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# **Librarians' Understanding of Information Literacy (IL) in Academic Libraries in Bulgaria: A Case Study**

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# Information Literacy (IL)

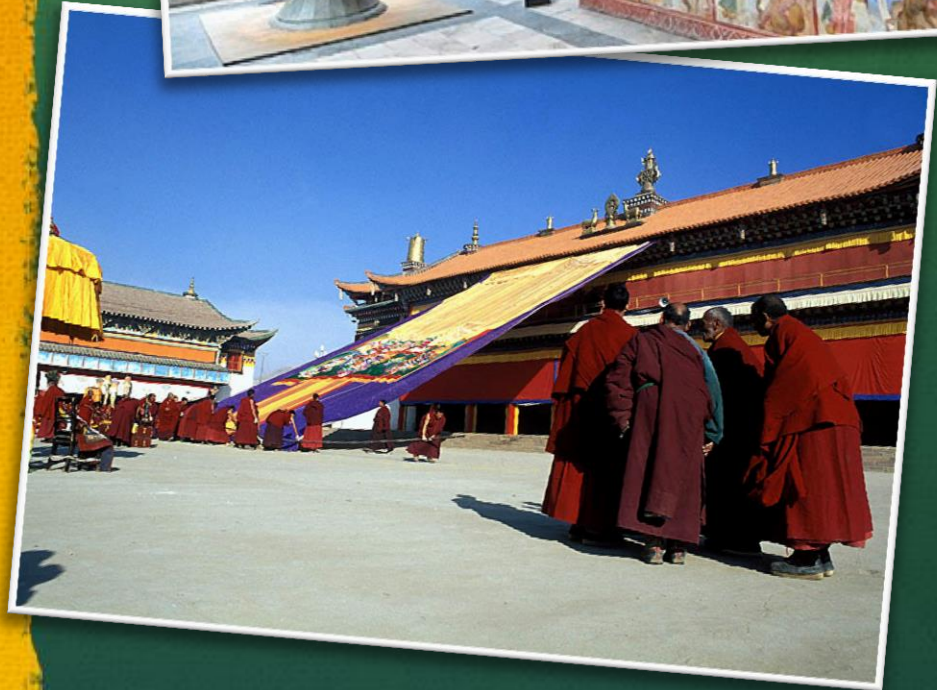
- IL encompasses the ways we discover, value and use information and is influenced by the specific sociocultural characteristics of the country/region.
- The understanding of IL defines the frameworks for teaching IL in academic settings and impacts pedagogy.



# Information Literacy (IL)

The intrinsic quality of the IL agenda is embodied in understanding and utilizing “the power of effective information use in all social and cultural contexts”

(Bruce, as cited in Whitworth, 2014, p.b.c.).





# Research Problem

- IL understanding may vary in different parts of the world depending on factors such as historical perspective and socio-cultural characteristics.
- Need of employing culturally grounded approaches to IL.

Existing frameworks and best practices models from abroad “cannot just be blindly copied or nested into IL policies” of specific countries, since the framework (the context) is quite different. (Špiranec & Pejova, 2010, p. 79)

- This study aims at illuminating a culturally grounded understanding of IL contextualized by a particular landscape in terms of a specific geographic region with related socio-cultural characteristics.

# Bulgaria





# Bulgarian Cultural & Socio-historical Context

Historical perspective

Language

Traditions in education

Traditions in  
librarianship

Wider political  
& sociotechnical  
perspective



# Significance

- Addresses the need of applying culturally grounded approaches to IL to better serve specific groups.
- Adds to the international pool of knowledge in the field. Librarians' IL understanding in Bulgaria and in Bulgarian academic libraries has not been investigated previously.
- Benefits Bulgarian academic librarians by providing a view of their understanding of IL and possibly facilitate further inquiry into suitable framework and practices.



