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ONE COUNTRY ONE LIBRARY

Mirela Roncevic

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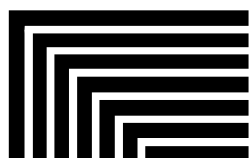
R E P O R T S

Expert Guides to Library Systems and Services

One Country One Library

The model for an open national digital library that serves the changing needs of twenty-first-century users, publishers, and libraries

Mirela Roncevic



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Mirela Roncevic is a writer, journalist, editor, content developer, and publishing and library consultant. Over the course of her publishing and library career—print and digital, trade and academic publishing—she has worked with a range of publishers and libraries and partnered with global companies creating new opportunities for publishers, authors, readers, educators, researchers, and librarians. She has also contributed articles, reports, features, reviews, and stories to a range of publications and has served as managing editor of several book series. Mirela is the author of several books and reports on e-books and digital content published by ALA, and her doctoral research explores the impact on DRM, open access, open educational resources, and open digital libraries.

Abstract

One Country One Library (OCOL) is an idea to turn countries into open digital libraries via geographic coordinates and to measure the impact of reading materials in each country. The platform, available as a web and mobile application, houses all types of materials, including books, academic journals, general articles, short stories, and guides. It serves as a digital reading room, a self-publishing platform, a learning tool, an information kiosk for tourists, and a powerful new evaluator of the materials' performance and reader activities. Publishers are paid a participation fee per country and supplied with detailed analytics showing each publication's score and impact. This issue of *Library Technology Reports* (vol. 56, no. 7), "One Country One Library," sheds light on the idea as well as on the technology and the business model designed to make the idea sustainable for participating countries, libraries, publishers, authors, and organizations. The goal of the report is to present the OCOL idea in its simplicity as well as its complexity and to encourage librarians and other book professionals to consider building open national digital libraries that serve the needs of the widest possible range of users.

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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 to 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

The OCOL Platform

Features

The OCOL platform is intended to be accessible to all people inside a country's borders, regardless of their location or whether they have a library card, attend a school or university, or live near a public library. In fact, the whole point of this open library project is to move away from traditional practices (such as requiring elaborate patron authentication when logging in to use a library's digital resources) and to introduce some new possibilities by taking advantage of a wide range of technological advances that now afford us the luxury of rethinking the notion of the library and the experience of using a library, while, of course, remaining sensitive to the issue of patron privacy (among other issues).

The platform could be accessed on any device, by using either the web-based version (see figure 2.1), ideal for laptops, or one of the two app versions (for Android and iOS devices), ideal for use on mobile phones and tablets. For each new OCOL library, a new version of the same app would be created and given a unique name. The LoC platform and app would serve as the blueprint for others. Each app (no matter how many are available simultaneously in the app stores around the world) would pull from the same site, but it would not necessarily display the same content. (This, of course, depends on agreements with publishers in various territories and on digital rights.) While the platform is designed to work best as a national library—that is, a library that is open to all people inside a particular country—it can be adjusted to fit smaller geographic areas (e.g., cities, campuses), although in the initial stages of IT development, this option is not yet available.

Users could enter the app in three unique ways:

- as completely anonymous readers (In this case, e-mail and password are not authenticated or needed. Users go in as guests and begin browsing

and reading like other users. The downside of this approach is that the app, while it tracks readings of those users, is not able to remember what is read and how much of each publication is read.)

- by creating a user account with a unique (and authenticated) password (This is recommended for users who want to use the features of the app to the fullest while preserving their privacy as much as possible.)
- via social media (Google or Facebook)

The platform could be used in the Croatian or English language. (More languages were planned for later stages of IT development, including German, Spanish, Italian, and French, as these are the languages most often spoken by visitors to Croatia.) Upon entry into the web version, users would be greeted by participating libraries and sponsors (a short message appears in a small window in the upper right corner and goes away after a few seconds) and see a carousel of books pulled from a range of categories (these rotate daily with the goal of drawing attention to a wide range of publications before users begin their browsing journeys). Various characters (beyond the Roman alphabet) are supported to ensure accurate and precise searching.

Some unique features include the following:

- **No purchasing**—While each book receives a unique page inside the library displaying useful information to the reader (e.g., description, publisher, publication year), no price is included. Since LoC is not a bookstore but a library, it strives to honor the mission of a library in providing free reading to patrons, rather than serving as a marketing vehicle for book sales. Therefore, the user experience must resemble that of a library patron using library resources rather than a shopper visiting an online bookstore. This does not mean that, in our negotiations with publishers,

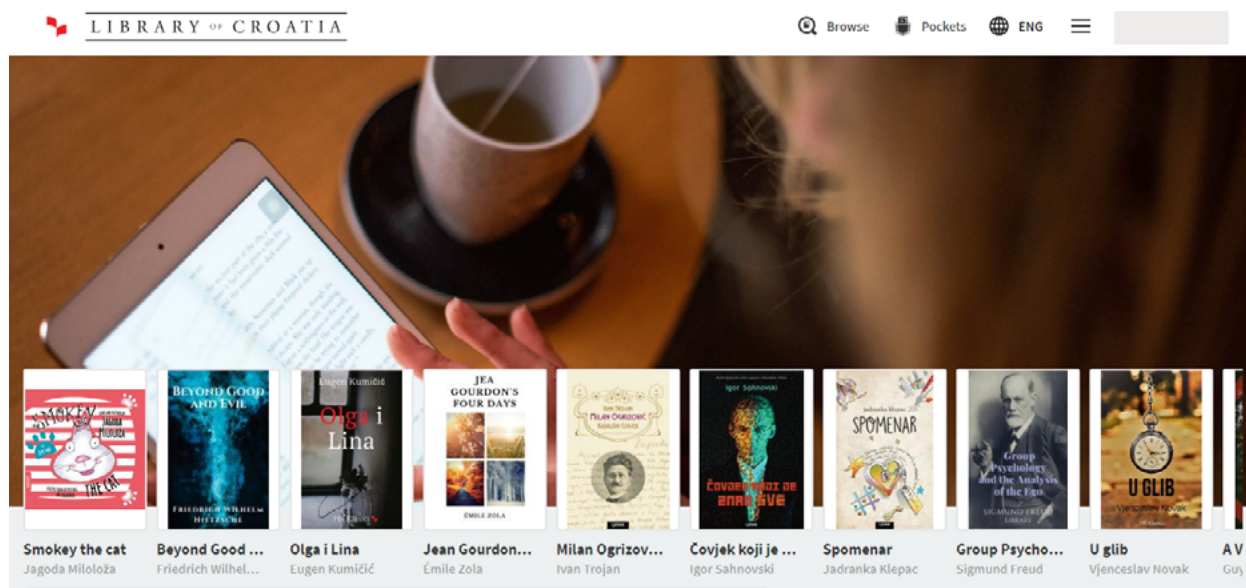


Figure 2.1
Home page of OCOL's web-based version

we do not use various currencies (particularly US dollars and euros), as publishers are paid for participation (more on this in chapter 4), but it does mean that this information is both irrelevant and distracting to the library user.

- **No ratings and reviews**—While most reading platforms offer users reading recommendations (Amazon pioneered this decades ago) by drawing the user's attention to the publications either by the same author or on the same subject or to other books read by users whose interests are similar to the user's, OCOL reverses the process and does not provide reviews or recommendations. This means that users are not asked to rate books or write reviews after reading them. Studies have shown that such approaches, while helpful to some, have also had detrimental effects. In addition, reviews by reputable sources often found on book pages have long been a way for publishers to promote their own authors and interests, which may or may not be in line with what the user will ultimately like or need. The goal here is not to completely deny the value of reviews, but by not including such random and often highly subjective opinions, we encourage more reading and more independent thinking.
- **"Edutising"**—Sponsors are visible to users, but just enough to make the users aware who is paying for the content and the library's IT maintenance and not to distract from reading by using various commercial tactics. In fact, the library

does not allow any kind of selling activities. Sponsors can use only their logos in their subtle messages to users (placed either on the home page or inside one of the Channels), or they may actively participate in the reading by creating Profiles inside the library. These Profiles may include the content relevant to the sponsor, but again, the sponsor does not display ads selling products or messages. In a nutshell, OCOL aims to honor the definition of a library and not resemble a platform like YouTube, where users are constantly bombarded and interrupted with advertisements of all kinds. Since the nature of each sponsor's presence is educational (rather than commercial), but still gives the sponsor an opportunity to effectively brand its organization, OCOL refers to this type of integrity sponsorship (and this type of marketing) as *edutising* (educational advertising).

