# Who Will Take Over the Libraries of the New Europe?

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## THE ENLARGEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

When we take a look on any map, we see that the 2004 and 2007 enlargements of the European Union can't help but have a tremendous impact on the future of the continent. It cannot go unnoticed that the shape of the continent has substantially changed; even of we do not know that the total surface of the EU countries is now 4,324,782 km² (or 1,669,807 sq mi) as opposed to over 3,250,000 km² at the break of the Millennium. The population, nearly half a billion, has risen by 21%, and it includes large countries, like Poland, which itself makes 8% of the EU population.[1] Here is New Europe, or NE. Having admitted Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, the European Union, apart from the ideas behind it, its politics and its government, can never be the same.

With the Gross Domestic Product, however, the advancement brought in by the Enlargement was not so rapid. Indeed, what Europe has incorporated are simply weaker economies, and the professional comment on this is endless. Unprofessionally, we librarians can admit that for both sides it is not necessarily a bad thing, because from what we see, it is obvious that uneven products, markets, sales and consumption levels of the members countries bring in more dynamics and new synergies. Economic diversification of EU member states opens up new markets and causes migration, which is one of the factors of development.

Those new countries are not really new or foreign in their basic features. They have in common the same European creations of towns and printing shops - both of German origin - and of public libraries, heavily influenced by what happened in the United States of America in the late 19th century. Shaping of their own middle class may be currently a little slow, but they used to take pride in having intelligentsia, a class of people educated, without real power but with the feeling of responsibility for their countries, whose spirit and non-conformism secured for them the role of teachers, mentors, and occasionally leaders.

Despite this, the fiercely defended stereotype of intellectual and spiritual values being allegedly the most serious strength of East Europe (as opposed to the materialistic West), apparently takes a blow when we look at indicators of scientific productivity. With the enlargement, they have not gone up, but rather the opposite. A 2005 study limited to the essential field of biomedical research shows that in the years 1994-2004 Europe produced original research papers whose number was 76% of those published by authors affiliated to American institutions. The inclusion of ten new countries in 2004 changed that into 66%, and if the output of Romania and Bulgaria were to be taken into account, it is only 55%. The paper "Comparison of amount of biomedical research ..." has been heavily cited, but no similar studies seem to have emerged (Soteriades & Falagas, 2005). The picture would be more complicated if the output of Estonia, Slovenia and some other countries were taken separately. With the idea of Europe gaining a chance of engaging into an equal-basis play with the United States, or the expected superpowers of the 21st century, that trend is certainly worth more attention than it receives.

What is also an important feature of the New Europe are its neighbours. Contrary to what many 'old Europeans' think, it's not only and not really the Eurasian giant of Russia (which has its enclave of Kaliningrad, formerly Königsberg, on the Baltic sea, surrounded by the EU countries) but Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova. Their histories are entwined with our histories, languages, and folklore. It creates a ground for very close cooperation. Also, these countries have resources of actual and potential labour force, not necessarily unskilled. Moreover, Ukrainian - next to Russian - capital is increasingly present in Hungary, Poland and some other NE countries.

## THE LIBRARY SCENE

The New Europe's library scene is not lavishly covered in library literature. According to Alojz Androvič, this is where "the East of Eden" is located. In his 2002 Bielefeld conference paper, our eminent Slovakian colleague is presenting us a picture of a part, which has some five times less of everything than the West of Europe (Androvič, 2002). Another study shows us that an important unifying factor for the entire European library scene is the bad or moderate salaries of librarians (probably with the exception of Ireland, the United Kingdom and Belgium). In only 50% of countries in Europe (but in almost all new European countries) some variant of Library Science is a full academic discipline (Chadaj, Garczyńska & Szaflarska, 2007). It is a paradox then that we now do not have good statistics in readership and computer literacy. Our traditional cult of books and libraries does not help us in Poland,

being able to identify only one group which could be called the reading public, namely children (Straus, Wolff & Wierny, 2007).

We tried to introduce new information technologies from the very fall of Communism - and sometimes earlier, but at that time to minor practical effects. The effects did come when Western restrictions on high technologies imposed on COMECON countries were lifted. A new group of library automation experts rose quickly in the nineties in countries like Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. That period already requires a historian (Quandt, 2002). It is believed in this part that by coming late we avoided some errors, which pioneers in the West had to make. The others are ready to admit that the effort we put into automation was mostly to bridge a civilization gap and lacked a deeper strategic dimension, which is what Christine Borgman observed in 1996 (Borgman, 1996). What is essential now is that we offer the same services and same products as the libraries in the Old Europe; trends are the same and so are the complaints (for instance concerning pricing schemes for scientific literature or concerning Google domination in literature searches).

