

The National Library of Romania – Challenges and Perspectives

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Abstract: National Library of Romania is an important institution constantly focused on the long term preservation process and the permanent access to cultural heritage. Its collections are part of the European cultural heritage, and all the requests and standards were established by The European Digital Library. The movable cultural heritage legislation and the national legal framework defining the Legal Deposit – which regulate the national documentary heritage – became referential documents for the Romanian culture and civilization. The aim of this paper is to present the changes and perspectives of the National Library's activity since its moving into a new location. The new premises have direct implication for defining and redefining the core activities, for the development of new activities and for defining the institutional management and marketing strategies.

Keywords: The National Library of Romania; public library; cultural heritage; collections



1. History

Compared with other European countries, Romania has a relatively young national library whose collections illustrate, by their development and structure, Romania's historical destiny. The biography of what is currently known as “**the National Library of Romania**” begins on October 15, 1836, when the **Journal (Order)** for founding the first public national library in Romania was issued. This first public library was in fact the first national library, located on the premises of the cultural institution of “**Saint Sava**” National College.

The original collections consisted of 8,000 books that could be consulted in two rooms. The National Library developed its collections by means of donations, purchasing and Legal Deposit. The collection development policy was deliberately intended to gather as many papers, manuscripts or printed documents as possible about the history of the Romanian people, issued in the three principalities (**Moldavia, Wallachia, and Transylvania**) or abroad. The library collections increased every year, so, eight years after the opening, it had over 14,000 publications.

In 1861, the National Library was moved on the premises of the University of Bucharest. Three years later, in 1864, through “**The public library regulation**”, issued by the prime-minister Nicolae Krețulescu and signed by the ruler Al. I. Cuza, the National Library became the “**Central State Library**”. From this date until 1901, the institution would carry out the major functions of a national library. In 1901, the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies voted the closedown of the Central State Library and its collections were transferred to the Romanian Academy Library.

The new National Library of Romania was raised on the premises of the first Institute of Legal Medicine built in Bucharest and directed by Professor Mina Minovci from Brăila. It was erected in 1892 and demolished in under the regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu in 1985.



Institute of Legal Medicine (1892)

After a break of 54 years, the compelling need for Romania to have an organisation that should carry out the functions of a national library led to the re-establishment of this institution. The most

important chapter in the biography of the National Library can be considered the year 1955, when it was founded **the State Library**, the country's main public library, an institution created on a modern library, with specific tasks of national libraries. Thus, by the decision of the **Council of Ministers** (number 1193 from June 25, 1955), the institution resumed its activity under its old name, slightly changed (the "**State Central Library**") until 1990, when it received its current name "**The National Library of Romania**" (Government Decision **476 of February 5, 1990**), following the model of other libraries in Europe.

The State Central Library was opened to the public in 1956, with 41,959 bibliographical units (b.u.), some of which were part of the current book production, collected through the Legal Deposit function by the "**Book State Fund**" (established in 1952 by the Council of Ministers decision of Popular Republic of Romania) and deriving from the collections of several large public libraries – or more exactly of what was left of them –, from the libraries of cultural establishments, foundations and museums, as well as from private collections, collected and managed by the Book State Fund.

The collections grew very fast, the main methods of collection development being the **Legal Deposit, Current Acquisitions, Donations, International Exchanges**, and even taking over entire library collections of some dissolved institutions. The largest quantity of publications received, more than 1,000,000, was recorded in 1970, when the **Book State Fund** was fully incorporated. Another imported collection, taken over in the late 60s, came from the RASRSU Library (**the Romanian Association for Strengthening the Relations with the Soviet Union**). In the early 70s, the number of documents held by the State Central Library was about 7,000,000 b.u. [1]

2. New beginnings

After 40 year-long wait, the building of the National Library was completed in December 2011, and in April 23, 2012, on the occasion of the **National Librarian Day**, the library opened its doors to the public. The National Library of Romania (BNaR), re-opened after languishing for more than 20 years in a nearly finished state. The project was started already in 1986 during the regime of Communist head of state Nicolae Ceausescu and was on hold until 2004. Construction workers at the time estimated that the building was 80% finished and only six months from completion.

In 2007, Romania joined the European Union and agreed to adjust its policies on the digitization and preservation of cultural materials to conform with the **EU's Digital Libraries Initiative**, according to the National Library of Romania's website (<http://www.bibnat.ro>) In 2009, under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, construction on the nearly finished library began again.