# Literature Review

## Information Literacy as a Concept

Generic-skills Approach	Beyond the Generic-skills Approach	IL in different 'cultures'
<p>ALA (1989)</p> <p>Delphi study, Doyle (1992 )</p> <p>ACRL IL Standards</p> <p>Due to ALA's definition this was the primary approach to IL in North America but not necessarily in other countries.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Relational approach</b> (Bruce 1997, 2006, 2011; Bruce, Edwards &amp; Lupton, 2006; Gunto, Bruce, &amp; Davis, 2016)</li> <li>➤ <b>Social context approach</b> (Bruce, 2000; Bruce, Edwards &amp; Lupton, 2006; Marcum, 2002)</li> <li>➤ <b>Sociotechnical practice</b> (Tuominen, Savolainen &amp; Talja, 2005; Kovarova &amp; Zadravilova, 2013)</li> <li>➤ <b>Information landscapes</b> (Lloyd, 2006, 2010, etc.)</li> <li>➤ <b>Radical information literacy</b> (Whitworth, 2014)</li> </ul>	<p>Educational arena, workplace, etc. (Bruce, 1997, 2000, 2013; Gasteen &amp; O'Sullivan, 2000; Jinadu &amp; Kaur, 2014; Lloyd, 2005; Lloyd &amp; Williamson, 2008, etc.)</p> <p>Suggestions to study 'cultures' in terms of other parts of the world (education, Bruce, 1997; the workplace in different countries, Jinadu &amp; Kaur, 2014, etc.)</p>



# Literature Review

## IL and Academic Libraries

Generic-skills Approach	Beyond the Generic-skills Approach	Southeastern European countries
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Boff &amp; Johnson, 2002; Cunningham &amp; Lanning, 2002; Doyle, 1992; Hollister, 2005; Johnson &amp; Webber, 2003; <b>Korobili et al., 2008</b>; Sharkey, 2006; O'Hanlon, 2007; Stanger, 2009; etc.</li> <li>➤ Standards and frameworks based on decontextualized understanding of IL regarded as <i>generic skills</i> .</li> </ul>	<p>Complex phenomenon, which serves as a catalyst for learning (Bruce, 1997, 2000, 2011, etc.; Bruce, Edwards &amp; Lupton, 2006; Hughes, Bruce &amp; Edwards, 2007; etc.)</p> <p>Education <i>landscape</i> (Lloyd, 2006, 2010, etc.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Korobili et al., 2008</b>;</li> <li>➤ Špiranec &amp; Pejova, 2010,</li> <li>➤ <b>Yankova, 2004</b>;</li> <li>➤ Todorova &amp; Stoikova, <b>2012</b></li> </ul>

# Literature Review Summary

- There is an existing need of applying culturally grounded approaches to IL to better serve specific groups.
- Bulgaria is only just now adopting a user paradigm. Going from generic-skills approach to beyond generic-skills approach seems to be a critical shift that might need to happen. The potential beyond generic-skills approach needs to be well contextualized in terms of the Bulgarian context, hence the need of this study.
- The understanding of IL in Bulgarian academic libraries has not been researched so far. This study will address the existing gap by investigating how Bulgarian academic librarians understand IL and possibly facilitate further inquiry into suitable framework and practices.



# Research Questions

- *Qualitative central question*

How do Bulgarian academic librarians understand information literacy?

- *Additional qualitative question*

How do Bulgarian academic librarians practice information literacy?

# Socio-cultural Theoretical Framework

*Social constructivism* worldview through the lens of socio-cultural theoretical framework.

*Social constructivism (interpretivism)*: a metatheoretical view arguing that the mind constructs reality in its relationship to the world through a mental process, which is significantly informed by influences, such as societal conventions, history and interactions with other people.

Vygotsky: *understanding* is social in origin and the development of knowledge structures and knowledge formation in general take place within socio-cultural context (Translations: 1986, 1994).