Are we then identical? Let us not be confused with superficial similarities. Second looks may reveal unexpected similarities or hidden contrasts. If we pick up a hot theme of digital libraries, we may admit their more or less smooth progress across the continent. For instance, institutional repositories listed by Scientific Commons seem not to differ much in number and in contents between the Old and the New Europe. We understand that the list must be incomplete (with only two listed for Greece, Czech Republic, and Norway, respectively), and that the number of 13 for both Sweden and Poland, even if inaccurate, does reflect similarities of both countries' potentials. The surprise comes with the knowledge on how the materials for repositories are selected. Lithuanian Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Archive may be showing the actual, overwhelming trend, but when we take Poland, what we mostly see are institutional or regional libraries flooded with archives (otherwise, perhaps, very interesting and worth digital presence), with very few current degree research papers and with no statement on what basis some are included and some are not. And there is some embarrassment to finding out that there is only one institutional repository in Poland, which takes in all the PhD works of a school because the school (Politechnika Krakowska, Cracow University of Technology) has made it its policy, buttressed by the Rector's Regulation. To be sure, this very project (named Bibliotek@ Cyfrowa Politechniki Krakowskiej) does not fully meet OIA-PMH requirements, lacks the English interface, and is not listed by Scientific Commons, save by the emerging DART-Europe E-theses Portal (DEEP).

## POPULAR LIBRARY CULTURES

When it comes to research libraries, it seems that the automation revolution as well as the emergence of attractive new buildings of academic libraries across the New Europe has mostly passed unnoticed and unacknowledged. Traditionally, most scholars do not know what we do, do not care, and express the opinion that our routines, unavoidably simple, are focused on circulation. Many tend to respect us as guardians of treasures or feminine saviours who take care of their needs for literature on the basis of a personal service. Some are currently willing to add that the actual responsibility of the library manager is the library budget, substantially augmented by successful relating to Mother Brussels. My experience from Poland (and perhaps from Poland only) is that it does not necessarily come together with any strategic thinking on what will be the overall effect for libraries using that money.

This is probably why we in Poland do not have many European projects. Innovation is no public aim. Libraries can lay back and operate on a well-tested level. If students keep satisfying themselves with the wisdom on how to order and retrieve, check out and copy, and return items, then we probably do not need new generations of librarians. As for public libraries, they indulge in turning into literary salons and do not set goals like the deepening of civilisation competence of their auditoria (Caidi, 2006). And on top of that, professional advancement depends mostly on seniority - precisely, on years spent in service. Our library culture has it that the new guys do not decide.

Management styles can also be a part of folklore. The very practitioners commonly misunderstand managers' duties and qualifications, while they are well covered in numerous books.[2] Many directors are not leaders but rear runners to their institutions, which sometimes is accepted, because such a manager is not harmful for his crew and usually does not set any demanding goals. Generally, inattentive managers, failing to collect data that would be the basis for decision taking, are the rule in ill, malfunctioning systems (Renaud & Murray, 2003). Popular beliefs have it that the director "does not have" to be the leader because line managers are responsible for the day-to-day operations, and operations of the higher levels just do not exist. Many think that the director is only there to control the personnel, the others may add that it would be splendid if she looked good on public events or on TV. Numerous directors have their own little acres within the library, that is some activity or team they are familiar and busy themselves with, while all the others are delegated to deputy directors or heads of the departments and the general director just does not know about them. This is very much the case with directors stepping into the library world from politics or local government.

## AFTER THE RUSH

The brave years of library automation look like a long time ago. Online catalogues do not impress anybody, those who introduced them are gone or even passed away, and this is the digital age, which has arrived, with the full text and full text searches expected and requested by most of the users.

In many libraries the automation of the nineties had only supplemented the existing setting and failed to bring about any essential shift. Digital products, which came later, did not usually overlap with existing tools like those of a classical OPAC. They are now complete systems, which provide the full service, including their own finding tools. It was the new people who designed them. They built little on what was achieved earlier; they felt free to put forward a new terminology for old routines. In Poland these were mostly systems designers external to libraries; their style, their successfulness and their readiness to take over areas previously reserved to librarians keeps impressing many within and without the libraries. Numerous stakeholders are completely unaware of the fact that online databases existed earlier than search engines and full text journals.

