

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on i2010: Digital Libraries

(2006/C 229/07)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

Having regard to the Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on *I2010 — Digital libraries* COM(2005) 465 final;

Having regard to the decision of its President of 24 January 2006 to instruct its Commission for Culture and Education to draw up an opinion on this subject;

Having regard to its opinion on the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on *i2010 — A European Information Society for Growth and Employment*;

Having regard to the opinion of the Commission for Culture, Education and Research, adopted on 4 April 2006 (CdR 32/2006 rev. 1) (rapporteur: **Mr Jyrki Myllyvirta**, Mayor of Mikkeli (FI/EPP));

adopted the following opinion at its 65th plenary session, held on 14/15 June 2006 (meeting of 15 June):

1. The Committee of the Regions' views

The Committee of the Regions

1.1 **welcomes** the proposal for an initiative to digitise Europe's cultural heritage and develop digital libraries and **stresses** that it is a key component of the Commission's initiative — *i2010 — A European Information Society for Growth and Employment*, the full implementation of which is a prerequisite for improving European competitiveness;

1.2 **emphasises** that the digitisation, online accessibility and preservation of cultural heritage should be promoted in all European countries, regions, cities and languages in such a way that it supports the preservation of cultural and linguistic diversity. The point of departure should be appreciation of culture — including minority cultures — and preserving cultural achievements for future generations;

1.3 **recalls** that the digitisation of cultural heritage is advancing rapidly in other parts of the world and **stresses** that making European cultural heritage and literature widely accessible in digital form is a precondition for the success of the European knowledge-based society and at the same time supports the development of Europe's regions **and cities**;

1.4 **appreciates** the fact that the Commission communication highlights the major challenges and many unresolved technical, legal and financial questions relating to the digitisation of cultural heritage, and **notes** that local and regional authorities support efforts to move forward in this matter;

1.5 **stresses** that local and regional authorities are the most important implementing bodies for all information society strategies and in many cases it is they who maintain libraries, so that adequate attention should also be paid to the local and

regional dimension in the context of the digital libraries initiative;

1.6 **considers** it to be of the utmost importance that the digitisation of cultural heritage be promoted in Europe in all Member States and **emphasises** that the benefits of digitisation will only be achieved with the widespread promotion — including at local and regional level — of the online accessibility of cultural heritage and the development of intelligent information searches;

1.7 **points out** that digitisation is a long-term process which places heavy demands on resources, involving the ongoing maintenance, updating and conversion of material, and **agrees** about the benefits which digitisation brings for the accessibility and preservation of cultural heritage;

1.8 **recalls** that digital material comprises both digitised analogue material and new material which was originally created in digital format;

1.9 **notes** that digital library services in Member States comprise components constructed at national, regional and local level which are linked to each other by electronic means. For this to succeed there is a need for cooperation and coordination at European level;

1.10 **believes** that libraries has a vital role in making cultural heritage and literature accessible in an online environment as it is with their help that this material can best be delivered to the public, but at the same time **notes** that their cooperation with archives and museums and with other cultural establishments and relevant players in this field is absolutely essential.

2. The Committee of the Regions' recommendations

The Committee of the Regions,

2.1 **stresses** that the primary purpose of digitisation is not to replace traditional printed and other physical cultural material but rather to produce digitised material alongside analogue material and to promote the accessibility of information;

2.2 **emphasises** that as only a very small proportion of European cultural heritage is digitised and a vast amount of work remains to be done, new forms of funding also need to be developed, including collaboration with private sector players;

2.3 **points out** that in small countries and language areas commercial markets for digital material have, to date, been fairly small, even though the fixed costs associated with producing such material are of almost the same of order of magnitude as in the major language areas, and **stresses** that, thanks to technological advances, it is already possible and also important to take on board the needs of users in different language areas in developing digital libraries;

2.4 **notes** that, while a major part of Europe's older cultural heritage is already free of copyright restrictions and thus available on information networks, the Commission's proposal to reform copyright legislation relating to more recent cultural heritage is highly relevant;

2.5 **points out** that in some countries there are already signs that some sections of the public are being left behind by the advances in digital technology and **feels** that adequate opportunities to access the Internet and guidance on how to use it should also be made available to people in the least advantaged social groups;

2.6 **stresses** that local and regional authorities have a crucial role to play as producers and owners of cultural heri-

tage and in taking responsibility for ensuring that all members of the public are given as equal access to information society services as possible;

2.7 **emphasises** that the opportunity which public libraries in many European countries provide to access traditional printed material is still very important, but that they must also offer members of the public the opportunity to use the Internet and online services. Taking account of the end users of online services and their local needs requires that the organisation of these services be carried out by local and regional players. It is essential that this also be taken into consideration in the national funding of library activities;

2.8 **notes** that where local and regional authorities participate in various kinds of library or other consortia which own a network server environment and offer a full range of services it must be ensured that they are given sufficient opportunity to influence decision-making in this context;

2.9 **welcomes** the fact that the Commission highlights the challenges relating to the choice of material to be digitised and **considers** that it is important, first of all, that adequate attention be paid to selection criteria that are based on local and regional considerations and, in addition, that a balance be struck between selection criteria based on public demand, on the one hand, and on ensuring preservation, on the other hand;

2.10 **endorses** the proposal to formulate strategies for the long-term preservation of digitised cultural material so that the resources used for the digitisation of cultural heritage are not wasted when changes occur in technical systems and software;

2.11 **thinks** that the proposal to set up centres of competence in Member States is interesting and **stresses** that an important task of the centres should be ensuring that the necessary skills and know-how also exist at local and regional level and the dissemination of good practice.

Brussels, 15 June 2006

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Michel DELEBARRE
