SALALM

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Archives Nationales d’Haiti (National Archives of Haiti) and the DLOC Project: a new step toward regional cooperation and integration

1. The DLOC project seen from Haiti’s perspective

The Caribbean’s colonial past has weighed and still weighs heavily on the region’s future.

Numerous efforts deployed to overcome the linguistic, ethnic and geopolitical barriers have remained ineffective, resulting in never ending and often hollow speeches, tainted with hypocrisy, which are nothing but the product of contradictions that are very specific to this region.

Nothing however seems to be able to stop this permanent quest for regional solidarity initiated by the first socio-political movements of the 18th and 19th Centuries. The culminant points of these two historically extraordinary events are and remain the American and Haitian Revolutions which have strongly shaken the colonial yoke of the Caribbean. The Caribbean however was soon to become the theater of struggle for influence between the former colonial powers and the emerging new empires.

Geographical areas of political, economic and cultural influence profiled themselves and translated into linguistic mosaics in which English became predominant. Our educational systems were oriented more towards understanding metropolitan cultures than understanding our immediate environment.

The sector of documentation and information witnesses this domination. Currently, almost all regional centers and regional data bases of the Caribbean are located in English speaking countries and their content is for the most part in English. A few of these regional data bases are : the Caribbean Documentation Center UN/ECLAC and the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre Library CAREC, which are located in Trinidad; the Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute (CFNI) Library which is located in Jamaica, the PAHO/WHO Documentation Center and CARICOM Information Services Unit Documentation Center that are located in Guyana; the Caribbean Meteorological
Institute Library and the Caribbean Development Bank Library, that is located in Barbados.

Access to these data collections and bases remains very limited for Spanish speaking and French speaking individuals, in spite of the vast opportunities offered by the new information and communication technologies.

The DLOC formula appears to us to be a new and better way for us to collaborate and to share our documentary resources at multiple levels, and on a voluntary and unrestricted basis, by promoting collections that can make our respective countries better known to ourselves and to the World.

The DLOC project will enable us to gain access to this important material in our own languages. More importantly, we are going to acquire the appropriate technical training, as well as essential equipment, not only to contribute to the DLOC, but also to pursue our efforts to digitize other priceless collections that are threatened by destruction.

2. **Brief overview of the National Archives of Haiti**

The “Archives Nationales d'Haiti”, were created by a Presidential Decree on August 20, 1860, by the Government of Fabre Nicolas Geffrard. This Decree established the “General Archives of Finances” which were the Republic of Haiti’s first formal and official Archives. We are currently preparing the celebration of the Institution's Third Jubilee.

Although the Government has at a very early time legislated on the issue of Archives, after Geffrard (1859 – 1867), the Institution was never granted the attention it deserved. From 1868 to 1921, our Archives were completely abandoned, even on the occasion of the Celebration of the first Centennial of our Independence in 1904.

Aside from the moving of the archives repository, in 1922, to the current premises which were at first designed to shelter a public market, it wasn’t until 1941 that a Decree Law issued on October 20, 1941, changed the “Service in charge of the State's Archives” into the “National Archives”.

Several Decrees transferred the tutelage under which this Institution operated, although it acts as the guardian of national memory. As such, between 1941 and 1975, the National Archives were successively transferred from the tutelage of the Ministry of Finances (1941), to that of National Education, than to that of Justice in 1974. We also note the Decree of January 29, 1959, which granted to the graduates of the School of Ethnology majoring in Anthropology with the title of Archivists, Librarians, in addition to that of Museologists. The first organic law governing the National Archives was
published on September 2, 1976, and comprises 56 articles. Two major reasons have caused however that his law has for the most part remained a dead letter: reasons:

a) It is encumbered with a whole series of details that should have instead been consigned in its internal regulations.

b) No follow-up measures were taken-up after this law was published.

Between 1976 and 1983, the Institution lived through its last dark years and was reduced to its merest expression under the Ministry of Justice: pressures on the Vital Statistics data bases repository, removal of the Historical Archives repository and their return to the Central Office, general disarray, successive changes in Management without positive outcome until the formation of a Management Council in 1981, and the designation of a new Director General.

This transition ended on July 11, 1983, with the installation of the current team.

The possibility for a new start appeared therefore on the sky-line with the Decree of 1984, which named the National Archives of Haiti a detached unit of INHACA, which itself regrouped all the country's cultural institutions.

