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Table of Contents

1. euromuse.net – the exhibition portal for Europe ................................................................. 3
2. Objectives of the euromuse.net project ............................................................................. 4
3. Origin ............................................................................................................................... 6
4. Deployment approach ....................................................................................................... 7
5. Technical issues – euromuse.net and the Harmonise solution ........................................... 8
6. The euromuse.net partners and the euromuse.net museums in Europe ............................... 9
7. The euromuse.net association ......................................................................................... 12
1. euromuse.net – the exhibition portal for Europe

euromuse.net is a public access portal providing multilingual information on museums and their exhibitions throughout Europe. euromuse.net offers both, a ‘one-stop’ web tool to the greatest exhibitions in Europe for the public as well as a special data interface called Harmonise to deliver structured data (http://www.euromuse.net).

People interested in exhibitions and museums depend on access to information, which – in most cases – is only available spending great effort on a rather complex and scattered market as such bundled data from museums on a supranational and multilingual level is difficult to access.

The euromuse.net project has deployed a service existing since 2003, which provides multilingual information about temporary exhibitions and museums as well as other museum resources on a web platform. The project developed a wider pan-European data-collection based on public sector information to be re-used by different actors in the cultural and tourism fields.

The project improved and increased the existing platform, a website offering museum and exhibition information to the general public for free and integrated the museums' information of the euromuse.net database with the Harmonise tools. Through this integration euromuse.net’s rich content affiliates with the online offers of other European and national tourism and marketing services for culture. The end user can use the euromuse.net service to find and explore the European cultural heritage, presented in museums from all over Europe on the Internet.
2. Objectives of the euromuse.net project

The euromuse.net project objectives have been to:
• increase the awareness of museum services in general;
• provide information on temporary and permanent exhibitions and outstanding museum collections throughout Europe;
• improve the connection between existing marketing and promotion channels of the tourism industry and the cultural sector over the euromuse.net database;
• integrate euromuse.net’s rich content into the online offers of European and national marketing services in the long run;
• share an online set of scientific publications and other online offers from museums covering the museums’ research activities.

Project Description:

The general idea of the euromuse.net project is to better connect the museum sector with its relevant target groups – both on a professional and on a non-professional or private level. euromuse.net services support and strengthen existing connections between the general public interested in museums and exhibitions, the professional tourism sector and museum professionals. It helps to create easily accessible information about exhibitions and museums all over Europe.

This takes place by offering the information on complementing services: on the website http://www.euromuse.net, mainly for the general public and accessible for free, via tools for structured data exchange with databases of tourism industry and other tourism players (http://www.harmonet.org). In a later stage, the project decided – in accordance with the recommendations of the project’s reviewers – to enrich the data with additional information and to offer services to the portal.

Target groups:

The euromuse.net project is addressing at least three main target groups, which are:
• **the general public**, European tourists, who are enabled to receive a rich set of information on cultural events organised in European museums. They receive the service with a one-stop web-tool and free of charge. The euromuse.net website enables mobile European museum visitors to find all the relevant information in one spot and use comfortable search possibilities. Anyone interested in modern art exhibitions in France or in archaeological exhibitions between 1 June and 15 July anywhere in Europe will find relevant information on the euromuse.net website, presenting every exhibition at least in two languages.
• **tourism industries and services** is able to organise personalised tourism packages for their customers through the data offered by the euromuse.net service. Because the requests of industrial and private users normally differ, the project offers special access for tourism industry users besides the euromuse.net website. Special search strings and precise queries to the euromuse.net database allow optimised preparation of organised trips. Industrial users receive structured and xml formatted data on a special export from the euromuse.net database. The commercial users of this functionality are requested to pay a contribution for this service provided.
• **museum staff**, like curators, museum educators or university researchers have a platform to promote their own museum’s offers more effectively than before and can observe what is happening inside the European museum scene.
3. Origin

The idea for **euromuse.net** project was developed by a preparatory group made by the National Gallery in London, the Musée de Louvre in Paris, the Réunion des Musées Nationaux in Paris, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the Staten Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen, the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (partner of the proposal) and the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (partners of the proposal as members of the SPK Foundation). The first prototype was launched in autumn 2001. While in 2001 only few museums have been on the portal, the number of participating museums and countries has grown steadily. In the beginning of the eTEN project in 2008, there have already been 150 museums on euromuse.net. At the end of 2010, there are nearly 400 museums, which participate in euromuse.net. Initially, it have been museums from France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Denmark, who have set up the basic service in 2001. Now euromuse.net presents museums from 24 European countries. This platform constitutes an essential stepping-stone towards the creation of a European cultural space on the Internet.

