


Current trends in library and information science in the light of PhD research and studies – 1.

Interview with Etele Szüts

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The editorial team of CELISR conducted a short interview with recent graduates of the Library and Information Science doctoral program at the ELTE Doctoral School of Literary Studies, in order to provide the journal's readers with an insight into the current and future scientific activities of researchers, and to give an idea of the current research trends in the field. The following article contains a brief overview of the PhD research conducted by Etele Szüts, Director of the Hungarian Library Institute, with background and future prospects.

library digitization, digital preservation, research, interview, PhD program, Hungary

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 Supervisor: János Fodor

Please say a few words about your professional life, your inspirations.



Photo: Andrea Szüts-Péter

I am an IT Engineer and I have a PhD in LIS. I have been participating in digital library tasks related to the *Hungarian National Digital Archive* in different positions from 2014 to 2022. I have been coordinating the aggregation commitments related to – the digital library of the EU – Europeana from 2016 to 2022. I won the professional prize “*Young librarian of the year*” in 2018. Presently, I am the Director of the *Hungarian Library Institute* at the HNMPCC National Széchényi Library in Hungary, and I am the Hungarian member of the EC Expert Group on the common *European Data Space for Cultural Heritage*.

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My main research interests include national and international digitisation programmes and strategies, digital cultural heritage preservation, and digital archives of public collections and cultural institutions.

Please give a comprehensive summary of the research on which your PhD studies are based.

Those of us who work in Hungarian public collections, or have an insight into public collections, rightly feel that there is a lack of continuity in the digitisation of Hungarian cultural heritage held in Hungarian institutions. We often experience duplications or projects being discontinued and restarted. In my thesis, I wanted to find answers to the factors that hinder continuity and how to ensure long-term, sustainable digitisation of public collections. My research analysed the three decades of efforts made in the wake of our strategies for the digital preservation of Hungarian national cultural assets, the achievements of the current institutional systems and the potential problems.

My main objective was to prepare an interdisciplinary thesis based on international and national literature, strategy documents and progress reports, which would both scientifically map our practices over the last thirty years and the possible future development of the Hungarian system. Other objectives included: to present the evolution of the strategies and programmes related to the digitisation of Hungarian cultural heritage; to explore the institutional framework identified in the Hungarian strategic documents; to make recommendations for the further development of the Hungarian public collection digitisation strategy; and to provide an overview of the digital preservation of cultural assets, mainly from a library perspective.

In the doctoral research, I analysed the relevant Hungarian and foreign-language literature and a number of Hungarian and international strategies, research reports and reports on digitisation and digital preservation. I also conducted a comparative analysis with international examples of digitisation strategies and institutions in four European countries (the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Kingdom of Sweden, the Slovak Republic) comparing these Hungarian practices. I also conducted a quantitative research on the promotion of digitised cultural heritage through social media.

Since the oldest Hungarian public electronic book collection, the Hungarian Electronic Library (Hungarian: Magyar Elektronikus Könyvtár – MEK), has been available on the Internet since 1994, and the first state initiative to create the institutional conditions for the digital preservation of Hungarian cultural heritage was the establishment of the John von Neumann Digital Library in 1997, I chose the early 1990s and the above-mentioned milestones as the starting period of my research. It is clear that the objectives of the John von Neumann Digital Library were very similar to the mission of the Hungarian National Digital Archive (Hungarian: Magyar Nemzeti Digitális Archívum – MaNDA), formulated in 2011, which may also resemble the National Repository Project (Hungarian: Nemzeti Adattár Projekt – NAP), formulated in 2017 and still in the planning phase. The target date for the creation of the NAP was 2021, so the research boundary was also set until then. Naturally, where the thesis required it, I have included recent data or information published after 2021.

The aim of the thesis was to provide suggestions for the further development of the Hungarian public digitisation strategy as a possible vision for the future. It is hoped that the resulting proposals will be inspirational for the field of dig-

itisation of public collections and may contribute to the development of more effective and innovative methods in the future.

Who are the primary “beneficiaries” of your research – librarians, users, policy makers?

My PhD thesis provides a comprehensive overview of the digital preservation of Hungarian cultural assets (primarily from a library perspective), which can serve as a guide for both Hungarian and international LIS professionals. As a vision for the future, my thesis provides policy makers with suggestions for the development of a digitisation strategy for Hungarian public collections, taking into account the latest technological innovations and international trends. Furthermore, it draws attention to the importance of the long-term sustainability of digital preservation, the preservation and development of digital archives. Furthermore, it is hoped that it will contribute useful insights to the preservation of European cultural heritage in digital form, and will guide and inspire members of the LIS community worldwide.

Please summarize the main conclusion(s) of your thesis.

The thesis provides a comprehensive overview of Hungary’s digital preservation strategies for national cultural assets over the past thirty years, highlighting key lessons for future planning. It fills a gap in the Hungarian literature by presenting these strategies in an international context and evaluating Hungary’s performance against the five main points of the EU’s 2011/711/EU Recommendation. A quantitative analysis of social media use illustrates how targeted online marketing increased public engagement with digitised heritage. The thesis offers practical insights into current digitisation practices, international good practices, and provides forward-looking recommendations for improving Hungary’s public collection digitisation strategy.

What has Eötvös Loránd University given you – professionally, personally, communally?

For me, Eötvös Loránd University has given me the highest level of knowledge and approach professionally, and taught me patience, cooperation and self-reflection as a person. I appreciate being part of a supportive and inspiring intellectual community where dialogue and value creation are a natural part of everyday life. The PhD studies have given me the opportunity to engage in the national and international academic life and to deepen my contacts with the profession. It is particularly important for me to be able to actively contribute to the Hungarian LIS community.

Please say a few words about your future research plans.

The scope of the PhD thesis has obviously limited my research at several points and there are several areas that I would like to elaborate on in the future. For example, I discuss the digitisation of the cultural heritage of Hungarians living beyond the Hungarian borders of the Carpathian Basin in several parts of the thesis, but due to the limitations of the scope I could not present in detail the digitisation initiatives taking place in each country, the specificities of local institutional structures, and the opportunities and challenges of cooperation. This is definitely an area that I will develop in detail in the future, when I edit the research into a

monograph. In addition, I feel that there are other dimensions of digital preservation that could be expanded in the thesis, such as training and education of public collections professionals, users, partnerships, technical solutions, interoperability, content creation, are areas that could be expanded in the thesis.

