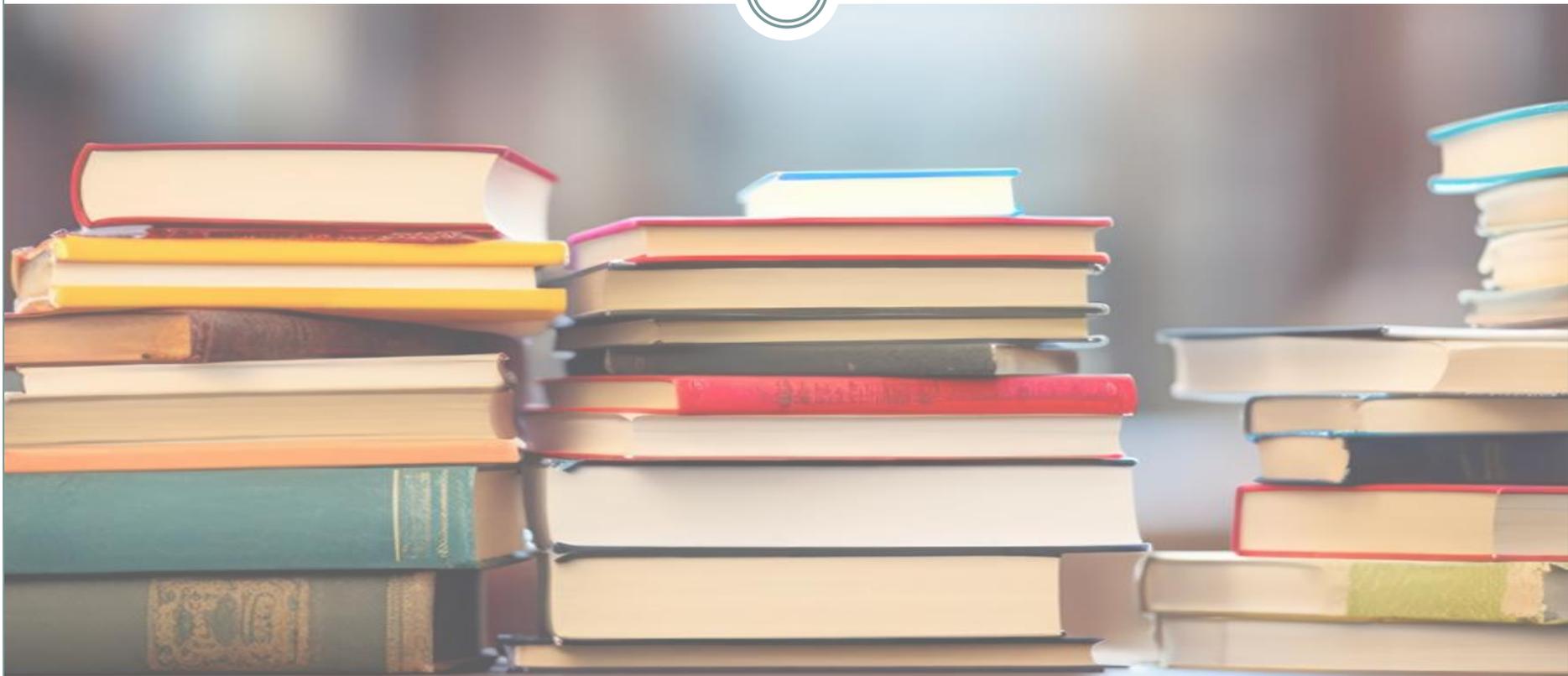


From Information Access to Lifelong Learning: The Evolving Role of Libraries in North Macedonia



Introduction



- Libraries are increasingly positioning themselves as centers for education and lifelong learning, not just repositories of books. The librarian profession is undergoing a big transformation, driven by digital technology, open access movements, AI, and evolving community needs.

Far from disappearing, librarianship is expanding into new roles that blend traditional skills with cutting-edge demands

Libraries have long served as centers for knowledge, culture, and education. In the context of North Macedonia, the role of libraries has evolved significantly, shifting from traditional repositories of books to modern learning hubs that promote lifelong learning for both users and librarians.

This paper explores the development of librarianship in Macedonia, the challenges faced by the library system, and the importance of lifelong learning as a continuous process for professional growth and community empowerment.

Introduction



- In today's information-driven society, libraries represent more than just physical spaces for reading and borrowing books—they are dynamic learning environments that foster personal and professional development.

