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Libraries in Croatia: Developments and Trends in the Postsocialist Period

IVANKA STRIČEVIĆ AND FRANJO PEHAR

ABSTRACT

In the last two decades, Croatian libraries have been influenced by four key factors: 1) becoming an independent state with new socio-political and economic systems in the 1990s, during which time the state transformed from socialism to a democracy with a market economy; 2) reconstructing after the devastation brought by war; 3) developing information and communication technologies; and 4) experiencing the effects of a global economic crisis, the impact of which is still strongly evident throughout Croatia. The present state of libraries in Croatia indicates that the profession of librarianship and libraries are facing many problems. Yet, there is also a sign of the significant potential resulting from the long tradition of librarianship in Croatian history, and the relatively high level of library development that had occurred centuries prior to the process of transition brought by upheaval in the late twentieth century. During the postsocialist period, libraries in Croatia saw the continued evolution of a historical, legal, and normative library framework invested in librarianship as a service to the public, coupled with an increase in international networking, cooperation, and education. The rapid global advancement of information and communications technologies in the last decade of the twentieth century expedited the construction of the technological infrastructure necessary to building Croatian libraries, enabling their innovation. At the present time, the country's libraries are characterized by a focus on the information needs of their patrons that is guided by the principle of freedom of access to information.

INTRODUCTION

This paper provides an overview of the evolution of Croatian libraries from the 1990s to the present. All of southeast Europe during this quarter century was, to a great extent, marked by the processes of transition. Croatia, however, was additionally impacted by the War of Independence of the early 1990s that made these ongoing societal and economic changes very explosive. On October 8, 1991, Croatia ceased to be one of the republics of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In 1992, it emerged as an internationally recognized independent state with a democratic government, and on July 1, 2013, Croatia became a member of the European Union (EU). The transformation of Croatian libraries needs to be observed in light of these political changes. The Croatian war affected all segments of librarianship in the country, evidenced by the destruction and damage sustained by library buildings and their collections, the displaced and suddenly impoverished library user base, and the nationwide efforts at postwar reconstruction that entailed changes in laws governing libraries. These laws, incidentally, included a number of educational reforms. Otherwise, changes in university education were also brought about by the Bologna System of Higher Education,¹ which Croatia joined in 2001, from a new educational system that was implemented expressly for librarians, and also from the sudden increase in the availability of information and communications technologies (ICT).

What distinguishes prewar Croatia from the prewar conditions of other communist-satellite countries in the region is that between 1945 and 1991, socialist Yugoslavia was less isolated than the other Eastern Bloc countries. Throughout the mid-twentieth century, Yugoslavia was open to foreign visitors and, subsequently, Croatians were free to travel to the West. For this reason, Croatian librarians were continuously in close contact with their Western colleagues, which, in turn, influenced the character and progress of Croatian libraries and librarianship before and after the 1990s. Today, Croatia shares the same fate as all other countries facing a world economic crisis characterized by rising unemployment and other burdens on general cultural advancement.

A BRIEF LOOK INTO THE PAST

Croatia is a Central European country surrounded by Slovenia, Hungary, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro to the north, and by the Adriatic Sea and Italy to the south. It is in an excellent geographic location, given that it has so much Mediterranean coastline. Its topography has been both an advantage and a disadvantage for the country throughout its thirteen-century-long history. While Croatia has enjoyed the advantage of an abundance of natural resources and served as a key transportation hub for the region, it has also long been at a disadvantage because of frequent conquests and consequent political changes throughout its history.

Before World War I, Croatia was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which was followed by a period, between 1918 and 1941, when it was part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, a federation whose name eventually changed to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. After World War II, Yugoslavia adopted the socialist political system and Croatia became one of six republics in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFR Yugoslavia, or SFRY).

Croatia declared its independence from SFRY in October 1991, which instigated the previously mentioned Croatian War of Independence (1991–1995). This war had a number of effects on the country as a whole and created a complexity of circumstances that shaped the newly independent Croatia during the last decade of the twentieth century. While Europe was in post-Soviet transition, new countries emerged and began to make their way as democracies, including the new state of Croatia. Croatia was distinct in that while most Eastern European states were establishing their independence without violent conflict, the new state of Croatia was wracked with the atrocities of war. Nonetheless, Croatia began a tortured movement toward a capitalist democracy, investing enormous effort in the reconstruction of a war-ravaged infrastructure. Naturally, the aftermath of the war had a negative impact on the way in which the newly sovereign state was able to install the basic systems on which a society functions and a culture thrives. This, of course, included libraries.

The Effects of War on Libraries in Croatia

The onset of armed conflict in Croatia caused great suffering to the civilian population. Killings and disappearances became commonplace; many people became refugees due to the massive destruction of Croatian towns. The demolition of sacred and historic sites and artifacts was dramatic. It is well-documented that cultural heritage closely connected with the history, memory, and identity of a nation are often the favored targets for destruction during armed conflicts (Riedlmayer, 2007; Sturges & Rosenberg, 1999). During the War of Independence of the early 1990s, many Croatian libraries, archives, and museums sustained some degree of damage. In fact, more than 200 library buildings across the country were destroyed or damaged during these years (Aparac-Gazivoda & Katalenac, 1993).

