Users and Readers

One of the first things we discussed in our brainstorming meetings when we began developing the OCOL platform was how to create a unique and impressive user experience. The objective was to build a new kind of library that would have something to offer to every type of user and reader regardless of their age, income, or location and to build a platform that would be very simple to use—and not something that required readers to learn how to use it. Many questions were asked in the beginning, which helped us understand the market that was to serve as the testing ground for the OCOL pilot: the Republic of Croatia. It was important to understand the users in Croatia, their reading habits, their digital preferences, their perspectives about print versus digital books, their perspectives about libraries, their income, and their attitudes toward reading in a century dominated by videos, pictures, games, and other multimedia.

We identified several types of potential LoC users: general users (lay readers), elementary and high school students, college and university students, teachers, and educators (including librarians), professors and scholars, and tourists and visitors. The questions we asked helped us to understand each user type with more clarity as well as to ultimately create a business model that would be attractive to publishers and authors as well as to potential sponsors. The questions included, among others, the following:
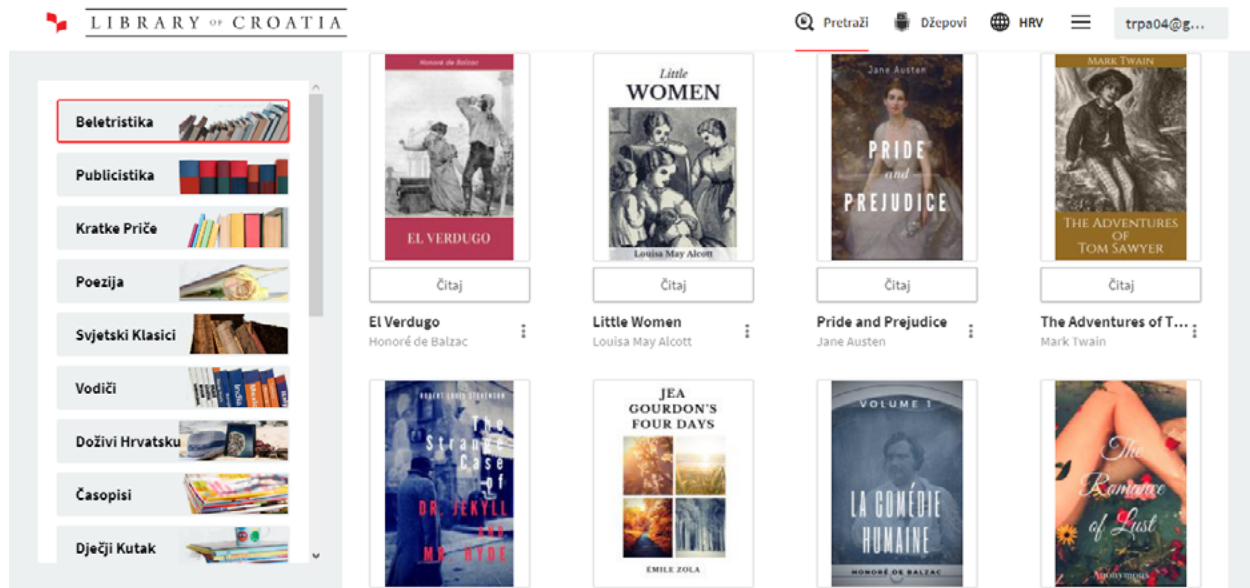
• How many people in Croatia own smartphones?

Figure 3.1
Browsing publications inside Channels

- How many people in Croatia own Androids versus iPhones?
- How many people in Croatia own tablets, not including old e-readers like the original Kindle? (For various technical reasons, LoC would not be compatible with e-readers that are not tablets.)
- How many people in Croatia own laptops?
- How many people in Croatia have a Facebook account?
- How many people in Croatia have a Google+ account?
- How many print books does an average consumer in Croatia buy each year?
- How many e-books does an average person in Croatia buy each year?
- How much of the Croatian population reads at least three books a year?
- What is the average number of books read by a person in a year?
- What did the previous pilots in Croatia that I managed (particularly Croatia Reads, which I wrote about in my previous issue of *Library Technology Reports*, "Free Reading Zones: Transforming Access to Books through Technology") reveal about the reading habits of Croatian consumers?
- What types of books sell the most in Croatia and where?
- How educated are Croatian readers about digital technologies, e-book files, reading on e-book platforms such as Scribd, using digital resources in libraries, and so on?

