

Interview Transcript



Filippou Tsimpoglou
1956 – 2023

*“Our death is awaited by the bright light of the sun.
Such is the triumphant sunset that we’ll see again,
and then we depart from the evenings of April,
heading to the distant dark kingdoms”.*
K. Karyotakis, Posthumous Fame

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Edited & Introduced: Dr. Giannis Tsakonas

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First steps

From early 80s to late 90s, Filippos worked in the National Documentation Centre managing many projects. From early 90s and then, Filippos had been pivotal in the formation of the Greek Consortium of Hellenic Academic Libraries, HEAL-Link. As member of a research performing institute, his silent, largely unobserved, work with other pioneering members from the academic libraries, highlighted the need to develop collective infrastructures by the community; infrastructures that would increase the visibility and the integrity of scientific information produced in Greece.

Oliver Blake (OB): Okay. So, I prepared some questions just about you, and the library, etc., which we can go through now, if that's okay?

Filippos Tsimpoglou (FT): Yes.

OB: Could you tell me a little bit about your background and how you came to this day, to work as the General Director of the Greek National Library?

FT: My background... First of all, I was a good student in the elementary school. I had worked hard in the village that I was living, but I liked to read. I liked reading, because I felt like I was moved, transmitted to the environment that the book described. It was like living it. Perhaps some people feel the same for a theatre play or a performance or a film. But of course, it was stronger, much stronger than everything. The very first book: I moved to far away Egypt, or to some other historical periods. I was impressed by this when I was really a child. Later, after the exams, I was admitted to the Economic University of Athens, for my B.A., my bachelor's degree from the University.



Filippos Tsimpoglou (first from right) with colleagues at a birthday party in 1994 at the National Documentation Centre (photo courtesy of Katerina Toraki).

Then I was working in the private sector for some three or four years, and, actually, I went to the National Documentation Centre, which was in the very, very beginning of establishing an infrastructure for information in the country. I had the chance, the opportunity, to be with almost 15 people, men and women, young people, that wanted to create the national documentation. And then, the information infrastructure for the country. I stayed there 16 years from 1983 to 1999. Then, I tried to find something more exciting in the meantime. While I had been developing the network of libraries most of part of my life, the career of my...

OB: Your journey?

FT: Yes, my journey was collaborating with many libraries. Not only one... not the only one. I was in the National Documentation Centre and I created the Union Catalogue of periodicals for libraries. Then, there was the international network for periodicals; my full time was on this. And I also created a database with full text of theses and dissertation, the PhD theses of Greece.

OB: Okay.

FT: So, my work, it was not only for one organization, but for the entire infrastructure.

OB: You were always collaborating and doing different things elsewhere.

The years in Cyprus

In 1999 Filippou moved to Cyprus to become the Director of the Library of the University of Cyprus. There, he was responsible for the development of the library on many levels, and he managed to make it the prime research library in the country. He was responsible for a lot of developmental programs that increased the visibility of the Cypriot cultural heritage, established a good understanding about the future role of Open Access and Open Science, and he also collaborated with other stakeholders to design and build the new state-of-the-art library "Stelios Ioannou". This is also the time he finished his PhD studies on Library and Information Science; something that it was conducted in parallel to his work duties.

FT: Then I moved through a process of electing personnel to the post of the Director of the Library of the University of Cyprus. A new university – a very young university. When I went there, in the end of 1999, at the beginning of 2000, it was only seven years old. I left 14 years later, in 2014, and I came here to the National Library. I think that when I went the University, the Library of the University of Cyprus was like a kid in first classes of elementary school. And when I left, it was a soldier!

OB: It was ready!

FT: Yes, it was ready! We, I, had the opportunity and the chance, not to design, but to make the architectural view of the library there, in the University of Cyprus. It was a donation of the family of Stelios Ioannou and they gave money to the University to create the library. And they also hired the atelier of Jean Nouvel, a famous French architect, to design it. And I was really lucky, very privileged, to collaborate with these people and to describe what I felt what a library, a university library, is. I knew almost nothing about university libraries. But I tried to find out principles that have to be covered or followed in order to have a result. And when I saw that something was not according to the principle, I went back, either to change the principle from the beginning, or to change the result. And we managed a very good collaboration, more than four or seven years of collaboration, to have something that is really from another galaxy, from another...

