

Round table

Quality of Digital Resources for the Humanities: between the technological limitations and user requirements

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1. Background

The digitisation of cultural and scientific heritage material for use by the scholarly community has historically been led by supply rather than by user demand. A recent report in the UK¹ advises that a major finding in terms of user need is that “availability does not equal accessibility” and that “much special collection material remains undiscoverable by digital means”. Accessibility is a primary concern of users – but users of digital Humanities resources themselves need to be addressed taking into account their specific needs. Even the research community is “non-homogeneous, institutionally diverse and variegated in its research patterns” both within and across disciplines.² But research community forms only one of the stereotypical user groups for such resources. We should know more about requirements of *users from the various types of memory institutions* (which are also non-homogeneous because libraries, museums and archives have different requirements – for example *respect du fonds* is a principle requirement for digitization of archival collections, but is not essential in the case of other types of cultural institutions). The *educational use* of digital resources in the Humanities puts other implications; and the *general user* is yet another case for consideration.

In addition, the dynamic dimension of digital resources also needs to be considered. In many cases digital resources are created with the idea to preserve cultural and scientific heritage for the future. But how much the users of the future will be similar to the users today? CIBER’s “Google Generation”³ report advised that the current huge book digitisation programmes will hugely benefit the user enhanced by the proliferation of open access material. The traditional boundaries of creator and user start to blur. The technological changes require to think about the resources not only as something created for the present, but as something which will be re-used in the future.

The better understanding of users and their requirements is strongly connected with the concept of quality.

¹Swan, A. (2008). *Key concerns within the scholarly communication process. Report to the JISC Scholarly Communications Group*. Available:

<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/aboutus/workinggroups/topconcernsreport.doc/>

² Brown, S., et al. (2007). *RePAH: A User Requirements Analysis for Researchers in the Arts and Humanities*. Report to the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Available:

<http://repah.dmu.ac.uk/report/>

³ Available: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/slais/research/ciber/downloads/>

2. Quality in Digital Libraries

The DELOS Digital Library Reference Model⁴ released in December 2007 defines quality as one of the six core domains of digital libraries (Fig. 1 presents these six domains, and Fig. 2 presents the basic concepts within the Quality domain).

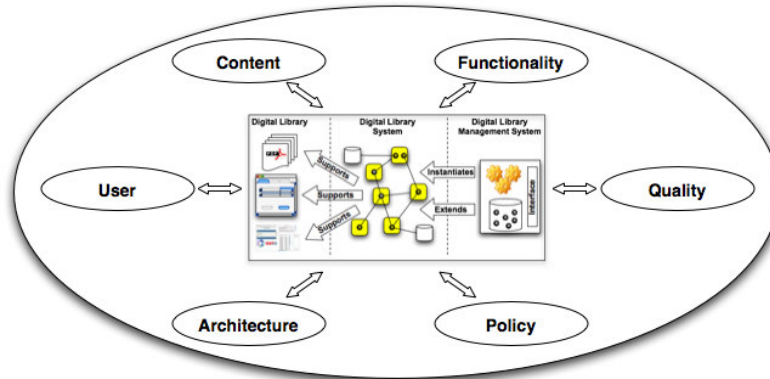


Fig. 1. Digital libraries universe in DELOS DLRM

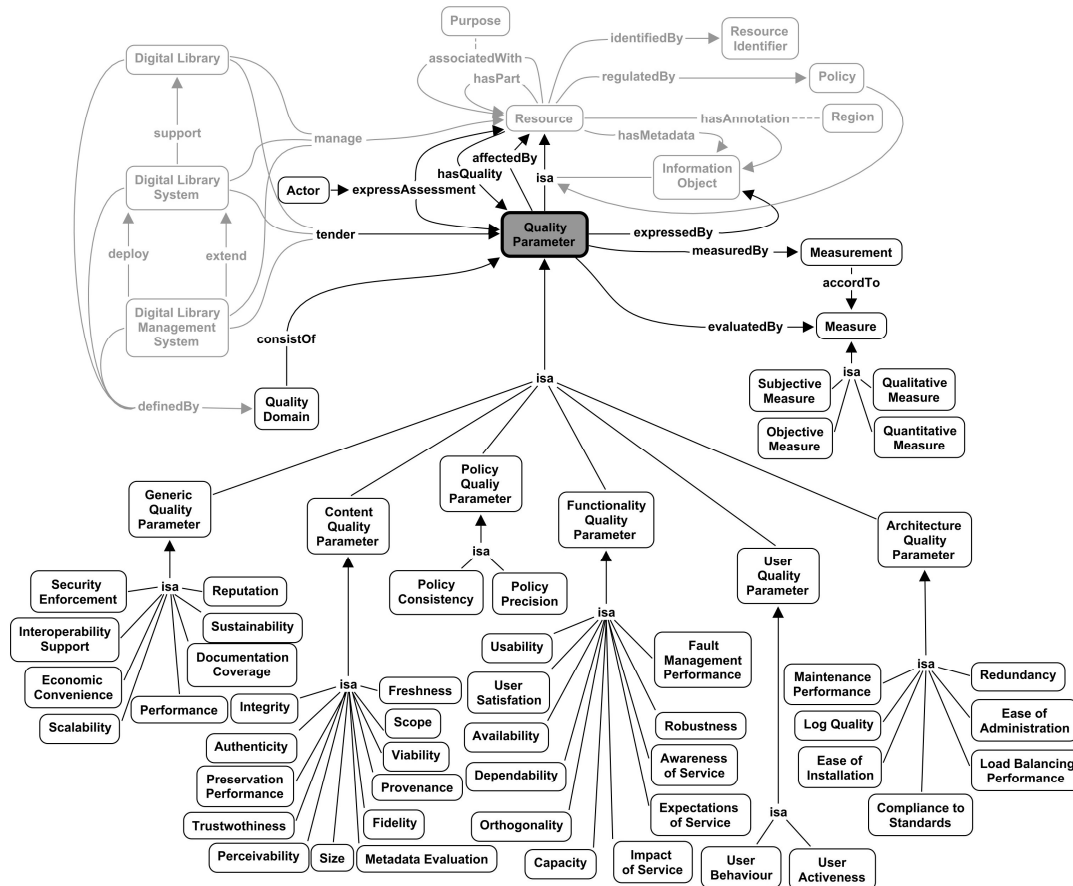


Fig. 2. Concepts from the Quality domain of the DELOS DLRM

⁴ Candela L., Castelli D., Ferro N., Koutrika G., Meghini C., Pagano P., Ross S., Soergel D., Agosti M., Dobrova M., Katifori V., Schuldt H. (2007). The DELOS Digital Library Reference Model. Foundations for Digital Libraries. ISTI-CNR at Gruppo ALI, Pisa, Italy. 215 pp. Available: http://www.delos.info/files/pdf/ReferenceModel/DELOS_DLReferenceModel_0.98.pdf

However, the concepts of quality and its evaluation in current digital libraries is still not widely used.

3. Questions for the Round Table

The basic aim of this round table would be to discuss issues which are of core importance in digital resources for the humanities, and to connect the idea of quality with the users' requirements.

The central issues which will be discussed include but are not limited to:

- Types of users for digital humanities' resources: researchers; memory institutions' professionals; educational users; users with special needs; general users;
- Key quality requirements and digital humanities' resources.
- Users of the present and users of the future.
- The international dimension of digital humanities' resources.