

Worldwide "Communitarian" Online Publishing: An Exercise in Wishful Thinking

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Keynote Abstract

Regretfully, this paper provides more questions than answers. Its main issue is how to balance the enthusiasm of the general public for web tools (wikies, blogs etc.) to provide content with the "authority" of the established content-providing (and content-preserving) institutions (i.e., universities, libraries, museums), in order to get the best possible worldwide resources. The central problem of the code of behaviour will be discussed — mainly for the reference resources —, including the related issues of editorial control and neutral point of view. Also the intellectual rights in a collaborative community and the problems of anonymity and "loose" pseudonyms will be considered. In the case of a public reference resource, the right balance between the institutionally controlled core and the (moderated) contributions of the public has to be carefully considered. How to motivate voluntary contributors? How to balance the goal of building a useful, reliable resource with the — less intellectually profitable, but culturally significant — effort to stimulate the people to research, document and write?

A discussion will follow on how to publish online "problematic" resources (e.g., xenophobic texts by important authors), i.e., do we publish well online "critical editions"? The keynote speaker is not aware of really satisfactory solutions. In a "physical" book we can wrap conveniently the problematic text in a "critical envelope" (such as an explanatory introduction, critical footnotes etc.). Online, this is more problematic: the lack of "physical" boundaries on the web makes the critical apparatus less visible. Novel ways of presentation are required and some suggestions of making the critical annotations sharing the same page with the text (vs. sharing the same volume, in the print world) will be tentatively offered.

The keynote address will also try to contribute to the reflection on the selection of materials for the future European Digital Library. Besides it will try to emphasize the distinction between a simple archiving on the web and the specific republishing (i.e., production of specific manifestations — in FRBR terms) in a genuine digital library. Finally, the Romanian project of an online "wish list" of works to be digitised and its mechanism of setting the priorities will be presented. Some "political" considerations on resource allocation for the European digital libraries will conclude the paper.