



The Library Grows With Me! Summer School for Young Romanian Librarians

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Abstract:

While libraries around the world are reinventing themselves, in Romania many libraries are only now beginning this journey. Also, cooperation and collaboration among library professionals is a desideratum not yet achieved. The new professionals, after being exposed to obsolete LIS curricula, armed with very few practical applications, enter into hierarchical and rather conservative organizational cultures, where experimenting is rare and promotion very difficult. This debut can result in losing motivation and changing professions.

*Acknowledging that continuous professional development opportunities and cooperation among professionals are top requirements for healthy library systems, IREX together with ANBPR initiated in 2010 a **Summer School for Young Professionals**. The aim was to identify committed young librarians and to encourage*

their involvement in the development of the public library system. 17 librarians from 10 counties aged 25 to 34 were selected based on self-sustainable project proposals to be implemented in their communities. The Summer School was organized as a non-formal place for learning and sharing. During 6 days of training, notions of communication, networking, advocacy and community outreach, basic project management, fundraising, new media, team-building and team-working were debated via workshops facilitated by librarians and community development professionals.

This paper will analyze the process, resources involved, lessons learned and current results of the initiative. We will start with a few considerations on how and why the library system, especially the public libraries network needed this intervention by giving a short overview of Romanian libraries past and present, positive facts and general challenges of the system. Then we will discuss challenges for young professionals and describe the Summer School for Young Professional as a possible model for engaging librarians in the professional environment, and a possible premise for the start of national network for new professionals in Romanian public libraries.

Introduction

The library system in Romania has had a long tradition, quite similar to other European libraries: the history of Romanian libraries goes back up to the Middle Ages, when monasteries and churches used to shelter those few books that have been published so far. While education system got stronger, so did school libraries, leading to the emergence of the public libraries: in the second half of 19th century some education libraries were opened to general public use. So, by the end of the 19th century Romania was in line with developments of its European neighbors, and efforts of creating a generic library law for all the Romanian Provinces were present. But this young emerging system was destined to cross troubled times: during communism regimes (1945 – 1989), not only that a strict political censorship was applied to new publications, but also library collections (together with their keepers) were expurgated. Libraries, especially public ones, were used as communism propaganda instruments, and no investment was brought in the development of a healthy library system.

Professional education for librarians was officially established in 1920s and was completely interrupted in 1960. For 30 years, until the rebirth of LIS education in 1990, there was no professional education for librarians in Romania. The lack of professional education, combined with the general political pressure, the complete isolation from international development in LIS were all factors that contributed to the poor performances of the Romanian library system.

After the long and dark age of communism the library system has been for the first time established on modern standards in 2002, when the library law was passed, as a result of the advocacy efforts made by library organizations, especially the National Association of Librarians and Public Libraries in Romania (ANBPR). According to this

law, the national system is structured in six categories, based on the functions and attributions each type of library has: by the end of 2008, the national statistics for libraries were: *4 National Libraries*: the National Library of Romania (<http://www.bibnat.ro>), the National Library of Education "I. C. Petrescu", the National Military Library, and the *Romanian Academy Library* (<http://www.bibacad.ro/>); *105 university libraries*, including the 4 central university libraries in Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Iasi and Timisoara; *787 special libraries* of public and economic institutions; *2930 public libraries*, of which 42 are county libraries¹ (including the Metropolitan Library in Bucharest), municipality, town and commune libraries and over *8,533 school libraries*.

Public Libraries in Romania

Public libraries in Romania were simultaneously neglected during the 50 year communist period and isolated from international counterparts at a time of great change in the library sector. Although Romania has initiated a process of political and economic modernization in the post-communist era, the country is still faced by a range of challenges and library reform has only recently begun to receive national attention. As a result, public libraries in Romania today are not appealing to the general public (only 10% of the population have visited a public library in the past year), and the role of public librarians is limited to traditional services such as book circulation and organizing cultural events.² Few public librarians have formal training, and those who do studied under a university curriculum in need of reform.³ Presently, there is neither a coherent national strategy for library and information issues, nor a widespread understanding of how libraries can benefit society. A massive cultural shift needs to occur for librarians and libraries to establish themselves as valuable, modern institutions.

As the crisis hit Romania, the number of public libraries decreased: by the end of 2009, there were 2919 public libraries serving a population of 21,430 million, and the total number of Romanian libraries is 12,229.⁴ According to the Library Law, each community - county, city, town or village - must have a public library for all the citizens in order to ensure the open access to information and all kind of documents, to lifelong learning and individual intellectual development, irrespective of social or economic status, age, sex, political affiliation, religion or nationality. Romanian public libraries are financed by local public authorities, but may also receive financial or other support from private individuals, as long as they meet their fundamental objectives and mission.

¹ Each of Romania's 42 county-level libraries (including the municipality of Bucharest) provides methodological support for local public libraries in that county, but funding for libraries is allocated on a local level. National policies related to public libraries are under the coordination of the Ministry of Culture; policies related to librarianship qualifications and training are under the Ministry of Education.

² Serbanuta, C. (2008). Do Romanian libraries have a future? *Community Informatics Lab Notes* (University of Illinois GSLIS), 9. Retrieved from <http://www.ideals.illinois.edu/handle/2142/8862>

³ Rapeanu, A.C., & Doinca, C. (2007). *Education for Library Professionals in Romania*. Retrieved from <http://www.inforum.cz/pdf/2007/rapeanu-anca.pdf>

⁴ According to The Romanian National Institute for Statistics - <https://statistici.insse.ro/shop/>

The role of Romanian public libraries is changing lately: more than a “resource room”, the public library becomes a social center, a place for both youth and elders to find the information they need, to use the facilities freely offered to them. As resources are very limited, quite often public libraries in Romania partner with different NGOs, other public institutions - such as schools, universities, foundations, associations etc. - to improve their cultural offers and services, and to answer the need of literacy, professional guidance and intellectual development.

