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Library as a space for inclusivity and dialogue: experience of transforming Polish libraries on the border of centuries

Objective. The research aims to analyze the transformations that took place in the Polish system of public libraries in the late 1980s – the early 2000s. **Methods.** Regarding methodology, the authors handle the concept of “the library” as “the meeting-place”, which presents an interpretation of conclusions made by Emmanuel Levinas, one of the classics of the philosophy of dialogue. **Results.** The results of the research evidence the concentration of efforts exerted by Polish librarians on the creation of pro-community libraries not meeting the community’s informational needs alone but being the hubs of dialogical interaction of various social groups. **Conclusions.** The conclusions outline the modern Polish libraries’ tending to expand the range of services provided for readers, taking into consideration severe competition among cultural institutions. The authors have proposed several promising strategies for further study of the problem range. These strategies are determined by the necessity of researching the title based on a broader background to the development of the librarianship theory in the countries of Western Europe and North America.

Keywords: library space; the third place; living library; dialogical space; inclusivity; tolerance

Introduction

Collapses of totalitarian regimes in Western Europe in the late 1980s – the early 1990s undoubtedly launched the evolutionary democratic development of the countries that exert every effort to reformat all the spheres of society’s life. Under these conditions, there were changes in perception of the assignment of the library that must be transformed from the repository of information that is primarily ideologized and censored into hubs of education, culture, and inclusivity provided with all the modern informational technologies. It is the availability of those hubs that emphasizes the local authorities and the citizens’ interest in the availability of information, elimination of censorship of all kinds, and cultural development of the region as a whole and the personality in particular. The introduction of brand new informational communicational technologies and the emergence of the globally interconnected computer networks (the Internet) require improvement of the library space, modernization of the process of providing services, and efficient meeting of modern readers’ needs.

Two decades have passed since Poland became a full-fledged member of the European community. From the political viewpoint, one can assume that the Polish society overcame the stigmas of the socialist epoch and trespassed on the so-called “iron curtain” that lasted long after the start of democratic transformations in the Polish People’s Republic in 1989. However, the accelerated tempo of democratization and modernization did not fully embrace the Polish libraries that for 40 years had been meant to meet the needs of the state as an organization of political power, not the needs of its citizens.

In addressing the philosophical categories of inclusivity and dialogue presented in the headline of the article, we can outline that over the late 20th century Polish libraries were practicing the monolog-based style of interaction with visitors. The “dialogue” consisted of holding thematic encounters dedicated to events of ideological character to boost control of the society.

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Furthermore, discussions held at the time of those encounters were rather technical; the interaction of visitors and their groups among one another did not comply with the functioning of “the space of dialogue”. In fact, the interaction between visitors and libraries was primarily linked to accounting for the quantity of texts read by visitors. Here we emphasize that in the proposed article, we are using the category of “the text” in broad (postmodernist sense), namely as information recorded on a material repository and reproduced with the help of miscellaneous technologies. At the same time, a reader of a modern library is a visitor whose informational, cultural, and ethical needs determine the content and the functions of the library space and who combines reading and discussion of the stuff he/she has read with learning, communication, formation of new competences, emotional restarting, reflection of a particular event or environment, etc.

The modern scientific developments in the problem made by Polish library scientists are characterized by at least three distinct tendencies:

1. A tendency to present the problem in the framework of a “case study”. This stylistics is typical of works by scientists directly concerned with work in libraries. The publications are mainly focused on descriptions of the experience gained by particular libraries in the selected aspects (Adamczyk, Smyła, Szumiec, & Wyszynska, 2021; Formela, 2021; Wojciechowska & Orzoł, 2020; Yanto, Prijana, & Nursari, 2023).

2. Abstracting theoretical studios of Western scientists or experience of West-European or American libraries (Materska, 2017; Starek & Piech, 2019; Stąporek, 2019). This approach is a reflection of the negative consequences of closed character typical of socialist countries in the late 20th century when there was a bad need to inform the scientific community of advanced achievements of “capitalist” science. Under the modern conditions of openness of society and knowledge, elaborations of the kind look archaic, though not losing their applied significance, since the proposed text to a certain extent presents an overview of the experience.

3. The lack of broad theoretical generalizations in the works by Polish researchers over the recent two decades is a logical consequence of the dominance of the two aforementioned tendencies in library science. Hence, there is a bad need for observational research on the one hand and for broad generalizations based on analysis of quantitative indices, which is impossible with no interdisciplinary approach to the problem.

