

Digital University Collections and the Open Access System

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Abstract:

In the contemporary era, the university libraries are forced to adapt to new technologies and digital requirements, becoming the main information resources for educational and research activities. The concept of Information Society is defined by the exchange of information, and technology is the basis of this society. Romanian university libraries must adapt to these challenges by digitizing their collections, creating digital archives that provide quick and diversified access to the necessary information.

Within the Romanian university libraries, it is necessary to digitize the collections in order to meet the online users' needs, and their development strategies must be correlated with the available funding. The digitization process must take into account the type of document and the required resources, such as metadata and access to information. The cooperation with other libraries and institutions is essential in order to avoid the repeated digitization of the same documents.

Currently the Romanian university libraries face challenges regarding access to digitized documents and the development of users' digital services. The cooperation with other institutions, such as the National Digital Library, is crucial for preserving the cultural heritage and for diversifying the access to information. The digitization process requires planning, financial resources and IT specialists in order to ensure its success.

In conclusion the university libraries adaptation to new technologies is crucial for ensuring fast and efficient access to the information needed for research and education activities. The cooperation with other institutions and the implementation of digitalization strategies will ensure that libraries remain the main sources of information in the digital era.

Keywords: *digital university collections, open access system; university libraries, information society*

1. Introduction

In current times, with the new technological developments, the behaviour of the user has changed, and the university library has the task, due to the nature of the activity performed, to do everything possible so that the user deems it the main information resource for the optimal performance of the teaching or research activity.

In his paper, *Theories of the Information Society* Frank Webster lists five categories of definitions of the information society: "technological, economic, occupational, spatial, cultural. The

basis of the future global information society is represented by recent information and communication technologies" ('Theories of the Information Society' 2024 p. 139).

Also, in his work *Noi studii de biblioteconomie* (New Librarianship Studies), Professor Mircea Regneală stated the fact that "the role of libraries today is not limited to keeping books and documents; the library also contributes intensively to the dissemination of the information contained in the publications. For this, it is required to take the initiative to create and multiply the channels along which the information can pass easily from the library to the reader". To this end, at the level of universities, departments have been established to train professionals in the field of information and documentation, who acquire skills in working with information based on clear methodologies.

That is why it is imperative for the university libraries in general and for the Romanian central university libraries, in particular, to adapt to the new challenges generated by the information society, to set as their objective the steps related to the identification of the financial resources necessary for scientific documentation and, at the same time, to reject the status of simple extensions of the universities, meeting the informational needs of the readers by organizational strategies applied to the new realities faced by the academic environment.

To that effect, it is absolutely necessary for the electronic services of traditional and newly created university libraries to be equivalent, in terms of organization, to the traditional services of classic university libraries. Digitizing funds that were traditionally set up as university collections and making them available to users through scientific databases is one of the most important tasks for university libraries.

Without modern info-documentary structures capable of satisfying the quality parameters required by the EU, reducing the gap between Romanian libraries and those in developed countries will remain a simple illusion. In order for Romanian research results to be known and disseminated internationally, it is necessary for Romania to develop a coherent digitization strategy at the level of higher education institutions, under the coordination of a consortium of Romanian university libraries, and this, firstly, for a faster access to different funding sources. Moreover, the cooperation between a university and its library should be translated into an agreement whereby all rights and obligations are regulated. More precisely, any university or university library should establish a digital institutional repository, through which to ensure the access of the entire scientific community to the various intellectual products: doctoral theses, various works and important publications of the university, etc. This objective requires the structuring of some conditions, both legal and organizational, to ensure access to materials in electronic format, especially since most of the university libraries participating in the creation of digital archives are implement publishing contracts, as well as standard record control numbers, such as ISBN. A such, there is a qualitative leap, because an enormous amount of works containing valuable information, stored in libraries, but with a restricted degree of access, is entered in well-organized databases, which contain the full text of the document and the metadata describing it, along with the protocols that facilitate interoperability with other systems and services (services providers).

