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THE CRISIS OF ACADEMIC EDUCATION OF LIBRARIANS IN POLAND. CAUSES – CURRENT STATE – PROSPECTS



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KEY WORDS: Education of librarians. Library studies. Deregulation of the librarian profession. Academic library centers.

ABSTRACT: Thesis/goal – The academic education of librarians in Poland is in a deep crisis. The subject of the article is the changes in the academic education of librarians in Poland that have taken place over the last several years. The aim

is to try to diagnose the causes of the crisis of education in the field of library science, to present the current educational offer of academic centers educating in this field so far, and to discuss the possibilities of changing the current situation. **Method** – The method used is an analysis and criticism of the literature and a critical analysis of the sources. The main source of data was the catalog of the National Library, websites of universities with traditions in educating librarians and available teaching curricula. The collected material was analyzed in order to verify the current educational offer in the field of library science and to identify the directions of changes in the didactic offer of academic centers that so far have given instruction in the field of scientific information and library science. **Results** – The offer of academic education for librarians is systematically decreasing, which results in a decreasing share of professionals among library staff. In many regions of the country, there is not a single center educating librarians at the university level. Changes in the offer of academic centers educating librarians so far are moving towards information architecture and information management. It is necessary to consolidate the community of practitioners and theoreticians, and a broad social discussion on the future of librarian education is needed.

INTRODUCTION

This article deals with the problem of the crisis experienced in the academic education of librarians in Poland. For several years, the number of academic centers offering studies in the field of scientific information and library science or other fields directly preparing for work in libraries of various types has been systematically decreasing. The article consists of four parts. In the first, the traditions of educating librarians in Poland are briefly presented. The second part contains a discussion of the current educational offer in library studies. The next part focuses on presenting the probable causes of changes in the educational offer, e.g. legal changes (Law on Higher Education, deregulation of the librarian profession) and discussing changes in the educational offer (new fields of study) of centers that have so far provided education in the field of scientific information and library science. The last part of the article concerns forecasts regarding the further education of librarians and questions about the possibilities of counteracting further impoverishment of the offer of library studies.

TRADITIONS OF LIBRARY EDUCATION IN POLAND

The education of librarians in Poland has a long tradition, beginning with university lectures on bibliography, through courses and trainings organized during the Second Polish Republic, to university education organized after World War II. Lectures on bibliography conducted at the Universities of Warsaw, Kraków, Vilnius and the Warsaw School of Economics by Joachim Lelewel, Jerzy Samuel Bandtkie, Aleksander Bohatkiewicz

wicz and Karol Estreicher in the 19th century were the first harbingers introducing the subject of book and library science to academic education (Kowalewska & Mikołajuk, 2013, p. 203). During the period of the Second Polish Republic, librarian knowledge was acquired mainly through professional practice, which, however, required supplementation with theoretical knowledge. Therefore, various courses and trainings were organized. Great achievements in this field were made by such institutions and organizations as: *Wolna Wszechnica Polska* (the Free Polish University) - Study of Social and Educational Work (1925-1939), *Polska Macierz Szkolna* (the Polish Educational Society), *Dwuletnia Szkoła Pracownic Społecznych* (the Two-Year School of Social Workers) (1928-1932), *Jednoroczna Szkoła Bibliotekarska* (the One-Year Library School) of the Warsaw Public Library (1929-1939), or the Polish Librarians' Union and its Vocational Training Commission (from 1935). Until 1939, the only institution educating librarians at the higher level was *Wolna Wszechnica Polska*. However, this school did not have the right to award academic degrees. A librarian course was created at the Pedagogical Faculty, where lecturers were, among others, Helena Radlińska and Jan Muszkowski (Gaca-Dąbrowska, 2007, pp. 102-106). For the purposes of the faculty, the first systematic program of library studies at the higher level was developed. It consisted of three groups of subjects: humanities; vocational subjects such as book studies, librarianship and readership; and practical classes (Więckowska, 1969, p.115).

