DIGITISATION EDUCATION IN HUNGARY: AN EXAMPLE

Poučevanje digitalizacije na Madžarskem: primer

Tibor Koltay

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Abstract

Purpose: The paper aims to present experience in digitisation education at the Hungarian School of Library and Information Science and to indicate various problematic issues and challenges that have arisen. To overcome a part of these problems it is useful to rely on the experience of similar digitisation projects and education programmes in Hungary and abroad.

Methodology/approach: Besides presenting the digitisation education programme at the Szent István University in Jászberény, a review of digitisation projects and digital libraries is given. Details about Hungarian digital resources are provided.

Results: Seven-year experience in the project-based digitisation education incorporated in the LIS programme at the Szent István University, Hungary shows many similarities with courses and programs offered by other European universities. The most serious challenge is to make the education based on real-life tasks.

Research limitation: The results of one type of coursework have been studied.

Originality/practical implications: Building a digital library in a small country encounters the same problems as the one presented in the study which puts digitisation into a context, comparable to other European projects.

Keywords: Digitisation, LIS education, Hungary, Case study

Izvleček

Namen: Članek obravnava izkušnje pri poučevanju digitalizacije v okviru madžarskega študija bibliotekarstva in informacijske tehnologije (LIS). Namen članka je pokazati pri tem na izzive s katerimi se omenjeni študijski program sooča ter morebitne rešitve
1 Introduction

Digitisation is an inseparable part of resource management in libraries, archives and museums as it can expand the access to library collections and it is one of the main methods to preserve original documents for future generations (Manžuch, 2008).

Keeping this in mind, the Department of Information and Library Studies, which provides undergraduate (B.A.) education in Library and Information Science at the Szent István University, Faculty of Applied Arts and Pedagogy, Jászberény, Hungary (http://www.abk.szie.hu/?q=node/240) has been offering digital library education since 2005. The digitisation course is mandatory both for full-time and part-time students with no regard to their specialization. Thus, digitisation courses last one semester and are taken by information management students as well as by students specializing in children and school librarianship. The former are required to attend 60 hours, while the course for future children and school librarians lasts 30 hours. Despite the differences in the number of hours the two courses have the same aim and philosophy, so they are treated as if they were a single course.

Digitisation education is grounded on the definition of a digital library which causes some terminological difficulties. While it is relatively easy to define virtual libraries as organized collections of hyperlinks that point towards resources available on the Internet outside a given library, the concept of the digital library is more subtle to define. There are different viewpoints whether the term is limited to digital only documents or to paper-based information sources of a "hybrid library". (Koltay & Boda, T. Koltay: Poučevanje digitalizacije na Madžarskem: primer, 217-230 Library, 56 (2012) 1-2)
It has to be added, that a minimal requirement set against digital libraries is that they should contain digital materials which are either born digital or digitised.

For the purpose of this paper, however, we will use a more complex definition of a digital library which also includes non-digital library resources.

2 Digitisation Education at Szent István University

As Manžuch, Huvila and Aparac-Jelušić (2005) point out, students participating in digitisation courses are required to demonstrate the ability to make decisions on digitisation initiatives. We believe that decision making and careful planning are pre-requisites for the digitisation process.

Besides, the question arises whether the course should be designed as a practical training course or as a pure theoretical and descriptive one. The best choice seems to be a combination of both (Dahlström & Doracic, 2009) as it was the case when digital library courses were introduced to our department. Experience prove that the combination of theoretical and practical work was a good decision.

We also decided to give priority to our cultural heritage though we have to agree with Manžuch (2008) pointing out that historical and cultural value of the documents should not be the sole criterion for digitisation, and that other criteria such as the subject of the document should also be considered.

We also believe that project management is crucial for digitisation education. One of the reasons is that digitisation in Hungarian libraries has not become a routine activity yet, even though the number of digitisation projects has grown considerably. Digitisation is also expensive, thus it needs to be controlled by project management tools. However, project management is incorporated into the digitisation course not on the theoretical level but to give students some practical advice and to present good practices.

