

# Information about the European Union in an acceding country: A survey of needs and information seeking behavior of public library users in Croatia

Sanjica Faletar Tanacković,  
Dino Radmilović and Boris Badurina

University of Osijek

Information Development  
2017, Vol. 33(2) 133–152  
© The Author(s) 2016  
Reprints and permission:  
sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav  
DOI: 10.1177/0266666916640029  
journals.sagepub.com/home/idv



## Abstract

This paper presents an exploratory study whose aim was to investigate selected aspects of information needs and information seeking behavior related to the European Union (EU) by public library users in an EU acceding country. Research questions addressed the importance of European information for respondents, types and context of EU information needs, and various aspects of the information seeking process (e.g., information sources consulted, obstacles encountered while seeking information). The findings revealed a high need for information about the EU and relatively low level of knowledge about the EU among the respondents. The results indicated that respondents required different types of EU-related information, mainly for personal reasons because they wanted to better understand the European Union in general and its effects on their everyday lives. The majority of respondents preferred readily available sources to access EU information, such as the Internet and TV/radio. Libraries and official EU publications were rarely used. When searching for European information, the majority of respondents faced the same problems as respondents in long-established EU countries: they struggled with the large amount of information related to the EU and they had difficulties in where to look for EU-related information. This is the first study of EU information needs and seeking behavior in an acceding country, and the findings are expected to be of interest to European administrations charged with the development of effective communication policies, national authorities in EU candidate and acceding countries, and information professionals in general.

## Keywords

European Union, information sources, public library users, information needs, information seeking, Croatia

Submitted: 27 November, 2015; Accepted: 29 February, 2016.

---

## Major rethinking of European Union information and communication policy is needed.

---

## Introduction

Ever since its inception, the European Union (EU) as a cultural, social, economic, and political union has put significant effort into the promotion of active citizenship and communication with citizens in order to explain its functioning and policies. The right of all citizens to be informed about EU issues has a legal basis in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Prutsch 2015). Over the years, EU

member states and candidate countries have set up a number of information networks and initiatives, such as European Documentation Centres, EU Information

---

### Corresponding author:

Sanjica Faletar Tanacković, Department of Information Sciences, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Osijek, Lorenza Jaegera 9, 31000 Osijek, Croatia.  
Email: sfaletar@ffos.hr

Corners, Depository Libraries, Euro Info Centres, Innovation Relay Centres, Info-Points Europe, Europe Direct, Europa, etc., to foster trust in the European project (Overy and Davies, 2010). However, recent surveys show that the general public still feels uninformed about the institutions, policies, and activities of the European Union. For example, 52% of citizens across the EU that participated in a study conducted in 2014 said they did not know how the EU worked, while 70% thought citizens in their country were ill-informed about European matters (Eurobarometer 2014). A recent crisis of confidence across the EU showed that it still struggles with the development of an adequate information and communication infrastructure and has not been successful in closing the communication gap between the Union and the citizens. Therefore, in October 2014, a call for a new 2015–2019 communication plan was issued and European institutions were asked to develop a new communication strategy to reconnect the people with the European project (Rouillon 2014).

A number of studies have been launched over the last three decades to map and assess EU information provision and use in member states. In order to contribute to the existing body of professional literature and expand current knowledge, a major study was launched in Croatia. While all previous studies related to EU information focused on the long-established member states, this study was conducted in an acceding country. It was believed that citizens in an acceding country might require different types of information than citizens who have lived in the EU for many years, and that they might face different challenges in finding and using information about the EU. With that in mind, the results obtained in this study were, when possible, compared to earlier studies in other European countries.

## Literature review

The topic of European Union information provision and its uses first attracted the attention of academic researchers in the mid-1980s (Hopkins 1985; Hopkins and Bingham 1987). The number of studies on this topic gradually increased over the next couple of decades as the EU information infrastructure developed and the network of EU information units diversified. However, the professional literature on this topic was still relatively scarce and its analysis revealed that scholars addressed two important aspects of the phenomenon. On the one hand, they

explored patterns of EU information provision and the operations of different EU information units, such as European Resource Centres, European Information Relays, and European Documentation Centres (Thomson 1992; Marcella and Parker 1995; Kelly and Nicholas 1996; Marcella, Baxter and Parker 1997; Cooper 1999). On the other hand, a number of authors focussed on EU-related information needs and uses of European citizens, mainly in the United Kingdom (UK) (Marcella, Baxter and Parker 1997; Sargent, Parker and Marcella 2000; Marcella 2001; Cousins and Muir 2002; Terra 2010; Gonzalez and Terra 2013). Studies in this latter group employed various methodologies (e.g., print and online surveys, interviews with librarians and users, document analysis), targeted different user groups (e.g., public library users, users of European Documentation Centres, women) and studied varying sizes of samples (e.g. 53 respondents in Cousins and Muir's study, 179 respondents in Marcella's study in 2001, 234 respondents in Terra's study). However, some general trends and insights could be identified, at least in respect to the level of actual or potential need for EU information, motivations for using EU information, required topics (thematic areas) of EU information, the use of different information sources, and challenges faced by respondents in searching for EU information.

One of the earliest studies into EU information needs was conducted by Marcella, Baxter and Parker among public library users in the UK (1997). They found that 28% of their respondents had actively sought EU information in the past. The most significant categories of EU information users were students and younger respondents. Subsequent studies in long-established EU countries confirmed a need for EU information among respondents, in particular of academic users (Sargent, Parker and Marcella 2000), and predicted an increased need for EU information in future (Marcella, Baxter and Parker 1997, Marcella 2001).

Several studies investigated the respondents' perception of how important EU information in their life was and how informed they perceived themselves to be in relation to EU matters. Both in Marcella's (2001) and Gonzalez and Terra's study (2013) the majority of respondents (58.1%) believed that EU information was important for them, either in their professional than personal life. While in Marcella's study 47.5% felt that they were not well informed about the European Union, in yet another UK study,

conducted in the East Midlands to find out if citizens knew enough about the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) to make an informed decision in a referendum on whether the UK should join the European single currency, 38% felt that they knew enough about the euro to vote in the referendum study (Cousins and Muir 2002). Interestingly, in the most recent survey of information on European matters, the majority of respondents (70%) considered that citizens in their country were ill-informed about European matters but they were slightly more positive about their personal knowledge of EU matters (Eurobarometer 2014).

Motivation for the use of EU-related information varied across studies, depending in most cases on the sample. In studies that surveyed academics and students (i.e., users of EDCs located at universities), the main reason was academic work (Sargent, Parker and Marcella 2000; Terra 2010). The majority of respondents in Marcella's study (2001), which was conducted among women, required EU information to better understand the functioning of the EU (as opposed to solving a problem or making a decision), and they encountered a need for such material most frequently in the following life situations: employment/professional role (46.9%), education (29.6%), and business environment (23.5%). In relation to the subject interests and types of information sought, studies identified a wide variety of thematic categories of information. However, the preference for information related to employment and social affairs, business activities, education and training, legislation/regulations, EU institutions and activities, funding opportunities, the environment, and human rights/equal opportunities seemed to predominate (Marcella, Baxter and Parker 1997; Marcella 2001; Gonzalez and Terra 2013).