As presented earlier, public libraries in Romania face many different challenges, ranging from not having proper buildings to hiring qualified and motivated staff, from coping with difficult financing mechanisms to general legal framework, including unsatisfactory career opportunities and unsuitable organizational cultures for young professionals. There is still a lot of resistance towards new technologies and innovative approaches among librarians; new methods are difficult to introduce, and, though it's years now since professionals acknowledge the necessity of customer-oriented libraries (meaning customer oriented staff and services, altogether), there's still much to do in order to have a library system able to fulfill its role, that of efficiently facilitating access to information and knowledge for all citizens.

Beyond the inherent problems of the times we live in, Romanian librarians are facing two difficult problems: the first is based on the economic and social development and especially on the financial crisis, whose repercussions on librarian's incomes are considerably; the second one comes from the inside. Especially young librarians face the problem of self-identification within the profession. This is because the educational system does not give enough attention to this profession. The absence of formal education in librarianship has a tremendous impact both on the quality of professionals in the field and in the public's perception of the professional statute and roles of librarians in Romania.

By definition, public libraries have encyclopedic collections for all types of users; because of this reason, and because of the 30 years when LIS education did not exist, within Romanian libraries we may find librarians with various backgrounds, literates and philosophers, historians and engineers, etc. Even though the Library Law provides a minimum of 5 percent of the annual budget of the library to be spent for professional training, sometimes it is not enough. Thus, in short time, it became quite difficult for young librarians (and not only for them!) to accommodate the profession, to undertake and identify themselves with library issues. For a young professional being librarian is a difficult job, with many challenges related primarily to her/his own mentality, but also to the collective one. She/he must overcome the fears about her/his professional abilities, then attempt, through continuous professional training and consistency to evolve.

Since 1990, after communism was abolished, there were some efforts in the library field, which addressed professional issues from different perspectives, and had different degrees of success. But we can say that the most extensive and comprehensive effort in this domain has been the implementation of Biblionet, a 5 year long program for

access to information funded by Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, as part of their Global Libraries Initiative.

Global Libraries has its origins in an extensive program which was initially designed for the U.S. public libraries. The U.S. Libraries Initiative goal was "ensuring that if you can get to a public library, you can reach the Internet". To achieve this ambitious goal, the program took two main directions: equipping public libraries with computers and Internet access, and providing librarians with the necessary skills to efficiently assist patrons, acknowledging the importance of libraries as community hubs, and of librarians as community facilitators. As the success of this program was significant in the U.S., Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation decided to open this opportunity to others, and form partnerships with select developing countries that demonstrate the need and the readiness to help public libraries provide free access to computers and the Internet, and training on how to make full use of these tools. Global Libraries is committed to help libraries in the process of evolving into vital tools that can advance the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. *"The vision of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is to bring about effective, sustainable public access to information and communication technology in libraries for people in developing and transitioning countries who would not otherwise have access, and to ensure it is useful and used in ways that improve people's lives and spread the benefits"*. Since then, Global Libraries became a large community; at present Global Libraries programs are implemented in 10 countries: Chile and Mexico, Botswana, Vietnam, Lithuania and Latvia, Poland, Bulgaria, Ukraine, and Romania.

Biblionet – The World in My Library!

In Romania, the name of the Global Libraries program is Biblionet – The World in My Library. It is a five-year development national program funded by Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and implemented by the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX)⁵ in partnership with major national and local organizations: the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, the Ministry of Communications and Information Society, EOS Foundation (Educating for an Open Society), the National Association of Librarians and Public Libraries in Romania (ANBPR)⁶, Intuitext⁷ and Romanian public libraries.

⁵ International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) is an international nonprofit organization providing leadership and innovative programs to improve the quality of education, strengthen independent media, and foster pluralistic civil society development. Founded in 1968, IREX works in more than 50 countries with a staff of over 500 professionals worldwide. IREX is the implementer of Biblionet and Bibliomist, the BMGF funded Global Libraries Programs in Romania and Ukraine. <http://www.irex.org>

⁶ The National Association of Librarians and Public Libraries (ANBPR) was founded in 1990 to provide professional direction for libraries and the library profession in Romania. <http://www.anbpr.org.ro>

- over 3,000 individual members, 38 chapters in nearly all of Romania's counties (41).
- representing Romanian librarians' interests on a national level, conducting training in new areas, publishing professional development materials and advocating for changes in national policy.

⁷ Intuitext is a Romanian producer of educational software.

Biblionet supports the transformation of public libraries into places where citizens can come together, inform their lives, and contribute to community discourse. Four primary objectives support this goal:

- Equipping more than 2,000 public libraries with technology so citizens have better access to information.
- Training over 3,000 librarians in how to use new technology to provide better services to library patrons and establishing up to 41 new training centers for librarians across the country.
- Helping to develop the organizational capacity of the National Association of Librarians and Public Libraries (ANBPR) to advocate on behalf of libraries and librarians.
- Fostering government support for the recognition of the essential role of libraries in a modern society.⁸

Biblionet will enable Romanians to get free access to information, by stimulating the development of a modern public library system in Romania, helping libraries respond to the needs of local communities by providing training courses for librarians and by introducing IT in the libraries, as part of a partnership of IREX, the National Association of Librarians and Public Libraries in Romania (ANBPR), local public authorities and libraries nationwide. Biblionet national program was launched on the 23rd of April 2009 – on the same date as the celebration of the National Day of the Librarian in Romania. To this date 920 libraries were already equipped, and more than 4400 computers are already available for public use. Also, about 1200 librarians received training in basic IT skills, and 37 professional training centers were established in county libraries. As part of the sustainability strategy, 80 librarians went through a Training of Trainers program, as one of the Biblionet's objective is to establish professional development centers accessible to all public librarians, in the respective county libraries (by the end of the 5 years, each county will have a fully equipped training lab, with 2 trainer librarians).

