

# Digitisation of Culture in Israel

The modern State of Israel was established by the decision of the General Assembly of the United Nations of November 1947 and is the creation of the Jewish People returning to its ancestral homeland that evolved from the renewal of Jewish culture that began in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century with the Jewish Enlightenment (Haskala) movement in Europe. In May 2010, Israel's population was estimated at 7,602,400 of whom 6,051,000 are Jews. Arab citizens of Israel form the country's second-largest [ethnic] group, which includes Muslims, Christians, Druze, and Samaritans.

Much of the diversity in Israel's culture reflects the background of its population. Originating from around the world, immigrants arrived with diverse cultural backgrounds and went on to contribute to the development of Israel's culture. The resonances of these distinct cultural trends and influences from all across the globe produced a unique mosaic of cultural diversity that makes up Israel's culture today. With a diverse population of immigrants from five continents and more than 100 countries; as well as significant subcultures such as Russians Jews, extremely Orthodox Jews, and Israeli Arabs; each with its own newspapers and cultural networks, Israeli culture is extremely varied.

These rich cultural traditions have greatly enriched the performing and plastic arts and have produced several world class performers including the internationally renowned **Israel Philharmonic Orchestra**<sup>1</sup> and the **New Israeli Opera**<sup>2</sup>; Israeli dance companies, among them the **Batsheva**<sup>3</sup> and **Bat Dor Companies**, the **Kibbutz Dance Company**<sup>4</sup>, as well as the internationally acclaimed **National Theater, Habima**<sup>5</sup> that was established in 1917 as well as many other theater companies<sup>6</sup>. Some 200 museums around the country receive millions of visitors annually a very popular pastime for most Israelis. **The Israel Museum, Jerusalem**<sup>7</sup> is the largest cultural institution in the State of Israel and is ranked among the world's leading art and archaeology museums. Founded in 1965, the Museum houses encyclopaedic collections, including works dating from prehistory to the present day, in its Archaeology, Fine Arts, and Jewish Art and Life Wings, and features the most extensive holdings of biblical and Holy Land archaeology in the world. The Museum has built a far-ranging collection of nearly 500,000 objects, representing the full scope of world material culture. In the summer of 2010, the Israel Museum completed the most comprehensive upgrade of its 20-acre campus in its history, featuring



The Shrine of the Book,  
at The Israel Museum,  
Jerusalem,  
© The Israel Museum,  
Jerusalem



Israel's propensity for e-content development is based on several factors: an entrepreneurial spirit; a commitment to innovation; a continuous maximization of the resources at our disposal; an unusually high concentration of local start-ups, and international facilities located in Israel and a strong R&D

new galleries, entrance facilities, and public spaces. Perhaps the most famous of the Israel Museums collections are the **Dead Sea Scrolls**. **The Shrine of the Book**<sup>8</sup> is the home of several exceptional archaeological finds: the Dead Sea Scrolls and other rare ancient manuscripts. The dome covers a structure which is two-thirds below the ground, and is reflected in a pool of water that surrounds it. The striking juxtaposition of the white dome and black basalt wall, precise and opposing geometrical shapes, creates a monumental effect and contributes an extraordinary phenomenon in the Israeli landscape.

**The Bible Lands Museum**<sup>9</sup> in Jerusalem offers a unique collection depicting the cultures and civilizations of the ancient lands of the Bible. The museum's extensive collection of Ancient Near Eastern art presents the history of the biblical is one of the largest and most impressive archaeological museums in Israel.

**The Rockefeller Museum**<sup>10</sup> is an archaeological museum located in Jerusalem, Israel that houses a large collection of artefacts unearthed in the excavations conducted in the Land of Israel (Ottoman Palestine) beginning in the late 19th century. The museum building is also the head office of the Israel Antiquities Authority and houses the extraordinary collection of antiquities unearthed in excavations conducted in the country mainly during the time of the British Mandate (1919-1948). **The Tower of David Museum**<sup>11</sup> in Jerusalem is housed in the magnificently restored ancient Citadel' first constructed 2,000 years ago by Herod the Great. The Tower of David Museum traces Jerusalem's long and eventful history through state-of-the art displays and exhibits utilising the most advanced technologies. Canaanites and Hebrews, Greeks and Romans, Crusaders, Muslims, Turks, British, and Israelis are richly presented and seek harmony within the age-old walls.

The Holocaust has played an inevitably critical role in the evolution of Israel and Israeli culture.

