

Digital Heritage Support Actions Concertation Event

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Report on the discussion and conclusions of the meeting

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1. The context for support actions as the transition from the Fifth Framework Programme (FP5) to the Sixth Framework Programme (FP6) is made

The objective of the meeting was to exchange information about ongoing support actions in the Digital Cultural Heritage area, including a discussion about the achievements and impact of support actions, the mechanisms which have proven successful, and especially the perspectives and future needs, taking general trends and the evolution from the Fifth to the Sixth Framework Programme for European Research (FP5 to FP6) into account.

Support actions have become an important instrument to complement RTD actions in the Fifth Framework Programme. Support actions fill gaps where the actors in the programme (project consortia, commission services, experts and advisors) feel that additional contributions are essential for the success of the programme, but are not provided by the main actors as part of RTD projects. Separate support actions are needed because some problems require wider cooperation among many projects, the tasks do not fit into RTD projects with a clear and limited focus, or are by their nature independent of RTD projects.

Support actions, including those represented here, typically concentrate on several of the following tasks:

- Contribution to standards
- Dissemination of essential information, especially if this is not directly exploitable, to a wide audience, including the organisation of conferences and meetings
- Promotion of best practice and competence building in key areas
- Evaluation and benchmarking
- Market watch and technology monitoring
- Research into socio-economic aspects of applications based on new technology

The program of the event and the support actions represented are described in the agenda (attached), where the links to the presentations can be found.

Trends and the changing context for RTD and Support Actions in the Sixth Framework Programme

The context for the future developments was set by Bernard Smith's presentation of the planning for and the decisions already made about FP6. Also, Mr. Seitz in his introduction stressed the fact that the foreseen enlargement of the EU will present challenges for the integration of

countries and organisations with different cultural backgrounds. This will be an issue for the coming years.

The context for FP6 has been set by the decisions at the Lisbon meeting of the European Council in March 2000, where the goal was set to create

... the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.

The preservation of Cultural Heritage is an important item on the agenda, and is described in the FP6 under discussion as

“For cultural heritage the effort will concentrate on intelligent systems for dynamic access to and preservation of tangible and intangible cultural and scientific resources.”

The concept of “ambient intelligence” is part of the vision for FP6 and demands more than only the creation of technology, but demands solutions which put people in the centre of attention, and lead to solutions for urgent societal problems (unemployment, changing skills and bridging the skills gap) are in the focus of the strategy (see also ISTAG documents on www.cordis.lu). Intelligent access to information is a pillar of this strategy, and one objective is to create value from the rich cultural heritage of Europe.

Where in FP5 the exploration and testing of new technology solutions, and also the dissemination of experience and results with new technology were important, the new orientation can be understood to focus large strategic projects on real, large scale solution to urgent problems such as unemployment, closing of the skills gap, inclusion and integration.

The demonstration of success in these undertakings is a major objective of integrated projects in FP6.

The management of FP6 will differ considerably from the previous management structures for community RTD. A target has been set to reduce management cost by 30%, which means that responsibilities must be decentralised and project management by the European Commission must be more indirect. Although not all details are as yet decided on, some trends are clear:

- Decentralisation of management, resulting in larger projects with a higher degree of autonomy

As a consequence the activities allocated to support actions today will be partly integrated into “Networks of Excellence” and “Integrated Projects” (two of the three types of projects defined for FP6). Contractual conditions

and the situation of SMEs may remain much as they are today, but still will have to be integrated into larger projects. A likely consequence is that there will be considerably fewer support actions as we know them today, and they will be focussed on activities clearly separate from and supplementary to the RTD projects. A small area of research has been defined which will directly support policy development.

- Integration with national programs

Based on article 169, the cooperation with and the integration of national programmes will be supported, this will be the third of the three instruments for implementing research in FP6. For the Digital Cultural Heritage (DCH) domain this is an important aspect, because the long-term activities in the areas of libraries, museums and other infrastructure instruments form the basis for DCH innovation and provide the basis for long-term impact and standardisation.

- Vertical Integration of Research and Technology Development with other programmes

It was also mentioned that vertical integration of RTD with programmes on a more operative level, as stated by Flavio Tariffi, may become relevant. This corresponds to the normal positioning of research, where upstream research supports the development of downstream operational actions. A tight vertical integration is generally thought to be highly desirable in this situation. The scale has to be kept in mind: Research represents a comparatively small share of total effort: In the relationship between FP6 and the Structural Funds, the Structural Funds represent a budget of 100 BEuro, as compared to the budget for FP6 on the order of 10 BEuro.

- Programme and project management based on monitoring and measurement of success and impact

The decentralised management of (larger) projects will allocate more responsibility and autonomy to the project consortia. This will require that appropriate organisations will have to exist with the necessary capacity to manage projects with durations of five years and possibly more, and budgets in the order of millions or 10s of millions of Euro. The less direct management by the commission will be implemented by using reporting based on measures of results and impact. A competitive basis for the activities will be sought. Consequently, accepted and valid measures for success and impact will be needed to a larger extent than in current practice.

