

THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF ROMANIA AND ITS USERS. AN APPROACH TO THE INFLUENCE OF THE NEW BUILDING ON THE INFORMATION ACCESS

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Abstract: *The role of a national library in society is to capitalize and to preserve the national intellectual heritage by organizing it, processing it, ensuring the access and availability of all media. The mission, functions and the specific prerogatives of the National Library of Romania (NLR) determine special types of users. A specific category of users are businesses coming from the publishing and media sector, or public from education or research areas. Another category of users are the libraries and the librarians from the National System of Libraries. The National Library of Romania acts as an encyclopedic library, thus individual users are an extremely heterogeneous group and come from various categories, environments and ages.*

Keywords: *National Library of Romania - functions and competences, Business users, Individual users, User strategy.*

1. Introduction

The relationship between a library and its users is determined by a series of objectives and factors that concern analyzing and knowing the target community, the type of library and its characteristics, as well as the information resources, technological material and human resources that the institution holds available. There is a strong connection between the purpose of a library and the community they assist. When considering the National System of Libraries (NSL) in Romania, we find institutions that generally define their mission, functions and attributions in accordance with the user's requirements. In order to provide the most accurate information to their users, a library must acknowledge its community, must organize

its collections in such manner that they are easily accessible, must select, acquire, and evaluate the needs of their customers and together with specialized personnel and adequate resources to elaborate a sustainable managerial plan for the institution. This statement stands true for a national library as for any other library.

2. Users of the National Library of Romania

In many countries, national libraries are unique institutions that have as main patrimonial mission the task to preserve and value the national intellectual inheritance through its organization, processes, access and availability via any media. The National Library of Romania has similar tasks with any

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other European national library and in accordance with the national legislation. According to the Libraries Law, no. 334/31.05.2002 republished, and to the Regulation for Organization and Operation, approved by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, the NLR is a public library that holds a legal personality and has attributions connected to organizing the Legal Deposit, according to the law, responsible for structuring and managing the National Reserve of Publications as well as the Nation Exchange Centre. As a National Methodological Centre, the library elaborates and releases methodological instructions and norms for public libraries, conducts research studies and reference documents for the library field as well as for other adjacent disciplines. As a National Centre of Pathology and Document Restoration, the National Library of Romania, develops and issues methodologies and rules for preservation and document restoration, sets organizing rules for local preservation laboratories to which they provide assistance at request. This institution also develops the Romanian National Bibliography for all document types, supplies the national bibliographic control as part of universal bibliographic control, assigns the international standard book number (ISBN) for all types of written documents, printed music (ISMN), serial publications (ISSN) and other categories documents, and attributes the cataloging in publication description (CIP), coordinates the development of the National Digital Library) among other national attributes. Each of this assignment underlines a specific function that has specific users, whose typology is highly diversified.

Through its *patrimonial function*, the National Library of Romania serves the society as a whole, ensuring the formation, the preservation and capitalization of the Romanian written and scientific heritage and contributes to adding it to both the European and worldwide written heritage, but most of all it promotes the Romanian culture and

civilization abroad. The beneficiary users for this role are legal entities, corporate and businesses, like *publishing houses* and *publishers* that need the ISBN, ISSN and CIP number, *Romanian cultural institutes abroad*, to which the National Library provides assistance to complete their collections, *research institutions* that can receive support on demand when drafting bibliographical papers and sharing its own documentary resources through local or international lending system, as well as *media institution*, *foundations*, *various organizations* that visit the National Library collections for information and specialized research. The National Library has over 6.000 users – legal entities as mentioned before – of which 5.800 are publishing houses or institutions that have editorial activity. In addition, through the International Exchange of Publication office, the library joins the international exchange community and has solid relations with over 250 partners in 60 countries. These *exchange partners* are mainly national libraries together with university libraries, academic libraries, museums, and other cultural institutions with which the national library has formal or informal agreements.

As the National Library of Romania is the central institution to organize the Legal Deposit, thus it has a series of *specific users*. In this case the NLR receives published materials as Legal Deposit items, then these are organized and registered, it holds one item for its own Legal Deposit, one for statistical reporting - to be mentioned in the Current National Bibliography for Romania - one item for the International Exchange of Publications and the rest gets distributed to other Romanian libraries (beneficiary users) as follows: Romanian Academy Library, Central University Library „*Lucian Blaga*” in Cluj-Napoca, Central University Library „*Mihai Eminescu*” in Iaşi, Central University Library „*Eugen Todoran*” in Timişoara. In addition, the materials belonging to the military field, written by individual authors or by legal

entities that do not belong to the military, are sent to the *National Military Library* and to the *Centre for Studies and Preservation of Military Historical Archives Pitești*. As for the local legal deposit, this is organized by the county libraries and by the Metropolitan Library in București and they can be the beneficiary of methodological library support.

