The Profession of Librarian and the Frontier Between the Library Space and Cyberspace

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Abstract

The general perception of the profession of librarian is affected by stereotypes due to lack of information. The instruction of a librarian, quite often ignored, must go beyond the limits of the education one gets at the university, the librarian's main duty being to observe what is new in the international library community and to permanently adapt and update his knowledge and skills. The image of the scholarly librarian of the Middle Ages, frequently encountered until the late 20th century, has become obsolete nowadays, as the attributes of the profession have changed radically. The direct consequence of the advent of online catalogues was the addition of a new amount of knowledge to the existing librarianship skills, the librarian becoming an information specialist. The combination between traditional librarianship knowledge and the skills claimed by the arrival of new technologies in the library, as well as their harmonization in the library activity has become a *sine-qua-non* condition for optimal processes and better services. The present library user has also a new image, his behaviour being decisive with regard to the configuration of the information access methods. Since the alternative associated with the library is the Internet, the information existing in the World Wide Web has turned the potential library users into great supporters of the search engines and of some interactive information and editing tools such as: wikis, folksonomies, tagging, blogging. Google and Wikipedia are visited by people quite often without questioning the truthfulness of the data found there. The new technologies may be advantageously employed in libraries, but the time saved must be used sensibly for activities which may attract the users to the library. The offered information has to be diverse and not restricted to bibliographic information. In the present paper a few initiatives are presented to illustrate the wide range of information and services offered to users by the Carol I Central University Library of Bucharest.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, although we are considerably far from the time when library science was not included among the disciplines taught at universities in Romania, the professional status of librarians is still affected by stereotypes due to lack of information. The education that forms the basis of a professional librarian is hardly known by the greatest part of those who come into contact with the library. The role of "information specialists", undertaken by professional librarians for many years, still confuses some people when they hear words such as "information, information specialist". In addition to this, if one draws a relation between the professional status and the payroll, one gets a completely unrealistic image, which, however, is unfortunately often associated with the profession of librarian.

The classical image of the librarian contains the following attributes: shy, reserved, serious, but having an excellent mind, reliable, surrounded by a mystery aura, looking at you with curious eyes from behind spectacles. The image of an information specialist may also contain other attributes such as: shy but witty scholar, sophisticated corporate information specialist, goddess of information, a person possessing a vocabulary full of words and expressions typical to the frequent users of the WWW.

The fight against such stereotypes concerning the meaning of the librarian's profession and the librarian's duties, meant to raise the librarians' professional self-respect, in the present world must be waged by the librarians themselves.

2. The library – a place for study and bibliographic information

Before the seventh and eighth decade of the past century and for centuries before, the library was the place where people preferred to study and obtain bibliographic information. The cards orderly placed one behind the other in the drawers of the traditional catalogue were the only ways of access to printed information. The librarian was the person who, in most cases, mediated the relation between the reader and the universe of knowledge existing at that time only between the covers of books and periodicals. More often than not people spoke about the erudition of the

librarian in the Dark Ages, and later on about the intelligent, rational and organized librarian, who would know for sure on which shelf the book containing that particular type of information one was looking for was placed.

One may be surprised to discover in the gallery of famous librarians[1] names such as: Philip Larkin (1922–1985), a well-known British poet, who was a librarian at the University of Hull for 30 years, J. Edgar Hoover (1895–1972), the first director of FBI and former librarian at the Library of Congress, August Strindberg (1849–1912), a Swedish playwright, novelist and short-story writer, assistant librarian at the Royal Library of Stockholm, Pope Pius XI (1857–1939), a librarian at the Vatican before becoming a pope, David Hume (1711–1776), a British philosopher and historian, a librarian for five years at the University of Edinburgh, where he wrote his History of England and the well-known adventurer Casanova (1725–1798), who spent the last 16 years of his life as the librarian of Count Waldstein in his castle in Bohemia.

The online catalogues (OPACs) produced a revolution in libraries, major changes being generated in specific activities, in the internal organization of institutions, in the librarians' mentalities and in their professional consciousness. Librarians needed to adapt themselves to the new conditions, and this was not easy for everyone. They had to acquire new knowledge, for which some were not well prepared for. Combining the traditional librarianship knowledge with the abilities required by the new technologies was a demanding process. Harmonizing these two facets of the librarian's activities became the *sine-qua-non* condition of the processes carried on and a premise of the services offered by any library.

