

Digitization Strategy

Multicultural History Society of Ontario

Session on Digitization Strategies in Canada
CRKN Access to Knowledge Conference
October 18, 2019

Why the Efforts of the Multicultural History Society of Ontario Might be of Interest

- Community-based organization
- Focus on diaspora and Indigenous communities
- Non-traditional archival materials
- Transnational reach
- Public history as well as scholarly research orientation
- Virtual volunteering program
- Decolonization efforts
- Heritage interpretative programming
- Cross-sectoral engagements

Introduction to the Multicultural History Society of Ontario and its Collections

- The MHSO was established in 1976 by Robert Harney, a renowned scholar in migration and ethnic studies, and a few close colleagues, such as Frank Iacobucci, J.M.S. Careless, and Pierre Savard, who were convinced that the chronicling of immigrant, ethnic, and Indigenous stories was essential to understanding Canada in the 20th century and beyond.
- The Society has a dual mandate as steward of heritage resources and educator.
 - It collects, preserves, and makes available irreplaceable records documenting immigrant, ethnic, and Indigenous experiences; and
 - it undertakes educational programming illuminating our histories of migration, ethnicity, and Indigeneity.
- During the over four decades of its operation, the MHSO has amassed an assemblage of archival materials that is national in its scope and significance, and it has successfully delivered public programming of national reach and impact. Some 100 ethnocultural and Indigenous communities and constituencies are represented in the Society's archival holdings.

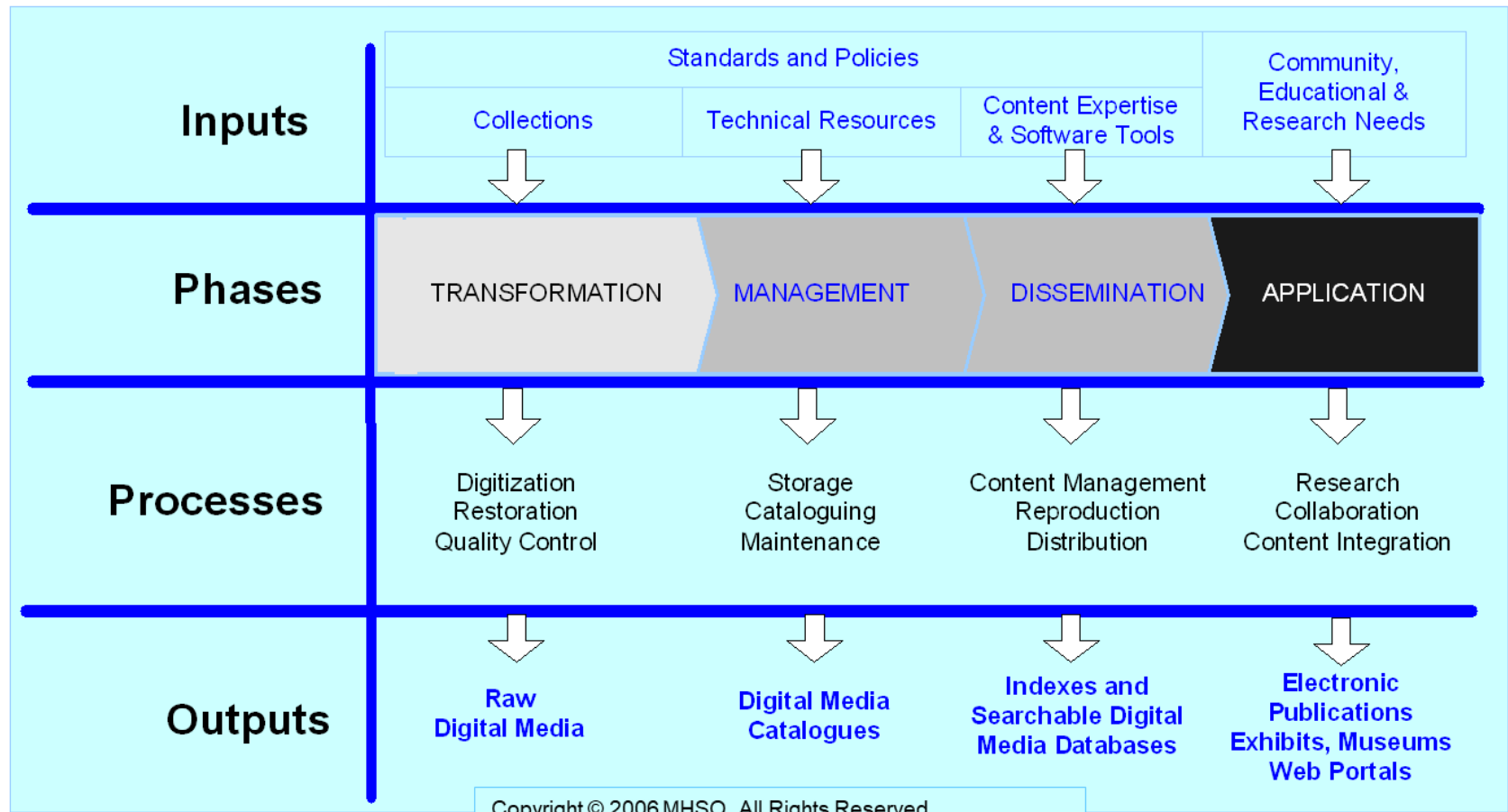
Introduction to the Multicultural History Society of Ontario and its Collections cont'd