Thus, the publication proposed is aimed at the overview of the progress of transformations in Polish libraries on the border of the 20th and the 21st centuries with a special emphasis on the categories of inclusivity and dialogue that are fundamental to modern libraries as cultural hubs.

Methods

The methodology of the research is based on a combination of the principles of scientific impartiality and a systematic approach. The authors have used general scientific and specialized cognition methods, in particular analysis, synthesis, methods of concretization, and generalization, which have made it possible to thoroughly expand on the problem under research.

In the framework of this essay, we will analyze one of the key concepts for the transformation of the library space that was widely spread in Poland since the early 21st century: the concept of the library as “the meeting-place” (also referred to as “the third place” and its practical implementation in the form of the so-called “living library”). In fact, we are dealing with various versions of interpreting “meeting philosophy” by Emmanuel Levinas, a French thinker, and representative of dialogics, where the library plays the role of a space for communication whose ultimate goal is to reach mutual understanding based on dialogue. Not resorting to profound philosophical generalizations, we will just outline that being a social space,

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the library is the meeting-place described by Levinas as a space for intercultural communication, whereas the culture of every particular individual in that space is perceived as a unique one (so many people – so many cultures) (Glinkowski, 2020; Parzych-Blakiewicz, 2016).

Results and Discussion

In the late 20th century, the political map of the world saw an increase in the number of states selecting the democratic development strategy, European values, principles of informational society, and authorities given to citizens. The intended purpose of libraries in those countries underwent gradual transformations.

In the 1990s a number of documents were developed. Those documents were aimed at a precise definition of the role of the library in the modern world as a pro-community educational, cultural, and informational space, in particular: IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (1994); IFLA Statement on Libraries and Intellectual Freedom (1999); Copenhagen Declaration on Public Libraries (1999); Council of EUROPE/EBLIDA guidelines on library legislation and policy in Europe (2000), etc.

Thus, the Manifesto of 1994 proclaims the following: “UNESCO's belief in the public library as a living force for education, culture, and information, and as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women” (IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, 1994). This document accentuates the following principles: availability of public libraries through the prism of adherence to human rights, whereas age, race, gender, religious belief, nationality, and social status must not become an obstacle to visiting a particular library; justice in providing library services regardless of the location of a particular public library, be it an urban or rural community; inclusivity of libraries means modern and convenient facilities and a comfortable space available to all, taking into consideration lack of the opportunity to physically visit an institution (services must be provided by all means) as well as a miscellany of informational services and events. Furthermore, an important question arises within a particular country: the creation of a national library network based on the related legislation, standards, and strategic plans, taking into consideration that “the public library network must be designed concerning national, regional, research-based and special libraries as well as libraries in schools, colleges and universities” (IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, 1994). Interaction of public libraries and communities is the priority of national development. Libraries as “local gates to knowledge” or “local informational centers” meeting local informational needs must be supported by national and local power agencies.

Over the next two decades of the new century, an essential development criterion for a library system or a particular library is digitalization. Introduction and use of brand-new communicational technologies in the library field acquire legal specifications in legislative acts, standards, strategic plans, development strategies, and other documents. In democratic countries of the world, civil society stands for adherence and compliance with human deeds and interrelations with moral and ethical values, namely kindness, dignity, honesty, justice, and tolerance. The concept of “inclusivity” the meaning of a space where everyone is equal, worthy of respect and support, and involved in its evolution is gaining popularity. Taking into consideration the aforementioned transformations, modernization of the 21st-century libraries can be understood as an uninterrupted process whose missions need outlining. The missions of public libraries are proclaimed in the IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (2022) (hereinafter referred to as the Manifesto of 2022). Their activities and provision of library services must be carried out in the format of such concepts as information, literacy, education, inclusivity, public involvement, and

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culture to form a sustainable society, using digital technologies. As for the Manifesto of 2022, one can see an increase in the aspects of the interaction among the library, the community, and the local power, participation in the management of the community by giving the related information to the readers. The Manifesto accentuates the participation of libraries in scientific progress as well as in the promotion of intercultural dialogue. In our view, the Manifesto of 2022 is more tolerant unlike the previous messages as it comes to the provision concerned with the expansion of the target audience of library services: “must be adapted to the different needs of communities in rural and urban areas, as well as to the needs of marginalized groups, users with special needs, multilingual users, and Indigenous Peoples within the community” (IFLA-UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, 2022). Special evidence is laid on the adjustment of partnership between the library and groups of users, educational institutions, NGOs, library associations and businesses, etc. from the local level to the international level to embrace a bigger part of the public.

