Libraries in Moldova: The Road to Renewal in Hard Economic Times

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Abstract

The transition from a communist to a democratic society has affected the entire social map of Moldova, including the library network. For over two and a half decades, Moldovan libraries have undergone major changes and reforms: from closed- to open-access stacks; from ideological institutions serving political platforms to public squares in support of democracy; from repositories of propaganda books to information centers serving the information needs of the communities they serve. This paper examines the changes in, and challenges faced by, Moldova's libraries from 1991, the year that marks the country's independence, to the present. Various projects—government-sponsored or assisted by international organizations, such as the Open Society Institute and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation—are featured.

Introduction

Part of Romania—with which it shares a common language and cultural heritage—during the interwar period and a Soviet republic after 1940, Moldova proclaimed its sovereignty in 1991, following the collapse of the USSR. Although independent, the country has remained under Russian influence, ruled by a string of pro-Russian presidents and governments. With an independent candidate winning the 2010 elections, in November 2013, the Moldovan government initiated an "association agreement" with the European Union (EU), advancing the pro-European coalition party's policy priority. The November 2014 parliamentary elections reinforced the country's aspiration for European integration. As a component of the social, educational, and cultural makeup of the emerging democracy, Moldovan libraries, which previously mirrored the Soviet model of library

provision, are becoming pro-Western, embracing—despite drastic budget restraints, poor infrastructure, and the low social status of library employees—modern services and practices.

Library Policy and Legislation

The changing political, social, economic, and administrative contexts led to a series of transformations in the library field. Despite the existence of a legal framework for libraries and the implementation of a series of initiatives designed to strengthen the library field—together designed to increase access to information and enhance professional performance—gaps in services remain. More policies are needed in the library sector, while the national library system requires further institutionalization. Regarding the legal framework that formed a baseline for reforms after Moldova's independence, it is worth mentioning the following pieces of legislation: the National Strategic Model of Libraries of the Republic of Moldova (December 27, 1991); the Reorientation of Supplemental Funds for Publication Acquisition and Weeding of Obsolete, Unwanted Literature (April 18, 1991); and the Application of UDC (Universal Decimal Classification) (October 8, 1991). It should be noted that during this period, a series of laws were approved aimed at supporting the development of libraries—among them, in chronological order: the Law on Copyright and Related Rights (1994, revised in 2010); the Law on Libraries (1994); the Law on Education (1995, revised in 2014); the Code of Administrative Offences (1995, revised in 2006); the Law on Culture (1999); and the Law on Publishing (2000). The following strategies targeting libraries have been adopted: the Government Program on Library Development in Moldova (1991) and the Program on Library Development in Moldova (1997). Although both programs ended in 2000, they marked the first stage in the development of policies for Moldovan libraries in transition.

During the first decade of the new millennium, a number of additional initiatives were formulated: the National Program to Improve Rural Libraries (2001); the Library Automation Program (2001); the Strategy on Library Development (2004); the National Strategy on Information Society (2005); the Program to Strengthen the Role of Libraries in Building the Information Society (2006); and the Strategy for the Development of the National Library System (2007).

The main legal framework for libraries was provided by the 1994 Law on Libraries, legislation that was praised by the European Council in 1998. However, many gaps continued to impede library activity, requiring the strengthening of the library field through further strategies and programs both at the local and national levels. The Ministry of Culture elaborated several important normative programs, such as Culture 2013–2015, which targets rural libraries, aiming to equip them with computers and internet access; and the National Program on the Informatization of Culture,

2012–2020, which focuses on the digitization of national heritage materials, on promoting library collections via electronic media, and on the creation of a national digital library. Other important programs setting goals and objectives for the future of Moldovan libraries include Culture 2020; the Strategy for the Development of Culture; Digital Moldova 2020; and the National Strategy for the e-Development of the Information Society.

