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# The Swiss National Library from 2007 to 2011: taking stock

Over the last five years, the Swiss National Library (NL) has expanded its services, improved cataloguing and indexing, and built up an electronic collection. The high standards of conservation have been maintained. All this was made possible by close cooperation with related institutions.

The NL set itself some ambitious objectives in its strategy for 2007–2011. They included:

- aligning services to the needs of our most important users,
- expanding paper conservation into a centre of competence,
- building up a collection of electronic Helvetica.

In the performance mandate for 2009–2011 the Federal Council also committed us to:

- coordinate with Switzerland's cantonal and university libraries, primary user groups and other national libraries,
- look for ways of delivering optimum management of library-specific IT applications.

A further key element of the performance mandate is a task that we have been performing for decades: maintaining a complete collection of printed works, making them available for circulation and outreach, and assisting with research requests and enquiries from our users.

As the performance mandate and strategy period come to an end, where does the NL stand?

## Improving ease of use

Using our resources has become substantially more convenient. The *HelveticArchives*<sup>3</sup> database, containing the holdings of the Swiss Literary Archives (SLA) and the Prints and Drawings Department, went online in 2008, the second of the NL's main databases to do so. The *Helveticat*<sup>4</sup> library catalogue has been progressively improved. Digitised material can be ordered direct from the catalogue, currently published periodicals have been integrated, and new entries are enhanced with tables of contents. *Swissbib*,<sup>5</sup> the metacatalogue of Swiss university libraries and the NL, further facilitates research. Visitors to the library now benefit from renovated public areas and improved technical infrastructure.

We are particularly focused on the needs of students and specialists working on the history, literatures, art and architecture of Switzerland, as well as information and documentation science. Each of these areas now has its own, freely accessible, specialised collection.

The new online version of the *Bibliography on Swiss History* (BSH)<sup>6</sup> facilitates the work of historians in particular, as do the newspapers and periodicals that have been digitised and placed online in association with third parties.

The SLA brings new sources and topics into the study of literature. It has expanded its research collaborations and publication activity in recent years. Its core area of research is editorial philology, on which it also offers courses at Swiss universities. The importance of the SLA was very much in evidence at the ceremony held on 14 January 2011 to mark 20 years since its creation.

Of particular interest to art and architecture specialists is the Prints and Drawings Department (PDD), whose holdings can now be conveniently accessed thanks to the creation of a central point of contact. The network of institutions affiliated to the Swiss Poster Catalogue is growing steadily. The other sub-collections of the PDD are progressively being catalogued in *HelveticArchives*. A comprehensive collection concept ensures continual development. Research cooperations are in the process of being established.

The NL's advisory services in paper conservation, electronic archiving and digitisation are aimed at information and documentation specialists in the broadest sense, but fellow specialists benefit most from the NL's role as a coordinator on national and international committees.



Marie-Christine Doffey,  
Director

3 [www.nb.admin.ch/helvetearchives](http://www.nb.admin.ch/helvetearchives)

4 [www.nb.admin.ch/helveticat](http://www.nb.admin.ch/helveticat)

5 [www.swissbib.ch](http://www.swissbib.ch)

6 [www.nb.admin.ch/bsh](http://www.nb.admin.ch/bsh) (1975–),

<http://retro.seals.ch/digbib/vollist?UID=bsg-001&id=browse&id2=browse1> (1913–1974)

All these innovations were necessary in order to maintain demand for our services at a constant level overall. On-site demand is tending to decline, while online services are proving more and more popular. The innovations have led to a marked increase in the use of the SLA, PDD and BSH.

## Conservation standards remain high

The NL has long been the Swiss leader in paper conservation. Together with the Swiss Federal Archives, it has carried out pioneering work in deacidification. After ten years of mass deacidification, the vast majority of the documents that are suitable for this process have been treated. Decisions on the treatment of further items will have to be made on a case-by-case basis. Tests are currently being carried out for this purpose.

The high point of recent years was the opening of the underground stacks west in 2009. Like its predecessor, the underground stacks east, it meets the highest standards of conservation. The two stacks have sufficient capacity to house print documents until the 2030s. The collections are generally well preserved, as is confirmed by the survey carried out over recent years. Where a need for action has been identified, appropriate measures have been initiated.

The conservation skills of the NL are now available to other institutions and private individuals on payment of a fee. However, federal regulations preclude this service from becoming a self-financing centre of competence.

## Electronic collection now accessible

The collection of electronic Helvetica is growing constantly. It consists of two parts. The first is digitally born documents such as websites, electronic books and periodicals. This will grow in importance as ever more material is published electronically. The second is digitised printed matter – books, periodicals, posters and the like. Both collections owe their creation and growth to cooperation with third parties including cantonal and university libraries, publishing houses and federal offices.

