

Junior Researcher R. Kasparaitė: “Continuous collaboration is important for librarians, enabling them to address the challenges of media literacy”

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Libraries play a key role in promoting media and information literacy and civic engagement by offering programmes, partnerships and initiatives to address media and information literacy issues, providing lifelong learning opportunities and organising community events.

“Collaborative efforts between librarians and other stakeholders are essential to successfully address the challenges of media and information literacy and to help societies navigate the complexity of today’s information environment,” says Rimgailė Kasparaitė, DIGIRES Junior Researcher, who conducted a study on librarians experiences in media and information literacy.

According to the junior researcher, while librarians are increasingly seen as facilitators and partners in the learning process, contributing to the development of key 21st century skills, they also face significant challenges,

including a lack of practical media literacy tools, the need to continuously develop media literacy skills, and a shortage of staff time.

One of the main challenges identified by the librarians interviewed, according to the junior researcher, is the lack of relevant material. “Librarians say that the available training material is too abstract, theoretically “dry” and often not related to local or Lithuanian problems, while people usually ask librarians for very practical advice on online banking, cyber security, and the use of various applications,” says R. Kasparaitė.

She said that librarians also often lack the time and opportunity to look at the broader context of media literacy: although librarians who deliver media literacy program to the public have a good understanding of the topics they have chosen (such as online safety, search engines, identifying misinformation), these and other topics require constant updating. In addition, librarians often rely on self-education at conferences, seminars and information/literature sources to improve their training skills.

R.Kasparaitė shares that although librarians are aware and familiar with fact-checking tools, as it is required by their job, they admit that in the current rush hour and due to the current workload, they cannot check all the information they come across in their daily lives, so they often choose to “deliberately back away” from information that seems “possibly false”.

According to R. Kasparaitė, during the interviews, librarians also emphasized that they had a lot of responsibility in dealing with various issues of public

concern at that time – according to the representatives of the libraries, during their long years of work they had to learn how to provide advice on computer literacy as well as on legal and even financial issues. “Librarians say they find that they become centres of attraction and reliable information in times of challenge. Therefore, librarians have to be resilient, because people come to them with all sorts of problems,” says R. Kasparaitė.

According to the junior researcher, another problem identified by librarians is that most people with smartphones think they know everything and can find information without the help of a library. It is also observed that people are very confident in their ability to identify misinformation, but they are reluctant to trust the media and often use alternative sources of information such as “Telegram”.

R.Kasparaitė shares that the representatives of smaller libraries still face the challenge of how to gather an audience that would be interested and willing to improve their knowledge in the field of media literacy: the number of residents of local communities is decreasing, and the remaining residents of the district are interested only in certain problems, usually related to computer literacy. On the other hand, representatives of urban libraries say that the problem is not building an audience, but maintaining interest in an already prepared programme.

There is also a lack of opportunities for cooperation with other institutions – although relations with local communities remain close, preserving the

importance of the library as a cultural and social centre, according to librarians, cooperation is often short-lived and lacks permanence.