

Training in Electronic Publishing for Cultural Heritage Specialists: The Bulgarian Experience

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Abstract: The issue at the heart of this article is an analysis of the actual condition of the publishing sector in Bulgaria and some predictions about the expected directions for its' future development in electronic environment. As the fourth great technique of writing, electronic text becomes unique medium for limitless exchange of human knowledge not only in the old continent, but in the world-wide scale.

Background

The e-publishing in Bulgaria is not widely spread and most publishers believe that the basic reason for this is financial. In spite of this many publishers show an interest in publishing in the new multimedia, recognising it as a priority type of publishing or intend to produce e-products in the future. What are the facts? Most Bulgarian publishers (84%) produce only printed materials, 11% - both printed and electronic, and 1% - only electronic products. The book sector in Bulgaria survives with incredible difficulties in spite of increasing amount of private publishers (1,800 in 1998). The first Bulgarian e-publications were on display at the Sofia Book Fair in 1998, but the most of them were produced with foreign participation. Since then private companies showed growing interest in investing in this field and the tendency for future development is positive.

Education in Traditional and Electronic Publishing

A paradox in the local attitudes towards training appears in the difference between the clearly expressed need in training (53%) and the inclination to pay for it. Most Bulgarian publishers (61%) are not able to participate in training programmes offered by EU and do not invest in training activities in general. Higher interest in investment in training is observed in publishers already engaged with a new media (66%). The need in enriched access to training resources from abroad is expressed by 59% of the publishers. This makes Bulgaria a suitable country for running training programmes of EU. For 13% of the Bulgarian publishers e-publishing is an absolute priority and for 59% this sector does not offer advantages. The current situation in Bulgaria shows that local training is not flexible enough to meet the needs of a book sector in transition. The National Book Center (NBC) implements the governmental policy in the publishing area. A working state policy in the publishing sector requires active co-operation with non-governmental associations, e.g. Association of Bulgarian Publishers, Association of Bulgarian Writers, and Union of Translators.

Electronic Publishing for Cultural Heritage Specialists

The situation is even more complicated in the specialized field of e-publishing for cultural heritage. In the typical case cultural institutions do not have the staff, able to produce complete electronic publications. An indicative example of co-operation is the one between our team from the Telecommunications Dept. at the Institute of Mathematics and Computer Science and the National Library. This is a unique case of collaboration between institutions with different profiles on national and international level. Other such useful initiatives, supported by working governmental publishing policy will help for preserving the rich cultural heritage of Bulgaria.

0. Background

0.1 Bulgarian Book Sector in Transition

Since 1989 in Bulgaria there were numerous changes in the social and culture life, which reflected the publishing sphere. The transition made government unable to sustain the tradition of widespread access to books, centralized distribution and subsidized low pricing. In the collapsed infrastructure the abolition of the state monopoly opened up the market and print runs decreased by 50%. However, the privatization boosted the development in this area and the number of private publishers reached 1,800 in 1998. Most Bulgarian publishers (84%) produce only printed materials, 11% – both printed and electronic, and 1% – electronic products only (lower than the average value for the region). Nowadays the book sector survives with incredible difficulties, being vulnerable to the slightest movements in costs.

This article outlines the basic problems in the sphere of training for traditional and electronic publishers in Bulgaria. Main needs in the new technological context for publishing are related with the challenge of continuing professional development and acquiring competitive skills. To illustrate the most critical issues in e-books sphere in Bulgaria were used conclusions and statistics from the latest surveys: *Kingham 1998*¹, *LEONARDO project 2000*², *a local study of the National Library*³ and *a joint survey of the National Book Center and Gallup International*.⁴

0.2 Electronic Publishing Development

For e-books World Wide Web could be estimated as an entirely new method of publishing (print-on-demand), marketing and distributing. Until the end of 2001 the PCs, which will be connected to the World Wide Web will be 268 million, and in addition by 2003 500 million of human population will be Internet consumer. Concerning CEE region the electronic publishing makes its first big steps. The advantage for Bulgaria is the strong information technology potential. The first Bulgarian e-publications were on display at the Sofia Book Fair in 1998, but most of them were produced with foreign participation. Since then private companies showed increasing interest in investing in this field. The electronic publishing in Bulgaria (Internet and CD-ROM) is restricted by the educational market and the main consumers are libraries, universities and Ministries. 27% from the electronic books are for the business market, and 33% - for the educational market. This fact explains other interesting circumstance – the language for 73% of Bulgarian electronic products is Bulgarian, which would be an obstacle for presenting of the Bulgarian publishers in the world market. According to statistics data from LEONARDO 20% of publishers of electronic products had started more than three years ago. In collaboration with XEROX Bulgaria the new technology *print-on-demand* already works effectively in local environment. In Bulgarian cyberspace appeared over fifteen well-structured Bulgarian web portals for electronic book trade, following the model of AMAZON.COM. They offer widespread scale of Bulgarian and foreign titles,⁵ but the searching is still slow. Low clients' activity remains the main restriction for the e-commerce in Bulgaria in general, not only for online book trade. The brake is the way of payment – a Bulgarian does not trust in electronic money. Other threat for the future of electronic publishing in general is increasing risk for intellectual property rights and business security, piracy, computer viruses, hackers etc. According Forrester Research by 2004 losses in electronic publishing would reach \$1.5 bn. There are already several working tools for copyright protection and security of e-texts (*digital watermarking*, *'wrapping'*, *XEROX Content Guard*) but they are not popular in Bulgaria. The key word used by Bulgarian publishers concerning multimedia

