The Memory of the World Programme: Its aims and architectures

Documentary heritage is the 'recorded collective memory of the peoples of the world [charting] the evolution of thought, discovery and achievements of human society'[1]. However, in many countries, due recognition of its fundamental role in human development and progress is still lacking. As a result, much of this heritage has disappeared and the remainder is endangered due to ignorance, neglect or deliberate destruction, as well as from factors ranging from natural disasters to chemical decay and obsolescence. Large-scale mobilization efforts are consequently required to ensure its protection and long-term accessibility as well as to make the world better aware of the importance of this legacy and its role in development.

It was with these goals in mind that UNESCO created the Memory of the World Programme (MoW) in 1992 as its platform for concerted global action. The three main objectives of the Programme are to:

$ encourage preservation of the world's documentary heritage;
$ facilitate universal access to this heritage;
$ raise global awareness of its existence and significance.

The Programme is articulated around the vision that the world's documentary heritage belongs to all peoples. As such, it should be preserved, protected and permanently accessible to all. From the outset of the Programme, the concept of documentary heritage was recognized as comprising, in addition to manuscripts and other rare documents, information recorded on any medium, as well as oral traditions, the importance of which varies from region to region. A document is defined as the output of "deliberate intellectual intent"[2] and its significance can comprise both the content and the carrier on which it is recorded. Carriers can be as lasting as a clay or stone tablet or as ephemeral as a website. Documents can take the form of a film, a musical opus, or an embroidered narrative and be recorded on plastic, papyrus or palm leaves.

An ever growing percentage of information today is produced, distributed and accessed in digital form. Born-digital heritage, such as electronic journals, web pages or databases, is also part of the world's documentary heritage. However, it too is subject to technical obsolescence and physical decay and is in need of preservation.

While documentary heritage is traditionally conserved in libraries, archives, museums and other information centres, its custodianship, especially for oral traditions, can also be social or communal when it directly relates to a particular group or community. Documentary heritage consequently is not confined to recognized geopolitical boundaries, but can encompass shared cultural, social or spiritual values that transcend traditional borders. Furthermore, the Programme makes no distinction between documentary heritage in public and private ownership. What matters is its significance to humanity.

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[1] Memory of the World: General Guidelines to Safeguard Documentary Heritage (revised edition). Paris, UNESCO, 2002. CII-95/WS-11rev
[2] Ibid

The underlying principle of MoW is that it contributes to UNESCO's constitutional mandate of building peace in the minds of men by facilitating intercultural dialogue, leading to mutual understanding and greater awareness of the 'Other'. It is based on the principle of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. In this regard, it is a major plank in UNESCO's platform to build knowledge societies where emphasis is given to ensuring democratic access to the information required to improve the quality of life and achieve lasting sustainable development. It is part of an overall strategic vision that includes similar types of activities carried out by different services within UNESCO. These include some of the universally known Programmes such as *Information for All, Man and the Biosphere*, *Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, *Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* and *Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* to mention but a few.

All these Programmes support the belief that knowledge and cultural expression form a shared, common legacy that should be transmitted to future generations. As cultural diversity is a source of creativity, UNESCO seeks to maintain awareness of its significance while respecting natural differences that may occur among peoples. However, unlike the major cultural programmes, the Memory of the World is managed by the Information Society Division which is part of the Communication and Information Sector (CI) in UNESCO. The core mandate of the Memory of the World is to safeguard civilization's knowledge which is in line with CI's strategic objective of building knowledge societies. To the extent that it also includes a cultural dimension, the Memory of the World nevertheless collaborates with the tangible and intangible heritage programmes. In fact, the Memory of the World Programme is modelled on the World Heritage Programme, albeit adapted to its own specific niche.

Structure
To attain its fundamental objectives, the MoW functions through a three-tiered structure operating at the international, regional and national levels with basic elements in common. Strategic guidance is provided by an International Advisory Committee (IAC) composed of 14 members appointed in their personal capacities for a four-year term by UNESCO's Director-General. This committee meets in ordinary session every two years to review global progress, make recommendations for inscription on -or deletion from- the International Register, the award of the UNESCO/Jikji Memory of the World Prize, and provide advice on issues having a bearing on the management and the development of the Programme.