Public libraries, in turn, did not have their own style at all. They remained largely untouched by the automation of the early nineties. With the arrival of the economic prosperity and confirmation of democratic mechanism in most townships, they at last succeeded in levying some money from the local councils. All across the New Europe, we see some very advanced public libraries, and the provincial public libraries in the Czech Republic or Poland, enjoying the status of research libraries, can only compete with academic libraries on the fields of resources, user-friendliness, infrastructure, and architectural charm. And by the way, they serve much the same audiences. But for a smaller public library it is easier to establish itself as the pride of the local mayor than as the knowledge institution. "Local authorities take care of us…" – this is what we often hear from directors. It seldom includes engaging in wider initiatives, supporting unconventional projects, or even acquiring a good selection of new publications. It often is enough if the building is renovated and some writer celebrities are invited for meetings.

## ADEQUACY OF LIBRARY EDUCATION

After the first two years of intensive automation I have the impression that tertiary education has signed itself out of the process and that it is the libraries that will have the duty of retraining their own staff. I expressed it at a conference of the Polish Library Association in Chorzów in 1994 (Hollender, 1994). But since then tertiary education has evolved, and commercial private schools have also included Library and Information Science programmes in their curricula. According to a comprehensive study of Juznic and Badovinac, there are well-established degree programmes at universities in most NE countries (Juznic & Badovinac, 2005). The authors identify types of those curricula and conclude that contents issues and auxiliary knowledge dominate them. They stress that LIS degrees originated in the fifties, based on the Soviet model, which stressed the formal education.

Since then, and especially since the seventies, frantic curricular adjustments occurred. But the question as to whether they percolated to library planning and library practice is very difficult to answer. Many colleague librarians still see two worlds, with the world of library practice having its own authors, authorities, citation tracks, conferences - all unmixed with those of academia.

On the other hand, it is harmful to curricula to have them characterized only by names of the courses. Even the course contents would not tell us the whole story, and what course contents analysis could be reliable enough with such a multitude of descriptions, languages, and styles, remains intangible. Instead, we have to remark that most library schools attach little value to the library practice. In their quest for a comprehensive curriculum, they just add new bricks, and lose control on the overall pattern. Programmes tend to be oriented on discipline, its logic, fullness and coherence, and not on students, their Weltanschauung, or their future careers; save on the practical solutions sought for in the information world.

Also, in most European countries a degree in LIS is not the exclusive passport for a career in the information world. Usually it is a complex combination of library studies, other studies, practice, and non-university certification. And there is news in Poland: a LIS postgraduate diploma is indispensable for promotion to senior library positions. This rule creates a very peculiar situation. There are practically no requirements if you are to become a national or provincial or township librarian, but there is a serious restriction if you are to hold a position which is slightly higher than what you can get when you enter the library with any degree. It somehow resembles the American rule of admitting to professional positions only those who graduated from ALA-accredited institutions. On the other hand, there is nothing comparable to ALA in Europe outside of the United Kingdom, save in the New Europe. There is not this kind of accreditation, and this kind of insight into the usefulness of academic programmes (Dowling, 2007).

It is thus very difficult to describe the value of LIS graduates, their potential and their position in the library world. Also, there is a question of what use can they make of their degree. If anything is worthwhile in the LIS curriculum then the institutional environment of a given library may waste it.[3] In many of them, operational day-to-day work turns librarianship into drudgery. If you have knowledge, or ideas, you can abandon them, because you will master a new knowledge - of the practitioner. It is an in-the-job training, for-the-job and from-the-job. After several years, if you do not try hard or are not selected for some continuing education programme, your LIS knowledge, if you had any, may well be forgotten and buried beneath your actual experience. And it is not like this because anybody wanted it or controlled it. Libraries as social organizations just have it that internal informal processes may totally invalidate the transparent. Informal opinion may contradict that of the management, senior staff often exercise power over the junior staff, and what counts is whose guy are you, and not what you are able to achieve.

Therefore many authors stress that a library career in Eastern Europe is unattractive and lacking prestige. From my own experience and talks just the opposite may be concluded: it is considered attractive and prestigious, especially in smaller localities with high unemployment rates. It is held in high esteem by those who perform it and does not really rank lowly; in society you are perceived as a member of your wider organization (like school) rather than as a librarian. By admitting that it might be prestigious we do not necessarily mean that it has to be interesting. To be sure, it is easy and safe. It does not imply challenges incident to other professions. Nobody questions that it had better be demanding, everybody is ready to stress challenges, but as we have already remarked, many librarians still think that the essence of the profession is issuing books (physically!). Such a routine can be very boring, as well as acquiring books which are flowing in as legal deposit copies, or items recommended by the local bookseller, and which are ordered because they are listed by faculties as assigned readings.[4] If it is not boring this is because it just gives you a thrill to relate to users, even if 'relating' seldom covers sophisticated reference work or educational advising.

