# OCPA WWW RESOURCE CENTRE

## Status and Development

**Report for Activity-Financing Contract No.8254584**

Culturelink OCPA WWW Project

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## 1. Background

The establishment of the Observatory of Cultural Policies in Africa (OCPA) was proposed in May 2001, following a series of regional consultations and experts meetings organized jointly by the Organization of African Unity, the Ford Foundation and UNESCO.

The Observatory was set up in 2002 with a view to monitor cultural trends and national cultural policies in the region and enhance their integration in human development strategies through advocacy, information, research, capacity building, networking, coordination and cooperation at the regional and international levels.

## 2. Strategy

As the Observatory was planned as a service-oriented resource centre and a regional coordinating and monitoring body for a network of experts and institutions involved in policy and decision making, cultural administration and management, research, training and information, the starting point was to establish the Observatory's regional information gateway function through setting up the OCPA website, as the most practical and effective instrument for compiling and disseminating information.

In accordance with regular Activity-Financing Contracts, the task of developing, setting-up and hosting, as well as regularly maintaining and updating the OCPA website has been entrusted to Culturelink, the Network of Networks for Research and Cooperation in Cultural Development.

### 2.1 Aims

The OCPA website represents a first step in establishing, developing and promoting the Observatory as a key regional resource centre for cultural policies in Africa, serving as a basis for the development of its permanent information resources and services, which shall include research activities, development of databases, an inventory of existing information sources, a newsletter, an information and discussion forum (listserv), press reviews, etc.

### 2.2 Objectives

The OCPA website was designed to serve as an information clearing house, an operational tool of wide support to the Observatory's objectives of

- collecting, maintaining, analyzing, updating and disseminating information on cultural development and cultural life in Africa within a global context,

- serving as a knowledge-based policy analysis mechanism and resource centre, developing integrated policy relevant information services, and

- stimulating the establishment of a network for information, research, training and cooperation among regional and national institutions, professional associations, individual experts and scientists interested in issues related to cultural policy in Africa.

## 3. Status

The Observatory of Cultural Policies in Africa website was set-up as a key resource centre for collecting, processing and analyzing data, as well as disseminating coherent and up-to-date information on the realities, trends, new concepts, challenges, experiences and practice of cultural life and cultural development policies in Africa.

Since its establishment in July 2001, the site has been hosted at the Culturelink Network server, located at the Institute for International Relations (IMO), Zagreb, Croatia, where it is regularly maintained, updated and further developed by the Culturelink Web Editor and Administrator.

Having elaborated the concept and design through a comprehensive web development project for the OCPA WWW Resource Centre, Culturelink continually cooperates with OCPA, regularly updating existing and developing new information services, hosted at the IMO server.

## 3.1  Activities

As foreseen by the latest Activity-Financing Contract expired on 31 October 2004, specific activities with a view to consolidating, further developing and promoting the OCPA web site have been carried out. These activities included:

- registration and establishment of the OCPA web site under its own domain name (*ocpanet.org*)

- hosting the web site and administering the technical facilities,

- developing the structure and enriching its contents,

- supplementing, checking and updating existing links,

- enlarging the list server membership,

- logging and analysis of the website usage statistics,

- conducting consultations with users of the web site and integrating their observations and suggestions in the web site, and

- advertising the site among the members of the Culturelink Network and the numerous users of its web resource centre.

