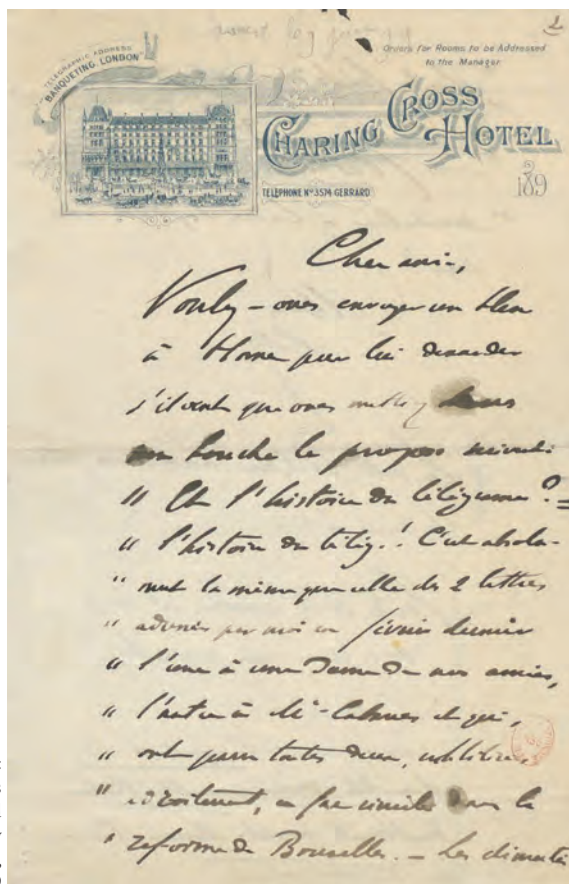


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Christophe
Dessaux
France
Monika
Hagedorn
-Saupe
Germany

Digitisation of cultural heritage in France

Interview with
Christophe Dessaux
by Monika Hagedorn-Saupe



Manuscript:
Letters
of Ferdinand
Walsin-Esterhazy
to Serge Basset,
1899

The following interview with Christophe Dessaux was conducted in 2011 when he was Chef de la Mission de la recherche et de la technologie, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, France. In Christophe Dessaux's term of office digitization of cultural heritage became a priority, of which he spoke with us. Christophe is now Conseiller de Coopération et d'Action Culturelle at the French Embassy in Uruguay.

Christophe Dessaux, you are Head of Department Research, Higher Education and Technology at the French Ministry of Culture and Communication. Your department is responsible for implementing the national digitisation plan. Can you tell us more about this strategy?

Digitisation of cultural heritage has been defined as a priority by the French Ministry of Culture and Communication. Digitization of heritage collections and contemporary art is a unique opportunity to valorise them and to make them accessible to everyone on the Internet. Online availability multiplies the possibilities of their use for research, for education and training, for cultural tourism, for regional development, and more broadly for the sake of the entire community. It is a means of promoting cultural diversity, cultural democratisation and cultural transmission of knowledge.

This ambitious public policy allows France to maintain control over its resources and to guarantee access to various users. It also seeks to promote the development of new innovative services for citizens.

The national digitisation plan is implemented through an annual call for projects with a budget of € 3 million. This call is open to public cultural actors (national or territorial) as well as non-profit

Christophe Dessaux by Monika Hagedorn-Saupe

Map with the islands
of Lipari and Vulcano,
near the coast of Sicily, 1699/
Drawing in colour made by Henry
Michelot, coxswain of the galley



private organizations (foundations, associations ...). Note that it excludes the National Audiovisual Institute (INA) and the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF), which have large specific budgets for the digitisation of their own prestigious collections. The plan aims to stimulate partnerships between State agencies, local government services and private structures. It also encourages the development of new forms of cross-collaboration between institutions (archives, libraries, museums, heritage ...). It is organised along six "thematic programs" to structure the projects of digitisation and thereby increase the availability of digital cultural resources and achieve coherence and critical mass.

