

# 2020 Activity Report -Summary

# Summary

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## 2020 Annual Report: Overview

2020 is a year that will not be forgotten any time soon. What happened at the BnF as of March was not fundamentally any different from what the whole country went through. We had to close down very quickly, define a business continuity plan and the essential actions for the institution and its staff: protecting the collections, maintaining the buildings, serving the public, and so on. Not only did we have to adapt, but we had to do so quickly and repeatedly. At no time did the BnF and the people who make it work and bring it to life give up, despite the difficulties, despite the uncertainty, and despite the concerns.

This annual report is another opportunity to acknowledge the way in which the teams endeavoured to preserve the services provided to the public, to continue the work linked to the collections and to projects with our partners. The effects of the COVID-19 crisis are highlighted in the report, and a number of sections bring together and illustrate the actions taken in such an atypical year at the start of the pandemic: limiting on-site access but continuing our work and expanding our online audience.

2020 cannot be reduced to just managing the COVID-19 crisis – it also featured acquisitions, scientific partnerships, Gallica marque blanche (Gallica Vanilla) sites, exhibitions, formalisation of strategic documents on research policy, and the digital plan. This third edition of the BnF's digital plan is made up of a cartography and a set of 40 documentary maps that help us to understand the digital transformation of the institution, its professions and its organisation, as well as the strategic axes and the vision that underpin its action in this area.

It is the BnF's collective ability to constantly give contemporary form to a centuries-old project: to shape and preserve our memory, to share its artefacts in order to provide a framework for new productions, creations and reflections, and to promote this exceptional heritage.

## Summary of strategic orientations

### A permanent link with the public and a search for new services

Visitor numbers in 2020 were strongly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Bibliothèque had to close several times and was only been able to reopen with reduced capacity and new reception arrangements in line with social distancing rules. Conversely, the audience for the BnF's websites and its many pre-existing online applications reached unprecedented numbers, with an exceptional increase during the lockdowns: overall, the Bibliothèque's plethora of online services recorded almost 48 million visits (up 17%).

As soon as it was forced to close, the BnF set about adapting its services for its users (increasing the range of electronic resources and extending them to a wider audience, strengthening the SINDBAD service for remote information) and significantly enhancing its vast digital collections: Gallica digital library and virtual exhibitions, teaching sequences adapted to "at home" classroom activities, and new online mediation methods.

These actions, some of which were accelerated due to the year's events, continued on from projects undertaken in previous years. For example, in order to make visits to reading rooms and exhibitions easier and more fluid, registration became completely paperless, with users able to submit their supporting documents via a secure web portal, so that their membership could be validated before their visit. For exhibitions and events, a ticketing and booking tool was set up in 2019 for the Tolkien

exhibition, which closed in February 2020 and received more than 135,000 visitors, an unprecedented number at the BnF. This tool was expanded and made permanent, allowing users who already hold a Pass or who are entitled to free entry to make a booking, thus guaranteeing optimum conditions for visiting the exhibition during the pandemic, as was the case for the *Josef Koudelka: Ruins* exhibition, which opened in September.

At the beginning of 2020, to encourage the general public to reclaim their heritage, the BnF made BDnF available, a digital creation tool for making comic strips, photonovels and any other multimedia story combining illustrations and text. While the project's primary target audience is schools, teachers and pupils, the chosen format – comics – is conducive to both educational and professional uses (authors) and creative and recreational uses aimed at a wide audience. In 2020, the application was downloaded more than 180,000 times and more than 360,000 projects were created.

The BnF also rolled out Gallicarte, the result of the winning project from the first BnF Hackathon. An algorithm was used to geolocate 180,000 maps and images in Gallica, and Gallicarte is linked to a participatory enrichment tool, *l'Arpenteur*, which enables Gallica users to pinpoint the position of documents that are poorly located or not located at all, in real time. The roll-out of Gallicarte and *l'Arpenteur* was accompanied by collaborative operations: in 2020, these facilitated the geolocation of more than 25,000 documents.