Updating of **euromuse.net** database is continuous and it also links to the homepage of each museum for their online resources and also searches the exhibition archives for information on exhibitions since 2001. The information is provided directly by the participating museums, which guarantee an accurate quality of reliable information. Audiences browsing the euromuse.net web page come from all over the world.

From 2008 – 2010 the project was co-financed by the European Commission with funding through eTEN programme, which is dedicated to the deployment of new technologies in Europe.
4. Deployment approach

The eTEN project was run by partners from Germany, Austria, Italy, Belgium and Finland. Every partner in the euromuse.net project involves in a special deployment site, which is organised by country and topic. The respective deployment site primarily started to work on the museums in the countries of the project participants in Germany, Italy and Austria. At the same time the deployment sites in Italy accompanied the first tourism services. From 2009 two partners from Belgium and Finland joined the project consortium and set up a deployment site, responsible for the museums and tourism service within their countries as well.

Results and insights from the deployment sites – like their experience from accompanying the different stakeholder groups have been used for improvements of training and optimisation of the further progress of the deployment. The project consortium learned by the feedback received how to guarantee a service directed on the needs and requirements of the euromuse.net members and users. In a second step, activities had been extended to other museums and tourism services in further European countries.

The deployment sites have been in contact to the museums and tourism services and to find out how the services are appreciated by the stakeholder groups, e.g. the museums (providing content) and the tourism services (as users of the content). Which enabled the deployment sites to be aware of problems and to deliver solutions for (unexpected) problems showing up. The deployment sites steadily identified the needs of the member museums, e.g. by surveys conducted in each of the user groups, because the project’s success mainly depends on the support of the member museums.
5. Technical issues – euromuse.net and the Harmonise solution

In order to solve the technological interoperability problem when trying to use data provided by museums to publish it on the euromuse.net portal and to exchange data between different partners in a network, Harmonise is a tool, which has taken the mediator approach. Harmonise, the “data mediator” translates data between two or more systems with different data schemes. The mediator acts as a kind of semantic gateway between the systems. It permits the receiver to view the data source as an extension of its own database, without concern for the differences in names and representations of data. Therefore the Harmonise solution allows actors to retain their existing data models unchanged, while being able to communicate and interoperate with all other participants involved in the virtual network. Theoretically data can be exchanged between every participant into every direction. In this case, the relevant exchange channels lie between museum and euromuse.net database as well as between euromuse.net database and the tourism bodies’ databases.

When trying to reach interoperability between different systems, using different data or data exchange formats, an ontology is used as a point of reference to map between the specific data format of each partner of Harmonise. If each element of a specific data format is identified with the concept it belongs to within the ontology, reconciliation between specific data formats can be performed. This is the basic approach of Harmonise to reach interoperability.

The existing euromuse.net service has been designed for using standard open solutions. For this reason the service did not need major adaptations to be aligned with the national regulations of the partner countries. However some minor adaptations have been done in order to fully adapt the existing software to the open source requirements. This mainly consisted of the adoption of a Content Management System for improving the multilingual functions and multiuser functionality of the service as well as mapping the existing euromuse.net data scheme into the Harmonise model.
6. The euromuse.net partners and the euromuse.net museums in Europe

While euromuse.net presents museums from 24 European countries (and museums from further countries have already declared their participation), it is a project consortium from five countries operating the service. The map illustrates the countries, which museums participate in euromuse.net.
The partners from Germany, Austria, Belgium, Finland and Italy comprise of cultural and IT bodies, which are interested to increase the visibility of exhibitions in Europe. A short description of the partners:

**Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz/Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation** is the coordinator of the project. The Foundation, located in Berlin and founded in 1957, is the biggest cultural complex within Germany. It has a highly unique character as the organisational umbrella which unites many types of cultural institutions. With 16 museums, the Staatsbibliothek (State Library), the Geheimes Staatsarchiv (Prussian State Archives) and a number of research institutes, the Preußenstiftung is an unparalleled cosmos of culture. The Institute for Museum Research also part of the Foundation will carry out most of the project participant duties.

