

Education of Librarians in Poland. Dilemmas and Challenges

Population: Poland is a country with 38, 422 million people.

Importance of the book and the library

So considering the significance and the role of the book in the lives of people of all ages, starting with the newborn, for whom book layettes are being prepared, to the elderly and the ill, I am convinced that they all need libraries. It will be a truism to say that libraries perform many important functions: as a neighborhood library they provide practical and affordable materials for reading, they are a basis of education in schools and universities, they also serve as witnesses of contemporary events, as e.g. monastery libraries do. But there are also libraries that are the only spiritual food for their users and definitely a kind of balm for the soul. These include specialized libraries, such as patients' libraries in hospitals or prison libraries.

In Poland many libraries try to meet the needs of various groups of users, including those with special needs.

Libraries in Poland

In 2012 there were more than 32 thousand libraries operating in Poland.

They were organized in networks, or operated within various types, distinguished, for example, according to the nature and needs of the community they serve the subject and formal range of the holdings, the territorial range, formal and legal foundations of for their activity, the sources of financing and the ways of providing access to their collections.

Despite having similar goals, many elements make them different from one other.

Some details about libraries in Poland

In 2012, according to GUS (Chief Statistical Office) data,

-the number of active public libraries in Poland was 8182; in 2012 nearly one-fifth (17,4% = 1427 libraries) were merged with another institution;

There were also:

-1087 research libraries (subject oriented libraries, special libraries, libraries of schools of higher education, libraries of the Polish Academy of Science, libraries of research institutes);

-318 pedagogical libraries;

-369 trade libraries;

-65 trade and fiction libraries;

-28 libraries of the centres for scientific, technical and economic information;

-14 libraries of scientific societies;

-20363 school libraries;

-1480 parish and church libraries;

-157 prison libraries

In addition to libraries, there are other cultural institutions such as:

- cultural houses/centers, community centers, clubs 3870

-museums and paramuseum institutions 866

-theaters, musical institutions 174

- art galleries 344

- movies 453

This information about cultural institutions is important because according to Polish regulations, it is possible to combine libraries with other cultural institutions

In 2012, nearly 1/5 (17.4%) of public libraries and library branches (in the city - 8.2%, in the country - 22.2%), functioned in the organizational merger with other institutions mainly with cultural centers or other cultural institutions.

So in Poland, we have a lot of libraries with a large diversity of goals, functions, tasks, user groups - they require different methods and forms of work, adapted to this variety.

It can be assumed that approximately 54 626 librarians were employed in Polish libraries in 2012,

Professional staff in detail in 2012

- public libraries employed over 23,3 thousand people, including nearly 18 thousand librarians, already 2/3 (71,5%) had professional library qualifications,

-research libraries employed over 11 thousand people, including over 86% in librarian positions. These people are well prepared to work in libraries - 58% of them had a university degree in library science. Research libraries employ experts in the fields of knowledge in which the collection of their library specialises,

-in school libraries nearly 22,3 thousand people were employed (as teachers-librarians - 17014 and teachers (for whom the work in library is not their main duty, but their responsibilities include at least one hour in a school library per week in charge of school library),

-pedagogical libraries employed 2289 people, 97,8% of them had a university degree in library science,

-trade libraries employed 1010 people,

-trade and fiction libraries employed 129 people,

-libraries of the INTE Centres employed 47 people,

-libraries of scientific societies employed 17 people.

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The development of professional qualifications

The possibility of constant development of librarians' professional skills is an important factor influencing the level of library services.

The last decade has been an intense time of raising the professional competence of librarians, not only in relation to information technology, but also in adapting librarianship skills and knowledge to new cultural and social requirements.

An important role in improving librarian competence in recent years has been played by the Library Development Program (implemented by FRSI= Foundation for the Development of Information Society), the National Library and the Polish Librarians Association that also systematically prepare their professional development offer.

It is clear that those librarians must have very diverse qualifications for librarian work, both specialist related to the substantive specialization of the library in which they operate, and librarian qualifications in collecting, developing, sharing, methods of work

with the reader, sources of information, organization and library management, marketing and promotion, just to name only some of them.

How do they achieve professional qualifications?

