

Summary of Fifth Plenary Session
Implementing a Maghreb Digital Library for Education, Science & Culture
Reported by Richard Sapon-White

The fifth plenary session of the conference consisted of presentations by Dr. Abderrahim Ameer (Bibliothèque Nationale du Maroc), Dr. Michel Merten (Memnon Audio Archiving Services), Dr. Alastair Cook (Thomson Scientific), Dr. M'hammad Benaboud (Tétouan-Asmir Association), and Dr. Mamadou Hadya Kane (Musée National de Nouackchott). Summaries of each presentation appear below, followed by a brief analysis of some common themes.

Dr. Ameer's presentation was entitled "Content and Users of Digital Library and Museum Collections: Vision and Strategy of the National Library of Morocco." The national library is interested in the development of digital content for the Maghreb region. It is important to collect, process and disseminate resources relating to the national heritage of each country. The region holds significant manuscripts, images, museum collections, and archives, all of which could be digitized. Priority should be given to anything in the public domain since copyright issues present a legal challenge for digitization.

Dr. Ameer went on to emphasize how important it is to encourage publishers to release publications in digital form. Legal issues make deposit of such e-documents in a national library problematic; nevertheless, the electronic format would expedite the timely dissemination of current research. Equally important to the Maghreb is the encouragement of indexing of regional publications in electronic databases. Bibliographic access to local publications via indexing is not currently available electronically.

Priority for digitization should be given to those items relating to Maghreb history. Emphasis should be placed on serving researchers in the region, but digitized resources should also be open to international researchers. Some adaptation of these resources should be available to the public, especially students, universities and research centers,

Michel Merton spoke about the work of Memnon. Memnon works via public-private partnerships to preserve and disseminate audiovisual resources. This has included digitizing archives, managing metadata, mass storage, and security issues.

In these partnerships, the public sector provides infrastructure, archives, scholarly credibility and local culture, while the private sector provides financing, equipment, international credibility, expertise, and knowledge management. Problems in their interactions come about because the private sector tends to work rapidly and seeks to be innovative while the public partners have a complex (i.e., slower) decision-making process.

The advantage of such partnerships is that there are economies of scale. It is easier to store and digitize thousands of documents in a large project than it is to conduct smaller

projects with fewer resources. The public-private partnership permits access to alternate sources of financing. To succeed, it is important to be patient with the others in the partnership. Public sector partners come to learn that the private sector is not only occupied with making money and the private sector comes to appreciate the strengths of the public sector.

Alastair Cook of Thomson Scientific, reported on the development and success of citation databases such as its Web of Science. Electronic literature has accelerated the availability of scholarly literature and information exchange. Citation analysis allows researchers to find out what other institutions are researching and avoid redundancy in their work. It also enables the user to track the development of ideas and discoveries from an international perspective. Web of Science is publisher-neutral and provides access to many open access journals.

Dr. M'hammed Benaboud described three digital projects he has been involved in over the past decade. These have included creating an interactive CD-ROM on the cultural heritage of Moroccan medinas. The first of these was created in Spanish, but the second one is in multiple languages. They introduce the user to the architecture, culture and arts of Morocco. Images and sound are included on the CD-ROMs. These were created on a shoestring budget with donated technical services.

The second project, also done with no outside financial input, was the cataloging of private libraries in Tetouan and other cities. Graduate students of Dr. Benaboud do the work, with private libraries benefiting by receiving a copy of their own catalog at the end of the project. A specialist at his university created the cataloging program, based on MS Access, a program that has been used for the university's own library catalog as well.

The third project described scanning eight journals published during the Spanish protectorate (of which Tetouan was capital).

Dr. Benaboud commented that it was better for him to spend his time actually doing these projects than to spending that time searching for funding for them.

Dr. Kane made a brief presentation on the National Library of Mauritania, founded in 1962 and the Musée National de Nouackchott, founded in 1972. Although these institutions feel they are lagging behind in digitization, some projects are in an embryonic state. The Musée National de Nouackchott has manuscripts that they would like to digitize, as well as prehistoric and medieval artifacts, including some from the Ghana Empire. Their motivation is to bring the museum to the people rather than waiting for the people to come to them. Establishing exhibits outside of Nouackchott and digitizing their holdings are ways of accomplishing this.

Although these presentations covered a broad range of topics, it is possible to discern several recurring themes:

- The presence of a rich cultural heritage in the Maghreb is awaiting a presence on the World Wide Web. There are numerous and substantial cultural resources throughout the region which remain uncataloged, unindexed, and therefore unknown to researchers outside the region. Many of these resources are in danger of deterioration. By producing digital surrogates and associating them with quality metadata, these resources can become available to people everywhere for learning and understanding this important part of the world.
- The successes of some projects to digitize cultural resources for the purposes of preservation and providing wider access require cooperation amongst people and amongst organizations. Although discussing very different projects, both Drs. Benaboud and Merten described successful digitization projects that drew on contributions from many to create a resource that was useful to all. Understanding the different contributions that are required to make a digital library (financial, technical, pedagogical, etc.) is one key to its success.
- Barriers exist that will need to be surmounted in order to build a regional digital library. It will be important to create ways for institutions, the private sector, and individuals to collaborate on projects; copyright and legal deposit issues need to be surmounted; identifying funding for digitization will be critical. As Dr. Benaboud's projects show, though, a great deal can be accomplished by committed individuals. The potential for overcoming many barriers and creating a successful digital library already exists amongst the workshop participants and sponsors.

I hope I have done justice in reporting the spirit of these presentations if not their precise wording. Any errors in this report are entirely my own.