

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Westminster		
Unit of Assessment: 26 Modern Languages and Linguistics		
Title of case study: Preserving London-French Web Heritage		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2012 - 2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Dr Saskia Huc-Hepher	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Senior Lecturer in French	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: Jan 1999 +
Period when the claimed impact occurred: July 2014 – Dec 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? Y/N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) Dr Saskia Huc-Hepher's web archiving project – the London French Special Collection (LFSC) – provides a lasting digital record of the community's online presence. Its impact has been manifold: it has stimulated community building through archival co-creation and the enhancement of the digital communication practice of the French Embassy; paved the way for further diasporic community collections within the UK Web Archive and expanded its user base; enhanced web archiving practice by directly informing the development of the Shine interface for the JISC UK Web Domain Dataset such that researchers are better able to navigate the data; provided a best-practice model adopted by others working in the field of community focused web curation; demonstrated how educators can use diasporic web archives to “decolonise” Digital Humanities and “reboot” Modern Languages.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) The research in this case study and the related web archiving project build on Huc-Hepher's role as Project Researcher on the British-Academy-funded History of the French in London project, led by Prof Debra Kelly (University of Westminster). This investigation into London's French community was the first of its kind, tracing the French presence from the 17th century to the present day and culminating in a multi-authored book for which Huc-Hepher co-wrote a chapter based on the initial findings of her contemporary ethnographic fieldwork [1].</p> <p>During this project, Huc-Hepher conceived and developed the original idea of a digital collection that would record the London French community's on-line presence, developing her expertise in the area of web archiving through her involvement in two major web archiving projects, co-led by the British Library, IHR, JISC, Oxford Internet Institute, CRASSH (Cambridge), King's College London, and Aarhus University. The first of these was AADDA (Analytical Access to the Domain Dark Archive), an 18-month JISC-funded project which ran from 01/2012 – 06/2013 and sought to enhance the sustainability of a dark (unavailable to the public) archive of UK domain websites collected between 1996 and 2010. The second project, the AHRC-funded BUDDAH (Big UK Domain Data for the Arts and Humanities), ran from 01/2014 – 03/2015 and brought humanities' researchers together with developers at the British Library in order to co-produce tools that would enhance the use of web archives, to showcase their cross-disciplinary value and to define a methodological and analytical framework for the study of big data in national internet archives.</p> <p>Huc-Hepher's London French Special Collection (LFSC) – the first digital archive of the online activities of the London French, and the first community archive of its kind anywhere in the world – was launched in 07/2014 with 68 websites, and then relaunched in 09/2018 with 115 [2]. The Open Access archive, developed using skills gained from the above projects, is theoretically underpinned by a pioneering “ethnosemiotic” framework of Huc-Hepher's own creation. Establishing several theoretical meeting points between Pierre Bourdieu's ethnography and Gunther Kress's multimodal social semiotics, Huc-Hepher conceptualises a culturally themed selective web-archiving modus operandi that draws on her humanities' scholarship, while developing useful practical recommendations regarding curation, classification and crowd-sourcing [3]. This ethnosemiotic framework not only provides an inclusive model that can be replicated, adapted and upscaled, but one that is informed by ethnographic sensitivities characteristic of Huc-Hepher's French cultural and linguistic grounding.</p> <p>The utility of this framework is demonstrated by its application to the analysis of a London-French blog [4]. Examining the dynamic relationships between blogger and audience, subjectivity and objectivity, on-line and what Huc-Hepher coins as ‘on-land’ habitus, and intermodal dynamics themselves, Huc-Hepher has demonstrated how her framework elucidates previously hidden facets of the blogger's cultural identity and sense of community belonging within the diasporic</p>		

context. The framework is thus a useful tool for identifying appropriate web objects for inclusion in community-themed archives, as well as presenting a valuable analytical template.

Huc-Hepher's incorporation of blended ethnographic methods in both her French and web archiving scholarship has gained national and international recognition, leading to an invitation to contribute to a multilingual and cross-institutional [study day](#) at the Institute of Modern Languages Research, co-funded by the Cross-Language Dynamics: Reshaping Community programme (AHRC Open World Research Initiative) and the AHRC Translating Cultures theme. This resulted in an innovative paper drafted collaboratively on-line by scholars from linguistic, digital, literary, anthropological and cultural studies [5]. Serving as a mission statement for Modern Languages, the paper makes a ground-breaking case for the ontological and epistemological synergies between ethnography and immersive language learning, as well as providing a set of concrete recommendations to enable the discipline to reinvent itself and thus safeguard the future of Modern Languages at a time when it is increasingly under [threat](#).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- [1] Huc-Hepher, S. & Drake, H. (2013). From the 16ème to South Ken? A contemporary study of the French population in London. In: Kelly, D. & Cornick, M. (eds.) *A history of the French in London: liberty, equality, opportunity*. London: University of London. pp. 391–429.
- [2] *London French Special Collection* in the British Library's UK Web Archive [[link](#)]
- [3] Huc-Hepher, S. (2015). Big Web data, small focus: An Ethnosemiotic approach to culturally themed selective Web archiving. *Big Data & Society*. [Downloaded 1000+ times; in the 92nd percentile and top 10% of all research outputs ever tracked by Altmetric]
- [4] Huc-Hepher, S. (2016). The Material Dynamics of a London-French Blog: A Multimodal Reading of Migrant Habitus. *Modern Languages Open*.
- [5] Wells, N., Forsdick, C., Bradley, J., Burdett, C., Burns, J., Demossier, M., de Zárte, M. H., Huc-Hepher, S., Jordan, S., Pitman, T. & Wall, G. (2019). Ethnography and Modern Languages. *Modern Languages Open* (1):1 [Viewed 1000+ times within a year of publication and with an Altmetric score of 43]