A vast number of materials housed in libraries were burned or damaged as a result of inappropriate evacuation and storage, unfortunately (Hasenay & Krtalić, 2010; Mušnjak, 1994, 1999). Prior to the 1990s, there had been “no clear guidelines about what to do and when. Evacuation of the library might seem to be the best solution, but there were many problems connected with it. . . . Therefore, librarians were left to their own devices and judgment” (Petr, 2003, p. 179). For this reason, preservation of library materials was one of the domains of library management that was most challenging during the war. Until 1995, the entire library system

experienced heavy interruptions in the selection, acquisition, and lending of library materials; experienced delays and other inconveniences regarding adequate funding, staffing, and working conditions; and experienced challenges with being able to offer even the most basic information services to patrons with any consistency. Hence, the reconstruction of libraries that were damaged during wartime became a top priority at the close of the twentieth century.

Many libraries in the areas that experienced heavier conflict continue to suffer the deleterious effects of war to the present day, specifically those libraries that lost irreplaceable historical collections (Aparac-Gazivoda & Katalenac, 1993). With regard to restoration efforts, it is important to point out that some parts of Croatia's library system actually prospered during postwar reconstruction. One example of this is the children's libraries. Eight war-damaged or destroyed children's libraries and departments were completely rebuilt in the late 1990s; at the same time, twenty-two others were built in places where they had not previously existed (Stričević, Čičko, & Križanić Delač, 2006). During the war and early postwar period, public libraries throughout Croatia saw an extraordinary rise in membership, a change that has been attributed to the fact that the libraries were open even when schools were closed. As well, this increase was likely due to recommendations made by the media to refugees that they should take a book along with a first-aid kit when going to shelters; large migrations of refugees from across war-torn Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina migrated to the areas of Croatia less affected by the conflicts (Stričević, 2009). At the same time, a number of "bibliotherapy" programs grew. These programs went in two directions: reading for fun to escape and to forget daily, wartime problems, and reading to cope with these same problems through reflection and discussions.

THE CROATIAN LIBRARY SYSTEM AND ITS LIBRARIES

The 2012 midyear estimate of the Croatian Bureau of Statistics reported that Croatia has 4.3 million citizens, with a distribution of just over 75 per square kilometer (Aranjoš Borovac, 2013, p. 3). Nearly one-fifth of the population lives in the capital city of Zagreb, and the official language is Croatian. According to the 2011 census, just over 90 percent of the population is Croat, and the remaining 10 percent is composed of ethnic minorities. The percentage of illiterate citizens is under 1 percent of the population at large—a number that has seen a decrease from a decade earlier, when illiteracy was at nearly 2 percent. During the same time period, the rate of severe material deprivation increased considerably. Yet, the number of internet users also increased annually despite this; in 2012, there were over 1.5 million Croatian households with 1.2 million broadband internet subscriptions.

The Number of Libraries in Croatia

According to the 1997 Law on Libraries (Zakon o knjižnicama), there are several kinds of libraries with varying purposes and types of collections. It is difficult to determine the exact number of libraries in Croatia because some are a part of another institution; for example, some public libraries operate within cultural centers, and some school libraries operate within rehabilitation centers. Nonetheless, according to recent statistics (Aranjoš Borovac, 2013, p. 30), it can be estimated that there were a total of 1,731 libraries in Croatia in 2010 (table 1).

Table 1. Type and number of libraries in 2010

National library (NUL)	1
University and libraries at institutions of higher education	137
General scientific	4
Special	148
Church (monastery)	14
Public	249
School (primary and secondary)	1,178
Total	1,731

It is especially difficult to determine the exact number of university and academic libraries because there are two kinds of public university, each with a different organizational structure: “traditional universities” with faculties; and “integrated universities,” consisting of departments. The basic difference between traditional and integrated universities is that the latter have a central university management and administration structure—that is, one university library without faculty libraries or branches. There are four traditional public universities (in Zagreb, Osijek, Split, and Rijeka), and three integrated public universities (in Zadar, Pula, and Dubrovnik). There are also a number of libraries at private universities or at public or private polytechnic institutes and colleges.

The Two Main Library Types

Libraries in Croatia belong to one of two types of executive systems: either a system devoted to science and education or one devoted to culture. The Ministry of Science, Education, and Sports is responsible for the essential functions of each university and other academic institutions in Croatia, as well as each special, research, and school library throughout the country. The Ministry of Culture, on the other hand, is responsible for the administration of public libraries. The Croatian Library Council is an advisory body that subsumes both ministries and deals with issues that all types of libraries face. Its governing body is comprised of representatives from both ministries, in addition to members of the Croatian Library Association. The central library is the National and University Library (NUL) in Zagreb, which serves both as the central library of the largest university

in the country and as the central—effectively the national—library of the entire Croatian library system. Academic libraries in Croatia vary with respect to how the academic institutions they support are organized; aside from central university libraries, almost every faculty or university department has its own library, which is more or less dependent on the central university library.

