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Global to Local: Diversity and Inclusiveness in Resource Sharing

ULSIT Projects and Practices in Diversity and Inclusiveness in Resource Sharing

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Abstract:

For decades, there has been a prevailing sense that the world is becoming increasingly interconnected, with information technologies bringing everything within arm's reach. Simultaneously, in pursuit of long-term goals of information equity and assurance, knowledge of the local context is starting to get lost in the stream of information. Recognizing these trends, the University of Library Studies, and Information Technologies (ULSIT), based in Sofia, Bulgaria, has been engaged in a series of projects over the past decade aimed at seeking balance in the new information landscape. This report presents the university's positive experiences in two main areas related to sharing academic and educational resources.
First, it highlights best practices in the digitization of the national retrospective bibliography of the Bulgarian Revival (1801–1878), transforming it from a local printed repertoire into a modern information retrieval system.
Second, it discusses projects focused on creating a platform with international games tailored to regional educational needs in the field of information literacy and library-information education.

Conclusions are drawn regarding best practices and challenges in forming clusters of academic information and their sharing.

Keywords: library and information education, digitization, bibliographic resources, game-based learning, training of librarians

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Introduction

Founded in 1949, the University of Library Studies and Information Technologies (ULSIT) has always been at the forefront of information changes in the preparation of its graduates and consulting specialists from the library sector in Bulgaria. Contrary to the theory that the library system was relatively stable and conservative until the implementation of the Internet, in the second half of the 20th century, library education in Bulgaria integrated new standards and rules for cataloging, microfilming, and library automatization into its programs. In this context, ULSIT reflects the changes of the last ten years, striving to work precisely under the motto of the conference 'Diversity and Inclusiveness in Resource Sharing'. During this period, projects have been developed in bibliographic ITS and GIS systems, gamification in education, information literacy for students and librarians, and digitization of educational resources in the field of library science. With this report, we want to share the university's experiences in such types of projects.

Bibliography of the Bulgarian Revival Books (1801–1878)

In 2012, 160 years had passed since the publication of the first Bulgarian bibliography (Shopov, 1852). Over this period, substantial advancements have been made in the methodology, scope, and application of bibliographic information. Through generations of bibliographic work and numerous revised and expanded editions, Bulgarian bibliography has achieved near-comprehensive coverage of Bulgarian books and periodicals. However, the reference books are available only in print format, and conducting information within them presents significant challenges—both in physical and time consumption terms. In response to the bibliographic accumulation and the evolving information needs, the project "Bibliography of the Bulgarian Revival Books (1801–1878)" or shortly Knigopis was initiated in 2016. The task of the project was to develop an Information Retrieval System (IRS) and a Geographic Information System (GIS) to provide detailed online bibliographic data concerning Bulgarian literature before the formation of the independent Bulgarian state. The project is funded by the Bulgarian National Science Fund (Zagorov, Encheva 2017).

The project began with a comprehensive review of the existing retrospective bibliographies that describe the literary output from the Revival period (Sreznevski, 1846; Shopov, 1852; Danov, 1862; 1866; Irechek, 1872; Balan, 1909; Nachov, 1912; Pogorelov, 1923; Stoyanov, 1957–1959; Teodosiev, 2007). In addition, the collections of major libraries collections holding Bulgarian Revival books were examined, including the National Library "St. Cyril and Methodius", the Central Library of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the Samokov Regional History Museum, and the National Academic Library and Information System (NALIS) union catalog. Given the international character of Bulgarian literature from this period, the collections of the

National Library of Hungary, the University Library in Budapest, and the National Library in Bucharest were also reviewed. For the sake of bibliographic completeness, online collections of the Library of Congress (USA), Matica Srpska (Novi Sad, Serbia), Lenin State Library (Moscow), French National Library, WorldCat, and other e-catalogs were consulted (Zagorov, 2020). An innovative feature of the project allows users to report bibliographic errors or suggest that the administrator upload bibliographic entries for books not yet registered. Based on the research conducted, the national bibliography of Bulgaria has expanded by 5% or 106 bibliographic entries. This is a significant achievement, considering that Bulgarian bibliographies have claimed near-total completeness since the 1960s (Zagorov, 2019). The process of locating and adding information is ongoing and continues to the present day, supported by the efforts of volunteers.