Huc-Hepher has been a partner in funded projects including:

- British Academy: History of French in London project (2011-2013) £8,000
- JISC: AADDA project (01/2012-06/2013) £38,509
- AHRC: BUDDAH project (01/2014-03/2015) £337,936

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Archiving and building community

The London French Special Collection (LFSC) helps foster a collective London-French identity by directly engaging the community and creating a “common-unity” presence within the national archive.

Community crowdsourcing – through the ‘Nominate a site’ tool – encourages French Londoners to **actively participate in the curatorial process and showcase the diversity of their community's contributions to the city's culture**. Active participation, by which contributors become personally invested in the project as co-creators, is substantiated by the database's growth to 139 sites in 2020, while the diversity of such sites is demonstrated by the archive's inclusion of everything from amateur theatre companies, NGOs, and regional associations to medical practitioners, schools, and the Huguenot Society. Importantly, by inviting community contributions, the LFSC **gives voice to facets of the community that a “top-down” entity of purely institutional value would miss** – for instance, the self-nomination of a site that is “representative of the bespoke architectural and interior design services requested by the French community in London” [a-i]. As Dr Naomi Wells, curator of the [Latin America UK](#) community archive at the British Library, states: Huc-Hepher's “Collection is particularly interesting in how it bridges the very institutional representations of the community with the more grassroots kind of organisations. I think it really provokes very interesting reflections on what makes a community” [a-ii].

The creator of the *Travels Around My Kitchen* blog, which features in the LFSC, further highlights the archive's “important” role in preserving “the gist of everyday [London-French] life and endeavours”, such that it is “given a prominence it might never otherwise get” [a-iii].

Significantly, the blogger emphasises the **sense of community identity created by the Collection**: “the diversity of sites archived gives an interesting picture of what the community in London is about” and helps answer “the topical question: Where do we come from?” [a-iii]. That the diasporic community is connecting via this archive is also attested to by the blogger: “It has brought lots of readers to my site” [a-iii].

By uniting disparate sites into a culturally coherent corpus, the LFSC serves to consolidate the “common-unity” presence of the diaspora today and for generations to come. Given the ephemerality of diasporic digital objects – these sites may only be “live” for a relatively short period of time – **the long-term safeguarding that the LFSC bestows is crucial for ensuring the legacy of the London-French community’s culturo-linguistic contributions** to the city and its inhabitants. This is especially important at a time when many such web objects are undergoing a process of extinction as the migrants move on following the UK’s departure from the European Union.

Such community building has also occurred via the use of the archive by the French Consulate. Recognising the archive’s function as “une mine précieuse d’informations” (a precious mine of information) in formal email correspondence after attending the public launch of the LFSC at the French Institute, the Vice Consul for France in the UK has described the archive as “une première dans le monde” (a worldwide first) which would allow him to gauge the temperature of the community on the ground [a-iv]. This appreciation of the archive’s value resulted in Huc-Hepher being invited to present her community-building archive practice at a meeting with “the Communication Officer of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development to the French Consulate in London, [where] all initiatives [...] to improve communication with the French community in the United Kingdom” were presented [a-iv]. Huc-Hepher’s archiving project was subsequently relayed back to Paris in a ministerial *compte-rendu* to demonstrate how the Consulate were **improving their digital communication provision and better catering for expatriate citizens’ needs based on information found in the LFSC** [a-iv]. A bulletin was subsequently published on the Consulate’s public-facing website and circulated in an eNewsletter to over 100,000 recipients, with a direct hyperlink to the Collection [a-v]. The effect of this on LFSC usage is described below.

Impact on UK Web Archive

The LFSC is included within the UK’s most prestigious online archive: the UK Web Archive ([UKWA](#)). Based at the British Library, the UKWA collects and preserves copies of UK digitally published resources (including websites, social media) and makes them available across the other Legal Deposit Libraries at Oxbridge, Trinity College, Dublin and the National Libraries of Scotland and Wales.