By law, every local community in Croatia should have a public library, but in practice, the successful implementation of this law varies greatly owing to the fact that more than 90 percent of a local community's budget comes from its local government. Public libraries in the country compose a network with nineteen central county libraries; the Zagreb City Library System is the largest library in this network, consisting of more than forty district branches. There are also nine public libraries serving ethnic minorities, in addition to one Jewish-community library. Funding for the staff of the central minority libraries comes directly from the Ministry of Culture. According to the 2008 Law on Education in Primary and Secondary Schools (*Zakon o odgoju i obrazovanju u osnovnoj i srednjoj školi*), every school is required to have a school library managed by a professional school librarian who also must demonstrate teaching competency.

Special libraries are integrated into the workings of various institutions, such as museums and private companies. In recent decades, many such libraries have closed their doors. During the socialist era, aside from their role as research institutions, these libraries also had educational and recreational purposes that served communist ideology. Their educational function was a result of an ideology that culture should be brought to the workers at their workplace. In advanced technological environments, these libraries were research-oriented, but with the advent of digital publishing, many have closed down (Jelušić, Stričević, & Badurina, 2012, p. 145). During the process of privatization that occurred after the 1990s, most previously state-owned companies were sold to foreign investors, who were uninterested in maintaining research and development units within Croatia. Because Croatia is a country with a long history and rich heritage, the number of monastery libraries is much larger than might be expected (see table 1). In many of these church libraries, the collections have not yet been inventoried or cataloged, and many are unorganized and often closed to researchers and the public.²

Croatia has a relatively large number of libraries for its size; the size of its population does not reflect the degree to which its library system has progressed. Individual libraries vary greatly from one another, not only in size, content, space, and number of patrons, but also in the degree to which their collections and services have been expanded. This heterogeneity indicates that the Croatian library system as a whole requires further cultivation. Jelušić, Stričević, and Badurina (2012, pp. 142–143) list seven key issues that Croatian libraries are currently facing:

- Library development depends on the institution that the library in question serves, whether it is in a rural or urban area. There are Croatian libraries with excellent infrastructure and innovative services currently supported by the latest technology, but there are also libraries that do not have even the most basic equipment for their core operations.
- Although there are legislated standards by which libraries are meant to operate, Croatian libraries in poorer places are not systematically funded, which results in insufficient infrastructure and reduced services.
- Although there are laws in place, they are not always uniformly applied, either because there are no repercussions when they are neglected or because they are simply not enforced.
- There are a number of projects that serve as examples of “best practices,” but they are often isolated and rarely have positive, systemic effects on the state of Croatian librarianship. Often, the measure of success is determined solely by the enthusiasm of individual institutions or librarians.
- There are statistics regarding library operations; however, there are no systematic studies that take into account the causes and the contexts of the work or research performed in them.
- The adoption and application of technology are not a part of a national plan but instead depend on the awareness, interest, and financial capabilities of the library founder or the institutions of which they are a part.
- Because there is no comprehensive, national strategy for introducing technology into libraries, several competing library-management software packages are used within the country, which inefficiently hinders cooperation.

At the same time, there are a number of factors that are positively affecting the advancement of library services in Croatia:

- A long and rich history and tradition of librarianship has provided an excellent foundation for the sustainability of the country’s libraries. A good example of this is the NUL, which was established in 1607 as the library of the Jesuit Gymnasium (Horvat, Kolanović, & Zgaga, 2010).
- Academic educational programs for the library profession began in 1961 as postgraduate studies in documentation and information sciences, and as a formalized graduate program of librarianship in 1977. At the present time, aspiring librarians can complete a master’s degree in library and information science (LIS) at one of three different universities in Croatia.
- The law that obliges librarians to have graduate-level qualification is meant to ensure professional status; it requires either a master’s degree in library science or the equivalent for those who graduated before the

introduction of the Bologna system in Croatia, or a master's degree with a certain number of core library science courses recognized by the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

- Contacts between Croatian librarians and their foreign colleagues have enabled a continuous transfer of knowledge and experiences and a cross-fertilization of ideas.
- Many conferences and seminars held in Croatia are organized by library type; for each library type, there are periodic professional meetings.
- Although the Croatian publishing industry, along with the rest of Croatian society, has been negatively affected by the currently harsh economic situation, in the field of librarianship, the publishing situation is less stark, given that an increasing number of publications are published electronically.

The progress of libraries and librarianship in postsocialist Croatia are primarily the result of the adaptation of an inherited legal framework. Although investment in librarianship as a public service has been insufficient, Croatian libraries have managed to maintain their core operations in these difficult economic times. The success of this in adverse conditions is a result of improved international cooperation and participation in international associations. Internationally recognized experts in attendance at academic and professional meetings are, therefore, involved in the education of Croatian librarians. Similarly, the quality of professional development and workplace learning has increased, allowing librarians to better understand and serve the needs of library patrons.

