

PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT: NEW BULGARIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT:

The New Bulgarian University Library (NBU Library) is an open data-sharing institution, where experience, projects and initiatives are public transparent. As an academic library, we are challenged to work for the constant improvement and sustainability of librarianship in Bulgaria. We were aware that investing in human capital will repay us in the near future. We realized the necessity to redesign the career pathway for librarians, based on defined stages of achievement, self-directed participation in library-wide projects, promoting team-working and demonstrated commitment to lifelong learning.

The NBU Library has design a three-stage training program for continuing education and professional capacity development - formal education, group training and individual training. Librarians were stimulated to acquire Master Degree, either in a subject field or in Librarianship, according their occupation requirements and ensuring better service level. To acquire new or improve the level of their competences, librarians are attending close group trainings within the Library. We have specialized group training on e-resources accessibility and functionalities, which is open for wide group of professionals. NBU Library personnel also attend group training in specialized courses of the National Center for Continuing Education of Librarians and trainings at other libraries. Library staff participates actively in joint local and international projects, conferences and workshops to exchange innovations and practices, and share experience.

The Library has developed a network for exchange of knowledge and is voting for continuing qualification of library personnel and distributed librarianship. In 2000 year the Library added a new communication channel – the first open access professional library and information science e-journal “Bibliosphere” (<http://bibliosphere.eu/>), indexed in DOAJ, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek and „Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts with Full Text (EBSCO Information Services). In 2008 the Library has launched an own blog (<http://www.nbulibrary-blog.eu/>), with daily updates, and since 2010 we also have our Facebook representation.

The necessity to build a knowledge base for permanent distribution of library achievements was realized. A long-term project (started in 2014), to build a complete open access archive, collecting 20 years of library staff publications, has been initiated, to make the Library a tribune for experience exchange. To increase accessibility and visibility of library output, publications are also deposited in the International digital repository for Library and Information Science „e-LIS“ and the network “ResearchGate”. The project pursues to demonstrate the NBU Library innovative approach to knowledge transfer as a step to build an open science environment in Bulgaria in the field of library and information science.

Thus, we have built a digital image of a modern Bulgarian library and have laid the foundations to collaborate on exploiting new processes, solutions and innovations, ensuring that open output is integrated in the ultimate research frame of the future.

Key words: learning library, continuing education, professional development, professional networks, e-LIS, ResearchGate

1. THE LEARNING LIBRARY

The New Bulgarian University (NBU) is the first non-government high school, founded in Bulgaria after the transition and was doomed to bring institutional, educational and organizational change to knowledge environment in the country. Part of the University’s mission is to contribute for advancement in higher education and putting its academic potential into community service.

The NBU Library as an integral part of the strategic goals and achievements of the University has adopted the main principles of open education, transparency and working for the public good. As an academic library, existing in a constantly changing environment, the Library is challenged to constantly improve its performance towards sustaining the librarianship in Bulgaria, by giving example of steady progress of service quality and ensuring base for knowledge transfer.

The University Library was aware of the fact that investing in human capital would allow the achievement of future development goals and sustaining Library and institutional projects.

The Library has developed as a learning organization, successfully managing to integrate four organizational elements: 1.) Organizational learning, 2.) Learning at work, 3.) Learning climate and 4.) Learning structure (Ortenblad, 2004). Thus building multi-dimensional learning system with three-stage trainings: formal (group and individual), informal (group and individual), and self-training – all along with their podcasts.

2. ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

Instructions for librarians, nowadays, are designed to enhance learning structure and build culture of continuous improvement by using technology platforms to capture, distil, apply and share knowledge.

2.1. Training under Projects and Institutional Trainings

Since its foundation in 1995, the Library pursues a modern approach for sustainable development which results in advocating for continuing skill and knowledge improvement. Library staff continuing education has been set up with the project “Modernization and organizational development of the University Library” (Tempus UM JEP 14464-99), coordinated by NBU Library. Four university libraries from UK, The Netherlands, Spain and Portugal instructed 6 librarians from four Bulgarian partnering libraries. Training was focused on top and middle managerial library levels to prompt optimization of library management. Training sessions were held locally and included also visits to instructing libraries. The project opened a new functional position - “subject librarian”. Thirteen librarians completed a master degree in various fields, corresponding to the University departmental structure.

During 2014 in the frame of a local project the NBU Library designed tailored information services for impaired students. The training course was adapted for a group of 6 librarians and technical staff on providing quality service.

Library staff was involved on a mass scale into an institutional project, under EU structural fund for quality improvement of educational services for students.

The “Career Development and Continuing Education“ Department offers skill-building/improving courses. The Library staff participated in computer’s courses and trainings for users’ communication and presentation skills in English language

Project and institutional trainings help library staff to upgrade their professional background and knowledge acquisition and are generally adapted for group training.