- at universities (BA and MA levels)
- in post-graduate studies (mainly for graduates in other fields of study who want to complement their qualifications)
- as part of professional development, various courses, workshop training courses, organized by the Polish Librarians Association, the National Library and libraries of various networks

University studies in the field of LIS are conducted:

in 10 centers of academic education: in Bydgoszcz (UKW), Katowice (UŚ), Kraków (UJ, UP), Kielce (UJK), Lublin (UMCS), Łódź (UŁ), Toruń (UMK), Warsaw (UW), Wrocław (UWr),

There are different programs at the BA level deal with:

- scientific information and librarianship in the UW, UP, UŚ, UJ, UKW, UMK
- information management at UJ
- information in e-society institutions - UŚ
- architecture information UW, UP, UMCS, UMK
- digital publishing of the UW
- network publishing, UWr

Education at the MA level has fewer diverse programs, but not all academic institutions provide education at the master's level

***Masters programs:**

- Information and Library Science - UW, UP, UWr, UŚ, UJK, UMK
- applied informatology - UMCS
- network publishing, UWr
- information management JU

In most cases, candidates for master's studies have BA in the field of LIS. Students having a BA in other fields are required to complement their LIS knowledge (additional 1-2 subjects of about 60 hours).

MA programs have a detailed specialist content. There are no basic contents in the field of librarianship which were presented at BA level.

The MA programs of Information and Library Science include specializations to choose by the students, dealing with (e.g.)

- school libraries,
- organization and management of libraries
- digital libraries,
- information management,
- publishing.
- history of the book,
- digital libraries and the Internet,
- cultural heritage institutions (about historical collections)
- information architecture

Postgraduate studies.

All Polish academic education centers related to LIS offer post-graduate studies addressed to graduates of BA programs in various fields. In addition to the above 10 centers, they are also conducted at the Higher School of Banking in Gdańsk.

There are a lot of them in total, and there is a lot to choose from.

- **But not every year all of them are activated due to the insufficient number of people interested in studies.**
- **There is also a problem with the organization of "librarian" studies in departments completely unrelated to LIS. And, in constant lack of students and pursuit for them, this, not always fair competition, leads to a reduction in the number of people interested in classical education in the field of librarianship in centers related to LIS studies**

The following postgraduate studies are conducted at LIS academic institutions:

- **publishing policy and bookshop, UW,**
- **literatures and books for children and youth, UW,**
- **library and information science, UJK, UP, UŚ, UMCs, UKW, UW, WSB,**
- **information architecture, UP UMK,**
- **network publishing, UMK,**
- **publishing, UP,**
- **culture management, UP,**
- **reading therapy, UP,**
- **publisher of digital products, UW,**
- **qualifications for librarians, UW,**
- **qualification for teachers-librarians, UW,**
- **creating a digital collection, UMCS,**
- **new technologies for culture and administration, UMCS,**
- **new technologies in the teacher's workshop, UMCS,**
- **another book, special and archival collections, UJ ,**
- **management of culture institutions, UKW,**
- **researching (infobrokering) and information management of UMK.**

According to what we see on the websites of individual education centers, analyzing their offers, it would seem that the situation in librarian education in Poland is good or even very good. There are many educational centers that have diverse and attractive programs, but ...

And here are our dilemmas and challenges.

Situation on the labor market since 2012

The situation on the labor market has been systematically changing due to the introduction of the law on deregulation of the profession.

To be employed in a library you do not necessarily have to complete your studies in library studies.

This means that people who do not have librarianship but other higher education can be employed in libraries.

The difference in employing people with library science and those with a different education is that it requires a 1 year longer internship while advancing to the next level in professional career. So the librarian's substantive knowledge has been reduced to 1 year of work in the library.

Deregulation of librarian profession

In 2012, actions were taken to facilitate access to certain professions, by resignation of special qualification requirements or exams

Deregulation took over 246 professions, among others, also librarians (and, eg. taxi drivers, real estate agents, tour pilots, security staff, guidance counselors, employment agents) they must complete the relevant studies but without the need for apprenticeship and without examinations to enter the profession).

Deregulation of librarian profession, Ordinance of 05.12.2012

In the Ordinance of the Ministry of Culture of 05.12.2012 r. on the requirements of qualifying for appointment to positions in libraries and librarianship positions for specialists in other professions related to the activities of the library it is written as follows: eg. Candidate for:

-librarian position must have: BA in LIS, BA in other fields of study (seniority 1 year), secondary education (seniority 2 years);

-senior librarian position must have: MA in different fields of studies, BA in LIS (seniority 2 years), BA in different fields of studies (seniority 3 years).

This means that many libraries employ specialists in other professions not related to librarianship and this is not always related to the specificity of a given library, which would justify this situation.

Often, graduates of attractive majors, eg. art history, foreign philology, archeology or history, unable to get a job in their profession, go to work in libraries. The decision to employ is at the discretion of the library's management.

