

Calimera Country Report

**Cultural Applications:
Local Institutions Mediating Electronic Resources**

France

Information on Public Libraries,
Local Museums and Archives



calimera

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Organisation

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In France, the decentralisation policy has shared the management of cultural organisms between State (Ministry) and 3 levels of local authorities: regions, councils and municipalities (districts). But, with the exception of national public establishments and decentralised government departments, most of the institutions are under the responsibility of local authorities. The central government retains the task of monitoring these institutions and promotes their modernisation through advice and incentives to local authorities.

At State level, the central administration of the [Ministry of Culture](#) defines the major orientations regarding public reading and culture heritage preservation. Three separate directorates (the directorate of Books and Reading, the directorate of French Museums, and the French Archives) of the Ministry allow the State's technical control over libraries, museums and archives.

The orientations defined by the central administration are for the mostly relayed and implemented by the [Regional Directorates for Cultural Affairs](#) (there are 30 DRACs, one per region). Each regional directorate has one or several advisors who provide information and advice to local authorities and professionals. They raise awareness of and explain the Ministry's main orientations; they collect and transmit information concerning their regions to the central administration. They implement State policy, particularly through subsidies, in the following areas: building, computerisation and co-operation between libraries, protection of written heritage and support for literary events.

At the highest local level, the region has responsibilities mainly oriented towards economic policy, planning and development and vocational training. Its cultural responsibilities are not strategic; the regions do not play a direct role in public reading and heritage preservation, but may provide financial support for communes or may develop co-operation and partnerships for specific heritage strategies. There are 26 [regions in France](#), 4 of which are overseas.

Within the region, councils have wide-ranging responsibilities: social policy, building and maintenance of secondary schools, land consolidation, organisation of school transport... It encourages access to public reading for communes with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants via the departmental lending libraries. It also manages major archives issues. There are 100 [departments](#) (4 overseas).

The municipality (district) is the basic local authority unit in France. It has various local powers, in particular concerning primary education, urban planning, social policy, road networks, museums and public libraries management. There are currently approximately 36,000 communes (32,000 of them being municipalities of less than 2,000 inhabitants), partially regrouped into conurbations that sometimes take responsibility for public reading. The creation of a district library is an optional responsibility of the commune; only 3,000 communes have their own libraries.

Public Libraries

The Directorate of Books and Reading

At ministerial level, [the directorate of Books and Reading](#), proposes and implements State action to encourage the development of public reading and the conservation and enhancement of written heritage. It also acts to encourage writing, publishing, bookshops, and the promotion of French books abroad. Its mandate also includes responsibility for the [Bibliothèque Nationale de France](#), the [Bibliothèque Publique d'Information](#) and the [Centre National du Livre](#). It also monitors, with the Ministry in charge of research, the media library activities at the [Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie](#).

The "Bibliothèque Nationale de France"

In terms of the scope of its missions, its collections, and the resources allocated to it, the [BNF](#) is one of the world's three leading libraries, the other two being the Library of Congress in Washington (USA) and the British Library in London (United Kingdom).

Heir to over seven centuries of history, beginning with the library of King Charles V, it is a public State institution under the responsibility of the Ministry of Communication and Culture and is one of France's most important cultural institutions.

Situated in Paris, the BNF welcomes over a million visitors a year, and its catalogue provides access to over ten million references and to a digital library called [Gallica](#).

The statutory mandate of the BNF is as follows:

- Collect (through legal deposits, purchases and donations), catalogue and conserve French and foreign collections of printed documents, manuscripts, coins and medals, prints, photographs, maps and plans, sheet music, audio, audiovisual and electronic documents.
- Ensure that the greatest number have access to these collections
- Highlight the value of these collections (by organising exhibitions and colloquia or through publications, for example)
- Lead research programmes concerning the heritage under its responsibility

To implement these actions, the BNF is at the hub of a documentary co-operation network, for implementing legal deposits as well as documentary policy and description of the collections: a network of "partner centres" and the "[Catalogue collectif de France](#)". The BNF is also a major player in international co-operation in the field of libraries, in its areas of expertise (heritage, bibliography, conservation, training, etc.).

The “Bibliothèque publique d’information”

Since it was created in 1976, The [Bibliothèque Publique d'Information](#), an original and exemplary institution, has asserted itself as the reference as far as national institutions for public reading are concerned. It is located in the [Pompidou Centre](#), and is tied to the Centre by a convention.

Its operating principles are as follows:

- Free access, free of charge
- Readers' autonomy (free access, documents for help with research)
- Up to date information, with permanent renewal of its collections (352,000 printed volumes, 6,700 maps and plans, 12,312 documentaries, 11,000 music CDs, 1,802 scores, 1,994 language learning methods, 232 self-teaching software packages). The significant volume of the collections of periodicals on paper or in electronic format also testifies to this permanent updating of the documentation available at the BPI (2,731 hard copy subscriptions, 1,089 electronic documents).
- The quality of the welcome offered to readers (2,200 seats for 10,750 sq. m) with information desks and extended opening hours, including Sundays and public holidays (open 62 hours a week and 3,300 hours per year).
- The attention paid to the widest possible range of audiences through services that encourage social and cultural integration: self-teaching, employment centre, services for the visually or physically impaired, world television, collections in foreign languages, etc.
- Technological development with the availability of 370 multimedia terminals, a recent overhaul of the information systems and networking of catalogues, bookmarks, CD-ROMs and databases.

