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BETWEEN THE ARCHIVE AND THE ALGORITHM. A HISTORIAN'S WORKSHOP AT THE KÓRNIK LIBRARY ON THE BICENTENNIAL OF ITS FOUNDING



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KEYWORDS: Kórnik Library. Humanist's Research Workshop. Scientific Library. Intelligence in Libraries. Digital Accessibility

ABSTRACT: The article argues that the project "Ocalone dziedzictwo odkryte na nowo" (Rescued Heritage Rediscovered), launched in 2026 – the year of the Kórnik Library's bicentennial – continues a two-hundred-year process in which the institution has shaped the humanist's working method. Using historical analysis and a case-study approach, the author reconstructs the Library's history, the role of the Działyński and Zamoyski families, and earlier digitisation efforts, before

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discussing the assumptions of the project, funded under the European Funds for Digital Development 2021–2027 programme: the digitisation of eight special collections, the modernisation of the Digital Platform, and the development of an AI-based Reader's Assistant. She reflects on the limits of automation and on the tension between the aura of the original and its digital surrogate. The article concludes that a research library co-creates the scholar's working method, and that its task in the digital age is not to replace that method with technology, but to enrich it responsibly.

INTRODUCTION[1]

A historian's toolbox isn't limited to method. It also encompasses the tools that allow researchers to access the source: the catalog, the reference number, later the microfilm, and today the digital platform. For two centuries, academic libraries have been co-creating this toolbox, not just serving it. The Kórnik Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences is a particularly striking example. In 2026, it will enter its third centenary. The bicentennial coincides with the launch of the "Rescued Heritage Rediscovered" project – one of the most complex undertakings in the institution's recent history, financed under the European Funds for Digital Development 2021–2027 program. The convergence of these two dates prompts a research question: are the digitization of collections, the modernization of the access platform, and the implementation of artificial intelligence-based tools changing the role of academic libraries toward researchers, or are they continuing the role that the Kórnik Library has performed for two centuries?

The article consists of several parts. The starting point is the history of the Library and the role of its successive creators in building both the collection and the infrastructure for its development – from the first card catalog to today's metadata. The article then discusses the value of the resource for individual humanities disciplines and the institution's digitization experiences to date, which – as demonstrated – have revealed the limitations of the current research framework, providing a direct starting point for the new project. Subsequent sections address the assumptions and scope of the project itself: the resources being digitized, the modernization of the Digital Platform, the development of the Reader's Assistant, and the project's place among similar initiatives implemented by other European libraries. A separate section is devoted to reflection on the limits of research automation and project management methodology, understood as a practice with a humanities dimension. The article also addresses the importance of investing public funds in a tool whose value

[1] Linguistic and grammatical proofreading of the original Polish text was performed using ChatGPT software, using OpenAI's GPT-5.6 Thinking language model, on July 21, 2026.

cannot be fully expressed in the language of economic analysis. The article concludes with remarks on the project's sustainability and the future of research based on the Kórnik collection.

THE DZIAŁYŃSKI FAMILY, THE ZAMOYSKI FAMILY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE FIRST RESEARCH WORKSHOP

The history of the Kórnik Library begins with the gesture of one man, although the date of its founding established by historiography – 1826 – is conventional. This is the year the already expanding book collection was transferred from Trzebaw, where it had been stored until then, to Kórnik (Bątkiewicz-Szymanowska, Biniaś-Szkopek 2020, pp. 101–102). The year 1815, the year in which young Tytus Działyński returned to his family home in Greater Poland after years of study, could just as well be considered the critical date. Then, as he wrote years later in a letter to Ludwik Königk from 1852, he started organizing the home archive, not in Kórnik, but in his hometown of Konarzewo, where in the years 1815–1816 he became familiar with the archive inherited from his great-grandmother Magdalena née Leszczyńska and her grandfather, Hetman Stefan Czarniecki: "After finishing school, I started organizing the library and archive, both the home library and the archive inherited from my great-grandmother Magdalena Leszczyńska and her grandfather, Hetman Czarniecki. This employment aroused in me the desire to create a collection for the use of my fellow countrymen" (Marciniak, Wiesiołowski, 1977, pp. 3–4).