## Essential adaptations to ensure continuity of collection management

The sudden closure of the Bibliothèque meant that the teams had to adapt to ensure that they could continue to enrich and preserve the collections. Every day, the Bibliothèque receives an average of 500 books and 800 newspapers, magazines and journals for legal deposit, in addition to all the other types of documents subject to legal deposit (printed music, cartographic and audiovisual documents, etc.). Unable to process these flows during strict lockdown, the BnF launched a communication campaign to inform publishers of the need to suspend the dispatch of their publications, while the BnF teams were available throughout to answer questions from depositors in order to organise deferred dispatches and ensure the necessary continuation of the growth of the collections. In terms of the collections for internet legal deposit, it was possible to maintain collections on a continuous basis. From February onwards, the BnF made available to researchers publications on the French web relating to the COVID-19 crisis, endeavouring to cover all facets of the crisis, from its medical and scientific aspects to its social, economic and political, cultural and moral aspects. As such, it carried out a major web archiving project to track the development and overall impact of the pandemic on the French web.

The year 2020 saw the continuation of various projects concerned with trialling the legal deposit of digital documents. The legal deposit of dematerialised sound (LDDS) input chain by flow which went into production in December 2019, recorded 4,460 deposits from the distributor Idol, which thus became the main depositor of phonograms, all media combined, in 2020. The Shared and Innovative Collection, Preservation and Dissemination of Audio-Visual Heritage (MISA OA) programme, run jointly by the BnF and the Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée (National Centre for Cinema and the Animated Images – CNC), officially began on 1 June 2020.

The conservation of the collections, both physical and digital, is one of the institution's main missions and challenges for current and future periods. Throughout lockdown, a number of systems were in place to monitor optimal conservation conditions, in particular with the help of climate monitoring data that could be consulted remotely. To ensure that the collections were kept safe and in good condition, regular staff rounds were quickly put in place at the five BnF sites, which house millions of documents.

As the conservation storage areas were fast reaching saturation point, the institution investigated solutions to expand its storage facilities in the medium and long term. The Bibliothèque finalised a comprehensive plan for the layout and dynamic management of its collections that was fully integrated

into the review of its property strategy. To this end, in 2020 the BnF published a Call for Expressions of Interest (AMI), the aim of which is to identify a regional partner capable of forging strong cultural cooperation as part of a project anchored in a region and to support the financing of property investment. The new facility is to house a National Press Conservatory and a Collection Conservation Centre. More than fifty applications covering more than 70 sites were received by 16 October 2020, the closing date for the AMI, with a choice of site scheduled for 2021.

Within the context of a complete redefinition of international cataloguing standards, the BnF has, for a number of years, been involved in a major project to completely overhaul its catalogue production application. Investigations were continued in 2020 around the Tying Together Works, Expressions, Events and Items (NOEMI) project.

## Documentary and scientific cooperation on the up despite the COVID-19 crisis

The BnF is committed to developing a large number of national and international cooperation activities that facilitate the sharing of its expertise, the pooling of its infrastructures and the co-production of content. Ongoing cultural and educational cooperation initiatives were rolled out across all the regions, even though a number of initiatives scheduled for 2020 had to be postponed due to pandemic.

Cooperation is primarily documentary, via the Union Catalogue of France, and through support for the digitisation of local collections and the creation and consultation of Internet archives, and the provision of shared tools. As such, the collaborative tool Automated Processing for the Development of Research Instruments (TapIR), which was developed in 2018 as part of the objectives for the co-production of bibliographic data set out in the contract of objectives and performance, enabled 88 different institutions to publish 171 new inventories and update and enhance more than 1,000 others in 2020.

The collective and cooperative dimension of Gallica continued to expand, with ten Gallica marque-blanc (Gallica Vanilla) digital libraries online in 2020, following the launch of *Rosalis*, the digital library of the city of Toulouse, *Pireneas*, the digital library of Pau, Béarn and the Pyrenees, and a site for the *Philharmonie de Paris* providing access to rights-protected documents with restricted access.

The PLATON platform, which provides access to reading material for people with disabilities, is a central tool for collaboration between publishers and accredited organisations. It experienced very dynamic activity, with a total of 128 accredited organisations in 2020 (107 in 2019) and 1,549 registered publishers (compared with 1,392 in 2019). In 2020, 15,800 publisher files were uploaded to the platform and the number of adapted files uploaded rose from 8,000 at the end of 2019 to 19,400 at the end of 2020. These files can be downloaded and used by other accredited organisations.

International digital cooperation was further strengthened with the continued development of the digital collection: Shared Heritage. Four sites have been opened since the beginning of 2017: France-Poland, Bibliothèques d'Orient (Libraries of the Middle East), France-Brazil and France-China. In 2020, the number of visits to these sites increased by 120%. The BnF also reaffirmed its ambitions in terms of accessibility and dialogue for its foreign collections, by publishing a document in 2020 setting out the main principles for managing these collections and publicising the initiatives undertaken to promote them.

