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Visibility of Côte d'Ivoire's documentary heritage: a cartographic study of libraries and archives in the digital age

Mariam BERTE SEKONGO[1]
[1]Virtual University of Côte d'Ivoire (UVCI), Côte d'Ivoire, mariambs2012@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

A country's documentary heritage – comprising books, periodicals, administrative documents and archives – can only fulfil its purpose if it is locatable, accessible and usable. As information-seeking practices now take place online, the digital visibility of the institutions holding this heritage has become a prerequisite for physical access to the collections. However, Côte d'Ivoire does not have an open and up-to-date national directory of its libraries, documentation centres and archives. The aim of this study is to identify the distribution of documentary institutions across Côte d'Ivoire in the digital age. The study was carried out using mixed-methods research, incorporating mapping. The quantitative component is based on an inventory compiled through web searches (Google and Google Scholar). The qualitative component consists of an inductive thematic analysis of a corpus. The results show that 72 entries were identified, of which 58 institutions were selected for analysis and 49 were geolocated. Twenty-one

organisations are located in Abidjan; excluding those in the network of reading and cultural activity centres (CLACs), 70 per cent of the geolocated organisations are concentrated there. In summary, a digital directory of Ivorian documentary organisations is possible but incomplete. In fact, it provides a heterogeneous snapshot rather than a reliable directory.

Keywords: Information science; documentary heritage; mapping; digital visibility; Côte d'Ivoire.

1. Introduction

1.1. Context: documentary heritage in the digital age

Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO, states that documentary heritage is an essential yet fragile component of the world's memory. According to her, UNESCO dedicates a safeguarding programme to it, shares best practices and maintains this register, which bears witness to the broadest tapestry of human history. This is the case with the libraries of Chinguetti in Mauritania and the archives of Amadou Hampâté Bâ in Côte d'Ivoire. (UNESCO, 2025). On 17 April 2025, UNESCO inscribed 74 new documentary heritage collections on its Memory of the World Register, bringing the total number of inscribed collections to 570. The inscriptions come from 72 countries and four international organisations. They cover, in particular, the scientific revolution, women's contributions to history and the major milestones in multilateralism.

The guidelines for the Memory of the World Programme, which is responsible for heritage held in museums, archives and libraries around the world, provide a definition of **documentary heritage.** It comprises the following elements: it is movable; it consists of a combination of signs/codes, sounds and/or images; it can be preserved (the medium is inert); it can be copied and transported; and it is the result of a deliberate act of documentation. A country's documentary heritage therefore comprises, in particular: books, periodicals, administrative documents and archives. It fulfils its function only if it is locatable, accessible and usable. However, information searches are generally carried out by students, researchers and the general public on the web. This is why the digital visibility of documents thus becomes a prerequisite for physical access to collections.

In Côte d'Ivoire, when discussing documentary heritage, we deemed it appropriate to map out libraries, archives and documentation centres. Furthermore, the National Library, which is supposed to safeguard this heritage, has faced difficulties that have affected its collection: the partial closure of the National Library from 2006 onwards (COLSOC, 2020), and the looting of university libraries during the 2011 crisis (Dubois et al., 2021). Mapping offers a way of making a situation comprehensible. It enables us to locate institutions, measure concentrations and gaps, and make data-driven arguments. It is not, however, neutral, as a map shows only what has been recorded and, therefore, in a web-based study, what is already visible (Harley, 1989). Far from being merely a limitation, this characteristic makes the map a suitable tool for our research question: the gaps in a map constructed from open-source data are indicators of invisibility.

1.2. State of the art

There is a wealth of information available, but it is scattered. According to the National Library (BNCI), the chapter on Côte d'Ivoire in the open-access handbook **Bibliothèques à l'international** notes that it grew out of the Ivorian documentation section of the Institut fondamental d'Afrique noire, that it was inaugurated in 1974 in a 6,500 m² building, and that it holds approximately 63,000 volumes; it also offers a digital library, AKWABA, which provided access to 381 digitised documents in partnership with the Francophone Multimedia Library in Limoges (Dubois et al., 2021). Its partial closure in 2006 left only the children's section open (COLSOC, 2020), which reopened in November 2008 thanks to sponsorship from Mitsubishi (Quiñones, 2012). According to the same author, unlike other French-speaking African countries, Côte d'Ivoire does not have a network of public libraries. The provision of library services therefore relies on a variety of initiatives. Firstly, the BNCI's 'Women and Reading' scheme, which set up 23 mini-libraries in hairdressing salons (Adjiman, 2014; Contreras, 2017). Then there is the CLAC network, supported by the International Organisation of La Francophonie ( ), which comprised 19 centres in 2023 (AllAfrica, 2023). Then there are community initiatives such as the feminist library '1949' (Le360 Afrique, 2022) or the libraries run by the Magic System Foundation (Dubois et al., 2021). Finally, we can mention the recently opened municipal library in Boundiali, inaugurated in 2025 (AllAfrica, 2025).

