


# A vision for the future of standardization in Bulgarian libraries National Cataloguing Rules

Milena Milanova   
mmilanovam@phls.uni-sofia.bg  
Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski",  
Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia, Bulgaria  
associate professor

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The article<sup>1</sup> aims to present the ongoing processes in Bulgarian libraries regarding the applied standards related to library technology and the processes of its digital transformation. The focus is on the efforts being made to develop national cataloging rules through the prism of the significant changes accompanying the development of the Bulgarian library infrastructure. Standardization is one of the main activities that ensures operational compatibility at the level of information exchange and retrieval and is recognized as essential for building library catalogs. Specialists in Bulgarian libraries have always followed the requirements and best practices in creating ILS. They need a new vision for building and developing OPACs in a way that allows the creation of vibrant and useful databases with easy and quality access to bibliographic information.

*standardization, digital transformation, Bulgarian libraries, OPAC, national cataloguing rules*

## 1. Introduction

The structure of the library system in Bulgaria consists of the following types of libraries: public libraries, university libraries, special libraries, and school libraries. Observations on the dynamics of its development indicate that around 70% are chitalishte libraries<sup>2</sup>, 21% are school libraries, and all others make up the remaining 9% (Harizanova, 2007). Providing current data on the exact number of libraries in Bulgaria is difficult due to the methodology<sup>3</sup> used by the National Statistical Institute (NSI) of Bulgaria<sup>4</sup> for collecting library statistics. According to data from 2013, the total number of libraries in the country is 3,938 for an area of 111 thousand square kilometers and a population of 7,245,677 (Doncheva, 2019). A characteristic feature of the Bulgarian library system is the well-developed network of public libraries, which are distributed as follows: one national library, 27 regional libraries, 16 municipal libraries, and 2,216 chitalishte libraries (Bulgaria. Ministry of Culture, 2025). The Minister of Culture has the authority to implement state policy regarding public libraries (Zakon za obshtestvenite biblioteki, 2023). Regional and municipal libraries are jointly administered by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Bulgaria and local government authorities. Chitalishte libraries operate within the institution People's Chitalishte (Community Cultural Centre), defined as a non-governmental organization (Zakon za narodnite chita-

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lishta, 2023) under the relevant legislation and are managed by the community center board. Legislation regulates the National Network of Public Libraries, with the Minister of Culture having coordinating, controlling, and methodological roles. Special attention is given to the participation of public libraries in automated library networks (Zakon za obshtestvenite biblioteki, 2023; Doncheva, 2019).

According to data from 2013, there are 66 university libraries and 1065 school libraries. Their activities are regulated within the framework of the structure, organization, and strategy for the development of the respective educational institution. Reforms in higher education, accreditation procedures for scientific fields, and academic staff development procedures influence the development of university libraries. University libraries establish their own networks, regulations, enrich their collections, and implement modern integrated library systems (ILS). According to the national register (NACID, 2025), there are 52 accredited higher education institutions in Bulgaria, implying that each maintains a library. However, national statistics cover only 13 libraries at institutions of higher education (National Statistical Institute, 2025).

Similar processes affect the development of school libraries, reflecting changes in secondary education. Legislation guarantees library and information services for students, indirectly suggesting the presence of a school library (Doncheva, 2019). Comprehensive data and research findings on the status of school libraries in Bulgaria are not available. National statistics do not reflect the activities of school libraries. If we assume that every school provides some form of library and information services, then the school library network would be the second largest in the country<sup>5,6</sup>.

Special libraries in Bulgaria are of particular interest. Data from 2013 includes only four such libraries (compared to 381 in 2000), while in 2024, five special libraries are included in national statistics. It can be argued that current data on the number and activities of special libraries are not available. Libraries in enterprises and institutions remain outside the statistics (Doncheva, 2019).

The development of modern library infrastructure in Bulgaria goes through various stages. Its uneven development is strongly influenced by social and political events. Until 1989, in the country, a Unified Library System was settled, characterized by a centralized structure and a national scientific-methodological center at the National Library, supporting the development of libraries nationwide (Doncheva, 2019). In 1990, the professional organization of specialists in libraries and information centers was established in Bulgaria – the Bulgarian Library and Information Association (BLIA 2025)<sup>7</sup>, which took on the role of supporting Bulgarian libraries. Various substructures operate within the professional organization, created on thematic or territorial principles (BLIA, 2025).

