

EFFORTS FOR THE DIGITISATION OF THE BOOKS IN ROMANIA (2008-2018). CHALLENGES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

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Abstract

The books modelled in time consciousness and mentalities, presenting a continuously increasing cultural, social and national function. In the same time, the books have economical function, due to the fact that the editing formulas, the costs, the destinations and the priority of the contents are aspects with a rapid dynamics. The 21st century is the time when the effort of the Romanian historical research makes visible efforts to synchronise with the tendencies of the EU research, through researches concretised in working instruments, destined to support the resize and the fluidisation of the knowledge, integrating it into a dynamic scientific circuit. These efforts, either belonging to a singular researcher or to a collective of researchers, target at the present time ambitious aims related not only to the scientific investigation of the books, but also to the development of strategies meant to ensure the rapid access to information. Thus, the digitisation of the cultural and scientific values as preservation of the identity and support for future researches represents only one cultural strategy, in full progress in Romania.

Important roles in this matter have the Directives and the Recommendations of the European Union, who initiated and supported a common policy for the entire European space, including projects financed directly by the European Commission, e.g. Europeana Digital Library in 2008. The Romanian specialised institutions answered to these directives and recommendations, thus, starting with 2008, there is in Romania an institutionalised effort for the preservation and recovery of the Romanian patrimony through digitisation. The present study aims, at a decade distance from the beginning of the institutionalised efforts for the digitalization of the patrimony, to analyse the concrete achievements and the Romanian level in the digitisation of the cultural patrimony, especially the digitisation of the books.

Keywords: digital library, book, digitisation national program

1 Introduction

The books modelled in time consciousness and mentalities, presenting a continuously increasing cultural, social and national function. In the same time, the books have economical function, due to the fact that the editing formulas, the costs, the destinations and the priority of the contents are aspects with a rapid dynamics. The 21st century is the time when the effort of the Romanian historical research makes visible efforts to synchronise with the tendencies of the EU research, through researches concretised in working instruments, destined to support the resize and the fluidisation of the knowledge, integrating it into a dynamic scientific circuit. These efforts, either belonging to a singular researcher or to a collective of researchers, target at the present

time ambitious aims related not only to the scientific investigation of the books, but also to the development of strategies meant to ensure the rapid access to information. Thus, the digitisation of the cultural and scientific values as preservation of the identity and support for future researches represents only one cultural strategy, in full progress in Romania. Inside the Sectorial strategy in the field of culture and of the national patrimony of Romania for 2014-2020, the book represents, next to the print press, a cultural field by itself, according to the framework elaborated by the European Statistical System Network on Culture [1].

The present study aims, at a decade distance from the beginning of the institutionalised efforts for the digitization of the heritage and in the context when 2018 was declared the year of the cultural heritage in Europe [2], to analyse the Romanian level and the steps in the process, and the most visible achievements in the digitisation of the cultural heritage, especially the digitisation of the books. We may say that digitisation started a new course, as revolutionary as the one belonging to Johannes Gutenberg at the middle of the 15th century, a no-return course [3].

2 The European context of the digitisation process

The European context had an important role in the initiation, the institutionalisation and the regulation of the framework for the digitisation process in Romania. The Directives and the Recommendations of the European Union opened and supported a common policy in the entire community space and Romania, as member, had to respond to it. The reference documents in the field are the Recommendation of the European Commission on the digitisation and online accessibility of the cultural material and digital preservation 2006/585/CE on the 24th of August 2006 [4]; The Conclusions of the EU Council C297 on the digitisation and online accessibility of the cultural material published in the official Journal of the EU on the 7th of December 2006 [5]; the Recommendation of the European Commission on the digitisation and online accessibility of the cultural material and digital preservation 2011/711/UE on the 27th of October 2011 [6]; the Directive 2013/37 UE of the European Parliament and Commission on the 26th of June 2013 [7] on the re-use of public sector information. The objectives were the development of a long term strategy in the field of the digitisation by each member state, the actualisation of the legislation in the field, according to the EU and the international laws in the field of the right of the copyright, the creation of national digital libraries, frameworks and online access platforms. The common European policy in the field of the digitisation was constructed progressively, supported on one hand by the legislative force of the program documents of the European Council, which established precise terms for the implementation of the objectives, and on the other hand, by the power of the example offered by the initiator of the policy, by project financed directly by the Council. The most representative example is the European Library [8], opened in 2008, an ambitious project intended as a travel in the history, the identity and the culture of the Europeans and which has over 51 million units in its collections, organised on domains and themes.

