

Online Collaboration Between European National Libraries Since 1995 – Building Towards a European Digital Library

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Abstract

To date there are 45 official national libraries in Europe. These libraries have been collaborating since 1987, when the Conference of European National Librarians (CENL) - the umbrella organisation for all European national libraries - was founded. Since 1995 European national libraries have been involved in *online* collaboration. In the advent of the creation of a European Digital Library, Olaf D. Janssen looks at 12 years of online cooperation between the national libraries of Europe, focusing on the period 2005-2007.

Keywords

Online collaboration, international organisation & management, national libraries, Europe, digital libraries, standardisation, multilinguality & interoperability, cultural heritage

1. The Conference of European National Librarians

The Conference of European National Librarians (CENL) ¹ is a foundation under Dutch law aiming to increase and reinforce the role of national libraries in Europe, in particular in respect of their responsibilities for maintaining the national cultural heritage and ensuring the accessibility of knowledge in that field.



Members of CENL ² are the national libraries/librarians of the member states of the Council of Europe ³ and Vatican City. The Conference currently consists of 45 members from 43 European countries (Italy and Russia have two member libraries each).

CENL was founded in 1987 in Lisbon at the first meeting of the national librarians of Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, UK, Spain, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and Vatican



City. They continued to meet annually and the group grew steadily. In 1991 the first East-West conference was organized with national libraries of Eastern Europe to establish closer links and a defined partnership. The most recent members are Azerbaijan and Moldova (2005).

The Conference pursues its objectives by means of annual membership meetings as well as initiatives and support of research and development activities. At the meetings the national libraries present their annual reports, report on ongoing projects and working group activities and invite speakers for topics of common interest.

CENL Vision & Mission

The vision of CENL is

enabling European national libraries to open up a world of information and knowledge and safeguard Europe's memory and cultural heritage.

The current mission of CENL is to support the European national libraries in their role to

- Give everybody fast, comprehensive, multilingual and longterm access to their collections and information, and wherever appropriate without cost.
- Do research & development to improve user services of national libraries.

and to

- Build the European Digital Library.
- Promote cultural diversity and multilinguality as basic values of the European culture.
- Safeguard European national cultural heritage and knowledge.
- Cooperate with other cultural heritage institutions, universities, publishers and information providers on a European as well as on a global level.

Section 4 (*The European Library*) and Section 5 (*TEL-ME-MOR*) will deal with the first two objectives of CENL. In Section 6 (*The European Digital Library*) the second part of the mission will be looked at in more detail.

2. Gabriel - Gateway to Europe's National Libraries

Many of the national libraries were among the early users of the World Wide Web. It was therefore not surprising that the idea of creating some kind of web-based service for national libraries to keep up-to-date with current developments was presented quite early, at the 1994 CENL meeting in Oslo. The internet offered an opportunity to create such a service and the initial idea of a bulletin board was expanded into a website on behalf of all CENL members. This site would not only be useful for the libraries themselves, but it could also provide an online guide and a single point of access to the online services of the European national libraries.

The national libraries of Finland, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Poland and the UK piloted a prototype which they named *Gabriel, Gateway and Bridge to Europe's National Libraries*. Gabriel⁴ was made available on multiple independent web servers located across

Europe. Because of its success, at the 1996 CENL meeting in Lisbon it was decided that Gabriel was to be launched as the official website of CENL on January 1st 1997.



Gabriel contained information on a European level (cooperative projects, international events), on a national level (descriptions of the national libraries, addresses, opening hours, their functions and their collections), and on individual services from the participating national libraries (e.g. online catalogues, national bibliographies and journal indexes). This information was offered in English, German and French, not because these languages were considered to be the most important, but because they are the most common second languages in use across Europe. A particularly popular section of Gabriel was *Treasures from Europe's National Libraries*⁵, which is a virtual exhibition of selected treasures from all over Europe's national libraries. It is an impressive representation of European cultural heritage throughout the centuries.

The Mission and Success of Gabriel

The mission of Gabriel was

to provide information about Europe's national libraries, their collections and their services in order to facilitate access to them, and to foster the development of new services based on a shared infrastructure.

To achieve this mission, the following general objectives were defined:

- *Guidance* - Gabriel served as a comprehensive and up-to-date online guide to the functions, collections and services of Europe's national libraries;
- *Promotion* - Gabriel aimed to promote the national libraries of Europe in every appropriate way;
- *Cooperation* - Gabriel supported the building of collaborative networks between European national libraries;
- *Model* - Gabriel served as a model for other shared networked services in the library field in Europe and elsewhere.

Gabriel was indeed a model to other shared network services. But its range was slightly limited, because the information provided via Gabriel was freely available, so there was no need to think about access control or billing procedures. The required technical infrastructure was already available; in this respect the project was actually very simple, although without the web it would have been very difficult to establish a service like Gabriel.