Over the recent fifteen years, Polish libraries have been working under the following principle “The library is for the community and the community is for the library” according to the very universal European model described above. In particular, “The Development Strategy of Public Capital for 2011-2020” approved by the Polish government emphasized that libraries must fully promote the improvement of public activity. Behind this general statement, one can see the state’s attempt to boost public involvement in social life. In other words, community members must create a convenient library space by themselves.

By introducing the concept of the library as a social space, the Polish government did not minimize the traditional assignment of libraries as informational hubs. For example, under the government initiative “Culture +”, libraries are destined to perform the function of coordinating digitalization processes; libraries must play the role of “the leading link” in the system of knowledge transfer. As a successful implementation case of the government program “Culture +”, Katarzyna Materska, a Polish librarian, gives an example of Lesser Poland Voivodeship, where libraries and public halls “are being transformed into modern and the community’s well-reputed centers of access to knowledge and culture” (Materska, 2017, pp. 69-81). Here it is noteworthy that the experience of Lesser Poland Voivodeship in the “Culture +” program does not demonstrate anything unique or brand new. The concept of a united system for knowledge management was actively implemented at the times of the Polish People’s Republic through the creation of a network of informational hubs based on libraries. However, the state power was pursuing absolutely different goals in those times, since control of information and its dissemination guaranteed control of society.

The concept of a modern library in Poland is closely linked to understanding a library as an integral part of the urban space, a cultural institution destined to serve the city and its residents as well as ruin the barriers between them and vice versa unite the society (Adamczyk, Smyła, Szumiec, & Wszyńska, 2021, p. 35). Here we would like to emphasize that until 1989 Polish libraries were torn apart from the urban environment since they were purely state-owned institutions meeting exclusively informational needs of the state (i.e. the state power). In the course of democratic reformations in the Polish People’s Republic and at the time of the crisis in the late 1980s, libraries embarked upon closeness to the community. This trend is going on now as well, since Polish regional libraries are funded by local government agencies and thus depend on the community, not on the state. In this context, it is expedient to emphasize that Poland is not a country of big cities and urban agglomerations, which is reflected in the structure of the library networks. Among all the Polish libraries, 75 % of them are rural or local institutions. As far as small populated areas, libraries are often the only cultural institutions (Jezińska, 2018, pp. 252-253).

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In analyzing the role of libraries within a community, it is expedient to address the theme of funding their work. According to Polish official statistics, in 2015 libraries were the biggest local culture hubs and at the same time, as little as 19 % of a particular community's overall culture-aimed budget was allotted for libraries. Therefore, it is not surprising that libraries were forced to switch to survival under the rules of marketing. Today, the Polish library field badly needs external funding. Granted funds and Maecenas' help is an extremely small part of this outside budget. According to Malgorzata Jezierska, only 8-9 % of an average modern Polish library's budget comes from grants and Maecenas, whereas most of the funds are covered by the library's management themselves (Jezierska, 2018, pp. 256-257).

Overall, the modernization of the Polish library field's socio-economic constituent is being carried out up to the Norwegian sample, since it is this Scandinavian country that has formed the vision of the library as a meeting-place and a forum for open social dialogue. Thus, the modern Polish library must combine the features of a center of information, culture, education, and social interaction (Jezierska, 2018, p. 254). Within this article, we will be primarily dwelling upon the latter constituent.

It is believed that the model of a modern Polish library the way it is being implemented in Poland can be homologated with the concept of the "third" place. According to this model, the "first" place is the home and the "second" place is the workplace. The "third" place can be understood as any public place where groups of individuals gather regularly, voluntarily, and informally to have a rest from home and work. Here we would like to emphasize that Ray Oldenburg, a sociologist and the author of the concept, did not mention libraries as institutions that can play the role of the "third" place. However, the distinct humanistic focus of libraries' activities does not exclude an opportunity for alternative use of the library space in favor of human development as the key actor of library interaction. Let us remind you that a book is just a tool for human development.