According to the Report of Romania on the 17th of January 2018, available on the site Europeana [9], the contribution of our country to Europeana is of 154,830 digital units. Since 2008 and until the date of the report, the expenses of Romania for the support of the project Europeana were 60,000 EUR, while projects with a total value of 7,920 EUR

were financed from the EU budget, having as beneficiary the County Library “Octavian Goga” Cluj-Napoca. Currently, Romania is not part in any project financed by EU, in order to contribute to Europeana. According to the presented data, the 154,830 units are the results of the efforts made by 52 partner institutions which responded to the call launched by Europeana. The institution with the largest contribution is the Central Academic library “Lucian Blaga” of Cluj-Napoca, with 58,363 digital units. The most important 20 Romanian institutions providing materials for Europeana are:

3 Data Partners Objects on the Portal

“Lucian Blaga” Central Academic Library, Cluj-Napoca, Romania	58,363
INP - National Heritage Institute, Bucharest	51,921
The Library of the Romanian Academy	9,422
Romanian Television	6,091
National Library of Romania	4,664
County Library "Alexandru D. Xenopol" Arad	3,064
County Library "Panait Istrati" Brăila	2,424
Babes Bolyai University	1,700
The Central History National Archives	1,651
Timis County Library	1,442
County Library "G. T. Kirileanu" Neamț	1,185
The museum collection of the Orthodox Archdiocese - Alba Iulia	1,022
The National Museum of the Union – Alba Iulia	986
County Library "Octavian Goga" Cluj	877
The Association of Hungarian Folk Dance from Romania, Sfântu Gheorghe	742
Images of Old Cluj	686
The County Museum Buzău, Romania	677
"Lucian Blaga" Academic Library of Sibiu	659
County Library “V.A. Urechia” Galați	501

The report offers a series of information on the web traffic in Romania during 2015-2017, the language of access, the number of units provided in the collection 1914-1918, which is unfortunately very small, only 19 units [10]. Europeana Network Association was created connected to Europeana library, an organism which reunites experts from the field of the digital heritage and which has, according to the report, 105 Romanian members. Moreover, as recognition of the expertise of the Romanian specialists, in the Council of the Association, with 36 members with a key-role in all the activities involving Europeana, there are 3 representatives from Romania: Mrs Sorina Stanca from “Octavian Goga” County Library Cluj-Napoca, Mrs Olimpia Curta and Mrs Cristina Ioana Roiu from “Lucian Blaga” Central Academic Library Cluj-Napoca [11].

4 The national framework of the digitisation process

The specialised Romanian institutions responded to the community steps, thus, starting with 2008, we may discuss in Romania of an institutionalised effort for the conservation and the recovery of the Romanian cultural heritage through digitisation. We mention the Order of the Minister of Culture 2244/15.04.2008 on the establishment of the Specialised Commissions for the digitisation of the national cultural resources [12] and the Decision 1676 from 10/12/2008 [13] for the approval of the National program for the digitisation of the national cultural resources and the creation of the Digital Library of Romania. The legislative regulations were the fundament for the existence of a digitisation project of the unitary patrimony, extended to a national scale, on 4 directions: written patrimony (libraries), mobile patrimony (museums, collections), audio-visual patrimony (audio-visual archives), immobile patrimony (monuments, archaeology).

The public policy was the starting point in the digitisation process of the cultural resources and the creation of the Digital Library of Romania. The schedule of the aims was established on multiannual bases, in correlation with the schedule periods of the European Union. For 2008-2014, a plan of action in 2 steps was decided. The time interval 2008-2009 aim to: develop dedicated software, its maintenance and update; to acquire the equipment for the storage data and for the access to the digital content; the development of professional formation. The second step was represented by the time 2010-2014, when the objectives were represented by the attraction of European financing; the Romanian participation to the European regional programs in the field of digitisation; the formation of public – public and public – private partnerships [14].