Although a solid preference for electronic resources and quality EU information available on the Internet was noted in several studies (Sargent, Parker and Marcella 2000; Marcella 2001; Terra 2010; Gonzalez and Terra 2013), the main sources used by respondents when searching for information on the European Union varied across studies. In general, academic users of EDCs believed that the best sources of EU information were documents published by the EU or available on official EU websites. These respondents especially used libraries (academic and public) and documentation centers (EDCs, Euro Info Centres) to obtain the required information (Terra 2010; Gonzalez and Terra 2013). On the other hand,

while European agencies (and their publications) were recognized as the best source of EU information by respondents in studies focusing on the general public and public library users when actively searching for material on the EU, respondents in these studies most frequently consulted readily available sources such as television, radio, and newspapers (Cousins and Muir 2002; Eurobarometer 2014). Interestingly, while the great majority of respondents (public library users) in Marcella, Baxter and Parker's study (1997) viewed their public libraries as a natural source of EU, in Cousin and Muir's study (2002), which was also conducted in a public library, only one respondent would go to the library for materials on the EU.

Finally, in several studies, respondents were asked to identify hindrances to using the EU information. Evidently, the most frequently reported problems are the same across studies. Respondents indicated the large quantity of EU information, not knowing where to look for and how to find EU information that is suitable for their needs, and difficulties in understanding EU terminology as the most important reasons that made accessing EU information difficult (Marcella 2001; Terra 2010; Gonzalez and Terra 2013).

## The study

In order to explore the public library users' information needs and patterns of information seeking behavior related to the European Union, a national study was launched in Croatia on the initiative of the authors. The aim was twofold: to investigate the role of public libraries in the provision of EU information and to explore citizens' attitudes, information needs, and patterns of information seeking behavior in relation to the European Union in a candidate country, which completed accession negotiations in 2013.

The data was collected during a 60-day period preceding July 1, 2013, when Croatia became a full member of the EU. The period from May through June 2013 was chosen because in that period Croatia was undertaking final preparations for its upcoming full membership in the European Union. Also, it was believed that by that time, the citizens would have already had the chance to establish their opinions and attitudes toward the EU, to experience intensive need for EU-related information, and to familiarize themselves with the sources of EU information. Also, this was believed to be the period when Croatian citizens would actively seek not only general but also more specific EU-related information.

The survey results are expected to be of interest to the European administration charged with the development of effective communication policies, to national authorities in EU candidate and acceding countries, and to information professionals in general. In this paper only results pertaining to public library users' information needs and information seeking experiences regarding the European Union will be presented.

### Research questions

The study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. How knowledgeable are public library users in Croatia about the European Union?
2. Is EU information important to public library users in Croatia?
3. What types of information (thematic areas) related to the European Union are required by public library users in Croatia and for what purposes do they require it?
4. How do public library users in Croatia search for EU information?
5. What challenges do public library users in Croatia face in that process?

The authors also aimed to identify factors (demographic characteristics) that influence the needs for and seeking behavior related to EU information. When possible, results obtained in this study were compared with earlier studies conducted in long-established EU countries.

### Methodology

Since the study was exploratory in nature and the large number of respondents from across the country had to be recruited, a survey by questionnaire was chosen to be the best method for data collection. The questionnaire consisted of 26 questions: 21 content questions (open questions, multiple choice questions, and Likert-like scale type questions) and five demographic questions (gender, age, educational background, working status, place of residence). It was piloted with six randomly chosen respondents (public library users), following which several minor changes were made. These changes were related to the phrasing of the questions. The survey questions, in line with the research questions, could be grouped into the following thematic sets:

- questions related to the citizens' profile (age, gender, education level, work status);
- questions related to the citizens' knowledge about the EU and importance of EU information;
- questions related to the citizens' need for EU information (thematic areas of interest, nature of their need, and life situations in which they required EU information); and
- questions related to the citizens' access to, seeking and use of EU information (information sources used, important aspects of EU information, facilitating and hindering elements), as well as barriers to information.

After written approval from library directors was obtained, the researchers mailed 620 copies of the print questionnaire to 41 of a total of 204 public libraries across Croatia. The selection of libraries included in the survey was done in the following manner: a set of 20 copies of the questionnaire was sent to each of the 21 largest public libraries (in all Croatia's counties, and in the city of Zagreb), and 10 copies of the questionnaire were mailed to 20 public libraries in the smallest communities in these counties. Librarians were asked to distribute the questionnaire to their users at the check-out desk. It was hoped that such an approach would help to attain as representative a sample as possible. A total of 465 valid completed copies of the questionnaire were returned (recall 75%). Closed question data was analyzed using SPSS software for statistical analysis. Open questions were coded and analyzed manually. Cross tabulations and bivariate statistics (Pearson Chi-Square tests) were used for the assessment of relationships between demographic and content variables.

In order to get a better picture of respondents' knowledge and perceptions of the European Union a series of Likert scale questions were designed. For ease of reading in the text the combined percentages are given (e.g. for Very Important/Important and Unimportant/Very Unimportant) and all data are provided in tables.

## Results

### General information about respondents

As can be seen in Table 1 the sample was varied in terms of gender, age, educational level, work status and place of residence. The majority of respondents were female (61.9%) and most frequently they were between 20 and 29 years of age (35.2%) In relation to education and work status, the largest proportions of

**Table 1.** Respondents by demographic characteristics.

	N	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	174	38.1
Female	283	61.9
Total responses on gender	457	
<b>Age</b>		
Under 20	59	12.8
20-29	161	35.2
30-44	136	29.7
45-54	50	10.9
55 +	52	11.3
Total responses on age	458	
<b>Education</b>		
High school degree	212	45.9
University degree	250	54.1
Total responses on education	462	
<b>Work status</b>		
Retired	31	6.8
Employed	216	47.3
Unemployed	70	15.3
Student	140	30.6
Total responses on work status	457	
<b>Place of residence</b>		
Urban	377	87.7
Rural	53	12.3
Total responses on residence	430	
Total responses overall	465	

the respondents had a university degree (54.1%) and were in paid employment (47.3%). Most copies of the questionnaire (87.7%) were filled out by respondents in large urban cities and only 12.3% in smaller communities that could be denoted as rural.

### *Knowledge about the European Union*

When asked to assess their level of knowledge about the European Union, and in particular about Croatia's accession process, the majority of respondents self-reported a relatively low level of knowledge about specific EU-related information (Table 2). Respondents indicated a higher level of knowledge about Croatia's accession process (26.8%) than about the EU in general (19.6%). This is expected since in the period when the data was collected, Croatia's accession process was covered extensively by all local media. The relative lack of success of the public information campaign conducted in Croatia by the EU during that period could perhaps be measured on the basis of the answers provided by the respondents to

the last statement on this question. When asked about their knowledge of the impact of Croatia's membership in the EU on their personal life, only 27.8% of respondents stated that they were informed about it.

To measure their objective knowledge of the European Union, respondents were asked to provide answers to the following questions: "When will Croatia become a full member of the EU?" (Answer: July 1, 2013); "For which EU body did Croatian citizens elect their representatives in the recent EU elections?" (Answer: EU Parliament); "Which city is informally considered to be EU's capital since the largest number of European institutions is located there?" (Answer: Brussels); and "Will Croatia become a part of Schengen area automatically with its full membership in the EU?" (Answer: No). Despite an intensive promotional EU campaign during the period when the survey was conducted, only 22.4% of the respondents gave correct answers to all four questions. If the results for respondents' self-assessment, as shown in Table 2, and results for their objective knowledge about the EU are compared, it can be concluded that they were rather accurate and honest in their self-assessments.