The figures are outdated or approximate. The 2007 IFLA/FAIFE report, for which the National Library acted as the respondent, covered 9 public libraries and 12 research libraries. This report also noted that fewer than 20 per cent of public, school and university libraries offered internet access, in a country where internet penetration stood at 0.8 per cent at the time (IFLA/FAIFE, 2007). A 2010 census cited by Dubois et al. (2021) mentioned 33 libraries and 40 documentation centres, but these figures are considered approximate due to the looting that took place in 2011.

As regards archives, existing research consists mainly of theses. Konan (2017) notes that the digital dissemination and promotion of public archives were non-existent at the National Archives Directorate, and proposes the creation of a website. Bai (2019) emphasises that the National Archives' premises have not undergone any refurbishment since the colonial era and advocates for the digitisation of colonial archives. The only notable digital resources are the work of external researchers (Bat and Hiribarren, n.d.) or foreign institutions, such as the Centre des archives diplomatiques de Nantes, which holds the archives of the French Embassy in Abidjan (CADN, 2000, 2001).

Finally, several stakeholders have sought to organise the information. For example, the UVCI was selected in 2019 to lead the LIBSENSE pilot programme for Francophone libraries (UVCI, 2019). An IFLA/IALL workshop held in Abidjan in 2017 brought together librarians from the National Assembly, universities and the OHADA region to discuss open-access legal information (IFLA and IALL, 2017), and the Association for the Promotion of Information and Documentation Sciences (APSID-CI) has been bringing together professionals since 2003 (AllAfrica, 2026a). However, none of these sources provides a spatialised overview.

1.3. Problem, objective and hypotheses

This observation gives rise to the following research questions: *is it possible to digitally catalogue, using open web sources, the libraries, documentation centres and archives of Côte d'Ivoire? How can an inventory of documentary institutions be compiled on the web? How can their geographical distribution be illustrated? And finally, how can their digital visibility be assessed by geographical area?*

The general objective is to identify the distribution of information organisations across Côte d'Ivoire in the digital age. This is broken down into three specific objectives, namely: to compile an inventory of information organisations identifiable on the web; to describe their geographical distribution through mapping; and to compare their digital visibility by geographical area.

The main hypothesis is that *Ivorian information resources are not sufficiently visible on the web*, which limits the possibility of cataloguing and mapping them comprehensively. Three secondary hypotheses elaborate on this: information resources are heavily concentrated in Abidjan, and the interior of the country is covered mainly by targeted public or cooperation programmes; visibility varies according to the type of institution – that is to say, foreign cultural centres and higher education institutions are more visible than public libraries, school libraries and archives. Finally, the visibility of these institutions depends in part on external partners rather than on their own online presence.

1.4. Theoretical framework

Our research question lies at the intersection of three theories: documentary heritage, digital visibility and critical cartography. The contributions of these complementary theories are presented below.

1.4.1. Documentary heritage

According to the Ivorian National Commission for UNESCO (2018), the Memory of the World Programme for the preservation of documentary heritage was established in 1992 by this international organisation. The 2015 Recommendation concerning the preservation and accessibility of documentary heritage, including digital heritage, serves as its normative framework. It organises States' actions around identification, preservation, access, general policy measures, and national and international cooperation (UNESCO, 2015). It also presents the long-term preservation and accessibility of documentary heritage as prerequisites for the exercise of freedom of opinion, expression and information. Côte d'Ivoire, a Member State, submitted a report to UNESCO on the implementation of this Recommendation in November 2018 (Ivorian National Commission for UNESCO, 2018).

1.4.2. Digital visibility

Visibility is a concept in the social sciences, linked to recognition and control (Brighenti, 2007). Thompson (2005) demonstrates that media-mediated visibility differs from the visibility of co-presence: it is produced by the media, is no longer dependent on location and provides access to recognition, whilst invisibility may result from exclusion. Applied to documentary institutions, this interpretation leads to a shift in perspective: the absence of traces on the web is not merely a technical flaw; it places the institution outside the sphere of recognition of users, researchers and partners.