To be eligible, projects must meet several criteria: the project must have a one-year calendar and digitised content must be accessible on the Internet at the end of the project. We also require

that these documents are free of rights (except in the case of contemporary works), or that the project leaders hold the rights to broadcast in digital form.

The selection of projects is entrusted to a committee of experts that gives special attention to the alignment of projects with the policy of the Ministry. The key words are "aggregation", in order to foster the development of networks of operators around thematic or regional content, "standards", in order to promote interoperability at both national and European level (Dublin Core, EAD, OAI-PMH, ...), "portals", and "innovation", in order to promote the development of new services for innovative cultural practices by users.

Other priority criteria are taken into consideration: coherence with the six thematic programs but also the inclusion in regional partnerships for joint initiatives aiming at valorising content. The combination of these two criteria is of course possible. The committee of experts also takes into consideration whether the project contributes to the enrichment of existing heritage databases.

How do you measure today the effects of this incentive policy?
What are the most significant accomplishments?





Map of the Italian territories and areas of influence in Africa.



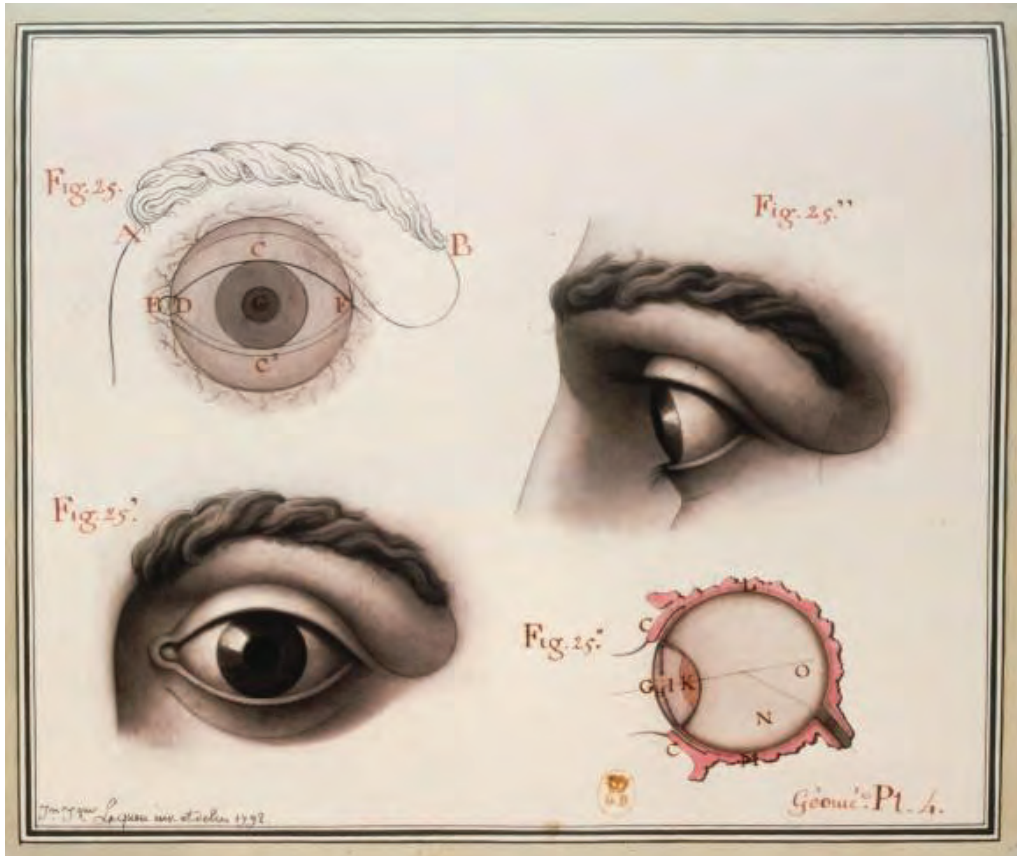
After several years of support to digitisation through this national plan, there is a real change in attitude of heritage institutions and associations, who have definitely shifted into the digital distribution of their works both online and on-site. Their goal is to broaden the audience, by enriching the content offered and by developing new digital uses both in the cultural venues themselves and on the Internet. The digitisation plan helped boost the momentum to help cultural institutions to meet the growing demand from citizens who want easy access to documents.

