Metadata: The Dublin Core down under

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The 4th Dublin Core Workshop in Canberra, 3-5 March 1997, was a lively, intellectually stimulating and physically exhausting event. There was not only debate in the National Library of Australia lifts, but also break out groups, used to identify major issues and finalise actions on key areas, and Bar 'birds of a feather' discussions which went well into the night and resumed at breakfast. With jet lag endemic many participants preferred just to keep on talking to resolve contentious issues.

Over three days, sixty-five people who had travelled, in aggregate, one million miles met at the National Library to continue the workshop series on developing a network resource description which could have the potential to improve structured access to information on the Internet. The Dublin Core workshop series promotes and develops the metadata elements required to facilitate the discovery of resources (documents and images) in a networked environment such as the Internet and supports interoperability amongst heterogeneous metadata systems. What was significant was the global representation of stakeholders brought together, by invitation, to establish a consensus on the issues of providing a foundation for electronic bibliographic description. Overall, there were twelve countries represented with twenty-two North Americans, sixteen Europeans, seven Asians and twenty Australians. The participants were from industry, academic, research and library communities with approximately twenty-five librarians, twenty-five information and networking technologists, and fifteen content specialists.

The workshop was another step forward in bringing a collective intelligence to bear on the difficult problem of resource discovery on the Internet.

The 'Dublin Core' is a high-level reference model and provides guidance for the semantic content of a simple resource description model. The consensus developed around this model is the major product of the workshops. Prototype applications of Dublin Core are emerging and recognition of the Dublin Core as a foundation for discovery-oriented resource description is growing. (see Nordic Metadata Project below).

References

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The workshop series began in March 1995 with the Metadata Workshop at the Online Computer Library Centre (OCLC) in Dublin, Ohio, co-sponsored by the National Centre for Supercomputing Applications. The major achievement was a consensus across the disciplines represented to create the thirteen elements of the Dublin Core. The second workshop, a joint effort between OCLC and the United Kingdom Office for Library and Information Networking was held in April 1996 in Warwick, United Kingdom . This Workshop sought to broaden international consensus, identify impediments to deployment such as syntax, and promote interoperability across languages and disciplines. Out of this came the 'Warwick Framework' to promote modular, separately accessible, maintainable and encryptable packages of metadata and provide for the co-existence of different varieties of metadata.

The Third Dublin Core Workshop was critical to those of us involved with photographs, slides, images, videoclips, and collections of images. The Image Metadata Workshop, co-sponsored by OCLC and the Coalition for Networked Information included seventy participants from museums, archives, digital libraries and providers. This workshop explored the usefulness of using the same metadata model for description of visual resources as for text. Agreed modifications allowed for a fifteen element set adding a descriptive element for the content of a visual resource and a rights management link or statement.

The 4th Dublin Core Workshop was co-sponsored by the National Library of Australia, the Distributed Systems Technology Centre, and OCLC. Two issues which required agreement were extensibility — refining aspects of the Dublin Core to include local or domain specific semantics, and syntax — the HTML description of the extended elements. Several Strawman Proposals were discussed, some of them prepared during the workshop, to act as stimulants for promoting an agreement on outcomes for qualifiers of the Dublin Core and their syntax.

Two levels of user expectation were defined: one level for the 'digital tourist' to permit a digital trawler to locate and access resources; and another more complex level to serve communities or disciplines with special needs. On the one hand there was a 'minimalist group' having an interest in making certain that standard, straight-forward, easily implementable effective resource descriptions become commonplace on the Internet; and on the other there were promoters of subject databases requiring more detail and precision for searching.

The achievements of the workshop included: The 'Canberra Qualifiers': use of qualifiers refined; statement on extensibility potential of elements and qualifiers; agreement on two alternate approaches for HTML syntax; and establishment of a liaison with W3C for future deployment of syntax: PICS model, Web Collections.

A further outcome was the establishment of working groups to pursue specific issues following the workshop — registry issues, multilinguality (non English DC), a minimal Dublin Core definition, and refinement of the coverage, date and relation elements. The detail of these outcomes is still being debated on the Meta2 discussion list and the workshop reports will soon be available (see 'Dublin Core down under' below). The success of this workshop was largely due to the skills of the organising committee: Stuart Weibel, OCLC, Renato Iannella, Distributed Systems Technology Centre, and Warwick Cathro, National Library of Australia. ∎