2. Achievements and results of support actions highlighted during the meeting

The presentations of the support actions made during the meeting (see agenda appended to this document) provided the background for discussion, including among others the following issues.

- Which needs for cross-programme activities exist today, and where will new needs arise in future?
- Which tasks demand continuity, how will the continuity be implemented and which organisations will be responsible?

2.2.1 Session 1: Networks of excellence / Co-ordination with national programmes / International cooperation

Support actions DELOS, ELSENET and PULMAN were presented. A common theme of these projects is the promotion of best practice, including common test and evaluation procedures and transfer of knowledge. A characteristic is that these projects combine a large number of the relevant organisations in their field, and may have to be sustained for a very long time in order to attain their impact.

It became clear in the discussion that so far these projects have often included an element of enthusiast and volunteer activity, i.e. they were not initiated and managed as part of the mission and strategic actions of an organisation, but have relied much on the initiatives of individuals. This is the manner of operation which is typical for academic environments. In the future, appropriate organisations will be needed which pursue these activities on a more stable and permanent basis, and can provide an organisational and financial basis for managing such projects. It was also pointed out that some activities, such as standardisation, should be the responsibility of organisations and institutions which represent a sufficient share of the organisations concerned.

The experience for example of ELSENET has shown that knowledge transfer, which is an essential component of standardisation activities, must be based on a sustainable long-term strategy, requires considerable resources and continuity, and has not been easy to implement. A proactive long-term strategy rather than reactive behaviour is desirable.

With reference to the perspective of FP6 there is no question that these actions need continuity, but the efficiency of the existing mechanism will have to be reviewed, and most likely new forms of organisation have to be found. It was also recognized that this may require some time for preparation and should be initiated without delay.

2.2.2 Session 2: Socio-economic frame, technology transfer and benchmarking

Projects TRIS, RADICAL, EVAN, LIBECON and PROACTe were presented.

Dissemination of results and events in different forms are core tasks of the projects presented in this section. Because each project concentrates on a restricted domain, the events are rather fragmented. Synergies are not fully realised as a consequence, and the impact generated remains limited to a restricted audience.

Future activities are likely to be more integrated to reduce the fragmentation and to achieve more synergy. As was pointed out, socio-economic research and relevant trials may be integrated with activities under the structural fund (which represent a much higher budget than RTD projects), leading to a vertical integration. Transfer of knowledge and skills, and competence building will play an important role here, as well as benchmarking.

2.2.3 Testbeds and technical cooperation for standardisation

Projects CLEF, VNET5 and CHIOS were presented.

Evaluation activities, as developed by CLEF and VNET5, stimulate technical advance and benefit from standardised benchmark tests. A general need was seen to introduce more serious tests and testbeds in more areas, and technology transfer and competence building is a challenge in this domain as in others.

In these activities, as in standardisation, activities must be sustained on a high technical and competence level for a considerable time in order to achieve the desired impact.

2.2.4 Session 4: Information and dissemination, technology transfer

Projects CULTIVATE, CELIP, HEREIN, HERITAGENET2 and DIFFUSE were presented in this session.

The importance of formal standards, notably XML, and somewhat less formally agreed standards and widely accepted ontologies are important

for the successful interoperation and long-term evolution in cultural heritage, libraries and collections.

As other activities, these will require appropriate instruments for long-term sustainability. The relevant context within which these must exist is not research, but the operational environment. Actions needed in this domain may have to span RTD and operational activities more fully in future.

3. Discussion

A number of issues were taken up in a structured discussion, and resulted in a number of coherent topics, which are reported here, and which relate to how support actions in DCH might evolve in the future:

A Change of the programme structure

The changes from FP5 to FP6 appear to be a change from managing a number of separate projects to the management of research programmes. The result is a more long-term vision for actions, and a focus on larger actions which represent significant numbers of relevant organisations. Many activities carried out by projects of the type "support action" will be carried out as part of larger projects, and significantly fewer separate support actions will be needed.

Events for dissemination and information exchange will be required further, but will be coordinated and integrated into larger events which should reach wider audiences.

The goal to administer FP6 more efficiently emphasizes the cost-efficiency of actions, including support actions. While it is clear that higher efficiency is an objective, it is not yet clear what can be done more efficiently, where the existing mechanisms are lacking, and which alternatives are in competition.

B Networks of excellence

Many important support actions are now operating in the form of networks of excellence, but the definition of these instruments will change in FP6. The new definition and the possible evolution of existing networks towards the new structures are not yet sufficiently clear. Networks of Excellence will be expected to have a critical mass in terms of share of the relevant organisations represented, and also in terms of economic stability.

