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UDC 027.7

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University Libraries on the Path to Enhancing Equity, Diversity, Accessibility, Inclusion

In this issue, our distinguished authors share their thoughts, ideas, and concerns about the role of higher education institution (HEI) libraries in promoting equality, diversity, accessibility, and inclusion in today's society. Conversations around this topic are not a new focus in HEI libraries. Librarians create and strive for improvement in developing a comfortable and welcoming environment (online and offline) for all students, faculty and staff. Librarians care about the diversity and accessibility of collections and services. But in this time of uncertainty, university communities want answers to general or 'point' questions about library support for vulnerable university communities (especially students with disabilities) and local communities. The articles pay special attention to the consideration of practices, tasks and strategies for the near future, provided by the Ukrainian authors as their self-reflection, direct experience of working in wartime, i.e. a crisis of the highest level, involving a threat to human life and health.

Keywords: libraries of higher education institutions; university librarians; time of uncertainty; equity; diversity; inclusion; accessibility; USUST; Ukraine

Dear readers, authors and colleagues!

In this 9th (2024) issue of UniLibNSD, we offer you a wide range of views from experts in international library and information science (LIS) on the topic 'On the Path to Enhancing Equity, Diversity, Accessibility, Inclusion'. The IXth International Conference 'University Library at a new stage of social communications development', which took place on 3-4 October 2024 in Dnipro (Ukraine) in a mixed format, was dedicated to this topic (http://conflib.diit.edu.ua/Conf_univ_Library_2024/).

The UniLibNSD 2024 conference is organised by the Scientific Library of the Ukrainian State University of Science and Technologies. The co-organisers are the Library of Kaunas University of Technology (Lithuania) and the Library of the University of Perpetual Help System LAGUNA (Philippines).

The authors of this issue of the journal had the opportunity not only to share their scientific work in manuscripts, but also to present their thoughts as inspiring speakers from 18 countries at various sections of the international conference UniLibNSD 2024.

Full-length articles for this issue were selected, reviewed and recommended for publication by members of the international editorial board.

None of us chooses the time in which we live. It so happens that we live in difficult times of change, in a frantic pace, with a huge amount of information, events, the speed of new technologies, 'tectonic shifts' in geopolitics and the world economy, armed conflicts, natural disasters... It seems that all the destructive factors, instability and uncertainty are now everywhere around us, both globally and locally, in the public and private spheres. But this time of uncertainty gives us the opportunity to understand what our core values are and build on them, to rethink our

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perspectives to see potential opportunities among the risks of the current situation, and to develop the skills to deal with this uncertainty, which can lead to growth and transformation.

In the context of our profession, the most important thing for any country is significant changes in national higher education, the distancing of learning and research processes, rapid development of ICT, new communication practices and new meanings...

But at the same time, this reinforces the importance of equity, diversity and inclusion – the cornerstones of a number of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Sustainable Development GOALS, 2024).

The pursuit of social justice is part of the mission of libraries. Therefore, the opportunity to address systemic inequalities in education by promoting effective, inclusive, and equitable access to quality academic resources, services, and spaces motivates librarians to constantly look for new ways and initiate new projects.

The global library and information community celebrates the diverse nature of humanity and the unique nature of all people. That is why we are committed to fighting Nazism, racism, hatred and prejudice, and to confronting systems of oppression whenever and wherever we encounter them (http://conflib.diit.edu.ua/Conf_univ_Library_2024/).

The authors explore the realities of today's library and information activities, share their experiences, answer questions that motivate them to reflect on the work of library teams in general and their own coordinate system, and defend the opportunity and right to be involved in shaping the future of university libraries.

Conversations around diversity, equity and inclusion, or DEI, are not a new focus in libraries of higher education institutions. Librarians have been creating and striving for excellence in developing comfortable and welcoming environments (online and offline) for all students, faculty and staff (EBSCO, 2023). But it is at a time of uncertainty for the university community that local communities want answers to common or 'point' questions:

- Have libraries identified and implemented opportunities to support diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility and belonging in their HEIs, their physical and virtual environments, collections and services for the needs of the community?

- How can we promote a culture of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility in our teaching practices (information literacy, academic integrity, open educational resources, citizen science, etc.) through strategies that include adaptation, training and continuing professional development?