The transition from a highly centralized to a fully decentralized structure and activities still affects the Bulgarian library system. This is reflected in the uneven development of libraries by type and territory, the lack of complete and regular statistical data, disruptions in methodological activities across all libraries, delays in timely reporting, implementation, and updating of standards, rules, and principles in various library activities and processes. Results from legislative, educational, and scientific projects implemented over the years partially help overcome the negative consequences of the transformation of the Bulgarian library system. Nevertheless, the need for a national strategy, a vision for building and sustainably developing the toolkit for constructing library and information systems in Bulgaria, including rules, standards, and guidelines, becomes increasingly apparent.

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## 2. Historical and Standardization Developments in Bulgarian

### Library Cataloging

Bulgarian libraries have their own guides for catalog construction dating back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Yavrukova, 2022), compiled by individual prominent figures<sup>8</sup>. Gradually, this activity became institutionalized and centralized. Rules and guidelines for describing various types of documents were developed for different types of libraries. In 1989, the "Guide for Alphabetical Catalogs of Books" (Rakovodstvo za azbuchni katalozi na knigi, 1989) was published, which essentially represents the current cataloging rules used by Bulgarian libraries. Up until 1989, centralized methodological guidance was provided for cataloging processes in libraries, which was gradually discontinued.

The beginning of publishing standards for bibliographic description in Bulgaria dates back to 1972 when the first Bulgarian state standard for describing printed works (BDS 9735:1972) was published. Over time, a series of standards were created, initially coordinated by the Standards Committee at the National Library (1971–1975), followed by the Coordination Commission on Standardization (1980–1989) and the Technical Committee 16 (TC 16) established in 1992 at the Bulgarian Institute for Standardization (BIS) (Yavrukova, 2022; Bulgarian Institute for Standardization, 2025). By 1989, necessary standards for bibliographic description, abbreviations, catalog layout, arrangement, and bibliographic data in various editions were developed (Yavrukova, 2022). All these standards were approved as Bulgarian State Standards (BSS) with mandatory applicability. These standards followed the philosophy of the Universal Bibliographic Control (UBC) Program and fully reflected the international community's efforts to harmonize and unify cataloging activities. After 1989, two more national standards were developed – for analytical bibliographic description and selected divisions of the Universal Decimal Classification (UDC). The Bulgarian Institute for Standardization (BIS) through TC 16 works on developing and adopting standards in archival, library, and information activities. The primary activity involves developing national standards and introducing European and certain international standards, as well as regularly reviewing BSS every five years. Sectoral standards are considered significant for specific professional communities and are not part of BIS's program. Therefore, BIS does not engage in developing national standards for bibliographic description. Their main activity remains the regular review of existing standards and their gradual phasing out<sup>9</sup>, which is currently the case – the BSSs for bibliographic description have been repealed. This raises a fundamental question for Bulgarian specialists: what is the primary tool for creating bibliographic records and library catalogs? Nonetheless, the need to update the tools available to library professionals in Bulgaria is recognized. Over the years, several translations of international standards and guidelines have been realized. Unfortunately, this activity can be described as sporadic, driven by the need to preserve traditions and achievements and to continue following established principles. It is primarily due to the voluntary efforts of leading Bulgarian specialists supporting the Bulgarian library community. Over the years, ISBD (G) (2004); ISBD (ER); ISBD (NBM); ISBD (Serials) (2002); ICP (2009), (2016); FRBR (2009); FRAD (2009); ISBD, Consolidated ed. (2011, 2021)<sup>10</sup> have been translated into Bulgarian. It can be argued that the Bulgarian library community has the entire set of standards, and terminological changes resulting from research on the functionality of bibliographic records have been incorporated into International Cataloging Principles and consolidated editions of ISBD. These changes are also included in educational programs for LIS<sup>11</sup> in Bulgaria.

