
Albanian Libraries in a Changing Society

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of the Albanian library network within the changing context of the past twenty-two years. The first part traces the development of the library system in Albania by giving a brief review of library legislation and library science education and professional training. The second part provides background information about the implementation of new technologies that facilitated free access to information throughout the country. The paper highlights the leadership role of the National Library of Albania (NLA), which functions as the professional body that oversees all libraries in the country, and its leading role nationwide. The NLA's engagement in various digitization projects that ensure access to the Albanian national cultural heritage and treasures makes it an important contributor to international projects as well.

“There is nothing permanent except change.”
—Heraclitus (540–475 BCE)

Although the *library institution* in Albania in its current state is relatively new, the *library tradition* is an old one. Significant evidence confirms that during the Middle Ages, at the courts of Albanian princes, nobles, barons, and rulers, there were chancelleries that functioned in the two erudite languages of the continent—Latin and Greek—and within those courts, libraries were present as well. The geopolitical position of Albania, situated in the transition zone from West to East and vice versa, enabled Albanians to establish an active book trade both with Constantinople and the western part of Europe. The Ottoman caesura represented a violent interruption

of these developments. Nonetheless, for nearly five centuries of Ottoman rule, the Albanians did not lose their library tradition; under the Turkish occupation, knowledge was disseminated mainly through the libraries of the great families of *pashas* and *beys* and through the religious institutions: Benedictine abbeys, Franciscan and Jesuit monasteries, Orthodox monasteries, madrasas, and tekkes of Bektashi's believers (Plasari, 2002). The Albano-Balkanological collection of the Albanian Literature Commission, a joint Albanian/Austrian institution established in the city of Shkodra in 1917, served as the nucleus for the National Library of Albania (NLA), which was established in 1920. After World War II, the first public libraries were opened, in towns such as Tirana, Elbasan, Shkodra, and Korça, and then later on in smaller urban areas. The development of secondary education led to the establishment of university libraries beginning in 1957.

The Albanian national library network consists of all the libraries in the Republic of Albania: the national library, public libraries, academic libraries, school libraries, and various special libraries. Similar to other Eastern European postcommunist countries, the primary political, social, and economic changes that have occurred in Albania over the last twenty-two years have had a dramatic influence on the country's society and its national library system. Democratic changes have gradually increased the demand for better access to information and for the updating of library resources. As a country with no democratic past and no experience as an information-based society, providing open access to all citizens has become one of the most important priorities in everyday library work. Although the direct impact of democracy in library services has become visible through the involvement of librarians in the democratic process and with ensuring that citizens have unrestricted access to information, the postcommunist transition has entailed considerable financial difficulties for the library system.

IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES

The large-scale implementation of new technologies (computers, laptops, mobile phones, iPods, tablets, Kindle readers, and so on) launched an information and communications revolution that has positively affected Albanian life by creating conditions that enable information sharing among users and institutions, while also bringing about palpable qualitative changes. A generation that has grown up with video games in online communities has redefined Albanian users' expectations. The implementation of new technologies in libraries has fostered the spread of the internet in Albania. The World Bank has provided data for Albania internet usage (indicator: per 100 people). During the period from 1995 to 2013, use of the internet averaged 16.26 percent of the population (with a minimum of 0.01 percent in 1995, and maximum of 60.1 percent in 2013). The International Telecommunication Union provides data for Albania mobile phone subscribers (indicator: per 100 people) from 1996 to 2013.

The average value for Albania during that period was 46.76 subscribers per 100 people, with a minimum of 0.07 subscribers per 100 people in 1996, and a maximum of 116.16 subscribers per 100 people in 2013 (Albanian Internet Users, n.d.; Albanian Mobile Phone Subscribers, n.d.).

The new information and communications technologies were warmly welcomed by the Albanian library community, which has embraced the newly defined role of libraries as digital information hubs. Albanian librarians have been actively engaged in changing Albanian society by providing free and unrestricted access to library collections and by making an ever increasing number of collections available in digital format. Innovative librarians have turned on the “green digital light,” facilitating the arrival of the “digital highway” in Albania. Yet, there are some libraries that still have but limited online access, so that their catalogers continue to handle paper records. A study conducted in 2012 revealed that Albanian librarians need more training in order to become proficient users of information and communications technologies (Haska, 2013).