The Summer School for Young Romanian Librarians

Throughout the first year of full implementation of Biblionet, IREX has gained a much clearer picture of the strengths, weaknesses and needs of the Romanian public library system. Therefore, IREX applied the savings from the first year to strengthen and enhance program areas in which further investment will result in the greatest long-term impact for the sustainability of library reform and development.

One of the biggest challenges for Biblionet is the lack of professional training opportunities for librarians. Few public librarians have formal training, and those who studied do an obsolete university curriculum, which is highly theoretical. So far, the professional educational offer for public libraries specifics is either poor or inefficient. The experience of both pilot project and first year of Biblionet has shown that Romanian librarians have the capacity for change, and are willing to do so when presented the

⁸ Biblionet program website. <http://www.biblionet.ro>

opportunity. Librarians need opportunities to develop their skills if they are to move broad policy, service, and sustainability discussions forward. Having worked with Romanian librarians for nearly two and a half years (the 18 months of the pilot program are included), Biblionet has repeatedly seen that librarians, when given access to resources ranging from information to funding for equipment, have the capacity and the will to innovate and refashion their libraries as places for community building, to advocate and collaborate for common purposes. Acknowledging that continuous professional development opportunities and cooperation among professionals are top requirements for healthy library systems, IREX together with ANBPR initiated in 2010 a Summer School for Young Professionals. The aim was to identify young librarians who are committed to the profession and able to act as change agents among peers, and to encourage their involvement in the development of a modern public library system in Romania. To achieve these we envisioned 3 main objectives:

- to encourage proactive and innovative initiatives of young professionals in public libraries;
- to encourage young professionals to be active in professional associations and other professional organizations;
- to create a proper framework for networking and sharing, innovation and collaboration among young professionals.

Through participation in the Summer School for Young Professionals of Public Libraries a group of select young librarians was to develop new skills and added-value knowledge such as: leadership abilities, basic project management skills, advocacy and communication, understand and get involved in professional association's activities. The Summer School aimed to create the proper environment for networking and sharing, using a format especially designed for young professionals, to enhance their abilities to advocate and create active partnerships which will contribute to the development of their carriers, and of the library system, in general.

Selected librarians were exposed to a creative and inviting environment for interactive learning and sharing, encouraged to identify problems and opportunities within the profession, and design action-plans to address them. The Summer School was organized as a non-formal place for learning and sharing. During 6 days of training, various topics were discussed, during guided workshops, training sessions and Q&A sessions, coordinated by professionals from libraries and from community development organizations.

When we stated to design the Summer School, we described the audience as 15 to 20 Junior-level to Middle-level professionals (who have not worked in libraries for more than 5 years) currently working in public libraries. We envisioned 3 types of action plans to be put in practice by the librarians when they return to their libraries using what they learned during the Summer School Program, and an agreed-upon process for tracking the progress of the projects:

- Proactive and innovative action plans designed and implemented by young professionals in public libraries; 5 – 14 initiatives/projects based on community needs;

- Increased awareness of the importance of active involvement in professional organizations and practical projects to be implemented; at least one project to be implemented by a team of 3-5 librarians, to solve one of the problems/fructify one of the opportunities identified within the professional association framework;
- Increased knowledge and professionalism among the participants and a strengthened professional network; increased awareness of the importance of networking and knowledge sharing, active partnerships, and being active in the regional and national library communities – at least one project to be implemented by a team of 3-5 librarians, to solve one of the problems/fructify one of the opportunities identified.

The call for applications was launched on the 14th of May 2010, and advertised on different professional channels: biblionet.ro website and forum, Biblos – the professional discussion list of Romanian librarians, ANBPR and other professional associations' websites and blogs, and through other relevant partners, such as county libraries and county chapters of the Association. The information package describing the process and application templates were posted on biblionet.ro website and forum, as the official source for information. A Q&A topic on biblionet.ro forum was made available to address related issues, answer specific questions and explain the process.

Application submission was opened for 30 days, starting June 1st; forms were received exclusively by email; correct submission of applications and eligibility were checked and confirmed by e-mail, no later than 5 working days from receive. Incomplete forms were not considered for selection. Application package consisted of resume, letter of intent and a self-financed project proposal; for all these we provided templates to be used. Evaluation criteria for pre-screening were:

- Demonstrated leadership potential;
- Willingness and demonstrated ability to share what is learned with peers;
- Communication skills;
- Willingness and demonstrated ability to work as team members;
- Demonstrated interest in library issues;
- Commitment to attend the program and related activities;
- Basic project management skills;
- Innovation and creativity, and solution-oriented attitude.

Submitted application forms were to be analyzed and scored by IREX staff, and then a mixed committee was to be formed, with representatives from the library association, community development professionals from Romanian NGOs, and speakers selected for the training period. The way we first envisioned the process, with a national two-steps selection, would have been appropriate for the situation in which we would have received more than 40 applications. We were prepared to select 25 - 30 candidates for final phase of selection. When submission deadline arrived, we discovered our expectations were too high in terms of number of candidates: we only received 18 eligible applications. We discussed this unexpected result with different partners from the library field, to better understand the low number of applicants. As in Romania public institutions are in the process of restructuring, the law prevented libraries from hiring

staff for the last 3 years. Also, we encountered another unexpected problem: no applications from small rural librarians. We draw our conclusions, and decided to go further.

