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"Success stories" as an evidence form: Organizational legitimization in an international technology assistance project

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Introduction

Technology-related projects are often deemed "successful" based on quantitative measures alone like the number of hardware rollouts or the increase in number of internet users. The problem is that these kinds of measures presume or equate an increase in quantity with success. What is also at work here is the "assumed transformational effect of technology" (Day 1998, 636). This is to say that the sheer presence of information technology beyond what existed prior to project implementation guarantees success. Another "devil" at work in these metrics is the assumption that only these particular kinds of successes "really" count. This takes us back to what is meant by transformational – which in this context signifies a particular kind of transformation, a kind of triumphant individualism, best represented by the Horatio Alger story but here slightly retold, that becomes the ultimate measure of a project's success. In this particular version of the story an individual, through the use of public access computers (PAC), is able to overcome a central crisis in his or her life all because of his or her newfound access to information technology.

We observed this phenomenon in a study of public libraries in Salaj County, Romania. Many of these libraries were a part of Global Libraries Romania – Biblionet (Biblionet), a project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and implemented by IREX[1] that provides computers to public libraries along with training and support for librarians in using the new technology. Some communities also had computer centers provided as part of a World Bank Knowledge Economy Project in Romania which opened the "Punct de Acces Public de Informare" (Public Access Points of Information or PAPI) centers. While both programs share one basic goal – to provide free public access to computers and the internet in underserved areas, the programs differ greatly in how they evaluate program effectiveness. Little can be found in the literature about how or even if the World Bank PAPI centers had an impact on local communities (or even about the project itself for that matter), and in many instances we found the centers to be closed or inaccessible during our site visits. In contrast, the Biblionet project places a strong emphasis on both project and process evaluation. It has incorporated into its project an intensive impact assessment program, called the Global Libraries Impact Planning and Assessment (IPA) process. The IPA includes training for program participants that helps them to identify metrics by which they can gauge the "success" of their programs in order to develop projects that will be sustainable over time (Fried, Kochanowicz and Chiranov 2010).

Fried, Kochanowicz and Chiranov write the following about the IPA performance metrics used by Biblionet:

> The information captured by the performance metrics is intended to help monitor progress of individual programs (for local learning and course correction) but

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also for GL's (Global Libraries') purposes, to track performance of our grant portfolio as a whole. The performance metrics are few in number, but are perceived as mainstream and desirable by managers, funders and policy makers. Where possible, they draw on existing standards. (60)

One problem with the IPA approach is that the metrics used are not necessarily program-specific or developed from the bottom-up, but are developed in the greater context of Western libraries and then trickle down to the local level. Our experience with these metrics in Salaj County was that impact – which in theory includes effects at all levels – was almost always used as a way to highlight "success". Furthermore, the development of and reliance on predefined or predetermined metrics alone to gauge the success of technology-based projects does not necessarily guarantee accurate results. This is because metrics can overlook those more subtle effects of technology-related programs, especially those that do not produce radical transformation or results. In some cases, such effects might even be considered in the early phases of a technological rollout as being incidental or "unintended" consequences.

The research project in Salaj County uncovered trends in information, technology, and library use that so far seemed to fall outside the metrics that were being used to gauge Biblionet's impact (success). Through a discussion of key findings that include information bleed through, occasional users, kin work, and recreational use of technology we will explain how the reliance on predetermined metrics overlooked these findings because of Biblionet's reliance on the rhetoric of success in Romania. This bias in the direction of "success" and Biblionet's use of individual success stories as evidence has had some negative effects of which project staff seem unaware. Also, the use of this rhetoric was not confined to the Romanian project participants we interviewed. It is also used by IREX staff inside and outside Romania and the rhetoric provides the narrative structure of many of Biblionet/IREX's in-house publications and PR materials, whether published in English or Romanian. Our research on Salaj County also suggests that the reliance on this rhetoric of success has the potential to conceal or underestimate Biblionet's actual value and potential contributions in Romania, both short- and long-term, because the metrics of success, as defined by Biblionet, either fail to identify (or more likely cannot pick up) the more widespread potential for innovation inherent in such a project. This is because the measures IREX relies on not only focus on "success", but also define success (whether transformational success, individual success, or both) in terms that mask or distort the value Biblionet has had and can have on community members. Further, our observations in Salaj County suggest that this bias towards the transformational and the individual seem to overlook unintended but equally important elements of change.