The crucial factor for the success of Gabriel was the political will and commitment of the people in the national libraries to create a common service. Gabriel was a shared responsibility of all CENL libraries: it was jointly developed and maintained by a large international group of colleagues working cooperatively across national boundaries. Moreover, it gave all libraries a presence on the web, even before some had an individual website (it was not until 2004 that all CENL libraries operated a website).

From Gabriel to TEL Project - 2001 onwards

Although Gabriel provided much useful practical information about the national libraries of Europe, it lacked one vital functionality: it offered no facility to centrally search across the combined (digital and non-digital) collections and catalogues of the participating libraries. For this reason the TEL Project was started in February 2001. It was decided from the start that any TEL-related elements being added to Gabriel would be an addition to the already existing Gabriel services, and not a replacement. The existing Gabriel components would remain available. Gabriel was discontinued as a separate site in June 2005.

3. The TEL Project – A Feasibility Study

With the shortcomings of Gabriel in mind, on February 1st 2001 the TEL Project ⁶ was started. The overall goal of this project was the development of a cooperative framework that would lay the foundation for a system enabling integrated access to the distributed collections of the European national libraries. In other words, TEL Project was a feasibility study aimed at answering the question: *“Is it possible to create one central service for searching the catalogues & collections of all European national libraries?”*

The TEL Project was conducted as an Accompanying Measure funded under the European Union's Fifth Framework IST programme ⁷. The project partners were the national libraries of Finland, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, UK, Slovenia and Switzerland along with ICCU (the Italian central cataloguing institution) and CENL. In total 1.2M€ was funded by the European Union, the remaining 800K€ was financed by the partners.



Description of Work and Achievements

The work focused on reaching essential agreements with a large number of stakeholders on standards and processes in critical areas such as interoperability, scalability and multilingual issues. A roadmap to create a viable operational service after the end of the project was part of the work, so substantial effort was put into creating a sustainable business model for any eventual system and its future, including market research and user surveys.



Similar to Gabriel, the nature of the work was heavily based on consensus building through human networking. Work concentrated on

- *Publishers relations*: establishing cooperative approaches to business, licensing and copyright matters.
- *Metadata development & standardization*: creation of common standards for metadata, interoperability, scalability, multilingual issues and performance evaluation.
- *Public relations*: Publicity, organisation of workshops and seminars, dissemination and publication of project results.

The TEL Project officially ran for 30 months. At the end of this period the main achievements were:

- creation of consensus between national libraries on the mission and content of a yet to be launched European Library Service and agreement on a business model for the development and support of this service.
- establishment of agreed standardised metadata application profiles (based on the Dublin Core standard ⁸) for objects and collections within an environment which would enable their controlled evolution to accommodate future new types of material and new collections (the so-called TEL Application Profiles ⁹)
- design of a flexible prototype webportal (based on the SRU protocol ¹⁰)

Following the initial 30 months, work continued on a smaller scale for half a year. During the 2003 CENL meeting in Vilnius, the members adopted a resolution to build the new pan-European library service. The planned creation of this multilingual service, to be called *The European Library*, represented the successful culmination of 36 months of work by the partners in the TEL Project. The new service would be based upon the results of the TEL Project and would be launched in the beginning of 2005.

4. The European Library – An Operational Service

After a preparation phase of nine months in which the results from of TEL Project were converted into an operational service, *The European Library* ¹¹ portal (v1.0) was launched on 17th March 2005. Although the software was known to contain imperfections, the site was launched as a beta version, mainly to discover how robust the system was in a live environment and to conduct a user survey to find out how closely the portal matched the needs and understandings of users. This feedback as well as unsolicited comments were used to launch the alpha version (v1.1) on 24th November 2005. The homepage of v1.1 is shown in Figure1.

Vision, Mission and Added Value of The European Library

Today The European Library provides multilingual resource discovery facilities for researchers and informed citizens. It innovatively - for the first time - offers integrated access to the tens of millions of resources (books, magazines, journals... - both digital and non-digital) of national libraries of Europe. It offers free searching and delivers digital objects - some free, some priced. Moreover, it also gives information about the libraries themselves as represented on the Gabriel website.

Moreover, the service has added value

A. *For the users*, because

- Of the phenomenal depth and quality of trusted deep web resources held in the national libraries.
- It gives easy access to native resources held in other countries.
- It enables types of collection-level searching which would otherwise be impossible.
- The results from a federated search are presented to the user in a single screen.

- It is a major contribution to research both in making resources widely available and by making possible new connections through exploitation of a huge virtual library collection.
- It encourages new research!