The use of the library as the "third" place is equally beneficial both for the community and for the libraries themselves. Under the modern conditions of severe competition among cultural institutions, libraries are competing in the direct meaning of the world for the right to include their services in human everyday activities. Implementation of the "third" place concept in the framework of the library makes it possible to halt the rapidly decreasing popularity of libraries and to halt the process of visitors' outflow. Maia Wojciechowska and Monika Orzoł present a series of vital and working cases of using the library space as the "third" place: a press coffee stall, a game space, a modeling club, a third-age university, a booklover's club, a movie-lovers' club, etc. (Wojciechowska & Orzoł, 2020, pp. 3-4).

A vivid example of the "third" place in the framework of the urban space is the affiliation of Voivodeship and Jozef Conrad Korzeniowski City Public Library in Gdansk known as Manhattan Library. It took that library about a year to be built, which cost 1.000.000. zlotys. The solemn opening ceremony of the library space in March 2012 had consequences as well. When Manhattan Library was opened, five other Gdansk libraries were closed down. That year's new institution posed itself as the first media library on the territory of the Coastal Area.

Library space was adjusted in the form of a few miscellaneous zones, such as a classical library (with the amount of more than 70.000 volumes and reading rooms full of books and periodicals), a public multimedia space (Gdansk's first media library with 4,2 thousand entries of audio/video repositories, electronic and audiobooks), a reading room of comic strips (more than 7.000 titles), a children's club and a game space (popular game consoles). The libraries also provided individual rooms with sofas and coffee tables. There was an opportunity to use office equipment and even musical instruments (guitar, percussion, synthesizer). Access to the services

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was made via a plastic card with a symbolic fee, which is the analog of a reader's card giving an opportunity of ordering services and remote consultations.

As early as in the first year of work, more than 13,5 thousand individuals formed their Manhattan library readers' cards. Next year the number of readers equaled 14,4 thousand. It is noteworthy that the group portrait of the Manhattan library visitor did not match the portrait of an average reader of an ordinary Polish library: less than 19% of readers had higher education, whereas the most representative age category of visitors was the age of 21 – 30 years old (the 16-21-year-old category running second). As it was expected, it was the media library that mostly attracted visitors: 68% of readers called it a completely new type of library (Formela, 2021, pp. 77-81).

As another example of a successful adjustment of a dialogue space in the Polish library environment, we can present the Main Library of Life Sciences University in Lublin. This academic library practices both enlightenment-minded events and charity festivals aimed at not only uniting the community in aiding people with particular disabilities but also at promoting affirmation of the idea of rejecting barriers in communication within a community. In particular, the Main Library of Life Sciences University in Lublin regularly holds the "Antiquarian Dreams" charity act aimed at collecting books for the auction whose revenues are allotted for aid for children suffering from diseases. Among the other charity initiatives, we can also mention the so-called "scientific picnics" for people with eyesight and hearing deficiencies.

The library considers work with readers of a young age as its main assignment. That work is adjusted as master classes in calligraphy, work on the typing machine, etc. Along with the enlightenment content of workshops of the sort, they carry a particular career guidance orientation, since the library remains a structural unit of Life Sciences University. Let us emphasize here that this transformation of the library profile required considerable effort in the field of upgrading the personnel's qualifications. However, according to the Life Sciences University's management, this effort was a profitable long-term investment, since today the library workers can provide the University's instructors with free-of-charge courses in working with bibliographical managers, the search of electronic sources, electronic publishing, basics of Altmetric, the image of the university, etc. The aforementioned courses are very resource-consuming in case of involvement of facilitators from the outside; not every university can afford this luxury. Therefore, the initiative of Life Sciences University in Lublin is also an example of the successful integration of the community, the library, and the educational institution (Starek & Piech, 2019, pp. 115-117).

"The living library" model results from the "third place" concept where the library space plays the role of just a mediator in communication between individuals. First of all, it is necessary to distinctly understand the terminology. "The living library" is not a place. "The living library" is an individual who represents a part of society (the minority) or a group suffering discrimination in the existing model of society. Nowadays "the living library" concept is perceived as an efficient strategy that makes it possible to arrange a meeting and a dialogue of people with opposite views and values.

"The living library" acts following the principles of a traditional library. A reader (an individual eager for answers) can call the space "the living library" at a specified time and read (get along with) a book (an individual eager to become understandable). Thus, books are available in this interaction only in the form of a comparative concept or an analog.