In this framework, data is continually collected and processed, the OCPA Web Resource Centre content is further developed, structured and designed, and the resulting new HTML-coded pages are on the average made publicly available on the Web server several times a week.
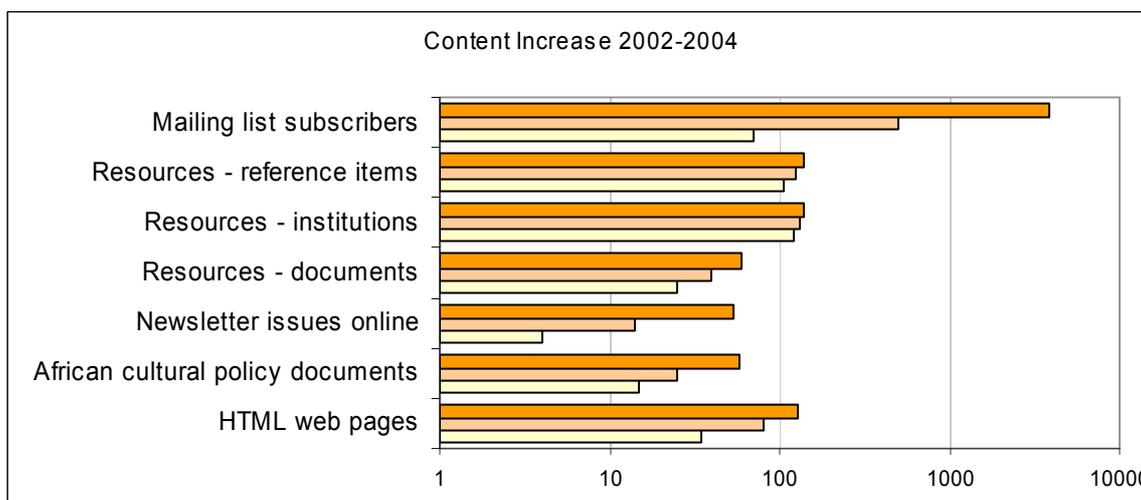


**Figure 1: Website content increase for the current contract period**

## 3.2  Services

The information services available to the visitors are grouped into several major collections, facilitating the navigation and targeted content retrieval throughout the site, structured as follows:

| observatory | general information about the Observatory and its work:<br>• establishment, organization, aims, objectives, expected results, framework, partners and contact information |
|---|---|
| news | announcements of relevant events and news from the field via a regular newsletter |
| activities | mailing list, regularly published newsletter and reports from OCPA meetings; further activities are being developed (databases, documentation centre, publications, etc.) |

| resources | listings of relevant information available over the Internet, including: <br>• cultural policies; <br>• documents:  working papers, reports, conclusions and recommendations; <br>• references:  projects, events, publications, news and listings, as well as relevant OAU, UNESCO and Culturelink links; <br>• institutions:  international, regional and sub-regional organizations, ministries and national cultural institutions, foundations, networks and research centres, NGOs, museums. |
|---|---|
| support | user support information, including: <br>• website usage help:  helpdesk, free browser/viewers download; <br>• navigation tool:  site map; <br>• content retrieval tool:  simple and advanced search mechanism; <br>• service information:  site credits, copyright, disclaimer, privacy statement. |

**Table 1: OCPA WWW information services**

Special attention is paid to the relevance of the content, concentrating on the focus and scope, as well as the accuracy and quality of the information provided. Updated on a regular basis, the site currently consists of some 125 Web pages (HTML format) and 150 documents (MS Word and Adobe PDF format). Beyond this, it provides easy access to numerous other relevant information sources and web sites.
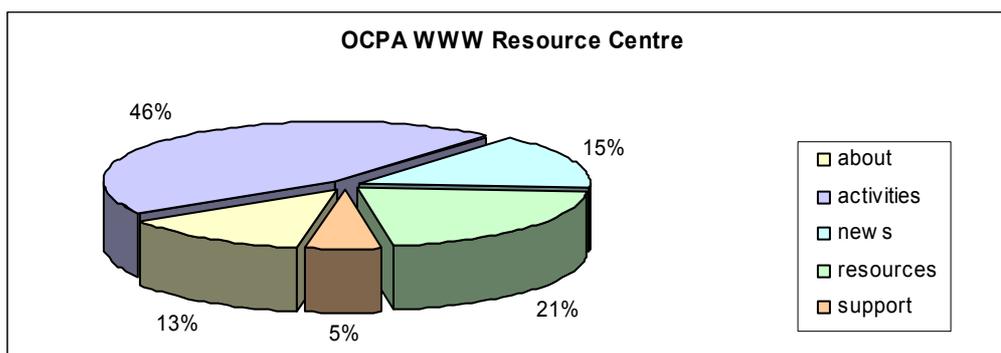