The most important outcome of the introduction of new technologies in the libraries manifested through the OPACs was the radical change in the orientation of the library's fundamental activities – cataloguing and indexing – the shift from the librarian to the library user, the well-known "user friendliness". Access to information is no longer mediated by the librarian, or not in the way it was done before. The traditional catalogue required great knowledge of cataloguing and classification of the reference librarian in charge of the information retrieval services. The online catalogues offer new and more convenient search keys to the user (free text search, words from titles and subject

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[1] http://www.bwctc.northants.sch.uk/Pages/infocentres/lc_famous.html

headings) and give him a higher degree of independence from the librarian.[1]

Another major outcome is the inclusion of reference services in the library activities nowadays, the organizational structure of a library being unconceivable without those. The reference librarian has a special profile, which combines the attributes of librarians from different departments of the library, but it has also specific features.

Apart from those mentioned above, the introduction of new library technologies requires a higher degree of initiative from the librarian. The integrated library systems, initially built in the "laboratories" of computer specialists as the product of their collaboration with one or more librarians, these days tend to be the result of the interactive work of the two professional categories.

The functional requirements of the new generations of online catalogues bring together elements derived from the minimal configuration of the catalogue (existing in most such products) with the need to represent the library collection and with the new trends in the user interface design, in close connection with the development policy of each library. Nowadays the OPAC is designed according to the needs of library users, their behaviour shaping the methods of access to the information contained in the library collection.

The expansion of accessible resources, starting from the information available in the library catalogues – metadata –, is considered a challenge for the two factors responsible for the design of the user interface: the librarian and the computer specialist. For this purpose, the librarian has to know and to clearly formulate his requirements closely related with those of the users so that they can be achieved as fully as possible by those who structure and make possible the information retrieval from the technical point of view.

3. The Internet – a space which confers access to the universe of knowledge

If the intention of Otlet and Lafontaine to organize the information existing in the total literary output at the beginning of the 20th century seems admirable nowadays and is regarded with respect, it holds equally true that the ambition to organize the information available

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[1] Victoria Frâncu, "Bibliotecarul, anonim organizator al universului cunoaşterii" (The Librarian, the Anonymous Organizer of the Universe of Knowledge), *Revista Română de Biblioteconomie şi Ştiinţa Informării* (The Romanian Review of Library and Information Science) (2007): 8–13.

today in the multitude of information sources is impossible.[1] The largest information source is the Internet which cumulates huge amounts of data whose stability is questionable. How can one organize files which can be found now on the WWW, and within 6 months, when accessing the same address, one gets a message announcing that the information is no longer available?

The committed advocates of the Internet, supporters of the search engines, will answer that information on the WWW can not only be retrieved but also disseminated and shared and tagged. Through interactive, very well established and clearly explained techniques for the exigent, self-respected user, information is thus self-organized. Who has not heard yet about wikis, folksonomies, tagging, blogging and other interactive information and editing instruments in the Internet? Wikipedia is an encyclopaedia which everybody calls on without asking about the correctness of its data. Double checking the data is always welcome, but the source is fast, useful and largely available. The access to information becomes more and more easier, as well as simultaneous and satisfactory. In the practical section of this paper we shall illustrate the way the librarians of the Carol I Central University Library create metadata using Internet resources.

3.1. About Google Book Search and the likelihood of frustration feelings

Google Book Search is a service provided by Google which enables full text search of books previously scanned and stored in Google. It contains a database of about 100,000 titles harvested by editors and authors, and a number of 10,000 works which are indexed and can be retrieved. In March 2007, New York Times reported that Google had digitized already one million copyright-free volumes. In cases where the works were copyright protected, access has been limited, the restricted access being notified by a polite message.

A personal experience with Google Book Search justifies my appreciation for the search possibilities offered by this service, accessibility being its most outstanding attribute. Keyword searching is much more convenient and brings more results than any other type of search in a library catalogue. In addition to this, the factor called

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[1] Wouter Schalier, "Why Organize Information When You Can Find It: UDC and Libraries in an Internet World", 2007 http://www.udcc.org/seminar07/presentations/schallier.pdf.

serendipity[1] is at home in this approach, which enriches one's knowledge and, according to a user who described his experience with WWW, "increases the number of happy accidents in a user's life".