It is important to note that this paper is not about whether evaluation is or can be an objective process. It is too late in the day to even make an argument of any kind that assumes a "view from nowhere" is possible. What we examine here is the construction of the measures invoked and applied in a particular development and assessment process. What these measures mark and evaluate, however, are not "real" things but rather emerge from a set of socio-cultural

processes that bias these measures in one direction or another – and those who use or apply these metrics are often unaware of this. Like all efforts at quantification and demarcation, its endpoints are derived from society, history and culture more than anything literally real. What we are concerned with here, then, is an intellectual colonialism of a kind that is seldom acknowledged or reported on. This is to show how certain categories of self and value underlie and in some real sense have "sidelined" a well-meaning, well-intentioned evaluation effort (for categories are not just something good to think about: they also reflect, usually in some hierarchical way, what is "good" and what is "not good"). To go one step further, this evaluation and its measures for those who use them are not something of a universal, objective operation. In actuality, they are nothing of the sort: they reflect one culture's and one class' (generally a US, middle or professional class) understanding of what is valuable and what should be counted. This raises the question of whether it is possible to build a culturally appropriate set of evaluation measures without taking into account something like Foucault's archaeology of knowledge. Without such work, what may inform and set the agenda in any particular development effort runs the risk of being not much more than some reflection of American understandings and imperatives.

Context and Methodology

The research project included seven weeks qualitative field research that focused on information and technology use in rural and urban libraries in Salaj County, Romania. Data collection was based on the ethnographic method as practiced in cultural anthropology. This study focused primarily on libraries and/or any internet or other type of information center available to the community and included both PAPI centers as well as first-round and second-round community Biblionet sites. First-round site libraries had already received the computers, related peripherals and training that comprise the Biblionet package; second-round site librarians had received some training but had yet to receive computer hardware in their libraries.

Qualitative data was collected through a series of in-depth interviews conducted both in-person and by phone with as many librarians, library professionals, and library users as possible in the city of Zalău. In smaller communities and villages, additional informants were interviewed as time allowed. Informant selection took into account demographic, ethnic, social and economic variables, and care was taken to include community members of various ethnicities and economic statuses as well as local community leaders. Approximately 110 in-depth interviews were conducted, with some informants being interviewed more than once. Interviews were conducted using interpreters that included two local high school English teachers, three Romanian graduate students who were part of the research team, and a guide, a native Romanian speaker. All the interpreters were fluent in English and the guide has worked with Bader, Nyce and their students several times before in other community studies in Romania. Researchers also observed users and librarians during their daily activities at the libraries and internet centers, at library-sponsored community events, and at Biblionet-sponsored training sessions. Field notes were taken by all members of the research team both during interviews and observation at library sites, and to record impressions and observations while traveling between research sites. The group met regularly as well in order to discuss research findings, to refine the research questions

and to address related issues over the course of the study visit. Interviews were taped when permission was granted, and transcriptions were made and analyzed by the research team.

Fieldwork was led by Gail Bader and James M. Nyce, assistant and associate professors of anthropology at Ball State University. The research group consisted of 15 graduate and undergraduate students from a variety of disciplines as well as an information professional from Bryn Mawr College. This is the fifth trip to Romania led by Bader and Nyce, who began their work in Romania in 2003. Five of the researchers had worked in the field previously with Drs. Bader and Nyce. Prior community studies that Bader and Nyce have carried out with their students have focused on information, knowledge use, and cultural preservation in pre- and post-revolution Romania (see Beasley and Nyce 2009; Crane, Dopp, Solis and Nyce 2006; Closet-Crane, Dopp, Solis and Nyce 2009; Klimaszewski and Nyce 2009; Klimaszewski, Bader and Nyce 2012; Klimaszewski, Bader, Nyce and Beasley 2010; Littrell, Nyce, Straub and Whipple 2006; Whipple and Nyce 2007). One new aspect of this research trip was that it included Dr. Alexandru Balacescu, an anthropologist, and three of his graduate students in anthropology at the Şcoala Naţională de Studii Politice şi Administrative (SNSPA) in Bucharest.

