

Bulgarian Library Associations and Lifelong Learning for LIS Professionals

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***Abstract:** The paper explores the role and contribution of the Bulgarian library associations in the development of librarianship in the country, in establishing a modern vision for libraries and librarians and their involvement in the information, educational, scientific and cultural construction of the emerging knowledge society. It is focused on the priorities in the work of library associations in response to mobilizing science knowledge and policy for sustainable development. The report tracks the development and operation of the Bulgarian library associations – Bulgarian Library and Information Association (BLIA), Association of University Libraries (AUL) – and other library consortia – Bulgarian Information Consortium (BIC) and National Academic Library and Information System (NALIS). The main goal is to systematize the achievements in the implementation of projects and initiatives of the Bulgarian library associations in an effort to be effective partners of LIS higher education (especially with the State University of Library Studies and Information Technology), in lifelong learning of LIS professionals. Research methods: retrospective and systematic analysis, desk research and critical analysis of the results. The article's conclusions are linked with the national cultural policy, library legislation and with the collaboration between library associations and LIS education system. The research investigates the impact of the library organizations' activities on the theoretical fields of library and information science and education and also on library practice.*

***Keywords:** Library association, LIS higher education, lifelong learning, State University of Library Studies and Information Technology*

Introduction

The library associations enable the consolidation of librarians, provide leadership and development of the profession, form a society's opinion on libraries and their modern mission, influence social and cultural trends in society and participate in dispute resolution. With their activities the library associations encourage interaction among library staff at the national level as well as international and intercultural dialogue with Europe and the whole world.

Bulgarian Library Associations – A Brief Review

The survey, by the methods of retrospective and systematic analysis, tracks the emergence, development and operation of the Bulgarian library associations – Bulgarian Library and Information Association (BLIA), Association of University Libraries (AUL) – and other library consortia – Bulgarian Information Consortium (BIC), the National Academic Library and Information System (NALIS) – and presents their structure and activities. The main goal is to systematize the current theoretical issues and concrete achievements in the implementation of projects and initiatives of the Bulgarian library associations in their effort to be effective partners of LIS higher education in lifelong learning of LIS professionals.

The first attempt to create a professional association of librarians in Bulgaria occurred on 17 October 1926. The Constituent Congress of the Bulgarian Library Union was held in the University Library in Sofia. It opened with

Vasil Klasanov's paper entitled "Goals and Tasks of the Bulgarian Library Union". The Union existed for a short time; attempts have been made to reopen it but without sustainable success.

Bulgarian Library and Information Association (BLIA)

On 13th March 1990 the Bulgarian library community established an association named the Union of Library and Information Services Officers (ULISO). In 2008 the name of the association was changed to the Bulgarian Library and Information Association (BLIA). The BLIA is a non-governmental organization of specialists in the library and information sector. It is a voluntary, independent professional organization that brings together professionals, united for improving library and information service and raising the prestige of librarianship. Members may be individuals or institutions who have the willingness to mark their interest in and support for the purposes and professional activities of the Association. BLIA's institutional members are divided into two sections: Libraries, and other organizations and companies. There are some sections: the American Experience for Libraries Section (founded on 3rd October 2004, supported by exchange programs of the US Department of State); the Bibliology Section; Student Affiliates Section; the Sociological Research Section; and the School Library Section (*Bulgarian Library and Information Association*, 2011).

BLIA's (2011) main tasks and priorities are the following:

- Representing the interests of BLIA's members in the implementation of the national library, information and cultural policies;
- Continuous working on the development of updated library regulations, relevant to the needs of different types of libraries;
- Assisting and encouraging the development of the library and information sector in Bulgaria in line with European and international standards and trends;
- Encouraging interlibrary cooperation;
- Participation in current national programs and initiating new programs and projects at local, national and international level;
- Providing support for enhancing professional qualifications and the continuing education of library and information specialists;
- Expanding and consolidating the Association's structure; develop BLIA's cooperation with the international library community;
- Developing publishing programs and stimulating research and sociological surveys on current issues in the field;
- Involvement in proactive public communication for: transforming the profile and standing of the profession; increasing the visibility of BLIA in the Bulgarian public sphere; attracting new partners in the country and abroad.