- **Public marginalia**—The reading app includes a range of functionalities digital readers have come to expect from such platforms (including the ability to change fonts, size of letters, and background color; the option to use a font for dyslexic readers; the ability to remember where a reader stopped reading and to track reader's time in the library), but it goes beyond the familiar to include a unique feature called *public marginalia*. This means that readers can notate various publications they access and make their notes private (visible only to them) or public (visible to other users when they access the same publication).

A filter would allow users to report public notes that in some way violate the author's or the book's integrity.

- **Distinct Profiles**—There are several types of Profiles in the library: those of users, kept private and visible only to the user, and those of partners (i.e., sponsors), educators, and public figures, which are visible to other users of the library. Each of the three public Profiles plays a distinct role inside the library, with the common goal of enhancing the user experience by pointing users to the content of their interest.
- **User privacy**—The library strives to protect user privacy (as libraries have done for decades). To do that effectively, some compromises have to take place along the way. While it can be argued that reader privacy can never be fully achieved through use of any technology, users can be given more options.

In addition to these distinct features, many others are designed to enhance the user experience at various stages of browsing or reading, including, among others, the ability to filter searches by language and the option to see what percentage of the book is read inside the reader, at the bottom of each page (or how much reading is left before completing a title). The platform also features an *i* icon (which stands for *information*) located in various places (e.g., browsing page, Channel pages, book pages), which users can click to get more information about various features and functionalities that may not immediately be clear to them. Further, the OCOL app is built in such a way that it accommodates future expansion and the inclusion of multimedia and audio files (which would not be available at launch, as they require more storage capacity and bring a special set of challenges and issues).

As far as accessing the OCOL website (or app) outside of the geographic borders of the participating country goes—in this case, Croatia—users could still access or download it as there would be enough content on the platform that is available for free globally (e.g., many public domain titles and open access books), while licensed content would be visible only in places where there is an agreement with publishers. If publishers explicitly tell us in writing that they want the licensed content to remain open beyond the licensed territory (e.g., for promotional purposes), we can honor that request at any time. The technology allows us to “open” and “close” e-publications as needed.

When visitors leave Croatia to go back to their home countries, they would be able to continue reading the materials they enjoyed on their trip only if they weren't licensed content open for reading only to the people physically inside Croatia. The app is not able at the moment to allow the reading of licensed materials for at least two or three weeks upon exiting

the country—this would be a much better user experience as users would be allowed to finish what they started reading when returning to their homelands—but for security purposes, and to honor publishers' wishes, as well as to control the OCOL budget, this benefit was added to the IT development wish list for future development phases.

OCOL also pays special attention to the safety of the digital files. DRM technology is included in every incarnation of the platform and the app (LoC is but a blueprint). This technology ensures that the appropriate content is available to the local audience, but the content also looks and feels global (in that the collection of publications is highly multilingual and diverse). In addition, the technology is designed to eliminate any friction and ensure a superior user experience. In essence, the reading app represents the library in which every type of reader feels welcome: lay reader, academic, high school student, university student, self-taught learner, and so on. Lastly, OCOL recognizes that while on the one hand, editorial filtering makes for a better collection (quantity cannot replace quality, and publications have to be carefully vetted before entering the library), on the other hand, OCOL also wants to promote a healthy dose of user judgment (in the belief that users know best what they want to read and how), so we do not want to completely eliminate the type of content that may be uncomfortable to some.

Lastly, the goal of OCOL is to promote reading as a highly personal experience, a *journey* on which the reader embarks voluntarily to discover new knowledge. The browsing element is highly sophisticated, and in order to enhance that journey, a book is not imposed on the reader. Instead, the reader enjoys the process of *discovery* and learns through it. It's not about the relationship between those of us behind the scenes and the reader. It's about the relationship between the reader and the content. The ultimate goal is for the reader to reach a point where they feel that everyone got out of their way.

Content

The OCOL platform includes a wide range of content and incorporates various format types as well as various subjects and categories. As OCOL's mission is to present a national library that incorporates the features of various types of libraries (public, academic, research, specialized, school), the content must reflect this mission and grow over time to satisfy the needs of a diverse group of users—from elementary and high school children to students and scholars, and from lay local readers to tourists and visitors looking for literature in languages other than the native language. At the onset, LoC was going to include publications in several languages, not only the native Croatian (which

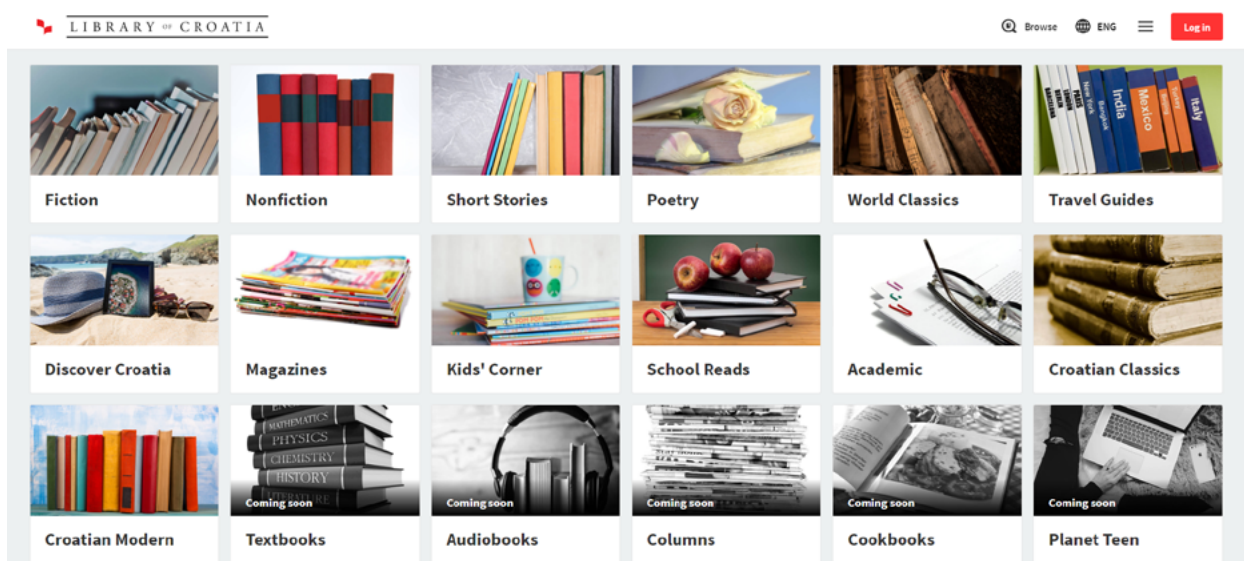


Figure 2.2
Channels as entry points on home page

was the priority), but also including the main languages—English, German, Spanish, Italian, French—and the regional languages that are spoken by large numbers of tourists and visitors traveling to Croatia each year (among them Serbian, Bosnian, Slovenian, Czech, Slovakian, and Hungarian).

Content types include books (for all ages), short stories (as stand-alone publications with unique covers), textbooks, professional literature, academic articles, academic journals, general articles and columns from newspapers, consumer magazines, guides and brochures for tourists and visitors, and audiobooks. The goal is to satisfy the reading appetites of a wide range of users: from recreational readers enjoying romance novels to elementary school children looking for school reads; from scientists and university professors looking for new research in their subject fields to business travelers.

