GÖRÜŞLER / OPINIONS

Library Highway: Library Professionals as Agents of Changes*

Kütüphane Geçidi: Değişim Temsilcileri Olarak Kütüphane Çalışanları

*Jurgita RUDŽIONIENĖ***, Ina PUZAKINAITĖ*** and Eglė AUDZEVIČIŪTĖ*****

Abstract

The main aim of the article is to find out how the professional public librarians have changed during last decades of huge changes in public libraries. Specialists which have long professional work experience as public librarians were selected for this research. Due to this, the empirical research was performed. The research points out professional and personal changes of librarians due to modernization processes at the library as social institution acting in information and communication field. Quantitative research was used to fulfill the task of the research. Questionnaire was created for the research and was used to survey the librarians of selected libraries. Research reports the results of the study based on the data derived from actual observation of several Lithuanian public libraries and their librarians, who have their work experience at the library more than 10 years. Five public libraries which have won competition of the best public libraries in Lithuania according to their results were chosen (competition was arranged in the frame of the project "Bibliotekos pažangai" (Libraries for Innovation) initiated by Bill & and Melinda Gates Foundation. The research consists of several steps. Selection of libraries was made at the first step. The second step of the research was to choose librarians from selected libraries with indicated work experience. The third step was to make a quantitative study. For this purpose a special questionnaire was created. The research results indicate professional and personal changes of public librarians due to intensive Information technologies development at the libraries and show professional librarians as agents of changes.

Keywords: *Changes, Public libraries, Public librarians, New generation, Information technologies, Library highway*

Öz

Makalenin amacı, profesyonel halk kütüphanecilerinin son yıllarda halk kütüphanelerinde meydana gelen büyük değişiklikler paralelinde nasıl değiştiğini ortaya koymaktır. Araştırma örneklemi uzun süreli iş deneyimine sahip halk kütüphanelerinde çalışan uzmanlar arasından seçilmiştir ve buna bağlı olarak deneysel bir çalışma gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırma ilgi ve iletişim alanında faaliyet gösteren sosyal bir kurum özelliği taşıyan kütüphanelerin modernleşme

sürecinden kaynaklı olarak kütüphanecilerin mesleki ve kişisel değişikliklerine dikkat çekmektedir. Araştırma yöntemi olarak nicel araştırma yöntemi kullanılmış; oluşturulan bir anket ile kütüphanelerde çalışan kütüphanecilerin çalışmalarındaki değişiklikler ölçümlenmiştir. Araştırma, Litvanya halk kütüphanelerinde 10 yıldan fazla süredir çalışan kütüphanecilerinden gerçek gözlem ile elde edilen verilerin sonuçlarını yansıtmaktadır. Araştırma kapsamında elde edilen veriler Litvanya'da Bill & Melinda Gates Vakfı tarafından düzenlenen "Bibliotekos pažangai" (Yenilik için Kütüphaneler) yarışması sonuçlarına göre en iyi 5 halk kütüphanesinden toplanmıştır. Genel olarak araştırma, kütüphanelerin seçimi, iş deneyimine sahip kütüphanecilerin belirtilen kütüphanelerden seçimi nicel çalışmanın yürütülmesi amacıyla anketin uygulanması aşamalarından oluşmaktadır. Araştırma sonuçları halk kütüphanecilerinin bilgi teknolojilerinin gelişiminden doğan mesleki ve kişisel değişikliklerini göstermektedir ve kütüphanecileri değişimin temsilcileri olarak betimlemektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: *Değişim, Halk kütüphaneleri, Halk kütüphanecileri, Yeni nesil, Bilgi teknolojileri, Kütüphane geçidi*

Introduction

All human activities are based on information. Libraries as information and communication institutions play an important role in our society. Library provides all necessary privileges – each member of society can have access to a wide range of information and communication materials and services. "With the help of experienced librarians, libraries are constantly observing their catchment area in order to structure their offers to cater to its needs and requirements" (Libraries for all, 2010, p. 6).

Redesigning library activities in the 21st century is a challenge and a must. Significant changes occurred during the last decades in the whole information and communication sector, and libraries are not the exception. Now we are dealing with the new generation libraries and we also need new generation librarians. What is the story and opinion of those professional specialists, who had seen the whole evolution of changes in libraries during last decades and have taken their active participation in it changing the library from old fashioned one to a modern today's information and communication institution?