In 2011 three experts nominated by BLIA were elected to the IFLA Standing Committees' for Sections, for the 2011-2015 term (*Bulgarian Library and Information Association*, 2011).

Other library associations have also been established in Bulgaria – Association of University Libraries (AUL), Bulgarian Information Consortium (BIC) and "National Academic Library and Information System" (NALIS) Foundation. The basic aims of their activity is to increase the possibilities for information provision for science and education.

Association of the University Libraries in Bulgaria (AUL)

In 2000, on the initiative of the University Library "St. Kliment Ohridski", the AUL was established under its president Prof. DSc Ivanka Yankova. The Association of the University Libraries is a natural outgrowth of the joint work of the Board of Directors of the High School libraries formed in 1978 under the management of the University Library at Sofia University, and of the Board's work to build a united information system in Bulgaria (*Association of the University Libraries in Bulgaria*, 2011). The Association of the University Libraries in Bulgaria contributes to improving and developing the library-information services in the sphere of higher education in Bulgaria, to the consolidation of the professional community of university libraries and to the consolidation of their active role in the information society. The basic aims which the Association of University Libraries is striving to realize are protection of the common interests of the university libraries in deciding questions of status, place, finance and transformation into digital libraries as a significant and necessary component of the development of higher education on the road to European integration. The AUL achieves its goals through project management, lifelong learning programs and training, best practices implementation, consultations, conferences and seminars, database presentations, publications, etc. (Yankova, 2008).

Bulgarian Information Consortium (BIC)

The BIC has the mission of providing the best information resources at the best possible price to the Bulgarian users, applying high professional selection and criteria and offering the best services. Its goals are the following (*Bulgarian Information Consortium*, 2011):

- To support and encourage the use of information resources in Bulgaria;
- To meet the information needs of the Association's members and their users;
- To negotiate preferential financial terms for the use of information resources for all Association members;
- To encourage further development of information services provision through training, additional qualification, public relations and other appropriate means and methods;
- To foster the co-operation, resource sharing and exchange of experience between the members of the Association.

The Association achieves its goals through:

- Popularizing and distributing information resources by marketing analyses, training and fund raising policy;
- Establishing and keeping productive contacts with vendors, publishers and corresponding organizations in the country and abroad; Negotiating preferential financial terms and conditions for its members;
- Organizing promotional sessions for introducing the public to the electronic databases and their functionality;
- Keeping its members informed about the latest trends in digital information dissemination;
- Offering a wide range of activities to support collaboration among the members of the Association and improvement of the services and information packages offered.

National Academic Library and Information System (NALIS) Foundation

NALIS Foundation was registered as a legal entity of a non-commercial character on April 15th 2009. The activities of the NALIS Foundation are organized around a large-scale project supported by the America for Bulgaria Foundation. The founders are: Central Library of the Bulgarian Academy of Science, Central Library of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and Library of the American University in Bulgaria. The NALIS Foundation was launched to answer the growing need of Bulgarian society for the following (*National Academic Library and Information System*, 2011):

- Functional integration of the library and information systems and catalogue registers of the research institutes, universities and some bigger book repositories;
- High awareness in the field of research and scientific activity;
- Application of up-to-date information service models meeting world standards;
- International cooperation in the field of the library information and communication systems.

Library Associations and Public Relations for Popularization of Lifelong Learning Activities

Table 1 summarizes the use of Public Relations (PR) tools of the Bulgarian library associations to achieve their goals and objectives in lifelong learning programs.

As Table 1 shows, all four of the associations have their own web sites. They organize conferences, carry out projects, educational and lobbying activities as well as publishing and disseminating press releases. On the other hand, only two of these associations, namely BLIA and BIC, use social media for PR and only BLIA carries out national campaigns.

National campaigns carried out by BLIA in the period of 2006-2011 are listed below:

- 2006 - Library – Investment in the Future
- 2007 - Libraries – our Shared Responsibility!
- 2008 - Libraries on the Agenda!
- 2009 - Library – Information and Communication for All!
- 2010 - Modern Library – your Right!
- 2011 - Libraries – Partners in Education!

