Kosova Libraries: Where Practical Steps Are Most Needed
by Besim J. Kokollari

Editors Note: Kosova has been administered since 1999 by the UN Mission in Kosovo. In this article, the author follows Albanian spelling conventions, for example, Kosova instead of Kosovo.

I am Besim Kokollari from Kosova. First, I am going to write a few words about myself: some background information and what I do. I follow with a brief section on the current situation of the library and information profession in my country. I conclude with a plan for action and progress.

I am currently enrolled in two master degrees. The first, which is almost at the end, is in curriculum, teaching and learning at the University of Calgary, Canada, which I take through distance learning. The second is in digital library learning, which I have just started, and it will take place in three European Union countries – Norway, Estonia and Italy – in a face-to-face mode. Both degrees were enabled through scholarships, the former from the Canadian International Development Agency, the latter from the European Union Erasmus Mundus program. I have also been fortunate enough to study library and information science for one semester at Simmons College, both at the Boston and Mount Holyoke campuses, through a librarian training project funded by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State. Early this year, I was awarded an Individual Mobility Grant from the European Union to stay for one month at the Middlesex University Libraries, London, to see how they work and what information technology they have. So, both North Americans and Europeans have been good to me. Back at home, I received my BA in English language and literature from the University of Prishtina in 2002, and I used to teach both at the primary school and the university levels. Lately, I have been mainly working for the National and University Library of Kosova.

I have been president of Kosova Librarians Association for the past two years. This opportunity, as well as working for the National and University Library of Kosova, has given me unique possibilities to see and be involved with the most recent library developments in the country. In the library profession, which is the focus of this article, there are two conferences organized each year. One is called “Library Week in Kosova,” the other is “The Albania-Kosova Library Conference.”

Library Week in Kosova was established in 2003. It is jointly organized by the National and University Library and the United States Office in Prishtina and is celebrated at the same time as the American Library Association’s National Library Week in the United States. It is a weeklong local event intended to improve library infrastructure, expose Kosovar librarians to new Western library developments through the shared experiences and knowledge of American and European library expert speakers, and to raise the library awareness in our community through the media.

The Albania-Kosova Library Conference was established in 2006 by the National Library of Albania and the National and University Library of Kosova. It is a rotating conference: one year it takes place in Albania, the next, in Kosova. It has a more regional purpose and a more scientific nature than Library Week. The conference fosters collaboration and standardization efforts in the library profession between the two countries, influencing other Albanian libraries throughout the Balkan region.

In addition to sharing knowledge and experience gained from those two library conferences, the National and University Library of Kosova acts as the highest library institution in the country and therefore is responsible for the maintenance of the network of public libraries in Kosova. The library also bears the responsibility for training new librarians in the job, although efforts have been irregular and not sustained. There is much to do in this direction as long as there is no library school in the country.

For our libraries, infrastructure remains a great concern. Many public libraries, mainly school libraries, some of which acted as village libraries as
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Many governments of countries around the world have invested in different projects in Kosova, some in the library field, some in other fields. ASIS&T and its members, as well as similar organizations, can act as ambassadors in their countries to advise their governments to invest in Kosova’s future, that is, in the education of its people, in library service to its people, in libraries and in other information institutions. Sharing your knowledge and opportunities with Kosova’s information professionals, such as the free ASIS&T membership granted to me for the year of 2007, will help us stay informed and permit us to take advantage of opportunities relevant to our situation. Libraries aim at serving the whole country, feeding the information needs of its people so that they become informed citizens of today and better planners of tomorrow. Practical and concrete steps, informed by well-defined knowledge and experience, are needed to improve the present library situation in my country. Therefore, this article is a call to the world to support the information profession in my country now, so that we can become informed citizens of the world today and contributors to a secure tomorrow.