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The Public Historical Library of Andritsaina: the new challenges and the digital era

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Abstract:

Inaugurated in 1879, the Public Historical Library of Andritsaina, one of the richest and important libraries in Greece, houses rare manuscripts and books that date from the first period of typography and the printing press to the 19th century. In a period of technological wonders and of the public's predilection for innovative tools, the Library of Andritsaina, a provincial library, aimed at responding to new currents and needs and showing extroversion in order to expose its unique collection to a wider public. In 2019, the Library of Andritsaina in partnership with Clio Muse Tours, a company specialized in self-guided audio and virtual tours, created a self-guided audio tour, available in smartphones, pc, and tablets, where a number of its collection is presented, while in 2020 the Library, always in collaboration with Clio Muse, conceived and produced a digital interactive timeline with a map and images, that includes valuable information about rare publications of antique Greek essays, which belong to the collection, revealing, at the same time, how the collection was composed of and its journey from Paris to Andritsaina. The purpose of this communication is to expose the concept behind this collaboration, how and in which terms a traditional institution desired to modernize its image, and the way of approaching the public, especially the young population as well as the travelers who visit the village of Andritsaina. Additionally, the audio tour and the timeline, that was created by Clio Muse, are going to be presented giving emphasis to the challenges, occurred during

this technological transformation of a part of the collection, while user interactions statistics are going to be provided.

Keywords: #digital library #digital collection.

1. INTRODUCTION

Andritsaina is a beautiful mountainous and leafy landscape, but an almost isolated place 4 hours away from Athens (the capital of Greece). While it is hard to imagine that a passionate collector of books Konstantinos Agathofron Nikolopoulos (1786-1841), based in Paris, in the early 19th century, wanted to donate his collection of 3696 rare titles at his father's birthplace, Andritsaina village.

Indeed in 1879, inaugurated the Public Historical Library of Andritsaina also known as "Nikolopoulios", one of the richest and most important libraries in the country that houses the remarkable collections of K.Nikolopoulos, with rare versions of the early years of printing (such as the 1515 Pindar's "Victory Odes" edition), and E.Kallianiotis. It also includes an exhibition of plaster casts from the frieze of the Temple of Apollo Epicurius (donation from the British Museum in 1963), and a historical archive with manuscripts from the Greek Revolution and the post-revolution period.



1. The mountainous village of Andritsaina ©<http://www.andritsainalibrary.gr/en/andritsaina/>



2. The building of Andritsaina's library ©<http://www.andritsainalibrary.gr/en/andritsaina/>

2. THE GREAT BENEFACTOR AND HIS COLLECTION

In 1786 Konstantinos Nikolopoulos was born in Smyrna. His father was Hatzi-Georgios Nikolopoulos born in Andritsaina, who after the Orlov's revolt left his homeland and took refuge in Smyrna, fearing the retaliation of the Turks. The bishop of Smyrna took him under his protection, while a little later he met his second wife and mother of Constantine, the midwife Panagiota Matzourani. The information about Nikolopoulos's childhood, up to 18 is either confusing or inaccurate. Nevertheless, he was well educated and did further studies in Bucharest. At the age of 20 went to Paris where stayed and worked until the end of his life.

He taught Greek literature at "Atheneum" and distinguished himself in many areas. He was involved in poetry and music while his name is even found in the "International Biography of Musicians". He spoke 4 languages, wrote articles in magazines, and book reviews. He was a member of the Ionian Academy, the "Hellenic Society" and the Literary Society of Paris, and was also appointed as a librarian at the Library of the Institute of France and a contributor to the Encyclopedia of Paris. As a frantic collector, he created a great private library, which he donated 47 wooden boxes with books in 1838 by letter to the municipality of Andritsaina. The 3696 donated books were not only rare but also excellent examples of bookbinding. Paperbacks, leatherbound, bound with gold and parchment, decorated with miniature sculpture and engraving on their cover, the collection's books carry notes, signatures, and dedications of prominent personalities and prominent nobles of the time. Among them are editions of ancient Greek, Latin, and French writers, as well as all sorts of textbooks, from literature, history, and philosophy to law, medicine, and geography.

Moreover, the collection consists of dictionaries, rare copies of the Bible, versions in various languages such as Hebrew and Aramaic, as well as engravings and scores. It is noteworthy that the books of the Ancient Greek Secretariat come from Italian typographic centers as well as from major publishing centers in northern Europe. After deciding to donate his collection, he printed a lithographic dedication, affixing the labels to each volume separately, which read: "Sacred bequeathing of Andritsaina. Agathofronos Nikolopoulos's Gift". The first part of the signature stated to whom the books belonged, while the second stated the name of the donor. He adopted the nickname "Agathofron", which means "high conviction", as a middle name influenced by the humanist standards of his time. Nikolopoulos suddenly died in Paris in 1841, without ever having visited his father's birthplace.

