Digital Heritage and Future Museums

Issues and Methods in the Presentation and Preservation of Digital Heritage

by Cary Karp
Director of Internet Strategy and Technology, Swedish Museum of Natural History, Stockholm

The Chair, Dr. Cary Karp, introduced the session by pointing out that intangible heritage is by no means a recent museum concern. The session would address applications of state-of-the-art digital presentation and preservation technologies, but these could be placed within the established museological framework. His presentation, *Naming the Intangible,* was based on the UNESCO definition of digital heritage and their call for priority concern with material that exists solely in digital format. This requires a digital identifier for each digital object which invariably includes a domain name when presented via the Internet. The utility of the *.museum* top-level domain for the verification of museum origin was described. Internationalising domain names further increases their value and can call particular attention to indigenous languages. http://icom.museum/idn/ which provides domain names to ICOM's National Committees in their local languages was demonstrated.

> Shinjiro Oono, Director, Internet Museum, Tokyo (Japan), presented *Current Japanese Initiatives in the Management of Intangible Heritage,* which focus on means for structuring and accessing the contents of large repositories of digital material. An innovative user interface had been developed and its demonstration was the central aspect of this presentation.

> Dr. Kenneth Hamma, Executive Director of Digital Policy and Initiatives at the J. Paul Getty Trust (U.S.A.), made a presentation entitled *What me? Intangible?,* based on a case study of digital resource management and policy in the programmes of that organisation over the last ten years. It examined the importance of managing intangible heritage resources and discussed what can easily go wrong when value is underestimated or when key technical facilities are unavailable. Measures were described that can help ensure longevity beyond the life span of the creator or originator.

> Prof. Soon Cheol Park, ChonBook University (Rep. of Korea), gave a presentation prepared jointly with Hanhee Hahm on *Audio and Visual Documents Archiving and Analysis in the Digital Era.* This described a twofold research initiative directed toward the preservation of audio-visual data, and towards the development of software intended to provide easy access to such data. This included a database system using Dublin Core metadata, a content-based search system in audio-visual documents and text mining tools for oral history and transcript documents.

> Susan Hazan, Curator of New Media and Head of the Internet Office at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, presented *Where is the gallery? Virtual museums in an age of augmented reality.* Art that is born digital is totally dependent on electronic means for its dissemination, interpretation and presentation. It may be accessed in essentially the same way either from the museum gallery or from the home computer. What then is the role of the institution hosting the born digital exhibition, and how can remote visitors be assured that they are viewing 'the real thing'? The presentation considered how museums connect visitors in the physical gallery to the on-line artwork, while allowing remote visitors access to the museum-located artefact. Case studies drawn from a range of on-line museums were used to demonstrate some of the methodological issues challenging museum practice.

> Prof. Kyung-Bae Min, Dept. of NGO Studies at Kyung-Hee Cyber University (Rep. of Korea), ended with *The Information-Trust Campaign in Korea as Digital Heritage Preservation,* a recent venture to preserve important material presented on the Internet of the type that otherwise often disappears. The Information-Trust Campaign is a digital counterpart to national environmental preservation movements. It is intended to restore valuable knowledge and information in cyberspace with voluntary participation and public fund raising. The resulting material is placed in the public domain.

Future Museums: new public, new skills and new directions

by Jean-Marcel Humbert
Direction des Musées de France, Paris. Former Chairperson, AVICOM

Jean-Marcel Humbert opened the session with a reminder that mediation may soon replace indispensable confrontation. Already we no longer refer to works, but to virtual or sound content. So what will be the role of museums in the future? And why do museums seek at all costs to appropriate the intangible heritage, when they are already unable to manage the tangible heritage? The notion of a "multi-cultural complex" (as in the New National Museum of Korea) is certainly interesting, provided museum staff are willing to work with other cultural specialists involved in intangible heritage.

> The Director of the Nabi Art Center (Rep. of Korea), Ms Soh Yeong Roh, talked about the way her museum related to the new generation of visitors, born into the computer age. In order to discover what art meant to them, the museum commissioned digital artworks to create an immediate rapport with the public. Creativity must become an integral part of the new media, so that art can contribute to the humanisation of new technologies.

> Frank Proschan, Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (U.S.A.), presented the Global Sound Web site, which offers a library of sound, with musical documents from archives all over the world. The items can be downloaded along with educational resources and detailed information to suit all types of public. This digital heritage will in turn provide a medium for future creation.

> John Hudson, Information Services and Programs Manager, Sydney Olympic Park Authority (Australia), showed how the younger generation had contributed to the creation of a digital heritage. When Sydney was chosen to host the Olympic Games, the venue had to be decontaminated, while preserving the memory of what it had been. A source of digital documentation was created, covering the last two hundred years, and brought alive through the schools network of New South Wales. This local project may well become national.

> Mali Voi, Director of Culture, Pacific Office, UNESCO (Apia, Samoa), pointed out the difficulties encountered, basically due to lack of funds, by small museums simply wishing to keep their collections in good condition. Digital technology could be of considerable assistance to these museums in their educational role, by facilitating access to objects, reducing costs, promoting national identity on an international scale and extending the lifetime of the collections.

> Finally, Michel Van Praet, Natural History Museum, Paris (France), questioned the need for digital techniques in museums, in the context of the original object. Of course, natural history museums have a specific mission in preserving material testimonies to explain natural phenomena but digital techniques do not detract from the physical elements of an exhibition, such as interaction between visitors. Digital and physical exhibition techniques can co-exist but we must remain free to appreciate reality in its tangible form.

> Amareswar Galla, Director of Sustainable Heritage Development, National University of Australia, drew together the strands of the day's session by emphasising the need to define a number of issues. What is a museum, a virtual exhibit or cybermuseology? What elements should be preserved within the digital media? How can one protect indigenous peoples from the detrimental effects of digital techniques and the exploitation of their intangible heritage? ICOM has a duty to address the vast discrepancies created by digital technology.