### *Importance of EU information*

When asked how important information about the European Union is to them, almost a half (43.6%) stated that it was important and just under a fifth (18.5%) stated that information about the EU was not important to them. A relatively large proportion, however, (38%) could not decide whether EU information was important or not important to them (Table 3). In relation to this question, statistically significant connections were not found with any of the demographic variables.

In order to shed more light on their perceptions of the European Union, respondents were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement (on a Likert-like scale) with a set of EU-related statements as shown in Table 4. A substantial proportion of respondents expressed relatively positive general feelings toward the European Union. Slightly more respondents were worried about Croatia's joining the EU (40.3%) than agreed that joining the EU was a positive development for Croatia (36.6%). Respondents believed less frequently that membership in the EU would positively impact their personal life (37%) than their professional life (52.8%). While less than a third (31.5%) thought that joining the EU would resolve the

**Table 2.** Knowledge about the European Union.

Knowledge about EU	Fully Informed N (%)	Informed N (%)	Do Not Know N (%)	Uninformed N (%)	Totally Uninformed N (%)	Total
EU institutions and activities	21 (4.8%)	65 (14.8%)	171 (39.0%)	113 (25.8%)	68 (15.%)	438
Croatia's accession process	28 (6.4%)	89 (20.4%)	182 (41.6%)	89 (20.4%)	49 (11.2%)	437
Impact of EU membership on personal life	27 (6.1%)	97 (21.7%)	195 (43.7%)	70 (15.7%)	57 (12.8%)	446

**Table 3.** Importance of EU information.

Importance of EU Information	Very Important N (%)	Important N (%)	Do Not Know N (%)	Unimportant N (%)	Very Unimportant N (%)	Total
	57 (12.8%)	137 (30.8%)	169 (38.0%)	51 (11.5%)	31 (7.0%)	445

**Table 4.** Attitudes toward European Union.

Attitudes toward EU	Fully Agree N (%)	Agree N (%)	Do Not Know N (%)	Disagree N (%)	Fully Disagree N (%)	Total
EU membership is a positive thing for Croatia.	38 (8.4%)	127 (28.2%)	171 (38.0%)	67 (14.9%)	47 (10.4%)	450
EU membership will positively impact my personal life.	36 (7.9%)	132 (29.1%)	155 (34.2%)	87 (19.2%)	43 (9.5%)	453
EU membership will positively impact my professional life.	49 (11.0%)	186 (41.8%)	132 (29.7%)	48 (10.8%)	30 (6.7%)	445
In EU Croatia will lose its sovereignty and independence.	56 (12.4%)	81 (18.0%)	138 (30.6%)	122 (27.1%)	54 (12.0%)	451
EU membership can help Croatia in solving economic problems.	21 (4.6%)	122 (26.9%)	153 (33.7%)	107 (23.6%)	51 (11.2%)	454
I am worried about Croatia's joining the EU.	50 (11.1%)	131 (29.2%)	136 (30.3%)	102 (22.7%)	30 (6.7%)	449

country's economic problems, slightly more than a third (34.8%) did not think so. This shows that respondents were rather objective and rational and that many did not believe that joining the EU is a panacea for the country's financial challenges. It is interesting to note that the highest number of respondents (39.1%) gave negative responses in relation to the statement that in EU Croatia will lose its sovereignty and independence. Overall, relatively high proportions of respondents (in some questions up to 38%) chose the "Do not know" option in this question, which suggests that they did not form a concrete opinion on these issues yet.

On examining responses to this question, it was established that gender, place of residence, and the

work status of respondents, rather than their educational level or age, in most cases, influenced significantly their perceptions of the European Union. In Table 5, as in similar cases throughout the paper, only those variables for which statistical significance was identified, were included. It is interesting to note here that retired respondents were more positive about EU membership in general (EU membership is a positive thing for the country) than students and the unemployed. However, students and the unemployed were more positive about the impact of EU membership on their professional life. A less positive attitude toward the impact of EU on their lives by respondents in rural areas could probably be explained by less intensive EU promotional campaign in smaller places because

**Table 5.** Attitudes toward EU – significance tests.

Attitudes toward EU	Work status (Mean)				F	p
	retired	Employed	unemployed	student		
EU membership is a positive thing for Croatia.	3.58	3.18	3.00	2.96	3.106	0.026
EU membership will positively impact my professional life.	2.83	3.31	3.34	3.64	5.702	0.001

  

	Gender (Mean)		t	p
	M	F		
EU membership is a positive thing for Croatia.	3.27	3.01	2.406	0.014

  

	Place of residence (Mean)		t	p
	Urban	Rural		
EU membership will positively impact my personal life.	3.11	2.70	2.540	0.011

majority of EU information dissemination activities took places in large cities. Also there is a difference in opinion between men and women: men have a more positive attitude toward Croatia's membership in the EU.

### *The need for EU information*

In the third research question, the information needs of respondents were investigated. This section of the questionnaire sought to explore what types of information (thematic areas) related to the European Union are required by respondents and for what purpose do they require it. The majority of respondents (61.9%) reported that they required EU information at least once in the last 12 months.

The respondents who stated that they encountered the need for EU information at least on one occasion in the past year were then asked in more detail about the topic and nature of their information need. In relation to thematic areas of the required EU information, the respondents reported a wide variety of categories of information, selecting all responses that applied to them from a list of predetermined categories. As shown in Table 6, the largest proportion of respondents looked for the following EU-related information: impact of EU membership on Croatia's economy (61.8%), employment opportunities in Europe (58.4%), impact of EU membership on everyday life of citizens in Croatia (58%), education in European countries (53.9%), and statistical information and information about living conditions in EU member states (49.7%).

**Table 6.** Thematic areas of required EU information.

Thematic Area	N	%
Impact of EU membership on Croatia's economy	181	61.8
Employment opportunities	171	58.4
Impact of EU membership on everyday life	170	58.0
Educational opportunities	158	53.9
Member states: statistical information, living conditions	145	49.7
Impact of EU on Croatia's political scene	133	45.4
EU institutions and activities	127	43.5
Human rights/Equal opportunities	124	42.5
Mobility in the EU	115	39.4
Regulations and legislature	115	39.4
Croatia's accession process	114	38.9
Consumer matters/Workers' rights	110	37.4
Funding opportunities	109	37.2
EU taxation and customs	108	36.9
Environment	93	31.7
Social policy	78	26.5
Corruption and organized crime	77	26.3
Businesses and economy	74	25.2
Health care	74	25.2
EU market	56	19.2
Science and research: projects, funding	44	15.0
Forestry, fishing, & maritime affairs	42	14.4
Something else	42	14.4
Total	465	100

Upon examination of responses to this question, in relation to respondents' age, gender, educational level, work status, and place of residence, some noticeable and yet some unsurprising statistically significant