Huc-Hepher’s work on the **LFSC helps the UKWA to achieve its mandate**. A key aspect of the UKWA’s [mission statement](#) is to “reflect the rich diversity of lives and interests throughout the UK”. The LFSC corresponds and directly contributes to this objective, as confirmed by the judging panel of the Digital Preservation Awards 2018. The panel underlined Huc-Hepher’s “mature approach to preservation which is of wide significance and benefit”, adding that the “long term, distinctive and distinguished commitment and contribution the UKWA has made [is] well presented within the nomination” [b-i].

Further, as the British Library’s Web Archiving Engagement Manager states: “Working with Saskia on building a diaspora community collection (French in London) has subsequently **paved the way for further diaspora community collections which are now considered highly important to the web archive**” [b-ii]. The UKWA collective further confirm that Huc-Hepher “started a genre of diaspora collections that is growing” [b-iii].

The LFSC has also **expanded the UKWA user base**. Analysis of quantitative Google Analytics data provided by the British Library suggests the public dissemination of Huc-Hepher’s research by the French Consulate (described above) significantly impacted the number of UKWA users as a whole. Between April 2014 and February 2015, the monthly average of UKWA page visits was 24,616, but when the Embassy published its bulletin and newsletter in March 2015, a spike of 35,179 users was recorded, representing a rise of 10,563, i.e. a 45% increase compared to the 2015 average [b-iv]. The British Library also recorded the highest number of page views on record in March 2015 (date of the Consular newsletter): 115,192, compared to a three-year average of approximately 93,000 [b-iv].

Enhancing web archiving practice

Huc-Hepher's research on navigating archives with big data sets has been adopted by others working to make major UK archives accessible to the public. Informed by her work on the AADDA project, Huc-Hepher's [case-study](#) on the usability of London French blogs in the LFSC directly fed into **the development of the Shine interface (search tools and dashboard) for the JISC UK Web Domain Dataset**. This archive contains snapshots of all UK-domain websites collected between 1996 and 2013, a significant proportion of which are now unavailable to the public via search engines on the live web. "Due to the scale and diversity of the data contained in the archive, the [Shine] search interface became an essential tool for navigation of the archive" and made this formerly dark archive accessible to public users [c-i, p.221].

Huc-Hepher's **impact on the design of the prototype Shine search engine in regard to search functionality** is evidenced by Peter Webster, who was at that time Web Archiving Engagement and Liaison Manager at the British Library, where the dark archive was stored. Webster states that "it was preferable to be able to utilise what Saskia Huc-Hepher described as the 'objective power of arbitrariness'. If a query produced more results than could be inspected individually, then both Saskia and Rona Cran [a fellow BUDDAH researcher] were more comfortable with making their own decisions about taking smaller samples from those results than relying on a closed algorithm to make that selection" [c-ii].

Josh Cowls of the University of Oxford further highlights how Huc-Hepher's work within the BUDDAH project was "especially important for the development of 'Shine'" in **helping developers identify the nuanced ways in which the JISC archive needed to be navigated** [c-i, p.221]. Cowls reports on how "Huc-Hepher was able to conduct rich, illuminating analysis with only a small number of resources": a selection of community blogs, whose semiotic affordances, such as "colour palettes, the content and lay-out of banner images, typography and text", allowed her to identify "meaningful changes in the emotional position of the blogger in relation to London" [c-i. p. 224-5]. This work "point[ed] to the contribution to research that even a single [web] page or object can play" [c-i. p. 225].

Speaking on behalf of Shine, the Web Archiving Engagement Manager at the British Library confirms that Huc-Hepher's "work in participating in the AHRC funded 'Big UK Domain Data for the Arts and Humanities' project helped lead to several developments within the field of web archiving and the UK Web Archive in particular. Before this project it was unclear how researchers might use a web archive but through working with Saskia and other participants we built in geographical and language search filters" [b-ii]. Huc-Hepher's intervention here thus informed the interface developers of the potential needs of Humanities' researchers and, in turn, has **enabled researchers to better navigate the big data and reap more meaningful results**.

Equally importantly, Huc-Hepher's work on **the LFSC is serving as a model adopted by other community web curators**. In addition to the aforementioned Latin America UK collection, [Russia in the UK](#) and Chinese in London collections are currently being curated. The curator of the former "was directed by the British Library" to Huc-Hepher's work as an example of best-practice "in terms of very specific community web curation" [c-iii]. Likewise, Jane Winters, Professor of Digital Humanities and Pro-Dean for Libraries at the School of Advanced Study (SAS), University of London, states that Huc-Hepher's research has impacted upon her own practice, confirming that the "careful curation that Saskia has done is absolutely a model. [...] I have certainly become much more interested in community archives than was the case previously. I hadn't really thought about that at all [...] It informs my thoughts about who we need to involve in research projects, and that you need to look at co-creating with the people who are producing these materials" [c-iv]. Winters also confirms that Huc-Hepher's impact in this area has international reach: "the Royal Library in the Netherlands is looking at the [Dutch] [Chinese community](#) [...] following exactly the same idea [...] but Saskia was pretty much there at the beginning; hers was the first kind of project which was doing that and that model has really spread out, not just in the UK but outside as well" through Huc-Hepher's dissemination activities [c-iv].