Through its methodological function, the NLR assists libraries and librarians that belong to the National Library System. This particular task is specific to national libraries and comprises the rules and regulations, standards and best practices that allow them to cooperate and to interact so the whole NLS would work as a single entity. This methodological function underlines specific characteristics as follows: *professional* – as in drafting, translating and adaptation of various instruments, standards and norms needed to pursue all library activities; *patrimonial* – by creating and maintaining the liaison between the national heritage and the local heritage, via the National Library and county libraries to such extent that the national written heritage is created, processed, preserved and promoted using specific activities and services that allow tracking the route of a publication from the mere intention to its enclosure in local and national bibliographies, to storing it in storehouses for preservation, conservation purposes as well as for the use of future generations; *legal* – defined by the proposal and promotion of legal regulations and *socio-professional* – by maintaining and support role of the Library and of the Librarian in society. In performing the methodological function, two main approaches are identified: the bottom – up approach where libraries look up to the National Library and top-down approach where the NLR provides assistance and support to the local libraries belonging to the NLS. These two main tracks aid the NLR in transmitting regulations and the needed instruments to properly handle the professional activities. The methodological attribution is also sustained by the editorial

work of the NLR, of which are mentioned the series of National Bibliographies and the reference materials like *Abstracts in Library and Information Studies*, *Librarianship – Syntheses*, *Translations*, *Methodologies*, *Information and documentation*, *The Romanian Review for Book Conservation and Restoration*, *Cultural Anniversaries*, *Library journal*, *Romanian Review of Book History*, and *National Library of Romania Review*. Currently, the Catalogue of Romanian Information and Documentation Institutions (CASIDRO), compiled by the NLR, gives detailed information about 3.320 Romanian libraries that benefit from this methodological role: the Romanian Academy Library, 56 university libraries, 40 county libraries and the Metropolitan Library in Bucharest, 61 municipal libraries, 204 city libraries, over 2.563 communal libraries, 41 libraries belonging to the Teaching Staff House, 312 school libraries/ Centers of Documentation in secondary schools and high-schools, 42 special libraries.

The structure of the NLR is a mixt combination of public and national attributions, and most times it is considered to be both national library as well as public library. The public library function is represented by a 15 percent of the overall activity of the library, as specified in the Organizational and Functioning Regulations of the NLR. As for the expectations of the library's general public, they regard fast access to library's collections, redesigning the services offered by the library or better use of the electronic environment for research purposes, to mention just a few. The collection development in the NLR constitutes the process of fulfilling the users' expectations regarding the library's collections and that can be done in a very effective manner using internal as well as external resources. From this perspective, the first task of the library and a mandatory job of the librarians working for the collection development department must be to

investigate the user's needs and expectations, considering their typology (rural or urban population, students or professors, a specialized group of people or an institution), the existing activities in the target community, their general interest, level of education, communicational and informational behavior, other characteristics. The overall community analysis could answer questions such as: Who the users are? What are their information needs and for what purpose? What kind of informational behavior they have? What are the formal and informal requirements of the information system? How can they find the information needed? How they can transfer the information?

Considering its organizational structure, the size of its collections, the products and the services offered to the public, the NLR was assigned the role of an encyclopedic library that handles special collections and responds to a large variety of information queries, from pleasure reading to scientific research. The user's typology is so diversified to such extent that a heterogeneous group can be identified, having different professional and personal interests. Generally users come and visit the library having expectations similar to those anticipated from a public library, or a university library, special library; there's even a segment interested in the library's special collections section or users who need materials that can only be found in a local library far away from their location and they ask the NLR for a interlibrary loan, national or international.

3. The new headquarters of the National Library of Romania and the services offered to its users

The relationship with the library's users, their satisfaction and the quality of the services is strongly connected to the resources, mainly technological, material but also human resources, available on site as well as in the space in which they carry their work.

Since its re-establishment in 1955, the NLR lacked the physical space where its customers could come and access the library collections. The library activities were carried out in many locations, none of them adequate, and that supported to some extent the specific functions and activities. The discussions concerning an actual building for the National Library started in the late '60s - in 1968 the first theme design was drafted and resumed after the 1977 earthquake; later, further studies for the earthquake resistance and restructure of the original draft had been carried out and the design was updated. The construction of the current building started in 1986, but the 1989 events forced the investment to cease. By 2005, the institution's budget funds were allocated which allowed establishing storage rooms for the libraries collections scattered in different locations. In 2007, the Romanian Government sets a priority task on the new library building, and with consistent help from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, assigns a private company, S.C. Carpați Proiect the completion of the building. This company worked together with the library manager's, librarians support and guidance, and so the plans were revised and the building presented itself as particularly ambitious project that would represent the library institution and Romania worldwide. The focus was to create a representative building that would ensure a good flow for all library activities, thus the NLR now has wide open spaces for public access, spaces for exhibitions and other cultural activities, technical spaces and annexes, parking lot, all combined in a unitary architectural structure. And so out of the initial plans resulted a spacious centre for culture, open for the general public of all ages, easy accessible and modern, following the 21st century architectural style. The plans of the new library included special areas where the specific functions – library specific areas, methodological, patrimonial - of the NLR could be carried out. These were focused on

