Chronicling eCulture WG and Charting Future Activities and Publication

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Abstract: This presentation is in part a report on the past eCulture sessions as well as a proposal to chart the path of the eCulture Working Group (WG) for the next two years. Since it was first rectified in 2006, the founding Chair Prof Kameoka and Prof Sato as the Chair in succession have diligently promoted crossdiscipline participation. In these past five years this WG has accumulated reports of on-going projects and activities on topics such as food culture, digital archive of historical and cultural artefacts, traditional and pop culture. It is proposed that we discuss how best to strategize and gather our resources to sustain the momentum of this WG. As mentioned in the last meeting in Hanoi, due to the fact that eCulture is still a novice discipline, we lack publication in this area to promote our participation. Publication will need to take into account that we deal with videos, digital images and sound in our eCulture projects. How best do we publish these reports in a world of academia that demands ISI publications? It is hoped that the discussion that follows this presentation will also look at possible global cooperation to promote eCulture activities.

Keywords: eCulture, digital archive, cultural heritage, cyber performance, pop culture

1. Introduction

The presentation was intended to be a report on past eCulture sessions as well as discussion on the path of the eCulture Working Group (WG) for the next two years. This will take into account the aims and objectives of eCulture since it was ratified as Working
Group in the 2006 APAN meeting in Akihabara, Japan. So far fifteen (15) eCulture sessions have been part of the APAN meetings programmes, including the Bird of Feather meetings to set up the WG [1].

2. Formation of eCulture in APAN

The eCulture WG was initiated as a Birds of a Feather (BOF) at the 2004 18th APAN Meetings/QUESTnet 2004 held at Cairns, Australia. The initiative was led by the founding Chair, Professor Tanaka Kameoka of Mie University. In his first proposal “What is eCulture in APAN” [2] the basis of forming an e-Culture BoF was from the perspective of Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies that link various disciplines such as contemporary politics, economics, social issues and culture. eCulture projects work towards contributing to the wider society. Thus, Media and Technology are crucial in the processing of cultural contents into various forms for the electronic media. Subsequently, the definition of eCulture was forwarded at the 19th APAN Meetings as follows:

E-Culture is an interdisciplinary research which covers contemporary politics, economics, social issues and culture. Of course, e-Culture should be connected to other APAN contents. E-Culture workshop brings together participants from academia, industry and government to learn and to discuss about e-Culture activities in the APAN countries. [3]

As eCulture is oriented towards arts, humanities and social science, Kameoka’s presentation proposed how eCulture could be situated in the context of APAN which is basically a network infrastructure that focuses mainly on e-Science and Natural Resources with established agriculture WG [3]. Therefore, apart from being a component that focuses on the arts and humanities in APAN, eCulture hopes to bridge the gaps between the sciences and humanities with technology as a common platform.

Founding Chair Prof Kameoka and Prof Sato have promoted eCulture as a cross-discipline WG since its inception. This is because the very nature of e-culture is for content providers to work alongside hand-in-hand with technology developers to seek the best possible way to capture, store and present content in digital form. For instance, digital tools make it possible for us to archive priceless artefacts and communicate them to the public. This in turn enables eCulture to bridge cultural divide and contribute in educating the public. According to van Oost et al, emuseums are able to reach a completely different and diverse public, including those who would never even consider visiting museums [4].

2. Compilation of eCulture Topics
An analysis of the APAN website of past e-culture meetings reveal that a total of 110 e-culture presentations have been presented since its BoF status. The following section presents an overview of e-culture topics that have been presented up to 31st APAN Meetings at the APRICOT-APAN 2011, Hong Kong, recently.

The following Table 1 presents an overview of the type of topics that have been presented in the past sessions.

**Table 1.** Categories of eCulture Presentations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>eCulture Initiatives</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Technology / Technology- oriented</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Digital content</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reports of eCulture Projects</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>110</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*To view all title of topics refer to the APAN website [1]*

Table 1 shows that presentation topics have been grouped into four (4) general categories. The following sections provides some examples to elaborate the categories.

2.1 *eCulture Initiatives*

These would include presentations on

- APAN eCulture
  APAN eCulture topics include presentations on preliminary proposals on the setting up of eCulture as a BoF and discussions up to present on plans to move forward.

- Digital Resources for eCulture
  Includes presentations on infrastructures for eculture and learning such as KAREN and Internet 2

- Country reports
  Speakers presented reports of eCulture activities in each of their respective countries.

2.2 *Technology /Technology- oriented*
These refer to technical presentations of networks, systems, hardware and software for computing, rendering and storing digital data. These included also technical problems faced and solutions obtained in the projects.

2.3 Digital Content

Speakers shared and demonstrated their digital images of artefacts, monuments, statues and historical GIS including the following:

- Digital Archives
- Portals
- eMuseums
- Database

2.4 Reports of eCulture Projects

This category includes presentations on projects on:

- Virtual Communities
- Community-based projects
- Historical Sites and Geo-Informatics
- Intangible Heritage and Culture
- ICT and Education
- Food culture
- Cyber Performance

Some of the presentation may no doubt be placed in two or more categories.

