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NATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR DIGITIZATION OF LIBRARIES, MUSEUMS AND ARCHIVES IN HUNGARY

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To realize the main program of the i2010 initiative, the European Digital Library, participating libraries and other public collections should by all means harmonize their digitization projects on national level. The Hungarian cultural government plans to do this on the level of public collections: libraries, archives, museums and even the National Film Archive.

Digitization is in progress in Hungarian libraries, archives and museums for years, but common approach and coordination have not yet been achieved even in the specific branches. Lack of resource is only one reason for this phenomenon, lack of new approaches in certain branches, and lack of adequate competence also needs to be mentioned.

The most important task of every public collection in the field of digitization is to digitize the records (catalogues, register of fonds, item registers of museums, etc.) with a standard aspect. Only this can guarantee equal access to the documents. From this point of view, the distribution of different sectors is unequal. While almost all of the most important public and special libraries (630 libraries) have an electronic catalogue, museums have not even agreed upon a standard register system. Archives process their documents uniformly in the eArchive system on a national level. In the field of libraries, a national joint catalogue has been created. Another problem is that public collections lag behind with the so called “retrospective conversion” the digitization of card catalogues and other records. The National Széchényi Library takes immense efforts to make the card catalogue of records before 1952 accessible in electronic form as soon as possible. Presently only the data of records after 1952 are found in the OPAC of the national library.

The present official statistics of archives and museums do not contain information regarding the quality and quantity of digital documents. We have only partial knowledge of the already digitized material from individual experience and pieces of data. Only in 2007 did the questionnaires used for making library statistics include a question regarding digital documents in the field of special libraries, but the data cannot yet be evaluated.

Although the Hungarian legal deposit act of 1998 contains a regulation regarding the submitting of electronic documents, this works only in the case of electronic documents in circulation, the creation of a regulation for the submission of e-books is still in progress in the national library.

History of the coordination of digitization in libraries and public collections

Being familiar with the Hungarian and international trends, cultural politics realized that sporadic and uncoordinated digitization in public collections sooner or later leads to chaos. That is why the Library Institute and the John von Neumann Digital Library got a commission to prepare a study dealing with the mapping and typifying of the national public asset to prepare for the coordinated digitization. The study gave commendations of the technological requirements in digitizing different types of documents, measured and typified the documents in public collections, film archives, radio- and television stations. Unfortunately, the study gave no space for the precise survey of digital contents.

In 2005, with the cooperation of the Library Institute, the John von Neumann Digital Library and the National Széchényi Library, relying on a broad team of professionals, designed the national strategy plan for library digitization between 2006–2013. Parallel

to this, archives also made their IT strategy plans for the area of the archives, part of which deals with digitization. Museums continue their digitization work on institutional levels, they failed to make a branch strategy because of the diverse contents.

Branch strategies are indispensable for the planning of national digitization. However, plans remain plans, if there is not enough financial support for the project. In Hungary the government supported digitization in public collections only with smaller tenders for special areas, for a comprehensive project there was not enough resource available. This situation has changed with the start of the development supporting projects of the European Union in 2007–2008. As we all know, the EU does not support the digitization of the cultural asset of states, it considers this to be the competence of the governments. That is why the public collection sector can only start digitization of items and documents in public collections in harmony with the development of educational contents, selecting and forming them into thematic services. This way the aim is not the digitization of certain parts of collections, but the creation of library, archive and museum services, which support public and higher education, life-long study and is based on selected material.

Steps towards realization

Digitization that supports education can only be achieved along standard principles, because this way digitized materials can be connected easily and in a multiple way, according to the needs of education. Public collections cooperate to be efficient in designing a precise plan with the conduct of the national library for the economical digitization of the contents of public collections in a way that gives the best possible quality. The National Széchényi Library and its partners got the commission to prepare the digitization project creating new educational contents.

Creating a National Digital Register

To make precise plans, we have to see what kind of documents did libraries, archives and museums gather or digitize. There is no comprehensive database that contains all the information of digital documents in public collections. This has to be supplemented, to make the digital public asset transparent and to avoid duplication.

The creation of electronic educational material needs a great quantity of resource documents. During preparation, we compile a list of priorities for the institutions, which gives support to the selection of documents to be digitized. The most important aspect is the needs of education, but directors of the individual collections have to take into consideration the needs of library users, and the protection of heavily used documents. Thorough planning of the priorities helps to assign the course of digitization for years, and to plan the distribution of resources.

During the preparation project we measure the digital public asset in different public collections, and make the gathered information searchable in a database.