being easily accessible especially when some of them host valuable, rare or unique, documentary materials. The spaces that are considered library related areas include the information desk, the registration desk, the access area, references halls, bibliographic research room, traditional and electronic catalogs, specialized reading rooms for various kind of activities, spaces for readings, research, individual study, storage rooms for books, manuscripts, prints, photographs, maps, periodicals, theses, legal deposit, etc. as well as computer work spaces, digital library and electronic publishing, open or closed spaces for events with audio-visual multimedia; the space for the National Center of Pathology and Document Restoration, office areas and other national and international exchange activities, the space for the national reserve publications, training rooms – all benefit now from larger rooms; the building of the NLR provides as well spaces for publishing and printing, reproduction, the Book Museum is hosted here, and last but not least areas for the users, employees and documents that were designed to have a minimum interference from each other.

The cultural areas of the NLR allow a good representation of its valuable documents and offer great opportunities for cultural and scientific activities. We now find in the library building an auditorium with 380 seats, rooms for conferences and cultural activities with different sizes, multifunctional public spaces that can be used for various meetings, events, a media room, bookshop, antiques shop, exhibition spaces. The whole composition is structured around a large atrium, which gathers all these spaces together, functionally and aesthetically, while featuring on the corners panoramic elevators and escalators leading to the reading rooms. Overall, the new headquarters of the National Library was designed to meet the national library functions and cultural functions and to support leisure reading and other cultural activities. At the

first level, from the ground floor, are dedicated entirely to the public, whilst the upper levels hold storage rooms, special reading rooms and preservation areas - special collections, restoration laboratory, all that providing easy access as in a public library but also spaces dedicate to protecting and preserving the national heritage as a national library.

4. Space – user’s relation at the National Library of Romania

The architectural composition of the current NLR building required the institution to redesign the development strategy, to resize its relation with the users, to diversify its services and products, and eventually to recreate a new cultural identity. A year after the official opening, a new identity of the library has emerged, assimilating all functions and attributions bonding them to the current space. The number of registered users has increased, around 26.000 three times more than previous year, but also the number of visits, non-registered users - around 120.000, that come to attend the cultural, educative events. Moreover, there’s a change in the users behavior related to the spaces they are in, the reading rooms hold study group and individual research activities, using the library’s computers or the wi-fi connection but also the open spaces are very busy places to meet and study. Along with the arrangement of the children and youth spaces the users’ typology grew to such extent that now children of all ages, teens, and young adults can visit the library. Around 20% of the library users are high-school students, teachers and professors that hold some of their educational activities at the library. All 7 readings rooms opened so far registered a visit frequency of 84%, out of which the children and youth reading room and the American Corner space are most used for cultural activities. The professional training is another activity that has now dedicated spaces used

mainly by library students, but also by librarians attending their continuous education training sessions, as the NLR became a registered training provider for the library field. But the most spectacular and dynamic development of the new facility was the promotion of cultural events. The exhibition area and multifunctional rooms allowed the library to successfully promote written culture activities, to develop partnerships with museums, theaters, art associations and educational organizations, high level research institutions, with writers and artists, to organize and invite the general public to exhibitions, cultural and scientific activities. Considering only this aspect, the library space use has increased 10 times, in the last year and contributed to transform the library into a living institution, with a dynamic and active presence in the community.

5. Conclusions

The architecture of the space can decisively influence the quality of services offered by an institution to its communities. The National Library case is illustrative in this respect, having a history of more than 40 years of activity in inadequate space – both for users and for collections – which stopped the library to be part of the educational and cultural life of the community. The absence of proper and suitable space had negative repercussions on the work of the library itself and its perception in the community. The efforts the staff made to fulfill the library's specific functions were huge and with not so very visible results; moving into the new building urged the institution to redefine and recreate the relationship with its users to fully assert her national and cultural attributions. The analysis of activities carried out after a year of operation in the new building encourages us to believe that the National Library fulfills its main mission by being the key player for documentary and scientific heritage and in the same time holds itself responsible for the

promotion and exploitation nationally and internationally its collections, while meeting a wide range of information needs.

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