

Dancing in the dark: Webs in Koldo Mitxelena Kulturunea

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Koldo Mitxelena Kulturunea library, placed in Donostia-San Sebastián, and property of the Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa, is a public library characterized by its conservationism, product of its history and the close collections that lodges.

Its situation, already complex owing to its contradictory dual nature, has got even more complicated because it has had to cope with the huge challenges of the digital age; consisting on electronic resources, library without walls, hybrid library, digital literacy... all the new, or not so new, tendencies that mean a challenge to us.

We approached these challenges like a dancer dancing in the dark: we have followed the music, trying to keep time, but unable to see... intuitively, guessing, trying always to keep time, to follow the music but, oops!, tripping, making mistakes, failing. The trial and error method is the basis of dancing in the dark.

So, I will only speak about the less embarrassing of our dancing attempts. They are scared dances (who knows what monsters are stalking in the dark?), failed ones, some of them funny and many, if not all, following the music that they play around; dances that we saw in other screens and we tried, with our natural lack of grace, to imitate.

We do not usually excel on the dance floor, we are not specially proud of what we do but as we have been invited to this IV Forum of the National Authorities on Public Libraries in Europe, the fact that our hosts get us up for a dance, cheer us up, encourage us and in some ways, it attenuates our embarrassment.

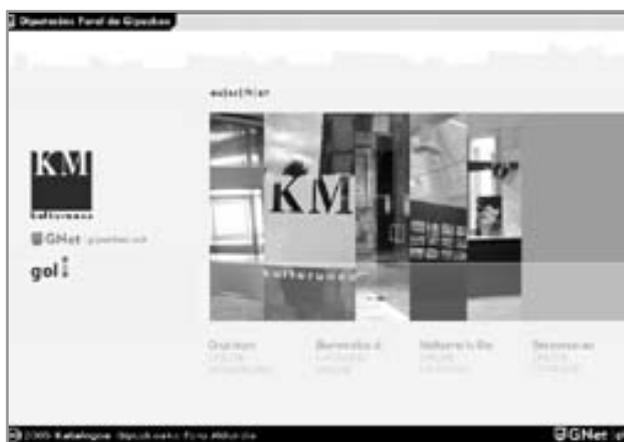
Here are our dances.

Koldo Mitxelena Kulturunea library is located in the Koldo Mitxelena Kulturunea cultural centre, placed in central San Sebastián. It shares the building with the offices of the Basque Language and Culture Office of Gipuzkoa Provincial Council.

Apart from sharing physical location they share as well virtual location, GipuzkoaKultura website. A bilingual site, where a series of blogs, working as CMS, allows us to inform, almost daily, of the activities in the Office and in the library.

Obviously the library has also its OPAC. Our OPAC, as the great majority of them, at least around us, agrees with that emphatic statement that, if I am allowed, will transcribe in its original language: The OPACs suck!

Our OPAC, AMICUS, is not an exception. Although we are installing tools at the moment like



Aquabrowser, it is still a tool that has not been developed enough to satisfy nowadays necessities. It might be providers' fault or customers' but we have the necessity of searching for better solutions, updated and able to solve the problems.

Looking for it, we have started to make a plugin search, for Mozilla Firefox as well as for IE7, with the aim of showing how the OPAC can live together with other much more advanced technological settings... it is a forlorn attempt but at least it is an attempt.

Leaving aside the OPAC, we can discuss some of the digital products that although not very significant, they have meant a big effort, dance steps in the dark.

Firstly, we have tried to go beyond the library walls, broadcasting on the internet the conferences, presentations, press conferences that took place daily at Koldo Mitxelena Kulturunea library.

Secondly, we have attempted to revive, with the help of other institutions like the Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa, all these jewels of the past that, very often lie among the pages of ancient books. And that we have tried to revive and give them a new digital life by means of this system.

We refer to the Album of the 19th century: it is a compilation of the engravings lodged in two museums and in our library. They have been catalogued and digitized so everybody can have access to them. It is a collection that we constantly try to increase.



As we have said before, Koldo Mitxelena Kulturunea library has some specific stocks, like Alfonso Sastre's and Eva Forest's, who recently passed away. A website is dedicated to these writers and their batch.

Among the traditional activities of public libraries, reading guides have always been present. We also make them, at the beginning only printed versions on paper. Owing to this fact, the digital versions have been influenced by these paper editions, link that, in the next future, we will try to conceal, reform or eliminate.



These reading guidances comprise, along the 14 years of library's life, numerous writers. Some of them bound to our cultural scene like Pío Baroja or Miguel de Unamuno, others distant in time or space but still very interesting like Clarice Lispector, Torgny Lindgren, Anton Chejov or James Ellroy. All of them have been the subject of conferences and publications.



As we have mentioned before, very often our dances in the dark have imitated choreographies that we have seen and that we have tried, in some way, to mimic. In this sense, the digitized brochure stock of the Biblioteca municipal de Lisieu has been an inspiration for our irregular digitized collection of leaflets, called *Atzo Atzokoa*, which could be translated as “yesterday matters” or something like that. An attempt to revive, or something similar, one of the most varied stocks of any heritage library: the historic leaflet.

Finally, we will present a difficult project, due to its complexity, that we managed to design, elaborate and publish. Regarding our recent History, we realized that 1936 was a turning point in the History of Gipuzkoa. It was a year in which a democratic country went through a coup d’etat, a revolutionary period as a result of the coup d’etat, a civil conflict, a military occupation and a dictatorship, everything within the 365 days of that year. We decided to make an online information point considering that one of the most con-



sulted newspapers of our library was Frente Popular, the diary published only for a few days (almost two months) in the few days that passed between the coup d'état takes place and until the occupation of San Sebastián.

Our approach was made through the daily press at that time, almost always published in San Sebastián but we have also some newspapers published in Bilbao.

We have complemented it with the complete version of two books: a study of the situation in Gipuzkoa, loyal to the Republic and a vivid testimony of those days. We have added some photographs of that time to show the graphic context of that period.

But these newspapers, as historic elements, are not the only digitized ones. One of our last digitized products is a database to be completed with digitized newspapers available on line.

As we have shown, our slow, hesitant attempts, are the result of a silent imitation, trying to follow the tune. We dance in the dark, convinced that now it is time to dance.

