for grant agreements implementing future funding programmes.
- (7) Best Practice Networks have proved to have had a significant impact on networking and practical testing by providing the most appropriate solutions and involving all relevant stakeholders. This funding instrument should be considered for funding activities that seek to achieve competitive and innovative solutions.
- (8) In the educational content area, continuous action is needed to support the implementation of efficient context-aware brokerage systems and learning technologies standardisation. Actions carried out should focus on the use of educational content by specific groups (e.g. SMEs) in specific educational contexts while still contributing to global standardisation of learning technologies.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In recognition of the need for further support at European level to increase the availability of European digital content, particularly in areas of public interest, measures to make digital content in Europe more accessible, usable and exploitable have been continued under the ICT PSP since 2009.

The themes included in the ICT PSP 2009 and 2010 work programmes as eContentplus follow-up activities are in line with the evaluators' recommendation that funding actions should be linked to clearly defined policy objectives. The objectives for these themes seek to foster projects in support of Commission policy in the following fields: digital libraries; digitisation and online accessibility of cultural content, and digital preservation; access, dissemination and preservation of scientific information in the digital age and re-use of Public Sector Information.

These areas have also been recognised among the priorities for action of the Digital Agenda for Europe⁵. The ICT PSP will continue to be used to support the policy objective of strengthening Europeana and supporting initiatives allowing improved accessibility of Europe's cultural heritage online.

In line with the recommendations of the reflection group on bringing Europe's cultural heritage online⁶, ICT PSP will be used to encourage the digitisation and online availability of cultural material - including books, maps, newspapers, sound, archival material, photographs, museum objects, films⁷ and audiovisual material – in order to make it more accessible for Europe's citizens and easier to use for leisure, work and study.

Funding will be used to encourage public bodies to realise the objective of stimulating content markets by making their information available on transparent, effective, non-discriminatory terms.

The Digital Agenda for Europe also sets out the policy objective of mainstreaming eLearning in the national policies in order to modernise education and training. eContentplus results in the area of educational content could become a major building block on the way towards achieving this objective. Within the Digital Agenda for Europe pillar of "Enhancing digital literacy, skills and inclusion" eLearning will foster the acquisition of the digital skills necessary for innovation and growth in a knowledge-based society.

The Commission invites the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions to:

- (1) take note that the Programme has been successfully implemented;
- (2) continue to assist the Commission in its work of increasing the visibility of the initiatives aimed at making digital content in Europe more accessible, usable and exploitable and stimulate a continued dialogue on digital content issues.

⁵ COM(2010) 245, A Digital Agenda for Europe, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions

⁶ "Comité des Sages" on Bringing Europe's Cultural Heritage On-line
http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/digital_libraries/comite_des_sages/index_en.htm

⁷ Commission Communication on opportunities and challenges for European cinema in the digital era, COM(2010) 487 final