In North Macedonia, libraries play a vital role in promoting literacy, cultural heritage, and lifelong education.

As the country continues its path toward digital transformation and integration within European educational frameworks, the concept of lifelong learning has become increasingly relevant for both librarians and users.

The Development of Librarianship in Macedonia



- The history of librarianship in Macedonia can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when the first public and school libraries were established.

Following the country's independence in 1991, Macedonian libraries underwent significant changes to adapt to the democratic, educational, and technological needs of the new society.

Key institutions such as the National and University Library "St. Clement of Ohrid" – Skopje have played a leading role in library development, standardization, and professional education.

Libraries have become increasingly involved in digitization projects, information literacy programs, and cooperation with international organizations such as IFLA and UNESCO.

Lifelong Learning and Libraries



- Lifelong learning is a fundamental element of personal growth, social inclusion, and sustainable development. It is defined as the continuous, voluntary, and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge, skills, and competencies throughout an individual's life. Libraries, as public and educational institutions, are central to this concept because they provide free and open access to information and opportunities for learning at all stages of life.

In North Macedonia, libraries have increasingly recognized their role as active participants in the national strategy for lifelong learning. They are not only places where people come to read or borrow books but also community centers that promote learning through formal and informal activities. Modern libraries encourage individuals to engage in self-education, to improve their digital competencies, and to participate in cultural and intellectual life.

Lifelong Learning and Libraries



- Libraries support lifelong learning in several key ways:
 - Access to diverse learning materials: Public and university libraries provide users with a wide range of books, journals, online databases, and digital resources that support both formal education and independent study.
 - Educational programs and workshops: Many libraries organize lectures, workshops, and training sessions on topics such as information literacy, research skills, and digital safety. These programs help users become more confident in using technology and evaluating online information.
 - Support for marginalized groups: Libraries play an important social role by promoting inclusion. They offer services and programs for children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and minority groups, helping them gain access to learning and personal development opportunities.
 - Encouraging creativity and innovation: Some libraries in Macedonia have started to introduce makerspaces and creative learning environments where users can experiment with new technologies, such as 3D printing, coding, and multimedia creation.

Lifelong Learning and Libraries



- Moreover, the role of libraries in supporting lifelong learning extends beyond providing materials—they also function as safe and welcoming spaces for dialogue, cooperation, and reflection. In small towns and rural areas, libraries are often the only accessible institutions that offer educational resources and internet access. This makes them vital actors in bridging the digital divide and promoting equal learning opportunities.

The connection between lifelong learning and libraries also aligns with broader European educational policies, such as those encouraged by UNESCO and the European Union. Macedonian libraries increasingly participate in international projects focused on digital transformation, open access, and inclusive education. These collaborations contribute to the modernization of library services and ensure that libraries continue to meet the evolving learning needs of their communities.

Ultimately, lifelong learning within the library context empowers individuals to adapt to change, develop critical thinking, and actively contribute to society. Libraries, therefore, are not simply guardians of knowledge—they are engines of learning, progress, and innovation that accompany citizens throughout their entire lives.

Lifelong Learning for Librarians



- For librarians, lifelong learning is essential to maintain professional competence and adapt to rapid technological and social changes. Continuous professional development includes:
 - Participation in seminars, conferences, and training organized by national and international library associations.
 - Acquiring new digital skills and knowledge of information technologies.
 - Engaging in research, publishing, and networking with other professionals.
 - Understanding user needs and improving library services accordingly.

The transformation from a traditional librarian to an information professional requires a constant process of learning, innovation, and adaptation.

Challenges and Opportunities



- Despite significant progress, Macedonian libraries face several challenges:
 - Limited financial and technological resources.
 - Need for modernization of infrastructure and digital collections.
 - Insufficient training opportunities for librarians in smaller municipalities.
 - Low public awareness of the role of libraries in lifelong learning.

However, opportunities lie in international cooperation, EU-funded projects, and national strategies that promote digital and information literacy.

Conclusion



- Librarianship in Macedonia is at a crossroads between tradition and modernity. Libraries are not only cultural and educational institutions but also catalysts for lifelong learning and social inclusion.

The continuous education of librarians and the promotion of learning opportunities for users are key to ensuring that libraries remain relevant and influential in the digital era.

By investing in people, knowledge, and innovation, Macedonian libraries can continue to empower individuals and communities for generations to come.

Thank you for your attention !

