Digitisation in public libraries: challenges and practice in Germany

Bernhard Hoppe

Head of Section, Ministry of Education, Science and Culture Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany

The Spanish organisers asked me to give you a short report about digitisation in German libraries. It is a pleasure for me to do so.

First of all: Digitisation in libraries is strongly linked with digitisation on other fields of cultural activities, e.g. archives, museums and monument preservation. This means digitisation is a challenge for a closer co-operation of these institutions and it will be very helpful for the mutual understanding and for a common success of cultural affairs in the society. That's the reason why I intend to talk not only about libraries but about different sectors of the cultural heritage.

Nevertheless my report will focus on libraries. I will give you some information about the most recent decisions how the process of digitisation will be organised in Germany, and how far it has advanced until now. But, particularly, I want to introduce some exemplary projects with their WebPages, and the web addresses where you may find further information.

I hope to fulfil at least some of your expectations.

Users and content in libraries

It is to be noted that today cataloguing in almost all libraries is carried out exclusively digitally. The availability of bibliographic records via library OPACs is the rule in public libraries as well. The retro-conversion of old card-catalogues continues and will do so for a quite a while. But digitisation of complete works cannot be carried out on a large scale and, due to the general situation of resources, must be restricted to special copies and certain ranges of books and special collections.

The next step is the so called catalogue enrichment: Several libraries and networks of libraries in Germany provide, attached to the catalogue information about a book, further information such as tables of content, publisher's information, text samples, cover images etc., so that users may find more infor-mation about the books already within the electronic catalogue, and their choice of books is made much easier.

Before I shift to special aspects, let me highlight another point of common interest: from my point of view, libraries, as well as other cultural institutions fulfil a social mission in the field of education and science. That's the reason why I am convinced that the access to digitised sources in libraries and the access to the information stored in libraries via internet must be free of charge – at least as long as these sources are used for cultural and scientific aims. There may be some exceptions from the open access philosophy - e.g. photos taken from works of art - but in general, providing cultural goods must not be a matter of commerce.

Examples for best practice

In German libraries digitisation began with a lot of singular projects. Decisions where to begin had been made particularly by funding but as well by special interests and most simply by chance. It had been a process of learning by doing and the concept had been created by the experiences of the people being involved in it.

At the web address www.dl-forum.de/eubamdo-ku/06-05-DiGi-Projekte-Online.pdf you find a list pointing out all German major projects in the field of digitising contents of cultural heritage.

The table contains 294 projects on 54 pages from the scopes of libraries, archives, museums and monument preservation.

Don't be afraid I am going to highlight only three of them.

The German digital journal archive named DigiZeitschriften (www.Digizeitschriften.de) is a research service. Students and researchers find access to the most important German research journals via institutions, which subscribe this service. At the moment,

about 110 journals with more than three million pages are available in 16 subject areas, e.g. Arts, Economics, Education, English language and literature, Geology, Germanic language and literature, History, Law, Librarianship, Mathematics, Music, Philology, Religion.

For the realisation of the project, nine special collection libraries - leaded by the State and University Library of Göttingen - joined forces to form a working team in 1999. Since then, the number of members is growing.

Because of the experience that a large number of the questions asked by the users of public libraries is concerning recently shown films and the history of films, I´d like to attract your attention to an actually launched project which concerns the German film.

www.Filmportal.de, a central cost-free internet platform for information on all German cinema films, provides information about currently 60,000 German feature films ranging from 1895 till today. As of now, 6,000 titles are covered in-depth, featuring synopses, reviews, photos or posters. Moreover, filmportal.de lists more than 120.000 names relevant for the national film and offers more than 1200 biographies. In addition to this, extensive "Theme Worlds" offer texts on important periods and aspects of German film history.

The "Portal Digitalisierter Drucke" (www.zvdd.de) - my last example - is a very timely tool, not only for researchers, that is urgently needed due to digital developments. It is the central digital catalogue and access point to all digitised library materials. It aims at listing all fully digitised library documents which are free for Internet access, and which satisfy average science quality criteria. Digitised documents include newspapers, serials, music prints, broadsheets and, of course, monographs.

How is the process of digitisation organised and what is the political support for digitisation in Germany.

Culture, the support of sciences and the related infrastructures in Germany form part of the decentralised responsibility of the 16 States, the so called "Länder". Therefore, many digitisation activities lie within the responsibility of the 16 States and their Ministries for Culture or Science. Furthermore, many initiatives have been independently developed by universities, libraries, archives, museums, research centres, academies, private associations and publishers within their specific legal frameworks.

The Federal Government assumes responsibility only in some areas and fulfils a coordinating role in some others. Within this responsibility, the Ministries both for Education and Research (BMBF) and for Economics and Labour (BMWA) support several digitisation initiatives in this quite heterogeneous landscape.

At the level of the Federal Government, in 2005 the Commissioner for Cultural and Media Affairs (BKM) has commissioned a study State-of-the-art report on digitisation of cultural heritage materials, with recommendations for further action (in German language: Bestandsaufnahme zur Digitalisierung von Kulturgut, mit Handlungsempfehlungen), carried out by one of the Fraunhofer Institutes. Its background are, on the one hand, the deliberations of some European heads of government in 2005 concerning the creation of a European Digital Library by digitising the European cultural heritage. This is a response to the Google initiative for the digitisation and accessibility of several million (mostly English-language) books. On the other hand this study consisting of 176 pages, addresses:

- the need to have a state-of-the-art overview of the techniques, problems and challenges of digitising cultural materials,

- the need to avoid duplication of work at the national level and,

- the questions related to providing easy access to digitised materials.