We therefore define the *digital visibility of a documentary organisation* as its ability to be found, identified and contacted remotely via accessible, reliable and up-to-date online traces

1.4.3. Critical cartography

Wood (1992) emphasises that maps construct arguments, whilst Crampton and Krygier (2006) argue that critical cartography is a tool for the redistribution of knowledge. For our study, the map therefore has a dual status: it is both a

method of spatial analysis and a critical object, as the gaps in a map constructed on the web indicate data gaps as much as actual absences.

2. Methods

2.1. Research design

We adopted a convergent mixed-methods design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017). Two strands were conducted in parallel over the same period and subsequently integrated into the interpretation. The quantitative strand focuses on an inventory of the facilities: numbers of staff, distribution by type and by area, distances, and levels of visibility. The qualitative component is a thematic analysis of a corpus of documents relating to these facilities (reports, theses, conference presentations, press articles, institutional web pages). This choice is justified by the nature of the research question. In fact, the figures indicate where the documented facilities are located and to what extent they are visible. Mapping serves as a point of integration because each map combines quantitative data (location, level) with qualitative information (status, partners).

2.2. Geographical scope and unit of analysis

The geographical scope is the territory of Côte d'Ivoire. The unit of analysis is *the documentary institution*, defined as any entity possessing a documented, organised collection – whether printed or digital – made available to the public, even if access is restricted. Examples of documentary institutions include the National Library, university libraries, public libraries, school libraries, archive centres, institutional documentation centres and cultural centres. The population under analysis therefore comprises 58 institutions out of 72 records.

2.3. Quantitative section

2.3.1. Data collection

Data collection was carried out in September 2026 via web searches using the general-purpose search engine Google and the academic search engine Google Scholar, in both French and English. Search queries combined generic terms ('library', 'archives', 'documentation centre', 'media library', 'CLAC') with types of institution (universities, government departments, cultural centres, schools) and city names. The full text of relevant institutional web pages was consulted. The search was continued, category by category, until a reasonable number of relevant results had been exhausted, without claiming to be exhaustive. Each record refers to at least one source and a date of consultation.

2.3.2. Variables

Each entry includes the name and the following classification: national library, public library, archives, higher education and research, institutional and administrative documentation, cultural centre, school library, digital resource, association or coordinating body. In addition, it includes the town or city, a status, the source, geographical coordinates and their level of precision. The geographical coordinates are approximate: they are at neighbourhood or locality level, except for two organisations whose coordinates are published (the BNCI and the UVCI). The records are then grouped into five zones: Abidjan, South (excluding Abidjan), Centre and North.

2.3.3. Visibility indicator

The web visibility of each organisation is rated on an ordinal scale from 0 to 3 (Table 1). The scale measures what a user can find online about the organisation itself, not about its parent organisation: this is the difference between level 2 (documented by the parent organisation or a partner) and level 3 (its own page or website).

Table 1. Web visibility scale for documentary organisations.

Level	Definition	Examples from the inventory
0	Historical record only: old reference, with no recent information	American Cultural Centre (2008), Jacques Aka Cultural Centre (1992)
1	Indirect reference: press, scientific literature, third-party documents	CLAC, '1949' library, school libraries
2	Documented via the governing body or a partner (website, fact sheet, social media page)	BNCI, National Archives, UFHB, UVCI, CIRES
3	Page or website specific to the library	Goethe-Institut (library), Institut français (media library), documentation departments of the Ministries of Finance and Planning

2.3.4. Analysis

As the sample is not probabilistic, we limit ourselves to descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations. The proportions describe our corpus and not the country as a whole.

2.4. Qualitative component

The qualitative corpus comprises the documents used to compile and interpret the inventory. These documents include, in particular: international reports (IFLA/FAIFE), textbook chapters, Master's theses, conference presentations, press articles, pages from institutional websites and archive inventories. We first subjected them to an inductive thematic analysis: reading the texts in full, identifying passages relating to the existence, status, partners, access and digital presence of the organisations. We then grouped them into themes. The analysis is based on the traceability of the extracts, on triangulation between different types of sources, and on comparing the themes with the quantitative results.

