



Librarians in Bulgaria and the Trends in the Information Environment

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Abstract

The paper presents the results of the survey, titled 'Library professionals in Bulgaria and the changing information ecosystem', implemented among Bulgarian librarians in March 2022. The survey aims to examine the level of awareness about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the changing global information environment among professionals working in Bulgarian libraries. The research methodology includes the implementation of an empirical online survey and analyses of the dataset of answers of 200 respondents (equivalent to above 10% of all the employees working in the Bulgarian libraries according to the Bulgarian Statistics Institute and its data out of 2022) using standard statistical methods and online desk research. The goal of the paper is to show the findings and to analyze them in the context of the LIS research and practical field.

Keywords: *Librarians, Bulgaria, Sustainable Development Goals, IFLA Trend Report*

1. Introduction

The awareness and attitude of library specialists regarding trends in the changing information environment is an extremely important factor for the process of change and development of the library system in Bulgaria. Human resource is a leading force when it comes to building better communication models, modern social environment and information management mechanisms. Initiatives in the direction of improving the knowledge and skills of library employees should be a priority for library management. It is very important to expand their access to up-to-date information about the development of the profession in our country and around the world. Also being aware of their opportunities to contribute to the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), as well as creating conditions for communication and exchange of experience. One of the goals of the present study is to establish the level of awareness regarding the main trends in the changing information environment and the role of libraries in achieving the UN SDGs among Bulgarian information specialists. Their attitude towards these trends is also explored.

Solutions to many questions and challenges already exist and are easily applicable in practice, according to the directions of the different libraries. The problem is that specialists need to be well informed to be able to successfully apply them in their work.

2. Literature review

The study is theoretically based on some of the most important documents, in relation to the development of modern libraries in the last decade. These are the *IFLA Trend report 2013* and its Updates from 2018, 2019, 2021 and *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* by the UN [4, 5]. Based on the knowledge and perspectives that these documents provide, the questionnaires for the online survey were built and its results were analyzed.

3. Research Methods

The paper summarizes the results of the survey 'Library professionals in Bulgaria and the changing information ecosystem' using standard statistical methods. Research efforts examine the level of awareness about the Sustainable Development Goals and the changing global information environment among professionals working in Bulgarian libraries. The questionnaire was built to check the knowledge of the Bulgarian librarians and their ability to communicate internationally.

The questionnaire contains questions in a Google form sheet and has been sent to over 500 email addresses. Most of the questions are multiple choice, 6 are with the possibility to select more than one answer and only 1 question is optional.

The target group are specialists, working in different Bulgarian libraries – national, public, academic, school etc. The total respondents are 200, which is relevant to above of 10% of all the employees



working in the Bulgarian libraries according to the Bulgarian Statistic Institute and its data out of 2022 [2]. The paper shows the results briefly for each of the questions.

