



World Digital Library: A Technical Assessment by Stanford Libraries

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WDL Current State

At the request of the Center for Research Libraries (CRL), Stanford Libraries conducted a review of the World Digital Library (WDL) at the end of 2018. The goals of this review were to 1.) Assess the functionality and features of the software applications and system currently used by WDL, and 2.) Identify and evaluate potential options for new architecture for the WDL.

Based on a review of the public site, “back office” operational documentation, and an intensive interview with WDL staff at Library of Congress (LC) in December 2018, we observed the following strengths, and opportunities to consider new approaches.

Strengths of the Current Site

- Very high quality presentation of digital objects
- Relatively small collection, but with high traffic
- Includes digital library materials from areas with low- or no-digital library capacity
- High quality, rigorous translation workflows
- High quality, extensive metadata with authority control
- Rich functionality for search and delivery (e.g., ReadSpeaker real time text-to-speech)
- Performant, global delivery of content using a CDN (content delivery network)
- Extensive metrics and instrumentation of site
- Due to its origin, resourcing and administrative structure, the Library of Congress was able to apply significant local support with a correspondingly strong decision making structure.

Changes to Consider

- Centrally-driven: Library of Congress applied the overwhelming balance of administrative, technical and curatorial effort, without affordances for deep contributions from other institutions
- No externally-facing deposit or curation tools; all ingest work done by LC

- Variable quality, completeness and organization of submitted content: LC workflow accommodated incomplete digital objects; this limited the overall volume of materials and also entailed significant work centrally to accession content.
- Intellectual property (IP) constraints due to LC's role and organizational culture ("hyper-cautious") led to substantial limits on allowable content
- The multilingual translations are rigorous and valuable, but also expensive, labor-intensive and time consuming to produce; this will likely need to be approached in a different way in the future.
- LC staff observed that WDL could have had much better and more content if it had submissions sourced from a handful of institutions with high quality materials and workflows
- LC staff envisioned dual pathways for adding WDL content moving forward:
 - A "fast track", based on interoperable access using the [International Image Interoperability Framework](#) provided by the contributing institution and leveraging metadata aggregation
 - A "slow track", with content hosted by a digital repository provided as part of the WDL infrastructure
- WDL can move from publish-when-done, to publish-early-and-enrich-over-time (let content go live with partial description, e.g., or only one or a few translations)
- There are opportunities for crowdsourcing and/or club-sourcing content:
 - narratives
 - descriptive metadata
 - authority control
 - translations (get benefits of participatory content contribution)
- WDL may benefit from a more deliberative / concentrated content development strategy (i.e., concentrating on content in certain themes, not only whatever an individual institution may volunteer)

Options for Moving Forward

Based on the successes of the World Digital Library in its current form, the impending end of LC's internal support for the systems, and our understanding of WDL's value and strategy moving forward, we assume that WDL's future incarnation will:

- Provide world-class access, and continue to serve as an international showcase for digital libraries
- Have a strong and diverse contributory model, with content drawn from across the globe
- Have a strong and diverse participatory model, including a more distributed effort for the co-creation and co-curation of metadata, translations, and narrative or interpretive content
- Employ a streamlined workflow for accessioning, describing and enriching content
- Leverage current digital library technologies, standards and methods
- Continue to provide digital repository services for institutions and content that require them.