The **Istituto per i beni artistici, culturali e naturali (Ibacn)** of the Region Emilia Romagna, Italy was founded in 1974 to support and advise the Regional Government in policy making and to act as an advisory body to local authorities in the field of cultural heritage. Ibacn promotes and carries out research projects for the enhancement, the restoration and the protection of cultural objects, historical cities and cultural heritage.

The **Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna** is the main Austrian museum of art, including unique collections ranging from Ancient Egyptian and Greek and Roman Antiquities to the Collections of Medieval Art to the splendid Renaissance and Baroque Collections. The museum has left the project consortium at the end of 2008, but is still a strong supporter of euromuse.net and presents its collections on the portal.

The **eTourism Competence Center Austria (ECCA)** deals with the examination of all application areas of information and communication technologies in the field of tourism, the development of concrete IT solutions for tourism as well as the analysis and support of IT-usage in tourism. As a catalyst between academic research and the tourism industry ECCA is investigating the most relevant employment areas of new IT applications in tourism.

**Comune di Rimini** is the municipal governmental institution of the City of Rimini, Italy, and Musei di Rimini is the public institution managing the local museums. In particular the City Museums host collections illustrating local history over the centuries, with specific sections on Roman history. The Museo degli Sguardi is one of the most important ethnographic museums in Italy.

**Provincia di Rimini** is the NUTS-2 governmental institution of the area around Rimini, Italy and is directly responsible for the implementation of local policies concerning the tourism sector, which represents the most important economic segment of the area. The Provincia of Rimini has a large experience in running national and transnational projects; most of them focused on tourism and tourism promotion and belongs to the Network of Cities for Sustainable Tourism.

**Amitié**, Bologna, Italy is a research centre focusing on the use of information technology in education and training. Born as a University-Enterprise Training Partnership within the EU Comett Programme in 1991, since mid-1990s it has a large experience in supporting the development of IT based services in the cultural sector. It also coordinated the FreeTime
project (run in 2002 within the Innovation and SME Programme), aiming at improving the use of Information Technology within the tourism sector.

Suomen museolitto - Finlands museiforbund (Finnish Museum Association) was established in 1923. Its core tasks are to safeguard the interests of the museum field, provide information, as well as education and training. Finnish Museums Association is the central organisation for museums. Its tasks include looking after museums´ interests and advancing museums´ activities. The Finnish Museums Association incorporates all professionally run museums in the country. The Finnish Museums Association participates in development of legislation, museum work and the financial status of museums, for example, by participating in the Ministry of education working group on digitalisation of the cultural heritage.

Openbaar Kunstbezit in Vlaanderen vzw, Belgium was created in 1963, with the objective to provide information concerning museum exhibitions and activities for stimulating the interest of public. The effort of OKV consists of opening up the museums to a more wide public, considering both commercial aspects and the different policy levels (municipal, provincial, federal and Flemish community) involved in cultural management. OKV also supports the Flemish museums with its know-how in publications (paper-based and web) and communication strategy.
7. The euromuse.net association

The euromuse.net partners have come to the conclusion and agreed to set up an association of German law continuing the eTEN project. The euromuse.net – das Ausstellungsportal für Europa e.V. association will be a non-profit association under German law which is organised with a non-profit character to be set up in the beginning of 2011.

It has been figured out to be the best form of organisation for euromuse.net because it suits best for the project’s aim. A variety of criteria made the consortium decide to set up an association:

- low administrational effort
- low cost of establishment
- flexibility in the membership model
- possibility of all the euromuse.net consortium partners to join
- easy possibilities to align the association to the current needs
- possibility to employ personal and to work on a voluntary basis at the same time

Each of the founding members will take over a specific role in the association and be responsible for the operation of the service as well as for its extension, in order to provide assets to the association. First of all, all the partners will contribute to the editorial work and stay in contact to the participating museums, which they are in charge of.