Lithuanian public libraries are popular social institutions especially in province area. They attract thousands of people each year. Together with numerous public libraries worldwide, Lithuanian libraries have experienced great changes during last decades. According to R. Petuchovaitė (2004) public libraries as a construct of a modern society exist in all countries and stand on the common background of traditional values – public openness and accessibility, and support from local and central government. Societal paradigm transformations caused by technological progress has influenced the role and values of the public library, creating a potential base for an active role in economical and societal wellbeing of information and knowledge societies, states R. Petuchovaitė. According to Lithuanian official library statistics from the year 2011 there are 5 county public libraries and 60 municipal public libraries and their 1241 branches in

Lithuania with 11,4 million visitors during 2011 year (total of libraries of different types and sizes is nearly 2700) (Lietuvos Respublikos Kultūros Ministerija, 2012). However we all know that the past decades have made a lot of changes in library field: libraries have become a unique public service network that is serving different information needs, including development of the digital skills, especially groups of social risk, supporting social integration, providing access to e-government information and other e-services. Due to these important changes, the information professionals – librarians – had to change as well. This situation inspire researchers to analyze the new situation in libraries seeking to clear up how they did succeed to adapt innovations and changes. Therefore the empirical research was made in selected Lithuanian public libraries, and results, interpretation and conclusions are presented in this article.

Methodology

The *main purpose* of the research **–** to find out how the professional public librarians have changed during the last decades of huge changes in public libraries. The *quantitative research* using surveying method was chosen because it helps to go deeper into issues of interest and explore nuances related to the problem. Therefore, professional librarians which have more than 10 years work experience at the library were selected. This selection criterion was chosen because it was intended to explore librarians' real possibilities to observe changes in public libraries during the time and their actual professional experience in the period of transition from traditional to modern public library. Special *questionnaire* for this research was created. Open and closed questions were included because the respondents will have possibility to choose their answers from given several possible options as well as to express their own opinion answering to the open questions. The respondents were asked about the most significant information technology changes in public libraries, they were asked to express their opinion on the workload before and after installing e-services in their libraries, to indicate the most important changes for libraries and librarians, to describe relations between librarians and library users, to characterize new image of librarians etc. In addition to this, it was important to find out how librarians managed to focus more than before on their professional activities after libraries were modernized, and how they succeed to master IT while serving community. Also, the questions about how librarians succeed to gain their additional professional skills and to improve existing ones were given. It was important to know how librarians succeed to act in new ways and forms of communicating with their users. Statistical methods for data analysis were used, and results interpretation was made and conclusions were drawn.

Research Process

Selection of libraries was made according to the project "Bibliotekos pažangai" results from 2012. Five Lithuanian public libraries as the main winners of the competition "Modern society – an innovative library" prized as the most modern, well-equipped

and best rated public libraries were chosen. Project "Bibliotekos pažangai" was running for Lithuanian public libraries by Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania, the Lithuanian National Martynas Mažvydas Library and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation during the period 2007-2012 (Libraries for Innovation, 2013). The key aim of the project "Libraries for Innovation" was to achieve considerably better use of information technologies among Lithuanian people creating possibilities to fulfill their social needs using public libraries and their e-services, especially in rural areas and among social risk group individuals, in order to obtain information and communication skills. During several project running years most of the Lithuanian public libraries have launched free of charge public internet services, and librarians' IT and digital competences were improved substantially, which now allow libraries to be a powerful medium which helps each community individual to use wide range of IT means while using e-services meeting their social and information needs. During this project, which lasted for 4.5 year, 1276 public libraries received technical equipment, they were equipped with broadband internet connection etc. All libraries were included in the training activities of specialists and visitors, encouraging and enabling e-service usage and intensive consulting on this usage (Sociumas LT, 2012; Libraries for Innovation, 2013).

The questionnaires were sent to 66 professional librarians of 5 Lithuanian public libraries described above and given below in order to survey their librarians which have their work experience in libraries of 10 and more years. Maximum feedback was reached, e.g. nearly 100 percent of questionnaires were received (65 questionnaires from total 66), responding the online questionnaire version. Libraries which were represented by research respondents are:

1. Utena A. and M. Miškiniai Public Library, www.uvb.lt
2. Marijampolė Petras Kriaučiūnas Public Library, www.marvb.lt
3. Povilas Višinskis Šiauliai County Public Library, www.savb.lt
4. Kaunas County Public Library, www.kvb.lt
5. Vilnius Municipal Central Library, www.vcb.lt

Special acknowledgements go to directors of those libraries, who expressed their interest in our research and kindly collaborated in this research helping to identify and select librarians, which are working in libraries for many years and might have observed and took participation in the most changes.

