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Iasi Librarians: "County Library Deserves a Home"

Iasi county librarians understand that desperate times call for desperate measures. After hearing that the county council was planning to strip the community of its library building in the local Palace of Culture, Iasi librarians started an advocacy campaign to ensure officials provide their citizens with a proper library home.

For the last 55 years, the library has been located in the Iasi Palace of Culture, a neo-gothic building nationally prized for its architecture, where library staff served Iasi's residents with access to information and community space. In need of repairs, the county council recently began discussing a renovation project for the aging building. The library and staff were assured that the council would find sufficient space for the library during the interim while the renovations were completed.

However, when the council met to make its final decision, plans to relocate the library were tabled. Instead, the council president abruptly announced that the library and its 600,000 holdings would be divided and put in storage across the city. Staff would likewise be split into multiple locations. Effectively, the library's community space and services would disappear for Iasi's 320,000 residents.

Responding to the announcement, Iasi librarians Bogdan Ghiurco and Mihail Grinea stepped up to create an advocacy campaign that would ensure the library found a proper home.

So Ghiurco and Grinea set out to inform the people of Iasi about what was going to



"Iasi county library deserves a home" say students from Iasi who have joined the library advocacy effort

happen to the library and why it was important for residents to have a strong central library with public space. They began to get the news out by contacting local media to describe what was happening, starting a blog (<http://biblioteciesene.wordpress.com>), and using Facebook to inform their community.

The campaign has managed to get front-page news articles and coverage from local TV stations. Citizens are also responding online to the effort with pictures and video clips showing their support for the library asking that an adequate location be found. One local daily newspaper has even started an ancillary campaign supporting the library. They also requested help from the ANBPR, who responded with open letters to the county council President and the county council's union.

And while the council hasn't yet responded with a suitable solution, Ghiurco and Grinea are hopeful that their actions will have an impact. Because, in their words, "Iasi County library deserves a home."

Regional Journal: Ribbon Cutting Ceremony Livezi, Bacau County

How are citizens and educators using new library services in Romania? How does the support of local officials affect library development? On April 12th, we had the opportunity to find out when IREX was invited to be part of a ribbon cutting ceremony for the opening of a Biblionet-participating library in Livezi, in Bacau County.

Arriving in Livezi, we noticed that the library shared the same building with the Town Hall and that the whole structure was in a process of renovation. To our surprise, however, the library was looking very good. A lot of improvements were immediately visible: new desks for the computers, new doors and windows, and an efficient heating system. The library was filled with children, librarians from around the county, and school teachers who all waited anxiously for the opening ceremony to begin. The ceremony started with a priest blessing the library, a presentation from the head librarian about the

Biblionet process, and a few words from the mayor, the vice-president of the county council and Mr. Enache, the Coordinator from the Bacau County Library. It was clear that Ms. Mihaela Stan will lead the library well, especially as the Mayor promised his continued support for her and the library in the future.

After the official presentations, children from the local schools gave a performance and we were invited to lunch. During lunch, we had a chance to speak to another librarian attending the ceremony, Ms. Felicia Baci from Lipova, Bacau County. She reported that one of the local school's teachers is bringing his students to the library and giving them online tests. She says that children often come back in the afternoon and retake the test because they believe



Youth from Livezi in Bacau county stage a folk exhibition as a part of the library's inauguration even on April 12

they can do better. Biblionet librarians in Livezi will soon see what similar uses educators in their town will find for their new, modern library.

Harghita Librarian Reaches Out, Finds New Library Visitors

During her 20 years as a village librarian in rural Harghita County, Maria Otilia Barsan has been searching for ways to reach out into her community and offer services for all her constituents. Despite budget setbacks and the many challenges faced by rural libraries, Barsan's library recently joined the Biblionet program, bringing public access computers for library visitors and a government-funded internet connection to the library.

Partnering with two teachers from the local school in late 2008, Barsan visited the patients from the neuro-psychiatric rehabilitation and recovery center in Tulghes village, bringing along a collection of books from the library. She described the visit as part of her responsibilities as a librarian, to "bring an ounce of joy to these people who spend their lives within the walls of a social hospital."

Shortly after this visit, Tamas Benedek, a patient in the rehabilitation center came to join the library. "He wanted a library card so he could borrow books, not any books, but books on science, mathematics, physics, astronomy, philosophy," Barsan remembers.

Benedek grew up in a Romanian orphanage, but was forced to leave at age 18. After wandering through the Harghita Mountains,

"I was found there, almost frozen and thus both my both legs were amputated. My nightmare life continued, until I found shelter in the neuro-psychiatric rehabilitation and recovery center in Tulghes," he said, recalling how he ended up in the rehabilitation center.

