

## Library and Education in Contemporary Society

---

### *Library and Education*

**Dr. Gheorghe Buluță**

E-mail: gbuluta@umf.ro

*Dr. Gheorghe Buluță is a certified expert of the Ministry of Culture in the field of old and bibliophile book. He was the general director of the “Mihail Sadoveanu” Municipal Library Bucharest and of the Central Library of the “Carol Davila” University of Medicine and Pharmacy – Bucharest. He taught as a lecturer courses of bibliography, history of book and writing at the University of Bucharest and at the “Valahia” University of Târgoviște and courses for the improvement of librarians’ training at the Centre of Professional Training in Culture. He has a very rich editorial activity, being the author of more than 20 books, published as unique author or/and in collaboration, and of more than 400 studies, articles and reviews. His fields of interests are history of book and libraries, bibliography and library management.*

#### **Abstract**

The psycho-social phenomena generated by mass-media and the new information and communication technologies at the level of the young generations have led to new communication practices that bypass libraries and revolutionized the intellectual labor practices, with texts being rather used than read. In this context, our article examines the need to increase the library's role in developing the quality of education and research and brings to attention a few possible solutions which include a partnership between various types of libraries and between librarians' associations and NGOs to facilitate education through library and safeguard reading.

**Keywords:** library, education, reading, children, youth, new information and communication technologies

The contemporary world dominated by mass-media and the new information and communication technologies, is full of paradoxes.

However, in a fully fledged "knowledge society", knowledge is of less interest for the young generations, trapped in the entertainment universe and seduced by consumption. Access to information has never been freer, faster and easier, but it always seems that what is at hand is not wanted.

Between computer and TV, "*the video-child*" as he is called by Giovanni Sartori (1), grows with the belief that only "nerds" should read, he believes that sustained effort is useless and that success is a matter of "guts" and luck, a script in which Books, School, Intelligence and Work have no place.

Libraries, especially public and academic libraries, have to struggle with deeply entrenched attitudes, with new communication practices which bypass them, their role in education becoming so difficult that it seems utopian.

The attitude of families showing lack of parents' concern with Books, the perverse or / and harmful effects of television and computer addiction are premises with which schools and libraries have to fight but with small chances of success.

The situation is a little better in the first school cycle, at least in urban areas, but the interest which teachers and librarians manage to work up in children is reduced drastically in higher grades. Many public libraries make remarkable efforts, pursuing dedicated programmes, working with schools, developing new offers, taking advantage as much as possible of the fact that there is still a compulsory school bibliography, but the psychosocial phenomena generated by commercial television and the enticing power of computers are stronger. It is not our intention to minimize the benefits for knowledge of the new information and communication technologies. The problem is that the practice of using them and the associated attitudes make one intellectually poorer instead of richer, make one look stupid instead of enhancing one's intelligence, make one's mind get lazy instead of sharpening it. It is users that are to be blamed for this and not technology. A statistical analysis places Romania in a leading position in the sad top of *illiteracy* (2) and things are not going to improve.

Clearly the library and the school, even in an active partnership, which is still so necessary, cannot fully counteract the effects of the declining family education and those of a deteriorating public life quality by watching stupid television shows. Certainly, *the cause is not completely lost*, or at least *we cannot afford to abdicate from the missions of the public library*, as they were listed in *the UNESCO Manifesto for Public Library* and *the Copenhagen Declaration – Public Libraries and Information*

*Society*, or of the school library, as indicated in *the School Library Manifesto*, or of libraries in general, as stipulated in *the Glasgow Declaration on libraries, information services and intellectual freedom* and in *the IFLA Manifesto on the Internet*. All these documents of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) point out that "freedom of access to information, regardless of means and borders is a fundamental responsibility of the library". By providing access to the world of knowledge, of thought and culture, libraries are "guarantors of free choice, cultural development, continuing research and information provided both to individuals and communities." (3)

The idea of increasing the library's role in the qualitative development of education and research is of interest for many library professionals and information services around the world, taking in our opinion on an urgent topicality. For example, these concerns are found in a series of speciality reports and articles.