The family passion for collecting documents went deeper than Tytus's own generation: the basis for the future collection was the archives already collected by his grandfather, the Kalisz voivode Augustyn Działyński, and his father Ksawery – a small collection of manuscripts of about 80 volumes, mostly political in content, as well as a larger family economic archive of several hundred volumes. (Marciniak, *Księgozbiór Augustyna Działyńskiego (1715–1759) wojewody kaliskiego*, 1976, pp. 191–235). Tytus Działyński thus acquired his love of books from his family home, quite literally. His father, Ksawery, and uncle, Ignacy, were members of the Great Sejm and signatories of the Constitution of May 3, 1791 (Bątkiewicz-Szymanowska, Biniaś-Szkopek 2020, p. 102). Tytus himself, collecting manuscripts, old prints, family documents, and maps, was guided by a belief typical of his generation, shaped by the experience of partitions and the failure of uprisings: since political independence cannot be saved, it is necessary to preserve what preceded it and could be rebuilt in the future – memory, language, documentation of one's own history. He called the institution he created *Bibliotheca Patriae*, his native library. He did not stop at just accumulating collections. He published sources on Polish

history, including those not his own, so that their content would survive even when the originals were returned to their owners and lost in the turmoil of history.

Tytus Działyński died in 1861, leaving a collection of approximately 1,000 manuscripts and 25,000 printed items – a collection he himself described as "not great, but royal" (Bątkiewicz-Szymanowska, Biniaś-Szkopek 2020, pp. 107–108). It was inherited by his son, Jan Działyński, who expanded the Library's profile to include topics of mathematics and physics that were close to his heart, a legacy of which is the collection of manuscripts left by Józef Maria Hoene-Wroński, preserved to this day. During his lifetime the collection expanded by 500 manuscripts, 6,500 books – including 2,500 old prints – and 6,000 engravings and prints (Bątkiewicz-Szymanowska, Biniaś-Szkopek 2020, pp. 109–110). Having no children of his own, Jan Działyński handed over the Library and museum to his nephew, Władysław Zamoyski, in 1880.

Władysław Zamoyski, although more often remembered in historiography as a defender of the Tatra Mountains and creator of the Zakopane estate, clearly understood that the collection inherited from his grandfather and uncle had not only financial but, above all, cultural value. It was he, at the end of his life, together with his mother Jadwiga and sister Maria, who made the decision thanks to which the Kórnik Library operates to this day: the establishment of the "Zakłady Kórnickie" Foundation, whose task was to oversee the Library, the museum, and the Institute of Dendrology, established at his behest. The Sejm passed the act establishing the Foundation on July 30, 1925 (Fundacja Zakłady Kórnickie, 2025).

In 1926, the Library's first director, Władysław Pociecha, was appointed; he was succeeded in this position by Józef Grycz and Stanisław Bodniak. The idea of its own academic journal had been with the Library for a long time: Tytus and Jan Działyński had already been considering it, and in 1870 the first editorial meeting took place in Paris, interrupted by the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War. In 1872, Zygmunt Celichowski again abandoned the idea, proposing to Jan Działyński an annual journal modeled on the Ossoliński Library's publishing house (Grycz, 1929, pp. 3–4; Kosman, 1977, p. 5). The idea was not realized until 1929, when, at Józef Grycz's initiative, the first issue of *Pamiętnik Biblioteki Kórnickiej* was published. This journal has been published continuously to this day and has become a staple for researchers of the institution's history, providing them with tools for ongoing documentation and scholarly exchange. After the authorities of the Polish People's Republic dissolved all pre-war foundations in 1953, the Polish Academy of Sciences took over the Kórnik Library and continues to manage it to this day. Its headquarters remain in Kórnik Castle, which was added to the list of historical monuments in

2011. Some scholarly activity is also conducted at the Działyński Palace in Poznań.[2]

It's worth emphasizing that Kórnik Castle was never intended as an isolated treasure trove. The surrounding park, today known as the Kórnik Arboretum, and the castle's entire residential complex were part of a single concept, intended to transform Kórnik into a place where science, gardening, and book collecting form a coherent cultural project.

The value of the collection gathered in Kórnik cannot be overestimated, nor its significance for the research of four distinct humanities disciplines. The manuscript collection now numbers over 15,000 items, including a unique collection of over 250 parchment diplomas, half of which are medieval documents. The collection of old printed books exceeds 40,000 volumes, including over 200 incunabula – books published before 1500 (Grycz, 1929, pp. 49–75; Mężyński, 1973, pp. 328–334; Marciniak, 1982; Bolewska, Marciniak, 1987). It is one of the richest and oldest collections of this type in Poland, encompassing objects of significance far beyond the regional dimension (Falk, Losik, 2017, pp. 255–271).

