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LIBRARY USERS, OFFERINGS AND TYPES OF SERVICES IN POLAND

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Keywords: Public libraries. Academic libraries. Library users. Library services. Information services.

Thesis/purpose of the article – The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of modern library and information services for users of Polish public and academic libraries. These have emerged due to the transformations resulting from technological progress, new document formats, innovative ways in which information circulates, evolving environments, and user needs, as well as social phenomena such as fragmentation of society, population ageing and a very low level of readership in Poland. **Research methodology** – Analysis and critical review of literature as well as content-related assessment of web services were performed. **Major outputs/conclusions** – The outline of library services offered by Polish

public and academic libraries provided in this article is not exhaustive. However, it can reasonably lead to the conclusion that the library offerings in Poland in the 2nd decade of the 21st century is incomparably more extensive than even a dozen years back. The social and political transformations following 1989, Poland's membership in European structures, the evolution of information and communication technologies, changing user needs and social metamorphoses as well as solutions developed in other countries being implemented have all largely shaped the current approach to the role of libraries. Libraries extend their fields of activity, entering areas previously set aside for cultural institutions. By offering a wider range of services for very diverse groups of recipients, they are becoming increasingly rooted in the public space.

INTRODUCTION

The tasks and roles of each library result from the adopted perspective. If libraries are seen as intermediaries in social communication, what matters most are their tasks or functions described by Jacek Wojciechowski through the following keywords: information, educational support, intellectual and aesthetic tasks, entertainment, substitution and integration (Wojciechowski, 2010, pp. 149-186). This leads to a series of questions such as: how do modern libraries perform their role? Are all their functions treated equally? Have any innovative ways to fulfil them emerged? This article provides an overview of the services provided by modern-day libraries with respect to the above tasks.

At the close of the second decade of the 21st century, we can find libraries at two stages of their organisational development in Poland[1]. The first group testify to a coarse and ascetic past. They are caught in stagnation, more often than not attributable to their managers, and represent a warning to those librarians who have based their survival strategies on passive approaches. For it cannot be assumed that waiting inactively will pay off and that, all in all, "things will work out somehow". Probably not. In an age of ubiquitous and fierce competition, even in the field of culture and education, such a passive attitude may have disastrous consequences and eventually cause the library to close down. Such disasters do occur, but also positive, pro-active attitudes among librarians are resulting in increasingly creative contributions to the evolution of libraries, transforming them into centres capable of competing with other leisure activity providers. The recent years have shown that such libraries in the second stage of their development are increasingly numerous. Today, they are the ones shaping the conditions of Polish public librarianship. Academic libraries have cre-

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[1] In 2014, the Polish Central Statistical Office (GUS) registered 9,812 libraries in Poland, including 8,094 public libraries, 1,043 scientific libraries, 269 pedagogical libraries, 326 professional libraries, 58 professional and literary libraries, 22 of Scientific, Technical and Economic Information Centres (INTE) and 14 libraries of research societies (National Library of Poland, 2016).

ated an even more attractive universe, experiencing what is probably the most splendid period of prosperity in their entire history. Numerous investments in new buildings, digitisation, and transformation into hybrid libraries indicate that academic libraries are enjoying a true renaissance in their development.

Due to the large variety of works resulting from the multitude of different library types, managing bodies and end users, this article can provide no more than a summary overview of certain symptomatic phenomena and good practices. However, its purpose is to explain the condition of today's Polish libraries in general. The main indicators analysed were characteristics related to the users of Polish libraries, the new types of services and offerings provided, and information services offered. We have focused on both public libraries, which are very numerous and open to everyone, and academic ones, which drive the development of Polish librarianship, especially in terms of technology and approaches to information. This article omits the largest category of libraries, namely school libraries[2]. These are closely linked to the schools in which they operate, their activities being mostly limited to a specific school community. Furthermore, any evolution in school libraries is virtually a consequence of the schools' development, which means they have little control over their own condition. We have not discussed professional, scientific (except for academic and public ones), pedagogical and other libraries included in the GUS statistics, which are rather sparsely scattered over the social space of Poland and undoubtedly play a secondary role when it comes to inspiring change and progress in technology and services.

LIBRARY USERS

A library user is anyone who uses the resources and services offered by a library, not necessarily through borrowing books (Czapnik, Gruszka & Tadeusiewicz, 2011, p. 351; Reitz, 2014). We must not forget that the social reach of libraries naturally extends far beyond making library materials available for external loans. In Poland, the most frequent reasons for visiting libraries are, among others: consulting the press, borrowing and returning books for family members, sessions and events held at the library, using a computer connected to the Internet, being able to study in suitable conditions, and borrowing required reading for school classes, whether or not such books are going to be read (Michalak, Koryś & Kopeć, 2016, pp. 4, 47-48).