After 25 years of operation, and after a full renovation of its spaces in 1999-2000, restructuring of the library services was undertaken in order to better co-ordinate activities and to encourage synergies in view of an institutional project to be successfully completed within the next five years. The functions are now grouped into four centres of activity: documentary development, service to the public, cultural action and communication, resources.

Like the BNF, the BPI also intends to increase and diversify its regional and international actions.

The media library at the Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie

[This media library](#) is part of the Cité des Sciences et de l'industrie, a public institution under the responsibility of the Ministries in charge of culture and research. Its mandate is to make developments in science, technology and industrial expertise accessible to all.

The media library consists of theme-based areas that enable visitors to make the link with the Cité des Science's museums, where individual mediation is offered to visitors:

- Life and the environment to learn about the natural sciences, understand the different faces of planet Earth and rethink how we look at health;
- Exact sciences and industry, which groups together the pure sciences and their direct or indirect applications to industry;
- History of science, for those interested in analysing societies and knowledge through history, sociology and philosophy of science;
- Science and society to better understand the human, social, philosophical and political issues related to developments in science and technology;
- Childhood with documentary collections for children including albums, CD-ROMs and films.

Two new documentary collections have been created: Leisure and Everyday and Education and Teaching.

There are also service spaces with personalised mediation:

- La cité des métiers is an information and advice area on careers and professions open to all.
- The Louis-Braille room offers the visually impaired work booths equipped with computer terminals to surf the Web and read, write, scan and reconstitute documents from the media library in synthetic speech and temporary Braille.
- La cyber-base consists of free initiation workshops on new technologies.
- La cité de la santé (Health Cité) provides responses to our questions concerning information on health.

Departmental Lending Libraries

At council level, the State created in 1945 centralised lending libraries. Responsibility for them was transferred to the local ("Département" or district level) authorities within the framework of the decentralisation legislation of 1986, and in 1992 they were renamed departmental lending libraries ([bibliothèques départementales de prêt](#), or BDP).

The initial task of the BDPs was to serve districts ("communes") in rural areas (fewer than 10,000 inhabitants). First of all filled thanks to vehicles, the famous "bibliobus" (library buses), this aim is increasingly being pursued through the creation of permanent reading centres, relays and small municipal libraries. Departmental lending libraries play an essential role in training managers, often voluntary workers, provide assistance and advice, hold exhibitions, and co-ordinate reading development actions on a departmental scale. Their role is thus globally being transformed from that of a distributing service to heading up logistics networks.

Departmental lending libraries cover practically the whole of France's territory, including the Overseas Territories, enabling access to books and other media for over 48% of inhabitants of rural districts. They may also deposit materials in schools, prisons and retirement homes. In summary, they have become true facilitators and co-ordinators of department-wide public reading networks.

In 2002, 97 departmental lending libraries employed approximately 2,600 people, with over 23 million printed documents, 2 millions audio documents and 387,000 video documents. Among these 97 BDPs, 80 possess 68 700 digital optical disks, and 49 possess other documents (slides, posters, postcards, etc.). They have deposited over 13 million documents in the libraries of the 18,300 districts they serve; 97 have computerised information systems, 93 have Internet access.

The public libraries network

[Public libraries](#) - which were often created following the confiscation of aristocrats' collections or religious property during the French Revolution - have, since 1803, been under the responsibility of communes (municipalities) or groups of communes.

Their priority mission is to conserve and highlight their heritage collections, which are particularly rich (13.2 million heritage printed documents, mainly early, rare or precious books). Public libraries have undergone significant modernisation, particularly over the last twenty years, to fulfil their mission of developing public reading.

They are currently the most frequented cultural facilities, and they are seen as fundamental places for social integration and learning about citizenship, providing access to information, culture, education and leisure for all audiences.

A few figures to evaluate their importance (latest available data is for 2002):

- 3,012 public libraries serving 63.7% of the French population; 25,100 people working there; their combined surface area is 2 million sq. m, i.e. 5.5 sq. m for 100 inhabitants
- Their collections are growing and diversifying: 95.2 million non-heritage printed documents, 7,6 million sound recordings, 1.3 million video recordings
- 1,239 libraries offer public Internet access with 4,771 terminals.

Frequentation:

- 31% of the population frequent public libraries
- 6.7 million people are subscribed (17.4% of the population) and borrow 188 million documents.

Public libraries are making efforts to conquer new audiences by increasing their cultural actions (book fairs, writing workshops, meetings with authors) and partnerships (social services, early child care, retirement homes, prisons, etc.).

Despite the progress achieved, there are still disparities in access to books: between different communes, departments and regions, and social and economic disparities.

Museums

The Directorate of French Museums

[This directorate](#) within the Ministry of Culture, in connexion with the DRACs in French regions, implements the government's policy on museums through:

- the purchase of works of art;
- the conservation, protection, restoration, study and enrichment of collections and the promotion of research;
- dissemination and the presentation of collections to the public;
- monitoring architectural and museum programmes (in both the national and catalogued and monitored museums);
- preparation and implementation of training programmes for professional museum staff;
- scientific and technical monitoring of the management of the collections of more than 1,000 museums run by authorities and associations;
- observation of the art market and flows of books;
- international cooperation in all fields relating to museum activities;
- definition and application of the legislative and regulatory framework for museums and public collections;
- management and modernisation of the [33 national museums](#).