Library Science Education

Since 1964, the Moldova State University (MSU) has offered courses in library science at bachelor's, master's, and PhD levels. During five decades the school has undergone a series of changes, reflected in its change of name: from the School of Librarianship and Bibliography, to the School of Library Science and Information Assistance, to its present inclusion in the Department of Communications. Currently, the following specializations are included in the bachelor's degree program: librarianship, information assistance, and archives; IT and communications; and information and sociocultural services. Master's degree studies offer specializations in digital libraries and information services, and the management of information institutions. The MSU program focuses on developing competencies in cataloging, data analysis, communications, information literacy, needs assessment, and the use of the internet and other ICTs. The master's-level programs are of two types: research-based and professional-based. There are ten to fifteen government-sponsored scholarships per year, as well as university support to cover the fees for top-tier students. Students have opportunities to complete internships. In addition to MSU, the Soroca Art College offers a four-year library science program. The programs outlined here provide a foundation for the further development of library science education in Moldova that will prepare future leaders in the field.

Continuing Education for Librarians

From 2002 to 2006, the Library Association of Moldova (LAM), in partnership with the National Library and with support from the Moldova-Soros Foundation, established a training center for librarians. The center offered courses in management, ICT services, modernization of library services, library-user expectations, and community outreach. By the end of the program, the center had trained about 1,700 librarians, representing more than 60 percent of all librarians in the country. Despite the fact that the center has not remained sustainable after the donor's funding ended, the team of trainers assembled, the knowledge base of lessons learned, and the positive outcomes achieved provided an enduring legacy. It is only in 2013 that the continuing education process was restarted by the LAM in partnership with the Municipality of Chişinău. It has been funded within the Novateca program by a five-year, US$12 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

In March 2014, the Novateca program opened the National Center of Professional Excellence for Librarians at the B. P. Haşdeu Municipal Library in Chişinău. The center provides professional development opportunities for librarians and organizes various educational activities for librarians from a variety of library sectors—including public, academic, and school—aimed at promoting innovation in Moldovan libraries. Currently, courses on the use of ICTs and modern library services are being delivered.

In addition, librarians can attend training courses organized by the Continuing Training Center at MSU in partnership with LAM, where two training modules are delivered: Modernization and Change through the UNESCO Manifesto (for school librarians), and Innovation Management for Information Institutions (for directors and senior managers from all types of libraries)—both for a total of seventy-two hours. The center is accredited to award certificates and diplomas to be used for job promotion and career advancement.

According to statistical reports for 2013 compiled by the Consiliul Biblioteconomic Naţional (CBN) for the National Bureau of Statistics, the library system in Moldova consists of a total of 2,774 libraries (including 1,368 public and 28 academic libraries), in addition to 1,293 school libraries. The library system employs a total of 4,479 librarians, including 2,419 public librarians, 1,354 school librarians, 450 academic librarians, and 256 college librarians (CBN, 2014).

Public Libraries

Throughout the period since 1989, public libraries have been facing considerable difficulties. The new phase they entered following their repression under communism has seen their reorganization, an assumption of new responsibilities, the development of new services focused on the identification of community needs, and the promotion of democratic societal values. Librarians have gained freedom in designing creative programs and using initiatives that lead to new partnerships, especially with county libraries in Romania: Alba Iulia, Bacău, Baia Mare, Bistriţa-Năsăud, Botoşani, Bucharest, Buzău, Cluj-Napoca, Constanţa, Dâmboviţa, Focşani, Iaşi, Piatra Neamţ, Târgu-Mureş, all of which contributed enormously to the establishment of sustained book drives. Several Romanian public libraries have established a sister library program with libraries in Moldova; others have opened branches in Moldova and continued to supply them with Romanian books (Harris, 2008).

