



## Libraries and Inter-Generational Communication Good Practices and Their Educational Results

Rositsa Petrova - Vasileva

"Sava Dobroplodni" Regional Library, Sliven, Bulgaria  
Tel.: +359-886-090-712; e-mail: [rpetrova@iradeum.com](mailto:rpetrova@iradeum.com)

### Short Communication

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#### ABSTRACT

The process of changes today, on the border between traditional and digital culture, is a clear sign for a change of the communication characteristics and habits of man. As a result of the expansion of new information technologies people who have different communication skills are born and brought up, and rapid technological changes create communication gap between generations living together in a common period of time. Availability and / or lack of information literacy nowadays have become an increasingly important factor in the integration of the human person in society. And here lies the new role of library, by improving computer literacy and level of handling information technology of older users to overcome differences, improve communication, to bridge the gap between generations. The article presents also good practices to improve IT skills of older users of "Sava Dobroplodni" Regional Library - Sliven as an example of the realization of intergenerational practices for bringing people together.

**Keywords:** Communication between generations, Classification of generations, Communication differences, Integration of adults in information society, Libraries and improving IT skills.

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### I. Introduction

Today we are on the border between two cultures - traditional and digital - seemingly a simple statement, characterizing our busy life and the hectic whirlwind of technological changes, determining the permanent metamorphoses of media resources. But if we think deeper about "the sentence" to closely monitor these communication transformations, we will find that in addition to the privilege of living in a time of rapid changes, the current situation for all of us is a double edged sword. The transfer of the collective memory from real into a virtual media is no longer just another option for storing information; this is a clear sign for a change of communication characteristics and habits of man.

The process of rapid changes today covers the entire communication system. As a result of the expansion of new information technologies people who have different communication skills are born and brought up. Man develops depending on the nature of the information environment that surrounds him, recreating patterns of communication channels used. For the first time now we observe an inverted model of knowledge creating - from

the younger to the older generation. In periods of social upheaval or rapid technological development, the differences between generations increase sharply and affect essential features. As a result, the generational waves significantly shorten- generations change in 10 years instead of 20-25 years. Differences dominate in intergenerational relationships. In such times of intense changes two processes overlap - faster coming young generations, which differ significantly, and in some of their features - radically from the previous ones, along with rapidly changing stereotypes of all generations under the pressure of the changed social environment. Differences between generations grow into generational conflicts. Generational conflict is observed now too. Nowadays we may observe several generations that have been brought up not only in the specific socio-economic and political changes, but also in extremely rapid technological changes that catalyze communication gap between generations living together in a common period of time.

## **II. Methodology**

In the first decade of the 21c., according to the classification of generations by Mark McCrindle (McCrindle, 2007) 7 generations live together as each one has specific cultural and communication features. The oldest is Elders' generation - people who were born before 1925, Builders' generation - people born in the period 1925 - 1946, Baby boomers - the generation of people born between 1946 and 1964, Generation X – people born in the period 1965 -1979, Generation Y – people born between 1980 -1994, Generation Z – people born between 1995 and 2009, and the youngest / people born after 2010/ is generation "Alpha", which, according to researchers, marks a new stage in the evolution of mankind.

Undoubtedly, computer literacy, level of learning and level of working with information technologies are the accelerators, constantly fueling generational conflict and gap between generations in our time. We all, different generations, hardly communicate with each other, and it cannot be denied nor frightening us. We need to simply explore these differences. Availability and / or lack of information literacy have become an increasingly important factor in the integration of the human person in society, a factor that will probably create new minority groups in future. According to the factor level of work with information technologies, the following four categories of people are defined (McCrindle and Wolfinger, 2006):

- Unfamiliar to digital technologies - People over 65 years of age. These are the generations of Elders and Builders. Internet, online games, social networks are completely unfamiliar concepts to them.
- Digital immigrants - Baby boomers generation - aged 47 to 64 years. Some of them successfully take advantage of new technologies, but most of them accept them reluctantly.
- Adapting to digital technologies - Generation X - 32 to 46 years old. Generation X willingly embraces technologies that make it a consumer.
- Digital natives - Generations Y, Z, "Alpha" - understanding them reveals the genesis of communication revolution.

Observations of new youngsters show a new virtual synthesis associated with the emergence of the digital world. On the one hand, the role and ease of practicing distant relations in the network greatly increase. Virtual mobility needs no support. Moreover, the strong relationships themselves within small communities carried over into the cyberspace, open, and become accessible to outsiders, without a proven relation with the group. And here lies the new role of library - by improving computer literacy and level of work with information technology of elder users to overcome differences and to improve communication with the younger generations, to bridge the gap between generations. Users' training for work with new information technologies can contribute to greater cohesion and overcoming social exclusion, for more understanding and respect between generations.