Without having had its own building and ensured the proper functionalities of a national library, the institution had carried out its activities in unsuitable locations, often being forced to move its collections, organize passive storage facilities, and limit or even stop its main activities – with repercussions on the patrimonial function of the library. The library collections had been scattered in several locations in Bucharest and around the country, each having its own particular collection development policy.



The National Library under construction

The complexity of achieving its specific functions – from the oldest ever known, organizing the **Legal Deposit, National Bibliographic Agency, National Reserve of Publications**, up to the **National and International Library Exchange, National Centre for Pathology and Restoration of Publications, National Centre for ISBN-ISSN-CIP**, and coordinating the **National Digital Library** – as

well as the challenge of managing the collections had been determined, for more than 60 years, by the lack of space and by the manner of constituting library collections through the acquisition of private or institutional collection during the Communist regime.

The new headquarters of the National Library has allowed bringing together the collections and organizing them as a whole, observing the principles of modern librarianship and varying the cultural and exhibition activities, which have all lead the institution to a modern stage of its existence. The various areas - the ones destined to the National Library functions (mainly cultural functions), administrative spaces, functional and technical areas, outbuildings, parking area, etc.- are all harmonized architecturally in terms of aesthetics and functionality. The result is a major cultural centre, appealing and interesting for the public. The areas are vast, with a modern look. The exterior of the building reflects the 21st century modern architecture. [2]

3. The National Library today – Modern perspectives

Many personalities of world culture were librarians. For example, the Enlightenment librarian was the specialist who lean toward books and profession. The Ecole des Chartes, founded in 1821, established the first forms of vocational education in libraries and for librarians, and in 1879, in France, there is the first professional degree in this area. The librarian of the nineteenth century is the specialist who bends on both the books and profession, and with more respect and more application towards the user. In the twentieth century, with widespread access to information, the librarian is the specialist in information science, in storing, selection and access to information sources.

What do we want from the librarian today? Let's start from the premise that the book and the library are part of education. Library plays a mediating role between the large amount of information and reader/user. It initiates the reader to the results of its own curiosities; it initiates what to look for in the huge maze of information. The librarian is actually a person with a huge cultural dynamism and apparently only for those who do not know, plays a shading role. In fact, he is the guarantee for the existence of any author.

What do we want from the public library? In the communism era, in Romania, the public library had a sorting and conservation role - gate-keeper, primarily an information center and, not least, a place of censorship (**the S Fund**). Library was then, at every level of organization, primarily a library for direct educational use - school, secondary, university level - except Romania's major traditional libraries, Library of Academy, for example. Today, the library is a place of reader privacy. Library today involves extensive cultural act from exhibitions to conferences, meetings and cultural debates, giving every citizen equal access to information, to its data and services. Library today is a great public space, where the librarian, in all his activities, should apply the marketing strategies and mix to digital Information Services.

Library is a non-profit making organisation and its services have long been assumed to be free of charge to its users, but the perspectives changed in the past few years, because the library is no more the only primary information provider. Nowadays users have other primary sources they turn to when they need good information and reference services. A modern library celebrates the reading as individual act and, in the same time, shapes and redefines its role in the community. Our future depends on libraries, because a library cannot exist without its readers. [5]

Constituting the patrimony collections of Romania is the core activity of the National Library and this is implemented, independently, by numerous library services. The first stage of the patrimonial activity is provided by the **National Centre for ISBN-ISSN-CIP** that records the publishing companies from Romania, manages **ISBN, ISSN, ISMN** standards, **CIP description** (Cataloguing in publication), and sends reports to international and professional agencies.

The Legal Deposit is the second stage of the patrimonial flow and the main way of collection development and creation of national documentary heritage. The current Legal Deposit law (**Law number 111/1995, republished**) stipulates the obligation of submitting copies for Legal Deposit by institutions (printing/ publishing companies), but also by individuals who take responsibility for publishing materials, and determines the categories of materials, the institutions that coordinate the Legal Deposit, the categories of documents that are not subject to Legal Deposit. [3] [4]

The National Library organizes Legal Deposit centrally: the publishers send documents, the library registers the new documents, processing them and granting Legal Deposit numbers, saving a copy for its own Legal Deposit, one for statistical reporting and the development of Romania's current national bibliography, and a copy for the international exchange of publications, and distributing copies to other third-parties: the Romanian Academy Library, the "Lucian Blaga" Central University Library in Cluj-Napoca, the "Mihai Eminescu" Central University Library in Iași, the "Eugen Todoran" Central University Library in Timișoara.