At launch, OCOL's content would be organized into various Channels (figure 2.2), which may be accessed directly from the home page (located just below the main image) or on the browsing pages inside the library. These Channels can change as needed, and at the outset would include the following: Fiction, Nonfiction, Short Stories, Poetry, World Classics, Travel Guides, Discover Croatia (exclusively for tourists), Magazines, Kids' Corner (children's literature, School Reads [required school reading for Croatian students grades 1 through 12]), Academic (for scholars and students of higher education), Croatian Classics, and Croatian Modern. The Channels that display on the home page in black-and-white would have a "Coming

soon" label, as they were on the horizon but not yet ready to launch. The idea here was to give the user a taste of what's to come. They included Textbooks, Audiobooks, Columns, Cookbooks, and Planet Teen. The choice of these additional Channels was not random; they were chosen because of the type of content we knew we could secure in the near future and the demand on the user side.

In order to ensure proper DRM protection and to inform and educate users about why and how the publications are freely available to them in the library (and why we do not guarantee that they will always remain in the library), all publications would carry one of four disclaimers, which correspond to one of four classifications of content types inside the library: public domain, open access, licensed, and self-published. This means that every publication page would display one of these four classifications assigned to each title and explain to the reader why and how each title is open to them to read without restriction and without pay. The text for each classification is as follows:

- **Public Domain**—This title is in the public domain, as the author or translator has been deceased for 70-plus years. We have made it available for reading in this territory because there are no legal restrictions as to how public domain titles may be used. If you have any reason to suspect this title is not in the public domain in this territory, please notify us. [Titles that carry a public domain classification may be downloaded and read offline.]

- **Open Access**—This title carries several Open Access licenses, which means it has been made available for reading by the organization that has sponsored its publication. This usually refers to academic literature published by universities and various institutions of learning. If you have any reason to suspect this title does not carry an Open Access license, please notify us. [Titles that carry an open access classification may be downloaded and read offline.]
- **Licensed**—This title is open for reading in this territory because its digital rights holder, usually the publisher, has signed an agreement with us regarding this and other titles in its catalog and has given us permission to open this title for reading in the library for a pre-determined amount of time. [Titles that carry a licensed classification can be accessed by readers only while online and cannot be downloaded. This ensures protection of copyright as this classification is used for commercial titles.]
- **Self-Published**—This title has been self-published through our platform and its author has agreed, before uploading the publication, to open it for reading in this territory. The author reserves the right to withdraw the title from the platform with a month's notice to our editors and to the readers. [Titles that carry a self-published classification can be accessed by readers only while online and cannot be downloaded; this ensures the protection of copyright for commercial titles. They may be downloaded by readers only if the author gives prior consent.]

Pockets

Another unique feature that allows users to build their own mini-libraries inside the library is called Pockets. Pockets are collections of titles the reader builds on his or her own terms by adding books to previously created libraries, which the user can name, describe, and make public only if approved by the editorial team. The reason users cannot automatically make Pockets public is because when we initially allowed this feature in the first group of users (university students), who tested the platform in a focus group, we realized that most Pockets (created over the course of several days) were not complete, not helpful to other users, and not well written or organized. For this reason, we opted to allow Pockets to be public (i.e., visible to other users) only when they were created by partners and educators who our editorial team would help build useful, subject-oriented Pockets that would serve as educational tools or have mass appeal (e.g., Healthy Eating during Pregnancy; Great Fiction with Strong Female Leads; English-Language Classics

Everyone Should Read in Their Lifetime; Biographies of Great Scientists; Pivotal Moments of the Twentieth Century; Managing Personal Finances).

These mini-libraries are a great way for readers to deepen their understanding of certain topics, authors, or fields and for those that make them public (e.g., influential authors, organizations, libraries) to showcase their knowledge of a subject, provide recommendations, or draw attention to certain themes, people, or events. Users may add titles to their Pockets while browsing or when visiting each publication's unique page. Below the cover of each title, the user always has two options: to read the text or to add it to a Pocket (either an existing one or a brand-new one). If a user wants to make a Pocket public after investing time and effort into it, they can send it to editorial for consideration. If approved, that user's Pocket becomes visible to all users in the library.

Profiles

There are four types of Profiles in the platform. The first is the User Profile, which is always private and visible only to the user; when visiting their Profile, the user is able to see all of their reading activities, opened titles, and created Pockets. The remaining three Profiles are usually public and visible to everyone. They are the following:

- **Partner Profiles**—The Profiles of those sponsoring the library. This is the space partners use to promote reading via their own prebuilt Pockets. These can be highly customized to include a unique top image, the logo of the sponsor, a brief statement about the organization, and a link to its website. Their goal is to allow partners as much exposure as possible by giving them a corner in the library where they can actively participate in the promotion of reading.
- **Educator Profiles**—The Profiles of teachers, professors, and other educators interested in engaging a targeted group of users, usually their students, by creating Pockets specific to various classes or coursework.
- **Public Figure Profiles**—The Profiles of highly influential persons, such as well-known authors, who use the library to promote their work or the work of other writers. These Profiles have mass appeal because they have the celebrity element, which attracts large followings.

Analytics

Measuring reading activities and gaining insight into how the platform is used form a crucial component of

the OCOL idea. The focus, of course, is not on collecting the users' personal information (reader privacy is guarded every step of the way) but on providing publishers, authors, libraries, and partners with valuable information about where interest lies and how best to monetize it. Publishers are, of course, most interested in knowing which of their own titles and authors are receiving the most attention and where, while sponsors and partners are most interested in knowing how many people at any moment are reading or using the library and where they are located (this helps them determine the value of their promotional and marketing activities and the return on investment of participating in *edutising*). Reports provided to participating publishers, authors, and sponsors include the following information:

- popularity of each title and or author (This can also be determined by the OCOL Impact Score, discussed in chapter 4.).
- performance of individual Channels in the library compared to overall reading statistics
- popularity of specific publication types (e.g., novels, short stories, columns) and of specific subjects and genres within categories or Channels (e.g., fiction, history, performing arts)
- parts of the country where the most reading takes place, clearly identified by city, county, specific

location, or event (Note: No personal information is provided about readers, not even if they access the platform through their social media accounts, which would make it relatively easy to obtain such information.)

- time of day, week, or month when most reading takes place

Reading reports provided to publishers, authors, and sponsors are one part of the role and value of analytics. Others include built-in algorithms designed to assign value to publications via the OCOL Impact Score (more on its design and purpose in chapter 4), which is visible to all users at all times, and some advanced features that allow the internal team to track reading activities and monitor protection of the books (e.g., information about how many users log in anonymously vs. via social media or personal e-mail; types of books downloaded for offline reading and the frequency of those downloads; the frequency of public notes inside certain titles; etc.). The main goal here is not only to ensure that the platform stays stable and its content protected from any inappropriate or threatening activity but also to preserve the integrity of the library, which is to be used freely by anyone but which is designed in a way that asks every user to do their part and read both responsibly and respectfully.

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?