This multidisciplinary significance of resources explains why digitization projects conducted in a research library cannot be treated solely as IT endeavors. They are equally formative, requiring the involvement of librarians, historians, philologists, and art historians at every stage of the process—from object selection to metadata processing, which is now becoming a part of the research apparatus of nearly every humanities discipline.

FROM A PAPER CATALOG TO A DIGITAL RESEARCH WORKSHOP

Before the Kórnik Library embarked on the "Recovered Heritage" project, it already had nearly twenty years of experience in digitally sharing its collections, and thus in building a digital version of its research toolkit. Since 2002, in cooperation with the Poznań Foundation of Scientific Libraries and the Poznań Supercomputing and Networking Center, it has been co-creating the Wielkopolska Digital Library – this partnership was formally summarized at the national conference "Polish Digital Libraries" organized by these three institutions in December 2009 (Mazurek, Stroiński, Węglarz 2010, p. 3). In their reflection on the further development of the Wielkopolska Digital Library, the current director of the Library, Magdalena Biniaś-Szkopek, together with Wojciech Zagartowski, later asked whether a digital library, by making private

[2] Entry of the Kórnik Castle into the list of historical monuments by the decree of the President of the Republic of Poland of 15 June 2011. (Dz. U. nr 143, poz. 836) – as cited in: E. Bątkiewicz-Szymanowska, M. Biniaś-Szkopek, op. cit.., pp. 114, 125, 128.

collections available alongside institutional resources, could function as a kind of virtual museum – a question that anticipated some of the ambitions that the Reader's Assistant sets for itself today (Biniaś-Szkopek, Zagartowski, 2015, pp. 157–168).

The Kórnik Library actively participated in the CACAO project, carried out in the years 2007–2009. It carried out work within the framework of the undertaking "Protection and conservation of Cieszyn written heritage" (2008–2010), as well as in the projects POLONIA MAIOR FONTES and "Wielkopolska Printing in the 16th–18th centuries." In the years 2011–2013, in cooperation with the "Zakłady Kórnickie" Foundation, it implemented the project "The most valuable cultural jewels – Kórnik meetings," financed by the Wielkopolska Regional Operational Programme, within the framework of which cyclical workshops and thematic exhibitions introduced the general public to the history of manuscripts, old prints, and 19th-century prints; Due to the great interest of its users, the Library continued its activities at its own expense in 2014. This undertaking, although small in comparison to the current project, proves that the Kórnik workshop has long included not only specialist researchers, but also lay recipients, for whom dissemination and educational activities – today one of the five tasks of "Salvaged Heritage" – are as important a form of contact with the collection as research.

The Kórnik experience did not arise in a vacuum. The years 2004–2014 were a period of intense development of the legal and institutional framework for Polish heritage digitization. The first regulations concerning digital repositories were drafted and models for their financing and maintenance were developed, which were also used by academic libraries including the Kórnik Library (Dzięglewski, Guzik, 2015).

The most significant digitization project to date, however, remains the project "Digital access to the resources of the Polish Academy of Sciences Kórnik Library," carried out in the years 2016–2019, co-financed under the Digital Poland Operational Programme 2014–2020 (no. POPC.02.03.01-IP.01-00-002/15). 6,758 objects were digitized, over 700,000 scans were made, with a total volume of 32.10 TB, with a budget of PLN 6,298,199 (Biniaś-Szkopek, 2020, pp. 167-169). The scientific session summarizing the project at that time, "Treasures of the Kórnik Library. From a private book collection to a digital platform," which took place on June 13, 2019 at the Działyński Palace, gathered nearly 200 librarians, genealogists and researchers from all over Poland, which proves that the interest in the digital workshop based on the Kórnik resources goes far beyond the institution itself (Mikołajczyk, 2020, pp. 170–172).

These experiences are significant not only as facts recorded in the institution's chronicle. They reveal a phenomenon fundamental to understanding the genesis of the new project: digitization alone, understood

as the creation of a digital representation of an object, is a necessary but insufficient condition for building a truly functional research workshop. The Digital Platform of the Polish Academy of Sciences Kórnik Library was created in the previous decade, for the purposes of earlier projects (Biniaś-Szkopek, Losik, 2023, pp. 295-312). Over time, it failed to keep pace with user expectations and the standards developed in the meantime by the international digital library community. It did not meet digital accessibility requirements for people with disabilities, was not fully interoperable with aggregators such as Europeana, and did not offer the semantic search tools that users had become accustomed to on other services, including the Polish-language Polona. The collections were saved and digitized, but the very techniques employed to use them began to age faster than the objects that had been waiting for centuries in Kórnik warehouses.