Various typologies of library users exist, resulting from adopted classification criteria such as age, place of residence, profession, corporate rank

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[2] In the 2013/2014 school year, 21,529 schools in Poland had their own libraries.

etc. (Reitz, 2014). If we consider socio-professional groups, as revealed by the most recent published data for 2015, Polish libraries are most frequently used by school and university students, followed by specialised professionals and, finally, white-collar workers. These are called intensive readers, reading seven or more books annually. More women than men use libraries, library users being usually people with a tertiary education and residing in the biggest cities – those with a population exceeding 500,000, resulting in both a higher population density and a more developed and diverse library network. Public libraries are less frequently used by those who are economically disadvantaged, with lower educational attainment, and with no home book collection. Among the reasons why they do not use libraries, they mention factors such as the lack of need given the amount of information available online, being able to cope without libraries, the lack of a public library in their neighbourhood, and finally the insufficient number of recent publications available in libraries (Michalak, Koryś & Kopeć, 2016, pp. 49-54).

Despite the evident changes in what public libraries have to offer, Poles still believe their primary function is to lend books that readers could not have afforded otherwise or that are no longer available in bookshops. Another advantage of libraries often cited is the librarians' assistance in finding information needed and in recommending specific titles. The third most frequently listed feature of libraries is the accessibility and "friendliness" of their premises. Far more rarely, Poles appreciate the opportunity to consult the press, use a computer connected to the Internet, take part in sessions and workshops, or borrow multi-media materials (Michalak, Koryś & Kopeć, 2016, pp. 55-56).

As emphasised above, Poles still mainly go to the library to borrow books. To attract new readers, an offering is required that would go beyond this primary function, creating new needs to which the library would respond. Such potential needs are, for instance, building communities based on common interests and creating so-called *third places* (Kruszewski, 2012, pp. 189, 424-426). As the level of readership in Poland overall is on the decline, such plans should also be inclusive of people who are outside the reach of written culture (Michalak, Koryś & Kopeć, 2016, p. 86). It seems that many recommendations based on readership surveys conducted in Poland are already being implemented in a substantial number of Polish libraries, as described in more detail below.

Let us point out that, apart from the groups of most frequent library users listed above, people at risk of social and digital exclusion are no strangers to libraries. This includes the unemployed, solitary, elderly, disabled, people living in rural areas, those with low education levels, delinquents, the economically disadvantaged, foreigners, and immigrants as well as members of national and ethnic minorities (Panek & Czapiński, 2015, p. 426; Szarfen-

berg, 2014). Not everyone uses libraries to the same extent, nor do libraries target their services equally at everyone. For instance, analyses of their offerings have shown that in recent years the needs of the disabled and the elderly have been given special consideration. This is a positive phenomenon, since as anticipated by demographers their numbers will grow in the future.

LIBRARY SERVICES AND OFFERING

The activity of libraries is defined through services which can be generally grouped into three categories: making holdings available, providing information, and working with the reader (Wojciechowski, 2001, p. 46). Naturally, these are being constantly transformed by technological progress, new forms of documents, the evolution of the way information circulates, and finally by the changing environment and user needs. Among the numerous emerging services in library offerings, the ones that deserve particular attention are on the one hand those resulting from the development of information and communication technologies (mostly information services), and the related information overload, and on the other, those that are a consequence of diagnosed social phenomena such as social fragmentation, the resulting social and digital exclusion, population ageing, and the very low level of readership in Poland.

Considering the catastrophic condition of readership in Poland – as compared to other European countries – and the declining number of people borrowing books from libraries[3], promoting books has become a natural role of these institutions. For years now, they have encouraged reading through traditional means of user outreach, such as exhibitions of the latest editions, meetings with authors, contests for readers, or Book Discussion Clubs. However, new types of activities have also emerged. Some libraries have started to promote reading as a leisure activity and to highlight its benefits while working with families of newborn babies. One example is the "Off to a Good Start" programme run by the Municipal Public Library in Wrocław since 2010. It aims at encouraging readership from a very early age. At first, layettes consisting of a book for children, a handbook for parents, and a brochure on activities offered by the public library were distributed in selected maternity hospitals and library branches in the city. Today, such "reading packs" are given out to users under the age of 5 at the library branches. The library also edited and published a booklet entitled *Na dobry początek* [Off to a Good Start] with book recommendations for young readers, suggested handbooks for parents, guidelines on how to play with children using books, and finally an invitation to take part in family events

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[3] 37% of Poles declared having read at least one book in 2015, with at least 17% of readers borrowing books from public libraries, and 5% from school libraries (Michalak, Koryś & Kopeć, 2016, pp. 4, 47-48).

organised by the library branches in Wrocław (Municipal Public Library in Wrocław, 2016).

