Usage of EU Structural Funds for Lithuanian Cultural Heritage Digitization

Introduction: content of the report

Lithuania, with a population of approximately 3.5 million, has undergone rapid social, economical and political transformation since the restoration of its sovereignty in 1991. After regaining its position within the map of Europe and integration into the assembly of European countries on May 1, 2004, Lithuania experienced new opportunities for its national security and national policy, social development and economics. Nowadays there is a functioning market economy in the democratic Lithuania providing the basis for sustainable economic development.

My report is directly related with current possibilities for the renewal of the national economy and culture: fundraising from the EU Structural Funds for digitization projects. I will also focus on the obstacles that interfered with the fundraising process in 2004-2006 and the latest fundraising activities at the recent programming period of 2007-2013.

In September 2005, Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania (NLL) together with the partners – the Lithuanian Art Museum and the Lithuanian Archives Department – launched a joint project. It was

one of the first projects in terms of scale and content ever undertaken in Lithuania and in the European Union, which received financial support of approximately 4 million EUR for cultural heritage digitization and access from the EU Structural Funds. This financial support has enabled to create the Integrated Virtual System integrating the rich and diverse national cultural heritage and the databank for cultural heritage content digitized by archives, libraries and museums. The databank aggregates distributed digital content, providing a single access point to national and worldwide users via the common portal "epaveldas.lt", which is a central reference portal for digitized cultural assets. I presume this to be the main reason for having the honour to be invited to speak at this outstanding conference.

Overlooking the progress from the newly emerged concept to the successful achievement of this project we could admit that the path was not paved with roses. So what were the difficulties that we encountered? How did we succeed to overcome these difficulties and what measures were taken for their elimination in order to create more favourable EU funding opportunities for cultural heritage digitization? These are the issues that I am going to address in my report.

1. EU fundraising in 2004-2006

The EU structural support for Lithuania started in 2004-2006 under the Single Programming Document[1] (SPD), which identified aims and actions to be taken by Lithuania and institution responsible for the EU structural funding as well as contributions from the EU Structural Funds and other financing sources. Although several important communications had already been adopted by the European Commission and significant international digitization programmes and projects had been initiated, we encountered some difficulties at this programming period in Lithuania. Here are the major of them:
− Absence of strategic documents on cultural heritage digitization and access;
− Lack of measures for digital content in the Single Programming Document (SPD) 2004-2006;
− Lack of cooperation between memory institutions.

EU fundraising obstacles in
Lithuania in 2004-2006

✓ Lack of strategic legal solutions on cultural heritage digitization;
✓ Lack of measures for digital content within the Single
   Programming Document (SPD) 2002-2006;
✓ Lack of cooperation between memory institutions.

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[1] *Lietuvos bendrasis programavimo dokumentas*. Retrieved May 18, 2009, from http://www.smm.lt/es_parama/docs/2004-preliminarus_BPD_02.pdf.

All these obstacles have been eliminated through joint effort by numerous national institutions.

I will give a brief review of the above-mentioned difficulties and our efforts for their removal.

1.1 Concept for Cultural Heritage Digitization and Access

Prior to 2005, there had been no strategic document adopted in Lithuania on cultural heritage digitization and access. Without such a document, the most perfect ideas have no real prospect for attracting EU structural support. That is why a team of experts from NLL initiated preparation of a draft concept for digitization of movable cultural assets and access to them. It was presented to the Ministry of Culture of Lithuania. The document was revised by the Digitization Council established by the order of the Minister of Culture, and in the summer of 2005, it was adopted by the Government[2].

The *Concept* defines the objective, goals and principles of cultural heritage digitization, also common selection criteria, setting the foundation for consistent and purposeful work of memory institutions aiming to secure and actualize the cultural heritage of the nation as well as improve access to it. On the basis of the *Concept*, coordination and monitoring of the support for cultural heritage digitization on the national level is carried out by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania together with the Ministry of Education and Science, Information Society Development Committee under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, and the Lithuanian Archives Department under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania. They also present suggestions for efficient realization of this support to the Council on Digitization of Lithuanian Cultural Heritage.

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[2] *Lietuvos kultūros paveldo skaitmeninimo koncepcija* : patvirtinta Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės 2005 m. rugpjūčio 25 d. nutarimu Nr. 933 // Valstybės žinios. – 2005, rugpj. 30 (Nr. 105), p. 5-6.

This document served as a basis not only for applying for EU structural support, but also for the development of a coordinated approach to digitization − collaboration between libraries, archives and museums, which is a central precondition for their digital convergence.