The number of projects submitted each year is constantly increasing, as is the number of candidate structures in all areas. And local governments are becoming more and more present, taking over the funding of projects up to 50%, which has the effect of reinforcing cooperation at regional, departmental, and municipal levels.

Through our thematic programs, the digitisation plan helped to build networks of actors who came together to develop resources into a coherent whole. This applies, for example, for collections of musical instruments stored in 230 French museums and joined in a national database accessible on the website of the library of the Cité de la Musique (<http://mediatheque.cite-musique.fr/masc/>). The database has more than 7000 instruments and more than 7000 photos. Another example is the site "Memory of the Somme" (<http://archives.somme.fr>), directed by the Département of the Somme, which allows users to view, download and print for free 3 million pages and images of the archives of the Somme (marital status, population censuses, cadastral maps, stamps, photographs, postcards) and over 3000 photographs from the Museum of the Great War in Peronne.

Since 2007, six thematic programmes have structured the call for proposals: the territories, the people, French and the languages of France, art and archaeology, architecture, contemporary art. Each theme includes several axes, and is enriched by new lines over the years to target and expand the types of collections to be digitised. Thus, in 2010, comics, graphic design, and modern dance were introduced into the list of collections to be taken into account.

Image: Diagram of the eye : drawing / Jn Jque Lequeu inv. et delin. 1792



This thematic approach has allowed the creation of a large corpus of coherent content and encouraged the creation of cultural portals, especially around contemporary art (dance, music, video art, design, street art and circus...), reinforcing and networking digital culture. One can cite the example of a contemporary music portal that provides access to nearly 200,000 books, scores, sound recordings, videos ... in 32 databases of more than twenty French organizations devoted to musical creation after 1945 (www.musiquecontemporaine.fr). The portal "24-25" is an entry point in the French audiovisual collections of several organizations dedicated to avant-garde cinema and video art (<http://24-25.fr/>). The portal design (www.portaildesign.fr) brings together four major public collections of French decorative arts and design from the early twentieth century to today (Museum of Decorative Arts, National Center of Art / National Fund of Contemporary Art, Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne / Centre of Industrial Creation (Mnam / BCC) and the Musée d'Art Moderne de Saint-Etienne Métropole), more than 15,000 works. Note also the portal Genealogy (www.culture.fr/eng/Genealogie), which brings together research in the databases of various national or local archives, associations of genealogists and the Ministry of Defence.





Image: "Le diable couleur de rose" ("The pink devil"),
the opera comique by Guillaume Levrier-Champrion:
costume
Bosquier-Gavaudan (Valogne) / drawing made by Joly



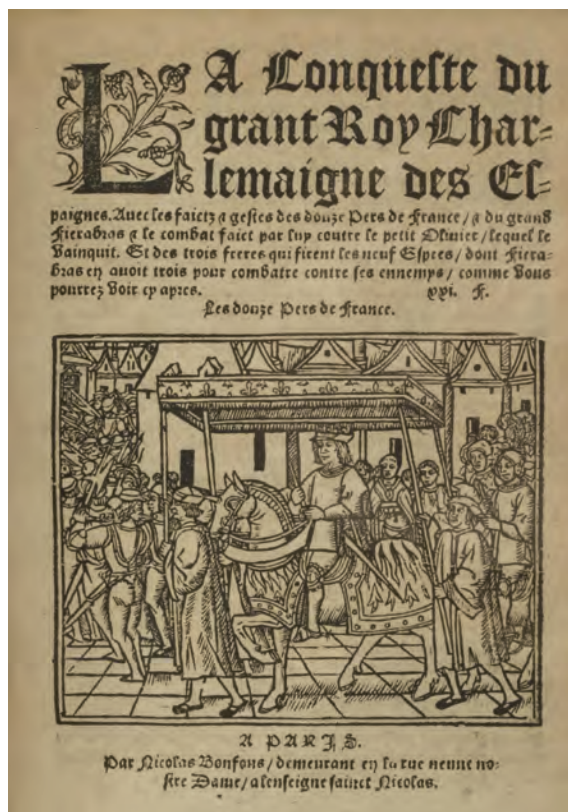
At national level, digitised collections are listed in the online catalogue "Patrimoine numérique" (www.numerique.culture.fr) which is administered by my department. 1714 digitised collections are now described, with links to websites where they exist. Thematic files enable cross discovery of these collections: for example, the file "Sea" invites the reader to explore archives, photographic collections, collections of objects, and works of art on navigation, fishermen, and seaside architecture ...