Table 1. Library associations and their public relations activities

| PR Tools | BLIA | AUL | BIC | NALIS |
|---|------|-----|-----|-------|
| Conferences | x | x | x | x |
| National campaigns | x | - | - | - |
| Web sites | x | x | x | x |
| Social media (blogs, Facebook etc.) | x | - | x | - |
| Project activities | x | x | x | x |
| Press releases, bulletins, publishing (print and e-version) | x | x | x | x |
| Educational activities | x | x | x | x |
| Others (lobbying, media coverage, etc.) | x | x | x | x |

This new direction for the activity of BLIA follows the experience of the American Library Association (ALA), shared in the framework of the project American-Bulgarian Library Exchange (ABLE - <http://www.ableportal.bg>). BLIA also organizes a campaign called “Reading Marathon“ which has been held annually since 2006 as a part of the national campaign “Reading Bulgaria”. In this initiative libraries from all around the country take part and Bulgaria participates in the celebration of World Book Day in this way. World Book Day, celebrated since 1996, was initiated by UNESCO in recognition of the crucial role of reading and education for personal development.

A number of successful projects have been carried out by the Bulgarian library associations. We will mention some selected projects of BLIA and AUL, which have had an important effect, both for the lifelong learning activities of the associations and their members and for the society as a whole.

Selected BLIA National Projects

Access for persons with disabilities to electronic information in Bulgarian libraries (2005-2006, British Council Bulgaria, www.libsu.uni-sofia.bg/project_access/); legislative framework for libraries and library and information activities in Bulgaria (2006); Management of public libraries (2008, British Council-Bulgaria); Bulgarian Libraries – access points to information and communication for all (2008 to date, part of the Global Libraries Initiative of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BLIA is one of the key partners, <http://www.glbulgaria.bg/en/>); advancement and sustainable development of the library sector in Bulgaria (2010-2014, supported by the America for Bulgaria Foundation).

BLIA is also a partner in the following international projects: American-Bulgarian Library Exchange (ABLE, 2003-2006, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. State Department, IRIS, Colorado Association of Libraries); CALIMERA (2005, Cultural Applications: Local Institutions Mediating Electronic Resource Access); PULMAN Network (Public Libraries Mobilising Advanced Network); ENTITLE (Europe’s New Libraries Together in Transversal Learning Environments).

Selected AUL Projects

The University libraries – center for scientific and culture communication, bridge to the unified European educational space (European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008, http://www.aub-bg.org/ey2008/index_en.html); partner of the State University of Library Studies and Information Technology in the project “Developing a network of continuous education centers for librarian organizers, serving the small local communities” (2008-2009, PHARE); the international project ‘Danube Seniors’ Universities - DASUN 2011, <http://www.dasun.eu/>; Centre for General Scientific Education of the University of Ulm (ZAWiW der Universität Ulm), etc. In 2011 AUL was co-organizer, together with the State University of Library Studies and Information Technology and Bourgas Free University, of a Conference with international participation on “Library and Cultural Management and ICT” (September 3-4, 2011, Bourgas).

A summary, Bulgarian library associations apply rich PR techniques and approaches for effective interaction with the LIS higher education institutions, professional community and to strengthen collegial relationships at national and international level.

Models of Collaboration in Lifelong Learning

The first sustainable model of cooperation is the Center for Continuing Education for Librarians (CCEL) at the BLIA which was founded in 2001, in cooperation with the Department of Library and Information Studies and Cultural Policy at the Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski'. The Center provides opportunities for professional qualification and continuing education for graduate specialists with bachelor's or master's degree.

CCEL is a focal point for continuing professional qualification in library management, management of information resources, services and staff; introduction of new technologies and their application. The range of programs is designed to supplement and expand the knowledge and skills of university graduates in Library and Information Studies.

The Center for Continuing Education for Librarians (CCEL, 2011) offers training for:

- library managers, librarians, information specialists with bachelor's or master's degree, working in different types of libraries;
- graduate specialists with bachelor's or master's degree, working in other institutions;
- librarians from the methodological departments of regional libraries, who provide consulting services and training for small libraries' staff in their regions.