Legislative Framework for Croatian Libraries

As noted above, the legal structure in which Croatian libraries operate is administered by two ministries in the Croatian government: the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Science, Education, and Sports. To overcome problems arising from this duality, the Ministry of Culture founded the Croatian Library Council, an advisory body that includes professionals from both systems. Council representatives are nominated by two ministries, the Croatian Library Association and the Croatian Rectors Conference. The main task of this council is to keep track of librarianship within the country by proposing legislation, enforcing professional standards, and validating the professional status of librarians.

The principal legislature governing the area of librarianship that applies to all types of libraries is the 1997 Law on Libraries. This law has been amended several times over the past decade and is currently being reviewed again, since the reality of practice and the expectations enshrined in the law have clearly been at odds with each other. One such area of disagreement is the professional status of librarians. Since 2005, there have been programs in Croatian universities that have complied with the

requirements of the Bologna system, but the Law on Libraries had been passed several years earlier. In practice, this has meant that prior to 2005, university library programs were of two or four years duration, and that after 2005, with the adoption of Bologna, these programs are now at least of three years' duration at the undergraduate level and a minimum of two years at the master's level. The existing law does not yet reflect these changes, however. The 2011 Ordinance Regarding the Conditions and Manner of Acquisition of Professional Licensing in the Library Profession (*Pravilnik o uvjetima i načinu stjecanja stručnih zvanja u knjižničarskoj struci*) includes a system of assessment and evaluation for formal education based on Bologna that has been adapted from its study programs. The system takes into account competencies that need to be acquired in accordance with the ECTS. Recently, this document was subject to revision due to the tendency by both the library schools and the profession to require a larger number of ECTS in core library subjects than was stated in the 2011 document. The previously mentioned 1997 Law on Libraries requires that every library must employ a graduate librarian that has attained a master's degree. Public libraries, on the other hand, can employ individuals with only an undergraduate degree in LIS. This is not the case in school libraries, where in most cases there is at least one librarian who, according to the 2008 Law on Education in Primary and Secondary Schools, has to have a master's degree, with an additional 60 ECTS credits in the area of teaching competencies. The graduate program has 120 ECTS credits in total; therefore, the elementary and high school librarians are, indeed, trained teacher librarians.

Among the components of the 1997 Law on Libraries, there are provisions for the regulation of specific areas of librarianship, such as the operations of central libraries that are responsible for such things as building library networks and de-accessioning materials. In practice, certain types of libraries adopt the standards proposed by both the Croatian Library Council and the relevant ministries—the aforementioned Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Science, Education, and Sports. Unfortunately, from the proclamation of independence up to the present time, the standards for academic, special, and research libraries have not yet been adopted. The 2000 Standard for School Libraries (*Standard za školske knjižnice*) and 1999 Standards for Public Libraries (*Standardi za narodne knjižnice u Republici Hrvatskoj*) have two major complications: first, the dynamic development of ICT has provoked a need for more frequent changes of library standards; and second, these standards are often not regulated but instead reflect an ideal that many libraries are not able to attain. (No sanctions are typically imposed on those funders who fail to adhere to legal standards for libraries.)

In practice, the implementation of library standards in Croatia assumes the financing suggested by the 1997 Law on Libraries; however, due to

the grave economic situation in the country, noncompliance with the law goes unsanctioned. There are measures that, for example, the Ministry of Culture applies in cases where the local community fails to appropriately fund a public library. In these situations, the ministry offers support for building infrastructure and collection development. Such measures may be helpful for individual libraries in economically deprived areas, but they cannot contribute to the lasting stability and sustainability of the whole system. The consequences of insufficient funding are especially felt by the public libraries in economically deprived areas, thus causing uneven growth of libraries throughout the country. The NUL and libraries in higher education are funded solely on the national level, and, unfortunately, both have shared the unenviable fate of all other state-funded institutions in recent years.

MEETING USER NEEDS

Although during the last two decades, Croatian libraries have changed many aspects of the way they operate, perhaps the most significant change has occurred in the way that user services are provided. The understanding that libraries exist to serve their users was only inaugurated during the war and the postwar period of the 1990s. The diversification of services was significantly influenced by the migration of great numbers of people. The idea that libraries should justify the funds they invested in their services by measuring the impact on users, and the fact that outcomes should be assessed through an evaluation of the usage of library resources, began in earnest during the first decades of the twenty-first century. Over the last two decades, Croatian libraries have written mission statements that clearly indicate a commitment to serving user needs. Libraries throughout the country are starting to closely study their user communities and exchange the examples of good practices. Naturally, their services vary with respect to the types of library in question; however, the focus placed on the needs of users has become the common guiding principle for all aspects of library operations—from the acquisition and collection-building process to any educational and recreational activities offered.

This trend can be observed through an examination of the topics that have been published or presented at conferences. Educational incentives move away from mere concern with library literacy and are moving toward the perceived importance of promoting information literacy in general. Reading and readership have always been at the center of a librarians' focus; however, due to the changes brought about by the rapid development of ICT and the emergence of new information carriers and electronic formats, this focus has shifted. Programs that promote reading have since moved in two directions: first, from an interest in print materials to one that develops competencies for reading in the digital environment; and second, they have maintained the understanding that both print and digi-

tal reading formats are each important in their own right. Therefore, the cultural and educational programs that promote books and reading, especially those intended for children and young people, now focus on stimulating interest not only in printed books but also in reading e-books and other digital resources. Unfortunately, the Croatian book market faces the same issues as other countries with “small language groups” (Velagić & Pehar, 2014): there are too few e-publications in the Croatian language. Libraries have always had a prominent cultural role in Croatia, and this has been especially true of public libraries. This tradition has carried on into the present time, and public libraries continue to be community centers that offer numerous cultural events and programs.