OB: I think I know the library it has the central column going upwards, like the cylinder...

FT: Have you been there?

OB: I haven't been there, but I know it from pictures and I've seen...

Ft: I see. Yeah, it's, it's, um...

OB: It's a famous library!

FT: Yes, I'm not disappointed; but I left the library. I think that I had offered everything that I could offer. I had lived in the concrete. And then, before, being in the National Documentation Centre, I started, almost when I went to the Cyprus University, my PhD on library collaboration. So, I was very interested in this, a phenomenon that I tried to investigate. I saw the collaboration in the libraries, with the result of the collaboration, and it was much more multiplied, more than the sum of the individual libraries. We could do much more things, than what if we do something alone. "This is systems" that one friend told to me. "This is systems thinking that you hold – this is systems thinking". So, I started not only to discover my practice and my experience, but to learn the theoretical, to see the how. And I started with Peter Checkland's books about systems approach, soft systems methodology, and I followed this. So, I did something that they wanted to see theoretically, to implement in practice: collaboration of academic libraries or research libraries....

OB: I'm just checking to see... (reference to recording device)

FT: ...Yeah, in the digital environment. So, uh, I had my PhD in the Ionian University in Corfu. It was the only information Science and Librarianship Department in the country. Now there are two more at the university level, which before they were technological institutions, like polytechnics. So, I had my PhD after having at least 20 years of experience in the field, I was not young. I was mature and I wanted to understand in the theoretical environment and to implement what I knew. So, I took not even one day for an educational license....

OB: Leave?

FT: Yes, because it was my life, my job and my study; all at the same time. What I learned, during the evening, after my job, I tried to implement working with the people. So, I was one of the people that created... I suggested the creation of a consortium of the Hellenic Academic Libraries, which is known here as HEAL-Link, the Hellenic Academic Libraries Link. Which all the universities agreed, and they said yes. I was one of the four-member team, four member? - five member, who suggested this HEAL-Link. HEAL-Link is now alive for more than one quarter of a century. When I went to Cyprus, I asked to join the consortium that I had suggested in Athens, in Greece. So, the University of Cyprus became a joint university with a consortium. Then two more universities appeared in public university system in Cyprus. We then created a consortium. We created this because it's an institution, not only the people, but the institutions that we created a consortium and tried to make collaboration with publishers and have contracts and agreements, beyond the agreement that the HEAL-Link had in Greece. So, before the crisis, it was... we created the Cyprus Consortium of Academic Libraries, I think it was in 2006, early 2006. Six years later because of the crisis in Greece, we separated, but we agreed with the HEAL-Link to separate, to have different contracts with the publishers. So, it was a velvet divorce with the mother consortium, with a small set of three universities. We also collaborated with others. It can be considered, that I am not only the one that suggested the creation of the HEAL-Link in the 1990s, but was one of the founders, this period of the collaboration in the Cyprus University. And as I was not young, but I was more mature. Um, if people, the librarians in Cyprus, uh, consider that it was my, you know, I, I...



Filippos Tsimpoglou receiving from the UCY Rector Stavros Zenios the award of Recognized for Excellence in Europe (3 stars) from the European Foundation for Quality Management in 2009 (photo courtesy of Sylvia Koukounidou).

OB: Your work...

FT: It is; not to be modest or to do... I was very happy that I tried to pass my experience to these people. And the most important is not that I stayed 14 years and we created what we gained, but most important thing is that now, leaving Cyprus, they are alone by themselves for eight years and this is my success. That they try to create without me, for eight years, and they do things better than me! So, this is my... Yes, this is... this is the reason I am happy!

OB: You gave them the foundations and you left something that they can take...

FT: Because I wanted to create people that try! I said Okay, learn, but don't repeat my mistakes. Learn from your own mistakes (laughter!).

New beginnings

Taking the position of the Director General at the National Library of Greece in 2014 was a new beginning, not just for Filippos, but for the country itself. During his service at the National Library, Filippos transformed the role of Director General to the one of the National Librarian. The difference is subtle, but substantial. In a country where disagreement is the norm, the consensus in the esteemed personality of Filippos was the exception. Filippos spoke vocally and often about the challenges he faced in the National Library, mainly the organizational and cultural ones. For each and every one, he had a clear proposal for resolution.

OB: And so that brings us up to the present day. So, what was the appeal of the National Library? And why did you want to come here?

