

# Celebrating the Local Historian: Kollezzjoni Programmi tal-Festa at the Junior College Library

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## Introduction

The *Kollezzjoni Programmi tal-Festa* within the University of Malta Junior College Library is made up of publications and pamphlets published annually by local parishes and *festa* organisations. These publications have proven to be an excellent source of information about local heritage, historical events, history, art, culture, folklore and biographies of local personalities. The aim of this commentary is to highlight the project being undertaken by the Junior College Library. The goals of this project are twofold: to enhance the *Melitensia* collection within the Library, both in print and online; and to better equip librarians, by enhancing the local authority lists to better suit the needs of the local scene. This collection has also contributed to the standardisation of local subject headings used by librarians.

## Assembly

Currently, the collection is made up of over 6000 catalogued entries which researchers can view by appointment. As a collection it was mainly assembled by means of social media which has played an important role in the collation of said collection since many organisations were contacted through their group page. It was decided that a Facebook group should be created in order to communicate and network with other enthusiasts and also showcase the collection. Since the collection is reliant on donations from the public, parishes and organisations as well as the band clubs, the Facebook group proved to be a very important tool to gather such material. In fact, after a public call for donations of said publications, the response from individual collectors was positive, with many donating their duplicate copies to our collection. At present, the collection development is aimed at obtaining the publications published in the late 60s and early 70s as well as to fill in any lacunae.

## Authority Lists

This collection has made an impact on how librarians at the University of Malta work. Prior to 2017, the concept of maintaining local authority lists was not a priority. This project has helped to significantly shift more focus to these lists. Subject headings form part of a library's authority list. An authority list is a set of terms used by librarians in catalogue entries to facilitate searching by providing consistent terminology as access points. The UM Library follows and uses the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH). The LCSH are flexible to use and have been translated into many languages, which makes them more attractive for librarians and special collections such as ours.

Subject authority lists enrich the metadata used when cataloguing new entries. The metadata of the uploaded articles contains points of access such as the author and subject headings. The latter helps to indicate what the subject matter of the article is and consequently allows for a better browsing experience. A 2005 (Gross, Taylor 2005) and subsequent 2015 (Gross et al. 2015) study have shown that between 27% (Gross et al. 2015, p. 31) and 35.9% (Gross, Taylor 2005, p. 212) of "hits would be lost if the subject headings were not present in the records" (Gross, Taylor et al. 2015, p. 31). These studies continue to state that in some cases, from eighty to up to a hundred percent of the record would not be retrieved. Rather than having an endless number of results to sort through, subject headings allow for more relevant hits to the search in question (Gross, Taylor 2005, p. 224). Additionally, the presence of subject headings in the metadata records allows the grouping together of alternative spellings and synonyms, links together obsolete terms, helps to differentiate between variant meanings of terms (Gross et al. 2015, p. 31) and provides "searchable text for non-textual resources" (Gross et al. 2015, p. 31). Consequently, subject headings provide a shorter results list, but with a higher relevance to the research being done (Chan 2000, p. 5).

*Melitensia Subject Headings* (MSH) are used "to access and express the topic content of documents" (Library and Archives of Canada 2019) on Malta and Maltese topics. Apart from the lack of local subject headings, there are also inconsistencies which need to be addressed in relation to anything local such as church names, localities and personal names. The large influx of *Melitensia* which this project has brought with it increased the demand of locally related subject headings. These include a range of material, such as cultural, historical, geographical, literary, political and social topics.

Subject headings also help to increase the specificity of the article's subject. For example, in a sample of 219 articles uploaded on OAR@UM, the University of Malta's Institutional Repository (University of Malta Library 2021), and published by Soċjetà Filarmonika Santa Marija of Mosta, the term 'Mosta' is listed 826 times either as a main term or as a subdivision. This helps to refine searches by locality and enforces the concept of 'Localensia' (Cilia 2011).

Besides the MSH, additional authority lists were established from this project. These include a list of all the local band clubs together with a list of religious orders present on the islands. The third list consists of an extensive inventory of cathedrals, churches and chapels on the Maltese islands. The majority of these churches are Catholic, however churches belonging to other Christian denominations and other faiths are also listed. This list of approximately 900 entries also includes deconsecrated and lost churches.

The Maltese Biography List is another comprehensive list representing historical and current personalities. This list was especially helpful to correct inconsistencies in variations of name spelling used in subject headings. The variant used was listed in Schiavone's two volume work *Dictionary of Maltese Biography* (Schiavone 2009). This dictionary provided a good foundation for this list, however it required substantial updates. These updates included, where necessary, the year of birth and/or death together with the addition of more current personalities. Additionally, this project has provided ample new entries by way of musicians, artists, historical figures, politicians and clergy, amongst others.

All of these lists are works in progress, with updates and new additions happening on a regular basis. Suggestions are encouraged, and if they meet the criteria required then they are added to the MSH list. These in-house lists are available to all the UM Librarians to use.

The print collection is organised alphabetically by locality and then according to the respective organisation, which facilitates searching for both the researcher and the librarians. Furthermore, Junior College librarians were able to create an alphanumeric classification schedule for each of the associations and/or feasts present in the collection. This classification schedule was built as a hybrid between two established systems, namely the Lynn and Library of Congress.

Material from this collection is also accessible online through OAR@UM. After going through an evaluation process, articles with specific *Melitensia* material are scanned and uploaded. Uploading at article level allows librarians to create richer metadata which provides a higher degree of discoverability. New material uploaded on OAR@UM is periodically harvested by Google and Google Scholar. This helps to make these articles discoverable through a simple Google search. In addition, Google Scholar also helps to direct researchers to these articles and others written by University of Malta academics, allowing a wider range of access.

As a concept, the *Kollezżjoni Programmi tal-Festa* is not the first of its kind. There are several private collections of such publications on the islands. Moreover, as per the 1925 Act no. II, and subsequently the Malta Libraries Act of 2011, a Legal Deposit is imposed on all Maltese authors and publishers to provide two copies of their publications for the National Libraries of Malta and Gozo (Malta Libraries 2015). The holdings available on the Malta Libraries catalogue are haphazard at best, which makes it difficult for a researcher to locate or browse a certain publication.

## Conclusion

The assembly and organisation of the *Kollezzjoni Programmi tal-Festa* is the first of its kind in the local academic library context. What makes this particular collection unique is its accessibility. Having this collection of publications grouped in one place, both in print and online on OAR@UM (Slonina 2018, p. 5), allows for better access to all researchers. This not only enhances the visibility of the author's work but also creates a greater impact and allows for further dissemination. The creation of a consistent controlled vocabulary, such as the MSH list, further enhances the browsing and discoverability of the collection.

This collection has by far exceeded expectations when it comes to *Melitensia* material which has enhanced both the digital and print collections of the University of Malta Library. The librarians' role in this project is not only to collect and organise these publications, but also to provide access on as many levels as possible.

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