The search starting from the word "dress" brings 460600 results in 0.51 seconds.[2] Apart from the mandatory element i.e. the scanned cover of the book, the first page of results includes as options several possibilities to refine this result (by categories of related subjects). The exclusive display of the book covers enables one to open each book at the page which includes the used keyword, or to display the abstract of the book whose title includes this keyword. Additionally, one gets links to commercial firms whose names include the word "dress".

A number of additional buttons makes the navigation in Google Book Search very attractive and extremely useful by the variety of opportunities it offers. These are: Reviews, Other editions, Buy this book, Borrow this book, Add reviews, Add to my library, plus links to related subjects.

There's only one thing that Google Book Search can be blamed for: reading from the computer screen, however good that screen is, affects your vision, which, in the case of traditional reading from the printed page, will not happen, or not to the same extent. It is yet beyond dispute that the great variety of literature offered by Google Book Search on the basis of a single keyword cannot be reached by book indexes, or by library catalogue systems.

3.2. About the advantages of RFID and the right to privacy and confidentiality

Although the RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) technology can be simplified and reduced to the meaning of an electronic barcode, it is much more than that http://www.ringgold.com/biblio-tech/html/rfid.html. The RFID system has 3 component parts: a label, a reader, and an antenna. Since the end of the 1990s it has been used in libraries for the management of inventory numbers, the circulation and security of publications.

The RFID label is small-sized and is placed inside the cover of the publication. It contains an engraved antenna and a tiny chip including essential bibliographic data along with a unique identification number.

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[1] The effect by which one accidentally discovers something fortunate, especially while looking for something else.
[2] Search made in July 2007.

The reader activates the antenna in order to generate a radiofrequency field (RF). When the label passes through this RF field, the information stored in the chip is decoded by the reader and transferred to the central server, which, in its turn, conveys it to the integrated library system. Unlike the barcodes, the RFID labels can be read through desks and book covers, irrespective of the orientation of the label reader or antenna, on the move (e.g. while the book is returned to the library), several at the same time, and from a distance from the antenna.

Therefore, the RFID technology is used in libraries for inventories, for efficient and ergonomic security and circulation of publications. Publications can be easily returned by the user himself so that his personal data might have a higher degree of privacy. The use of RFID technology by unauthorized persons or its defective implementation could jeopardize the privacy and confidentiality of the library users. That is why ALA (American Library Association) included in their policy a guide with regard to the problems of privacy and confidentiality implied by the use of RFID technology in libraries http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/statementspols/otherpolicies/rfidguidelines.ht m#1.

The Carol I Central University Library of Bucharest is considering the advantages of introducing RFID technology in order to assist activities such as inventories and book circulation and security, besides those presented by the representatives of the company RFID Solutions, Romania when promoting the product. The implementation of this technology in the library has obvious benefits, such as: saving time and intellectual efforts in making the inventories, saving the human energy necessary to transfer piles of books for inventories, the efficient control of the book circulation inside the library, an easier way to make library statistics without displacing a number of librarians from their current activities for this purpose.

4. What would the librarians have to do?

Schallier evokes the portrait of nowadays "angry young man": fascinated with the new technologies, performing simultaneous activities – multitasking – as a way of living. He considers it is essential to stay connected, prefers interactivity to isolation, does not tolerate delays, and considers action more important than knowledge; to him learning is the result of action and is not obtained by order.[1] Under these circumstances,

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[1] Schallier, "Why Organize Information..."

when libraries have more and more users belonging to the "copy-paste" generation, it is obvious that librarians should very quickly direct their interest towards the users. They should no longer wait for the users to come to the library. But instead they should strive to regain the users for the library, to welcome and meet their information needs within the library space.

For this to happen there is a strong need for people with ideas and people of action, able to put ideas into practice. The first move, both essential and mandatory, is that the library collections and services may be visible on the Internet. The more the design and functionality of the library catalogue's user interface look like those of Google and/or Amazon search engines, the more favourable its effect on the user. Introducing new options along with traditional ones in the online catalogues are attractive and increase the users' trust in the library. The actual trend in the library catalogues is on one hand, to coagulate information by collating it through standardized criteria, and on the other hand, to diversify it through linking it with related information either from the catalogue itself, or from resources outside the library. The conceptual model offered by FRBR[1] is created just for this kind of purpose.

The above mentioned cooperation between librarians and computer specialists, having as a starting point the user's behaviour, should result in an interface of the online catalogue which will not generate frustration but instead bring users into the library.