Some initiatives have become nationwide, such as the one pursued by the Centre for Children's Literature (CLD) at the Municipal Public Library in Oświęcim. Not only has the Centre been building up a collection of children's literature in order to lend artistically and thematically diverse publications, but it also works to influence publishers and foster interest in a variety of publications by seeking to acquire books through many different channels. Awarding the Kornel Makuszyński Literary Prize is particularly helpful in this respect, as it drives other promotional activities related to the dissemination of books among children (see Krawczyk, 2015, pp. 140-146).

Given the growing availability of e-texts, including e-books and other reading matter available online, as well as the increasing selection of e-text media, there is an emerging need (also noted by many librarians) for training related to the use of the latest information and communication technologies. Another issue in this context is promoting the e-books made available by libraries (Kisilowska, Paul & Zając, 2016, p. 7). It is equally important to improve information competencies, especially in relation to searching for, analysing, and selecting information, which is of immense importance in the context of the current dramatic rise in the amount of information available. As librarians undertake such tasks, the offerings of libraries are incorporating training sessions and workshops on using modern technologies, searching for information online (mainly in academic libraries), and the promotion of electronic resources available in libraries. For instance, the Municipal Public Library in Piekary Śląskie ran a project called "Senior Readers in the Library", where participants could learn how to use tablets, VR headsets, 3D printers, 3D pens, and iPads. The same library runs workshops on robotics for young users, as well as coding sessions and workshops for various age groups (Municipal Public Library...). Another notable initiative aimed at promoting e-books is the lending of e-book readers, for example within the *Arteteka* project of the Regional Public Library in Cracow (Regional Public Library in Cracow, 2015a), as well as making *Czytak* audio-book readers available to visually impaired users, arranged by public libraries in cooperation with the *Larix* Association of Assistance to the Disabled (*Stowarzyszenie*...).

Another socially significant role of Polish libraries is to offer services targeted at those sectors of the society that run the risk of social exclusion or discrimination, along with promoting desirable attitudes – especially given the current context – such as tolerance and openness towards people of other cultures, beliefs, or religions. Such initiatives fall into the category of social participation activities held in libraries (Zybert, 2015). Certain groups at risk of social exclusion are targeted by public libraries which, as public institutions open to everyone, undertake initiatives aimed at fos-

tering social integration and fighting exclusion and stigmatisation. Many actions are addressed to third-age users, specifically digital, internet, and multi-media literacy workshops, activation sessions (for example supporting people with depression), special events, Book Discussion Clubs, bibliotherapy sessions (e.g. using reminiscence therapy), lectures and talks on preventive healthcare and safety, working with Senior Citizen Clubs, promoting users' own work, language courses (mostly English), inter-generational integration (e.g. young library users teaching seniors how to use new technologies), reading out loud, or getting senior citizens involved in volunteering. For the unemployed, training sessions are held on how to prepare job applications (CVs, cover letters etc.), along with digital literacy courses, meetings with employment counsellors or employment agency officers, workshops with psychologists or make-up artists, as well as opening centres of information on the local labour markets, in cooperation with employment agencies.

Polish libraries also offer services dedicated to foreigners and national or ethnic minorities; however, because of the country's social structure these are far fewer[4]. The offerings for this group, however limited, typically consists of acquiring texts in their native languages, Polish language courses, and integration sessions, as well as promoting the culture and language of the respective minority.

Some libraries offer permanent services for the disabled, sometimes outside of the library building. Ordering books over the telephone is a well-established practice for delivering library materials directly to people with reduced mobility or to the disabled, as well as to nursing homes, occupational therapy workshops and hospitals. Such activities are carried out both in big cities and in smaller localities. One example is the option to order books over the phone at the Public Library of the Śródmieście District in Warsaw (Public Library of the Śródmieście District...), another is the Library on Wheels of the Municipal Public Library in Gruta (Municipal Public Library...). Other initiatives aimed at supporting users with disabilities include individual and group sessions concerning the use of library materials, integration meetings, and competitions or training sessions dedicated to the latest information and communication technologies.

