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2018: a year of transition for the National Library

With a new library management system, a restructured website, attractive exhibitions, a new platform for digital periodicals, and additions to the analogue and digital collections, the National Library is constantly adapting to new challenges.

In 2018, the National Library (NL) acquired a new library management system from Ex Libris, a company that specialises in IT solutions for libraries. The system is outsourced in the form of “software as a service” hosted on a remote server in the cloud. Getting the new system up and running consumed a substantial amount of in-house resources over many months, which also caused some inconvenience to our users. The Primo VE user interface is still experiencing numerous teething problems which we are resolving with the supplier. One of the consequences of this project is a delay in processing new monographic and periodical acquisitions at the NL. Unless additional resources are made available, it will take a number of years to clear the backlog.

The launch of these new products is a major event in the Swiss library community. After the Library Am Guisanplatz, Renouvaud, the Vaud library network, and the Swiss National Library, in 2020 it will be the turn of the approximately 400 Swiss scientific libraries grouped together in SLSP, the Swiss Library Service Platform, to migrate to these same systems, unlocking new future synergies at the national level.

Our completely restructured website www.nb.admin.ch now devotes greater attention to the collections, which are showcased and enhanced with illustrations and in-depth presentations.

Our extensive programme of exhibitions and events in Bern, Neuchâtel and Lugano proved highly popular with attendees. The exhibition “LSD. Ein Sorgenkind wird 75” not only attracted record numbers of visitors but also appealed to a very diverse audience interested in finding out about the major social and cultural changes in Switzerland and around the world brought about by the accidental discovery of LSD 75 years earlier by the Basel-based chemist Albert Hofmann.

At the Centre Dürrenmatt Neuchâtel, a look back at the year 1968 from a range of original perspectives linked to the career of Friedrich Dürrenmatt brought together a number of players both local and international.

Our increasingly digital collections are growing rapidly. In addition to Swiss literary output, both commercial and non-commercial, major new holdings were added to the collections of the Swiss Literary Archives, the Prints and Drawings Department and the Swiss National Sound Archives. Web Archive Switzerland marked 10 years since its inception. The number of digitised documents continues to grow, thanks to valuable partnerships. The NL launched the new platform for the historical and contemporary Swiss press in the form of www.e-newspaperarchives.ch, which lists more than 100 titles or 3.5 million pages. Long-term archiving of digital documents is a priority. Our specialists have been working hard to collate and archive the digital collections on a single server at the National Sound Archives by 2019. The next stage will be to design and implement a long-term archiving system.

Nevertheless, the NL faces certain difficulties. Owing to budget cuts we were obliged to close the NL on Saturdays. We are aware that this decision runs counter to the needs of some of our users, who made their feelings on the subject known, and to the practice of many libraries that are working to open their doors seven days a week. This difficult decision has caused a decline in the number of visits to the NL and the number of documents loaned out, but it allows us to retain our capacity to innovate.



Marie-Christine Doffey,
Director

Added to this are structural problems identified during a routine check carried out in summer 2017. Part of the building – the eight-storey “book tower” – no longer meets current standards with regard to earthquake resistance. Some areas had to be closed to the public and measures to shore up the affected sections were put in place by the Federal Office of Construction and Logistics, which is responsible for our building. Some sections of the Federal Office of Culture (FOC) that are based in the NL building will be relocated to the immediate vicinity and other moves, both internal and external, will take place in 2019. A complete renovation of the National Library is necessary. This major project will extend over a number of years (from 2022–2023 to around 2027) and will involve relocating the entire NL and FOC, specifically the public part of the library (reading rooms, circulation, exhibitions, etc.) including the Swiss Literary Archives and Prints and Drawings Department, together with all the workplaces and a large part of the infrastructure. However, the logistical challenge will be a new opportunity to adapt our building and its infrastructure to the needs of a national library in the 21st century.

Marie-Christine Doffey
Director