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**Bridging the digital divide:
libraries providing access for all?**

What is Worth of Digitizing: the Selection Criteria

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Abstract

Digitization over the years became integral part of library management and many library projects are oriented toward digitizing library material, for preservation purposes as well as accessibility of library materials. The key factor in such projects is good organization based on clearly defined goals and selection criteria. The purpose of this paper is to examine selection criteria for materials which are being digitized and the most common criteria in the existing digitization standards and guidelines. The special emphasis is put on the differences between selection criteria in several countries, which have already implemented such criteria in digitization projects, and those developed within Croatian national digitization project “Croatian Cultural Heritage”.

Keywords: digitization, selection criteria, libraries

Introduction

Digitization, as an omnipresent phenomenon in 21st century, is an integral part of information institution's activities. To establish a framework for selection of significant and representative items of the cultural heritage certain institutions produce guidelines for the selection of materials for digitization. Establishing criteria for the selection of priorities in the transfer of materials in digital form depends on tasks and type of institution which implements the project, the type of materials and scope of each digitization project, as well as on users' profiles and needs. These guidelines make general criteria for evaluating materials and indicate their use. Also, the purpose of these guidelines is to encourage institutions to create a strategy and plan for digitizing materials, selection criteria, as well as to make the list of priorities for digitization, which will provide better long-term planning and coordination of digitization at the national and international level without repeating activities.[1]

By digitizing its collections, information institutions aim to:

- enable people, regardless of location, to directly access, use and publish, where copyright and agreements allow, a range of collection materials without having to visit institution
- preserve rare and fragile collections and those at risk of format obsolescence, while also improving access to their content by providing digital surrogates of the items for use
- build a critical mass of digital content relating to particular country's or area's documentary and cultural heritage to support research, education, publishing and exhibition programs
- engage with new audiences by making collections available in the online environment for use by different communities. [2]

Selection criteria for digitization

In order to determine which are the most common criteria for selection of materials for digitization in the individual institutions, guidelines which prescribe criteria for selection have been analyzed. Two national guidelines have been analyzed, made by national libraries, Library of Congress in USA and National Library of Australia. Also, two guidelines created within the digitization projects of library, archival and museum materials have been analysed, made by Croatian national digitization project "Croatian Cultural Heritage" and "North Carolina: Exploring Cultural Heritage Online."

“Croatian Cultural Heritage”

The project Croatian Cultural Heritage [3] is croatian national project which prescribes guidelines for the selection of materials for digitization. The goal and stated purpose of digitizing is to protect the original, improve the availability of materials, create new products and services, complete the holdings and establish co-operation and digitization on demand. Given the large amount of materials that are digitized in some information institutions, digitization must be based on selection and gradual building of a representative collection. The value of the materials can be estimated by its intellectual content, the historical and material value, where the following criteria should be applied:

- rare and unique materials
- artistic value
- importance for institution (the item is identified by institution)
- importance for understanding some particular subject area
- broad or deep coverage of a particular subject area
- useful or new content
- data on objects and groups of items that are insufficiently documented elsewhere

- proof of the historic value of the institution
- materials that will gain new value in digital form
- materials that will be very interesting to users long term.[4]

North Carolina ECHO (Exploring Cultural Heritage Online)

North Carolina ECHO (Exploring Cultural Heritage Online)[5] is an online portal to online special collections of North Carolina's libraries, archives and museums, historic sites. The vision of this project is that all of North Carolina's cultural institutions work together to make the state's unique cultural and historical resources accessible for the education and enjoyment of people of all ages in the state, nation and the world. Selection criteria are divided in following sections:

- audience- collection items which will be interesting for large public, and multiple levels of users
- impact on institution- immediate utility of the digitised object for the institution, increase demand for digitised object
- intellectual control- when digitization is providing better indexing and bibliographic control of the material
- intellectual property rights- for those materials which copyright is owned or it is easy to obtain
- value- uniqueness of materials, digital collections with enduring value, those materials which will attract funding and generate institutional prestige and add value to the collection.[6]

Collection digitization policy of National Library of Australia

Collection digitization policy of National Library of Australia outlines Librarian's approach to digitisation of its collections and to providing access and managing its digital collection. The Library routinely digitises collection materials selected by collection managers, primarily pictures, maps, printed music, newspaper and oral history and folklore collections. Also the following general criteria are applied:

- collection materials selected for routine digitization- historical and/or cultural significance of material, unique and/or rare materials, high demand of material, out of copyright status or permission to digitise obtained, restricted access to the material due to its conditions, value, vulnerability or location, and adding value through providing online access
- collection materials requested by users- library supports national and international access to its collections through interlibrary loans, the document supply service and Copies Direct service which enable users to purchase digital or print copies of items in the Library's collections.
- collection materials in fragile state- fragile and/or valuable material or where there is a high risk that the original would deteriorate
- collection materials used in public outreach programs- materials which support the Library's public programs and outreach activities such as exhibitions, publications, cultural events and educational activities. [7]