Introduction to Public Libraries in Romania and to Biblionet

Most US citizens take for granted that the public library is a "publicly funded yet independent institution that provides free, unbiased access to information for the benefit of the entire community" (McClure and Jaeger 2009, 5). However, Romanian public libraries do not share the same legacy. Prior to communist rule, public libraries in Romania were seen as the keepers of the highest examples of culture and civilization – its written legacy. Libraries in Romania were often thought of and described as museums of the book. This is a perception of a library, its holdings and its raison d'etre that is quite different than the perception that Andrew Carnegie helped to "enshrine" in the United States. Under communism, public librarians became essentially "tools that supported the dissemination of the totalitarian government's views" (Anghelescu, Lukenbill, Lukenbill and Owens 2009, 151). Since the revolution in 1989, these institutions, especially those in rural areas, have largely been neglected and have suffered from lingering negative perceptions because of their former role as state-controlled information providers under the communist regime (Anghelescu et al. 2009).

Biblionet has stepped in to help Romanian community libraries grow and develop beyond their oppressive legacy. Biblionet project goals are centered around providing access to appropriate technology, training public librarians to use technology, developing the capacity of the Romanian National Association of Public Libraries and Librarians (ANBPR), and fostering government support for libraries in Romania (IREX n.d.). When Biblionet provides computer hardware and related peripherals to a community's libraries, local government officials and librarians are taken on as project partners who must commit to renovating and improving their library's public space in order to receive the Biblionet equipment. Local governments must also agree to provide ongoing funding for broadband access. In addition, local librarians are provided with extensive, ongoing training so that they can help users with the new technology and develop

and expand local library programs. In this way, Biblionet has been the catalyst for local municipalities to improve physical library spaces not only to make way for technology, but also to modernize and revitalize the library as a public institution in Romania.

Research Findings

Information Bleed Through

One of the most obvious impacts of the Biblionet program is that it facilitates computer and internet access, especially in rural communities where there had previously been little or no access, let alone free public access. While we did not witness the majority of users lives being radically transformed through their use of the internet or through newfound computer skills, the presence of computers and the internet at the library has facilitated technology transfer, allowing users to incorporate information technology and internet use into everyday life. This transfer occurs not just between the librarian and the library user, or between the user and the internet. It can also occur between users as they help each other trouble-shoot whatever problems they may have while using the library's technology suite. This even extends beyond the library, because what is learned at the library is often taken home and used outside of the internet center. Library patrons who would not have purchased a home computer before might now do so – and they can share their newfound competence and information with family and friends.

This kind of technology transfer reminds us that the flow of information is not simply the movement of information from point A to point B. We found it more appropriate to describe the information flow we observed in Salaj County around libraries and Biblionet as "information bleed through." This has something in common with Weiss's (1980, 1982) "information creep", in which information finds a variety of avenues in which to travel: indirectly, incompletely, or unexpectedly. We extend this idea to the concept of bleed through because not only did information travel indirectly or partially, it also overlapped with and sometimes even obscured those other information sources with which the user was more familiar, more comfortable and/or made use of at the same time. However, it is also important to note that during our field research we did not observe much bleed through between traditional library holdings (books, periodicals) and new technologically mediated resources.

As we observed, information can creep, seep, move and "bleed through" slowly, unevenly and incompletely, causing overlap not just between old and new information resources, but also between old and new ways of finding and using information. This is significant for Biblionet because the research literature suggests that "the Internet tends to complement rather than replace existing media and patterns of behavior" (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman, and Robinson 2001, 307). It is important to recognize that information will slowly make its way into the everyday activities of users – as it is needed by those users. Everyday activities themselves can change just as slowly and unevenly based on improvements to and dissemination of technology and information access. Like the policymakers Weiss (1986) reports on, Romanians "are barraged by information from many quarters" (277). Romanians, like the rest of the world, are susceptible to information overload as they receive information from social science, public

reaction, financial and economic sources, and from cultural, media and political events. Given what others have discussed about information creep, just because the information floodgates have theoretically opened and a wealth of information is now available to Romanian citizens via the internet, this does not mean that information of all kinds will move swiftly, directly, and purposefully from the new information sources to community members, library users, or even local librarians.