After World War II, the education of librarians took various forms. These ranged through courses and trainings organized by the ZBP and then the SBP, the State Librarians Training Center in Jarocin (1948-1978), librarian high schools (1950-1959), the State Librarians Correspondence Training Center (1953-1975) and the H. Radlińska Center for Continuing Education of Librarians (1976-2006) in Warsaw, which included fifteen branches of Post-secondary Extramural Library Study (Żmigrodzki, 1998, pp. 388-391).

The tradition of educating librarians at the university level in Poland dates back to 1945, when the first Department of Library Science was established at the University of Łódź. Gradually, library studies appeared at the Universities of Warsaw, Wrocław, Poznań, Toruń, Katowice, Lublin, and Gdańsk, and at the Pedagogical Colleges in Bydgoszcz, Kielce, Kraków, Olsztyn, Szczecin, and Zielona Góra. Since 1968, the academic education system has also included post-graduate studies (Konieczna & Kurek-Kokocińska, 2016; Wojakowski, 1989; Więckowska, 1972; Konieczna, 2016). At the turn of the 21st century, the situation of library science academic centers seemed relatively stable. They systematically expanded their scientific staff and didactic offer, and studies in the field of library science and scientific information continued to attract many students, without causing major recruitment problems. At the end of the 1990s, such

studies were conducted in fourteen academic centers (the University of Warsaw, the University of Wrocław, the Jagiellonian University, the University of Silesia in Katowice, the University of Łódź, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, the Pedagogical University of Kraków, Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz, the University of Białystok, the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, the University of Gdańsk, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, and the Faculty of Pedagogy and Art in Kalisz). Among the units offering the field of scientific information and library science, eight had the rank of an institute, two functioned as academic departments, and four as faculties (Konieczna, 2016, pp. 16-19; Grygowski, 2020, pp. 145-148). Stabilization was confirmed by the introduction of ministerial standards in 2007 (Regulation, 2007). These unified the principles of education for librarians, starting from the name of the field of study – scientific information and library science – through the profile of the graduate program to the educational content framework (defining groups of basic and major subject matter). It was assumed that a graduate of library studies “should be prepared to work in various institutions operating in the field of public communication, culture, education, business, science and administration dealing with the collection, development and sharing of documents and collections of information about documents and information systems. They should be prepared to work in: all types of libraries, information centers, bibliographic workshops, publishing houses, archives, bookstores [...]” (Próchnicka, 2008). This situation of relative stability and uniformity of curricula was changed by the amendment to the *Law on Higher Education* of 2011 (Act, 2011) and the introduction of the National Qualifications Framework. One of the main provisions of the Act was the extended autonomy of universities in the sphere of didactics, which allowed for independent creation of curricula, abolishing the uniformity of compulsory content and names of fields of study. This was one of the reasons for the gradual liquidation of the field of information science and library science from the educational offer and its replacement with other “more attractive” fields. Adoption of the National Qualifications Framework made it necessary to define the effects of education, qualifications acquired in the Polish higher education system, and to define the profile of studies: practical or general academic (Regulation, 2011).

CURRENT EDUCATIONAL OFFER IN SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION AND LIBRARY STUDIES

Since the situation was still relatively stable in the first decade of this century, one should ask what happened in recent years that, as prof. Ja-

cek Wojciechowski writes, led the professional education of librarians to be gradually abolished: "There is no need to tell fairy tales: this is the annulment of professional education for librarians at all levels and in all forms. From this perspective, therefore, it is also the germination of the disappearance of decent academic librarianship and of any other librarianship. The devil knows why, and only in Poland" (Wojciechowski, 2020). These words seem completely justified if we compare the current educational offer with the state presented above. Of the fourteen universities that offered studies in the field of scientific information and library science (bachelor, master and post-graduate studies), the field of study remained in the offer of only four: at the University of Warsaw's Faculty of Journalism, Information and Book Studies – full-time and extramural first and second cycle program; the University of Wrocław's Institute of Information and Media Sciences – full-time and extramural studies (extramural studies – no recruitment for the first year); the University of Silesia in Katowice's Institute of Cultural Studies (former Institute of Library and Information Science) – full-time and extramural studies of the first and second cycle (extramural studies – only the first year) and at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań's Faculty of Pedagogy and Arts in Kalisz, Department of Scientific Information - first-cycle studies. From the current academic year, a major in librarianship has been introduced at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw¹.

