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Information tools – integration into the librarian profession

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ABSTRACT: The improvement of Information Technology (IT) in the last two decades has led to many changes in Library and Information Sciences. The librarian profession has been challenged in many areas. In relation to these changes, a new type of source has recently been discovered – information tools. There is a wide variety of tools used in IT that serve different purposes, depending on the specific area of IT. They are usually associated to the business needs, but libraries can also benefit from them. The aim of this paper is to present two information tools, designed to support librarians and the achievement of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals – the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Library Map of the World and the European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations (EBLIDA) Matrix. Each of them has a specific purpose and needs to be popularised among librarians and guided in its use in order to be effective. As part of PhD study ‘Libraries and future information ecosystem’, an online survey was conducted among Bulgarian librarians. Thanks to the survey results, the paper explores some ways how these tools can be integrated into the work of Bulgarian librarians, so that they can be effectively involved in the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

KEYWORDS: Sustainable Development Goals, information tools, librarians, Bulgaria, IFLA Map of the World, EBLIDA Matrix

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INTRODUCTION

The Internet and new technologies for communication and exchange of information create a prerequisite for achieving good results in the field of library services. This is possible through the timely exchange of experience and sharing of good practices from libraries around the world. The need for physical isolation as a result of the spread of COVID-19 led to changes in the conduct of a number of events, which were transferred to the online space. Thus, many forums, round tables, discussions, conferences, etc. started to be held in a hybrid mode or completely online, which contributes to the possibility of more and more interested people participating. Also, this way the information reaches more people. Online meeting platforms (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Webex, etc.) offer multiple possibilities - for recording, for feedback, for access from any device, anywhere in the world, at any time.

It is extremely important that Bulgarian librarians actively participate in this modern method of communication with their colleagues around the world. In this way, large-scale projects can be carried out in partnership easily, affordably and with the possibility of low-budget participation. This paper emphasizes another aspect of the benefits of this dynamically changing environment – the opportunities for free use of tools developed for the benefit of libraries by international organizations. These new ways of communication also facilitate the ability to collect information, which specialists from the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and the European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations (EBLIDA) analyse and make available to libraries worldwide.

METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted by analyzing information from the official web pages of the tools - IFLA's "Library Map of the World" and EBLIDA's "Matrix" and other documents related to the benefits of integrating them into the work of Bulgarian librarians.

Analysis has been carried out between June-September 2023 as a follow up on the research work done for the PhD study 'Libraries and future information ecosystem' (2019-2022) and as part of project titled, "Study of Attitudes to the Therapeutic Potential of Reading in Atypical Situations for the Individual". The empirical part of the PhD study led to the conclusion that Bulgarian librarians are very poorly informed about the opportunities they have for communication and participation in different activities on international level. This conclusion inspired a deeper view on these two information tools, which appeared in the PhD study as examples of innovative and useful for the librarians.

The paper is presenting the two information tools – what is available on their websites, how they gather their information, who can use it and why for. Also, the research is interested in their relation to the achievement of the 17 UN SDGs.

There are several studies led by Bulgarian LIS scientists such as T. Todorova (2014a,b), L. Parizhkova (2014), I. Peteva (2015), O. Harizanova (2010), etc. which are related to the problems Bulgarian librarians face with their integration to the international librarian community. These studies have been considered during the current research to show the necessity of different approaches for informing and involving the Bulgarian libraries to the modern international communication.

RESULTS

Libraries actively use their collections, educational programs, exhibitions and collaborative projects with citizens to give visibility and information about the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals. The good news is that many libraries - often without realizing it and without naming it explicitly - are already working towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

To make the efforts of Bulgarian librarians more effective, it is recommended to become familiar with and use good practices from libraries around the world. The tools presented in the paper are extremely

significant precisely in the direction of raising awareness. They provide an opportunity to better understand the importance of libraries in achieving the SDGs and to provide specific guidance for each library.