Several cultural institutions pay tribute to the Six Million who perished in the Holocaust, with the world-renowned museum in Jerusalem **Yad Vashem**<sup>12</sup> - **The Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Authority** - as the leading authority on this subject. Yad Vashem's task is to perpetuate the legacy of the Holocaust to future generations so that the world never forgets the horrors and cruelty of the Holocaust. Its principal missions are commemoration and documentation of the events of the Holocaust, collection, examination, and publication of testimonies to the Holocaust, the collection and memorialisation of the names of Holocaust victims, and research and education. The Archive collection, the largest and most comprehensive repository of material on the Holocaust in the world, comprises 58 million pages of documents and nearly 100,000 still photographs, along with thousands of films and videotaped testimonies of survivors. These may be accessed by the public both in the museum and on-line including **The Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names**<sup>13</sup> where you may search for family members or friends and upload your own information and photos directly into the database.

**The Diaspora Museum**<sup>14</sup> in Tel Aviv, the Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, conveys the story of the Jewish people from the time of their expulsion from the Land of Israel 2,500 years ago to the present. It relates the unique story of the continuity of the Jewish people through exhibition, education and cultural endeavours, providing multiple avenues of personal historical identification. Also located in Tel Aviv is **The Eretz Israel Museum**<sup>15</sup>, a multidisciplinary museum that exhibits opulent collections in the fields of Archaeology, Judaica, Ethnography, Material Culture and the Applied Arts of the Land of Israel.

Two national cultural institutions that have taken on a leading role in Israel's cultural heritage are the **Israel State Archives**<sup>16</sup> and



**The National Library of Israel**<sup>17</sup>. The Israel State Archives is the national archives of the State of Israel. It was established in May 1948 and the Archives Law of 1955 regulates its operation. The State Archivist heads the Israel State Archives as well as all of the archives in Israel. The Archives contains, inter alia, documents, maps, postage stamps, official publications of the various government ministries, the Knesset, Israel's parliament, and the President's Residence; stenographic records of government meetings from 1948 onwards; minutes of Knesset Committee sessions; records of governmental commissions of enquiry and legal documentation, including records of the High Court of Justice and land registry records. In addition, the Israel State Archives holds many private archives of institutions and people of importance in the history of Palestine and Israel. It also houses a variety of audio-visual records, including films documenting events from the time of the British Mandate onwards, such as the trial of Adolf Eichmann, audio recordings and video tapes with testimonies of central figures in Israel; audio recordings of speeches, Knesset sessions, ceremonies and many other events, as well as a collection of some 100,000 photographs.

**The National Library of Israel** objectives are to collect, preserve, cultivate and endow the treasures of knowledge, heritage and culture in general, with an emphasis on the Land of Israel, the State of Israel and the Jewish people in particular. As the National Library of Israel, it collects all material published in the country. At the same time, it tries to acquire all publications appearing elsewhere in the world that relate to Israel. It collects Israeli publications on all subjects, with no distinction as to format, language, age level, literary value, orientation and the like. This includes thousands of periodicals of all type and origin, such as national and local (including kibbutzim) newspapers, government bulletins, organs of trade

unions and professional associations, financial reports of corporations, newsletters of youth movements and schools, scholarly and recreational journals, synagogue leaflets, market surveys and television program guides. Apart from being the National Library of the Jewish people, most of whom live outside the State of Israel, it collects books, periodicals, manuscripts, documents, recordings, maps, and pictures that reflect or represent the history of the Jewish people and its culture with no distinction as to orientation, purpose, importance or age level, encompassing all aspects of Jewish life and cultural expression: history, biography, language, education, religion, folklore, philosophy, belles lettres, art, recreation, and so on.

Together with **The Israel Museum, Jerusalem**, these three national cultural institutions have taken on a leadership role in the digitisation of cultural heritage in Israel over the last two decades. Israel has participated in the EU Framework Program for RTD since FP4. This created the opportunity for its active participation in the EC Lund program for the digitisation of culture. Through its participation in the NRG framework annual reports were produced that reflected the digitisation of culture and how it evolved in Israel<sup>18</sup>.

The digitisation of culture in Israel also derives from its economy being grounded on hi-tech industries. Israel is the first among the OECD countries by expenditure on RTD as a percentage of the GDP (4.864%) thus demonstrating innovation, development and creativity<sup>19</sup>. Software exports total US \$3.6b from total exports of US\$64b. Broadband household penetration in 2008 was near 72% and the subscriber growth is 12% yearly rate in 2009. This set Israel above the OECD average, between Japan and New Zealand<sup>20</sup>.