The screenshot shows the homepage of The European Library Portal v1.1. At the top, there is a header with the library's name in multiple languages: "οθήκη La Biblioteca Europea Det europæiske bibliotek La bibliothèque k The European Library Det europeiska biblioteket Avrupa Kütüphanası Evropska knjižnica Az Európai Könyvtár Die Europäische Bibliothek". Below this is a navigation bar with tabs for "SEARCH", "COLLECTIONS", "LIBRARIES", "TREASURES", and "ABOUT US". The "SEARCH" tab is active, showing sub-tabs for "Simple search", "Advanced search", and "Results". A search box is present with the placeholder text "Enter a title, an author, ..." and a "SEARCH" button. Below the search box, there is a help icon (?) and instructions: "On start up you search in the [default list of collections](#)." and "For more specific results [choose your own collections](#)." A link for "[Advanced search](#) (more options)" is also provided. A section titled "Browser support" lists supported browsers: "Internet Explorer 6.0+(pc), Firefox 1.0.2+(pc/mac) and Mozilla 1.7.8/Netscape 7.2+(pc/mac). Opera and Safari are currently not supported. Extended browser support is under development." On the right side, there is a featured section titled "THE EUROPEAN DIGITAL LIBRARY TREASURES" with an image of an old manuscript. Below the image, the text reads: "Kratovo Four Gospels National Library of the Republic of Macedonia". There are two links: "[View treasure](#)" and "[More treasures](#)". The footer contains links for "Announcements", "Terms of service", "Technical info", "Feedback", "Sitemap", "Contact", and a language selector set to "English (eng)".

Figure 1: Homepage of The European Library Portal –v1.1. This version was launched on 24 November 2005.

B. For the partner libraries, because

- It provides an international showcase for their collections, products and services.
- It gives them an increased exposure on the world stage with combined political mass providing greater marketing and negotiation power.
- It gives libraries a feedback loop on what users are expecting on a European scale.
- The European Library is a mechanism to extend collaboration (Sections 5 & 6).

C. For the content, because

- It provides feedback on user demands which can prioritise institutional and national digitisation activities.
- The European Library provides a cooperative framework for continuous development, sharing and innovation in metadata, interoperability and other technical standards.

The European Library is targeted at informed citizens world-wide - both professional and non-professional - who want a powerful and simple way of finding library materials. Moreover, it will attract researchers as there is a vast virtual collection of materials from all disciplines. It offers anyone with an interest a simple route to access European cultural resources.

Hence, the vision of The European Library is:

Provision of equal access to promote world-wide understanding of the richness and diversity of European learning and culture.

and its mission is:

The European Library exists to open up the universe of knowledge, information and cultures of all Europe's national libraries.

Organisation & Management – Situation to Date

The development and support of The European Library portal is carried out by a specially created and staffed *European Library Office*¹² which is hosted by the Koninklijke Bibliotheek¹³, the National Library of the Netherlands. The Office, set up in June 2004, started with 3 members of staff (Head of Office, a Webmaster and a Technical Assistant) and has grown to currently 6 people (adding in extra technical, marketing and administration staff)

The Office is funded by contributions from the participating CENL members. The European Library has two different types of participant libraries: the currently 16 *Full Participants* are those libraries of which the catalogues & collections¹⁴ can be searched via the portal . The online resources of the other 29 *Basic Participants* will be included at a later stage. The information from the Gabriel site is available for both types of participants.

The Office is responsible to The European Library Management Board, which comprises the directors of the Full Participants. These libraries also provide members of staff for teams of technical,

editorial and language experts. These groups are critical to the ongoing development and direction of The European Library. They provide Europe wide expertise, sound boards for ideas and real practical knowledge as well as being the means of ensuring full participation when required from each partner library. The use of these networks leads to a strong collaborative framework. However, it is of vital importance that each partner fulfils its responsibility to The European Library, as the total it is only as good as its weakest link.



Full Participants commit funding for 3 years to the development of the service, with a renewal of the subscription after that period. Annual fees depend on the total budget of the library and are between 1K€ and 30K€ with a one-time joining fee of 5K€ Basic Participants pay 300€ per year. Besides these subscriptions The European Library actively seeks funding from the European Commission ¹⁵, where relevant to the wider development of the service (including satellite projects - such as TEL-ME-MOR - Section 5).

The current 16 Full Participants are the national libraries of Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy (Florence), Latvia, Netherlands, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, along with ICCU (the national central cataloguing institute from Rome, Italy). In July 2006 the national library of Spain will become the next Full Participant. To maintain momentum, for the Full Participants there is an opt-out policy for portal and marketing development. But of course any new portal functionality or marketing strategy will be built upon consensus achieved in the various expert groups.

Next Steps - Towards the Future

On 2nd May 2006 the latest version (v1.2) of the portal software was released. In the months before, the Office conducted various user studies to improve functionality. The results showed that - similar to what other studies on federated searching in digital library environments have shown - end-users are Google-minded: they in general don't understand the fact that they *first* have to select the collections they want to search in *before* they can make a query. For this reason v1.2 paid special attention to thematic collection searching (see Figure2).

