Protecting and Promoting Global Recorded Knowledge

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Memory of the World

20th Anniversary
While stone, papyrus, parchment and paper formerly contained the evidence of our past, radio, film, television and the Internet are the canvas of modern life.

In a world where emphasis is placed on speed and where life is becoming increasingly hurried, we must take time to conserve the records of what defines our roots, our past and our existence.

To this end, in 1992, UNESCO created the Memory of the World Programme.
A shared memory

Documentary heritage in archives, libraries and museums constitutes a major part of the memory of the peoples of the world and reflects the diversity of peoples, language and cultures. However, that memory is fragile.

Millions of textual and print items such as books, manuscripts, newspapers, photographs and governmental records; millions of films, audio and video tapes and discs are at risk of crumbling into dust or fading away and disappearing for eternity! Floods and fires, storms and earthquakes can destroy our heritage overnight. Humidity, heat, dust and salt-laden atmospheres also play their part, and losses can arise from technical obsolescence as well as physical decay affecting not only traditional carriers but also the ‘new’ digital media.

Together, we must act to preserve this heritage, mobilize efforts and resources so that future generations can enjoy our legacy. Not taking action will result in the loss of entire chapters of our heritage and lead to impoverishment of the global identity.

Only collective action can save our documentary heritage!
In 1992, UNESCO launched the Memory of the World Programme (MoW) to protect and promote the world's documentary heritage through preservation and access. These two tasks complement each other, for access encourages protection, and preservation ensures access.

The Memory of the World Programme

LOGO

In 2009 the IAC adopted a new logo to brand the MoW Programme and to ensure a more visual connection to UNESCO. Committees and institutions holding documentary heritage items listed on a Register can request the use of the UNESCO Memory of the World logo. The conditions for the use of the logo are determined by UNESCO and cannot be changed without its consent.

To obtain the logo each institution or committee is required to complete and send a very simple Logo Request Form to the UNESCO Programme Officer in charge of the Memory of the World Programme. A specific logo in accordance with UNESCO's graphical guidelines will then be created. Institutions and Committees must annually complete a questionnaire describing events and activities that they have organized to promote the registered documentary item or the MoW Programme. This will enable UNESCO to evaluate the outreach and impact that MoW Programme has had.

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Further information and copies of the request form can be found on the Memory of the World website: http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CUC/pdf/mow/mow_guidelines_on_logo_use_en.pdf

The Hamburg Bible, GKS 4, 2° I-III; Illuminated initial that shows how the Hamburg Bible was produced
Photo: © The Royal Library
The Memory of the World International Register, created in 1997, lists documentary heritage which has been identified by the International Advisory Committee as meeting the criteria of world significance. It now lists 301 items from 102 countries, 4 international organizations and one private foundation.

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* Joint Inscriptions between 2 or more countries.
Preserving knowledge enables it to be shared and utilized for sustainable development and improvement of the human condition. With the onset of digitality and the ease with which information can be shared, greater awareness of the fragility of digital data also led to calls for UNESCO to propose measures for the protection of this latest form of recorded knowledge. Firstly, with the 2003 Charter on the Preservation of the Digital Heritage and its associated Guidelines, UNESCO has been encouraging its Member States to develop policies for digital information management.

The Memory of the World in the Digital Age: Digitization and Preservation

At present, digital information is being lost because its value is underestimated, because of the absence of legal and institutional frameworks or because custodians lack knowledge, skills and funding. In order to explore these issues in depth and obtain solutions, UNESCO’s Director-General convened an international conference: The Memory of the World in the Digital Age: Digitization and Preservation from 26 to 28 September 2012 in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

More than 500 participants from 110 countries discussed the key factors affecting the two major aspects of records, documents and data in the digital environment:

1. issues pertaining to the digitization of analogue material, and
2. issues pertaining to continuity, access, and preservation of authentic, reliable, and accurate digital materials.
3. As a result of these discussions, the participants agreed that:
4. as enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, each individual has the right to seek, receive and impart information through any media and regardless of frontiers (article 19). Citizens exercise this right when they access information in digital form. Trustworthiness and integrity of documentary heritage and documentary systems are therefore a prerequisite for the continued exercise of this right.