The next important task for the project team was to address the functions and user interface of the Information Retrieval System (IRS). The main user interface of the Knigopis website consists of two primary layers—a classic bibliographic list, where books are arranged in chronological-alphabetical order, and a Geographic Information System (GIS) that visually presents the bibliographic data. The second option is particularly useful, as during this period, Bulgarian books were published across a broad geographic range, spanning the triangle between New York, Moscow, and Istanbul.

The primary search function is also conducted from the homepage. Due to the unregulated spelling and lack of standards in the literary Bulgarian language during the period before the Liberation of Bulgaria, the IRS allows searching by a specific word or by default. The search is further divided into simple and advanced searches. In the advanced search, various bibliographic elements from the description of a specific book can be combined. The number of filters in the IRS corresponds to the number of elements in the bibliographic description of the document, thereby allowing the user to navigate from the general pool of information to a specific book and vice versa, from a specific element of the description to a pool of documents that share a particular bibliographic characteristic. The search results can be sorted alphabetically, chronologically, and by document size. The advance search has the option to use virtual keyboard for three main alphabets used in the Bulgarian Revival Books: Bulgarian, Greek, and Latin.

Each specific book is represented by an extended bibliographic record, an ISBD description, and a MARC description. The extended record includes a photo of the title page(s) for quick verification of the bibliographic information, an expanded "Note" field, reference links to existing printed bibliographic guides where the document is described, and a link to a digital copy/copies if available. It becomes evident that some books have been digitized multiple times, while a significant number have not been digitized at all. Information about digital copies enables Bulgarian libraries to better and more strategically plan their digitization policies (Zlatkova, Angelova, 2019). Each record or set of records can be copied, printed, or downloaded.

The website also features an English-language version, allowing access for foreign users. Over the past four years, the Knigopis have gained widespread popularity within academic circles and society. The system of specialized bibliographic information was officially launched on June 6, 2020, after being tested by two groups of library and IT specialists (Zagorov, Encheva, 2020; Zagorov et al., 2020). The

testing of the completed product provided positive feedback regarding both the reliability of the bibliographic data and the functionalities of the IRS. The information system has been presented in academic circles through an information campaign (Yancheva, 2019). Today, four years later, the database is used daily by between 20 and 100 users, with a geographical profile indicating resource usage from 60 countries worldwide. Given the location and number of academic institutions engaged in Bulgarian history and literature, the data from the analytical tool show that the Bibliography project has successfully fulfilled its second primary objective—to share bibliographic information accessibly and freely with all who need it.

The project also has another positive impact. The PhD students who participated in the team have developed into accomplished researchers, and after their appointment to the ULSIT team, they proposed ideas for projects on the topic of diversity and inclusiveness in resource sharing. Currently, Gergana Yancheva is developing a GIS to present the dispersed e-resources of Bulgarian regional libraries in an accessible and user-friendly format (Yancheva, 2024). Gabriela Angelova is preparing a system to provide information about the literary and documentary heritage of the small community of Bulgarian Catholics (Angelova, 2024). These steps enable active digital engagement among people at the regional, national, and international levels and lay a solid foundation for the development of Bulgarian digital humanities.

The project introduces several innovations: visualization of bibliographic information through GIS; the possibility of cross-checking bibliographic data with visual material/digital copies; linking printed bibliographies with the e-version; the ability for users to supplement and correct the database; and the possibility of planning digital collections using information on available digital copies.

A key aspect of sharing experiences is identifying the challenges. Regarding the Bibliography project, these can be summarized into three main categories:

1. Difficulties in communication between IT and library specialists during the working process;

2. Lack of resources to support the project after its funding period ends;

3. The dynamics of the web environment—what was innovative four years ago may become an anachronism today.

NAVIGATE, TLIT4U and NEDLib projects

During the period 2017-2024 a team from the Department of Library Sciences at the University of Library Studies and Information Technologies (ULSIT) successfully implemented two projects under the Erasmus+ program of the European Commission for game-based learning in information and media literacy with a target group students and teachers in library and information sciences as well as librarians from academic and public libraries: NAVIGATE and TLIT4U. Partners of ULSIT were University of Parma and Foundation at the Polytechnic University in Milan, Italy, University of Gavle, Sweden and University of Lapland, Finland. From September 1, 2023, the same team of ULSIT is working on a new three-year Erasmus project: NEDLib aimed at increasing the competences of public librarians through the development by university professors of study modules in four priority areas. Partners of ULSIT are: National Library of

Latvia, Association of the Romanian Public Librarians, Directorate for Books, Archives and Libraries, Portugal, Global Libraries - Bulgaria Foundation and International Hellenic University, Greece.

