

The OIE is Digitising its Archives and Placing Them Online

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Introduction

-Origins

The need to fight animal diseases at the global level led to the creation of the Office International des Epizooties through an international Agreement signed in Paris on 25 January 1924 by 28 States.

In May 2003 the Office became the World Organisation for Animal Health but kept its historical acronym: OIE.

The objectives of the OIE at the time of its creation were mainly to ensure transparency in the global animal disease situation in order to improve animal health worldwide and to collect, analyse and disseminate veterinary scientific information. Its new objectives concern the activities of Veterinary Services and their intent is to provide expertise, to encourage international solidarity in the control of animal diseases, and to improve the legal framework and resources of national Veterinary Services. In the first decade of this century, an additional objective was to promote animal welfare

Within its World Trade Organization (WTO) mandate, the OIE also intends to safeguard world trade by publishing health standards for international trade in animals and animal products, to provide a better guarantee of the safety of food of animal origin, through a science-based approach.

-Publications

The OIE began publishing in 1927. For almost 60 years its main publication remained the “*Bulletin of the Office international des epizooties*”.

It was a miscellaneous collection of reports on its activities, containing:

- Epidemiological and regulatory information
- Scientific articles
- Texts on events relating to the Office
- Proceedings and reports of the annual General Session of the International Committee
- All official documents of the Office and its activities with other International Organisations
- Original articles on epizootic diseases
- Documents and information on International Meetings and Conferences, Conventions, Laws and Regulations
- Statistics on the animal health situation in Member Countries

- Reports of Specialist and Regional Commissions

The 93 volumes of the *Bulletin* from 1927 to 1981 reflect the history of the Organisation since its creation.

The OIE then started developing and publishing two types of international health standards for animals and animal products – trade standards and biological standards:

- *The International Animal Health Code*, the regulatory basis for world-wide trade in animals and animal products, first issued in 1968, is revised annually.
- *The Manual of Diagnostic Tests and Vaccines*, a contribution to the international harmonisation of methods for the diagnosis and control of the most important animal diseases, was first published in 1989.

Both international standards, originally written for *terrestrial animals* only, have been published for *aquatic animals* since 1995.

To collect, analyse and disseminate veterinary scientific information, a new quarterly trilingual periodical appeared in 1982: the *Scientific and Technical Review*. Since 1997, there are three issues published per year.

To provide information on the world animal health situation, disease information is published separately: *Statistics on Animal Health* started to be published annually in 1959, and became *World Animal Health* in 1985.

This information, as well as the information contained in *Monthly Epizootic Circular*, and then *Weekly Disease Information* has been available electronically through two databases, *HANDISTATUS* from 1994 to 2004 and *WAHID* (World Animal Health Information Database) since 2005.

Since 2002, the *Bulletin* is published in magazine format four times a year.

Thematic publications and Technical items have been, and still are published in the three official languages of the OIE: English, French and Spanish.

Digitisation

Background

The Internet has fundamentally changed the practical and economic realities of distributing scientific knowledge and cultural heritage. For the first time ever, the Internet now offers the chance to constitute a global and interactive representation of human knowledge and the guarantee of worldwide access.

As a result, the nature of scientific communication is changing very rapidly and radically. The challenge is to exploit the new possibilities offered by the technology to improve scientific communication while at the same time retaining the best features of the present system.

Digitisation programmes have been undertaken all over the world to provide 24-hour access to users worldwide via the Internet. Through these programmes, an increasingly large collection of books, articles and documents of all kinds can be shared.

Soon, students and perhaps researchers will only search online, and it will be almost as if the information that cannot be found there does not exist.

Paradoxically, lack of money, time and interest can lead institutions to forget their own special collections, leaving them hidden and unprocessed, and running the risk of disappearing if they remain invisible.

Katie Hafner, in the *New York Times* article, “History, Digitized (and Abridged),” quotes Edward L. Ayers, historian and now president of the University of Richmond, as saying:

“There’s an illusion being created that all the world’s knowledge is on the Web, but we haven’t begun to glimpse what is out there in local archives and libraries. Material that is not digitized risks being neglected as it would not have been in the past, virtually lost to the great majority of potential users.”(1)

We do not only need to keep and preserve these collections; we also need to make them accessible. Our mission of disseminating knowledge will not be complete if the information is not made widely and readily available. New possibilities of knowledge dissemination not only through the classical form but also and increasingly through the open access paradigm via the Internet have to be undertaken.

The Council of European Union, in its “Conclusions on scientific information in the digital age: access, dissemination and preservation” (2) recognises that “the Internet has created unprecedented possibilities to disseminate, share and build on the outcome of research efforts and that effective and long-lasting digital preservation of scientific information is fundamental to the current and future development of European research.”

The Project

A specialised Organisation like the OIE, which started publishing its activities since its creation, has accumulated through the years a unique and accurate source of information in the field of animal health, animal diseases, diagnostic and control means and measures, scientific research and sanitary regulations.

This is the reason why we started thinking of a digitisation programme for the OIE historical publications as soon as the beginning of this century. Through digitisation, we thought we could provide access to this information, which otherwise would stay hidden.

After a rather long period of consultation, it was decided, in September 2008, to undertake the task of digitising the main OIE archives in order to make them available to the public on its website and to provide, on the Internet, what researchers want and use.

We are also aware that, by increasing access, we make our publications better known and we increase the perceived value of our information.

