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THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF ROMANIA – THE NEW HEADQUARTERS – NEW CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

Abstract: The National Library of Romania ensures the assembling, processing, preservation, conservation, and management of the national documentary heritage. Its valuable collections are part of the European cultural heritage, a true cultural and scientific treasure for future generations. The aim of this paper is to present the implications, changes and perspectives of the National Library's activity as a result of 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, for the institutional management, as well as for defining the institutional strategies.

Keywords: National Library of Romania; Legal Deposit; new headquarters, new design, cultural spaces

1. Introduction

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 in its new headquarters. 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 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, current and retrospective acquisition, donations, transfer, international exchange, Legal Deposit.

The new headquarters of the National Library have 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.

2. National Library of Romania – Short Presentation

Compared with other European countries, Romania has a relatively young national library whose collections illustrate, by their development and structure, Romania's historical

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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 our country 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 Bercan (1996).

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. Financial resources were assigned each year for purchasing old and new books, published in Transylvania and Moldova, Buda or Vienna, and the regular subscriptions were renewed.

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 Kreţulescu 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.

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. 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.

The dimension and profile of the National Library's collections are mainly due to the national functions that this institution must meet. We can confirm today the existence of more than 12,000,000 b.u. Most of them need bibliographical processing and registering in online catalogues. 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),

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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. The National Library of Romania owns two patrimony collections located in Bucharest city (Special Collections department) and Alba Iulia (the "Batthyaneum" branch).

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. 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 Iaşi , the "Eugen Todoran" Central University Library in Timişoara.

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; Românica) and creating the groundwork for information exchanges through specific information systems.

The valorisation of the highly valuable patrimony of the library takes various forms, from publishing them in catalogues and databases, printing of specialized works, organizing thematic cultural events, providing documentary support for printed or audio-video cultural materials, to involvement in national and international projects on the preservation and valorisation of the national cultural heritage.

3. The New Headquarters of the National Library of Romania

Buildings housing national libraries are, generally, representative ones, as they symbolically sum up the people's cultural heritage. Many European countries house their national libraries in former palaces (Austria, Spain, Hungary), in buildings of patrimonial and symbolic value (the Czech Republic, Italy, Finland) or buildings designed for national library purposes, properly sized and representing the pinnacle of architectural achievement (France, Great Britain, Russia, Belarus, Croatia).

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This European reality was, for the National Library of Romania, the basic argument for supporting a representative project for its new headquarters. The first discussions on its new headquarters date back from the 60s (in 1968 the first design concept was drafted) and were resumed after the 1977 earthquake, the design concept being updated with additional studies of earthquake-resistant design and adjustments for the subsequent partitioning. The construction started in 1986. The events of December 1989 led to the interruption of the financial investment. Till 2005, funds were allocated from the budget of the institution, allowing the arrangement of storage facilities, and bringing together the collections situated in different locations. In 2007, the project for the new building of the National Library of Romania was taken on by the Romanian Government as a project of national priority and benefited from the financing of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

The (re)designing concept was drawn up by the "Carpaţi Project" architectural company, with the collaboration of specialists with the National Library of Romania, and proved to be extremely ambitious, aiming for a representative building in terms of architecture, as a significant contribution to promoting the image of the institution and even of Romania in the world. The main concern was designing a representative building for the National Library, with all multiple functions required by this type of institution. The various areas: the ones destined to the National Library functions, areas having 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.

The areas for the National Library functions were rigorously designed for specific activities, in accordance with librarianship methodology, patrimonial and legal provisions, ensuring easy access to books and information resources of the library. These areas received special attention, as most of them house documents of unique patrimonial value. The library areas include the information and registration desks, access control, reference rooms, bibliographic research rooms, traditional and electronic catalogues, specialized reading rooms for research and individual study, storage spaces for books, manuscripts, prints, photographs, maps, plans, periodicals, theses, Legal Deposit, etc.; the IT areas, the digital library and electronic editing, audio-visual and multimedia events, areas for National Centre for Book Pathology and Restoration; office spaces for various national activities such as International Book Exchange Services, National Reserve of Publications, methodological centre for professional training and development; spaces for typography and the publishing house, the Book Museum; separate and specific areas for users, employees and publications, with minimum horizontal and vertical interference.

The areas having mainly cultural functions allow the National Library to present to the general public its valuable documents part of the special collections, significant for the Romanian traditional culture and civilization. Thus, the library has an Assembly hall with 380 seats, halls of different capacities, for conferences and cultural events, multi-functional public spaces for meetings, various cultural events; multimedia halls, bookstore and antique store, exhibition areas; spaces for catering and entertainment.

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 Aula (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

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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.

4. A New Beginning. Strategies and Perspectives

Moving to the new premises has been the most important chapter in the history of the National Library of Romania. 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. Since its re-establishment in 1955, the library had had several spaces in Bucharest and around the country for storing publications and for library activities. Leaving some storage spaces and storing documents on various premises for different periods of time led to many publications being packed up, without the chance of processing, waiting for conservation and preservation areas. 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, their order depending on the topography of the new office space, time schedule assigned to each operation, assessment of material, financial and human resources, reorganization of collections and activities in the new spaces.

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", establishing a collection for retrospective addition, the exchange and inter-library loan schemes, National Reserve of Publications, and developing specific activities for valorising the national cultural heritage.

The medium-term institutional development strategy took into account the predictable changes of internal and external environment, rethinking 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 areas for the national library functions (as well as the public library function) have been rigorously designed, controlled and structured. The facilities of new spaces brought flexibility, adaptability, expansion, accessibility, stability and environmental control, security, efficiency and effectiveness, comfort, and diversity. 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. At the national level, given the methodological function granted by the specific legislation, the National Library of Romania coordinates, in terms of librarianship(standards and professional ethics, lifelong learning, and professional development), the activity of all types of libraries part of the national library system. The National Library development perspectives cannot be

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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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