Research Results

Significant changes are seen in particularly every field of our daily life. Even talking about libraries we now have got new generation libraries and we also need to have new generation librarians. What is the story of those professionals, who had seen it all the way – from a very old fashioned start till the very modern present? So, let's remind

our idea of the research to find out how the professional librarians, who has their work experience in libraries more than 10 years have changed together with the libraries they work for many years. Data analyzed and the most significant results are presented in this section of the article according to the main aspects (dimensions) of the research asked respondents in questionnaire: information professionals as change agents, designing new library spaces dimension, serving society in a digital age, changes of workload, developing new competencies, mobile information services and dimension 'from collection to connection'. Most of those dimensions were based on Bobcatsss2013 conference in Ankara themes and subthemes.

Information Professionals as Change-Agents dimension: First of all, it came out, that most of respondents (37%) in chosen 5 public Lithuanian libraries have a very long work experience – they have been working in libraries for 30 and even more years. The longest work experience was even 58 years. This means that librarians and respondents of the research have seen a lot of changes in libraries and had to change themselves as well (Figure 1).
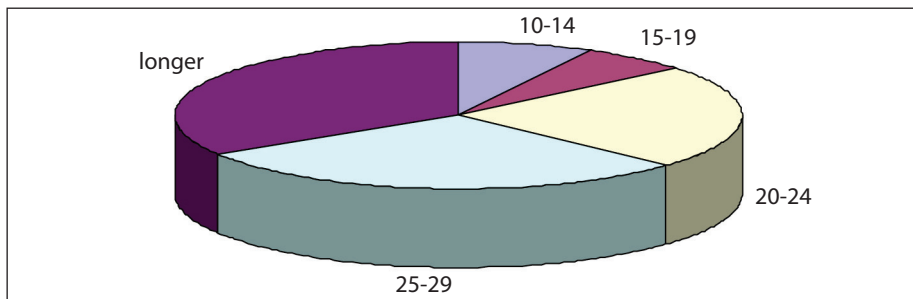

Figure 1. Work Experience

Designing New Library Spaces dimension: What is more, respondents pointed out, that during the last decades, the most significant change in their work and working place is IT development (software and hardware). It was treated as a very important positive change in the library. Also, a lot of respondents pointed out, that digitalization of books and other information media, is also a very important positive change, that had turned library upside-down. Modernization of working places (equipped with IT) is seen as the most significant change in libraries by the most amount of respondents (60 answers from total 65), while the abundance of e-publications was draw attention only by 10 respondents (from total 65). While interpreting the last result, important point to remember is that respondents of the research are public librarians, and their responses are based mostly on their experience in public libraries – e-publications are not common in public libraries as, for example, in academic and other scientific libraries (Figure 2).
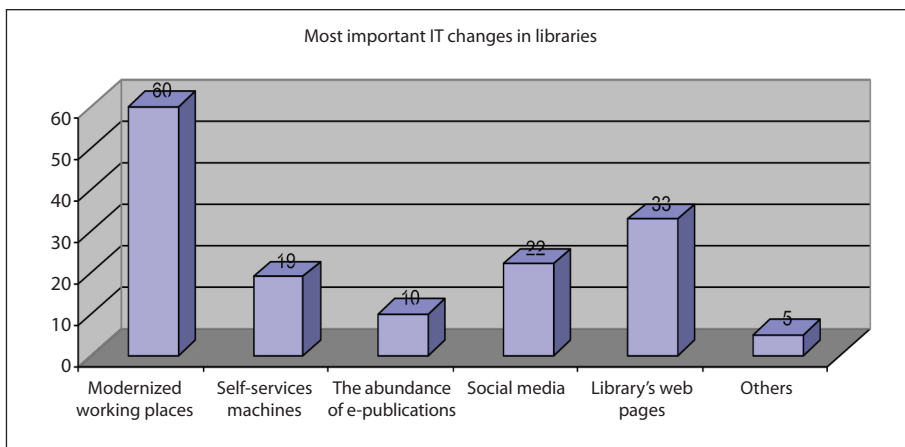
Figure 2. IT Changes in Libraries

