

Libraries Preserving GLAM Collections: could we sustain needs and address growth at the same time?

Bogdan Trifunović

Digitization Center, Public Library Čačak, Serbia

E-mail address: bogdan@cacak-dis.rs



Copyright © 2017 by Bogdan Trifunović. This work is made available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

Abstract:

This paper deals with a question of whether libraries, particularly public libraries, could take the role of “digital hubs” for small to medium sized cultural and memory institutions, in an effort of providing sustainable and usable solutions of the long-term digital preservation of digitized and born-digital content in local communities. While many cultural and memory institutions within the cultural or GLAM sector (galleries, libraries, archives, and museums) are already doing digitization of their collections, few of them have properly addressed issues in long-term digital preservation and access. This could be attributed to the fact that many smaller institutions lack resources for developing or implementing a long-term strategy in preserving their digital collections. The issue here is how to achieve collaborative agreement between cultural heritage institutions about resources and needs, on the one hand, while maintaining sustainable long-term digital preservation program of local heritage, on the other hand. The paper focuses on the case study of Serbia and the Public Library “Vladislav Petković Dis” Čačak, with a comparative approach through relevant examples from other countries.

Keywords: digital preservation, cultural heritage, GLAM collections, public libraries, collaboration.

“Convincing organisations to invest in their digital collections is really hard work!
We know that Digital Preservation needs to be a part of the ‘Business as Usual’ but
how can we raise the profile of digital preservation and get the funding and support we
need?”¹

¹ *The GLAMourisation of Digital Preservation* (pdf brochure),
<https://www.arkgroupaustralia.com.au/events/the-glamourisation-of-digital-preservation/>, accessed 2nd May 2017.

Introduction

Cited words from the brochure published for a forum on digital preservation in Australia in 2016 shows that such an activity in the preservation of cultural heritage is still an issue in even developed countries, with strong background in digitization of the material kept in memory institutions. While many institutions in the cultural or GLAM sector (galleries, libraries, archives, and museums) are already doing digitization of their collections, few of them have properly addressed issues in the long-term digital preservation and access. This could be attributed to the fact that many smaller institutions lack resources for developing or implementing a long-term strategy in preserving their digital collections. On the other hand, in today's market economy there is a huge pressure imposed on cultural sector to be visible, thus the emphasis is usually on the publicly oriented *presentation* of digitized cultural heritage. For instance, in Serbia a number of projects emerged in the field of digitization and presentation of digitized material in the past several years, but almost none in the field of digital preservation or long-term access to cultural or scientific heritage. Nevertheless, libraries in Serbia lead digitization and digital preservation activities and have over a decade of an initiative in this field among other cultural institutions.

This paper deals with a question of whether libraries, particularly public libraries, could take the role of “digital hubs” for the small to medium sized cultural and memory institutions, in an effort of providing sustainable and usable solutions of the long-term digital preservation of digitized and born-digital content in local communities. Libraries in Serbia lead processes in digitization of cultural heritage and they are the only cultural institutions in Serbia which have created collaborative digital library or repository of digitized material, the Digital Library maintained by the National Library of Serbia (<http://digitalna.nb.rs/>), which is also the biggest national digital resource of that kind. Many university and public libraries also have their own digitization programs and projects, which usually are the only such initiative in local communities in case of many public libraries. Nevertheless, digital preservation was to a certain degree neglected field of research and investment of resources, as the emphasis was on digitization and presentation of digitized collections online, that is on the creation of digital libraries. As it was already said, which is also applicable for the case of Serbia: “However, most digitisation projects were focussed on access and not on preservation quality. As consequence, the survival of the produced digital collection might be in many cases endangered. This is even more worrying since huge amount of resources have been invested in digitisation.” (Kavčić-Čolić, 2013: 94)

An analysis of projects of digitization of library material that were supported by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia in the period 2012-2014 (Trifunović, 2014) reveals that funding for equipment purchase usually were allocated for scanners and computers, which suggests that focus was on creating digital material, rarely on its long-term preservation. Resources that are already limited for the projects of digitization, were spent for multiple scanner purchases, without a cost-benefit investigation if it is necessary or justifiable that the state supports every type or size of institution for the purchase of expensive equipment. At the same time, the question what happens with so many digitized objects in the long-term was never addressed.