LIBRARY MAP OF THE WORLD

The World Library Map (see Fig. 1.) is a valuable tool developed by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) designed to collect evidence and demonstrate the importance and value of libraries around the world. The map allows access to different types of information: how many libraries a country has; how many of them offer internet access; how many registered library users there are in the country and how many visits are made; number of borrowed library materials per year, etc. The information available from the Library Map is a clear way of demonstrating how well libraries are being used, and quantitative data can be interpreted in reports, petitions and presentations. In addition, there is much qualitative evidence showing how libraries around the world are supporting the SDGs.

Fig. 1: IFLA (2017).



Libraries are leading organizers and providers of free access to all types of information for all citizens. To show the potential of the global library community, the World Library Map includes all types of libraries, including national, academic, community, school and special. The initial

set of performance indicators includes number of libraries; libraries providing access to the Internet; employees and volunteers; registered users and visitors; number of borrowings.

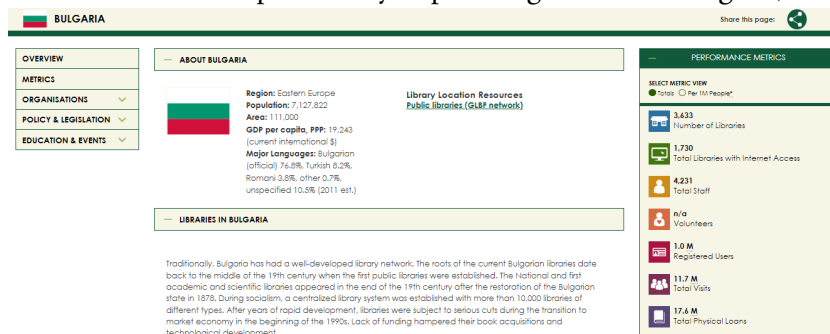
As an advocacy tool, the Library World Map is also a platform providing access to SDG stories, demonstrating how libraries in different countries contribute to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and serve as partners in meeting local development needs (Library 2017).

Data is collected through an annual survey conducted between April and the end of October. IFLA selects a partner for this purpose - a national library association, national library or other institution in any country in the world to link and collect aggregated data at national level. The survey questionnaire is available on the Library Card website in three languages.

The webpage of the Map can be accessed in seven languages – Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Russian, Spanish.

The tool offers different types of selections – one of them is by country – for the purposes of the research Bulgaria was targeted (Fig. 2.) The tool provides brief information about the library network of the country and performance metrics, which are showing different categories due to the data provided from the survey.

Fig. 2: Library Map of the World – About Bulgaria (Resource accessed 23.06.2023: <https://librarymap.ifla.org/countries/Bulgaria>)



EBLIDA MATRIX

On the website of the European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations (EBLIDA) the so-called Matrix of EBLIDA (see Fig. 3.). It provides information at the service of European libraries - how they can get involved in the implementation of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This Matrix provides information on each of the Sustainable Development Goals in the following areas:

- Selection of EU programs that are suitable for libraries;
- Library policy;
- Possibilities for financing the library;
- Main indicators;
- Library Indicators.

Fig. 3: EBLIDA Matrix (2023).



The EBLIDA matrix works by considering that the mission of libraries is not only related to the collections stored in their buildings and on their servers. Libraries must respond to the needs expressed by

the communities with which they interact. They must work within a framework in which economic, social and cultural objectives are aligned and united in a clear and definitive direction. This framework is the UN's Sustainable Development Goals initiative, which was adopted by all UN member states in 2015, and is a common blueprint for peace and prosperity, now and into the future.

If, for example, a library operates in a context where there is a high level of pollution and/or a political commitment to eliminate plastics. Its task is not to set pollution control policies in motion - there are specialized departments and research centers responsible for this. But libraries can disseminate information and create awareness among users about the problem and possible solutions. They can initiate or collaborate on citizen science projects and be examples of a Green Library themselves.

A sustainable society is above all a matter of lifestyle. Therefore, libraries, which claim to be places of meeting and socializing, can be instrumental in turning malpractice into virtuous behavior.