It implements government supervision of the following establishments:

- [La réunion du Musées Nationaux \(the association of national museums\)](#)
- the museum of [national estate of Versailles](#)
- [the Auguste Rodin](#), Jean-Jacques Henner and Gustave Moreau museums
- the public establishment and the museum of the [Grand Louvre](#)
- the [Central Union of Decorative Arts](#)

It has also incited and supported online catalogues of several museums:

[Catalogue des collections des musées de France \(Base Joconde\)](#)

Collections of archaeology, contemporary art, decorative arts, history, fine art and ethnology belonging to the French public collections 194,000 records and 52,500 pictures.

[MNR](#)

Musées Nationaux Récupération: 2,000 objects recovered in Germany after Second World War.

[Catalogue collectif des bibliothèques des musées nationaux](#)

Shared catalogue of books and periodic from 24 libraries of national museums, 212,000 records regularly updated.

[Musées](#)

Catalogue of the "Centre de documentation de la Direction des musées de France", 30,000 records.

[Muséofile](#)

Directory of the French museums, more than 1,000 records.

La Réunion des Musées Nationaux

Although the [RMN](#)'s main mission, under the responsibility of the Ministry, remains the financing and acquisition of works of art to enrich national collections, it has gradually been entrusted with three other missions: visitor reception, organization of temporary exhibitions and cultural promotion concerning both these exhibitions and national permanent collections.

Acquiring works of art to expand the national collections is the Réunion des musées nationaux's primary mission, for which it was set up in 1895.

It makes purchases - from individuals or art dealers or bids at public auctions - and manages donations. In 2002, the RMN spent 7 million euros on acquisitions.

The RMN participates in the development of reception areas as well as in the administration and management of public services (access, ticketing, cloakroom, guided tours, booking, etc.), for the majority of national museums and for the exhibitions that it co-organizes with them. Its board of directors fixes entrance fees as well as exemptions and discounts granted to specific visitor categories.

Since 1990, the RMN has undertaken regular surveys of visitors attending national museums and exhibitions.

Since 1930, the RMN has been in charge of the administrative and logistic organization of most temporary exhibitions presented in national museums as well as the larger exhibitions of the [Galeries nationales du Grand Palais](#) since they opened to the public in 1966.

Exhibitions in national museums are scheduled several years in advance by a special committee, which meets regularly at the RMN's head office. The RMN organizes around 20 exhibitions a year, which differ in size, subject and cost.

The RMN has always had a commercial activity, although at the beginning it was limited to selling the engravings produced by the Louvre's workshops. In the 1930s, it took over the publication of postcards, guides and catalogues for the national museums' permanent collections and the temporary exhibitions organized by the RMN. This publishing activity — extended to audiovisual publications, and, since 1993, to multimedia — has flourished in recent years and the RMN's structure has changed accordingly. It is now an EPIC, a public enterprise of an industrial and commercial nature.

The RMN also disseminates cultural material, striving to reconcile its mission as a public service with market forces. It therefore focuses on top quality, both in the choice and content of the products and in their production.

The sub-division for museums, scientific and technical culture of the Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education, Research and Technology, manages the sub-division for museums and scientific and technical culture within the Directorate of Research. This sub-division proposes and implements policy for the dissemination of scientific and technical culture.

It exercises government supervision of the following establishments:

- Palace of Discovery
- Museum of "[Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers](#)"
- [National Museum of Natural History \(and Museum of Mankind\)](#)
- [National Museum of Education](#)

It also carries out scientific and technical monitoring of the management of collections in museums of natural history belonging to local authorities.

Archives

The Directorate of French Archives

Within the French Ministry of culture, [the French Archives](#) administers the national archives and monitors the public archives other than those of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence.

On behalf of central government, it monitors the archives of local authorities. In the case of public archives, its field of action extends from monitoring the day-to-day archives to compiling, processing and communicating the definitive archives. In the case of private archives, it extends to researching, processing and communicating the archives entrusted to it. There are five [national archive centres](#) in France, 26 regional centres, 100 [departmental centres](#) and 500 [municipal centres](#).

History of French Archives

The specific administration of archives began at the time of the French Revolution as the latter gave rise to new needs: the preservation of archives of the new institutions, the grouping together of records from the administrations of the Old Regime, and the management of archives seized as national property. Although the National Archives were created by decree on September 7, 1790, their fundamental text is the law of Messidor 7, Year II (June 25, 1794) whose purpose was threefold:

- the centralization of the National Archives;
- the introduction of the public nature of the archives as opposed to the former rule of state secrecy;
- the setting-up of a national archives network.

For documents kept outside of Paris, the fundamental text is the law of Brumaire 5, year V (October 26, 1796) which called for an archives agency for each department of France. Until 1884, the National Archives developed independently from the network of local (i.e. departmental, community and hospital) archives. The National Archives, an institution of the State, were under the authority of various ministries until 1870 when they were placed under the aegis of the Ministry of State Instruction.

In 1808, the National Archives were set up at the Hôtel de Soubise where they are still located today. The local archives, on the other hand, are part of the Ministry of the Interior, and it was during the July Monarchy and the Second Empire that they were truly organised: specific rules and methods were implemented, specialized personnel (students from the Ecole des Chartes) were brought in, and collections of printed inventories were launched.

