IIIi
International Co-operation

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The development of interactive multimedia initiatives in Europe has been characterised by a series of cooperative international projects, three leading examples of which are discussed in this section. Each of these elegantly named projects has received crucial support from European Commission programmes to encourage the growth of technological and cultural innovation.

NARCISSE (the Network of Art Research Computer Image Systems in Europe) was established in 1990, with initial support from the IMPACT I programme. It now includes collaborators in France, Portugal, Germany and Switzerland, with earlier participation from Italy. Its priorities include improving the preservation of and access to the large numbers of x-rays and photographs about paintings held by the participating laboratories. The practical results of the research include the design of a high-quality scanner, compression and storage innovations and the production of an illustrated database about the terms used to describe the images. The partners have also been concerned to encourage an awareness of the project among researchers and the public.

The Brancusi initiative is developing products concerning the sculptor Constantine Brancusi, in part for a representative of this work to be held in 1995. With partners in the UK, Rumania, France, Italy, Germany and the US, the core project has funding from IMPACT II programme. It sees both the public and researchers as the as the audiences for its work, with potential products including museum information systems and a series of CD-ROM's. The paper notes the importance of collaboration, but balances this with a recognition of the cost and time involved in supporting a successful international venture.

VAN EYCK (the Visual Arts Network for the Exchange of Cultural Knowledge) is funded as part of DGXIII's Library Action Plan, with partners in the UK, Ireland and the Netherlands. It is designing a scholarly work station, as a means of providing a user with access to a variety of text and images databases. An initial emphasis is being placed on an analysis of user requirements and the development of data standards and image transfer techniques.

The three projects are excellent illustrations of the value of international collaboration. It is important to note how the projects include participation from within European Community and other countries, with an emphasis on the significance of professional collaboration.

The authors stress the role of interactive ventures in building on collections, making them more accessible and better understood. The new products complement the collections and existing products such as a bibliographies and catalogues. They also point to the potential for developing a range of resources from the initial project base, with these addressing the interests of both the public and research audiences. They indicate the way a project can evolve with the experience of its partners, taking account of new opportunities and needs.

NARCISSE and VAN EYCK are important demonstrations of the way technical innovations can be initiated and driven by the cultural community, with benefits for other projects and in different business sectors. It is important that the museum community is supported by this type of innovation, providing the tools needed to project and provide access to collections and information.

From a short-term project-based initiative, NARCISSE had identified the value of long-term collaboration and continuity of research. These and other projects have opened up the potential for a wider range of cooperative projects within the European Community and further afield.