According to the EBLIDA page, the information in the Matrix is updated on an annual basis. In this way, librarians and professionals can use it as a compass: to shape national, regional library policies in relation to SDGs perspectives; as a banner: to raise the profile of the library, projects to be submitted to European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF); as a calculator: to assess to what extent libraries' performance corresponds to Eurostat's sustainability indicators (EBLIDA Matrix, 2023).

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As part of PhD study titled "Libraries and future information ecosystem" an online survey was conducted among Bulgarian librarians. The nature of the empirical research on the topic "Library specialists in Bulgaria and the changing information ecosystem" implies the use of a method of direct communication with the respondent group of Bulgarian library specialists as its object. The survey aims to investigate the level of awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals and the changing global

information environment among professionals working in Bulgarian libraries. The aim is to identify gaps in awareness and define the needs of professionals for better ways to access information about new trends in the changing information ecosystem and the opportunities for information professionals and users to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development goals. The target group of this study are librarians from public and university libraries in the country. The survey card contains 22 questions and is distributed to respondents via Google Forms between February 5 and March 30, 2022. The questions are accompanied by suggested possible answers. 18 questions are mandatory, but all have the option of a neutral answer. There is an opportunity to mark more than one answer for six questions, and only the last one has a free answer and is optional. The preparation and drafting of the questions were done in accordance with the objectives of the study and the specifics of the targeted group. The survey is completed anonymously, respondents have the option to enter the institution they work in as an answer to the last question. The survey card was sent directly to about 500 email addresses and spread through specialized groups in social networks. Respondents were invited to complete the form three times within this period. The result achieved before the survey was closed is 200 complete responses. According to information from the Bulgarian Statistical Institute from 2019, the total number of people working in the libraries in Bulgaria was around 1200, so the respondent's percentage can be considered reliable.

The data has been processed using typical statistical methods and presented using diagrams. The results of the survey are presented separately for each question and analysis was done based on them and on the theoretical chapters of the PhD study research.

In summary, the research establishes an unsatisfactory level of awareness regarding the new trends in the library and information sector described in the IFLA Trend Reports (2013, 2018, 2019, 2021) on the main guidelines for the development of the information society and the relationship of libraries to the UN SDGs. This reflects on the ability of Bulgarian library and information specialists to effectively apply modern methods in serving user needs, as well as to implement long-term changes

in the direction of modernizing the library institution. The survey results showed a low level of awareness of the professionals in relation to these instruments and the institutions behind them. This statistic led to exploration of different ways of how these types of tools and the information from the international institutions and organization can be integrated more effectively into the Bulgarian libraries. Here are some of the observations:

- Stimulation for participation in different international discussions, forums, projects etc., so the professionals can share ideas and see how the libraries work on the achievement of SDGs in other countries;
- Websites contend translation to Bulgarian or language courses for the library employees;
- Building a platform for library professionals titled “Libraries and future information ecosystem”, which collects multiple data from different sources (national – ministry websites, governmental documents, Bulgarian library association etc., and international – organizations, federations, associations such as IFLA, EBLIDA, Liber, also European council, different university library websites etc.) and providing field for the Bulgarian librarians to share information, discuss different topics and ask questions.

CONCLUSIONS

According to T. Todorova, the rediscovery of the importance of libraries and librarians in modern times is through the quality performance of their key function - of active partners in professional guidance, training and personal development in a networked environment with the three main pillars - access, retrieval and evaluation of information. For the implementation of the new concept of the library, the role of information is leading, considering the diversity of information carriers and the virtual nature of a large part of the information flow, created and exchanged in the conditions of the modern information ecosystem (Todorova, 2014a).

It is extremely important that Bulgarian librarians show professional curiosity and take active advantage of the created and working international tools for librarianship. Such are the “Library Map of the World” maintained by IFLA and the EBLIDA “Matrix” discussed in the present work. Their integration into the work of Bulgarian library institutions would lead to a few new ideas and potential improvements in the sector.

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