### 3. The State of Bibliographic Standards in Bulgaria

The centralized development of the Bulgarian library system has a long-term impact on the catalogs and bibliographic databases created in libraries. The National Library has the methodological obligation to support all types and kinds of libraries. A system for central cataloging has been developed<sup>12</sup>, and standards and rules for bibliographic description are composed in close cooperation between major Bulgarian public, university, and academic libraries and are easily disseminated through the centralized structure of the library system. At the same time, the educational system implies unified training of personnel in the country, especially in the field of cataloging. During this period, the bibliographic BSSs were also developed. All this leads to a relatively high degree of unification and standardization in the construction of library catalogs.

As an initial date for the introduction of ICT in Bulgarian libraries we can point to 1992, when the foundation was laid for the creation of the national bibliography of Bulgaria using ILS. During this period, the National Library still had the leading role in library processes. The expectations of the Bulgarian library community were to maintain the well-functioning structure while gradually transitioning towards automating various types of libraries until they were integrated into a nationwide network<sup>13</sup>. There was an agreement within the library community regarding the application of BSS for bibliographic description, the use of a unified classification scheme – UDC, as well as the use of a national subject heading maintained by the National Library. Unfortunately, it can be said that a very critical moment for the development of libraries in Bulgaria was missed. The project for a National Automated Library Network (NALIN) did not receive support and was not implemented. Processes began for the independent development of libraries, strongly influenced by institutional, financial, and organizational affiliations. Research on the development of the library system shows alarming results concerning the lack of library catalogs and the implementation of ILS. According to data from 2017, 70% of public libraries do not maintain any catalog, 13% have an electronic catalog, and 5% provide online access to it<sup>14</sup> (Global Libraries – Bulgaria Foundation, 2018). Since public libraries hold the largest share in the country, their uneven development is alarming, including in terms of their catalogs. Recent research on the digitization of activities in regional libraries in Bulgaria found that library specialists self-assess the level of digital transformation in libraries as very high, particularly in terms of building electronic catalogs. An analysis of the data and observations of their websites confirms the presence of technology belonging to an older generation<sup>15</sup>. According to the study, only 4% of websites belong to the Web 2.0 generation (Harizanova, O. et al., 2023).

Observations on the implementation and use of ILS in the work of all libraries in the country repeat the observations and conclusions from studies focusing solely on public libraries (Fig. 1). Available data on the availability of OPAC<sup>16</sup> in Bulgarian libraries show that 154 libraries of all types have an electronic catalog, which is about 4% of libraries. It is characteristic that bibliographic records are created in different software environments, which greatly affects their quality. Of these libraries, 137 primarily use two software products specifically developed for Bulgarian libraries and reflecting national practices and peculiarities. These products do not offer record creation in MARC format but only outputs. Implementation is modular, which also applies to catalog records, affecting the structure of the databases and searching within them. It should be noted that searching in union catalogs of individual libraries using the same software is

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possible, united on different principles: territorial, by type of library, or by type of documents (Table 1).

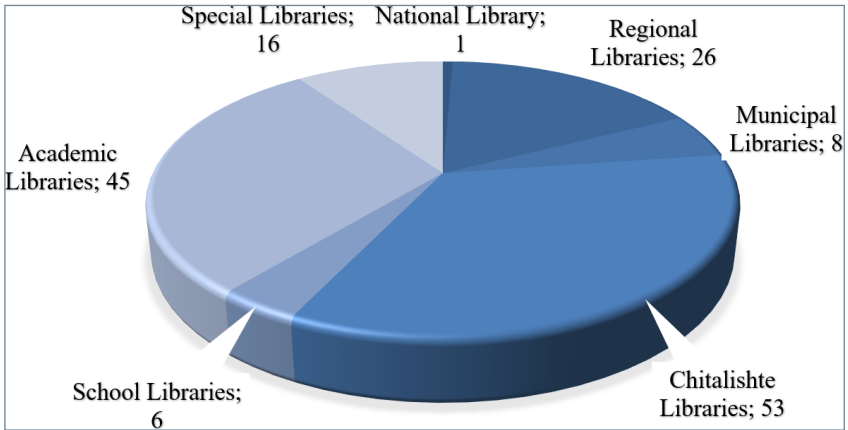


Fig. 1: Libraries by type with OPAC

An additional 17 libraries maintain electronic catalogs through the implementation of other software products: Aleph500, EOS.Web, COBISS, VTLS, home systems, and Koha. Simultaneously, there is maintenance of union catalogs by type and region, which include resources from another 18 community center libraries (2 union catalogs) and 71 school libraries (Table 1). The NALIS<sup>17</sup> union catalog unites resources from 40 Bulgarian libraries of various types based on an agreement to provide bibliographic records for inclusion in the union catalog. Searching in it is possible through open-source software for finding information resources called VuFind. In practice, it provides the ability to simultaneously search the resources provided by all participants in the union catalog, regardless of the software product used to build the electronic catalog (NALIS Foundation, 2025).