- Most of the archival materials collected by the MHSO are housed in two repositories:
 - the MHSO Archives, and
 - the Archives of Ontario.

Additional materials are held in the archives of the Centre de recherche en civilisation canadienne-française and in the Ontario Jewish Archives.
- In addition to photographs and organizational and personal textual records, the MHSO Archives includes:
 - approximately 6,295 oral history interviews containing testimonies from members of 58 ethnocultural communities and 23 First Nations, and
 - approximately 860 newspapers and periodicals, over 575 hardcopy and 350 microfilm, produced in/for 54 ethnocultural and 14 Indigenous communities/constituencies.
- The MHSO fonds in the Archives of Ontario includes:
 - approximately 84,000 photographs donated by individuals and organizations in 52 ethnocultural communities and by 19 Indigenous individuals, and
 - approximately 170 metres and 1,446 microfilm reels of textual records from individuals, organizations, and businesses in 40 ethnocultural communities.

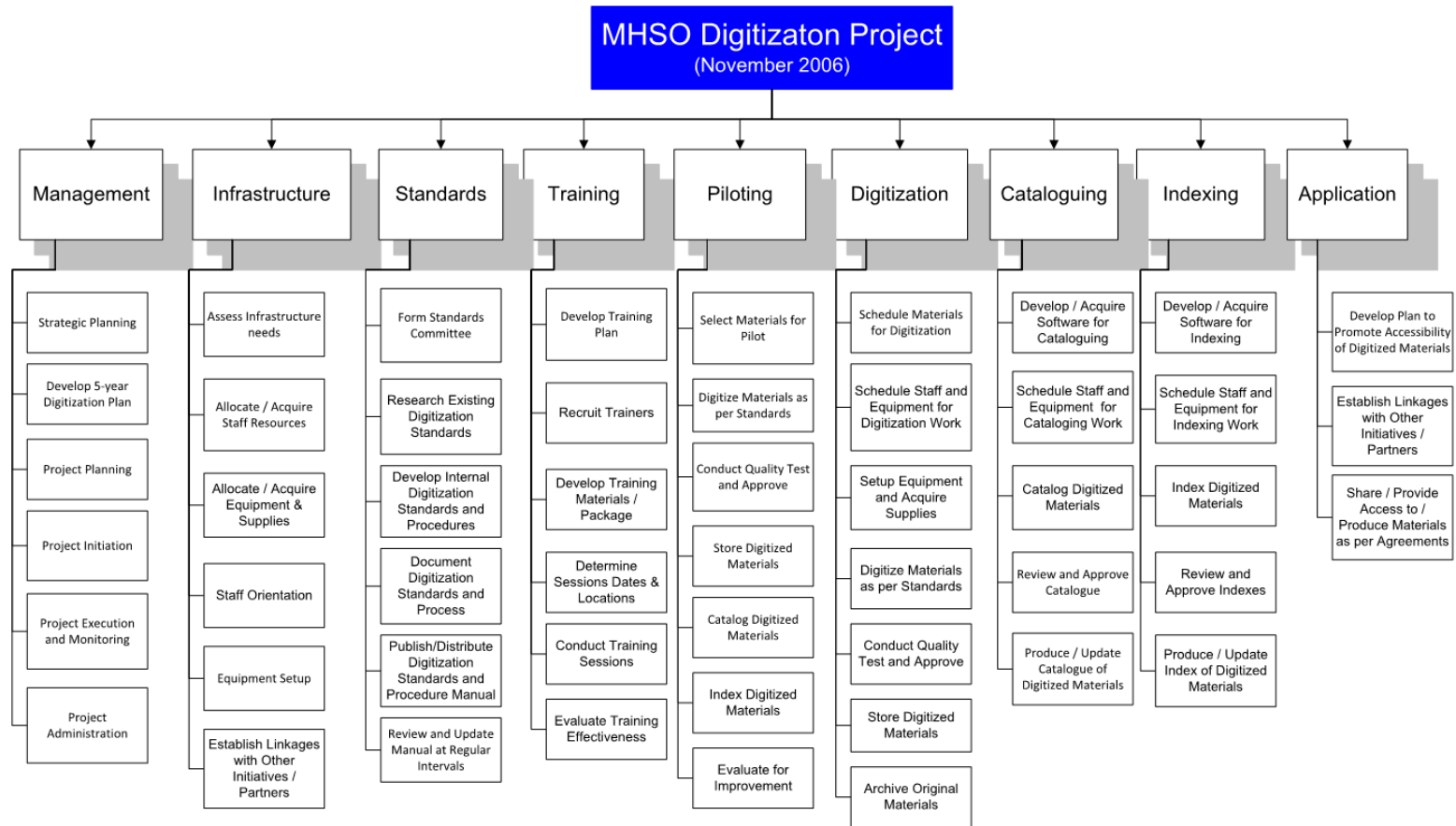
MHSO Digitization Strategy

A Value-Enhancing Chain Process



MHSO Digitization Strategy

Detailed Charting of Project Activities



MHSO Digitization Strategy

Five-Year Project Plan

- An objective was established – to digitize, catalogue, and index all of the interviews and newspapers in the MHSO Archives by June 2011.
- Priorities within archival collections were identified, and a detailed timeline was produced.
- Subsequent adjustments to the plan have included:
 - a lengthening of the timeframe to the present,
 - the inclusion of photographs,
 - a more extensive use of professional digitization services,
 - more collaborative work earlier in the process,
 - greater attention paid to contextual materials, both contemporary and new, to explain and enhance the archival materials, and
 - an increased focus on ‘application’, not just as one phase in the process but as the primary impetus for the work.
- In recent years, digitization work has been undertaken in association with a parallel initiative to re-arrange and re-describe the MHSO’s archival holdings in compliance with current archival practice.