THE LIBRARIAN’S ROLE

In the electronic age, global information networks have changed the world, and “the role of [librarians has grown] from that of a collector and preserver of information resources to a professional involved in very complex issues of organization [and] the dissemination of and access to information” (Burke, 2001). Librarians monitor users’ needs and make every effort to ensure the public’s quick access to information. In addition, librarians have started acting as mediators between information and patrons; librarians assist users in retrieving information online, while also teaching them how to search for information on their own. Albanian librarians have taken advantage of technological opportunities to offer hands-on services to library users; they are no longer information *custodians* but have become *facilitators*. In Albania, the contemporary information society has offered access to global knowledge, unlike during the previous period when national collections were “preserved”—meaning physically locked away—in closed areas. Albanian libraries are increasingly becoming information centers instead of places where librarians only lend library materials.

NEW TRENDS IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE

Over the past two decades, changes in society and technology have had a significant impact on Albanian libraries. The social revolution in the country ultimately paved the way for a digital revolution to take place in the Albanian library community. Since the early 1990s, librarians have made every effort to become involved in European digital projects, many of which are still under way. Such projects will lead to further development and modernization of the country’s library system.

Library Legislation

The first Albanian law concerning libraries, which was initially drafted by Albanian and foreign library experts, was approved by Parliament in February 2000 and amended in 2004. The Albanian national library network, which includes all libraries in the republic, consists of the NLA, forty-five public libraries, thirty-five special libraries, and twenty-four academic libraries. There is also a school library network of approximately 1,500 schools, where there are limited collections of books and part-time teachers act as librarians. All of these libraries operate according to the Albanian Library Law, which provides the legal framework for the creation, funding, and staffing of libraries within the Albanian library system. The law is supplemented by numerous acts and regulations. Enacted in 1922 and revised in 1992, the Legal Deposit Law entitles the NLA to play the role of archival repository for all of the country's publications and to publish the *National Bibliography of Albania*. In 2006, when it was approved by Parliament, the first Albanian Book Law required publishers to send to the NLA five gratis copies of every title printed in the country and to send to municipal libraries five copies of each publication printed in their districts.

Library Services

Albanian library users have new opportunities to interact with previously limited information resources. These opportunities include open-shelf access, online public-access catalogs, digitized catalogs, databases, electronic resources, internet access, and the Albanian digital library. Several libraries have begun to design websites that offer new services to patrons in order to provide them with free, unlimited access to online databases and digital collections. Despite the fact that the technological and digital revolution has brought about changes in many libraries, online services like "Ask a Librarian" are still limited.

Freedom of Information

Understanding the role of information in a democratic society, Albanian libraries began promoting free access to information, and libraries became open to all after the fall of communism. The attitude of librarians has likewise changed. In order to take the first steps toward free public access to information for all citizens as a fundamental human right, efforts have been made to guarantee equal access to information to all users, regardless of their information needs. In fact, open access to information is now guaranteed by Albanian library law. Democratic changes that occurred during the 1990s brought about the possibility of change in the policies of the NLA. These policies have abandoned the extreme restrictions that used to exist on the availability of certain library-materials categories and been replaced by policies that remove barriers and increase access to information (Plasari, 2002). Analysis of the previous ten years of

new acquisitions at the NLA (using my own internal study of the library's operations) shows that out of the 10,650 new foreign entries, 63.7 percent are in English, 9.3 percent in German, 8.3 percent in Italian, 7.3 percent in French, 3.6 percent in Romanian, 0.9 percent in Russian, 0.3 percent in Bulgarian, and the remainder (6.6 percent) in other languages.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Until the late 1990s, there was no automated library system in Albania because of the scarcity of computers. Internet access was only available through telephone lines. Pilot automation projects that facilitated the acquisition of equipment were made possible through foreign grant programs sponsored by the Open Society Fund. Initially, open library software was used, and the process of library automation began. Starting on this process as a country where a basic infrastructure was missing, Albania became a country in which the implementation of new information and communications technologies became the priority for every library director. The concept of *libraries without walls* became a reality. The NLA has since witnessed significant innovative changes. It was the first library in the country to develop a strategic plan for the implementation of new technologies in library services, for example, while other Albanian libraries are merely at the beginning of this process.