As for the information retrieval through subject, specific for the academic library users, the integrated library systems should have the capacity to allow navigation by search trees, enabling the user to enlarge or restrict the search field. The labels of the search buttons should in this case be very intelligently formulated, in a language that is as close as possible to that of the users. Some decision-makers' inclination to respect the library specific terminology in the design of the OPAC display is counter indicated, harmful and altogether useless and irrelevant for the user of the catalogue. Likewise, the navigation has to be conducted in such a way as to stimulate the curious user to find out more.

The catalogue itself should be enriched with additional data and services such as: the scanned images of book covers and table of contents, classified lists of newly acquired documents, reviews and even excerpts of books appreciated as interesting in a chronological context.

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[1] http://www.loc.gov/cds/downloads/FRBR.PDF

5. Additional information and services offered by the Carol I Central University Library of Bucharest

The turning of the libraries' interests towards the full satisfaction of the library users' requests and needs led to an intense concern in the diversification and improvement of the offered services. The size of the collection, i.e. the number of documents in the store-rooms, or the number of the library users are no longer as impressive nowadays as they were 10 years ago, for example. What matters now is the accessibility of the information existing in the catalogue and the quality of the offered services.

A few additional information services offered by the Carol I Central University Library of Bucharest are now presented in order to illustrate the ideas mentioned above.

5.1. An outstanding initiative of the librarians was to include the contents notes in the bibliographic records. Thus, a title such as: *The Language Lottery: toward a Biology of Grammars* only reveals to the user that the book is about linguistics. Likewise, the descriptors assigned to the document: Bio-linguistics and Language acquisition, only fix the general context of the document subject. The specific information about this subject is provided by the contents notes which mention the chapters of the book (Figure 1).
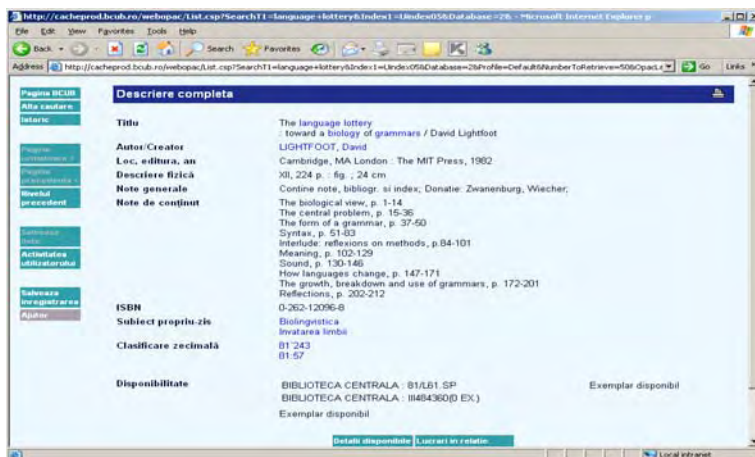

Fig. 1. An example of bibliographic record including contents notes

This way the record gets additional value and gives the user additional information on the contents of the document.

5.2. The scanned images of book covers and tables of contents for newly acquired publications may also be visualized in WebOPAC (Figure 2). The electronic access to the book cover, shown in the figure, along with the possibility of access to the table of contents page increase the attractiveness of the catalogue by providing extra information for the user.
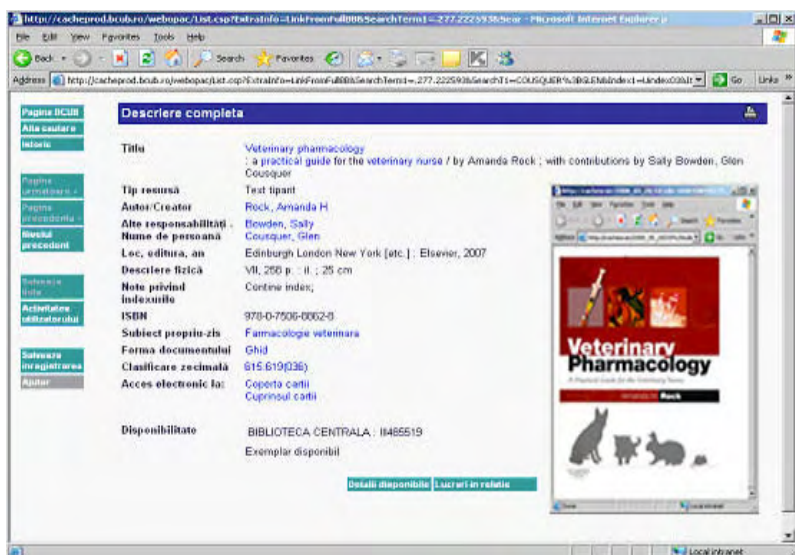