A recent review of various aspects of "the parallel universe of information" in terms of the stakes, threats and opportunities newly arising out of the virtual world for the library and information professionals, proposes to direct the new generations of Internet users towards the supply of useful and valuable, possibly customized information. Libraries are in competition with a mass of non-validated, unprocessed, immediately available information, regardless of distance. It is a model that tends to be the only one for a generation born ready connected to the Internet". (4)

An Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) report shows that 89% of first years students use a search engine in their documentary research and only 2% use the computerized information tools of a library. 93% of users are satisfied with this practice. (5) Another report on the behaviour of future researchers, namely those in the "Google generation", born after 1993, presents a series of issues related to their practice of accessing the virtual library for research and online reading purposes. First of all, there is a tendency to go through only a small part of the literature consulted, as well as a different reading technique of electronic documents as compared to those on paper support, which involves rather a scanning of the information and even a way of favouring the online reading, thus avoiding the reading of the printed document. It is noted that the ability to use search engines does not have a counterpart of the same quality in the assessment practice of the information obtained. Weaknesses in circumscribing clearly one's own information needs and in establishing a search strategy, complemented only by querying search engines using words of common language, must be

pointed out. When these young people do not find library catalogues available for interactive use, they prefer to use familiar tools like Yahoo or Google. (6)

We are witnessing and finding hard to accept *a revolution in the intellectual labour practices*, in which the text is rather *used* than *read*, and ways of *effective reading* (read-scan, rapid selection, copy and paste) are adopted, in other words *new ways of working with the text*, just as different for the older generation, as reading a roll book rather than a codex type book was for them. The emphasis is on effective reading and not on the traditional one, defined through the phrase which has become obsolete – "book time" (in Miron Costin's words – "*There is no other more beautiful and useful way of spending leisure time than book time, reading a book*").

The new Internet practices are very different. In an interview with a very young professor from the Faculty of Journalism and Communication Sciences, University of Bucharest, he noticed that many students who are preparing to become journalists or communicators, "use only the basic functions of e-mail, do not know how to look for information on the Internet, although they are attracted to multi-media and anything interactive. They often do not realize what tools are available. Internet is just about chatting on the mess and funny videos on You Tube". (7)

What can libraries and especially librarians do? A methodological and relevant response even now can be found in the writings of Professor *Dan Simonescu* (1902–1993), corresponding member of the Romanian Academy, "We often talk of "the future library". The essence of this future libraries, consists of upgrading them and, especially, of upgrading the thinking of their servants, the librarians. The library of the future will introduce new methods of book dissemination and information of readers through the automation of various services. The librarian must be prepared in time for change, for the "shock of the future"! (8) Another approach would be to ask questions: how to adapt the info-documentary offer of the library to the information and reading needs of young people?, how to give up our professional habits and adapt to the young people's language with the purpose of restoring an effective communication, which seems so difficult today? There is an answer to these questions: "to communicate with each other, we must be synchronous". (9) Librarians *should fight* to maintain their status as information professionals and mediators of useful and valuable information, which they select and capitalize for the benefit of library users.

A lot has been discussed about *the role of libraries in achieving a quality higher education*. So far there are more questions than solutions.

Among the topics most debated recently mention should be made of several. Thus, libraries *should*: provide extensive collections of digitized documents, accessible through the catalogues of those institutions; facilitate access to information, both in their premises and remotely; modernize and diversify the services offered to the users; organize and develop online reference services; simplify library catalogues, as this is the tendency for the new generation OPACs.

In fact one can speak of "the need for libraries to enter the digital world as *key players*, which means efficient interconnection with other relevant international institutions so that they contribute to the development of the distributed repository of global knowledge." (10)

A current phenomenon, specific to academic training is distance learning, which has consequences in the world of libraries from several perspectives. Firstly, librarians without a higher education diploma have the opportunity to raise their level of training by attending such classes. Secondly, distance learning students represent a potential public for libraries, which has not been taken into account so far.

Every county has at least one distance learning local centre. What *should* libraries do, considering that the number of students has been growing lately? Here are some suggestions: to identify the local distance learning centres of various universities; to find out what subjects are studied, how many students are enrolled in them and what works are recommended; to collaborate with these centres and inform them about the library offer in terms of papers and other info-documentary resources that may be of interest for the curriculum and the documentation requirements for undergraduate and master students; to try to enter a partnership with interested universities, which can endow the public library with the literature (lectures) necessary for students or can transfer for a limited period of time the publication resources associated to the respective education programmes; to offer faculties the opportunity to advertise their education programmes in the space of the library. This approach is useful for young audiences, helping them to see the library as a place where they have access to centralized and systematized information on the education offer in all areas. If the public library enters their consciousness as a provider of useful information, specifically as a source of direct benefits, it is clear that its status as an active, necessary, exciting public institution will be enhanced.