One last Decree was issued in March 1986, for the first time granting the National Archives of Haiti the status of autonomous organization as well as an administrative capacity. It was therefore a new start. In addition to being allocated funds granted from the Public Treasury, the National Archives are now able to establish and use its own income. The current team is now able to carry-out a whole series of projects with the technical and financial assistance of UNDP, UNESCO, the OAS, ACDI, the French Cooperation Mission, and AIMF. Here are a few of the projects among those undertaken:

- Rehabilitation of the Central Building (incomplete)
- Rehabilitation of the Annex housing the Vital Statistics Department
- Implementation of the Restoration and the Micrography labs
- Training of approximately fifty (50) technicians (Archivists, Librarians, bookbinders, Restorers, Micrography technicians, Computer technicians)
- Implementation of the “ARCHIVEX” data base, which is currently Haiti’s only reliable data base for Vital Statistics.
- Microfilming of the Registers of Vital Statistics of the XIXth Century with the technical and financial assistance of the Genealogical Society of UTAH

Two data base projects are currently underway:

1) Extension of the “ARCHIVEX” data base, and the automation of all the customer service activities.
2) Implementation of the digitalization lab within the framework of the DLOC project.

The National Archives currently have an annual provisional budget of 47,589,547.00 Gourdes ((SU$1.189.547.00) allocated as follows

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<th>Gdes</th>
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<td>Gdes</td>
<td>36.000.000.00 Own income (Research, production of abstracts and other services)</td>
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We are currently in the process of planning the “Third Jubilee Program” which includes

a) Completing the Central Building
b) Opening up Annexes and making our Services available in the provincial cities
c) The development of the Archives Center (cite des Archives) over 5 hectares, a complex that will be able to shelter our country’s Intermediary and Historical Archives for more than One hundred (100) years.

3. Nature of Archives Collection

The first archives repository of the Republic of Haiti dates back to the French colonization period. Political turbulences have occasioned thefts, looting and destruction by fire.

Certain specimens have however reach us in pie of all, as attested by the Registers of Vital Statistics dating back to the 18th Century.

The countries very first public archives repository was located in Marchand Dessalines, and were dispersed after Emperor Dessaline’s death. The Archives of Christophe’s Kingdom suffered the same fate. Several items are in certain private collections in Haiti and abroad; the Original Deed of Haiti’s Declaration of Independence has however yet to be found.

Several very important documents have reached us. Our repository currently comprises 8415,10 linear meters, categorized as follows:

Registers dating back to the Colonial period, as well the archives repository of Moreau de St. Mery (114 rolls of microfilm);

Public documents:
3.2.1 from 1804 to 1914 (Letters, reports, laws, decrees)
3.2.2 from 1915 to 1934 (Period of American Occupation)
3.2.3 1935 to 1950 (Letters, Finances, Customs, Registers of accounts and letters, maps and sketches
Collections of photographs (positives and negatives, including photograph and records of the first Haitian migrants to Cuba.
Printed Archives (Official Gazette Le Moniteur as well as collections of old newspapers
Registers of vital statistics from 1793 through 2005, in a unique of repository
Registers that is shared by Haitian and the Dominican Republic (1826 – 1844)
Collections of books on the History of Haiti. 2,600 volumes

After 1986, we were given what remained of the Archives of the Armed Forces of Haiti, and of those of the former Ministry of Information.

Two important facts are worth mentioning:

1. All the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are kept by that Ministry
2. There are currently more than fifty (50) years of archives dating back from 1950 to our days, which are warehoused in various Ministries and other public organizations. Due to lack of sufficient and appropriate space, the National Archives cannot receive these documents on a regular basis with the exception of Registers of Vital Statistics.

Haiti’s archives repository has, scattered here and there, information concerning other countries of the region, more specially the United States, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, the Bahamas, Martinique, Guadeloupe, to name only these few.

As more than three fourths (3/4) of our archives repositories have not been processed, many surprises still await us, as we have not inventoried these resources since 1860.

4. **Description of the first contribution to DLOC : 5000 photographs**

An astonishing discovery was made in 1998 by our archivists. They accidentally came upon over 5000 negatives of photographs which we were able to collect in spite of their bad state of conservation.

These are albums of well protected, identified, cataloged and inventoried negatives of photographs taking during the period 1918 to 1950 of:

- Public buildings taken prior to their restoration
- Heads of State visiting Haiti
- Roads and bridges at the time they were being built or restored
- Haitian Heads of State
- Haitian statesmen and writers
• Various demonstrations
• Historical sites.

5. **Perspectives for future contributions**

The training that will be provided to the National Archives’ technicians and the equipment that will be put in place will be used to digitize other archives repositories which may be eventually introduced into the DLOC. We are considering including in the DLOC any archival documents that are of interest for Haiti.

Furthermore, there are other documentary institutions in Haiti that have most interesting collections. As such, from the very beginning, we have invited the following institutions to participate in our training and retraining programs.

• The Library of the Fathers of the Holy Spirit where a digitization program is underway, and which holds rare and priceless collections dating back to the 16th Century, that are of interest for the entire Caribbean region.

• The Haitian National Library which has just launched a digitization project of the Des-Courtilz Library.

• Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF) which has expertise in digitization, and which is currently assisting Bibliothèque Nationale.

• The Library of Frères de l'Instruction Chrétienne which has rich collection on Haiti and on the Caribbean at large.

All these institutions have expressed their wish to become full partners of the DLOC program.