

# The Education of Librarians in Bulgaria in the Changing Environment after 1990 – Achievements and Issues

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## **Abstract**

*In this presentation we describe the local and global trends, that influence the process of teaching. We give examples of our activities, and evaluate their usefulness for the education of the local students in a global surrounding. Political changes like the freedom of the press influenced a radical change in the work of the libraries in Bulgaria. They now have to be in competition with a variety of public and private media (TV, press) or institutions, provider of information- or free-time services (Internet clubs, etc.). Other political changes like the possibility to exchange information, ideas and people have provoked changes in the systems of education and publishing. As a result we have a variety of different genres, themes, design or interpretation editions or new medias. On the other hand worsening economical situation in the country reflected unfavourably on the resources of the Bulgarian libraries. Because the economic situation in different towns and villages is not equal we put stress in education on communication skills, the research of good library practices, the use of sociological methods and doing a situation analysis in a physical library. The above changes concern the curricula, the programmes, the methods and the tools, used for teaching. More and more new technologies are used to present the curricula, syllabus and teaching aids. We use also some new communication instruments (Email) and Web “” based education. In the programs we put stress on the changes in the library services in a virtual environment and on the active use of the information resources (traditional and modern) in the library.*

*The processes of globalisation have an effect on the change over of:*

- 1) the mission, goals and roles of the libraries; That has an influence on the contents of the teaching subjects, on the terminology, on the priorities in the library services. As result new courses were initiated as to meet the requests of the libraries. They are more customer oriented like “” ‘Library services for the disabled’; ‘Public Relations’; ‘Library brokerage’; ‘Web design’; ‘Marketing and management’ instead of ‘Organization and Control in the Library’; ‘etc.*
- 2) the intercultural communication ; Bulgaria as a whole and our Higher School in particular are not more isolated from the communication processes in the world. In that respect we present experience in running a joint workshop with American and Bulgarian students. Different methods of teaching were used (discution, team work; situation analysis; role play; brain storming; meeting with official authorities; informal meetings; use of the Internet and video-camera; Some experience in intercultural communication has also been gained through participation in the virtual project ‘Collaboration across borders. Cabweb.net.com’ (in JILID and in HELP); Organizing courses with foreign lecturer (from Germany, Russia, USA).*
- 3) New requirments for the teaching process, connected with the membership of Bulgaria in the European Union like the mobility of students and teachers;*
- 4) information technologies. The global projects “” ‘Minerva, Kalimera, 2010: digital library,’ etc.; accelaration of the introducing of new technologies and changing the necessary equipment as to come near to the information society . All these require to include information about that project in the education programs and at the same time to train the students how to use the digital resources of the libraries.*

## **The Context of Changing Practices**

After 1990 the education of librarians in Bulgaria has been influenced by two kinds of changes. Some of these are more or less local, others are of a global character. Both of them have influenced the courses, the methods of teaching and control of knowledge. Our goal is to illuminate how the impact on the social, political, economic and technological environment has affected the curricula, programmes and teaching methods. Some of the most important local political and economic changes after 1989 in Bulgaria have been: the building of the multiparty system and the end of the communist ideology; the free media; the free exchange of information, ideas and people; the land reform; the restitution of forests, real estate or factories, which were nationalised after 1946. The development of private entrepreneurship has touched seventy per cent of the national economy. The Monetary Board and tough budgetary limits were established. How have these and other changes have influenced the free Access to Knowledge and Information for the users in libraries and in other similar institutions?

Some of the above listed changes had positive results, others were negative. The work in the libraries was influenced indirectly mainly by other fields of activities like publishing, education, mass and electronic media. On the positive side many private publishing houses were set up. They have free contact with publishers from Western Europe and the USA and exchange of information, ideas and editions. Many reference books came out; books of new literary genres, forms, themes, authors were printed; new media for children and young people (CD, videos, computer games, and cassettes) appeared and were well received. For the first time the reading public had an access to books on religion and spirituality, books on love-making, practical psychology, marketing manuals, etc. Now many of the Bulgarian publishers advertise their products electronically in the same way as their colleagues in Europe.

