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THE DIGITIZATION OF THE CULTURAL HERITAGE AT THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF ROMANIA. OBJECTIVES AND PERSPECTIVES

Abstract. The National Library of Romania is an important institution constantly focused in the process of long-term preservation and permanent access to the cultural heritage. The purpose of this document is to set out two action areas: first, strengthen efforts to expand and improve access to the digital knowledge and joining partnerships with the libraries from the national system of libraries in order to sustain the sharing of the documentary, technical, human and material resources, and secondly, to define a Public Policy for the digitization of cultural resources and the creation of the Digital Library of Romania, already adopted since January 2008. In this regards, a feasibility research study on digitization, digital preservation and online accessibility of library resources has been conducted among the cultural institutions that own cultural material eligible for digitization. The results of the study give us a proper evaluation and an approach of the documentary corpus of the national library system, the stage of the digitization process, the technical infrastructure, as well as the training level of the staff. Also, a coherent and integrated digitization solution at a national level has been established in compliance with the requests and standards established by The European Digital Library, thus ensuring the interoperability with EDL. The National Library of Romania, by its legal functions, by its structure and organization, by its methodological functions, can coordinate at the level of the national system of libraries the activity of digitization and organization of the Romanian Digital Library.

Keywords: National Library of Romania; Digitization; Digital Library; Public Policy; Projects.

1. Concerns and actions taken on the digitization field involving the NLR and the LNS (Libraries National System)

A concise and pertinent analysis for the early forms of digitization in the Romanian libraries must take account of the involvement of these structures in the search process for new ways to solve problems related to management, long-term preservation and dissemination of resources and collections, while improving services for the users. Thus, we can talk about the constant concerns of libraries and institutions holding valuable collections, regarding the preservation and recovery in modern forms of documentary funds, as reflected by a series of initiatives that preceded what we can name now the shaping process and the conceptual framework of digital library.

Prior to the creation of a functional digital library, numerous public libraries have already acquired databases with journal subscription, their holdings were accessed over the OPAC and they started to build up an effective way to their electronic collections. One of the library's principal goals with regards to modern information and communication technologies was the transformation of all the catalogues of its holdings into electronic databases searchable on the internet.

For cultural institutions traditionally entrusted with collecting and preserving cultural heritage, the question of finding a way to be kept for future generations has become extremely

pressing and they have been constantly focused in the process of long-term preservation and permanent access to the valuable treasures.

As a consequence of all those initiatives, the libraries could:

- Make resources broadly available
- Reach new users
- Provide a value-added service
- Capitalize on investment in resources and technology
- Preserve original resources
- Increase seamless access to the collections

Within the framework of the policy of permanent support of cultural values and according to his mandate to promote the preservation of cultural heritage, the National Library of Romania has been devoted on securing the preservation of the national heritage, assuming as well to transmit the spiritual values of the Romanian people. In this respect, the National Library of Romania wants to broaden the access to culture, by attracting more categories of users to study its valuable collections and by active involvement in the development process of the European Digital Library.

Local relevant initiatives - existing projects at the national level. Until now, in Romania, due to the limited financial and human resources of the libraries, as well as in the lack of a close cooperation and collaboration, there have been some *isolated, sporadic and small sized initiatives* in the field of digitizing projects without creating functional and interoperational metadata. All these initiatives have been based on stringent budgets, not coordinated at a national level and without the necessary infrastructure.

The same characteristics could be mentioned also in the field of public-private partnerships, when collaborative efforts were not strongly encouraged or enforced, and we could saw them as reduced in number, size and significance.

There are some relevant projects in the framework of the local initiative that preceded the building of the national digital library.

- The National Library of Romania together with the CIMEC (Apograf – The National Digital Library of Manuscripts and old books – over 50.000 pages from the Batthyaneum branch of the National Library of Romania)
- The National Academy Library (over 36.000 digital facsimiles from the "Eminescu's Manuscripts", "Traian Vuia" Archive)
- The Metropolitan Library of Bucharest (over 5.500 pages of school bibliography)
- The "Panait Istrati" County Library of Brăila (over 30.000 pages of Romanian literature in accordance with the school curricula)
- The County Library of Braşov – the digitalisation of the publication "Gazeta de Transilvania"
- The Central University Library "Carol I" of Bucharest (about 20.000 pages – rare books, manuscripts, serials, current monographs)

Research-area projects carried out through university libraries, research institutions. University libraries and research institutes were involved in numerous research projects at national and international levels sustained by MEC, focused mainly on issues related to the new technologies, the development of digital content, integrated systems of data bases, applications of the information and communication technologies in various fields of activity and the last but not the least to the improvement of information and documentation flows.