Consequently, the objective of setting-up a digital university archive, i.e. creating the possibility for researchers and students to access digitized scientific documents quickly and from various locations, must represent a priority task of all university libraries and, more than that, the need for members of university communities to master the methods of using these new technologies it is all the more pressing.

In his work *Science of communication*, writer J.J. Cuilenburg shows that "the methods and extent with which information is produced, collected, processed, preserved, have evolved together with the development of human society. To all this is added the marriage between the computer and telecommunications, decisive for the amplification of communication. The two technologies

(computer technology and communication technology), taken together, are called information technology" (van Cuilenburg *et al.* 1998 p. 59).

Therefore, in the future, Romanian university libraries must be able to respond to user requests in the most documented way possible, in order to identify and operationalize information, and it is necessary, at the same time, to actively participate in research and knowledge development processes, in order to substantiate research bases and ensuring the efficient transfer of information.

2. The impact of digital information technology on collections in Romanian university libraries under open-access system

In the contemporary age, the university library faces important transformations, due to the rapid development of information and communication technology. Alongside the traditional libraries, together with the advent of digital technology, the foundations of a new info-documentary structure model were laid: the digital library. In this new context, university libraries are under strong pressure to align themselves with the information society's objectives, whose defining goal is the permanent access via the most efficient search engines to national and international digitized informational collections.

Hence, in the process of adapting the university environment to the directives of this new way of managing and organizing information, the educational system has a key role in initiating any project to update the university structures, especially communication systems, which are under a true exponential development.

Also, it is mandatory to create a planning of the services that "will be the core of the entire managerial activity, because it is involved in all segments of this development process. Planning is an analytical process that involves assessing the future, establishing a mission, determining certain objectives in the context of that future, imagining the paths of action to achieve these objectives, all included in an appropriate action program", as specified by Professor Ionel Enache, in his book *Planning and organizing library services* (Ionel 2004 p. 52).

In order for these radical, completely new changes to be made, first it is imperative to find the financing methods, without which narrowing the gap between Romanian libraries and those in developed countries will remain a simple illusion because, in the information society, the library permanently redefines its objectives and resources to constantly ensure the exchange of information on traditional or digital media and the continuous access to national and international information resources, through the most efficient search engines. All the more as university libraries and university centers, which are integrated into the education and research system, deal with both the processing and the management of information dissemination, support the development of the scientific community by popularizing electronic resources organized by profile or by rendering individual services on demand, acting as mediators between library resources and users, trying to establish the necessary balance between collections and their circulation.

In essence, it can be stated that the information society is the society that is based on the Internet. At the same time, globalization is also a consequence, mainly of the exponential evolution of the Internet. So, "it can be said about globalization that it is one of the phenomena specific to the information society. Given the link between the informational society and globalization, the statement that globalization is a consequence of the informational society is justified, because the informational society is an irreversible process".), says researcher Mihai Draganescu in the book

titled *Globalizarea și Societatea Informațională (Globalization and the Informational Society)* (Drăgănescu 2001 p. 3).

Therefore, any info-documentary structure must identify methods for: selecting, digitizing and storing cultural resources corresponding to written heritage, movable cultural heritage, immovable cultural heritage, audiovisual heritage, archival heritage and, in particular, to ensure quick access to stored information and at the same time, the regulation of the legal framework and the identification of financial resources.

The main reason for the digitization of traditional documents worldwide and then nationally was the preservation of heritage and rare documents. Digital scanning of rare documents is universally recognized as preventive preservation. For this type of documents, digitization is the only successful solution in the fight with time and space.

The selection of documents for the digitization process is much more laborious than the selection for the purchase or licensing of documents published directly in digital format, as it involves the expenditure of resources for titles that may already exist in the library collection. Thus, in order to avoid repeated digitization of a title, it is necessary to identify the digitization projects that have taken place or are taking place at the level of university libraries or other educational institutions throughout the country.

At the same time, it should be mentioned that in the process of cataloging digital documents, the lack of drafting the descriptors (they can be quickly and radically converted into metadata) is a decisive factor in excluding a collection from digitization. Creating metadata is more expensive than scanning, but the accuracy of the description provided and the user's quick access to information must be taken into account.

