The paper presents some thoughts about functions of virtual library called kombibka.com. The primary goal of KOMBIBKA is to create an internet-based collection of the literary heritage of Russia’s (former) national minorities. This collection will be openly accessible worldwide.

Special software was designed for KOMBIBKA Project — a multi-faced word and information retrieval program. Besides word search, several other options, like subject search are assigned to the program as well. Translation program is also planned to be developed for kombibka.com.

Kombibka.com would not be just a web-site consisting of various collections with effective search functions. The aim of KOMBIBKA is also to become a forum of cultural heritage, and to provide plenty of background information on the subject. Kombibka.com will provide access to full texts of documents included. No access to originals printed on fragile acid paper will be provided.

Представлен ряд идей по поводу функционирования виртуальной библиотеки kombibka.com. Глав­ная цель проекта КОМБИБКА — создание в Интернете собрания литературного наследия нацио­нальных меньшинств, проживавших на территории Российской Империи. Это собрание будет функционировать в режиме свободного доступа в любой точке мира. Для проекта КОМБИБКА было разработано специальное программное обеспечение — программа для поиска слов и информа­ционного поиска. Кроме поиска по словам у программы есть также другие опции, в частности, предметный поиск. Для kombibka.com запланирована также разработка программы-переводчика. Kombibka.com — это не только веб-сайт, содержащий документы из различных собраний и обладающий эффективными поисковыми функциями. Сайт kombibka.com также должен стать форумом по культурному наследию и предоставлять разнообразную информацию по предмету. Kombibka.com будет обеспечивать доступ к полным текстам документов, включенных в собрание. Доступ к оригиналам, напечатанным на слабой бумаге, содержащей большой процент кислоты, не будет.

From Archives to a Virtual Library

The aim of this paper is to present some thoughts about functions that should be incorporated in the virtual library called kombibka.com and what this environment could look like. During the pilot project the aim is to create a prototype(s) that can be tested by the research team and users. The MediaLab of the University of Art and Design in Helsinki will be responsible for the technical and visual side of the project. The MediaLab has recently carried out projects dealing with preserving and dispersing cultural heritage in digital form.
Internet-based Collection

The primary goal of KOMBIBKA is to create an internet-based collection of the literary heritage of Russia’s (former) national minorities. Members of these minorities, many living in diaspora, as well as researchers would have an open access to this collection worldwide. The material should be available in as good resolution as possible, so that the reading and studying of it would be easy. The user could enlarge or reduce the size of the documents as needed.

Search Functions

The central technological challenge of KOMBIBKA is to create a multi-faced word and information retrieval program which can read complex writing systems in various alphabets with diacritic signs and different reading directions. A word search, for instance, would be done with the language in question by selecting the letters and diacritic signs from a separate character menu. In this way the user would not be dependent on the computer’s keyboard or language settings. The results could be first presented with the program’s own interpretation from which the user would have straight access to the original document. The word retrieval program should also be able to carry out fuzzy search that would take into account different orthographical variations. Besides word search, various other options could be added to the retrieval system, like subject search which would gather works related to a certain theme etc.

Translation Functions

One vision is to provide a translation program at kombibka.com. Then also people who are not so familiar with the languages could locate material in the collections and be able to read it. Of course, at the moment the translation programs are defective and under development. With a translation program the user could search for items from various collections in different languages at the same time.

Cultural Heritage Forum

Kombibka.com would not be just a web-site consisting of various collections with effective search functions, but it could also provide plenty of various background information, among others of the cultures and languages in question, their literary heritage, printing activity in the Russian Empire etc. The aim of KOMBIBKA is also to become a forum of cultural heritage, where researchers and members of the dispersed communities could exchange information, interpretations and explanations of the material. This information could stay permanently in the database for others to be seen.

Virtual Environment

When planning the virtual environment of kombibka.com, one of the objectives is not to imitate the existing conventions of material or digital world — the aim is to create an environment that suits, in the best possible way, the cultural heritage(s) in question. One of the aims is that the architecture of kombibka.com should not be too two-dimensional. Three-dimensional maps and models are helpful in perceiving the environment and in navigating within the web-site.

One central visual problem is how the cultural heritage, in this case old books, newspapers and documents, should be brought into digital form so that their authenticity and feeling of material would be preserved. Kombibka.com will be the only place where this material is available. No one will have access to the originals printed on fragile acid paper.

Testing the prototype(s)

The members of KOMBIBKA team will test the word and information retrieval program prototype(s) and the over-all virtual environment. The prototypes should also be tested by the users so that the team would get feedback and ideas how to develop further the web-site. It is important to get the teams’ ideas and innovations to correlate with the consumers’ conception on what the environment should be like and how it should work.