Introduction

"Nothing is more impotent than an unread library."

John Waters, *Role Models*

One Country One Library (OCOL) is the name of the project I founded and managed with the goal of developing a global platform of books and other publications that would be freely accessible to people in participating countries via open digital national libraries. These open libraries not only introduce to users a new way of engaging with digital content but also offer sustainable business models to publishers, authors, and sponsors. They take into consideration the needs and wants of readers, libraries, and publishers, while encouraging a wide array of companies and organizations to join forces to promote reading and encourage use of open digital libraries. During the three years that I've actively worked on this project (2017–2020), I applied the extensive knowledge I acquired over the years working with innovative companies and organizations that do transformative and cutting-edge things with e-books and digital content around the world—particularly in the United States and Europe—and challenged myself (and those who worked with me) to come up with solutions to the parts that remain an obstacle for readers, publishers, and libraries (e.g., how to make books available to readers while paying copyright holders fairly; how to protect reader privacy; and how to build platforms that are affordable to sustain long-term).

Since I had participated in various digital pilots (involving both public and academic libraries, as well as trade and scholarly publishers), some more successful than others, and learned from them along the way, I was well aware of the challenges still facing the publishing industry almost two decades into the twenty-first century. There was, in fact, little need to question whether publishers, authors, or libraries want to open knowledge to people, particularly knowledge found in the millions of books that have long stopped selling in bookstores or may not be available in libraries. The vast majority have long known that public demand has constantly and consistently been pushing both publishers and libraries in the direction of digital content. The challenge was, and remains, how to make digital content freely available to users sensibly, legally, and sustainably so that content creators get their fair share, while libraries get the most bang for their buck if they decide to invest in such large-scale projects. OCOL is an attempt to present an idea of a new open digital library that takes all that has worked thus far and eliminates all that hasn't, while proposing some new ways of thinking and of promoting and delivering digital content to users.

This report explains the OCOL idea and the platform associated with it in as much detail as possible in order to inspire and encourage librarians and information professionals to consider embarking on such projects, either by developing something on their own or by applying the OCOL model. The report is divided into five chapters, each tackling a specific angle and the ways it affects various users and organizations. Chapter 1 introduces OCOL as well as the Library of Croatia (LoC), OCOL's first manifestation and pilot (i.e., the OCOL idea and the open digital national library it proposes were first tested in Croatia). Chapter 2 delves into the global platform (website and application) designed to host the content and explains its key features and functionalities, the breadth of content, the importance of analytics, and the uniqueness of such original features as Pockets and Profiles. Chapter 3 zooms in on the benefits of the OCOL platform from the perspectives of various readers, including general users, elementary and high school students, college and university students and professors, and tourists and visitors. Chapter 4 discusses the OCOL platform from the perspective of publishers and authors and explains why they gain a great deal by being part of it, not only because the business model is designed to give them maximum benefits but also because the platform encourages independent authors

to self-publish. Chapter 5 focuses on the types of sponsorships available to those interested in joining forces to open such libraries in their countries and the roles libraries play in making such projects a reality.

It is important to note that the OCOL project has not, as of this writing, received any kind of government funding at any stage of its development. The platform was created, built, and promoted by relying solely on personal savings and the willingness of various OCOL team members to devote significant amounts of time, energy, and resources to developing the platform for modest earnings. What we ultimately settled for was not what we envisioned in the beginning. As we built the platform and developed sustainable business models for publishers and sponsors as well as for the OCOL team, we changed them over time by learning from errors and by receiving feedback from the many parties we consulted along the way.

Acknowledgments

I owe a special thank you to OCOL team members for their work, enthusiasm, and perseverance. I also am grateful to the representatives of the libraries, organizations, and corporations who set aside time and showed great interest in learning about the platform and its potential. Although we were not able to secure any long-term partnership with them, which would have opened LoC to the general public in late 2019, we engaged in many discussions that helped us consider perspectives we wouldn't have otherwise considered. These include, among many others, the organizations with which we made the most progress: the Croatian National Tourist Board (and its several city affiliates), the Croatian National Bank, the University of Rijeka, Pula High School, and Valamar Hotels.

Many others have also participated in the project, either as outside contributors (e.g., IT specialists, graphic designers, PR and marketing professionals) or as individuals who helped open doors to various institutions and organizations where we sought sponsorship. While I will not name them in this report (and it would be a long list), I remain indebted to them as well for their moral support and help along the long and windy way. It takes a village to get any digital project going, but it truly takes an army much larger than a village to attempt to open a national digital library of the scope of the Library of Croatia and to envision a global platform that could be replicated in countries around the world.

One Country One Library: The Idea

The idea to build an open digital library that covers the geographical borders of an entire country did not come overnight. It was the product and result of working on various projects, over a long period of time, and with various companies and organizations—for profit and not-for-profit—that cater to public, academic, and school libraries and that use technology to deepen the impact of digital libraries in their communities. Since the advent of the internet and digital content, various organizations have engaged in projects that bring e-books and other digital publications to patrons outside the confines of physical libraries.

