



BRIDGING ACADEMIA AND SOCIETY: CULTURAL-EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AS SITES OF AI LITERACY - A PILOT MODEL FROM SERBIA

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Abstract:

Artificial intelligence is already altering how knowledge is accessed, produced, and evaluated, yet the spaces in which its broader educational and cultural implications can be meaningfully discussed remain limited. Conversations about AI tend to take place either in technical circles or within formal academic settings, leaving open a practical question: where can educators, young people, and the wider public engage with these changes in ways that are both intellectually demanding and accessible? This paper examines the scientific-professional program *Limits and Possibilities: AI in Education, Culture, and Society*, implemented at the Belgrade Youth Center (BYC) between February and October 2026, as an attempt to address this gap. As a cultural-educational institution with a longstanding role in public learning, the BYC provided a setting in which discussions of AI could move beyond expert discourse and become part of a broader conversation. Organized through six thematic areas—from pedagogy, language, literature, and translation to digital safety, ethics, and the social consequences of technological change—the program approached AI as a question unfolding across disciplines and contexts. Rather than treating AI literacy as a technical or professional skill, the paper positions it as a cultural and civic competence that requires spaces for interpretation, questioning, and connection to everyday experience. Its contribution lies in conceptualizing cultural-educational institutions as mediating environments between research communities and the public sphere, capable of sustaining interdisciplinary dialogue that formal systems often struggle to maintain.

Keywords:

AI literacy, Public Humanities, Cultural-Educational Institutions, Interdisciplinary Learning, Serbia.

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence has entered education with remarkable speed and very little pause for reflection. Students use it, teachers negotiate it, institutions attempt to regulate it. What does it actually mean to understand AI in educational and societal terms? The conversation often moves quickly to issues of efficiency, integration, or risk, but much more rarely to the question of how such a technology should be interpreted, discussed, and critically situated within the broader landscape of knowledge, culture, and public life. Part of the difficulty lies in where these conversations take place. Discussions about AI are still largely contained within two familiar environments.

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On the one hand, there are technical and specialist domains, where the focus remains on development, performance, and innovation. On the other, there are formal educational settings, where AI is approached through curricula, training, or classroom application. Both are necessary, yet neither fully addresses the growing need for spaces in which AI can be examined as a complex social, cultural, and educational phenomenon, accessible not only to experts, but to those who encounter its effects in everyday life.

This shifts the problem from access to understanding. If AI is already shaping how knowledge is produced, communicated, and trusted, where do individuals develop the capacity to engage with it critically? Not simply to use it, but to question it, interpret it, and understand the conditions under which it operates. In this sense, AI literacy begins to appear less as a technical competence and more as a form of cultural and civic understanding.

Recent scholarship has moved in this direction by expanding AI literacy to include ethical, social, and critical dimensions. Even so, most efforts to develop it remain situated within formal educational structures [1] [2] [3] [4]. Much less attention has been given to institutions that operate between education and public life, particularly those capable of translating academic knowledge into forms that are accessible for wider audiences.

This paper examines the scientific-professional program *Limits and Possibilities: AI in Education, Culture, and Society*, implemented at the Belgrade Youth Center between February and October 2026, as a case through which that gap can be explored. More precisely, it asks what becomes possible when discussions of AI are structured as interdisciplinary public dialogue and opened to those outside specialist communities. As a cultural-educational institution, the Belgrade Youth Center provides a setting in which academic expertise, professional practice, and public concerns can meet in ways that are less common within formal educational frameworks.

The paper proceeds from a simple claim: cultural-educational institutions can function as sites of AI literacy. Their significance lies not only in making knowledge available, but in creating conditions in which it can be interpreted, questioned, and related to lived experience. If AI is already reshaping how knowledge is produced and communicated, then the issue is no longer only whether education will respond, but where that response can meaningfully take place.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Recent scholarship makes it difficult to treat AI literacy as a narrowly technical competence. Early already emphasized that it includes not only understanding and use, but also evaluation, creation, and ethical reflection. One foundational review defined AI literacy through four broad dimensions (knowing and understanding, using and applying, evaluating and creating, and ethical issues), thereby linking it directly to judgment and responsibility [5]. More recent approaches extend this view. Some scholars describe AI literacy as encompassing ethical, social, and policy-related dimensions [6], while others propose structured models as the seven-dimensional “AI literacy heptagon,” which integrates technical, critical, social, and legal aspects [7]. These approaches shift the focus from defining AI literacy toward organizing it as a multidimensional educational construct.