Related to the tendency to monitor user needs, there is also a need for greater visibility of Croatian libraries. This may be a reflection of the aspiration to reach all potential users, regardless of the type of library in question. The idea of inclusiveness is especially evident in the way in which services have been designed for users who have traditionally been left out or who have been “invisible” to the libraries. This most often pertains to people with special needs or those living in special circumstances. It appears that this inclusiveness is a result of two key factors: the implementation of the 2007 National Strategy of Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (Nacionalna strategija izjednačavanja mogućnosti za osobe s invaliditetom), which protects the rights of people with disabilities or other developmental difficulties to accessing public services; and the continual implementation of international standards, notably the guidelines for collections and for services offered to special user groups written by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), which have been translated into Croatian and published by the Croatian Library Association.

Almost all libraries in Croatia are in the process of developing at least some services for users with disabilities. This focus on individuals with special needs and those living in special circumstances is practically a revolutionary societal change for the country. Prior to the 1990s, there was almost no mention of their needs, and much less of their rights. Social inclusion and the championing of rights of people with special needs have appeared with the recent process of democratization. The issues involved concern a belief in there being an equal right to the access of information. Libraries in the newly founded state of Croatia thus recognized their role in providing a climate of inclusion in order to truly provide services to *all* of its citizens.³ The significance of these projects is enormous: they not only meet the specific needs of users within particular contexts but also serve as examples to libraries that wish to provide services to the same or similar user groups within their own communities that have been identified.

Recently, public libraries in the more socially aware climate of contemporary Croatia have engaged in a critical discussion of the concept of the

third place/space. Prompted by this phrase, discussions at the Ninth Conference on Public Libraries in the Republic of Croatia that convened in late 2013 introduced a number of examples of best practices and a range of innovative services that can be geared to meet the different needs of various social groups (Deveto savjetovanje za narodne knjižnice u Republici Hrvatskoj, <http://sznk.nsk.hr>). The effectiveness of user services that have been implemented in Croatia over the last two decades should not be analyzed without also considering the influence of new technologies, which are necessary to contemporary library infrastructure. Only by communicating with users does a *technological service* become a *library service*—a means to support programs by offering users instruction within either the physical library space or through a library's website.

APPLICATION OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY IN LIBRARIES

Over the last few decades, libraries throughout the world have witnessed drastic changes in the area of information transfer. While these changes have been essential to the role of information institutions like libraries, such changes occurring in a country that was also experiencing massive sociopolitical and economic upheaval during wartime present an extremely complex set of problems. For a library organization, the adoption of any new ICT is not only a matter of upgrading the existing infrastructure but also entails a change in library operations overall because space requirements, education and training, and all other aspects of its functioning must be taken into account. Adding to the complexity of the situation in Croatia was the fact that many these issues had to be dealt with all at once. Croatian libraries, therefore, faced a far greater number of challenges in the adoption of new ICT than was the case in countries with stable democracies. New technology had actually been introduced in Croatian libraries as early as the 1980s; however, the adoption process was rather slow at the beginning. This can be attributed partially to the fact that librarians at the time were not trained to work with technology; therefore, it could not have been expected that any new technology would have significantly enhanced the ability of these libraries to provide better services. The application of technology in Croatian libraries primarily depended on the enthusiasm of independently inspired, technology-conscious library management and staff. In order for more significant progress to occur, national-level changes were needed first. Despite the complex economic, social, and political circumstances that Croatia faced at the beginning of 1990s, thanks to a few key government decisions, the installation of new technology into libraries followed similar adoption in the West by only a brief time-lag.

The University Computing Center (SRCE) was founded in 1971. In the beginning, it was linked only to the University of Zagreb, but in the early 1990s, became the central institution in the field of ICT within Croatia.

At around the same time, in 1991, the Croatian War of Independence began and the Ministry of Science and Technology, despite very complex circumstances, founded the Croatian Academic and Research Network (CARNet). Although at this time the Croatian government was faced with the grave task of protecting the lives and safety of its citizens in a time of war, it was able to recognize the importance of promoting information technology to prevent the interruption of scientific research and other intellectual endeavors. In 1992, the CARNet project established its first internet connection and its own domain name: “.hr.” In 1995, CARNet had already grown from a small project into a thriving institution whose role was to “promote the progress of both the individuals and society as a whole through the use of new information technologies” (“Hrvatska akademska i istraživačka mreža,” 2013). CARNet’s influence on the expansion of information systems for the purpose of providing educational services has been truly substantial; however, to date, internet service remains limited to the NUL and other academic, research, and school libraries. Public libraries remain outside of this system and must often secure access to a network by using personal devices, and their technology-based library services remain mostly underdeveloped.

