



## STRATEGIES FOR MULTIMEDIA ARCHIVES

Gent, 6 februari 2009

## FUNDING REPORT SESSION 1

*This session elaborated on the question of how digitization efforts can be financed, and how heritage institutions relate their mission of preserving and unlocking cultural material to the necessity of finding financial means for the realization of this mission. This topic was approached from three different angles.*

In his talk on public-private partnerships for digitisation, **Jeff Ubois** (Intelligent Television, Berkeley) began by debunking some general prejudices concerning the digitization of audiovisual collections. According to him, the old medium will eventually be converted into a new and probably less long-lived medium whether heritage sector wants it or not. Fears on the longevity of digital documents are generally justified, but at the same time much is yet unknown on the actual life-span of these documents. And as for film delivering the best quality, this may in the near future no longer be the case as digitization quality increases and digitization costs drop. Additionally, many users may not even expect more than 'youtube quality' for their AV. Considering that changes will happen, Jeff Ubois argued to meet the rising challenges with a progressive but intelligent attitude. The social engagement and public responsibility of heritage institutions dictates that they keep up with their time.

One of the practical and ethical effects of these changes is the increasing necessity of collaborated effort; public-private partnerships are one such option. As ill-conceived partnerships can be dangerous, institutions need to deal with the existing principles and consult available guidelines as much as possible. Jeff proposed some such guidelines based on an RLG-sponsored analysis of Google digitization agreements and the principles found in *Lot 49*, the *NARA principles* and the *Open Content Alliance*. Central issues to keep in mind are: avoid limitations on the right to consult with third parties; define qualities and formats and hang on to ownership; aim for open access; make sure to be able to distribute your content; define how to deal with 'usage data'; and make sure that limitations on ownership expire when the contract ends. With these and other elements in mind, heritage institutions should be better placed to build partnerships while staying true to their mission.

**Kurt Deggellers** (Memoriav, Basel) lecture gave an overview of the history and approach of Memoriav, a collaboration between several Swiss organisations for the preservation and disclosure of audiovisual heritage. It showed how the problems posed by a fragmented cultural field – due to sovereignty of the 26 Swiss cantons in terms of cultural policy – could be partially overcome by the creation of a central platform for audiovisual archiving. Founded in 1984, supported by the government since 1988 and officially active under the name Memoriav since 1990, the initiative hoped to exceed the political division by pooling the expertise of the National Library, the Federal Archives, the Federal Communication Service, the Public Radio and Television, the National Film Archive, the National Sound Archives, and the Institution for the Preservation of Photography. Originally, the institutions participated on a voluntary basis. Now funding is provided on a project-based level. The initiative sets up partnerships with institutions from the cantons, whereby 50% of the costs are supported by Memoriav and 50% by the partner institutions. The latter remain owner of all the resulting digital materials and Memoriav receives the necessary metadata to centralize the access to these. Memoriav hereby plays a guiding and supporting role, without acting as a repository or as an external authority. The case illustrated the necessity for collaboration and increasing expertise and access for the preservation of this fragmented and fragile heritage, and showed how this might be accomplished through collaborative efforts without resulting in a centralized institution or mega-repository.

The third presentation was given by **Mel Collier** (KULeuven, Leuven), who provided a closer look into the role of services as a way of making heritage programmes sustainable and attractive for third-party financial collaboration. Sustainability is a difficult issue here, since few institutions have an official digital archiving policy and important questions remain therefore unanswered: what is the value of digitization, who are the users, what is the potential market, which technologies are available, what are the risks, what are the

costs,... The question of what to select and how (both in terms of digitization and of *born-digital* documents), how to engage collaborations between public and private institutions, and what the EU policy will be (more money on EU level seems indeed to be available) remain problematic, too. A central factor was the realization that where the provider of access is not the rightsholder to the material – and this is most often the case – there can be no question of producing revenue from the digitized materials themselves. As a result, Mel proposed that it would be the added services which would most likely attract both an audience and potential financiers. Sustainability then becomes a matter of retrieving some of the initial cost, rather than making the service as a whole economically viable. He provided a number of examples which pointed in this direction, from the Ithaka-JISC study showing how academics are often unfamiliar with commercial lines of thought, and the Ontario Digital Library example of the positive impact of a simple, one-step access to the available material, to Europeana, which hopes to get 15% of its funding from private means, by attracting audiences and advertisers through the its critical mass of materials and the introduction of social networking possibilities. His conclusion was that such partnerships may indeed play a part in retrieving some of the invested money. As a whole, however, he felt that cultural endeavors would always rely heaviest on government funding, and that the time has come for these governments to expand their views and accept the need for much larger-scale efforts in digitizing culture.

The conclusions of these talks and of the discussion which ensued were therefore promising and challenging alike. In light of the pervasively digital nature of every-day life and the necessity for heritage institutions to venture into this digital realm, it seems that partnerships are the logical way to share expertise and financial means. Cooperation may help pool fragmented resources, enhance knowledge of the heritage itself and enhance the ways in which this heritage reaches the public. Meanwhile, collaborations between public and private or commercial initiatives may provide financial means and possibilities which would not be available otherwise. However, heritage institutions must always remain true to their primary mission to protect and disseminate the public heritage. This implies that careful deliberation must proceed any possible commercial attachments, as public heritage should in one way or another remain public in nature and there are ethical issues on the use of this material for commercial purposes. Meanwhile, the nature of heritage collections will most likely imply that their direct commercial uses would be limited, and heritage institutions should therefore expect at best to regain only a fraction of the costs of the digital effort. Society as a whole, and government in particular, will have to carry most of the financial burden of digital heritage. And, if the remarks of the speakers and the audience are an indication, there seems to be reasonable consensus that this is the way it should be.