An important issue to clarify will be which organisations are able to manage Networks of Excellence, and which ones will be interested to do

so. Existing networks represent considerable value in terms of the working organisation built up, often over a long time. It will be important to consider which organisations will continue to manage existing Networks, and new organisations such as EEIGs may have to be established.

In the area of Cultural Heritage many organisations (most libraries in Europe, for example, have a staff of 3 or less) are small in every respect, and an important task for the near future will be to identify the organisations which will have the financial and personnel capacity to manage Networks of Excellence and also represent organisations in their domain.

C Long-term coordination issues and standardisation

Standardisation is the typical task which requires long-term commitment and the combination of the interests of many parties. The many small institutions may have to form groups and associations in order to participate and be represented in these activities. No one doubts that these activities are essential, require long-term commitment and the participation of an adequate representation of organisations with the relevant mission.

The organisation and financing of pre-standardisation activities must be considered, and changes in standardisation work may take place.

It was discussed whether the EU might strive for an organisation which integrates and supports all relevant standardisation activities.

D Benchmarking, metrics and demonstration of the economic benefit.

It is mentioned that measurement of success and assessment and benchmarking will become more important for programme management in FP6. This will mean that project consortia as well as the EC will be interested to have reliable and meaningful methods for the measurement and presentation of success as part of the quality management and for benchmarking purposes at their disposition.

Projects will want to have some control over the measures according to which they are evaluated, and external audits may be implemented.

Standards for benchmarking, impact measurement – maybe comparable to standard procedures for accounting – may be desirable.

The presentation of project success is an important but also sensitive issue, and reliable, valid measures and procedures would appear as a strength if developed.

For the impact assessment of ongoing activities it was indicated that success stories might permit to move in the right direction in many projects.

The quality management of the aspired large projects in FP6 still appears as a challenge for which innovative answers are needed.

E Definition of Cultural Heritage

The large projects and actions in FP6 will have an impact in Europe as a whole. When assuming and allocating responsibilities, or when new organisations are established, common definitions of tasks, objects and domains of Cultural Heritage in Europe are essential. It was observed that currently the sometimes widely different definitions of terms used, particularly in the old and the future new member states are an obstacle to effective cooperation. It was felt in the discussion that at this stage especially dissemination, impact assessment and the definition of precise targets in the planning of future activities suffer from the fact that the domain of cultural heritage is not defined precisely, and the term is not used consistently.

F Vertical Integration of RTD with other EU programmes

The structural funds of the EU will support regional activities which also include activities concerning cultural heritage and diversity. There is a potential link with RTD actions in the Digital Cultural Heritage area, where a strong technology transfer from RTD projects can feed into regional activities. This is a natural position for RTD which could provide a good linkage between upstream RTD and deployment of results on an operational level.

This hypothesis needs to be explored further.

G International cooperation

International cooperation is stressed as an element which will be strengthened in FP6. Many support actions, in particular those addressing standardisation, have been cooperating with relevant international organisations as a matter of course. Many of these actions will be integrated into the activities of the future projects. It was less obvious which changes would occur in this respect, but this will have to be addressed in the context of RTD actions, rather than in the context of support actions.

H Actions targeting new member states and candidate countries

Attention was drawn to the fact that there still is considerable need to provide specific support to ease the integration of organisations from the “accession” states into the EU research programmes, especially from the organisations from Eastern Europe, which were well represented at the meeting. It was argued that specific support for supporting the high quality participation in FP6 actions will be needed in these areas for some time to come, and which must also take into account the weak situation of cultural heritage organisations in these countries.

4. Conclusions – Points for further consideration

(1) Many of the tasks of Support Actions in FP5, notably issues such as standardisation, improving communication among projects and dissemination, are likely to be integrated into the larger projects (Networks of Excellence and Integrated Projects). Many dispersed and sector specific dissemination activities will be integrated into larger events, addressing wider audiences.

(2) Organisations with the required capabilities (legal and financial infrastructure, size, sustainability and representative for a sector) will be needed to carry out projects as envisaged in FP6, and also to continue long-term activities such as standardisation. Networks of excellence will have a prominent role in FP6, but it remains to be elaborated how these will evolve from and possibly be related to the existing networks of excellence. New organisations, for example in the form of the EEIG, representing important sectors may be needed in order to carry out the tasks in the Digital Cultural Heritage area.

(3) Benchmarking, measures for impact and success measures, and mechanisms to assess the value and cost-effectiveness of projects will be important in the future management structure of FP6. This issue requires further consideration, and should result in well-founded measures which are meaningful and acceptable for all participants.

(4) The definition of the domain, of actors, tasks and objects of work in the Cultural Heritage area should be pursued in order to come to common concepts and a common terminology across Europe. This is felt to be important to ease cooperation and effective dissemination.

(5) The vertical integration of RTD activities in FP6 and related operational activities in the context of the Structural Funds is seen as an issue to be investigated further.