

Survey: Cultural and scientific heritage inventory and digitization in South-Eastern Europe

Nikola Ikonov

Institute for Bulgarian Language, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
Institute of Mathematics and Informatics, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
nikonov@ibl.bas.bg

Milena Dobrev

Centre for Digital Library Research, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK
Institute of Mathematics and Informatics, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
milena.dobrev@strath.ac.uk

Brief history

- The survey was done in 2006 (for the SEEDI Meeting in Sofia) based on similar surveys done by Minerva
- The purpose of this survey was to collect information related to the current state of work on cultural and scientific heritage inventories and digitization in South-Eastern Europe in order to:
 - Facilitate the contacts between the institutions in South-Eastern Europe, working in the field, and ease their participation in joined activities.
 - Provide with guidance and specific inputs for the analysis as well as recommendation and proposals.
 - Find areas in greatest need for cooperation.
 - Define possibilities for exchange of expertise

Dissemination of survey results

- In 2007 – mentioned in an UNESCO funded project “Directory of institutions from SEE involved in digitization of cultural heritage”, aiming to become an useful tool not only for the countries in the region but also for organizations from other parts of Europe looking for project partners and subcontractors.
- In various publications, documents, references, plans, strategies, related to the digitization activities in the region (the latest one is related to Faro convention).
- Published on the SEEDI and IMI webpages.
- The survey is available as a set of country presentations; further analysis would be helpful.
- No data on Montenegro, Albania.

Can we use them today?

- Most of the institutions (ministries, state commissions, agencies, museums, libraries, archives) and their addresses are the same.
- A few contact persons have changed.
- Some URL addresses have changed.
- The overall situation related to the digitization of the cultural heritage has improved but to our great regret – for most of the countries – insignificantly.
- These considerations make the survey results as a whole still usable.

Re-using the survey results

- No ranking, no cross-comparison
- Survey results are used with the reservation that some conclusions can be invalid for separate countries where important changes in their profiles could have occurred in the meantime without our knowledge.
- We will try to focus on following issues:
 - general analysis of particular survey results (things that aren't mentioned explicitly in the survey but can be find out behind the answered questions)
 - looking for and defining possibilities for exchange of expertise.
 - looking for and defining areas in greatest need for cooperation.
 - recommendation and proposals.

Analysis 1

- Common issues:
 - SEE national collections are of *European importance* but they still are *not accessible* in electronic form.
 - Lack of *national strategies* (leading to heterogeneity and lack of coordination between separate scattered local initiatives).
 - Lack of *regular governmental programmes* (respectively, funding), digitization is strongly dependent on external financial support.
 - Gaps in the *local laws* and *legislative regulations* related to digitization leading to difficulties for the decision makers in the cultural and scientific heritage sector institutions.
 - Relatively *poor IT infrastructure* in the cultural heritage sector and insufficient professional digitization equipment; underdeveloped use of new and emerging technologies.

Analysis 2

- Lack of understanding and practical solutions on the importance of such issues as *common quality standards, interoperability, long term preservation, etc.*
- Unsatisfactory level of *Digitisation work* – SEE countries do not match current EC priorities.
- Ambiguity of legal *copyright issues* which leads to serious problems related to both the primary sources and the results of research work during digitization.
- Lack of *general guidelines* for digitization of cultural heritage. Each institution, which undertakes a digitization project, uses its own rules and quality requirements.
- Most of the scientific and cultural institutions still don't have *inventories* in electronic form.
- Lack of *qualified personnel*.
- Although there are suggestions for real cooperation, it is still not achieved.

Possibilities for exchange of expertise

- Despite the similarity in the overall situation of the SEE countries, there are significant differences between them in particular areas.
- Each SEE country has its own priority areas where high-level expertise is acquired.
- Although a disadvantage this heterogeneity is a precondition for an intensive exchange of expertise.
- The role of SEEDI is to define this areas and to organize the flow of expertise within the region using its typical instruments.

Areas in greatest need for cooperation

- The survey results have shown that experience exists basically in the pre-digitisation stages of work (cataloguing, text encoding), and in the subsequent digital conversion phase (scanning, sound and image conversion).
- Most of the remaining phases of the digitization chain and complete workflows are underestimated and respectively underdeveloped.
- We can define the following critical areas where special attention is required and cooperation can be very useful:
 - Generation and management of metadata
 - Digitization standards for different types of heritage
 - Metodologies and best practices
 - Data preservation and curation
 - Interoperability
 - Multilingual and cross domain search
 - Integration of digitised resources in virtual research and learning environments (VRE/VLE)
 - Staff training