Fig. 2. A bibliographic record offering access to the book cover and table of contents

5.3. Another source of additional information is provided by the activation of one function of the online catalogue based on the Unimarc format, i.e. the authorities for *personal names, family names, institution names, geographical names, uniform titles* and, for the moment, a small number of *subject headings* (Figure 3).
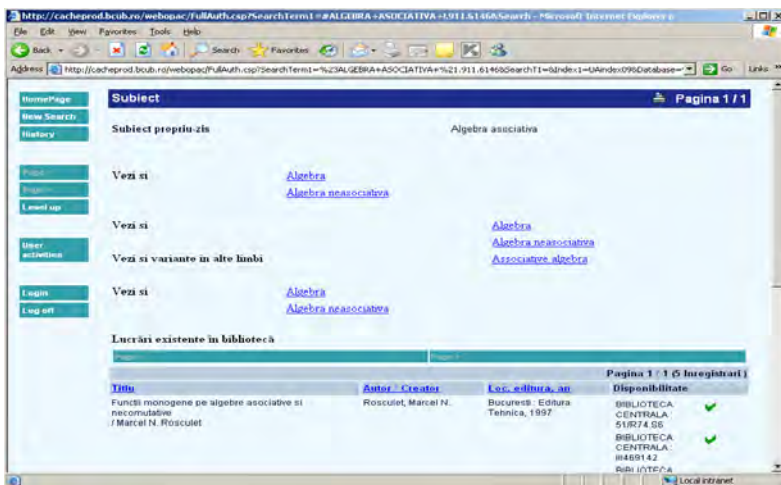
Fig. 3. An example of a subject authority record display

The authority records are constructed by librarians from the Cataloguing and Indexing Departments of the library.

5.4. Within the framework of *Project Romania*, which is a partnership of the central university libraries of Bucharest, Cluj and Iaşi, the Central University Library of Bucharest chose to offer the user the possibility to visualize in the online catalogue the title of the serial publication including the article whose *analytical description* is displayed on the screen (Figure 4).
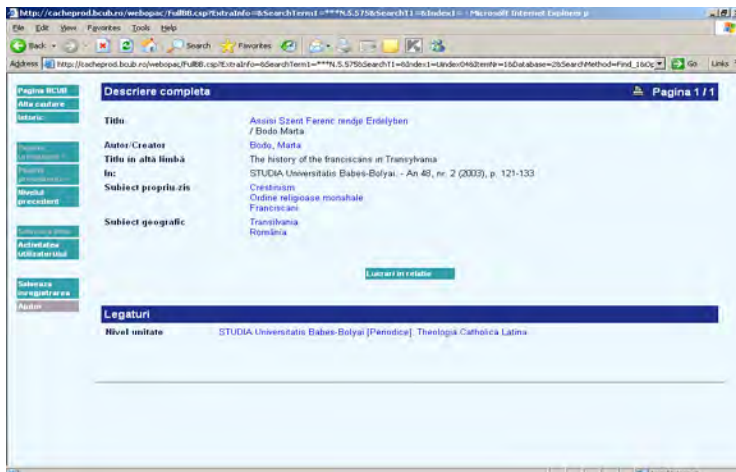
Fig. 4. The analytical description of an article from a serial publication within Project Romania

On the other hand, if the search is started from the title of the serial publication, once the titles of the articles are displayed, the user can easily select any article belonging to the series according to his or her information interests (Figure 5).
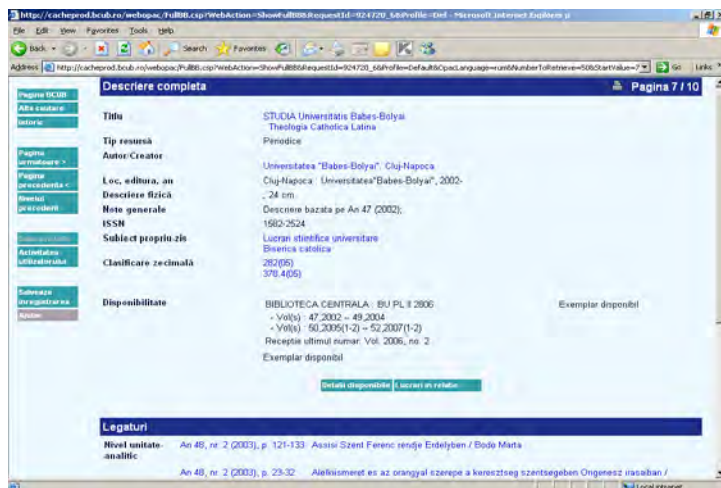