The issue is no longer whether students and teachers can use AI tools, but how they understand their role, limits, and consequences. Empirical work shows that project-based AI literacy education supports not only problem-solving, but also metacognitive and ethical awareness [2], while research on educators frames AI literacy as a professional competence that includes interpreting AI outputs, adapting them to pedagogical contexts, and evaluating their reliability [3]. At earlier educational stages, it is increasingly approached as part of general learning, combining conceptual understanding, data awareness, and interaction with AI systems [4]. Across these contexts, AI literacy appears less as a discrete skill and more as a developmental process that connects learning, teaching, and curriculum design.

In addition, an important strand of the literature emphasizes critical dimension. AI literacy is framed as the ability to examine its social, political, and ethical implications, including questions of bias, power, and accountability [8]. A related study shows that participatory approaches can enhance such understanding by making these conditions visible through practices like annotation and collaborative development [9]. In this sense, engagement with AI reveals how linguistic choices, categorization, and embedded assumptions shape systems, particularly in fields where interpretation and meaning are central.

For the present study, the key implication is that AI education cannot remain confined to technical instruction or the instrumental classroom use. Discussions are still often framed in terms of user competence, while



what is needed is a broader perspective that addresses both individual and societal dimensions [10]. From this angle, AI can be understood an interdisciplinary “translation problem,” requiring movement between technical, educational, and cultural frameworks in order to make it intelligible across different domains.

At the same time, research shows that AI literacy develops unevenly across levels and disciplines, reflecting both the diversity and fragmentation of the field [1]. Most studies remain focused on formal educational settings, particularly curricula and professional training. As AI increasingly shapes public discourse, work, and cultural production, this leaves open a key question: where such issues can be meaningfully addressed outside institutional contexts. This gap points to the limited attention given to institutions that operate between education and the public sphere.

Recent work in science education and communication addresses this issue by showing that public understanding of AI is shaped by how expert knowledge circulates beyond specialist communities [11]. Scientific discourse now frequently frames AI in relation to governance, responsibility, and social impact, indicating that understanding it requires more than technical knowledge. It also involves the ability to interpret how such narratives are constructed and communicated, positioning science communication as part of the educational process rather than an external activity.

This shift also raises questions of participation. AI is not culturally neutral, and expanding access to its discussion is closely tied to issues of epistemic justice [12]. Who takes part in these conversations shapes whose knowledge is recognized and whose concerns remain unaddressed. Institutions capable of translating complex knowledge into accessible forms therefore play a crucial role in shaping public understanding.

Recent studies in humanities-oriented educational contexts point in a similar direction. Work on culturally grounded chatbot models demonstrates how AI can be integrated into learning environments in ways that combine linguistic, pedagogical, and ethical considerations ([13] [14]). Such approaches, however, remain largely situated within formal or semi-formal contexts, leaving open the question of how comparable forms of engagement might develop in public and non-formal settings.

3. A CULTURAL-EDUCATIONAL MODEL OF PUBLIC AI LITERACY

3.1. THE SERBIAN CONTEXT: BETWEEN STRATEGY AND PRACTICE

At the level of policy, Serbia has made visible and, in some respects, relatively early efforts to integrate AI into education. National frameworks clearly position education as a key driver of AI development, and elements of AI-related content have already entered school curricula, mainly within technical and STEM-oriented subjects. This approach is supported by broader infrastructural investment, including the establishment of the National Platform for Artificial Intelligence at the State Data Center in Kragujevac, a high-performance computing system available to universities, research institutes, and domestic innovation sectors, reinforcing the link between education, research, and technological development. It is further shaped by strategic documents, including *the Strategy for the Development of Artificial Intelligence in the Republic of Serbia* for the periods 2020–2025 and 2025–2030, where education is framed not only as a site of application, but as part of a longer process of technological and societal change. These documents also emphasize public awareness, acknowledging that AI cannot remain confined to expert domains if its broader implications are to be understood.

