CAIS Poster: Shaping of A Digital Library Canada's North: The Case of the Inuvialuit Settlement Region

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Abstract
This poster will introduce a research project that is currently being conducted to develop digital library infrastructure for the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (ISR) in Canada's north to preserve rich cultural heritage material of northern communities and to facilitate sharing and dissemination of such material. This poster will report on an environmental scan that is being conducted in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region to identify and examine the currently available information bearing objects and artefact types held within the communities and community resource centres.

Résumé

1. Introduction

Digital libraries provide democratic, organized and open access to quality information sources (Lagoze 2010; Lesk 1997). Digital libraries are useful mechanisms for the storage, preservation and dissemination of cultural heritage information and are particularly relevant to Northern communities. According to Semali and Asino (2013), "cultural heritage refers to local and traditional places, rituals, cultural practices, foods, costumes or attire, plants, and areas of cultural, religious, and ceremonial significance" (p.27). Research suggests that Canadian First Nations groups support documentation of cultural knowledge in order to pass it on to future generations, and that libraries can be "the most important custodians of documented traditional knowledge" (Maina 2009: p.281; Lyons 2010).

This proposal aims to introduce a research project that is currently being conducted to develop digital library infrastructure for the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in Canada's north to preserve rich cultural heritage material of northern communities and to facilitate sharing and dissemination of such material. This poster will report on the key components of the multi-phase digital library infrastructure and will provide some emerging results in relation to an on-going environmental scan of the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (ISR) in the North West Territories (NWT).

2. Literature Review

Digital Libraries allow for both digitization and organization of information (Lesk 1997; Lyman 1998; Saracevic 2000) in different formats such as text and multimedia (Zaphiris et al. 2004) and can made available through the Web (Comeaux, 2007). Examples of key digital libraries include the First Nations Collection of the Southern Oregon Digital Archives; the Tibetan and Himalayan Library; the Arctic Science and Technology Information System (ASTIS), which includes the Inuvialuit Settlement Region database; and Haathi Trust. Harper (2006) identified five key elements for developing a good digital library, including system architecture, digitization of content, metadata involvement, visual interface, and preservation of digital objects. Digital libraries are appropriate platforms for multilingual and cultural applications (Zaphiris et al. 2004; Dunn 2011; Nakata et al. 2008; Maina 2009; Parandjuk 2010) and have the potential to serve users with different types of needs and abilities. For instance, oral history collections in audio format on digital library platforms can benefit the community (Deo et al. 2002). Digital libraries specifically designed to meet the needs of northern communities can provide both framework and infrastructure to capture cultural heritage information which can include traditional knowledge such as traditional place names, hunting grounds and waterways (Tyson 1999; Asmah 2010; White 2006).

3. Research Design

An environmental scan is being conducted in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (ISR) to identify and examine the currently available information bearing objects and artefact types held within the communities and community resource centres, including local libraries, cultural centres and other organizations in the region. In addition, an exploratory interview was conducted, with one of the project collaborators who leads the Inuvialuit Cultural Resource Center (ICRC) to identify the various stakeholders and users of the proposed digital library in order to initiate a study of the information needs and information seeking behaviour of northern communities as a basis for the development of the digital library.

4. Key and Emerging Findings

The poster will present an overview of the proposed digital library project, including overarching objectives of the project, and the emerging findings from the environmental scan as well as the findings from the interview with the community collaborator. Examples of the key themes that will be included in the poster are:

- An overview of library and resource centres in the ISR region that forms the NWT Library Network. This network, for example, includes Aurora College libraries, the Western Arctic Research Centre library, the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, and Public Library Services.
- Identification of various information artefacts created and held by the community members in ISR. Examples include oral history materials, such as digitized transcripts, photos, archived material as well as genealogical recordings.
- Social, cultural, technological, and political considerations of the digital library project as emerging from the environmental scan in the North, particularly the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in NWT.
- Assessment of the variety of formats in which material exist (e.g., VHS tapes and cassettes), and the state of current digitization programs.
- Identification of different stakeholders (e.g., health care professionals, community corporation members, regional boards, student groups, and library and other cultural resource centre staff) in order to conduct information needs and information seeking behaviour study in Inuvialuit Settlement Region communities.

More findings will emerge from the ongoing research including some new findings resulting from an upcoming visit to the north by the research team members in February 2015, which will be included in the poster.

5. Conclusion

The poster will provide the overall scope, nature and the current state of the proposed digital library project in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region. The poster will contribute to the original research on community-led digital library development and will make valuable connection between the existing research on digital libraries and ways in which the information needs of northern communities can be met. This poster addresses the conference theme on many levels, particularly research issues such as 'memory institutions, collection and organization of material objects for individual access and social value, and social trends and information behaviours, consideration in the practical present, …' as identified in call for papers.

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