

The Library: from classic to postmodern

MARIA CARMEN NADIA PETRE
PhD student Doctoral School of Letters¹
Bucharest University Romania
nadiapetre@gmail.com

Abstract

In its long and irregular transition, from traditional library to the electronic book we have seen combining and alternating the hybrid, electronic and most recently the digital libraries. All these concepts which are combining and are conditioning each other, are referring to methods of organization and use of an informational content (which exists or not in an informational structure).

1 Short history of the word “library”

In order to explain these notions we will take a quick overview of the history of the word “library”. Since the clay plates till the lovely books covered in leather, the traditional library represents the place where the information can be found, but it is not offered directly, being necessary a slow process only to get the document which contains it.

Recently, from 20th century, the hybrid library is the one where we can find the computers being part of the process. The word “hybrid library” was introduced by the Anglo-Saxon literature and represents this structure in which coexist the traditional printed documents, the audio-visual documents, the multimedia documents and the possibility to access the informational resources through the networks and especially through Internet. Furthermore, the users are provided with a search engine for the documentations resources.

As many of us already know, the electronic library provides text documents, audio-visual and multimedia, transferred on an electronic storage device, organized in collections and having specific consulting conditions. The electronic library enable users to access online the electronic catalogue and other secondary documents (e.g. bibliographies, thesis, scientific papers) and also offers other electronic informational resources which exist or not in the library. Several electronic libraries which are connected to a network could share their informational resources, offering the possibility to access the electronic resources which are not in their own collections; so the electronic library is the predecessor of the digital library.

The special literature gives us many definitions of **digital library** depending on the meaning their authors give to this expression. One of these definitions says that the digital library represents an organizational concept which collects the informational resources in electronic format, structured in data bases, multimedia applications accessible through information and communication technologies. After he analyzed many of the digital library’s definitions, Borgman (1999, 227-243) considered only two of them as being relevant:

- one structured content generated by the users requirements and available for the users;
- an institutional structure which provides digital products and services.

Trying to find a comprehensive definition of digital library, The Association of Research Libraries (ARL, 1995) has identified some of its essential characteristics:

- digital library is not a singular entity;
- digital library needs a technology compatible with resources of other libraries, this technology must guarantee the access to the external informational resources;
- the connections between the electronic libraries and the information services are transparent to the end users;
- its purpose is to ensure the universal access to the digital libraries and information services;
- the collection of virtual libraries are not limited to text documents, hypertexts or hypermedia, but are extended to digital documents which could not be represented or circulated in printed format.

In the same time, the digital library assimilates and develops a series of principles from the area of Library and Information Science, as follows:

- the electronic documents are in a form of an organized collection;
- the documents which forms the collection are made, bought, collected and recorded in the accordance with the principles of collections development;
- the electronic documents are available in a coherent manner directly or through specialized products and services in order to enable the consumer to use it as an ordinary library material;
- the library structure is approached according to the dynamic development principle, that means: the library evolution in time, based on resources stability, the removal of old, inaccessible or inadequate documents, diversifying and upgrading the informational resources access tools.

Analyzing the concepts mentioned above, we can state that the digital library is both a stabile structure and an organizational concept.

The electronic book –the Kindle and iPad gadgets, through which, no matter if you are home or you travel, you can access any book you want– will come like a storm and all the national or European virtual libraries will became obsolete.

