

Bibliography, an Instrument for Self-clarification

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Keywords: bibliological literature in Romania, scientometry, content analysis, bibliography – books

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Motto:

*“The starting point of our research was the awareness that scientific research and **original creation** within bibliologic professions have – in the present situation – a fundamental and decisive role.”*

Ana Maria Căpâlneanu

Although it may seem strange at a first sight, the idea that “scientific documentation” – though it has in its name the attribute “**science**” – could be a *creative* activity is difficult to accept and even more difficult to realize in our country. And – I dare state – this difficulty is **not** to be met with in the intellectual, scientific, and cultural circles in which and for the benefit of which it is done in fact, but mainly “inside” the profession itself; namely for those who **practice** it. And the mental barriers, as well as the usual criteria and exigencies of recognition and affirmation, tend towards this direction.

The book I am reviewing seems to me important, even decisive all the more and exactly in this (counter)direction.¹ The work in two volumes is entitled *The Informational Factor in Education and Research in the Context of Modernizing Scientific Documentation*. This dry and technical title, in itself, does not draw any attention to the work in the multitude of colourless and odourless titles used in this domain to

¹ Ana Maria Căpâlneanu, *Factorul informațional în învățământ și cercetare în contextul modernizării documentării științifice* (The Informational Factor in Education and Research in the Context of Modernizing Scientific Documentation) (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2008), Vol. I-II, 531 pp.

denominate mainly impersonal textbooks similar to collages. Here, however, behind this title there is an explicit and really savoury cultural history – more precisely a history of culture itself –, which, though extremely well-informed and well-documented, is neither too “dense”, nor superficial, but analyzes explicitly both the directions and the senses (as well as their mingling) of that which is called the “informational factor” and “scientific documentation”.

Contrary, therefore, to other expressions used often emptyly in this kind of literature – such as “info-documentary structures”¹ – created in an improvised manner by all kind of improvised individuals, the “informational factor” is a real *terminus technicus* here, outlined and articulated clearly, and, moreover, with a horizon: “I called *informational factor* – from a diachronic point of view – all that refers to intermediation towards information, from secondary and tertiary documents created as informative aids in the educational and research process to the institutions having an informational role, and also to the documentary aids dedicated to the education of information and documentation specialists.”² Therefore, the informational factor will be unfolded both diachronically and structurally in the course of the six chapters of the first part of the book’s first volume, as well as in the second part in which, in fact, the entire research culminates.

Things are the same with “scientific documentation” too. Its birth and its tendencies of gradual – and still “unfinished” – formation and individualization are presented in a truly captivating mental, conceptual, semantic, and organizational history in permanent confluence with the social evolution of science, education, culture, as well as with the evolution of scientific, educational, and cultural institutions both on a national and an international level. So that in the new sense, the term “document” refers to all kinds of information carriers, it evolves naturally and with ease towards the term “documentation” (meaning both the act and the result) and, from here, to encompassing the domain of science and of scientific research. Of course, without losing its organic semantic connections with more traditional terms such as bibliography, librarianship, bibliography, etc; terms, which in their mutual and concomitant provocations and reflections, are continually reshaped, redefined, and historically reformulated. In the course of this process

¹ An expression which, unfortunately, at least once occurs in this work too...

² Căpâleanu, *Factorul informațional...*, 16.

they have received the in a “common” and synthetic contextual formulation: *library and information science*.

In the context of these evolutions, reflections, reformulations, and debates the author reveals and confers a specific place – as the region of convergences – to **bibliographies** both through the history and the evolution of the concept: “Bibliographies are real syntheses of information from one or several domains which they systematize in information classes, divisions and subdivisions and which they offer as reference points in investigating a subject.”¹

The new technical coordinates – and mainly in a society based from now on and in an explicit and assumed way on cognition – confer, however, to the informational factor new structures, new possibilities, positions, and callings. These connect to the **explosion** of information the **implosion** – and even the requirement of “continuous” implosion – of the time of its communication.² This is realized diachronically by the gradual assimilation of the “universal bibliographic control” (namely by establishing some international standards for bibliographic descriptions) required and permitted by the necessity of computerization. These things made possible the constitution of some real information networks on the basis of which the Internet, this “network of networks” has been formed.

On the basis and with the aid of this frame, these substantial theoretical-conceptual delimitations and constructions, the author turns to the presentation and historical analysis of the information and documentation process in Romania in the modern age (Chapter 2), a whole chapter (Chapter 3) being then dedicated to the landmarks, structures, and developments of the period after 1945, constant attention being given to the institutions connected with the “information factor” and with their productions-performances. In this spirit, in Chapter 4, the book continues with the analysis of the particular – even privileged – role and development of the Library of the Romanian Academy, of its plans for elaborating the great national repertoires of the Romanian culture and the national bibliography/bibliographies, as well as of the network of documentary structures in the field of scientific research within the Academy. This chapter seems to be so far the only publication where we can find – gathered in a unified bibliographic description – all the works published within the national bibliographic plan by the Library of the Romanian Academy.

¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

² *Ibid.*, 46–47.

Not being a historian, I cannot evaluate these chapters with regard to the novelty of the data and information contained in them. However, even so it is obvious that the analyses are made with that view which directs with lucidity and good judgement the detection of connections as processes; namely, both accumulations and openings. These, consequently, lead the investigation on to the information and technical-scientific documentation centres (Chapter 5), that is, to their birth and development in the course of time. The thread of ideas then passes on to the more general idea of a national information and documentation system and the technical and structural – therefore objective and subjective – problems met with in its construction and adaptation, as well as in the elaboration of coherent national informational policy (Chapter 6).

Surely, the culmination of Ana Maria Căpâlneau's investigations is in the second part of the first volume, which presents an entirely autonomous, creative, and innovative research, dedicated to *The Thematic and Generic Analysis of the Romanian Monographs in Bibliology – Published in the Interval 1945–2004*. This chapter, on the one hand, falls in perfectly with the logic, text – and also subtext – of the first part, taking into consideration the fact that in the majority of the chapters the author systematically investigates and discusses the activity, conditions, structures, and productions for the information and documentation specialists' professional formation and development. The chapter, on the other hand, "throws a light" – both on the problems and senses –, somehow retroactively, to everything which has been said before in the book.

Realized with the aid of a strict methodology of bibliological, documental, sociological, as well as biblio- and scientometric origin, synthesized here in a particular way, the discussed analysis aims at and achieves, simultaneously, several results and benefits. Firstly and basically, it has a bibliographic benefit, since thus the first bibliography of all Romanian bibliological books published in the given period has been made, as exhaustively as possible. To this the entirely decisive and remarkable fact is added that this bibliological literature is bibliographically analyzed here both from the point of view of **subjects**, as well as from the perspective of the scientific-epistemological **level** at which the subjects occurring in the course of time are discussed in these works. These aspects of the scientific-epistemological level and depth have been established, expressed, and analyzed through an entire set of descriptors named "**generic descriptors**".

Though methodologically inspired by former research – which referred to articles and studies published in Romanian scientific journals¹ – Ana Maria Căpâlneanu had to build a completely new system of “generic descriptors” adapted to the “object” for this analysis. These descriptors are: treatise, monograph, documentary synthesis, textbook, collective volume, essay, and reference book. Each descriptor is defined as precisely as possible, the definitions constituting at the same time the rule by which they are applied. With their aid even the epistemological level of any specialized literature can be studied, taking also into consideration the decisive specification that basically “the epistemological level of a specialized literature – in its documentary component formed by books – is indicated by the rate of **monographs** in this literature, in the same way as the rate of studies indicates the scientific level of the publications in specialized journals.”²

The data obtained in this way is then statistically (biblio- and scientometrically) processed focusing on thematic and generic, as well as on temporal aspects. Thus a highly conclusive image is outlined both on the dynamics of the discussed issues and on the epistemological level of the professional editorial production; the dynamics of the themes being determined, and sometimes radically modified, by social-political contexts, various conjunctures and situations.

The second part of the volume therefore analyzes, step by step, aspect by aspect, both the issues related to the themes and to the epistemological level of this literature. It must be studied, therefore, with special attention and also with openness and honesty **towards ourselves!** For, what I think is greatly emphasized in this review, related to the truths revealed by Ana Maria Căpâlneanu’s investigation – truths which, otherwise, are in perfect accord with the results of the research on the **specialist journals** we have mentioned before – is the fact that, from the perspective of the **epistemological levels** – namely, from the perspective of genres – this literature is, on the whole, dominated by **textbooks** (26.69%), then by reference works (21.97%), documentary syntheses

¹ See: Florina Iliș, István Király, and Angela Marcu, “Bibliografia analitică, analiză de conținut și de gen a literaturii bibliologice din revistele românești de profil – Cercetare pentru perioada 1990–1997” (Bibliographic, Content and Generic Analysis of the Bibliological Literature in the Romanian Specialist Journals – Research for the Period 1990–1997), *Hermeneutica Bibliothecaria – Antologie Philobiblon (I)*, ed. Florina Iliș and Ionuț Costea (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană, 1998), 83–175.

² Căpâlneanu, *Factorul informațional...*, 240.