What Has Been Achieved Thus Far

- Implementation has been rather episodic, primarily because of the lack of resources. It has involved various collaborations, at different points in time, with a number of universities (e.g., the State University of New York at Buffalo, the University of Toronto Scarborough, the University of Calgary, Athabasca University, Simon Fraser University).
- Archival materials digitized to date include:
 - 3,935 oral history interviews,
 - 75 newspapers – approximately 650,000 pages, and
 - 6,671 photographs.
- Associated contextual materials digitized and/or completed to date include:
 - 1,676 original log and identification forms for the interviews,
 - 107 researcher/interviewer files,
 - 525 full-text transcripts (finalized versions) ... an additional 552 are in process, 265 of which have gone through a first edit,
 - 124 narrator biographical notes, and
 - 37 newspaper administrative histories.
- A comprehensive Terms for Indexing tool has been produced.

What Has Been Achieved Thus Far, cont'd

- An online version of the Society's reference work and research tool, the Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples, has been produced.
- The MHSO is working on a digitization agreement with the Archives of Ontario to enable it to digitize the photographs in the MHSO fonds.
- The Society has created an online repository, Discovering Multicultural Canada (DMC). Work on the customized technical infrastructure began in 2016. Infrastructure design and development work and pilot testing were completed in 2018. Substantial content has been uploaded to the repository.
- DMC has been designed to host multiple digital archives created by organizations and facilities with ethnocultural and Indigenous archival holdings, with the MHSO's digital archive as the anchor archive. Founding partners in DMC are the Canadian Polish Research Institute and the Canadian Macedonian Historical Society.
- A dynamic resource, DMC will be continually expanded over time with the creation of multiple new archives and the addition of substantial new content. The MHSO will use its existing connections with community-based organizations and facilities to secure additional DMC partners.