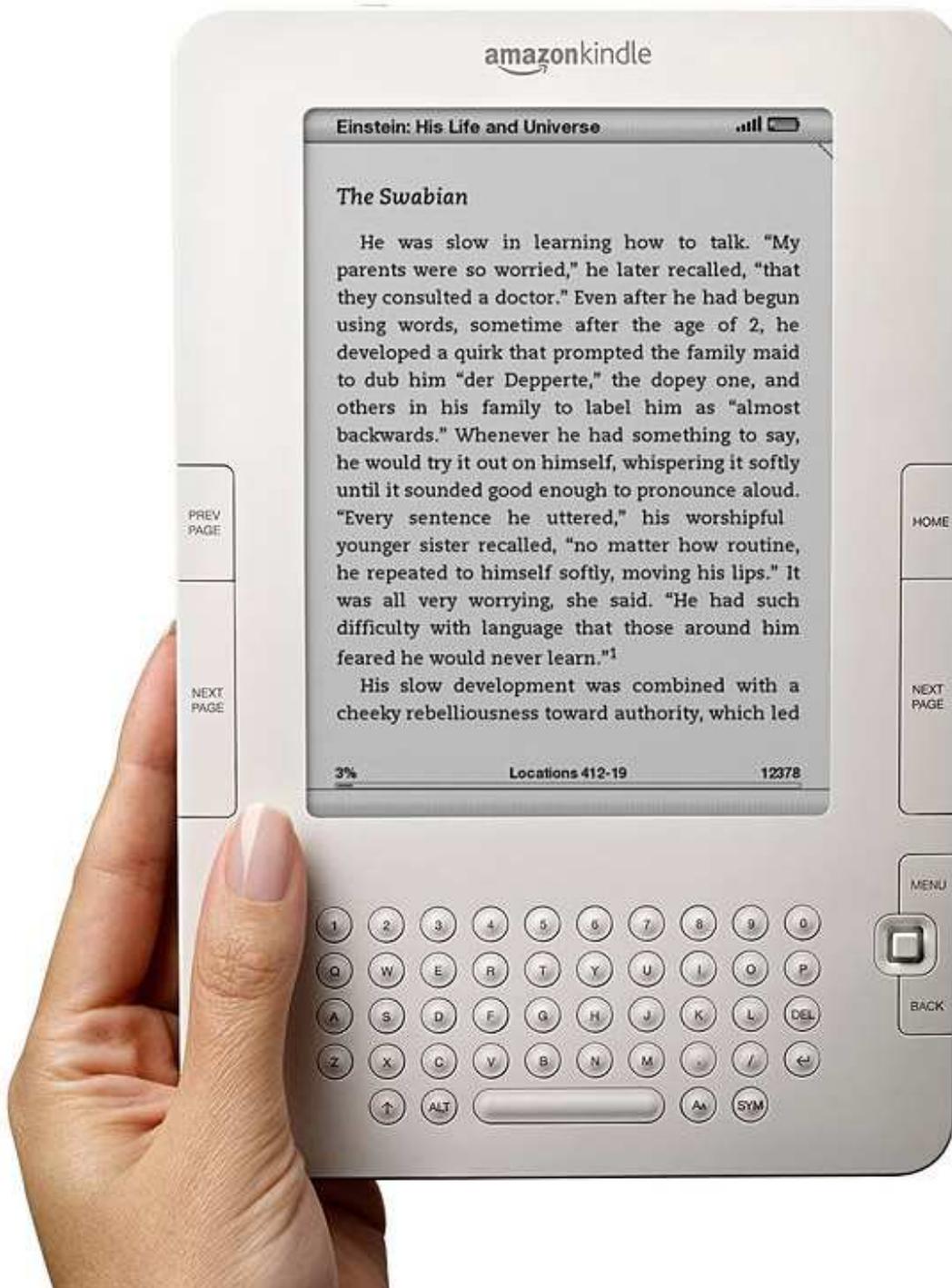


Figure 1. Kindle electronic book

The evolution of informatics is to fast, and we are moving to slow. So is no more a dilemma –who does not adapt will become the lost shipwrecked in the future’s waters which already begun to flood us. (Tudor, 2010, p.27)

2 From the European national library to the European digital library

The national library's social and cultural prestige is given by its institutional statute of national importance. In the context of information's globalization, the national libraries defined their role in the unite society, through an agreement, within the specialized section "National Libraries" from the IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations). The role of national libraries in our society is to collect and preserve the national intellectual legacy through organizing, processing, access and availability of the national documentary patrimony.

The 48 national libraries (46 Europeans) are members of CENL (Conference of European National Librarians) <<http://www.cenl.org/>>; the role of this professional association is to sustain the professional and scientific collaboration between libraries, to ensure the active implication of these structures in the process of development, protection and capitalization of the European cultural legacy.

With the aim of building a European digital library, the European Commission has identified three guidelines:

- online accessibility (which involves informatics and communication infrastructures development and specific informatics tools);
- the digitization of all collections (transferring all traditional collections in digital format);
- preservation of electronic documents and of all collections to ensure the future generation's access to information.

In the development process of these three guidelines the following types of challenges may occur:

- financial problems –high cost of digitization and preservation process;
- technical problems –due to the diversity and dynamics of the new technologies;
- organizational problems –due to the necessity of a good coordination both at national and European level.

Many projects financed by European funds had as purpose the digitization of the national and European patrimony with the intention of creation of new opportunities for science and education, ensuring economic and social development resources, improving the access to information for the European partners. These are international projects with partners from different member states of the European Union, in this way allowing the interaction between partners, promoting the cultural and linguistic diversity, identifying models and development strategies on a medium or long term, ensuring the online access to European cultural content.

From the library perspective, we will refer to the following projects: The European Library –TEL is a project started in March 2005 with European funds and which propose to offer free access to the informational and documentary resources which exist in all 46 national libraries from Europe, in 20 languages. The digital resources can be in the text or bibliographic format (bibliographic recordings of non electronic documents).

