Preface: Archives, Libraries, and Museums in the Era of the Participatory Social Web

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The term Web 2.0 refers to a set of tools that enhance and support user-generated content. Web 2.0 has made possible—and intensified global collaborative mechanisms for the production of content. For two decades, it has been gradually transforming the traditional World Wide Web, through a dissemination model mainly structured by service and content providers.

In some areas, the participatory and collaborative nature of Web 2.0 are blurring old boundaries and hierarchies between professionals and amateurs. Professions related to the creation and dissemination of content and knowledge seem to be particularly affected (publishers, artists, graphic designers, journalists, authors, singers, actors, and so on). A massive adoption of participatory web technologies by the general public has led to a reconfiguration and repositioning of professionals and of the stakeholders in many sectors.

This special issue (volume 39, number 3/4) investigates the changes underway in cultural heritage institutions such as libraries, archives, museums that are confronted with the widespread use of Web 2.0 platforms and practices. The specific questions addressed by the accepted articles include the following:

- How do Web 2.0 applications transform the relationship that libraries, museums, and archives have with their public and vice versa?
- What socio-professional changes or epistemological repositioning underway among stakeholders of libraries, archives, museums, and media are caused by these new digital devices?
- How do patrons of libraries, archives, and museums view the Web 2.0 applications developed by these institutions to enhance their online presence?
- Are the concepts of participatory libraries or museums becoming a reality? Are we moving away from past non-participatory practices to new practices that are now participatory?
- How will physical institutions (museums, libraries, and archives) coexist in the long term alongside their virtual sites?

- Is the institutional and historical distinction between archives, libraries, and museums still valid? Is it being challenged by digital phenomena and are the boundaries between them becoming porous due to new needs generated by the public social web (for example, "museo-libraries")?

The eight articles accepted for publication cover a wide spectrum of institution types and collections (museum objects, archival documents, libraries, and herbaria collections). Altogether, they analyze the changes wrought by Web 2.0 practices and platforms from a wide range of perspectives: epistemological, historical, sociological, technological, and political.

The first article is by Isola Ajiferuke, Jamie Goodfellow, and Adeola Opesade, who carried out an empirical assessment of the effectiveness of user-generated content (UGC) for retrieving documents in library online public access catalogues (OPACs). The authors compared the performance of user-attributed tags on the BiblioCommons platform to that of controlled vocabulary (keywords and subject terms) to retrieve documents from the OPACs of three different libraries in North America and New Zealand. Their results showed that a large number of items in public libraries were not tagged. Those items that were tagged exhibited a high level of lexical variation (acronyms, abbreviations, slangs, one-letter words, spelling variants, and language variants). The authors also found that user tags exhibited a higher level of inconsistency, while some tags were promotional in nature, thereby casting doubts about their real authors (users or librarians). Their findings point to the fact that UGC is too idiosyncratic to be of real use in indexing and retrieving public collections of knowledge and cultural artefacts in any professional capacity. Aggregation of the user tags across more than fifty libraries using the BiblioCommons platform did not seem to produce the saturating effect found in Wikipedia, where aggregated opinions (the wisdom of the crowd principle) have helped to resolve conflicting narratives about the object under study.

The article by Lorri Mon and Jisue Lee also takes an empirical and quantitative approach to assessing the social media presence of cultural heritage institutions. Using statistical data analysis techniques, the authors analyzed the activities of 400 public libraries on Twitter in the United States to examine how libraries engage with users on social media. The metrics produced several calculated Twitter-related indicators: library profile (how the library presented itself on its Twitter account); audience (number of followers); reciprocity (number of users followed back by the library); number of tweets; joining date; authority; and influence (presence on lists created by other Twitter users).

In the third study, Bérengère Stassin offers an insight into French librarians' perceptions of the importance of Library 2.0 for their profession. Through a survey of thirty-seven non-institutional blogs maintained by academic and public librarians in France, she analyzed major topics found in these blogs. Her results showed that, although Library 2.0 was a recurrent topic, it was far from being the most important one in terms of number of dedicated posts. Other issues such as the library itself and copyright were more predominant. She also found

that librarians employed different discursive genres to write about Library 2.0: opinion posts on what role social media should have for libraries as institutions; accounts of initiatives or experimentations; and book reviews and descriptions of tools, which were among the discourse genres found. Globally, she found that librarians were pessimistic about the inertia gripping French libraries, which makes them very slow to adapt professional training and culture to the rapidly changing digital environment and social practices of their patrons.

