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Greek Libraries Network

Purpose, goals, vision. The audience development in libraries through educational programs for children

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Abstract:

Purpose – Abstract:

Purpose - In 2015 the National Library of Greece took over the Greek Libraries Network to support the efforts of academic, research, public, municipal and school libraries in the country to develop and advance the services they offer to the public.

The main objective is to make this network a center of knowledge diffusion, networking and professional communication among its members as well as making libraries hubs of creativity for everyone.

Design/methodology/approach - The existence of this network gives each member-library the ability to multiply its users, since the users of each library are members of the entire network. The actions of the Greek Libraries Network aim at audience development in the libraries, with a special focus on children, in order to create a new generation of readers.

Findings - The proposed educational programs promote reading through specific themes and books. Through specially designed workshops children can experience the library as a space that offers innumerable opportunities for education and creativity.

Originality/value - In this endeavor, the National Library of Greece stands shoulder to shoulder by visiting the natural spaces of each member-library of the Greek Libraries Network, heeding their needs and concerns, but also getting feedback and new ideas for the improvement of its services.

Index Terms — networking; libraries; collaboration; Summer Campaign; library networks

I. INTRODUCTION - IDENTITY OF THE PROJECT

In 2015, the National Library of Greece (NLG) took over the libraries network which was initiated and funded by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF) and the Non-Profit Civil Partnership (NPCP) Future Library.

As part of the transition of the National Library of Greece to its new facilities at the Stavros Niarchos Foundation

Cultural Center (SNFCC), the project was included in Action 4, which focused on the Audience Development. The network was taken over by the NLG and in 2016 the Greek Libraries Network (GLN) was created.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 2011, the NPCP Future Library, with exclusive donor the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, created a network of libraries from all over the country with a view to reinforcing people's awareness of the importance of libraries as centers of learning, creativity and interaction. One of its actions was the Summer Campaign for the Promotion of Reading and Creativity, under the theme "Journeys with the Library as a Compass" in the summer of 2012. During the first year that the Summer Campaign activities were implemented in 87 Public and Municipal Libraries across Greece, they attracted the interest of the public which visited them: more than 20,000 people, adults and children. The actions continued under the guidance of Future Library until 2014.

In 2015, the National Library of Greece has taken over the baton assuming the role of coordinator and trainer. The Future Library [1] and the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, which funded the actions, collaborated with the NLG during the first year in order to prepare and implement the Summer Reading and Creativity Campaign.

In 2016, the Summer Campaign (SC) started with a three-day seminar in Athens, where libraries' staff from all over Greece participated in interactive workshops and work groups, so that they could be able to transmit to the rhythms/atmosphere, and respond to the requirements and the challenges of the Summer Campaign in their city. As part of the development of the project, the webpage of the Greek Libraries Network (<https://network.nlg.gr/>) was created, in which the member-libraries were placed on a common map, through an online process of application for the submittal and posting of their data. Finally, 2016 has been the last year that the exclusive donor was the Stavros Niarchos Foundation.

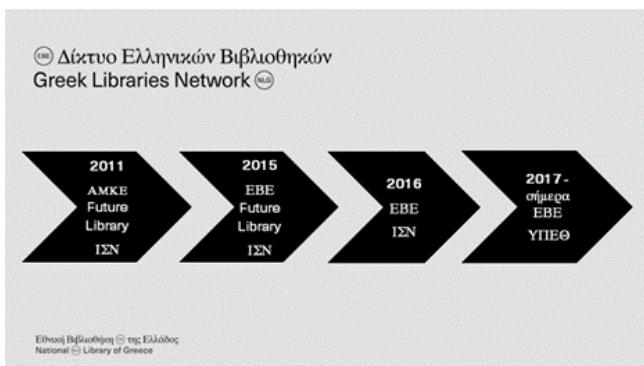


Figure 1. Historical background - GLN Creation.

As of 2017, the National Library of Greece has planned, organized and coordinated the actions of the Greek Libraries Network funded by the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs. Educational programs have grown as well; in addition to the Summer Campaign, there are actions to celebrate Christmas, World Book Day and a series of monthly thematic workshops since January 2018.

