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Managing Archival Collections for Digitisation: Experience from Two Projects of 1.55 and 2.07 Million €

Abstract

The National Archives of Finland has been digitising archival records for the last ten years. Before the digitising projects funded by the Ministry of Education, the Digital Archives¹ of the National Archives Service amounted to approximately 1.5 million document files. The two digitisation projects have made it possible to increase that figure considerably. Customers get substantially easier access to material through digitisation, which also protects the original material.

Two large digitisation projects funded by the Ministry of Education occurred one after the other, during the years 2009 and 2010, at the National Archives of Finland. The first one started in May 2009. A total sum of 1 550 000 € was granted for this project. The second project started in June 2010, with a sum of 2 070 000 €.

Both grants were to be used by the end of the grant year, meaning that the digitisation project was to be carried out in eight and in seven months, respectively. The author of this contribution was chosen to be head of both projects. Use of money for internal expenditure was partly ruled out – the digitising services were to be purchased from external service providers.

Besides microfiches and microfilms in roll form (process 1), maps and drawings (process 2) were chosen for digitisation as well as catalogue card file collections (process 3). The microfilm collections do need different pre- and post-treatments compared to treatments for originals, like map and catalogue card collections. Maps and drawings need different pre-treatments compared to microfilms.

1 <http://digi.narc.fi/digi> [16th March 2011]

In connection with the project, two software programs were also created for collecting the technical metadata of the digitising and image processing. In early 2010, metadata requirements will be added to the recommendations of the National Archives for digitisation quality criteria. The use of metadata software is recommended particularly for the digitisation operations of memory organizations in order to make it possible to collect digitisation and image processing metadata in a consistent way.

This paper will show that digitisation is not only scanning. Actually, in the case of digitising large archival collections, the scanning phase is the fastest and simplest part of large projects, although it needs to be done in high quality. This paper will explain the various parts related to collection management during the two large digitisation projects that took place at the National Archives of Finland in 2009 and in 2010.