For 2016-2020, the Strategy for national culture and heritage 2016-2022 a document in the stage of approval, offers in numbers a balance of the previous achievements and the future projections. According to the National Strategy for the digital agenda of Romania 2020, 750,000 units should be digitised and published in the European Digital Library until the end of the year 2015. Only 7.6% were digitised until 2016, a reason for the Ministry of Culture to propose financing from non-refundable funds for the project e-Cultura, aiming to digitise until 2020 a number of 750,000 resources mostly from the domain of the mobile cultural patrimony [15]. The strategy for the development of Romania for the next 20 years, proposed to the Romanian Academy, also approaches as priority direction of action the digitisation of the documents existing in libraries and their integration in the European and universal informational circuit. Ambitious targets are proposed: on short term (3 years) – 50,000 digitised objects; on medium term (10 years) – 75,000 digitised objects and on long term (20 years) – 100,000 digitised objects [16].

5 Achievements and visibility

The European context and the national framework for the development of this ambitious digitisation process of the resources of the cultural patrimony are characterised by a set of legislative regulations, multiannual strategies and public policies, all bringing forward the importance and the benefit of digitisation for people and society.

The period 2008-2009 was the period of initiating some local institutionalised projects, individual or collective, that aimed to digitise documents of zonal or regional importance. The libraries with a rich cultural fund were the first to respond to the calls. They elaborated yearly plans of digitisation, with objectives and terms, but subject to fluctuations due to the modifications in the legislations, in budgets or personnel. The process was implemented in the Romanian libraries using the personnel, the equipment and the funds of the libraries (County Library “Astra” Sibiu, County Library Mureş, County Library “George Bariţiu” Braşov, and County Library “Octavian Goga” Cluj-Napoca)[17]. Each of these project represented attempts to conquest a field with many unknown elements. The general note characterising this period of beginning is given by mobility and enthusiasm. The conquest of the new field was achieved step by step, sometimes empirically, but constantly, in an effort subordinated to the generous objective of opening the access to knowledge. One of the most frequent problems in the digitisation process intending the online dissemination of materials was and still is the copyright protecting the online contents. E.g., the online access to the digital collection of one of the most longest-living regional periodicals, *Gazeta de Transilvania*, was not simple to obtain. The process required in a first phase the approval of the Romanian Office for Copyrights (ORDA) in order to load the collection. ORDA considered that the online access is against the legal regulations on the copy making and use with the aim of preserving the original. It was permitted the download of the online catalogue of the periodical on the page of the County Library Braşov, without the attachment of images and the possibility for the users to save the digital version on a computer without connection to internet. The beginnings of the digitisation of the cultural patrimony to the County Library “George Bariţiu” were marked by experiments, searches and attempts of defining and communicating, and debates. One of the projects of that time, the digital library of *Gazeta de Transilvania* is now a reality, the site www.gazetatransilvaniei.ro hosting the periodical starting with its first year of appearance, 1838 [18].

The achievements of the digitising process in the Romanian libraries are validated by visibility, given by the online environment. For the online search of the Romanian digital libraries (key words: digital libraries Romania), only a few names appear. The online fluctuations do not permit a definitive hierarchy, but the results of the searches for the period September 2017- March 2018 return the same institutions: the Romanian National Library, the Library of Bucharest, the Central Academic Library “Lucian Blaga” Cluj-Napoca, the County Library “ASTRA” Sibiu, the County Library “Gheorghe T. Kirileanu” Neamţ, and the County Library Mureş.