Recommendations and proposals, related to the survey

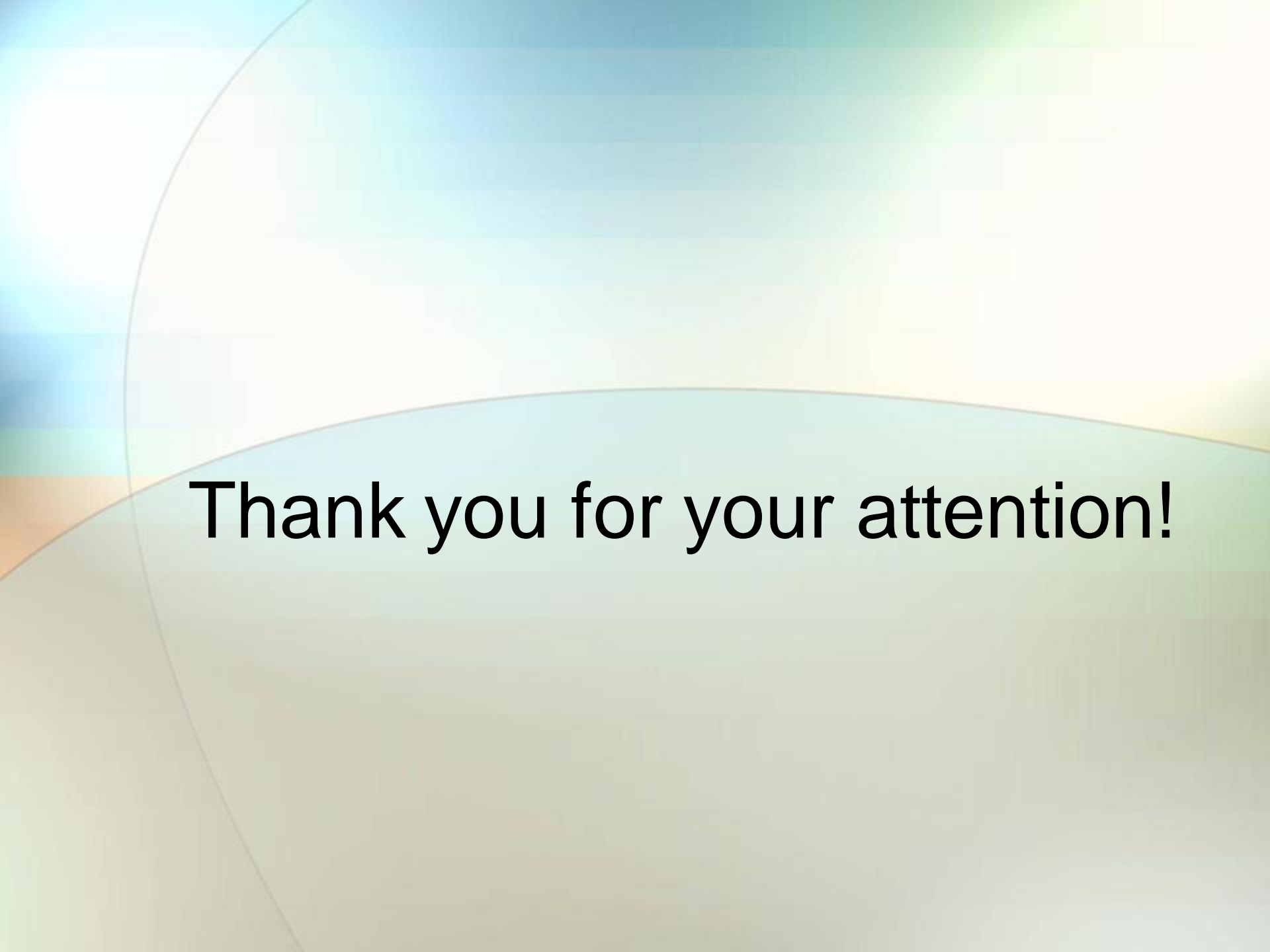
- Update the data in the questionnaires (all SEEDI countries):
 - Bringing up to date the contact data;
 - Correction of broken links;
 - Adding new information where available;
- Broaden the scope of the survey, adding new questions (M. Dobрева, N. Ikonov, G. de Francesco).
- Collection of the filled-in questionnaires (September, Banja Luka, SEEDI conference)
- Online and printed versions – December 2009.

Conclusions

- We have formulated following basic tasks that in our opinion, will boost the digitization activities in the SEE countries and will put the overall process on European level:
 - Creating joint infrastructure for the key cultural and scientific heritage institutions work.
 - Establishing a common methodological network for institutions which take care for different types of heritage.
 - Finding common standards for encoding and data interchange for the locally-specific features and workflows assuring quality.
 - Overcoming the practice of small scale isolated initiatives and promoting a trend to structured complementary activities.

Conclusions

- Introducing areas such as data curation which are currently not developed in the SEE countries.
- Affecting the training and educational gap in the digital preservation and access field, specialists learn from their own pitfalls, not from structured programs.
- Drawing a “map” of existing resources and expertise – this will facilitate the participation in further EU initiatives.
- Strengthen the regional cooperation (SEEDI, bi-and multi-lateral.
- Joint participation in European projects.



Thank you for your attention!