The composition of the Committee differs from the majority of other International Committees in that its members are appointed in a personal capacity, rather than being elected as official representatives of their governments. However, all efforts are deployed to ensure equitable geographic representation.

So far the IAC has met on eight occasions (Pultusk, Poland, 1993; Paris, France, 1995; Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 1997; Vienna, Austria, 1999; Cheongju, Republic of Korea, 2001; Gdansk, Poland, 2003; Lijiang, People's Republic of China, 2005 and Pretoria, South Africa, 2007); the 9th meeting is slated to be held in 2009 in Bridgetown, Barbados. In steering the Programme, the IAC is aided by four subsidiary bodies: a Bureau and Technical, Marketing and Register Sub-committees which are tasked with implementing different aspects of the Programme and providing specific advice relating to preservation technology, promotion and fund-raising, and assessment of nominations for inscription on the Register.

Each of these has its own membership requirements, rules of procedure and cooperates closely with each other in the interests of the Programme. Their membership reflects different geographic perspectives as well as subject specializations where appropriate. These bodies are supported by a Secretariat, provided by the Information Society Division at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, which serves as the intermediary and liaison for all matters relating to MoW.

Along with the IAC, National Committees are a key component of the Programme and establish their own operating procedures in securing overall objectives. They are also encouraged to set up national Memory of the World Registers to support local preservation and access activities and raise national awareness of the importance of safeguarding the documentary heritage. To date, about 60 countries have created national committees, although many of these are no longer very active. Therefore, greater involvement on the part of information professionals is necessary to revitalize these bodies to accomplish their responsibilities.

MoW also has three regional committees established in Asia and the Pacific (1998), Latin America and the Caribbean (2000) as well as Africa (2008) to examine issues that are outside the purview of the IAC. They serve as a mechanism for cooperation beyond national levels. Regional committees can equally be set up to examine issues related to shared cultures and/or interests, rather than being geographic in nature.

National committees are expected to provide annual reports on their activities both to the UNESCO secretariat as well as to the National Commission in their country of operation and/or to the appropriate regional committee, which in turn, informs the IAC of major events and programmes in which it has been involved.

In addition to this formal structure, MoW enjoys and maintains close links with the leading NGOs and other partners active in the field of documentary heritage. It has managed to attract a very vibrant international community of well-wishers and volunteers from different countries around the world. Networking remains a source of potential benefit to the Programme to build on the particular strengths and experiences of information institutions and heritage bodies in these countries.

Legal framework
Unlike the World Heritage and the Intangible Heritage programmes, MoW does not have the status of a Convention. The *UNESCO Charter on the Preservation of the Digital Heritage,* adopted by its General Conference in 2003, is the only normative instrument under the auspices of the Memory of the World so far. It is intended to encourage the elaboration of policies, legal frameworks and archival procedures to safeguard this type of heritage. International Conventions are subject to ratification or accession by States. Less formal and non-binding in nature are Recommendations, Charters and similar standard-setting instruments; these are designed to influence the development of national laws and practices in a particular field.

Operating outside the confines of a legal instrument has invested MoW with a certain degree of flexibility, enabling it to easily maintain an open and inclusive structure without formal obstacles to instituting change. However, this adaptability has been offset by a lack of

visibility in Member States which have no legal obligation to preserve their heritage. It also suffers from the lack of a broad-based public perception of its importance and effective pressure groups to institute appropriate safeguards.

Within the MoW Programme itself, UNESCO pays especial attention to legal issues affecting intellectual heritage to ensure that freedom of access also respects the limits set by national and international legislation. It seeks to avoid breaches of copyright while maintaining respect for cultural restrictions through a balance between excessive protection and unlimited access.