Table 1: Integrated Library Systems and OPAC

Integrated Library Systems (ILS)	National Library	Regional Libraries	Municipal Libraries	Chitalishte Libraries	School Libraries	Academic Libraries	Special Libraries	Union Catalogs	
COBISS.bg <a href="https://bg.cobiss.net/">https://bg.cobiss.net/</a>	1	-	-	1	-	-	1	COBISS.bg	3
Library software "Automated Library" (AB) <a href="https://www.pc-tm.eu/">https://www.pc-tm.eu/</a>	-	12	6	30	4	36	9	Union University Library Catalog (ULC)	15
								Union catalog of libraries working with AB	5
								Union catalog of libraries at universities - Northeastern Bulgaria - NORTHEAST	6
Library systems e-Lib Prima/i-Lib Prima <a href="https://softlib.bg/">https://softlib.bg/</a>	-	10	2	22	1	3	2	REGINA books. Union catalog of Regional libraries	5

Integrated Library Systems (ILS)	National Library	Regional Libraries	Municipal Libraries	Chitalishte Libraries	School Libraries	Academic Libraries	Special Libraries	Union Catalogs	
Library systems e-Lib Prima/i-Lib Prima <a href="https://softlib.bg/">https://softlib.bg/</a>	-	10	2	22	1	3	2	REGINA PI. Union catalog of Bulgarian periodicals. Digital collection until 1944.	4
								REGINA articles. Union catalog for articles from periodicals after 1996	7
								National United Catalogue of Old Printed, Rare and Valuable Editions	4
								Unified electronic catalog of books in libraries of the Panagyurishte municipality	7
								Unified electronic catalog of books in libraries in Ruse and the region	11
Aleph 500 ExLibris <a href="https://exlibrisgroup.com/products/aleph-integrated-library-system/">https://exlibrisgroup.com/products/aleph-integrated-library-system/</a>	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-
EOS.Web <a href="https://www.sirsidynix.com/eos-web/">https://www.sirsidynix.com/eos-web/</a>	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-
VTLS Innovative Interfaces, Inc <a href="https://www.iii.com/news/innovative-announces-vega-discover-release/">https://www.iii.com/news/innovative-announces-vega-discover-release/</a>	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Koha Library Software <a href="https://koha-community.org/">https://koha-community.org/</a>	-	3	-	-	1	1	4	NALIS Union Catalogue <a href="https://unicat.nalis.bg/?lng=en">https://unicat.nalis.bg/?lng=en</a>	40
Home systems	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	Electronic catalog Media libraries at school <a href="https://www.libonline-bg.com/">https://www.libonline-bg.com/</a>	71

From the review conducted, it becomes evident that Bulgarian library specialists have always aimed to build standardized and harmonized library systems. The establishment of OPAC is based on a secure and well-organized foundation, where all conditions are present for implementing the universal bibliographic control program. The lack of a unified state policy, as well as low levels of funding, gradually puts specialists in a position where they cannot widely and timely reflect the changes occurring in cataloging processes. The level of ILS implementation remains low and fragmented. The absence of a centralized unit to perform corrective functions regarding decision-making and achieving a high level of standardization gradually affects the quality of bibliographic records in the electronic catalogs of libraries. This is particularly visible in the construction of union catalogs, which combine bibliographic records created through different ILSs. Critical differences exist in controlled access points, creating multilevel bibliographic records, and the low level of FRBRization of Bulgarian OPAC catalogs.