Numerous library activities for groups running the risk of social and digital exclusion have been implemented within projects of the Information Society Development Foundation (FRSI), such as *RozPRACUJ to z biblioteką* [WORK this out with the Library], *Praca Enter. Biblioteka jako miejsce informacji o rynku pracy* [New Job. Enter. The Library as a Centre of Labour

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[4] According to recent statistics, foreigners granted a permanent or temporary residence permit represent only 0.65% of the country's population (excluding visa holders), national minorities – 0.67%, and ethnic minorities – 0.074% (Ministry of the Interior and Administration, 2016; Polish Office for Foreigners (UDSC), 2016).

Market Information], or *Biblioteka miejscem spotkań wielu kultur* [The Library Where Cultures Meet]. The Library Development Program, implemented jointly by the Polish-American Freedom Foundation (PAFF) and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation within the Global Libraries initiative, played a key role in enabling public libraries in Poland to take on the above tasks. The programme was implemented in the years 2009-2015 by the Information Society Development Foundation (FRSI) established by the Polish-American Freedom Foundation. Its main objective was to support public libraries in Poland in becoming local centres of social activity. It involved nearly 4,000 public libraries, especially in smaller towns and in rural areas. The programme helped libraries to acquire computer equipment and to train employees, promoted their modernisation, and fostered their cooperation with other institutions and organisations that could support them in a number of ways. As a result, public libraries broadened their offerings by introducing countless attractive services responding to the needs of the local communities. With new forms of library promotion, they became centres of social life and leisure. Lastly, many people were trained in using modern technologies, and the opening hours of many libraries were extended (FRSI, 2016).

The number of initiatives undertaken by public libraries, as reported in the monthly editions of the newsletter *Biblioteka. Tu się dzieje!* [Library on the Move] published by the FRSI, shows how important a milestone this programme was,. For example, in its September 2016 issue, the magazine announced that a project of foreign language courses had been launched by the FRSI in cooperation with the Funmedia company to provide users of public libraries with free access to language courses. Additionally, over a hundred institutions are to participate in the second edition of a programme entitled *Link do przyszłości. Zaprogramuj swoją karierę* [Link to the Future. Program your Career], supporting young people in their professional and pre-professional decisions. Also, webinars are hosted by FRSI partner portals, such as labib.pl. In September 2016, the latter launched its monthly cycle entitled *Od potrzeby do uczestnictwa, czyli jak zaangażować młodzież do działania* [From need to participation. How to involve the youth in action]. The *Rozmawiajmy o uchodźcach* [Let's talk about refugees] project teaches tolerance as well as pro-active and pro-social attitudes. Such examples showcase not only the increased activity of public libraries in their role as community centres, but also their ability to work with other institutions and non-profit organisations. To exchange experiences, a congress of public libraries entitled *I Am the Library!* was launched, held in November 2016 in Łódź (*Library…*).

Services for those at risk of social and digital exclusion mostly aim at fighting those phenomena, but also portray the library as an open and appealing place of leisure activity where everyone can have a good time, ei-

ther by themselves or with others. Whether we call it the destination library, the third place, or the library supermarket (Grygrowski, 2015, pp. 11, 15; Oldenburg, 1999, pp. 21, 32), the idea is to create a friendly space favouring leisure, play, entertainment, and social life on the one hand, and on the other to offer places where readers can focus on reading or studying. More and more, Polish libraries are taking on the challenge of becoming a research, cultural, and leisure centre, such as the Manhattan Library in the Manhattan Shopping Centre in Gdańsk, which apart from various activities for children, young people, and adults, offers a diverse collection (including audio books, films, comic strips and CDs) as well as game consoles and musical instruments (Regional and Municipal Public Library in Gdańsk, 2015). Another case in point is the comprehensive, extensive offerings of the Regional Public Library in Cracow, which includes: art exhibitions; volunteer training; educational workshops on diverse topics for all age groups; participation in European programmes promoting social integration, tolerance, inter-cultural and inter-generational dialogue; literary soirées; workshops for children during their winter and summer holidays; board game sessions; literary games; reading together; digital literacy education for senior citizens; foreign language courses; reviews of various art forms delivered by the disabled; and many more (Regional Public Library in Cracow, 2015b). Such highly diverse activities as are now offered by Polish libraries foster the role of the library as a public space, as well as that of an institution that "educates for culture" (Kisilowska, 2015).

