

## **A brief presentation of the French Consortium Archives des mondes contemporains (ArcMC).**

I've been asked to give a brief presentation about a French national project named *Consortium Consortium Archives des Mondes Contemporains* (ArcMC, Consortium "Archives of the contemporary worlds"), the general aim of which is to promote digital humanities in the field of contemporary history and social sciences.

I'll be very brief and will not describe all the activities of the Consortium. I would just like to say a few words about its nature in the French academic context, and then underline, in a second point, its characteristics and its organisation. I'll finish with a few remarks about its achievements and its possible future with the IALHI.

The Consortium was created in November 2012. It is directed by Serge Wolikow, a university professor that some of you must know, and is run by the Maison des sciences de l'Homme de Dijon, where its headquarters are. (The Maisons des sciences de l'Homme — there are 22 in France — are designed to make researchers from the universities and from the National Center for scientific research (CNRS) work altogether, in the same place, on common projects). The Consortium ARCMC is one of the ten consortia created under the umbrella and recognised by Human-Num, the big French administrative structure created to boost digital humanities in the field of humanities and social sciences. Created and run by the CNRS, Human-Num — a name that you cannot miss if you look at projects concerning digital humanities in France — is a national structure called a TGIR, Très Grande Infrastructure de Recherche (Very Big Infrastructure of or for Research). Human-Num doesn't only promote the development of digital humanities but is also offering, with its partners, different technical services and infrastructures for the conservation, the treatment, the description, the diffusion, the exchange or the long-term preservation of digital data and metadata.

The Consortium is organised as a network of 13 partners: the Maison des sciences de l'Homme de Dijon and 3 other ones, 6 academic research teams of laboratories, among them the Centre d'histoire sociale du XXème siècle (CHS), a long-time member of the IALHI that most of you must know, and 3 archive centres or institutions dealing with archives, among them the National Archives and Génériques (an association which is also a member of the IALHI and specialised in the field of migrants' archives). For its special programmes, this network can also work with outside partners, like for example the CODHOS (Collectif des centres de documentation en histoire ouvrière et sociale), a collective of archive institutions specialising in the field of labour and social history, a network that you have certainly heard about during previous conferences, which is a sort of French equivalent of the IALHI (Most of the French members of the IALHI also belong, at the national level, to the CODHOS). Two points: firstly, the IALHI and the Consortium have a lot in common (and 3 members of the Consortium participated as partners and content providers of the previous HOPE project); secondly: the BDIC officially joined the Consortium last Spring.

In order to sum up the nature of Consortium, I will insist on one of its main characteristics. While the other 9 consortia are mostly networks of researchers and scholars, and mostly deal with research archives or researchers' archives, the consortium Archives des mondes contemporains is mainly dealing with the question of sources and archives **for** research. Dedicated to contemporary studies from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and designed to be cross-disciplinary, its aim is to take archives into account, as its name suggests, and to facilitate making collections and data available for researchers. Different considerations have prompted its creation, among them the knowledge that archive sources for contemporary research are particularly numerous, various and heterogeneous (from paper ones to digital ones, including also, for example, photographs, films, videos, etc.). Other considerations are that these archives are kept under different legal statuses (public or private), that they are scattered among many different institutions for their conservation, with very different levels of descriptions, and that they can be included (or not) in different digitization projects. All these factors have led to

the creation of the Consortium network, designed to promote action in a real collective and collaborative way, and organized to make academics specialized in different fields work as closely as possible with professional archivists or librarians and IT professionals specialized in digital humanities (digitization processes, online diffusion of sources, etc.).

The Consortium does not have a big budget, and is not really directing things. It aims instead to organize, to initiate, to boost, to promote and/or to support collaborative research programmes based on the use of sources and archive collections, whether these collections already exist (in analogic or digital formats) or still have to be collected, gathered and/or “constructed”. In addition to programmes developed by the National Archives or the National Library, its aim is also to promote and coordinate their inventories, their digitization and their multiple use, and if possible to support their online publication and diffusion. Another important goal of the Consortium is also to develop and sustain bridges between these research projects and recommendations of best practices, services, tools and infrastructures developed and offered by Human-Num.

To do so, its activities have been organized and structured around 6 themes: social movements and workers’ organisations / Critical thinking / Rural worlds / Business, industry and industrial work / Circulations, migrations / Research and researchers’ archives.

Different collective research projects have been developed around these themes, and this structure appears to be a good practical way to develop exchanges and collaboration between archive institutions and the academic world.

Web pages and a scientific blog have been created to present and follow Consortium’s activities. Projects are presented theme by theme. The Consortium partners have opportunities to publicise their collections, with links to inventories, digitized collections or different digital online realizations, like for example virtual exhibitions. Thanks to the tools and infrastructures offered by Huma-Num, the Consortium can also help to enrich metadata and support data dissemination, to facilitate their use or re-use by for different research projects developed collectively or by individuals. I don’t have enough time to tell you about all projects developed with the support of the Consortium, but the

most emblematic is perhaps the Paprika project, run by the Maison des sciences de l'Homme de Dijon, dedicated to the study of the communist phenomenon, both in its French and international dimensions. A scientific blog and a portal have been developed to centralize information and give better common access to different collections for the period from 1917-1947, small or big, held in different French public or private institutions.

To conclude very briefly, I should add that, through its different projects, a large part of the Consortium's activities has also been dedicated to the dissemination of information about best practices for digitization, including for example the questions of digital data storage, description, exchange or long-term preservation. Information is shared on the scientific blog of the Consortium, and meetings, workshops and seminars have been organized to help academics, archivists and librarians discuss collectively these topics. (I should mention, for example, a seminar called "Audiovisual archives and research").

Its aims are very similar to the objectives of IALHI, i.e. to facilitate and boost exchanges between the world of archives and the academic universe, give a better publicity to collections' inventories, make them more easily accessible and usable, and disseminate best practices. We already have close links since some institutions are already involved in these different networks of cooperation. One can hope that digitization programmes developed with the support of the Consortium will contribute to the development of the Social History Portal. The Consortium should certainly help the SHP to find new partners and content providers. It is pretty certain that IALHI and the Consortium have a future in common —a future that now needs to be built.

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