It was from this diagnosis – and not from the fashion for artificial intelligence or the desire to use the available pool of EU funds – that the project "Rescued Heritage Rediscovered" arose, intended as a thorough reconstruction of the workshop, not just its cosmetic refreshment.

"RESCUED HERITAGE REDISCOVERED" – A NEW WORKSHOP, NOT A NEW BEGINNING

The project is financed under the European Funds for Digital Development 2021–2027 program, Priority FERC.02: Advanced Digital Services, Measure FERC.02.03: Digital Accessibility and Reuse of Public Sector Information. The beneficiary of the project is the Polish Academy of Sciences, and the direct implementer is the Kórnik Library. It is no coincidence that the implementation commences in early 2026, the year of the Library's bicentennial celebrations. The project manager is Dr. hab. Magdalena Biniaś-Szkopek, professor at Adam Mickiewicz University and director of the Kórnik Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences. It is worth noting that she is also the author and co-author of scientific studies on the history of the institution itself, a researcher who professionally uses the workshop she co-creates as an administrator. The project is also overseen by the Steering Committee, chaired by Aleksandra Losik, the Library's systems librarian and deputy director. Thanks to this arrangement, strategic design decisions combine scholarly knowledge of the Library's history with operational knowledge of the resources and the everyday needs of researchers using its facilities.

The project's title itself deserves a separate interpretive note. The term "saved heritage" refers directly to the foundational gesture of Tytus Działyński and generations of subsequent custodians of the collection – this heritage has already been saved once, rescued from the risk of dispersal or destruction, including during the most difficult moments

of history, such as World War II and the post-war ownership changes. The phrase "rediscovered," however, indicates the goal of the current undertaking: it is not about rescuing physical objects, but about making them once again visible, searchable, and included in the research tools of the 21st-century reader, who most often encounters heritage through a screen, not a manuscript page.

The project's scope was divided into five tasks, including conservation work preceding digitization, creating digital representations, metadata processing, developing and implementing access tools, and dissemination and educational activities. The sequence of these stages is worth emphasizing: digitization begins not with the scanner, but with the conservator, who determines the condition of the object in which it can be digitized without risking further deterioration. Despite its "digital" name, the project remains essentially a conservation and library project, in which information technology is the last, yet most visible, element of the development process. The work schedule takes the form of a Gantt chart and anticipates the following phases: preparatory, conservation, digitization, implementation, and dissemination, with specific milestones for the coming years.

Against this backdrop, it is worth noting a separate, parallel effort undertaken by the Library over the previous fifteen years, before it was even able to access FERC funding – an effort that concerned not the researcher's skills, but the material foundation on which those skills rest. For decades, the preservation of the substance of the buildings – Kórnik Castle and the Działyński Palace – occurred without access to EU funds. As an entity without legal personality, reporting directly to the Chancellery of the Polish Academy of Sciences, the Library could not independently apply for European funds, and the Polish Academy of Sciences is not a beneficiary in EU competitions for construction investments (Woźniak, 2020, pp. 173–189). Therefore, between 2007 and 2019, subsequent stages of renovation work were financed exclusively from targeted subsidies from the Polish Academy of Sciences, support from the "Zakłady Kórnickie" Foundation, Poznań County, and the City and Commune of Kórnik.

RESOURCES SUBJECT TO DIGITIZATION – EIGHT UNIQUE COLLECTIONS

The digitization covered eight special collections, differing in type of material, period of creation, and degree of processing to date, but connected by prior archival research, which allowed them to be included in the project as units ready for digitization. Two of them have a status confirmed internationally or nationally within the UNESCO "Memory of the World" program: the Czech Brethren Library – a collection of 1,500 old

religious and intellectual prints from the 16th to 18th centuries, included on the program's World Register – and the files of the "Morskie Oko Dispute" – six archival units (manuscripts, maps, press) documenting the border dispute at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, included on the National Register. The remaining six collections include: 30 parchment documents from the years 1531–1676, mainly royal, bearing seals; approximately 30 units of medieval manuscripts – fragments of Latin theological and legal codes, reused as bookbinding waste paper; approximately 3,000 letters of correspondence between Tytus and Jan Działyński from the 19th century; 7,000 photographs from the mid-19th and early 20th centuries; 17,500 bibliographic descriptions of monographic prints from the years 1919–1997 (entries starting with the letters M–O), intended for retroconversion to the MARC21 format; and the fourteen-volume series "Old Polish Officials" with verified biographies of officials of the Crown and Lithuania from the 15th to the 18th century.