2.5. Map production

Here we consulted the AI tool, specifically Claude AI. The text that follows is the tool's response. The map background is taken from the Natural Earth dataset, at a scale of 1:10 million, showing country boundaries, distributed via the *world-atlas* package (Natural Earth, n.d.). We extracted Côte d'Ivoire and five neighbouring countries (Mali, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia) from this dataset, then simplified the outlines using the Douglas–Peucker algorithm (tolerance of 0.003° for Côte d'Ivoire, 0.025° for the neighbouring countries). The projection is equirectangular, with the same scale along both axes; the distortion, of the order of 1 per cent at this latitude, is negligible for descriptive purposes. The points were verified using a test to check whether they fell within the national polygon: all 49 positions lie within the country's borders.

Four maps were produced: a national map by type of structure (Figure 1), a map of Abidjan by neighbourhood (Figure 2), a national map by visibility level (Figure 3) and a graph of levels by zone (Figure 4). At the Abidjan scale, the base map has been deliberately omitted: the data resolution does not allow for an accurate representation of the coastline and the lagoon, and a rough outline would be misleading. Facilities are shown by neighbourhood, and points with the same address are slightly spaced apart to ensure legibility. An interactive version of the map, featuring filters and fact sheets, was produced in parallel; it is not reproduced here.

2.6. Reliability, limitations and ethics

Four methodological limitations must be noted from the outset. Firstly, the *visibility bias*: a web-based inventory does not capture structures that are completely invisible; our results therefore underestimate the extent of invisibility. Secondly, *the snapshot effect*: the data describe the state of the sources in September 2026, and several sources predate this date. Thirdly, the *single coder*: the level of visibility was not subject to double-coding. Furthermore, *spatial accuracy*: the positions are approximate, which precludes detailed distance analyses. The study does not involve any individuals and is based on public sources; the inventory data are provided in the appendix and in an attached file to enable replication and critical review.

3. Results

3.1. Composition of the corpus

The data collection yielded 72 records. After excluding purely digital resources, associations and coordinating bodies, and organisations located abroad, 58 organisations form the analysis population. Table 2 shows its composition. Public libraries dominate (27 organisations, or 47 per cent), due to the 19 CLACs; these are followed by higher education and research (14), institutional and administrative documentation (5), foreign cultural centres (4), school libraries (4), archives (3) and the National Library (1).

Table 2. Composition of the study population (n = 58).

Type of organisation	Number	Proportion (%)	Geolocated	Status to be verified
National Library	1	1.7	1	0
Public reading (including 19 CLACs)	27	46.6	24	14
Higher education and research	14	24.1	13	6
Institutional and administrative documentation	5	8.6	3	3
Foreign cultural centre	4	6.9	4	3
School library	4	6.9	2	4
Archives	3	5.2	2	0

Total	**58**	**100**	**49**	**30**

Two points are immediately apparent. Firstly, only three archival institutions could be identified in Côte d'Ivoire: the National Archives Directorate, the Documentation and Archives Department of the National Assembly, and a digital archiving project run by the Court of Auditors. Secondly, the status of 30 out of 58 organisations (52 per cent) needs to be verified, as the source is outdated, indirect or does not confirm that the organisation is currently active. This figure is in itself a finding: it highlights the fragility of the available information.

3.2. Spatial distribution at national level

Of the 58 organisations, 49 could be geolocated (85 per cent). Figure 1 shows them by type. Abidjan is home to 21 of these 49 organisations (43 per cent); the remaining 28 are spread across the South (5), the Centre (11) and the North (12). This seemingly more balanced distribution is misleading: 19 of the 28 facilities in the interior (68 per cent) are CLACs, that is to say, the result of a single programme. If we set aside the CLACs, 21 of the 30 geolocated facilities (70 per cent) are located in Abidjan, whilst the interior has only 9: the municipal library in Boundiali, five university libraries (Bouaké, Korhogo, Daloa, Yamoussoukro and San-Pédro, the latter of which was under construction in 2021) (Financial Afrik, 2021; Koffi, 2017; MESRS, 2024), a school library in Bangolo, a planned school library in Aboisso and a former cultural centre in Bouaké.

Figure 1. Geolocated library facilities in Côte d'Ivoire, by type (n = 49; the 21 facilities in Abidjan are grouped into a single marker). Background: Natural Earth, simplified. Approximate locations.

Table 3. Distribution by geographical area (n = 58).

