

News media digitisation at the National Library of South Africa

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Abstract:

An overview will be given of the development of digitisation services at the NLSA. The purpose of digitisation is to preserve materials significant to South African heritage and also to provide access to such materials for research purposes and as well as access to the general public. Digitisation is inherently part of the NLSA mandate to protect and preserve South Africa published heritage. Collections that were selected for digitisation covered a wide range of collections including newspapers, manuscripts, maps, negatives, photographs and drawings. The Reprographic & Digital Services Section is operated at both campuses of the NLSA in Pretoria and Cape Town. Digitisation policy development was driven by the Department of Arts and Culture. A draft digitisation policy of the NLSA will be discussed. Reference will be made to a case study of digitising a selection of South African historical newspaper titles.

Keywords: Digitization, National Library of South Africa (NLSA), Black Press, Publications, newspapers, books, Reprographic and Digital services, Indian Opinion, DISA

News Media Digitization at the National Library:

Brief History

The National Library first commenced as two institutions; the first library was built in Cape Town in 1818 and became known as the “South African Library”. The second library was built in Pretoria in 1887 and it became the State Library. On the 1st of November 1999 the two libraries were amalgamated to become what we now know as the National Library.

Legal Deposit

The National Library of South Africa is a Legal Deposit Library and it is one of five Legal deposit Libraries in South Africa. The remainder of the Legal Deposit library institutions are as follows: Municipal Library, National Film, Video and Sound Archives, Library of Parliament.

The NLSA receives book, serial, newspaper, government publication or other printed items published in South Africa.

Development of Digitization at the NLSA

The now Reprographic and Digitization section of the NLSA was solely focused on Microfilm before digitization commenced on both campuses. The production of microfilm still continues at the Pretoria campus. The NLSA holds a master collection of S.A. newspaper titles on microfilm from the earliest print publications.

Digitization started in 2005/6 with scans being done on an ad hoc basis for external clients in the Cape Town campus.

What is Digitization

Digitization is an approach to preserve and facilitate access to fragile collections and to reduce the handling of originals. The ultimate goal of Digitization is to preserve and provide access to material digitized.

To better serve this goal, The NLSA acquired two dedicated Zeutschel OS 14000 scanners for both campuses in 2011 which scan up to 600 dpi.

The NLSA currently digitizes for mass preservation purposes as well as for external clients. However in terms of access, there is currently no online system to provide access to these digitized files as of yet however a system to provide access is currently underway.

Projects

DISA (Digital Innovation South Africa): One of the first Digitization Projects that the NLSA became involved in, was the UKZN based project-DISA

Digital Innovation South Africa (DISA) was a nonprofit initiative for co-operation among research libraries and archives in South Africa which was aimed at making, Southern African materials of high political interest accessible the world of academia.(JSTOR)

DISA partnered with the NLSA in what was called- "The DISA Southern African Freedom Struggles 1950-1994 project."

The NLSA successfully scanned the 'Sechaba' journal from the ANC struggle archives as one of its first digitization projects. The DISA Project commenced in 2001 and ended in 2009

The Black Press

The Black Press Project focuses on digitally preserving newspapers that were racially segregated in the past. These newspapers vocalised their protest against the regime of the time so much so that they were banned during the apartheid era.

(Switzer. L & Switzer. D, 1979)

The Black press project can be divided into 3 stages.

- Christian Missionaries (1830-1880)
- The Protest Press (1880-1930)
- The Protest to Resistance stage (1940-1960 (Switzer. L & Switzer .D, 1979)

Pivotal leaders in the Black Press movement include: John Jabavu of Imvo Zabantsundu (1884), Walter Rubusana of Izwi Labantu (1897), Solomon Plaatjie of Koranta ea Becoana (1901), John Dube of Ilanga lase Natal (1903) and Mahatma Gandhi of Indian Opinion (1903) amongst others (Switzer. L & Switzer. D, 1979).

The Digitization of such newspapers is in line with the National Library's mandate of preserving documents or material of South African Heritage, thus making this project of the utmost importance.

The Black Press Project consists of plus minus 200k pages, and commenced in 2011 at the NLSA Pretoria Campus and is comprised of newspapers primarily written in languages that are indigenous to South Africa. The Digitization of the project is predominately done at the Pretoria campus.

Newspaper titles digitized thus far include:

Izwi Lama Swazi
Naledi Ya baTswana
Inkundla Ya Bantu
Imvo Zabantsundu
Iphepha Lesizwe Indaba
Umhlobo Wabantwana
Motswalle Wa Bana
Egoli
Lentsoe la BaSotho
The Mirror

The Indian Opinion

The NLSA was approached in 2014 by the Indian Embassy to digitize certain portions (1930-1949) of the Indian Opinion , a newspaper established by Mahatma Gandhi.

The Indian Opinion is currently being digitized in both the Cape Town and Pretoria campus.

Challenges

Challenges that the National Library is faced with when conducting these digitization tasks or projects is often, lack of staff, equipment and funding.

Digitization Policies

The Department of Arts and Culture's National Policy on the Digitisation of Heritage Resources is still pending and has not been implemented as of yet. The final draft for public

review was in August 2010. It is for this reason that the NLSA drafted its very own policy in the interim. The final draft of the policy was drafted in February 2014.

References:

Switzer. L & Switzer D., 1979 = The black press in South Africa and Lesotho : a descriptive bibliographic guide to African, coloured and Indian newspapers, newsletters and magazines 1836 - 1976 / Les Switzer and Donna Switzer. - Boston, Mass. : Hall, 1979 (Bibliographies and guides in African studies)