RICHES
RESOURCES

04

Digital Technologies: Re-thinking Turkish Libraries in an Information Society

Digital technology (DT) has had an enormous impact on Turkish society and culture and has introduced many changes in cultural heritage (CH) institutions such as libraries in Turkey. Traditionally used for borrowing books, doing homework or spending free time within a specific restricted timeframe, the introduction of DT has allowed for an expanded service for users with no restrictions of time and place or socio-economic background. For example, the important and extensive history and CH of Anatolia has been digitised and can be accessed online by anyone, at any time and in any place.

THINK
PAPERS

This Think Paper is one of a collection of Think Papers issued by RICHES in order to stimulate further debate on the issues arising from the research.

Research undertaken by the RICHES project covers a range of subject areas including digital libraries, virtual performance, crafts, fashion, technologies and spaces.

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Based on RICHES research the aim and focus of this think paper is to outline the introduction of digital technologies in Turkish libraries and to give an account of the current situation and its subsequent evolving status. It addresses the issues and challenges raised in the digitisation of CH and also the benefits and offers an opportunity to rethink the role of Turkish libraries in an information society.

Aksam Newspapers dated 12 January 1929

Digitisation and Libraries in Turkey

RICHES is a research project about change: the change that digital technologies are bringing to our society decentering culture and CH away from institutional structures and towards the individual. Libraries and archives are one of the institutions that experienced change when they started to digitise their collections in transforming sources from analogue to digital media in order to enable increasing access of CH to the public.

 This development and implementation of information and communications technology (ICT) has resulted in the reinvention of libraries. In an information society, users of libraries

expect to have the same DT experience as they would in other aspects of their life with immediate and accurate access to CH without restrictions. CH institutions, in order to remain relevant to a contemporary information society, have had to keep pace with these new and emerging developments in DT. As a result, many CH institutions give priority to digitisation for the preservation, interpretation and access to their collections. However, this has not been without its challenges. For more than a decade, CH professionals in museums, libraries and archives have been challenged with how to integrate DT according to their needs and struggled with the challenges of preserving information in a digital environment.

Benefits of Digital Technologies in Libraries and Archives

RICHES research has highlighted that there are many benefits in adopting DT in CH institutions such as libraries and archives and that it can, and has, had an impact in every stage of information processing from the retrieving of information to improving customer service:

- Users may become a member of these institutions online and browse and reserve from their library / collection.

- Users may benefit from the electronic materials without the restrictions of time and space.

- Usage of IT in institutions definitely saves time and money, reduces human resources and decreases faults in processing.

- Digitisation provides much more storage options compared with the analogue systems.

- Provides more collaboration and co-operation possibilities.

Digital Technology in Turkish Libraries

Prior to the implementation of DT in Turkish libraries, operations and process were undertaken in analogue. Although there is no current data on DT, evidence suggests there has been increasing and ongoing adoption and use of DT, particularly in the CH sector in accessing, archiving, interpreting and preserving CH. For example, efforts in digitisation can be seen in many Turkish CH institutions in Istanbul, Ankara and İzmir: the General Directorate of State Archives, the Turkish National Library, the Süleymaniye Library, the Beyazıt State Library, the Atatürk Library and the Konya Regional Manuscript Library. Although these were initially individual digitisation processes they have been brought together as an online collective accessible at https://yazmalar.yek.gov.tr/portal/main/login.

The Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism has established an executive presidency to administer and standardise the digitisation of manuscripts and all manuscript libraries in Turkey are responsible to them. One of the first and most innovative libraries in adopting

DT in Turkey was the library of Islamic History, Art and Culture Research Center (IRCICA) which established the Farabi Digital Library project. This has digitised important material on Islamic culture and the Ottoman Empire.

Digitisation has allowed researchers from all over the world to access the rich cultural content of the Turkish National Library. This has a collection of rich sources that include books, printed works, rare manuscripts of art, printed works with the Arabic alphabet, daily newspapers, magazines, bulletins, annuals, posters, maps, musical notes, audio-records (CD and tape) and pictures. Currently, half of the non-book collection (more than 100.000) including manuscripts, fine arts (posters, paintings, brochures etc.), gramophone records, talking books, bibliographies and serials are being digitised and made accessible to users.

Manuscript: Eczâ minel-Kurân. Risale-i Musiki by Yusuf Nizameddin

As a government authority on libraries and archives, the Directorate General of Libraries and Publications has conducted various researches (case studies, survey and questionnaires, reports, workshops, projects) on digitisation in Turkey in recent years. Some of the outcomes are as follows:

- Initially, the importance of digitisation was not recognised.
- The situation has now changed and digitisation includes preservation as well as sharing and accessing.
- There is a lack of technical know-how and infrastructure.

- Institutions implement their own methods and there is a need for common policies and strategies to make possible the sharing of best practice.

- Personnel qualification and training is one of the most important issues in digital services. With the evolving system of technology, a need for continuous training is necessary. Whether born digital or not, long-term access and preservation of digital records are essential aspects of access and retrieval of data over a long period. Because of the wide productivity of these documents which can be easily lost in the wide world of information, these digital files are the guarantee of accession and retrieval for future years. Because of this reason, curators need to keep up with the developments of the digital age.

- There are issues about copyright, accession, sustainability, storage, back-up and data integrity that need to be addressed at the different levels, from the policy domain to the technological research and development. There is a lack of common approaches and solutions to the problem of the persistent identifiers.

- Also there is a language issue on accession of the digitised content because of the Arabic alphabet still cannot be ocr'ed.

- Institutions and their staff are mostly unaware of the e-infrastructure possibilities; in some cases they are not even connected to the e-infrastructure providers.

Rethinking the role of DT in Turkish Libraries: Future possibilities

Digitisation in Turkish libraries needs to continue to develop. Some of the actions we suggest to perform about digitisation of CH in Turkish libraries and archives are the following:

- Nationwide interoperability and a global policy about digitisation should be provided.

- Necessary changes in laws should be undertaken in order to overcome the legal issues about copyright, accession and data sharing.

- Staff training should be provided for the operational system.

- Publications and guidelines about digitisation should be provided.

- Usage of union catalogs, NREN and e-infrastructures in CH area helps sharing heritage wider.

- An advisory board for the digitisation processes should be constituted under the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism. This board should coordinate the tasks on digitisation.

- A nationwide inventory on CH sources that are about to be digitised should be compiled.

Hacivat from traditional Turkish shadow play "Hacivat & Karagoz".

Zenne: A Turkish female impersonator in Turkish shadow play.

"Bringing cultural heritage and people together in a changing Europe and finding new ways of engaging with heritage in a digital world"

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