

Chapter 2.13

Cross–Cultural Design and Usability of a Digital Library Supporting Access to Maori Cultural Heritage Resources

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ABSTRACT

Part of the worldwide appeal for digital libraries (DLs) lies in their potential to preserve cultural heritage resources, to expand access to indigenous resources, and to promote deeper understanding among user communities. As cultural heritage resources are being made into a shared worldwide collection of information resources, cross-cultural design and usability issues of DLs supporting access to such resources become critical concerns. This chapter looks specifically at issues concerning supporting access to Māori heritage materials available in New Zealand through DL technologies. The chapter commences with an examination of the Māori culture, the nature and forms of Māori heritage resources and their specific requirements for representation, organisation

and retrieval. It then proceeds to identify a set of critical research issues crucial to the success of such DLs. For these research issues, challenges are identified and potential strategies to meet these challenges are proposed.

INTRODUCTION

Part of the worldwide appeal for digital libraries (DLs) lies in their potential to open up new dimension of reaching traditional and new audiences by providing access to cultural heritage resources in ways undreamt of a decade ago, and to promote better understanding of indigenous knowledge. Over the last three decades, cultural heritage institutions including libraries, archives and museums have started to integrate technology in one way

or another into various aspects of their mission and services. As cultural and heritage resources are being made into a shared worldwide collection of information resources, the implications of information representation and organisation, and usability practices for the conduct of scholarship and indigenous knowledge sharing will need to be explored and addressed appropriately.

DIGITAL LIBRARIES AND MÂORI CULTURAL HERITAGE RESOURCES

This chapter looks specifically at issues concerning supporting access to Māori indigenous resources through DL technologies. The chapter commences with an examination of the Māori culture, the nature and forms of Māori heritage resources and their specific requirements for representation, storage, organisation and retrieval in a DL environment. The chapter then proceeds to identify a set of critical research issues crucial to the success of a DL aimed at promoting worldwide access and for the appropriate use of Māori cultural heritage resources.

Māori Cultural Heritage Resources: Forms and Nature

In designing DLs of Māori indigenous resources, it is important to consider the forms and nature of traditional Māori heritage resources and to examine the digitisation needs of the material types involved. Traditional Māori knowledge and skills have been transferred in the forms of waiata (songs), mōteatea (folk songs), whakaahua (paintings), whakairo (carvings) and stories or legends (kōrero, pūrākau). It makes an interesting case, therefore, to examine the transfer of these various forms of Māori heritage materials to DLs, and to look into the use and usability of such resources in the electronic environment. While indigenous resources are being made available to international community, it is important to remember

that DLs of such collections will be important to the Māori community as well. Hence, the issue of Māori culture as user context will need to be addressed.

Since the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi (Waitangi Tribunal, 2004) on February 6, 1840, Māori culture has been greatly influenced by the settlement of tauwi (immigrants), colonization and involvement in international conflicts. Against this backdrop, the need to preserve Māori cultural and heritage resources in all forms becomes an urgent matter. Many institutions in New Zealand (NZ) find themselves in a position where they have to take note of developments relating to practices surrounding the rediscovery and preservation of the Māori culture and to practices of making available previously largely inaccessible Māori indigenous materials. There is a wealth of Māori heritage materials in NZ, and DLs have been explored as a potential platform to support these practices. Collections of Māori manuscripts, letters, early printed materials, such as the 1908 Southern Māori electoral roll, as well as collections of pictures, photographs, maps, sound and oral history recordings are held in various institutions in the country. The sheer volume of these materials together with the firmness with which the Māori communities are now asserting their rights in respect of their cultural resources (Diesch, 2003) make the case an important, timely and interesting study.

The Ranfurly Collection (NLNZ, 2003) is an example of a project taking advantage of digital technologies to make publicly available a major heritage collection of NZ. The Ranfurlys were enthusiastic chroniclers and the collection provides a unique record of the private lives of the family and their entourage. The collection includes letters, diaries, scrapbooks, sketchbooks, paintings and photographs, and the collection forms a rich source of information about NZ and New Zealanders. The Niupepa Collection (NZDL, 2004; Apperly et al., 2001) is another heritage collection that has recently been made available. Niupepa is an

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