The processing of documents part of the collections of the National Library of Romania, the third stage of the patrimonial flow, is carried out observing the norms, methodologies and procedures specific to each type of document, meeting at the same time the international standards, and contributing to the creation and editing of the **National Bibliography of Romania** (as **National Bibliographic Agency**) with its series (**Books, albums, maps; Serial publications; Musical scores, records, cassettes; Doctoral theses; Papers in periodicals; Română**) and creating the groundwork for information exchanges through specific information systems.

The dimension and profile of the National Library's collections are mainly due to the national functions that this institution must meet. By identifying the typology of documents, one can find in the library's collections books (**current publications, old books, rare and bibliophile books**), **manuscripts** (original works, correspondence – handwritten or printed, bound in volumes or organized in files), **microformats** (microfilms, microcards), **cartographic documents** (maps, atlases, plans), **historic book archives, printed musical scores, graphic documents** (engravings, Japanese prints, ex libris, studies of paintings, technical drawings), **dissertations and doctoral theses, standards, guidebooks, methodologies** and other **technical documents, numismatic and philatelic documents, posters and leaflets, photographs, audio-visual documents** (including music records) and **electronic documents (CDs and DVDs)**.

4. New Headquarters of the National Library

The whole design is structured around a large Atrium which everything converges towards, functionally and aesthetically. The atrium is equipped with panoramic elevators and escalators that lead to the reading rooms. The building – one of the largest in the capital city – consists of

two main bodies: the Assembly hall (22,000 sq m) and the body of the library itself (90,000 sq m), the total area being of 112,000 sq m. The new headquarters of the National Library of Romania have been designed to house the functions of a national library, but also cultural and leisure functions. The first levels, from the ground floor, are destined to the general public, and the upper ones – for storage, the Special Collections, Restoration laboratory and Legal Deposit, taking into consideration the easy access to the library spaces and the conservation, in all material respects, of the patrimonial collections.

This complex, long-awaited, and thoroughly prepared process of moving the library to an adequate location meant actually bringing together, for the first time, in a coherent, uniform and systematic way, its collections and the specific activities. The new headquarters of the National Library gathered collections and activities that had initially been hosted in 11 locations. Before moving to the new premises, a new strategy and programs had already been developed, as well as business plans which aimed to clearly identify the library operations.

In defining the relocation strategy there have been a series of problems regarding the collections that had been unsolved for years due to the lack of space and human resources. Moving and assembling all library activities on one site is regarded as one step in an extended institutional development policy. The publications that were part of the passive storage facilities (known as **“destructured” library collections**) were integrated to the new premises, in storage units organized according to specific library rules. Other aspects which must be considered are: **digitisation, conserving and reintegrating** to the academic circuit of the works concerning the national cultural heritage, rare and bibliophile editions, retrospective supplementing of the National Library of Romania collections, especially with prints, such as „Românica”.

The medium-term institutional development strategy took into account the predictable changes of internal and external environment, re-thinking information and documentation flows, the products and services available to users, collection management as a single unit, functioning in a system perfectly adapted to the internal and external environment, pragmatic and strategic directions, implementation of programs and projects at the national and international levels.



The National Library of Romania today

The chance of a new beginning empowers the National Library to overcome its previous achievements, to become more involved in all activities concerning the printed cultural heritage, to play an active role in the Romanian library system. Involved in European projects, and as a member of **CENL (Conference of European National Librarians)** and other international organizations, the National Library of Romania is a representative institution that supports the integration of the Romanian cultural heritage to the European and international cultural heritage. [6]

At the national level, given the methodological function granted by the specific legislation, the National Library of Romania coordinates, in terms of librarianship practice (standards and professional ethics, lifelong learning, and professional development), the activity of all types of libraries of the national library system. The National Library development perspectives cannot be separated from the development of the entire system of libraries in Romania, due to the legal and professional framework and the affiliation of its activity with the other types of libraries.

Thus, National Library of Romania carries out a scientific function, similar to that of the **Romanian Academy Library** and the specialized libraries, an educational function (similar to the school or university libraries), a public and community function (similar to public libraries). The main function of the National Library of Romania is patrimonial, but it is complementary to other types of libraries part of the national library system.

5. Conclusions

By its specific tasks and functions, the National Library of Romania is the institution that ensures the assembling of national documentary heritage and its preservation for future generations. Its methodological function as coordinator of the National Library System leads to promoting and supporting legislation in this area, best practices in specific activities, consistent regulations and standards; coordination of programs and projects at the national level, playing an important role in the development of digitization in Romanian libraries.

The current activity, the projects and ongoing programs of the institution are interdependent and subordinated to the specific objective and mission statement of the National Library: valorising and preserving the national intellectual heritage by organizing, processing, promoting and preservation of national documentary heritage on all media and its integration to the European and world heritage.



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