In 2019, the BnF's commitment to heritage protection received the support of the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Zones (Alliance internationale pour la protection du patrimoine dans les zones de conflit, ALIPH) for its project to safeguard and disseminate Iraqi written heritage. Implementation of this four-year project began in 2020, with the signing of agreements in Iraq and France (Institut national du Patrimoine (National Heritage Institute – INP)).

One of the Bibliothèque's fundamental scientific missions is to run research programs linked to the heritage for which it is responsible. In order to make the research carried out by the institution and the

scientific expertise of its staff more visible, the BnF published *Research at the BnF*, a summary document that is the result of a wide-ranging reflection involving the scientific staff of the BnF and the members of its Scientific Council. It presents to its audiences and its scientific partners the challenges and organisation of the research carried out by its scientific staff, either on their own or in partnership.

This national and international scientific activity is possible thanks to a network of partners from the world of research and higher education. In September 2020, the BnF signed a partnership agreement with the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (French National Centre for Scientific Research – CNRS)'s Huma-Num Very Large Research Infrastructure (TGIR) to jointly set up the BnF Data Lab, a new research space dedicated to the automated mining and analysis of digital corpora, which will open on the François-Mitterrand site in spring 2021. 2020 also saw the implementation of a new method of hosting and supporting young researchers wishing to work on the Bibliothèque's collections, by awarding two post-doctoral contracts co-financed with leading scientific partners, the Collège de France and the University Research School (EUR) TransLitteræ: Transferts et humanités interdisciplinaires under the auspices of the École Normale Supérieure (Ulm).

## Human and financial management aimed at ensuring the continued operation of the Bibliothèque and the well-being of its staff

The COVID-19 crisis meant that the Bibliothèque had to adapt its activities and its employees' working methods very quickly. The activation of the Business Continuity Plan ensured the full continuity of the Bibliothèque's essential functions, followed by the rapid roll-out of a much broader range of missions, as well as the management of closures and reopenings.

In an unprecedented context, the BnF made a concerted effort to maintain the link between the institution and its employees: providing information in real time, supporting new working arrangements, and communicating on health measures taken by the institution. It also put in place a system for monitoring and assisting people who may need special support.

From mid-March 2020, the BnF equipped its staff with IT equipment as required and depending on availability. To this end, several successive orders, not planned in the budget, were quickly placed. Based on the results of an independent survey to which 54% of staff responded, and on an internal feedback system, a review of remote working was undertaken to overcome the perceived divide, beyond the IT equipment itself, between staff who can work remotely and those who cannot owing to the nature of their duties.

Before the outbreak of the pandemic, the BnF had a largely paperless budgeting and accounting system, which was a considerable asset in maintaining the expenditure and revenue chain during the COVID-19 crisis. The large number of staff able to work remotely and the rapid implementation of exceptional procedures, both internally and with the French Ministry of Culture's budgetary and accounting controls, enabled activity to be maintained in the areas of purchasing, public procurement, expenditure execution, invoices and staff payroll.

The renovation of the Richelieu site is one of the Ministry's key projects. The COVID-19 crisis had a major impact on the progress of the work in 2020, with a complete halt until May, then a resumption with reduced quotas for each company. As a result of this exceptional situation, and despite the ongoing renovation work, the reopening had to be postponed by several months: the fully renovated site will once again be fully accessible to the public in summer 2022, and the BnF will be able to roll out the new scientific, cultural and educational plan that it hopes to achieve for this historic site.

This renovation is supported by sponsorship funding, the development of which has been severely hampered by the COVID-19 crisis. Despite the unfavourable economic climate, the public offering launched in 2020 to support the renovation of the Richelieu site was a resounding success, with the bookcases, cities and columns of the Oval Room being "adopted", and three new sponsors, including an

American foundation, joining the circle of sponsors for Richelieu. As a sign of their attachment to the institution and its heritage vocation, donors also responded favourably to the public offering for the acquisition of a first edition of Marcel Proust's *Swann's Way*, with more than 1,700 donors and major donors making it possible to reach the hoped-for amount. This edition, enriched with an eight-page letter of dedication, will soon be digitised and its contents made freely available on Gallica, before being presented to the public at the exhibition that the Bibliothèque will devote to Marcel Proust in 2022.