1.2 E-content within the Single Programming Document 2004-2006

Alongside with the preparation of a draft concept, EU fundraising activities for digitization of the documentary heritage were started by myself. Today we could state that the progress towards the EU support might have been both shorter and less complicated, but for the above-mentioned obstacle − lack of measures for digital content creation in the SPD 2004-2006. A survey into the context of the preparation of the SPD reveals low participation by non-governmental organizations. The use of EU structural support was a new area of activities for Lithuania. Non-governmental organizations' role in this process was rather passive, and the institutions involved took a rather sectoral approach. As a result, the latest trends within certain areas were not adequately reflected in the programming document for that period. This, in its turn, restricted the possibilities for EU structural funding.

This explains why selecting a measure favourable for the EU structural funding of documentary heritage digitization within the SPD 2004-2006 was not an easy task for NLL. It must be admitted, though, that contemporary EU communications were declaring a new integrated approach to long-term preservation of cultural heritage. They stated the importance of digitization of cultural and scientific heritage and the perspective for electronic access to the digital memory and its long-term preservation. However, these priorities for the development of information society were not adequately reflected in Measure 3.3 of the SPD 2004-2006 − "Development of Information Technology Services and Infrastructure" − according to which NLL and the partners were anticipating financial support for the project "Creation of the Integrated Virtual Library System" from the EU Structural Funds.

In our opinion, it was the only favourable measure at that time, because its objectives were compatible with our principal goals: "Ensure access to information resources by means of information technologies…for the entire population of the country" and "…implementation of various content creation projects, e.g. … − providing support for integration of the existing Lithuanian content (virtual libraries, digital maps, etc.) into the digital environment…" (SPD 2004-2006, p. 228). Despite the fact that creation of Lithuanian content was among the specified objectives, the principal priority of this measure was development of infrastructure, attracting 70% of its total expenditure. And as for cultural heritage, it could hardly be discerned within this measure. Continuous argument was needed in order to convince the teams of the Information Society Development Committee and the Central Project Management Agency that absence of digital content rendered impossible establishment of public e-services. Eventually we succeeded: in the middle of 2005, we were officially acknowledged as recipients of the financial support. It was some time later that we learned about hesitations by one of EU experts about financing a culture project under this measure. This context explains the interest in the mechanism of our success expressed by colleagues from a number of countries. We could therefore presume that other countries have encountered a similar situation.

2. EU fundraising for the new programming period of 2007-2013

We could admit with some satisfaction that by persistent and joint effort we managed to basically alter the situation with cultural heritage digitization that was characteristic of the previous programming period. The change was mainly caused by the project undertaken by NLL and the partners as well as initiatives started by NLL alone.

Now let me introduce the innovations defined in the *Strategy on Digitization of Lithuanian Cultural Heritage, Digital Content Preservation and Access* and its *Implementation Framework*[3].

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[3] *Lietuvos kultūros paveldo skaitmeninimo, skaitmeninio turinio saugojimo ir prieigos strategija : Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės nutarimo projektas*. Retrieved April 24, 2009, from
http://www.lrkm.lt/go.php/lit/PROJEKTAS_DEL_LIETUVOS_KULTUROS_PAVELDO_/158/0/159.

2.1. A new strategy for coordination of digitization programmes

The *Concept* approved in 2005, however, does not define organization of digitization activities and funding of these activities. This imperfection prompted me to initiate further updating of the regulatory framework and to set up an initiative group for the development of a draft project for the strategy on digitization. The drafted project was presented to the Ministry of Culture. After the general debate by the team from the Ministry of Culture and the Council on Digitization as well as a public debate, the *Strategy on Digitization of Lithuanian Cultural Strategy, Digital Content Preservation and Access* as well as a draft strategic framework for its implementation in 2007-2013 were approved. And on May 20 this year, these significant documents were adopted by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania.

The vision of the *Strategy* manifests itself as the single digital information space of the Lithuanian cultural heritage, which extends the lifetime of cultural heritage objects; provides current, comprehensive and authoritative information about Lithuanian cultural heritage to Europe and worldwide; ensures permanent and reliable use of cultural heritage resources for research, educational and cultural purposes.

The *Strategy* pursues the aim to encourage digitization of cultural heritage objects preserved at memory institutions, guarantee long-term preservation of Lithuanian cultural heritage, its integration into the global digital space and worldwide access to it.