	Library	Museum	Archive
Surveyed institutions	500	300	60
All institutions	2742	840	84

The online questionnaire, which was made with taking into consideration the specialities of the three public collection areas have an online fill-in program. This questionnaire is

filled in by appointed staff members of the data providing institution with the help of surveyors. Data needed for the identification of institutions were gathered from statistics.

Public collections can use the data of the closed and ongoing projects in designing new projects to plan their digitization more precisely and rationally.

The database operates also as a decision supporting system, because it shows the connections between the already digitized contents and those waiting for digitization. This way it is avoidable to support projects that do not respond to the needs of education, or cannot become parts of the new public education contents. “White spots”, or missing areas in the field of electronic document also appear. The possibility of a more precise, more rational project planning arises.

The database helps to discover documents useful for education but not yet digitized, which can be placed into the adequate position on the list of priorities. With sharing information, the multiple purpose recycling of documents can be achieved.

Identifying and storing the legal data of a document helps to decide which parts can be made accessible to everyone without constrictions, and in which part should the access be limited to abide by the copyright law.

Hungarian digital libraries

Even today a great number of digital libraries are operating in Hungary. The most significant is the collection created last year by merging of the documents of the Hungarian Electronic Library and the János Neumann Digital Library, which works in the national library. Part of the documents was submitted to the library, another part came into being with the digitization of traditional material.

Public collections would like to continue digitization more rationally in the future, for this reason they created the common coordination program, to ensure the unified digitization of texts, pictures, sound- and video materials. Digitization for educational purposes also helps the protection of holdings, because we can share heavily used and searched documents with a great number of users in electronic form at the same time without giving them the original document.

What kind of technology to use?

The most important aim is to design a know-how, which will be valid for all digitization projects in public collections and which can guarantee coordinated digitization, combination of digitized elements, and the sharing these documents with the widest possible range of users on a standard surface.

The technological guide appoints the range of technologies to use in the case of different document types, gives methodological commendation for the precise planning and the controlling of processes, assigns standards that will be valid for the product, and decides which circumstances should the service have. A wide range of documents become accessible for the participants of public and higher education and for the purposes of life-long study, with equal chance for every user.

During the construction our experts survey the international practice and analyse the Hungarian examples. They deduce experience from the negative experience of past years and the positive practices, and decide the technological direction to be followed. They take into consideration the directives of international projects like MINERVA.

We appoint different technologies with which the transparency of electronic documents and the construction of unified archives. The methodological commendations help the applicants to plan the project precisely, to decide the method of realization, and to direct and control processes. We also give directions for the protection of holdings. We help public collections in choosing the commendations and licences to be applied, and in administering copyright permissions.

Choice of standards

One of the basic conditions of the work along unified principles is the use of standards. We set up a committee of experts which decides the standards to use during digitization and making of metadata taking into consideration both the Hungarian and international practices. The specification of different areas should be taken into consideration in the commendation. For example, we should store different data of a document in a library and of a work of art in a museum. A book that can be scanned or a charter with a seal from the Middle Ages should be treated differently from an object in a museum that has to be visualised in 3D.

Standardized solutions should be taken into consideration also in the field of services, especially in the case of electronic educational material, where multifunctional usage, good quality and the connection between eLearning services are important.

Using standards helps to guarantee the unified format of digitized contents and that services based on them can be connected and the possibility to connect to international networks.

Analysis of legal environment

Our aim is to make the digitized contents and educational materials based on them accessible for everyone. Digitization of materials protected by copyright is unavoidable, but we have to examine how to harmonize the protection of copyright and the claim for wide access.

Both the legal regulations and technological possibilities have to be examined, which influence the legal publication of the protected documents. There is a possibility to publish the documents in a closed network, which would be a great step, because all the contents digitized in libraries could be accessed in all of the public collections and in educational institutions.

The importance of cooperation, expected results

The final aim of digitization is to create educational material and thematic web pages for the different levels of education. We should endeavour to create valuable content services, which build up along standard principles and can comprise more collections. The most efficient way to reach this aim is cooperation and coordination. Central coordination guarantees the assigning of standardized principles of selection and the coordination of work.

If public collections harmonize their principles and methods, duplicated digitization is avoidable and a good division of work can be achieved. Only this way can we exploit resources better.

Competence centres, established regionally help the experts of public collections to create content services. They monitor the observance of basic rules, review the recommendation for standards, and publish the standard technology guide.

Precise planning and continuous monitoring makes standard service accessible for everyone. Digital contents are stored in central databases, which guarantee the long-term preservation of materials.