

November 2011

INSIDE:

- LIBRARIES HELP FARMERS GET AGRICULTURE SUBSIDIES 1
- ONLINE PAYMENTS MAKE TAX TIME EASIER IN LUNCAVITA 1
- LIBRARY ASSOCIATION MEMBERS TAKE TRIP TO EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT 2
- REFLECTIONS FROM PAUL BARAN, BIBLIONET PROGRAM DIRECTOR ON E-GOVERNMENT 3

Libraries Help Farmers Get Agriculture Subsidies

This year, 400 public libraries in Romania helped 17,000 farmers successfully receive farm subsidies of over \$54,000 per library. The Sadova library in Suceava County was one of the first to partner in this e-government initiative, and local farmers are finding guidance and at their local libraries. Agriculture is critical to the Romanian economy, accounting for nearly 30% of the labor force in 2009, significantly higher than many of its fellow European Union (EU) countries.

Membership in the EU has opened up opportunities for funding through the Common Agricultural Policy, with agriculture subsidies offering farmers a chance to modernize their land and increase their profitability.

With this transition comes a new electronic system; in Sadova librarian



APIA representative helps farmers apply for subsidies Mures County

Loredana Coca helps community members learn about and use the resources necessary to access funding available from the EU. Applicants currently go to the town hall to get the information they need to fill out their applications, including satellite images of their land, and then enter the data online using a secure account, completing the process by print-

(Continued on page 4)

Online Payments Make Tax Time Easier in Lun-cavita

Nearly 1500 libraries have joined Biblionet, and libraries new and old to the program are developing a diverse set of local initiatives that combine new and existing technology resources to improve people's lives. One example is the integration of libraries with an existing network of Information Access Points, built through a grant from the World Bank via the Ministry of Communications and Information Society. In Luncavita, a commune in Tulcea County Romania, the mayor's vision has put them at the forefront of using these resources to access e-governmetn services.

Stefan Ilie was elected in 2008 as one of the youngest mayors in the country, and believes firmly that access to information and technology is vital for the citizens and public institutions alike. He put that belief into action when he pioneered

(Continued on page 2)



IREX
WWW.IREX.ORG

Online Payments Make Tax Time Easier in Luncavita

(Continued from page 1)

a new online tax payment system, joining in June of 2011: “We became the first commune in Romania to join the national e-payment network for local taxes, SNEP, before bigger cities, which, at least in theory would prevail. Even the ministry people were amazed to receive our request to enroll in SNEP. Since then there have been several payments carried out suc-

cessfully through www.ghiseul.ro.”

Community members come to the library to use the internet access offered on computers gained through Biblionet and the Information Access Points project to pay taxes. Many payments are also made by people who own property in Luncavita but live far away from the commune, a group that particularly benefits from the ability to pay online instead of making a long trip to a local office. The success has spread; now the Association of Communes is promoting the use of technology, opening opportunities for more and more communes to join the e-payment system. “It’s interesting to see the buzz created by technology in our commune,” Mayor Ilie concludes, “what with the information points and the library being modernized. The number of library users increased by 17%, which is a formidable thing. We have even had more book donations since we implemented Biblionet!”

For librarian Constanta Andone, having computers in the library has changed her daily routine: “Some people have come to ask me about computers, and I taught them basic skills. In a month there can be 10-12 people coming solely for computer classes.” As for the future of e-government in Luncavita, both mayor Ilie and librarian Andone are committed to teaching citizens how to use these tools and benefit from the opportunities. ■



Website offers option to pay taxes online.

Library Association Members Visit European Parliament

At the beginning of this year, the Romanian Library Association, the ANBPR, chose group of librarians from across the country to visit the European Parliament in Brussels. A trip to the European Parliament might seem like an unlikely choice for a library study tour, but as one participant noted, “the informative role that libraries play and the way they transform themselves into centers for community development make becoming more visible to governments and the people absolutely necessary. The experience we had at the EU Parliament is worth more than a hundred hours spent reading about it.”

Florica Pop, director of the Salaj County library, noted the greatest achievement of the trip, “through this visit we created a permanent relationship and we pointed out the fact that public libraries are information centers already present in communities, so they can send in information directly to us.” Every participant received materials that they have made available in

each of their libraries and communities. The participants were also briefed on the Parliament website, which has additional resources that they can help their patrons access, “I have distributed all the knowledge we received, including this detail, to all of our librarians in the county” said Pop. While Romania has been a member of the European Union since 2007, forging new pathways for information to move from Brussels to local communities improves the connection between citizens and one of the most important bodies of the EU.