Because the effects of information bleed through are hard to measure, this does not mean they do not occur or that they are not important in the lives of Romanians as they are brought into the fold of the information society through projects like Biblionet. Romania's transformation to an information society will not be accomplished simply because individuals are provided with free access or first-time access to computers. It will come when Romanians have the tools that will enable them to find, understand, and use information relevant to their individual needs. It will also come as libraries better understand and begin to fulfill their role as open and free information agencies not just for the disadvantaged, but for all Romanians. This in turn will enable them to make positive contributions to social change in Romania.

Occasional Users

The Biblionet program has provided new opportunities and incentives for Romanians to visit their local public libraries. Nearly all of the libraries we visited reported that they have had more users coming to the library since the advent of the Biblionet program. The majority of these users would be classified as occasional users of the library. The occasional user is someone who will have various information needs throughout his or her life and who may turn to the library as a source of information at those points. In other words, when occasional users who know and believe that their public library is there for them when they need it, they will provide just as much support for their local libraries as any other group.

Despite their increase in number, the occasional user has been among the least celebrated contributions by Biblionet in the Salaj County libraries. Especially in the case of rural libraries, this could be Biblionet's most enduring and positive contribution, even though it is one whose significance has been little recognized or its importance fully understood by Biblionet staff or sponsors. Too often technology projects tend to emphasize only the creation of expert, full-time users, and this was what the Biblionet metrics provided to us emphasized as well. In addition, when we asked to talk to users, it was generally suggested both by project funders and by the local librarians that we schedule interviews with frequent users. This is despite the fact that the role occasional users play in developing both technology literacy and information literacy is equally if not more significant, despite these users being generally ignored in most discussions of computer use (*for exceptions see* Aslib, 1995; Gorman, 2005). While the development of frequent users has been a focus of the Biblionet metrics (Chiranov 2009; CURS 2010), it may be less important for public libraries to focus on creating expert users or frequent users from novice ones. In fact, at least one research study found that it is not the library's frequent users who are its biggest supporters, but rather the occasional user(s) (McClure and Bertot 1998). After all, frequent users are already committed to the library and in every community will never be more than a small number.

Occasional users are not adept at all facets of computer, internet or information work. What they do learn, however, is to be successful enough (as opposed to "competent" as information scientists define the term) with a particular application or computer task, given the user's needs and knowledge, at a particular point in time to "get the job done." While Biblionet has neither explicitly promoted the growth of this class of users nor this type of competence, such competence can have value for users, their families and their communities. It may be that the use of terms "novice" and "expert" may obscure the kinds of (and increase in) technological competence Biblionet has brought to Romanian towns and cities. What is understood here by "occasional user" goes beyond the notions of frequency and expertise. It means a particular user learns a limited set of pragmatic, goal-oriented information strategies – each responding to an "occasional" information need or opportunity. Whether this can "stack up" into something like expert competence is an issue no one seems to have explored in much detail.

Kin Work

In Salaj County, we observed how technology use reinforced habitual or traditional practices. Even occasional use of technology seemed to facilitate and even "amplify" traditional forms of information as well as traditional information networks. In particular we found evidence that the Biblionet program has helped extend family work and kin work, which is the labor undertaken in Romanian society, mainly by women, to help maintain their families and to create and maintain different kinds of male-female relations. We observed women using internet technologies and computer competence they had learned for this purpose. This was particularly the case at one Biblionet access point, the Zalău pensioner club.

Here is what one 60-year-old woman had to say about this:

I have two children, one in Bucharest and one in Toronto, Canada. They were the main reason for which I started to learn the computer. I found so much joy in being able to stay in contact with them through email. The first thing that I did was to write to them about this center and the beautiful things that are happening here. Then we started to see each other on the webcam and I was so moved to see my niece and we started to talk much more than we use to on the telephone.

Throughout our research visit, many women expressed similar sentiments. One 62-year-old user put it this way:

I enrolled at the internet center, immediately after they opened it. I took the training classes in order to learn how to communicate through email and messenger with my children. I have seven children, four in France, one in Spain, one in Bucharest, and one in Zalău. I missed them a lot so I had to do something. So in less than two weeks I learned how to send and receive messages from my children. Now we are permanently in touch and the fact that the telephone bill has lowered considerably is also an extraordinary thing.

