Digitisation Strategy of the German National Library 2017–2020

Strategic orientation

The digitisation strategy of the German National Library is part of its overall strategy. This has multiple objectives:

Firstly, digitisation serves to protect and preserve Germany's cultural memory in the form of the collected text, image and sound documents held in the German National Library. This is necessary if works are structurally damaged or vulnerable due to their material-specific characteristics. Digitisation and the provision of digital reproductions allow the originals to be protected against further damage and their content to be preserved.

A further objective of digitisation is to radically improve the visibility, access to and usage possibilities of the Library's own resources for academic, research, education and culture purposes as well as for the general public in Germany and abroad. Within the framework of copyright legislation the Library strives to provide free access to the digitised objects, to embed these in relevant academic, social and cultural contexts, and to attract new user groups.

The digitisation of analogue media is one of the routine tasks of the German National Library. A key aspect here is the digitisation of tables of contents for catalogue enrichment. This will continue in the future because the increasing use of the digitised tables of contents shows how important this service is for users of the Library worldwide.

Although more comprehensive digitisation (within the legal framework) of the out-of-commerce works published up to 1965 would be highly desirable for academic purposes, realistically the German National Library will have to carry out its digitisation on a selective basis in order to stay within its staffing and financial limits.

The main focus of the digitisation – for text, image, or sound-based documents - is on the following groups of 20th century works which:

| are particularly worthy of protection because of the risk to the continued existence of the original,
| can be made publicly accessible because they are public domain or out-of-commerce,
| are most urgently needed in digital form by academia, research, culture and education[1]
| complement its own digital holdings[2]
| complement the digital offerings of other cultural institutions in Germany and which permit the networking of content across different institutions[3]

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[1] Cooperation with individuals and institutions from academia is required for this.

[2] i.e. existing digital collection priorities are extended to include similar or related topics. This also includes filling any gaps in the holdings through cooperative digitisation projects with partners.

[3] Partnerships with libraries, museums and archives are targeted.

Coordination with other institutions

The German National Library's digitisation activities are always conducted in coordination with other cultural and academic institutions or as a supplement to their projects. Existing structures such as the Sammlung Deutscher Drucke and the Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek or national services such as the procedure for licensing out-of-commerce works or for persistent addressing and long-term preservation of digital objects support this. The primary objective is to coordinate the content-related, scheduling and organisational priorities in the digitisation of the written cultural heritage of the 20th century in an effort to avoid unnecessary duplication and to save costs. Further goals are to intensify cooperation between the partners, to exploit synergies, to refine existing control instruments, and to generate services for all partners.[4]

Standards: Digitisation, cataloguing and provision

The German National Library bases its digitisation of analogue objects, its cataloguing of the digital reproductions and its provision of the results on generally accepted national and international standards. In the context of digitisation it adheres to the practical "Digitisation" guidelines of the German Research Foundation (DFG). A high degree of automation is aimed at in all steps and processes.

It is necessary to assign persistent addresses to the bibliographic metadata and the digitised works to ensure that they remain permanently identifiable and citable.

A further standard aspect of the digitisation process is full-text recognition. The resulting text data, like the descriptive metadata, are rendered retrievable and, where legally possible, released for use by other information providers who can then integrate these data into their search services.

Copyright-free objects can be published under CC0 terms and may in some cases also be re-used commercially, whereas other works that are made publicly available by the German National Library are offered on the basis of their licensing conditions.

The German National Library indexes the works it digitises in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie. It also ensures that the data can also be retrieved via the main reference systems and services, such as the German Union Catalogue of Serials, the Central Index of Digitised Prints or WorldCat. Naturally, these also include major multi-discipline library portals such as the Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek and Europeana.

Rights management

The German National Library attaches a great deal of importance to copyright protection, meaning that the provision of digitised works on a copyright-compliant basis is an enduring obligation. Accordingly, the digitised objects are made available for use in the reading rooms of the library or globally via the Internet depending on their copyright status. The clearance of rights which is imperative for use outside the reading rooms is undertaken using various checking methods and procedures.

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[4] Within the cooperation framework the German National Library also offers direct support to its partners in digitising the national cultural heritage by making individual works from its collections available for digitising by third parties where this is possible given the legal, conservational and organisational restrictions.

Long-term preservation

All digitised works are stored in line with the latest technical standards in the preservation repository of the German National Library which constitutes part of a stable technical infrastructure for academia and research, culture and education. This ensures their accessibility and authenticity for future generations and provides for diverse usage scenarios.

Organisation of digitisation

The German National Library has no digitisation centre of its own, and has no intention of establishing one. Instead, it relies on external service providers to carry out digitisation. These providers are selected in public tendering procedures.

The planning, development and operation of digitising routines as well as the implementation of digitisation projects are coordinated as a shared-service task in a separate organisational unit which brings together the most important design, planning, development and operation skills for digitising routines and also the management of digitisation projects. The work of the digitisation process itself, however, is organised by the Library. This is spread across several departments due to the diversity of the tasks involved, and ranges from selecting the works, cataloguing, digitising and organising rights clearance and licensing for them through to the provision and long-term preservation of digital objects.

Financing

There is correspondingly great demand for funding if the major national challenge of digitising text, image and sound documents is to be properly met and if the German libraries are to make a concerted contribution to achieving comprehensive, systematic and lastingly effective digitisation of the national cultural heritage of the 20th century. This will need to be covered by increased external funding (e.g. DFG, BMBF, BKM, EU) and the expansion of public-private partnerships. In addition, the German National Library strives to fund digitisation activities from its own budget, despite this only sufficing to cover a small proportion of the demand for digitisation for preservation or catalogue enrichment purposes. A long-term increase in specially allocated federal funding is desirable for further digitisation services.

Further development of the digitisation strategy

The digitisation strategy, the associated individual measures and their organisational implementation are regularly reviewed, revised and refined as required.

Planning 2017-2020

The planned digitisation projects in the coming years, as well as the key projects for the further development and optimisation of business processes in this area are included in the Strategic Priorities of the German National Library for 2017 to 2020. These can be found here (Section 3.2).