**Figure 2: Average usage of major OCPA website sections (percentage of total visits)**
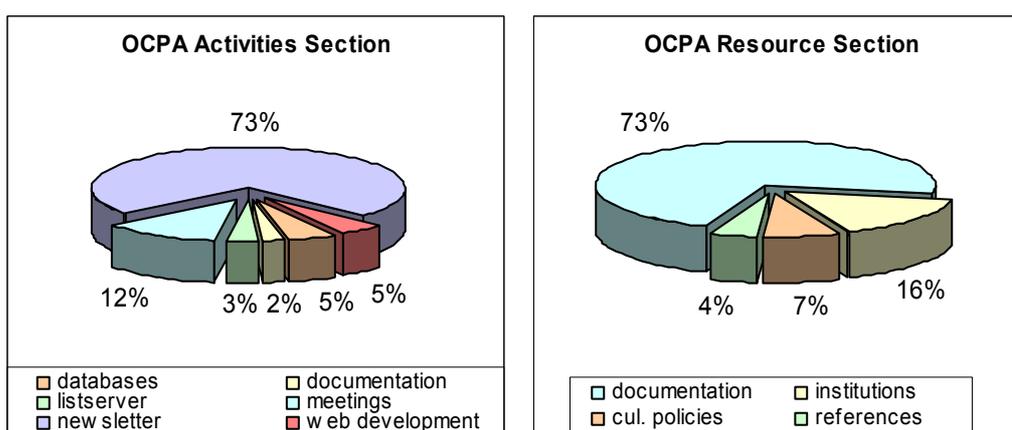


**Figure 3: Detailed usage breakdown of website content sections**

Mapping the existing information sources on culture and development problems in Africa and giving an overview of the main reference documents concerning cultural development policies and initiatives in the region, as well as helping those seeking partnership and financial support for their cultural development projects, the website's 'resources' section presently links to 140 reference items (events, projects, publications, information sources), as many institutions of interest, including a selected

listing of 70 relevant African and international cultural and artistic non-governmental organizations and some 60 African cultural policy documents such as working papers, reports, conclusions and recommendations. The 'news' section lists current announcements, while the index and full listing of some 120 past announcements have been archived for reference purposes. The site also includes over 50 issues of OCPA News, the e-bulletin of the Observatory published regularly every fortnight. These issues contain hundreds of news items, announcements and pieces of information.

The 'activities' section of the OCPA website is to be expanded and further developed as the Observatory itself becomes operational. This section so far features access to the OCPA mailing list, including detailed information on and instructions for its usage, documentation deriving from OCPA meetings and recent issues of the OCPA Newsletter, as well as information on the Observatory's documentation centre and database project.

The required technical facilities for a mailing list were set up and configured on the Web server, enabling the establishment of a discussion forum which permits all OCPA partners to communicate regularly and efficiently any announcements, news and information about events and research, or raise any questions and/or issues with the Observatory members. The list currently has over 3800 subscribers.

## 3.3  Considerations

As this resource centre should benefit all categories of stakeholders of cultural development, with a special emphasis on African users, taking into account the prevailing technological infrastructure limitations throughout the continent, the website implementation was optimized for generation 3.0 browsers and above, and adapted for a screen resolution of 640x480 pixels, using a 256 color palette.

Owing to these considerations, the Web presentation is largely kept text-based with a simple navigation and content retrieval mechanism based on menu bars and a free search engine.

## 3.4  Navigation

An intuitive usability of OCPA's WWW information services has been achieved through a clear content layout and the use of easily accessible, hierarchically structured navigation bars and menus. To give easy insight into the site structure and speed up navigation to a specific topic, a site map gives a linked overview of the entire site.

## 3.5  Languages

As foreseen by the OCPA Draft Project Document, the linguistic scope of the OCPA website currently covers English and French, planning to include, as soon as possible and to the extent possible, information services in Arabic, Portuguese and Kiswahili.

As a first step towards this multilingual objective, the OCPA website, set up in English language, also includes numerous news items and documents in French and occasionally in Spanish. In addition, users are instructed about the possibility of using the free AltaVista Babel Fish translation service, enabling them to access the information not available in their usual working languages.

## 3.6  Searchability

To facilitate targeted content retrieval by searching for specific words or expressions through the pages of the entire site, a free search mechanism is available from the top of each page, providing access to a simple search form, as well as to an advanced search form which allows the specification of certain search criteria. To maintain this searchability, the entire site is indexed regularly.

Using this mechanism, currently, up to 50 search requests are conducted per month.

## 3.7  Support

A collection of service help pages offers user support to its visitors, providing free browser and reader tools to facilitate the display of all OCPA Web documents, explaining the basic and advanced

navigation and content retrieval mechanisms, and offering service information which includes Web development credits and legal information such as copyright notice, disclaimer and privacy statement.

## 3.8 Promotion

The OCPA WWW project is promoted through the publication of news about its activities in the *Culturelink* review, and is continually advertized through a link from the Culturelink Network WWW Resource Centre.

