ILS 655 Assignment-Digital Library Project Review Paper 01

World Digital Library

Lucinda D. Mazza

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The World Digital Library contains cultural and historical content from countries around the world. Each item has been digitized for quality viewing and made available to anyone in the world to view for free.

World Digital Library Mission

The World Digital Library (WDL) makes available on the Internet, free of charge and in multilingual format, significant primary materials from countries and cultures around the world.

The principal objectives of the WDL are to:

- Promote international and intercultural understanding;

- Expand the volume and variety of cultural content on the Internet;

- Provide resources for educators, scholars, and general audiences;

- Build capacity in partner institutions to narrow the digital divide within and between countries. ("World Digital Library," 2009)

Project Background

In 2005, then U.S. Librarian of Congress James H. Billington, proposed the concept of a World Digital Library to members of the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO (United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization).   The idea was to "create an Internet-based, easily-accessible collection of the world's cultural riches that would tell the stories and highlight

the achievements of all countries and cultures" ("World Digital Library," 2009). Billington was quoted as saying the following to the New York Times "The vision is simply that this is a means for promoting far better intercultural understanding in the world"("World Digital Library Moves Ahead," 2008). UNESCO agreed with James Billington and designated "UNESCO's Directorate for Communication and Information to work with the Library of Congress to develop the project" ("World Digital Library," 2009).

The first major financial contribution to the project was a "$3 million dollar grant from its first patron, Google"(Read, 2005). Google "decided to join the Library of Congress's project because 'we share a common mission of making the world's information universally accessible and useful,' said Sergey Brin, a founder of Google" (Read, 2005).

"The model for the international library, according to Mr. Billington, would be the Library of Congress's American Memory project, which has digitized millions of American items, like Mathew Brady's Civil War photographs and Thomas Edison's first films" (Read, 2005).

In 2006 the Library of Congress and UNESCO arranged an Experts Meeting with representatives from around the world. Working together this group established development standards and guidelines for the selection of content.

By 2007 a prototype of a future WDL was presented at a UNESCO General Conference. The prototype had been developed by the Library of Congress and five partner institutions: the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the National Library of Brazil, the National Library and Archives of Egypt, the National Library of Russia, and the Russian State Library.

Two years later, in April 2009, the WDL is launched to the international public providing a " freely-accessible version of the WDL" ("World Digital Library," 2009). The content represented "contributions from 26 institutions in 19 countries, including major cultural institutions from the largest Arabic-, Chinese-, English-, French-, Portuguese-, Russian-, and Spanish-speaking countries in the world" ("World Digital Library," 2009).

Organization of Resources

The WDL allows viewers to discover, view and learn about cultural treasures from countries all over the world. A wide variety of treasures are included in the collection, such as: "manuscripts, maps, rare books, musical scores, recordings, films, prints, photographs and architectural drawings" ("World Digital Library," 2009).

Classification of the content was first and foremost done with the existing catalog records supplied by the partner institutions, only supplementing the records to enhance browsing. "For classification by topic, the WDL relies upon the Dewey Decimal Classification System, which was made available in the seven interface languages by OCLC" ("World Digital Library," 2009).

The content of the WDL is not translated; the primary materials remain in their original language. What is translated is "the metadata (information about the materials) that make it possible to search and browse the site in seven languages" ("World Digital Library," 2009).

Service Features

Searching the WDL can be done using one of the seven languages provided; Arabic, English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Russian and Chinese. However, specific printed artifacts always remain in their original language.

When first arriving at the WDL home page, one is greeted with a map of the world and a timeline. The contents of the WDL are organized by geographic regions, identified on the World map. Each region contains the unique cultural treasures from that region and time.

Underneath the world map is a sliding timeline that allows you to search for items aligned with specific times in history. Each of the geographic regions remains the same, but the amount of items reflected pertains to the timeframe chosen by the viewer. This allows the viewer to search by date and region. Content can also be browsed by place, topic, type of material and institution.

Viewing items can be done in a number of ways depending on the type of material. Audio and video archives are viewed using Adobe Flash Player. Books can be viewed using the pageturner feature that allows flipping to the next page or jumping to a specific page number. Photographs and other single images can be viewed in their original size or enlarged to full screen size.

Every item in the WDL can be downloaded, even the image viewers and pageturners. Books are also available in pdf format which can be read using Adobe reader.