**Table 7.** Thematic areas of required EU information – significance tests.

	Gender (%)		$\chi^2$	p
	M	F		
Employment opportunities	49.5	64.1	5.876	0.015
Educational opportunities	40.2	61.9	12.731	0.000
EU institutions and activities	35.5	47.8	4.113	0.043
Funding opportunities	28.0	43.1	6.504	0.011
EU market	25.2	15.6	4.058	0.044
Science and research: projects. funding	21.5	10.5	6.530	0.011

  

	Age (%)					$\chi^2$	p
	- 20	20-29	30-44	45-54	55 +		
Employment opportunities	80.6	72.6	50.0	48.1	22.6	35.496	0.000
Educational opportunities	87.1	65.1	47.9	40.7	16.1	40.192	0.000
Member states: statistical information. living conditions	71.0	59.4	43.8	48.1	16.7	24.096	0.000
Mobility in the EU	54.8	52.8	32.3	22.2	16.7	22.905	0.000
Businesses and economy	9.7	35.8	19.8	18.5	29.0	12.626	0.013

  

	Education (%)		$\chi^2$	p
	High school	University degree		
Impact of EU membership on Croatia's economy	68.6	57.1	3.948	0.047
Employment opportunities	65.3	53.7	3.862	0.049
Impact of EU membership on everyday life	66.9	52.0	6.466	0.011

  

	Work status (%)				$\chi^2$	p
	retired	employed	unemployed	student		
Employment opportunities	33.3	48.3	69.8	75.9	22.455	0.000
Educational opportunities	6.7	44.4	51.2	82.3	44.708	0.000
Member states: statistical information. living conditions	26.7	44.7	51.2	64.6	11.689	0.009
Mobility in the EU	20.0	28.5	47.6	59.5	24.463	0.000
Corruption and organized crime	53.3	23.2	37.2	21.5	9.963	0.019

  

	Residence (%)		$\chi^2$	p
	Urban	Rural		
Employment opportunities	61.9	36.7	6.992	0.008
Impact of EU membership on everyday life	62.8	33.3	9.540	0.002
Social policy	28.0	10.0	4.487	0.034
Health care	27.6	10.0	4.317	0.038

differences were found (Table 7). For example, interest in information regarding employment opportunities in the EU was expressed predominantly by students, by the unemployed, by respondents under the age of 20 and by urban dwellers. Finding employment is generally one of main information and existential needs of students, unemployed and young people and these findings do not come as a surprise.

In order to understand the nature of their need for EU information, in the next couple of questions, the respondents were asked to indicate in which life situations they encountered a need for EU information and for what purposes they required it. The first question was based upon Dervin's typology of life situations in which individuals may feel a need for information (Dervin 1976). The largest proportion of respondents



**Table 8.** Context in which EU information was required – significance tests.

	Gender (%)					$\chi^2$	P
	M	F					
Education or professional development	18.5	31.1			8.788	0.003	
To understand better	20.7	30.4			5.180	0.023	

  

	Age (%)					$\chi^2$	P
	- 20	20-29	30-44	45-54	55 +		
Professional reasons	3.4	17.4	19.3	18.0	7.7	11.347	0.023
Education or professional development	18.6	39.4	25.7	14.0	7.7	29.139	0.000
Solving a concrete problem	0.0	5.6	11.8	4.0	1.9	13.466	0.009
Curiosity	16.9	22.5	12.5	6.0	9.6	11.812	0.019

  

	Education (%)		$\chi^2$	P
	High school	University degree		
Professional reasons	6.6	22.0	21.225	0.000
Personal reasons	35.8	48.0	6.934	0.008
Education or professional development	18.5	32.4	11.509	0.001
Solving a concrete problem	3.3	8.4	5.237	0.022

  

	Work status				$\chi^2$	P
	retired	employed	unemployed	student		
Professional reasons	3.3	23.6	5.7	7.9	26.516	0.000
Personal reasons	22.6	49.5	37.1	37.1	11.869	0.008
Solving a concrete problem	3.2	9.7	4.3	2.1	9.584	0.022
Curiosity	3.2	13.0	13.0	23.6	11.863	0.008

  

	Residence (%)		$\chi^2$	P
	Urban	Rural		
To understand better	28.1	15.1	4.045	0.044

indicated that they required information about the European Union to better understand the functioning of the EU in general (26.9%). To a much lesser degree respondents sought EU information to reduce the feeling of insecurity and uncertainty about specific EU issues (9.7%), to solve a concrete problem related to EU (6%) or to make a decision regarding a specific EU issue (5.6%). Additionally, respondents provided further information about the context in which they needed the EU information. They reported that they required information about the European Union most frequently for their personal reasons when they were internally motivated to actively search for a specific piece of EU-related information (42.2%) or when they employed an undirected search for EU-related

information out of curiosity (15.3%). A quarter of respondents (25.9%) sought EU information for education or professional development reasons. Least frequently the respondents required EU information in their professional role (14.9%). In response to these questions, there were some marked differences between different groups of respondents (Table 8). For example, since women were more interested in educational opportunities (in question regarding thematic areas of required information) it does not come as a surprise that they indicated more frequently than men that they sought EU information for education or professional development. Respondents with university degree sought EU information more frequently than respondents with high school education in both

**Table 9.** Future need of EU information – significance tests.

	Age (%)					$\chi^2$	p
	- 20	20-29	30-44	45-54	55 +		
Will grow in the future	62.1	72.3	82.7	78.0	67.3	26.389	0.001
Will decrease	10.3	2.5	0.0	0.0	1.9		
Will remain the same	27.6	25.2	17.3	22.0	30.8		
	Education (%)		$\chi^2$	p			
	High school	University degree					
Will grow in the future	63.8	82.3	21.918	0.000			
Will decrease	4.3	0.8					
Will remain the same	31.9	16.9					
	Work status				$\chi^2$	p	
	retired	employed	Unemployed	student			
Will grow in the future	70	79.4	72.1	67.6	15.750	0.015	
Will decrease	0	0.5	1.5	5.8			
Will remain the same	30	20.1	26.5	26.6			

personal, professional and educational context. This can probably be explained by their more varied personal interests and more complex professional obligations. Students and young people (aged 20 to 29) are generally believed to have substantial amounts of free time and varying personal interests (unattached to work) so it does not come as a surprise that they were the two groups of respondents who sought EU information out of curiosity most frequently. While women and respondents in urban communities most frequently sought EU information in order to understand better, respondents aged 30-44, with university degree and in paid employment, most frequently required EU information to solve a concrete problem. It is not surprising that respondents in paid employment and with university degree need EU information to solve a concrete problem more frequently than other categories of respondents. Croatian institutions and companies are increasingly collaborating with those in the EU and are required to observe EU legislation and regulations in their business activities. For that reason, it could be argued that in their work individuals routinely face specific challenges and concrete problems related to the EU, which need to be dealt with. Also, it could be argued that individuals with university qualifications hold position that involve more complex relationship with both domestic and international partners.

All respondents were then asked to predict their future need for EU information. The majority of respondents (73.9%) believed that their need for EU information would grow in the future. Almost a quarter (23.7%) indicated that their needs would remain the same and only 2.4% felt that their need for EU information would decrease. The increased need for EU information was most frequently predicted by respondents aged 30 to 44 (82.7%), by respondents with a university degree (82.3%), and by respondents in paid employment (79.4%) (Table 9). These results are consistent with other findings of the actual need for EU information among respondents.