In 1897, the National Archives and the department of archives of the Ministry of the Interior merged within the Ministry of State Instruction and became the Directorate of the Archives, which, in turn, became the Directorate of the Archives of France in 1936. Since 1959, year in which André Malraux created the Ministry of Cultural Affairs; the Archives of France have been one of the Directorates of the Ministry of Culture. The archives law of January 3, 1979, with its implementation decrees of December 3, provided a coherent corpus of all the rules for managing public archives and for protecting private archives, applicable to all local and national public organisations.

Policies and Strategic Activities

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Public Libraries

State aid for local authority public libraries

When the decentralisation laws came into force in 1986, the State transferred, in a "general provision for decentralisation" the credits that were until then devoted to equipping and running public libraries.

A specific funding arrangement was set up within this framework to help local authorities to build, modernise and operate public libraries on a yearly basis. These credits are not ordinary State subsidies: they are automatically allocated to local authorities that comply with the regulatory conditions.

For 2003, the State paid:

- 23.16m to help cover operating costs for municipal libraries (1,645 libraries received aid corresponding to 3.29% of their overheads)
- 45.8m for 733 building, equipment or computerisation operations for municipal libraries, subsidised at an average rate of 39%;
- 6.2m for building or modernising BDPs and libraries in their networks.
- In addition to this there were subsidies for acquisitions allocated to local authority libraries by the Centre National du Livre (3.1m in 2003) and subsidies from the Directorate of Books and Reading for heritage acquisitions (approximately 590,000 in 2003).

The mechanism has greatly contributed to the growth in public libraries in France over the last 20 years: the surfaces of municipal libraries have quadrupled, to reach two million sq. m today.

Responsibilities and autonomy of local authorities

Public libraries are funded by the State when established or when expanded (investing in or starting very important works), but the local government subsidises 97 % of the operational costs (staff, acquisitions, and maintenance of buildings...). Thus, the municipality (the mayor, the local council) has all the powers of decision concerning the appointments of officials, the budget and the decisions concerning expenses of all kinds (including the buying of books, disks, periodicals).

In this way the elected decision-makers of the communities called 'territorial' have all the authority and all the power to run their institutions according to their own decisions. The State control is carried out in two ways:

- As regards the legality of the administrative measures (in particular the legal form of the budget, the decisions taken in council) but never whether these decisions are desirable.
- As regards the neutrality of the territorial local authorities towards the private business sector, which ought not to be favoured when choosing providers of services (Codes concerning business agreements within the public sector).

As concerns the libraries, the State control is strictly 'technical'. It works through the General Inspection of the Libraries (l'Inspection générale des bibliothèques) at the request of the Minister of Culture. It concerns the administration of the collections, especially in relation to the national heritage, rare and ancient, regarding the disposals... A regulating clause of the ordinance establishing this control states that the libraries are to respect the 'pluralism'.

Municipal libraries with a regional vocation

Created by the law of July 15th 1992, the Programme for Municipal Libraries with a Regional Vocation (BMVR) enabled the funding and building of major municipal facilities. These were to play the role of counterweights to the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF) and be key players in regional co-operation.

This measure, which provided strong incentives (State support for local authority efforts to the tune of 40%), gave rise to twelve major public reading establishments in the French regions.

The libraries of Châlons-en-Champagne, La Rochelle, Limoges, Marseille, Montpellier, Nice, Orléans, Poitiers Toulouse and Troyes are already open. The library of Reims, bipolar library, has opened one of its two sites (Médiathèque Cathédrale). The library in Rennes will open at the beginning of 2005.

The programme for municipal libraries with a regional vocation has enabled the creation, over a decade, of over 150,000 sq. m of floor space in addition to the 50,000 sq. m built every year in France today.

At a time when the programme created by the law of 1992 is nearing completion, we can observe that it has undeniably had a significant impact on the French library landscape. It has contributed to the renaissance and the diversity of architectural styles and has also enabled us to rethink the relationship between documentary offerings and users in an innovative way, by providing spaces for relaxation, exhibitions, highlighting heritage collections and cultural action.

Over and above their cultural role in their cities, the BMVR and the large institutions that are set to follow must assert their regional vocation, ranging from the setting up of regional bibliographic databases to concerted policies for conservation and promotion of written heritage.

National Development Programme for Local Media Libraries in Rural Areas and Outlying Urban Districts.

Rural areas and outlying urban districts have not benefited as much as town centres from the growth of libraries over the last twenty years. They are often deprived of any quality cultural facilities despite the fact that the need is as great, if not greater, than elsewhere. This is why the Minister for Culture and Communication, Jean-Jacques Aillagon, began a development programme for local media libraries - the "Ruches" (beehives). This programme provides support for local authorities at levels that act as an incentive, for building, planning and equipment as well as operational activities (qualification of jobs, building multimedia collections).

The State's level of investment is combined with specific quality requirements:

- Architecture,
- Reception and services,
- Modernity and conviviality for the spaces,
- Diversity of collections and openness to information technologies

These "Ruches" (a "ruche" is literally a beehive) are destined to be spaces for social interaction, and tools for fighting the cultural and digital divide.

To launch this programme, the Ministry of Communication and Culture simultaneously launched a Call for Ideas to sixteen teams of architects with the aim of selecting young talented architects to promote them in professional circles and to local decision-makers.

