A Digital Library of the Middle East
Standards and Framework

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The new technology of communication reduces space and time in searching of knowledge. It brings different peoples into closer contact with each other, in addition to resolve firing up the deep conflict between cultures and create better understanding of t he cultures of other nations. As internet is the fast vehicle to communicate, most of talented and ambitious young people in the developing as well as the developed world can access. The project under consideration could create the documentary records of cultural achievements and aspirations of the Middle East for other cultures, languages and nations. Any digital library (DL) needs a clear sense of direction where the implementation will be difficult if goalposts keep shifting. The mission of DL is to develop a regional strategy to collect, archive, preserve and give everyone the chance to know more about the treasure of the middle east such as: scanning huge number of ancient manuscripts, rare books, photographs, drawings, fine arts, audio files; movies; maps…etc; that are created in digital formats, for both current and future generations. On the other hand, the published databases; online journal; e-books; e-magazines...etc can be delivered more quickly and effectively to more people than ever in an open environment.

Many countries of the Middle East have cultural memories older than other countries in the world, so the project will not be created in a vacuum; it has to follow a broad vision intended to be a regional, and co-operative, to put the unique treasures of each culture of the Middle East countries into a global library to be displayed online. It attempts to combine theory with practice, research project with user service, and to balance the immediate needs of users with a global and long-term perspective on digital resources.

From my side, I propose the following items which have the priority for discussions during our meeting:

1- Standards:
Standards for the project can be determined by its global outlook and long-term interoperability.

Key standards to start are:
- Dublin Core and MARC 21 for metadata,
- LCSH for subject vocabulary,
- AACR2 for resource descriptions,

- CQL for information retrieval,
- Z39.50 for cross-searching with other catalogues.

2- Framework:

Soergel (2002) presented a broad - based framework of DL in the following eleven themes:

1- DL must integrate access to materials with access to tools to process these materials. (DL = materials + tools).
2- DL should support individual and community information spaces.
3- DL need semantic structure.
4- DL need linked data structures for powerful navigation and search.
5- DL should support powerful search that combines information across databases.
6- DL interfaces should guide users through complex tasks.
7- DL field should provide ready- made tools for building and using semantically rich digital libraries.
8- DL design should be informed by studies of user requirements and user behaviour.
9- DL evaluation needs to consider new functionality.
10- Legal/organizational issues of information access and rights management need to be addressed using new technology.
11- DL needs sustainable business model.

He also presented the following propose three principles:

1- Some see the DL field focused on serving research, scholarship, and education, but in order to achieve their full benefit for society and a concomitant viable business model, DLs must also support practice.
2- Some see DLs as providing services primarily to individual users, but DLs must also support collaboration and communities and of practice.
3- Some see DLs primarily as a means for accessing information, but in order to reach their full potential, DLs must go beyond that and support new ways of intellectual work.

All of these elements interact and depend on each other.