# Methodology: Case Study

- A *case study* research implies studying a case within a real-life contemporary context of settings (Yin, 2009).
- A case study does not require control of behavioral events and is suitable with 'how' and 'why' research questions (Yin, 2014).
- A case study is the process of conducting systematic, critical inquiry into a phenomenon of choice and generating understanding to contribute to cumulative public knowledge of the topic (Simons, 2009).
- All these make it an apposite methodology to use with my research question: *How do Bulgarian academic librarians understand information literacy?*

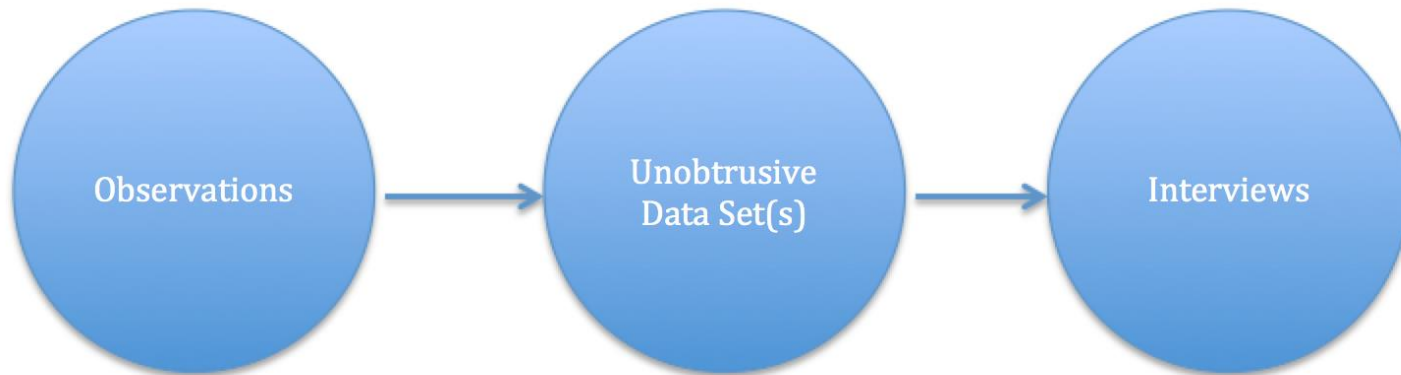
# Defining the Case

- Setting of Bulgaria
- Bulgarian academic libraries are spaces in which the country's culture and traditions in education are reflected. The older libraries could be considered keepers of culture and they might have strong influences on other libraries.
- *Bounding the case*: the artifacts to be analyzed and the academic librarians to be interviewed will be selected from different academic libraries (older and newer; general and specialized universities). Information literacy practices (if any) will be investigated, also. Relevant records, documents, audiovisual materials and artifacts will be investigated. It seems worth bounding the study temporally, i.e., 2008-2017, reflecting the fact that Bulgaria became part of the European Union in 2007.



# *Instrumental Case Study with exploratory and ethnographic elements*

## Research Design



# Observations

(One library from each type)

Type 1	Type 2	Type 3
<p><b>Library Studies related</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Bulgarian University of Library Studies and Information Technologies, Sofia.</li> </ul> <p>This is the only university that might have existing courses (if any) on IL in its curriculum.</p>	<p><b>General, broad scope universities in terms of disciplines</b> (older and newer)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Sofia University (SU)</li> <li>➤ New Bulgarian University (NBU), Sofia</li> <li>➤ The St. Cyril and St. Methodius University at Veliko Tarnovo</li> </ul>	<p><b>Specialized Universities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Sofia Medical University</li> <li>➤ University of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy at Sofia</li> <li>➤ University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy at Sofia</li> </ul>



# Unobtrusive data Set(s)

- ❖ Publications, presentations, and posters by academic librarians in Bulgarian
- ❖ Library guides, handouts, flyers, etc.
- ❖ Publications from professional organizations such as newsletters, conferences (if any), organization's mission, vision, policy documents and materials, etc.
- ❖ Grants & corresponding findings or developments
- ❖ Artifacts such as websites, tutorials, etc.

