Lessons for the future drawn from Flemish and Dutch digital heritage projects

Introduction

In 2013, the Council for Dutch Language and Literature presented its advisory report entitled *Valuing Partnership - Advice on Dutch-Flemish policy for the sustainable management, preservation and dissemination of Dutch-language digital heritage* (only published in Dutch as *Waardeer Samenwerking – Advies over Nederlands-Vlaams beleid voor het duurzaam beheren, behouden en beschikbaar stellen van Nederlandstalig digitaal erfgoed -* http://taalunieversum.org/publicaties/waardeer-samenwerking) to the Committee of Ministers of the Nederlandse Taalunie (Dutch Language Union). On the basis of this advice, it was decided to establish the Taalunie Commission on Digital Heritage, with a mandate to formulate answers to the following three questions:

1. Which lessons can be learned from other major digitisation projects that are being or have been undertaken?
2. What are the success factors for Dutch-Flemish cooperation in the field of international data infrastructures?
3. Under what circumstances would institutions allow their collections and data relating to their collections, to be made available in the form of open data in order to achieve optimised use and reuse?

The first two of the above questions have been answered by the Taalunie Commission on Digital Heritage by means of two reports. The commission is currently in the process of answering the third and final question of the Taalunie Committee of Ministers.

Lessons for the future drawn from Flemish and Dutch digital heritage projects (only published in Dutch as *Lessen voor de toekomst uit Vlaamse en Nederlandse digitaalerfgoedprojecten*)

This first report relates to the question of which lessons can be drawn from major Dutch and Flemish digital heritage projects. These projects were analysed in order to identify more general lessons to be drawn from the experience of these projects.

The investigation revealed that digitisation in the cultural heritage sector is still largely dependent on temporary, project-based funding. However, the scope of such projects is shifting increasingly towards providing more permanent and interlinked heritage facilities. Governments and politicians take decisions on the funding of individual projects, without an adequate overview of the wider context.

Project goals can be presented in an excessively optimistic way when there is insufficient ICT expertise with the project funders and when the benefits for end-users do not play a significant role in project applications.

These lessons reveal a dilemma. The reuse of existing solutions and project results could be encouraged, but then the risk would arise that dominant parties or suppliers monopolise specific processes within the sector. Individual projects may be entitled to make their own decisions with regard to technical solutions as well, but then the risk of fragmentation of investments across similar projects might arise.

Based on this first report, the Taalunie Commission on Digital Heritage has published a second report with recommendations for the implementation of new digital heritage projects in the Dutch-Flemish context and at the international level.

The full report is available in Dutch at http://taalunieversum.org/publicaties/lessen-voor-de-toekomst-uit-vlaamse-en-nederlandse-digitaalerfgoedprojecten.