The responsibility for the introduction of new technologies into Croatian libraries was given to the NUL, an institution that has always had a central role in managing Croatian librarianship. Today, the responsibilities of the NUL follow that which was set forth by the 1997 Law on Libraries, paragraph 14 of which stating: “The National and University Library in Zagreb is a public institution of national importance which offers library and information services as national library and central library of the University of Zagreb, and facilitates scientific research and development activities promoting Croatian librarianship and the construction and development of the Croatian library system.” Experience has shown that the efforts of the NUL were not uniformly implemented throughout all parts of the system, however. There are some notable Croatian libraries that during the previous two decades have developed innovative services that affected the entire library system.

One of the most prominent protagonists on the library scene is the scientific library at the Ruder Bošković Institute. It is the largest research library in Croatia that offers information systems that serve the needs of scientific research and communication. One of its most prominent digital services is the Croatian Scientific Bibliography (CROSBI), which serves as a central reference tool for the entire research community in the country. Significant changes in a system that has an influence on librarianship, such as changes caused by the rapid development of ICT, must be carefully managed. Unfortunately, this was not the case with implementation of library-management systems; in fact, not only the implementation of these systems, but even their design since the 1980s was done by the library community

itself. This was partly caused by the fact that for more than thirty years, and still today, the libraries in Croatia did not have unique library-management software—not necessarily a problem in itself. The problem is the lack of interoperability protocols and procedures, which results in the redundancy of materials processing in which many tasks in various types of libraries, but also within the same type, are duplicated. For example, this occurs in cataloging and classification, where the same title is simultaneously processed in different libraries, different cataloging standards, and different library-management systems.

A similar situation has occurred in the process of digitization. There are fragmented projects in a number of different libraries throughout the country that have created the potential for a number of problems, such as how materials should be selected for digitization and how laws are imposed on libraries regarding rights and the usage of digitized materials. The National Program for the Digitization of Archival, Museum, and Library Collections in Croatia (also called Croatian Cultural Heritage) was implemented in 2007 (Seiter-Šverko, 2012). A website for this project was created as a reference point for all issues relating to digitization, and as a storage place for the archival, museum, and library material undergoing digitization. So far, activities on the site indicate the successful implementation of the approach suggested by the national program and that the digitization of cultural artifacts has proceeded in a manner similar to other archives, museums, and libraries throughout Europe. It is necessary to maintain a coherent national strategy for ongoing digitization in terms of how to prioritize the national, regional, or local significance of resources selected for digitization, as well as to prevent fragmented and unrelated projects.⁴ In doing so, Croatian libraries should continue to take note of other, previously successful projects (Seiter-Šverko & Križaj, 2012).

By their very nature, libraries are inclined to cooperate with other heritage institutions, and this is perhaps most evident in projects involving information organization and those involving digitization. An initiative from 1997 that gathered the archives, libraries, and museums (ALM) community has resulted in the continual offering of ALM seminars. These seminars are organized annually by one of the three professional archive, library, and museum organizations, with the support of LIS departments at the universities in Osijek, Zadar, and Zagreb, the NUL, and the Croatian State Archive. These meetings bring together scholars and experts with the aim of discussing contemporary information infrastructure as a basis for improving cooperation among institutions in the field, especially given the fact that the digitization of national heritage is not the sole domain of any one of these institutions.

TECHNOLOGY-BASED LIBRARY SERVICES

Croatia joined the World Wide Web in November 1992. This has had an important impact on the availability of technology-based services that libraries are able to offer their users. In the early stages, the internet was used only by librarians for everyday work and for searches requested by the users of academic and research libraries. By the end of the 1990s, however, internet access was available in public libraries on a limited basis as well. The provision of internet access for library users was not a result of a nationally coordinated policy, but mostly the initiative of efforts made by individual libraries. Some libraries charged extra for this service, and others did not. In 2001, the first free internet access in a public library was offered to library members and all other citizens (Matovina, Pavlaković, & Stričević, 2002). It is indisputable that library infrastructure guided this implementation of internet service for public use in Croatian libraries because the majority of them simply did not have enough workstations in the 1990s. It was only in 2002 that the government adopted the "Information and Communication Technology: Croatia in the 21st Century" plan (Strategija "Informacijska i komunikacijska tehnologija—Hrvatska u 21 stoljeću"), which entailed the provision of access to information services from public-access points in schools, libraries, and local communities—all of which are of particular importance to young people and those who have no other means of access. It is also stressed that along with the introduction of the internet to public libraries, whatever services existed should also be improved because this would allow users to quickly and accurately search for the availability of library materials.

Librarians rapidly became aware that new digital technologies are not only useful for searching catalogs and online databases. What is common to all Croatian libraries is a goal of responding to the informational, educational, and recreational needs of their users as best as possible; for this reason, over the past decade, new services have been created under the credo "Be where the users are." Libraries now consider their role as one of user education in the new information/communication context. Therefore, computer education and information literacy are now services that are offered in almost every Croatian library's virtual space. All libraries in the country now have websites, either on their own or as part of whatever institution to which they belong. School libraries maintain homepages on schools' websites; the same goes for special libraries that are part of an institute or company and for academic libraries that are a part of a university or polytechnic institute. Public libraries that do not have their own websites may publish basic information online through the public libraries portal (Portal narodnih knjižnica, <http://www.knjiznica.hr/home.php>). There are still a number of smaller libraries that do not offer the possibility of searching their catalogs through an online public-access catalog, however.