From the perspective of the faculty staff in order to enhance the education of the future librarians they have to make additional efforts to follow the current changing and flexible book market. On the other side, there was an abuse of freedom in publishing. There was a lot of pornography published and scandalous newspapers, journals or books. The variety of choice on the book market led to the possibility of the librarian becoming a censor or making a rigorous selection of media for her/his library. This brought about a change in our education plan and we introduced a new course – ‘Censorship in the libraries’. We also initiated new themes in old courses like ‘Building of library stocks’, ‘Bibliography’, ‘Reference work’ and others. In all these disciplines we placed an emphasis on the independent thinking on the part of students, but also new standards in the evaluation of new editions.

The monopoly of the National TV and the National Radio was broken and many cables- and broadcasting stations came to life. Most of them have special programmes for teens or for other groups. There is a diversity of newspapers and journals for all kinds of readers. Many video houses and Internet clubs were opened. All of them are crowded with young people. For the first time in many years the libraries are in real competition for the free time of the citizens. For the education of librarians that means the inclusion of new disciplines like ‘Communication skills’, ‘Public relations’ and ‘Practical marketing’ to ensure for the future librarians knowledge about promotion techniques and successful dealing with people.

### ***Changes in the School Curriculum***

In the last ten years we have been witnessing radical changes in the sphere of education. In the elementary and the secondary education the educational programmes of basic disciplines like ‘Bularian language and literature’, ‘History’ and ‘Philosophy’ were modified. The ideological aspects fell away and even the Bularian classics had new readers. New themes, new authors and new interpretations came forward. New subject like the study of religion, marketing, management or disciplines with applied topics were introduced in some schools, such as informatics, insurance, tourism and others. In all schools the teaching of foreign languages was intensified. The obligatory Russian language was replaced with English or German. In some schools the schoolchildren have the opportunity to select from a variety of languages and from a variety of textbooks what to learn. On the other hand, the worsening economic conditions in the country affected unfavourably the number of new books in the libraries. That influenced, to a great extent, the library services in the public or school libraries. It was determined that a large part of the stocks no longer corresponded to the readers’ demands neither in quantity, nor in quality. We observed a great amount of refusals in these libraries.

### ***Implications for Teaching Librarians***

Because the economic situation in different towns and villages is not equal and constantly changes, in the librarians’ education we stressed the qualitative criteria for document selection; on the reference techniques; on the research of good library practices in relation with the supply and the search of alternative financial funds; the use of sociological methods and on knowledge about situation analysis in a concrete library. The main difficulty for teaching was the great difference between the conditions in the libraries, some of which were modern, but most of them traditional in services and appearance. That determined the teaching of some disciplines like for example classification and cataloguing in a traditional way. On the other hand, we observed also a rapid change of readings groups and their information needs and/or tastes. Last, but not least, in the libraries a great variety of software was used. So we have not only to teach, but at the same time to do research in some Bulgarian libraries for information about the above running processes.

From 1994 to 2006 many inquiries were made, in particular on the reading tastes of children and schoolchildren and/or the expectation of library services; their attitude towards computers, Internet, books and libraries. Many students from the disciplines ‘Library services for children and schoolchildren’ took part

in that research carried out in the capital, in different town or villages in Bulgaria. The results were published in professional journals or were presented on national or International conferences. The economic situation concerns also the students, most of whom do not have computers at home. That is the reason not to use so intensely some methods of communication with groups of students and methods of peering and assessments, which we have seen discussed in HELP.

The processes of globalisation has had an effect upon the change of the mission, goals and tasks of libraries. That has an influence on the contents of the teaching subjects, on the terminology, on the priorities in the library services. As a result new courses were initiated to meet the requests of the libraries. These are more customer oriented like 'Library services for the disabled', 'Public relations', 'Library brokerage', 'Web design', 'Marketing and management' instead of 'Organisation and control in the library', etc.

In the last three years we had also to study and respect the new requirements towards the teaching process, connected with the membership of Bulgaria in the European Union like the mobility of students and teachers; the ESCT. We had to change our curricula, but also our methods of control. We had to make assessment of the activity of students during discussion and to put more stress on assessment of self-dependent homework.