After the visit, librarians prepared new guides to the European Parliament to add to their collections. Each librarian has taken on a project related to what they learned in Brussels. The county library in Satu Mare succeeded in reopening their lecture hall for public access, where the county will host a Europe

(Continued on page 3)

Reflections from Paul Baran, Biblionet Program Director on E-government Opportunities

On a flight to Gdansk, Poland en route to the Innovation for Digital Inclusion conference I had the unique opportunity for a candid conversation with a representative of the Romanian Ministry of Communications and Information Society, Mr. Bogdan Savonea, who is the Deputy Secretary General and longtime partner and supporter of the Biblionet program. To date the Ministry has shown their support to the program by actively participating at events hosted by Biblionet as well as officially signing a three-way partnership agreement between the Ministry, IREX, and the National Association of Public Libraries and Librarians (ANBPR). I asked Mr. Savonea why he and the Ministry believe in the created partnership and he explained that, “such a consolidated and widespread investment in providing access to technology and information provides the Government with new possibilities to further the digital agenda and e-Government services.”

I spent the better part of four full working days working together with Mr. Savonea as well as Ms. Luminita Corneanu from the Ministry of Culture and Ms. Raluca Daminescu from the Agency for Payments and Assistance in Agriculture (APIA), the agency that distributes farm subsidies, committing to the advancement of e-inclusion efforts for Romania and learning from other European countries. Our primary goal was to advocate on behalf of the imperative role public libraries play in reducing the digital divide and to gain formal recognition in the Gdansk Roadmap, an effort that paid off. Ms. Corneanu explained that for the Ministry of Culture it is essential to establish libraries as hubs of communication in the community: “This was a good opportunity for us to understand how European institutions see access to Internet in public libraries and to start assessing new ways for Romanian public authorities to cooperate. Our aim is to provide not only access to information and online services, but also valuable online content, to as many people as possible.” In this context, the Biblionet program is following in the footsteps of other Global Libraries programs all over Europe: by creating the infrastructure, especially in rural areas, it provides a platform for improving the lives of all citizens.

Farmers have benefitted by this new network in a number of ways, and the APIA, the agency in charge of paying subsidies for the use of agricultural land, is more than willing to use libraries in the future. Ms. Daminescu, one of the initiators of this partnership between APIA and public libraries, hopes to see even more farmers using the services: “Our idea is to switch to digital applications for funds completely next year. This cannot be done unless farmers have access to computers, Internet and somebody to tell them what to do. No matter how much our local agents and experts want to do this, they won’t be able to cover hundreds of thousands of people alone.”

Biblionet is exactly half way through program implementation. Our best chance at leaving behind a better developed and sustainable library system as we phase out is to build partnerships, connections and trust between public and private stakeholders. Whether to pay taxes, listen to experts talk about alcohol abuse and domestic violence, or learn about organic farming, Romanians will come to their public libraries knowing these are friendly and welcoming spaces. ■

Biblionet is exactly half way through program implementation. Our best chance at leaving behind a better developed and sustainable library system as we phase out is to build partnerships, connections and trust between public and private stakeholders. Whether to pay taxes, listen to experts talk about alcohol abuse and domestic violence, or learn about organic farming, Romanians will come to their public libraries knowing these are friendly and welcoming spaces. ■



(Continued from page 2)

Direct Info Center. Maria Demble from Salaj has taken on educating her community about the potential to petition the EU directly on issues citizens care about. This focus is a new activity for many librarians in Romania, and has opened up new opportunities for outreach and leadership in navigating the many e-government resources available from both the Romanian and European Union governments. ■

IREX Biblionet Office:

15 Dr. Staicovici Nicolae St., 050556, District 5 Bucharest, Romania

Phone: +4021 410 2563
Fax: + 4021 410 2564
Email: office@irex.ro

IREX Headquarters:

2121 K Street NW #700 Washington DC 20037

Phone: 202 628 8188
Fax: 202 628 8189
E-mail: gl@irex.org



IREX
WWW.IREX.ORG

IREX is an international nonprofit organization providing leadership and innovative programs to improve the quality of education, strengthen independent media, and foster pluralistic civil society development. Founded in 1968, IREX works in more than 50 countries.

Libraries Help Farmers Get Agriculture Subsidies



Farmers consult records to complete agriculture subsidy applications

(Continued from page 1)

ing their application forms using the Biblionet computers and printers at the library. The new system is intended to improve the ability of farmers across Romania to benefit from this funding; the internet access and training available at the public libraries ensures that people from all backgrounds are able to take advantage of that possibility.

The librarian's role in Sadova has been relatively simple: as grant applicants come to the library, she helps them to access their accounts with their user name and password, and can print the applications so that they can submit them as paper copies, or help them submit it online. "So far, the process has been fairly straightforward, but this might change as the program becomes completely electronic in February 2012," Loredana explains. One of the more difficult components of this process will be learning about how to access satellite images of various plots of land using a tool like

Google Maps. The library is well-prepared to help patrons use these new tools, and in the initial analysis of the program, Suceava ranks among the first counties in number of subsidies received.

Biblionet partnered with the Agency for Payments and Interventions in Agriculture to streamline the process of assisting farmers in attracting subsidies from European funds by bringing it online. While the average annual budget for the pilot public libraries is between \$9,500 and \$14,000 per year, in the first year, participant libraries assisted in bringing \$20.3 to \$27.1 million back to their communities. This is a solid example of the ways libraries and the Romanian government can collaborate in order to better enact various e-government initiatives. ■