The fourth article by Manuel Zacklad and Lisa Chupin sheds interesting and pertinent light on the participatory practices induced by digital platforms of herbaria (collections of dried plants). To characterize the forms of cooperation between institutional curators and amateurs, the authors observed the modalities of the participation deployed on these platforms and evaluated the possible epistemological and socio-professional repositioning of the professional curators. They observed that even for herbaria sites that strongly encourage user participation, it is overseen by curators and biodiversity specialists. The most active contributors do not have the rights to arbitrate divergent opinions and solve litigious cases based on their experience. This prerogative still lies in the hands of the institution that owns the herbarium collection and digital platform. This form of supervised participation is largely predominant and does not engender the emancipation and liberating properties attributed to Web 2.0 platforms nor does it satisfy the epistemic drive of the contributors. The objectives of the professional curators and the collection owners seem to be to avoid interpersonal cooperation among contributors by resorting to a regulated coordination. The authors conclude that the digitization of natural history collections has not been accompanied by leveraging the digital to facilitate the emergence of new and heterogeneous actors that can renew the old forms of authoritative mediation. The result could be disillusionment and the loss of some of the most active contributors of these participatory platforms since the emancipating and liberating promises of online participation are not met.

The fifth article by Florence Andreacola, Eric SanJuan, and Marie-Sylvie Poli sheds further light on how museums are grappling with the injunction to "participate," which lies at the heart of the Web 2.0 paradigm. Based on a case study of a French museum, the authors developed both quantitative and qualitative techniques (surveys and semi-structured interviews) to analyze the perception that virtual and physical visitors had of museums and their activities and how museum visitors used digital technologies to share their museum experiences with others. Their results showed that visitors used digital technologies mostly to prepare their visit but that, during the visit, they respected the solemnity of the physical museum. They also preferred to share impressions of their visit orally in face-to-face communications rather than by using digital media. Their study concluded that museums may be at a turning point where they cannot afford to not have an online presence since this has become the mediation space for prolonging museum experiences. However, the online presence and use of digital media by museums needs to be negotiated carefully if they are to continue to fulfil all of their missions.

The sixth article by Cheryl Klimazewski addresses another question raised by the special issue concerning the solidity of the historical boundaries between archives, libraries, and museums faced with the technological advancements of the last decades. Backed by an international literature review, the author was able to demonstrate that historically there was more convergence and collaboration between libraries, archives, and museums (LAMs). However, changes in institutional culture and societal needs for increased literacy, rather than technological advancement, have led to a "split," with each institution drifting apart and becoming a "type." Currently, LAMs are being "lumped" together in the literature due more to the policies and strategic vision of an "integrated cultural web" rather than to a real convergence of professional practices. Nevertheless, increased digitization of knowledge and cultural heritage artefacts has been a strong advocate for an integrated curriculum for training LAM professionals, which should lead to more collaboration and convergence. The level to which practices across domains can or should converge is still a matter of current debate. Finally, the author warns that technological advancement is not neutral and that digitization can lead to a loss of memory of the original objects that have been transformed into bytes, subsequently leading to a depreciation of the social function and value of LAM institutions, given that more and more of their "objects" are available on the Internet and can be viewed from anywhere.

The seventh article by Amy Williams brings some practical answers to the issue of lumping or splitting LAMs that was raised by Cheryl Klimazewski. Williams explored how archival practices are evolving in the Web 2.0 era with the emergence of the concept of "Archives 2.0" and how the culture of collaboration and participation have spread to other cultural heritage institutions such as libraries and museums and, hence, to three institutions types that were hitherto held to be separate.

She examines the processes and modalities through which various bodies—be they professional heritage institutions such as archives or museums or simply associations and foundations—preserve cultural heritage artefacts. As in Klimazewski's article, Williams observes that the digital phenomenon is an enabler of collaboration and participation. It boosts collaboration between information professionals (archivists and librarians) and between professionals and the general public as well as helping to create communities around the preservation and sharing of specific historical collections. Digitization has also brought about the blurring of many frontiers in the archival field. For instance, when describing a historical object, the creator of the archival description is at the same time the "provenance" (source) and "custodian" of the digital collection, which rarely happened when archives were mainly in physical form. Current institutional policies in the United States augur for an increase in collaboration and convergence between archivists and other cultural heritage institutions.