The website of the GLN is gradually being developed on a training and communication platform, enabling each member-library of the GLN to be informed, to communicate with each other and to take part in projects through special forms. The platform also hosts the educational / informative meetings of the NLG's library staff, which are being livestreamed, no longer requiring physical presence. In this way, the Greek Libraries Network follows the National Library of Greece in its transition to a new era.

III. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

The GLN's aim is to support the efforts of the academic, research, public, municipal and school libraries of the country in order to develop and advance the services they offer to their public. In the organizational sector, the NLG aims to provide library support by creating common catalogs and to defend their political, economic and social positions so that libraries throughout the country are at the epicenter of every community.

The main objective of the network is to be a basis and a means of information, dissemination of information, knowledge and professional communication among its members. The focus is always on highlighting libraries as hubs of creativity for both the young and the elder people. The existence of this network allows each member-library to multiply its users, since the users of each library are members of the entire network. In the future, the NLG aims to connect member-libraries with the services of the Union Catalog and the Electronic Reading Room of the NLG.

The National Library of Greece, as a reference point for libraries, aspires to undertake the responsibility of organizing training programs for the employees of its members', to plan, organize and carry out national and international actions such as campaigns or conferences.

IV. ACTIONS OF THE GREEK LIBRARIES NETWORK AND RESULTS

The GLN was created to offer support to every library that operates locally and to evolve its role from the traditional to a more modern one, following the transition of the National Library into a digital environment. Joint actions and the development of common services and tools at a national level aim at the advancement of libraries into information and knowledge centers and at increasing their visitors/users. Through the network's approach, the users of a member-library of the GLN gain access to all the other libraries.

The Greek Libraries Network now consists of 220 libraries, including Public, Municipal and Private libraries from all over Greece, libraries of private schools and one library in Cyprus. The GLN is gradually expanding to other libraries in Cyprus, while its aim is to include Academic and Research libraries.

From 2015 to the present day, the GLN coordinator has visited 150 libraries, with the aim of building relationships of trust, considering their needs as well as ideas for potential new collaborations. These visits result in the strengthening of relations between Libraries and local government bodies, their staffing with human resources and their logistical support.

The development of their audience is gradually evolving, starting from a young age, with the creation of a culture of library use, through educational programs and workshops formed based on innovative pedagogical method approaches. The Summer Campaign for four consecutive years (2015-2018), the anniversary programs, Workshop of Wishes, Reading Points, A Christmas Story, Heroes, Let's Meet!, and the new program "In the Library, every month, we have a.....theme!" (January 2018 - May 2019) had a great impact on children aged from 4 to 14 years old. The Summer Reading and Creativity Campaign is now an institution for GLN libraries and has been proposed twice to claim the "Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award" (ALMA) [2], the world's largest award for children's and youth literature.

The concept of networking, however, is also presented in the way of communication, information and training of the NLG's libraries' staff. Online meetings, forms of e-participation/evaluation and communication fora are some indicative steps in the transition to the digital age.

V. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

A. *Summer Campaign for the Promotion of Reading and Creativity*

i. ***It is no Library here (2015)***

In 2015, the NLG co-organized with the NPCP Future Library - the Summer Campaign to Promote Reading and Creativity. Its theme was "It is no Library here..." and 110 Municipal and Public Libraries took part in it, hosting 1,966 events with 44,251 children attending. According to the statistics from the evaluation questionnaires on completion of the program, 20,080 children borrowed at least one book while the children of the SC 2015 borrowed 41,718 books in total. In November, a review conference was held, with the

aim of announcing results and the sharing of experience from the program.

ii. Become an explorer of the world (2016)

The Summer Campaign 2016 was organized by the NLG, with exclusive funding from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, and followed the planning process of previous years, but now without the assistance of the Future Library. A three-day training seminar was held with the participation of Librarians in 7 different interactive workshops and work groups.