Implementation

We had to define the needs:

- What was the objective?
- Who was the public concerned?

- What should be digitised?
- How should we implement the project?
- Which technical commitments could meet our budget?
- How did we intend to exploit the digitised documents?

The first objective was to preserve our historical publications; the second was to improve access to OIE publications and information in order to meet the requests received daily, as we knew we could provide information that could not be found elsewhere.

OIE Members are entitled to know about the evolution of their sanitary situation, veterinary services and regulations, international standardisation, etc., since they first joined the OIE, and they are now growing keen on collecting data on their own national history in these fields. By increasing access to its collections through digitisation, the OIE will be able to meet its Members' expectations and greatly expand its information potential.

Communicating and sharing on the Internet of the new historical resources emanating from the digitisation programme should more generally meet the need for information of Governmental Authorities, Diplomatic Missions, Delegates to the OIE, Observers from other International Organisations, on the one hand, and the many Academies, Learned Societies, and Teaching Faculties, particularly the many veterinarians, biologists, laboratory workers, epidemiologists, statisticians, livestock producers, historians, and students, on the other hand, who, in their various way, are interested in the work and the accomplishments of the OIE over the years.

In order to choose which publications should be included in the project, it was rather easy to make a study of the requests received within the last decade, to define which kind of information was most required and to compare information produced and published by the OIE and information requested by users. I then tried to analyse, according to the OIE objectives and missions, the relative importance of its historical publications in order to define those having priority for a first digitisation programme, and the choice was quite obvious.

The *Bulletin*, together with the scientific articles published since 1981 in the *Scientific and Technical Review*, the International health standards published in the "*International Animal Health Code*" since 1968, the "*Manual of Diagnostic Tests and Vaccines*" since 1989, statistics on animal health worldwide published annually in "*Statistics on Animal Health*" and "*World Animal Health*" since 1959, were chosen for the first programme, as a valuable contribution to the improvement of animal health worldwide and a rich historical resource in the field of public health.

We then had to define the specifications needed and this was not at all the easiest task for someone like me who was completely ignorant of all technical requirements needed for the implementation of a digitisation programme.

Therefore, I had a look around, read a lot about the subject, consulted colleagues with some experience in the field and tried to thoroughly study the existing firms specialised in digitisation and their achievements in the field. This took a while, but it allowed me to compile a list of contacts and to learn more about the abilities of some companies. Three of them were approached and consulted between 2006 and 2009. Long meetings were held to

talk about the aims of the project and the specifications needed to meet our expectations. We had to take into account many pre-existent criteria, such as: the characteristics of the collection, its shape, presentation, format, paper quality, state of preservation, physical volume etc.

Then, we had to go into technical details concerning: the level of quality expected, the colour mode, the resolution rate, the definition, the size and weight of images and finally the OCR rate and where we needed to apply “corrected” OCR.

We had always to keep in mind the cost of the project.

Several estimates were produced, studied and discussed according to different levels of specification.

A well-known Company, which was at the time busy digitising the oldest archives of the “Bibliothèque Nationale de France”, was finally chosen.

This project started in September 2008 with the digitisation of the complete collection (100 000 pages) of the *Bulletin* from Volume 1 (1927) to Volume 93 (1981), together with the *1921 Paris International Conference*, which is at the origin of the creation of the OIE.

The digitisation of the *Scientific and Technical Review* from 1981 to 2000, before the articles became available online started in November 2008 and has been achieved by now.

The project continues with the first editions of the “*Code*”, the “*Manual*” and “*World Animal Health*”, and is due to finish by the middle of 2010.

Throughout the digitisation process, I made it my duty to thoroughly check all digitised pages, including quality, research possibilities and technical requirements.

Conclusion

One objective of the project is also to link the digitised documents to other resources online. The electronic files obtained from the digitisation process will be integrated into the OIE bibliographic database (3) (extracted from the database online on the OIE Intranet site), which at the present time gives access to more than 4550 referenced OIE documents, with about 2200 documents in full text.

The OIE Website was completely restructured in 2009 and 2010, for both editorial and graphical contents, and expanded to include several new headings, a new search engine, an online bookshop and the launching of the documents database. It gives free access to disease information from 1996, early warning and weekly disease information; International Standards (*Codes, Manuals, etc.*); *Scientific and Technical Review* (contents and abstracts); *Bulletin*, scientific and general information on OIE activities, animal diseases including zoonoses, Conference presentations, media resources, press releases and editorials from the Director General in English, French and Spanish: <http://www.oie.int>

With the addition of the digitised archives, the public online access to OIE publications will be considerably enriched with several thousand documents being available reflecting the history of OIE activities through more than 80 years of existence.

Through this digitisation programme, we shall also increase the visibility of the Organisation, valorise its actions since its creation, attract attention towards its activities, focus interest on its publications, provide a better understanding of its aims and missions throughout the years and certainly enhance its influence in the field of Public Health.

Notes

- (1) Hafner, K. History, Digitized (and Abridged). *New York Times*, March 10, 2007.
- (2) 2832nd Competitiveness (Internal market, Industry and Research) Council meeting; Brussels, 22 and 23 November 2007.
- (3) The new OIE Website will soon launch this public access to the OIE document database where its main publications, including books, articles, Conference proceedings, reports of Working Groups, Specialist and Scientific Commissions, resolutions and recommendations, etc. can be searched by English or French keywords.

References

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