The National Library of Albania (NLA)

The NLA was founded by the Albanian government in 1920. It was thereafter inaugurated on December 10, 1922, but did not begin to produce an official national bibliography until 1959, when a section for bibliography was established within the library. Its bibliography department has since served as the national bibliographic center for Albania. In addition to producing the current national bibliography, it also works on selected retrospective bibliographies and bibliographies of works in Albanian that are published outside of the country. It is also responsible for the serial *Albanica*, a bibliography of foreign works about Albania. The Albanian Library Law designated the NLA as the nation's beneficiary for the legal deposit of Albanian publications, the country's main bibliographic center, the research center in the field of library and information science and bibliography, and the center for continuing professional training for library staff. The law also indicated that the NLA should serve as the center for the preservation of Albano-Balkanological publications, the main ISBN agency for Albanian publications since 1998, and the only national center for the conservation and restoration of rare collections.

The NLA operates under the authority of the Albanian Ministry of Culture. It is the primary library institution in the country and also an important scientific research institution. The NLA is charged with collecting and preserving the written cultural heritage of Albania. In the new millennium, aside from fulfilling its traditional functions, the NLA's fo-

cus has expanded to include the provision of free and equal access to information for all Albanians. As of December 22, 2014, the NLA's collections amounted to 1,164,127 items. While previously, the perceived need was that the library required more English-language materials, researchers have recently indicated the need for an enriched collection of current Albanian-language materials, particularly in digital form (Robinson, 2010).

Automation. During the early 1990s, Albanian libraries underwent a major transformation. Faced with economic and professional challenges when Albanian citizens first experienced political freedom, the NLA was able to offer the first personal computers for library use. In 1994, despite skepticism and fear of the previous generation of catalogers not being prepared for the technological boom, the first free library-software programs, CDS and ISIS, allowed the NLA to take its first steps toward creating an electronic catalog, which was followed by the implementation of a simple local area network (LAN) in 1998. The library-computerization process required the reshaping of workflows and the modification of the library structure and its operations. Technical library procedures, such as those for handwritten catalog cards and for user registration, were quickly eliminated when the NLA was connected to the internet in 1998. Free access to the internet attracted curious, new library users, especially the younger generation. The year 1999 marked a historical event: the NLA joined the global information network. In 2000, the integrated library software Adlib was installed, enabling the retrospective conversion of the old catalog. The NLA was the first library in the country to purchase and implement an integrated library system. Currently, the NLA offers online services to its users, who can conduct remote searches in the library system via the internet.

As of December 22, 2014, the NLA's automated catalog contained 325,207 records. Its online catalog contains bibliographic records of books, articles, maps, dissertations, serials, and audiovisual materials acquired after 1994. The web interface allows for full searches across eleven predefined fields. In addition, the library continues to produce a CD-ROM database in which clients can access bibliographic citations and full articles in the social sciences. The internet is no longer a luxury; it is largely used for collection development and interlibrary loan services. Improving internal communications, the intranet has been used in the library since 1998 to share information among library employees.

The redesign and restructuring of the NLA's website in 2009 enabled users to access new services, including digitized catalogs, e-services, Albanian digital collections, and the digital content of European libraries and their online databases, through a single search point: the European portal, the European Library. According to the NLA's website statistics, the number of users has increased every year; the resources most frequently accessed by virtual users are the online public-access catalog and other

digitized catalogs and e-bibliographies. The NLA is the only library in the country that monitors its website's statistical indicators. A comparison of the usage of the library's website from 2009 to 2014 indicated a marked increase. For example, in 2010, 794 users accessed the Albanian digital library, as compared to 1,753 in 2013 and 2,119 in 2014; there were 1,040 users who accessed the e-bibliography in 2012, 1,825 in 2013, and 1,940 in 2014 (table 1).