The proceedings and recommendations of The Memory of the World in the Digital Age: Digitization and Preservation, an international conference on permanent access to digital documentary heritage held in September 2012, are expected to serve as the background to UNESCO’s action in the field. The UNESCO /UBC Vancouver Declaration is reproduced below in its entirety to provide guidance on the development of digital policies.

Digital technology offers unprecedented means to transmit and store information. Documents and data in digital form are important for science, education, culture and economic and social development, but assuring their continuity over time is a far from resolved problem. While countries differ greatly as to the possibilities they have to implement policies to address sustainability access to digital resources, the fundamental challenges are universal. Closer collaboration in managing these resources will be beneficial for all.
5. for analogue documents, digitization can protect valuable documents from deterioration by reducing handling. In the case of audiovisual documents, digitization is the only means of ensuring their survival;

6. many objects are born digital, but without due consideration of the means of ensuring their continuing accessibility, and authentic, reliable, and accurate preservation through time and technological change. These issues of access and preservation apply also to digitized materials; a better understanding of the digital environment is essential for the establishment of digital preservation models that respect fundamental legal principles enshrined in institutional regulatory frameworks, and balance access with privacy, right to knowledge with economic rights, and respect ownership and control of indigenous cultural heritage and traditional knowledge in digital format;

7. digital preservation should be a development priority, and investments in infrastructure are essential to ensure trustworthiness of preserved digital records as well as their long-term accessibility and usability;

8. education and training programmes for information professionals must be developed and provided to prepare or reposition them to implement both digitization and preservation practices relevant to the needs of governments and their citizens;

9. there is a pressing need to establish a roadmap proposing solutions, agreements and policies, that ensure long term access and trustworthy preservation. This roadmap should address issues like open government, open data, open access and electronic government. It should dovetail with national and international priorities and be in full agreement with human rights.

Recommendations

Taking current and emerging challenges into consideration, the participants:

Urge the UNESCO secretariat to:

a. play an active advocacy role to make digital preservation frameworks and practices a reality, by promoting digital objects management and preservation in all appropriate forms, including working with other UN agencies, funds and programmes;

b. support the work of the international archival, library and museum community to secure an international legal framework of copyright exceptions and limitations to ensure preservation of and access to cultural heritage in digital format, and acquisition of and access to that heritage in a culturally appropriate manner;

c. collaborate with international professional associations and other international bodies to develop academic curricula for digitization and digital preservation, and implement training programmes and global educational approaches that enhance the capabilities of archives, library, and museum personnel to manage and preserve digital information;

d. establish a multi-stakeholder forum for the discussion of standardization in digitization and digital preservation practices, including the establishment of digital format registries;

e. in cooperation with international professional associations and research projects teams, design and publish guidelines, policies and procedures as well as best-practice models in digitization and digital preservation;

f. support the belief that good management of trustworthy digital information is fundamental to sustainable development by developing and implementing a global digital roadmap under the auspices of the Memory of the World Programme to encourage all relevant stakeholders, in particular governments and the industry, to invest in trustworthy digital infrastructure and digital preservation;

g. create an emergency programme aiming at preservation of documentary materials endangered by natural disasters or armed conflicts, as well as a programme for the recovery of analogue and digital heritage that is under threat of becoming, or is already, inaccessible because of obsolete hardware and software;
h. encourage engagement of cultural heritage professionals knowledgeable about digital forensics concepts, methods and tools in order to ensure capture and reliable preservation of authentic, contextualized and meaningful information, and appropriate mediation of access to the information;

i. update the implementation guidelines of the 2003 UNESCO Charter on preservation of digital heritage and give consideration to the inclusion of preservation of and access to digitized cultural heritage in the proposed recommendation on documentary heritage being examined by the 190th session of UNESCO’s Executive Board;

j. work with national and international research and heritage bodies to develop criteria for assessing whether repositories are, or can be improved to be, trustworthy in terms of their ability to preserve digital holdings;

k. promote cooperation with international standards bodies in order to increase consistency among different reference sources on digital preservation, and support the development of standards compliant with the principles endorsed by UNESCO.