Aimed to develop TEL, were co-financed by the European Commission the TEL ME MORE project (2005-2008) which supported 10 national libraries from European Union's members states, to become full participants in TEL, and also TEL+ project (2007-2008) having two main purposes:

- digitization of 20 millions pages in different languages;

- to support Romania and Bulgaria to become full members of TEL (The national library of Romania is member of TEL+ since October 2007).

A concrete project, part of this initiative and which intended to capitalize the European patrimony was EDL (European Digital Library <<http://www.edlproject.eu/>>) (2006-2008) which proposed to ensure the multilingual access, through the Internet, to cultural collections from the member countries. EDL was financed by European Commission in the eContent+ Program and it was an extension of TEL, founded by CENL. Its purpose was to provide access of the electronic collections through a single access point. In this project, were involved initially 9 national libraries from European Union (Greece, Island, Belgium, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Sweden, Norway, Spain, Luxemburg) with propose to have 50 millions digital recordings, accessible through a single access point to the bibliographic catalogues and digital collections.

From the beginning of 2008, EDL entered a new stage of evolution, becoming *Europeana* and aiming to involve in the development of digital content, all European Union Member States. Due to CENL involvement in i2010 Digital Libraries, the projects TEL and EDL will support each other and will develop the interfaces multilingual aspects. TEL is the foundation of developing European Digital Library.

Regarding to the relation between TEL and Europeana, a large group of experienced people (technical activities, marketing and publishing) are working both for TEL and Europeana allowing the collaboration and complementarity of both projects. Europeana will become full operational in 2010, till then the prototype being functional. Also, many projects will be connected to it with purpose of adding digital content. The objective is a content estimated to 10 millions of digital units till the end of this year. Europeana will not be just a collector, but also a products and services provider. For the moment and for the future, the main problem is the financing. To avoid the reliance on financing through projects it is under discussion the proposal of a governmental financing mechanism, by the member countries, the remaining 15% being self-financing.

The European institutes affirms that this initiative, realized at the libraries level, to be extended to museums, archives and any others structures with the role of preservation and valorization of European cultural patrimony. In this direction were elaborated two recommendations: Commission Recommendation on the digitization and online accessibility of cultural material and digital preservation (2006/585/EC) and the Council Conclusions on Digitization and Online Accessibility of Cultural Material, and Digital Preservation (2006/C 297/01).

The first one has as a general objective sustaining the economic and cultural European potential and increasing of the competition through transferring on the Internet the cultural and scientific legacy, allowing the creation of “collective European memory” accessible to each citizen for documentation, research or pleasure purposes.

This recommendation aims the followings: the initiative of developing the European digital library to be correlated with the national and local efforts of digitization and preservation of cultural resources; the coordination of actions at European level to create a synergy of national collections; dissemination of digitization and preservation best practices; improving the public access and dedicated users to the European Union member states cultural and scientific patrimony.

The Council Conclusions have its roots in the idea that European Union is based on a linguistic and cultural diversity and that cultural and scientific information have a key role in the economic and social levels and so, there must be ensured the access of the citizens and research community to this content in digital format.

Moreover, considering the diversity and unequal efforts of the members states in digitization and online access to the libraries, museums and archives resources as well as the participation of CENL in the organization and creation of TEL (the collective resources of national libraries from Europe), the recommendation's objective is the mobility of the members countries for an active involvement in digitization and online access to the cultural resources and preservation through digitization.

3 Conclusions

Till the appearance of the European Digital Library, I have to run and buy a Kindle electronic book and afterward to change my occupation ... eventually I'll become a writer and provide with books the Kindle gadgets.

I think it is obvious, that when these reading electronic devices will be cheap enough that most of the people will have such a device, the world will find herself nearby a "glorious" end of a "multilateral and complete" apocalypse, which leave behind just integrated gadgets in a different food chain from an other dimension.

Bibliography

Association of Research Libraries (1995). "Definition and purposes of a digital library". <<http://archive.ifla.org/documents/libraries/net/ar1-dlib.txt>>. [Accessed: 25/02/2010].

Borgman, C. I. (1999). "What are digital libraries? Competing vision". *Information Processing and Management*, no. 35(3), p. 227-243.

Comission of the European Communities (2006). *Commission recommendation on the digitization and online accessibility of cultural material and digital preservation (2006/585/EC)*. (http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/digital_libraries/doc/recommendation/comm_recomm/en.pdf). [Accessed: 23/02/2010].

"Council Conclusions on Digitization and Online Accessibility of Cultural Material, and Digital Preservation (2006/C 297/01)", *Official Journal of the European Union*, 7/12/2006. <http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/digital_libraries/doc/culture_council/council_conclusions_nov_2006/en.pdf>. [Accessed: 27/02/2010].

Tudor, Bogdan (2010). "The future book?" *Financial Week*, 1st February (2010), p. 27.

Notes

¹ This paper is the result of my doctoral research stage in Faculty of Library and Information Science of Barcelona University