Since 1989, the number of public libraries has been in continual decline, falling from 1,949 to 1,368 a quarter of a century later—a loss of 581 libraries (or just under 30 percent). One reason for this is that beginning in 1990, library statistics no longer included the pro-Russian breakaway Trans-Dniester territory (a self-proclaimed independent region), which became completely isolated and no longer reported statistical data. Another

reason for these decreasing numbers was the financial crisis of the 1990s, during which many small libraries were closed and library staff made redundant. In addition, massive emigration left rural areas depopulated, with little or no need for library services. Budget cuts drastically affected acquisitions, the purchasing of equipment, employee salaries, and virtually every other aspect of operations. During the twenty-five years after 1989, public library staff dropped by just over 27 percent, from 3,338 to 2,419 librarians. Such a significant decline in personnel can also be explained by the lack of emerging professionals entering the library field.

Circulation statistics reflect a similar descending trend in book borrowing: from 1,573,800 items checked out in 1989 to only 827,100 items in 2013. This decrease is partly explained, however, by the fact that libraries have adopted the new standards for statistical evidence in libraries (ISO 2789:2006), which has led to considerably smaller figures reported. Yet, it is evident that library users' reading preferences have changed since the fall of communism, but libraries, with their dated collections and no e-services for remote virtual users, have not been fully prepared to meet users' expectations.

In 1989, public library collections amounted to a total of 24,658,800 documents, but by January 2013 this figure had dropped to 16,912,000. This significant decrease in the collections was due to the massive weeding out of publications pertaining to communist ideology, as well as publications in Cyrillic that never circulated. Library collections abounded in Russian literature, one of the prime tools supporting the "Russification" of Moldova by the USSR. After Moldova's independence, Romanian was declared the country's official language, and the Romanian language, previously written in Cyrillic, reverted to the Latin alphabet. However, libraries lacked literature in Romanian. Large shipments of books in Romanian were organized from Romania to Moldova in order to restore the country's library collections that, at this time, were being purged of Soviet literature. The main mission of libraries during the first years of the post-communist period was to restore the Moldovans' ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identity (Anghelescu, 2006; Anghelescu, Ploşniţă, & Tabac, 2010).

Another opportunity that contributed to the progress of libraries in Moldova was the library program of the Moldova-Soros Foundation, which, during the period 1997–2006, sponsored a number of projects for the development of libraries. These projects included improving the quality of library collections; equipping libraries with computers and other information technologies; enhancing a diversity of library services by providing information on various media; website development; developing electronic catalogs and other databases; and providing new services to different categories of users, such as children and young adults, disabled people, minority groups, and special populations in prisons, hospitals, and orphanages.

The major drawback of public libraries in Moldova has been the lack of funding, which has slowed their progress in overcoming the communist legacy. Scarce budgets have coincided with an increasing need to remodel old library spaces and modernize dated collections that are rarely used. In addition, scarce funding has prevented libraries from keeping pace with the appearance of new ICTs. At the beginning of 2014, only 291 out of the 1,368 public libraries were connected to the internet, representing an internet penetration of just over 21 percent. In 2012, the number of computers for staff use in these 1,368 public libraries amounted to just 336, with many libraries having no computer facilities whatsoever.

Novateca: New Beginnings

These alarming statistics were to play a major role in bringing foreign aid to public libraries in Moldova. The main development seen in the public library sector was a US$12 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, administered by IREX (International Research and Exchanges Board) Moldova and the Novateca program. An assessment of the information environment in general, and of the access to information through public libraries in particular, was conducted by IREX in 2011 in preparation for the beginning of the program (IREX, 2012).

IREX's report found a rapid growth in internet adoption in Moldova. By 2010, there were forty internet users per every hundred citizens, compared to nineteen in 2006 and only seven in 2003. From this perspective, Moldova compared favorably with Ukraine, which had twenty-three internet users per hundred citizens in 2010, and was on a par with Romania's rate (39 percent). However, despite rapid growth in the adoption of the internet by Moldovan citizens, few could afford connections at home, and many homes did not have a connection option at all. Public libraries, therefore, became the main means of providing Moldovan citizens with access to the internet (IREX, 2012).