We give national perspective to digitisation by studying Hungarian planning documents (including the National Digitisation Plan for Libraries 2007-2013, www.ki.oszk.hu/old/strategia/tmp/Orsz_Dig_terv_angol.rtf), the majority of which are based on European guidelines, in particular those of the Minerva project (Minerva, 2003).

The theoretical part of the course offers the following themes:
- Digitisation of text and of other forms;
- Project planning;
• Selection of materials;
• Scanning, photography and using Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software;
• Publishing on the web;
• Preservation.

It would be impossible to enumerate the entire contents of our course. Instead, we point to the most substantial issues. Students should get acquainted with basic technical and other practical parameters like resolution or questions of the efficient use of OCRs. We try to find answers to a basic question: Which is the most cost-effective way of capturing and visualizing library documents? The questions of source text quality are also addressed.

The discussion of intellectual property rights is central to the education, even if we direct the attention of our students to the controversial nature of today's copyright legislation.

Good practice handbooks, like the one provided by the Minerva project (http://www.minervaeurope.org/listgoodpract.htm, using the Hungarian translation) are invaluable for the programme.

Some of the issues and skills addressed in the practical part of the course are the following:
• Scanning and using the OCR software;
• Errors, weak points, solutions to the problems of scanning and OCR-ing;
• Digitizing pictures;
• Foundations of image editing.

At the moment we can digitise materials up to A/4 and our students can experience the digitisation of 24x36 mm negatives.

We use both commercial and freeware software. When making our students acquainted with the basic functions of the OmniPage 14 Pro OCR software (http://www.nuance.com/for-business/by-product/omnipage/index.htm) we also lay emphasis on the trainable (teachable) nature of OCR programmes.

The students begin with digitising small size printed material, pictures, photos, drawings. They learn how to use graphic viewers like IrfanView (http://www.irfanview.com/) and photo manipulation tools like GIMP (http://www.gimp.org/). The relationship between precision, readability and visibility is also discussed. Visits to the digitisation laboratory of the National Széchényi Library (http://regi.oszk.hu/index_en.htm) allow our students to have an idea how microfilms and paper documents larger than
A/4 are digitised. They can also get some practical experience at a university library, i.e. the Kosáry Domokos Library and Archive in Gödöllő (http://lib.szie.hu/) and many other institutions.

This part of digitisation education results in each student's "masterpiece" which contains documents digitised and saved in different formats (among others pdf, MS Word doc). The theoretical part concludes in project plans, presented by a team of students. These presentations proved to be extremely useful, despite the fact that they face the challenges described below.

3 Challenges

The most serious challenge to our course is the fact that our students have to work on imaginary projects and not on real-life projects. Each team is required to prepare a short presentation of documents they intend to digitise and give reason for their decision. This is followed by the before-mentioned detailed project plan that answers at least the following questions:

• What (work needs to be done)?
• Who (should do it)?
• Where (should it take place)?
• When (will it take place)?
• How (will it be done)? (Minerva 2003)

The problem is that there is no possibility for real financial planning. On the other hand many project teams have done greater work than it was expected at the beginning of the digitisation course. There is even some hope that a few projects completed by our part-time students can be realized in their parent institutions: libraries and information centres.

Despite the difficulties outlined above we insist on project plans, because we know that the documentation and evaluation phase of a project are utterly important. This is true even if we are aware of the fact that digitisation projects may be infamous for neglecting the documentation and evaluation phase (Dahlström & Doracic, 2009).
Projects and digital libraries studied in the programme

It is not the aim of this paper to give a comprehensive overview of digital libraries in general. Neither do we want to review digitisation projects worldwide. Rather, we want to point out the most notable and unique resources that are studied by our students. A peculiar example of this is the “Helmasperger Notarial Instrument” digitised as part of the Gutenberg Digital Project in Göttingen (http://www.gutenbergdigital.de/gudi/eframes/index.htm). However, by providing a translation and a transcription, as well as comments to the text, the digital version shows how much added value such projects can produce.