In addition to talking with family, these women also cultivated friendships with other women and even romantic relationships with men. One 67-year-old woman told us about a relationship she was having online with an American man. She began using the internet after the death of her husband. She told us that she often used the internet at home, staying up late to "chat" with her male suitor online. From what we heard and observed, the internet and the connection it brings to men and women of this age group allows them to maintain and extend the kinds of social relationships they have with family members and peers. It can also help them regain or reconstruct a place in society that gives them more of a sense of purpose in their lives.

What needs to be stressed here is that that this kin work was not "transformed" because of computer or internet use. What the internet provided instead were additional venues and opportunities for women to maintain kinship ties, to communicate with family members and friends, and to find male suitors. In addition, the computer enabled these varieties of "relationship work" because internet access was less expensive than many of the means women had used in the past to carry out labor of this kind. One woman, for example, told us that she had not been able to do any of this before internet access was made available at Zalău's pensioner club because she could not afford a home computer or the monthly internet connection fees.

Therefore, another result of Biblionet providing free internet access in Salaj County is that kin work appeared to increase in number, frequency and kind. This frequency occurred also because women often "brought home" from the library or the Pensioners' Club new knowledge and competence and used it at their homes and at the homes of other friends and relatives. If libraries "target" this class of users more directly this could help further increase the number of occasional users in the towns and villages where the Biblionet program is now in place. This could have a waterfall effect because familiarity with, confidence in, and a desire to experiment with kin and family computer work could then disseminate up and down generations of family and friends. These exchanges with the family across and between generations could help "solidify" kinship networks as well as help them to increase in number and depth. Friendship and romantic exchange may be facilitated in the same way. In addition, kin work is also a vehicle through which Biblionet has an opportunity to help bridge "the gender gap" that often exists between women and information technology.

Recreational use of computers and the internet

The activities we observed of public access computer users in the library differed depending on whether we arrived at the library during scheduled or unscheduled visits. During scheduled visits it seemed the librarians went to some lengths to fill the seats at the computers with patrons who appeared to be instructed to use the internet in ways the librarians thought we would approve of. These activities included patrons carrying out research tasks like looking up famous Romanians on Wikipedia or carrying out a variety of Google searches on more "intellectual" type topics about famous authors or historical figures. But once we "faded into the background" we found users carrying out other, perhaps more typical activities. Most of these were social activities, such as instant messaging, e-mailing friends, or talking to family members.

It also included watching videos on YouTube and elsewhere of songs or performances by popular Romanian entertainers and pop artists, comparison shopping, or posting to blogs and other social networking sites. It was generally these types of recreational activities patrons were engaged in when we arrived for observation unannounced.

It may be that librarians in Romania need to reconsider what constitutes "legitimate" uses of the internet or of library resources. This seems especially important because the libraries involved in the Biblionet program at the Salaj County Library, with the exception of the Pensioners' Club, seemed to us to encourage mainly children and adolescents to use library resources. Adolescents and children tended to use library computers to access these types of "incidental" or "recreational" resources. While what constitutes "proper use" is an issue often debated by librarians, some consider recreational use of the library to be among the most important of the services a public library can provide (McClure and Jaeger 2009). In fact, given that social and recreational use of the internet was so high among Romanian library users, it might make sense for Biblionet trainers and librarians to work together to develop more programs to help library patrons use these tools and resources more effectively. Even though the jury may still be out on whether information and technological competence can transfer from these kinds of "occasional" internet use to others, this type of recreational use is something a program like Biblionet should support and value. It is worth noting that most US public libraries regard "recreational" use of computers as a "valid" use by patrons. Furthermore, from our research, it is not entirely clear what role librarians involved in the Biblionet program have played to date in the transfer of "recreational" competence to the more "serious" information tasks like the quality assessment and use of internet data (information literacy).

The rhetoric of impact assessment in Salaj County

Based on the information and literature disseminated by the Global Libraries program, Global Library grantees are to design their programs to achieve both maximum impact and sustainability (Fried, Kochanowicz and Chiranov 2010). This includes learning how to define the proper metrics by which they can judge the successes of their programs (Fried, Kochanowicz and Chiranov 2010; Chiranov 2010). However, both the metrics and the rhetoric employed tends to stress one type of impact: success. In addition, these metrics define success in one particular way. The rhetoric of success emphasizes terms like "improving users lives", making a "real difference", "creating value", or "changing" or "improving peoples' lives" (Fried, Kochanowicz and Chiranov 2010).