### Seeking EU information

The last two research questions investigated the respondents' process of seeking EU information and the challenges they faced in that process. First, respondents were asked how they stayed informed in general about the EU (e.g., about the most recent developments in Croatia's accession process, EU regulations and legislation, projects). Following that, respondents were asked to describe (by answering a set of questions) how they (actively) sought and used the EU information when they last encountered an actual need for it. They were also asked to indicate problems they faced in that process. In both questions, respondents could give more than one response.

**Table 10.** Acquisition of EU information.

	N	%
Accidentally through different media (TV, radio, print media, websites)	286	61.8
In casual conversations with friends and family members	178	38.3
Actively sought EU information in order to keep themselves abreast of new EU-related developments	98	21.1
Choose not to acquire information about the European Union	33	7.1
Ignored or avoided any EU-related information	14	3.0
Total	465	

The largest proportion of respondents (61.8%) indicated that they stayed informed about the European Union in general by accidentally acquiring such information through different media, either by encountering it while routinely watching TV, listening to the radio, reading print media (newspapers and magazines) or news websites. A significant proportion of respondents (38.3%) also acquired EU information in conversation with friends and family members. While 21.1% of the respondents stated that they actively sought EU information in order to keep themselves abreast of new EU-related developments, 7.1% stated that they choose not to acquire information about the European Union and 3.0% said that they ignored or avoided any EU-related information (Table 10).

In response to this question, there were some marked differences between different groups of respondents (Table 11). Women and young people tend to obtain EU information most frequently in casual conversation with family members and friends. The fact that university graduates use personal sources less frequently than respondents with high school degree is logical because they are usually regarded as more experienced users of diverse information sources. At first sight, it is surprising to see that students are the most frequent users of personal sources as a way to obtain the required EU information. We would expect them to use quality information sources. However, the use of this least effort option could be understood if we are reminded that majority of students required EU information for personal reasons.

In order to better understand their process of actively searching for information on the European Union, in this section of the questionnaire elements

of the critical incident technique (CIT) were employed. Critical incident technique relies on recollection of an actual event and has been identified as an effective research approach in user-centered studies. Respondents were asked about the sources they consulted in order to find the required EU information the last time they felt a need for it. The great majority of respondents indicated the Internet as the main source used when searching for EU information (78.7%). The Internet total is comprised of the aggregate of local news websites (25.6%), official EU websites (24.1%), Croatian EU-related websites (15.9%) and websites of the Croatian government (13.1%). Television/radio was ranked in second place (51%). Interestingly, while 32% of respondents stated that they obtained EU information from general TV/radio programs, only 18.7% of respondents indicated that they obtained EU information from a specialized TV or radio program that specifically dealt with issues related to the European Union. The print media (newspapers and magazines) were ranked in third place (27.7%) as a preferred source of information on the European Union. Of the 72 (15.5%) respondents who visited any type of the library to look for EU information 13.1% visited the local public library and 2.4% went to some other type of library (Table 12). The reason for low use of public libraries, as suggested by the results later on, probably lies in the fact that slightly more than half of the respondents thought their local libraries did not have EU information.

Upon examination of responses to this question, in relation to respondents' age, gender, educational level, work status, and place of residence, a number of statistically significant differences have been found (Table 13). For example, official EU websites were least frequently consulted by respondents over 55 and most frequently by respondents aged 20–29 and those with a university diploma. This could be explained by the fact that official EU websites present quite complex information architecture which could be challenging for older and less-educated respondents who might not have the required information literacy skills. It comes as a surprise that general TV/radio programs were least frequently consulted by retired respondents and most frequently by students. Quite the opposite was to be expected. However, as far as the students are concerned, these findings are in line with their use of other least effort sources and the context in which they required EU information most frequently (personal and not educational reasons).

**Table 11.** Acquisition of EU information – significance tests.

	Gender (%)					$\chi^2$	p
	M		F				
In casual conversations with friends and family members	31.0		43.1			6.635	0.010
	Age (%)					$\chi^2$	p
	- 20	20-29	30-44	45-54	55 +		
In casual conversations with friends and family members	47.5	44.7	37.5	34.0	17.3	14.954	0.005
Choose not to acquire information about the European Union	20.3	9.3	2.9	2.0	0.0	26.775	0.000
Ignored or avoided any EU-related information	11.9	2.5	0.7	0.0	1.9	21.229	0.000
	Education (%)		$\chi^2$	p			
	High school	University degree					
In casual conversations with friends and family members	43.4	34.4	3.920	0.048			
Actively sought EU information in order to keep themselves abreast of new EU-related developments	14.2	27.2	11.688	0.001			
Choose not to acquire information about the European Union	11.3	3.6	10.310	0.001			
	Work status				$\chi^2$	p	
	retired	employed	Unemployed	student			
In casual conversations with friends and family members	19.4	38.4	34.3	46.4	8.964	0.030	
Choose not to acquire information about the European Union	0.0	2.8	8.6	15.0	21.614	0.000	

**Table 12.** Consulted sources of EU information.

Consulted sources	N	%
Internet	366	78.7
TV/radio	237	51
Print media	129	27.7
Personal sources	109	23.4
Library	72	15.5
EU information/documentation centre	14	3.0

In order to shed more light on the relatively low use of libraries in their process of seeking EU information, respondents were asked if they ever consulted their local public library to obtain required EU information. They were also asked if they knew whether EU information could be found in their local public library.

In their search for EU information, men consulted libraries more often than women. It could probably be argued here that women were not sufficiently motivated to search for EU information, to invest the effort of visiting the library. The low use of libraries by young respondents and students is in accord with

earlier findings. Table 14 shows values for respondents who reported that they used their local public library for this purpose.

A total of 49.8% of respondents reported they knew that their public library had such material. Slightly less, 46.7% of respondents, indicated that they did not know their public library had such material. Interestingly, 3.5% of respondents reported that they knew for sure that their library did not possess EU information. By aggregating percentages for the last two answers, one could conclude that the majority of respondents (50.2%) thought their local libraries did not have EU information.

On examining responses to this question, it was established that respondents with a university degree, retired respondents and those aged 45–54 were most knowledgeable of their library's collection because they indicated most frequently that their local library has EU information. Students and young people under 20, who are often the least represented user group in Croatia's public libraries, most frequently did not know whether their public library had such materials. (Table 15).