The digitisation plan encourages those responsible for digitisation projects to use open technologies and standards for interoperability. This helped create in 2007 a search engine at the national level: the digitised content available online are harvested by the search engine "Collections" developed by the Ministry of Culture and Communication. This semantic and multilingual (English, French, Spanish) engine searches an ever-increasing number of databases, websites and virtual exhibitions produced by cultural institutions. It allows scientists to find more than 4.3 million documents and 3 million images with one click.

For the call for proposals 2011, what major goals have you set and what projects have you prioritized?

While maintaining the general orientations and thematic programs of previous years, the call for proposals 2011 has defined a certain number of priorities: overseas, collections emblematic of the history of France and the sources of local history, the First World War, photographic collections, the 3D modelling of archaeology and historic monuments, art crafts, maritime and fluvial heritage, fashion and textile heritage, and contemporary creation (e.g. network of opera houses, contemporary music, contemporary dance, experimental cinema, and video art).

Book:
 "La Conqueste du grant roy Charlemaigne des Espaignes."
 (The Charlemagne's victory over the Spaniards)



We received 277 projects involving 340 structures, and we selected 150. The new areas were very much welcomed. And we got projects with great relevance, both in terms of content and in terms of networks of actors, as several structures are mobilizing to build a sizeable corpus of documents on the same theme or the same territory.

The Ministry of Culture and Communications maintains its support to projects that meet the growing demand for Internet access to sources of genealogy (family status, military records, personnel numbers, notarial sources) and works of museums. We also pursue methodically the digitisation of graphic art, collections of fashion and textiles, and regional and local press. The richness of cultural diversity will be valorised by projects supported by the National Museum of the history of immigration and the association Génériques.

This call in 2011 will help further strengthen the provision of online digital cultural content for all audiences, across all cultural and historical attractions, from a dual perspective of territorial attractiveness and contribution to cultural education.

How is your national digitisation plan related with European projects in this area?

The national digitisation plan is a pillar of the French strategy to contribute to the European digital library Europeana, the other two axes being the mass digitisation of books held by the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF) and the Audiovisual Archives of Institut National de l'Audiovisuel (INA).

The major objectives set by the French digitisation plan are the same ones that have been defined at European level: providing content in all domains (archives, libraries, monuments, art, archaeology ...), offer a structured development of networks of institutions and collections, achieve critical mass, promote free and open access, promote their use for all.





Newspaper: "Le Petit journal.
Supplément du dimanche"



The contribution of France to the European library is a major role of "Collections", through which data is aggregated at the national level and then harvested by Europeana. Two other national aggregators enrich Europeana: Gallica digital library of BnF, and Ina Archives for all portal.

Moreover, France is a partner in several European projects on digitisation of cultural heritage. It is at the origin, with Italy and the United Kingdom, of the Michael European portal, launched in 2004. Recall that Michael is a multi-lingual catalogue that provides quick and easy access to digital collections of libraries, archives, museums, monuments ... two dozen European countries. Patrimoine numérique, the French catalogue of digital collections, is integrated into Michael.

And of course, France and museums participating in the ATHENA project and will participate in its follow-up Linked heritage.

Your department also supports other projects that exploit digital technologies to broaden and diversify the means of public access to heritage and creation. Can you elaborate?