Those projects were able to produce a real impact on the economic and social environment due to the multidisciplinary research teams involved in their concerns for the development of content accessible through multiple sides, likewise enlarged the area of beneficiaries. Among the most important projects we could quote:

- Prototype project for public services in informatized libraries
- Management system of the National Fund of Technical Regulations
- Specialized information system for urban data bases.
- National Management System of digital resources in science and technology based on grid structures SINRED.

All those concerns, initiatives and projects have created the premises for the development of a public policy proposal PPP in September 2007, in accordance with the Commission Recommendation on the digitization and online accessibility of cultural material and digital preservation (2006/585/EC), enabling the implementation of the most important project for all the libraries and other info-documentary structures of Romania, The Digital Library.

2. Public Policy (PP) – define, objects, purposes

In the last decade a key question was raised among the different stakeholders. Why a **public policy** in the above mentioned digitization field?

Public awareness needs to be raised up and policy-makers should avoid fragmentation of investments and efforts. Therefore, agreements on technical standards must involve also the research community and the stakeholders.

Following the Recommendation of the European Commission and the Council Conclusions, the Romanian Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs (MoCRA) has launched a wide consultation process whose results were incorporated within a **Public Policy (PP) for the digitization of cultural resources and the creation of the Digital Library of Romania**. In January 2008, the PP was approved by the Government after the consultation of the main stakeholders: the National Library of Romania with the county level libraries, Institute for Cultural Memory (CIMEC), the National Centre of Cinematography, National Film Archive and Directorate for Museums, Collections and Governmental Granting within MoCRA.

The *main objectives of the Public Policy* for the digitization of cultural resources are:

- Improvement, coordination and efficiency of digitization processes of cultural material at national level
- Increase the number of digitized representative cultural material, diversification and digital preservation
- Improvement of public accessibility to national cultural material

Also to support the public policy outline, in the August-September 2007 period, the National Library of Romania accomplished a study concerning the digitalization and online accessibility of cultural material and digital preservation in the national library system in Romania. In the first stage, the study focused on the public libraries, but will continue with the libraries from the educational system. The libraries participating in the questionnaire proposed by NLR provided data about their collections and catalogues, ongoing retroconversion programs, electronic resources acquired or made by libraries, IT infrastructure, human resources and existing digitization projects.

A "**documentary corpus**", including the documents from the special collections category (old books, incunabula, bibliophile books, manuscripts, photos) representative for the Romanian culture, has been established in order to be integrated in EDL (the European Digital Library). In the development of this documentary corpus all the libraries from the

public library system participated with their suggestions and the National Library of Romania suggested the digitalization based on the type of the documents from the representative funds of special collections (both the libraries from Bucharest and those from Alba Iulia, the Batthyaneum branch).

Based on this **feasibility research study on digitization, digital preservation and online accessibility of library resources** regarding the documentary corpus of the national library system, the stage of the digitization process, the technical infrastructure, as well as the training level of the staff, a **digitization solution** was proposed, including a **budget estimation**.

The public policy proposal became effective starting from January 2008 and represents the basis of a **multiannual programme for 7 years regarding the process of the digitization of cultural resources** and the creation of the Digital Library of Romania.

A broad action plan has been set up and comprises **two stages**:

I. 2008-2009
- Development of specific software, maintaining and updating;
- Purchase of technical equipment and manpower for digitization;
- Purchase of IT equipment (creation of data bases, provide digital content access) and support to local digitization initiatives;
- Professional training.

II. 2010 – 2014
The activities of the programme can be supported up to 40% through:
- European programmes,
- Participation of Romania in European regional programmes in the digitization area;
- Public-Public Partnerships with local authorities that hold cultural material;
- Public-Private Partnerships between MoCRA and/or local public administration structures and private entities.

