

# Archives in Web 2.0: New Opportunities

<u>Marta Nogueira</u> describes how three Web 2.0 applications (Facebook, Flickr, YouTube) can work as a virtual extension for archives and other cultural organisations, by identifying benefits obtained from the use of Web 2.0 applications.

#### Introduction

Archives are using Web 2.0 applications in a context that allows for new types of interaction, new opportunities regarding institutional promotion, new ways of providing their services and making their heritage known to the community. Applications such as Facebook (online social network), Flickr (online image-sharing community) and YouTube (online video sharing community) are already used by cultural organisations that interact in the informal context of Web 2.0. In this article I aim to describe how Web 2.0 can work as a virtual extension for archives and other cultural organisations, by identifying impacts and benefits resulting from the use of Web 2.0 applications together with some goals and strategies of such use.

## Web 2.0: Impacts and Benefits

The use of Web 2.0 applications [1] by archives and libraries is having several effects on the way their services and products are made available to the public, as well as on the way they operate (Archive 2.0 and Library 2.0). Such impacts vary and depend on the type of applications, their characteristics and functionalities, and the way they are used and kept. One of the immediate effects of the use of these applications is the growing number of public they reach (visitors, potential users or actual users) [2]. As an example, the collections on display on the Library of Congress Channel on YouTube had 1,044 registered users and 24,162 viewers in May 2009, a number that grew to 4,655 enrolled users and 96,685 viewers by December 2009. On Flickr, a photograph of the Library of Congress [3] had been seen 6,433 times by 14 May 2009, with 15 comments and 5 notes while 25 people had added it to their Favourites; by 17 December 2009 the same image had been viewed 9,373 times, with 17 comments and 7 notes while 67 people had added it to their Favourites.

On Facebook, Patrimonigencat (Spain) had 655 friends in May 2009, a number that grew to 1,266 by December 2009.

The growing number of visitors to the page (Facebook), photostream (Flickr) or channel (YouTube) represents an extremely significant quantitative element to cultural organisations seeking to enlarge and diversify their users and to raise their public recognition far beyond their current number of users.

Apart from the increase in the number of users reached, there are other less immediate but nonetheless beneficial effects from the use of Web 2.0 applications. In an article on the use of these applications by Chinese library and information professional Dongmei Cao [4] listed eight benefits:

- increased importance of the library to the user;
- improvement in the library's image;
- potential of new interactive services to raise the level and quality of the service provided;
- increased involvement of users and improved communication of the library with such users;
- improvement in communication among librarians;
- greater ability to find quick solutions to meet the needs of users;
- improvement in shared knowledge and collaboration.

All these advantages, while being specifically applied to libraries and librarians, can be extended to archives. And the benefits of the use of these applications while listed specifically to archives are also extended to libraries; in 2008 King listed benefits that Web 2.0 tools can confer on archives: 'increased awareness of its collections; varied access of its collections; diversification of users; improved relationships & links in the sector; additional information about collections; new dynamic ways to engage.' [5].

In addition to the benefits mentioned by Dongmei Cao and Kiara King, others can be identified arising from the use of Web 2.0 applications such as: the use of such applications (at the moment) is free of charge; the increased visibility and presence on the Internet, and consequently around the globe (content search and tagging); the contribution to improved information literacy of users and the general public [6]; the recognition of users as a valid source of information. Also the opportunity to enthuse users with the type of contact established and better communication through contact that is simultaneously institutional and informal, professional and personal.

Beside all the benefits of the use of Web 2.0 applications, there is also the impact of the use of Web 2.0 applications among institutions, as the use of these applications by high-profile organisations seems to be a factor in encouraging other institutions to join and use such tools. For example, the presence of the Library of Congress on Flickr [7] and its role in the launching of the Commons Project [8] have definitely influenced other archives, libraries and museums to gain access to the project, independently of its reputation and pioneering characteristics. The institutional standing of the Library of Congress seemed to encourage and thus multiply the use of this application by other organisations.

### Web 2.0: Resistance to Use and Disadvantages

Adoption of Web 2.0 applications by archives and libraries and other organisations operating in the cultural sphere is growing, as part of a general increasing trend in the use of such applications. However, there nonetheless exists a degree of reluctance to the use of these applications by some archives and libraries. Archives and libraries choose either to reject or postpone their adoption of such applications due to their lack of knowledge of them, or their reluctance to recognise these applications as 'official' or valid. The informal nature of Web 2.0 seems to cause unease among institutions which might be said to operate within a formal sphere; such institutions do not consider them to offer sufficient added value to justify the necessary allocation of resources and effort to implement them, and point to the pressing nature of other priorities.