By the end of 2006 the current number of 16 Full Participants should have grown to 20. With most of the libraries from the TEL-ME-MOR project (Section 5) joining within the coming 15 months, this number will likely to have increased to around 30 by the end of 2007. For smaller libraries who feel less able to join due to resource or knowledge issues supporting measures will be conceived. The entire organisation should be able to run efficiently on the subscriptions paid by the member libraries (but not omitting additional funding from third parties such as the European Union).

The European Library Newsletter ¹⁶, which was issued bimonthly right from the start of the Office in June 2004, has grown from an initial 450 (an inheritance from the TEL Project) to 730 subscribers currently. The target audience are the Basic Participant libraries, librarians & information professionals who are engaged in related services or projects and publishers & policy makers concerned with technical, legal and content issues of digital publications. The goal for 2006 is to have 1000 people signed up, with 2000 by the end of 2007.

For customer service, The European Library makes sure that all questions & comments are answered in a fast and appropriate way. Currently this can be done on an ad-hoc basis, but when eventually all European national libraries will be Full Participants, the Office needs to make sure that the site is highly self explanatory, as a helpdesk is an enormous undertaking for a full pan-European portal in 37 languages. To ensure that the portal is being developed according to user priorities and requirements, the Office will

continue to analyse the data obtained from its log files and web analytics software and will conduct regular usability and user surveys.

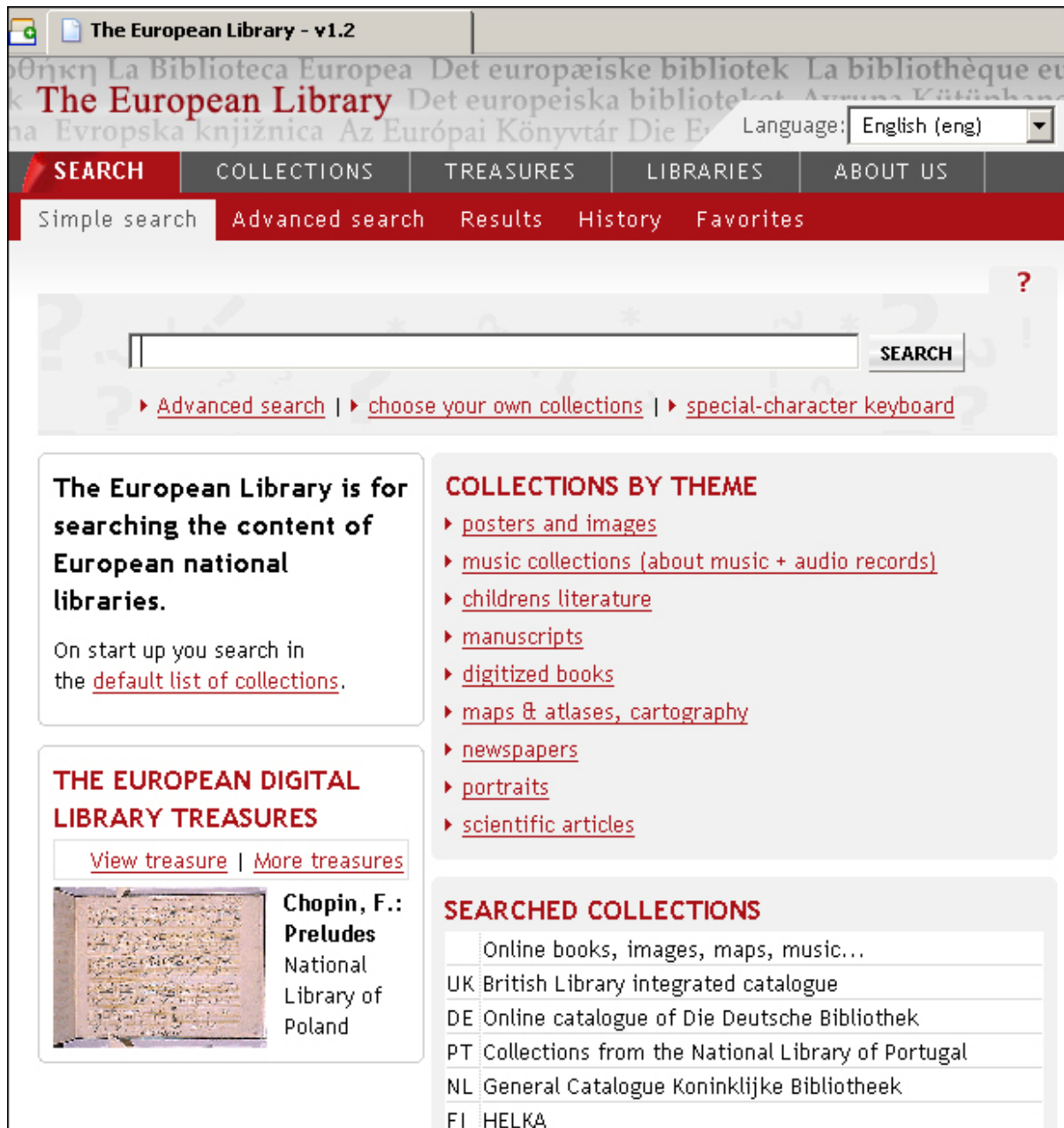


Figure2: Homepage of The European Library Portal –v1.2. This version was launched on 2 May 2006. Note the more thematic approach to collection-level searching compared to v1.1

