Digitization in French Archives: Projects and Perspectives

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This talk will cover:

- Background, types of digitized materials
- Online access to digitized materials
- Recent trends: thematic portals, educational use, role of the users
Background, types of digitized materials
First projects in French Archives

- 1993: National Archives
- 1994: Departmental Archives of Mayenne
- 1995: Departmental Archives of Aveyron (notarial records)
- Digitization as a preservation format (parish and civil status registers, cadastral records, local newspapers, postcards)
- Consultation of digital images on local computer networks
Digital Heritage Catalog
http://www.numerique.culture.fr/
Some statistics (Digital Heritage Catalog)

- 1,578 collections listed, result from the initiatives of the government, local authorities, associations and foundations
  - 728 references from archival institutions (448 departmental archives)
  - 406 references from libraries
  - 153 references from cultural heritage
  - 149 references from museums
  - 88 references from audiovisual institutions
Types of digitized materials

- Graphic documents (photos, postcards, posters): 40%
- Maps, plans, cadastral records: 21%
- Parish and civil status registers, decennial tables: 17%
- Population census, notarial archives, military recruitment, municipal deliberations): 9%
- Digitization projects concerning registers are the most important (2-3 million images for civil status registers in departmental archives)
An example, Departmental Archives of Var
Other types of digitized materials

- Notebooks of teachers during the First World War (departmental archives of Charente-Maritime)
- Sound recordings: oral testimonials about the beginnings of the Social Welfare Administration, employees of the National Institute for Agronomic Research, proceedings of territorial assemblies, local radio emissions, etc.  [https://www2.nancy.inra.fr/collectif/archorales/](https://www2.nancy.inra.fr/collectif/archorales/)
Oral cultural heritage of the Sarthe
Digitization of archival finding aids

- The aim is to convert paper-based finding aids to digital format using EAD
  - *The National Archives develop an information system for the new center of Pierrefitte-sur-Seine and initiate an important campaign of digitization / retroconversion of finding aids*
  - *The National Archives of Overseas and several departmental archives have published on the web XML/EAD holding guides providing access to more detailed finding aids*
  - *At the Archives départementales des Pyrénées-Atlantiques, the encoding of legacy finding aids written between 1863 and 2000 has been part of a program of digitization of the collections*
Some statistics (since January 2009)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of digitized or being digitized pages</strong></td>
<td>133 443 421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Civil status register</strong></td>
<td>120 385 656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of digitized or being digitized images</strong></td>
<td>1 340 900</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Online access to digitized materials
The National Annual Digitization Plan

- On a national level, France has been implementing a National Digitization Plan for its collections since 1996.
- This coordinated program concerns all the areas that fall under the domain of the ministry: archives, heritage, architecture, museums, the arts, music, books and audiovisual.
- The program aims to increase the number of digitization projects, improve the quality and increase visibility.
  - A key area of interest is the access to digitized collections.
Some statistics

- Number of archival institutions that uploaded archival materials (beginning 2009): 64
  - Departmental archives: 47
  - Municipal Archives: 14

Institutional approach

- the resources were made available at first in the reading rooms, then on the websites of the archival institutions
## Some statistics

Departmental Archives that have uploaded their civil status records (registers and tables)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Departments</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Mayenne, Savoie, Vendée</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Yvelines</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Alpes-Maritimes, Côtes d'Armor, Sarthe, Tarn, Vienne</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Ain, Hautes-Alpes, Corrèze, Gironde, Oise, Orne, Morbihan, Var</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>38</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Number of online resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of digitized pages online or partially online</td>
<td>90,537,988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online or partially (National Archives)</td>
<td>1,873,247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online or partially (Departmental Archives)</td>
<td>87,856,602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online or partially (Municipal Archives)</td>
<td>808,139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of online or partially online digitized images</td>
<td>438,572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online (National Archives)</td>
<td>11,987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online (Departmental Archives)</td>
<td>406,784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online (Municipal Archives)</td>
<td>19,801</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Types of digitized materials online

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Material</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of digitized and uploaded fonds / collections</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parish and civil status registers, decennial tables</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Census lists</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military rolls</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notarial archives</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cadastre</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo collections and postcards</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maps and plans</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posters collections</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most frequent ways of access

- Creation of specialized databases providing access to a specific type of materials
  - resources available through a pre-established list (list of cities for the cadastre) or a search form or a map of a territory