3. THE INAUGURATION OF THE LIBRARY

The donated collection of books was traveled in crates by ship from Paris to Nafplio, escorted by two of Nikolopoulos' compatriots, and then on mules all the way up to Andritsaina. After 39 years of staying in the church of Agia Varvara, the collection was housed in the area's Gymnasium building, while since 1998, the Library has been housed in its current building, just opposite the old one. In addition to the Nikolopoulos and Kallianiotis collections (the 2nd one consists of 4341 books and handwritten documents of the greek pre-revolutionary, revolutionary and post-revolutionary period), donors offered money, books, furniture, houses, and logistical infrastructure.

Among them is the Swiss Association of Friends of the Andritsaina Library. The Association, chaired by its founder Panagiotis Petropoulos (1987-2003), Martin Nicoulin (2003-2017), and Dimitrios Tselepis (2017 until today) and based on the great generosity of its members has to show, in more than thirty years since its founding, a large and important project for the benefit of the Andritsaina Library. The purpose of the Public Historical Library of Andritsaina is educational, cultural, and informational. The assistance of the Board of Trustees and Directors of the Library is important for the promotion of its work. While the contribution of the Greek Ministry of Education is highlighted as important since it enables Andritsaina's Library to accomplish its goals since 1930, through its financial support.



3. The indoors of the Public Historical Library of Andritsaina
©<http://www.andritsainalibrary.gr/en/andritsaina/>

4. THE AIM

According to Shim and Kantor *“researchers recognize two broad aspects of evaluating library performance: “effectiveness” and “efficiency”. By effectiveness refer to the extent to which library services meet the goals set by the organization”*. While the library per se could interpret the term effectiveness as the impact have its services on its users.

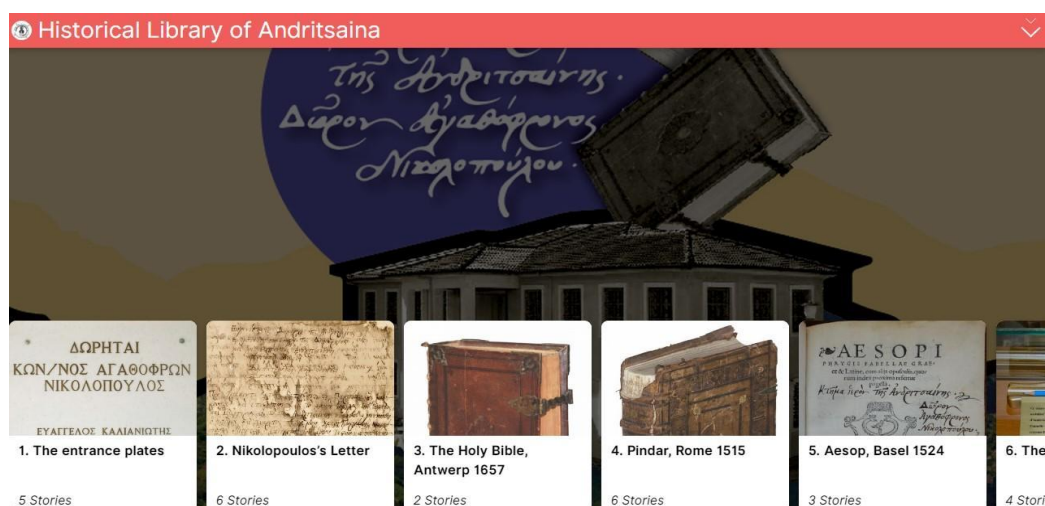
In addition to it, there is another aspect the so-called “efficiency”, (Cooper & Rhodes 1978, 429-444) that measures either the library's ability to transform its resources into services, or to produce a certain level of services with the minimum amount of resources. Even though they're quite a few publications related to the “efficiency aspect” in the library literature, it is a major concern for the decision-makers.

Meanwhile, living in the digital era means there is widespread, ready and easy access to, sharing of, and use of information electronically accessible. With the motto “ the future is

digital” and the public’s predilection for innovative tools, the Library of Andritsaina, a provincial library, aimed to respond to new currents and needs by showing extroversion to expose its unique collections to a wider public. Therefore the modernization of the Library was the only option and a key driver for safeguarding its sustainability and increasing audience awareness at a national and an international level.