**Table 13.** Consulted sources of EU information – significance tests.

	Gender (%)					$\chi^2$	p
	M	F					
Croatian EU-related websites	10.3	19.8			7.080	0.008	
	Age (%)					$\chi^2$	p
	- 20	20-29	30-44	45-54	55 +		
Official EU websites	15.3	31.1	26.5	22.0	9.6	13.230	0.010
Local news websites	23.7	28.6	32.4	24.0	3.8	17.020	0.002
Personal sources	22.0	29.8	27.2	12.0	9.6	13.790	0.008
	Education (%)		$\chi^2$	p			
	High school	University Degree					
Official EU websites	16.0	31.2	14.360	0.000			
Croatian EU-related websites	11.3	20.0	6.424	0.011			
Croatian government websites	7.5	18.0	10.937	0.001			
	Work status				$\chi^2$	p	
	retired	employed	unemployed	student			
General TV/radio program	12.9	30.2	37.1	37.9	8.456	0.037	

**Table 14.** Looking for EU information in local public library – significance tests.

		Gender (%)		$\chi^2$	p		
		M	F				
		42.0	29.0	8.031	0.005		
		Age (%)				$\chi^2$	p
- 20	20-29	30-44	45-54	55 +			
19,0	24,5	42,2	56,0	41,2	28.010	0.000	
		Education (%)		$\chi^2$	p		
		High school	Degree				
		24,9	42,3	15.328	0.000		
		Work status (%)			$\chi^2$	p	
retired	employed	unemployed	student				
56,7	43,1	29,9	18,0	31.017	0.000		

Respondents were then asked to provide information about the use of official EU publications, either in print or electronic format, in their most recent search

for EU information. Most frequently, respondents consulted print brochures and leaflets published by the EU (20.2%) and *The Bulletin of the European Union* (10.8%). Small proportions of respondents also used the EU treaties (6.2%), general reports on the activities of the European Union (5.4%), official journals of the European Union — L, C, and S series (5.0%), and working documents of the European Commission - COM documents (1.9%). The largest proportion of respondents stated that they did not use any official EU documents (38.7%).

In relation to this question, a small number of statistically significant differences were found (Table 16). In general, it could be said that official EU publications were most frequently used by respondents with university degrees and those in paid employment, who were most likely forced to use them as a part of their work tasks.

Based on their most recent searching experience, respondents were then asked to indicate the three most objective and reliable sources of EU information (Table 17). Keeping in mind the low use of official EU documents, it comes as a surprise that 57.6% of respondents reported that the single most reliable and objective information about the EU could be obtained

**Table 15.** Knowledge of EU information in local public library – significance tests.

	Age (%)					$\chi^2$	p
	- 20	20-29	30-44	45-54	55 +		
Yes	32.8	39.6	57.5	75.0	60.8	33.567	0.000
No	1.7	6.3	3.0	2.0	0.0		
Don't know	65.5	54.1	39.6	26.0	39.2		

  

	Education (%)		$\chi^2$	p
	High school	University degree		
Yes	38.8	59.1	19.000	0.000
No	3.8	3.2		
Don't know	57.4	37.7		

  

	Work status				$\chi^2$	p
	retired	employed	unemployed	student		
Yes	73.3	61.9	38.8	30.9	44.730	0.000
No	0.00	2.3	7.5	4.3		
Don't know	26.7	35.8	53.7	64.7		

**Table 16.** Consulted official EU publications – significance tests.

	Age (%)					$\chi^2$	p
	- 20	20-29	30-44	45-54	55 +		
EU treaties	1.7	11.8	3.7	0.0	7.7	15.418	0.004

  

	Education (%)		$\chi^2$	p
	High school	University degree		
<i>The Bulletin of the European Union</i>	6.6	14.4	7.225	0.007

  

	Work status				$\chi^2$	p
	retired	employed	Unemployed	student		
<i>The Bulletin of the European Union</i>	9.7	15.7	8.6	4.3	12.116	0.007

from EU institutions, their publications, official websites and documentation and information centres. Interestingly, almost the same proportion of respondents (58.3%) also stated that such information could be acquired in media: TV/radio, newspapers, and news Web sites. Almost a third believed that most objective and reliable EU information could be acquired through nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) (29.2%). Other sources were indicated in much lower frequencies, including national governments (12.9%), public libraries (18.7%), family members and friends (10.5%), and political parties (2.6%).

Upon examination of responses to this question, in relation to respondents' age, gender, educational level, work status, and place of residence, a number of statistically significant differences have been found (Table 18). For example, the national government was indicated as the most objective and reliable source of EU information most frequently by retired respondents and least frequently by the unemployed. Respondents with a university degree reported preference for EU institutions as a source of the required EU information, and media was indicated as the most objective and reliable source of EU information more

**Table 17.** Most objective and reliable sources of EU information.

Most Objective and Reliable Sources	N	%
Media (newspapers, TV/radio, news websites)	271	58.3
EU institutions (incl. their websites, official publications, documentation and information centres)	268	57.6
NGOs	136	29.2
Public libraries	87	18.7
National government	60	12.9
Personal sources	49	10.5
Political parties	11	2.4
Total	465	

frequently by respondents with a high school diploma than by respondents with a university degree. This could probably be explained by lower information literacy skills and limited knowledge of and access to different information sources by less educated individuals. Positive attitude toward information produced by EU institutions on the part of the employed respondents could probably be explained by the fact that their need for EU information is driven by concrete work tasks, which require official and trusted information. Interestingly, political parties were reported as the most objective and reliable source of EU information most frequently by respondents under 20. Respondents with university degrees expressed preference for EU information produced and disseminated by NGOs.

In the same context, the significance of specific aspects of the EU information was further investigated. The respondents placed similar value on the accuracy (Mean 4.71), comprehensibility (Mean 4.60), objectivity (Mean 4.44), accessibility (Mean 4.44), and currency (Mean 4.38) of EU information. All of these aspects were regarded relatively important by respondents. As slightly less important aspect of the EU information respondents indicated only its applicability to their personal situation (Mean 3.70).

Educational background is statistically significantly related to accuracy, currency, objectivity, comprehensibility, and accessibility: a stronger preference by respondents with a university degree than by respondents with a high school diploma is indicated. It could be argued that respondents with university degree are more critical users of EU information because they have better information literacy skills and are more experienced users of such information (Table 19).

In order to shed more light on the actual search process, respondents were then asked to describe problems they faced when they searched for EU information most recently (open question). While only a small proportion of respondents indicated that they did not have any problems, the majority of respondents faced multiple challenges in searching for required EU information. Surprisingly, the two challenges faced most frequently by respondents were the large amount of information related to the European Union available on the Internet and difficulties in identifying the one best place to look for EU information. Approximately one in ten respondents also had problems associated with assessing accuracy and reliability of the available information. Respondents also faced a linguistic barrier when searching for EU information because the accessible information was not in Croatian, or they could not understand it due to heavy use of specialized, technical terms. Despite these hindrances, the smallest proportion of respondents indicated that the information obtained was not useful for satisfying their need for EU information (16.8%). While a total of 39.0% felt that they obtained useful information, the majority could not decide whether they found the useful information or not (44.2%).

## Discussion

The aim of the study was to explore the citizens' perceptions, information needs and patterns of information seeking behavior and use related to the European Union in an acceding country (Croatia) and to identify any differences and similarities in relation to relevant studies conducted in long-established EU member states. This section discusses the results of the study following the structure of the research questions.