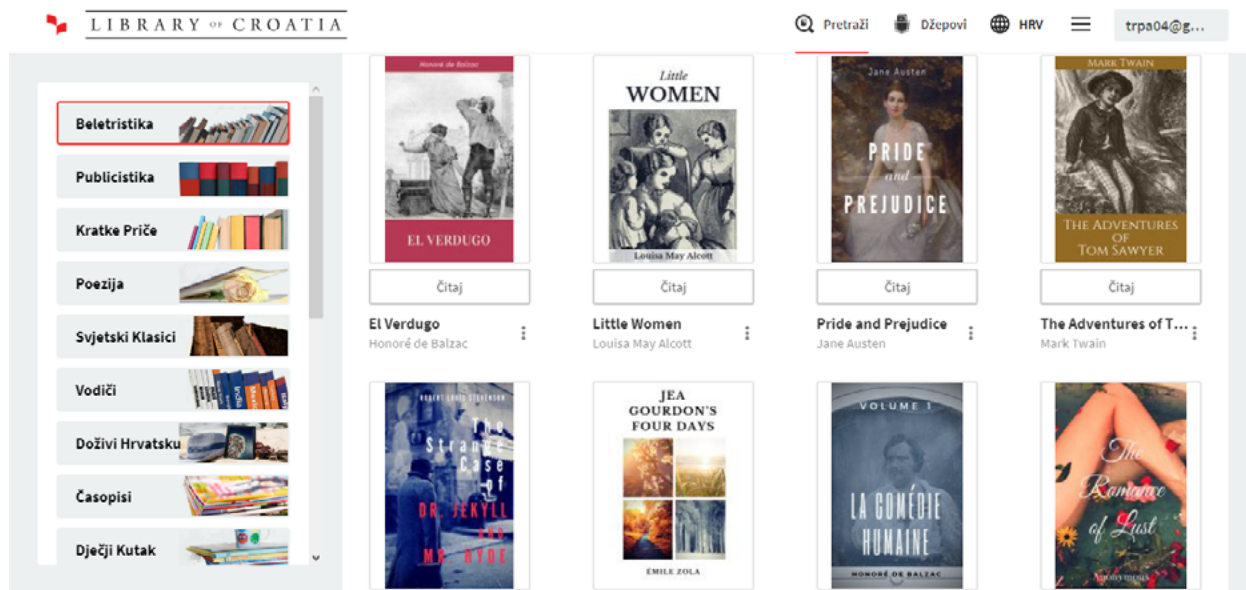


Figure 3.1
Browsing publications inside Channels

- 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 pre-defined 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.

Publishers and Authors

While the importance of a superior user experience is paramount, including a sophisticated reading app and a wide variety of innovative features available on the OCOL platform, the library's most valuable asset is its content. The more quality books and publications make up the library, the higher its value. That's why it is crucial to build a strong foundation with publishers and authors and create attractive business models that would encourage them to participate and make their content available in the platform.

To create a sustainable business model for participating publishers, many things had to be considered, particularly those that elucidate the state of the publishing industry in Croatia and its overall trends. Those questions allowed us to think long and hard about how to fairly compensate publishers and authors by giving them good reason to participate, while ensuring that the platform can be functional and sustainable in the long term. Perhaps most important: the platform needed to serve as proof to publishers and authors that their *modus operandi* and print sales would not be negatively affected by the availability of digital counterparts of their content in the platform. While this could not be guaranteed, there were ways to structure the business model so that their risk was minimal, while the potential to gain valuable insight and increase sales was significant. Before coming up with the proposed model, the following needed to be considered:

- How many popular (nonacademic) books are published in Croatia every year?
- How many scientific (academic) books are published in Croatia every year?
- How many children's books are published in Croatia every year?
- How many books overall are sold in Croatia every year in print?
- What categories of books sell the most in Croatia?
- Which publishers sell the most in the country?
- What types of books sell the most, including categories of both fiction and nonfiction?
- How many publishers are there in Croatia given its relatively small size?
- Do they publish exclusively in the native language, or do they also publish in other languages?
- How many publishers have EPUB versions of e-books?
- What times of the year do books sell the most in Croatia?
- What bookstores are the most lucrative in Croatia?
- How well do foreign-language books sell in Croatia?
- What is the most popular language sold?
- Is there an archive or institute in Croatia that digitizes public domain titles and hosts them on a widely available platform (like Project Gutenberg)?
- How many public domain titles in Croatia exist in PDF versus in EPUB?
- How many academic journals are there in the national online repository? How many stand-alone academic articles are there in this repository, and what is their overall quality?
- Are e-textbooks popular in Croatia, and are publishers investing in them?
- How many books are sold in total in Croatian bookstores?
- How many books exist for circulation in Croatian libraries?
- How do publishers sell to libraries?
- How much money do Croatian publishers get from the government (via various stimulus packages)?
- What are currently the top twenty best-selling books in Croatia (native and foreign)?
- What is the information literacy level of Croatian citizens compared to those in other countries?
- What is the average price of an academic book and of a trade book in Croatia?

- What is the biggest bookstore in Croatia, and how many books approximately does it hold?
- What is the average number of books read by a person in a year?
- How many Croatians buy books online and have them shipped to their home address?
- How many Croatians buy e-books online and read them on their mobile devices?
- How much does it cost an average publisher to publish a book in Croatia (including the cost of editorial and production), and what print sales are needed to recoup this cost?
- What is considered a best-selling book in Croatia? (How many copies must be sold in a given year?)
- How many books are self-published in Croatia and through which channels?
- How well do self-published books (in any format) sell in Croatia?

Business Model

When the OCOL project was first unveiled to the publishing community (inside and outside Croatia), it was described in various brochures as follows:

- Publishers are paid for a one-year license to open a collection of e-books for reading.
- Publishers get live streams of each book's performance and Impact Score 24/7.
- Publishers may use detailed reports to predict revenue opportunities and increase print sales.
- Publishers compete by investing in the book's measurable online impact.
- Publishers get paid for participating directly from sponsorship funds, payable immediately after they are received from sponsors.
- Authors get invaluable insight into each book's performance.
- Authors connect with readers on a deep level.
- Authors and publishers may use readers' public notes to get useful feedback.
- Authors may use the book's Impact Score to attract new deals with publishers.
- Authors and publishers may use the book's Impact Score in promotional and marketing activities.

Some of the key parts of the agreement between OCOL and participating publishers included the following details of the nature of the partnership and the mission of the project:

- The OCOL platform enables the creation of open digital libraries in countries around the world through the use of geographic coordinates. People who access open digital libraries are identified through geographic coordinates to be inside the

country's physical borders.

- The platform serves to enable access to popular and academic literature, stimulate learning via tools for students of all ages, encourage discovery of emerging independent authors, and connect readers with similar interests.
- The platform has been developed to support the One Country One Library initiative, whose purpose is to bring books and other content in digital format to people in various geographic areas, including rural and isolated areas.
- The company provides participating partners around the world, which may include public, academic, or special libraries or library associations; nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); and private entities in the business of digital publishing, digital libraries, and distribution of digital content, with a license to use the platform and its technology and make its core collection of content open for digital reading to users in the country of their operation (in the case of the first pilot, Croatia).
- The platform and the platform content, which includes books, textbooks, short stories, journals, articles, and other reading and educational materials in digital format, are available in multiple languages via agreements with participating publishers and distributors and may be accessed by users of open digital libraries on personal computers, smartphones, and tablets.
- The reading of the platform content is supported and enabled by participating local and government sponsors—that is, organizations, corporations, and businesses that act as official sponsors of open digital libraries.
- The content owner (i.e., publisher or copyright holder) therefore grants to the company a non-exclusive right to display, market, and make available for digital reading its licensed content to users of the platform immediately after the company's partners have received funds from the sponsors in that country.
- OCOL warrants that it will make licensed content available for digital reading to users of open digital libraries (in this case, the Library of Croatia) only after the agreement with the sponsors in each participating country has been fully executed and payment has been received.

To summarize, participating publishers need to commit to the project for a year (most agreements involving digital content are for two years), they get a flat fee for a collection of titles to be open inside the library per country, and they will be paid in advance the full amount for one year soon after the funds from the participating sponsors are secured. After the year is up, publishers can evaluate the impact of their titles

in the library and decide if they want to continue participating for another year. As an example, Publisher A may give LoC a collection of 100 titles, each priced at \$10 per year (which means the publisher gets \$1,000 for participation for one year), and regardless of how the titles sell in print (and whether they sell at all), they all have the same starting value (\$10). Twelve months later, when the contract is up, both the library and the Publisher A evaluate the impact of the 100 titles.