Digitizing such a diverse collection requires a tailored approach for each collection, essentially creating several distinct yet coherent resource workshops. Different technical parameters, conservation regimes, and metadata schemes apply to a parchment manuscript, an eighteenth-century map, and finally, a nineteenth-century family correspondence. This diversity is reflected in the adopted metadata standards: MARC21 and Dublin Core are used for bibliographic description, METS for the structure of complex objects, MIX for technical metadata of digital images, and PREMIS for long-term preservation metadata. Together, these standards create a multi-layered yet coherent description system that simultaneously meets the needs of the researcher, conservator, and IT system administrator – the three primary users of the new workshop.

A DIGITAL PLATFORM AS A NEW RESEARCH WORKSHOP TOOL

The heart of the project remains a thorough modernization of the PAN Kórnik Library Digital Platform, intended as the central tool for future research based on the Kórnik collection. The new platform will meet the WCAG 2.1 digital accessibility requirements at level AA, support the OAI-PMH protocol (for data export) enabling metadata aggregation by external repositories, and implement the EDM (Europeana Data Model) data model, which will enable the Kórnik collection to be incorporated into the Europeana infrastructure. The IIIF protocol will also be implemented, enabling advanced presentation and comparison of digital images regardless of the system in which they are stored – a solution of particular importance for manuscript and early printed book researchers who increasingly work comparatively, collating objects currently scattered throughout libraries across Europe. The metadata will

be based on MARC21, Dublin Core, METS, MIX, and PREMIS formats, ensuring compatibility with existing national and international systems, including the dLibra software used by the Wielkopolska Digital Library, and ultimately also with KRONIK@ and Polona. The adopted solutions also implement the five-star linked open data model, in accordance with the Act on Open Data and Reuse of Public Sector Information. It is worth remembering that the quality of Polish digital libraries can still be varied and strongly dependent on the software used, as demonstrated by a qualitative-heuristic assessment of the usability of the websites of ten national digital libraries (Żernicka, 2014). The awareness of this variation was one of the factors behind the decision, made a decade ago, to build a dedicated platform rather than expand an existing solution.

It is worth going beyond the purely technical description of the standards and asking about their significance for the humanities research profession. The WCAG standard is not merely a formal requirement imposed by EU legislators, but a condition for ensuring that research based on the Kórnik resource is also accessible to researchers and readers for whom access barriers are not a matter of distance from Kórnik, but rather of visual or mobility impairments.

READER'S ASSISTANT – ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE LIMITS OF WORKSHOP AUTOMATION

The element that most distinguishes the current project from the Library's previous digitization experiences is the development of the Reader's Assistant – a tool utilizing artificial intelligence technologies: OCR, natural language processing (NLP), and semantic search, with the potential use of large-scale Polish language models. The Assistant is intended to become a new element of the reader's toolkit – whether for researchers, high school students, or virtual tourists – facilitating navigation through resources that, without the aid of a well-designed search tool, can easily prove impenetrable, especially for those not professionally researching manuscripts.

The artificial intelligence in the project is not limited to the reader interface, however – it also encompasses the stages preceding the accessibility of an object, typically invisible to the end user. An equally important, though less impressive, element of the Digital Platform modernization is the new conservation module, which allows for ongoing monitoring of the state of preservation of objects, planning and recording conservation activities, and integrating this information into the digitization process. For the first time in the Library's history, conservation and digitization data will coexist in a single system, rather than in distinct, separately maintained registers. Conservators gain a tool as modern as

the reader. Artificial intelligence also supports the collection development process itself, not just subsequent searching: the Reader's Assistant's functions include automatic metadata generation and the identification of semantic links between items, which is intended to reduce the workload of the cataloging team working with thousands of items. It is worth noting that the AI and OCR training planned for the project will encompass not only IT specialists but also the conservators and librarians responsible for developing the collection. This means that the new tools are being put in the hands of those who daily determine the condition and description of an item before digitization, not just the end user.

