

# A store of knowledge for the future

Autor(en): **Doffey, Marie-Christine**

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## A store of knowledge for the future

The Swiss National Library (NL) has never been more in the limelight than during the year under review, when its open days brought the institution to the attention of many who had scarcely known it existed. The occasion was the inauguration of its second underground stacks, home to a mind-boggling five million documents on paper. Although an electronic collection does not afford the same physical experience, in a few decades the digital generation may well be impressed by peta, exa, zetta and yottabytes of information just as we are today by cubic metres. In any case, the NL is readying itself for the coming change, since electronic documents are just as much a part of our cultural legacy as are documents on paper.

29 August 2009, 11 am. Just one hour after the doors were opened, more than 200 visitors had arrived, eager for a glimpse behind the curtain at the NL, and by the time the library closed the next day at 6 pm that number had risen to almost 2500. The main attraction was the two underground stacks, of which the newer stacks west began operation in 2009, after almost four years of construction. Like their counterpart on the east, they meet all demands for optimal conservation of material.

As part of the inauguration of the new stacks, visitors were invited to have a look at those areas of the NL normally off limits to laypeople. The event was advertised with posters, newspaper ads<sup>4</sup> and a television commercial on all three national channels – the first ever in the history of the NL. And, just in time for the big day, the NL launched its own channel on YouTube.<sup>5</sup>

### Three Swiss out of four know about the NL

The open days were an amazing success. The enormous interest of visitors has been matched by the NL's improved profile nationwide. While in May just six of 100 people surveyed spontaneously mentioned the National Library, by September 2009 this proportion had increased to ten percent and, upon being read a list of libraries, fully 75% recognised the NL, as against 70% in May 2009 and 60% in July of 2007.<sup>6</sup>

Because a national institution must also be rooted in the nation it serves, the NL occasionally stages major events and regularly mounts exhibitions targeted at a broader public than simply its users.

### Acclaim for 'Encyclopaedias', 'Loosli' and 'Pasolini'

In 2009 three exhibitions enjoyed considerable attention: *In the beginning is the word: Encyclopaedias in Switzerland*, a Swiss National Library exhibition in collaboration with the Historical Dictionary of Switzerland; *Carl Albert Loosli*, an exhibition by the Carl-Albert-Loosli Society; and *Pier Paolo Pasolini* at the Centre Dürrenmatt Neuchâtel, a co-production with Zurich's Museum Strauhof.

Exhibitions typically centre around an element of the NL's collection, as was the case in the Loosli show, for instance, or the exhibition entitled *Ulrich Meister: Works on Paper*, mounted by the Prints and Drawings Department of the NL, which last year acquired the artist's personal archives. But the year's most spectacular accession came without a doubt from the Robert Walser Foundation, which deposited its holdings for keeping with the Swiss Literary Archives (SLA).

### 'HelveticArchives' growing

The collections are catalogued according to the nature of their content in three main databases: *Helveticat* for print and digital publications, the Swiss Poster Catalogue for posters, and *HelveticArchives* for archives and iconographic documents. Each of the first two catalogues contains entries for the entirety of the relevant collection, *HelveticArchives* is still in development, though

4 Ad space was provided free of charge by the following: *Basler Zeitung*, *L'Hebdo*, *L'Illustré*, *La Liberté*, *Le Quotidien Jurassien*, *Le Temps*, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, *NZZ am Sonntag*. The campaign enjoyed the support of *Presse Suisse*, the association of newspaper publishers from western Switzerland.

5 [www.youtube.com/swissnationallibrary](http://www.youtube.com/swissnationallibrary).

6 The 2009 surveys were performed by GfK Hergiswil, the one in July of 2007 by Konso AG, Basel.

making good progress: whereas in late 2008 it contained 69 004 data sets, by late 2009 that figure had already grown to 88 294. Online access to the electronic collection – which includes documents both born digital and digitally reformatted – is expected to be available in late 2010. The plan to establish an NL web portal for searches in all catalogues at once, however, has had to be abandoned. Rather than creating our own portal, we have given priority instead to the integration of *Helveticat* (at very least) into *swissbib*, the Swiss metacatalogue currently in development, as well as to allowing the major search engines to index our catalogues.

### Selective digitisation

The availability of documents in digital form is taking on ever greater significance in the name of increasing user convenience. During the year under review the NL approved a digitisation strategy that sets out its priorities from the present until 2015. We have opted for selective digitisation of items from our collection, since digitisation of everything we hold, in addition to being prohibitively expensive, would require the establishment of copyright in all cases, and thus demand tremendous effort. We are now focusing instead on those holdings that offer the greatest advantage to users when digitised: newspapers, photoportraits and other documents in great demand, as well as those which can no longer be physically lent in their original form. Wherever possible, digitisation projects are to be carried out in collaboration with partners. When digitising newspapers, for instance, we work with the publishing house in possession of the relevant rights, which typically also takes on project management and is responsible for online access. This model was used in 2009 for the digitisation of four historical newspaper holdings: six years each of the *Express* and the *Impartial*, which were uploaded to the Internet in December, as well as the *Gazette de Lausanne* and the *Nouveau Quotidien*, which are to go online in February 2010.

### Online use, in-house use

Wherever possible and advisable, catalogues and digitised documents are also made accessible by way of national and international networks. At the Swiss national level, *e-lib.ch* is the main network used, while international networks used are *WorldCat*, *The European Library* and *Europeana*.<sup>7</sup>

In the course of 2010, in-house use of holdings and infrastructure is to be made more attractive. As soon as the requisite renovations have been completed, the open access collection is to be made available in sections covering history, literature, art and architecture, and information and documentation, the four main study and research areas of NL users.

### NL recognised as a family-friendly organisation

It isn't often that libraries win awards – but that's exactly what happened to the NL in 2009. The association *UND Familie und Arbeit* awarded the NL its seal of approval for particularly family-friendly employers.

### Swiss National Library Commission

During the year under review, in the course of addressing issues of national library policy, the Swiss National Library Commission invited delegates from all types of library to two workshops, where a common position on the current problems and challenges facing Swiss libraries was hammered out. The results of these workshops will next be submitted to Swiss political authorities at both the cantonal and federal level as practical proposals for action.

Marie-Christine Doffey  
Director