Projects and Promotion
With a view to preserving and providing access to documentary heritage, MoW has carried out a number of projects around the world. These were integral to a campaign to raise awareness of the Programme and have resulted in the publication of CD-ROMs, web sites and documents. Detailed descriptions of the different projects can be found on the Memory of the World website at: http://www.unesco.org/webworld/mow/. They cover all types of documents: postcards, manuscripts, traditional music, etc. The majority of these have been financed by UNESCO through its own limited budget and while external funds were obtained from Norway and Luxembourg, for example, for the slave trade archives and the Timbuktu manuscripts projects respectively, many more projects are in need of financing.

No one organization can fund the vast scope of activities that have to be undertaken to conserve the documentary heritage. This requires a collective effort and must be more actively pursued as the Programme matures. The UNESCO/Jikji Memory of the World Prize, set up and funded by the Republic of Korea, serves as an excellent example. The biennial Prize of US$30,000 serves to commemorate the inscription of the *Buljo jikji simche yojeol*, the oldest existing book made with movable metal print, on the Memory of the World Register. Apart from Korea, which also subsidizes a biennial regional Asian workshop and an annual national workshop in a selected Asian country, no regular contributor is associated with the Programme. Hopefully, other sponsors will make their specific contribution to reinforcing the Programme.

MoW also gives high priority to the training of preservation specialists as they are the architects and stakeholders in national endeavours to protect documentary heritage. As the number of courses that can be organized is limited, training modules have been produced and distributed, mainly on CD-ROM, to allow specialists to undergo basic training in their own time and at their own institution. Technical literature, describing software and standards, has been developed and published to provide further advice in collection management and preservation.

Registers
After 15 years of existence, there is a steadily growing recognition of the role and potential of the Memory of the World Programme in safeguarding the documentary heritage, both analogue and digital. This achievement is chiefly due to the Register, its most successful and visible element. Unfortunately, many people mistakenly consider this to be the sum of the Programme.

Inscription on a Memory of the World Register not only raises the profile of a particular item in the country or countries concerned, it also acknowledges the importance of the

documentary heritage and can be catalytic in attracting private and/or public funds for preservation work. Each session, an increasing number of countries and institutions submit nominations, which augurs well in scaling-up public understanding of the Programme. Having local and other heritage items listed serves to awaken national pride and contributes to awareness of safeguarding documentary heritage.

Nominations may be made by individuals or institutions, and concern public or private items. This helps to ensure the widest range of nominations, and can serve to showcase the heritage of minority groups. In 10 years, the International Register has grown to 160 inscriptions of a diversity of items from all corners of the Earth. Regional Registers, established in Latin America and the Caribbean and Asia/Pacific, are steadily making their mark, along with an increasing number of countries that have set up national Registers.

The three Registers (international, regional and national) do **_not_** indicate degrees of importance of heritage; rather they correspond to the sphere of influence of a particular listing. To maintain credibility, they must be mutually consistent in their definition of significance and in the rigour of their operations. In this way, they have the potential to be as well-known as their counterpart, the World Heritage List.

Conclusions

Since its creation, the Memory of the World Programme has considerably consolidated and evolved over the years. It is confirmed as the umbrella structure for global documentary preservation efforts. Its major strengths have been identified and are being built upon. At the same time, certain weaknesses have to be resolved and a strategic plan needs to be developed to guide its future policies and orientations. It is an open and inclusive programme that has shown an admirable degree of flexibility and adaptability. When it was established, digital technology had not yet taken such a firm root in global behaviour, yet the Programme was quick to realize both its potential as an access mechanism, and the risks of potential loss of memory, especially of born-digital material.

A joint effort in promoting preservation policies as an objective in itself will have greater impact on all levels. Consequently, more dialogue should be engaged with other heritage programmes to ensure complementarity and compatibility in our approaches to safeguarding documentary heritage, while respecting each other's specific focus. In this regard, UNESCO National Commissions and national Memory of the World committees have an important role in ensuring exchanges among members in different regions of the world, not just with their immediate neighbours.

The objectives of MoW are sound, making it a good, solid programme which can be summed up in the words of George Bernard Shaw: 'We are made wise not by the recollection of our past, but by the responsibility for our future'. By preserving the world's knowledge, MoW provides the groundwork for safeguarding the future.