The decision to treat handwritten text recognition (HTR) as a pilot rather than a fully implemented element of the workshop is particularly noteworthy. This stems from the limited maturity of this technology when applied to historical manuscripts with diverse, often highly individualized handwriting. The Kórnik manuscripts encompass documents spanning several centuries and multiple authors, making them particularly challenging in this regard. This decision should be understood not as a technical limitation, but as a conscious methodological choice regarding the boundaries that should be set for automated work with historical sources. A tool that misreads a manuscript without signaling the uncertainty of its own reading can do more harm than no tool at all: an erroneous transcription easily enters scholarly circulation, but is difficult to detect and correct later, especially when automatically replicated in metadata indexed by search engines and aggregators. Adopting a pilot approach means that the Kórnik Library consciously prioritizes the source's credibility over the effectiveness of its technological claims. The final interpretation of the manuscript remains where – at least at this stage of technological development – it should remain in the researcher's workshop: in his hands, not in an algorithm.

This observation applies to the entire project in a broader sense. A digital surrogate of an object, even a top-quality scan made available in the IIIF standard, does not fully replace contact with the original, nor does it exhaust the skills of a researcher working with a physical source. It does not convey the texture of the paper, traces of use, sometimes even the smell or the weight of the book in the hand. The tension between the "aura" of the original and its technically perfect reproduction has long been a subject of reflection in the humanities and does not disappear with technological progress – only its character changes. The "Rescued Heritage Rediscovered" project does not claim to replace the original in the researcher's workshop. Its ambition is rather to expand the circle of people who will learn about the existence of a given object: perhaps thanks to a digital discovery, they will want to come to Kórnik to incorporate it into their own workshop in a full way, with direct contact with the

original. In this approach, digital reproduction serves as an invitation to the workshop, not a substitute.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT METHODOLOGY AS A HUMANISTIC PRACTICE

Project management was based on the PCM (Project Cycle Management) methodology, a standard used in EU projects since the 1990s, supplemented by a User-Centered Design approach during the design phase of the platform and Reader Assistant functionality – the stage where the future user experience is decided. This combination deserves separate discussion, as it is not solely a matter of formal compliance with the funder's requirements. PCM imposes a discipline – clearly defined goals, metrics, schedule, and budget – that is often lacking in humanities projects conducted in an academic setting, where timelines can be stretched and responsibilities dispersed. UCD, on the other hand, introduces an element easily overlooked in a technological project: the need to constantly address the actual needs of the researcher using the experience, not the IT team's perceptions of what the researcher might need. The combination of design discipline and user sensitivity is essentially the answer to one question: how, within a limited time and budget, to build a workshop that actually meets the needs of the person for whom it is being built, and not just the designers' perceptions of their needs.

During the project preparation phase, an analysis of eleven identified risks pertaining to technology, organization, and sustainability was conducted, along with planned remedial actions. The project also considers compliance with horizontal principles applicable to EU projects: the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the DNSH principle, and the principle of gender equality, as well as the national Open Data Act. An anti-corruption action plan was also included as a permanent element of the adopted methodology. These elements, although seemingly purely formal, contribute to the project's image of a project that takes seriously not only the technical but also the ethical and social responsibility of a public institution building a workspace for thousands of future users. A separate element of this responsibility is the compliance of digitization with copyright law—an issue still ambiguous in library and archive practice, especially with orphan works and materials with an undetermined legal status. This further justifies the project's pilot approach to the most experimental tools in the workspace.

A COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS AND THE SENSE OF INVESTING IN A WORKSHOP WHOSE VALUE CANNOT BE FULLY CALCULATED

The project was preceded by a multi-criteria analysis of three variants: a no-investment option (W0), an investment option involving the construction of a dedicated platform (W1), and one based on the expansion of the existing dLibra software (W2). Variant W1 received the highest score of 4.250 out of 5, compared to 3.200 for W2 and 2.350 for W0. Its advantages stemmed primarily from the ability to fully adapt its functionality to the specific needs of the Kórnik resource and the flexibility of integrating AI-based tools, which is difficult to achieve within the existing dLibra software that is shared with other institutions.