Similarly, a broader consensus about what shall be digitized, for what purposes, with what resources, and how, was not established in the past decade, leaving institutions to their sole decisions and practices in digitization, partly in digital preservation as well (Trifunović, 2014: 51). A national strategy on this matter was not created, although in early June 2017 the

Ministry of Culture in Serbia announced that document *Strategy in culture in Serbia 2017-2027* will be available for public discussion.²

A good example of a slightly different approach could be seen in Poland, where numerous cultural heritage institutions are involved in digitization activities. Over 80 Polish digital libraries existed in 2013, with over 1.000.000 digital objects accessible via the Web. The majority of them (over 75%) use for digitization a product of Poznan Supercomputing and Networking Center (PSNC) dLibra Digital Library Framework, which is focused on management and on-line presentation of large number of objects (Mazurek et. al, 2013: 75). The PSNC also developed dMuseion solution for museums and other heritage institutions that deal with the digitization of physical artefacts, as well as dArceo for long-term digital preservation and dLab for digitization workflow management. Previously, an analysis of PSNC showed that “almost none of the Polish institutions involved in the mass digitisation projects uses the long-term preservation tools in the context of their content” (Mazurek et. al, 2013: 75-77). That way a single institution provided complete solution for digitization and digital preservation processes in cultural institutions, an approach still needed in Serbia and in most neighboring countries of Serbia.

The real question in the long run is how to establish economic and technological sustainability of digital preservation, maintaining such service at the level which will satisfy other GLAM institutions to recognize library as the optimal solution for their needs. This paper will show applied solutions at the Digitization Centre of the Public Library Čačak and future plans based on existing knowledge and experience.

Long-term digital preservation: the challenges for those under-resourced

Digital preservation is a complex and expensive process, which is constantly changing. But the question is also how much it would cost the society if digital preservation does not exist at all in the framework of preservation of cultural heritage (Kavčić-Čolić, 2013: 95). The process of digital preservation starts with the production of digital object, which ensures that digital preservation with digitization will make an integral and well-structured process of cultural heritage preservation. There are many solutions for digital preservation and the majority of them are provided by the companies who sell their products and services to libraries and other cultural institutions. The complexity of digital preservation is clear factor to be considered when an institution is choosing the option how to deal with this issue. Sometimes digital preservation is part of the outsourced work for the complete digitization solution offered by commercial vendor to cultural sector. That way the institution only needs to provide stable funding and to trust that files and metadata will be kept in accordance with the standards in industry. As with digitization, the author believes that librarians must take active role in digital preservation of their digital assets, regardless if library is doing the whole process in-house or outsourcing it completely. There are many reasons for that, primarily to control that everything is done of highest quality (Alenka Kavčić-Čolić, 95), from master files to presentation files, reformatting, metadata, to name just a few of the main challenges in the process.

The main metadata scheme for digital preservation PREMIS (PREservation Metadata Implementation Strategies) is based on the information model of the Open Archival Information System (OAIS), which is an ISO standard (ISO 14271:2003). Considering that public libraries mostly use Dublin Core for description of digital objects and collections,³

² <http://kultura.gov.rs/cyr/aktuelnosti/predstavljen-nacrt-strategije-razvoja-kulture-u-republici-srbiji-od-2017--do-2027->, accessed 2nd June 2017.

³ “Dublin Core Metadata (DC) in Digital Libraries”, <http://jodyderidder.com/metadata/dc.html>, accessed 2nd May 2017.

because of its simplicity and optional fields that handle metadata, for PREMIS librarians might need to invest more time and resources, as well as for METS, a metadata standard for structuring all of the varied types of metadata captured during the process of digitization and digital preservation. The good news is that Dublin Core is the first step that will not affect any chosen final archival standard for digital preservation, as the Dublin Core can describe almost any type of digital object, regardless of its provenience.

Making a library community's "digital hub"

An example of local partnership among the cultural institutions can be observed in the town of Koprivnica in Croatia. The public library in Koprivnica from 2007 initiated and coordinated digitization of local cultural heritage. In this process main partners of this library were the State Archives in Varaždin and the City Museum Koprivnica, as well as outsourcing company. The library and its partners in 2011 started cooperative digital repository *Cultural Heritage of Koprivnica*, which is the result of a "consciousness of the joint contribution and ownership over the final product of digitization in preserving and safekeeping the native identity". (Sabolović-Krajina, D., Gačan, M., 2014: 52) It must be stressed that these efforts of local heritage institutions were developed after the Ministry of Culture in Croatia had initiated the National Digitization Program of Archival, Library and Museum Holdings, which helped in replacing the short-term and random projects in digitization of cultural heritage with the more strategically oriented approach (Sabolović-Krajina, D., Gačan, M., 2014: 53). At the same time, the local community must acknowledge and understand that that cultural heritage digitization and digital preservation is primarily a local concern (Sabolović-Krajina, D., Gačan, M., 2014: 55). This is an important aspect in considering the topic of cultural heritage preservation: the orientation of the relevant ministry, that is the government, to regulate and support with crucial documents (laws, strategies, guidelines, etc) future local, regional, and national initiatives, which will be planned and executed in accordance with the overall national strategy in (digital) preservation of cultural heritage. Unfortunately, on the website of *Cultural Heritage of Koprivnica* <http://kkb.arhivx.net/>, hosted by the third-party service provider, there is information that from 26th April 2017 this collaborative portal stopped to work after the mutual agreement of the three involved institutions/project partners. The content is not visible any more on the given address (accessed 29th May 2017). This is also indicative information for the topic on collaborative work on the cultural heritage preservation: there should exist a leading partner among cultural institutions gathered around a project, which could address the potential risks in the long-term preservation, such as the cancellation of a project or termination of contracts with third-party service providers. In the case of Serbia, libraries usually could take the role of a leading partner for the digital preservation of cultural heritage.

