Tatjana Aparac-Jelusic
Round Table:
Digital Libraries: Challenges, Expectations and Possibilities of Future Cooperation

Today it is widely accepted that libraries, information systems and services are getting greatly and increasingly affected by the rapid evolution of the digital age in all of their functions. In comparison to print resources, digital resources are considerably different in the way they are used, accessed and retrieved. The use of digital resources depends on effective human-computer interaction. It is also strongly affected by users' demands & needs, by the design and organisation of content offered, as well as by the ways of acquiring new knowledge and skills.

For all these reasons it seemed important to propose and organise Round Table on DLs and give the invited participants and audience an opportunity for discussing new challenges and expectations as well as possibilities of the future cooperation between Croatian experts in the wider field of computer science and information sciences.

The main goal of such cooperative efforts should be to ensure an effective and efficient flow of information from the generators and information providers to Croatian users in the digital environment, by employing all intellectual capabilities and technical support available. Due to the complexity of requirements caused by the changing environment, it is no longer possible for Croatian information specialists to act without being continuously abreast of new methods and techniques or without exchanging their visions and ideas with colleagues in other fields and disciplines interested in the topic.

Thus, the intention was to address the changing and challenging environment for libraries and information systems in the digital age, with the emphasis on examining contemporary problems, advances and solutions in Croatia. Professor Kalpic and colleagues Mirna Willer, Predrag Pale and Damir Boras, as well a LIS student Koraljka Golub, were invited to discuss with the Chair of the Panel some of the DL issues related to new challenges, expectations and their views of possible cooperation among Croatian specialists.

Themes and problems suggested to be approached during the discussion vary from concepts, methods, techniques, a variety of DLs aspects such as selection, organization, preservation to presentation of digital resources, information networks and networked co-operation, as well as to services offered, access problems, questions related to the users, the use of the Internet and the role of information professionals.

The questions that arose from these topics were:

Which challenges do you find in the DL concept?

What can we aspect from DLs in our community, primarily the academic one?

In which direction and areas could co-operation best develop?

How to plan development of digital collections, national research digital library, or any other DL?

Who should be in charge of specific parts and who should be responsible for national planning?

In his discussion professor Kalpic pointed out several topics of great importance in the academic community including copyright issues, ways of stimulating producers of academic material for making it web accessible, and the per-review process for web published material and criteria for evaluating it.

Dr. Boras expressed his opinion in regard to the importance of DLs as sources of knowledge and pointed out that the academic material provided on the web should be critically reviewed. He suggested that all curricula must be put on the web.

In expressing her opinion about the purpose of library, M. Willer, Msc discussed issues related to professional standards, methods and techniques developed inside the LIS community which could serve as a solid base in the digital environment. She also talked about ways of building up the digital library as a system, with a special attention to its functional parts, as well as problems related to the digitized material preservation, its lengthiness and the need to develop methods and techniques for the long-term preservation.

P. Pale, Msc raised the issue of the DL purpose - whom it is assigned to, and how to chose the right staff for it. His concern was also related to access and retrieval issues of the DLs as well as to the organisation of the web in relation to the transparency of its content.

Miss Golub presented a digital collection of exam literature for LIS students at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb, and the purpose to which it has been built. She pointed out advances of creating digital collections of various subject areas such as special collections and exam literature collections, at which case students of similar sciences and disciplines from all over Croatia could cooperate and make good use of them.

The participants from the audience (eight of them) arose several other questions and issues such as metadata, collecting information related to DLs' users and use, availability of full texts and problems which might arise from it, experience with related DLs projects in Croatia, especially with describing electronic publications and a few digital collections, the urge for cooperation with publishers etc.

Some suggestions for future steps were given, including the importance of making priority lists, deciding about pilot projects for university textbooks, and deciding about CIP for ER.

<div align="right">Dr. Tatjana Aparac-Jelusic, Panel Chair</div>

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