The publication of IFLA's International Cataloguing Principles in 2009 changed the understanding of the functions of library catalogs and their role in information access. The main changes in bibliographic description standards reflected in the consolidated edition of International Standards Bibliographic Description (ISBD, 2011) became available to Bulgarian catalogers with the translation of the standard in 2012. Its use in libraries in Bulgaria began hesitantly and only in some libraries. There was resistance among specialists. For example, during the implementation of the COBISS.bg system at the National Library, bibliographic records began to be compiled based on ISBD, Consolidated ed., 2012. In the curriculum on cataloging at Sofia University, FRBR and ISBD, Consolidated ed., 2012, also began to be taught. During the same period, discussions also began about reviewing and repealing the BSSs for bibliographic description, which would lead to the adoption of the consolidated edition of the ISBD. The Section on Cataloging formed within BLIA plays a significant role, organizing periodic round tables (2016, 2023), where steps for developing Bulgarian catalogs and updating them are discussed.

The main challenges facing Bulgarian specialists are related to rethinking the functions of library catalogs, placing the user at the center, and increasing search and access capabilities to information with a special emphasis on controlling access points.

When created, BSS fully reflects ISBD in its structure, adding elements from bibliographic records that are not subject to standardization but rather guidelines and rules. For example, BSS addresses the issue of the title proper and contains rules for its determination and composition. They contain precise and unambiguous rules for multilevel bibliographic description, reflecting the specifics of different types of resources. They include instructions and schemes for arranging bibliographic information in the form of a catalog card in two variants: a detailed scheme and a simplified description scheme with simplified punctuation for elements. A special standard for analytical description of composite parts has been developed. They are consistent with compiling bibliographic editions (Sbornik balgarski darzhavni standarti, 1990). Of course, all these standards are intended for traditional catalogs and publications, working with well-established and familiar terminology and to some extent managing to replace the lack of national cataloging rules. These circumstances make BSS a convenient tool for work and application. Here, we must also note another fact related to Bulgarian ILS, which fully comply with and reflect the characteristics of catalogs created through the application of BSS.

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#### 4. Activity of standardizations

As mentioned earlier, the establishment of the Section of Cataloging within BLIA is expected to lead to change and gradual modernization of cataloging processes in the country. The main activity involves drafting National Cataloging Rules that will reflect:

- The structure of ISBD.

The development of rules intended for the description of all types of resources will be adopted, following the approach established in the ISBD. A general introductory section will include basic guidelines for compiling bibliographic descriptions, followed by rules, instructions, and examples related to the different types of documents.

- The terminology of LRM.

The terminology adopted in IFLA's library conceptual model will be reflected through translations, guidelines, and clarifications, which will help specialists understand and work freely with the concepts and terms of the model.

- The determination of access points.

Rules and guidelines will be provided to support the determination of primary and additional access points, along with recommendations and examples for their representation in library catalogs, based on national practices and ILS in use.

- Control of access points.

Rules will be developed for the creation of Authorized Access Point for Person, Family, Corporate Body.

- Establishing various search options.

Search requirements will be included, following the example of the ICP.

- Visualization possibilities.

The possibilities for displaying information will be outlined, based on different practices, purposes, and uses of bibliographic records – for example, for users, bibliographic systems, and citations.

- Composing multilevel records.

Rules will be developed for the creation of multilevel records, including options for selecting appropriate solutions and reflecting national practices.

- Placing different types of users at the center of cataloging activities.

The developed rules will take into account the presence of different users and purposes for using bibliographic information, which will be reflected in the examples, display options, record completeness levels, the determination of access points, and the search criteria in library catalogs.

#### 5. Conclusion

Applying and using standards for bibliographic description is a voluntary act. Catalogers in Bulgarian libraries are familiar with the principles of the UBC Program and follow general guidelines that allow for complete harmonization and standardization of library catalogs. In modern conditions, there is a growing need to determine a natural center that, on a voluntary basis, will be accepted as the main one regarding the strategy for developing the toolkit for building Bulgarian library information systems. The beginning has been set with the first translations of the ICP and the ISBD, research on the functionality of bibliographic and control data. The Cataloging Section within BLIA proposed and developed a plan for drafting National Cataloging Rules. To achieve this, an agreement was made to support the development of these rules, ensuring that the realized rules will be adopted in the work of participating libraries. Work on the National Rules is