Discovering Multicultural Canada

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Multicultural History
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Reflections on the MHSO's Experience to Date

- Based on its experience to date, the MHSO has a few thoughts regarding its views on and approach to digitization, its interests, and its future role.
- The Society is more convinced than ever about the need to preserve and provide access to unique, irreplaceable archival materials related to our histories of migration, ethnicity, and Indigeneity. These materials document the many different ways in which life in Canada has been experienced. They enable those who use them to explore our past from multiple perspectives and to gain nuanced, fully inclusive understandings of that past.
- The MHSO strives to enliven history. It remains committed to the initial focus, in its digitization efforts, on interviews, newspapers, and photographs because, given their immediacy, voices and images from the past have an unparalleled capacity to engage Canadians. In addition, because these are 'common-place' materials, they are more readily accessible and will appeal to a larger segment of the population than other types of archival material.
- The Society has come to realize that the iterative character of the digitization process adds value, in and of itself, to archival materials. The materials are revisited repeatedly in the process, and each time work is undertaken on them, and the quality and impact of that work is assessed and critiqued, our understandings of them are deepened. This is a perhaps unanticipated outcome of digitization.

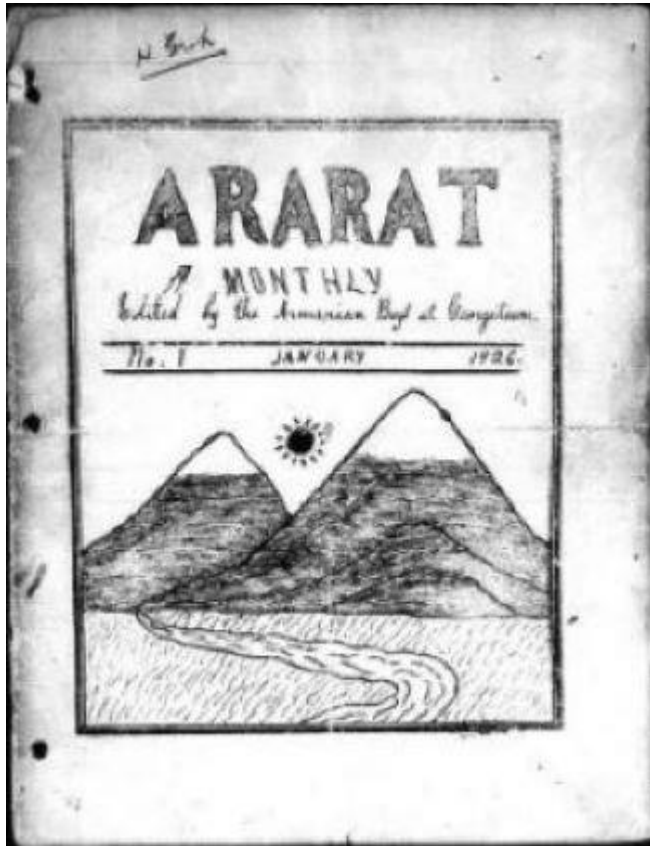
Reflections on the MHSO's Experience to Date, cont'd

- When dealing with materials documenting migration, ethnic, and Indigenous experiences, the Society believes that it is important to pursue large-scale initiatives that produce extensive content and consolidate it for users in one site online. Detailed, in-depth documentation of our diverse histories made readily available will serve multiple disciplines and a range of interests, and it will enable archive users to compare and contrast experiences within and across communities in different places at different times.
- The MHSO is working to describe Indigenous archival materials according to, and within, Indigenous cultural contexts and to develop culturally relevant content explaining and enhancing those materials. However, it is fully aware that something more fundamental is required to decolonize its work. It must critique and dismantle the knowledge identification and information management structures, processes, and practices that perpetuate colonialism.
- Innovation is an obvious associate of digitization. The Society is intrigued by, and is excited to explore, the new possibilities for digital creation that digitization offers for individuals, community-based heritage and cultural organizations and facilities, and businesses – the creative mining, reusing and remixing of digital data to produce, in its most sophisticated applications, immersive, multi-sensory cultural experiences.

Reflections on the MHSO's Experience to Date, cont'd

- Digitization is reshaping the MHSO's role in the creation and dissemination of historical content. The Society has identified over 25 additional potential *Discovering Multicultural Canada* partners in Ontario alone. It will assist these and other organizations/facilities in creating their own digital archives. It also looks forward to assuming a leadership role in digital stewardship, designing and delivering comprehensive workshops, providing online tutorials, and producing web resources for a network of DMC partners.

Thank You!



Elizabeth Price
Development Manager
Multicultural History Society of Ontario
elizabeth.price@mhso.ca
<http://www.mhso.ca>