Area	Number	Proportion (%)	of which CLAC	of which others	Status to be verified
Abidjan	21	36.2	0	21	9
South (excluding Abidjan)	5	8.6	3	2	5
Centre	11	19.0	6	5	8
North	12	20.7	10	2	0
Not geolocated	9	15.5	0	9	8
Total	**58**	**100**	**19**	**39**	**30**

The distance between the inland facilities and Abidjan is considerable. For the 28 facilities geolocated outside Abidjan, the median distance to Abidjan is 319 km (minimum 92 km, maximum 569 km); only 3 are within 150 km, and 16 (57 per cent) are 300 km or more away. The North stands out due to the absence of statutes to verify (Table 3), which is likely due to the recent date and the precise nature of the articles describing the first CLAC network, rather than to better documentation of the organisations themselves (see 3.4).

3.3. Focus on Abidjan

Figure 2 shows the 21 institutions in Abidjan, broken down by neighbourhood. They are grouped into three clusters. The first cluster is **the Plateau**: the National Library, the National Archives, the National Assembly's Documentation Service, the ministries' documentation departments, the Museum of Civilisations library, the Salam Mosque library (AllAfrica, 2026b), and the Institut français. The second cluster is **the Cocody campus**: Félix Houphouët-Boigny University and its libraries, UVCI, CERAP, CIRES, the Goethe-Institut, the Confucius Institute (AidData, n.d.), and the former American Cultural Centre. Finally, the last cluster comprises **more outlying sites**: Yopougon with the '1949' library; in Marcory, the Magic Library of Anoumabo; in Adiopodoumé, the Swiss Centre for Scientific Research; and in Abobo-Adjamé, the Nangui Abrogoua University Library.

Figure 2. Documentary facilities in Abidjan by neighbourhood (n = 21). Schematic view without a detailed map background; approximate locations, points at the same address shown separately.

This concentration reflects the country's administrative structure: the Plateau district is home to the administration, the archives and the National Library. In Cocody, there is Félix Houphouët Boigny University and the foreign cultural centres. This has a practical consequence, namely that a single address often covers several institutions (for example, the documentation and s departments of two ministries). This complicates precise geocoding and makes textual lists indispensable for the maps.

3.4. Digital visibility

Visibility levels are distributed as follows (n = 58): level 0 for 3 organisations (5 per cent), level 1 for 42 (72 per cent), level 2 for 9 (16 per cent) and level 3 for 4 (7 per cent). At the threshold used (at least level 2), 13 out of 58 organisations (22 per cent) are sufficiently visible. The result depends heavily on the threshold: 95 per cent of organisations reach at least level 1, but only 7 per cent reach level 3. Almost all are therefore mentioned somewhere on the web; very few have their own online presence.

Table 4. Visibility levels by type of organisation (number of staff).

Type of organisation	N0	N1	N2	N3	Total	Level ≥ 2 (%)
National Library	0	0	1	0	1	100
Public reading	1	26	0	0	27	0
Foreign Cultural Centre	1	1	0	2	4	50
Higher education and research	0	7	7	0	14	50
School library	0	4	0	0	4	0
Institutional and administrative documentation	1	2	0	2	5	40
Archives	0	2	1	0	3	33
Total	**3**	**42**	**9**	**4**	**58**	**22**

Table 4 confirms marked differences between types. None of the 27 public reading facilities exceeds level 1, nor do any of the four school libraries. All 19 CLACs are at level 1: they are described in the press and programme documents, but we could not find a dedicated webpage or website for any of them. Conversely, two foreign cultural centres (Goethe-Institut, n.d.; Institut français, 2024) and two ministerial documentation departments have a dedicated webpage (level 3). In higher education, half of the institutions reach level 2, but this largely reflects the visibility of the university itself, not that of its library: in the sources, the library is often mentioned in just a single line within the institution's profile. As for archives, only the National Archives Department reaches level 2, via a social media page and third-party profiles; it does not have its own website (COLSOC, 2020).

Table 5. Visibility levels by geographical area (number of staff).