In March 2006 the site attracted around 100,000 visitors. With the main marketing & communications offensive still to begin, the goal is to reach out to 1.5 million users monthly by the end of 2006, expanding to 5 million a month by the end of 2007. A linkage programme is underway, targeted at all relevant institutions and learned societies throughout the world. The European Library aims to increase its Google page-rank from the current 3,050 links to the site to 12,000 by the end of 2007.

Ultimately The European Library wants to be the means of access to the digital libraries of Europe and to ensure that such access works for the user. The breadth of this will

be decided over the coming months in relation to the outcomes of the European Digital Library – see Section 6.

5. TEL-ME-MOR – Expanding the Network

Started in February 2005, the 1.4M€*TEL-ME-MOR project*¹⁷ is a two-year project funded by the European Union (EU) with the overall goal of stimulating and facilitating institutions and organisations from the New Member States (NMS) of the European Union¹⁸ to apply for future EU funding in the field of cultural heritage, learning and ICT.

Besides this overall aim, there is a more practical goal to *The European Library: Modular Extensions for Mediating Online Resources*: preparing the ten NMS national libraries to become Full Participants of The European Library. The national library of Slovenia is already a Full Participant, so it will only benefit directly from the first objective.

TEL-ME-MOR addresses the cultural, educational, industrial and public sectors. It aims to bring together the various professional networks, the authorities which are responsible for the institutions and their services to the research sector and the research, scholarly & IT communities. In particular, the project targets the following audiences:



- Libraries, museums, archives
- Educational institutions (schools, universities, etc.)
- Researchers
- Government agencies and policy makers
- Local authorities

Description of Work and Added Value

The activities of the TEL-ME-MOR project are organised into five work packages (WPs). They deal with

- The analysis of research requirements in the NMS (WP1).
- The development of the multilingual capacity of the network (WP3).
- Awareness building and electronic information space for research partnerships (WP4).
- Management, coordination and evaluation activities of the project (WP5).

The European Library Office leads WP2 which deals with developing the network for access to national resources. In other words: the collections from the NMS national libraries are made ready to be included in The European Library. Before any NMS collection can be made available however, it is first tested in the TEL-ME-MOR Test Portal¹⁹. However, the national library has to become a Full Participant first (the subscription fee is not included in the TEL-ME-MOR funding) In addition to this, WP2 aims to raise the profile of this knowledge network in the NMS.

Besides the added values mentioned in Section 4, the benefits of this project to the growth of The European Library are:

- The creation of new quality and trusted resources for end-users. Currently there are 165 collections available in The European Library. The TEL-ME-MOR partners will contribute an extra 56 collections before the end of 2006.
- The extension of the existing network and collaborative framework in the field of technology, open standards and the development & sharing of knowledge.
- The extended profile and increased political mass of The European Library. This might serve as an example for cooperation with and between other European cultural institutions, such as archives and museums (see Section 6)

6. Towards a European Digital Library

In December 2004 Google announced its plans to digitise and publish online 15 million volumes from four prestigious US libraries (Stanford, Michigan, Harvard and New York) and from the Oxford University Library in the UK by the year 2015. This bold initiative sparked a wave of (panic?) activities across Europe.

Google Unites Europe - A European Vision

In an article in the French newspaper *Le Monde* the President of the French national library²⁰, Jean-Noël Jeanneney, expressed his concern that Google's initiative could create a bias towards the English language and Anglo-American culture. He stressed the cultural diversity and multilinguality as basic values of the European culture. His comments were widely picked up in the media, who immediately presented it as a 'cultural war with Google'. In the weeks after the article, Jeanneney weakened his statements, but remained the key figure in awakening decision makers and mobilising funds for the digitisation of European cultural heritage.

Making the holdings of Europe's libraries and archives available online will not be a trivial task. Firstly, there is a wide range of different materials available – books, film fragments, photographs, manuscripts, sheet music, speeches, sounds, etc. Secondly, what materials to select from around 2.5 billion books and bound periodicals in Europe's libraries and millions of hours of film and video in its audiovisual archives?