Access platforms are now available for all types of electronic documents. Where copyright permits, original electronic documents and digitised monographs can be consulted via [www.e-helvetica.nb.admin.ch](http://www.e-helvetica.nb.admin.ch). Dedicated platforms provide access to periodicals,<sup>7</sup> newspapers,<sup>8</sup> posters<sup>9</sup> and digitised archive documents.<sup>10</sup>

The NL is also among the Swiss leaders in the electronic field. The fact that the electronic edition of the *Swiss Official Gazette of Commerce* is archived in the NL is just one reflection of this fact. The [www.digicord.ch](http://www.digicord.ch) platform jointly established by the NL and the RERO<sup>11</sup> serves to coordinate digitisation in Swiss libraries.

## Coordination and standardisation facilitate research

Coordination is indispensable to standardisation as well as a key prerequisite for data exchange and therefore making research easier and more convenient. A range of bodies are working to improve international coordination. Members of NL staff occupy leading functions in the IFLA,<sup>12</sup> the European Dewey Users' Group and the tri-national standardisation committee of the German National Library. In 2011 the Director of the NL was elected Vice-Chair of the CENL.<sup>13</sup> The NL was also represented on the board of *The European Library* until 2011. Following its involvement in

7 <http://retro.seals.ch>

8 [www.swisspressarchives.ch](http://www.swisspressarchives.ch)

9 [www.nb.admin.ch/posters](http://www.nb.admin.ch/posters)

10 [www.nb.admin.ch/helveticarchives](http://www.nb.admin.ch/helveticarchives)

11 Réseau des bibliothèques de Suisse occidentale (Library Network of Western Switzerland)

12 International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions

13 Conference of European National Librarians

the German National Library's *Schlagwortnormdatei* (Keyword authority control), the NL is going a step further and will soon be introducing the *Gemeinsame Normdatei* (Combined authority files). Coordination in Switzerland is in the hands of, among others, the Conference of Swiss University Libraries, which the Director chaired from 2008 to 2011. She additionally heads the steering committee of the "e-lib.ch" project, which is developing a Swiss portal for comprehensive academic information research. Since 2005 the Director of the NL has also been Vice-Chair of *Memoriav*.<sup>14</sup> The head of the PDD chairs *Memoriav*'s photographic competence group. The Swiss Poster Catalogue,<sup>15</sup> which is coordinated by the PDD, works closely with a wide range of partners to offer a virtual collection of Swiss posters that can be accessed regardless of where the originals are stored. Initiated by the SLA, KOOP-LITERA Schweiz is an internationally linked joint platform for Switzerland's literary archives.

Created in 2010, the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Libraries serves as their forum for coordination and exchange. The NL is also represented on the board. In 2010, the Swiss National Library Commission drew up a *Charter of Swiss Libraries*. In response, the EDK<sup>16</sup> set up a working group to devise a nationally coordinated libraries' policy.

## IT for the future

If a library is to fulfil its mandate, it needs sufficient money, competent and motivated staff, and state-of-the-art information technology.

For the 2009–2011 performance mandate period, the federal government made a total of CHF 113.4 million available to the NL.

Our staff are not only competent, but also highly motivated. That is confirmed by the positive feedback from users and the good results of the 2009 and 2011 staff surveys. Users normally respond with understanding even if they are unable to get precisely what they want – because the reasons why are explained in a friendly manner.

Our IT environment is integrated into that of the federal administration. That means our office automation meets the latest standards, though certain library-specific applications are still lagging behind. A new strategic IT plan is being put in place to help us catch up. In the years ahead, we need and intend to create the optimum basis for a digital library. Paper may always be with us, but the future is digital.

## In memoriam Charlotte Kerr Dürrenmatt

Even a publicly financed institution depends on the dedication of private individuals. One of our most generous donors passed away on 28 December 2011: Charlotte Kerr Dürrenmatt. The SLA owes its foundation to her husband, the writer Friedrich Dürrenmatt. She herself was the driving force behind the creation of the Centre Dürrenmatt Neuchâtel (CDN). Until her death she was Vice-President of the Advisory Board and provided financial support for various events and publications of both the CDN and the SLA. We will remember Charlotte Kerr Dürrenmatt as a passionate advocate of the work of a great Swiss writer.

Marie-Christine Doffey  
Director

<sup>14</sup> Association for the preservation of the audiovisual heritage of Switzerland

<sup>15</sup> [www.nb.admin.ch/posters](http://www.nb.admin.ch/posters)

<sup>16</sup> Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education