The growth in the use of the NLA website can be explained by the increasing numbers of individuals with access to the internet at home or, more recently, via mobile phones, the usage of which is widespread in the country. A closer look at the statistics regarding information and communications technologies in 2013, as compared to 2012, reveals that the number of active mobile users, as well as mobile-phone customers using the internet (typically, Albanian users access broadband service via 3G) has grown. The number of active mobile users at the end of 2013 amounted to 3.7 million, compared to 3.5 million at the end of 2012. At the end of 2013, the number of subscribers to fixed broadband access for mobile communications (via 3G USB card/modem) was about 294,000, which represents an increase of 36 percent compared to 2012. In 2013, the number of users accessing the 3G broadband (via wireless handsets and USB cards) was 1.2 million, compared to 694,000 during the previous year (AKEP, 2014).

Projects. As the pioneer for library services in the country, the NLA evaluated its older materials and decided to make them available worldwide. The catalog containing printed cards for the Manuscripts and Rare Book Collection used by academic audiences was digitized through a project titled "Information Digitization (Digital Conversion of Special Collections Card Catalogs)." The digitized catalog is now available to users through the NLA's website. The retrospective conversion of the library's catalog began in 2003 and has focused on works related to Albania and the Balkans (1989–1995) and the Albanian Book Archives (1555–1994). Most of

Table 1. Comparison of the usage of the NLA's website, 2009–2014

| Number of . . . | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 |
|---------------------------------------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| New and returning visitors | 14,773 | 15,304 | 43,786 | 43,850 | 51,023 | 60,855 |
| Visits to site | 25,048 | 26,558 | 68,087 | 69,273 | 85,042 | 200,811 |
| Countries represented by users | 103 | 111 | 101 | 119 | 122 | 12 |
| Languages represented by users | 61 | 69 | 96 | 110 | 121 | 14 |
| Users who accessed subpages | 69,422 | 81,274 | 182,984 | 200,517 | 250,588 | 305,517 |
| Searches in the OPAC | 38,138 | 40,279 | 89,086 | 89,100 | 109,417 | 137,691 |
| Visits to digitized catalogs | 1,875 | 611 | 4,490 | 6,108 | 6,247 | 6,019 |
| Users who accessed the Events page | 2,803 | 4,738 | 4,950 | 4,462 | 5,100 | 6,393 |
| Albanian digital library | – | 794 | 1,399 | 2,623 | 1,753 | 2,119 |
| e-bibliography | – | – | – | 1,040 | 1,825 | 1,940 |

the catalog cards were handwritten; with only a fraction printed, the retrospective conversion was realized by manually keying in all of the cards. The creation of the new Department of Retrospective Electronic Conversion in 2006 accelerated the process, and, by the end of 2013, a total of 23,500 records were available online. This project is still underway. The NLA became the first library in Albania to adopt an open-access strategy to showcase national cultural history. This stemmed from the European policy that aims to ensure online access to European digital cultural heritage. The project began in 2009 with the digitization of rare collections, and the service allows the NLA to make its collections available to a wider audience. Because there is no specific budget for this project, the library working group decided to use Greenstone, an open-source, multilingual software “produced by the New Zealand Library Project at the University of Waikato and developed and distributed in cooperation with the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Human Info NGO” (About Greenstone, n.d.).

The Albanian Digital Library, e-ALBANICA, is the gateway to all Albanian national heritage resources dating from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries and to foreign-language resources related to Albania’s history and culture and existing in the NLA collections. This digital collection currently contains old and rare books, manuscripts, maps, periodicals, and other works, all of which are available on the library’s website. During the last few years, by developing its own digital-library’s strategy, the NLA’s goal has been to provide access to its digital collections and promote Albanian cultural heritage as part of the larger category of European digital content. This is supported by UNESCO’s 2013 message that was broadcast on World Book and Copyright Day:

Digital books offer new opportunities for access to knowledge, at reduced costs and over wide geographical areas. Traditional books are still powerful: failsafe, portable and standing the test of time. All forms of books make a valuable contribution to education and the dissemination of culture and information. The diversity of books and editorial content is a source of enrichment that we must support through appropriate public policies and protect from uniformity. This *bibliodiversity* is our common wealth, making books much more than a physical object, for they are our most beautiful invention for sharing ideas beyond the boundaries of space and time. (Bokova, 2013; emphasis in original)

This sentiment was meant to encourage librarians that are not yet involved in or are at the beginning of the digital revolution to “use technology intelligently to enhance service” (Gorman, 1998).