Israel's propensity for e-content development is based on several factors: an entrepreneurial spirit; a commitment to innovation; a continuous maximization of the resources at our



Jerusalem -  
Tower of David.  
Photo taken by  
User: EdoM  
<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jerusalem-TowerOfDavid-004.jpg>



disposal; an unusually high concentration of local start-ups, and international facilities located in Israel and a strong R&D that builds upon a high percentage of highly qualified scientists and engineers.

Israel experts have been active since 2003 in the MINERVA Ministerial Network for Valorising Activities in Digitisation<sup>21</sup> Israel is contributing to the building of Europeana through its experts and by providing substantial troves of content through its association with projects like ATHENA, Judaica Europeana and Linked Heritage. The National Library of Is-

rael, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, the Israel State Archive and hundreds of other institutions are uploading their digital resources to Europeana. The government launched in February 2010 a 100 million Euro program for the recovery and empowerment of the infrastructures of heritage in Israel. TAMAR - as this program is called - includes a focus on the 21<sup>st</sup> Century technologies grounded on the work carried out by MINERVA and aims to implement the standards and technologies established by Europeana into the national framework<sup>22</sup>.

1. See: [www.ipo.co.il](http://www.ipo.co.il)
2. See: [www.israel-opera.co.il](http://www.israel-opera.co.il)
3. See: [www.batsheva.co.il](http://www.batsheva.co.il)
4. See: [www.kcdc.co.il](http://www.kcdc.co.il)
5. See: [www.habima.co.il](http://www.habima.co.il)
6. See: *All About Jewish Theater*, <http://www.jewish-theatre.com>
7. See: [www.imj.org.il](http://www.imj.org.il)
8. See: [www.english.imjnet.org.il/htmls/page\\_899.aspx?c0=14389&bsp=14162](http://www.english.imjnet.org.il/htmls/page_899.aspx?c0=14389&bsp=14162)
9. See: [www.blmj.org](http://www.blmj.org)
10. See: [www.english.imjnet.org.il/htmls/page\\_1684.aspx?c0=15160&bsp=14162](http://www.english.imjnet.org.il/htmls/page_1684.aspx?c0=15160&bsp=14162)
11. See: [www.towerof david.org.il](http://www.towerof david.org.il)
12. See: [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org)
13. See: [www.yadvashem.org/wps/portal/IY\\_HON>Welcome](http://www.yadvashem.org/wps/portal/IY_HON>Welcome)
14. See: [www.bh.org.il](http://www.bh.org.il)
15. See: [www.eretzmuseum.org.il](http://www.eretzmuseum.org.il)
16. See: [www.pmo.gov.il/PMOEng/PM+Office/Departments/deparchive.htm](http://www.pmo.gov.il/PMOEng/PM+Office/Departments/deparchive.htm)
17. See: [www.jnul.huji.ac.il/eng](http://www.jnul.huji.ac.il/eng)
18. See: [www.minerva.unitedapps.com/nrg\\_reports.html](http://www.minerva.unitedapps.com/nrg_reports.html)
19. Economic Highlights 3rd Quarter 2010 State of Israel, Ministry of Finance, International Affairs Department, [www.financisrael.mof.gov.il/FinanceIsrael/Docs/En/EconomicHighlights/EconomicHighlights-2010-3.pps](http://www.financisrael.mof.gov.il/FinanceIsrael/Docs/En/EconomicHighlights/EconomicHighlights-2010-3.pps)  
Ministry of Communication, presentation at the Science and Technology Committee of the Knesset (Parliament), November 2009, [www.moc.gov.il/sip\\_storage/FILES/1/1891.pdf](http://www.moc.gov.il/sip_storage/FILES/1/1891.pdf)
20. [www.minervaisrael.org.il](http://www.minervaisrael.org.il)
21. [www.minervaeurope.org](http://www.minervaeurope.org)
22. TAMAR: Action guidelines for the recovery and empowerment of infrastructures of national heritage [www.pmo.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/419CBBC2-7AC5-41B3-9714-D4E5D1E14222/0/tamar.pdf](http://www.pmo.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/419CBBC2-7AC5-41B3-9714-D4E5D1E14222/0/tamar.pdf)