During the pilot phase of the Novateca program, 68 libraries across six different districts (*raioane*) were equipped with a total of 304 computers, and 243 librarians were trained in ICT skills and new service delivery. In 2013, it was declared that the five-year program would "provide Moldovan citizens with access to relevant information and modern, locally tailored services in public libraries to enrich their lives, drawing on technology tools and trained librarians who can guide them in this process" (Novateca, 2013). It is predicted that by the end of the program, around 1,500 librarians will have attended professional development courses that will enable them to provide citizen-focused, modern library services in newly equipped libraries. The three main goals of the Novateca program are

• to enrich people's lives through quality services in modernized public libraries;

- to democratize Moldova's society by ensuring access to information through modernized public libraries; and
- to transform public libraries into successful information and training centers through innovation and the provision of quality services, which will improve the lives of each citizen and society as a whole (IREX, 2012).

The Novateca program will enable public libraries to shift from being repositories of dated books to becoming information centers focused on serving their communities. The role of public librarians will shift from being book custodians to acting as information providers ready to serve their patrons in collaboration with other agencies in their area.

THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

The first public library in Moldova was established in 1832 by an order issued by the Ministry of the Interior of the Russian Empire. The National Library of the Republic of Moldova (NLRM) is the successor of this library. Its first collection, consisting of 428 volumes (mostly in French) included works on classical literature, history, geography, and travel, as well as books on military campaigns and military leaders (NLRM, 2014a). Soviet rule brought about the "Russification" of the Romanian language and the Sovietization of library collections, where literature in Russian became preponderant. After Moldova's independence in 1991, the NLRM had to implement a systematic weeding-out process to remove dated materials in the Russian language, replacing them with new items in Romanian (Anghelescu, 2004).

In order to support collection growth in the Romanian language, the Romanian Legal Deposit Law included the NLRM as a beneficiary of legal deposit copies of Romanian imprints. From 1992 to 2000, the NLRM received 33,011 books in Romanian. The supply was discontinued during the following decade (2001–2011), but since July 2011, when the program restarted, to December 2014, a total of 6,354 Romanian books were added to the NLRM's collections. Currently, the library's collections in Romanian amount to only 12.4 percent of the total stock. Collection growth relies heavily upon the NLRM's receiving legal deposit copies from both Romanian and Moldovan publishers (the literature from these amounts to 45.1 percent of that growth). Gifts represent 24 percent of the library's collection growth, while international exchanges of publications amount to 19.6 percent. Acquisitions represented only 11.3 percent of collection growth during 2011 (NLRM, 2012a). As of January 2014, the NLRM harbored a collection consisting of some 2.5 million items: books and periodicals, audiovisual materials, music scores, graphic art, and microforms. The majority of the collection continues to be in Cyrillic, which much of the younger generation is not able to read.

In 2011, the NLRM had 7,815 registered users, who borrowed 415,373

items (some 53 items per person). The library's reading rooms can accommodate 425 patrons, with access to 50 computers with internet capability. In 2013, the NLRM reported 7,100 registered users, who made 82,400 visits to the library's two physical locations in Chişinău; in addition, there were 1,418,900 virtual visits to the library's website. The NLRM organizes and hosts some fifty events annually: conferences, symposia, colloquia, and exhibitions (NLRM, 2014b).

In 2008, the NLRM launched SIBIMOL (Integrated System of Automated Libraries in Moldova), a shared cataloging system that enables major libraries in the country to contribute bibliographic records. SIBIMOL was included as a major component in the country's long-term computerization program for 2012–2020, under the provision of the action plan targeting e-service/integrated access to the library system of the Republic of Moldova (NLRM, 2012b; SIBIMOL, 2012). Every year, some 20,000 new records are added to SIBIMOL; by the end of 2013, it contained some 385,000 bibliographic records.

The NLRM has been engaged in developing Moldavica, Moldova's National Digital Library, focused on the digitization of unique and rare items belonging to Moldova's Memory, the country's national heritage preservation program. Some 60,000 pages had been digitized by the end of 2011 (NLRM, 2012a) and are available online in the NLRM's Virtual Museum. The library is also a supplier of digital objects to the European Library.