Analyzing the descriptions of fields of study in the recruitment systems of universities, it can be noticed that emphasis is on the dominance of content in the field of information management and organization, social communication, or media communication in education programs, in a way hiding strictly librarian-related content. In the description of the field of study at the Faculty of Journalism, Information and Book Studies of the University of Warsaw for undergraduate studies, one can read: "During your studies you will learn to recognize information needs; create information resources; design and use tools for their organization, development and sharing in various centers (information departments of institutions and organizations, computer information networks or libraries)" (see footnote 1). At the University of Wrocław, it is emphasized first of all that studies prepare students for professional careers as information brokers and managers, and only secondarily as librarians – "If you are interested in media communication, management and information transfer in the modern world, and in the future you would like to move efficiently in thicket of information and knowledge, work as an information broker

¹ All information on the current educational offer was verified on the basis of information contained on the websites of individual universities and in the POLON database (list of pages in the bibliography).

and manager, run a publishing business, become a qualified librarian and bibliotherapist – you should choose this field of study” (see footnote 1). At the University of Silesia in the offer addressed to potential candidates we read: “Studies in the field of scientific information and library science offer preparation for professions in which knowledge is necessary, as well as provide a set of skills in the field of organization and social communication through written documents (traditional and electronic) and non-textual media [...] supporting or satisfying needs that are educational, knowledge-creating, artistic, entertainment providing, or compensatory in the life sphere of individuals and societies systematically striving for general progress” (see footnote 1). It is not difficult to notice that the possibility of working in a library is not particularly exposed, and sometimes is even overlooked. A clear difference in the particular emphasis placed on content of education can be seen in the program of the latest major – librarianship – which has been introduced, starting from the current academic year 2022/2023, at Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University. This is a master’s program, definitely of a historical nature - “Studies in the field of librarianship at Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University give you the opportunity to gain a thorough knowledge of the history of books, periodicals and libraries throughout history, including the creators of libraries and bibliographies, and their impact on the socio-cultural environment of Poland and Europe. During classes students gain detailed knowledge about the development of historical book collections and special collections in Poland, and are also prepared in the field of acquiring, cataloging, sharing and storing library resources.” (see footnote 1). We can observe great diversity in the field of specializations or thematic blocks offered at individual universities. And here our attention is drawn to the dominance of information science content over bibliological or librarian content. The offer of the University of Warsaw for undergraduate studies includes the following thematic blocks, from which the student chooses two: digital librarianship, science management, culture animation. The following specialties are offered for MA studies: editing, information and knowledge architecture, cultural heritage, information and communication in cultural institutions, library organization and management, information and knowledge management. At the University of Silesia, students are offered such thematic blocks as: culture and book editing, modern library, the young reader in the world of books and media, protection and conservation of library collections. At the University of Wrocław, students can choose from the following specialties: teaching (1st cycle), digital cultural heritage, information brokering, information management (2nd cycle). Bachelor’s studies in the field of scientific information and library science are also conducted at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (Faculty of Pedagogy and Art in Kalisz). These are the only studies with a practical

profile, the others have a general academic profile. In the course description, we find information about the possibility of obtaining typically librarian qualifications. The library is also indicated as the first, potential place of work – “Studies in the field of Scientific Information and Library Science allow you to obtain specialist education in the field of information and librarianship broadly understood. The content of education includes the theory and methodology of information and library activities, i.e. the collection, processing and sharing of data and information from various fields of knowledge. Students acquire the skills to create and navigate databases, on-line catalogs and other electronic information resources, learn to search for information in automated systems and on the Internet. They are able to develop various types of documents in the MARC21 International Format, in accordance with the RDA rules. The study program prepares you to work in libraries, information broker companies, as well as in all positions related to information management.” (see footnote 1). The studies offer two specialties – information brokering and school librarianship.

