

Letter to the Editor

RAY EDMONDSON

Ian Wilson's article "The UNESCO Memory of the World Program: Promise Postponed" (*Archivaria*, Spring 2019) is timely and makes a substantial contribution to academic and professional discussion on the program at a critical point in its history. Having served in a variety of roles in Memory of the World (MoW) over the last two decades, and having chaired the working party that carried out the review of its general guidelines between 2015 and 2017, I would like to comment on a couple of issues raised in the article.

At the 12th meeting of the MoW International Advisory Committee (IAC), held in Abu Dhabi (4–6 October 2015), there was lengthy discussion on revising the rules and procedures of the IAC and the general guidelines of the program. As they had previously been revised back in 2002 when MoW was a much smaller operation, it was recognized that the guidelines had become seriously outdated; for example, they did not adequately provide for digital documents. Further, they now needed to be aligned with the *Recommendation Concerning the Preservation of, and Access to, Documentary Heritage Including in Digital Form*, up for imminent adoption by UNESCO's 2015 general conference.

I was assigned by the IAC to assemble and chair a group to undertake the revision. It was accepted that this task would require a two-year time frame and wide consultation. Though not foreshadowed at the IAC meeting, a second working group in which Dr. Wilson participated was subsequently established to review the IAC's statutes and rules.

The politicization of MoW, for the first time in its 25-year history, while not the reason for the review, complicated the task considerably. The political pressures should have been handled separately by the UNESCO secretariat, which is experienced in managing conflicting member states' interests expressed through nominations to heritage registers, rather than being allowed to derail the MoW program itself.

The 2015 Recommendation was evolved through two experts meetings held in Warsaw in 2012 and 2014, which evaluated the relative merits of a MoW convention versus a MoW recommendation and reached a clear preference for the latter. Having been part of both meetings, I believe this was the correct choice – so I disagree with Dr. Wilson on this point. On the other hand, I firmly agree with him on the chronic under-resourcing of the MoW program by UNESCO and the problems that this has created.

In the interests of further debate, may I commend to your readers the new book *The UNESCO Memory of the World Programme: Key Aspects and Recent Developments*,¹ of which I am co-editor. It is intended, like Dr. Wilson's article, to provoke thorough analysis and comment on the philosophy, character, politics, and potential of the program, including the recent review process.

Yours,

Dr. Ray Edmondson

9 July 2019

1 Ray Edmondson, Habil Lothar Jordan, and Anca Claudia Prodan, eds., *The UNESCO Memory of the World Programme: Key Aspects and Recent Developments* (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2019).

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