The *Strategy* aspires to:
− create a seamless system of cultural heritage digitization and ensure its reliable functionality;
− develop and expand the Integrated Virtual System of digital cultural heritage combining search, preservation and access features;
− standardize cultural heritage digitization, preservation and access workflows;

− digitize cultural heritage objects and deliver their content into the common cultural heritage portal "epaveldas.lt";

− encourage initiatives on cultural heritage access.

The adopted *Implementation Framework for the Strategy on Digitization 2007-2013* provides more sustainable options for funding from the state budget and the EU Structural Funds. Priority has been given to the projects which provide possibilities for development of partnership relationships between memory institutions for creation of the single Lithuanian digital cultural heritage information space and integration of their products into the system of the digital cultural heritage and common portal "epaveldas.lt". In concrete terms, under the *Implementation Framework*, EUR 5 840 000 have been granted from the state budget and EUR 12 318 000 from the EU Structural Funds.

The *Strategy on Digitization of Lithuanian Cultural Heritage, Digital Content Preservation and Access* and its *Implementation Framework* will help to expand the established infrastructure in order to create a single digital cultural heritage information space, extend the lifetime of cultural heritage objects, provide current and authoritative information about Lithuanian cultural heritage in the virtual environment, and facilitate preservation and promotion of Lithuanian culture in a globalized world.

2.2 Lithuanian culture in the information society: e-services and e-content

The adopted *Strategy on Digitization of Lithuanian Cultural Heritage, Digital Content Preservation and Access* and its *Implementation Framework* enables project funding under the implementation measure "Lithuanian culture in the information society" of the 3rd priority "Information society for all" of the *Operational Programme on Economic Growth for 2007-2013*[4].

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[4] *2007-2013 m. Ekonomikos augimo veiksmų programa.* Retrieved May 18, 2009 from
http://www.esparama.lt/ES_Parama/strukturines_paramos_2007_1013m._medis/titulinis/files/2VP_EA_2007-07-05.pdf.

The experience gained by state and non-governmental organizations in the course of drafting the previous programming document and the lessons learnt have been successfully applied in the drafting of the *National General Strategy: the Lithuanian Strategy for the Use of the European Union Structural Assistance for 2007-2013*[5] and 4 operational programmes on its implementation.

The interest in the drafting of the *Strategy* by the public partners has considerably increased. The figure illustrates the involvement of state and non-governmental organizations.
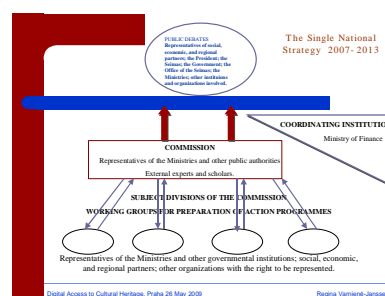
Participation of representatives from NLL and the Ministry of Culture in the drafting of the implementation measure "Lithuanian culture in the information society" played a major role in the framing of the underlying aspects of Priority 3 "Information society for all" within the *Operational Programme on Economic Growth for 2007-2013*, e.g. "Development of digital information services by establishing full-text databases and interactive multimedia services on the basis of data and items accumulated in state and other archives, museums and libraries. Systems for the management and search for content of libraries, museums and archives are to be developed and integrated online. The use of ICT should also help ensure preservation of the Lithuanian language and its use in all areas of public life taking account of globalization processes, EU integration and development of global knowledge society[6]."

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[5] *Nacionalinė bendroji strategija : Lietuvos 2007-2013 metų Europos Sąjungos struktūrinės paramos panadoijimo strategija konvergencijos tikslui įgyvendinti*. Retrieved May 18, 2009 from
http://www.esparama.lt/ES_Parama/strukturines_paramos_2007_1013m._medis/titulinis/files/Strategija_2007-03-30.pdf
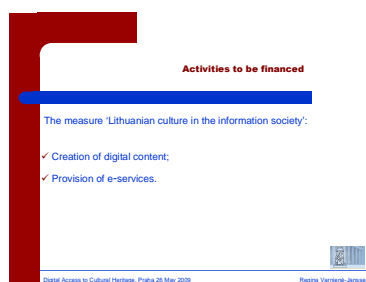[6] *2007-2013 m. Ekonomikos augimo veiksmų programa*. Retrieved May 18, 2009 from
http://www.esparama.lt/ES_Parama/strukturines_paramos_2007_1013m._medis/titulinis/files/2VP_EA_2007-07-05.pdf, p. 38.