Postgraduate studies complement the educational offer for bachelor’s and master’s studies. However, here too a decrease in interest from candidates is observed, which results in the suspension of recruitment or the removal of studies from the offer. At present, from the former library science centers, postgraduate studies are offered by: the University of Warsaw, Postgraduate Studies in Library Science; the University of Silesia, Qualifying Postgraduate Studies in Library and Information Science; the Pedagogical University in Kraków, Library and Information Science (2 or 3 semesters); the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Library Science and Scientific Information; and the University of Białystok, Postgraduate Studies in Reading Animation, Scientific Information and Librarianship.

Due to low interest, recruitment remains suspended at the University of Wrocław, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, and Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz. Some centers offer post-graduate studies thematically related to the issues of bibliology and information science, which can complement or extend library knowledge. These are: Postgraduate Studies in Publishing Policy and Bookselling and New Media in Cultural Heritage Institutions at the University of Warsaw; Editing at the Pedagogical University of Cracow; Postgraduate Studies in Information Brokering and Information Management and Postgraduate Studies in Web Publishing at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń.

Postgraduate studies in the field of library science can also be found in the offer of some private universities, such as Poznań University of Social Sciences (Scientific, electronic information and library science); the Uni-

versity of Vocational Education in Wrocław, University of Lower Silesia, (Library Science); the University of Humanities and Economics in Łódź (Library science with elements of digital information management). It should be clearly noted, however, that not all of the above-mentioned universities have inaugurated these studies which are included in the recruitment offer, due to too little interest.

CHANGES IN THE EDUCATIONAL OFFER OF ACADEMIC CENTERS EDUCATING LIBRARIANS

As it has already been mentioned, when analyzing the current educational offer in library science studies, in the last decade we have observed significant changes in the educational offer of academic centers that have so far educated future library staff. There are several main reasons for this state of affairs. These are primarily legal changes whose consequences for the education of librarians are still observed today. They were initiated by the already mentioned *Law on Higher Education* of 2011 (Ustawa, 2011) which expanded the autonomy of universities in the sphere of teaching, allowing for the independent creation of curricula. As a consequence, in 2012 new fields of study appeared in the offer of centers educating librarians and information services employees, instead of or in addition to scientific information and library science. These included: information in e-society (UMCS), information management and bibliology (UMK Toruń), information management (UJ), information in the digital environment (UŁ), electronic and online publishing (U Wroc.) or information architecture (UP Krakow). Some of these turned out to be odd ephemera which were liquidated after several cycles of education. Others, such as information architecture or information management, became dominant over time in the didactic offer of library science centers. A detailed summary of the current didactic offer of these centers (apart from scientific information and library science) is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Didactic offer (1st and 2nd cycle program) of academic centers educating so far in the field of scientific information and library science. (as of March 2023). Author's study.

University	Faculty / Institute	Field of Study
University of Warsaw	Faculty of Journalism, Information and Book Studies	<i>Architecture of Information Spaces – 1st and 2nd cycle program</i> <i>Modern publishing – 1st and 2nd cycle program</i>

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń	Institute for Information and Communication Research	<i>Information Architecture – 1st and 2nd cycle program</i>
Maria Skłodowska-Curie University in Lublin	Institute of Cultural Sciences	<i>Information Architecture – 1st and 2nd cycle program</i>
	Institute of Social Communication and Media Science	<i>Public Relations and Information Management – 1st cycle program</i>
University of Wrocław	Institute of Information and Media Sciences	<i>Digital and Web Publishing – 1st and 2nd cycle program</i>
		<i>Information Management – 1st cycle program</i>
University of Silesia in Katowice	Institute of Cultural Sciences	<i>Information Architecture – 1st cycle program</i>
Pedagogical University of Cracow	Institute of Information Sciences	<i>Information Architecture – 1st cycle program</i>
		<i>Information Management and Digital Publishing – 1st and 2nd cycle program</i>
Jagiellonian University	Institute of Information Studies	<i>Information Management – 1st and 2nd cycle program</i> <i>Digital information processing – 1st and 2nd cycle program</i>
University of Łódź	Department of Library and Information Science	<i>Information in the digital environment – 1st cycle program</i>
		<i>Computer science with business English – 2nd cycle program</i>