Area	N0	N1	N2	N3	Total	Level ≥ 2 (%)
Abidjan	1	9	7	4	21	52
South (excluding Abidjan)	0	5	0	0	5	0
Centre	1	9	1	0	11	9
North	0	11	1	0	12	8
Not geolocated	1	8	0	0	9	0
Total	**3**	**42**	**9**	**4**	**58**	**22**

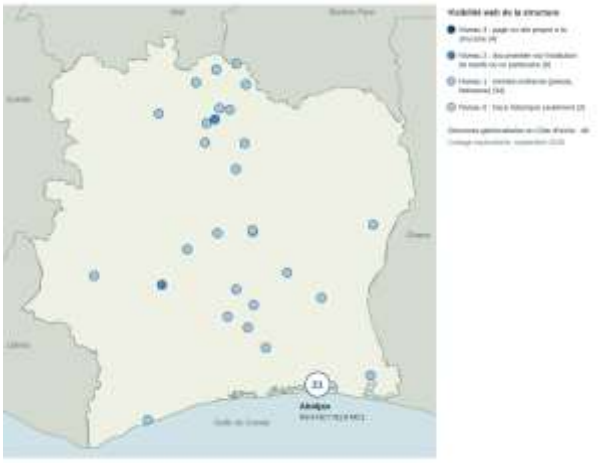

Figure 3. Web visibility of geolocated documentary structures (n = 49). Level 3 is only achieved in Abidjan. Exploratory coding, September 2026.

Table 5 and Figure 3 show that the visibility gradient follows that of concentration. In Abidjan, 11 out of 21 institutions (52 per cent) reach at least Level 2, and all four Level 3 institutions are located there. Outside Abidjan, only 2 of 28 geolocated institutions (7 per cent) reach Level 2 (one university in Daloa and one in Korhogo), and none reach Level 3; across all institutions outside Abidjan, including those not geolocated, the proportion falls to 5 per cent (2 out of 37). Figure 4 summarises these differences.

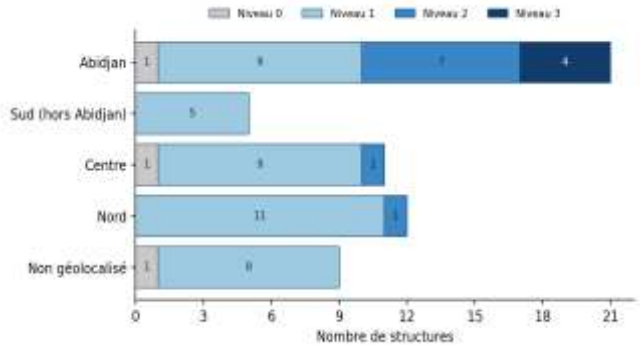

Figure 4. Levels of web visibility by geographical area (n = 58, student numbers).

3.5. Qualitative results: six themes

The thematic analysis of the corpus revealed six themes, summarised in Table 6 and detailed below.

Table 6. Themes identified from the qualitative analysis.

Theme	Content	Examples and sources
1. Dependence on partners	Establishment, provision of resources or visibility ensured by external stakeholders	Sponsorship of the BNCI's children's library; CLAC and OIF; Goethe-Institut and Institut français; colonial archives website maintained by external researchers
2. Historical fragility	Disruptions that have interrupted or compromised services	Partial closure of the BNCI in 2006; looting in 2011; National Archives premises not refurbished
3. The CLACs: the backbone of the interior	A single programme structures services outside Abidjan	19 CLACs by 2023; support from the CLACs for the Boundiali municipal library
4. Archives with low visibility	Few facilities, no dedicated site, digitisation in its infancy	No dedicated website; digitisation projects; inventories hosted abroad
5. Digital access via platforms	Digital services are delivered via platforms rather than through organisations	AKWABA; the UVCI's virtual library; the OHADA's online library

6. Uncertainty and discrepancies	Outdated, incomplete or contradictory sources	Conflicting figures regarding a book donation; differing years for the launch of a programme; sources from 1992 and 2008

Theme 1: Dependence on external **partners.** Many organisations owe their existence, facilities or visibility to external stakeholders. The BNCI's children's library was reopened in 2008 thanks to a donation from Mitsubishi (Quiñones, 2012). Similarly, a 'French Corner' was established in 2013 with the support of the National Book Centre. Subsequently, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BnF) donated children's books in 2016 (ActuaLitté, 2016). The CLACs form part of an OIF programme (AllAfrica, 2023). Two of the four Level 3 organisations are foreign cultural institutions. Their visibility is bolstered by their international network. Finally, the most comprehensive online catalogue of colonial archives was compiled by two historians based outside the country (Bat and Hiribarren, n.d.). This dependence supports hypothesis H3, although we are unable to test it statistically.

Theme 2: historical fragility. Several sources link invisibility to disruptions. The partial closure of the BNCI in 2006 left only the children's section open (COLSOC, 2020); the UFHB libraries were looted in 2011 (Dubois et al., 2021); the National Archives' premises have not been refurbished since the colonial era (Bai, 2019). Digital visibility is therefore being rebuilt on physical infrastructures that are themselves fragile.

