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THE BULGARIAN PUBLIC LIBRARIES HELP THE CITIZENS OF THE MUNICIPALITY

The economic infrastructure and the social conditions in Bulgaria change rapidly. Therefore new problems arise in the society. The most significant of them are the unemployment, the changes of technologies and/or occupations; movement and migration of people; the invasion of foreign sects. At the same time the participation of the government and/or the parties in the public life decreases. However the priority change is expected to be in the mind of the people. They must cope with the changing situation in this new situation. The librarians in Bulgaria also have to be able to take the initiative, to be inventive and creative as to the choice of forms of services to the readers. In this regard it is required from the librarians to get closer to the everyday problems of the citizens in the municipality.

In order to solve the above problems we have to answer several questions. First of all we need to specify the concrete everyday problems, the citizens search information about. Second we have to determine the sources and the place of such information. Then we have to decide how to organize and to store it. Most interesting thing in this process is the utilisation and the preservation of this information. For the purpose students from the State Higher Institute of Library Studies and Information technologies were engaged. A pilot group of students was entrusted with the task to research the above problems in different places in Bulgaria. They have to interview readers in public libraries about their problems in the capital city, in one regional city and in several small villages. Then the students have to check up which reference questions are asked in the public libraries and find out which information resources are available at the related libraries. The study is concentrated mainly in two areas—education and labor and employment. The results are not representative for the country, but only show the tendencies of the existing problems and possible decisions to be taken.

In various municipalities different issues of the day, that worry the citizens were found, for which solution the proper information should be established and used. For example in the very small villages there was a need about addresses information of services of different firms for repair, medical help available, for teaching languages in the cities. The

questions, which were asked depended also upon the region, where the public library was, and also from the age of the people. Some of the questions were about how to grow vegetables and to look after animals in the private farm. Others were interested in addresses of firms for computer and languages learning. In small and in medium size towns interest was shown in finding a job in the country or abroad, also questions about where to find a place for requalification for a new job or activity. In the big cities the real issues concerned the prevention from crimes or the problem with the narcotics. The general problems of all citizens were connected with their families (the raising of the children, their bringing up and education); the search for a job and the training for a new job; also problems, connected with services outside the library and need of new legal information in different fields.

It was interesting to find out if the citizens would search the needed practical daily information in the library or elsewhere. In Sofia was found, that the women and the men have a different attitude toward the ability of the library to help them in solving their problems. The women were more active than men in using the information sources at the library. Men preferred to search solutions other ways. The women asked mainly for legal information, also for some reference editions or journals. The older women searched also information about health and alternative forms of medical treatment. The younger women were interested in the library information, connected with their education and tourist information or how to continue their education in a foreign country and where to find a job. Most of them think that the library must have CDs with information and an Internet access to bigger libraries or the the web pages of the government. Most of the women and half of the men didn't know, that the library has also economic information. More readers of the libraries confidence in the information, published in the newspapers. In some of the public libraries the above ratio is 80% from the women and almost 60% of the men. Most of the customers in Sofia didn't expect from the library to give them addresses of firms for different services. In fact they can easily find such address information in all central newspapers.

It was found, that the practical questions of the readers of the regional public library were concentrated in the search of legal information; reference books and addresses of firms for services. All various questioned readers had an interest on economic information, also in finding regional projects for employment, for explanation of tax or labor questions. There was a great need of information how to find a firm for improving the computer or language skills. Some of the women were

interested to find addresses of firms for health or cleaning and other services. The women were more active in the search of new practical information in the regional library, than the men.

Thereafter *we have to ascertain which from the searched sources can be found in the libraries, how are they organized and stored.* In the smaller public libraries in Sofia mostly books and newspapers were found. There was a lack of new reference editions, especially on practical economic topics, such as tax law and rules; social insurance; single entry book keeping; about the customs regulations and duties; how to manage a firm; business correspondence in different languages; even an up-to-date book on marketing. There was a lack of books on alternative medicine, although there is a wide choice of such books on the book market. There was a lack of new and practical journals on topics of interest to young women. We couldn't find an address file or directory books from the type "Where to go? Whom to ask?", although there are such directories in some areas – for example there are brochures on "Where to study in Sofia; in Germany: in Europe: in the world." There was not an Internet access to sources for practical information, although such information exists in Bulgaria. In the regional library we found much more journals, newspapers and books on practical information than in the small public libraries in Sofia and in the villages. In some of the regional libraries the librarians make even address files with records for the firms in the community. They have also Internet access and well organized department, where information for the community is being gathered and updated.

All the existing practical information, stored in the library was organized in a traditional way – the books and the brochures were on the library shelves. Some of the books couldn't be found easily, without the help of the librarian. In the regional library existed an on-line catalogue and in the smaller public libraries a traditional catalogue. We found, that there were not enough instructions and signs, which could be of help for finding a specific community information. This fact explained also that some of the readers didn't know about practical information, existing in the library, while others have found it with the help of the librarians.

After the research the students at the State institut of Library Studies and Information technologies have to develop similar files on selected from them subject matter on practical problems. Such files were for example – "Currency rates"(made for the City library in Sofia); "The Sex – what have to be known about Sex"; "For the make-up and fashionable accessories for young people; (both for teenagers); "Privat establishment

institutions”; “Social insurance”; “The healthy way of living”; “Forms and institutions for alternative medicine”“Where to study foreign languages in Sofia?”

At the same time and in connection with frequently asked questions we discussed some problems with the deputy Minister of Labor and Social Affairs and with representatives of the Information centre of the Ministry. They have recommended us a list of companies, approved by the Ministry for sending and organizing Bulgarians to work abroad. They received with thanks our proposal for including questions and answers column for ordinary citizens on the webpage of the Ministry. They agreed also to include in the web page information about local small-scale projects.

As a result of the research we can draw following conclusions:

- More and more people in Bulgaria need various kinds of practical daily information for their business or living. In addition they need also a tailored to the living in the community information, a part of which is difficult to find. They need also a governmental information, including about the negotiated regulations in different practical areas between the European Union and Bulgaria regulations in different practical areas, in which they work. (for example for products like meat, cheese, vegetables and others). Therefore there must be an Information center in a library for such needs in the municipality.
- The public library is a suitable place for this service. There is a collection of free information media such as reference books, journals and newspapers. Public libraries have a specialized staff, which is trained to answer reference questions. Furthermore their staff is much more polite than state employees in the municipality. They can serve the readers much faster than the office holders. They can give introductory information about every practical question and could be of help where to go next, if they have additional files with addresses of firms, persons, agencies or on frequently asked topics, available outside the library. These files must be related to the special local conditions and possibilities.
- To be more effective in answering the reference questions on practical topics the librarians must be prepared to organize the reference collection in a more practical way. Furthermore they must search for additional addresses, including addresses of Internet sources. They must be in contact with local people, groups, companies and institutions in order to gather from them a new local information, that can't be found easily elsewhere. After that they

must develop the found information more transparable, to put appropriate signs and instructions for the readers. In addition they must be more precise regarding the messages in the mass media. The community information on daily problems need to be frequently up-dated.

- After the establishing a community Information center the librarians must advertise the new service in the local society. They must be more active as to point to the local authorities the kinds and forms of their relevant service. That can be used to prevent library's budget cuts by authorities.
- Finally the librarians can create a web page and/or a weblog, where they have to announce interesting practical local news to the people in the community. If they don't have computers in the library they can point to the new interesting practical information, using different forms. It is important to show to the citizens in the community, that the librarians think about their problems and are prepared to help them to find a solution, finding an appropriate first hand information for each case.

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