What we observed while studying the libraries in Salaj County was the role the success story had in measuring project impact and success. One way the success story rhetoric played out was that a particular example of a success story was told to us repeatedly and in different contexts both by program participants (Romanian libraries and library directors) as well as by IREX staff. The same success story was repeated to us on at least five occasions by different individuals (librarians and/or IREX staff) during our time in the field and it repeatedly appears in program literature:

During the third quarterly meeting, Global Libraries – Biblionet Romania heard their first successes! A citizen in a rural area with difficulty accessing specialized medical practices had successful kidney surgery. Using PAC (public access computers) in her public library, a lady found out about a good urology practice in a big city and made an appointment with the help of the librarian within the PAC." (Chiranov 2010,104; Fried, Kochanowicz and Chiranov 2009, 15; Fried, Kochanowicz and Chiranov 2010, 68).

This type of story can be an indicator of the potential inherent in internet technology and does make for exciting and emotional marketing. However, it represents an extreme example – an outlier – of the results projects like Biblionet can have. Most people's experience of using the internet will not necessarily be so life-changing. While such stories can be capitalized on as part of the funding or philanthropy rhetoric (Fried, Kochanowicz and Chiranov 2010, 60), it is worthwhile asking as researchers how such an extreme example of "success" might color people's perceptions. That is to say, what does this mean for those who may not have as much to gain when it comes to program "success" when they have less life-changing experiences or create what might be perceived by them and others as having "less value" during their time surfing the web or sending instant messages.

Another example of how the rhetoric of success played out was during our site visits. Many librarians were convinced (at least at first) that the research group was there to assess the program – and/or their own performance – and to see if they were succeeding or failing. This affected the kind of access we were granted when scheduling interviews with librarians during the first weeks of fieldwork. The effect that this group of Americans (even though they were accompanied by Romanians) had on various city libraries and villages was remarkable and was unlike our other research experiences elsewhere in Transylvania. This may be a residual effect of the Peace Corps activity that occurred in Salaj County during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Given this legacy and the importance foreign aid has today in Romania, it is not outside the realm of possibility that informants worried that if they said or if we saw the wrong thing their funding could be cut off as swiftly as it was turned on. At a number of sites, staff seemed uncomfortable, nervous and even suspicious when we showed up outside a regularly scheduled site visit. More than one librarian in Zalău explained that this was due to their desire to be "good hosts." This among other things seemed to mean that they wanted to present the most positive view of their library, their community and themselves. This concern with image is at least in part a holdover from the communist era, but it also perhaps reflects a genuine desire to actively and positively promote the Biblionet program itself.

As we have noted, evaluation metrics for information technology projects tend to assume that the success of a project can be achieved only where or when it produces radical change(s) for individuals, the library, and the nation/society itself. What we heard from project staff, librarians and others in Salaj County suggest that these "success stories" were heavily valued, often repeated and, in our opinion, attributed too much significance. Given this "press", it is not surprising that the less glamorous examples of change or improvement associated with Biblionet can be overlooked or under-emphasized. In Zalău, the constant "celebration" of Biblionet successes (the number of press conferences, the extended media coverage, the "staging" of

various library events, the numerous ribbon cuttings) tended to overshadow less spectacular but potentially more significant changes that we have discussed in our findings. This leads to programs like Biblionet not fully recognizing, and thus not fully capitalizing on, the kinds of widespread and meaningful yet incremental changes that Biblionet has set into motion. This stress on certain kinds of success can create unrealistic expectations in the community and lead to "witch hunts" which can decrease staff performance and organization morale. It can also muddy the waters for subsequent program and research efforts.

Equally important from the start, unlike many other community information projects, Biblionet has stressed project sustainability. This is a decisive factor in shaping project strategy and community/library selection. It can also help ensure that these project's positive changes, even those presented here but so far not acknowledged by Biblionet, will make a lasting impact on Romanian society. Therefore, to place too much emphasis on one-time, one event "success stories" seems antithetical to Biblionet's ideological commitment to sustainability and long-term change. It also misrepresents the extent to which Biblionet is laying the foundation that can help libraries and librarians in Romania fulfill the most important role public libraries can have: serving all of a country's citizens by providing equitable access to information and in this way supporting the social, civil, and political rights of individuals (Kerslake and Kinnell, 1998; McClure and Jaeger, 2009). Further, this program has the potential to help provide Romanians with an important competitive advantage as their country continues to develop its economy and to build on its commitment to democratic values.