Preservation Digital Reformatting Program of Library of Congress

The goal the Library of Congress preservation reformatting is to preserve Library's collections and offer broad public access to at-risk materials. The digitising component of the Program has three parts: selection criteria, digital reformatting principles and specifications

and life-cycle management of Library of Congress digital data. Selection of materials for preservation digital reformatting is based on value, use, condition, characteristics of the original item, and appropriateness of digital reproductions for the use and access. [8]

- value – priority is given to high-value materials of national interest
- condition – items that are not serviceable because of damage or fragility and items stored on unstable media
- use – original materials with high frequency of demand or high retrieval costs
- characteristics of originals- originals in different physical formats and with different characteristics
- acceptability of the resulting digital object- the digital object resulting from the reformatting process must meet the requirements of the custodial division and Preservation Directorate
- access aids- access aids of all types, especially when the advantages of digital technology will significantly enhance access

Croatian digitization project

The project "Croatian Cultural Heritage" is a national project of digitization of archival, library and museum materials. Its aim is to encourage creation of new digital content, improve its accessibility and visibility and promote a systematic and uniform approach to digitized materials in cultural institutions.[9] Digital collections created within the project are divided by subject, time period, geographic region and type of material within which are divided into subgroups. Given the large number of digital collections available on the project website, the collection of newspapers (10 items), books (28 items) and magazines (3 items) have been analyzed.

The aim of analysis was to determine how many digital collections created under the project meet the selection criteria and which criteria are most commonly used. The analysis showed that the selection of digital collections within the project was based on the selection criteria presented in previously described "Guidelines for the selection of materials for digitization" and most frequently used criteria are:

1. materials that will be interesting to users on long term
2. rare and unique materials
3. materials that will gain new value in digital form
4. importance for understanding some particular subject area
5. artistic value
6. useful and/or the new content
7. broad or deep coverage of a particular subject area
8. importance for institution (the item is identified by institution)
9. proof of the historic value of the institution
10. data on objects and groups of items that are insufficiently documented elsewhere

It can be concluded that Croatian digitization projects follow the proposed criteria and that the national digitization project fulfilled its purpose and confirmed the importance of establishing guidelines and standards on a national level.

Conclusion

Detailed analysis of the four documents showed that they all have in common the criteria of rarity and uniqueness of materials, high frequency of demand, damage and fragility of materials and adding value to materials by providing online access. North Carolina and the National Library of Australia as a criterion of selection indicate the importance of intellectual property rights. North Carolina and "Croatian Cultural Heritage" project emphasize the

importance of benefits of the digital object to the institution and increase interest in the facility in a new format. National Library of Australia and "Croatian Cultural Heritage" as a criterion of selection highlight historical, artistic and cultural significance of material.

National Library of Australia is the only one among four of them who indicates criteria of frequency of user's requests, and material's usage in outreach programs. As the selection criteria, only North Carolina ECHO indicates possibility of better indexing and bibliographic control and importance of materials for gaining new funding sources. Unlike the other three documents, Library of Congress is the only one who is listing acceptability of the resulting digital object and access aids as the selection criteria. Access aids of all types are candidates for digital reformatting, especially when the advantages of digital technology will significantly enhance access to microfilm or print collections.[10]

Documents created within Croatian national digitization project "Croatian Cultural Heritage" highlights some criteria that are not mentioned in the other three documents. These criteria are: the importance of materials for understanding of a particular subject area, broad/deep coverage of a subject area, or useful or new dated content, data on items or documents that are insufficiently documented elsewhere, and materials that testify to the historic value of the institution.

Selection criteria are present in majority of library management segments, such as acquisition, retention, preservation, usage etc. Selection criteria for digitisation are (or at least should be) considered as supplement to already established and defined library management issues that arise from clear mission of the institution and knowing its collections and user needs. This paper is a small contribution to rethinking the role of criteria in managing library collections in digital age.

Notes:

1. National Library of Australia. Collection Digitisation Policy 2006 . [cited: 2009-12-12]. Available at: http://www.ncecho.org/dig/guide_2selection.shtml
2. Nacionalni projekt «Hrvatska kulturna baština» 2007. Smjernice za odabir građe za digitalizaciju. [cited: 2009-12-13]. Available at: http://www.kultura.hr/hr/content/download/596/7925/file/smjernice_odabir.pdf
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8. The Library of Congress. Selection Criteria for Preservation Digital Reformatting 2006. [cited: 2009-12-12]. Available at: <http://www.loc.gov/preserv/prd/presdig/presselection.html>
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10. The Library of Congress. Selection Criteria for Preservation Digital Reformatting 2006. [cited: 2009-12-12]. Available at:
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