- Integration in encoded finding aids of digital images corresponding to the described document(s)
  - the user is provided with the digitized documents, their description and the description of the higher levels
Digital platforms: Archim
Digital platforms: Archim

http://www.culture.gouv.fr/documentation/archim/accueil.html

- Offers digitally scanned images of valuable historical documents, pictures and photographs and thereby preserves the extensive holdings of France's National Archives' historical department

- Highlights include: medieval manuscripts and especially illuminated manuscripts; casts of medieval seals; eye-catching atlases from the Ancien Régime; French Revolutionary documents; virtual albums of nineteenth century art purchased from Parisian salons
Digital platforms: Ulysse

http://caom.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/sdx/ulysse/index

- Started in 2002, aims to progressively make available spare photographs, or albums, postcards, posters, drawings and engravings, maps and layouts
- Both a simplified descriptive notice and a detailed one give all the necessary information in order to understand the documents
- The user can go further and have a look at the detailed finding aids, being progressively put on-line
Digital platforms : L’Histoire par l’image
Digital platforms : L’Histoire par l’image

http://www.histoire-image.org/

- Working in partnership with the Ministry of Education

- The project aims at promoting an innovative and complex approach of history from 1789 to 1939 through interpretation of visual archives

- It required to set up a selection committee with historians, museums mediators, educators, etc. and an editorial team working continuously on the content of the website
Example of a finding aid with digitized images

Departmental Archives of Val-de-Marne
Recent trends: thematic portals, educational use, role of the users
Access and reuse of digital cultural resources

- Digitization in French Archives is more and more regulated in terms of access and reuse of digital cultural resources
- It also results from strategic goals
- The Ministry of Culture financially supports digitization projects, encourages cultural themes but also develops rules:
  - web publication of digital resources, free access to documents, use of tools based on Web 2.0, development of platforms for providing access to general audience, use of open technical standards for harmonizing digital resources and federating them thematic portals (data interoperability), etc.
Thematic portals

- The issue is to use the flexibility that is made possible by digitization and online publication.
- Geographical distance is no longer a constraint today.
- It is possible to integrate digital resources from various institutions and distant in space around a theme or a shared project.
- Archival portals have been developed, including the portal New France - New horizons, where digital resources are distributed from Canadian and French archives.
Genealogy Gateway
Genealogy Gateway

- Led by the Archives of France and the Ministry of Culture
- Available at the site Culture.fr, integrates several genealogical databases www.culture.fr
- Offers a single access point to various digitized genealogical resources, is ultimately intended to be as comprehensive as possible
  - Parish registers and civil status records
  - Additional resources will be digitized: naturalization documents, records of Legion of Honor, military rolls or population censuses
International portals

The Archives of France also participates in projects of international portals, including Europeana (the European digital library) and the European archival APEnet portal.

Interoperability of digital resources is a primary concern in these projects.

The harvesting of records using the OAI-PMH for the Collections website was from this point of view an important advancement for the archival network.
Educational Use

Archival resources also attract young audiences, for example:

- **Copains de banlieue**: animation flash game developed by the Municipal Archives of Saint-Denis.  

- The Mystery of Beautiful Cordeliere: directed by the departmental archives of Aube, the principle of this game is to solve enigmas by exploring records [http://www.archives-aube.com/](http://www.archives-aube.com/)

Archival institutions provide users with training online modules, including paleography.
Users and Web 2.0

- Development of applications enabling users and volunteers to enrich the digital content (indexing or collaborative annotation)
  - *Departmental archives of the Mayenne, Yvelines, Ain, Municipal Archives of Rennes*

- A means of access to the digital image of a document is to retrieve it by recording in the search interface keywords such as names or geographical names

- The images of documents can then be very finely indexed
Collaborative annotation interfaces

- Such a solution requires the services to develop a software interface specifically adapted and rigorous control procedures about the quality of the indexation made by users.

- For instance, the departmental archives of Yvelines have just launched an application of this kind for the digitized newspapers of the former department of Seine-et-Oise, and it is now available on the portal “The Kyosque”.

http://img-dad.cg78.fr/path/pac/LeKyosque/internet.html
Example of collaborative annotation interface
Other innovative cultural practices

- Insertion of RSS feeds, sharing content on digital platforms such as Daily Motion, Flickr, etc..
- This assumes that the archival institution is attentive to its website.
- Some software provide archival features to easily link the data entered in the production modules and the website that will provide access to the same data.
- But for the moment the website management is mostly entrusted to partners, for instance the territorial organization on which the archival institution depends, or a company.
Conclusion

- Public interest and demand for digitization of archival materials are very important.

- This has led to the introduction of archival standards and the development of new services and software tools (direct encoding of the description, annotation modules, management of web site, digital images viewer ...).