The theme of SC 2018 was “Become an explorer of the world”. Every day, all the libraries had a specific mission, which was implemented and presented in a different way. For the first time, the libraries had the opportunity to simultaneously implement actions, on a Pan-Hellenic scale, while the visitors had the opportunity to concurrently follow the SC on their summer destinations. During the program, 62.313 children participated in 3.195 creative workshops that were implemented in 146 libraries of the GLN, 20 of which were participating for the first time. The lending of children’s books surpassed all expectations, reaching 117.217, while 30.698 children borrowed books at least once. For the innovative educational program of the SC 2016, the NLG was selected as a nominee for the international award “Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award” (ALMA 2017) [2], the world’s largest prize for children’s and youth literature. [3]. International distinction for the ALMA prize)

iii. Point-to-Point Adventures (2017)

The theme of the 2017 Summer Reading and Creativity Campaign, “Point-to-Point Adventures”, was based on the relocation of the National Library of Greece, which in 2017 was spanning a geographical, as well as symbolic distance, from one point to another, from the emblematic Vallianio building to the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center. For about three months, 162 libraries across Greece joined forces and offered 3,319 creative workshops which were attended by 61,991 children. 39.52% of children were enthused by the actions, while the lending of children’s books reached 96.408.

The innovation in this program came from the communication of the persons responsible for the libraries of NLG, where it was proposed to write a story aiming at cross-cultural communication, the joint production of original content and the experiential participation of children in a Pan-Hellenic network that promotes reading and creativity in practice. Thus, starting with four libraries and four photographs, the writing of four different stories began. The stories travelled to 49 libraries of the GLN all over Greece where the children created the “stories from library to library”. Their work was presented on an interactive map on the GLN’s website [4]. Stories from library to library). When the SC 2017 program ended, the NLG was selected as a nominee to claim the “Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award” (ALMA 2018)[2] for a second year.

iv. Favorite Data: Observing and Measuring the World

The theme of the Summer Reading and Creativity Campaign 2018, in which 148 members of the GLN participated, focused on “Favorite Data”. From June 20th to September 7th, children were called on to observe, record, comprehend, and report data through 46 different workshops tailored accordingly to innovative methodological approaches to pedagogy.



Figure 2. Comparison bar of statistic results SC 2015 – 2017

B. In the Library, every month, we have... a theme!

In January 2018, the National Library launched a pilot program for the GLN by providing the corresponding supporting material to each participating library so that it could organize, each month, four workshops -around a common theme- for children or for school classes. The aim of the program was to transform libraries and their children’s departments into centers of informal education, where knowledge is approached through experimentation, personal experience and many books. The program ended successfully in May 2018 and returned with new themes in October 2018.

C. Anniversary Programs

i. Workshop of Wishes (Christmas, 2016)

In December 2016, 70 member-libraries of the GLN participated in a workshop to create wishes, making use of material and instructions sent by the National Library. The workshop was based on excerpts of books that children converted into a wish for the New Year. The children’s wishes were sent to the NLG and decorated its new home at SNFCC. Adults also took part in the workshop online, writing their own wishes and their favorite quotes from Christmas stories, utilizing social media tools [5]. Workshop of wishes all over Greece).

ii. Reading Points (World Book Day, 2017)

The program that was implemented owing to World Book Day 2017 was organized around six sections that represent the aspects of reading as experience and content, highlighting what, where, how, when, and why we read. It addressed different ages with texts of different difficulty, encouraging young and old to answer specific questions using a text, a drawing, a photo or a video [6]. Take part in “The reading points”!).

iii. Christmas in the Library (Christmas, 2017)

For Christmas 2017, the children who participated in the workshops created an illustrated story titled “Christmas in the Library”, that was starring main characters of Christmas. The stories were created exclusively with symbols and images and were recorded in a specially designed notebook. The notebooks with stories were sent to the NLG and placed on the shelves of the NLG’s Public Library Department at SNFCC, creating an exhibition that allowed each visitor to see and narrate every illustrated Christmas story in his own way [7].

iv. Heroes, let's meet! (World Book Day, 2018)

On World Book Day in 2018, the National Library of Greece proposed to the members of the GLN to become acquainted with the heroes of children’s literature both worldwide and within their country of origin through the program “Heroes, let’s meet!”. Each library participating in the action chose a hero or heroine from a list of 150-characters from 50 different countries in the world. The children gathered information about the hero or the heroine adopted by the Library of their area, and they created the profile and a model which accompanied them for the rest of the library’s activities [8].