These sixteen teams were called upon to propose, starting from a framework-programme and four sites, innovative reflections on the mission and the architectural stamp of these types of facilities. The accent was placed on reception and entertainment spaces, Internet access, and the expectations of users wanting local public services, while also giving priority to users' discovery of the collections (reading and music rooms for example).

Plan of Action for Written Heritage (PAPE)

This plan aims to de-concentrate initiatives and resources, prioritise, innovate and create new co-operation measures. It is being developed around two focuses, implemented by the Directorate of Books and Reading (DLL) and the DRAC.

The DLL possesses a large amount of data on written heritage and libraries, but this data is heterogeneous. This is why the ongoing survey, which is being undertaken on a regional basis, is to present an updated report on the collections and on actions, and should allow for a complete re-examination of all the programmes subsidised. This survey should lead to rapidly operational projects for action.

The Plan of Action for Written Heritage consists of a set of regional plans. These regional plans, defined by the DRACs in co-operation with the local authorities, will implement major national orientations at local level.

There are three main orientations:

- Highlight five national priorities for written heritage: the conservation and enhancement of national collections; the building of information resources - completion of the major catalogues underway (incunabula, musical collections from before the 19th century), and extension of the collective catalogues, the Catalogue Collectif de France being the priority; highlighting the value of the collections - putting catalogues online, building of virtual libraries, and innovations concerning exhibitions and broadcasting; widening the circles of readers and audiences; staff training.
- Give the regions, departments, towns and agglomerations the initiative
- Encourage co-operation: the State is called upon to facilitate the signing of partnerships, organise operations, take part in the funding of projects, intervene on scientific and standardisation issues and on the design, organisation and funding of specialist training. The Bibliothèque Nationale de France, the regional co-operation structures, the municipal libraries with a regional vocation, the classified municipal libraries, the regional-sized libraries and the university libraries are all potential partners for the PAPE.

Promoting Reading for "Deprived Audiences" (disabled people, hospitals and prisons)

To facilitate access to reading for the blind (reading in Braille) and the sight-impaired (large print publications), the Ministry in charge of culture is co-ordinating a number of focuses for reflection and action.

Many public libraries have special departments equipped with multimedia materials (computers with character-enlargement software, voice synthesis, scanners, and Braille printers and keyboards): Bibliothèque Publique d'Information, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, and municipal libraries in large towns such as Bordeaux, Montpellier, Limoges, Poitiers, Marseilles, Troyes and Toulouse. The State contributes to funding this equipment.

Working days are organised by the Ministry and the BPI to prepare and train professionals on welcoming and facilitating library services for the handicapped, and on alternate format publishing. Since 1995, in order to raise awareness of accessible publishing, the Ministry of Culture has organised and subsidised the presence of specialist publishers (Braille, tactile, digital and large print) at the major book fairs.

The Ministry also provides subsidies for the main associations in this sector.

Reading is the most widespread cultural practice in hospitals. One of the main goals of the convention signed between the Ministers of Culture and Health (1999) to develop cultural activities in these places is to help the development of libraries in health institutions.

There are numerous partnerships between hospitals and municipal or departmental libraries. Involvement of public libraries enables professionals to intervene, staff training, the setting up of acquisition and elimination policies, the development of book-related events, and ensures free access to collections.

The development of reading in prisons, in partnership with the Ministry of Justice, is one of the most long-standing actions for promoting reading implemented by the Directorate of Books and Reading (1990). Here too, partnerships with municipal libraries have enabled the setting up of true institutional libraries, with regularly updated collections. In addition, since 1997, "books and reading in prison" project managers have been recruited by regional co-operation agencies in order to sign first regional then local agreements, and to continue encouraging the development of these libraries.

Museums

The French museums main strategic activities are related to the national digitisation programme.

The digitisation of cultural and scientific heritage in France is organised under various programmes. The national digitisation programme of the Ministry of Culture and Communication concerns the State-owned holdings of public departments, whereas major national institutions such as the INA (National Audiovisual Institute), the BNF (National Library of France), the RMN (Association of National Museums) and the IRCAM (the Institute for Acoustic/Musical Research and Coordination) each have their own digitization programmes.

Launched in 1996, the National digitisation programme of the Ministry of Culture and Communication concerns the digitisation of iconographic, sound and audiovisual holdings belonging to the State.

The digitisation programme currently covers 20 regions and 3 Directorates of the central administration of the Ministry of Culture and Communication, bringing together holdings conserved in the departments covered by the general inventory of the artistic and cultural treasures of France, in archaeology departments, at historical monuments, in museums, in the archives of the Départements and in municipal libraries.

Projects are also under way with the network of museums in the French-speaking world (France, Belgium, Switzerland, Quebec/Canada) to create a portal. This project is piloted by the [OCIM](#), the Office for Museographical Co-operation and Information of the University of Dijon.

In collaboration with the [Centre for National Monuments](#), a national programme devoted to 3D resources has begun in 2003 for the digitisation of French monuments.

A campaign for the digitisation of panoramic and 3D museum objects has been launched through collaboration between The French Museum Centre for Research and Restoration and the Society of National Museums. Finally, the future Quai Branly Museum, dedicated to the civilizations of Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas, is committed to digitise its complete collection and its most remarkable relief, as well as to producing digital 3D models of the exhibition halls now under construction.

