



**New institutions, New landscapes:
two models of convergence in Canada:
Dialogue between
Mr. Ian Wilson,
Librarian and Archivist of Canada and
Madame Lise Bissonnette
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Context

- Mindful of a social, economic and technological environment undergoing deep-seated transformation, the documentary communities have been engaged for some 10 years now in in-depth reflection on the content of their missions
- The library has changed considerably in its role, from:
 - a place of services and promotion of reading
 - to:
 - a place of culture
 - a place of life and sociability
 - a place for the people, a place of free expression
- The role of archives has also changed profoundly
 - In the beginning, strong emphasis was placed on preservation, clients were researchers
 - Today, there is openness to making resources available to broad publics
- With a new landscape
 - Driven by digital
 - Transformed by the Internet
 - A New role of information
 - A Diverse society
 - With Greater expectation of access
 - And Connected through networks

- And Users are at the heart of these reflections
- How can they be provided with truly democratic access to knowledge?
 - Documentary heritage
 - Collections of universal scope
 - Lending collection
 - Public and private archives
 - Self-education tools
- How can there be continuity in the responses to users' various requests?
- A consensus was reached around
 - one-stop service
 - and the network concept
 - local or regional network
 - national network
 - international network
- This new dynamic implies an active convergence between
 - libraries
 - archives
 - museums
 - and other cultural institutions
- To support this convergence, some countries have chosen to create common supervisory bodies for
 - libraries
 - archives
 - museums
- Breaking new ground, Canada and Québec chose instead to merge their institutions in the field
 - In 2004, LAC merged library-science, archival and museum-related activities within a single institution
 - Between 2002 and 2006, BAnQ merged the missions of national library, public library and archives within a single institution
- While implementing approaches based on a common inspiration, LAC and BAnQ nevertheless applied two distinct, equally interesting models

DIALOGUE

- 1- How has Canada / Québec responded to this new environment?
In this context, what motivated Canada / Québec to respond to this new environment?**

Mr. Wilson: Let me start with the second question first. I think it is vital to remember that we are functioning in a remarkable new information landscape. In just 15 minutes the world produces an amount of data equal to all the information held at the Library of

Congress. It has been estimated that the digital data generated in the world in 2006 alone would be the equivalent of 12 stacks of books reaching from the Earth to the Sun. We have to respond to the information expectations of Canadians – both content wise and in terms of access – created by this new landscape. This is the only way to stay relevant as a knowledge institution in a knowledge-driven world.

While the information expectations of Canadians may be greater, our role in this area is essentially the same – to provide easy access to accurate and extensive information, to our documentary heritage, no matter what the format. This is the key, of course – format. Digital technology allows us to reach audiences as never before, but also creates unique preservation and access challenges. By combining our national library and archives, we are responding to a world where the boundaries and distinctions between types of information are becoming increasingly blurred. And as we continue to provide traditional services to our traditional partners, we are also responding by operating as a dynamic ecosystem of resources, expertise and ideas – combining services for greater access and taking the lead in the development of policies and standards that will keep us at the forefront of information management. More and more we are connecting with new partners, both nationally and internationally, as well as building community networks and making the best use of digital technologies.

Madame Bissonnette: Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec has chosen to react to this new environment by creating the indispensable means for truly democratic access to knowledge and culture. To accomplish this, it has undertaken profoundly innovative actions institutionally, technologically and architecturally.

As an institution, BAnQ has chosen to practise convergence between its various missions – national library, national archives, large public library and virtual library – respecting pre-existing professional and disciplinary boundaries, but creating strong cores of common services.

The information technologies form the most important core service unifying the institution. BAnQ has created and is developing a very diversified Web portal that provides users with one-stop service for all the resources available. Hosted on the portal are abundant digital collections in all formats, as well as remote services accessible throughout Québec and to all Quebecers: subscription, record management, reference, interlibrary loan and databases, to name a few. Various extranets on the portal support the networks of Québec archives and libraries. BAnQ's digitization policy is aimed at Québec's entire documentary heritage.

The architectural quality of BAnQ, symbolized by the Grande Bibliothèque – open since 2005 – which brings together heritage and public collections and is visited by some 10,000 people each day, extends to its 11 facilities spread across Québec's vast territory. The transformations wrought by the grouping of archival and library science missions will thus extend beyond the major urban centres as services are developed in the regions.

2- Could you illustrate the new challenges you were/are facing and the strategic choices you have made?

Mr. Wilson: The challenges we face are the same ones we have always faced – for example, how to balance the need to protect and preserve Canada's heritage with a commitment to making it more accessible. The difference is that our heritage has suddenly become more fragile, more fleeting. The average lifespan of a piece of paper is about one hundred years, but a page on the web has a lifespan of about 100 days. What is lost today is lost forever. So the new challenge we face is how to continue preserving the heritage of the past, as well as the heritage that is being created today, and to make it all available and accessible to Canadians. To do this we have made a number of strategic choices as an institution. The first is to take full advantage of digital opportunities. The second is to go national, making our collection more relevant and accessible throughout the country. The third is to focus on effective recordkeeping in the Government of Canada. The fourth is to increasingly deliver our mandate through partnerships, finding new ways to share resources and deliver services. And finally, we intend to consult more with individual Canadians, so that our programs and services truly reflect their needs.

Madame Bissonnette: In the coming years, BAnQ will have to meet three main challenges.

It will have to make convergence a winning formula and see that the various specialists who have ensured the success of its novel approach thus far – librarians, archivists, and people in charge of cultural activities and information technologies – continue to work in perfect synergy.

It will also have to work untiringly in the area of accessibility, constantly bringing in new clienteles, particularly among "non-library-goers", and meeting user expectations as precisely as possible, with the help of the Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 technologies.

It will have to penetrate people's minds with a new image of the library as a place of culture, community life and intellectual freedom.

3- How do you see your institution in three years?

Mr. Wilson: There was a time when a single library contained the collective imagination of the entire world. When I look ahead, to Library and Archives in the year 2010, I picture a single organization that contains the collective imagination of a nation – in books, pamphlets and newspapers; letters, diaries and official records; in films, broadcasts, photographs, portraits and landscapes; and in the maps and globes that maintain the voices, the images and the hopes of those who went before us. And I also see an organization that makes available the records we create now, the evidence of the creative and intellectual output of our digital age – preserved as safely as a book or a work

of art. It is my ultimate vision to have LAC, along with its partners, take the lead in the digitization of all Canadian published works, with complete and open access to our cultural heritage, with bilingual content and search capabilities, and with the resources to preserve the enormous range of materials that reflect who we are as Canadians. LAC in 2010 will be a dynamic and digitized source of ideas and debate, an organization that works seamlessly with other libraries and archives to deliver our mandate, and a knowledge institution that allows people to explore our vast heritage wherever they live.

Madame Bissonnette: In three years, BAnQ ought to have set up and promoted a virtual library that offers users documents and services as developed as those formerly obtainable only at physical sites.

It should also be playing a leading role in a structured Québec cultural network, bringing together a large number of partners with complementary missions: libraries, archives, museums, theatres, schools and universities, municipal and economic communities, etc.

It should be a place of cultural activity and exchange of ideas that is part of the lives of all Quebecers.