We adapted the selection process and were ready to evaluate applications. Our aim was to choose 15 strong candidates out of the 18 applicants. This was not an easy job, and, after scoring applications (4 IREX representatives with different backgrounds were part of this process – a librarian, a capacity building specialist, a media specialist and a training specialist) we found out we only had 12 strong candidates. The other 5 had different strong points, and we could not agree on which 3 of them to exclude. Only now the idea of forming a more heterogeneous group (in terms of background and current level of professional and personal skills) aroused. We calculated the risks and decided it is an experiment that we want to proceed with.

One of the applicants had to withdraw, due to medical problems, so we finally had a group of 17 young librarians coming from 10 counties, with ages between 25 and 34. All of them are women and the vast majority is working in county libraries, only one came from a small town library and one from a communal library. Their expectations were quite different, as their professional specialization was quite heterogeneous. Also, their project proposals, which were to be implemented after the Summer School in and for the communities they were serving, with their own resources and/or fundraising efforts, varied very much in themes and approaches. As we started reshaping the “curricula” for the 6 days, we also had to take into consideration the budgetary limits. Though financing was not an issue in itself, our intention was to create a sustainable model that will be taken over in the future by the ANBR and the “graduates” from the Summer School.

Our initial estimates for the budget were:

| Budget line | Number of units X Cost/unit | Total (USD) |
|---|---|--------------------|
| Equipment | Laptops, video projector all available | 0 |
| Accommodation & meals for participants | 20 persons X 8 nights X 65 USD/day/person | 10.400 USD |
| Accommodation & meals for speakers & facilitators | 6 persons X 8 nights X 80 USD/day/person | 3.200 USD |
| Transportation costs for participants | 20 persons X 65 USD/person | 1.300 USD |
| Transportation costs for speakers & facilitators | 1 international travel = 500 USD 6 persons X 50 USD/person = 300 USD | 800 USD |
| Speakers' fees | 4 persons X 200 USD/day | 800 USD |
| Training folders and promotional materials (office supplies + t-shirts) | 25 persons X 20 USD/pers. | 500 USD |
| TOTAL | | 17.000 USD |

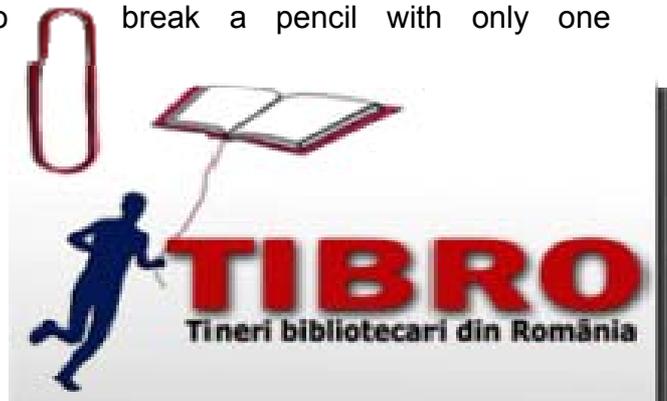
One of the solutions for these constraints we were facing was to make all efforts to co-opt in the Summer School different resource persons from inside and outside the program (Biblionet friends) to volunteer as trainers/facilitators for each day of the Summer School. This way we also were trying to explore resource-persons' availability for pro-bono training. And we succeeded! By the end of the planning adjustment phase, the Summer School budget was 11.000 USD and we have respected that number.

After analyzing in depth the expectations of the 17 future participants, we established the main focuses of the 6 days of training:

- **Day 1 – Advocacy and networking**, hosted by IREX Advocacy Officer, Daniela Drăghici;
- **Day 2 – Communication**, hosted by PR specialist, Alina Jantea from DC Communication (a PR Company);
- **Day 3 – Professional associations and professional networking**, hosted by Monica Avram, board member of ANBPR. We had also two Skype video-conferences, one with IREX DC Program Officer, Meaghan O'Connor, about how ALA is working for/with young professional and one about professional networks available online, with Claudia Șerbănuță, PhD candidate at the University of Illinois, one of most active bloggers about librarianship issues in Romania.
- **Day 4 – Innovation in libraries, hosted by IREX (Anca Râpeanu & Cristina Văileanu)**. We also established two Skype video-conferences followed by Q&A sessions with Morten Findstoem, from Copenhagen City Library and Heikki Marjomma from Helsinki Public Library, Library 10 about innovative services provided with low resources/funds and a lot of creativity. Some of the services ideas that appeared from conversations were:
 - The laptop doctor – putting the IT specialists working in library to the use of the community;
 - The beach library – more the principle of going with the library where your users are
 - Puppets show – puppets built by children for children from re-usable materials;
 - Music/gaming night in library – the focus was on creating the proper atmosphere – video & online gaming, but also cardboard gaming.
- **Day 5 – Basis of project management and fundraising**, hosted by Ruxandra Sassu, Mădălina Ene and Georgiana Gavrilă, from PACT Foundation⁹;
- **Day 6, morning – session for the readjustment of the project proposal submitted by participants** with the assistance of the PACT Foundation and IREX representatives, in the light of the new knowledge & abilities acquired during the week.
- **Day 6, afternoon – outdoor team building activities** (treasure hunt) to foster the team work and create more powerful bonds, as well as to highlight a constructive competition between participants.

