Erasmus+ Projects in Libraries: The ADELE and BIBLIO Projects

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Introduction

The Central Institute for the Union Catalogue of Italian Libraries, ICCU, has a long tradition within European projects and in recent years has been involved as a partner in two Erasmus+ projects on librarians' skills and self-assessment: BIBLIO (Boosting digital skills and competencies for librarians in Europe) and ADELE (Advancing Digital Empowerment of Libraries in Europe). The two projects are developing their activities in the context of public libraries, but their results may also be useful and applicable in the context of school libraries as they concern librarians' skills and libraries' digital strategies.

On one hand the BIBLIO project, ended last April, which underlines the importance of digital and transversal skills to face the new challenges of the contemporary world (the pandemic emergency made this need even more urgent), and on the other hand the ADELE project which focuses on the self-assessment of digital skills and strategies adopted by libraries in order to design improvement activities/actions.

The BIBLIO Project

The project BIBLIO: boosting digital skills and librarians in Europe is funded by Erasmus + KA2 programme: Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices - Sector

Skills Alliances and places the professional figure of the librarian at the center of European reflection.

The project, started in November 2019 and ended last April (thanks to an extension granted for the pandemic emergency), had as its main objective the identification of librarians' skills gap especially in terms of digital and transversal competences to produce specific professional profiles and Vocational Education and Training (VET) curricula, level 5 of the European Qualification Framework

The final goal of the project was to fill these gaps by enriching the toolbox of the librarians through training courses:

1) A MOOC course, of 8 weeks, which involved around 100 library professionals per participant Country, for a total of 400 librarians or aspirants from all over Europe.
2) A specialisation course through the blended learning formula: face-to-face and individual lessons, online lessons, project-based learning and work-based learning to foster intergenerational learning.

The project also made use of several European tools for the standardisation of results: European Qualification Framework (EQF) useful for comparing the different levels of the profession among European citizens, Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp), the reference framework for digital competences, Entrepreneurship Competence Framework (EntreComp), the European reference framework for entrepreneurial competences.

In Italy, the library profession is attested at EQF levels 6, 7, 8 by the UNI 11535:2014 standard and by the Ministry of Culture's lists of professionals: the project produced two EQF level 5 curricula, a first step in the profession's world at European level that will produce a methodology that can be replicated at higher levels of the framework.

The Consortium

The activities of the project, coordinated by the University of Bari 'Aldo Moro', were carried out by an international consortium of 10 organizations from 5 European countries: Italy, Greece, Latvia, Bulgaria and Belgium. The partnership was composed of organizations in the

sector such as national library networks, vocational training institutions specialized in digital competences and two European networks.

For the first group of partners besides ICCU we find Global Libraries - Bulgaria Foundation (GLBF) in Bulgaria and Kultūras informācijas sistēmu centre (KISC) in Latvia. The vocational training organisations include, in addition to the project coordinator, the European Grants International Academy SRL (EGInA), the Center for vocational training to University of Library studies and Information Technologies (ULSIT) in Bulgaria; SIA DMG in Latvia and the Hellenic Open University (HOU) in Greece. Finally, two European networks: All Digital and Public Libraries 2030.

The Methodology and the Research Phase

The first project phase (from November 2019 to March 2020) was dedicated to the training needs research: the survey collected both qualitative and quantitative data and consisted of several steps:

- Desk research;
- Questionnaire for librarians;
- Librarians' interviews;
- VET best practice interviews.

Desk research was the first stage of research, useful to know the skills required in job vacancies and addressed in the training courses (formal and non-formal) in the different partner countries in the last three years. The European results of this first phase show an initial gap in the skills required and offered between countries. A common aspect found was the need to acquire pedagogical skills and the ability to investigate the users' needs due to the transformation of the librarian into a figure increasingly oriented towards educational and research activities in understanding the needs of the community served by the library.

Afterwards, the partners distributed a questionnaire on training needs to librarians in public libraries, identified as the most appropriate type of library to investigate. The questionnaire investigated their knowledge of DigComp, their self-assessment of their own skills, the services offered by the libraries, the last training courses attended, and the skills felt as the most needed.

94% of the respondents seemed motivated and aware of the need to update their skills. Regarding content, respondents from different countries indicated the need to know how to interact with users both online and offline, to learn how to create digital content and to strengthen information, data and media literacy skills. An interest in exploring technological changes also emerged, although this was not always indicated as an immediate training need.