Usually, the access to digitized documents is achieved depending on the type of document, even via the Internet. From this perspective, it is necessary to put into practice a new system that allows the electronic management of access control, but also of the frequency of use of the managed digitized documents. It is very useful that all digitization efforts are supported by effective search engines, especially since access is desired not only from the library, but from any location.

Also, the retroactive conversion of the documents already existing in the library funds is increasing the level of access to the collections, but it is much more important that the titles newly entered into the collections are also in digital format, in order to increase accessibility.

But, among all the conditional elements, the financial aspect can be appreciated as decisive. This aspect will be in close interdependency with the digitization solution chosen, which is determined by the type of document. Worldwide, digitization projects attract more and more researchers, engineers, specialists in computers or in the science of information and communication. The high interest in this direction is explained by the substantial funds that have begun to be invested in this type of cutting-edge research. In Romania, the financial resources available to the libraries only allow the development of specific, small-scale initiatives. In order to carry out a digitization project at the national level, it is necessary to ensure direct financing or support through projects dedicated to the achievement of this objective.

Until now, few Romanian university libraries have significantly digitized book collections, courses and periodicals found in the bibliographic lists of the faculties, the vast majority of them have digitized special collections. Sanda Bercovici believes that "The profile of the university, the number of faculties, the spatial organization determine, in most cases, the structure of the library. University libraries are more efficient and more cost-effective than specialized ones, especially in the era of the informational explosion" (Bercovici 2007 p. 10).

Conclusions

In the digital age, users of university libraries can influence selection decisions directly through purchase recommendations, but, especially, indirectly through the librarian's knowledge of the educational programs and research interests of the relevant institution. The greatest responsibility rests with the library and teaching staff. Lack of collaboration seems to be, in most Romanian university libraries, a critical issue, difficult to solve in a short period of time. It would be ideal for all university libraries, central facilities and branches, to receive a copy of each bibliography recommended for each subject of study, for each individual academic year, with specifications regarding the number of students enrolled in each course at the relevant universities. When these data involve changes, it is natural that they should be brought to the attention of the library staff. However, this does not always happen, having adverse consequences on the structure and characteristics of library collections.

The reference fund also requires special attention in the context of the collection development process, as it is positioned on the border between the two essential directions of the development process: universality or specialization. University libraries tend to keep reference documents of a general nature at the central facilities, those of a specific nature falling under the responsibility of the branches. Angela Marcu in the work titled *Noi tendințe în serviciile de referințe din biblioteci (New trends in library reference services)* states that: "The librarian-user relationship goes beyond rigid formalism, conventional communication, a feedback, without which a real and fruitful communication relationship cannot be established, between the partners who relate, regardless of the context and purpose, establishing, therefore, between the holder of information and the beneficiary, a very special connection, a mutual support" (Marcu 2006).

Also, the extremely contradictory trends manifested in the current librarianship activities carried out, especially in the Romanian university libraries, have imposed the need to adopt appropriate managerial practices for each individual structure, starting from general aspects, but insisting more on their specificity. The idea circulated by specialists in the field is that, currently, the main contradiction in the development of contemporary library collections is related to the ratio between the investment of resources in own collections and the investment for the expansion and improvement of interconnections, of various types of informational relations. The determinations are imposed by general goals and objectives, but also by the specific conditions of the environment, the particularities of users, the size of resources, the quality of technologies, traditions, etc. The option is not easy, it is not obvious, it is not without risks.

Specialist Peter Brophy points out that "the classic library model, based only on collection development, is no longer up-to-date. The model of systems that thought of the library according to purchase, classification or loan operations retains its value as an organizational and administrative tool, but it can no longer define the mission of libraries in the new age of information technology" (Brophy 2004).

The process of supplementing the collections has been and will be constantly given special attention because the contemporary library cannot successfully fulfill its mission of being both a manager and a generator of information, without developing viable strategies to be permanently integrated in the fast pace of the development of society on a global scale.

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