2.2. Professional Training

The NBU Library is a member organization of: the Bulgarian Library-Information Association, the Foundation National Academic Library Information System and the Bulgarian Information Consortium. The librarians have attended different professional and qualification-raising trainings, initiated by the above mentioned entities in the field of digitalization, electronic resources, cataloguing, MARC 21, authority records management, etc. Most of the courses were held in the library and offered certificate at their completion.

The European program Erasmus is another form for self-improvement and acquiring new knowledge. Four librarians exchanged information about the improvement of information and administrative services for students, students with impairments, adapting new technological solution and managing in a network environment.

Professional trainings are focused and very appropriate for strengthening the qualification and skill-developing for the different professional positions, either in a library or related organization. Professional trainings are usually perceived as group or individual one.

3. LEARNING AT WORK

3.1 Local staff training programme

The NBU Library is the only library in Bulgaria to design and adapt local staff training programme. It all started in 2006, when the necessity to announce changes and strengthen the communication process within the home organization has been realised. On every aspect from our everyday workflow to innovations and newly adapted tools and techniques, the Library has designed group training sessions, performed by colleagues with in-depth understanding of the discussed issue. Sessions go two by two, according the topic of the training, so that everybody may visit them. This form of learning allowed all library staff to be updated on innovations in the Library and receive a general view in the context of the library strategy and future trends for development. Group trainings have created atmosphere for easy learning, discussions and problem solving, developing communication channels on different levels. This type of trainings is appropriate for transition from one position to another, or training new personnel.

3.2 Seminars, conferences and congress participation (Informal learning)

Another way for professional development is to attend international, national and local professional forums. It is an opportunity to exchange expertise, and update on good practices and innovations from all aspects of library science. During the years, and increase of NBU attendance to professional events has been marked – up to 3 visits to international conferences per year. A practice to share impressions from international conferences among Bulgarian library community is established.

The Library invested in continuing education and self-development. The chosen policy supports library and technical staff to meet challenges in networking environment and to satisfy end users' needs. The set of trainings followed a flexible structure. The educational sessions have been carried out on different level: at the Library, on institutional level, during the working process and overtime. Participation in events supported knowledge acquiring, experience exchange and building of informal contacts. Transferring of methods, means, policies, etc., contributed to sustain a modern library.

4. LEARNING CLIMATE

Training and instructing resulted in a huge document flow. Though many of NBU librarians were engaged in different forms of continuous training, we soon realized that our reach is still locked within our home institution. The Library envisioned upgrading the traditional model of knowledge exchange in Bulgaria. We have already worked together with our colleagues and have adopted an exchange network of professional events, but we decided that the new Web would foster the exchange progress and would allow greater flexibility of library and information professionals. The idea to have a new, entirely online and open access communication channel was born in 2000. At the time only one professional journal existed – “Library”, the official edition of the National Library “St. St. Cyril and Methodius” and the Ministry of Culture. Further the NBU Library popularized its activity via social networks, as well as print and electronic media.

4.1. Own communication channel

NBU Library electronic journal "Bibliosphere" was launched in 2001. The editorial board sought not only to reflect library achievements, but also to promote library - information resources and services in general, as well as to present critical statements on current issues in the field.

Authorship is represented in diverse groups of librarians, archivists, publishers, IT professionals, academics and outstanding students. The journal design changed three times to adjust the changing information environment. "Bibliosphere" is the first Bulgarian journal, indexed in the "Directory of Open Access Journals" (DOAJ) and is presented there since May 2005. In the section "Libraries and Information Science" are now indexed 10,496 journals, with 1 896 078 articles. The same year "Bibliosphere" was indexed in the "Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek". In 2008 "Bibliosphere" is accessible in the full-text electronic resource Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts with Full Text (EBSCOhost). By the end of 2011 the journal was added to the "Directory of Open Access Scholarly Resources" (ROAD).

From its appearance, articles in the journal are 105 and 52% are created by NBU librarians. The editing of an open access electronic journal in 2001 from the Library of NBU has been dictated by a policy of transparency. Widespread sharing of good practice, project results and statements leads to faster development in the professional sphere. For the past five years (2010-2014) "Bibliosphere" e-journal was visited 115,957 times.

4.2. Other communication channels

After the "Librarian" journal ceased from editing in 1991, in a year, the country lacked a professional journal for library theory and practice. In 1993 the National Library "St. St. Cyril and Methodius" started publishing the "Library" journal. The subject range of the journal expanded, adding book science and literary history sections. In this edition authors from NBU Library are 5, presented with 7 publications (for the period 2000 to 2012).

Over the years, the publication activity of the independent and voluntary professional organization Union of Librarians and Information Workers (Officers) in Bulgaria, later changing their name to "Bulgarian Library and Information Association" (BLIA), is wide in range and scope. In its print "Bulletin" (ISSN 1310-4330) 3 librarians from NBU participated with publications. In the journal of the Association which started in 2011, 7 authors from the NBU library with 7 publications took part. NBU Library has also contributed with 19 reports to the Association Annual National Conference, released in Conference Proceedings.