carried out voluntarily by representatives of the National Library, the Library of Sofia University, the Library of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the Regional Library in Plovdiv, and representatives of the two main educational institutions in the field of LIS in the country – The Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and The University of Library Studies and Information Technologies (ULSIT). The goal is to involve representatives of different types and sizes of libraries, as well as academics in the field of library cataloging, in the development of the new national rules. External experts with previous and/or specific experience in various cataloging processes, as well as in methodological, research, and scientific activities, will also participate in the process. It is planned that the work on the rules will proceed in stages, starting with the development of general rules. After each stage, a national discussion is planned in two phases – among members of the Cataloging Section and participating libraries, followed by a nationwide discussion before the final adoption of the rules. Work on the rules is in its initial stage of developing general provisions and requirements for cataloging rules.

The Bulgarian library community is ready to support and actively participate in the gradual development of a modern national cataloging toolkit. It is expected that the activity will continue and develop constantly through voluntary association and work on various aspects of building ILS in Bulgarian libraries, which will bring library systems to a contemporary level and influence the overall level of digital transformation of the library infrastructure in Bulgaria.

## Footnote

<sup>1</sup> This study is financed by the European Union-NextGenerationEU, through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria, project SUMMIT BG-RRP-2.004-0008-C01

<sup>2</sup> Type of public libraries part of the structure of Bulgarian Chitalishte (Bulgarian Community Cultural Centre. Available at: <https://bulgarianculturalcenter.org/our-vision/>. Accessed: 2025.05.20.).

<sup>3</sup> <https://nsi.bg/en/content/766/statistical-data>

<sup>4</sup> Since 2000, data has been collected only for libraries with a collection of over 200,000 library items, or this amounts to just 49 libraries by 2024. In 2000, there were 6,942 libraries in Bulgaria.

<sup>5</sup> According to data from 2007, school libraries account for approximately 21% of the library network in the country (Harizanova, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> In Bulgaria, there are currently 2352 schools operating (Ministry of Education and Science, 2025).

<sup>7</sup> Until 2008, the name of the association was the Union of Library and Information Workers.

<sup>8</sup> Acad. Stoyan Arghirov (1869–1939) was a philologist, historian, translator, and the founder of library science in Bulgaria. He published a guide for establishing libraries in 1898. Petar Nenkov was the first paid librarian, appointed at the library of the "Saglasie" community center in Pleven, Bulgaria. In 1908, he created a guide for describing, classifying, and arranging books.

<sup>9</sup> The Bulgarian state standards for bibliographic description were abolished in 2024.

<sup>10</sup> Translations of MARC 21 Lite Bibliographic Format (2005), MARC 21 Format for Bibliographic Data (2010), and UNIMARC Manual: bibliographic format (2002) are available in Bulgarian. A translation of an abridged edition of UDC was also realized in 2017. Despite multiple discussions, a well-recognized professional interest, and an acknowledged necessity, translations of FRSD and RDA into Bulgarian have not yet been implemented.

<sup>11</sup> In 1970, a Decree by the Council of Ministers was adopted for the organization of a Unified Library System in Bulgaria, including central cataloging.

<sup>12</sup> In 1970, a Decree by the Council of Ministers was adopted for the organization of a Unified Library System in Bulgaria, including central cataloging.

<sup>13</sup> In 1993, the NALIN project was developed. (Izgrazhdane i razvitie na Natsionalna avtomatizirana bibliotechno-informatsionna mrezha, 1993).

<sup>14</sup> The study was conducted in 2017 among 842 public libraries out of a total of 2,114.

<sup>15</sup> The research projects include Accessibility of Information Electronic Services of Regional Libraries, No. 80-10-60/10.5.2022; and Digital Maturity of Public Libraries in Bulgaria, No. 70-123-473/27.6.2023.

<sup>16</sup> The data was extracted through information searches on google.com, websites of ILS providers in Bulgaria, as well as library websites. Only data that objectively showed the presence of OPAC in libraries was used for the analysis.

<sup>17</sup> NALIS Foundation has been adapted VuFind for searching specifically catalogue records, digital objects, repositories, bibliographies, and other collections and sources. (NALIS Foundation, 2025)

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