Archives

The French Archives strategic policy

The law of January 3, 1979 stipulates that archives are preserved "in the public interest, not only for the need and the justification of the rights of natural persons and legal entities, both public and private, but also for the historical documentation of research", goals to which the law of July 22, 1983 added the obligation to enhance the cultural dimension of archives.

The Directorate of the Archives of France is responsible for proposing strategic choices concerning archives to the Ministry of Culture and for implementing them. It has multiple roles: advising, giving incentive, setting up rules, evaluating and controlling related to the collection, sorting, classification, description, preservation and communication - both to researchers as well as to all citizens - of all public archives (with the exception of those of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence).

To guarantee compliance with the law and the application of homogeneous scientific and technical standards, the Archives of France control [the National Archives](#), the regional, departmental and municipal archives agencies, as well as the archive agencies of those organisations, which are authorised, by way of derogation, to manage their permanent archives.

As far as private archives are concerned, the Archives of France ensure the safeguard of collections and documents, which, from a historical viewpoint, are of national interest. They accomplish this task by controlling exports and by implementing specific policies of market acquisition and of classification of historical archives. On a more general level, the Archives of France make certain that records which are entrusted to public archives agencies are processed and made available and that their value is enhanced.

Furthermore, the Archives of France see to it that the archival heritage is properly disseminated and developed throughout all of France. They pilot nearly 700 national, regional, departmental and municipal archives agencies, mainly through seminars, inter-regional meetings and training cycles. On a regional level, DRAC support the actions of the Archives de France.

Libraries

- 97 departmental lending libraries in 2002, serving 48% of inhabitants of rural districts (32,000 cities out of 36,000 have less than 2,000 inhabitants in France). They employ approximately 2,600 people.
- 3067 public libraries in 2003, serving 65% of the French population (17% of subscribers), 39,000 staff of which 34% volunteers. 12 public libraries have a regional vocation.
- 31% of the population frequent municipal libraries
- 2,377 public libraries are computerised, 1,239 of them offer public access to Internet with an average of 4 PC per library.

Museums

Each year French museums welcome some 70 million visitors. To have an idea of their collections, see above "Organisation: Museums".

They are officially:

- 33 national public museums in France, half of which are outside Paris. They are under the state control, except 5 establishments having their juridical and financial autonomy: museums of the Louvre, Versailles, Henner, Gustave-Moreau and Rodin.
- 1,078 museums "listed or controlled" by the Directorate of Museums of France, which guarantees their scientific and cultural standards. They usually belong to local authorities.
- However, alongside these "certificated" museums, many other establishments coexist (overall 3900 museums), managed by various ministries, organisations, town councils, institutions or private individuals.

Archives

5 national archives centres, 26 regional centres, 100 departmental and 500 municipal centres are under the responsibility of the Ministry of culture

Basic figures from the national archives centres:

- The Historical Centre of National Archives, for documents published before 1958 and the archives of the Heads of State, holds 90 km of shelving. In 2002, visitors successfully accessed to 66 221 articles after requests.
- The Centre for Contemporary Archives, mostly for documents published after 1958, holds 193 km of shelving, 14 Tetra octets of digitized documents (1 Tetra octets = 1,000 Giga octets). In 2003, 7,500 articles were consulted.
- The Centre for Archives of Overseas Territories, for documents on former French possessions overseas, holds: 37 km of shelving, 60,000 maps, 80,000 photos and 100,000 books.
- The National Centre for Microfilms, for original microforms of documents preserved in other national or territorial centres, holds more than 3,700 km of microfilms.

To improve the French information society

Abstracts of the official ministerial report about the French digitalisation policy, reported in the [Minerva 2003](#) progress report.

The fourth committee of all ministries on information-based society ([CISI 2003](#)), presided over by the Prime Minister, was held on July 10th, 2003. A series of measures looking to rejuvenate a "Citizen's Digital Republic" was adopted.

These measures come within the framework of the [RE/SO 2007](#) plan, launched by the Prime Minister at the end of 2002, which aims at developing a universal information society.

The CISI has underlined the role of both digital cultural content creation, and digitisation of cultural heritage in promoting the use of the Internet. The cooperation between the E.U. member states and France has been recognised as a strong determining factor in the continued creation of a common European cultural domain.

Culture.fr

An Internet portal named "Culture.fr" was unveiled by the Ministry of Culture and Communication on the 7th of October 2003, as a new means of communicating and promoting the work of French cultural institutions. The objective of the portal is to facilitate access to cultural works, and to promote the many French initiatives. "Culture.fr" features access to resources by themes or regions, and is aimed at the general public. There is [a section devoted to children](#) and the portal is accessible to the disabled through the W3C/Web Accessibility Initiative standard.

Programmes and Initiatives for the Development of Digital Cultural Resources

The national digitisation programme of the Ministry of Culture and Communication is open to all participants presenting cultural projects. Coordinated by the Research and Technology Department (MRT), the national digitisation programme is a complementary programme to programmes such as the DICREAM for artistic multimedia production, [RIAM](#) for innovation in cultural enterprises, as well as digitisation initiatives in public establishments such as, the Louvre, The French National Library, and the National Audiovisual Institute (INA).

A call for bids on new digitisation projects, launched in April 2003, aimed at the digitisation of both governmental and non-governmental resources presenting a major cultural interest, as well as the creation of new services specialising in access to these resources. It encompassed textual documents (including manuscripts and antiquarian works), sound, images, 3D representations, and, for the first time, video collections.