⁹ PACT is a Romanian NGO active in the field of community development and social economy, working mainly in rural areas of Romania for the development of community organizations and community enterprises.

To increase the effects of the Summer School, we combined various methods: we had interactive trainings with information and dynamic group exercises (how to build a tower out of 16 spaghetti and one marshmallow); we had presentations and facilitated workshops; we even had motivational sessions, to help participants overcome personal obstacles and gain self-confidence (how to break a pencil with only one finger); we practiced together the 2 minutes-message, and had role-playing for fundraising activities; we exposed them to best-practices from advanced libraries (such as Copenhagen Public Library¹⁰ and Library 10 from Helsinki¹¹), but also to Romanian successful projects, (such as efotografi@mea, the photography club in Vrancea County Library¹²).



The participants were a dynamic group, and by the end of the week a real team started to form. They liked very much the idea of developing a professional network of young librarians within the ANBPR and embraced it from the first day of training.

So, by the end of the Summer School, they already had a name: **TIBRO – Tineri Bibliotecari din Romania** (Young Librarians in Romania), a common purpose - *TIBRO group goal is to build upon innovative potential of young librarians in Romania - and defined objectives: to facilitate the exchange of ideas, information and best practices among young librarians; to collaborate in developing joint projects, actions and initiatives; to increase the visibility of young professionals in the Romanian public libraries.*

Also, they left the Summer School having a clear idea of the platform and content they will create and use as the main instrument of communication and

„The Summer school was a wonderful experience, first of all due to the new connections we formed, then to the well-prepared trainers and the relaxed environment which motivated us to work as a team.” Raluca Nutiu, Mureş County Library



“I liked the role-playing and real-life situations simulations we made; we learned from our mistakes. I appreciated very much the part about communication, but also the friendships we started and all the ideas we shared.” Ioana Chiru, Braşov County Library



¹⁰ <http://www.copenhagenet.dk/Index.asp>

¹¹ <http://www.lib.hel.fi/en-GB/kirjasto10/>

¹² <http://efotografiamea.bjvrancea.ro/>

promotion of their ideas and experiences – after training hours, almost each evening, they'd gather on one of the rooms and work on the blog's structure and distributed responsibilities for creating content. Their hope was to use the TIBRO blog (<http://blogtibro.wordpress.com/>) also as a tool for recruiting new members/contributors.

When we conducted the post-training evaluations, we were happy to see that every single participant noted two things that they learned and are going to use in their work from now on:

- how to work in a team and as a team - the benefits of team working and being active in a professional network;
- the importance of and how to do an assessment of the community needs before developing any library service/project.

We left the Summer School location with a commonly agreed plan:

- by October 1st, participants were to finalize all the readjustments/modifications to their projects, with IREX's assistance (if needed);
- by October 1st, participants wanted to have the blog online with at least one post per decided category;
- during the last week of each month, they will report online about the progress of their individual projects and about any collaboration between them (if it would be the case) on Biblionet forum, but also on their blog;
- October 1st 2010 – March 20th, 2011 was set as implementation period for projects;
- After the implementation phase, the best 5 implemented projects will be presented by their coordinators during the ANBPR spring conference (April - May).

As described earlier, the Summer School projects were self-sustainable (no financing for them was available through the program). Also, the projects should start implementation in October 2010 and be finalized by the end of March 2011. Projects had to be focused on community needs and innovative (either in topic they addressed, or in the solution they proposed). In the planning phase we decided that, by the end of implementation period we needed to have at least 5 proactive and innovative action plans designed and implemented; also to demonstrate increased awareness of the importance of active involvement in professional organizations and groups, we needed at least one group project to be implemented (by a team of 3-5 librarians), project meant to solve one of the problems or fructify one of the opportunities identified within the professional association framework; as for checking professional growth among the participants and a strengthened professional network, as well as increased awareness of the importance of networking and knowledge sharing, active partnerships, and being active in the regional and national library communities, at least one project to be implemented by a team of 3-5 librarians, to solve one of the problems or fructify one of the opportunities identified.

So far, this is what figures show: we had 17 young librarians participating in the training; one did not respond to any appeals afterwards, one had to decline the implementation of the project for personal reasons (she got accepted in a PhD program in Germany and had to leave the country). From the 15 left, all started implementation on time or with very small delays; 8 finalized their projects as planned and the other 7 are in different stages of implementation. We can consider that we fully met this goal.

As for the implemented projects, they can be roughly grouped in categories related to target audience or subject of the community need, including: projects that reached out to vulnerable groups (IT training for the visually impaired, in Iași; support group for children with speech difficulties in Buzău) or underserved population (Bookmobile services for children in rural localities in Suceava county, in localities there are no public libraries; movie screenings for children in rural localities of Dolj County, where the library are not properly equipped for these types of activities); outreach projects (access to library collections for tourists in Suceava hotels); projects which resulted in creation of relevant online content; projects for educating and informing the community on different specific issues (encouraging volunteering in Vaslui; against Roma discrimination, also Valsui; promoting local history and architecture heritage in Târgu Mureș; organizing a “human library” for Brasov citizens); projects for entertainment and leisure (reading club for seniors and children activities in Craiova); and projects for professional development. Most of the proposals were a mixture of two or more of the above categories.

In all cases, the young librarians were enthusiastic and ready to give their best, despite their relative lack of experience in project management. Most of the projects needed more time than initially planned – this is one of the big lessons all our young colleagues learned the rough way: that planning thoroughly before can save precious time. Though in most of the cases they had to overcome their colleagues’ reluctance, and spend extra hours performing tasks that were completely new to them, librarians took full responsibility and went on with their projects, no matter the obstacles, and continued activities.