***Serving Society in a Digital Age* dimension:** What is more, according to respondents, after installing e-services into the library, the general workload has increased, because librarians had to take care about e-services and put a lot of their strengths to develop and maintain them. So the main attention of respondents goes to e-services as a new type of information services in library which has significant increased general and personal workload of librarians – 75 percent (49 answers from total 65). Those library activities are based on internet facilities. It includes also all the social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, and the web site of the library, etc. Respondents indicated that they are working still a lot on various events in their libraries, such as book presentations or meetings with writers, exhibitions, etc., but even this part of library activities couldn't avoid intensive use of technology and mostly deals with internet – 52 percent (34 answers from total 65). This is the second remarkable factor in increasing workload due to changes in library activities indicated by respondents. On the other hand, arranging events, preparing and sending online invitations and other material is much easier now, and higher quality services attract much more people to come to the library. Anyway, according to 25 percent of respondents' opinion, the workload didn't change and remains pretty the same as earlier (Figure 3).

***Developing New Competencies* dimension:** In addition to this, it came out, that librarians, who work in libraries for many years, had to gain new skills or improve their existing ones in order to be able to work with computers, internet or other technologies. Due to this, 89 percent (58 respondents from total 65) had to attend different kind of special qualification courses and receive certificate in order to be able to adopt changes and to scope with their new quality duties at the library. Nearly half of all respondents (45 percent, 29 respondents from total 65) attended special qualification courses and
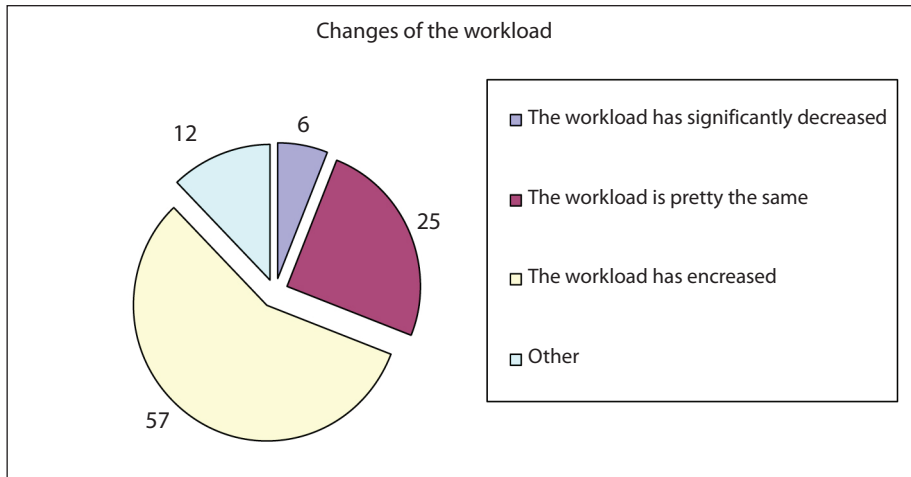
Figure 3. Changes of the Librarians' Workload

received certificates that enable them to work with IT in delivering information services as well as arranging the entire library activities. It was totally new experience for those respondents, and they should learn and gain new IT skills. Nearly one third of the respondents (29 percent, 19 answers from total 65) indicated the change from direct communication with their users to social networking. Other respondents indicated that they are involved in the nonformal long life learning at the library constantly – each day they find something new in different sources and find different ways of seeking information during the daily processes of their work, because they are constantly browsing the internet sources, finding information about international experience, browsing conference materials etc. or communicate with other libraries and colleagues.

Mobile and Flexible Information Services **dimension:** What is more, it was important to find out, how new library services have changed relations among librarians and library users. The old fashioned libraries had pretty strong interaction between users and librarians because of dominating face to face communication culture. Now, when library users can order their books or other items online and use special technology for borrowing books and returning them back to the library, the interaction and relations between library staff and users have changed. According to librarians, the relation has changed a lot, but they treat it as a positive change. In this case the librarians themselves have got possibility to concentrate more on other activities and are able to devote themselves for more efficient and productive consulting of their users, even if it is done online. Also, it was mentioned by respondents, that nowadays' library users look at the librarians from different perspective – they are tending to treat librarians as professionals who give users all necessary directions enabling them to find

required information and materials. The online communication is not seen as negative interaction – on the contrary, librarians enjoy being able to work in a modern and fast way. *"I see better perspective of our communication...", "The information exchange process is much easier…", "Online communication is interesting and saves up time…"* – just some quotations from respondents answers, which indicate positive reflection of need of library changes to their "long library experience" and reveal good perspectives to their further development.