After discovering the library during Barsan's visit, Benedek visited the library through a regular transportation service provided by the hospital. Once he was released, he continued visiting the library daily, no easy task given his physical limitations.

Benedek helped welcome the library's new computers and internet service earlier this year. "He was very impressed when I



Tamas Benedek now routinely visits the Tulghes public library in Harghita county after librarian Maria Otilia Barsan shared library resources with patients from the Tulghes hospital

handed him the invitation to the inauguration" said Barsan. Today, Benedek enjoys using the library's computers and public space—he often stays for 3-4 hours a day, using email and discovering new information on the internet.

Baia Mare Library Introduces New Training and Community Development Resources in Maramures County



On Europe Day 2010, students at the Firiza CIE center conducted research (above) and created posters using the community's new technologies (below)



Access to information at the local library is a high priority for Ioana and Adrian Hochia of Firiza, a district of Baia Mare. The rural community's remote location and distance from the county library has often meant residents go without access to relevant news and communication. In response, the couple collaborated with the "Petre Dulfu" Maramures County Library to design a project that would create a center with new technologies in Firiza so that residents can access information and communicate online.

"We chose to get involved in this project because we as a community need to be informed, so we always know what is happening locally and nationally. It is very hard to find a newspaper here, people do not really have internet access, and in some places there is no mobile phone signal. How well can area citizens live when they don't have access to information?" asked Ioana Hochia, underscoring how online resources can help the iso-

lated community overcome traditional barriers to accessing news and information.

In October 2009, the library received a grant through Biblionet's Community Participation Contest (CPC) to open a Center for Information and Education (CIE) in Firiza. The library purchased three laptop computers, a printer, desks and chairs, and donated additional furniture and books for the center. The Mansio Association of Firiza, where the center is located, agreed to pay the ongoing broadband connection costs and staff the center with volunteers.

New people began to use the center's services almost as soon as it opened. Twenty-five residents from the community attended month-long introductory computing courses at the CIE. They learned computer basics—from how to turn a computer on to different internet applications, such as email and search engines. Others in the community began using the center to borrow books or to use laptops with the center's free internet access to inform themselves on various topics, from current events to business matters.

"At first, people were skeptical regarding the center. They could not believe that these services are free. They began to discover its potential: the owners of tourist guesthouses in the area came to the center to use the laptops and the internet in order to advertise their services on specialized sites. Also, many people who seek

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First Steps in Braila

By Corina Ciuraru – Biblionet Braila County Coordinator

This winter saw the completion of Biblionet's first phase in Braila. Librarians were trained and we received new equipment. We all expected the first signs of spring before celebrating the new face of the public libraries in this county. We now have twenty local libraries participating in the first phase of the project. There were glitches and things are not perfect, but I can tell for sure that something has changed in rural libraries.

I would like to share my experiences coordinating with librarians and IREX. I started with enthusiasm, believing that our plan to revolutionize everything was all that mattered. Nothing is possible without dreams, and I dream a lot, but I found I had to open my eyes and match my dreams to reality. We learned that enthusiasm and energy were not enough to transform libraries in Braila overnight. But we are teaching librarians how to redefine

themselves, and as coordinator, I am helping them do it.

Rural libraries face many challenges. Libraries have survived decay for decades, with obsolete book collections and conceptions that no one managed to alter. Biblionet is changing libraries and their roles, and a donation of IT equipment has deeper implications. How do we manage this transition? For some librari-

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ans, taking the training course was like opening Pandora's Box.

I don't believe that my role is over once computers have been installed in the libraries. And I don't believe that we have completed all the trainings courses that will be useful. I believe that our work starts now, because we have to explain to librarians in the subtlest and most detailed way what they can do with their computers, beyond just using software applications.

At the completion of the program, I want to open the door of any library in rural Braila and meet children, young people, and adults looking for a place to learn, get information, and relax. This will take time, but until then we have 20 libraries in Braila to enjoy, freshly painted and outfitted with modern equipment for the public, without which the libraries cannot exist.



At the Ianca library, librarian Mita Ilie shows the space where she plans to install computers in June 2009 (above); in March 2010, library visitors are busy using the new technology (below)

New Training and Community Development Resources in Maramures County

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European funding for agriculture and tourism learned how to write a project proposal for funding here," said Ioana Hochia.

When asked about the center's future, Adrian Hochia replied, "With the center's success and high demand for services, we will organize a new introductory computing course and host a series

of meetings with a representative of the National Agency for Community Programs in Education and Training (ANPCDEFP). This representative can explain how to manage European projects and the necessary mechanisms and steps to access European funds to interested citizens. And we will not stop there!"