Case studies

1. Title of project: Reviews Library, implemented by Vaslui County Library

Project Coordinator: Mihaela Trifan, librarian

The project focused on better promotion for the library collections, using an online platform for reviewing books to make them more appealing for library users and any other potential readers from the community. Vaslui County Library has not used before book reviews as a marketing instrument but also as an instrument to attract more children and teenagers to read more.

Book reviews are not currently used as an instrument to stimulate reading in Romanian public libraries. Libraries are not used to promote online their new acquisitions, although the majority of the Romanian County Libraries have websites. The project was built on the opportunity of promoting new acquisitions and providing a „glimpse” of their content in the online environment. The project targets library users and potential users who want to be informed online about the library collections and about new acquisitions. The guiding principle of the project was: the user is searching for the information, but also the information can find its user.

*To reach its goal, the project tried to promote the library collections and attract new clients using online tools never used before in the library (e.g. creating **Pagini de Biblioteca** Facebook page), and making the information accessible online through online communication and awareness raising activities, especially targeted to children and teenagers, to stimulate them to develop the habit of reading.*

During the 6 months of the project the following activities were planned and organized:

- *developing a webpage for book reviews, integrated in the library website (<http://www.bjvaslui.ro/paginidebiblioteca/>) containing 70 book reviews by the end of March 2011. The webpage is promoted through a dedicated Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1719596331&sk=wall>);*
- *creating and editing a 28 page printed Catalogue with reviews and information about the library collections, where they can be found in the library, targeting users with no internet access – 50 copies distributed in public places in Vaslui (schools, public institutions, shops) – available also online at <http://www.bjvaslui.ro/paginidebiblioteca/files/catalog.pdf> ;*
- *developing a data base with email addresses of users to keep them informed about library news and to distribute the Catalogue – by the end of March the data base had 200 email addresses;*
- *organizing a Collages Contest for children and teenagers to promote reading and stimulate their imagination and creativity – 89 participants from 7 local schools, aged 10 to 17, 21 collages and 8 awards (books).*

The resources used were mostly the internal resources of the library (equipment and

office supplies) and quite numerous human resources (colleagues who were persuaded to join the project team). The total cost of the project was about USD 450, out of which USD 300 (books and office supplies) came as sponsorships from local companies.

The biggest challenge for the project coordinator was to readjust her initial expectations to the reality of a Romanian library, facing budgetary and personnel cuts. Although the project was supported by the library director, and the coordinator managed to keep involved 8 more colleagues, they only manage to develop 70 book reviews out of 150 initially estimated, and they didn't succeed in creating the newsletter they planned for promoting the library collections (to be distributed regularly to the library users by email).

However, we can consider the project successful and easily replicable as the objectives were achieved, at least in terms of developing new online tools for marketing library collection, especially new acquisitions. The webpage with reviews is practically a work in progress, as new reviews are going to be uploaded. As well, this year the coordinator wants to continue and develop the newsletter.



“In the “What I’m Sorry For...” Chapter I’ll include the fact that we couldn’t create the newsletter, and having only 70 out of 150 book reviews. It’s a good lesson for me, as I initially had to big expectations. I had to adjust things on the way, but I also added some: for example the Catalogue was supposed to be only with reviews, but with my colleagues help I added also descriptions

for the collections available in the reading room, media and multimedia collections. But we are going to continue this project. For me the 6 months represented more than building a new system for my library, and I think I managed to do this. I’m very happy with what I’ve finished my first project! And the team that I managed to put together was wonderful: everybody worked with passion, sometimes long after the working hours.”, says Trifan.

2. Title of project: *The library becomes alive!, implemented by Toplița Municipal Library*

Project coordinator: *Viorica Lazăr*

The project idea was born from the need many librarians expressed in different occasions: as the library is an important cultural al information hub in a community, it should provide a wide range of cultural activities for the community members. Unfortunately, the lack of resources prevents libraries from hiring professionals able to organize, mediate and facilitate this sort of diverse activities. Though there are librarians who are interested to get more involved, they admit they need more help in designing and managing activities to attract more users.

*As a response to this need of professional development, **The library becomes alive!** project aimed at organizing and delivering an online training on cultural animation and management. The two main objectives were:*

- Provide online training and support for at least 15 librarians who are members of the National Association of Public Libraries and Librarians in Romania;*
- Improve the new skills by practical exercises during workshops.*

The direct beneficiaries of the training were 19 librarians from Harghita and Covasna counties, who benefited from online and offline sessions, and gained new theoretical and practical skills.

The course used two approaches to reach its goal: for the theoretical support, a course support was created and posted online on the project's blog: bibliotecaanima.blogspot.com. The 19 selected librarians had to go through the 8 modules of the course (new modules were posted on the blog bi-weekly). The group used as a communication tool a Google group; for each module the librarians had practical exercises and "homework" to do. For this first component, training materials were created pro-bono, and existing resources were used (computers and internet connection of the library). Most of the library staff was involved in organizing and delivering training (5 of 6 librarians). The practical approach consisted in organizing a workshop in February, which involved fundraising activities, as covering costs for accommodation and meals for some of the participants was necessary. All costs (approximately 300 USD) were covered by partnerships with ANBPR Harghita Branch and Toplita Cultural Center.

Although in planning phase all communication for this project was supposed to be performed online, by blog, Google group and e-mailing, the heterogeneous level in IT skills of the 19 participants became a challenge for the organizers. Support documents (on how to use blog accounts, or Google group documents) had to be created, and supplementary information had to be provided by phone. Also, there was no feed-back from trainees, although all platforms allowed easy communication between organizers and trainees.