The first result indicates the Romanian National Library, through the National Digital Library [19], containing digital collections created by digitising some documents from the special collection of the Romanian National Library, organised on themes or events. The site is connected to Europeana, allowing the access to the exposed collections. Among the collections of the National Digital Library we mention: the Historical archive, with 2,296 resources, containing the Fund of historical documents from the 15th-19th century, the Kogălniceanu Fund, the Saint Georges Fund, the Brătianu Fund, the Fund of the 20th century, the Fund of loose papers, 145 incunabula, 329 old Romanian periodicals, 521 resources of old Romanian and bibliophile books, 1,608 Romanian and European photos, Romanian illustrated postcards and illustrated postcards from Basarabia and Bucovina, photo albums, etc., 697 manuscripts among which Arabian and Greek manuscripts, but also precious documents from the

collections of the Batthyaneum Library from (251 manuscripts and 14 incunabula) [20]. Manuscripts and incunabula from the Batthyaneum Library are also possible to be researched nowadays on the portal Manuscriptorium of the Czech National Library [21], the largest digital library of manuscripts and old books in Europe, which managed to integrate, until the present time, collections from over 46 representative institutions from Romania, especially the National Libraries [22]. The National Digital Library offers access to collections and also to the phases of the entire digitisation process through the activity of the Commission for the digitisation of the written cultural heritage. Thus, a section is dedicated to the Inventory of the digitised documents in the national library system, reflecting the beginnings of the digitisation process in Romania [23] and to the Inventory list of the digitised documents in the Romanian library (updated in September 2017) [24]. In August 2017, the document contained 25 institutions (county and academic libraries and museums) and 22,292 inventoried units, while in September 2017 there were 22,521 inventoried units. There are indicated the owner, the title and the type of the document (old Romanian book, manuscript, postcard), the author, the locality, the publishing house, the year, the code and the inventory number. The digitisation process concretised in digital collections and archives represents a priority direction of the Romanian National Library in the Strategic Plan 2017-2021, opened to suggestions and proposals [25]. The inventory list is an extremely important document that allows the identification of all the libraries that transmitted to the National Libraries information related to the digitised documents, in an alphabetical order. There are present: Batthyaneum Library, County Library “A. D. Xenopol” Arad [26], County Library “Dinicu Golescu” Argeş [27], County Library “Bod Péter” Sfântu Gheorghe [28], County Library “George Bariţiu” Braşov [29], County Library “Panait Istrati” Brăila [30], County Library “Octavian Goga” Cluj-Napoca [31], County Library “Ioan N. Roman” Constanţa [32], County Library “V. A. Urechea” Galaţi [33], County Library “Ovid Densusianu” Hunedoara [34], and County Library “Gheorghe Asachi” Iaşi [35], present in the list with only two digitised works. The Inventory list includes the County Library Mureş [36], an institution in the top of the results of the search engines on the most visible digital libraries in Romania. As element of novelty, the digital library offers a List of the digital libraries, most of them in Europe, and the link to them. According to the displayed information, the Digital Library contains 137 documents: books, periodicals and dictionaries. Only 3 books are available in the section dedicated to the old books, mentioning that a larger number is scanned and being processed for loading. We find as components of the digital library: books for students, the result of an AFCN project initiated in 2008; works on the County Library Mureş and presentations on various themes.

The County Library “Gheorghe T. Kirileanu” Neamţ [37] has a strong visibility online, being presented as result for the search for a digital library. The institution is currently present on the portal Europeana with 150 digital objects (pdf files), over 9,000 pages with online access and a content of local history and culture. The digitisation activity was developed between 2008 and 2011, in the project “EuropeanaLocal”, with a result of 114 volumes in books and periodicals, independent or in collection, coming from the Documentary Fund “G. T. Kirileanu”, a total of 14,937 pages [38].

The inventory list also includes the County Library Prahova, the County Library Satu-Mare, the County Library “Astra” Sibiu, the County Library Timiş, the County Library Tulcea, the County Library Vaslui, the Museum “Casa Mureşenilor” from Braşov [39] – the possessor of the Archive of Mureşeni, The Szekely National Museum, the Central

Academic Library Bucharest, the Central Academic Library Cluj, the Central Academic Library Sibiu, and the Central Academic Library Craiova.

The County Library “Astra” Sibiu is one of the most visible digital libraries in Romania. The digital library contains books, manuscripts, periodical and iconographic materials from the collection of ASTRA County Library Sibiu. The selection criteria for digitisation are: unique publications, publications relevant for Sibiu and Transylvania, very solicited documents and documents scanned to the solicitation of the readers [40].