INFORMATION SERVICES

Even though providing information is one of the library's services, it deserves to be discussed separately, specifically because it has been developing incomparably faster than any other type of activity pursued by libraries. Information services offered by libraries extend from making their holdings available within their premises, through individual and inter-library loans, to providing access to digital resources. A crucial element in this catalogue of tasks is also providing information about libraries' offerings and activities with the intention of promoting library services, which is necessary considering the fierce competition they face from other cultural institutions and sources of information. Additionally, university libraries are providing information about their own published output by preparing bibliometric databases and providing thematically grouped (bibliographic and factual), patent, normalisation, regional, business-related and European information (Tokarska, 2013, pp. 484-490). Due to the formal structure of the information, it is distributed by the library on a remote basis, which leads to a specific use being given to its service space. The library thus begins to extend beyond the walls of its own building. For years now, it has been present in

the households of people with disabilities or reduced mobility thanks to home delivery services, and now it has also become available in the virtual environment, directly on the computers and smartphones of its clients.

At present, many services are delivered by means of electronic platforms (e-services). Libraries provide remote access to e-resources, electronic orders and loan extensions, and a large variety of librarian-user communication platforms. They have introduced an increasing number of such new services: for instance, since 2012 the Poznań University Library has been offering automated services such as *libsmart copy* (ordering copies of library items) and *libsmart payment* (remote payment of outstanding fees), along with *libsmart reminder* and its internal modules (e-notifications on order status, returns and e-reminders) (Theus, 2015, p. 430). E-book loan services made available by libraries have also gained in popularity, especially through electronic book platforms such as IBUK Libra (mainly in academic and pedagogical libraries) and Legimi (mostly in public libraries).

The information services offered by modern libraries are also being transformed due to the evolving role of the Internet user, who has now become an active and creative co-author of content rather than a passive recipient. The Web 2.0, and soon probably also Web 3.0 technologies – characterised among other things by the use of popular tags – empower users to comment on the information distributed online in qualitative aspects. Therefore, issues such as information services with the use of the social web features have already been discussed in Polish research literature for about 10 years now by authors such as Agnieszka Koszowska, Bożena Jaskowska, and Grzegorz Gmiterek (Jaskowska, 2008; Koszowska, 2008; Gmiterek, 2012).

The manual for librarians by Anna Tokarska singles out several aspects of organising access to information, for example: information technologies, media in the library, library systems, and the process of searching for information online in a broader sense (Tokarska, 2013, p. 403). Web 2.0 technology, i.e. the second generation of the Internet, is one of the tools integrating these partially divergent activities. Research by Marta Tyszkowska on the use of the tools and functions offered by the second-generation Internet has shown that Polish university libraries use features such as social media, Wiki mechanisms, blogs, folksonomies, RSS channels, discussion lists and forums, podcasts and videocasts, social library catalogues, and geolocation (Tyszkowska, 2015). Their usefulness may vary, as it is subject not only to the objective needs of the libraries, but also to subjective factors, such as temporary fads for particular communication channels. In this sense, in recent years academic libraries (at universities of both the humanities and technology) have shown a tendency to focus on the following services: suggestions for books and other reading matter worth acquiring, interactive maps, social media profiles, online instant messaging services and – more rarely – personalised user interfaces or videos (Tyszkowska, 2015, p. 148;

A. Sidorczuk, A. Gogiel-Kuźmicka, 2012). Meanwhile, RSS channels providing news about the library and information on the latest publications do not seem to spark much interest among users, as revealed by Tyszkowska (Tyszkowska, 2015, p. 111). Trends related to specific virtual products are probably what impedes using them to their full potential.

Online crowdsourcing is another new tool enabling users to participate in building up library-related information. According to its definition, online crowdsourcing is "the activity of homogeneous virtual communities engaging their knowledge, skills or assets in order to perform tasks online (either for a consideration or free of charge) characterised by a certain complexity, assigned following an open call for proposals issued by a natural person, organisation, non-profit institution or a company, under their supervision" (Kowalska 2015, p. 145). Online crowdsourcing is sometimes also used by libraries, even though in Poland it has not become widespread yet. LibraryThink is one example of a solution implemented typically by smaller libraries which are not in a position to purchase an integrated library system or have no record database of their own. Since 2013, the Library of the Institute of Polish Studies at the University of Wrocław, followed by the Library of the Institute of English Studies at the University of Warsaw, have been using tags and book recommendations proposed by users (Kowalska, 2015, p. 256). Another interesting example of cooperation between librarians and users is the involvement of volunteers through social digitisation workshops at the Silesian Library (since 2007) and the Municipal Public Library in Słupsk (since 2009). Such contributors upload digitised library materials to local digital libraries from private collections or from institutions that have no technical facilities to handle them (Kowalska, 2015, pp. 252-253).