Initially, the project envisaged a qualitative in-depth study through the use of the coaching circle technique to be carried out in person, but due to the COVID19 emergency, it was replaced with in-depth interviews, easier to be managed virtually. The interviewees were mainly librarians and users (not all countries managed to involve them due to the difficulty in reaching them when libraries were closed to the public).

Librarians from different countries underlined that these skills are often entrusted within libraries to one or a few staff members and how the approach to digital technology also differs from person to person: those who approach it positively and those who are discouraged by technological changes.

The importance of the digital independence of staff is so important that in libraries every librarian should have at least a basic level of these competences. Another aspect is the perception and image of libraries: even today, when someone talks about libraries, thoughts turn exclusively to book collections, less to the services and different activities that libraries have been carrying out for a long time.

Finally, the last phase of the research involved interviews with trainers from the most successful training experiences in the field.

The main results emerged, from the content point of view, pointed at a widespread need for digitally oriented courses, from the formal point of view the results confirmed the preference for blended learning (a need accentuated by the COVID-19 SARS pandemic emergency) which provides greater flexibility for working students.

Furthermore, in several countries, it emerged how the collaborative approach between the participants stimulated learning and enabled the emergence of virtuous collaborations between libraries.

The Two Job Profiles and the Training Course

The results obtained during the research phase described above led to the delineation of two job profiles, resulting from two main needs: on the one hand the need for communication skills, related to community facilitation and user relations, and on the other hand digital and technical support skills.

The two professional profiles are:

- *Community Engagement and Communication Officer (CECO)*: a profile mainly addressed to the communication and facilitation needs of the community, a support figure in the analysis of user needs and in the outlining of new services.
- *Digital Transformation Facilitator (DIGY)*: a profile more oriented towards technical skills, able to provide support in digital processes and digitisation activities in the library.

After the elaboration of the job profiles, the knowledge required for each profile was identified and then mapping was carried out with two European reference frameworks: DigComp and Entrecomp. This led to the creation of the training modules and the contents for the training courses.

The training offer of the project was articulated as follows:

- Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), 80 hours;
- Specialisation Course, 405 hours, including:
  - Blended training course, 240 hours:
    - Online classes and self-study, 160 hours
    - Face-to-face training, 20 hours
    - Project-based learning, 40 hours;
    - Assessment, 20 hours;
  - Work-based learning, 165 hours.

The Work-based Learning phase was very important because it facilitated intergenerational learning and allowed students to engage with more experienced professionals in the field. Project ideas were developed by the students with the support of teachers, tutors, and librarians in the host libraries.

This phase also involved libraries of a different nature such as specialist libraries, university libraries, but also innovative laboratories such as UNIBA's Spin off Dabimus. The projects presented focused on digitisation processes for the DIGY profile and on community involvement for the CECO profile.

The project recently came to an end and the consortium of partners is already working on a possible follow-up, taking into account the valuable suggestions of students, librarians, and trainers gathered during the evaluation phase. Finally, on 28 March, the partnership was welcomed by the Vice-President of the European Parliament, Marc Angel: on this occasion, a librarian from each country was able to give voice to his/her experience and talked about the BIBLIO experience and the impact on the library and his own skills.

The ADELE Project

The second project in which ICCU is involved as a partner is the ADELE project (Advancing Digital Empowerment for Libraries in Europe - 2021-1-IE01-KA220-ADU-000029436), funded by the Erasmus+ KA2 programme, which seems to be in natural continuity with the BIBLIO project described above. After the study on the skills needed by contemporary librarians, pursued by BIBLIO, ADELE in fact wants to support the adoption of digital strategies and techniques by providing librarians with a self-assessment tool to assess how much and how they are working on these aspects. The project started in February 2022 and will end in February 2024.

The ADELE aim is to design and test a tool for public libraries in Europe that could also support the work of librarians in other types of libraries. The ADELE tool is inspired by SELFIE, a similar tool produced by another European project and addressed to schools. Like SELFIE, ADELE will produce a free, customizable, web-based tool addressed to different profiles in the library context (director/director, librarian/librarian, user).

The anonymous responses will give back a 360-degree view of the library, its digital skills and strategies: in fact, the constant use of this tool over time will help librarians in monitoring these aspects and designing improvement activities. The ADELE tool will give the opportunity to libraries to carry out two test sessions in a year and to download a detailed report of all responses.

The specific objectives of the project are:

- Test and adapt the European Commission's SELFIE tool areas and statements to the library sector;
- Develop advanced digital skills of participating librarians through webinars offered.

In addition to the creation of the multilingual tool (it will be translated into the languages of the partner countries-English, Italian, Bulgarian, and French), the project will produce a toolkit to facilitate its use and the collection of 100 best practices from across Europe to support libraries in their improvement actions.