- Do HEI librarians feel that their libraries and institutions truly contribute to the development of a DEI culture?

- Are libraries able to organise ongoing research and gain insights into the professional and personal impact of DEI work of their staff in key areas such as work environment, job responsibilities and personal factors?

- Is there a link between the choice of resource licensing strategies (e.g. Creative Commons) and the notion of equity in the research and education ecosystem?

- How can the expansion and quality of library activities be promoted in times of socio-economic crisis and frequent physical inaccessibility, such as: organising discussion groups on social justice; curating various art exhibitions by people from underrepresented groups; documenting the history of the university/college; digitising primary sources and research materials for accessibility? etc.

Thus, when discussing equity in library support for vulnerable university communities (especially students with disabilities) and local communities, and emphasising the need for constant critical reflection by librarians, the authors emphasise certain principles. For example:

ISSN 2707-0476 (Online)

University Library at a New Stage of Social Communications Development. Conference Proceedings, 2024, No. 9
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• openness and accessibility of resources and services;

• diversity of textual and non-textual documents and the possibility of their multiple use by any person;

• providing content in alternative formats and empowering users to make informed choices;

• implementing training and development programmes that raise awareness of the importance of inclusion in librarianship;

• working with communities to create inclusive spatial solutions that meet the needs of all users;

• using the latest technologies to improve accessibility of library services and long-term preservation of content;

• interaction with the entire community on the issue of inclusion as a process of real inclusion of people with disabilities in educational and scientific life;

• socio-cultural and socio-ethical transformations in ensuring equal rights and opportunities (especially during armed conflicts);

• volunteering/intellectual philanthropy, etc.

This general analysis of questions and answers, principles and features is a snapshot of the developments and challenges that the authors of the UniLibNSD journal have highlighted in their articles:

The authors emphasise that today critical librarianship is actively trying to assert that libraries are not neutral, and calls on librarians to take active measures to prevent genocide, anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices for the benefit of both users and the profession itself (Kolesnykova, 2022). The library and information community shall protect the rights to the highest human values throughout the world, democratic rights, value the diversity of cultures, support national education and science.

The articles pay special attention to the consideration of practices, tasks and strategies for the near future, provided by the Ukrainian authors as their self-reflection, direct experience of working in wartime, i.e. a crisis of the highest level, involving a threat to human life and health.

Although we work in different sectors, geographical regions, and have different perspectives, we all want to see the profession grow and succeed. Sometimes we only take incremental steps, but we are moving forward, and that is something worth celebrating.

The international editorial board appreciates the contribution of eachauthor. We sincerely thank our readers for their interest in UniLibNSD, our reviewers for their competence, delicacy and goodwill. We sincerely wish our partners and readers success and confidence in tomorrow! We invite you to cooperate.

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Університетські бібліотеки на шляху до посилення справедливості, різноманітності, доступності та інклюзії

У цьому випуску наші шановні автори діляться своїми думками, ідеями та сумнівами про можливості бібліотек закладів вищої освіти (ЗВО) у сприянні рівності, різноманітності, доступності та інклюзії в сучасному суспільстві. Розмови навколо цієї теми не є новим фокусом в бібліотеках ЗВО. Бібліотекарі створюють і прагнуть удосконалення в розвитку комфортного і доброзичливого середовища (онлайн і офлайн) для всіх студентів, викладачів і співробітників. Бібліотекарі піклуються про різноманітність і доступність колекцій та послуг. Але саме в час невизначеності спільноти університетів бажають почути відповіді на загальні чи «точкові» питання щодо бібліотечної підтримки вразливих університетських спільнот (особливо студентів з обмеженими можливостями) і місцевих громад. Особливу увагу в статтях приділено розгляду практик, завдань і стратегій на найближчий час, наданих українськими авторами як їх саморефлексії, безпосереднього кризового досвіду роботи у воєнний час, тобто кризи найвищого рівня, пов'язаного із загрозою життю і здоров'ю людей.

Ключові слова: бібліотеки закладів вищої освіти; університетські бібліотекарі; час невизначеності; справедливість; різноманітність; інклюзія; доступність; УДУНТ; Україна