



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

2005
60
1945

Bureau of Public Information
memobpi

Libraries and Archives

Libraries and archives are essential to the free flow of knowledge. They play a key role in the preservation of cultural and intellectual memory. UNESCO has promoted their development for the past 60 years.

For 60 years, UNESCO has been entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring the spread of knowledge through improved access to printed and published materials produced anywhere in the world. Much of this knowledge is stored in and can be accessed through libraries which are the caretakers of society's accumulation of wisdom.

With the advent of ICTs, the traditional role of libraries has changed to one of providing access to information in different formats from different sources.

The concept of libraries without walls is becoming accepted as one means of enabling access to content around the clock either through new functions or adapting its services to users in a digital environment.

In 2003, UNESCO, with the University of Waikato, New Zealand, developed the "Greenstone Digital Library Software" as a tool to organize information and publish it on the Internet or on CD-ROM. It is intended to empower users to build their own digital libraries.

The Organization also assists libraries to acquire appropriate technologies and network resources. Training programmes are being developed with specially-designed training materials to meet the needs of library staff.

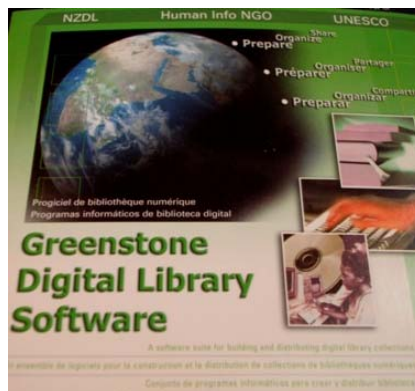
The UNESCO Library Portal and the UNESCO Archives Portal provide a single interactive access point to

information for librarians and archivists as well as their communities. They currently contain over 22,000 links to websites of libraries and archives around the world, as well as to resources related to training, preservation and international co-operation in these areas.

ARCHIVES: TRACES OF LIFE

Archives contain the "instructive traces of life", according to a former Director-General, Jaime Torres-Bodet, or, in the words of Desmond Tutu, they "hold us accountable... They are a potent bulwark against human rights violations. We must remember our past so we do not repeat it". These quotes express the essence of archives: they are essential for accountability and thereby for good governance; they constitute individual and collective memories and they are indispensable for understanding the past of societies and individual citizens. Furthermore, they provide evidence that may inspire orientations and actions at present and in the future.

Archives contain the "instructive traces of life", according to a former Director-General, Jaime Torres-Bodet, or, in the words of Desmond Tutu, they "hold us accountable... They are a potent bulwark against human rights violations. We must remember our past so we do not repeat it". These quotes express the essence of archives: they are essential for accountability and thereby for good governance; they constitute individual and collective



A software suite for building and distributing digital library collections
(© UNESCO)

memories and they are indispensable for understanding the past of societies and individual citizens. Furthermore, they provide evidence that may inspire orientations and actions at present and in the future.

In 1979, UNESCO created its Records and Archives Management Programme (RAMP) in cooperation with the International Council on Archives in order to meet the needs of Member States and developing countries in particular, in the areas of archives administration and records

Libraries and archives

Digital Heritage

More and more, cultural and educational resources are being produced, distributed and consulted in electronic form. The heritage of original digital content—which might be digital photos, a web page or a database—makes up an integral part of the heritage of humanity. The Charter on the Preservation of the Digital Heritage (2003) tackles the risk of this evolution.

The inherent instability of the Internet presents additional risks for knowledge in HTML format. The need to preserve this new form of indexed knowledge requires international agreement on issues such as archiving, preservation and diffusion. The guidelines accompanying this charter are aimed at adapting and enlarging existing measures in this domain, such as procedure, legal instruments and methods of archiving. For example, UNESCO has brought together CD-Rom manufacturers to discuss the development of an archiving format.

In order to produce this charter, UNESCO organized several regional consultations concerning the conservation of digital heritage in 2002. These consultations took place in the Baltic Region (Latvia), in Africa (Ethiopia), Latin America and the Caribbean (Nicaragua) and Asia and the Pacific (Australia).

management. This Programme serves to focalize activities to support national development through infrastructure development, strategies for archival training, standard-setting instruments, protection of the archival heritage, application of ICTs and research in archival theory and practice. UNESCO publishes studies and guidelines on different aspects of archiving and additional resources on archives are made available free of charge.

The Organization also contributes to capacity-building and digitization of holdings. A large number of training workshops have been conducted throughout the world to develop skills needed for the preservation of archives. This includes the Joint Technical Symposium, organized every 3-4 years on the technical developments in conservation.

To a large extent, the camera has replaced the pen in recording our history. Today, television archives are some of the largest repositories of the collective memory of the 20th century but while all documents are affected by chemical factors that contribute to their decay, audiovisual records are particularly vulnerable: they are doomed from the day they are made and the process of decay cannot be stopped.

However, digital media which are becoming the most widely used method of storage and access are also

inherently fragile. Whether information is recorded on stone or parchment, print, magnetic or digital supports, huge swathes of recorded memory will be permanently lost if active measures to ensure its conservation are not undertaken. Preservation is essential for continued access to knowledge whether it is recorded on traditional analogue media or the more recent digital supports.

Contact

Information Society
Division,
Joie Springer, Programme
Specialist
j.springer@unesco.org

To Find Out More

UNESCO Library Portal:
http://www.unesco.org/webworld/portal_bib/

UNESCO Archives Portal:
http://www.unesco.org/webworld/portal_archives/

UNESCO Documents and Publications:
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/ulis/index.html>