FT: I had no reason to leave from Cyprus; the money, the salary was very good, and conditions in another way, even after the capital controls that Cyprus suffered; and many people lost their money, what they had in the bank. But the salaries kept in a very good condition. And I decided to come only for one reason: to support the National Library. I knew the National Library. And it is not arrogance, but, or how do you call it, but I knew that I could support this. Yeah... and how to call it, support this challenge. Challenge, because the National Library was for many, many years, neglected and did not play the role of the National Library, where in a country, like Greece, libraries were first developed and the information dissemination, the freedom of information, was from the classical era.

OB: The National Library was not at this national level.

FT: The national library was not in this rank, in this class of, in this level of... Imagine, when I came in for the in 2014 that were only 45 people, now we have 182 people. We are still very lower than the average of the small European national libraries. But it's okay.

OB: It's growth.

FT: Yes, it's growth. The budget was only €240,000. Now it's about €6.5 million, which is, uh, um... the collection is, it is a dual situation with the collection we have.... You saw some of them, we have some treasures, real treasures, rare, very beautiful books, and manuscripts and maps. But there are a lot of gaps in the collection, normal books that were printed 50 years ago or 20 years ago. We had not bought books for many, many decades. Not buying books! We collected the legal deposit from the internal production of books, but not the books published abroad concerning Greek civilization, which is our mission. In 2017, I and other people from of the administration of the library, suggested and passed a new law, a new act for the National Library. So, a lot of things were described and were foreseen for the development in the new level of the library, in 2017. Then we started to create the organization chapter and the statute, statutes that we call organization, which describes in more detail what are the departments, the directory the...

OB: You map?

FP: Not, you map... not only map, it is a piece of paper with a map also that describes the jobs of every department, of every ability...

OB: Okay, tasks, responsibilities

FP: ...and also, yes, responsibilities and also the qualifications that you need for staffing these people. So, this is ready, and this is mature, and we have submitted the second level of legislation, the law and then the organizational chart – is it strategic matter of the next 14/15 years. Let's see, here is the National Library of Greece's strategic plan for 2002 (displays plan on computer) which is a very detailed description, of three main areas of action which is, I can complete it here (using computer)... Three pillars: First, the completion of all the classic services of a developed National Library with modern approach. What I said, we have not yet the role of the National Library. We have done a lot of things, but we have to complete our collection, to catalogue the new collections and to find places for this collection. So, this collection, one collection, of course the libraries start with the collection. It's a prerequisite to be, that the library has something, either physical books, or a collection of e-books or information, digitized, etc. But they must have something otherwise, it's a place with no content. So, the content is the first, but we have the content, we have the problems of the staff to catalogue and then the place to put the collection. The second is to know what exists the country – whatever exists. We have made, I forgot to say we support the infrastructure for 32, all public libraries, all over the country to have their catalogue, an online catalogue, their OPAC, their users; we support 32 now and we are going to move to go to 40 libraries. Every year we increase by ten libraries. So, this is actually over to other libraries, the public libraries. So we have created a national union catalogue of this library. It's a demo. You didn't see it. I didn't show you it, but it's okay. It's a union catalogue. Let's see here.... The same, that's the union catalogue. Here you have about two million (shows on computer). It's a demo, not... But we, we have here to add these 30 libraries which is almost one million plus records, plus the university libraries, etc... But it's here...

OB: It's one of the pillars of the strategy to build this?

FT: Exactly, exactly, exactly, so...

OB: And this is the way you will do it.

FT: And the other is, as a National Library, we keep not only the written but also the digitized: the web content. It's some days that we have it, we have the archive of the Greek web. So, I don't want to delay but I hope to show to you, it's... I have to find this now (searching on computer). It's some only two weeks that they have...

OB: Okay. So, it it's a new service...

FT: Very, very new. But we collaborated with the Internet Archive. So, we have the Greek, uhm,...

OB: ...the Greek version of this.