Urge UNESCO’s Member States to:

a. develop and enforce laws that ensure rights of all citizens to relevant knowledge;

b. develop public policies enabling and supporting preservation of digital heritage in a rapidly changing technological environment;

c. promote cooperation between their legislative bodies and archives, libraries and museums and other relevant organizations, in order to develop legal frameworks that support preservation of, and access to, digital cultural heritage;

d. develop strategies for open government and open data that address the need to create and maintain trust and reliance in digital government records;

e. provide legal guarantees that information to which citizens are legally entitled be available in an open format;

f. encourage private sector organizations to invest in trustworthy digital infrastructure and digital preservation;

g. develop a Recommendation for the promotion of legal deposit laws for digital formats;

h. establish appropriate oversight body(ies), e.g., Information Ombudsman, to monitor and protect the necessary degree of independence required by archives, libraries, museums and other heritage organizations to preserve and provide access to digital information in such a way that sustains public trust in what information is selected for preservation and how it is preserved;

i. identify and propose registration of digital documentary heritage on a Memory of the World Register;

j. ensure that analogue contents will be made available in digital form, to avoid their future neglect in a world of predominant digital information retrieval;

k. raise public awareness of relevance of digital preservation for the endurance of our cultural heritage;

l. promote the use of standards and widely recognized guidelines and best practices on digitization and digital preservation among the relevant national organizations and communities.

Urge professional organizations in the cultural heritage sector to:

a. cooperate with other professional associations, international and regional organizations and commercial enterprises to ensure that significant born-digital materials are preserved by promoting and advocating for digital legal deposit laws;

b. assist in the development of a cohesive, conceptual and practical vision for a digital strategy capable of addressing the management and preservation of recorded information in all its forms in the digital environment;
c. encourage their members to take into consideration the reliability, authenticity, copyright ownership and future use of digital information, and to develop policies for all aspects of management and preservation of digital materials;

d. cooperate with the private sector for the development of products that facilitate the long-term retention and preservation of information recorded in a digital format;

e. encourage members to identify and evaluate the specific threats to which their digital information is vulnerable, and implement appropriate processes and policies to mitigate these threats.

Urge private sector organizations to:

a. cooperate with archives, library, museum and other relevant organizations to ensure long-term accessibility to digital information;

b. adhere to recognized metadata standards designed in cooperation with information professionals for description and/or management of digital resources, in order to enable interoperability of sources that can be presumed authentic and guaranteed reliable and accurate;

c. take digital preservation issues into consideration when participating in national and international standards initiatives and in their work on multi-jurisdictional and other partnership initiatives where information generated in a digital format is to be retained through the long term.

Projects

The Memory of the World programme is also about protecting heritage. Funding may come from UNESCO or other sources and concern conservation or digitization projects, awareness raising or training activities. In this context, several pilot projects have been carried out since the start of the Programme.

National Projects

- Czech Republic - Prague Manuscripts
- Armenia - Virtual Matenadaran
- Yemen - The Sana’a Manuscripts
- Turkey - The Kandilli Observatory Manuscripts
- Mali - Timbuctu Manuscripts
- Lithuania - Manuscripts of the University of Vilnius
- Poland - Memory of Poland
- Egypt - Treasures of Dar Al-Kutub
- Czech Republic - Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts
- South Africa - Preserving the Mandela Documentary Memory

Regional Projects

Within the Memory of the World Programme, a number of regional and inter-regional projects with a flagship character were implemented for demonstration and promotional purposes. Some of these include:

- West African Postcards
- The Archives of the Dutch East Indies Company
- Hungary - Bibliotheca Corviniana
- Palm-leaf Manuscripts
- Memory of Iberoamerica

International Projects

- Slave Trade Archives Project
Open Source Repository and Preservation System

After an investigation of the costs of preservation in the digital era, the Sub-Committee on Technology (SCoT) of MoW argued the case for affordable tools, technology and training as the solution for digital preservation of simple digital objects. As none of the repository systems that were analyzed seemed to have proper storage strategies, SCoT proposed to construct a practical open-source archival system for digital preservation that builds on existing open-source programmes. A pilot project is currently being implemented to test the recommendations of the study, and develop a system that is appropriate to, and replicable in, less developed countries.

Partners to develop and test the project will be identified and its results will be transferred to institutions in developing countries. Any new software created by the project will be released under GPL v2 license and all system documentation will be released under Creative Commons licence.