The findings, based on the print survey of 465 public library users from across country, revealed that Croatia's citizens found EU information important (43.6%); although, they felt relatively ill-informed about the EU. Only 19.6% respondents in this study thought they were well informed about EU institutions and activities, and only 22.4% respondents gave correct answers to all factographic questions relating to the EU. Also, respondents indicated that they were slightly less knowledgeable about the EU in general (its institutions and activities) than about Croatia's accession process or impact of the EU on their personal life. Similarly, studies conducted in long-

**Table 18.** Most objective and reliable sources of EU information – significance tests.

	Gender (%)					$\chi^2$	p
	M	F					
NGOs	21.8	33.9				7.591	0.006
EU institutions	51.1	62.5				5.751	0.016

  

	Age (%)					$\chi^2$	p
	- 20	20-29	30-44	45-54	55 +		
Political parties	6.8	1.2	0.7	2.0	5.8	9.865	0.043
EU institutions	42.4	63.4	60.3	64.0	46.2	11.823	0.019
NGOs	16.9	31.7	37.5	18.0	25.0	12.755	0.013

  

	Education (%)		$\chi^2$	p
	High school	University degree		
Media	67.0	51.6	11.192	0.001
EU institutions	44.8	69.2	27.013	0.000
NGOs	21.7	36.0	11.297	0.001

  

	Work status (%)				$\chi^2$	p
	retired	employed	unemployed	student		
National government	32.3	10.6	10.0	14.3	11.877	0.008
EU institutions	41.9	66.7	45.7	54.3	15.073	0.002

**Table 19.** Important aspects of EU information – significance tests.

Important Aspects	Gender (Mean)					t	p
	M	F					
Comprehensibility	4.48	4.68				-2.513	0.013

  

	Age (Mean)					F	p
	- 20	20-29	30-44	45-54	55 +		
Currency	3.98	4.42	4.61	4.15	4.33	5.408	0.000

  

	Education		t	p
	High school	University degree		
Accuracy	4.61	4.80	-2.327	0.016
Currency	4.18	4.55	-4.094	0.000
Comprehensibility	4.50	4.69	-2.431	0.012
Objectivity	4.32	4.54	-2.418	0.013
Accessibility	4.31	4.54	-2.616	0.007

  

	Work status (Mean)				F	p
	retired	employed	unemployed	student		
Currency	4.40	4.57	4.12	4.21	5.185	0.000



established EU member states reported high importance of EU information for citizens: 58.1% in the UK (Marcella 2001) and 65% in Portugal and Spain (Gonzalez and Terra 2013). However, in contrast to this study, in Cousins and Muir's (2002) and Marcella's (2001) studies, significantly more respondents (38% and 35.8% respectively) felt that they were well informed about EU matters. These findings suggest that the level of knowledge about the EU is much lower among citizens of an acceding country, despite their interest for such information, and that a more effective EU information network is needed in such countries. However, a recent survey carried out across the European Union reported that only 26% of respondents believed that citizens in their countries were well-informed about EU matters (Eurobarometer 2014). This indicates that the European Union might indeed be in need of a new communication strategy that will reconnect it with the people and possibly contribute to the end of the crisis of confidence across the Union.

Earlier studies have shown that citizens in long-established EU member states required EU-related information on a wide range of topics with emphasis on employment and social affairs, business activities, legislation/regulations, funding opportunities, education, human rights, and EU activities (Marcella, Baxter and Parker 1997; Marcella 2001; Gonzalez and Terra 2013). Although information regarding employment and education opportunities were also frequently sought in this study, unsurprisingly, respondents reported the highest preference for information related to the impact of EU membership on Croatia's economy, political life and citizens' everyday life. This preference was closely followed by statistical information and living conditions in member states and information about EU institutions and activities. In line with some earlier findings in long-established EU countries (Marcella 2001), Croatia's citizens needed EU-related information far more frequently to better understand the functioning of the Union (26.9%) than to solve a specific problem (9.7%) or make a decision (6%). While the majority of respondents in this study sought EU information for personal reasons (42.2%), citizens in long-established countries, on the other hand, required EU-related information most often in their professional role and for educational/research purposes (Sargent, Parker and Marcella 2000; Marcella 2001; Terra 2010; Gonzalez and Terra 2013). To some extent, this result could be explained by the fact that

respondents in earlier studies were mainly academic users of European Documentation Centres, which are in most cases located at universities, while respondents in the study reported in this paper were recruited from the general population. Since respondents from across studies (Marcella and Baxter 1997; Marcella, Baxter and Parker 1997; Marcella 2001) felt that their EU information needs would increase in the future, information units providing EU information should put more effort into developing their collections (print or online) around required topics to meet the specific needs of EU citizens. Evidently, in the context of an acceding country, collections of EU material should on one hand try to present the European Union in general (e.g., statistical information about EU member countries, data on their educational and health care system, information on living conditions) and describe how the EU functions (e.g., institutions, procedures, activities). On the other hand, EU material in such collections should focus on the effects of the EU policies, legislation, and practices on the everyday lives of citizens in new EU member countries.

As far as the process of searching for EU information is concerned, the study showed that the majority of respondents (78.7%) used the Internet to obtain the required information. Local news websites (25.6%) were consulted slightly more frequently than official EU websites (24.1%). In their search for EU information television and radio were used by more than half of respondents (51%). On the other hand, libraries in general and EU information and documentation centres were used quite rarely (15.5% and 3.0% respectively). Quite a large proportion of respondents (38.7%) did not use any official EU documents/publications; although, they reported that they were the second most reliable source of EU information (57.6%), following media (TV, radio, newspapers, news websites) (58.3%). These findings support the preference for the so called least effort information sources, and electronic sources of information in particular. Although preference for electronic sources in general was also established in several earlier studies (Marcella 2001; Terra 2010; Gonzalez and Terra 2013), the results of our study are in contrast with the heavy use of libraries in long-established EU countries reported in earlier studies (Marcella 2001; Terra 2010; Gonzalez and Terra 2013).

Since findings suggest that respondents in acceding country prefer familiar and easily accessible (local) information sources (news websites, television and radio), the EU administration should put more effort

into communication of EU information via these sources. Low use of libraries (public or academic) as a source of EU information for Croatia's citizens might be explained by the fact that the majority of respondents (50.2%) did not know that such information could be found in libraries. This surely makes a case for stronger marketing activity on the part of libraries.

Most respondents reported having problems in accessing EU information. The two most frequently reported challenges were the large amount of information related to the European Union and difficulties in identifying where to look for EU information. Also, the lack of required information in their native language and the technical terminology used were identified, but to a lesser degree, as important reasons that made accessing EU information difficult. On the other hand, respondents rated accuracy and comprehensibility as two most important aspects of EU information. Interestingly, the same challenges were reported by respondents in long-established EU countries (Marcella 2001; Cousins and Muir 2002; Terra 2010; Gonzalez and Terra 2013). These findings suggest that citizens across the EU are not aware of trustworthy sources of EU information in their surroundings (e.g., in local libraries) and have problems in selecting (i.e., evaluating) online EU-related sources. The large amount of online information related to the EU has obviously become a disadvantage. Evidently, an effort should be made to raise the general level of awareness among citizens as to where reliable and current EU-related information can be found and to promote already available quality sources. Also, the EU should focus its communication efforts and channel relevant information and sources not only through its official websites and publications but also via local media and other easily accessible information sources (television, radio, libraries, etc.).

## Conclusion

In this exploratory study, the first of its kind conducted in an EU acceding country, insights into perceptions, information needs, seeking behavior and use of Croatian public library users as related to the European Union were obtained. In addition, comparisons with similar studies conducted in long-established EU countries were made.

In the study, almost every second respondent reported that they perceived Croatia's membership in the EU as a positive thing in general and that access

to information about the European Union was important to them personally. In line with an earlier study conducted among EU citizens, our survey revealed a relatively low level of knowledge about the EU among respondents (e.g. Marcella 2001). In general, more respondents self-reported that they were uninformed about the European Union than that they were informed about it.