FT: We have also collaborated with the University of Athens, in crawling the web, to have the text and the videos in our premises and elaborate them, either for computational linguistic purposes, or other. So, we have started a lot of things and we will continue. Another pillar is the consolidation of the leading role of the National Library among the Hellenic Library's ecosystem. We try to support them. We have created a National Library with all these 25 libraries. We support them by paying their education in RDA. RDA is Resource Description and Access, the new formats, the new protocols, the new role of the bibliographic practices by offering courses to more than 150 cataloguers from the academic libraries. And we paid for all of them. It's going to be that it is offering to train. And there are three, as I told you, there are three schools of librarianship and information science in the country, and we offer 50 licenses per university for students, to familiarize with the new RDA, the new trends in the librarianship. And working with the Lending Department, we want to create a prototype for the other libraries. Either with the recording studio or the others. And last, but not least, it's, if we do all these, we will be the Centre for Excellence for the Study of the Hellenic Civilization. But we have to have the people. We have to have the equipment. We have to have the collection. So, these are the three pillars for the moment. There are 128 projects described in a piece of paper. One page. This is the summary. And we try to find funders to finance these 100 plus projects. Can we find in the first, uh, ten million of this, for the next, let's say, three years?

OB: Okay. And what are some of the main challenges that you face trying to make this happen in the National Library? What difficulties do you have?

FT: A lot of difficulties there are.

OB: What's the main one...

FT: First, of course, there was the lack of space, lack of collections, lack of staff, lack of budget. But now we have the space. Okay, we need to expand, but we have the space. The budget, okay, we have the annual budget, but we want to expand it. So, we try. It's a challenge. We cover space. Umm, budget, the budget and the funding, but not yet staff. We need more staff. You cannot run the recording studios without recording technicians. And so, the challenge is to set up the National Library of Greece that it corresponds worldwide. What do I mean: when they were in the... when we were in the preparation of terms of transition from the magnificent old building to this building everyone would say "it's a big project, it's a great big project". Yes, it is, but it starts; it has a duration and it's completed. What happens within National Library, now starts the real development with the National Library. I tried to compare, to have benchmarks with other libraries. So that's why we need to be in the European, the international environment. We had the chance, the opportunity and happiness to contribute to the IFLA Conference here in 2019. So, to support, to be, to collaborate with the conference of European National Librarians, CDNL, LIBER, so we can take ideas, we can benchmark ourselves. We want to be very strict, because if we know what is happening, we can change what's happening. Otherwise, we cannot. The challenge is staffing. We have made this organization that permits the government to support us with qualified stuff. And this is documented. It's not only this, but they are written, you can see a page describing every single paper, every single... the budget, the cost, it is very much, well known. Now what we need is the way that all the decisions are taken, and now we ask for funding. I hope that we will find the funds to create this project.

OB: So, it seems like despite these challenges, you're really laying a foundation to tackle them long term. You know, to have this framework, have the requirements of the staff.

FT: Yes, yes, and it will be a combination of State support, through the annual budgets, stabilizing the budgets and supporting with staff and we try... and we will find funds from non-governmental organizations, philanthropic organisations, etc. Because of all these things have happened, positive things, we have collected an amount of about 180,000 books added to our collection. So, it's about one third of

the collections we already had, in four years. We found one third of the collection. So, nothing is impossible.

From national to international collaboration

Filippos appreciated the power of collaboration. There is strong evidence throughout his whole career of this. Perhaps the most accurate thing about collaboration was something that he once said: “in order to collaborate, you should be ready to compromise, to lose a part of your identity.” He knew that with this sacrifice, you would be led to new places that otherwise you could not see.

OB: You spoke about it a little bit there with collaboration, with IFLA and LIBER. Why is it important for your library to be a member of LIBER, in your opinion?

FT: Every library has to be a member of LIBER and of other similar organizations. Why? Because, first of all, the libraries cannot be considered as single post, single entities. They are part of the world grid, how to call it..

OB: Network...



Filippos Tsimpoglou addressing the plenary of the LIBER2017 Annual Conference. His keynote speech had the title “For Every Library Transforms: A National Library in the Research Landscape” (<https://vimeo.com/225075509>).

FT: Network, but it must be something that exists. And we all felt, first of all, our digital content. We have users from other libraries, and we gain from the collection of other libraries. What is called the Alexandrian library pattern cannot be valid nowadays. It is the collaboration; it is the complementarity of

the collections and of the functions. Complementarity in many, many elements. Originally, an academic library has to collaborate with public libraries because they have their users, other kinds of users, other audience, and they have the infrastructure. But because the libraries, also the public libraries, have the content. So, it's a complementary function that is included in the notion of 'Library'. Research libraries, or academic ones or the national, must be part and contribute to LIBER, because they will learn a lot. They can share their experiences, but then they can learn. I start with what Socrates said that: "I know nothing - I know only that I am aware about my..."