The curriculum complies with the current trends and standards in library and information service. It comprises the following modules: Management for library leaders; Library marketing and communication; Sociology of reading and readers; Library programs; Collection management; Cataloguing; Library services; Training of library users; Technologies in libraries; Foreign language training for librarians; and Cultural heritage (CCEL, 2011).

In 2004 the Center for Continuing Training in the State University of Library Studies and Information Technologies was established. Among its activities we would like to underline the Project "Developing a Network of Continuing Education Centers for Librarian-Organizers, Serving the Small Local Communities" (1st June 2008 – 1st June 2009), Project PHARE, Program of EU "Economic and Social Cohesion". The project was realized under the management and vocational training guidance and capacity of the State University of Library Studies and Information Technologies (SULSIT), together with the Association of the University Libraries (AUL) in Bulgaria and with the support of the Union of the Chitalishta¹, Sofia. It had the mission of helping the unemployed persons from small towns and villages to become librarian-organizers and to adapt the trained people to the new reality of the Bulgarian membership in the European Union by means of initiatives for lifelong learning. Thanks to that vocational training they can develop and exploit the local potential – cultural, historical, ethnographical. The project assures preparation (training) assistance for improvement of the employability skills and chances of the members of the local community with respect to the local, regional, national and EU market. It helps to lessen unemployment thanks to training and reorienting some unemployed persons to new activities.

The specific objective of the project was to establish a network of continuing education centers for librarian-organizers in small local communities through development of existing adult training centers and implementation of the new information technologies in the educational process for the specialty "librarian-organizer". This was carried out by SULSIT, AUL and chitalishte "Razvitie" in Drianovo, chitalishte "N.Y.Vaptsarov" in Dulovo and chitalishte "Razvitie" in Elhovo. This partnership guaranteed both high quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of the proposed project action and continuation of the activities envisaged in the project after its actual completion in the specified time (Stoykova & Todorova, 2010).

Conclusions and Suggestions

Library associations carry enormous potential to increase the competence of professionals on current topics, concentrating their efforts on solving problems and inspiring many followers in the direction of useful public purposes.

By tracking the emergence and development and in-depth analysis of the lifelong learning activity of the Bulgarian library associations, namely BLIA, AUL, and other library consortia and associations, namely BIC and NALIS, we reached the following conclusions:

- Library associations are an important factor in the continuing lifelong education of library specialists; they are the intermediary that carries theoretical achievements, knowledge and leading experience to practicing

¹ Traditional community centers.

librarians. This makes them “trainer associations”, “educating library associations”, and their natural partners are the higher educational institutions;

- The emergence, development and activity of library associations BLIA, AUL, BIC and NALIS are very important for the presentation and promotion of the activities of Bulgarian libraries. With their activities they unite and activate the library, museum, archives and information institutions in the process of building the information society and community, based on knowledge;
- Analysis of the programs and themes of their conferences, seminars, workshops and initiatives gives us a summary for the assessment of current problems, of the solutions achieved to modern theoretical and practical issues and the specific achievements of libraries in the way of implementing EU policies to build a single European information and educational space;
- Associations are active in developing the basic problems of information society: digitization, preservation and provision, free and equal access to online European and world cultural heritage; information legislation and protection of intellectual property; modernization of LIS education; development and application of information technologies, etc.;
- With their activities the library associations promote intercultural and international dialogue and encourage interaction with library communities in Europe and the world.

Suggestions for best practices:

- It is necessary to have a partnership with state and local authorities in the initiatives of the library associations to make a real impact that can benefit the society;
- Realization of coherent Public Relations strategy – continuous and effective in order to make the efforts and activities, mission and objectives of the library associations visible and recognizable to the community;
- To build stable relationships with other cultural institutions – museums, archives, galleries in order to develop the implementation of new information technologies in preservation, digitization and ensure access to cultural heritage for society;
- Library Associations should be engaged in tangible initiatives, which are current in the library and information sphere in certain countries and in the whole world and which contribute real benefits to the society;
- Library Associations must be open and linked in networks on national and international levels. They create the stable library international community which spreads the best world practices and achievements to every researcher and practitioner in the library and information field.

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