The research revealed a relatively high need for EU information: 61.9% of respondents reported that they had required information related to the EU at least once in the last 12 months. They required information about a wide range of thematic areas such as impact of EU membership on Croatia's economy, politics and citizens' everyday life, employment and educational opportunities in the EU, statistical information and information about living conditions in the EU, and information about EU institutions and activities. It is interesting to note that in most cases respondents in this study sought EU information for personal reasons (42.2%), while citizens in long-established countries, on the other hand, required EU-related information most often in their professional role and for educational/research purposes (Sargent, Parker and Marcella 2000; Marcella 2001; Terra 2010; Gonzalez and Terra 2013).

Heavy use of least effort, i.e. easily accessible information sources (local news websites, television, radio, press, personal sources) and lack of awareness and/or low use of the quality sources of EU information, in particular official EU publications and libraries, were identified. Since the majority of respondents required EU-related information for their personal reasons, with the aim of better understanding the EU's functioning and its activities and not to solve a specific problem, they might not have been motivated strongly enough to devote more time or effort to the search process. In addition, when searching for EU information, respondents were in most cases discouraged by a number of hindering factors such as the large amount of information related to the European Union, difficulties in identifying where to look for EU information, lack of required information in their native language and the technical terminology used. It is interesting to note that identical challenges in accessing EU information were identified both in an acceding and long-established EU countries. This suggests that major rethinking of European Union information and communication policy is needed.

If the EU administration aims to tackle the recent crisis of confidence across the Union and promote

active citizenship efficiently, it should stir up public interest and raise awareness about the EU project anew. Information dissemination sources should be reconsidered and promoted widely. If EU information services are to be used, they must be visible. Information should be taken to the citizens: via local news websites, television, or local libraries. Whatever meets citizens' needs best and demands least effort on their part should be employed. The format, nature, content, language and style of EU publications should also be revised and made accessible, both physically and intellectually, for the target audience. Findings of this and some earlier studies suggest that the focus should not be on highly technical information, presented in its original format, but on some kind of digested, popular publications that will increase citizens' understanding and readily answer their questions. In these communications, the native languages of citizens across Europe should be used. In addition, national governments should reconsider their part in this process and assume a more active role and partner with the EU to inform their citizens.

Despite the small sample of respondents, the limitations inherent to the methodology used (survey), and the acknowledged need for additional research to verify the results, the findings have important implications for the EU administration charged with the development of effective communication policies, national governments, and information professionals in general.

## References

- Abercrombie N, Hill S and Turner BS (1984) *Dictionary of Sociology*. London: Penguin Books, p. 377.
- Cooper M (1999) Public libraries and EU information. *Aslib Proceedings* 51(10): 346–361.
- Cousins SJ and Muir A (2002) Providing information on economic and monetary union: A case study of the East Midlands European Information Relay. *Journal of Documentation* 58(4): 396–421.
- Dervin B (1976) The everyday information needs of the average citizen: A taxonomy for analysis. In: Kochen M and Donohue JP (eds.) *Information for the Community*. Chicago: ALA, pp. 48–54.
- Eurobarometer (2014) Media use in the European Union. No 82. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb82/eb82\\_media\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb82/eb82_media_en.pdf) (accessed 4 May, 2015).
- Gonzalez YM and Terra AL (2013) Need for, demand for, and use of European Union information. *Libri* 63(4): 320–338.
- Hopkins M (1985) *European Communities Information: Its use and users*. London; New York: Mansell Publishing.
- Hopkins M and Bingham G (1987) *The Business Use of European Communities Information in the United Kingdom*. London: British Library Research and Development Department.
- Kelly A and Nicholas D (1996) The Public Information Relay: Really making EU information accessible to the general public? *Aslib Proceedings* 48(6): 151–157.
- Marcella R (2001) The need for European Union information amongst women in the United Kingdom: Results of a survey. *Journal of Documentation* 57(4): 492–518.
- Marcella R and Baxter G (1997) European Union information: An investigation of need amongst public library users in three Scottish authorities. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* 29(2): 69–76.
- Marcella R, Baxter G and Parker S (1997) The provision of European information by public libraries in the UK. *Library Management* 18(1): 7–41.
- Marcella R and Parker S (1995) European information: The pattern of provision in Scotland. *Aslib Proceedings* 47(2): 35–40.
- Overy P and Davies E (2010) *European Information: A guide to official sources*. Available at: <http://www.eia.org.uk/EUInfoGuide.pdf> (accessed 4 May, 2015).
- Prutsch MJ (2015) Communication policy. Available at: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/atyourservice/en/displayFtu.html?ftuId=FTU\\_5.13.8.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/atyourservice/en/displayFtu.html?ftuId=FTU_5.13.8.html) (accessed 4 May, 2015).
- Rouillon C (2014) A call for a 2015-2019 communication plan: Reconnecting Europe with its citizens. Available at: <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/eu-priorities-2020/call-2015-2019-communication-plan-reconnecting-europe-its-citizens> (accessed 4 May, 2015).
- Sargent C, Parker S and Marcella R (2000) The provision of European information to the academic community in university libraries: A case study of a European Documentation Centre. *New Library World* 101(1156): 161–174.
- Terra AL (2010) European information users: Topics from a comparative analysis within the European Union. *New Library World* 111(5-6): 189–202.
- Thomson I (1992) European Community information providers in the UK: The role of European Documentation Centres. *Refer* 8(1), 8–17.

## About the authors

**Sanjica Faletar Tanacković** is an associate professor at Department of Information Sciences, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Osijek, Croatia. She obtained her PhD in information science in 2009 from Zagreb University, Croatia. She participated in a number of

local and international projects such as R&D coordination action CALIMERA (Cultural Applications: Local Institutions Mediating Electronic Resource Access) funded by the European Union (2003-2005). She served as a President of the Croatian Reading Association (2006-2008). She has edited several professional monographs and conference proceedings and is a member of the Editorial Board for *Libellarium: journal for the research of writing, books, and cultural heritage institutions*. She is a co-director of the biennial international conference Libraries in the Digital Age (LIDA), which has been organized since 2000 by Rutgers University, USA, Zadar University, Croatia, and Osijek University, Croatia. Her research interests are in convergence of cultural heritage institutions, user-centered library services and human information behavior. Contact: Department of Information Sciences, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Osijek, Lorenza Jaegera 9, 31000 Osijek, Croatia, sfaletar@ffos.hr

**Boris Badurina** is an assistant professor at the Department of Information Sciences, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Osijek, Croatia. He graduated from

the University of Zagreb with BA in Sociology and PhD in information science. His research has been in a range from digital libraries development to the new technologies use, impact, and acceptance and lately social media and e-book use and perception. He is also involved in technology and system development of two NSF funded Memory Net projects at Simmons College Boston USA as well as in several online library services in Croatia like the Croatian national 'Ask a librarian' service. He currently holds courses in digital libraries development, research methodologies and theories of information society. Contact: Department of Information Sciences, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Osijek, Lorenza Jaegera 9, 31000 Osijek, Croatia, badurina@ffos.hr

**Dino Radmilović** is a graduate student at the Department of Information Sciences, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Osijek, Croatia. His research interests are in human information behaviour. Contact: Department of Information Sciences, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Osijek, Lorenza Jaegera 9, 31000 Osijek, Croatia, dradmilov@ffos.hr