OB: "...the limits."

FT: "...the limits." So, by having a collaboration with others, you can learn more. And so, learning more about what is the library, what is happening, is one of the benefits. The other is more practical. I had in the past collaboration with members of LIBER in projects. So not only knowledge, which is very important. No, no -information is everywhere, but also projects that could be funded by organizations and be in collaboration with other libraries. So, this is the main thing. Knowing and realizing what you are learning.

A normal day at work

Filippos was able to organize big projects that were seemingly unmanageable. With projects that appeared unruly and awkward, he could bring them together with successful outcomes. Under the energy and enthusiasm, he could also make connections with people in a personal way, connecting with the employees he worked with on a daily basis.

OB: And then, maybe just coming back to your job, your every day: What does a normal day at work look like?

FT: Hmm...

OB: Does that exist?

FT: Yeah. Okay. Um... normal day. It's a full day. We start... I don't start with the emails, but with the calendar, because I try to prepare my day and collaborate with people. These things are much more difficult here because we have not a clear chart. Our organisation chart contains about 27 Departments, organized in seven sectors, and for the moment we have only six Departments. So, we have created several Departments, several Heads and try to work with them. It's a lot of work to go from the Director General level to the Director level, then to the Department Head level, and finally at the single, but active, member of the library to support him or her in doing his or her job and come back again and then move. It's a lift - up-down-back. This lift is a special lift, not only up and down, but also right and left, front and back.

OB: So, a three-dimensional lift - it goes everywhere!

FT: So, it's difficult... Okay, I have the willingness to support. So, meetings are a full all day, organized, trying to offer, trying to prepare something, say 10 or 20% of the whole thing and then give it. And then I say, okay, go! Then say that 10 or 20% of the whole thing comes back and that this is something that you have to be much better. And this is my..., when I see that somebody elaborated the first idea and created something not just more, but something magnificent, bigger!

OB: That's what you like to work with?

FT: Yes. So, the days is - calendar, meetings, preparation. Giving things and ideas and then waiting for getting back. Not only me, but all the people here have a load much more than they are...

OB: Everyone has too much.

FT: ...because of, of the numbers, because of the... We have a very wide area of activities that we try on. Plus, we must support the exhibitions. Here is an exhibition to attract new audiences. Then we want to have it in another city, to make another exhibition, or to have some lectures. And we will try to produce, after many years, this book (takes book from shelf) that was published in 1999 with the treasures of the

National Library.... We try to make a new editions, you will see, new publications because the National Library has to make publications.

OB: Mm. So, you, you have a lot of different things going on. I could see that from the tour and what you showed me from all the restorations, to music studios, and kids' areas, there's a big variation. So yeah, I can see why you have a lot to do...

FT: And we have some context. Okay, you have children here, but they want to read! Okay. How many you are? 50. Okay, let's go to the second floor, where there is a quiet area, and you can read. So, you can give the children's space, they can be happy and read, of course.

OB: And then one, where you're trying to create a centre for Hellenic knowledge . And then the next you walk downstairs and you're trying to keep the children away from people. So, others can be quiet.

FT: That's the people that come here to read the manuscripts or to study. They see the children and say okay, there is another world here. This won't do anything. And the people, there's more kids, and they are the future researchers for the general collection. So, we want to talk, for an osmosis to exist, but to the right a direction.

The transition

One of Filippou's key achievements was managing the transition from the old premises of the National Library to a new building that hosted a range of new services. The new building gave the National Library widespread visibility and upgraded its prestige. However, the building itself does not make a library, and in parallel to the transition he had to re-organize the Library, bringing its operation to the 21st century. Filippou truly respected the effort of each employee, and he believed that in order to 'build' the institution called National Library he had to develop cultured and trained professionals.

OB: Okay and then I have some questions about the building the new library. So, when did the library open - this building?

FT: In January of 18.

OB: 2018

FT: No, no. April 18, 2018. The books were moved here.

OB: Okay. And so, you started this position in 2014?

FT: Yes.

OB: So how, how was it managing that transition and how involved were you involved in that process?

