

Closing lecture. Conference “Opening the Focus: Heritage and new realities of the sound and audiovisual archive”. University of Salamanca (Spain), 24-25 October 2019).

## **USING NEW MEDIA CHANNELS TO ENHANCE ACCESS TO AND USE OF INSCRIPTIONS ON THE MEMORY OF THE WORLD (MOW) INTERNATIONAL REGISTER: A PROPOSAL**

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### **BACKGROUND**

The Memory of the World (MoW) Programme, set up in 1992, aims to preserve documentary heritage, provide universal access to it, and raise public awareness of its shared cultural value. It does this within the framework of UNESCO’s *2015 Recommendation concerning the preservation of, and access to documentary heritage, including in digital form*.

In this regard, the principal means of raising awareness of the importance of documentary heritage is the MoW registers. The MoW registers, at national, regional and international levels, honour items and collections of documentary heritage of world significance.

The MoW Secretariat in Paris handles the MoW International Register, while national and regional committees of the MoW Programme administer the national and regional registers respectively.

Over the last 25 years, some 429 documentary heritage items have been inscribed on the MoW International Register, covering over 100 countries, across all the five geopolitical regions of UNESCO – Africa, Arab States, Latin-American and Caribbean States, Asian and Pacific States as well as Western European and North American States.

At the core of the MoW International Register is an attempt to promote, in the words of the UNESCO Constitution, “mutual understanding and a truer and more perfect knowledge of each other’s lives” through the sharing of world-significant documentary heritage. In this regard, in recognizing this point, the 2015 Recommendation of the MoW Programme underlines “the importance of documentary heritage to promote the sharing of knowledge for greater understanding and dialogue, in order to promote peace and respect for freedom, democracy, human rights and dignity.” The 2015 Recommendation also considers “at the same time that the

preservation of, and long-term accessibility to documentary heritage underpins fundamental freedoms of opinion, expression, and information as human rights.”

Against this background, how can new media channels as part of the evolving digital environment be exploited to enhance the potential consumption of the items of documentary heritage inscribed on the MoW International Register? In this paper, I sketch key aspects of the digital environment and how UNESCO has responded to them, particularly in enhancing universal access to documentary heritage within the framework of the MoW Programme. Then, I attempt to map out a specific project proposal focused on how the MoW Programme is attempting to harness the digital environment – through a possible partnership with a Chinese company (Tencent) – to promote access to items of documentary heritage inscribed on the MoW International Register, as described above.

## **DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE IN THE EVOLVING DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT**

UNESCO’s 2015 *Recommendation* serves as a robust normative framework for the preservation efforts of libraries, archives, museums, and other keeping places across the globe, including in the evolving digital environment. The aspect of digital cultural heritage is highlighted in the 2012 Vancouver Declaration adopted by UNESCO and the University of British Columbia. The Vancouver Declaration makes it abundantly clear that digitization can protect valuable analogue documents from deterioration by reducing handling. In the case of audio-visual documents, digitization is the only means of ensuring their survival.

UNESCO has adopted other normative frameworks that reinforce the need to focus on digital cultural heritage as an important part of the 2015 *Recommendation*’s effort in harnessing digital technologies for preservation and accessibility. These include:

- The 2003 Charter on the Preservation of Digital Heritage; and
- The 2011 Moscow Declaration on Digital Information Preservation.

Digital preservation and accessibility form an important aspect of democratic citizenship, particularly by linking cultural heritage to questions of universal access. In particular, the 2015 *Recommendation* encourages UNESCO’s Member States to provide for conditions in which the “world’s documentary heritage” can be “permanently accessible and re-usable by all without hindrance”, providing “the means for understanding social, political, collective as well as personal history.” In this regard, the 2015 *Recommendation* recognizes the need for “interoperability

standards” in the deployment of digital technologies for greater accessibility, encouraging Member States to “support memory institutions in the development of international standards for access and use, using recognized standards that support interoperability.” Significantly, the 2015 *Recommendation* acknowledges digitization of analogue materials as not only a preservation strategy for universal access to documentary heritage, but also as an opportunity for Member States to develop appropriate policies, strategies and actions that respond to the totality of all the five critical aspects of documentary heritage, namely *identification, preservation, access, policy and cooperation*.

More specifically, to achieve this, the 2015 *Recommendation* encourages Member States to “support memory institutions’ participation in the development of international standards for preservation”, including developing “awareness-raising and capacity-building measures and policies as a key component of preservation, including promoting research as well as training for documentary heritage professionals and providing facilities for such.”

An important trend related to emerging technologies such as big data, artificial intelligence and extended reality is the extent to which these technologies may provide possibilities to further process and use digital cultural heritage. Increasingly, the development of these very technologies is becoming a matter of discussion as to how they can be conceptualized as *heritage*. For example, in addition to discussing the ethical aspects of artificial intelligence in all its manifestations, UNESCO has also been discussing how software source code can be treated as heritage for sustainable development, including through the development of an open Global Software Registry, which will help all stakeholders to recognize and enable software reuse as an important part of all modern software development. Accordingly, in November 2018, UNESCO organized an expert meeting on the subject, resulting in the *Paris Call on Software Source Code as Heritage for Sustainable Development*.

