The *MetaMap*, an Online Tool for Learning about Metadata
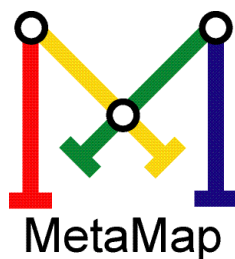
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MetaMap

The *MetaMap* (<http://mapageweb.umontreal.ca/turner/>) is a graphic study aid and reference tool to help people understand how approximately 200 metadata initiatives worldwide are related to information management in digital libraries. It represents these in the form of a subway map to help the user navigate metaspace, and leans heavily on the conventions of the *London Underground Map* (London), noted for its clarity in helping users sort out complex reality. Each metadata standard, set, or initiative (MSSI) is represented as a station on a line. Each line has a theme, and these include processes of information management (Creation, Organisation, Dissemination, Preservation), institutions with expertise in information management (Libraries, Archives, Museums), and types of digital documentation (Text, Still Images, Moving Images, Sound). In addition, organisations deeply involved in Web activity and metadata norms, such as the *World Wide Web Consortium*, the *IETF*, and the *IEEE* are included on a separate line. When the user passes the mouse over a station name, the expanded name of the acronym appears. A mouse click on the name opens a window with other useful information such as the purpose of the MSSI, its sponsor, and links to the official and other useful Web sites. The *MetaMap* is available in English and French, and there is some information online in Spanish and Portuguese while these versions are being built. We are also negotiating with potential partners to build versions in several other languages.

The arrival of the World Wide Web and the new networked environment for information has already radically changed the approach to information management. This new information environment has no analogue in history and over the past ten years or so, it has been necessary to re-think the techniques and methods used for organising information. Various types of metadata are being developed in response to various information management needs. Descriptive metadata is used for identification, discovery and access, and can also help in evaluating resources. Recordkeeping metadata helps to order, to validate, and to archive an organisation's resources and, with the arrival of electronic information is also considered "a tool that can help ensure the meaning, manageability and longevity of records and the information they contain" (New South Wales). In addition, preservation metadata plays the specific role of contributing to longterm conservation of digital resources. But whatever the particular reasons for which metadata is used, all types of metadata have in common the physical and intellectual management of resources to ensure access to them both now and in the long term. Basic readings which are helpful to those who wish to get a grasp on the concept of metadata include articles by Hodge and Hillman. The latter article is on use of the *Dublin Core* (*DCMI*). Without common rules and principles for metadata construction, the metadata and the corresponding resources would remain underused or would not be used at all (Soft Experience). This need for uniformity explains why the adoption of metadata standards quickly became so necessary.

The metadata standards and sets constructed to date already constitute a long list. As this list continues to grow, it becomes more and more difficult to keep track of this information, which forms the basis of the *Semantic Web*. In addition to standards and sets, a number of initiatives have been undertaken, often with a number of collaborators, in order to serve as testbeds for metadata sets and standards and to demonstrate the effectiveness of additional techniques for organising networked information. A number of major players assume the responsibility for several initiatives (e.g. *IETF* 2004, *IEEE* 2003, *W3C* 2004, *DCMI* 2004).

The idea of developing a tool such as the *MetaMap* arose from the idea that it would be useful to gather in a single place information about the many MSSIs that have come into existence over the last several years. Since the focus of attention in the information management community is the Web, and since the Web is the chief source for information about metadata for managing networked information, it was thought to be particularly helpful to produce a Web-based tool, in addition to a poster (in colour, French and English recto-verso, 90 x 60 cm) which is available free of charge. The *MetaMap* is sponsored by the *Groupe départemental de recherche en information visuelle* (*GRIV* 2003) at the Université de Montréal. Work on the *MetaMap* is funded by *CoRIMedia* (<http://www.corimedia.org>), a research consortium based at the Université de Sherbrooke.

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