

Digital Library of the Belgrade City Library in the service of Citizen Science

Olivera Nastić

Belgrade City Library

ABSTRACT

Citizen science allows participants to directly contribute to research, increase their understanding of science, and learn about issues facing the entire community. However, a significant concern related to practising citizen science is the ability of amateur scientists, i.e., citizen science volunteers, to provide quality and accurate data. From a societal angle, it is essential to engage with societal actors in various formats that suit participants, evaluate two-way learning outcomes, and develop the transformative role of science communication. (3) Public libraries and their digital collections have an important role in fostering citizen science. By curating and providing access to verifiable sources of information public libraries empower citizens and non-academic researchers to collaborate on research projects, thereby democratising knowledge and promoting a culture of lifelong learning and scientific inquiry. (1)

We will present the history of the Digital Library of the Belgrade City Library (BCL) and its implications for citizen science. The first steps and plans for digitization were made in 2000, but it only started to be realised much later. BCL became a partner in the two-year project AccessIT (Accelerate the circulation of culture through exchange of skills in information technology), which was funded by the European Commission, from the "Culture 2007-2013" Program. The duration of the project was from May 1, 2009 to April 30, 2011. The project coordinator was MDR Partners from London, the partners were PSNC (Poznan Supercomputing and Networking Center) from Poland, Hacettepe University from Ankara - Turkey, the Central Public Library from Veria - Greece and the Belgrade City Library. The project is designed to encourage intercultural dialogue, international connection and cooperation of cultural workers, as well as transnational presentation of cultural treasures. The result of the work on this project is the "dLibra digital library" (dLibra, 2016). (4) The Digital Library of the Belgrade City Library has been available to users since August 2012. The total number of views since the beginning of the Digital Library of the City of Belgrade was 3,274,389 or 163,927 views in 2012, that is, 449 views per day. (2)

However, due to the development of new technologies and the lack of space for storing digital objects, at the end of 2018, the Library's management decided to switch to the new ResCarta platform (ResCarta, 2019) for the creation of the Digital Library. Therefore, from January of 2019, it moved to the new ResCarta platform. This

professional software for creating and organising digital collections can be loaded on a stand-alone system or on a shared network. An unlimited number of users can share the tools or unlimited copies can be uploaded to the server. Although relatively small in size (728 items), the Digital Library of the Belgrade City Library contains diverse materials, including digitised books, periodicals, geographical maps, and annual reports. (5) Most of the digitised material is associated with Belgrade's history or library programs, making the collections highly relevant for those studying the history and culture of Belgrade and its surroundings. All researchers, including academic and non-academic researchers, as well as citizen scientists, can access collections and can get the support of the Beogradika Department if the required resources are not available in the digital library. Thanks to the increasing amount of digitised material, the materials are available to a considerably wider audience and potential researchers, helping them overcome the physical boundaries of the library space and any financial constraints limiting access to materials..

The Digital Library of the Belgrade City Library stands as a testament to the power of digitization in preserving cultural heritage and supporting research, including citizen science. Citizen science is a versatile concept, adaptable to a wide range of situations and disciplines. The Digital Library of the Belgrade City Library (BCL) provides a rich resource for non-academic researchers and citizen scientists to engage in meaningful research.

On the poster, a number of use cases where the Digital Library's materials have been used in research conducted by non-academic researchers and citizen scientists will be presented. The Beogradika Department plays a pivotal role in collecting and curating materials related to Belgrade, ensuring that researchers have access to a comprehensive archive. This collection is particularly valuable for those who are not affiliated with academic institutions but are passionate about researching Belgrade's past. These use cases demonstrate the flexibility and applicability of citizen science, showcasing how the Digital Library of the Belgrade City Library supports a diverse range of research endeavours. By providing access to curated resources, the library empowers non-academic researchers, journalists, and educators to contribute to the broader understanding of Belgrade's history and culture. This structure will highlight the practical applications of the Digital Library in supporting citizen science and non-academic research.

The majority of researchers utilising the Digital Library of the Belgrade City Library (BCL) hail from cultural institutions. Although they employ scholarly research methodologies, their primary goal is to produce outputs for non-academic audiences. The presentation will focus on a number of use cases illustrating this kind of collaboration, including:

Jelena Jovanović Simić, Museum of the Serbian Medical Society; research topic: "The first years of the Children's Clinic in Belgrade",

Jelica Reljić, State Archives of Serbia; research topic: "Serbs in Sarajevo",

–Ranka Gašić, Institute for Contemporary History, research topic: “Economic history between the two wars, banking institutions of Belgrade”.

The collaboration between the Digital Library and cultural institutions exemplifies how scholarly research can be adapted to serve non-academic audiences. Through these use cases, the presentation will underscore the importance of such partnerships in making cultural heritage accessible and engaging for the wider public. The examples discussed illustrate the significant impact that well- curated digital archives, such as the Digital Library of the Belgrade City Library (BCL), can have in supporting citizen science. By making historical and cultural resources accessible to a broader audience, these archives empower non-academic researchers and foster public engagement with

scholarly research. In addition to the examples covered in the presentation, further illustrations of this impact will be displayed on the poster. It will feature photographs and additional use cases, providing a visual and comprehensive overview of how the Digital Library's resources are being utilised. These examples are just a glimpse into the broader potential of digital archives. As digitization efforts continue to expand, so too will the opportunities for collaboration between cultural institutions, researchers, and citizen scientists. The future holds even more possibilities for making history and culture accessible to all.

The Digital Library of the Belgrade City Library serves as a vital repository of the cultural heritage of Belgrade and its surroundings. Through its evolution across two different platforms and continuous upgrades, it has become an essential resource for researchers, educators, and the general public. This presentation will highlight the significant strides made by the Belgrade City Library in the field of digitization. From the early days of digitization efforts to the adoption of more advanced platforms, the Library has consistently prioritised the preservation and accessibility of its valuable materials.

KEYWORDS

citizen science; Beogradika Department; Belgrade; Digital Belgrade City Library; digitization; research

REFERENCES

1. Cohn, J. P. (2008). Citizen science: Can volunteers do real research? *BioScience*, 58(3), 192–197. <https://doi.org/10.1641/B580303>
2. Đukić, P. (2010). Digitalizujem, dakle postojim. *Glas biblioteke : časopis zasavremeno bibliotekarstvo*, 17, 31–37.
3. Hecker, S. et al. (2018): Innovation in citizen science – perspectives on science-policy advances. Meeting report *Citizen Science: Theory and Practice* 3 (1), 4 10.5334/cstp.114.

4. Sagić, A. (2019). Local newspapers as a source for social research. IFLA WLIC 2019. Preuzeto 19. maja 2020, sa <http://library.ifla.org/2483/1/085-sagic-en.pdf>
5. Ćorović, Lj. M. (2010). Digitization of special collections at the Belgrade City Library. *Novine Beogradskog čitališta (New Series)*, VI(43), 28. Retrieved December 11, 2020, from <http://www.bgb.org.rs/nbc/ISSN 0354-2041>