Other organisations mainly associate Web 2.0 applications with personal leisure. However, leisure is one aspect of Web 2.0 that assumes little significance when compared to other factors. Access, indexing and folksonomy [9], information recovery in new contexts, the attraction of different audiences and the raising of these institutions' profile are all issues directly related to archives and libraries and are well represented in Web 2.0 applications, creating new challenges for these institutions. It is also quite likely that some of these institutions are observing the use and presence of archives and libraries already present on Web 2.0 and are considering their own involvement, deciding on how they can and should place themselves.

To some archives the process of adoption of Web 2.0 applications can also prove more onerous when approval is dependent on a hierarchy that may not always recognise the value of the organisation's presence on Web 2.0. The use of such applications is free of charge and immediate, but their adoption still requires time and additional work from existing resources. But the issue seems to revolve around the positioning of the organisation, on its own framing or the framing defined or allowed by its management. However, some authors believe that this should not be regarded as a serious option, and that it should form part of libraries' marketing strategy: 'Many librarians focus their marketing energy and time around promotional activities including advertising, special events, publicity, and brand awareness. But in today's world, marketing managers need to have Web 2.0 strategies and techniques as part of their library marketing plans.' [10].

Apart from the resistance arising from the lack of knowledge or non-recognition of Web 2.0, the use of these applications also has a negative side. Data protection of social network users may not always be guaranteed, there is also the danger of giving access to data to third parties with commercial motives, and the fact that some of these applications, which are now free of charge, may not be toll-free in the future (for instance, whither Facebook, now that it has 350 million users? [11]. Such questions are not yet totally clarified, nor can they be easily answered, neither by individual users nor institutional users [12].

There are also other issues, such as the possibility of anonymous users interacting in an abusive fashion with these institutions, as well as unwelcome associations with certain religious and / or political groups or symbols. The fact that these applications are time-consuming and that they may be used under the name of an organisation are also relevant issues. For instance, the registration on Facebook of an archive or library by an individual user without mentioning that it is not the official page of the institution, that is, without the authorisation of the organisation supposedly registered.

Such instances have occurred in the past and continue to arise on Facebook; for example, the page of Archivo General de Simancas was created by an archive user without the sanction of the Archive, and which registers very little activity [13]. An identical situation may also have occurred with the Facebook page of the Directorate-General of Portuguese Archives (DGARQ). In the beginning of April 2010, the page was deleted leaving doubts as to whether it was the official page or if the page was created by an unauthorised person. This situation has been detected and DGARQ has now a new page at Facebook [14].

The success or failure in the use of Web 2.0 applications is dependent on a number of factors; namely, the capacity of organisations to maintain active use of these applications. On Facebook, regular interaction with a group of friends may be decisive for contact with visitors, real users or potential users. On Flickr, the regular display of images keeps users engaged and encourages them to visit and explore an organisation's image database more frequently. The same happens on YouTube.

## Web 2.0 Applications: Strategies and Objectives

The use of Web 2.0 applications by archives and libraries is best undertaken with defined strategies and objectives. However their adoption may derive from the fact that other institutions are using them or even simply because of 'fashion'. While objectives are often more easily identified, the strategies of use that generate them are defined in a more or a less clear manner, depending on institutions' global vision of their engagement with Web 2.0. One approach is that of deliberately diversified use of applications, as a means of enlarging the presence of the archive or library on the Internet, creating a wider range of points of access to the public. An example of this is Patrimonigencat, which has a blog [15], uses Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, Delicious, YouTube, Panoramio, RSS, among others.



Figure 1: The portal Patrimoni Gencat [24]

Another example is the Library of Congress (which operates a blog, uses Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, YouTube, RSS, among others [16]). 'Maintaining a continuous unlimited presence or concentrating on the maintenance of short-term availability of contents' (Library of Congress) [17] both represent an extension to that approach. The

establishment of an institutional global vision and consequent strategy for engagement with Web 2.0 increases the potential of benefits that each application may bring, raising the game considerably above that of what simply the application may or may not allow.

There are other factors that have a bearing upon outcomes, such as the context in which an institution's applications operate. For example, the degree of variety among their users will determine whether those applications represent a challenge or added value. For instance, on Flickr a community of professional and amateur photographers may access, comment and add to their favourites images and photography collections from archives, libraries and museums, access to which was previously restricted to a limited geographical space, or electronically mainly to one point of access (the portal or Web page of the hosting institution). Apart from the exponential increase in the potential benefits of disclosing these archives together with the attendant and supplementary information on their collections, there is also the possible opportunity to gather additional information on them from quite unexpected but well-informed sources among the public.