The first library consortium for shared use of electronic resources evolved as part of the initiative of the Library of the New Bulgarian University with the financial support of Open Society institute in Budapest, Hungary. The organization is non-profit and is called "Bulgarian Information Consortium" (BIC). Under the patronage of the Consortium, in the period 2003 to 2013, seminars "Good Library Practices" and "Technology Day" were organized, as well as an annual national meeting. Reports of the cited events are collected in the "Bulgarian Information Consortium Yearbook" (ISSN 1312-4773). NBU Library was presented with 38 publications from 13 authors. Another edition of the Consortium is the newsletter "New Library" (ISSN 1312-8841), where 14 materials were prepared by 5 librarians at NBU.

NBU Library participated with reports in several national and international conferences: Civil Society and Social Development (2002, Sofia, Bulgaria) "Libraries - Reading - Communications" (2003, 2004, Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria), "Information behaviour in digital libraries" (2003, c. Bratislava, Slovakia), "Libraries, Globalisation and Cooperation" (2004, Sofia, Bulgaria), "Digital Spectrum: Integrating Technology and Culture" (2006, Bansko, Bulgaria), "TELECOM 2011: Telecommunications, environment for the provision of information services for all" (2011, Sofia, Bulgaria), "Digital Presentation and Preservation of Cultural and Scientific Heritage" (2012, Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria), "Information literacy - training models and good practices" (2012, Varna, Bulgaria), "Digital present and future economic, cultural, educational, legal and technological impacts" (2013, Sofia, Bulgaria). The Library exhibited some of its open access initiatives with poster, titled "Create, attract, deposit" to the VII International Conference "Open Repositories 2012: Open Services for Open Content: Local In for Global Out" (2012 Edinburgh, UK). It sets out methods for training of faculty and graduate students to deposit scientific research and creative portfolio in digital form. Bulgaria is presented for the first time by the New Bulgarian University Library at Annual Conference of the Association of European research

libraries (Ligue des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche: Association of European Research Libraries (LIBER). On the 43rd Annual conference "Research Libraries in the Information Landscape 2020 " the Library participated with the poster " Voluntary Deposit and Institutional Open Access Culture "(2014 Riga, Latvia). Articles from authors from the library go also to the periodicals " Media World"(ISSN 1311-7483) and "Education and career"(ISSN 1311-8374).

4.3. Social Networks

In 2011 the Library developed a marketing strategy to expand its impact on end user and colleagues, as well, as to open library to the University academic community and society in general. The NBU Library "conquered" social networks. We used blog (2008-), facebook (2010-), twitter, google+(2013-) and youtube (2011-) to reach out for our audience, sharing information for conferences, round tables, working meeting, projects, etc.

5. LEARNING STRUCTURE

The challenges brought about by new technologies in general and e-records management in particular require that records and archives management staff be equipped with new skills and competencies through training or retraining to be able to effectively operate and undertake projects in an e-environment.

We have recently realized that all publications from our library, for 20 years of history, have been not systemized. Some of them still exist as traditional publications in journals and conference proceedings, others - in electronic form. We have difficulties to trace them for citation, references, etc. That prompted us in 2014 to launch a library archive and collect all publications and other materials (posters as well), created by NBU librarians. The occasion was the 20th Anniversary of the NBU Library.

The project opened with the creation of a mandate that ensures digital copy of each publication, getting author's permission to publish them on open access. Authors are acquainted with the mandate. The document is with significant importance for the future collecting of publications.

The process included authors' identification and locating and linking to their publications in journals and proceedings, catalogues, bibliographies, etc. Each publication is presented with digital copy and is accompanied by metadata in the archive. Resumes from the born-digital documents have been extracted (if they existed). Thus the complex of two files passed next stage when titles, author's names, abstracts and key words have been translated in Bulgarian or in English.

Open information infrastructure for publications preserving and accessing is called International digital repository for Library and Information Science „e-LIS“. Librarians have personally deposited their publications in e-LIS. The functionality of the system turned to be limited with no option to generate reference lists for authors, as they are cited with Cyrillic and Latin symbols. We decided to transfer all documents in the ResearchGate network. The new platform advantages are: authors may choose institutional affiliation, the list of all authors' publications is easy generated and the system provides statistics for the number of publication's reviews and downloads. Another benefit of the transition to the new platform is the immediate connection between librarians and academic staff at the University.

By the end of 2015 we are going to link to the archive via library web page. Records and full-text documents are chronologically arranged. That way the progress of the Library, over the years, through the personnel publications might be traced.

6. CONCLUSION

The NBU Library as a learning organization seeks to apply the accumulated knowledge in practice. The library has shared its project results and experience with professional community in the country and abroad through different communication channels. The recently initiated project

demonstrated innovative approach for knowledge transfer and information dissemination in Bulgaria. The authors benefit that all their materials are collected and preserved and free access makes them more visible and cited. Publications presence in the ResearchGate made them distinguished and supported tracking of co-authors and followers. The project followed the University mission to acquire free flow and dissemination of library achievements. A good climate for professional exchange, cooperation, collaboration and future participation in mutual initiatives has been established.

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