2. How best to strategize and gather our resources

The way forward for this WG is to strategize and gather available resources to sustain the momentum of this WG. This presentation echoes what Prof Yoshinori Sato’s presentation during the 2010 30th APAN Meetings in Hanoi, Vietnam. As a WG in the Application Technology Area of APAN, eCulture’s target area has spread compared to when it was first formed. Today it has become more relevant today in terms of the cultural, social or human dimensions it encompasses. [5]

At the meeting, it was agreed that one way to increase participation is to allow members to form taskforces teams and to present status reports. The first taskforce agreed upon is the “Culture Website” proposed by Wilson Tien of Culture Mondo Network Asia-Pacific Secretariat, to be hosted by the TELDAP, Taiwan.
The second taskforce team proposed was food culture which was initiated by Professor Kameoka at a Common Session with the Agriculture WG at the 2006 22nd APAN Meetings, Singapore [6]. Another Joint Meeting was held between eCulture WG and Agriculture WG (Masayuki Hirafuji, Chair, Agriculture WG) at the 2007 24th APAN Meetings in Xi’an China [7]. It was at the 2010 29th APAN Sydney Meetings that Prof. Yoshinori Sato expanded on the link between "Food Culture and eCulture." [8]

This WG has accumulated presentation slides of on-going eCulture projects and activities on topics such as food culture, digital archive of historical and cultural artefacts, traditional and pop culture. It is proposed that we discuss how best to strategize and gather our resources to sustain the momentum of this WG. This leads to the next topic of discussion.

4. Publication

At the last 30th APAN meeting in Hanoi, one of the issues raised was the fact that an avenue has to be created for more publication opportunity for eCulture. As a novice discipline, publication is lacking in this area to promote our involvement in this WG. Publication will need to take into account that we deal with videos, digital images and sound in our eCulture projects. Thanks to the recent development led by Chris Elvidge that APAN has begun to publish APAN on-line proceedings hosted at the University Putra Malaysia website link.

However, the question still remains regarding on how best we publish these reports in a world of academia that demands ISI publication. In some parts of the world, Malaysia for instance, non-ISI publications are considered of less significance in contributing towards the ranking of the universities. One practical solution would be for APAN to have its own ISI journal, or at least work towards one, to create the avenue for the publication of these reports. One system would be for certain proceedings to be selected to be expanded into papers that are of similar standard and reviewing procedures conducted by reputable journals.

5. Upcoming Activities

In order to sustain the next four sessions of this WG, future activities were tabled to facilitate discussion. This section includes what transpired at the discussion of the various topics. Apart from having taskforce leaders to present status reports, the following were proposed for the WG:
• APAN eCulture Portal – To have its own eculture portal, relevant specifically to APAN and to be linked to other relevant websites in the Asia-Pacific Ring as well as Europe, Africa and the Americas

• Encourage participation – To take into account its cross-discipline in nature, participation at the eculture sessions ought to be reflected in numbers and representation of various areas, especially technology and the natural sciences.

• Publication – To consider how to publish digital materials (visual, sound, movement) from eCulture presentations. With the online facility for APAN proceedings set up by APAN and hosted by UPM as suggested by Chris Evert seems the best possible avenue at present.

• Database – To compile who’s doing what and where in eculture. It was mooted during the conception of eCulture by Prof Kameoka that eCUlture WG has its own Databank Managing System (DBMS).

• Cyber Performance – To set up a taskforce as it was agreed at the 30th APAN Meetings cyber performances could be a feature to attract more participation as well as showcase advanced network. Prof DY Kim has agreed to take on the taskforce and further discussions for a possibility of a performance in the next APAN meeting.

• Standards – What entailed from the discussion on cyber performance, another important taskforce was set up. This WG should take into account that there are literatures and documents from institutions that have discussed eCulture components and standards. Ronchi [9] points out the work that has been done on standards:

  Consider, for instance, cultural heritage databanks. Such datasets hold various information types, ranging from alphanumeric data to images or computer generated movies. Experts in cultural heritage started to define data structure and formats many years ago in order to promote standards enabling information storage and exchange.
• Referring to these would avoid reinventing the wheel and enable this WG to leapfrog as time is of the essence.

It was agreed that Dr. Simon C. Lin of Academia Sinica, Taiwan, will be able to provide Andrew Howard of Australia national University who will be leading the taskforce on standards for eCulture and high-speed network, in particular for the future cyber performances. This would be in line with how eCulture should move forward as it is situated in APAN that is all about advanced network.

6. Conclusion

It is hoped that the discussion that follows this presentation will also look at possible global cooperation to promote eCulture activities.

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References

1. www.APAN.net