Information literacy is the first of the five key components of digital competences defined by DIGCOMP, the European Digital Competence Framework [DIGCOMP, 2022]. Today, we expect the European population to be able to manage information and knowledge through the conscious use of skills such as browsing, searching and filtering data, information and digital content; evaluation and management of data, information and digital content; interaction through digital technologies; sharing and expressing a civic stance through digital technologies. However, the widespread phenomenon of fake content and news shows that we are still far from achieving these goals. This happens at the level of civil society, but also in subgroups for which better knowledge would be expected: e.g. the students in the universities. Developing educational elements to increase information literacy is critical to whether we will be able to make the most of new technologies or face the inability to manage the processes we have started.

In view of the above-mentioned problems, the Erasmus+ project NAVIGATE – Information Literacy: a Game-based Learning Approach for Avoiding Fake Content [NAVIGATE project, 2017] set out to bring innovation to this field by applying a game-based approach to the information literacy education of undergraduate students from humanities in Europe. It started in September 2017 and ended on December 31, 2020. The activities implemented within the NAVIGATE project aimed to increase the competences of students and librarians in recognizing fake content and to create opportunities for their active participation in learning through research, experimentation, competition and cooperation. The main tasks of the project were: creating a game model for teaching information literacy, consisting of a curriculum based on a competency tree; development of educational material in the form of games included in the curriculum, work modules with specific game tasks, learning activities based on games; preparation of a guide supporting future users of the game approach in information literacy education.

In planning the game-based learning model to be developed by NAVIGATE, the project team analyzed different information literacy learning frameworks, paying particular attention to those applied in higher education such as ACRL [Association of College and Research Libraries Information Literacy Framework, 2016] and SCONUL [Seven Pillars of Information Literacy Core Model for Higher Education, 2011]. The Digital Competence Framework DIGCOMP was explored and subsequently included as a student self-assessment tool in addition to the comparative study on information literacy perceptions and skills of students from Bulgaria, Italy and Sweden conducted in the first phase of the project. It is believed that when standards or pillars of information literacy frameworks are incorporated into a specific situation, subsequent instructional actions flow easily from them. However, it was difficult for the project team to embody the considered standards in online learning materials or to use them directly as a basis for game-based learning activities. Another challenge in working on the pedagogical model was that new frameworks had to be formulated for the context of misinformation, a central issue for the NAVIGATE project. Taking into account the above-mentioned limitations of existing frameworks for information literacy and digital competences and based on the student gaps identified in the study, the project team

developed an original framework (Competency Tree) as an interactive web tool: https://www.navigateproject.eu /o1/competency-tree-as-a-wheel/) that includes information literacy skills students need to avoid fake content. The competence tree consists of 5 main pillars (Plan - Find relevant information; Identify and scope - Search / Find information; Identify, evaluate and avoid fake information; Manage and communicate information; Digital competence regarding fake content), each of them including various additional skills related to information literacy.

The NAVIGATE project identified and evaluated 67 games from around the world used by librarians and educators to teach information literacy skills in university settings. The games were scored from 1 to 10 by information literacy educators, librarians and experts with technical competencies according to the following quality criteria: content (according to the skills / learning outcomes included in the Competency Tree); relevance of activities; assessment (linked to a specific learning outcome). Scoring each game from 1 to 10 was done both based on the core and additional skills covered by the Competency Tree, as well as according to characteristics such as playability, lastability, level of engagement, user interface, quality of the story. The following metadata were also taken into account in the evaluation: producer and year, genre, multilingualism, modality (single or multiplayer), type of platform / operating system, type of access (open / paid), difficulty curve (low, medium, high) and type of assessment (quantitative / qualitative). It is interesting to note that information literacy games feature a rich variety of genres: for example, adventure, role-playing, puzzle, management, video-based, storytelling, multiple-choice, dialogue-based, quiz-based, and etc. The selection of the 20 best examples of information literacy games is available through an interactive database on the project website (https://www.navigateproject.eu/navigamesearch-tool/). NaviGameSearcher is designed to offer educators, librarians, and students information and advice on the possible uses and basic functions of games. The availability of filters helps users to select games based both on their educational goals and on the desired technical characteristics.