The biggest challenge for the project was organizing the workshop – all partners were fully involved, and the feed-back strategy was revised: instead of waiting for it, organizers asked for it, using a very simple satisfaction questionnaire. As over 70% of participants were happy with the training format and content, the project can be considered successful, and recommended as a low-cost professional development alternative to be organized at a county level.



It is said that a picture makes up for a thousand words. Well, here's one from the February workshop: the lady in the middle who can't stop laughing is Melinda Bedo from the Harghita County Library, one of the trainer librarians 100% involved in the project.

3. Title of project : *We grow together, implemented by Children Section of Buzău County Library*

Project coordinator: *Iulia Irimia*

The project addresses the need for social integration observed among children with speaking deficiencies, which often are introverted, and tend to be marginalized by their colleagues in kindergartens and schools. "We grow together" project is based on a partnership between the library and Buzău Speech Therapy Center and the main goal is to develop interest for knowledge, enhance intellectual capacity, diversify communication means and increase inclusion of children with speech impairments in different socio-cultural environments.

To achieve its goal, three major objectives were established: promote reading to children with speech impairments and modify their attitude towards information; increase school performance and develop their communication skills; and increase their participation in socio-cultural local events.

The direct beneficiaries of the project were 10 children aged between 4 and 9 years. Activities started in mid-November and included weekly meetings between children, librarians, volunteers and parents. Meetings were arranged every Friday afternoon, from 5 pm to 7 pm. For the entire project period one librarian was involved permanently in the activities, and another one helped with the organizing. Necessary resources, such as computers, video projector and sound system, DVDs and books existed already, and the librarian covered herself the costs of needed extra stationary (approximately 50 USD). All activities were organized in the library by the 2 librarians working in the Children's Section, in close cooperation with speech therapist and physiologist from the center. Activities with children included story-time hours, movies screenings, presenting books, discussing read books and advising new readings, discussing themes proposed by children and parents, games to develop practical skills or speech improvement. Also, children were invited to participate in all activities and cultural events organized by the library.

The project was appreciated by children and their parents or grandparents, who often chose to spend the 2 hours in the library, either as participants in the meetings, or as regular users. One of the challenges of the project was the attention span of the kids:

the librarians had to be very creative so as to prevent the meetings from becoming dull and loose the children's interest. To get the kids ideas and involve them, each time they met they would vote for one of the alternatives of activities that they could be part of. Though the project initially aimed at 15 participants, they started as a group of 5 and got new members on the way. The limited number allowed librarians to keep the participants as one group – if more were to come, they should have doubled their efforts and organize 2 groups, which would have meant twice the effort and resources.

During project implementation, the attitude change among participant children was visible: Before the project, though they has similar problems and followed similar therapy, the children had no group activities and did not know each other. Creating the opportunity for them to meet in a safe place, to see that other kids have the same difficulties they face, getting them involved in games and discussions resulted in a more opened behavior, better self-image and self-esteem, which lead to a change of attitudes from others, like teachers or school colleagues.

Bianca, or "Bianta" as she calls herself, a 5 year old girl who can't pronounce "C" correctly, was the first one to say that she really loves coming here, to see the "little books". "Our intention was not to work on their speech problems – they do this at the Center. What we tried to do was to show them that they are not alone, that other kids have the same problem, and that they deserve and receive attention. What is important is that they found a place where they can be themselves, a place where nobody loughs at them when they speak. Our meeting functioned as a support group for them, and I am glad that though the project ended, they sometimes come to say "Hi!" when they return from school or kindergarten." says Irimia.

TIBRO blog

One of the non-expected results after the first edition of the Summer School for Young Librarians was the TIBRO blog, as the online platform of the Summer School participants, but also for the newly created professional network of young librarians.

The structure of the blog was developed during the breaks and evenings of the Summer School, and all the participants contributed with a lot of enthusiasm. The structure is the following: General Information; News from My Library (projects and initiatives from libraries); Ideas' Notebook (project ideas, solutions to specific problems); Resources; Professional Development; Summer School 2010; Funding Opportunities. The blog is available at <http://blogtibro.wordpress.com/>

A new logo for the network was developed and the blog was available online starting with October 2010 and by the end of the year the average number of posts per month was 12. However, during the first 4 months of 2011 the number of posts drastically decreased at around 2 posts per month. Part is due to the contributor's busy schedule with their daily tasks in library and finalization of the projects. But part is due to the decrease of the enthusiasm and dynamism generated by the Summer School participation.



To address this IREX is working with the ANBPR to find the best ways in which to keep the contributors engaged. We are hoping the by publicly recognizing the added

value of the projects implemented by participants and awarding the best implemented ones at the ANBPR Spring Conference, as well as keeping them engaged and involving them in the planning and organization of the 2011 Summer School, at least the most active ones (around 8-9 persons) will regain their enthusiasm and confidence and continue to contribute to the blog and increase their efforts to recruit new members for the young librarian professional network.

Next steps

a. Awarding the best implemented projects

Although initially we decided to select the best 5 implemented projects to be presented at the ANBPR Spring Conference and offer an award to the best one, by the middle of April, when we received the final reports of the projects, we ended up in the situation where only 8 out of 17 projects were completed in all or in the majority of the initial proposed objectives.

The initial criteria for the selection of the best implemented projects were:

- Project fully implemented and finished;
- Originality/novelty of the project idea and/or implementation approach for the community;
- The level of success – proposed objectives achieved;
- Clarity and transparency in implementation;
- Observing the proposed deadlines;
- Capacity to establish partnerships with other stakeholders at the community level - sustainability
- Community outreach level (if the case);
- Capacity to find the needed resources/fundraise for ensuring a sound project implementation.