Disciplinary thinking and learning in Modern Languages and Digital Humanities

As an open access resource that requires no payment from end-users, the LFSC's socio-linguistically and culturally rich web objects have already found practical use in the languages' classroom. For instance, a French teacher at one of three secondary schools trialling the archive in their KS3-5 French language teaching highlights how the archive "**offer[s] a different**

perspective on what being or speaking French is thanks to the authentic resources which belong to the 21st century” [d-i].

Huc-Hepher’s work in this area is also playing an important role in the broader movement to “decolonise” Digital Humanities and “reboot” the Modern Languages discipline. The LFSC **provides Digital Humanities’ scholars with a multilingual worldview that challenges the monolingual English norm** in this area. This point is underscored by Prof Winters, who confirms that “digital research tends to be incredibly Anglophone, so what Saskia is doing, considering language-switching and people using languages other than English online, is really significant to get introduced and to have people think about” [c-iv]. Further, Paul Spence, lead of the Digital Mediations strand of the Language Acts and Worldmaking programme (AHRC Open World Research Initiative) of which Westminster is a partner, states that “Huc-Hepher’s web archive is **a significant contribution to broader efforts to reshape Modern Languages as a discipline in light of new media landscapes and affordances**. It has clear pedagogical value as a new object of study which aligns well with emerging teaching methods in Modern Languages, while also forcefully demonstrating the potential of language-based content for data-driven studies” [d-ii].

Huc-Hepher’s engagement activities – encompassing national and international interventions in both disciplinary areas [d-iii], often where they converge, as with her invited talk at the OWRI [Mapping Multilingualism & Digital Culture](#) workshop at King’s College London in June 2017 – has had a direct impact on the change of practice of those working in both areas. Along with Spence in his work as Senior Lecturer in Digital Humanities at King’s, this is exemplified by Wells and Winters subsequently using Huc-Hepher’s methodology when **training the next generation of researchers to use web archives**.

Wells has drawn on Huc-Hepher’s work for her own curation of the Latin America UK archive and, in her capacity as a research associate at the Institute for Modern Languages Research ([IMLR](#)), has “been using Saskia’s Special Collection as an example when introducing postgraduate researchers to the [UK] Web Archive and particularly to the Languages students” at the IMLR [a-ii]. Winters states that at SAS the LFSC model “has already been followed at PhD level and it could very easily be introduced to Masters level, especially as we have got that long view now, with more than twenty years of web archives; so contemporary historians need to be thinking about these kinds of things” [c-iv]. Other examples include a Language Coordinator from the London School of Economics incorporating new concepts presented by Huc-Hepher for use in her own project with students on developing a small-scale community web archive: “When talking about the linguistic landscapes I prefer much more the terms on-land vs. on-line than online/offline [...] it is more accurate to use [Huc-Hepher’s] terminology” [d-iv].

Huc-Hepher is thus demonstrably **generating new ways of thinking and encouraging better engagement with digitally mediated knowledge production** among both the current and next generations of scholars in Modern Languages and Digital Humanities.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- [a] (i) Anonymised archive submission (ii) Testimony from Dr Naomi Wells (iii) Testimony from creator of the Travels Around My Kitchen blog (iv) Correspondence from the French Consulate in London [French language; redacted] (v) Bulletin on French Consulate/Embassy website 10/03/15 [\[link\]](#)
- [b] (i) Digital Preservation Awards 2018 nomination correspondence (ii) Testimony from the Web Archiving Engagement Manager at The British Library (iii) UKWA Twitter 5/11/20 [\[link\]](#) (iv) Google analytics data for Open Access UK Web Archive from 04/2014 to 09/2015
- [c] (i) Josh Cows. ‘Cultures of the UK Web’ (2017), in Brugger, N. and Schroeder, R. (eds.) *The Web as History: Using Web Archives to Understand the Past and Present*. London: University College London Press, pp.220-237 [\[link\]](#) (ii) Peter Webster “Web archives as big data”, *Big UK Domain Data for the Arts and Humanities*, 27/01/15 [\[link\]](#) (iii) Testimony from Curator of Russia in the UK archive (iv) Testimony from Professor Jane Winters
- [d] (i) Testimony from school teacher using LFSC (ii) Testimony from Paul Spence, King’s College London (iii) Engagement activities list (iv) LSE Email Exchange (Redacted)