FT: The whole building was funded by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, while the area was given by the Municipality of Kallithea to the Greek state. The Greek State permitted the building to be set up and the money was given by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation. Then, the building was finished in 2017. And the Stavros Niarchos Foundation gave its share to the State. So, now it belongs to the Ministry of Finances of the Hellenic Republic. It is public. And there are three different organizations. The National Opera, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre and the Stavros Niarchos Park, and the National Library. There are three ministries supervising: the Minister of Education, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Finances. And then there is the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre which promotes the idea of the children's library in our organization, but also helps us to have the support by the State. The Cultural Centre also makes many events, free of charge, mostly, So, three different Ministries and three different types of institutions under one roof. We are National legal entity of... oh no, no, no, public legal entity, not private legal entity. Then, it is interesting that there are three different statuses, there are three different institutions, and that we are still together and we collaborate, supporting each other.

OB: Yeah. So, this is about the organization. But how was....

FT: The organisation of how we would move? We were supported by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation; a part of the cost of the building was dedicated to this. They have granted €5 million to prepare our transition. So, we cleaned the collection, made an inventory of the collection, worked on it, created the first digital services, etc. and we prepared all these processes for moving from the old building to the new one. So more than 500 people, mostly outsourced people, supported this achievement. But we managed it. It took us about three years of preparation and three months of moving; every day! And seven days, no seven months to record the place that the.... But one hour after the move, the moving of the collections we were ready to open the library the next day. So, part of the preparation was the collaboration with people that were, I would say, the best in their domain. We had the support of external people, and of course the enthusiasm from the personnel of our own library. A small number, only 45, but they supported this aim. We made what is called internal training. We had about seven actions and more than 50 projects during the period of the transition. The staff had to understand what was happening and to learn at the same time. So, we created internal courses, more than 28, all these three or four years, that one of us or one of our collaborators explained what was happening, what was being supported, etc.

OB: Yeah, and what was the advantage of that, in the end?

FT: We learned what was happening! The problem was that most of the people were secondments, so that meant that they left. So, the knowledge, the know-how was lost; it went missing. So, this is the situation. It took me more than five times to develop a posters collection. First month, zero posters. Nine months after, four and a half thousand posters; in nine months. And then, no renewal of the tender. So, stop for a year, then find another person; then develop a 5 to 8.000 posters collection; then the secondment goes to back to the school, then comes back. This takes a lot of time to do with four different people in five years, for something that it could be done in a year.

OB: Yeah. Yeah. And you talked about your staff and then being trained and this interdepartmental learning...

FT: And this would continue during the COVID situation. Yeah, we made systematically about 16 internal groups through teleconference for all the personnel. And then we moved to tele-training the Greek municipal and public library personnel. So, we said to all: "okay next week, next month we have a seminar", hopefully spreading this experience to about 60 groups.

OB: So then thinking about your staff. If you could, if there was something you would like your staff to be trained on, they'll have more skills, what would you choose? Is there anything you think: "my team would be stronger if they had expertise in this?"

FP: We made certain members of our staff to participate in Erasmus+ programs. So, we have planned the training of a big number of our personnel, about 28 to 29 people to go abroad to learn in the next three years. And we made a plan; we know which country and which library they will visit. More and more, like the majority of them, are members of LIBER. But also, municipal libraries that are very well developed. But we are not only open to visiting, but I support the participation of our people in conferences as training. And this is a big number of hours that are spent. Not really in money, because of them are state funded, but in effort and participation. But I try to find the money for people to present something so that we are known to other people. It's another kind of training. Open your experience and learn by the others. So, we're a....

OB: ...and sending your staff to all the libraries: What do you hope they would bring back?

FT: To bring back their experiences and to understand that things are different and why; what we can see after filtering their knowledge and if we can implement what they have learned. Not without critique but, reasonable and feasible implementation. One of the results of the internal courses during COVID was that the electronic resources that we had got 300 million displays and some of them was from our own personnel. So, people from the departments started to search our own online resources and they learned about their own conservation. So new methods, new materials from the bibliography. I said, okay, the next step is to visit centres that are excellent in this kind of implementation, in the things that they do and the things that they make. So, it has a connection to that excellence.

OB: Yeah. And, and then as a, as a national library, you need to be some of your trusted centre of knowledge for the country and you need to represent something about Greek culture; Greek heritage. How do you deal with that responsibility as a national library?