publishing industry is 'caution' and the main problem for successful development of electronic publishing is funding, lack of qualified staff, business partners and piracy. 66% of Bulgarian publishers admit that their staff need to improve existing, and to develop new, skills as a requirement for electronic publishing, and the way they prefer for this include training initiatives.

1. Education in Traditional and Electronic Publishing

1.1 State policy

The National Book Center (NBC) implements the governmental policy in the publishing area. It is a non-profit organization at the Ministry of Culture promoting the development of national writing, setting up the traditional *Sofia Book Fairs* and initiating legislation in the sector. Its' last activities are related with the *Book Support Programme*. NBC is also interested in developing electronic publishing. As a connection link between the government and private publishers NBC works in collaboration with ABPTOE (Association of Bookseller and Publisher Training Organizations). The aim is raising professional standards in the publishing field in local environment. A working state policy in the publishing sector requires active co-operation with non-governmental associations as well, e.g. Association of Bulgarian Publishers, Association of Bulgarian Writers, Union of Translators, EBCC (Euro-Bulgarian Culture Centre).

1.2 Training Needs

Most of Bulgarian publishers (61%)⁶ are not able to participate in training programmes offered by EU and do not invest in training activities in general. This situation is typical for the whole region. The need in enriched access to training resources from abroad is expressed by 59% of the Bulgarian publishers, which is considerably higher than in other countries from CEE. This makes Bulgaria a suitable country for running training programmes of EU. The recent low level of participation in any kind of training initiatives is explained by a lack of *specialized staff* (60%) and *technical problems* (33%). A significantly high number of publishers (43%) expect that a possibility for changing of training resources should arise in a years time. Higher interest in investment in training is observed in publishers engaged with a new media (66%). A paradox in the local attitudes towards training appears in the difference between the clearly expressed *need in training* (53%) and the *inclination to pay for it*. Most publishers give their preference to other areas of investment, e.g. new products (80%).

1.3 Training in Electronic Publishing

For 13% of the Bulgarian publishers e-publishing is an absolute priority and for 59% this sector does not offer advantages. When analyze the data from LEONARDO project have to be marked the fact that it is not concentrate on e-publishers, but covers whole sector. Therefore the results are representative for the publishing sector as a whole. The e-publishing is not widely spread and most publishers (90% against the average for the region 79%) believe that the basic reason for this is not lack of tradition, but financing. The current situation in Bulgaria shows that local training is not flexible enough to meet the needs of a book sector in transition. The participation in foreign training programmes is still unsatisfactory.

1.4 Current University Degree Programmes. Open and Distance learning - the alternative of the future

There are twenty-three universities in Bulgaria, but unfortunately students interested on publishing education, esp. electronic publishing have a little choice, although a number of universities (Sofia University, New Bulgarian University, American University in Bulgaria etc) offer degree programmes in Multimedia Computer Science etc. The Book Publishing Department at the Sofia University offers the one-of-a-kind professional education in the area. There is no formal training for bookselling and book distribution.

Regional Phare Distance Education Study Centre (RDESC) in University of Sofia provides distance education and training programmes in publishing and not only within and outside the region through its' local network. It has branches, organized as local centers, in the New Bulgarian University, Medical University and Technical University. Associate centers towards RDESC are Bulgarian National Television and Bulgarian National Radio, which are involved in dissemination of the information about the different activities of the centre. RDESC develops a portfolio of distance education programmes targeted not only at students but at specialized training-the-trainers.

2. Electronic Publishing for Cultural Heritage Specialists

The situation is even more complicated in the specialized field of e-publishing for cultural heritage. The need to produce materials of specialized content and the difficulty to persuade institutions storing cultural heritage to give access to their holdings are amongst the key characteristics of this area. In the typical case cultural institutions do not have the staff, able to produce complete electronic publications. The professional e-publications will be a fact only through co-operation with experienced IT specialists. An indicative example of such co-operation is the one between our team from the Telecommunications Dept. at the Institute of Mathematics and Computer Science and the Manuscript Dept. of the National Library. One of our endeavors is to create an electronic catalogue of the departments' holdings within the frameworks of an EU-funded project MASTER⁷, whose closing conference will be this summer in Sofia. Another current project aims to produce the first electronic edition of a mediæval Bulgarian manuscript, The Enina Apostle, dated XI century in co-operation with Dr. K. Kiernan from Kentucky State University, USA. This is a unique case of collaboration between institutions with different profiles on national and international level. Such joint activities could also be considered as an example of unconventional interdisciplinary training illustrating how the introduction of e-publishing changes the roles in the publishing sector in general. There is a big need of training in such interdisciplinary fields. Our team organized successfully two international summer schools in this area⁸.