Under this measure, projects are to be financed according to national project selection criteria. According to the description of financing conditions, 14.5 million EUR have been granted for the intended projects.

Measure 'Lithuanian culture in the information society'

The goal - creation of valuable digital heritage by conversion of unique and valuable cultural heritage objects, works of art, cultural creations, information about significant phenomena in the historical and social reality into the digital form.

Total amount: EUR 14 493 000.

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Eligible applicants to receive financial support include memory, academic, and other institutions concerned with cultural heritage that are listed under the *Implementation Framework* for the Strategy.

Activities to be financed

The measure 'Lithuanian culture in the information society':

✓ Creation of digital content;
✓ Provision of e-services.

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The adoption of the *Strategy on Digitization of Lithuanian Cultural Heritage, Digital Content Preservation and Access* and its *Implementation Framework* by the Government will be immediately followed by the adoption of the priority list including 7 projects intended to be financed in 2009-2011.

Project selection and administration

Measure 'Lithuanian culture in the information society':

✓ National selection criteria;
✓ Information Society Development Committee;
✓ Implementing agency for the Measure - The Central Project Management Agency.

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Here is the list of these projects.

Projects to be financed

1. 'Creation of the Lithuanian cultural heritage content and access' - NLL (the National Library): EUR 8 800 000;
2. 'Lithuanian documentary cinema online' - Lithuanian State Archives: EUR 3 000 000;
3. 'Building and restoration of the sovereign Lithuanian state: digitization of the historical heritage' - the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, the Office of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania: EUR 9 000 000;

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As we can see here, the NLL project is also included into list of the projects eligible for funding. While shortly introducing the project by NLL intended to be started later this year, it is important to notice that it is an extension of a previous project, and its duration is 30 months.

Projects to be financed

4. 'Millenium: digitization of the Lithuanian historical and cultural heritage' - Vilnius University: EUR 1 880 000;
5. Better availability of audiobooks for the visually impaired: Lithuanian Library for the Blind – EUR 1 000 000;
6. Digitization of records preserved at the Lithuanian Radio Archives - Lithuanian National Radio and Television: EUR 1 800 000.

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Involvement of the Library of the Academy of Sciences and the Vilnius University Library into this project will ensure integrity of the documentary heritage, because the documents that are outside of the National Library holdings will be digitized.

Goals of the NLL project

✓ Development of the partnership infrastructure;
✓ Digital content creation;
✓ Standardization of metadata, digital object archiving and digital content access;
✓ Development of the infrastructure of the Integrated Virtual System and the portal 'epaveldas.lt'.

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The Archives Department will pursue digitization of the Roman Catholic Church registers. The Art Museum will start digitization of 3D objects and their integration into the portal. These objects include works of graphic art: traditional and historical sculpture; works of applied arts: Easter eggs, traditional Easter palms, traditional ceramics, chests, woodwork, furniture and much more. The Lithuanian Theatre, Music and Cinema Museum will present a considerable number of scenography pieces and archival material belonging to various associations and fellowships, and other important documents.

Conclusions

1. All necessary preconditions required for digitization of the national cultural heritage, its long-term preservation and access have been established in Lithuania, because:

− The measure "Lithuanian culture in the information society" of the 3rd priority "Information society for all" within the *Operational Programme on Economic Growth for 2007-2013* provides for funding of digitization projects. The Lithuanian culture has been singled out as a priority area for investment with the total amount of 14.5 million EUR.

− *Concept for Lithuanian Cultural Heritage Digitization and Access*, the *Strategy on Digitization of Lithuanian Cultural Heritage, Digital Content Preservation and Access* and the measure "Lithuanian culture in the information society" of the 3rd priority "Information society for all" within the *Operational Programme on Economic Growth for 2007-2013* provide legal basis for memory institutions to apply for EU structural funding.

Conclusions:

− An integrated virtual cultural heritage system for archives, libraries and museums has been created in Lithuania, which is based on a common cross-sectoral approach to digital cultural heritage objects, irrespective of their type, provenience, content or structure. The system is compatible with international standards and recommendations, therefore compatibility of cultural heritage content both on national and global levels has been ensured.

2. EU structural funding for the development of the established system enables to pursue systematic creation of the digital content, achieve integrity of the national cultural heritage and the whole spectrum of its forms; the safety of cultural heritage objects will be secured; remote users will have the same access opportunities as residents of the bigger cities. Therefore receiving the EU structural support for the project by NLL and the partners is of vital importance for the enrichment of the created digital content.