Library legislation invested the NLRM with the responsibility of coordinating all public library activities at the national level. Since 1949, the library has been designated the national "methodological center" for the public library sector, with a special department designed to assist regional and municipal training centers in providing support and guidance to libraries and librarians in need of training. The NLRM has been engaged in the continuing education of public librarians in the country through courses, workshops, conferences, and symposia. Beginning in 2009, the library's Department of Research and Development in Librarianship has been using social media to provide professional training and assistance (Osoianu, 2013). The NLRM is engaged in publishing bibliographies, research studies, and other materials that promote its work and collections.

Another responsibility of the NLRM at the national level is to collect statistical data for the public library sector, which is then supplied to the National Bureau of Statistics, the compiler of the *Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Moldova*, available both in print and as a CD-ROM in Romanian, Russian, and English. The data are also made available on the NLRM's website (NLRM, 2014c).

The National Children's Library

The Ion Creangă National Children's Library (NLC) was founded in Chişinău in October 1944 to serve as the city children's library. After only

one year, it achieved the status of state children's library in the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1949, the library was named after the Russian poet A. S. Puškin; in 1990, it was renamed in honor of Ion Creangă, the Romanian writer who specialized in literature for children. Currently, the NLC is the main children's library in Moldova; its principal responsibilities are to preserve and promote the national repertory of publications for children; to offer to children and young adults access to national and universal knowledge and literature through diverse services, activities, and programs; and to coordinate the activity of children's libraries throughout the country. The library has a collection of more than 245,000 items: books, serials, audiovisual recordings, CDs and DVDs, and e-books. In addition, the NLC serves as a legal repository of publications for children. It serves about 13,000 users annually: children and young adults up to age 16, parents, educators, teachers, and professionals in the fields of education, literature, and publishing.

In cooperation with various partners, the NLC organizes national programs aimed at promoting reading and book publishing: the International Children and Youth Book Fair; the reading contest At the Springs of Wisdom; the reading campaign The Children of Moldova Read One Book; and the To Culture and Civilization through Reading program. The NLC hosts many creative writing and drawing contests for children, such as Discover the Fairytale through Theater; Pages from the History of My Family; An Imaginary Journey in the World of Books; and On the Winds of Fantasy to the Land of Childhood: Homage to Spiridon Vangheli.

The library has implemented a few important projects with the financial support from foreign partners. In order to offer users modern and innovative services, in 2001, with the support of the Moldova-Soros Foundation, the Library established a multimedia room. In 2010, the Swedish Institute contributed to the renovation and reorganization, according to the child's perspective, of the section for children ages 1–10 called Biblioteca Picilor (kids' library). Another important project has been the establishment of the bookmobile for children, implemented in 2014 with the support of the Japanese embassy.

The NLC issues various bibliographical publications, including bio-bibliographical dictionaries (*Authors of Children and Young Adult Literature in Moldova* and *Writers: Laureates of the Hans Christian Andersen Award*); bio-bibliographies featuring local writers (*Spiridon Vangheli*, *Grigore Vieru*, *Arcadie Suceveanu*, *Vasile Romanciuc*, and *Claudia Partole*); and selective bibliographies on specific subjects or for different age categories. The NLC has an online electronic catalog, maintains a website and a blog, and has a presence on social media.

Academic Libraries

University libraries have undergone significant changes in terms of collections, services, staffing, and meeting users' expectations. After 1989, these libraries made notable attempts to keep pace with the development of Moldova's emerging democratic society. Within the context of the sociopolitical and cultural reforms in the country, after decades of totalitarianism, academic libraries have redefined their mission, goals, and objectives by becoming an integral part of the process of national revival.