4. Findings

The first question aims to gain information on how familiar the respondents are with the United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development entitled "Transforming our World" 2030 and its relationship with libraries [5]. Out of a total of 200 respondents, only 18% stated that they are familiar with the UN SDGs and participate in related initiatives. 20% indicate that they are familiar with the Goals, but do not participate in initiatives and projects related to them. Of all respondents - 26% note that they are poorly familiar with them, 32% are not familiar at all. These answers show a very low level of awareness of the Bulgarian librarians regarding the SDGs and the importance that information specialists and libraries have in achieving them. By answering the second question, respondents specify whether their library has participated in a project or initiative in support of any of the 17 SDGs [3]. The answers are logically linked to the low level of awareness of the respondents, evident from the first question. More than half of the respondents 52.5% shared that the libraries they work in do not participate in initiatives and projects related to the SDGs, and 20.5% found it difficult to answer. The third question on the survey asks librarians who have noted participation in SDG-related initiatives to indicate exactly which of the Goals they were targeting. Only 83 people answered this question, and 53% of them stated that the initiatives in which they participated were related to Goal 4 - Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. The next most popular Goal in which respondents participated is Goal 3 - Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. The remaining Goals are significantly under-selected. Through the fourth question, librarians provide information about the form of participation. There are 171 answers total and 36.8% of them confirm that they have not taken part in projects related to the SDGs in any form. 35.7% indicate that they participated through exhibitions, 29.8% via library collections and 24.6% by providing access to information for the benefit of SDGs-related projects. This shows that the Bulgarian specialists are more focused on local and national performances and less often on international ones. As an answer to the fifth question, the survey participants indicate the most used ways to stay informed about global changes related to the library sector. 59.9% noted that they read and follow library-related news in mass information channels – news broadcasts, online media, newspapers, etc.; 49% of all 200 respondents indicate that they follow websites, news in social media and blogs of libraries - Bulgarian and foreign; 44.5% read specialized periodicals such as "Library" magazine, online magazine of the Bulgarian Library and Information Association (BLIA), "Publisher" magazine, etc.; 41% are mostly using the website of BLIA [1]. The responses show poor use of international information channels. The sixth question also confirms what was established in the previous one - Bulgarian libraries rarely participate in international initiatives. 38.5% confirm that they only work at the local and national level. 22% of respondents state that they do not take part in international projects, but are involved remotely as listeners or trainees whenever possible. Approximately the same number indicated that they often participate in international projects or one project a year - 18%. The rest of the participants gave free answers, some of which can be distributed to the non-participating libraries. The results indicate that there is no active participation of Bulgarian libraries on the international scene which is mostly caused by the low level of awareness established by the previous questions. The seventh question is interested in the participation of libraries in projects with national funding - 37% of 200 respondents confirm that they are often involved in national projects. 35% indicated that they take part in at least one project per year, and 9.5% confirmed remote participation as listeners or trainees. The results show that at the local and national level librarians manage to communicate and become more actively involved in projects. An eighth question is asking about the communication methods librarians use to inform themselves for opportunities to participate in projects and initiatives. The most preferred among them are the website of the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education and Science (MES), the Scientific Research Fund as part of MES, other ministries and state institutions (69.5%) and the website and online magazine of - 44%. As it became clear, Bulgarian specialists mainly take part in local and national initiatives and projects. A significantly small percentage of respondents indicated the use of official websites of international organizations and institutions. The ninth question asks whether librarians know the logos of several international organizations and initiatives of key importance in the library sector (See Fig. 1). 53% indicated that they know the logos, the institutions behind them and their activities. 29.5% of respondents recognize almost all logos, but do not find a direct connection with their daily work.



Fig.1. Logos from Question 9

The tenth question of the survey is interested in the level of awareness of employees in Bulgarian libraries regarding IFLA Trend Report 2013 and the Five Trends that it points for the future and changes in the global information environment and also for the respondent's awareness about the Report's updates published in 2018, 2019 and 2021 [4]. A total of 29% of the respondents indicated that they were slightly familiar with the Reports, 22.5% are not familiar at all, and 5.5% are hesitant. 21.5% state that they are aware, and 21% confirm that they are also interested in the updates of the Report. The answers show that the Bulgarian specialists are not sufficiently interested in the current discussions of the international library community. Raising their awareness would support the process of applying modern management approaches for the implementation of their library and information functions in our country and for more effective cooperation in international terms. 179 respondents answered eleventh question, which inquired whether librarians in the country found the IFLA Reports useful in meeting the challenges of the changing information ecosystem. Almost half of them (45.8%) state that the Reports are useful, but it is necessary to rethink them according to the Bulgarian reality. 19% are convinced of its usefulness, and 27.4% cannot answer. The relatively large percentage of people who cannot judge its usefulness is related to the low level of awareness, and in this case also of understanding. Interpreting these types of documents is a challenge, especially when librarians communicate primarily at local and national level.

The respondents are quite sure regarding the twelfth question - 49% answered with conviction that the creation of a specialized information online portal for librarians in the country would be useful, and 43% supported its creation. The next question asks about respondents' preferences regarding different headings in such an information portal.

The most preferred are the following:

- News from the library and information sector (75.5%)
- Professional experience - "Shared by colleagues" (70%)
- National projects and competitions (52%)
- A library of useful open access professional resources (57.5%)
- Normative documents and strategies (54%)
- International projects and competitions (52%)
- IFLA trends in the information environment (50%)

These preferences show that library specialists in the country need up-to-date information and a space for exchanging ideas and good practices. There is a little less interest in international projects and news, but this is rather related to the language barrier that stands in front of many of the librarians.

5. Conclusions

The focus of the future work should be on the communication of the Bulgarian librarians with their international colleagues from countries all over the world, exchange of good practices for developing the library services, participation in projects and initiatives on international level and collaboration with LIS academic education for lifelong learning activities.



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