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The analogue and digital worlds are merging

The analogue and digital worlds are merging into a single reality. As a memory institution of the Swiss Confederation, the Swiss National Library stands ready to address this development. Four key action areas set out the direction in which we are going.

“The future is digital. But paper remains.” That was our strategy for 2012–2019² when we formulated it back in 2011. These days, digital publications are no longer formats of the future. They are here and they are growing; new forms are being developed, others discarded. Digital information production has a dynamism that its paper counterpart now lacks. Paper’s genres are familiar; no new ones are being developed. Yet nor are they dying out. Printed information continues to be produced and consulted, often in parallel to digital. Many of us still browse through our favourite newspaper in the morning and turn to Wikipedia when we come across something we want to know more about.

This example demonstrates that the familiar opposition of the “analogue” and “digital” worlds will soon be obsolete in day to day terms. People live their lives within a single reality and make use of the tools best suited to their needs, provided they have access to them. As a library, we are obliged to retain an analytical distinction between the analogue and digital worlds, because otherwise it would be impossible to manage them. In practice, however, the two are merging.

This new reality is reflected in the revised version of our strategy³ which came into force at the end of 2014. As a memory institution of the Swiss Confederation, the NL is determined, required and able to embrace the societal reality of our approach to information. Our collection is analogue and digital. We want it to be quick to find and easy to use. Both on site and online.

Four key action areas up to 2019

Step by step, we are committed to bringing our vision closer to reality. We aim to make sources from Switzerland available around the globe, at any time, everywhere and for everyone interested in them. Our particular focus is on students, experts and researchers in the humanities and the people of Switzerland. The former work with our collections; the latter can discover and use part of their cultural heritage at the NL.

We have set out the following key action areas up to 2019:

1. Preserving records of the present for the future.
2. Making our content easy to find and simple to use.
3. Supporting researchers in their work.
4. Fostering debate about Switzerland.

Our success in the first two areas will in part determine how far our voice is listened to in research and in public discourse about Switzerland.

Preserving records of the present for the future

Collection and preservation are the starting point of all heritage transmission. Working with our partners, we continue to collect Helvetica on all storage media. We guarantee their long-term preservation in their original form and their ongoing readability.

We have long been successfully employing the methods of conserving paper documents. In 2014, we completed the paper deacidification programme that we embarked on in 2000. This enabled us to at least quadruple the life of the documents treated.⁴



Marie-Christine Doffey,
Director

² See 99th Annual Report 2012, p. 3ff.

³ <http://www.nb.admin.ch/org/00779/index.html?lang=en>

⁴ See p. 14.

The ongoing process of change renders collecting and preserving digital publications considerably more resource-intensive than for those on paper. We are currently developing a method of handling them that is expedient and makes the most effective use of our resources. A key role in this process is played by a “repository”: a central data store for the long-term archiving and management of our digital content.

The NL's collections will soon encompass sound storage media as well as text and image documents. In November 2014, when approving the Culture Dispatch, the Federal Council decided to incorporate the Swiss National Sound Archives into the Swiss National Library from 1st January 2016. Both the Board of the Sound Archives and the Federal Council believe this is the best way to preserve this part of Switzerland's cultural heritage. The Sound Archives will remain in Lugano once the integration is complete. Lugano will thus become the NL's third location, in addition to its headquarters in Bern and the Centre Dürrenmatt Neuchâtel.

Making our content easy to find and simple to use

The first precondition for globally accessible content is standardised, high-quality metadata. We therefore catalogue in accordance with international standards. Since 2013, subject indexing has been carried out using the new combined authority file. A new subject cataloguing concept has been drawn up to enable digitally born documents to be indexed as well, without more staff being required.⁵

The next few years will see the replacement of the library system and, with it, the user interface. In future, we aim to make our bibliographic data available primarily via an appropriate metacatalogue. In the interests of wider availability and easier access, we plan to dispense with a separate NL user interface in the foreseeable future. This will require the introduction of a new library system, scheduled for 2017.

The aim is to enable not only the metadata but also the actual documents and their content to be easily located on site and, where the law permits, online. In terms of content, our focus is on Swiss personalities and places, as well as events of importance to Switzerland. As with the library catalogue, the emphasis in terms of dissemination channels is on third-party platforms, which typically have greater reach and address other groups than the NL's own platforms. A prime example of this is our collaboration with Wikimedia Switzerland, which began in 2014.⁶

Supporting researchers in their work

Our collections consist first and foremost of information. For that information to be translated into knowledge, it must be structured, appraised and contextualised: in a word, it must be researched. Supporting research in the humanities is one of our central concerns. We offer both services and personal advice to assist with this.

We supply expert knowledge in literary studies, historical sciences and visual studies. We maintain close contacts with the relevant academic communities, enabling us to adapt our offering continually in response to new developments in research. We are currently networking the *Bibliography on Swiss History*⁷ with platforms that deliver added value for researchers, such as the *Historical Dictionary of Switzerland*⁸ and *Diplomatic Documents of Switzerland*.⁹

⁵ See p. 13.

⁶ See p. 15.

⁷ www.nb.admin.ch/bsg

⁸ www.hls-dhs-dss.ch

⁹ www.dodis.ch

In literary studies, and for the appraisal of our image collections, we enter into research partnerships with universities and memory institutions. One current example is the Swiss National Science Foundation project on artists' books,¹⁰ which is being carried out by the NL's Prints and Drawings Department together with the University of Lausanne. We publish the results of our research in an appropriate form. During the year in review, the Swiss Literary Archives published two volumes documenting the results of academic conferences.¹¹

Fostering debate about Switzerland

Few collections are better placed than ours to encourage reflection about our country and contribute to a better understanding of it. For this reason we present a selection of our documents in historical and cultural contexts, on site and online. We aim to combine familiar forms of presentation with new ones, thus exploiting both the aura of the original and the reach of the reproduction.

We organise specialist colloquia in which experts in various disciplines can engage with our collections and also with general issues facing memory institutions.

Events and major exhibitions, both at our headquarters in Bern and in the Centre Dürrenmatt Neuchâtel, will remain important for a wider audience. The exhibition *Under Propaganda Fire. Switzerland and the First World War*, a joint presentation with the Museum of Communication during the year in review, offers an initial taste of the new methodology guiding our cultural outreach activities. Documents not on show in the exhibition itself were regularly published on Facebook to accompany it. In future, we intend to enhance this extension into the virtual realm, enabling those who are unwilling or unable to travel to benefit from our programme, and from their cultural heritage.

Encouraging participation in cultural heritage, social cohesion, and creation and innovation, are the three areas of action defined by the Federal Council in the Culture Dispatch. Transposed into the terms of our mandate, they have been incorporated into the NL's revised strategy.

Marie-Christine Doffey,
Director

¹⁰ See p. 17.
¹¹ See p. 18.