The NAVIGATE game-based learning model and related to it Competency Tree with the five pillars of information literacy include various learning scenarios and roles relating to the student, the librarian and the teacher. Learning pathways depend on the learning outcomes selected and prioritized by the Competency Tree (what is not covered by the 20 best examples of information literacy games). The goal is to provide educators and librarians with support in using games in information literacy courses. As a result, two very different digital games were created with interfaces in Bulgarian, Italian, Swedish and English, available at: https://www.navigateproject.eu/games/. The first game Information Trap Manager is an adventure and strategy game simulating a university campus. It provides an opportunity for students to acquire competencies related to information literacy at an intermediate and advanced level. Learning in the game is achieved through various objects: student dormitory, student cafe, student club, library, exam center, classrooms, knowledge center, etc. Using digital dice, players move around the campus board to explore learning outcomes (open access, search techniques, interlibrary loan, scholarly databases, citation techniques, electronic library services, etc.) facing a series of challenges developing information literacy skills. The second game Navigator is a storytelling-based mini-game simulating social communication applications. The aim is to increase the awareness of humanities students about the risks related to the quality of information

sources. The game is based on the “Integrated Instruction” approach, encouraging players to study the CRAAP (Currency, Relevance, Authorship, Accuracy and Purpose) test to evaluate documents and sources. Navigator starts with breaking news, followed by a chat dialogue with a robot assistant based on artificial intelligence. Students learn how to identify, assess and prevent the creation, use and dissemination of fake information. The two games created in the framework of the project have a tool to set a time to play and provide quantitative and qualitative feedback on the success of the participants.

The second Erasmus project, coordinated by the Department of Library Sciences at ULSIT, TLIT4U - Improving Transliteracy Skills through Serious Games [TLIT4U project, 2021] is implemented during the period November 1, 2021 - May 31, 2024. TLIT4U follows the successful example of the implementation of the NAVIGATE project Information Literacy: a Game-Based Learning Approach for Avoiding Fake Content (2017-2020). The project emphasizes the need to improve students’ skills related to different types of literacy and to train teachers and librarians to apply the STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math) model with the help of digital educational games.

During the implementation of TLIT4U, four main results were achieved through the development of various intellectual products. The first product is related to satisfying the need for change corresponding to the needs of students who are looking for dynamism and efficiency in their studies at universities. This need is a priority for university teachers, who in turn must provide the expected high quality of education. After researching pedagogical models and educational frameworks, the project team adapted the STEAM model to combine the innovative teaching strategy of transliteracy with the practical knowledge and skills traditionally used in the sciences. As a final result of the activities carried out during the first stage of the project, a Conceptual model for teaching transliteracy in higher education was developed, which is also applicable by non-formal educational institutions, for example libraries. During the implementation of the second stage of the project, teachers and librarians were provided with an interactive Didactic Guide for teaching transliteracy in an adapted curriculum with STEAM elements. The third stage of the project was dedicated to the development of a Pilot Model for Game-Based Learning in Transliteracy. The design of the educational game ensures the fulfillment of quality criteria such as usability, reproduction, etc. The final fourth stage of TLIT4U is characterized by the development of the Games’ Selection Tool (a tool containing selected educational games thematically related to the project) as well as the game for learning transliteracy LEA (Learning in Academia) to be used by universities and libraries.

The Games’ Selection Tool (https://translit-eu.unibit.bg/gamesearch/) provides different groups of users with the opportunity to acquire transliteracy skills by participating in various digital games. The interactive tool is designed for teachers, librarians and all educational professionals who want to use digital games as effective tools in their teaching practice. The selected games, with their diverse types of resources and learning objectives, guide players through the domains of different transliteracy concepts aimed at improving their information literacy and STEAM competencies. Each educational game is presented with a description, an educational

objective and an evaluation method. In the rating section on the project website, each game is rated on a scale of 0 to 10.