Currently, there are seventeen government-sponsored universities and eleven private universities in Moldova. Libraries in higher education institutions are part of the organizational structure of the parent institution, and their mission is to meet the information needs of students, faculty, and researchers through the provision of information resources and information literacy training. Communist propaganda and other ideological writings have been expunged from academic library collections. Documents in Romanian have been added to library collections through various collaborative projects between the two countries. The Pro-Bessarabia and Bukovina Cultural Association in Galați, Romania, contributed Romanian books worth US$150,000 to the collections of the library of the Alecu Russo State University in Bălți. In addition, university libraries have received materials from the Council of Europe, UN, EU, NATO, World Bank, AgroWeb, and others.

Statistics for 1989 indicate a total of 7,290,098 items held by academic libraries in Moldova. The number of users amounted to a total of 80,690, who made 2,796,368 visits and accounted for 688,795 circulation transactions. According to statistics for 2013, the 28 academic libraries in Moldova harbored nearly 16 million books and periodicals. The largest academic libraries, which also serve as methodological centers, are those belonging to Moldova State University; N. Testemițanu State University of Medicine and Pharmacy; Agricultural University; Academy of Economic Studies; Alecu Russo State University; Ion Creangă National Children's Library; State Technical University; Academy for Music; Theatre, and Fine Arts; and Free International University of Moldova.

The year 1989 marked the beginning of the computerization of academic libraries. The first automated one was the library of the Academy of Economic Studies. Currently, ten out of the seventeen academic libraries have automated library systems. However, none of these is *fully* automated, and they use only certain modules of their system. Due to financial austerity and other factors, the modernization process, concluded a study conducted in 2011, has remained quite slow, uneven, and inefficient (Harconița, Zasmenco, & Karnaev, 2012).

In 1999, five major university libraries joined the eIFL (electronic Information for Libraries) Direct cooperation project and created the Electronic Resources Moldova (REM) consortium. As a consequence, these

five libraries have access to a variety of licensed databases, such as EBSCO, Springer, BioOne, Cambridge University Press, IOPscience, Oxford Reference Online, and Royal Society Publishing. Along with the development of electronic collections, university libraries are focused on improving users' experiences. Since 2002, university librarians have offered information literacy courses to students by developing library aids embedded in various courses of the curricula (Tcaci, 2014). In 2005, Moldova joined the Bologna higher education system, and its universities have been changing their curricula to align their courses with other universities throughout Europe; hence academic libraries had to develop their collections and services in accordance with user requirements and international standards. Academic libraries' budgets have been very limited, however, and consequently acquisitions have dropped dramatically.

Valuable exchanges of ideas and collaboration with academic libraries in other countries have brought a new wave of university libraries' exposure to international values, standards, and practices. Currently, the library of the State University of Medicine and Pharmacy and six other university libraries are involved in a project within the TEMPUS program—the Modern Information Services for Improvement Study Quality project—whose main goal is to create integrated e-libraries and to improve information services for quality education in Moldovan universities (http://misisq .usmf.md/index.phpen-us). In recent years, university libraries, such as the Academy of Economic Studies, Alecu Russo State University, and Ion Creangă National Children's Library, have been active in promoting open access policies, which led to the creation of institutional repositories.

The economic crisis and its subsequent transition phase have had negative impacts on library funding. Beginning in 2013, universities have been encouraged to adopt a self-financing model. Based on current legislation, university library services are free for users, but a library can provide additional, fee-based services, such as copying, scanning, and binding. Insufficient budgets have had a negative impact on acquisitions of information resources as well as on IT equipment and staffing.

Within the private university library sector, the library of the Free International University of Moldova (ULIM), located in Chişinău, stands out. It was established in 1992, along with the university itself. Its print collection amounts to approximately 250,000 books and 80,000 separate issues of periodicals. The ULIM's digital library provides access to its e-collection, its open access institutional repository, and to twenty-four licensed databases. The library is actively engaged in the promotion of information literacy and provides research assistance to its students and faculty (Corghenci, 2002; Sochircă, Corghenci, Borş, & Cerneauscaite, 2012).