However, the results of the financial analysis are interesting from the perspective adopted in this article. The project's net present value (FNPV) was -14,331,542.41 PLN. A negative value of this indicator does not indicate the project's failure; rather, it is a natural, expected characteristic, confirming that the investment is in a scientific tool, not a commercial venture. The benefits of the project lie not in the profit and loss statement, but in the social, scientific, and educational dimensions – in the quality of the workshop that its future users gain. Assessed solely in terms of return on investment, this project – like most libraries, museums, and archives worldwide – should never have been implemented. The socio-economic benefit analysis estimated the total value of benefits generated by the project at 3,819,688 PLN annually, resulting from, among other things, time savings for users, reduced consumption of originals, and increased accessibility for people with disabilities. Even this number, however, is only a partial, conventional approximation of the value for the research workshop of Polish humanities, given the fact that a manuscript or an old print, previously kept in a single copy in a warehouse in Kórnik, becomes available simultaneously to a researcher from Krakow, a high school student from Poznań and an internet user from Chicago.

Demand analysis estimates indicate the scale of this audience, and thus the potential users of the new library. Research staff numbers come to approximately 2,400, students and academics approximately 64,000, cultural institutions approximately 100, and Library staff approximately 50. Artificial intelligence and digitization specialists number approximately 207, high school students approximately 1,400, and virtual tourists approximately 700. Platform users are expected to increase from the current number of approximately 7,800 to 10,000. One important aspect of this comparison is that researchers, the group for whom the original nineteenth-century Library and its first cataloging library were created, today constitute only one – and not necessarily the largest – of many groups using the library based on the Kórnik collection. This demonstrates

a fundamental change in the understanding of the mission of heritage institutions over the course of two centuries: from a closed workshop, accessible to a select few, to a workshop open to thousands of diverse users, many of whom will never cross the threshold of Kórnik Castle, and yet will benefit from its resources just as effectively as a researcher who once worked in the reading room.

THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROJECT AND THE FUTURE OF THE RESEARCH WORKSHOP AFTER THE ANNIVERSARY

In accordance with FERC program requirements, the project envisages a five-year sustainability period, spanning 2029–2034. A detailed plan for the financial and organizational resources necessary to sustain its results, an operational model for the platform and Reader Assistant after implementation, a business continuity plan, a data security policy, and an organizational change management strategy were developed, including the need to train Library staff in the use of the new workshop tools. In EU projects, the five-year sustainability horizon is not merely a formal accounting requirement; it forces the project team to think beyond the funding close date. This thinking is inherently close to the way the Library and its workshop have operated for two hundred years: from the perspective of generations of researchers, not administrative terms.

Beyond the EU funding period, the "Recovered Heritage" project is intended to provide a foundation for further expansion of the research toolkit: further integration with Europeana, the development of currently pilot-based applications of handwriting recognition as the technology matures, and likely also the next stages of digitization of the resource, which – despite two decades of work – is still largely awaiting inclusion in the digital research toolkit. It can be expected that additional collections, currently outside the scope of the project due to budget constraints, will become the subject of future applications, building on the experience and infrastructure developed between 2026 and 2029. Therefore, the project carried out during the Library's bicentennial year does not close a certain stage of its research toolkit; it opens it.

CONCLUSION

Anniversaries of cultural institutions can be an opportunity for quantitative assessments: counting how many objects have been collected, how many years the institution has survived, and how many generations of researchers have benefited from it. The bicentennial of the Kórnik Library, however, prompts a different kind of assessment – a reflection

on how the researcher's skills using its resources have evolved, even as literally everything around them has changed, from the partitions, through wars, to the digital era. The conviction that guided Tytus Działyński at the beginning of assembling the collection has not changed: that heritage is worth saving, and that saved heritage locked away beyond the reader's reach, beyond their workspace, loses its meaning. The role of Kórnik itself has also remained unchanged – a place where the library, park, and castle have co-created a single cultural project for two hundred years, today enriched by a digital dimension.

The "Recovered Heritage" project, launched in the year of the Library's bicentennial, is a contemporary answer to the same question Tytus Działyński posed two hundred years earlier when building his first workshop: how to save it without closing it off? How to preserve it and make it accessible? The tools of the workshop have changed – from the castle library to a digital platform compliant with international interoperability standards, from the card catalog to an AI-based assistant, from microfilm to the IIIF protocol. The research library's purpose for the researcher has not changed. This – not any single project metric, no number of scans or terabytes – seems to be the best measure of what the Kórnik Library celebrates in 2026: not the technology itself, but two hundred years of fidelity to the idea that a research library exists to build and continually renew the tools of work for those who use its resources.

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