Three major criteria for selection: appeal of the resources for a wide audience; feasibility of provision of intellectual property rights for the resources; the relevance of the skills development plan.

For the purpose of increasing its structural impact on the sector, the bids also aimed at encouraging:

- partnerships between the cultural institutions, but also between the industry and the research sector, throughout the creation of common services, and the continued use of data;
- new financing opportunities for projects, such as complementary financing from provinces and sponsors.

One hundred and thirty-one high quality proposals were received, a request totalling more than 10 millions Euros, while only a quarter of that amount was available in the budget. The extent of this demand illustrates at once the eagerness of cultural establishments to develop digitised resources, and the potential impact of digitisation on the sector.

The analysis of projects enables the release of an ensemble of thematic and dynamic priorities, in the field of 3D digitisation, sound resources, fragile and endangered documents, and old cadastral land surveys, often used by the department of public records.

To facilitate local and on-line access to an archive of sound resources, an experimental project was entrusted to the Musical and Acoustic Research Institute (IRCAM), to place at the disposal of the participants a music resource publication server, based on common tools in free softwares. This server will host sound and music archives and documents held by cultural institutions who have been beneficiaries of the national digitisation program since the year 2000.

Concerning motion picture archives, The [Toubiana Report](#) of January 2003, mentions the possibility of the French Film Archives (National Centre of Cinematography) launching a programme of digitisation of legal resources at the National Library. M. Hubert Astier has been entrusted the task of composing a comprehensive strategy for the preservation of Audiovisual Heritage which defines priorities and criteria, models of valorisation, and legal aspects and management of copyrights.

The National Archives in cooperation with the French Federation of Genealogy (comprised of 500 association and 500,000 members) have launched "[France Généalogie](#)". This is an Internet portal accessing a comprehensive archive of genealogical resources including a number of Library Websites and records services, and the main databases allowing genealogist to access all known relevant resources. This collaboration with associates and colleagues in the sector has allowed a modernization of the services being offered to the public.

Lastly, the Ministry facilitates the creation of leading products on-line in order to illustrate National Celebrations and to distribute the results of research in fields such as archaeology. Two important electronic publications were realized for the celebration of [Baroque Musician Marc-Antoine Charpentier](#) and for the celebration of [the Sale of Louisiana by Napoleon](#). In the field of archaeology, [the Ancient Paris Website](#), featured many 3D representations of antique monuments at the Gallo- Roman site of Lutèce, realized by the MRT, in collaboration with The City of Paris and the National Centre of Monuments and received the Möbius Award in 2003.

Joint Library Catalogues

Over the last few years, France has established several major joint catalogues. These catalogues are currently grouped around the "[Catalogue collectif de France](#)", which enables simultaneous consultation of three large bibliographic databases listing over 15 million entries:

- The catalogue [Bn-OPALE +](#) of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (7 million entries),
- The joint catalogue [SUDoc](#) of university libraries (5.5 million entries): this contains, in particular, the national joint catalogue of serial publications and the catalogue of academic theses,
- The joint catalogue BMR: this groups together the early and regional collections of over 50 municipal libraries (2.5 million entries).

The Catalogue collectif de France is set to evolve considerably in the years to come. The databases that compose it are regularly enhanced with the addition of new university library (SUDoc) or municipal library (BMR) collections, and are progressively opening up to multimedia documents: this is the case for the BN-OPALE + catalogue, which is to integrate the audiovisual collections of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in 2003.

The Ministry of Communication and Culture, in collaboration with various partners, is also reflecting on developing new joint catalogues devoted to specialised documents: manuscripts, sheet music, prints and photographs, maps and plans, etc.

The ongoing computerisation of the old Catalogue général des manuscrits des bibliothèques publiques de France (General catalogue of manuscripts of French public libraries) compliant with new XML formats should enable creation in the medium term of a joint French catalogue of manuscripts that allows for regular enhancements and updates.

The long-term aim is for these specialised joint catalogues to integrate the Catalogue collectif de France.

There are also more specific projects developed on an ad hoc basis: in 2002 the [Enluminures](#) database was opened, which enables consultation of scanned reproductions of illuminations and decorative elements of medieval manuscripts kept in France's municipal libraries. Enluminures currently includes over 14,000 images that can be viewed as thumbnails or full-screen. It is regularly enhanced with images and entries describing the collections of around a hundred libraries.

Key Standards and Guidelines

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Innovation and emerging standards

The diffusion of standards and tools across the range of cultural participants producing digital content has been indispensable in maintaining quality. Many seminars have been organized to facilitate the debate over technical questions at the heart of the professional community, particularly the seminar on library Websites and the digitisation of shared collections, held in Marseille in July 2003, organised within the framework of the "[Pôles Associés](#)" (Associated Centres) of the French National Library, and the one on multilingual access to cultural resources in October 2003 organized by the MRT (the Research and Technology Department) for the Minerva project, opening the archives and museums for library professionals.

An official presentation was organized the 7th of October, 2003, at the National Archives Historical Centre featuring [Pleade Applications](#) (generic applications for consultation and research for XML/EAD (XML: eXtensible Markup Language ; EAD: Encoded Archival Description) search engines), and [Navimages](#) (generic applications for the management, consultation and research of batch digital images) using the [XML freeware Platform SDX 2.1](#). Two hundred and fifty people were assembled from both private and cultural sectors, but also some from abroad who could evaluate the available data-processing tools for any service or interested institution.