Other problems

There are no entrance exams to the universities in Poland, only competition of matriculation certificates.

Candidates are allowed to submit documents for many programs/studies. Studies in the field of LIS are considered to be easy to get admitted to because the number of seats is greater than for elitist destinations. So candidates for studies, also very attractive, apply for several fields of study.

If they are not admitted to the desired department (usually librarianship is not the dream), they decide to accept librarianship and during the first year, or after completing it, they try to move to another one.

Other problems continued

Another very serious problem related to recruitment are students who decide to submit documents for librarianship and when they receive student rights, i.e. a student ID and especially health insurance (hence they are called ZUS students) they stop coming to classes or do not even start them and take a job (not in a library!). This is a very desirable situation for employers, because they do not have to pay insurance for such employees.

The limits of admissions to studies are determined by the Ministry, they cannot be increased at any rate. If those who have been admitted to university drop out, then in the second year we do not have enough students, this creates problems with fulfilling the obligatory teaching load of academic teachers.

Studies (programs) in information and library science

Traditional LIS studies prepare mainly for work in libraries. Due to the change I was talking about (everybody can work in library as a librarian), the interest in librarian studies is decreasing.

Hence, actions are taken to attract, retain students and eliminate ZUS students.

Not being able to have entrance exams, this year we are introducing competence talks, talks about books, etc., to make at least a little effort for candidates, not just submit documents.

Some ideas what to do to make programs more interesting for candidates

Trying to make programs more interesting to attract young people, some ideas appeared:

-(a) give subject different names than before, although in principle the content remains almost unchanged or

-(b) introduce new programs, alongside information and librarianship.

These new programs are, for example, information architecture, editing, digital publishing. From the point of view of the needs of libraries - they prepare candidates in a limited scope, only to one of the aspects / sections of library work.

So they do not prepare for work at various job positions in libraries.

Their graduates can, just like graduates of other programs, be admitted to work in libraries, but they do not have to.

Graduates of these new fields often do not even have e.g. general knowledge about libraries, about the methods of work with different users and special documents.

Now, after completing the (b) programs these graduates will not have librarian qualifications. However while employed in a library they can acquire competences needed to work in a given library as part of the on-site training at the workplace provided by qualified librarians.

But in a few years the situation will change. Experienced and qualified librarians will retire, and there will not be any education in the field of traditional librarianship.

At the beginning I said that there are many libraries with different expectations in terms of competent staff, relevant to its type (especially public or school libraries).

Apart from special skills and knowledge (literature, music, art, etc.) useful at work with young people

they need knowledge and skills for example in the field of library organization, promotion, organization of exhibitions, methods of animation, methods of work with the reader, and these are not in the proposed studies introduced in place of the existing librarianship.

If this tendency persists (lack of programs in traditional librarianship at BA level) and the emergence of BA programs originated from MA programs in the field of LIS (as I said with very limited knowledge of library science) then in the need of specific qualifications for work (with e.g. children, adolescents or adults) in other faculties (Polish studies, Cultural studies, Pedagogy) there will be organized competitive courses not named as library science programs, as it is now. They will not provide all the knowledge needed for librarian work, but will equip students with fragmentary competences.

As a result, we observe:

-a departure from LIS programs, giving broad education in the field of library science, with various competences useful to work in different types of libraries. They could be supplemented with specialized courses, corresponding to the interests or specific needs during the work in a given library

-to a variety of individual programs realized at different university faculties.

They use the content previously included in LIS education (eg. methods of work with children, activating methods, children's literature) and give very narrow qualifications useful for work in various institutions, not necessarily libraries, but without knowledge of librarianship

It may soon turn out that the only comprehensive studies in the field of librarianship are 2 or 3 semester postgraduate studies in this field.

It is difficult to predict whether the education of librarians will be limited to obtaining education in various areas which will be supplemented with LIS postgraduate studies, or whether only a narrow specialist education based on another non-library science programs will be enough.

Or maybe we will return to the beginnings of educating librarians in Poland, when from dispersed content, separate subjects assigned to different programs, one LIS education program (containing what seemed the librarian should know) was created, as was over 65 years ago.

But maybe there is no need for education in the field of traditional librarianship?

There are over 50,000 jobs for librarians in Polish librarianship. This indicates there are big challenges to develop this labor market. Although interest in studies in the field of librarianship is diminishing, libraries do exist and there are people employed in them. A team consisting of library directors was established to determine their expectations regarding the competencies of employees. This should be translated into curricula implemented in academic centers. It is hoped that this will help to solve dilemmas related to the education of librarians in Poland.