The site's address is also available from all major search engines and directories (AltaVista, HotBot, Yahoo!, Open Directory, etc.), making its resources widely known and used. To be recognized and included in search result listings, keyword meta tags are regularly used in the pages' HTML code.

This has resulted in an obvious growth of the number of users of the site as well as the number of searches conducted through it, reflecting the interest and true need for these services.

Around 5000 page views are currently registered monthly, generated by visitors from 140 countries worldwide.

## 3.9 Publication

In addition to the web publishing activities, the Culturelink Network has produced and published the Observatory's first two paper publications – a 60-page strategic OCPA document and report from the resource centre published in English and French language. The preparation of an electronic edition of the publication is also planned.

## 4.  Development

In line with the Observatory's task of serving as a regional information gateway and resource centre for issues related to cultural policies in Africa, the OCPA website needs to be continuously updated and regularly expanded, collecting, processing, analysing data and disseminating coherent and up-to-date information, and guiding the user to both the most recent and the most significant web resources concerning culture and development problems, initiatives and policies in Africa.

Plans for the future development of the OCPA WWW Resource Centre include the development of further information services, especially databases (such as the planned Database of Specialists and Institutions Working in the Field of Culture, Cultural Development and Cultural Policies in Africa). Further priority action for the development and improvement of the website includes several tasks:

- Redesign and adaptation of the entire OCPA website to include the newly designed OCPA logo.

- With the progressive development of the Observatory's activities, the website's 'news' section should be reserved for timely OCPA announcements, keeping the publication of external news and current information for the Newsletter.

- To facilitate the navigation and browsing through long lists of useful links and resources, the references section needs to be thoroughly reorganized and consolidated, refining it and braking it down into more specific, focused categories, including separate lists for ministries of culture, development cooperation agencies, African studies, bibliographies, publications and periodicals, press and media services, events, portals and search engines. Introductory remarks explaining the content structure and providing navigation support should be included. Eventually, developing a structured portal to African cultural information might be considered.

- Further relevant full-text documents are to be made available in digital format, requiring their scanning, editing, formatting and inclusion in the website.

- In line with its multilingual orientation, additional existing texts and documents should be made available at the website upon being translated. It is also planned to set up the basic website structure in French, starting with the information about the Observatory itself.

- To facilitate an efficient management of the envisaged enlargement of the site and the further development of new information services, migration of the site to a content management system should be considered.

At a later stage, aiming to further communication between them, the Observatory might open its web space to its partner institutions and those interested in the exchange of ideas and non-commercial information relevant to the field of culture and their work. In addition to the existing mailing list, a web-based discussion forum might be created, aiming to facilitate active participation in reflection, the exchange of experiences and the development of joint projects, designed to promote cultural policies integrated in sustainable human development strategies.

## 5. Conclusion

The long-term objective of the OCPA WWW Resource Centre project is the development of a worldwide information system for the study of African cultural policy and life, cultural management and development strategies, taking advantage of today's available information and communication technology to facilitate cooperation and promote new partnerships.

Complemented and updated on a daily basis, OCPA's resource centre already represents a unique source of hand-picked quality information freely available over the World Wide Web. As the Observatory is established and further developed, more on-line information services, including interactive databases, shall be set up.

Through its Internet activities, OCPA strengthens research capacities by sharing the available data more equitably worldwide, forging new tools, innovative approaches and alternative alliances at local, national, regional and international levels.

With its background and practical skill and experience in the field, making use of its established data processing techniques and Internet presentation technology, the Culturelink Network is, as reliable partner, well-equipped to continue to cooperate with the Observatory in the process of researching, monitoring, collecting and disseminating up-to-date policy-relevant knowledge and information via the Internet.

Keeping the OCPA site hosted and developed at Culturelink /IMO offers several decisive advantages:

- financial implications – absolutely lowest yearly cost,

- quality/price – the features offered by the IMO server are more than sufficient for OCPA's current needs, matching and partly surpassing the features available in much more costly packages,

- capacity/performance – no limit to the usable hard disk space and data transfer rates needed for the present contents and services as well as their medium and long term future development,

- web authoring – regular content updating and further development of the web structure and design at a incomparably low cost,

- content – cooperation with the Culturelink Network concerning the incorporation of relevant African news items in the OCPA web site.