General Users

The term *general user* refers to the broadest type of LoC user. It is most closely related to a typical public library user or any person inside the country who accesses the open digital library without a specific educational purpose or agenda. They are often referred to as lay readers and include everyone from a user who would access the library once out of curiosity and never return to an avid reader who would read a few books at once and regularly create new Pockets, follow the Profiles of authors, notate books, and use the library in a multitude of ways. The LoC platform/application becomes the users' public library in their Pocket that does not discriminate based on where they live. It is open 24/7. They do not have to pay to obtain or renew their membership card (in Croatia patrons pay a small annual fee for the privilege of using the public library). They can read while in transit, on public transportation on their way to work, in the privacy of their living room, in public parks, on the beaches, and so on. They never have to worry about needing to purchase access, as there is no buying of any kind in the library. Some of the things not

afforded to them by the physical library are afforded to them in the virtual one.

One such thing is more reader privacy. While some may argue that, as fervent defenders of privacy for decades, public libraries in physical form have firmly defended their patrons' right to privacy and therefore proven to be safe havens for readers (many examples from recent decades point to US librarians' unwavering stance about not revealing their patrons' reading activities), OCOL tries to raise the bar even higher by using technology to enhance reader privacy while controlling it in the areas where it might be compromised more than before. A good example of enhancing reader privacy is the ability to enter the library completely anonymously without having to get authenticated or use an e-mail account. While this feature of the OCOL/LoC platform presents some challenges to the IT developers, whose job is to protect the safety of licensed content and measure all reading (including the reading of anonymous readers), it is necessary because it gives users the ability to go into the library without any obligation to ever return or leave a trace of their e-mail or social media account.

The downside of such anonymous entry is the loss of personalized features, which are saved only for users with a proper account, but the upside is the ability to get an accurate picture of how many users choose to remain anonymous inside this library. Previous digital pilots I participated in often showed that users did not care about their privacy as much as librarians did, and the vast majority enter digital resources through their social media accounts, such as Facebook or Google, because it is easier and faster. If their main concern is "easier and faster," the anonymous entry is as easy and as fast as using a social media account; it requires only a click before users find themselves on the library's browsing pages.

It is also important to note that the OCOL idea gives readers the privacy to carry on their reading journey of discovery quietly and on their own terms without the usual middlemen influencing their reading, including, for example, reader advisory librarians, teachers, educators, PR and marketing agents, savvy self-promoting authors, other users, and so on. This may be a radical idea that strays from what technology has been trying to achieve, very successfully, the past couple of decades—to build networks among users who like the same things, to encourage sharing and suggestions, and to promote products and services and allow individuals to promote themselves.

The reason for this approach is the mission of OCOL to encourage and support reading as a highly personal experience and to be the safe haven for the reader looking for a quiet place online where they get to read and discover, in silence, and not be constantly bombarded with advertisements, recommendations, and other noises coming at them from all sides. What

makes this approach radical indeed is that it does not encourage reader-to-reader or user-to-user interaction, but instead it places its trust in the reader to be able to find and discover, on purpose or serendipitously, what they are hoping to find. In other words, if most reading platforms and book-oriented websites invite users to connect with others, the OCOL platform asks them to "disconnect" and reap the benefits of reading and deciding on their own terms.

Elementary and High Schools

While general and lay readers enter the LoC platform to discover books, authors, or topics without any predefined agendas and often without even knowing what they are after, elementary and high school students have a different reason to visit the library. While they, too, like any other user, may use it for lay reading, LoC strives to be the one-stop resource for all their school-related reading activities, especially required reading for literature classes. The LoC Channel School Reads was built specifically with their needs in mind. It includes required school readings from grades 1 through 12 (organized into Pockets by grades), which are largely in the public domain (about 70 percent of high school readings in Croatia are by authors who have been dead for at least seventy years). The ones that are not in the public domain would fall into the licensed content category.

Elementary and high school teachers may use LoC to encourage thoughtful use of public marginalia by inviting their students to notate required readings and share their thoughts with other students by making them public. Or teachers may use public marginalia feature to leave their own public notes for their students and allow for faster, more efficient learning and sharing of knowledge and ideas. They also may use the Pockets features to organize their class readings, and since as educators they are allowed to have a public Profile, they can create unique Profile pages where all their students can access a wide variety of information, books, and publications all in one place.