## CHANGING OF THE GUARDS?

There was no 'changing of the guards' in NE after the fall of Communism. They did not have the reserve of some West Germany to import library managers to replace apparatchiks, and probably would not be willing to have. In many libraries old managerial habits seem more persistent than old managers. In most NE countries (with the noble exception of those smaller ones) the overall direction is not determined by any national level policy. The intake of really new people may happen due to adoption of more liberal rules on transfer of services. Let us fantasize: Shenzhen (PRC) or Guangzhou, or Shanghai library system administration is hired to run public libraries in the NE province of Mazovia, or Moravia, or Transylvania. Also immigrants may provide for a major replacement, but it is not likely that they will ever become the independent policy making factor. Yet another scenario is possible: we shall only superficially control the quality of the library personnel, because most political parties want to keep a sector with a large number of easily accessible jobs. With populist policies present in some New European countries we are likely to waive any restrictions on managerial positions: they will become a political property and will be offered to political friends and allies without any library credentials.

Another factor causing a major change in the age, qualifications and culture of the library staff can be the retirement age and demography. With the low birth rates and increasing retirement ages, we are an aging society, and the cultural consequences of that seem vast.[5] The birth rates have been going down almost everywhere for more than two decades, only in Poland did a sharp increase happen in the early eighties of the 20th century. It means that it is now that the employers in Poland might be under pressure of a new generation of university graduates with distinctive cultural features, like being born under the martial law (1981-82), being schooled under 'early capitalism', and gaining maturity within a fairly wealthy society. It would require, however, lots of additional research to determine whether we are going to have baby boomers taking over a substantial number of positions in libraries, if such a group can really have unique professional views, and if those views can lead to an action which would endanger the position of the library establishment. It is more likely that the takeover would be slower and lack a face of one generation.

## GENDER ISSUES

There is a saying in Poland that the current generation is 'Generation 1,200'. Yes, 1200 zloty (less than Euro 400) is what most alumni earn in Poland on their entry-level positions in the state sector. There is much bitterness to this saying, because it alludes to another name for a generation, namely 'JP2', by which an alleged emotional and intellectual attachment of the whole generation (not necessarily of Poles only) to the person and the teaching of the late Pope John Paul II was meant. What is important is that in no NE country do young library staff seem happy with their wages.

The process seems more important because of the differences between what both sexes earn. Yes, those few men employed in libraries in NE are more likely to occupy managerial positions than women. When we, however, compare salaries of people on the same positions, the rewarding seems gender blind. It would be very difficult to make a case of women being oppressed in libraries of NE.[6] But the whole profession is in a sense oppressed. Is it like this because it is dominated by one sex - the sex which elsewhere suffers from economic inequality? Or is it so because libraries were once dominated by women, and the social process happened to exclude the library profession from fair competition for acknowledgement and funding? This might be a very essential question, because we already have one low-paid profession in NE, namely medical, and are unable to explain how did it happen that the average salaries of physicians and nurses in countries like Poland are so much below the salaries on comparable positions in countries like Ireland or Sweden. But the health service in this part of Europe is not dominated by women to the extent that information services are.

On the other hand, we cannot depart from our previous remark that for many females library work is convenient and easy. It usually offers some flexibility in job hours, and it includes Saturday and evening duties, with a consequence that some day you can claim back that day or those hours. With the missing auxiliary, hour-paid staff, librarians can save up to several days and add them to their yearly vacation allowance with only some legal restrictions. Also, in a library you seldom have a problem of uncompleted work or overtime work. Many heads of departments see to it that routines do not change, so once you mastered the basic set of operations, you are hardly requested to retrain. The predominant image of the library work is clerical. It always pays to do your job well, but it also pays not to question the rules, the aims, and the overall sense of the work. And if so, it simultaneously does not pay to be familiar with the professional literature or progress in the other libraries, and suggest improvements to the senior staff you report to.

As working in a library seldom makes you step into the shoes of a leader and innovator, you have a chance to do very well in your job by exercising the right not to become one. And you are very well prepared to that role. Thus librarianship becomes a very good career for individuals, who want a safe nine to five job (or indeed, eight to four, or eight to three for middle-senior staff in Poland) in which you would not be totally taken with work. You may pick it up without a threat that you will have to cater to the needs of the information society or master new techniques of, say, information architecture. This is mostly for a woman whom society prescribes conformism, and there is many a library where conformism is welcome.