A study conducted in 2010 discovered the significance of developing a national digital library for schools. In addition to examining the economic and technological challenges of designing such an information system, the study explores strategies and priorities for creating such a program

at the national level (Li & Sula, 2011). The NLA took into account the recommendation of the European Council, which advised that the future of libraries will be digital: "A common access point for European's digital cultural heritage, the National Library policy advocating vigorously the necessity's vision of a National Digital Library's Center, which can build more digital collections, offer more and more possibility and access with a 'mouse click' to digital cultural and scientific content to all treasures of humanity, turned the dream into reality" (European Commission, 2006).

Inaugurated in 2013, the National Written Heritage Digital Center was equipped with the latest technological tools. This newly established laboratory will not only enable a rapid mass digitization of the nation's rich heritage, but it will also ensure high-quality access to digital library collections and services for the global, online community.

User Services. The NLA is open seventy-two hours per week, during which time users can borrow library materials or use them in the reading rooms. In recent years, special attention has been paid to online user services. Through its website, the NLA offers access to electronic resources and services, including e-bibliographies, online public-access catalogs, the e-Albanica digital library, e-ISBN, and "Ask a Librarian."

International Partnerships. Following the democratic changes in Albania, the NLA became a member of several associations, including IFLA, LIBER, CENL, and CDNL. In 1998, the NLA became a member of the Council of European National Libraries, and in recent years it has been involved in several European projects in order to ensure easy access to its collections through national or international portals. In 2008, the NLA became a full partner in The European Library (TEL), a portal that offers free access to digital books, journals, newspapers, maps, audio-visual, and other materials from the collections of national libraries throughout Europe. Albanian cultural heritage is widely represented in this European collection, which allows internet users to perform searches using the Albanian language. Building on this, the NLA has recently become a full participant in two of the most significant European and global projects: Europeana, and the World Digital Library.

The NLA's main objective has been the development and growth of regional library collaboration. Since 2003, the library has collaborated with the National and University Library of Kosovo, and in 2005, the partners began organizing an annual conference on information and library science that is held alternatively in Tirana, Albania, and Kosovo (Republic of Kosovo, 2013). Since 2004, the NLA has hosted an "American Corner." This service is helpful to many researchers in various fields. The American Corner program is a library and information service with open access to all media that offers a wide range of information about the history, politics, literature, and culture of the United States. The reference materials exist in printed form, as CD-ROM databases, and direct access to various

information sources via the internet. Albanian library users can access the American Corner electronic resources (via eLibraryUSA) from the NLA's computers or through a Kindle e-book reader.

Public Libraries

The public libraries that operate through the country's district communications technology depend professionally on the NLA but financially on local authorities. Because there is no municipal library in the capital city, the NLA also functions as a city public library for Tirana's citizens. Because official statistical data are missing, the most recent data were collected by the NLA website. The implementation of new information and communications technologies also indicates an overall increase of library users at the NLA. Statistically, as of late December 2000, there were only 76,000 registered users; after December 31, 2013, there were a reported 173,389 users of the NLA—a very significant increase (around 130 percent). The number of books accessed has also increased: in December 2000, the library had but 75,195 volumes in circulation, which rose to 187,248 in 2013. Statistics also show that an average of thirty-three library materials were consulted per each library member that had registered for 2013, as opposed to just twenty-eight library materials being consulted per library member registered in 2009.

During the transition period, Albanian public libraries were confronted with significant financial difficulties, which required seeking out creative ways to provide new services to patrons. As user communities moved beyond the traditional limits of libraries, many librarians, liberated from dogma and censorship, began to have a new vision of the information revolution and information services. In reading rooms, open shelves now provide easier, freer access to resources for all users. In a period when physical distance is no longer a barrier, the implementation of new technologies is being influenced by external factors, such as the lack of funds for technical equipment, internet fees, network optimization, expansion of LANs, and an increasing demand for client workstations. As a result of pilot automation projects, library equipment and software that were offered free of charge primarily to public libraries have strongly connected libraries to their communities. However, while services in public libraries commenced automation, their electronic catalogs continue to be available only in-house. UNESCO provided software that was free to libraries (CDS/ISIS), and it was used during the first stages of the creation of small databases. Public libraries without the internet have access to electronic resources through CD-ROM/DVD. Within the framework of the eIFEL (Electronic Information for Libraries) project, most public libraries have subscription access to electronic resources, especially electronic, full-text journal collections in a variety of fields.