In addition, the project has created an international network of librarians from different countries who have contributed to the design of the tool (currently in beta version) and who will meet each other during the international training weeks (Learning, Teaching and Training Activities, LTTA) in the 4 project partner countries: Italy, Belgium, Ireland and Bulgaria. During LTTAs they will have the opportunity to participate in training activities and strengthen their network.

The project partnership differs a little from the BIBLIO project; in fact, with the exception of the project coordinator, the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) the Irish agency that collaborates with the public library service by making recommendations and providing necessary services, the rest of the consortium consists of: ICCU, EGInA Ltd., Global Libraries - Bulgaria Foundation (GLBF) and Public Libraries 2030 (PL2030).

The 100 public libraries engaged in the design of the tool come from different countries, in fact, in addition to Ireland, Italy, Bulgaria, included in the partnership, there are libraries from: Austria, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Finland, Lithuania, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden, Czech Republic, Romania, thanks to the extensive network of PL2030.

The selection included more innovative libraries as well as small ones to facilitate exchange among professionals from different backgrounds and stimulate collaboration and sharing.

The starting point, as already anticipated, is the SELFIE tool: the tool created by the European Commission for schools involved in formal learning. The project is divided into several phases of work:

- Development of the methodological framework and in-depth analysis of the SELFIE tool with selected participants;
- Conceptual design of the beta version of the ADELE tool;
- Technical development of the beta version of the ADELE tool;
- Further testing and revision;
- Final version and official launch of the tool;
- Development of a toolkit to support the digital transformation of non-formal learning institutions;
- Training libraries staff involved in the project and strengthening the international network.

In this first year, the partners worked intensively on the design and development of the tool, readapting the areas, statements and target groups of the SELFIE tool.
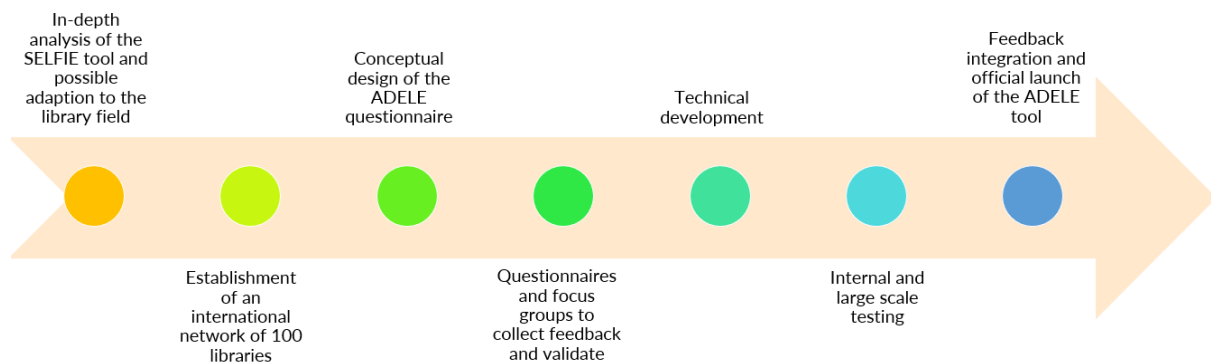
The areas defined are as follows:

- *Management;*
- *Infrastructure, equipment, support and resources;*
- *Continuing professional development, CPD;*
- *Self-reflection on digital competences;*
- *Learning opportunities on digital competences;*

- *Collaboration, networking, and community.*

The areas listed contain the statements (short sentences and questions) that can be answered using the Likert scale, from 1-6 responses. The statements can be both mandatory and optional: libraries, therefore, during customization, will be able to choose which optional questions to include and which to exclude, and will also be able to add specific statements, based on their context and needs.

The beta version (presented on March 1 at the first multiplier event of the project, "Boosting the digital readiness of public libraries with the ADELE tool"), is the result of constant discussion with the librarians involved: their input, through questionnaires and focus groups, has been remarkable in connecting the partners' work to the concrete reality of libraries and returning a satisfactory product in line with their expectations.

For instance, a librarian coined the word "radarous" to define the tool to indicate a radar that penetrates inside the various aspects in an analytical and comprehensive manner. After the development phase, the testing phase is currently about to begin, and the final version of the tool will be released this fall.

In conclusion, once the ADELE tool is finalized, all libraries will be able to use it by adapting it to their specific needs thanks to the possibility of including customized statements. Although public libraries were the starting point in the design, this flexibility means that it can easily be adapted to other contexts such as school libraries.

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Biography

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