## CONCLUSION: WHAT WE KNOW AND WHAT WE WANT

Thus we do not know who will eventually take over the information world of the New Europe, because there is a mosaic of simultaneous processes, and no policy which would bring them all home, or to the library, or on to some common platform. We see some new energetic people in libraries, but few seek managerial positions before reaching the age of 40. It is much in fashion to be a manager, but not in the library. It is easy to find good computing people in libraries, and if they are not too busy with helping the others with word processing or fixing paper jams in printers, they can certainly prove their skills in code writing or their knowledge of equipment and networking.

We see some others who want to work with young adults and propose new innovative services.[7] It is with some disappointment that there may not be that many ready to get involved in database management or data conversion. Few find attractive the field of copyright, legislation, policymaking and lobbying. Many want to try scanning and picture processing, but the once prestigious departments of early books and special collections see nowadays few well-prepared candidates, and digital libraries lack managers equally proficient in technologies and in metadata. And the library as an institution ready to respond in the condition of crisis or danger, is unfortunately hardly heard of in this part (Winston & Quinn, 2005).

To avoid chaos, we need decisive steps in library legislation as well as in establishing and observing standards. Benchmarking and quality assurance have to cease being an academic issue; they have to be incorporated into practice. We certainly need new methods of management. The old ones will not lure the new generation and will no longer encourage anybody to manage information and knowledge. A step from project management - which indeed has proved successful in some libraries - to managing by projects (and by task teams) needs at last to be made. Promoting people not for years in service, nor for only bringing to the library a new certificate, but first of all for a successful project completion is really within reach. And when, in addition, the profession becomes really global and a library will be in the position to hire a manager of any level, coming from a more advanced environment, or just a brilliant contributor from any environment, the future of libraries in New Europe is at least as certain as the future of democracy.

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Scientific Commons. http://www.scientificcommons.org/

**NOTES**

[1] Numbers derived from Wikipedia: http://wikipedia.org/

[2] Poland' classic, for instant, is Jacek Wojciechowski, with his Organizacja i zarządzanie w bibliotekach (Organization and management in libraries), Warsaw, Cracow : Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1998. Wojciechowski's stress on leadership qualities of the manager is as strong as Anne Murray's, cf. R. Renaud and A. Murray: "Organizing for Leadership: How University Libraries Can Meet the Challenge in Higher Education". In: C. E. Regenstein, B. I. Dewey: Leadership, Higher Education, and the Information Age, New York, London : Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc., 2003, pp. 163-180.

[3] The author draws mostly on his experience, but many observations and statements by N. Caidi, op. cit., seem very relevant to his point.

[4] Cf. the opinion on the scene in many libraries, as expressed by young librarians and LIS students during a conference I Forum Młodych Bibliotekarzy pt. Zrób karierę w bibliotece! (1st Forum of Young Librarians : librarianship is your career). The note on the Forum by M. Wasik and J. Huk appeared in Bibliotekarz, (2007)1, 27-29.

[5] Cf. Retirement Ages for Men and Women in EU Accession Countries (table), in: "Fact Sheet 3, Gender Aspects of Social Protection and Pensions in Ageing Europe: Regional Preparatory Meeting for the 10-year Review of Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action Geneva, Switzerland, 14-15 December 2004", UNECE United Nations Economic Commission of Europe, http://www.unece.org/press/pr2004/04gen_n05e.htm, noted on May 25, 2007. The possible consequences of an increase in the statutory retirement age in Central Europe are analyzed by H. Polackova, Retirement Age Considerations for Central Europe  "Economics of Planning", Volume 32, Number 1, 1999, pp. 1-21.

[6] We located no study relating directly to this issue. On gender issues in economies of NE cf. E. Fultz, S. Steinhilber: "Social Security Reform and Gender Equality: Recent Experience in Central Europe". International Labour Review, 143(2004)3, 249-273. Traditional roles of women in families and persistence of the belief that woman is responsible for the home and children combined with the trend to pick up a career to better support children are revealed in many studies, including the recent one, funded by the European Social Fund, by Irena Kotowska, Urszula Sztanderska and Irena Wóycicka. See the interview by I. Wóycicka to P. Pacewicz: "Bez Pracy Nie Ma Dzieci" (No Job No Children). Gazeta Wyborcza, (June 30th-July 1st 2007)151, 17-18.

[7] Cf. successful new branches in Wrocław and Olsztyn, Poland, respectively: http://www.mediateka.biblioteka.wroc.pl/ and http://www.planeta11.olsztyn.pl/