Finally, Chern Li Liew, Shannon Wellington, Gillian Oliver, and Reid Perkins's article addresses how Web 2.0 platforms and practices affect the relationship between libraries, museums, and archives and their patrons. The authors address one specific question raised by the special issue concerning to what extent

the concepts of participatory libraries or museums are becoming a reality and whether we are moving away from non-participatory past practices toward new practices that are more participatory.

Their study goes a long way in debunking the myth of the power of social media and Web 2.0 practices in transforming social and professional practices in cultural heritage institutions. Liew and her colleagues began their study by completing a much needed literature review of the origins of the "2.0" ideology within cultural heritage and preservation institutions. They showed how a user-centric approach to archives, promoted in the 1980s, predated the actual Web 2.0 technologies that can enable it and, hence, predated the emergence of the concept of Archives 2.0. They also recall that the postmodernist criticisms of traditional archival practices, which are steeped in a positivist-objectivist stance serving only the interests of dominant groups who claim to portray the "truth," is a more powerful argument for advocating a more pluralistic approach to cultural heritage preservation, which incorporates the viewpoints of diverse stakeholders, including the public. How this is to be achieved practically, whether with Web 2.0 platforms or not, remains an open question.

Likewise, their literature review of the concept of Library 2.0 confronts different viewpoints about how libraries should embrace the Web 2.0 phenomena and underscored the fact that, although a lot has been written about the need for libraries to move to a more participatory approach, implementing this and crowning it with success is far from straightforward. Moreover, the use of Web 2.0 platforms such as blogs and wikis has not led to a real epistemological or sociological shift in the realm of library work and the way librarians relate with their patrons.

Backed by empirical evidence in the form of a survey of cultural heritage institutions' use of social media, Liew and her colleagues analyzed hundreds of responses from a varied group of institutions (libraries and archives) across the world. They were thus able to analyze the reasons why professionals adopted social media and the difficulties they encountered in trying to use them. One of the reasons given by librarians for not developing social media policy is very revealing: the non-hierarchical nature of social media "does not sit well within the very hierarchical structure" of these institutions imbued with a "command and control" philosophy. Transitioning to a social media platform will then entail an epistemological repositioning of the senior management "hierarchy," which will have to let go of some of its commands. This could have both positive and negative consequences for the institution. On the positive side, social media can be used in libraries and archives to "engage new communities of users, provide powerful tools for advocacy and outreach and democratize institutional management of cultural memory." On the negative side, "the affordances of social media may impact negatively on institutional branding, alienate users and compromise information dissemination." Currently, the main motivations for libraries and archives to be present on social media seem to be more of an expectation: to appear technologically savvy, to be aligned with the technological

practices of their patrons, and to be present "where the users are." The real participatory practice that will be transformational will be when libraries and archives accept to integrate UGC into their collections. Their findings indicate that cultural heritage institutions (libraries, archives, and museums) are still stuck in the classical "one way broadcast model of the early World Wide Web" and that "although there has been enthusiastic uptake of social media tools, there is little evidence of the current use being *transformative.*"

The eight articles published in this special issue arrive at converging conclusions—that the oft-proclaimed liberating and empowering capacity of Web 2.0 for the general public has not yet taken professional practices in the cultural heritage institutions by storm, whereas it has caused a blurring of frontiers between amateurs and professionals in e-commerce, politics or journalism where UGC, user feedback, and the entry of new players have upset old hierarchies, strongholds, and professional practices. Web 2.0 is yet to challenge the authoritative role of librarians, archivists, and museum curators as the main custodians and authors of the narrative on world cultural heritage. Although some cultural heritage institutions have experimented successfully with some form of participation and collaboration with the public (see, for instance, the Library of Congress on Flickr [http://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2008/01/my-friend-flickr-a-match-made-in-photo-heaven/] and the Normandy archives crowd-sourcing experiences on Flickr [https://www.flickr.com/photos/photosnormandie/]), it is still the professionals that have the final word on which UGC is integrated into the official narrative of knowledge and cultural heritage artefacts. Hence, the authoritative role of controlled vocabularies and of librarians, archivists, and museum curators appears to resist the participatory ideology of Web 2.0.