Public libraries, where local history is preserved, have made significant strides in the development of new local cultural services for the community in recent years. At present, public libraries have become prominent information centers. They have recently undertaken significant efforts toward the implementation of new technologies in library work. In order to promote the Albanian local cultural heritage, several public libraries have undertaken a variety of projects for local memory digitization by making the digital content available on their website or on CD/DVD support. In accordance with the IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (1994), the Albanian public libraries have provided free public library services, which include mobile libraries to serve areas without direct access to a public library, for all.

Public libraries are offering access not only to national but also foreign heritage. They operate lending services, run cultural events, and provide places for meetings, exhibitions, and other activities. They have often been viewed as a form of national treasure, contributing to local and national identities. In our new information age, they naturally face many challenges and will be forced to reconsider their role in Albanian society (Robinson, 2010). Determining the roles, tasks, and functions of public libraries is paramount to identifying their role as a gateway to the resources of interest to their users, offering not only books and other printed materials but also all kinds of information and access to new media, leading toward the concept of the *multimedia library*.

During the nearly twenty years that Albania gradually transitioned into a democracy, books became a rare and expensive commodity because of a decrease in the availability of library funding. To promote reading in communities lacking access to books, UNICEF and IKEA initiated Albania Reads, a collaboration aimed at opening libraries in 850 schools (Carter, 2008). Partnerë për Fëmijët, a nonprofit organization that seeks to improve the quality of life for children in Albania, started mobile library service in an effort to provide 1,600 young people who live in isolated rural communities with access to books and learning activities. Begun in 2012, the mobile library, which is stocked with a wide selection of books, encyclopedias, and activities, visits forty-five communities once a month, thus enabling children to borrow books and participate in games and activities designed to help them “improve their learning, vocabulary, social skills and use of free time” (“Monthly Mobile Library,” 2012).

Academic Libraries

University libraries in Albania are relatively better equipped than their public counterparts. Unlike public libraries, the involvement of academic libraries in Tempus Phare programs brought about administrative and technological reforms due to the relationship it formed with other European

universities through interlibrary cooperation and the organization of training sessions that allowed libraries to recover from decades of political remoteness. Electronic access to scientific information in university libraries in Albania was enabled in order to meet the academic community's growing demands. University libraries, previously isolated from access to scientific achievements, started to benefit from financial support and technical assistance from European projects and were also able to acquire computers and subsequently develop quality online information-resources systems. While most academic libraries are partially automated by using various software platforms, a study conducted in 2012 found that the difficulties these libraries continue to face are mainly because of funding issues (Haska, 2013).

Academic libraries in Albania have branch, or faculty, libraries that have improved their services to students and researchers. They provide free internet access for all students and academic staff. Academic libraries are currently faced with the issue of decreased funding despite the increased need to maintain the ability to provide uninterrupted access to e-knowledge. In order to meet their users' needs, academic libraries began to organize in consortia in order to purchase information resources for the research and instructional needs of the academic community. Open-access journals have become an important emerging trend aimed at overcoming the country's current economic conditions. Established in 1966, the Albanian University of Arts includes schools of music, fine arts, and the performing arts and is home to the most important art library in Albania. The library of the University of Arts, which today has about 40,000 titles, has made significant progress in terms of digitization efforts. The library's digital archive will contain a fine arts gallery, musical scores of Albanian composers, biographies of Albanian personalities from all artistic fields, digitized sound recordings and films, and graduate and postgraduate student work (Bakiasi, 2011).