Teachers and educators may also use LoC to encourage the use of e-textbooks and educational materials (one of the Channels would be dedicated especially to e-textbooks). However, this use of digital materials was not planned in phase 1 of development, as textbooks in Croatia are not, at the time of this writing and to my knowledge, available in the reflowable EPUB format. This would, therefore, require serious consideration and allotment of time, manpower, and resources, so we opted not to offer this option at launch but planned it for later stages of IT development.

Colleges and Universities

The needs of students attending colleges and universities are in many ways even more specialized than those of lower-level students. At this age, students are apt at using digital resources. Given their heavy use of social media, they expect the user experience to be frictionless. It could be said that they are the toughest group of users to please, as they are used to using platforms that are fast and that get them the information they need at the speed of light. The fewer clicks standing between them and the required reading materials, the better. The public marginalia feature of the reading app is of special value to them because they can compare notes with other students as they research various topics and prepare for their classes. Like elementary and high school students, they can use the library as lay readers, but most of all they can use it for their schoolwork.

Given the steep cost of higher education around the world, student housing, and so on, students are very drawn to open educational resources (OERs) as an alternative to pricey print textbooks (which are slowly being phased out in many countries, including the United States). This type of open digital library is a natural hosting platform for OERs. Not only will they always be within students' reach, all in one place, but students will also be able to notate them, share notes with others, and use the same platform for all their reading and research needs without having to consult a large number of other online resources.

Professors and scholars can utilize the platform not only to create reading assignments (via Pockets) and draw students' attention to required or recommended literature but also to perform a lot of research on their own. The Academic Channel inside the library was designed with their needs in mind. The plan is for this Channel to host a wide variety of scholarly materials, not only books but also journals and stand-alone scholarly articles. In later versions of the platform, OCOL would include scholarly videos and e-lectures. Further, the platform's self-publishing capabilities (explained in chapter 4) would allow scholars to publish their own work and make it widely available to other scholars in other universities and institutions. They publish their work like any other author, of course, by selecting when and where it is available for free and what license the work carries.

Tourists and Visitors

One of LoC's and OCOL's special features is that the library does not distinguish between types of users. Since it does not assign zip codes to users in any way (it cares only that users are physically present to access all materials, and they can be anywhere in the

world to access much of the content), the library is open to noncitizens as it is to the country's citizens. The value of this for Croatia's tourism and hospitality industry would be enormous as the country would send a powerful message to its visitors: they would be able to enjoy its open library like any other person inside Croatia during their stay. The open library would help brand Croatia as a country of knowledge and culture, which finds innovative ways to use technology for the benefit of all who reside in Croatia at any time. It would brand Croatia as a country that knows how to build bridges between tradition and innovation, between sophisticated marketing and promotion. When tourists land in Croatia, they would land in a country that embraces and promotes reading of all kinds of literature, popular, scientific, or informative, regardless of the person's whereabouts.

Tourists and visitors enter the LoC app the same way as any other type of user and enjoy the same benefits. They can choose to browse the platform in English and to filter searching according to one of several languages available at the onset. They can remain completely anonymous, or they may log in the usual way. They may also use the Discover Croatia Channel inside the library to peruse literature about the country, including various tourist guides, brochures, history books, and more. This Channel would require digitization of various materials into EPUB, the supported file format, and coordination with the board's officials to ensure the Channel is diverse and serves a wide variety of tourists' needs with the goal of both informing and entertaining them. The main purpose of the Channel, of course, would be to provide materials geared toward tourists, all in one place. The rest of the library is accessible to tourists the same way it is accessible to other users.

When tourists return to their home countries, the app stays on their device, and they are still able to access the platform and much of its content as before, either on portable devices or via computers and laptops. However, the content licensed only for the country of Croatia remains open and freely available only to users inside Croatia. This restriction ensures that we honor our contracts with publishers, which are location-based. Most of public domain and open access content (along with some self-published content if the authors wish to grant such rights and have that kind of visibility) remains open globally, as well as the entire Discover Croatia Channel, which they can use to continue learning about the country or plan their next visit.