The Ask a Librarian reference service began as a project with the goal of determining whether it were possible to introduce a new online service, and whether this would improve the existing reference services in Croatian public libraries (Pitajte knjižničare, <http://www.knjiznica.hr/pitajte-knjiznicare/>). Today, this service is available via almost all public library websites in the country. The same type of service is available for the academic and research community at the NUL. Aside from these, there are a number of other projects based on web 2.0 services that, again, reflect Croatian librarians' efforts to serve user needs as they exist in reality. This realism regarding contemporary information behavior has had the overall effect of improving library operations, thus enhancing the quality of services offered. Croatian libraries of the present day, such as the public library in Zagreb, often maintain dynamic Facebook accounts. In addition to social media, many librarians maintain professional blogs; for example, children's librarians from several cities have been blogging to encourage reading among children and young adults by inviting them to create and edit the sites' content.

Croatian librarians' focus on inclusive services is also reflected in innovative projects in the area of people with special needs, an example of which is the service for persons with print disabilities, called the Vergilius project, offered by the NUL. Its aim is to help with the physical orientation and navigation of the blind and visually impaired throughout a library building (Gabriel, 2010). The architecture for the Vergilius system includes a dedicated Wi-Fi-access point, smartphone devices, web services, and special applications for system administration. Aside from what is listed here, there are a number of other examples of recently implemented practices that illustrate the ways in which libraries approach the design of their collections and services in the digital environment.⁵ There is no doubt that the application of new technology in library operations and the building of collections and services for users both require a different set of library skills than those available two or more decades ago. It is therefore necessary to look at the changes planned for the education for future librarians, as well as what the opportunities for continuing professional development and workplace learning will be.

THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF LIBRARIANS

Up until the 1960s in Croatia, no formal education for the librarian profession existed. Librarians would be tested in library operations, and by preparing for and passing the exam, they would acquire the competencies and credentials to work in libraries. The first graduate program in library studies was founded in 1977 at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, as a two-year supplementary study program, and from 1986 as a four-year program for the education of librarians, archivists, and museologists (Horvat, Kolanović, & Zgaga, 2010). Prior to

this, postgraduate studies in librarianship, documentation, and information sciences were offered from 1961 to 1970 by the Faculty of Sciences at the University of Zagreb, and after 1970 as part of the newly established Center for Postgraduate Studies at the university. The J. J. Strossmayer University in Osijek also began offering library and information education in 1998; and in 2003, the Department for Library Science was founded at the University of Zadar, changing its name, in 2011, to the Department of Information Sciences. In summary, for professional education, Croatian librarians may choose from one of three programs:

- The Department of Information and Communication Sciences, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb
- The Department of Information Sciences, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, J. J. Strossmayer University in Osijek
- The Department of Information Sciences, University of Zadar

The study programs are all identical in structure: three years of undergraduate study and two years of graduate study. Each differs in the curriculum they offer, however. Aside from the undergraduate and graduate studies, the program at the University of Zagreb also offers a doctoral program in ICS; the University of Zadar offers a doctoral program in information sciences as well.

Since the end of the 1990s, professionals in the Croatian library community have become increasingly aware of the need for undergraduate education in the fields of archiving, museum work, and librarianship to be implemented within the context of information science, the aim being to teach knowledge and skills for each of these domains within a single information field. As for the graduate level, the prevailing opinion is that educational programs should offer specialized knowledge in one of these areas in order for students to easily utilize the knowledge they acquire within their chosen fields. The goal is to direct students toward the design and management of web resources and services both in the bibliographic and the wider information sectors. The Bologna Declaration, signed by Croatia in 2001, was a topic of much debate among the experts in the field; it was a hot topic at conferences and in the scientific literature on education for information professionals (Aparac-Jelušić, Faletar Tanacković, & Jelušić, 2007). The aim in designing the undergraduate curriculum for library science education was to enable future professionals to be able to work in any type of information institution, in any place that information services are offered.

This educational approach allows students who finish their undergraduate study and decide not to continue to the graduate level to have more options as they enter the job market because they are not as limited by having qualifications only in one discipline. General knowledge and specific skills within core subjects play significant roles in the successful adaptation

to a changing work environment. The option to choose an elective class in information science while also taking courses in other areas like history, linguistics, psychology, pedagogy, or economics allows students to create their own professional profiles with respect to specific information areas or types of libraries. Factors like the availability of teaching staff and other conditions certainly have an effect on study programs at the universities, but so also do other factors, such as the requirements recommended by professional bodies with regard to the cultivation of expected competencies. Changes affecting academic education for librarians in Croatia occur at the organizational and methodological level; therefore, it is necessary to harmonize academic titles in the context of international recognition of degrees and student mobility (Aparac-Jelušić, Faletar Tanacković, & Jelušić, 2007).