3.NLR contribution to representative projects – Manuscriptorium, ENRICH

The National Library of Romania is involved in some very interesting and large international projects, especially in projects that create relevant digital content to the enhancement of European cultural memory:
- **"Manuscriptorium – building virtual research environment for the sphere of historical resources"** http://www.manuscriptorium.com

Manuscriptorium is a system for collecting and making accessible on the internet information on historical book resources, linked to a virtual library of digitised documents and financed and coordinated by the National Library of the Czech Republic.

After the UNESCO „Memory of the World" initiative in 1992 and follow-up programme Memoriae Mundi Series Bohemica (MMSB), an electronic research environment for the sphere of historical book from libraries, archives and museums was developed. The results were incorporeted in the Manuscriptorium project.

NLR has provided to the Manuscriptorium a valuable collection of old Romanian books: Liturghier slavonesc, 1508; Apostol. Târgovişte, 1547; Molitvenic. Târgovişte, 1545; Pravalia. Govora, 1640; Molitvenic. Câmpulung, 1635; Şapte taine. Iaşi, 1644, etc.

- **ENRICH - E**uropean **N**etworking **R**esources and **I**nformation concerning **C**ultural **H**eritage (December 2007 – November 2009) http://enrich.manuscriptorium.com/

ENRICH, the targeted project funded under the eContentPlus programme, also coordinated by the National Library of the Czech Republic aims to virtual aggregation of information concerning old documentary heritage, especially manuscripts and incunabula, and other historical documents. The main goal is to provide seamless access to old documentary heritage from various European cultural institutions in order to create a shared virtual research. Enrich is built on the Manuscriptorium Digital Library that has already managed to aggregate data from 46 collections from the Czech Republic and abroad. The project groups together almost 85% of currently digitized manuscripts in the national libraries in Europe and will provide data also.

4. NLR – valuable treasures

NLR owns valuable collections that include some of the most important prints and manuscripts from the South-Eastern European heritage:

Macarie - Slavonic Book of Liturgies. The first book was printed on the present-day territory of Romania in 1508, during the reign of Radu the Great, by Macarie of Montenegro extraction. There are five copies in the country - three in the Library of the Romanian Academy, one in the Archbishopic Library in Sibiu and the one described here in the National Library. This copy is complete and has been restored. The binding is that of the time - brown leather on wood, a simple monastic work. It was compulsory for the Orthodox Church liturgy service books of that time to include the three liturgies: that according to St. John Chrisostomos, that of St. Basil the Great and the Divine Liturgy, preceded by the set ritual of the liturgy, comprising the service performed by the deacon.

The watermarks of the paper - representing a balance with round or triangular pans in a circle, an anchor in a circle and a cardinal's hat - are proof that it was made in Italy (most probably in Venice). The language of the text is Middle Bulgarian, as used in the Romanian manuscripts of the time, and not the Middle Serbian of the texts which Macarie had printed in Montenegro. He arrived to the Romanian provinces fleeing from the Turkish invasion. Macarie's printing is different in its letter characteristics from that of Montenegro and Venice, as it was influenced by the lettering of the Romanian manuscripts of the time.

Codex Aureus. Old latin manuscript, the Codex Aureus was ordered by the franc Emperor Charles the Great (742–814) and is remarkable through his calligraphy and painted images. It is written on fine sheets of parchment with gold letters, therefore the name of the Golden Codex, and the text of the manuscript represents a fragment from a Tetraevanghel comprising only the first two Gospels, Matthew's and Mark's. The other part of the manuscript, corresponding to Luke and John Gospel, is in the wealth of the Vatican Library in Rome. The actual binding of the fragment housed at the Alba Iulia branch is not the original one, and the two covers made in ivory are in London and Rome. It is a unique case of a document founded in three countries.

5. Conclusions

The National Library of Romania, by its legal functions, by its structure and organization, by its methodological functions, can coordinate at the level of the national

system of libraries the activity of digitization and organization of the Romanian Digital Library. With its valuable collections, NLR is part of the European cultural heritage for the next generations, thus will take the leading role in the development towards a digitization of the Romanian library environment, as a challenge to put forward a variety of competitive services.

The importance of the sharing of the documentary, technical, human and material resources is unanimously recognized at the level of the Romanian national libraries system. The sharing resources principle will lead to the establishing of partnerships between the National Library of Romania and the libraries from the system. These partnerships will beneficiate of the support offered by the private system, when possible.

The main goal remains to develop and nurture relationships with key partners, in order to maintain a virtual library comprised of accurate, up-to-date, comprehensive electronic information.

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