### ***Intercultural Communication***

Another important effect of globalisation with positive impact on the education process was the increase of intercultural communication. Bulgaria as a whole and our Higher School in particular are no longer isolated from the communication processes in the world. In that sense, we have experience in making a joint workshop with American and Bulgarian students. Different methods of teaching were used (discussion, team work; situation analysis; role play; brain storming; meeting with official authorities; informal meetings; use of the Internet and video-camera). Other American colleagues came to teach for a short time to our students and showed us how they organised and presented their lectures and how they communicated with the students. Our visit in a German Higher School produced new ideas for teaching, for organising a team work and for future joint projects.

We have also gained some experience in intercultural communication through the participation in the virtual project 'Collaboration across borders. [www.cabweb.net](http://www.cabweb.net).' (in JILID and in HELP). We were able to discover some problems by taking part in both forums. Some of the problems were technical, others organisational. There were also problems in communication and for us – linguistic problems. In JILID we found that the huge number of participants made it very difficult to follow the discussion. The email box of the participants was full of unimportant or meaningless messages, which made the communication impossible. The topical area was not wide enough – only 200 words could be seen in front of the page and additionally 300 words. The topics were formulated too broadly and some of the participants had sent their answers to incorrect topics.

From the Bulgarian side one of the main problems in preparing the messages for the forum was the circumstance that the information on the Bulgarian websites on the offered topics wasn't in the correct format. Although such information existed, it was only in Bulgarian, not in English. We had to search additionally in the printed media for example about the meaning of colours in different messages. After the search and discover of the information needed it had to be translated into English. In fact we had to bring together a lot of messages, but most of them remained in Bulgarian and had never been sent to JILID. In spite of the difficulties we succeeded in offering to the students different and interesting reference questions and demonstrated the use of interactive methods in education. We made a lot of useful contacts with tutors from different countries. We could promote our culture all over the world as our students show curiosity and real interest in virtual interactive learning. Last, but not least, when we speak about globalisation, we have in mind the changes caused by the use of new information technologies in the teaching process. More and more new technologies are used to present the curricula, syllabus, some school- and teaching aids. We use also some new communication instruments (e-mail), Web – based education. In the programmes stress is put on the changes in the library services in virtual environment and on the active use of information resources (traditional and modern) in the library.

The problems of using the new technologies in teaching are influenced also by the condition of the libraries in which these technologies are dynamically introduced. The libraries in Bulgaria are carrying out active re-orientation in the new information environment, as the deepest changes in the last five years have been related

to the creation of electronic contents. In the past 30 years the efforts to create an electronic catalogue as well as electronic contents are limited by technical, technological problems and lack of trained specialists.

The practical needs were transformed into action programmes and plans, but their realisation was predetermined by the technological basis of society. The access of Bulgaria to the new computer technologies was limited by embargo prohibitions, and this had an inevitable effect upon the speed of changes in the university curricula for training specialists in the field of library and information activities. The contents and the structure of the librarians training curricula have undergone the successive transformations in the dynamics of the social-economical changes during the last eighteen years. The replacement of the library software generation from the 1980s with programme systems on Windows-platform caused qualitative changes in the syllabus and new approaches to teaching, new requirements towards its mastering by students.

The most significant changes in the contents of bachelor curricula are observed on the part of information and communication technologies in the library activity. The previous curricula included syllabus on computer technologies and programme systems on DOS platform, now the content is enriched with new courses, but there are qualitative changes in the teaching methodology and especially in the requirements for acquiring the new content. The evolution of this change is shown in Table 1, namely in these two aspects.

### ***Problems of Syllabus***

Table 1: Evolution of the content and the teaching methodology			
<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>BASIC SOFTWARE AND HARDWARE</b>	<b>USER SOFTWARE</b>	<b>EVALUATION</b>
Computer technologies	DOS, US (IBM360/370)	Text editing programmes CDS/ISIS	Traditionally on paper
Computer technologies	MS DOS, Pravec-16 (IBM-PC)	Text editing programmes CDS/ISIS-micro	Traditionally on paper including tests
Library computer technologies	Windows, IBM-PC, Internet	MS OFFICE, WinISIS, Aleph	Online, Electronic form

The changes can be characterised by the general conclusion that there is a transfer from syllabus-oriented model to programme model. These reflect analogous processes, tracing the changes in management technologies and in production itself: improving and reengineering. The following of analogous strategies is observed in the development of libraries, too.