I have selected three applications (among many of the available Web 2.0 applications) in order to demonstrate how Web 2.0 applications may be applied: Facebook (social network) [18], Flickr (image sharing community) [19] and YouTube (video sharing community) [20].

#### Facebook

Facebook, founded in February 2004, is owned by Facebook, Inc. It is a social network that allows people to communicate and share information within a context of social interaction [18]. 'Facebook's mission is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected.' [18]. Some archives opted to emphasise the Facebook utilities to communicate with the public. As an example, the Spanish archive Ceu Archivo General, has its information profile embedded in its invitation to users to connect via chat or to send a message to the organisation through Facebook's message box [21]). In Facebook each individual or group user has a page on which to display information and keeps a group of contacts, while also making combined use of other applications (e.g. images, music, games, etc.). Users can also personalise their page. Several functions are available to support, for example: real-time interaction with a group of 'friends' (pokes, chats, posts and comments to posts); interaction among each other by visiting profiles; making friends; establishing contacts; posting comments; sending messages, and; suggesting friends to other friends.

Some archives already use Facebook: Arhivele Nationale ale Romaniei; Arxíu de Constantí; Ceu Archivo General; The National Archives (UK); National Archives of Australia; Patrimoni.gencat; US National Archives, among others, as well as libraries and museums (Biblioteca Nacional de España, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Library of Congress, Brooklyn Museum, MoMA (The Museum of Modern Art), among others). These organisations have groups of friends that include individual and group users; among these groups we find other archives and libraries, as well as projects [22], associations and bodies from all walks of life and from around the world. They have differing aims in their adoption of Facebook: they attach differing

degrees of importance to the various facets of Facebook such as: the number of its users (350 million) [23] and what that represents to them as institutions (Patrimoni.gencat) [24]; its 'immediacy' factor as well as the exchange of opinions (Patrimoni.gencat) [24]; the opportunity to create new means of communication with the public and receiving feedback from same (National Archives of Australia) [25]; exposure of the Archive's news releases (Arxiu de Constantí) [26] and the generation of new audiences (National Archives of Australia) [27]; the option of permanent contact with the public and the opportunity of serving that public on the Internet, in real time, by inviting users to connect via chat or send a message to the institution through Facebook's message box (Ceu Archivo General) [21].

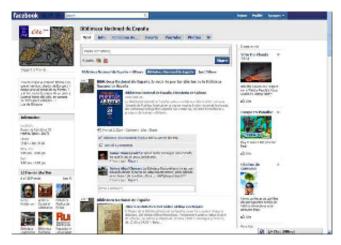


Figure 2: Facebook page of Biblioteca Nacional de España

To archives and libraries, the adoption of Facebook may generate a new type of relationship with real users and increase awareness of the archive among potential users or visitors. Engagement is closer, with more of an interaction with many users rather than a simple contact. The communication established may not necessarily be based on the rendering of a service, but on the contact itself.

#### Flickr

Flickr, founded in 2004, is now the property of Yahoo Inc. It is a photograph- (and other image formats-) and video-hosting site, as well as a Web service suite. It is also an online community of professional and amateur photographers for users who wish to publish and share their images and videos on the Web. Its use is free of charge, but there is also the option of subscription offering an account with additional functionality. Flickr allows users to store, edit, organise, share, geo-reference, generate products with images, define forms of access to images, take part in discussion forums and maintain contact within an online photography community.

In January 2008, Flickr launched the Commons Project [8] in partnership with the Library of Congress; this project includes archives, libraries and museums from around the world [8]. The main objectives of the project are: to increase access to publicly held photography collections (or collections held by institutions that waive their property rights), and; to provide a means for the general public to contribute information and knowledge that enriches these holdings. Archives, libraries and