Fig. 5. A bibliographic record for a series having links to the analytical records displayed

5.5 An additional service, highly appreciated by library users, is offered by the Reference Department, i.e. *Bibliographies by request*.[1] Based on an interview, which is the starting point, a form is filled in with data regarding the field, the subject and the destination of the bibliographic research. The sources for the bibliographies by request are: the online catalogue of the library, other library catalogues, the Internet, commercial databases. The bibliographic list containing the sources requested by the user is handed to him in printed and/or in electronic version.

Once this is done, the resulting bibliographic list is integrated in the structure of an interactive text file, according to its subject. The classified bibliographic lists, as component parts of the interactive text file, are systematically ordered according to the Universal Decimal Classification (UDC). A range of hierarchical relations between classes and subclasses of the UDC, on one hand, and between those and the bibliographic lists, on the other, contribute to a product helpful to the users, one which is incomparably better than the former variant of chronologically ordered lists.

5.6. *REM (References by E-Mail)* is another additional service offered by the Reference Department of the Central University Library of Bucharest. Essentially the users' information needs are answered by e-mail with maximum rapidity. The end-user either fills in the online form existing on the library's website (the Services – References by e-mail button on the left-hand corner of the screen) or sends his message directly to the collective address refer@bcub.ro. The message containing simple or complex requests is answered by the librarian in the reference area or is directed to other departments of the library, according to the nature and complexity of the request. The answer is sent to the user within the shortest possible time. All the messages (both questions and answers) are archived chronologically in a special Outlook (the e-mail provider) account, according to the day they were sent to the users.

5.7. The series of *electronic resources* provided by the Central University Library of Bucharest for its users contains a number of *2883 titles of electronic books* from Springer Verlag from various fields such as: architecture and design, behavioural sciences, medical and biomedical sciences, business and economy, chemistry and materials science, computer science, earth and environmental science, engineering,

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[1] I thank Corina Dovâncă, the author of the interactive text file, for the details given in paragraphs 5.5 and 5.6.

humanities, social sciences and law, mathematics and statistics, medicine, physics and astronomy. The link to full text files is a real advantage to the user in need of authorized and updated scientific information. Considered by some an advantage and by others an impediment, the subject access to these resources is made through English subject headings released together with the catalogue records by the supplier. The electronic books are available at: http://ebooks.springerlink.com/.

5.8. The databases for scientific journals acquired by subscription by the Central University Library of Bucharest are: *Chadwyck Healey* (http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk/), for periodicals in the fields of: arts, humanities and social sciences; *EBSCO*, (http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?authtype=ip,uid&profile=ehost &default), a collection of databases with encyclopaedic contents; *EMBASE* (http://www.embase.com) for information in the fields of biomedicine and pharmacology; *EUREF* for information and bibliographic references about Europe (http://www.euref.ro); *ProQuest*, an encyclopaedic collection of databases in which several types of electronic documents from full text articles, indexed information and abstracts to doctoral dissertations are combined in a friendly and intuitive interface (http://www.proquest.com); *Scopus*, a database of abstracts and citations for research literature, and web resources, representing a powerful information and documentation tool (http://www.scopus.com/); *Springerlink*, an interactive database which unites 11 virtual libraries grouped by fields (http://www.springerlink.com/home/ main.mpx); and *SwetsWise* (https://www.swetswise.com/public/login.do), for social sciences, technology, medicine, literature and arts.

6. Conclusions

Considering all we have said above, the following conclusions can be drawn as requirements for present day libraries and for their librarians:

- The libraries should be as close as possible to the web search engines in terms of catalogue structure and design of their web-site.
- The information they offer should be as diversified as possible, and it should go beyond the limits of bibliographic information.
- The routine activities should be approached extensively through automated procedures (processing and inventory operations), thus making it possible to use the saved time in activities to attract users to the library.

- All available resources should be intelligently and attractively shown on the library web-site, raising the users' curious to gradually explore them.
- The help messages and other buttons should contain user-friendly terms and not technical library terms.
- Librarians should deal with users using intelligence, professionalism and inventiveness.