

## MEDIA LITERACY

**TECHNOLOGY AND MEDIA PREFERENCES:  
RESULTS FROM SOME USER STUDIES IN  
ALBANIAN PUBLIC LIBRARIES**

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**ABSTRACT:** The paper studies the state of awareness of information literacy and media literacy in Albania and the role of libraries in raising their capacity in fostering use of technology and media and practicing policies of life-long learning (LLL) and education. There is an urgent need in Albania to raise the awareness on information and media literacy issues in the new realities and the skills needed to navigate, evaluate, and use information and technology. The role of the libraries and other institutions is of great importance and impact when it comes to assisting users of all levels not only to find but also to evaluate and use information properly for professional and daily life decisions. This research and the surveys done in Fier Public Library during 1995-2012, will bring a contribution to a greater understanding of the situation in most of the public libraries in Albania and the impact that information, media, and new technologies have in our daily life. The purpose of the research is to raise the awareness of all the stakeholders in Albanian society on its importance for future development. The research has shown that libraries, librarians, and other stakeholders of the society lack understanding on information and media literacy as well as the right infrastructure to support the development of information and communication technology (ICT).

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### Introduction

The first time one of the authors was exposed to Information Literacy (IL)<sup>1</sup> concept was when participating at UNESCO Training the Trainers IL Workshop in Ankara, Turkey, 2008. In one of the panels, the author had the chance to share the new practices and the experience of Fier Public Library Albania (FPLA), which she learned in her role as manager of that library for more than 10 years. This is why she decided to explore the IL state of the users of her library and some other IL issues in the

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<sup>1</sup> Hereinafter "IL" is used instead of Information Literacy.

region. This paper presents the results of some of these studies. The ability to adapt to the increasing developments in the “Information Age” requires a high degree of IL skills. People can be information literate in the absence of ICT, but the volume and variable quality of digital information, and its role in knowledge societies, has highlighted the need for all people to achieve IL skills. For people to use IL within a knowledge society, both access to information and the capacity to use ICT are prerequisites. Catts and Lau (2008) argue that IL is however, a distinct capacity and an integral aspect of adult competencies.

### **The role of libraries in new technology era**

Experience of Fier Public Library Albania and some other institutions from 1995 to date are shared below. Nowadays they are normal and simple activities for many libraries in the region, but they used to be challenging during that time and still are for many public Albanian libraries. Future research may compare the situations and share other practices.

#### ***Opinion survey, Fier Public Library Albania (1995-1996)***

- a) *Sample*: all users of Fier Public Library, 200 answers received, the average age 25.
- b) *Method*: questionnaire with one question: “How would you like (imagine) your library in the future?”
- c) *Findings*: Most readers (70%) wanted to go and find the book in the shelves by themselves (the concept “users” and “open access” were not known by the Albanian librarians at that time). After that, things have changed. In 2000, the library introduced open access to all departments and materials being the first public library in Albania to do it. This increased significantly (by 4 times) the number of users with library cards, also a big number of the visitors and users of the new services and activities. Almost every week, local TVs were present to cover the activities.

#### ***Introducing a new service for children and the Influence on the number of library users (2001-2002)***

The author noticed that the 4-6 group-age was not encouraged to visit and use the library. The mentality was that it was better for children to register after they learn to read. Inspired by the participation in IFLA 1999, ALA 2000, and the study visits in Plum Public Library Chicago, Illinois, and the libraries of Frankfurt Municipalities, Fier Public Library introduced the “Story Time”, an activity reading to small children. To avoid staff resistance to this very new service, volunteers were encouraged. A new and attractive corner was built and kindergarten children were invited once a week. The program was accompanied by creative activities. The example was nationally shared and some other few libraries tried to offer it. During 2002, 689 children became part of the reading program and they remained permanent users.

#### ***A preference survey in various institutions (2002-2003)***

During plans to create a new Information and Training Centre, Fier Public Library surveyed users for their information preferences (hard copy or electronic).

- a) *Sample*: NGO, school teachers in Fier, users of Fier Public Library and governmental institutions.
- b) *Method*: questionnaire with 6 questions. About 250 were distributed and 191 filled in. This study presents only the answers to the question about information and

format preferences. Other questions included library opening hours, location, staff.

- c) *Findings:* More than 84% preferred electronic information and they appreciated the idea of the information and training centre in the library. This was the time when the internet was used only in few offices for administrative use, few lucky families, or in 3-5 Internet cafés in the city.