Two main trends in education emerge from this tally: information architecture and information management. When reviewing individual programs of study, one may note the presence of educational content in some of them, which was also included in the programs of library science studies. Often, this content is somehow “smuggled” in as optional items. This is undoubtedly related to the research interests of researchers and a specific attachment to bibliological issues. Some specialties even suggest that they prepare for work in libraries (e.g. modern librarianship – information science with business English at the University of Łódź), with an emphasis on modernity, digital libraries or libraries functioning in the new digital reality. The descriptions of most of these majors contain provisions stating that their graduates may work, among other places, in libraries, for example: “The program content is complemented by issues devoted

to the functioning and management of the so-called information institutions, i.e. all organizational forms in which information plays a key role in their functioning. This applies to libraries, archives, galleries and museums [...]” (Architecture of Information Spaces at the University of Warsaw); “Graduates of the PCiS (*Publikowanie cyfrowe I Sieciowe – Digital and Web Publishing*) field of first-cycle studies will be competent employees of the information sector [...]. They can look for employment in publishing houses of traditional and digital publications (books and magazines), Internet portals, companies digitizing publications, digital libraries, scientific institutions opening Open Access repositories, online bookstores, publishing and marketing departments” (Digital and Network Publishing at the University of Wrocław); “The offered program will provide preparation for work in institutions dealing with the collection, development and publication of traditional and digital documents” (Information Management and Digital Publishing at the Pedagogical University of Cracow). The fact that their graduates, as in the case of many other majors, can look for work in libraries is obvious. It remains an open question whether they are really properly prepared for this and whether there is a demand for them in libraries.

Another important legal act that undoubtedly influenced the situation of academic centers was the Act of 13 June 2013 amending the acts regulating the performance of certain professions (Act, 2013), including deregulating the profession of a librarian. Its consequence was the liquidation of the obligation to have a higher education, have professional experience (0-10 years) depending on the position, and passing the state exam for the position of a certified librarian. The act was adopted despite strong opposition from librarians, librarian associations and representatives of academic centers conducting library studies. Undoubtedly, this did not contribute to an increase in the professional prestige of librarians, and thus caused a further decline in interest in library studies (Brzezińska-Stec & Żochowska, 2013; Grygrowski, 2020, pp. 157-161).

The last legal act that has left its mark on the activities of libraries and universities is Act 2.0 - a constitution for science (Act, 2018). Its direct consequence for librarian training centers is their further reorganization due to *the Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of September 20, 2018 on the fields of science and scientific disciplines and artistic disciplines* (Regulation, 2018). Bibliology and information science ceased to be an independent scientific discipline in the field of humanities and was included in the field of social sciences, added to a group of disciplines defined as social communication and media sciences, together with media sciences and sciences of cognition and social communication (Koredczuk & Woźniak-Kasperek, 2019; Hofman, 2019). For many centers, this had far-reaching consequences, such as the liquidation of Institutes of Scientific Information

and Library Science (e.g. in Lublin, where two departments were created on the basis of the Institute: the Department of Information Science, Book Studies and Media Education at the Institute of Social Communication and Media Sciences in the Faculty of Political Science and Journalism, and the Department of Digital Humanities at the Institute of History in the Faculty of Humanities – currently the Department of Information and Digital Culture at the Faculty of Philology; or in Katowice, where the Institute of Library Science became part of the Institute of Cultural Sciences), transformations and changes of names, structures and locations at faculties (e.g. in Toruń – Information Research Institute and Communication; or in Wrocław – Institute of Information and Media Sciences). All this can undoubtedly have a negative impact on didactics and research in the field of what is broadly understood as book science.