The Central Academic Library “Lucian Blaga” of Cluj-Napoca [41] offers two active interfaces, the Digital Library with a new interface in d-space since 2010 and Transsilvanica Digital Library [42]. On the interface of the site Transsilvanica, among the most important works that were digitized and offered free to the readers, there is The Chronicles of the Romanians (Hronica românilor) by Gheorghe Șincai, Buda, 1808, 3 volumes, presented in excellent conditions of accessibility and visibility of the materials. The library offers access to 508 manuscripts [43] and 119 periodicals [44] belonging to the Romanian and Hungarian cultural patrimony: Transilvania, Luceafărul, Gazeta de Transilvania, Foaie pentru minte, inimă și literatură, Familia, Erdély. The d-space interface offers access to very various categories: manuscripts, old and books, iconographic materials, periodicals, books and excerpts, publication issued by the library, and bibliographies for academic courses. There are search possibilities among the available categories by author, subject, and publishing date.

The online results for the Romanian digital libraries show that the Digital Library of Bucharest [45] (former named Dacoromanica), created by the Metropolitan Library, is the most important Romanian digital library with free virtual access, offering a large range of digitized documents as text, image, audio or video, exact digital replicas of the documents from the patrimony of the Metropolitan Library and of other institutions with patrimonial funds (the Library of the Romanian Academy, the History Institute “Nicolae Iorga”, the Museum of the Romanian Literature), pursuing the integration in the community of the European digital libraries with books and manuscripts [46]. The documents are organised on domains: art, economy, history, linguistics.

Memoria (Memory), a Digital library of interviews, memoirs, oral history, books and images from the recent Romanian history stands out among the Romanian digital libraries and presents events from the 20th century as reflected in the mind of those who experienced them [47].

The digitisation effort, in the name of the openness to knowledge was done mostly in programmes with European or national funding. Such recent projects is Medievalia – fundamental texts of the Romanian Middle Age Culture [48], initiated by The Association Excellence through Culture, in partnership with the Library of the Romanian Academy, offering access to 62 manuscripts of old Romanian literature, 15th-18th century. Each volume contains a description and its localisation.

The most recent project in the field was coordinated by the University of Bucharest. The project “The digitisation of the medieval documents from the Romanian National Archives” was implemented by the University of Bucharest in partnership with “Babeș-Bolyai” University of Cluj-Napoca, the Romanian National Archives and the Norwegian National Archives. The project was developed between December 2014 and April 2017 and was financed with 3,942,848.08 RON, as part of SEE Mechanism on “The conservation and the revitalisation of the cultural and natural patrimony” [49]. It was the first important project of digitizing the historical documents from Romania.

More documents than initially estimated were discovered during the project (55,000 instead 36,000). Thus, there were scanned 39,850 archive units from the central and counties archives, most of them from the County Service Cluj of the National Archives, with 20,000 archive units. By processing these archive units, there was a result of approximately 55,000 documents, due to copies and abstracts [50]. The site including the free access data base www.arhivamedievala.ro [51] is operative by the time of the present study.

6 Conclusions

In the field of digitisation, after 10 years since the initiation of the process, we have a digitisation public policy and many declarations of intent concretised in the strategies of several institutions coordinating the domain. The concrete results are measurable and are better observable in the European contribution of our country and in the Inventory list of the digitized documents in the Romanian libraries, periodically updated by the National Library of Romania. The results are much disproportionate compared to the number and the value of the works in the possession of the Romanian public libraries. The poorly allocated funds and the lack of constancy and consistency in the public policy in the field are the main problems leading to the risk of transforming the digitisation of the Romanian heritage into an empty shell. There was a passage from the enthusiasm of the beginnings in all the libraries to the area of the partnerships, through European projects. There are very few the libraries that managed to implement the projects and the inoperative data bases are a proof for this aspect. Mainly the academic libraries obtained more visible results, due to the specialised personnel, but also due to the constant pressure coming from a category of readers – the students – that required for updates with the evolution of the technology. Still, there are very few public libraries, as the county libraries, offering online access to the digitised contents.

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