Digitization Centre in Čačak: from digitization of the Local History Collections to long-term keeping of records

The role of a library as the main "digital hub" of its community was born as an idea within the Digitization Centre of the Public Library Čačak in western Serbia. In 2008 the Library has established its Digitization Centre, the first of its kind among the public libraries in Serbia, which is responsible for the activities concerning library material digitization and digital preservation. The Digitization Centre runs all activities concerning digitization of Local History Collections in our institution, as well as those regarding digitization and digital preservation of other collections, held by cultural institutions, organizations or individuals, which are connected with the legacy, cultural and scientific heritage of this part of Serbia.

(Trifunović, 2013: 30, 31) In 2009 our project “Digital Library of Čačak” was voted as the best public library project in Serbia for the period 2006-2009, by the Association of Serbian Main Libraries.

Another important digital preservation program that profiled the institution and its Digitization Centre as the major centre for digitization and digital preservation of cultural heritage in western Serbia was the digitization of obsolete audio and video material held by the local media companies (newspaper, radio and TV stations). This long-term project was started in 2011 under the public-private partnership between the Library and local media, which proved so successful approach that today audio-video digitization with digital preservation of such material is regular work of the Library. Under the terms of the public-private partnership agreements, the Library got access to archives of media companies, took the material on audio and video tapes to the Digitization Centre, provide digitization services with metadata generation, and return material to the owners with a copy of all material in digital form. The Library kept all digitized material and metadata on its digital preservation devices – Network Attached Storages.

This ground-braking project had significant impact on the perception of the library in local community, as well as beyond, but also on the perception on the capabilities, resources and services such cultural institution could provide to the local community. The impact of audio-video digitization and digital preservation service on the business of the local media was also significant, as well as on the preservation of endangered part of local cultural heritage. The local media got an opportunity to obtain very important service free of charge and from an institution which functions in local community. In the troubled times of economical crisis the notion of preserving the past usually is not on agenda. Thus, thanks to the service part of the local media companies now have access to the old recordings and metadata, which save money, time and resources (Trifunović, 2013: 35).

The library and community it serves are enriched with the valuable part of local cultural heritage, before 2011 kept and hidden far away from public. Not just that someday all digitized and archived material will be used for research or presentation purposes, they will be preserved for the future generations as well. This aspect is extremely important in considering the final impact, which is hard to value in terms of money or immediate benefits on the local community. Nevertheless, if we count the number of media involved in the service and the number of people which should work on digitizing and organizing old archives individually, it could be concluded that at the moment Library is saving significant funds needed for full-time employees, their training and obtaining necessary hardware and software in every institution individually. Instead, the Library and its Digitization Centre are providing everything at one place and with the same price – free of charge for the partners, while in the future the archive and repository will be available to the researchers and later to the general public.

The Digitization Centre is the most advanced organizational unit for digitization and digital preservation in the District Morava. Although working under non-favorable conditions, understaffed and without enough working space, the Centre is equipped for digitization and digital preservation of textual sources, images, audio and video, with its own procedures for digitization, know-how and resources for long-term digital preservation. The Centre in the last few years strongly proposed an idea of transforming itself from the place of digitization of mostly library material into fully operational centre for digitization and long-term preservation of cultural heritage in the District Morava – the so-called “digital hub” of local cultural heritage. This means that Centre will be capable of providing services to other cultural institutions in digitization, metadata, storage, conversion, migration of data etc, as well as to civil sector, industry and private enterprises.

Two elements in positioning Library as the “digital hub” of the City of Čačak are important to be mentioned here. These are the initiative of the Library to provide digitization and digital preservation for other cultural institutions, public services and organizations that are budgeted by the City, and the other is initiative that Library, in partnership with the local Archives, provide long-term digital preservation of material produced by the City, primarily digital copies of *Official Gazette of the City of Čačak*, other official publications, and video recordings of the local parliament meetings. The Archives would be responsible for the physical media carriers (print material and physical video discs), while the Library will be responsible solely for the digital formats, digitization, records management, reformatting, metadata and preservation.