The results were presented to the donors. ICT infrastructure was offered. We offered open access to all materials in all the departments (was previously not a norm in our library or other Albanian ones) and eIFL, EBSCO and different information and trainings in ICT. This service really increased the number of users especially among the youth. Every day, more than 300 people visited the library. This Centre was the next logical step towards the further development of the library.

### ***Survey of all libraries of communes and schools in Fier Region (2002-2003)***

- a) *Sample:* all schools and commune libraries in Fier Region.
- b) *Method:* questionnaire, with 9 questions about the library space, staff, books, users, infrastructure, reading programs, activities, training, etc. About 50 copies were prepared, one copy per school, filled in by the director of the schools or the head of communes.
- c) *Findings:* From 44 schools and commune libraries, only 4 offered some services and had the space and a part time staff.

The survey studied the situation of these libraries after the many changes that occurred in Albania. Another reason was that Fier Public Library, had many requests from people living outside the city and the library with the staff and limited number of new book entries could not afford serving them all. We also wanted to offer training for all the teachers working with the school and commune libraries (usually language and literature teachers without training in librarianship. After data analysis, we invited all district school directors, vice directors, and staff in charge of libraries. They were informed on the new library services and trained to catalogue the books and offer reading programs.

### ***Who is shaping our opinions? How do we know that our opinions are really our own? (2010)***

A survey held for testing one of the IL skills, quality evaluation, relevance of the information sources. The topic: Is the AH1N1 Swine Flu Pandemic True or False?

- a) *Sample:* Employees of an International Organization in Albania. 6 participants, Albanian with postgraduate degrees. Average age is 32 years.
- b) *Method:* Questionnaire with 3 questions: Is a H1N1 Swine Pandemic Flue True or False? Which was the source that influenced the choice? Evaluate its relevance.
- c) *Findings:* 5 of the 6 think it is false, 1 thinks it is true. 4 respondents out of 6 think that one of the sources that influenced the choice is media.

As we see, the most popular, relevant source for the respondents is media or consumption of the ready offered information that has a great influence in shaping our opinions, even about health.

Media and other information providers such as libraries, archives, and the Internet are widely recognized as essential tools for helping citizens make informed decisions...and, therefore, citizens need a basic knowledge of their functions and how

to assess them. The purpose of media and information literacy is to impart this knowledge to the users. (MILID Yearbook 2013: 301).

### **Library infrastructure and staff training (2012)**

The goal of this study was to see where state libraries stand to support the new flow of information and ICT developments and how they deliver it to the end users.

- a) Sample: 5 state libraries: 3 school libraries (a nine year school, a general high school, a technic high school), a local municipality unit, a university library.
- b) Method: Interview with 20 questions.
- c) Findings: The school libraries serve a community between 700-1700 students and have only 1 part-time employee serving for 3 hours per week. There are no available internet and computers in the library. Internet was available only in one laboratory of informatics. Last entries were more than 1-2 years before, limited titles and copies done only through the General Directorate of Education. The space and library reading posts were limited compared to students they serve. Library instructions, which usually lasted one hour and were held annually, were offered. They were not familiar with IL concept and never participated in seminars, conferences, and trainings related to library issues.

The library of the local municipality unit has 3 employees. None of them has training in librarianship. No internet, only 1 computer, last book entry is 4 years old. The university library has 2 trained librarians. They have 2 computers in the library but no internet access. The online databases offered by IZUM through ERA project are used by students through remote access in internet cafés or at home. 1 librarian was informed about IL concept during her recent Master Studies in Library Science in Slovenia.

### **Conclusion**

Results of all these studies show that Albania needs better understanding of Media and IL concept, its benefits and requirements, integration of Media and IL curricula at all levels of education, creating the right infrastructure in the schools and libraries to support the new technologies and take the utmost care for further education and training.

IL in Albania has to become soon a priority for all the responsible authorities and other institutions and professional associations.

Albanian libraries, librarians, school libraries and library associations need to take the leadership role in creating a lobby, developing a Media and IL Action Plan, building and supporting IL initiatives, strategies, cooperation among schools, academic libraries, and in fostering a dialog among Ministries and Local Government authorities responsible for curricula and libraries, evaluating the impact of Media and IL, enhanced learning, and disseminating examples of good practice.

Albania will have to properly deal with the developments of the information age as they will have enormous impact in the country's democratic life and the nation's ability to integrate in Europe.

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