While creating the Bologna study programs, attention was paid to the question of ensuring that modern librarian competencies would be implemented in complex information surroundings. Croatian libraries still employ a significant number of librarians who received their education before the deployment of digital ICT in the workplace and whose information environment was limited to the physical library. For this reason, continuing professional training and education are especially important in order to bridge this gap between traditional library and modern information education. Around the time of the Bologna reforms of the higher education system in 2002, the Training Center for the Continuing Education of Librarians in the Republic of Croatia (CSSU) was founded in Zagreb, which now offers a sequence of courses for currently practicing librarians. Through the center, there are two professional associations that have been consistently contributing to the lifelong learning of librarians by organizing professional meetings and seminars: the Croatian Library Association and the Croatian Association of School Librarians.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The openness of Croatia's borders made it possible to collaborate with colleagues from Western countries even during the socialist era in Yugoslavia. During this time, Croatian libraries were able to make connections with libraries in other countries with more evolved librarianship practices. In Zagreb, the IFLA held a conference in 1954; thereafter, collaboration with the organization intensified. Croatian librarians attend IFLA's annual conferences and, particularly during the past two decades, have been involved as members, chairpersons, secretaries of sections, authors, and editors of IFLA publications. Thanks to such collaborations, a series of meetings of various sections of standing committees were held in Croatia during that time. Such collaborations have additionally enabled the engagement of foreign lecturers, who regularly attend Croatian library conferences as invited speakers. The resulting exchanges of experiences have intensified

the efforts to create Croatian translations of literature for librarians, for example, particularly of IFLA's guidelines, which are typically translated in the same year or in the year after adoption by the IFLA. In recent years, many of these translations have been available online through the Croatian Library Association's website.

As representatives of the Croatian Library Association or of their respective institutions, Croatian librarians are also involved in the European Bureau of Library Information and Documentation Associations (EBLIDA), as well as in a number of other programs, particularly in Europe—for example, the National Authorities on Public Libraries in Europe (NAPLE), whose second conference was held in Croatia in 2005. The NUL carries out most of these collaborations due to its role as the national center for bibliographic control; the Cataloging in Publication (CIP), International Standard Serial Number (ISSN), and International Standard Book Number (ISBN) programs are examples of its ongoing work. By the nature of things, the NUL collaborates closely with other related international offices and libraries. Its collaboration with the European Association for Library Education and Research (EUCLID) is significant for library education, considering that Croatia is currently experiencing a period of rapid expansion in this area. Moreover, its collaboration within Europe has intensified since Croatia joined the EU. It is this new situation that demands that the country further improves its international collaboration as a series of adjustments at the level of normal documents and guidelines for library operations, particularly those dealing with digital materials and collections handling.

Numerous international conferences held in Croatia during the past two decades attest to the continuity of its international collaboration. Among these, the annual Libraries in the Digital Age (LIDA) conference should be singled out because it focuses on the transformation of libraries and information services in the digital environment. The organizers of the LIDA conference—the Department of Information Sciences at the University of Zadar and the School of Communication and Information at Rutgers University in the United States—bring together researchers, educators, and practitioners from throughout the world for personal exchanges, discussions, and learning.

CONCLUSION

Despite the many problems that Croatian libraries face today as a result of the recent difficult economic situation in the country, solid foundations have been laid for the future. Libraries in Croatia have a long history and rich tradition, and its librarians recognize the positive potential in the changes wrought by the new sociopolitical system. Moreover, the emergence of new information tools and librarian education are providing a solid foundation for the future of Croatia's libraries. Public awareness that

libraries support the present-day needs of the country's users is essential because this shall ensure the institution's viability and longevity.

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NOTES

1. The Bologna Declaration is a key document for the reform of the structure of higher education systems in Europe. The Bologna process aims to create a European Higher Education Area and to provide tools to connect national education systems. Instituted in 1999, it seeks to ensure comparability in the standards and quality of higher education qualifications across Europe.
2. In recent years, the Department of Information Sciences at the universities in Osijek and Zadar have been actively working on the preservation and organization of monastery library collections. When appropriate, students have been included in that work. A good example of this is the work on the library of the Monastery of St. Francis in Zadar that was carried out by students and professors of the Department of Information Sciences at the University of Zadar. The library catalog is available through the University of Zadar's library network.
3. There are a number of examples that demonstrate the trend of Croatian libraries in providing services: the provision of services for the visually impaired in the public library in Koprivnica and the research library in Zadar; the provision of services for the homeless by Zagreb's libraries; the provision of free computer courses for the elderly by the city library in Zadar; the provision of home book delivery to the elderly by the public library in Rijeka; and the provision of equipment for students with special needs by the university library in Split.
4. The strategy for the digitization of Croatian cultural heritage artifacts and records is currently under construction by the Ministry of Culture in cooperation with archive, library, and museum professionals.
5. One of the recent issues of *Vjesnik bibliotekara Hrvatske* [Croatian librarians herald] (vol. 56, nos. 1–2 [2013]) has a series of articles that provide examples of innovative services related to the application of new technologies.

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