In 2010, the Ministry of Culture and Communication has embarked on a new initiative to support digital innovation and to develop new digital cultural services for the general public. My department aimed at facilitating experimentation by the general public of these new uses, promoting new approaches to consultation and reuse of digital cultural resources, and also encouraging new partnerships between cultural operators, research communities and private companies.

A first call for proposals has identified 60 projects covering all cultural sectors. We support experiments that are conducted *in situ*, in cultural institutions, and on the Internet. Different types of projects were supported:

Newspaper: Les Hommes du jour
(People of the day)(Paris. 1908)



- Innovative visits to explore heritage (castles, urban walks, abbey, twentieth century architecture, parks and gardens...): for example "geoculture-Limousin seen by artists", or "monumental iron and bronze statuary on smart-phone";

- Innovative approaches for visiting museums and exhibitions: for example "Museo", a multimedia device designed using sign language and experienced in the Musée du Quai Branly, or "e-CNCS", a platform of the "National Centre for stage costumes" in Second Life (<http://e-cnccs.net>), or "Museo-touch", a free application using multitouch technology to explore museum collections;

- Enhanced performing arts (music, dance, opera, theatre), whether participatory services for theatre texts, or dissemination of innovative operas ("Opera Bis" offers throughout the season 2010 - 2011 performances of opera in the city of Rennes, which are broadcast in Second Life) ...;

- Innovative services for books "enriched literary works", film, and music ("Music of the Universe" Alsatian mediatheques, offering listening to streaming music collections);

- Innovative libraries, collaborative archives;

- Digital services for education: "Versailles live", teaching workshops at a distance, "Archimôme" edutainment website for young people of the City of Architecture and Heritage, etc.

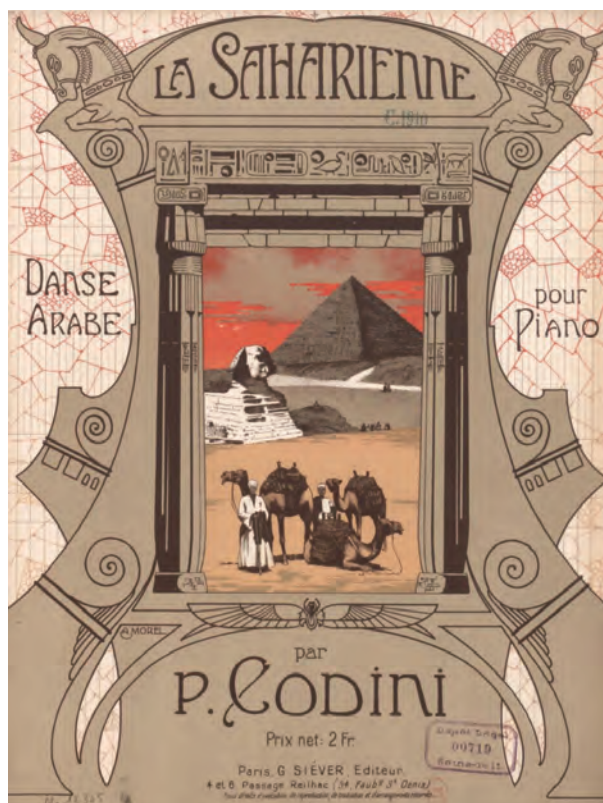
All these projects are presented on the platform Culture Labs (<http://culturelabs.culture.fr/>), conducted by the Ministry of Culture in partnership with the laboratory Leden (University Paris 8).

Culture Labs also reports on the experiences of the project leaders with the general public: video reports and live interviews are posted regularly. This platform makes it possible to evaluate the innovative use of digital media: we mainly assess mobility, interactivity, and participatory functions.

Culture Labs also aims to bring together other "Labs" that contribute to the dynamics of digital and cultural uses and create a synergy of networking and exchange among all stakeholders: the public, cultural structures, private partners, research laboratories, schools, and so forth.



Score: "La Saharienne : danse arabe pour piano"
 (La Saharienne: the Arabic dance music for piano),
 authored by
 P. Codini; illustration A. Morel



screenshot.jpg