Theme 3: CLACs, the backbone of the interior. The CLAC programme provides the bulk of the documentary resources outside Abidjan: ten centres in the North, nine in the Centre and the South, coordinated by the National Technical Centre for Public Reading and Cultural Activities (CENATELPAC) (AllAfrica, 2023). The programme remains active: the Ministry has announced that the CLACs will support the running of the Boundiali municipal library, which was inaugurated in 2025 (AllAfrica, 2025). The paradox is that this programme, which is crucial for territorial coverage, has a low profile as a network of individual facilities.

Theme 4: Archives with low visibility. Archives are the least represented and least documented type of resource online. The National Archives do not have their own website (COLSOC, 2020), the digital promotion of public archives was non-existent in 2017 (Konan, 2017), and the inventories of French archives relating to Abidjan are hosted in France (CADN, 2000, 2001). However, a digital archiving project for the Court of Auditors has been reported (PIAF, 2026).

Theme 5: Digitalisation relies on platforms. Digital resources are more visible than the physical structures they extend. The BNCI's AKWABA digital library, the UVCI's virtual library – designed as a national digital repository for higher education (Coulibaly, 2017) – and the OHADA's online library (Kouassi, 2017) all have specific web addresses, unlike most local libraries. The country's digital strategy therefore appears to prioritise centralised platforms rather than the individual online presence of each institution.

Theme 6: uncertainty and discrepancies. Sources sometimes contradict one another: according to ActuaLitté (2016), the BnF donated 20,000 children's books to the BNCI in 2016, whilst Livres Hebdo (2016) puts the figure at 200,000; the 'Women and Reading' initiative is dated 2012 by Contreras (2017) and linked to the 2013 Year of the Book by Adjiman (2014). Some references are dated (Jacques Aka Cultural Centre, 1992; American Cultural Centre, 2008). On the Goethe-Institut webpage consulted, a closure notice was displayed whilst the library's opening hours were published. These discrepancies confirm that an online inventory must retain a record of sources and dates.

3.6. Summary of results

The quantitative and qualitative results are consistent. A digital inventory is feasible; we have identified 72 entries and located 49 institutions. However, it remains incomplete and varied: more than half of the statuses need to be verified, and nearly three-quarters of the institutions are only visible through indirect references. The least visible areas and types are precisely those whose existence is most difficult to establish remotely (local libraries, archives, inland areas).

4. Discussion

4.1. Is it possible to digitally catalogue Ivorian documentary institutions?

The answer to this question is 'partially'. It is positive in the sense that a structured, categorised and mapped inventory can be compiled from open sources within a limited timeframe. On the other hand, it is negative in the sense that this inventory cannot serve as a reliable directory. **There are three reasons for this**. Firstly, the absence of an official national directory means that information must be pieced together from diverse sources, resulting in a snapshot rather than a reference framework. Secondly, the status of half of the institutions is uncertain, which means the inventory cannot be used to guide a user without further verification. Finally, the inventory

overlooks organisations that have left no online trace. Harley's (1989) critique of cartography serves as a reminder: a map is also read by what it does not show, and ours is also a map of data gaps.

4.2. Testing the hypotheses

Table 7 compares the hypotheses with the results.

Table 7. Hypotheses and results.

Hypothesis	Statement	Main result	Verdict
Main	The organisations are not visible enough on the web	22% at level ≥ 2; 7% at level 3; 95% at level ≥ 1	Confirmed, borderline
H1	Concentration in Abidjan; the interior is covered by targeted programmes	21 of the 30 geolocated facilities are outside CLACs (70 per cent); 19 of the 28 facilities in the interior are CLACs; median distance of 319 km	Confirmed
H2	Visibility varies by type	Public and school libraries: 0 per cent at level ≥ 2; higher education: 50 per cent; foreign cultural centres: 50 per cent; archives: 33 per cent	Confirmed, with some qualification for higher education
H3	Visibility dependent on external partners	Theme 1; 2 of the 4 Level 3 organisations are foreign cultural centres	Qualitatively supported, untested

The main hypothesis is confirmed, but the conclusion depends on the threshold. If the only requirement is a mention somewhere on the web (level 1), almost all organisations are visible; if a dedicated page is required (level 3), almost none are. We argue that Level 2 is the appropriate threshold for a user: it provides sufficient information to locate the institution and contact it, even if this involves going via the parent institution's website. This position is open to debate, and we provide the data in Table 4 so that the reader may apply a different threshold.