VI. COMMUNICATION AND NETWORKING

In 2016, the website of the Greek Libraries Network (<https://network.nlgr.gr/>)[9] was created, and the member-libraries of the GLN were placed on a common map (see Figure 3), through a registration application. The site enables visitors to link to each Library’s profile, to be kept informed of the libraries’ actions by a common calendar, and to follow up on the new programs that are being implemented in their area and the whole GLN.

From 2017, the website has gradually begun to develop into a platform of education, information and communication. The information meetings of the NLG with its members are now on live streaming, live chat and even on live link with the libraries via skype. Sessions on the use of new technologies and the management of social media tools are consistently included in the training of library staff, which takes place online every year.



Figure 3. Network.nlgr.gr website - Mapping the Libraries of GLN

In addition, the platform created a user area where each library gains access to the system and can manage its profile, participate in projects through special forms, request the workshops that they would like by date, and have access to a communication forum. As soon as a project is announced, all the member-libraries have the potential to apply for the project in which they wish to participate. Each project includes:

- The actions and the corresponding participation form for the actions, accessible only by the libraries that have requested participation.
- Files and material in order to implement actions with a link to google drive.
- Evaluation form, which libraries need to complete after each workshop.
- Unity in the forum, in which only the participating -in the project- libraries have access to.

To date, 220 libraries have been placed on the common map and have their own separate profile on the site. 10,537 events have been viewed on 40,187 visits to the site. 7,270 of these events have been posted on the platform by the libraries themselves. Library staff communication is evident from the posts on the live forum, which reach 260 in 36 different themes.

VII. GNL POWER - CONCLUSIONS

The library network taken over by the National Library of Greece numbered 110 Libraries, Public and Municipal. Within four years, that number doubled, and private libraries and private school libraries were added. However, the needs have also doubled. These challenges have led to changes and new applications.

Since 2017, financing of the GLN has been included in the state budget. The three-day seminar was replaced by an online informational and educational meeting where employees can watch live streaming via the GLN website and

send their questions to the special live chat or to watch it later on a video.

The idea gradually evolved and led to the transformation of the network.nlg.gr website into a platform that the National Library of Greece's coordination team can use as a synchronous training platform. The communication forum was also integrated into the platform, which replaced Basecamp. From their communication through these media, new ideas are born, common educational programs are being promoted and all libraries are supported by child and adult visits.

It is significantly important that children from across the country, through the SC and all the other educational programs, have come to know the libraries in their area and have learned that reading can be pleasant and entertaining, not compulsive and obligatory. The response was great and there was a need to create a new program covering the participation of libraries in other periods than summer.

Through all the above, one can see the benefits and the power of joining a common network, focusing on connection, cooperation, participation, organization, guidance, education and knowledge.

VIII. NEXT STEPS

The future objectives of NLG for the development and empowerment of the GLN are the following:

- gradual integration of the members of the GLN in the Collective Catalog
- connection, promotion and exploitation of the NLG's Electronic Reader's Library by the libraries' users
- training of the GLN members for the utilization of the NLG's electronic resources
- multi-copy exchange infrastructure from the member libraries of the GLN
- organization of training courses, seminars, conferences and campaigns of a Pan-Hellenic character
- creation of educational programs for all ages
- guidance on the creation of digital collections and their hosting on the NLG platform

The National Library of Greece intends to provide guidance and support to the libraries of the GLN, through informing and training their employees in new services and tools, aiming at the spreading and promotion of information, knowledge and Fillanagnosis, on a Pan-Hellenic range.

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