The initial concept of introducing computer technologies into the library activity with the purpose for its elaboration is replaced by a general change of the library model enforced by the necessity of its entering into the new information environment. The transition from using the computer as an assistant of the librarian towards the assignment of new tasks, including management, requires also a change in content and quality aspects with regard to the knowledge and skills of librarians in the future. Reflecting these requirements, we could define the following groups of problems:

- Creation of e-content for presentation of libraries and their information resources.
- Providing access and using own and external information resources.
- Cooperated and full-right participation in the international information exchange.

To fulfil these main tasks, not only quantitative accumulation is necessary, but also a high quality of electronic documents. For this purpose the future library specialists must solve the following problems:

1. Creation, collection and providing a long-term preservation of electronic documents, endowed with the quality of library preservation and being original editions or analogues of printed editions or correlates by their function.
2. Creation of united reference and request programme in all parts of the electronic stocks, which allow the final user to apply complex syntactical structures in query formulation.
3. Providing accessibility of electronic documents for the user.

4. Working out a dynamic model of get ahead of information for new incomings into the library electronic stocks.

With the acquired knowledge and skills for the solving of these tasks the library specialists will be able to meet the pressing need of high quality library e-content. It will transform into the new web-environment the main library functions with the respective structure, constant and reliable preservation of unique library collections in formats and carriers, for which data conversion and re-creation of the authentic information in them are provided.

### ***Communication Problems***

The next stage in the training of future library specialists after the creation of electronic resources is the solving of problems of providing their online access. A great quantity of the existing library electronic content is remaining in the so-called “invisible” or “deep” Web. The reason for the appearance of the invisible Web is the development of instruments and programme environment for creation of Web pages and the impossibility to be covered by the search engines. The current updating of syllabus is provided by the introduction of new programme technologies for making dynamic Web pages, and the students are trained to interact with the users – i.e., the last stage of virtual medium formation according to the requirements and the visions of the user. For instance, there is a model of functional decomposition of library Web site, which allows dynamic design of pages, built on module principle. As several comparatively independent parts – modules, could be differentiated in the site of each library. The Web sites of the Bulgarian libraries mostly contain the headings: New books, Events, Ask the librarian, Calendar, as well as counters for measuring the frequency of visits, online questionnaires.

Among the concrete tasks to be solved by students could be mentioned: design differentiation, content and communication, which embrace the initial stage of planning of design with the use of the XML technology, containing various information – from text to multimedia for different user groups or for creation of different versions of the site – for instance, in Bulgarian and in English.

### ***Present State of the Bulgarian Libraries in the Web Space***

The Bulgarian university, research and public libraries are presented in a satisfactory way in the Web space. The main reason for this is the different quality of the Web pages of the libraries, the different types of servers on which these are stored, the lack of links to most frequently visited Bulgarian catalogues and search machines, etc. The Bulgarian libraries' Web content presents only its own stocks and services, while the access to electronic resources is too limited because of their still small volume. Not only the libraries of the American University in Bulgaria and of the American Information Centre, but other Bulgarian libraries are also carrying out retro-conversion of their traditional catalogues into electronic ones. As a rule, the regional libraries include in their working plans mainly the cultural and historic heritage, the academic libraries – the access and use of full-text databases and online resources with syllabus depending on their profile. The information services of scientific research are a priority of the big research and university libraries. The tendency towards cooperation of the efforts for acquisition and providing online access to the biggest databases of prestige has increased in the last three years. There are some achievements of the Bulgarian Information Consortium, including the five biggest university libraries. Besides the already mentioned trend – presentation of the cultural and historic heritage in regions, the regional libraries successfully develop their educational function, too. A special attention should be paid to the successful realisation of a project for incorporation of children into the new information environment, which lays a solid basis for development of early eLearning. The successful projects of the Municipal Library in Dobrich “Children in the Web” (<http://www.libdgabe.dobrich.net/>), as well as the project of the Municipal Library “Nikola Furnadzhiev” in Pazardzhik “Library, school and parents together: let us save the love of reading!” are good examples for the role of libraries for protection of children from the real dangers of Internet and their incorporation into the world of books. The creation of the first Bulgarian virtual university (<http://www.bvu-bg.eu/>) marks the real introduction in Bulgaria of the new teaching form – Learning.