While aiming at preventing monopolistic, or quasi-monopolistic situations, under which access to digitised cultural heritage materials will be subject to economic framework conditions of one or few data providers respectively information brokers, the study will also analyse the economic potentials of such digitised materials.

EUBAM (www.EUBAM.de) was founded in September 2001. EUBAM means: Europäische Angelegenheiten für Bibliotheken, Archive und Museen. EUBAM is a permanent joint Working Group of representatives from the Ministries for culture of the States and the Federal Government as well as experts from Archives, Libraries, Museums and Monument Protection, and the German Research Council (DFG). Its mission is to inform these different sectors about European activities concerning the available funding of cultural activities and, in particular, about digitisation of cultural heritage which includes the complete list of German digitisation projects I mentioned before.

One of the most important topics of the current work of the EUBAM group is to organise the "Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek (DDB)", the German contribution to the EDLproject, which means the European digital library. EDLproject is a Targeted Project funded by the European Commission under the eContentplus Programme, within the area of Cultural content and scientific content. By the end of 2007, all EU countries will be members of the European Library service. EDLproject enhances access to the European Library portal, by continuing to develop its multi-lingual capacity and EDLproject takes first steps towards collaboration between The European Library and other non-library cultural initiatives, and expands the marketing and communication activities of The European Library service.

EDLproject had been one of the most highlighted topics on the cultural agenda during the recent German EU Council Presidency.

Linking the scenes – cultural heritage

Digitisation is no worth for itself. It is a means to an end, it is a tool providing better accessibility to the cultural sources for all users. This means in particular digitisation is able to link different "scenes". If digitisation facilitates the access to any information, it is a result of a strong co-operation among different "scenes" of institutions preserving cultural heritage, particularly libraries, archives and museums. But collections of audio resources and films and institutions in charge of monument preservation, are invited to co-operate as well.

With the BAM Portal (BAM means Bibliotheken, Archive, Museen) libraries, archives and museums in Germany (www.bam-portal.de) are for the first time offering a common, overarching search tool for and within their digital finding aids, catalogues and inventory lists. Following the example of successful Internet search engines, a central index of the holdings of the institutions is being built.

Academic persons and interested citizens can use the BAM-Portal as a first internet-based access point to the holdings of libraries, archives, museums and other kinds of institutions. They can see search results from these different types of institutions simultaneously. The results in the BAM-Portal are linked to the results in the original catalogues. Here, users will get more detailed information and are able to see the search result in its context, as well as available digitized documents.

The project started in May 2001. Early project partners were libraries, museums and the state archive in Baden-Württemberg. New partners since October 2005 are the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (including the famous Museums in Berlin, the Berlin State Library and the Institute for Museum Research) and the Federal Achive.

Just a glance to another project linking scientific sources stored in an archive with current cultural events:

- www.Literaturportal.de is on the one hand, an access to the German Literature Archive in Marbach am Neckar. On the other hand, the pages provide information about everything concerning the literature scene in Germany. E.g. there is a calendar sheet for each day. As you see yesterday it remembered the birthday of the Austrian author Peter Turrini.

- Literaturportal.de presents profiles of every major German-speaking author and information on the libraries, archives, literary houses, and museums. At Literaturportal.de you find a huge amount of information about literary events taking place all over Germany, as well as original recordings of authors reading their texts, and also information about prizes and scholarships.

If you are planning a visit to any city or region of Germany, make sure to visit this site before.

Long-term preservation and accessibility to all digital resources

It is common knowledge that long-term preservation of paper based sources is a serious problem. In contrast to this, digitised sources at the first glance seem to be prepared for the eternity. But in process of time it is not easier to care for digitised sources particularly with regard to two different aspects: Digitised sources can be physically destroyed and lose their information as well as paper. Secondly the access to the digitised sources may become a challenge too. Just think about the floppy-discs. They were very common just a few years ago. Today it is quite difficult to find a device with an appropriate drive.

That's the reason why I would like to attract your attention at last to the project NESTOR (www.langzeitarchivierung.de) which cares for this challenges. The acronym nestor was taken from the official project name "Network of Expertise in long-term STOrage and long-term availability of digital Resources in Germany".

The aim of nestor is to secure the preservation of digital resources in Germany, to facilitate an accurate account of our social, historical, technical and artistic development. The long-term accessibility of all digital resources of lasting value must be preserved - this, despite the changing conditions arising from rapid technological development.

Nestor aims to create an information and communication platform to bring together existing activities related to the long-term archiving of digital resources, and to introduce the discourse about the so called "Information Life Cycle Management".

The project tries to link sponsoring institutions with organisations and projects, which are active in the field of long-term archiving of digital resources and commercial services and industrial partners, which offer labour or products for long-term archiving. So Nestor addresses public funded institutions as well as partners from the so called creative industry.

Closing

At the beginning, I asked the question if libraries would become superfluous facing the world-wide-web, the digitisation projects and the possibility of getting any information from any working place at

any time. The current experiences of the public and the scientific libraries in Germany, and as far as I know, all over the world, are different from this idea: increasing numbers of users and reading-rooms crowded at any time, although they remain opened until late night.

My conclusion: digitisation is a means to an end, a strong improvement for the users, but the heart of libraries is the exchange of information from face to face. And that's the reason why future libraries will generally look more traditional than they are sometimes supposed to.