One scenario may be that only 10 percent of the titles get read a lot, while most get read little or are not opened at all by users. Another scenario may be that all 100 titles are read at various times in varying quantities. How the two parties wish to continue their partnership beyond year one and under what terms is up to them. They may renew the contract for a lot more for the same collection, or the library may offer compensation only for the titles that had the highest Impact Score and the publisher may agree to leave the other titles in the library without additional compensation (which allows them continued exposure). It is important to note here that publishers and authors get more out of the library than the participating fee. The library serves as a powerful tool for them to evaluate how their content is being read and where and to see if older content, particularly, which has not been selling in print or may not even be available for sale, may get a new life in virtual environments and lead to new revenue streams. It is also important to note that LoC will not pay publishers based on any percentage read, but after the first year of participation, the

publisher can ask a lot more for the titles that had a high Impact Score. Publishers are always paid up front for participation. This allows the library to control its own operation costs on a yearly basis.

Technical Aspects

Given my previous work with publishers on projects involving digital platforms and libraries, I was well versed in what to expect in terms of the types of files, their quality, and the technical issues or obstacles that might come up along the way. I knew that for established English-language publishers with a lot of experience in the digital arena, it would not be complicated to handle the transfer of the files after the signing of the contract. The technical part of the deal was rather simple: publishers were to deliver all files in EPUB format (the platform is not compatible with PDFs), and with each EPUB file they would also supply an ONIX file (which includes all relevant metadata) and a cover (in JPEG format). We gave publishers and book distributors information about the location of our FTP folder, where they would upload their files.

However, this proved to be a greater challenge with local Croatian publishers than initially realized. Many did not have EPUB files of their titles (only PDFs), and they had little or no knowledge of ONIX or the importance of metadata. The problem with not having EPUBs meant that we had to convert the PDFs into EPUBs, as that was the only way to get the titles into the library (since the publishers did not plan to

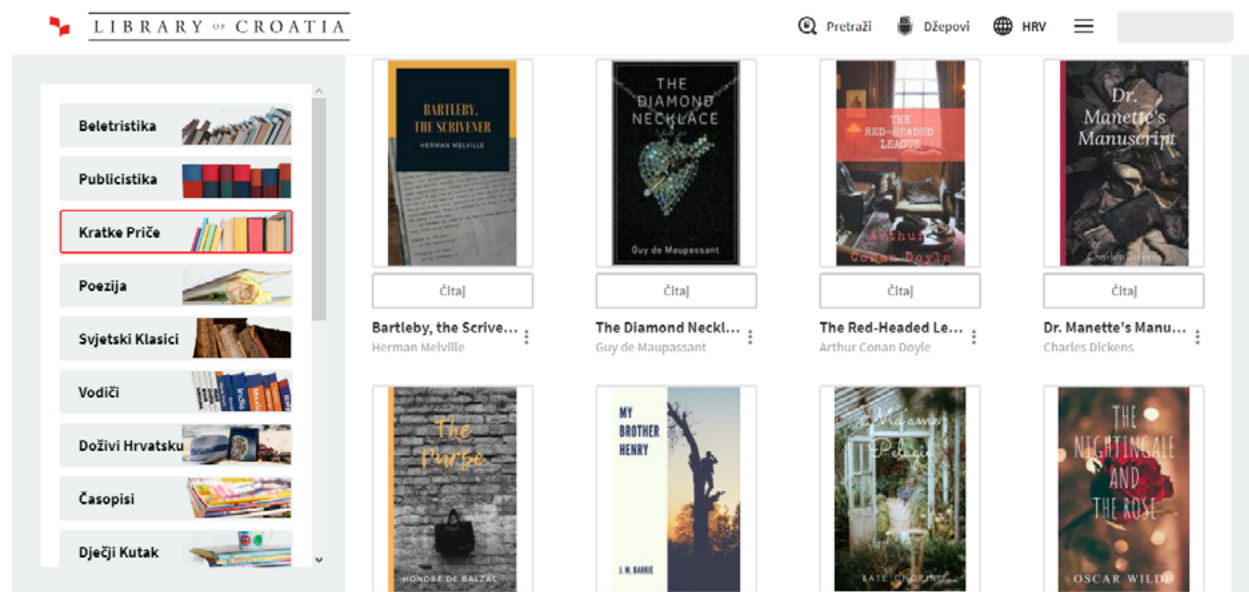


Figure 4.1
Sample book page

spend additional money for this task). We therefore had a digitization expert on the team whose role was to digitize available PDFs as professionally as possible. Since this took significant time and effort as well as our own resources, we carefully vetted the content to select the titles worth our time and effort. Next, since no publisher that worked with us in Croatia was able to supply ONIX files, we asked them to supply relevant information in an Excel spreadsheet, which we then used to manually add titles to the library. This also took a great deal of time and energy.

The publishers that were not able to provide ONIX files with relevant metadata information were asked to submit the following information in an Excel spreadsheet (which helped us to place each title in appropriate subjects as well as Channels in the library and to determine each title's digital rights details):

- author
- title
- subtitle
- publisher
- publication year (of digital version)
- language
- BISAC (as many codes/categories as necessary; many books have more than one)
- territory rights (for all licensed content; in the case of LoC, this field says "Croatia")
- ISBN
- disclaimer (for four content types: public domain, open access, licensed, self-published)
- description of the title for the book page

Self-Publishing

As the phenomenon of self-publishing grows, more and more public libraries are providing services to indie authors. This has especially been a trend in the United States and Canada in recent years. On the academic side of the digital spectrum, university libraries have been investing in digital repositories, which host the published work of their own professors and researchers. Outside libraries, the number of aspiring writers publishing their own work continues to skyrocket. The OCOL platform is designed to capture the self-publishing phenomenon by adding a self-publishing component to help local aspiring writers in various countries get the attention they seek and possibly deserve. While there is an editorial filter in place that monitors all publications uploaded into the platform (unknown authors cannot upload their own literature without going through an admissions process), indie authors are encouraged to publish their unpublished work in the library as self-published authors. Once submitted, the content needs to pass three filters designed to protect everyone in the process: editorial (each publication must be written and presented professionally), technical (each publication must be packaged properly and delivered in the right format), and legal (each author must confirm in writing that the work they are submitting is their own and take legal responsibility for publishing it under our terms in the library).

Every regular user of the library, when going into their own user dashboard, can click on a "Publish your work" icon to submit a file for review. The same rules

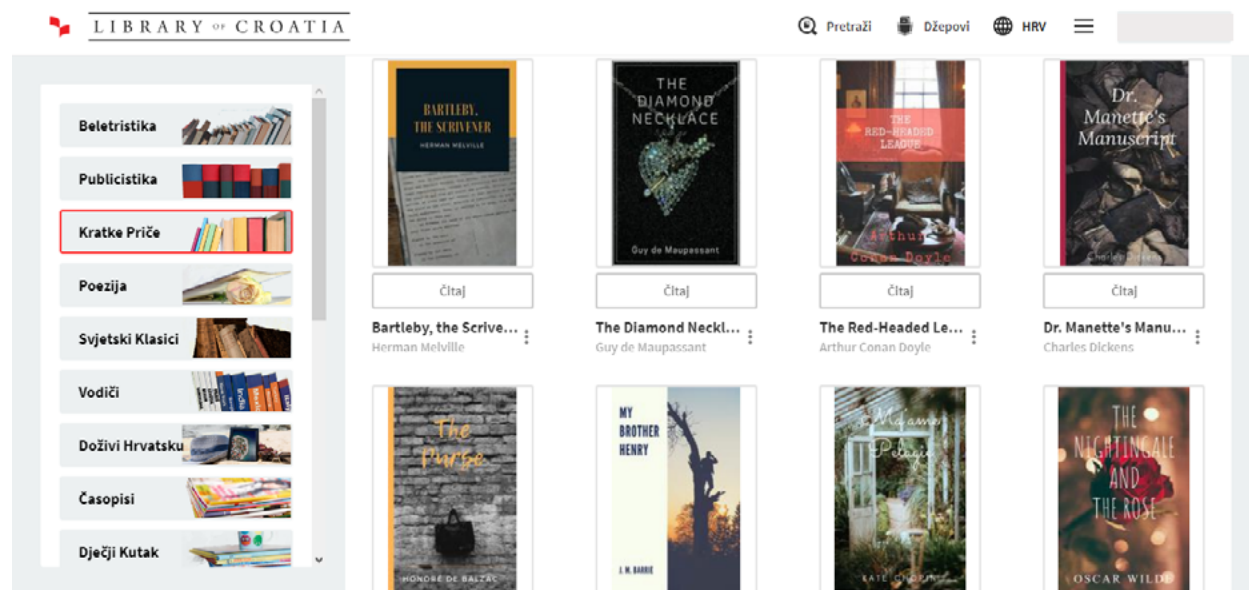


Figure 4.2
Short stories as stand-alone publications

apply to them as to publishers that upload titles in bulk via our FTP folder. They must fill out a number of fields about the publication they are submitting so that if it is approved, it will automatically receive a page that looks the same as other publications in the library.