Things began to speed up when the French call for safeguarding the European cultural heritage got critical backing from the leaders of five countries, supporting French President Jacques Chirac in asking for coordination and funding from the European Union to create a '*European Digital Library*'. This initiative found the support of a broad coalition of national libraries from Germany, Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Spain, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Slovakia, Sweden and the UK.

The European Union recognised the vital importance to digitise, preserve, and make Europe's written and audiovisual heritage available on the internet and usable for European citizens, innovators, artists and entrepreneurs for their studies, work or leisure, for now and for future generations. The first concrete action was the launch of an online consultation on

30 September 2005. All interested individuals and organisations were invited to give their views on a number of key issues concerning the creation of a European Digital Library. The consultation closed on 20 January 2006 and received 225 replies. In general, the initiative was welcomed and seen as an opportunity to make Europe's cultural heritage more accessible and usable.

Regarding the technology of a proposed European Digital Library, it was clear from the beginning that any kind of central database would be impossible to achieve, but – similar to The European Library portal - *integrated multilingual* access to the digitised materials of Europe's cultural institutions (libraries, archives, museums) would be more realistic. The contents of the European Digital Library would thus grow at the same speed as the underlying digital collections in the participating institutions.

It was also stressed from the start that the European Digital Library should not be constructed from scratch, but build on existing initiatives. In fact, the results of the online consultation indicated that The European Library would be a very good starting point, because it not only offers a working technological platform based on common standards, but also provides a firm cooperative organisational framework in which European national libraries already collaborate and have experimented with improving the online accessibility of their digital assets. As for the remaining two ingredients for a successful European Digital Library: the digitisation of many more resources and the challenge of multilingual search & retrieval still require more attention, research and commitment in the years ahead.

On 27 February '06 the European Commission decided to set up a 20 member *High Level Expert Group on Digital Libraries*²¹ to advise the Commission on how to best address the organisational, legal and technical challenges at a European level and to contribute to a shared strategic vision for the European Digital Library. A few days later the EU announced its next steps for this flagship project, already called '*one of the greatest digital construction projects ever undertaken*'. The decision to co-fund the creation of a Europe-wide network of digitisation centres and to address the issues of copyright protection was welcomed by CENL with great enthusiasm. The proposed timeline of the EU is as follows:

- 2006 - Full EU-wide collaboration between national libraries in the framework of The European Library and the CENL.
- 2008 - Multilingual access to digital collections of national libraries through The European Library portal. The collections must be searchable and usable. A minimum of 2 million digital works (books, pictures, sound files etc.) should be accessible through the European Digital Library.
- 2010 - the European Digital Library needs to have expanded to include collections of a number of archives, museums and other libraries, and possibly publishers. A minimum of 6 million digital works should be accessible through the European Digital Library. In practice, this number can be much higher, if cultural institutions of different types and at different levels (national, regional, local) participate.

The Role of CENL and The European Library

As a response to this, CENL had to re-think the position of The European Library within the bigger framework of the European Digital Library. At the time of writing this is

very much an ongoing process, but for now The European Library sees itself as the means of providing access. This 'access' is for the long term. It is based on creating, maintaining and conforming to standards in metadata, collection and service descriptions, data harvesting and access protocols. By creating a network across the 45 CENL member libraries there is a practical implementation of standards at an international level. The European Library can also help the priority in digitisation from analysis of user statistics and it can operate as a model organisational structure for cooperation with other cultural heritage institutions, universities, publishers and information providers on a European as well as on a global level.

Starting from the current 16 Full Participants, the first set of measures of The European Library for the years to come are:

- By the end of 2006 the 7 remaining NMS libraries¹⁸ should join as a result of the TEL-ME-MOR project. The necessary subscription fees will be taken care of by a one-time donation from Switzerland.
- From September '06 onwards work will start to bring another 10 libraries in the EU and EFTA²² on board by the end of 2007. This will be EU funded.
- Continue to work to persuade non-EU libraries to become Full Participants, such as Turkey, Russia and Ukraine, further strengthening and widening the political mass of CENL.

From the point of view of digital content, CENL has started a second set of actions early 2006. In the present European Library portal there are some rich seams of digitised materials, such as maps, music scores, manuscripts and posters. However, there is an emphasis on catalogues, rather than digital resources. Given the fact that currently only 5-10% of the metadata is enriched by digital objects, there is a desperate need for more (digital) content on The European Library. Because of this, CENL has set an overall goal for the coming years to digitise more content more quickly and to make sure that access is as complete as possible. At the moment of writing a content survey among CENL members is being conducted as a first step to satisfy this need. Aims of this survey are:

1. To make stakeholders aware of how little of the total holdings of the national libraries has been digitised so far and how enormous the potential is.
2. To describe the current baseline: what is available in what form in the Full Participant and TEL-ME-MOR libraries against the total holdings of these libraries.
3. To find out what will be digitised in institutional, regional or national digitisation programmes over the next 5 years
4. To find out what national libraries think should be digitised in the next 5 years
5. To describe for each library how it is currently decided what is digitised and what the prioritisation criteria for digitisation are.
6. To investigate ways how existing content can be used and promoted more efficiently.
 - a) To investigate what means are already or could become available within and across the libraries to make more efficient use of existing content-rich collections.
 - b) To investigate ways to facilitate the creation of virtual content-rich collections across (and within) the libraries (especially via promoting common metadata and access standards)

Strengthening the Cooperation

As a third series of measures to define and reinforce their position in the scope of the European Digital Library, CENL and The European Library have started working together with a number of relevant key initiatives in the cultural heritage field.