Special Libraries

A network of specialized libraries has also seen the development of automated processes. In Albania, such collections are normally subject-specific; for example, art, law, medicine, science, and engineering, and so on. In terms of collection development and acquisitions, Albanian librarians have had to take great care in purchasing adequate resources with limited funding, primarily because specialized literature has to be purchased from foreign countries. One of the most prominent special libraries in the country is the Library of the Parliament of Albania, which was established in the 1990s and now serves the members of the People's Assembly. The main mission of this library is to assist lawmakers and parliamentary committees and their staff members with research and to provide the information necessary for their legislative activities. Its holdings consist of

Albanian and foreign monographs, periodicals, and reference materials (Bufi, 1998). Using the ProCite4 software, the library has created several databases: the ProLigi database containing reference to Albanian legislation; ProGaz, a database of speeches delivered in plenary sessions, articles, interviews, opinions, and lawmakers' statements; ProLib, a database of bibliographic descriptions of the books in the library's holdings; ProCV, a database of the personal data of Albanian lawmakers, beginning in 1921 up to the present; and ProLigiRetrospektive, which contains references to legal information published before 1991 (Library of the Parliament of Albania, 2010).

LIS EDUCATION

The dynamic changes in the field of library and information science (LIS) has led to the establishment of a new educational policy vision: the adoption of library education.

Formal Education

The formal education of librarians in Albania started in 1969 when the National School of Librarianship was established at the NLA. LIS education is not offered at the university level, and the NLA continues to be the only legal national center for library education (as set forth as a requirement by the Albanian Library Law of 2000). Between 1990 and 2013, nearly 600 librarians from the national library system were educated via the National School of Librarianship. It is important to point out that in recent years, due to the influence of technological changes in the national library network, the rapid growth of personal computing, and the development of the web and internet, the school updated its curriculum by introducing new modules related to information and communications technologies and other new competencies. Courses regarding the organization of information, research, digitization, and information and communications technology have occupied an important place in LIS curricula. The latest National School of Librarianship curricula included 422 hours during 2012–2014, in comparison to the 234 required during 2010–2012. Many of these hours are also devoted to information technology and information literacy.

Continuing Education and Professional Training

Another important development within the LIS program at the NLA is the Library Training Center (LTC). Since 1999, as an attempt at adaptation to the latest developments in the LIS field, the NLA created the LTC to organize, on a continuing basis, annual courses with librarians from across the library system. The main goals of the LTC are to provide continuing library education, improve professional expertise within the Albanian library community, apply new information technologies toward library-user services, cooperate with similar centers abroad, and organize workshops,

conferences, and symposia. The increasing use of information and communications technology in recent years has influenced the revision of the LIS curriculum, which was last updated in 2013 to reflect the latest developments in the field. Currently, more than 80 percent of modules are related to information and communications technology.

The LTC organizes workshops and offers short training courses on the latest competencies and skills in librarianship. Promoting information organization skills, as well as information retrieval and research skills, is the most important task that Albanian librarians have to address. In recent years, the center has been providing user education in the form of short orientation courses regarding the use of the library and library information resources and catalogs. The LTC also provides training on web searching, information retrieval and evaluation, and the ethical use of information. The NLA is increasingly becoming a key player in providing librarians with tools to promote information literacy and lifelong learning in their patrons. Over the last few years it has started to pay special attention to developing even more programs for its implementation. The current expansion of the information literacy movement evolved from its precursor programs, including library instruction, bibliographical instruction, and reader/user instruction, to information seeking and fair usage of information. Various schools supported by the NLA have begun to offer programs for entry-level students on bibliographic research, internet searching, and search engines. Furthermore, these schools are also offering instruction in the use of library websites, catalogs—manual, electronic, and digitized—information resources, and digitized resources.

Postgraduate Education

The first program on postgraduate education in librarianship opened in 2009 with forty students. Before this, there were no graduate programs at the master's level in LIS offered in Albania. The University of Philology and the NLA have been working together to develop the country's current postgraduate LIS program.

CONCLUSION

Over the past twenty-two years, the winds of change have been sweeping through Albania, and Albanian libraries have evolved into ideologically democratic institutions seeking to provide free access to information for all. While open access, the internet, and electronic catalogs are available in many libraries, a great deal of work remains in store for the Albanian library community in order to completely transition to an automated library system in accordance with contemporary user expectations. The celebrated quote of Heraclitus stated at the beginning—"There is nothing permanent except change"—is applicable to Albanian libraries today. Even more unexpected challenges await libraries. However, Albanians are optimistic about coping with future change not only because of the ac-

complishments of its librarians and the positive, long-term impact they have made but also because of the achievements of the library community worldwide.

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