In the context of modern information services provided by libraries, their gradual adaptation to mobile devices such as mobile phones, smartphones, and tablets is an important development. The Rzeszów University Library launched a responsive website back in 2001. A small supplementary survey conducted in 2014 revealed that now 12% of Polish libraries that provide online information services also offer such versions of their websites. The information made available via mobile websites usually consists of the latest news (Marzec, 2016, p. 128), which indicates a certain trend in the way libraries operate, namely supporting local initiatives and openness to alternative ways of working at the library.

Libraries increasingly take into account the needs of people with disabilities when publishing information. This might mean on the one hand collecting documents in alternative formats (such as audio books, large-print books, typhlographics, or films with audio description/subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing) and making them available. This is most successfully done by public libraries which collect such documents either in their specialised or local branches. Some examples are: the Nicolaus Copernicus Re-

gional Public Library and its Readership Centre for the Sick and Disabled in Toruń, the Service Department for the Disabled of the Municipal and County Library in Wąbrzeźno, and the Audiobook and Multimedia Library of the Praga Południe District Library in Warsaw. Accessibility is also facilitated through purchasing assistive technologies, such as devices and software making it possible or easier to independently access information. Electronic magnifiers, screen readers, braille monitors, braille printers, and many other devices and pieces of software are now offered by modern academic libraries and, less frequently, by public libraries (Fedorowicz-Kruszewska & Cyrklaff, 2016). Examples of the former are the University of Warsaw Library, the Gdańsk University Library and the Casimir the Great University Library in Bydgoszcz.

Another means of increasing information accessibility are electronic full-text resources and bibliographies, along with digital libraries and repositories. Regional and institutional digital libraries launched by public, academic, and scientific libraries are well known; they can also be accessed through the Digital Library Federation service which collects, processes and shares online information about the holdings of Polish cultural and research institutions. Due to technical issues, not all the above resources are accessible to the disabled. Therefore, a few digital libraries have emerged to make their holdings available in assistive technology readable formats. Examples of such solutions are: the Academic Digital Library (ABC), which makes its holdings available exclusively to people with a certificate of either moderate or severe visual impairment, or other disabilities which make it impossible to read standard printed publications; the Digital Library of Zielona Góra for the Blind (ZBCN); and the online library of the Division of Collections for the Blind (DZdN) of the Central Library of Labour and Social Security (GBPiZS) – all specifically oriented towards people with visual impairment (Fedorowicz-Kruszewska, 2015).

CONCLUSION

The above types of library services are not exhaustive and do not cover all the activities taken on by modern Polish libraries, but should rather be seen as an example of their contributions, and as symptomatic of the cultural and social changes taking place at the turn of the centuries. Providing an exhaustive account of all their activities is impossible not only due to the limited size of this article, but also because library offerings in the second decade of the 21st century are incomparably larger in number to the ones existing even a dozen years back. First of all, the social and political changes after 1989 played a key role in this shift in attitudes towards the role of libraries, and then later so did Poland's accession to European structures. Besides this, developing information and communication technologies, evolv-

ing user needs, the adoption of solutions developed in other countries, and the post-modern implications of this social shift are factors that are currently shaping the role of libraries. Undoubtedly, libraries are expanding their fields of activity. This is what they need to do. Whether they want it or not, they have become part of a field of competitors trying to obtain customers, who, however, are still commonly referred to as 'users' in the librarians' professional literature and language. It is a fact that in Poland most library services are free of charge, which may create the impression that libraries have users, not clients. However, considering the marketing or PR activities pursued by librarians and their similarity to parallel actions in business areas, it is logical to discover analogies, which intensifies the impression that the needs of users must be addressed by libraries as carefully and meticulously as businesses care for their clients. As a result, libraries have started to offer a wider range of services for very diverse groups of recipients, becoming increasingly rooted in the public space. Forms of work that even in the 20th century represented the core of library activities have now lost their leading role, traditional books becoming nothing but a modest complement of the library offering. Does this mean that *libra-* should be removed from the term *library*? Certainly not. On the contrary, the activities described in this article show how intensely libraries work for their users/clients, how they respond to their current cultural, social, educational and information needs, and how irreplaceable they are in this activity.

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