

ENTITLE kick-off meeting

Bulgaria – overview

Public libraries in Bulgaria (with few exceptions) still suffer the consequences of the transition period – under funding which cannot provide adequate resources for lifelong learning. However, several positive developments are taking place:

1. The long awaited Library Act is underway. The draft is being reviewed by the Ministry of Culture and soon will be passed to the other ministries for discussions and approval. The new Library Act stipulates the financing mechanisms for libraries. Its enforcement will be a great step forward. Also, the draft highlights the role of libraries in lifelong learning. Programs for lifelong learning are included in the functional description of all sizes of public libraries.
2. Successful results of the American-Bulgarian Library Exchange project. The aim of the project was to establish 6 pilot Community Information Centers (CIC) which would serve as models for the entire library network. This project changed the model of the public library – from a museum of books to a vital community center. CICs were developed in two directions: a/ increasing capacity for online information; b/ developing partnerships with government and non-government organizations and fostering citizens' participation in community life. This model proved to be a winning one. The years 2006 and 2007 marked an expansion of this model throughout the country. The training in CIC concept is intensive. Not only ULISO, but also the Ministry of Culture and the Library School add this topic in their training curriculum. This transformation of libraries in proactive community centers is a good prerequisite for successful lifelong learning programs in libraries. The leading ABLE Libraries are pioneers in such programs and they started disseminating their best practices to the library network.
3. Over the past two years ULISO has conducted two National Library Weeks that brought the attention of policy makers to the library issues. This tradition will continue by communicating the libraries' needs to provide conditions for lifelong learning.
4. A joint project of BMGF Global Libraries' program and the Ministry of Culture is going to provide free Internet and computers to 1000 most remote libraries in rural areas. The project aims to overcome digital divide and to improve people's life through access to information. This is very promising plan that will hopefully lead to turning those libraries in small learning centers.
5. Information literacy is very recent issue which is being discussed by the professional community. This was the topic of the Annual ULISO's conference in June 2007. There will be some training initiatives organized by ULISO this year concerning the role of librarians and libraries in information literacy programs for citizens.