The review of the university sites in Bulgaria shows a different picture as regards the design and the contents of pages. Information could be found in all university sites about: structure of the university, management, teachers, faculties, departments, curricula, projects, material basis (auditoria, equipment, hostels, refectories, sports basis, etc.) There is information in the sites of the seven universities for students and online services, three universities offer access in a Website to resources for continued education. Distant training is offered by

foreign companies (Cisco systems), as well as cooperated training with Bulgarian universities (European computing education), mainly in information technologies. All university libraries have or are in the process of creation of online catalogues, which are accessible without limits for all citizens. The access to full-text, analytical and subject databases is allowed only to teachers and students from the respective universities. The big research and regional libraries offer a rich variety of bibliographical, subject, analytical, full-text databases, in most cases with open online access. Detailed information about the visited sites can be seen in Table 1.

The Central Library of BAS has an independent address (<http://www.cl.bas.bg>), accessible 24 hours a day. The Web-content is well structured and reveals entirely the online accessible resources. Full and free access is provided to the online catalogue, the electronic publications of the researchers in CL BAS, the electronic versions of the publications of CL and the central administration of BAS, to the virtual library with full-text works of classics of the Bulgarian literature, etc. Limited access to the subscribed full-text databases only for researchers from BAS is offered.

The various Web-designs may be accepted as an advantage for creation of colourful and expressive panorama of the presence of each library in the Web space, while the heterogeneous structuring of the Web-content of libraries causes some difficulties. The following general groups of problems can be formulated: heterogeneous structuring of the Web, ambiguous formulation of the search fields, inexact and incorrect definition and tracing of links. In this respect the coordinated efforts of the library society are necessary with the support of experts in the field of Web-creation in order to make a unified system of criteria for Web-design and structuring of the Web-content of the libraries for laying a technological basis for the future filling up with information resources of quality. To these conclusions reached the students from the discipline 'Library Science and Bibliography', and in the course of training in Library Communication Technologies they made a multiple criteria analysis of the sites of the regional and university libraries in Bulgaria. This experience was useful for the participation of students and teachers from our school in the Help project. In the course of several online sessions the Web pages of students from the University of Salford and from the Vroclaw University were evaluated. The results were useful for achieving independent assessment of the knowledge of our and the foreign students and confirmed the convertibility of knowledge.

### ***Conclusion: Local and Global in the Teaching of Students***

In this conclusion we attempt to understand the tensions that are apparent in the rapidly changing local context in relation to teaching students for librarian employment. The opening up of Bulgaria to the flow of people, ideas, information and communication and the concomitant changes in political and economic structures have created rapid change for many citizens. However, the focus of this paper was to try to understand the changes in communication and choice that have affected the existing curriculum for librarians and the explosion of choice for citizens. There are three related problems that we have had to cope with and these are: competition in terms of infrastructure; decision making about the content of a teaching syllabus for librarians entering employment and faced with new problems; the relationship between the local conditions and the global dynamic. Some of the infrastructure demands have been met but others, in relation to the education of librarians, have been left to the private sector to provide. The teaching content of programmes has changed and there is a realisation that a more flexible approach to modules may provide some benefits to prospective librarians.

In terms of the relationship between the local and the global the opposition of the two tendencies leads to extremes – from depersonalisation to conservation. The concept of general stereotypes, caused by the irreversible processes of globalisation must be domesticated by the national identification landmarks, through which not only originality and colouring would be achieved, but also enrichment and diversification of the dialogue between different schools and trends. In this way the local would have preserving and creative effect upon the potential of the global. From the example of the mutual evaluation of students from different universities and countries it can be seen that the communication globalisation has a catalytic effect for acceleration and enrichment of training and respectively the acquiring of knowledge and skill by the students. The integration of the different kinds of communication on the multifunctional platform of Internet determines the process of globalisation and the access to content, but the creation of the contents itself bears the mark of the place of its creation through the specificity of its genesis and development reflecting the variability and the dynamics of social and the conditions of its existence.

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