Electronic Imaging and the Visual Arts (EVA'94)
IT for Culture, Archaeology, Science and History (IT for CASH)
Berlin, 25.11.1994

EG Förderung für die Anwendung von Informationstechnologie im kulturellen Bereich

EU Support for the Application of Information Technology in the Cultural Field

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This paper presents firstly a historical view of IT & Telecomms projects in the cultural area which have received EU funding assistance. The new opportunities offered by the Fourth Framework Programme of the EU with over 3 Billion ECUs (6 Mrd DM) devoted to IT & Telecomms Programmes are then described with appropriate caveats and advice for potential bidders. Particular attention is given to the East German situation.

EU support for Information Technology & Telecomms applications in the cultural field began in the late 1980s with the EMN, VASARI and NARCISSE projects. The first 'wave' of projects was followed by a second wave in the early 1990s including MARC, MUSA, of ESPRIT and LACE, RAMA of RACE and a number of projects supported by the IMPACT Programme and ELISE and VAN EYCK of the Libraries Programme.

The results of these projects are showing how culture and technology can be combined to mutual advantage by 'user-led' challenges to scientists and technologists, as occurred in the original VASARI project, recently extended to the UFFIZI with a third VASARI system scanner being specially developed and installed by the East German-Italian MUSA project.

The EU's Fourth Framework Programme for RTD provides considerable opportunities for further such projects, particularly in the multimedia area which is one of the major common themes in a number of the individual Work Programmes.

In particular:

> The Information Technology programme includes a major area of Multimedia Systems in which cultural applications are included

> The Telematics Applications Programme, which includes a very diverse set of sectors ranging from Public Administrations to the Disabled and Elderly contains numerous references to cultural applications.

> The Advanced Communication Technologies & Services (ACTS) Programme includes technology and service demonstrators as well as interactive digital multimedia services technology development as a major theme. Cultural sector applications/ demonstrations should be included again following RAMA's success in particular as demonstrated at the CIDOC/MCN Conference in Washington in August 1994 when on-line connection with the UFFIZI, Goulandris Museum in Athens and the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid was established.

There are also initiatives from the EU's Cultural Directorate General (DGX) such as KALEIDESCOPE and DG XII for Science, including projects in the monuments area.

The cultural sector can look not only to exploring the benefits from the experimental application of these new technologies to its own problems and opportunities but also contribute to technology development by:

· Providing demonstration and test-bed opportunities

· 'Pushing' technology development itself.

For example, we may anticipate virtual reality as one of the technologies to be pushed / demonstrated by the cultural sector.

A particularly exciting potential development is the HUMANITY 2000 project under an ACTS international initiative which attempts to build a global multimedia system in the cultural field aimed towards the Information Society/'Infobahn'/Super Information Highway of 2000 and beyond.

The East German situation in particular appears promising given the historical emphasis paid to culture plus the massive investments in telecomms infrastructure by Telekom.

Thus, European Funding for Research and Technology Development (RTD) plus the inclusion of culture in the Maastricht Treaty has led to a promising situation for future developments.

It is appropriate nonetheless to sound a word of warning to temper the euphoric tone of the above. The success rate of proposals is anticipated to be only 1 in 10 - successful bidders will need to make an excellent case against heavy competition and careful evaluation by the EU.