museums can display their heritage content as users of Flickr. Currently the Commons Project has attracted the participation of archives, libraries and museums in Australia, Canada, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Their objectives in adopting Flickr also vary: they may be availing themselves of the opportunity to 'open' the archives and photography collections to the general public by making them available to comments and information from that same public (Library of Congress) [28]; the opportunity to share collections with a wider public and improve the information available on the collections through tags [29] and annotations on photos (Nationaal Archief of the Netherlands) [30]; to give users the opportunity to add extra information to images and available collections (tags, comments and notes) as well as the opportunity to share some of the most popular photos with a photography community (Library of Congress) [28]; to share images, through a new channel, with an archive's researchers, potential researchers and the general public; to provide access over the Web to primary sources; to make collections available to the widest possible audience (Library and Archives of Florida) [31]; and to broaden its public and provide a new means of access. The library wants to be where its actual and potential users are now found (Art Library of Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian) [32]. The importance accorded to the Flickr community can also have a positive impact on the use of this application (National Archives) [33]. The Portuguese library Biblioteca de Arte-Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian [34], the only Portuguese organisation participating in the Commons Project [8], concluded that Flickr and the library participating in the project generated a significant increase in awareness, and use, of its photograph collections as well as attracting new audiences [35]. The Portuguese library is making photograph collections available on a regular basis ('Horácio Novais Photographic Studio'; 'Portuguese Landscape Architecture'; 'Gothic Architecture in Portugal'; 'Amadeo de Souza Cardoso -COMMONS'; 'Mário Novais Photographic Studio'; 'Portuguese woodcarving'; 'Portuguese Tiles').



Figure 3: Biblioteca de Arte-Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian – Flickr Photostream [34].

The use of Flickr may allow archives and libraries to generate new means of access to and interaction with their patrons, as well as broaden the knowledge of such heritage to a larger and more diverse audience (namely the photographic community). The Commons Project is an opportunity for these institutions to extend their presence on the Web and expose their archives and photography collections (and other image formats) to the world. Such 'broadcasting' is done within a platform that brings together several cultural organisations and a diverse public, with the opportunity of extending the knowledge of their users, their own standing, rationale and institutional profile.

#### YouTube

YouTube [20], founded in February 2005, is now owned by Google Inc. It is a free video-sharing community that offers access to and the sharing of videos, films, video clips and amateur material that, in turn, can be disseminated through blogs and other Web locations. At present YouTube receives 20 hours of video every minute, uploaded by individuals and bodies from all over the world [36].

Videos can be uploaded in any format or through the YouTube site; this contributes to making more material more easily available. The absence of any control or filter on the material submitted also contributes to the speed at which it becomes available. Some of the archives and libraries already present on YouTube are the Library of Congress (USA), The US National Archives, The National Archives (UK), Nationaal Archief (Netherlands), University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Archivo de Arganda del Rey (Spain), Biblioteca Nacional de España (Spain), Patrimonigencat (Spain), among others.



Figure 4: The portal Patrimoni Gencat on YouTube [32]

Their motives for using YouTube are not dissimilar to those for adopting Flickr. The Library of Congress has already mentioned that, due to its size and importance, its collection of audiovisual material could be expected to be made available on YouTube [17].

Other reasons for these institutions to use YouTube are the broadcasting of popular films that are held in their archives, informing the public of events that will take place, bringing the National Archives to the people (US National Archives) [37], making contents freely available and bringing cultural organisations into the daily life of people (Biblioteca Nacional de España) [24].



Figure 5: YouTube channel of National Library of Spain

The use of YouTube by archives and libraries can represent a new type of exposure with a worldwide impact, at little cost and with wide access; it is also a powerful tool for raising the institutional profile worldwide and a promising channel when exploited in the marketing operations of such institutions.

#### Conclusion

In common with the trend in general use of Web 2.0 applications, their use by archives and libraries is also on the increase. This growing engagement has been having an influence on the way services and products are made available (loosely termed Archives 2.0 and Libraries 2.0). The possible effects arising from the use of these applications are significant and have implications in areas crucial to these institutions. The increase in and diversification of users is one of the impacts that is most often referred to; however, it is simply one of the potential impacts and not always the most significant. The adoption by archives and libraries of Web 2.0 applications are a signal recognition of their potential: the significance of the number of users that these applications bring together; the 'immediacy' factor; the support of exchange of views and the creation of new means of communication with the public; the opportunity afforded users to add extra information to content (text, images, audio and video); access to primary sources over the Web; the broadening of their audience, and; the potential of new ways of providing access, and; raising the institutional profile within the user community. The possible negative aspects arising from the use of these applications do not seem to outweigh their potential advantages.

Some bodies already have a global vision of their presence on Web 2.0, as well as a defined strategy for its use. Each application represents an individual context of use and allows a set of specific functionalities within a new rationale of democratisation in the production of content and access thereto, through interactive and collaborative platforms where anyone can be an author, publish and access content freely.

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- 1. Web 2.0
- 2. Archives
- 3. Libraries
- 4. Facebook
- 5. Flickr
- 6. YouTube
- 7. Cultural heritage
- 8. Cultural organisations