When looking for examples of good practice, we disregard the abovementioned difference between digital only and hybrid libraries.

The experiences of the two German digitisation centres in Göttingen (http://gdz.sub.uni-goettingen.de/en/) and Munich (http://www.digital-collections.de/index.html?c=startseite&l=en) serve as good examples of national coordination and work methodology.

One of the ongoing large scale digitisation projects in Hungary is done by the Library of the Hungarian Parliament (http://www.ogyk.hu/). It is the objective of this project to digitise approximately two million pages of historical parliamentary documents, legal sources (official gazettes, decisions), as well as books and periodicals on law, history and politics; to build a database of these materials and to make them accessible on an integrated portal (Boros, 2010). Materials digitised earlier are accessible under "Parliamentary Documents" (http://mpgy.ogyk.hu/).
Among digital libraries we should point to the pages the American Memories project (http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html), Austrian Literature Online (http://www.literature.at/) and Gallica http://gallica.bnf.fr/ are not missing, either. The reason for this is that they cover a rich variety of national cultural heritage.

In Hungary there are a number of digital libraries that give access to local history documents. We look at them as to valuable resources for the local communities. One notable example of these libraries is the Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County Digital Library (http://www.vfmk.hu/vfek).
One of the earliest Hungarian digital libraries is the Hungarian Digital Library (MEK, http://www.elib.hu/). Its history began in 1994, when a few enthusiastic librarians began to build a digital library collection of public-domain Hungarian texts for educational, scientific research, and cultural purposes, as well as belles-lettres. This initiative was first endorsed by the National Information Infrastructure Development Programme and in 1999 became part of the collections of the Széchényi National Library.

By the 1st of July 2011 the collection amounted to 9344 documents.
Picture 3: The English language home page of MEK
The Digital Literary Academy (http://www.pim.hu/object.90867f8f-d45e-40f9-8a6b-fe-0034f0db87.ivy) was established in 1998 and contains the complete digitised works of 71 Hungarian contemporary writers and poets.

While the above digital libraries are worth of attention in virtue of the originality, there are a few resources that fit only loosely into the category of digital libraries. Nonetheless they offer exceptionally useful services in retrieving digital texts.

The Electronic Periodicals Archive & Database (EPA, http://epa.oszk.hu/) was set up by the initiative of the Hungarian Electronic Library to create a bibliographic database and register of Hungarian e-periodicals and providing hosting services to some of the ongoing resources. The database comprises 2185 periodicals (1st of June 2012).

Picture 5: The home page of the Digital Literary Academy
The Hungarian Periodicals Table of Contents Database (MATARKA, http://www.matarka.hu/) offers not only searching and browsing of 1216 titles (1st of July 2011), but provides personalized SDI services. You can limit your search to full text resources directly and the database is linked to EPA.
Although the course concentrates on qualitative, critical and selective digitisation, we cannot pretend that large scale digitisation projects, especially the Google Book Search project (http://books.google.com/) do not exist. It seems, however that at the moment there is no definitive lesson to be learned.

5 Conclusion

Although this programme is only one of several Hungarian programs, the lessons learned in the past years can be useful for digitisation education offered by other institutions at home and abroad.

The digital library course raises the question that should be considered by any librarian of the 21st century. Are library services threatened by the extensive digitisation of library materials? According to library statistics the number of library visits is decreasing.
In any case, our answer is clear-cut: If people do not come to the library, the library should go to their homes and this can be done only in digital form (Bánkeszi, 2010).

References


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**Dr. Tibor Koltay**

Department of Information and Library Studies, Szent István University, Faculty of Applied and Professional Arts, H-5100 Jászberény, Rákóczi út 53
e-mail: Koltay.Tibor@abk.szie.hu