The movement of "living libraries" started in Denmark in 1993 with the "Stop Volden" initiative (which means against violence). The initiative was founded by a group of activists whose comrades became victims of discrimination and violence at one of the local rock festivals. Later, the movement gained momentum in Scandinavian countries and only in 2007 it was noticed in

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Poland. It was here where “Stop Volden” acquired a distinct library specificity since the first hubs of the public initiative in Warsaw and Wrocław were set up in libraries.

In practice, a dialogue-aimed meeting of “the living library” is going on as follows: people representing a particular group of the population or a group suffering some particular discrimination stereotypes, prejudices, etc. gather at a library’s premises in advance. Often, these people have badges specifying the group, such as Homeless, Jobless, Drug Addict, Ex-Convict, Feminist, Homosexual, Priest, etc. These people are booking the visitors of “the living library” and willingly get along with them. The end goal of those dialogue-aimed meetings is to reach mutual understanding and mutual respect resulting from an open dialogue. It is “the living library” that is the most efficient and socially significant example of using the library space as “the third place”.

Setups of those dialogue-aimed spaces in libraries have their positive and negative features. Among the undoubted advantages, in our view, is the independence of weather conditions, availability of premises and office equipment as well as logistics channels (placement of announcements of meetings on the library’s website and social networking websites) and finally, incentives for dissemination of libraries by their “traditional” predestinations. At the same time, it is impossible to evade some particular risks, especially when it comes to the specificity of Polish libraries; there is a challenge consisting of the change of the model (a meeting switches into a lecture), dependence on the schedule of events held by the library and a possibility of unacceptance of some particular “views” of “the living library”. As far as the latter, it is worthwhile explaining that Poland is a mono-ethnic and essentially Catholic state with the population clustered in tiny cities and towns. Therefore, there is a great risk of conflicts based on the unacceptance of some particular religious or sexual minorities because of which the dialogue-aimed space is transformed into a space of hostility (Mołodyńska-Küntzel, 2016, pp. 6-24).

Conclusions

Thus, based on the trends characterizing the modern development vector of Polish libraries, we have considered the process of drastic transformation of library work in Poland caused by a tendency for gradual democratization and humanization of all the spheres of cultural life after the transformations of the 1980s.

Under the conditions of Modern Poland, the library was transformed from an information hub into a space for dialogue and mutual understanding between populations, cultures, and social groups. The model of the new Polish library is aimed simultaneously at the preservation of the maximal number of libraries under the conditions of severe competition between cultural institutions and increased competitiveness of Polish libraries through universalizing the range of services they provide.

The concept of pro-community libraries introduced in Poland seems to us the only possible vector of sustainable development of the information and library system, taking into consideration the rapid rates of society’s digitalization. Along with that, we would like to outline broad prospects of further study of the problem of Polish libraries’ evolution with an emphasis on dialogue and inclusivity, which lies in the following: there is a necessity of including the problem in a broader context of transformations in the library systems of Western Europe and North America; availability of practical examples and the opportunity of using the positive experience of Polish cases would greatly contribute to comparative analysis of similar transformations on the example of Ukraine and other countries of the former USSR.

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Бібліотека як простір інклюзивності та діалогу: досвід трансформації польських книгозбірень на рубежі століть

Мета. Метою дослідження є аналіз трансформаційних перетворень, які мали місце у польській системі публічних бібліотек протягом кінця 1980-х – перших десятиліть 2000-х років. **Методика.** У методологічному плані автори спиралися на концепцію бібліотеки як «місця зустрічі», що являє собою варіацію трактувань висновків одного з класиків філософії діалогу Емануеля Левінаса. **Результати.** Дослідження свідчить про концентрацію зусиль польських бібліотекарів на побудові системи проградських бібліотек, які не тільки б слугували задоволенню інформаційних потреб громади, але й були місцями діалогічної взаємодії різних соціальних груп. **Висновки.** Констатується тяжіння сучасних польських бібліотек до розширення сфери послуг, що надаються читачам, з огляду на підвищення конкуренції серед закладів культури. Запропоновано ряд перспективних напрямів подальшого студіювання проблематики, що полягають у потребі розгляду теми на більш широкому тлі розвитку теорії бібліотечної справи у країнах Західної Європи та Північної Америки.

Ключові слова: бібліотечний простір; третє місце; жива бібліотека; діалоговий простір; інклюзивність; толерантність

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