# Interviews

- In-depth interviews: approximately 15-20 academic librarians representing the three types of libraries
- Semi-structured, open-ended
- Indicative questions
- Interview questions in Bulgarian
- Recorded by voice recorder in Bulgarian and transcribed (translated in English if necessary)



# Data Analysis

- Create and organize files for data
- Read through texts
- Make notes and formulate some initial codes
- Cross-data analysis
- The method of analysis will be a process that involves constant comparison in regards to data collection to allow me to explore unexpected information.

# Challenges and Strategies for Validating Findings

- Case study: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability (Yin, 2014).
- Multiple sources of evidence, establishing chains of evidence during data collection, key informants reviewing drafts report during the composition phase will assure construct validity.
- Pattern matching, explanation building, using logic models during the data analysis will achieve internal validity.
- External validity: using a specific theory in this single-case study.
- Using case study protocol and developing a comprehensive case study database during data collection will enhance reliability.



# Pilot Study

Observations (2)	Unobtrusive Data Set	Interviews (3)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ <b>Type 2: General, broad scope university in terms of disciplines (older)</b></li><li>➤ <b>Type 2: General, broad scope universities in terms of disciplines (newer)</b></li></ul>	<p>Conference proceedings: Symposium with international attendance, <i>Information Literacy – Training Models and Best Practices</i>, held in Varna, Bulgaria, in 2012.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ <b>Type 2 (older)</b></li><li>➤ <b>Type 2 (newer)</b></li><li>➤ <b>Type 3: Specialized University</b></li></ul>

# Pilot Study: Observations

Type 2 (Older)



Type 2 (Newer)





# Pilot Study: Unobtrusive Data Set

The only major publication  
related directly to IL  
identified so far:

Conference proceedings of a  
symposium with  
international attendance  
*Information Literacy – Training  
Models and Best Practices*

held in Varna, Bulgaria in  
2012

This has been the first and  
only event so far held in the  
country, which directly  
addresses IL.

- Three terms were used interchangeably as an equivalent or closely related to the term IL :
  - (1) *Информационна Грамотност* – Information Literacy;
  - (2) *Информационна компетентност* – Information Competency;
  - (3) *Информационна Култура* – Information Culture.
- A lot of publications referred directly to the ALA (1989) definition of IL and the generic-skills approach. These publications were using the term (1) *Информационна Грамотност* – Information Literacy. Other definitions mentioned: the one declared at a 2012 International Conference on *Media- and Information Literacy* in Moscow and an IFLA definition from 2006. No other approaches to IL were mentioned.
- Most of the authors in the collection are professors at the Bulgarian University of Library Studies and Information Technologies, Sofia.
- It seems that sometimes the meaning of information literacy has been considered as an equivalent to subject content knowledge: subject expertise and subject publications expertise.



# Pilot Study: Interviews (3)

3 interviews with academic librarians from 3 different academic libraries:

- Type (2) General, broad scope universities in terms of disciplines – 2 interviews:
  - ✧ One of the older (public university) academic library
  - ✧ one of the newest (private university) academic libraries;
- Type (3) Specialized universities academic libraries – 1 interview.

Initially identified cross themes from the interviews:

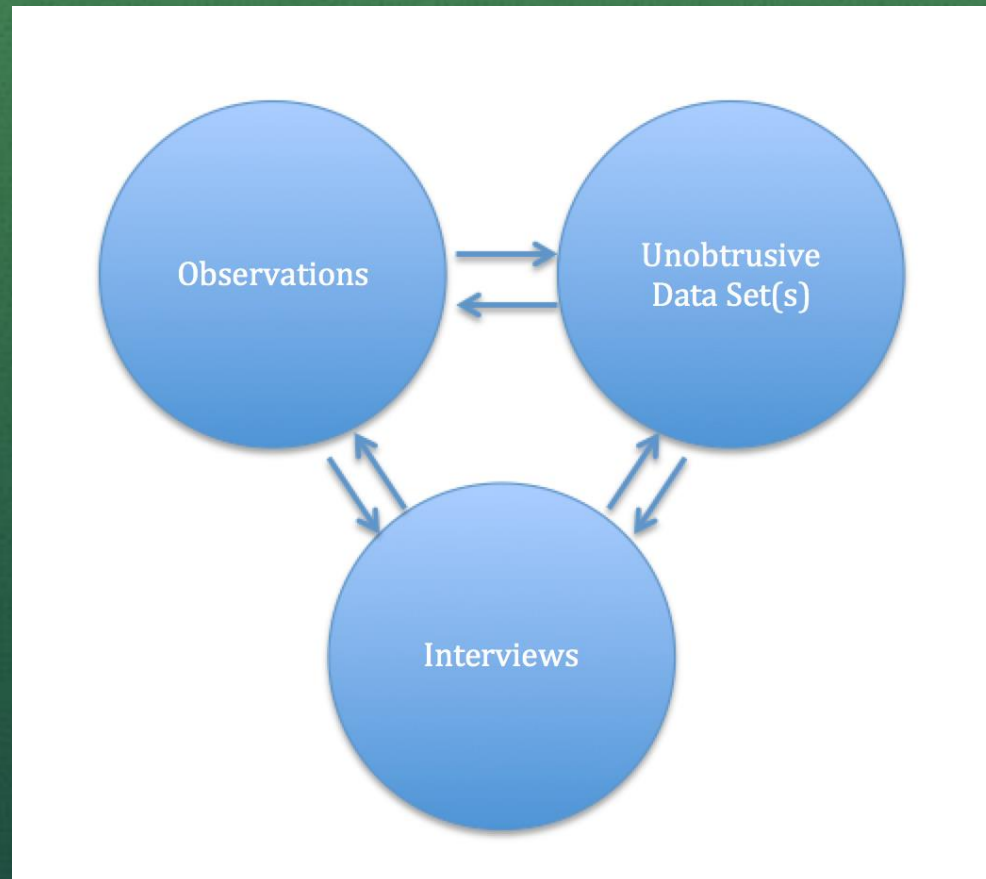
- Pressure to catch up with developments and best practices in the outside IL paradigm;
- Familiarity with ALA's (1989) definition of IL and imported examples of best practices affiliated with the generic-skills approach;
- Emphasis on subscription to online databases with content in English and on how to search in them.
- At the same time acknowledgment that students do not use these databases.
- Faculty members and doctoral students use the databases but not directly.
- Pressure to develop IL education practice, e.g., IL courses and workshops. Library orientation, introduction to library collections and library services, when available, are considered IL instruction.
- Bulgarians in general do not like to seek help.



# Initial Findings

- An early finding that has significance is that IL is being related to subject area competency. This finding has been underpinned by the data from each one of the methods (observations, unobtrusive data set analysis, and interviews).
- Also, the preliminary findings on the context suggested how Bulgarian academic librarians were setting the boundaries of IL, for example, instruction seemed to be limited to how to use the library. The substantial difference in access between the two visited libraries is expected to have significant impact on it.
- All of the three interviewed librarians mentioned pressure to catch up with developments and best practices in the outside IL paradigm mostly in relation to grants coming from the European Union. One of them was expected to design and develop a pilot IL program/course and seemed to feel quite unsure how exactly to approach this. This suggests that the findings of this study could definitely facilitate further inquiry into suitable framework and practices.

# How has the Pilot study informed the Research design?





# Next Steps

- Conduct main study observations in late September
- Conduct the rest of the interviews in late September and early October
- Proceed with data analysis – constant comparison
- Finish writing last two chapters of dissertation

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Questions?