(19.51%), and collective volumes (16.02%), while monographs (13.34%), essays (2.26%), and treatises (0.21%) – that is exactly the genres which confer, in fact, the **quality** and the **scientific-epistemological substance** of a specialized literature – **are on the last “places”!**

Irrespective, however, of the results obtained from the more detailed analyses¹ on the different textbook **types** (methodological textbooks, textbooks for professional education, school and university textbooks) within the evident dominance of this genre – which here asserts itself exactly **to the detriment of** monographs and treatises –, this dominance raises serious problems and questions regarding this entire literature. For, though inclined as we might be – in an entirely superficial manner – to consider textbooks an “impersonal” and **non-author** genre, we should, nevertheless, ask ourselves: **what are the origins of these textbooks**, in fact, in a specialized literature?! Textbooks which, moreover, “appear” in a permanently increasing number.

Anyhow, in the strident scarcity of monographs and treatise, textbooks – first of all university textbooks – can only be simple compilations, **lacking** therefore any basis or **creative affinity**, and, consequently, incomplete, deficient exactly in substance, giving no educational **stimulus** to any such creativity which would “teach”, guide, and encourage **autonomous** and responsible **research** on the part of those to whom, in fact, they are addressed. Most of these textbooks are – mainly after 1989 – “university” textbooks dedicated to students, that is, exactly to future graduate professionals, who are therefore educated, in most cases, by means and on the basis of some textbooks and “programmes” which **are not supported** by their “author’s” **own** research. Consequently, the majority of these textbooks as well as their “titled” authors can **teach** nobody what research is and how it should be done.

Immersed as we might be in the institutional and formal-bureaucratic bustle and pretences alleged in our country by the “Bologna Process”, the UNIVERSITY is and remains, nevertheless, an institution where – according to an essential expression by Wilhelm von Humboldt – “science is taught as a living problem”, namely: by being practiced! And the practice of science is called, after all, **RESEARCH**, while UNIVERSITY is exactly the place and space of access to science – as

¹ See: *Ibid.*, 254.

science; namely, as **scientific science**, which, evidently, can only be creative.

Consequently, **because of the lack** of this aspect – which results from the elaboration of studies for periodicals and monographs and treatise in the field of “books” – any so-called “university” textbook is only a disguised documentary synthesis devoid, however, of the latter’s honesty and “humility”.

Therefore, the author’s non-accidental specification gains an entirely particular seriousness: “With regard to monographs the road covered during the entire period we have studied indicates a weaker representation in the period of maximal development for the other genres reaching the highest level only in the 1990s with 23 (4.72%) publications, after which the level has decreased again in the 2000s. It is the only generic category which shows a descendent trend in the last few years, this being an alarming sign.”¹ To which the similarly “alarming” – or even desperate – situation of treatises is added: “we find a single volume in the form of a treatise, the genre which requires the most elevated and strict scientific level from the entire range of possible approaches for the discussion of a subject. The presence of a single treatise in specialized literature – and this too not unanimously recognized as such – seems to us symptomatic for the scientific level of the Romanian specialized literature, taking into consideration the fact that producing treatise marks the stage of scientific maturity in any discipline, domain, etc.”²

The first volume of Ana Maria Căpâleanu’s work is supplemented with six Appendices (*Library Associations, Consortia, Research and Development Institutions, Organizations; Textbooks and Methodological Works in Library and Information Science; Current Primary Romanian Periodicals with a Bibliological Character; The List of Library Catalogues Preserved in Manuscript Form in the Library of the Romanian Academy and of the Studies Elaborated on Their Basis; Information and Documentation Institutes, Centres, and Offices in Romania; and The List of Thematic Descriptors*) as well as with a *General Bibliography*, which, together, illustrate and complete seasonably the informational basis of the research. Volume II is entirely dedicated to *The Analytical Bibliography of Romanian Bibliological Books – Published in the Interval 1945–2004*, containing a total of 549

¹ Ibid., 258.

² Ibid., 256.

records, an index of authors and an index of subjects. Therefore, this volume can be used in fact as an autonomous bibliographic instrument of work.

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As a conclusion, we must emphatically state the fact that, due to its ideas, its structure, its epistemological level, and the entire message of the work, Ana Maria Căpâlneanu's research – which otherwise is her doctoral thesis –, together with the importance of the discussed issue, is, undoubtedly, an exemplary contribution to the “improvement” of statistics with respect to the monographs it analyzes. Thus, it also demonstrates *in vivo* the creative character and the possibilities of bibliographical research, information, and documentation. Therefore it also results in an appeal to practice them in this way.

In short, it is a **bibliography and research used as an instrument for self-clarification and self-evaluation.**

Translated by Ágnes Korondi