H2 requires some qualification. In higher education, level 2 often refers to the university itself, not its library. If we were to code the library alone, the results would probably be lower, which would reinforce the main hypothesis. This qualification is consistent with the finding by Dubois et al. (2021) that Ivorian university libraries are vulnerable and have limited digital resources, though we have not measured this.

4.3. Putting the results into perspective

Our figures are of the same order of magnitude as the few previous statistics available. The 2007 IFLA/FAIFE report identified 21 libraries (9 public and 12 research libraries), whilst the 2010 census cited by Dubois et al. (2021) 33 libraries and 40 documentation centres, totalling 73 organisations, compared with 58 physical locations in our analysis sample. The categories and scopes differ too greatly to allow for a direct comparison, and the comparison is made here merely to give an order of magnitude. It merely suggests that our inventory captures a significant proportion of the landscape, though it is impossible to say whether these are the same organisations.

This finding also raises questions about international tools. The IFLA's Library Map of the World provides statistics by country and helps to advocate for libraries, but it relies on national contributions (IFLA, n.d.); without a basic national register, a world map cannot go down to the level of individual facilities. The University of Montreal's handbook also notes that texts relating to libraries could not be found online, unlike the 2015 law on the book industry (Dubois et al., 2021): this invisibility also extends to the legal framework.

4.4. Implications

The results suggest five avenues for action, listed in order of perceived urgency:

- *A national open directory.* A public database, under an open licence, containing at least the name, type, address, contact details, opening hours, a contact person, status and date of last update. It could be hosted by an existing institution (Ministry of Culture, CENATELPAC, BNCI) in collaboration with APSID-CI; it could also feed into open databases such as Wikidata and OpenStreetMap.

- *A basic web entry for each organisation.* A single page – even on the supervisory body's website – listing the address, access conditions and contact details would elevate the organisation from level 1 to level 2. The 19 CLACs, all currently at level 1, would be the first to benefit from this.

- *A basic catalogue of archival holdings.* For archives, where the shortfall is most acute, the online publication of an inventory of holdings and finding aids, prior to any large-scale digitisation, would improve visibility at minimal cost.

- *A distinction between libraries and universities.* Each higher education institution would benefit from having a dedicated page for its library, linked to the library consortium and the virtual library.

- *Monitoring visibility.* A simple indicator, similar to ours and calculated annually, would enable progress to be measured.

4.5. Limitations

Two points are worth highlighting. Level 2 of higher education institutions reflects the institution rather than the library, which undoubtedly inflates the visibility of this category slightly. Furthermore, the absence of a survey of organisations and users prevents us from measuring the gap between online visibility and actual usage: an organisation with low visibility on the web may be very well known locally, and vice versa. Our findings relate to digital visibility, not to the overall accessibility of the documentary heritage.

4.6. Outlook

Four possible avenues for further research exist. Firstly, a double-coding process independent of visibility to assess the reliability of the indicator. Secondly, interviews with organisation managers and coordinating bodies (APSID-CI, CENATELPAC) to verify their status and supplement the non-web-based inventory. Furthermore, the study could be extended to under-represented categories such as town halls, local archives and school libraries. Finally, a longitudinal study would help determine whether recent initiatives (municipal libraries, digital archiving) are altering the landscape.

Conclusion

This study analysed the feasibility of digitally cataloguing libraries and archives in Côte d'Ivoire to determine whether these organisations are sufficiently visible online. A mixed-methods approach, incorporating mapping, led to consistent conclusions. An inventory comprising 72 records – including 58 institutions analysed and 49 geolocated – was compiled from open-access sources, though it remains incomplete. Half of the institutional statuses require verification, and three-quarters of the institutions are visible only through indirect references. Documentary institutions are concentrated in Abidjan, outside the CLAC programme alone, and visibility decreases with distance from the capital. It is noted that half of the institutions in Abidjan achieve a sufficient level of visibility, compared with 7 per cent of those in the interior. Archives, local libraries and school libraries are the least visible.

The hypothesis of insufficient visibility is therefore confirmed against a stringent threshold. The issue is not merely technical. However, making documentary institutions visible is a prerequisite for access to the collections. An open national directory, a basic web page for each institution and a basic catalogue of archival holdings are low-cost measures that would directly address the shortcomings identified. The maps produced here, including the interactive version, provide an initial overview of the current situation, which can be corrected, supplemented and monitored over time.

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