Having participated in such projects proactively—and having worked directly with both libraries and publishers to create positive outcomes for all sides—I witnessed firsthand the power of such projects to transform education and lifelong learning for people who would not set foot inside their local libraries. I also began to see that every initiative centered on opening digital content to people legally and promoting reading, at its core, was an attempt to do more than simply provide platforms that house digital content for large masses. It was an attempt to redefine the role of libraries in the twenty-first century. To me these projects were unveiling what the future library could look like.

On the heels of experimenting with different platforms and models, and while engaging in academic research that closely followed the impact of open access literature (i.e., books published under Creative Commons licenses), I began to envision a digital library that would be useful, transformative, and beneficial for all parts of the reading, writing, and publishing spectrum: authors, publishers, readers, librarians, educators, marketing professionals, researchers, and government officials.

The idea from the start was the create a platform that would encompass the best elements of the projects I already worked on (e.g., using GPS coordinates to define digital libraries within certain areas) while introducing some new concepts (e.g., new algorithms that determined each publication's impact by measuring reading activities). Most of all, the idea was to synthesize all that had worked thus far (to the extent that it made financial sense to both publishers and libraries) as well as to incorporate brand-new possibilities that required out-of-the-box thinking. The first time I wrote what I loosely refer to as the letter from the founder of the project, I described OCOL as follows. (The letter was never published but was shared digitally with a number of interested publishers and libraries.)

> The One Country One Library (OCOL) idea grew out of an awareness that until knowledge is fully democratized and until people are given equal opportunity to participate in the process of creating and sharing information and creative writing—regardless of their affiliation and proximity to

libraries—digital divides of the present will persist in the future. It also grew out of an awareness that until sustainable business models are created that support the work of publishers and authors of all kinds, e-books cannot be open for reading legally online the way other digital content has been opening for years and decades.

Most of all, the idea grew out of an awareness that by becoming invisible and as big as entire countries, libraries can transform their roles as well as the roles of e-books. The time is ripe to open our minds to the long-held belief by many: digital content is not here to compete with its print counterparts. It is here to level the playing field and to give us proof of value. The idea is simple: let's turn entire countries (and if not countries, then large geographic areas) into digital libraries and open them to all people inside their borders. Let's rely on sponsors, public and private, to support the cost of reading, popular and academic. Let's eliminate frictions standing in the way, including ZIP codes, library cards, and citizenship status. And let's develop a model that encourages publishers and authors to participate, while giving those that help pay for reading reason to participate.

Easier said than done? Certainly, but it is doable. The OCOL digital platform is designed to turn any country into an invisible, yet powerful library. It serves as a reading room for all readers, a publishing tool for emerging authors, a discovery tool for publishers and agents, a learning tool for students, a book club for avid readers, an information kiosk for tourists, and, best of all, an evaluator of any publication's value.

If the first key role of the e-book has been to democratize access, I invite you to consider that the second key role of the e-book is to reveal the value of its contents. What happens out there when publications reach readers? How much of each book do they read? And what parts specifically? When and where exactly? How often do they re-read the same parts? How long do they take to read? How often do they highlight, notate, share notes with others, and let friends on social media know about their reading discoveries?

How much do publishers and authors stand to gain by having such profound insight into each publication's value—no longer relying only on their best judgments but also on the readers' measurable activities to help point the way? And how much do they stand to gain by understanding each publication's value in each country? A great deal.

On the shoulders of the giants that came before the digital revolution gained momentum—THE giants like Project Gutenberg and Internet Archive—we have begun to grasp the true potential of digital content—to break barriers, reveal value, and give equal opportunity to all who want to teach and be taught, to inspire and be inspired: authors, readers, libraries, publishers, universities, schools, and students.

The OCOL platform was designed to encompass a range of elements, growing over time, that would reflect the needs and wants of twenty-first-century authors, lay readers, publishers, libraries, educators, students, researchers, and even tourists. It was designed to include a wide variety of content, both popular and academic, professional, and highly specialized. In a nutshell, the idea was to create an open digital library as big as a country that would be accessible to all people inside the country's geographic borders. This library would provide free and uninterrupted reading to users, sponsored by government and private organizations, including corporations. All of the copyrighted content would be protected by digital rights management (DRM) technology (to give publishers some peace of mind that their content is secure). Only public domain titles and open access titles (discussed in more detail in chapter 2) would not be coated with DRM, and the digital files of those titles would be downloadable by users, while the rest would be accessible only for reading. The library would represent a synthesis of all types of reading materials, popular and academic, requiring no library cards, IDs, or authentication for users to use it, although logging in with a username would be recommended for

Figure 1.1
Official OCOL logo

various reasons. (Reader privacy is discussed in more detail in chapter 3).