Because of the importance of developing an exchange of data between geographic information systems (SIG) and cultural information systems, the Ministry initiated collaboration with the [OpenGIS](#) consortium in order to facilitate interoperability between tools and standards. The goal is to expedite the completion of a cultural atlas for every region of France.

One of the first test use of the Metadata Protocol of the Open Archives Initiative ([OAI-PMH](#)) has been set up under the aegis of Regional Council of Aquitaine (local community), with the National French Library support, The Ministry of Culture (Regional Directorate of Cultural Affairs, the MRT, and Directorate of Culture and Architecture) and in collaboration with many institutions of that region to create a Portal: "Aquitaine Patrimoine" (Cultural Heritage of Aquitaine). This Portal, which is destined for the general public, will give access to cultural resources of every type of archive, libraries, museum, monuments, natural heritage, etc.

Joint activities between Libraries, Museums and Archives

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France commits herself to defending the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity and the production of local content, to furthering respect for the freedom of expression and pluralism of the media, to supporting universal access to heritage resources, and, in particular, for the development of policies concerning digitisation and to supporting institutions in charge of cultural heritage and knowledge.

Cross-Management of all patrimonial sectors

Multidisciplinary projects involving heritage held by archives, libraries and museums are conducted by the MRT (the Research and Technology Department) in co-operation with SMEs, the research sector and tourism (e.g. the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme (Foundation for Social Sciences) is leading the Euro-Mediterranean STRABON project supported by the Ministries of Culture, Tourism and Foreign Affairs) and charities and cultural associations (e.g. Relais Culture Europe in Minerva).

The multimedia and digital documentary committee of the ministry of culture endeavours to support the technology distribution and to develop competence for all the cultural participants: libraries, museums, archives, record bureaux, archaeology inventories, centres for the Arts, etc. The call for bids for projects of digitisation resources in 2003 championed the projects presented jointly by establishments belonging to various patrimonial sectors, and encouraged the collaboration of means.

Within the framework of a decentralization of State offices, this committee will have to guarantee coherence among those digital heritage initiatives accepted and supported across different regions and cultural domains.

Development of European and International Cooperation

The ramifications of French cultural organization in several international technological forums, in particular the [Cultural Content Forum](#) and the [Digicult](#) Forum, enable the exchange of significant information on innovations and help defining the priorities and the choices for the Ministry's policy of digitisation.

Thus, the international Resonances 2003 conferences, devoted to music technologies and organized by the IRCAM, allowed to present the innovations in digital musical creation and treated digitisation of sound and tools for automatic classification and management of music resources. The initiative of the ministry to install a portal devoted to the diffusion of sound files and archives was the topic of a particular seminar. Developments in audio-visual heritage resources, are being achieved through international networks, in particular that of PRESTO, with INA, RAI, and the BBC.

These international programmes create networks of shared information. Within the domain of research and restoration of museum objects, a national network was built to share data of various French laboratories, on the history of works and their scientific representations. Thanks to the European networks build over the last several years, notably with C2RMF (French Museum Centre for Research and Restoration), this network will grow throughout the years to come. It would be based in particular on research and development in the European CRISATEL, ARTIST and SCULPTEUR projects, which will allow the C2RMF by the beginning of 2004, to actuate the use of a totally new multi-spectral camera for the analysis of paintings, sculptures and objects of various sizes.

Bilateral co-operation facilitates the installation of access services common to their networks. The Italian European Union Presidency was an occasion to reinforce relations between France and Italy.

The French General Inventory and its Italian counterpart (ICCD), thus committed themselves to continued co-operation toward the realization of a trilingual thesaurus of art objects and monuments. To ensure interoperability between the different systems, software standards are maintained, and this permits the use of cultural resources with new and upcoming software applications. The Euro- Mediterranean project, **Strabon** and the [EMII-DCF project](#), are moving in this direction and bring new solutions for the re-use of the cultural contents for the promotion of cultural tourism and technological innovations.

Research

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The research network

The multimedia and digital documentary committee of the ministry of culture is based upon a network of research laboratories and encourages those doing research to use cultural heritage databases.

A special issue of the magazine "Document Numérique" (Digital Document Hermès Publishing) has been dedicated to cultural heritage files, in collaboration with many research laboratories and the MRT (the Research and Technology Department) of The Ministry of Culture and Communication. It gathers articles on the state-of-the-art, and research in progress (2D and 3D) and will be published at the end of the year 2003.

To facilitate the treatment of archives, often indexed by batches of millions of documents, collaboration with research laboratories enables implementing and perfecting new automatic solutions for indexing and digitising documents.

The [IMADOC](#) project lead by IRISA (Rennes) has already produced some important results for massive treatment of archives (automatic annotation, hand written characters recognition) thanks to the analysis of the structure of documents and collaborative indexing.

In order to better the process of production of digital resources in regards to audience, users of large image databases and digital libraries should be regularly re-evaluated.

An important study known as BibUsages, have been conducted on audience and evaluate use of the [Gallica Digital Library](#), by the French National Library in collaboration with France Telecom R&D department. The study shows that Internet users after having consulted the free resources on The Gallica server, augment their research with works sold on commercial Websites. This indicates links which can exist between cultural industries and digital public spaces. The role of the digital library showed equally strong in the promotion of Internet use across several types of audience.