1. To investigate the challenge of multilingual search & retrieval, The European Library is looking at the **MACS**²³ project. This CENL initiative aims to provide multilingual subject access to library catalogues. It enables users to simultaneously search the catalogues of the project's partner libraries in the language of their choice (English, French, German). This multilingual search is made possible thanks to the equivalence links created between the three indexing languages used in these libraries: SWD (for German), RAMEAU (for French) and LCSH (for English). Topics (headings) from the three lists are analysed to determine whether they are exact or partial matches, of a simple or complex nature. The end result is neither a translation nor a new thesaurus but a mapping of existing and widely used indexing languages.



2. The **DELOS**²⁴ network intends to conduct a joint program of activities aimed at integrating and coordinating the ongoing research activities of the major European teams working in Digital Library-related areas with the goal of developing the next generation Digital Library technologies.



The cooperation between DELOS and The European Library focuses primarily on the integration of DELOS-provided functionality into the existing The European Library portal and ensures that duplication of activity does not take place. DELOS has also benchmarked version 1.1 of The European Library software against their own benchmark standards.

3. France, Italy and the UK are working together on **MICHAEL**²⁵, a ground-breaking project that aims to provide simple and quick access to the digital collections of museums, libraries and archives from different European countries. The project began in June 2004, with the focus on implementing an innovative multilingual open source platform that will be equipped with a search engine. The Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands and Poland have also indicated interest. By 2007 the MICHAEL portal should be available in at least 12 European languages and will be capable of retrieving digital collections that are dispersed across Europe.



The European Library has approached MICHAEL to start talks aimed at ways of building on each others knowledge using the expertise within the networks and finding ways of jointly presenting content to the user.

4. MICHAEL was launched as spin-off of the **MINERVA**²⁶ working group. MINERVA is a network of EU Member States' Ministries to discuss, correlate and harmonise activities carried out in digitisation of cultural and scientific content for creating an agreed European



common platform, recommendations and guidelines about digitisation, metadata, long-term accessibility and preservation. Due to the high level of commitment assured by the involvement of EU governments, it aims to coordinate national programmes, and its approach is strongly based on the principle of embeddedness in national digitisation activities.

5. At the moment of writing The European Library is also starting talks with **BRICKS**²⁷. This project works with museums, libraries and other organisations and aims to maximise the impact for the construction of a shared digital heritage, which nevertheless respects the European cultural diversity. Its "bottom-up" approach, which is based on the interoperability of a dynamic community of local systems, maximises the use of existing resources and know-how, and, therefore, national investments. BRICKS will contribute in: a) tuning the mission of memory institutions in the digital era, b) developing a shared vision for the exploitation of digital cultural content and c) encouraging cultural cooperation for the construction of an interoperable cultural capital. BRICKS currently has 50 member organisations, also outside Europe.



This short overview shows that there have been many separate beginnings. The big challenge in the years ahead will be to unite the efforts that have started and provide easy and efficient access to the spectrum of collections, not only to European citizens, but also to the rest of the world. It is very unlikely that any of the parties mentioned here can and will have the resources and commitment to do all the work on its own. Probably the spotlight will be on the organisation that can best manage a project and get the various contributors to cooperate. CENL and The European Library have proven to play this game rather well so far. Time will tell if the current mission of The European Library - "*to open up the universe of knowledge, information and culture of all Europe's national libraries*" - is only a first step toward its vision - "*the provision of equal access to promote worldwide understanding of the richness and diversity of European learning and culture.*"



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After a career in astronomy, Olaf D. Janssen (1973) has been working for the National Library of the Netherlands since 2001. He started as the editor in chief for Gabriel, the web service of the European national libraries and the precursor of TheEuropeanLibrary.org.

In 2004 he was asked to join The European Library and has been involved in developing the site and managing the networks across Europe. Currently he is a project manager for TEL-ME-MOR, a project aimed at bringing the national libraries of the 10 New Member States of the European Union into

The European Library. He has given numerous presentations & lectures across Europe and in Asia.

His life-long passions include mountaineering, cycling, classical men's shoes and cooking.