Perhaps a series of solutions could be found through a *Partnership for education through libraries and the safeguarding of reading* which could bring together libraries of various types, regardless of their administrative and

financial affiliations, professional associations of librarians, NGOs whose social activities focus on children and youth and which could encourage the organization of *public debates*, including in the media and on channels accessible on the Internet. Moreover, it is worth reflecting on the use of library sites designed so as to attract Internet users and to arise curiosity. Why should they not receive "spam" from libraries, too?

Finally I will conclude with a piece of advice given by the Indian writer *Rabindranath Tagore* (1861–1941): "Do not limit the knowledge of a child to that of yours because he was born in another time".

### Bibliographical Notes

- (1) SARTORI, Giovanni. *Homo videns. Imbecilizarea prin televiziune și post-gândirea*. București: Humanitas, 2005.
- (2) CRAIA, Sultana. *Dicționar de comunicare, mass-media și știința informării*, București: Meronia, 2008.
- (3) BULUȚĂ, Gheorghe; CRAIA, Sultana; PETRESCU, Victor. *Biblioteca în societatea informației*. București: Do-MinoR, 2007.
- (4) EISENBERG, Mike. The parallel information universe. In: *Library Journal*, May 2008.
- (5) *College Students' Perceptions of the Libraries and Information Resources: A Report to the OCLC Membership*. Dublin (Ohio): OCLC, 2006.
- (6) Centre for Information Behaviour and the Evaluation of Research (Ciber) at University College London (UCL), *Information Behaviour of the Research of the Future: a Ciber Briefing Paper, 11 janvier 2008* – accesibil pe: [www.ucl.ac.uk/slais/research/ciber/downloads/ggexecutive.pdf](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/slais/research/ciber/downloads/ggexecutive.pdf).
- (7) "Citorii sînt și 1și 0" – interviu cu Manuela Preoteasa. In: *Dilema Veche*, VI, nr. 264, 5–11 martie 2009.
- (8) Cartea și biblioteca. In: *Centenar Dan Simonescu, Cartea și biblioteca. Contribuții la istoria culturii românești*. Antologie, prefață, tabel cronologic, bibliografie selectivă și note de Gheorghe Buluță și Victor Petrescu. Târgoviște: Bibliotheca, 2002.
- (9) TOUITON, Cecille. Les nouveaux usages des générations internet: un défi pour les bibliothèques et les bibliothécaires. In: *Bulletin des bibliothèques de France*, t. 53, nr. 4, 2008.
- (10) PORUMBEANU MADGE, Octavia-Luciana. *Bibliotecile medicale și utilizatorii de informații din România în era digitală*. București: Editura Universității din București, 2011.

### Bibliography

- BULUȚĂ, Gheorghe; CRAIA, Sultana; PETRESCU, Victor. *Biblioteca azi. Informare și comunicare*. Târgoviște, Editura Bibliotheca, 2004.
- BULUȚĂ, Gheorghe; CRAIA, Sultana; PETRESCU, Victor. *Biblioteca în societatea informației*. București, Do-MinoR, 2007.

- CRAIA, Sultana. *Comunicare și spațiu public la români*. București: Editura Meronia, 2005.
- PORUMBEANU, Octavia-Luciana. Educația în societatea cunoașterii și rolul structurilor infodocumentare. În: *Lucrările Conferinței Internaționale „Educație și creativitate pentru o societate bazată pe cunoaștere”*, organizată la București în perioada 22–23 noiembrie 2007. București: Editura Universității „Titu Maiorescu”, 2007, pp. 24–28.
- PORUMBEANU, Octavia-Luciana. Educația în societatea informațională / Education in the Information Society. În: *Studii de Biblioteconomie și Știința Informării / Library and Information Science Research*, nr. 11/2007, Editura Universității din București, 2007, pp. 129–136.
- PORUMBEANU, Octavia-Luciana. *Managementul cunoașterii și structurile infodocumentare*. Ed. a II-a. București: Editura Universității din București, 2011.