Digitalization: Options and Approaches
Toward the Issue of the Right Solution

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Abstract. Discusses existing approaches to digitize cultural heritage - Bulgarian practice and foreign experience are presented; listed possible priorities. Special / separate emphasis is placed on existing problems; underlined is the necessity of analyzing the situation and a policy for conducting digitization; learning of the user and the importance of the feedback are mentioned.

Keywords: digitization; approaches, coordination,; cultural heritage; management, organization.

1   Introduction

The proposed exposé aims to focus on two aspects of the process of digitalization in the library field. The first aspect relates to the way we approach problems in this area and the second one - by the way should be approached. The text reflects systematic observations on digitalization activities and summarizes the main trends reflected in specialized publications (1).

2   Approaches

The usual approach to the digitalization of documents relating to the so-called cultural heritage is to discuss issues of technology (technological steps, application of various methods, using different techniques, etc.) and to present individual cases (individual practices of institutions). For example, in the library field the problems of digitalization are reduced to sharing what they have digitized and how financing has been secured. By placing digitalization in the middle of the range of tasks that are performed is created the perception that this is a major innovation of libraries.

This sector (digitalization of literary heritage and, more broadly: libraries) clearly demonstrates both the state of the college circles and the specifics of the approaches that apply to digitalization. The first conclusion that can be drawn is that among college circles is widespread the assumption that in the society of pluralism, business and self-financing any approach can be chosen to find funding and to digitalize whatever is wanted. It is the only way to explain the diversity of approaches, different solutions

and total satisfaction from this condition, which can be seen among library professionals.

The second conclusion is that there are several common dominant understandings (points of reference for conducting the process of digitalization) shared by those involved in the digitalization of the sector:

- Digitalization has no alternative
- It guarantees the preservation of originals, especially those that are intensively used
- There are different approaches to using digitalization, respectively a number of options to choose from
- In the field of digitalization there is hugely successful, tested, fruitful and of high quality foreign experience.

The third conclusion is that in the field of library heritage is formed a concept that serves as the basis (arguments) for program activities in digitalization. The program is available and even discussed at a special conference, whereby an important condition is fulfilled making it public and presenting the project concerned (2). Leading performances in the program are recognizing the value of the respective objects of literary heritage, respectively - other printed materials (books and periodicals), recognition of the need for digitalization and presentation of them done so far, without, however, the basic parameters of the process (in quantitative and temporal and so on directions) nor is presented the aspect of financing digitalization.

The fourth conclusion is that the issue of digitalization is an appropriate form of participation in the project; formation of the agenda of the community library professionals; showing commitment to the core, leading global trends in the field; demonstrating initiative, etc.

At the same time, although not clearly identified there are different perspectives on what is a priority in the implementation of digitalization:

- What is publicly needed;
- What is valuable (the stress being on manuscripts and old-prints);
- What is under threat.

If we ignore for a moment the optimistic tone and put aside the shapely publications on this topic it can be noted that the current situation in the field of digitalization of cultural heritage (and more broadly - in the field of libraries and archives) raises more questions than suggests solutions. These are no formal issues, but ones of a routine but fundamentally important approach. Firstly it is the question of field of digitalization - what, why and how to digitalize and how it will be stored. Certainly any program of digitalization of cultural heritage, but also any other information media shall be preceded by an initial step, that of determining the extent (volume) of that to be digitized. It is inextricably linked with a clear definition of the reasons for selecting the volume and approach. Here we come to the choice of approach in setting priorities: a) is it necessary to have a priority, b) to allow alignment of priorities that matter (ranking) or c) finally resorting to floating prioritization and ranking them on cases and / or institutions.

All these issues in one way or another are reflected either in practice or in publications on digitalization in the library field. What has been done in the field of digitalization has gone out of its initial phase. Topics have been popularized, experience has been gained, there are certain achievements (especially in the field of archives with some initiatives of the State Agency Archives / National Archives). Various ambitious attempts exist to impart the scalability of achievement, to talk about the philosophy of digitalization etc.(3).

Process development is already in a phase when assessment is required on what has been done. On the agenda is a reflection of existing resources and analysis of current foreign practices and their applicability in Bulgarian conditions.

3 Problems

What are the problems and why should they be discussed?

For the second time in a foreseeable time period (after the implementation of the so-called library automation of bibliographic activities) libraries are faced with the challenge, and for the second time practice shows that work has started without approbation, without the roleplay of different solutions (4). At that, there are various foreign practices and extensive experience, which (at least at the level of publications) are cited, but not implemented.

Without sounding emotional, the current situation can be described as a crossroads. The main challenge is how some gaps should be filled and how some missteps will be transformed. This is a necessary condition to continue to work from the point that has been reached. This crossroad situation is due to skepticism in some scientific circles regarding certain practices in the field of digitalization (5).

A significant weakness in the Bulgarian practice is to understate the process of analyzing and summarizing the experience and bringing the process to a simple listing of facts about what has been done. Another disadvantage is examining every experience as positive; not indicating failures, missteps or unsatisfactory results.

The considered problem has another negative side, the lack of a comprehensive policy, lack of coordination combined with random financing; here stems no single approach to digitalization.

The absence of a concept as a whole is especially clear and even partial digitalization of the so-called heritage. The absence of this concept is reflected in the quality of the digitized objects and the access to them.

What is noticeable in many of the texts in the field of library and bibliographic field extends concerning digitalization: to work with the postulates and desirable formulations.

Strong underestimation of some of the actions preceding the digitalization process; it comes to routine, but mandatory practical steps such as improving the references apparatus before digitalizing

Underestimated are the issues which are placed with all their sharpness by foreign professionals in respect of their own, meaningful, and effective practices. I refer to the Director of Bundesarhiv in Bern, who, summarizing some Swiss practices identifies

those aspects of digitization, which are subject to different solutions such as how to create a reliable online availability of digital archives or how to ensure long-term preservation of digitized material (6).

Ignored is the need for feedback; Moreover, there is a creation of fictitious conclusions on feedback practice which distorts public perceptions related to digitalization and the interests of consumers. Observed practice shows that in college circles the library digitalization process is generally perceived as something autonomous and not trying to attract patrons; approaches to work with audiences are greatly underestimated. Ignored is the leading idea of modern librarianship (but archives studies as well (7), that the core of modern library services is consideration of the interests and desires of the patron. Here the solution touches a significant problem: scarce traditions in the field of library PR and marketing, lack of trained professionals and the emergence of bystanders performing similar functions. If you resort to examples from the archive area we will see that the patron is the center of attention (8).

The issue of the attitude towards the patron has another side: careful consideration of what experts know and the audience – does not (e.g. the status of individual literary monuments to their real value, etc.) Wishful thinking on the current status remains possible through targeted, active targeting of activities of library professionals to broaden the horizons of patrons.

It should also be noted that financial constraints are not only Bulgarian, nor the only decisive factor that limits activities of digitalizing literary heritage.

4   Conclusion

Based on my observations on the Bulgarian practice I would like to outline the following working setup:

Approach that Bulgarian Library Association needs concerning digitalization should be expressed in the following procedures:

1. Understanding of the practice abroad respectively comparing this practice to Bulgarian conditions, resources, capabilities, goals;
2. analysis of the experience so far;
3. Establish working concepts to digitalizing in different areas, libraries, archives and museums.

Instead of a conclusion I will focus on a vision for the digitalization process, although it is on the field of archives, in full force it applies to the library field, "Taking digitalization is only prompting, only a catalyst to accelerating the improvement" (9).

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