However, having only 8 finished projects by the middle of April and only 2 projects that after reviewing would have met the majority of the above criteria, we decided to select 4 projects to be presented at the conference, based on the level of success compared with the initial previsions. The 4 selected projects are: *“Reviews Library”* - addressing children & teenagers, *“The Library Becomes Alive”* - addressing librarians, *“We Grow Together”* - addressing children with speaking difficulties and *“Cinema on the Road”* - addressing elementary school children living in rural areas. As well, we decided to award all 4 coordinators of these projects to encourage them to continue and to remain involved and take the lead within the newly formed professional young librarian’s network. We also decided to award a 5th participant (Diana Gheorghieș) for her work in developing the TIBRO blog and taking the lead in engaging people to contribute to such a network.

b. Further involvement of the participants in the 2010 Summer School – establishing a Mentoring System

The concept of the Summer School for Young Librarians was from the beginning very dear to the ANBPR, so, starting with 2011 the planning and organization of the Summer School is going to be fully transferred to the Association. IREX is still going to be partner and get involved in the delivery phase, but not as much in the organization phase. As well, IREX is going to provide assistance in establishing some sort of “alumni system” for the Summer School participants, as one of the methods to keep the former participants engaged and increase the appetite of young professional for networking and for being more active within the Association.

So, for the 2011 Summer School, the participants from the 2010 Summer School will be invited to be part of the organization committee. The ones who will be willing to be involved will do the following:

- advertise the 2011 Summer School to their peers and also on the TIBRO blog;
- be part of the reviewing panel for the applications received and handle pre-screening for candidates (if it would be the case);
- assess of the selected participants’ needs and expectations for the Summer School 2011;
- find/document Romanian good practices in the areas of interest for participants;
- host/facilitate one/more sessions during Summer School on a commonly agreed topic and based on the participants needs;
- promote the idea of the young librarians’ network and recruit the new Summer School participants to join the network and contribute to the TIBRO blog.

After the Summer School, we want to establish a mentoring mechanism, so depending on the number of participants, we want to encourage each alumni to “adopt” a new participant and mentor her/him during the implementation of the project, and conduct the monthly forum discussions on the projects implementation status. Lately, within the development of the Biblionet program the idea of a mentoring mechanism is often discussed, so we are going to pilot such a system between young librarians, because mentoring as a form of professional development is practically unknown and inexperienced in Romanian library world.

c. Summer School for Young Romanian Librarians 2011

For the 2011 Summer School, IREX is transferring to the ANBPR the responsibility for organizing it, although the two organizations will be equally engaged in the planning, monitoring and evaluation phases. The entire concept and processes involved will be structured upon what was developed and piloted in 2010, in terms of advertising the opportunity, application and selection of participants. In addition, a group of former participant volunteers will be involved all the way, as previously described.

The format will be the same: applicants must submit resumes, letters of intent and project proposals, and the more coherent, innovative and solution-oriented to the community's needs 20 projects will be selected.

The 2011 edition of the Summer School for Young Librarians will be held during the last week of August, in a rustic and quite isolate location. During the six-day training, several professional issues will be addressed: there will be workshops and presentations, team working, motivational exercises and outdoor activities, with facilitators and professionals from libraries, community development organizations and private sector that are library supporters and willing to offer pro-bono training. A group of alumni will be also conducting sessions and presenting good practices.

After the second edition of the Summer School, during the project implementation period, ANBPR and IREX will pilot a mentoring mechanism between former and actual participants of the Summer School, and monitor closely if and how such a system works.

Conclusions

The experience gained after organizing the pilot edition of the Summer School confirmed our initial supposition, that young Romanians librarians have a great potential for creativity and innovation, which could lead to beneficial changes in Romanian public libraries. If they are empowered, young librarians will become very active and engaged agents in the profession; also they can push forward and overcome the quite slow and highly hierarchical system in Romanian public libraries by putting to work their fresh minds for the professional community and by becoming actively involved in professional associations.

In our opinion, the Summer School for Young Librarians proved to be a successful and quite easily replicable program for the personal and professional development of young librarians, which would strengthen their commitment to librarianship and, if the entire mechanism is observed (after participation at the Summer School the projects are implemented at the local level by each of the participants, they have where to turn for assistance and support, there is a monitoring and evaluation system in place and a sound approach towards publicly recognizing the added value of their work), a real network of young professional will be formed and functional at the national level. The alumni and mentoring system that we are planning to test starting with the second edition of the Summer School is meant to speed up this process and create long term sustainability. As well, the relatively low cost of the program and efforts to engage library supporters from various fields to pro-bono and volunteering activities, recommend it as a model of good practice in the area of professional development for young librarians.

Starting with 2011, the Association is trying to take the ownership of the program and transform it in a tradition. ANBPR intends to provide continuity to this positive experience and is hoping that the ANBPR Summer School will become a valuable professional and networking opportunity for young librarians, which will contribute in

time to the overall enhancement of the professional community and of the association. Therefore, ANBPR aims to provide, through this alternative form of professional training, a suitable framework for professional and personal development of the younger generation of librarians and encourage them to be part of a productive and innovative professional network within the association.

IREX and ANBPR will continue to work together so that the young librarians' voice will become stronger in their own libraries but also in the professional community. As there is a considerable demand for creating a specific group of interests to represent emerging leaders within the Association, we believe this would provide the proper framework for young professionals to work together to create ideas, innovate and share solutions and good practices, which will finally create benefits for the entire system of public libraries and, of course, for communities served.