Curator videos accompany some of the items in the collection. Video recordings are made of experts speaking about a specific item or collection of artifacts.

Technologies Involved

The technology used for the development of the WDL, represented several significant investments of time and money.

- "Consistent Metadata: Each item is described by a consistent set of bibliographic information (or metadata) relating to its geographical, temporal and topical coverage" ("World Digital Library," 2009).

- Descriptions have been written up by curators and other experts for each item that answer "the questions: 'What is this item and why is it significant?'" ("World Digital Library," 2009).

- "Multilingualism: The metadata, navigation, and supporting content are translated into seven languages" ("World Digital Library," 2009). This effort lengthened the project and makes maintenance more complicated, but it has brought the "WDL closer to the goal of being truly universal" ("World Digital Library," 2009).

- "Digital library technical development: The WDL team's work with state-of-the art tools and technologies led to advances in cataloging and multilingual Web site development" ("World Digital Library," 2009).

"Over the years the Library of Congress has worked with partners in Brazil, Egypt, Iraq, and Russia to establish digital conversion centers to produce high-quality digital images"

("World Digital Library," 2009).   They hope to continue this work, creating digital conversion centers throughout the world that will produce content not only for the WDL, but for other national and international projects.

The Library of Congress hosts the physical WDL site. A team working at the Library of Congress, maintain the site.

There are several WDL Working Groups that were established following the 2006 Experts Meeting; Content Selection Group and Technical Architecture Working Group. Participants of these groups are generally representatives from the partner institutions.

"The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and the Library of Congress have co-sponsored a working group to develop guidelines for digital libraries, including the WDL" ("World Digital Library," 2009).

The specific digitization standards for the WDL,   which include the "metadata, digitization, and file transfer standards, were established by the Library of Congress and other WDL partners, with input from the WDL working groups" ("World Digital Library," 2009).

Comments, Suggestions and Feedback

The WDL is a very exciting international project that brings together the cultural treasures of countries all over the world. It puts all participants on a level playing field with the creation of digitization centers in areas of the world that would otherwise have no access to such technology.   Using digital technology, all forms of artifacts can be captured, be they maps,

books, photographs, movies, or audio recordings and searched with no regard to form. Examples of items found in the WDL are:

- *Map of the Battles of Bull Run Near Manassas* (1861 in Virginia)

- Jackie Robinson of the Brooklyn Dodgers, Posed and Ready to Swing (photograph, 1954)

- *The History of Genghizcan the Great, First Emperor of the Ancient Moguls and Tartars*, written by François Pétis in 1722 (book, 448 pp, map)

- *Procession at Séville and Bullfighting Scenes*, motion picture recorded in Spain, between 1898 - 1899

- *Journal of Magellan's Voyage*, written by Antonio Pigafetta a French author around 1525. (manuscript, written on parchment, hand colored portions)

This would be a great addition to most libraries online reference resources, providing access to wonderful primary resources. Carley Knight stated in her review of the World Digital Library, "The ease of navigation and the simplicity of the user interface will make this a wonderful addition to any library catalogue" (Knight, 2010). Not only is the user interface easy to use and very intuitive, it is very responsive and the picture quality is excellent.

The WDL is still in its infancy having been introduced in 2009. Many countries are still creating their own digitization sites, limiting the amount of content collected to date. I hope more content gets added at a faster pace. Any library or historical institution may contribute towards the collection, thus opening the door for a wide range of artifacts.

Having designed the WDL to optimize digital coherency, this will allow for technological longevity and a long bright future for the World Digital Library. In addition to the significant contributions the WDL has made in the library and information science world, it has also politically been a unifying effort on an international level. By assisting under-developed countries with digitization technology, the WDL is allowing them to preserve artifacts that they otherwise would have lost, in both a figuratively and literal sense.

The WDL continues to grow today. They have a strong financial backing from all over the world. Some of the major contributors are, Google, Microsoft, The Carnegie Corporation of New York, The King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia and The Bridges of Understanding Foundation for the development of Middle East-related content.

In closing, Knight stated it well in her review, "Its information would be interesting to a four-year old in Siberia or to a 70-year old in Lisbon. It is exciting and rare to find a database so universally applicable and freely accessible. " (Knight, 2010).

References

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