One challenge that clearly emerges in this plan is the balance between the needs of other partners, other cultural institutions in the first place, and the growth of material that is becoming of interest for the Library, as the leading institution in digitization. Other cultural institutions, the Historical Archives, City Museum, Art Galery, has their own standards in keeping heritage, which not necessarily correspond with the standards of a library system. Nevertheless, approaching the whole issue with the strategy of “digitization for preservation”, to use the term coined by other authors (Conway, Arthur and others, see: Kavčić-Čolić, 2013: 93, 94), was convincing to other institutions that they will be free to continue their activities in digitization and presentation of digital collections, but to rely on the Library for the long-term preservation of their collections and associated metadata, which is unknown field of work for most of them. Thus, the Library will not deal much with the overall digitization work, except of its own collections, but to focus its resources on digital preservation, leaving also to partners to decide the priority in digital preservation.

The City of Čačak also recognized the benefit of such an approach, in both cost savings (fewer new employees are needed) and optimal usage of existing resources and knowledge (in this case within the Library). In the planned move of the Library to the new facilities in 2018 a state-of-art Digitization Centre will continue to work as the central place for all digitization activities of the City, its cultural institutions, public services and third parties (civil sector, individuals).

Conclusion

It must be stressed that long-term digital preservation of cultural heritage should be only considered as part of the broader coordinated process of keeping cultural heritage preserved for the future generations (Draft national framework, 2016). Conservation processes of valuable artefacts include digitization of physical items, for making digital copies or images that represent those items in digital technology, as well as for presentation of artefacts through digital media, the Internet, or in publications. Therefore, digital preservation inevitably makes part of other preservation actions, such as conservation, which put together provide necessary care given to the cultural artefacts, manuscripts, tangible and non-tangible heritage, in an effort of making cultural heritage accessible in the future. This is an excellent position for public libraries, taking into account their longer experience and expertise in digitization compared to other institutions. The tendency of “parochialism” has a long tradition in a country such as Serbia, where every cultural institution believes that there are and must be strict borders between the cultural domains that “belong” to every institution and should be exclusively reserved to gallery, library, archive or museum, respectively.⁴ But

⁴ The Library in Čačak had an argument with the local Archives on the issue of digitization of a video collection that belonged to the bankrupted TV station, as by the law all archival documentation at the end of a legal process must be stored for ten years in archives. The Library argued that only institution able to deal with such material is library, that the Archives does not have proper conditions for the long-term preservation of

the approach of libraries should follow the principle of “digitization for preservation”, that put an emphasis on both preservation strategy of cultural institutions and reformatting methods of creating digital copies in accordance with the needs of long-term preservation. That way library will exceed the pure technical part of the digitization process and could provide the added value in the long-term preservation of cultural heritage.

This paper does not suggest that everyone should work everything. Instead it promotes cooperation between the various factors involved in cultural heritage for more efficient usage of resources and their optimal allocation for the needs of communities that are interested in preservation of cultural heritage. The suggested strategy and approach by the Public Library in Čačak and its Digitization Centre could be applied as a basic model for other institutions, particularly libraries, to deal with the question of long-term digital preservation of cultural heritage. The main aspects of described strategy are initiative that Library will lead these efforts, innovation, available technical resources and staff capacities, and active collaboration with the stakeholders.

Acknowledgments

The author wants to acknowledge the support provided by the Public Library in Čačak and the Serbian Library Association along the process of writing and presenting this paper at the IFLA WLIC in Wrocław, 2017.

References

Draft national framework for digital access to Australia’s collections (2016). <https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/GLAM%20Peak%20-%20Draft%20National%20Framework.pdf>, accessed 15th May 2017.

Kavčić-Čolić, A. (2013). “Approaching Digitisation Through a Digital Preservation Perspective”. *Review of the National Center for Digitization* 22, 93-103.

Mazurek, C., Parkoła, T., Werla, M. (2013). “Tools for Mass Digitization and Long-Term Preservation in Cultural Heritage Institutions”. *Review of the National Center for Digitization* 22, 75-80.

Sabolović-Krajina, D., Gačan, M. (2014). “Digital Repository of *Cultural Heritage of Koprivnica*: an example of local partnership”. *Review of the National Center for Digitization* 25, 52-58.

Trifunović, B. (2014). “Funding of Library Material Digitization Projects in Serbia 2012-2014”, *Čitalište* XIII, no. 24, 51-57 (in Serbian).

Trifunović, B. (2013). “The public-private partnership case study in digitization of audiovisual heritage”. *OCLC Systems & Services*, Vol. 29 Issue: 1, 30-36.

video tapes, and that librarians just want to capture the content, not to keep the tapes as physical carriers of information. The arguments of the Library persuaded the bankruptcy manager to allow the Library to take the tapes for their digitization, making precedence in the legal practice of Serbia. After digitizing couple of thousand hours of video material, describing them and generating metadata, the Library sent the whole collection of tapes to the Archives, but the issue remained a hot topic for both institutions.