Yet once these ambitions are set alongside everyday educational practice, the picture becomes less coherent. Research points to uneven implementation, limited pedagogical support, and few structured opportunities for deeper engagement [15]. What emerges is not an absence of AI, but a lack of continuity in how it is approached. The tools are there (often already in use) but the conditions for making sense of them are not. Students experiment, teachers adjust, institutions respond, yet rarely within a shared framework that would allow these practices to become more sustained.

Outside formal education, current initiatives tend to move along two familiar lines. On the one hand, there are research-driven and institutional efforts, supported through national funding schemes (government programs for development of projects in the field of AI (i.e. Science Fund Republic of Serbia)) and the establishment of dedicated structures such as the Research and Development Institute for Artificial Intelligence of Serbia in March 2021. The opening of the Institute marks an important step, signaling that AI is no longer treated as a peripheral field but as a strategic area of development. Still, these initiatives remain largely situated within



academic and professional circles, where expertise is produced but less often translated into forms that reach wider publics.

On the other hand, there is a growing range of short-term educational and commercial programs aimed at introducing AI and digital skills through courses and workshops (i.e. Logiscool), or platform-based formats (i.e. CLEO). These initiatives increase visibility and more access, but their focus remains on how to operate and apply tools, leaving less room for questions that require sustained attention, such as what it means to rely on these systems and how they shape interpretation, authorship, and trust.

What remains difficult to locate across these initiatives are sustained spaces in which AI can be approached as a shared cultural and educational question. The issue is not the absence of activity, but a lack of connection between different forms of engagement. Technical expertise, formal education, and public initiatives continue to develop alongside one another, but rarely intersect in ways that support broader understanding. In this sense, AI is present across multiple domains, yet still unevenly interpreted.

3.2. FROM GAP TO PRACTICE: A CASE STUDY OF PUBLIC AI LITERACY

It is within this gap that the program *Limits and Possibilities: AI in Education, Culture, and Society* becomes relevant. It can be approached as a case study of AI literacy situated outside formal education, within a public and cultural context. It also offers a pilot model for how similar initiatives might be developed in cultural-educational institutions across Serbia, including in smaller local communities.

The program unfolded from February to October 2026 as a sequence of thematically distinct yet interconnected segments. Each month addressed AI from a different perspective, allowing the discussion to evolve rather than remain fixed. It began with AI in education, focusing on the changing role of teachers and classroom practice, before moving to language, literature, and translation, accompanied by a workshop for (Serbian) language and literature teachers. Later sessions expanded into scientific and technical domains, followed by discussions of digital safety, critical thinking, and the mental health of younger users. After a summer pause, the program returned to questions of culture and concluded with ethics, law, and the future of work.

Such a structure introduces a form of continuity that isolated lectures or short-term workshops rarely provide. Questions are not resolved within a single session but revisited and developed across different contexts. The combination of lectures and panel discussions plays a central role here. Rather than presenting fixed positions, it opens arguments to critique and reinterpretation, allowing participants to engage with AI as an ongoing process of inquiry rather than a set of conclusions.

This process continues in the international scientific conference planned as the final stage of the program. Building on earlier discussions, it shifts them into a more formal academic setting while retaining their grounding in public dialogue. Its significance lies not only in its thematic scope, but also in the way it is organized. A cultural-educational institution takes the lead, in partnership with several universities and the Pedagogical Society of Serbia, creating a form of collaboration that remains relatively uncommon in the local academic landscape, particularly among private institutions. Rather than remaining within institutional boundaries, the conference brings together different domains of expertise and extends the program's central idea: that discussions of AI should move between public engagement and academic inquiry. In this way, a reciprocal dynamic emerges, where public engagement informs research, while academic perspectives return to questions shaped by everyday experience.