In addition to legal changes, several other reasons for changing the didactic offer should be indicated. The main one is undoubtedly a decrease in interest in the current educational offer and recruitment difficulties that some universities have struggled with or are still struggling with. The profession of a librarian is not perceived as attractive, both in terms of remuneration and career opportunities. Consequently, another impulse for changes was the desire to make the didactic offer more attractive and adapt it to the needs of the modern labor market. This shows the growing demand of companies and institutions from the information sector for specialists conducting information activities, managing databases and electronic content. I leave open the question of whether this resulted in a lack of demand for librarians. Undoubtedly, Western patterns were also important, where one can see the desire to educate information and knowledge managers with competencies in the field of knowledge management, information architecture, ICT skills, information systems, user support, project management, promotion and marketing, and communication skills (Nowakowska, 2013; Ślaska, 2013). It should be noted, however, that this has not resulted in the complete liquidation of library science studies.

FORECASTS / QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE

In the context of the described changes, many questions arise about the future of librarian education, starting with what the content of teaching should be, what organizational shape it should take, whether there should be one unified name of the field of study, whether first – and second-cycle studies in library science are necessary, or whether postgraduate studies should be adapted to the specificity of work in particular types of libraries, what is the fate of library science graduates in the labor market, whether employees of particular types of libraries need separate skills and thus specific fields of study, to the question of how to revive library education.

Professor Elżbieta Barbara Zybert rightly notes that “in order to improve the perception of the librarian profession and library studies, and thus contribute to the increase of candidates’ interest in studies in this field, it is not enough to modernize the curricula. Broad social support is needed” (Zybert, 2020). According to her, the main reason for the poor condition of librarianship in Poland is the negative attitude of society to education and the low level of readership. This translates into the perception of libraries, and an important element of this perception is the professionally trained staff. Only a staff educated with modern methods will be able to effectively find themselves in both the digital and real environment and meet the expectations of the new library user. Henryk Hollender, writing about the profession of a librarian, remarks quite controversially that although library workers today in Poland carry out an extensive repertoire of tasks, and the results of their work have extensive social consequences, they do not conduct professional activity. This judgment was influenced by the following observations: “librarianship lacks commonly recognized points of reference, which are generally human authorities, strong institutions and the canon of publications; there is a lack of exemplary solutions, accepted as rational and perpetuated by professional literature; discussions ending with the adoption of such solutions and their implementation are absent; there are no librarians in public life; the librarian’s point of view is irrelevant in the discourse on science, education, media and social communication, the past and historical values, etc., despite the solidification of the political ritual consisting in public celebrations of all kinds of openings (library premises, digital libraries, etc.); significant initiatives, undertakings, activities that change the “state of the art” in the area of librarianship, bibliography and related areas come from representatives of other professions, especially IT specialists, or are a derivative of general trends such as digitization, open access, theories of “friendliness” of buildings and devices, etc.; Among young employees there is an office vision of library practice as repetitive activities consisting in “getting things done” (Hollender, 2015, p. 329-330). According to the author, the explanation for this situation is the lack of a professional education that would dominate the process of preparation for the profession: this once defined patterns and measure of success, inspired innovation and ensured a minimum of prestige. It seems that this process can only deepen in the situation of crisis in library studies.

It is difficult to give an unambiguous answer as to whether to be a good librarian it is necessary to have completed library studies. People with education other than that of a librarian have often worked in libraries, but it is worrying that in many environments they are beginning to constitute the majority. Practice and observation of the legal situation in many countries around the world, where professional preparation is required to take

up employment in librarian positions, shows that professionals should work in librarian positions (Zybert, 2020).

Forecasts regarding the situation of library studies in Poland are not optimistic. It is difficult to count on a sudden increase in interest in the field of study if no consolidated actions from theoreticians and practitioners are taken to improve the prestige of the profession, as well as intensive lobbying activities to restore the legal requirements for filling library positions. It is necessary to involve librarians, directors of institutions, academic teachers, and professional associations, and to undertake a broad social discussion on the problem. The fact that this discussion is getting wider and wider is a source of some optimism. However, it is impossible to resist the impression that a significant part of both the representatives of state authorities and the managerial staff of library institutions do not notice the problem.

If the community does not consolidate in joint actions to change this state, in a few years we may wake up in a situation where library studies will simply cease to exist.

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