

Pangia, the World Digital Library and Global Interoperability
Background and Rationale

The Cultural Heritage Online meeting at The Hague on March 20-21, 2019 will link planning for the next phase of the World Digital Library (WDL) and the emerging project Pangia. Given the common principles and commitment to global cooperation that the two efforts share, the meeting is an opportune time to explore the potential for coordinated future development and integration.

Shared Principles

The WDL was established to promote intercultural understanding, and serve as an important resource for scholars, educators, and the general public. It continues to aspire to narrowing the digital divide, particularly in countries where digital infrastructure is more basic. As a project framed by UNESCO, we can infer that the accessibility to cultural heritage that the WDL promotes is considered a public good. The term ‘Pangia’, a play on the geological term Pangaea, an ancient supercontinent, signifies the desire and feasibility of bringing together current and future digital library projects to accelerate machine learning functions and interoperability on a planetary scale. In these respects, the WDL elegantly provides a functional, cultural, and behavioral model for Pangia.

Global Scale Cooperation

Nearly 200 countries have contributed to the WDL. The metadata and descriptions of its objects are multilingual, and its content represents a wide range of human expression, including film, manuscripts, drawings, maps, audio recordings, ephemera, and photographs. Whereas the WDL is a centralized project, however, Pangia would form an umbrella under which the architecture, content and characters of autonomous digital libraries remain the responsibility of the country, region, or organization of origin.

Initial indications are, however, that the existing WDL technical architecture will be expensive and difficult to bring to a truly global scale, while the open platform of Pangia is envisioned for unlimited extensibility. A merger of the WDL and Pangia concepts could conceivably preserve the foundational WDL assets, and leverage the investment and knowledge gained over the last decade of work, helping to anchor and guide a new digital ecosystem.

Common Challenges

As the WDL community ponders its next iteration, key issues of technology, governance, and sustainability must be addressed in new ways. The two-day conference will frame and explore the possible solutions. On the first day the issues will be raised largely in the context of the WDL; the second day’s discussions will move on to explore how the next iteration of the WDL could support the broader Pangia effort. We hope that the insight and knowledge gained through discussions about evolving the WDL will inform subsequent Pangia discussions, applying valuable lessons learned and experience gained to the next generation of a global digital library.

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