

Review of the Alexandria Digital Library Project

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ILS 655: Digital Libraries

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February 5, 2011

Abstract

This review will examine various aspects of the Alexandria Digital Library (ADL), including the project's background, organization of resources, service features, and technologies. Also, the review will provide feedback on the site's interface design, usability, and current operational status.

Review of the Alexandria Digital Library

Project Background

The goal of the Alexandria Digital Library (ADL) was to collect georeferenced materials and make them available digitally across the globe. Its URL is <http://www.alexandria.ucsb.edu/>. The project was founded in 1994 at the University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB), which houses the extensive Map and Imagery Laboratory (MIL) inside its Davidson Library. Funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the Library of Congress Digital Preservation Initiative, the ADL sought to make these millions of maps, photos, atlases, and other materials accessible online to people around the world. Funding for the project ended in 2005. (Alexandria Digital Library, 2006)

Organization of Resources

As of 2004, ADL included several terabytes of information that is related to UCSB holdings; also, an accompanying gazetteer contained more than 4 million entries to assist in searching for specific places. (Goodchild, 2004) Even with such a large amount of material already compiled, ADL continued to grow its collections. Digitizing this material was no small task; by organizing itself in “nodes,” teams in various locations were “in the process of loading significant collections of geospatially-referenced information.” (Alexandria Digital Library, 2004) According to ADL’s About page (2004),

“The datasets that we are in the process of loading include [...] scanned aerial photographs (from the New Zealand Node); [...] scanned aerial photographs, digital elevation models, and digital raster graphics (from the United States Node); Landsat TM (UCSB Film Holdings), World Maps from the United States Central Intelligence Agency,

AVHRR & MODIS Satellite Scenes, AVHRR & MODIS Satellite Scenes, and PEGASUS (UCSB Library) map records.”

While ADL has been discontinued, this information was still put to use by the National Geospatial Digital Archive (NGDA).

Service Features

By Clicking on the Alexandria Digital Library link on the left side of the homepage, users will find the NGDA Globetrotter Interface. (It is also found by following the pathway Home > Current Collections > Operational Collections > Globetrotter: ADL Library Webclient.) This page allows users to search for “geospatial content around the world.” Search fields include areas for words and/or authors. There are also drop-down menus which allow users to choose object types and sorting options. To further narrow a search, users can select tabs for more options, advanced text, and advanced time/space. Users can also reset their queries or click on a link for help. (Alexandria Digital Library, 2004)

Technologies

ADL’s homepage interface is simple, consistent, and uses space effectively. (Tennant, 1999) No unusual software is required for users to navigate the homepage or Globetrotter Interface; the only hardware required to browse Globetrotter is a computer. For detailed information on the site’s internal structure (current in 1998), see [“The Alexandria Digital Library Architecture”](#) by Frew et al.

Feedback

As a user unfamiliar with this digital library, I found it difficult to navigate the Globetrotter Interface. For instance, I could not find any maps of Connecticut. Searches for Connecticut yielded maps of Massachusetts, and of the Connecticut Lakes in New Hampshire.

When I went to the Help page, the most recent message was from 2008; it was titled “Technical Difficulties” and read, “Some of the collections in Globetrotter may be offline as we resolve some technical issues. We will resume normal service as soon as possible.” Furthermore, there were several broken links on the homepage. As funding for the project ended several years ago, perhaps this is no longer as viable a resource as it once was, or was designed to be.

In reference to the discontinuation of funding, the “Research” section of the homepage states, “Future support for enhancement and dissemination of the operational library infrastructure will be provided by the Davidson Library UCSB. ADL technology will be the starting point for designing a distributed geospatial library network funded by the Library of Congress Digital Preservation Initiative. Please see www.ngda.org for more information.” NGDA was formed by the libraries at UCSB and Stanford to continue the preservation of geospatial resources. (National Geospatial Digital Archive, 2009)

Conclusion

ADL was a massive undertaking in terms of the sheer amount of materials to be digitized and organized. It was the first project that attempted to digitize maps and it led the way for further projects in archiving georeferenced materials, as well as research in the construction of digital libraries in general. Also, ADL is responsible for the concept of searching by location, which is now very commonplace on the internet. (Goodchild, 2004) Clearly, ADL was a forerunner amongst digital libraries and has had valuable implications for those in the fields of geography, cartography, and information science.

References

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