

**The Maghrib Digital Library: Content, Participants and Users**  
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The Maghrib Digital Library (MLD) is an exciting prospect. I envision that MLD should be an open-access focal point of scholarly, multi-media research material that improves access to original or hard to find data, abets in the generation of innovative, empirically based research, and engenders cross-national intellectual cooperation.

The Devil is in the details, however, as I discovered when I began to discuss the project with my Algerian colleagues. Beyond the rough expectations outlined above, I was hard pressed to answer the simplest of questions concerning the MLD project – questions which are to be outlined, if not hammered out, during this workshop.

Some questions were technical in nature: the type of operating system and platform, where the server(s) will be based, which technologies will be used to upload the various types of data, whether local band-width will accommodate three dimensional imaging or multimedia entries. Most questions, however, pertain to the mission of the MLD. These might be arranged into three categories: (1) what is and who will decide the content; (2) who are the partners and participants; and (3) who are the users? The following is a summary of some of the questions posed to me.

**Content:**

- Broadly speaking, the project seeks assemble material relating to science, culture, and education in the Maghrib. This is vague.
  - Does “Science” mean scientific works published by Maghrebi scientists? Or does it mean works with a specific, Maghrebi content, such as studies on geology, fauna and flora, ecology?
  - How will the MDL deal with the “Education” component? Will it electronically publish pedagogical material written by Maghrebi authors? Or does it target pedagogical material written specifically for Maghrebi students in mind? Or is this a general term to signify that the MDL will be a useful research tool?
- What is the range of material that the MDL wants to include?
  - Manuscripts and periodicals published in the Maghrib?
  - Manuscripts and periodicals published outside of the Maghrib?
  - Archival material and rare manuscripts in private or public holdings?
  - Dissertations, and Masters Theses?
  - Artifacts?
  - Works of art? By Maghrebi artists? Western artists interpreting the Maghrib (i.e. colonial art)?
  - Oral literature and history?

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- Multimedia, such as films, music and speeches?
- Legally speaking, how will MDL attain these materials?
  - Are Maghrebi copyright laws and enforcement mechanisms congruent with those in the United States?
  - How will this affect the user and the range of participants?
  - Some of these materials are already available on line via subscription, such as JSTOR. Will MDL become a subscriber?
    - If so, it is likely that these services will want some kind of say in access to their materials.
    - Alternatively, MDL could simply provide links to those websites, making the information unavailable to the overwhelming majority of users.
  - Coming from the social sciences, the material that most interests me is that with contemporary value – such as local periodicals and hard to find volumes printed at local publishing houses. Will MDL pay local publishers for digitizing rights?
  - Other materials MDL will need to seek out, such as artifacts and works of art of import held in local museums, rare manuscripts in private libraries. How will MDL go about identifying and / or acquiring those materials?
- The range is quite broad, and development will need to proceed in stages. In what order will the MDL digitize?
  - Archaeological material, with museum and private owner permission, as well as print material out of copyright could immediately be uploaded.
  - Too much emphasis on this material, however, runs the risk of isolating social scientists and others working on contemporary data.
- Who decides the content?
  - One centralized scientific committee, or a series of locally established scientific committees?
  - Prospective participants (i.e., those government agencies, private citizens, or research institutes that allow the MDL access to their material) and the end user will need to be consulted on potential MDL content.

### **Partners and Participants**

- The MLD will need to negotiate with a wide range of participants. Specifically, we mean those who control the rights to material to be digitized and included in the data base. These include:
  - Ministries of Culture, Education, Foreign Affairs, Religion
  - Museums and research institutes
  - Publishers
  - Civic groups working to preserve national or local heritage
  - Private citizens

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- While the Ministries, museums, research institutes, and publishers are easy to identify, private citizens holding significant collections are more difficult to identify. How will the MDL go about identifying those individuals?
- Participants will demand:
  - Guarantees that digitized material will not be commercially used
  - Guarantees of the quality of digitization
  - Trained specialists for the handling of materials during digitization
  - Information on the various points of access
    - Will these be open to the public or restricted in nature?

**Users**

Finally, MDL needs to identify its end user.

- Is the target audience the researcher, teacher, or student?
- What does the user need?
- How will MDL insure that material is properly digitized to optimize user needs?
- Will the MDL be open or closed access?
  - Will there be different levels of researcher access built into the platform?
  - Alternatively, restricted points of access might be envisioned – for example, select research centers and university libraries.

Having identified targeted content, participants and users, the MDL can move forward on the technical, organizational, and financial issues required for its implementation.