There is no denying that, from a marketing perspective, a feel-good story, especially one that reflects an individual's triumph over adversity, seems to make all the technology worthwhile. However such life-changing stories all too often inadvertently define the standard for judging project effects, positive and negative, and one has to ask to what extent is such a marker of success culturally biased. Such a standard places the emphasis, and indeed measures success (and the implied potential for failure) not only on the "successful" implementation of the technology alone, but also on the miraculous, life-changing/affirming use of the technology to perform miracles. While such stories reflect deeply held middle class American beliefs both about the individual and success, the reality is that when we focus too heavily on the transformational or life-changing effects this can cause us to overlook and/or undervalue the more incremental kinds of changes we have discussed above.

Conclusion

Several concepts need to be incorporated into Biblionet's impact assessment. This includes a better understanding of information bleed through, the role occasional users have in the information economy, and the development of library programs that foster kin work and recreational uses of computers and the internet. For Biblionet to continue its success in helping librarians develop and promote public library services and increase market share, concepts like these as well as more and different measures of success or impact need to become part of the Biblionet lexicon. Our research in Salaj County makes it clear that the internet complements but does not replace existing information channels. It also shows how internet access and

information use is understood and integrated into daily life is contingent on how these activities are informed by existing channels and kinds of information. This is a key concept in information literacy despite the fact that such types of everyday life activities may not be translatable into the rhetoric of success or modernization. As Romanians come to understand or define their place in the free-market economy, they will also need to understand their role (and that they have a role) as consumers of information. This means, learning how to discern good vs. bad, quality, what are the best services and resources available to them, etc. Public libraries and librarians, thanks to the jump-start given by Biblionet, are moving into a position where they can help Romanians develop and improve their skills in this crucial area.

What we want to stress here is the importance of incorporating qualitative research in project definition and evaluation. This can help broaden the parameters of how we determine success or impact and thus strengthen program development and sustainability. While difficult to measure, it is these seemingly accidental or "minor" changes Biblionet has brought to Romanian public libraries and librarians that can result, especially if acknowledged and properly supported, in more substantial changes in Romania than perhaps even program staff or funders would have thought possible. This paper suggests some trends that could be capitalized on and used as a springboard for further development of Biblionet and public libraries in Romania. But for Biblionet to be truly successful, project staff and project partners need to acknowledge and capitalize on the less obvious, even unintended, positive consequences this project has already had in Romania. To help with this, some of the terms used here like information bleed through, incremental change and unanticipated consequences should be incorporated into the project's strategy and vocabulary.

While radical/transformative program goals and endpoints are commonly found in the NGO literature and are, arguably, necessary up to a point for marketing and funding, such claims represent a kind of double-edged sword. These claims may not only ultimately undercut the credibility of legitimately successful projects, but they can also unrealistically raise client and community expectations. Given the relative inertia, the points of resistance and the possibility of co-option that Romania carries as part of its historical legacy, it is hard to think of any NGO project in Romania, no matter how well funded or implemented, that can measure its progress in such transformational terms over the long-term. Further, what our research has uncovered are some equally important but often under-reported changes that Biblionet has set into motion – changes that might not have come into play in Romania without this project.[2]

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[2] IREX's recent link to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has expanded the kinds of projects IREX is involved in. It has also enhanced IREX's prestige and increased its assets. This can help to explain the strong ideological commitment Biblionet staff and partners have to success (and the creation of success). After all, who wants to return, comparatively speaking, to the minor leagues? If all this still seems to strain credulity, this is the instruction the third author received when he emailed an IREX staffer about research opportunities for this summer (2011): she wrote, "Should we be able to fund…research, it will likely be extremely focused on a particular area that Biblionet is interested in." In her next mail, she explained what she meant: "We would like your team to do targeted research on new services developed by libraries in

[one] county…The outcome should be…2-3 page snapshots of what did the library do…how can others replicate it – with a success story."

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