***"From Collections to Connections"* dimension:** Finally, it was very important to get to know, how the image of librarians has change according to themselves. Most of the respondents marked that the image of librarian has improved a lot. The librarian is no more seen as an old fashioned profession. Some respondents noticed that a librarian of nowadays is a teacher, who must have a lot of knowledge to give all the necessary help to the users. Other respondents noticed, that being a librarian is no more seen as boring profession, and librarian is not just putting books from one shelf to another – according to them, nowadays librarians receive much more respect from society members. "We receive much more respect from readers…", "We now have more responsibilities because the amount of information is much more bigger…", "The librarians have now become computers specialists…", "We are no longer seen as the dull book lovers…" , state public librarians in their questionnaire.

Conclusions

The research performed at the 5 Lithuanian public libraries, which were recognized as the best public libraries according to the project "Bibliotekos pažangai" (Libraries for Innovation) which has running for Lithuanian public libraries by Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania, the Lithuanian National Martynas Mažvydas Library and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2007-2012) was anonymous and gave very clear and opened results. This was because quantitative research and the questions were constructed in a very correct way, and the answers helped to explore the issues and to understand the phenomena.

Research was focused on library specialists, which professional work experience at the public libraries was more that 10 years. Findings of the research performed reveal that significant part of the total number of public librarians are specialists working in public libraries for quite many years and play important role in developing process of public libraries. So it was extremely important to analyze situation on how this part of professional personnel succeed to change together with libraries during last decades and how they treated changes in libraries.

The outcomes of analysis give more clear view about significant changes in libraries and its impact to the librarians. Public librarians had to adapt themselves to the changing environment in public libraries as well as changing one outside the libraries learning totally new things, like working with computers, serving users and encouraging them

and teaching them how to handle with new technologies. Obviously, librarians faced with huge challenges, and those changes usually were not always seen as positive as it would be need to see. Research reveals that the most part of senior public librarians were active participants of changes and in spite of high cost of a lot of their efforts, they successfully have undergone the most challenges they have faced during the last decades: a lot of training and special qualification courses which enable librarians work with IT service and at the same to teach users how to use it; to create new communication habits, shifting from talking face to face, to online relations between librarian and library user.

Respondents marked that changes are necessary for libraries and especially for library professionals as first of all they are responsible for successful library development. Respondents recognized that they have to be very flexible and of course they need constant development and improvement of their professional knowledge and skills. At last it was noted that meaningful influence of IT is obvious but it doesn't mean that it substitutes totally face to face communication between librarians and library users.

The findings might be useful for many libraries in Lithuania and outside its borders, leading to better understanding how to manage with challenges in libraries changing style and speed and quality of daily work thriving library to modern social institution development. Research results might be important for the librarians of each of those selected libraries and their future in each library.

References

Libraries for Innovation. (2013). *Changes in the Library and in the Society. Report on the Impact Assessment Studies 2008–2012*. Retrieved February 25, 2013 from http://www.bibliotekospazangai.lt/media/public/Atsisiuntimui/TyrimuAtaskaitos/WEB_ENG/2011/2011_Report_Summary.pdf

Lietuvos Respublikos Kultūros Ministerija. (2013). *Bibliotekos*. Retrieved February 25, 2013 from http://www.lrkm.lt/index.php?1416773219

Libraries for all. (2010). *New models for intercultural library services*. Retrieved on January 19, 2013 from http://www.librariesforall.eu/

Libraries for all. (2010). *European strategy for multicultural education (ESME): Manual.* Retrieved February 22, 2013 from http://www.librariesforall.eu/en/products

Petuchovaitė, R. (2004). *Viešųjų bibliotekų paslaugų bendruomenei plėtra: Sėkmingos praktikos Lietuvoje ir tarptautinių veiksnių studija*. Vilnius.

Projektas "Bibliotekos pažangai" (2013). Retrieved February 22, 2013 from http://www.bibliotekospazangai.lt/lt/komunikacija-ir-viesinimas/archyvas/491-apdovanoti-konkurso-ziniasklaidos-atstovams-qsiuolaikine-biblioteka-visuomenes-pazangaiq-nugaletojai

Sociumas LT. (2012). *Projektas "Bibliotekos pažangai" paskelbė aktyviausias bibliotekas.* Retrieved February 27, 2013 from http://sociumas.delfi.lt/verslas/projektas-bibliotekos-pazangai-paskelbe-aktyviausias-bibliotekas.d?id=56783409