The broader significance of the program lies in how it repositions cultural-educational institutions. They do not function only as venues for dissemination, but as spaces in which academic inquiry and public understanding are brought into relation. At the same time, the conference suggests that such formats need not remain isolated. Within the same institutional framework, they can develop into recurring initiatives, including future conferences that continue to address AI from interdisciplinary perspectives. In this sense, the model points beyond a single location, opening the possibility of similar programs emerging across different communities in Serbia.

The program also brings into view a practical limitation. Participation remains uneven, particularly outside Belgrade. While online streaming extends the reach of individual events, it cannot replace locally grounded discussion shaped by specific communities. This points to a broader issue. Interest in AI is not confined to a single urban center, yet opportunities for sustained engagement are. In this sense, the value of the program lies not only in what it achieves within one institution,



but in what it makes possible elsewhere. Cultural centers, libraries, and educational institutions across Serbia already provide the necessary infrastructure. What is often missing is a format capable of supporting ongoing, interdisciplinary engagement with complex questions. The program shows that such engagement can be organized without reliance on specialized technologies or institutional exclusivity.

A key aspect of this approach lies in its function as a space of translation. Technical concepts are not treated as isolated knowledge, but reworked into questions that connect with language, culture, and everyday experience. This makes it possible for participants from different backgrounds to take part in the discussion, rather than remain outside it. The result is not simplification, but a shift in how understanding is built—through movement between perspectives rather than within a single domain.

A comparable dynamic can be observed in cultural institutions such as museums. Research on AI-based tools, including pilot chatbot systems implemented in museum environments (i.e. Nikola Tesla chatbot in Museum of Science and Technology in Belgrade) shows that audiences engage more deeply when interaction replaces passive reception [16]. The program at the Belgrade Youth Center operates within a similar logic, but extends it by structuring dialogue rather than relying on a single technological interface. In this sense, it functions as a pilot model, demonstrating that AI literacy can be developed within existing institutions and embedded in local contexts. What remains open is how such initiatives will be taken up, adapted, and extended across different communities in Serbia.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that the central issue is not the presence of AI in education, but the limited range of settings in which it is meaningfully discussed. Engagement remains concentrated within schools, universities, and research institutions, while the need for interpretation extends far beyond them. The case of the program at the Belgrade Youth Center shows that this gap can be addressed without new infrastructure, by rethinking how existing cultural-educational institutions are used.

Two points follow directly from this analysis. First, cultural-educational institutions can function as sites for the dissemination of AI literacy. Their position between academia and the broader public allows them to translate complex knowledge into forms that are accessible

without being simplified. Second, such initiatives can be organized as sustained, interdisciplinary programs rather than isolated events. This continuity is what enables participants to engage with AI as an evolving question, not a one-time topic.

The program also demonstrates that this approach is transferable. It should not remain limited to Belgrade. Cultural centers, libraries, and local educational institutions across Serbia already provide a network through which similar initiatives could be developed. What is required is not expansion from the center, but parallel development in other communities, shaped by local conditions and needs.

An additional aspect that deserves emphasis is institutional collaboration. The conference that concluded the program brought together several universities and the Pedagogical Society of Serbia under the coordination of a cultural institution. Such cooperation remains uncommon in practice, particularly across different institutional types. The example suggests that future initiatives should be designed as joint efforts, combining academic expertise with publicly oriented platforms.

Several practical directions follow. Cultural institutions should develop structured programs on AI rather than host occasional events. Universities should engage through sustained collaboration, not only outreach. At the local level, smaller communities should be supported in adapting similar models using existing spaces. Further research should examine how these initiatives function across different settings and where they support ongoing public engagement with AI.

The contribution of this paper lies in framing AI literacy as a practice that depends on where and how it is developed. The model presented here does not resolve the problem, but shows that meaningful engagement with AI can be organized within institutions that are already part of everyday cultural and educational life.



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