FT: First, belonging to all the organizations that you referred: the Conference of National Libraries of South East Europe Directors, CDNL, LIBER, IFLA of course, etc. All the international networks that we have to participate, LIBER is included. We want to participate. But my effort was everybody to be in one, at least one organization, to be the ambassador of the National Library there. Also, collaboration with Universities in the United States, that are dealing with the Greek civilization, history, or literature, etc. And we started also not only here to organize lessons and trainings for people, for students, but also to be shared with Schools in New York, in the States, again through tele-conferencing, to participate under their instructional staff, in events even remotely. For us in English, hardly speaking Greek, but uh, so we have this kind of...

OB: ...the networks.

Ft: The networks, yes.

OB: So, then the answer to that is really about being involved, and being involved outwardly to, to promote...

FT: Yeah, you ask the way that we promote that?

OB: Yeah. But I asked you about how you represent the heritage. It's about having visibility outwardly.

FT: Yes. And you see most of the events are on the web, everything. The problem is not if we exist. We exist. But we have to promote our existence, to forward our existence to the audience. It takes time. We know that our starting is... we are in the beginning, still in the beginning. We feel we have a long way to go, even if we have done a lot already. But we have a long way in front of us.

The man inside the professional

Filippos was a very gentle man. A kind heart that was eager to help people. At the same time, he was a hardworking man, very dedicated, and these were the key qualities that gathered people around him. However, the solitary nature of the Director General's duties and the Atlantean burden of the tasks he quotes in this interview perhaps were fatal to his health.

OB: Okay, so I've asked you most of the questions about work and about libraries and things. But when you are not here, what do you do in your free time?

FP: (laughs) I should say...

OB: You laughed at the idea of free time, and, maybe, you're a busy man.

FP: Okay... passing the years, I see that, first of all, I used to make use of all my summer leave, all the years, everywhere. Because I thought that during the year having a break, being yourself, enjoying the life, can be enough to pass the rest of the year at work, even if I like my work, like I told you. But it was very simple. Being here it is very pressing, with time, and I didn't find the opportunity or the way to have my vacation.

OB: ... to have this break.

FP: Yes. Why, you ask me? Because this break gives you life. Missing this, it is much more difficult. So, the last 4, 5, no 8 years that I am here, I missed these vacations, these holidays. I was one that used almost zero sick leave, and 100% of the summer holidays, all the holidays that...

OB: Okay, so you didn't use any holidays?

FP: A few holidays, not much. While all the time before the National Library, I used to spend all the days that I had for vacation. And this was giving life from the beginning – regenerate! And I suggest to everyone to keep it. Now, my job... my passing time now. Some escapes, driving and going somewhere easily, some weekends, to see, to make small breaks... Not this big break...

OB: ...like, a break?

FP: Yes, but it is not the same. I don't want to speak about the last years for this dimension. Because I miss those days, the days we refill our life with energy.

OB: So, it's been a hard few years with this type of work?

FP: Yes, yes, yes.

OB: And then, maybe... when you have your next holiday, because it will come, what do you plan to do?

FP: This year! And I try to relax during the holidays. But I try to find archaeological sites to walk on them- and to see them. Because, mountains, or old.... well, my wife teaches me to discover old villages, old ruins from villages and to discover other eras of living, of the people!

OB: Okay, so you like history...

FP: ... history, yes! And uh, good company with people to discover ideas. But the environment is the vacations, and that people are relaxed and they leave themselves to express, really. So next time, journeys, trips, excursions, and archaeology. Yes, archaeology is something I like to understand, because it is about other dimensions and we think that we know everything, but a lot of things can be already done, said, written. And what is written is something that brings us very closely to the National Library's mission.

OB: So, it's all linked – even when you get away, you're still here.

FT: It's all linked!

We tried to keep the interview as close as to the character of Filippos Tsimpoglou. People who knew him will certainly recognize the way he spoke. We hope this piece provides a fitting tribute to Filippos; to both his work professionally and his warm approach with all those he met. He achieved many things in life. He has achieved one final thing for the afterlife: *hysterophimia*, the posthumous fame as the testimony of his virtuous life that our ancestors believed to be the outmost achievement. Karyotakis closes his same-titled poem with these lines:

*“There may remain behind us only the verses,
ten only verses of our own to remain,
like pigeons that shipwrecked scatter at luck,
and when they bring the message is already late.”*

Filippos will be missed. He is already missed.