A good example of this is the program "Global Libraries - Bulgaria", which is implemented in Bulgarian libraries with financial support from The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. On a competitive basis, in three stages, the program included a total of 960 public libraries since 2009. The main objective of the program is provision of ICT equipment, providing Internet access and staff training to provide electronic services and training to users to support their integration into the information society, bridging the gap between generations and improve communication between them.

An Interim sociological study, measuring the effect of the progress of the program "Global Libraries- Bulgaria" established the following major changes in the target libraries and society during the period 2010 – 2012 (Alpha Research Ltd., 2012):

- Due to low penetration of ICT among people over 50 years old and Roma minority, target libraries become a major opportunity for the inclusion of these groups to technological society;
- Training courses for elder users on the program, qualitatively change their skills for using computer, internet and new technologies and lead to social inclusion of people and promote cohesion, mutual understanding and respect between generations;
- The demand for information and communication with relatives and friends are the most popular reasons for surfing the Internet;
- Thanks to the use of new methods of communication, differences between generations are overcome, a more active and supportive local community with a growing social integrity is built.

Considering the increasing role of information technologies, monthly training courses for adults: "First steps in computer literacy with practical application" for improving communication between the generations, are held in the training center at "Sava Dobroplodni" Regional Library - Sliven for third consecutive year.

The training includes: acquiring general knowledge about computer usage and its application, terms and information; getting started to work with the most popular word processing program "Word"; surfing the Internet; registration of an e-mail account, writing, sending, receiving e-mail messages; sending text in an attachment, creating a Skype account, work in social networks (Vasilev, 2012). Classes are a combination of presentations and exercises. Tutors work individually with each student. Courses for advanced users are organized along with the elementary courses too, as the program is open and formed according to the wishes of the students. Training and the models of teaching used give very good results, as it can be seen in surveys and interviews with students.

An important element in the work of "Sava Dobroplodni" Regional library - Sliven with adults to improve their computer skills and support their communication through Internet are also the individual consultations with librarians and volunteers on the 50 workstations for users in the different departments of the library. In these individual training young people impart knowledge and skills to adults and give them confidence

that communication with them is not impossible, that it could be free and useful.

### III. Conclusions

One of the most important outcomes of this project is that people not only obtain new skills, knowledge and techniques, that adult users gain renewed confidence in their own capabilities and improve communication and relations with the younger generations, but dialogue, respect, tolerance and civic participation is encouraged.

Of course, the improvement of information competencies of elder users of the library is just one example of the implementation of intergenerational practice for bringing people closer. Also a number of other initiatives to improve intergenerational communication to adjust the relationship between the generations to new realities are implemented in the library. The aim of our work in future is to develop and expand these practices, creating a new culture of relations and solidarity between generations.

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### Authors' Biographies



**Rositsa Petrova - Vasileva.** Education: Bachelor of Library studies and bibliography /1985/ Master of Pedagogy and Psychology /1990/. Doctor in Book studies, library studies and bibliography /2013/. She specialized in "Finance" /2002/. She has held the position of a Director of "Sava Dobroplodni" Regional Library - Sliven since April 1992.

She is an author of more than 30 bibliographies and over 200 publications in periodicals and collections of reports from scientific conferences in Bulgaria and abroad, compiler of 16 collections of reports and documentary editions. She is an author and manager of more than 30 projects funded by different donating organizations and EU programs related to equipping library with computers, automation of main library and bibliographic processes, building a Digital centre, training of librarians and users to work

with the new information technologies, design and construction of an additional building of the library, introduction of the system of financing "delegated budgets", implementation of important cultural projects, etc. She is the founder and organizer of the unique for Bulgaria National Children's Book Festival, which is held annually since 1999 and attracts many guests and participants from Bulgaria and abroad. She is a member of all Expert committees in library studies of the Ministry of Culture of Republic of Bulgaria since 2000. She is a chairwoman of the Association of regional libraries in Bulgaria from 1998 to 2002. She is a cofounder of the Association of the festivals for children's literature from the Balkan countries /2008/. She is a regional coordinator of the project "Global Libraries - Bulgaria" for Sliven region, funded by the "Bill and Melinda Gates" foundation since 2008. She is a lecturer in "Organization and Management of Public Libraries" and "Human Resources Management".

Major awards and honors: National Award "Golden Age" of Bulgarian Ministry of Culture – for her significant contribution to the development and popularization of Bulgarian culture /2006/; Honorary sign of Sliven - for outstanding contribution to the development of "Sava Dobroplodni" Regional Library as a modern cultural and information center /2005/; The "Little Prince" Award of the Association friends of the book "The Little Prince" - Tuzla (Bosnia and Herzegovina) for her contribution to the development of children's literature and intercultural cooperation in the Balkans /2012/.