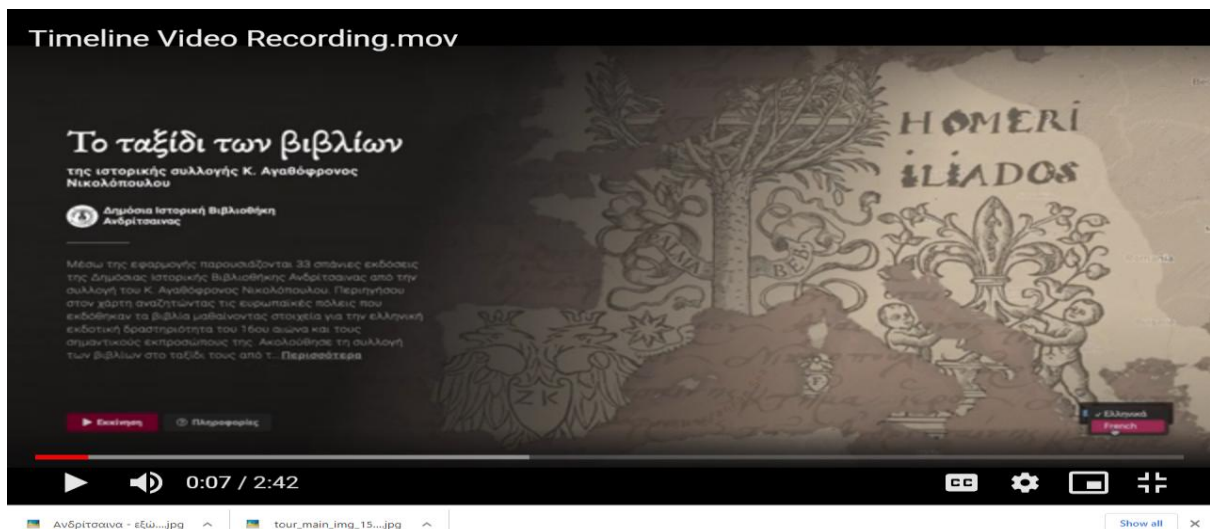
5. THE COLLABORATION

In 2019, the Library of Andritsaina in partnership with Clio Muse Tours, a company specialized since 2014 in self-guided audio and virtual tours, created a self-guided audio tour, available in smartphones, pc, and tablets. The reason why was to promote the treasures of World Publishing and Printing, of inestimable historical and intellectual value that adorn the library shelves. In this context, the physical or e-visitor had the chance to follow the path of the Historical Library of Andritsaina through 12 selected objects and 50 short audio & text stories available in 3 languages (Greek, English, French). Masterpieces of rare publications and manuscripts reveal their origins while presenting people who benefited the wider region by creating a cultural beacon for residents and visitors. In less than a year, 9342 e-viewers downloaded the digital tour and learned about the Library.



4. the tour experience view of the self-guided tour ©Clio Muse Tours

Almost one year later, the Board of the library decided to take the initial project one step further with the development of a digital timeline, offering visitors the absolute digital experience. On behalf of the Library, Clio Muse Tours conceived and produced “The journey of the books”, a digital interactive timeline map accompanied by images and text with audio, where 33 rare publications, part of the collection, are presented. Following their steps from the famous European publishing houses until their journey from Paris to Andritsaina as part of the Nikolopoulos book collection, and their final installation at current headquarters at the neoclassical building. Moreover, the users will learn facts about the life of the great donor, this project was launched recently.



5. The timeline “The journey of the books” project initial page ©Clio Muse Tours



6. The timeline project detail refers to the French revolution ©Clio Muse Tours

6. VALUES & OUTCOMES OF THE DIGITAL PROJECTS

By utilizing a values-based approach (Fouseki & Sakka, 2013) enabled us to understand the significance of the projects within the context of the Andritsaina Library and the wider region. The data gathered from questionnaires provided an indication of the values associated with the wider Andritsaina community. The most significant values (Avrami et al, 2000) that showcased were those of cultural, educational, social, and economic. In particular:

- The cultural. There are emerged parts of cultural heritage both tangible and intangible.
- The educational value. The school children and the local community learn some major aspects of their local history while at an advanced level provide in-depth Knowledge about less known events of our national history.
- Furthermore, the economic value (Bakshi et al, 2015). The local community is benefited by an increasing tourist flow that comes to Andritsaina due to the Library. Besides, the projects are free of charge for the users which is highlighted as an important benefit.

- Last but not least there is a social value with multiple aspects. 1) Through the digital projects, the information is always available: “The doors of the digital library never close; and is much more likely to be available when and where the user wants it”. 2) Tackle accessibility: as there are accessibility features to Clio Muse Tour Experience to make the self-guided audio tour more accessible to people with visual impairment as well as reading disorders. 3) In a pandemic period with numerous limitations and restrictions are contactless while practicing social distancing!

Since 2019 we have been doing systematic quantitative and qualitative data (Punch, 2005), evaluation and we gather interaction statistics (App & Tour Experience). Our findings have shown that after launching the first project we had a 50% growth in the number of visitors that came to our Library to admire the exhibits in person. According to age demographics, 50% of them belong to generation X (Roughly 35 - 50) and 20% are millennials (18-34) which is indeed important. The majority of them are Greek travelers.

In addition to it, according to our data, the physical visitors needed the flexibility to customize their visit related to their interests, something that gained via the self-guided tour. While the option of choosing among the content stories, skip some of them, repeat them as many times as they wish is highlighted as a key factor for them, and evaluated as a priority. Moreover, the Library gained an ongoing e-visitor audience (from all over the world) which is remarkable, which never existed in the past. Right after Clio Muse Tours promoted the exhibition to a fast-growing audience of travelers in 11 countries. This audience is willing to learn about our Library news, provide feedback, and promote our mission and goals.

7. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the public historical library of Andritsaina was the 1st Historical library in Greece that decided to invest in its digital transformation and became a successful case study for the rest. The Library succeeded to reach its goals not only to promote treasures of World Publishing and Printing, that adorn the library shelves but also to increase its audience awareness at both national and international levels.

Acknowledgments

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