

Chapter 4

BAM: A German Portal to Libraries, Archives, Museums

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ABSTRACT

Starting from cultural heritage initiatives of the European Union and cultural portals such as the European Digital Library Europeana and the future German Digital Library, the paper presents BAM, the joint portal for libraries, archives, museums in Germany which is currently the only portal for cultural content. since the German Digital Library is not yet online. The goal of BAM is to provide access to and increase the visibility of German cultural content on the Web. To do so the portal directs users from the list of results on the BAM website to the digital object on the participating institution's website. In addition, an alliance was formed with Wikipedia Germany to offer the possibility to link directly from an article's web link section to the results of a corresponding BAM search. Moreover, organizational, technical and content related issues of BAM are described. Finally, future research directions for cultural portals are indicated.

INTRODUCTION

BAM, the joint portal for libraries (in German: "Bibliotheken"), archives, museums, is currently the only existing single point of access for users in search of cultural content on the German Web. Due to this unique position, the BAM Portal and its hosting institution, the Bibliotheksservice-Zentrum Baden-Württemberg (Library Service

Centre Baden-Württemberg) respectively are involved in both the German and European efforts to establish, fund and maintain portals for research, culture and education: The future *German Digital Library* which is supposed to go online in 2011; the European Digital Library *Europeana* went online in November 2008. After describing the German and European approaches in the context of the strategy of the European Union, the chapter focuses on the BAM Portal as an example of a cultural portal which unites content from different institutions

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and branches— a challenge both the German and European cultural portal are confronted with. With regard to organizational issues and figures, technical structure and content related issues BAM can serve as a proof of concept and an inspiration for the national and the European portal. The practical experience of BAM, which dates back to 2001, suggests some directions for future research in the field of cultural portals, for example how to create and apply joint vocabulary and common authority files for the three sectors, how searching in cultural portals could be improved for the various target groups, how cultural portals can serve very diverse audiences, how the collection strategies of the different cultural portals and the participating institutions can be harmonised on a national and European level, what the roles of cultural portals in the information society will be, what a business model for cultural portals will be like, how content can be selected in a way that supports the role of a cultural portal, how copyright issues will of cultural content be dealt with, how cultural portals can become user-focused instead of collection-focused, and how cultural portals can be open for user participation in a social web.

CULTURAL HERITAGE INITIATIVES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION: AN OVERVIEW

During recent years, the European Union (EU) has been sponsoring several programs to promote the online accessibility of cultural content as “culture is a key dimension of the Information Society. The exchange of information on the world’s cultural heritage will help people from different cultures around the world to understand each other better” (quote from Pascon, 1997, p. 57). In addition to the cultural aspect, the EU also considers digital cultural content to be an important contribution to the development of a multimedia industry (cf. the so called Bangemann Report, 1994).

Therefore the EU has initiated a number of projects, for example ECHO¹, MICHAEL-Culture², MINERVA eC³ and i2010 Digital Libraries⁴ to name just a few. In addition to the EU initiatives there are also many national projects by the EU member states where national libraries, archives and museums organize projects to create and collect cultural content, for example the British Library⁵, the National Archive of Germany⁶, the portals *Gallica* of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France⁷ and *Joconde* of the Ministère de la culture de France⁸, the Italian portal *cultura italia – un patrimonio da esplorare*⁹ of the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali to mention but a few examples. All these distributed databases will be integrated into a European portal presenting the diversity and the common traditions of European cultural heritage in all branches of knowledge.

The aim of all the digitisation efforts in the EU and its member states is to increase the visibility and accessibility of the natural and cultural heritage via the Internet. For this reason *Europeana*¹⁰, the joint European portal for cultural content, was created, being the result of a ten years effort of the European Commission to promote a single point of access for digitised natural and cultural objects on the Internet. *Europeana* was launched on 20 November 2008 and has collected more than five million sets of data until December 2009. The strategic approach of the European portal is to restrict itself to the presentation of digitally available materials, i.e. digital objects and the corresponding metadata, instead of metadata that only describe these materials verbally without providing a digital version. In order to collect digital materials for *Europeana*, an EU project was launched: ATHENA¹¹. ATHENA will bring together relevant stakeholders and content owners from museums and other cultural institutions all over Europe, evaluate and integrate specific tools based on an agreed set of standards and guidelines to create harmonised access to the content. The Bibliotheksservice-Zentrum Baden-Württemberg

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