LEA - Learning in Academia (https://translit-eu.unibit.bg/lea-learning-in-academy/) is an online book-game developed by the TLIT4U project and available in 4 languages: English, Bulgarian, Finnish and Italian. It is a type of serious storytelling-based game aimed at supporting student learning in an academic context. The LEA game guides learners through the circular phases of scientific inquiry: from connecting prior knowledge and interests (Connect) to creating hypotheses and research questions (Wonder), Investigate - the phase in which we identify possible studies and resources to help us in our research, Construct - the moment we start to write and argue, continue with Express - the moment we assess our purpose and audience and adjust the message, and finish with Reflect - a phase of self-reflection that allows us to evaluate what we have done, to improve it and use for possible future developments.

All TLIT4U project definitions are collected in Word Treasure (https://translit-eu.unibit.bg/home/word-treasure/): an online dictionary containing definitions of terms related to different types of literacy, innovative learning approaches, new technological trends, etc. A related bibliography is provided along with the definitions.

The Erasmus project NEDLib - Digital Competence and Information Literacy for Librarians [NEDLib project, 2023] is the third project coordinated by the Library Sciences department of ULSIT. It aims to strengthen links between the education and library sectors and will run until 31 August 2026. Current information about the project is published on the NEDLib website: https://nedlib.unibit.bg/, as well as on its Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/nedlibproject.

During the implementation of the first phase of NEDLib, university professors from the two Departments of Library Sciences in Bulgaria and Greece developed training modules in four thematic areas: Information literacy; Media literacy; Disinformation and fake news; Gamification in libraries. Before proceeding with the development of the modules, the opinions of a significant number of library specialists were collected and analyzed regarding whether the content of the proposed modules meets the needs of modern library knowledge in the different geographical regions of Europe, as well as whether the envisaged trainings will satisfy the needs of librarians at different stages of their professional development.

In January and February 2025, within two five-day on-site trainings in Bulgaria and Greece, 65 predetermined key librarians from the five partner countries were trained by the university professors through the developed teaching modules. Subsequently, it is envisaged that the key librarians will train two additional target groups: librarians from public librarians and different categories of library users (students, young professionals, senior citizens). The trainings will be held in pre-selected libraries in Bulgaria, Greece, Latvia, Romania and Portugal which will act as regional training centers. In Bulgaria such centers will be the regional libraries in Veliko Tarnovo, Stara Zagora, Ruse, Plovdiv and Dobrich, as well as Sofia City Library. For the training purposes of the additional groups, the modules in the four subject areas developed by thboth universities will be adapted with the help of the key librarians to provide practice-oriented learning materials for further use in an online environment. In addition to English, the adapted modules will be available in the five languages of

the partnership. Access to the learning materials for librarians and library users will be provided through the project's Moodle-based e-learning platform. In the final phase of the NEDLib project, summer schools will be organized in all partner countries for the best performing participants in the different modules of the program. In June 2026, the final conference of NEDLib will be held in Bulgaria. It will provide a venue for meetings and discussions of key stakeholders from the five partner countries: key library staff, university professors, innovators, data management companies, journalists, etc.

Conclusions:

Faster, easier, and more user-friendly—this is how the information environment can be described today, whether it concerns scientific research or the training of specialists. Nowadays, everything is just a click away, but the work on the projects at ULSIT, alongside the obvious benefits, raises reflections on several concerning issues. The question of copyright and licensing agreements for information use increasingly resembles a battleground where the armies of large corporation maneuver against open-access portals. The digitization and sharing of information are costly and asymmetrically developed, often with the selected materials for digitization not reflecting the wealth of library collections, while at the same time leading to restrictions on access to physical collections. Issues of project funding, combined with the diversity of formats, software solutions, and their obsolescence, create challenges regarding the relevance, visibility, and accessibility of specific resources. It is not uncommon for valuable resources to disappear from the web, despite the hundreds of hours of work and brilliant ideas behind them. It is not surprising that, while working on a given project for 2-3 years, a more flexible and better technological solution may emerge. It should also be noted that the dehumanization of library reading rooms is occurring, as students and specialists increasingly avoid them in favor of convenient and easy-to-use e-resources. These are problems of dynamics and rapid growth that need to be more actively discussed by professionals in the library and information field.

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