Research and Special Libraries

In addition to university libraries, there are two main scientific libraries in Moldova. The Central Scientific Library of the Academy of Sciences is one of the largest scientific libraries in the country. It was founded in 1928 with a mission to create specialized collections to support the information and documentation needs for basic and applied scientific research. The Republican Technical Scientific Library of the National Institute of Economic Research at the Science Academy of Moldova is the methodological center for all technical libraries in the country. According to recent statistics (2013), only 15 technical libraries were operational in the country, with a collection totaling more than 14 million items and a circulation of 652,468.

Medical libraries are the most prominent special libraries. There are eighteen such libraries throughout the country, which are affiliated with both schools of medicine and pharmacy and large hospitals. Considering Moldova's large agricultural sector, it is not surprising that it has seventeen agricultural libraries, all affiliated with higher education institutions.

School Libraries

The number of school libraries has been steadily declining. In 2011, Moldova reported having 1,424 school libraries; in 2012, 1,367, a decrease of 4 percent. In 2014, their number dropped again by 5.5 percent, declining to 1,293 (180 situated in larger towns/municipalities, 164 in smaller towns, and 949 in rural areas), with 1,282 libraries located in public schools and 11 in private. In terms of collections, 19 of these libraries have less than 2,000 volumes, 115 less than 5,000, 378 less than 10,000, and 781 more than 10,000. In 2011, school library collections amounted to 1,817,338 items, but by 2013, the overall volume count dropped to 1,472,653 due to expunging (Harconița, 2014). In 2013, Moldova's school population amounted to 373,735 students; of these, 300,454 (80.4 percent) used the libraries in their schools, borrowing 8,661,696 books—an average of about 23 items per user.

Only 245 school libraries have computers, and of these, 140 are for user needs, with only 125 providing internet access. In 2013, websites were maintained by only 2 school libraries. In that same year, these libraries were staffed by 1,345 librarians, down by 9 percent from 2011, with only 191 librarians holding a graduate degree in library science (BIN, 2014).

The Library Association of Moldova

The Library Association of Moldova (LAM) was established in 1991 as a nongovernmental organization that unites the efforts of librarians in promoting high standards of providing library services. The LAM currently has more than 1,500 members and collectively represents the entire national library system. The association's major activities are focused on

promoting and implementing professional partnerships (for example, the REM consortium); providing access to professional information through its publishing of the *LAM Review* and the *LAM Newspaper*; undertaking analysis and research to help develop strategies for the library sector and the evolution of its legal framework; and supporting and organizing professional meetings in collaboration with partners both within the country and internationally. The LAM's major recent project, implemented during 2012–2013, was Building a Strong Library Association, supported by IFLA and the Novateca program. The essential outcomes of the project were the development of the LAM's internal governance documents (bylaws and regulations); and the formulation of LAM's strategy for 2014–2018, which includes regional and rural representation and a target for membership growth (400 newcomers, including librarians from school and academic libraries). The strategy addresses the following key areas:

- Continuing education for members
- Advocacy for the library profession
- Improvement of librarians' social status
- Capacity-building for the professional association (Costin, 2012)

The LAM has launched a newsletter (*LAM Newspaper*) and updated its website in order to foster better communication with its members. Through its advocacy, the association has undertaken an active role in influencing sectorial policies related to the Moldova 2020 strategic-development project: e-Culture, Digital Moldova, and e-Education. Relationships have also been developed with various ministries (Culture; Education; Information Technology and Communications), with meetings focused on the promotion of, and influencing strategic statements on, libraries, including the Law on Libraries and the Regulation on the Award of Categories of Qualification for Library Personnel (Moldova Government, 2012).

Conclusion
Libraries are already serving nearly every community in Moldova. These institutions, and the administrative, managerial, legal, and financial infrastructure built around them, constitute a basis for expanding services and projecting libraries as key providers of public information for Moldovan citizens into the future. In recent years, public libraries have been actively involved in the ongoing processes of modernization and democratization in Moldova.

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