Reading materials (including not only books but also a wide range of other publications supplied by publishers, authors, educators, and various partners) would be evaluated for impact based on a sophisticated algorithm that would track user activities, and a score would be assigned to each book or publication measuring its performance. A score could also be assigned to each user measuring his or her reading (an especially beneficial feature for educators). All reading materials would be open for reading 24/7 inside the country's borders, and those not coated with DRM technology (public domain and open access titles) would be accessible anywhere in the world outside the country (via the same platform).

In other words, the OCOL platform could be "turned on" in any country and be several things at once: a digital library open to all people, residents and visitors alike; a reading room for all types of readers at all reading levels; a publishing platform for independent and emerging authors; a talent discovery tool for publishers and literary agents; a learning platform for students, scholars, and researchers; a book club for readers seeking meaningful connections; an information kiosk for visitors and tourists; and an evaluator of a book's impact for authors and publishers.

Lastly, not all OCOL features discussed here are unique or revolutionary; much of what this platform offers already exists and has existed for years on various other platforms and digital library resources, which have been improving steadily over the past decade. The OCOL platform draws inspiration from them, with the goal of applying what has worked well and improving what has, in many ways, been an impediment to accelerating users' interest in e-books and digital content. It is an attempt to synchronize all of the benefits of digital reading already well known to libraries, publishers, and readers with the new possibilities not yet tested or minimally tested with new technologies.

Why the Library of Croatia?

The team I recruited for the OCOL project needed a testing ground, and I decided to test the OCOL idea in Croatia (the EU country of my birth and the country where I had previously engaged in several open digital reading projects). Some of those projects involved partnering with global companies with extensive experience in the library field; others were independent projects involving targeted groups of users. Some have been failed attempts at initiating projects that had long-term goals for libraries and publishers; others were mere pilots testing ideas and business models.

Croatia was familiar territory to me. I understood from previous experience what worked well and what needed a completely new approach. The benefits of using the country of Croatia as the starting point to test the technology and the business model were obvious from the start: the country is small enough that it would be relatively easy to accurately restrict access to the library to people inside the country's geographic borders. Given Croatia's small population (roughly four million), it would also be easy to control the cost of reading and to compensate publishers that would participate (more on this in chapter 4). The country draws millions of tourists each year from various EU and non-EU countries, which would give us the opportunity to develop part of the library exclusively for the needs of those visiting the country from outside for a short period of time and to build a multilingual collection of books stretching beyond the native Croatian and English languages. (English is widely spoken and used in Croatia in universities, schools, hotels, resorts, restaurants, and everyday life.)

There would, of course, be challenges along the way that would make Croatia a less-than-ideal choice for the OCOL pilot: both the library and publishing industries in the country tend to be resistant to change and highly dependent on government support and funding, with little interest in engaging in nontraditional projects and initiatives. Neither libraries nor publishers seriously embraced the concept of digital reading and digital books until very late (they still trail behind most countries of the European Union). Croatia has been struggling economically for years, with the private sector (which includes publishers) barely staying afloat, often with government support. The most successful Croatian publishers are highly dependent on the revenue received from print textbooks (a format being phased out in much of the developed world). In addition, Croatia has a high unemployment rate (averaging about 15 percent according to some estimates) and a private sector that usually prefers traditional rather than innovative marketing ideas.

The purpose of this report is to present the OCOL idea in all its complexity to interested librarians, publishers, and information professionals and to explain—in as much detail as possible without revealing confidential information—how the platform was designed and how it would function if it were live. (As of this writing, the platform still has not been activated owing to lack of interest from libraries and various government and private organizations; more on this in chapter 5.) While there is an underlying narrative to the flow of this report, the main goal is to explain the nuts and bolts of how the platform works for users; its benefits for all that are a part of it, including publishers, authors, educators, and librarians; and the way the business model works for those who wish to support the project either by supplying content or by taking on roles of active sponsors.

The various images of the OCOL platform used in this report are images of the platform in its Library of Croatia (LoC) incarnation. The platform's color and features, its name, and its logo are designed to vary depending on the location and the interests and desires of those who sponsor the platform. In the case of the Library of Croatia, the library logo alludes to the recognizable checkerboard found on Croatia's flag, and the color red is used throughout to give the platform a uniform look and feel (figure 1.2). Many more images (including videos) and information about the platform's design are available on the library's official website, which serves as a starting point for those interested in the vision and mission behind the first OCOL project.

Figure 1.2
Official logo of the Library of Croatia

Library of Croatia website
www.libraryofcroatia.org

In addition, a professional photographer was brought on board to create a series of original images with regular users (not models), of various ages, reading on smartphones and tablets. These pictures were used not only as rotating images on the platform but also for all activities promoting the library to the general public. The image of a high school girl reading a tablet while drinking tea in a café (figure 1.3) became the official image of the project when it was first unveiled to the public in April 2019.
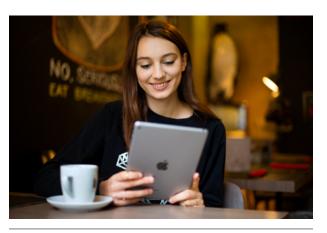

Figure 1.3
Official image of the LoC project used for PR and marketing purposes