Endnotes & References

1. CENL

¹ Conference of European National Librarians (CENL) <http://www.cenl.org>

² Members of CENL : <http://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/libraries>

³ Council of Europe: <http://www.coe.int>

2. GABRIEL

⁴ Gabriel website <http://www.kb.nl/gabriel> (no longer available – currently redirects to <http://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org>)

⁵ Treasures from Europe's National Libraries: currently available at <http://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/treasures>

* Dale, P. *Gabriel - a history and a new beginning*, Gabriel website, June 2002. Retrieved from Google cache on 30 April 2006

* Hakala, J. *Gabriel - Gateway to Europe's National Libraries*, Tietolinja News, Issue 1, 1999, <http://www.lib.helsinki.fi/tietolinja/0199/gabriel.html>

3. THE TEL PROJECT

⁶ TEL Project website. No longer online. Archive available at http://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/management/telproject_archive (password protected)

⁷ TEL Project - Information Society Technologies (IST) Project Fact Sheet http://icadc.cordis.lu/fep-cgi/srchidadb?ACTION=D&SESSION=&RCN=60643&CALLER=PROJ_IST

⁸ Dublin Core Metadata Initiative <http://www.dublincore.org/>

⁹ TEL Application Profiles for objects and collections

http://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/metadatabase/tel_ap.html

http://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/metadatabase/tel_ap_cld.html

¹⁰ SRU Protocol <http://www.loc.gov/standards/sru/>

* Woldering, B. *The European Library: Integrated Access to the National Libraries of Europe*, Ariadne, Issue 38, January 2004. <http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue38/woldering/>

* Schwens, U., Solberg, S., Woldering, B. and Dale, P. *The European Library (TEL) – The Gate to Europe's Knowledge*, Cultivate Interactive, Issue 5, 1 October 2001 <http://www.cultivate-int.org/issue5/tel/>

4. THE EUROPEAN LIBRARY

¹¹ The European Library: <http://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org>

¹² The European Library Office: <http://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/contact>

¹³ Koninklijke Bibliotheek, National Library of the Netherlands: <http://www.kb.nl>

¹⁴ Collections searchable via The European Library:

<http://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/collections>

¹⁵ Europe's Information Society Portal: http://europa.eu.int/information_society/index_en.htm

¹⁶ The European Library Newsletter: <http://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/newsletter>

- * Van Veen, T. and Oldroyd, B. *Search and Retrieval in the European Library: A New Approach*, D-Lib Magazine, Volume 10, Number 2, February 2004, [doi:10.1045/february2004-vanveen](https://doi.org/10.1045/february2004-vanveen)

5. TEL-ME-MOR

- ¹⁷ TEL-ME-MOR project website: <http://www.telmemor.net>
- ¹⁸ New Member States of the European Union: Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia. Joined the EU in 2004. Slovenia, Latvia and Estonia are already Full Participants of The European Library.
- ¹⁹ TEL-ME-MOR Test Portal : http://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/portal_TMM

6. THE EUROPEAN DIGITAL LIBRARY

- ²⁰ National Library of France: <http://www.bnf.fr>
- ²¹ Members of the *High Level Expert Group on Digital Libraries* http://europa.eu.int/information_society/activities/digital_libraries/high_level_expert_group/index_en.htm
- ²² EFTA - European Free Trade Association - International organization of Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein: <http://www.efta.int>
- ²³ MACS – Multilingual Access to Subjects. Partners are the national libraries of Switzerland, France, UK and Germany: <http://macs.cenl.org>
- ²⁴ DELOS - Network of Excellence on Digital Libraries: <http://www.delos.info> and <http://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/delos>
- ²⁵ MICHAEL - Multilingual Inventory of Cultural Heritage in Europe: <http://www.michael-culture.org> and <http://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/michael>
- ²⁶ MINERVA - Ministerial Network for Valorising Activities in Digitisation <http://www.minervaeurope.org>
- ²⁷ BRICKS - Building resources for Integrated Cultural Knowledge Services <http://www.brickscmmunity.org/>

- * *Overview of Publications about the creation of the European Digital Library* <http://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/press>
- * *European digital library proposed*, eGovernment News, 04 May 2005. Retrieved on 24 April 2006 from <http://europa.eu.int/idabc/en/document/4239/330>
- * *The European Digital Library: Frequently Asked Questions*. Retrieved on 24 April 2006 from <http://libraries.theeuropeanlibrary.org/press/edl-faq20060302.html>
- * *European Commission steps up efforts to put Europe's memory on the Web via a "European Digital Library"*. Retrieved on 24 April 2006 from <http://libraries.theeuropeanlibrary.org/press/edl20060302.html>
- * Bjørner, S. *Building a European Digital Library: A Challenge in the Culture Wars*, March 2006. Article retrieved from RedOrbit.com on 15 March 2006 <http://www.redorbit.com/modules/news/tools.php?tool=print&id=427040> (print version)