UNESCO’s appropriation of digital technologies to advance universal access to documentary heritage is located within the larger 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Organization’s focus on preservation and accessibility of documentary heritage, including in digital form, reinforces several of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 16, Target 16.10 on public access to information and fundamental freedoms, SDG 11, Target 11.4 on strengthening “efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage”, as well as SDG 4, Target 4.7 on inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning

opportunities for all, through acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

## **A PROPOSAL FOR HARNESSING THE POTENTIAL OF NEW MEDIA CHANNELS TO AMPLIFY ACCESS TO AND USE OF DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE**

UNESCO's analysis of the potential of new media channels for the exploitation of documentary heritage stems from its analysis, in particular, of China's Tencent Holdings Limited. This is an Internet value-added services company based in Shenzhen, China. For the purpose of this project, the following Tencent's activities were analyzed for potential application to the MoW International Register:

- **Weixin/WeChat:** Launched in 2011, the Weixin/WeChat platform integrates instant messaging and social entertainment, bringing about a mobile digital lifestyle on an easy to use app. Users get to engage in real-time communications via free text and multimedia messages, make video calls or share photos on their "moments". With over 938 million monthly active user accounts as of the first quarter of 2017, Weixin/WeChat has evolved into a connector and open platform across industries, connecting users with one another, with smart devices and with business services.
- **China Reading Limited (Tencent Literature):** China Reading Limited provides a one-stop, quality literature online reading platform for hundreds of millions of Internet users. Part of Tencent's interactive entertainment business, China Reading Limited brings the full integration of online and traditional literary works to one platform. China Reading Limited is home to hundreds of thousands of writers and almost a million works of literature.
- **Tencent classroom:** Tencent classroom, a professional online education platform launched by Tencent in 2014, includes numerous education institutions and online courses, which provide high quality online education services for millions of learners from all professions and businesses. With years of development of technology, the Tencent classroom provides institutions, teachers and students with high-quality online teaching services, including live video on-demand, browsing text and picture online, test questions and other interactive education on PCs and mobile devices.

- **Tencent Microblog:** Tencent Microblog is an established social media platform based on media and social networking attributes. A communications network centered on people, it aims to provide real-time and diverse information, satisfying the demand for readily available information on any subject that matters to users.<sup>1</sup>

Against this background, UNESCO elaborated several possible activities that could draw upon Tencent's initiatives to promote awareness of as well as access to the inscriptions on the MoW International Register, especially among young people in China and other countries where similar Internet-enabled services are offered, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region.

## EXPECTED RESULTS

Based on the above analysis, the following results could be envisaged as part of a proposal for collaboration with Tencent:

- Raise awareness of the **cultural significance** of UNESCO's documentary heritage inscriptions among at least 10,000 young people in China and elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific region, using Tencent's **WeChat** as an online platform. The platform could feature various MoW inscriptions in the form of 'Did You Know?' facts to stimulate young people's interest in exploring the historical knowledge that lies behind such inscriptions.
- Encourage a focus on the **educational value** of such inscriptions by utilizing the **Tencent Classroom** as a model for excellence in incorporating cultural heritage as a teaching resource for a variety of subjects, including history, photography, etc.
- Support **micro-blogging** on specific cultural heritage items as a way of creating **popular narratives** of the historical moments such items embody (e.g. using the Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon to narrate the story of the evolution of Chinese traditional and modern medicine).

## POSSIBLE ACTIVITIES

To achieve the three Expected Results, the Secretariat of the MoW Programme could attempt to establish partnerships with relevant stakeholders in order to design and undertake the following activities/outputs:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tencent.com/en-us/system.html>.

1. Set up an **official MoW account on WeChat**, including partnering with a relevant institution to maintain the account by periodically posting official news or introductions to selected MoW inscriptions in the form of texts, sounds or video clips.
2. Identify and commission at least five **Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs)**, who command influence and have a significant following or e-reputation on WeChat, who could blog about some of the most significant MoW inscriptions, and how these relate to modern life.
3. As part of creating such a repertoire of heritage narratives, UNESCO could explore the use of **3D models** to create realistic photo and/or video composites or representations of selected documentary inscriptions and, in some cases, the artifacts they refer to.
4. Organize an **expert meeting** to explore the possibility of (i) introducing MoW documentary heritage as a pedagogical information resource for online classroom teachers; (ii) the use of **3D models** to create realistic photo composites or representations of selected documentary inscriptions as a way of popularizing them among students; and (iii) developing online games on the interesting themes captured by the rich diversity of MoW inscriptions (e.g. struggles for self-rule; freedom from slavery; trading practices; human rights; technological advances; medical breakthroughs, etc.).
5. Following this expert meeting, organize a **capacity-building workshop for the teachers**, including using them as a **cohort for subsequent** capacity-building workshops in other regions that may be targeted for a similar intervention.
6. Using the same cohort of teachers, undertake at least ten **Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)** on documentary heritage as an instructional tool and historical narrative.

## CONCLUSION

The idea of building a partnership with a company like Tencent, and possibly with academics through the University of Salamanca, is aimed at taking advantage of the digital environment and what it offers by way of preservation and accessibility of documentary heritage. It is important to recognize that threats exist to the extent to which the digital environment may be harnessed towards the objectives spelt out in the 2015 *Recommendation*. Such threats include:

- Market concentration, in which global digital platforms are increasingly contributing to market concentration with no guarantee that their systems may be adapted to address documentary heritage preservation and accessibility as a global good or common. This could lead to the over-commercialization of access to and use of documentary heritage.
- Inability to treat digital technologies as a means and not an end to the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, including by harnessing them for public access to information and the protection of fundamental freedoms (e.g. SDG 16.10, etc.).

- Digital illiteracy, which may derail the harnessing of digital technologies for democratic citizenship, especially through an appreciation of cultural heritage as a bedrock for active citizen participation in modern Knowledge Societies. If citizens can use digital technologies to access documentary heritage and use it to understand their past and present, and further use that understanding to determine their futures, the chances for active civic engagement can be enhanced.

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