The OCOL platform encourages aspiring writers not only to submit book-length fiction and non-fiction but to also consider submitting short stories. The Short Stories Channel inside the library was designed for this purpose. It features a wide range of short stories by well-known or completely unknown authors that are presented as stand-alone titles that also receive Impact Scores. At launch, this Channel already included hundreds of short stories in the public domain by a wide range of authors from all over the world, which the OCOL team designed to look like all other EPUBs with unique covers. I am especially fond of this Channel, as it takes the format of the short story to a new level. It may also be a good place for not-so-avid readers to begin their reading journeys. Setting aside forty minutes to read a short story by Émile Zola or simply using the time a reader spends on the train on the way to work to read may be an empowering experience to a person who wants to read more fiction but hardly finds the time.

Impact Score

OCOL Impact Score (which changes its name depending on the library; in the case of LoC it's called LoC Impact Score) is presented to users in percentages and located on the publication page of each title. It shows the value of all reading materials in the platform (which include books, articles, journals, magazines, short stories, guides, brochures, etc.) based on user activities. In short, the more users engage with a certain publication, the higher its LoC Impact Score. If a publication gets an Impact Score of 17 percent, for example, that means it is in the top 17 percent of publications in terms of reader engagement and that 83 percent of publications available for reading in the library are used less than this publication.

An Impact Score is also assigned to individual readers (visible only to them) so that they can see how much they are reading in comparison to other users of the platform. The simple idea here is to promote reading and encourage users to continue pursuing knowledge and information on their own terms and according to their own interests and agendas.

The Impact Score is explained to publishers and sponsors as follows:

- The platform's algorithm monitors all reader activities, giving authors and publishers insight into each title's performance in each participating country.

- A score is assigned (and continuously updated) to each title, popular and academic, resulting in an accurate measurement of its online impact.
- A score is assigned (and continuously updated) to each reader, resulting in an accurate measurement of his or her engagement with the available literature.
- Various criteria are taken into consideration that determine each title's impact: number of downloads, pages or percentages read, pages reread by the same user, average time spent reading, number of highlights and bookmarks for each title, the presence of readers' notes (private or public marginalia), and sharing activities on social media. (For security purposes, users are allowed to share only three percent of any title on social media.)

To determine the impact value of each piece of reading material in the library, the following are taken into consideration:

- portion of the text read (based on page views as rendered on the user's screen)
- time spent reading (including first-time reading as well as rereading of certain parts)
- amount of user activity (including bookmarks, highlights, notes, and sharing)
- number of downloads (pertaining to entities inside a collection that users may export, including open access titles)
- number of times users visit the title page showing initial interest

This Impact Score affords a number of benefits for those who use the platform or participate in the OCOL projects. Not only does it help the internal team and the publishers determine how to renegotiate the terms of agreement after the first year is up (publishers may be in a position to ask for significantly more money per title for parts of the collection that performed well—the score is a reliable proof of value here), it allows the publishers to gain valuable insight into the interests of readers in particular subjects or authors per territory. Since publishing is a territorial industry and translation rights have always been sold per country (or language), the publisher is able to predict more accurately where there may be interest in promoting the print book and investing in translating it into the local language. In the case of LoC, if a book does well in the first year and has never been available in Croatian bookstores in the original language (or translation), the publisher has concrete evidence that it should direct its sales activities toward particular territories.

Likewise, the publisher may use the Impact Score to determine if the books that are read a lot lead to decreased sales of their print counterparts. This

controversial topic has been the subject of numerous papers, presentations, and book and library conference panels over the past decade. While many studies have investigated the impact of freely open digital resources on publishing, it still remains largely unclear whether opening books in digital format freely to users would be linked to decreased sales. I remain highly suspicious of this claim and believe that it may actually lead to increased sales. This opens up another discussion, which is not the subject of this report and should continue to be examined at great length: do print and digital versions of the same title ever really compete with each other, or is this fear groundless and the result of the publishers' unwillingness to experiment with business models enough to reach conclusive results?

The fact is, we still do not know. What we do know, and see persistently, is that pirated content is massively available online, and very few books are not available for free download on illegal sites. So publishers and authors already know this to be a major issue that remains largely unsolved (not even the most sophisticated DRM technologies are fully able to protect digital content from being pirated; I examined this phenomenon extensively in my previous Library Technology Report on Digital Rights Management). What we don't know is how to remedy the problem. OCOL proposes to be the solution to the problem with a "vaccine approach." In other words, we compete with the virus by becoming immune to the virus. We compete with pirated sites by investing in open digital libraries that will open content to people in safer ways for all, legally. Not only will they promote reading and reward content creators, open digital libraries like OCOL are able to provide a better user experience than pirate sites.

By closely examining the Impact Score of each title within each territory and comparing it to the print sales of the same book or publication in the same territory and in the same time period, the book industry may finally get some clues into whether opening content online actually leads to loss of revenue for publishers and authors.

In addition, the Impact Score is also beneficial to

sponsors because it shows them what types of literature are most popular in the territories where they are trying to make a tangible connection with the users and potential customers. While they will not know who reads what, they will know, for example, that in the country of Croatia, top categories being read include X, Y and Z, in what regions and cities they are read, when and where, which will allow them to consider how they wish to engage such users within the library and the kinds of Pockets they choose to create. The whole country, in fact, stands to gain a lot by understanding what happens when an open digital library is freely available to its citizens and tourists for twelve months. We may be surprised to discover, for example, that Croatians read heavily in English and that they gravitate toward certain subjects more than others (e.g., when it comes to fiction, they prefer drama over thrillers, and the numbers reflect that).

Lastly, the Impact Score is greatly beneficial to self-published authors as they can use it as proof that what they are producing has an audience. If a self-published author trying to secure a contract with a publishing house, for example, publishes two short stories (which our editorial team approves) on the platform and each story gets a score that places it in the top 20 percent of what was read in the library for a few consecutive weeks, that same author has a great argument to take with them to a meeting with a publisher, pointing to the Impact Score as proof that the publisher is likely to get a good return on investment because the author's writing has already been tested on the market.

These are just some of the benefits of the Impact Score; there are more, and they will become more apparent over time. It is by no means perfect, and it does not represent the full picture, only the picture of the library through its users, who will, of course, never include every single person in the country, but it does point us in a new direction and gets us to think about whether the way to increase people's interest in reading is by eliminating all barriers standing between the reader and the text and creating optimal conditions for them to want to visit this type of library and become a regular user.

Libraries and Partners

Much about OCOL leads one to think that this is a philanthropic project that aims to create optimal conditions for people of all backgrounds hailing from every corner of the country—vastly developed urban areas and isolated rural areas—to be able to have access to education, culture, and knowledge. It certainly isn't the first. For decades, many different organizations have been engaging in projects that tap into the power of technology to equalize access to knowledge. While it is true that the underlying mission of OCOL is to equalize access and opportunity (the platform accomplishes this on several levels, equalizing not only readers but also publishers, small and big; authors, known and unknown; and libraries, well endowed and barely keeping their doors open), it also recognizes that in order to create a sustainable approach, business models must be put into place that make sense for everyone.