CD-ROMs

- Preserving Documentary Heritage - A Tutorial -Tutorial on preservation for libraries, archives and cultural institutions
- Project and Human Info NGO Library Preservation and Conservation Tutorial – A tutorial prepared by CLIR in association with Cornell University Library with funding from the Henry Luce Foundation
- Document Preservation Collection containing most of the UNESCO RAMP Studies (Records and Archives Management Programme)
- The Greenstone Digital Library Software, a software suite for building digital libraries developed by UNESCO in association with New Zealand Digital Library Project and Human Info NGO.

Political rally for the SWAPO party, Namibia
Photo: © Claire Ritchie, John Marshall Film and Video Collection, HSFA, Smithsonian

The Montreux Jazz Festival
Photo: © 2006 Montreux Jazz Festival
UNESCO/Jikji Memory of the World Prize

The Prize promotes the objectives of the MoW Programme commemorating the inscription of the Buljo jikji simche yojeol, the oldest existing book of movable metal print in the world, on the Memory of the World Register.

The Jikji contains the essentials of Zen Buddhism compiled by priest Baegun in late Goryeo period. The book was printed in two volumes: the first volume has yet to be found and the second volume is kept in the National Library of France.

The Prize, consisting of an award of US$30 000, is given every two years to individuals or institutions that have made significant contributions to the preservation and accessibility of documentary heritage. The Prize, the operating costs as well as all costs related to the award ceremony are funded by the Republic of Korea at the City of Cheong-ju. The Prize has been awarded as follow: 2005, the National Library of the Czech Republic; 2007, the Austrian Academy of Sciences; 2009, the National Archives of Malaysia; 2011, the National Archives of Australia; 2013, Apoyo al Desarrollo de Archivos y Bibliotecas (Mexico).

Publications

General guidelines to safeguard documentary heritage

The original General Guidelines to the Memory of the World Programme were prepared, under the auspices of IFLA in 1995. This revised version took the work of the original team as a departure point. A MoW companion has been produced to offer concrete examples and better guidance in completing nomination forms.

Mitigating Disaster: A Strategic Guide to Risk Management in Heritage Collections

This book and accompanying CD-ROM, published by the UNESCO Cluster Office for the Caribbean, provides working guidelines for the protection of irreplaceable documentary, audio, and audiovisual heritage materials in times of disaster.

The text advocates that institutions, in line with their own security plan, create a written and realistic disaster action plan to preserve all forms of documentary heritage. This action plan should actively involve staff members who should be rapidly able to implement routines and procedures of the plan when disaster occurs.

Risks associated with the use of recordable CDs and DVDs as reliable storage media in archival collections: strategies and alternatives

The purpose of this document, prepared by the Memory of the World Programme’s Sub-Committee on Technology, is to provide detailed guidance on managing the risks associated with storing archival data on recordable CD and DVD. It recommends a strategy to reduce these risks through error measurement and appropriate management.
Memory of the World Committees

MoW stimulates projects and activities at all levels – international and regional and national. The Memory of the World Committees are the key to this strategy.

The International Advisory Committee (IAC) for the Memory of the World Programme is appointed by the Director-General of UNESCO to guide the planning and implementation of the Programme as a whole.

Regional committees have been set up in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. The most recent ARCMOW (Africa) was formed in 2008.

They identify regional projects, taking into account features common to a group of countries.

National Memory of the World committees are autonomous entities with their own terms of reference and their own rules of membership and succession. To be entitled to use the Memory of the World name and logo, they must be accredited by their UNESCO National Commission.

Each Committee should include experts capable of making an active contribution to the projects and users’ representative. Persons submitting projects must ensure that the rights of the owners of the holding or collections are protected. In addition, each project will set up its own scientific committee of specialists to determine the general thrust of the project and to supervise its organisation.

Detailed aspects of the role of national and regional Memory of the World Committees include:

- Identification and nomination of documentary heritage for the Memory of the World Programme;
- Development of Memory of the World Registers at the national and regional levels in close cooperation with governmental and non-governmental organizations;
- General management and monitoring of regional and national projects and activities undertaken as part of the Programme.

So far, Memory of the World Committees have been set up in more than 60 countries.