3. Conclusions

In the digital age, the only source of sustainable and inimitable advantage lies on the power of ideas. Enabled by networks, intellectual capital comes to fore and new economic principles begin to govern the publishing sphere. Electronic texts will revolutionise human thrust for knowledge. Electronic texts are becoming a medium influencing new creativity where mass culture, mass media and mass literature will eventually produce a multimedia society. According to EU research between 8 and 18% of the book market should be

functioning on electronic grounds in the beginning of the new Millenium with higher values (between 20 and 30%) for the scientific, technical and medical literature.

Where will be the place of the Bulgarian publishing industry compared to this general picture? If we take into account the data on the current development of the local electronic publishing sector and the trends presented above, we cannot be optimists. At the same time if we analyze the situation we could see a good base for establishing a tradition in electronic publications.

The initiative INFOPROFESSION 2000, organised by Artefact Ltd and Martinus Nijhoff Bulgaria last October, put the main base for future active collaboration between infoprofessionals (publishers, computer specialists, non-governmental and educational institutions and individuals, related with publishing area and esp. e-publishing.) The need for adequate presentation of real condition and trade possibilities of Bulgarian publishing sector had motivated creation of web portals, which structure was discussed at the conference. Annually conferences, new contacts will help for sharing the various experiences of Bulgarian infoprofessionals and will coordinate their efforts aimed at creating professional e-publications in local environment. Creators of Bulgarian publishing industry are supported by an old tradition of active readership and high level of literacy of the Bulgarians. They are open to take the advantage of the future and this is a good base.

A closed system has no future in the information society in the beginning of New Millenium and we have to work together for opening it. A working state publishing policy in Bulgaria, on which the government is working recently, international collaboration of non-governmental institutions and future consolidation of Europe in addition, will help to preserve the rich cultural heritage of one of the oldest countries in Europe.

4. References

¹ BULGARIA: A Book Sector in Difficulty. A report by David Kingham for the joint activity 'Governments love Books (electronic books too)' of the Council of Europe, UNESCO and Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels, Strasbourg, 1998
[<http://www.osi.hu/cpd/govermentslovebooks/bulgaria01.html>]

² The LEONARDO DA VINCI project of EC "Needs of Publishing Training in Europe in the Information Society" (III.2.A) is the first specialised research for publishing activities in the CEE region and the fullest one available till now. It is made among all publishers, not only electronically specialised ones and it is not a representative for software houses occupied mainly with electronic publishing. The second part of the project includes quantitative and qualitative research of publishing realities in ten candidates for associated membership in EU (Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Romania and Estonia) [<http://www.sca.bg/publications/frames/htm> , in Bulgarian]

³ *Book production in Bulgaria 1985–1995*, Bibliometrical analysis of the National Library. In: Informational Support of the Book Sector, Plovdiv 1996

⁴ *Data on the Bulgarian Book Publishing*, research of BBSS Gallup International made on request of the National Book Center at the Ministry of Culture, in Bulgarian, Sofia, 1998

⁵ The Bulgarian Book (<http://www.bgbook.dir.bg>) is the first Bulgarian web site, which proposed online orders and delivery for Bulgaria. It has weekly title renewal and 10% discount. Other pioneer in the area is ARTEFACT Ltd., the biggest private subscription company and the first one offering online subscriptions. The first Bulgarian Internet bookstore (<http://www.bgstore.com>) is specialised on computer and IT area. Nowadays the richest choice (over 11.000 titles) offers virtual bookstore HELIKON (<http://www.helikon.bg>). Other sites showing the level of Bulgarian electronic book trade are:
<http://www.pazar.bg>,
<http://www.easyshop.bg>,
<http://webgate.bg/global/tema/1.htm>,

<http://www.books.bg>,
<http://www.bgob.net>,
<http://www.slaveikov.com> ,
<http://edel.bulgarvoice.com>,
<http://stalker.dir.bg/book/bookshop.htm>,
<http://www.bora.exco.net>

⁶ The data in this section are based on the research “*Needs of Publishing Training in Europe in the Information Society*”, see note 2.

⁷ Manuscript Access through Standards for Electronic Records [<http://www.cta.dmu.ac.uk/projects/master/>]

⁸ <http://www.math.bas.bg/~dpm>
<http://www.math.bas.bg/~aitbs>