Every side of the book ecosystem must be given its fair share. Users will be invited to read and learn, without a setup and without personal information being extracted to sell to third parties. Publishers and authors will be encouraged to participate by (a) getting some compensation and (b) getting the kind of exposure that may lead to more revenue streams. Educators will want to participate because they will be giving their students valuable tools to be used for learning, free of charge to them. And, finally, sponsors (those who take the burden of paying for the platform's upkeep as well as the cost of reading) must be given a strong argument for why participation in this project gives them a new way to promote their brand, reaching new users while preserving the integrity and the interests of all involved. The fact is, without the influx of sponsorship funds, a project like OCOL cannot be sustained.

One thing that needs to be clarified about sponsorship is the decision to not call those that finance the project sponsors (although, in essence, that's what they are). The word *sponsorship* is often associated with donations to projects that would not be realized



Figure 5.1
Image used for invitation to events presenting LoC

without the good will of a large, powerful organization willing to step in. At least this is the case in Croatia. When one visits the websites of various corporations in Croatia and clicks on Sponsorships, one immediately encounters subheadings like “donations” and “social responsibility” and sees that various education and culture projects are often supported in their communities by local corporations seeking ways to gain the trust of the public. They usually donate a sum of money, and their logo is displayed where necessary to show to the public that their funds enabled a certain project or event. Public libraries, in particular, are no strangers to donations from community corporations. OCOL tries to raise the bar higher by giving potential sponsors the opportunity to be not passive donors but

active participants. Hence, they are officially called partners of the project, not sponsors, and the benefits to becoming a partner are many.

Sponsorship Defined

As was the case with the business model for publishers, a number of questions needed to be asked in order to determine the types of sponsorships offered and the business model that would make sense to those willing to come on board as official partners of the library. These questions would eventually guide us in the direction of developing the concepts of “educating” and three types of partners. And since many already gave significant donations to Croatian libraries, we needed to understand the library market and ways in which funds that would be potentially given to LoC might or might not intersect with the funds for various public and academic libraries. We therefore needed to know the answers to these questions:

- How many libraries are there in total in Croatia, public and academic?
- How big is the print collection of the largest Croatian library in the capital city of Zagreb?
- How many cities and towns in Croatia do not have any kind of library?
- How much money do Croatian libraries spend on buying new books?
- How much money do top corporations set aside in Croatia for sponsorship of various cultural and educational activities?
- What are the top ten private sponsors in Croatia? What industries are they in?
- What companies and organizations in Croatia have a history of supporting literacy, reading, libraries, and books in general?
- How many universities and colleges are there in Croatia?
- How many academic institutes are there in Croatia?
- How many people in Croatia currently have a library card?
- How much are public libraries visited and used in Croatia?
- What is the state of digital piracy in Croatia?
- What is the average circulation of a book in Croatian libraries? How many times is an average book checked out, on average, per year?
- How many people attend universities in Croatia (on average, at any time)?
- How do the biggest Croatian universities rank in the world and within the EU? How do their libraries compare?
- How much money do universities spend on library resources?
- How much on average do public libraries spend on their resources? What percentage goes to print versus digital resources?
- What are the most attended public events in Croatia, including book fairs, film festivals, concerts, Advent festivities, and so on?

After taking a closer look at the market we chose for our pilot and getting some concrete answers to these questions, it became evident rather fast that we'd be dealing with several types of potential partners that we needed to approach for sponsorship funds:

- **Government partners**—These included various government entities like the Ministries of Tourism and Education, various city government entities, and mayors' offices. They also included libraries that wanted to participate by allocating their own digital funds to the project and taking an active role within the platform (without needing to develop their own for their own patrons).
- **Educational partners**—These included various schools and universities, private and public, that wanted to join the library as partners, with the goal of using it for educational purposes and to encourage learning and sharing of knowledge among their students as well as to support their own employees, particularly professors and scholars, in publishing their work. These institutions, as part of their partnership package, might partner with LoC to digitize their own publications or the publications of their faculty and make them widely available.
- **Corporations**—These include a wide range of private companies: large or regional banks, insurance companies, technology companies, and any type of corporation actively engaging in marketing and advertising activities online in an ongoing effort to attract attention to its brand or services.
- **Tourism and hospitality industry**—This includes mostly hotel chains and government organizations dealing with tourists and visitors to the country. They were given a separate category because their target user is not a citizen but a foreign person visiting the country for a specific, usually brief, period of time. His or her needs are different from those of the users who are permanent residents. Therefore, this type of partnership has some unique aspects, depending on how far these organizations (e.g., a well-known hotel chain, the National Tourist Board) are willing to go to fully engage and impress the tourists with innovative services.
- **Small businesses**—These includes private cafés, bed-and-breakfasts, and other types of small businesses in the hospitality industry that are interested only in small groups of people visiting their properties.

The OCOL platform is designed to offer three partnership types, although only the first one was offered when the platform was unveiled to the public as the others would require more IT investment. Each of these three partnerships may be exclusive (more expensive) or nonexclusive (less expensive), and they can last anywhere from three months to a full year. Therefore, long, exclusive partnerships were the most expensive, while short, nonexclusive partnerships were the least expensive:

- **Public partner**—Everything the partner does in the library or places inside the library is seen by all users, regardless of where the users are geographically.
- **Location partner**—Everything the partner does in the library or places inside the library is seen in specific locations (e.g., only inside hotels of a large chain and on their premises).
- **Event partner**—Everything the partner does in the library or places inside the library is seen only by users attending specific events (e.g., a film festival in a specific town, the Advent in the city's center).

The partner's benefits are diverse, and they depend on a range of factors. Since this part of the project needed to be learned through experience and through trial and error, we decided to treat each potential partner on a case-by-case basis, but in general, this is how the main partner benefits were communicated to interested parties:

- Greet readers upon entry into the app.
- Support a project committed to spreading reading and literacy.
- Show innovative approaches to marketing and advertising. (This is where the concept of “edutising” comes in.)
- Show responsibility toward their communities.
- Support the spreading of knowledge beyond urban areas.
- Support cultural and educational segments of the society.
- Support the country's efforts to stimulate lifelong learning.
- Reach large numbers of users, including residents and visitors.
- Receive visibility inside the platform without invading reading.
- Have an opportunity to tie their brands to culture and education.

Several partner benefits were presented to interested parties and classified into two groups: inside-library benefits (including main greeting, embedded ad, and partner Profile) and outside-library benefits (web marketing, on-site marketing, PR campaign, and analytics). The benefits were described as follows:

- **Main greeting**—Greet users entering the platform on all devices and in all public spaces with a custom message showing your logo. In the web version, the greeting appears in the upper right corner for a few seconds and disappears; in the mobile version, the greeting displays across the

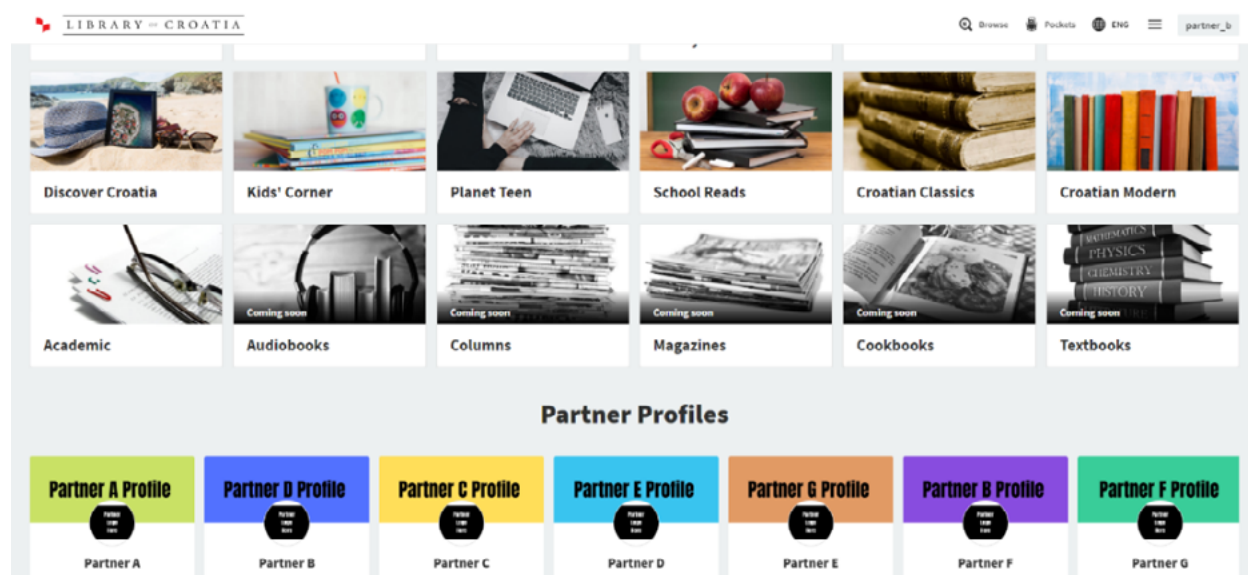


Figure 5.2
Location of partner Profiles on home page

entire screen before the reader enters the library.

- **Embedded ad**—Display company logo and relevant information inside the platform, linking to your LoC Profile. The purpose is to display the company logo and text that stays intact during browsing. The banner ad prominently displaying the logo and description of the partner's business is never shown in combination with another logo of another participating partner.
- **Partner Profile**—Actively promote publications relevant to your business via your own partner Profile, prominently displayed on the home page. The Profile includes custom image, logo, a block of customizable text, link to the partner's website, and a unique URL (e.g., www.libraryofcroatia.com/nameofpartner).
- **Web marketing**—Display authorized LoC badge on your organization's website, pointing to your Profile and advertising partnership with LoC.
- **On-site marketing**—Display authorized marketing materials in your organization's offices to promote official partnership with LoC to customers and your target audience in nonvirtual environments.
- **PR campaign**—Receive public recognition during LoC's PR campaign, including exposure in media channels, with your logo and company mentioned as the official partner in LoC's press materials.
- **Analytics**—Receive valuable insight via detailed reports showing reading habits, behaviors, and interests of users without compromising their privacy.

The Roles of Libraries

Where does this leave libraries? Are they to act as mere partners in this project and receive the same benefits as all others without any special visibility or credit? Is OCOL an attempt to build a national library that would directly compete with the national library that has existed for decades, possibly centuries? If one chooses to look at this from that perspective, one will easily come to that conclusion. That, however, is not the intention. First and foremost, OCOL, or in this case, LoC, is a digital library that has no physical, brick-and-mortar counterpart in any shape and form. It is a platform that utilizes technology to reach large groups of people. And technology allows us to blend roles and possibilities in ways we couldn't imagine just a couple of decades ago. It is not national on purpose but by default. If an app may be accessed by any person anywhere inside the country, it automatically means the library has a national appeal. Further, technology allows us to combine types of libraries into one multipurpose entry point.

OCOL attempts to show how this is possible by

unifying the needs of various users and eliminating unnecessary barriers (e.g., library cards, proof of residence). Further, it shows how to be the great equalizer. As mentioned before, OCOL equalizes users, authors, and publishers because all content is available in the same place and the playing field is leveled. Everyone gets the same chance, from the same starting point. More than this, OCOL equalizes all libraries, so that the national library in the city center has the same power in terms of its holdings as the small rural library on an island. Physical libraries have and will always have a strong, important purpose in their communities. The goal of open digital libraries is to do what they cannot, in ways that transcend zip codes, library cards, and various other proofs of belonging.

Public and academic libraries should certainly be partners in this project, but they can also launch similar projects on their own by using OCOL as the blueprint for their own undertaking. It is up to them to decide how active a role they want to play. As is already the case, some libraries have been proactively participating in transformative digital projects around the world, while others continue to trail behind. Some will have the resources and manpower to engage in large-scale national projects (and many already do) without needing to rely on new ideas and concepts such as OCOL. For many others, however, OCOL points the way. It shows them the path forward and inspires them to think outside the box and get the general public excited about the idea of an open library.

At its core, the OCOL idea will hopefully lead to people reading more because (a) it will be easy to access reading materials, (b) they will enjoy the new process and the new idea of an open library without restrictions, (c) they will appreciate that their privacy is guarded, as it always is in public libraries, and (d) they will be inspired to learn more and become life-long learners eager to uncover new worlds in silence and away from the constant bombardment of social media.

Future Prospects

If there is one thing the world learned in 2020, in light of the unprecedented circumstances brought about by the presence of the COVID-19 virus, it is that we live in challenging times despite having access to information as never before in the history of mankind. We also now live in times that require us to shift many daily activities online, not by choice but by necessity (including working online, attending classes online, visiting libraries online, etc.). On the one hand, we have made great strides on just about every digital front; on the other, we continue to struggle to understand how best to use technology for the benefit of readers everywhere. Libraries are at the forefront of

the digital revolution as they awaken to the importance of providing open access to quality information and research. OCOL by no means provides all the answers. It is an informed suggestion on how libraries may want to move forward—by joining forces with others to embrace the idea of open beyond unnecessary borders and restrictions and developing platforms that are able to simultaneously serve the needs of various users and patrons.

Much of what is proposed here will need to be tested to get a better idea of what works well and what needs more fine-tuning. Likewise, some features and possibilities were suggestions that were not included in the first phase of development but put on the wish list. And this list grew over time and many items need further consideration, including, for example:

- child mode, which allows users to filter out the content that may not be appropriate for children
- achievement/award system (allowing users with high Impact Scores to benefit in specific ways, not yet defined)
- the ability to create a type of scrapbook, allowing users to create their own books by dragging chunks of content (or entire chapters) into a newly created e-book (visible only to them. Note: the app must be able to recognize when a chapter from a book has been taken out and placed into this scrapbook so when and if the reading takes place, the reader knows where it's coming from. For copyright reasons, the scrapbook would remain visible only to the user and creator.)
- accessing all licensed books outside the participating country for a period of time so that tourists and visitors can finish their reader (and not be denied entry when they leave the country)

- local sponsorships that allow small business to participate (Their messages would be visible only to users in small, targeted locations.)
- the inclusion of multimedia, including audiobook files, podcasts, video lectures, and even gamified fiction

Over the course of many months, the OCOL team reached out to a wide range of potential partners, while simultaneously engaging in conversations with publishers, both local and regional. While we were successful in securing contracts with a number of mainstream publishers, local and global, while also populating the library with OCOL's own public domain and Open Access content, we were not successful in securing sponsorships from Croatian organizations. The sudden arrival of the coronavirus crisis in early 2020 played a role in delaying our efforts, but it also allowed us to take a break from the incessant conversations with potential partners in various fields and industries and let the feedback we had received sink in.

In retrospect, OCOL was and remains the most ambitious project I have embarked on in my career. I learned a great deal along the way of just how complex it is to attempt to build an open digital library of this magnitude, even if it covers only a small country the size of Croatia. I am proud of the many simplicities the library offers, as well as some unique features (particularly the concept of edutising, public marginalia, library-as-publisher, and the Impact Scores assigned to titles and readers), but I also recognize that some aspects need more testing and consideration. If we are soon able to activate the platform—either in Croatia or in any other region or territory interested in the concept and the idea in other parts of the world—the next phase of the learning journey begins. And it's been a remarkable journey so far.

Notes

Library Technology

R E P O R T S

Upcoming Issues	
November/ December 56:8	Consolidation of the Library Technology Industry by Marshall Breeding
January 57:1	Visualizing Digital Collections Data with R by Monika Glowacka-Musial
February/ March 57:2	Mobile Technology in Libraries by David Lee King

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