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A Slavonic Librarianship Phenomenon? The Polish-Bulgarian Cooperation Case Study

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Abstract

The paper's aim is to present the similarities and differences between the Bulgarian and Polish LIS education and research. The author tries to find out an influence of common Slavonic background in both cultural and language aspects of LIS development in both countries. The similarities can be indicated in history (being limited and bounded with the local, regional, and for some decades with the socialist tradition), European heritage, future perspectives. The differences come from such aspects of culture as religion, calendar, language (alphabet, grammar), as well as from science classification and development, or even geographical conditions. National and professional stereotypes seem to be of great importance either, as the sources of both positive and negative attitudes, to be observed also in research activity and educational cooperation.

There is also a significant influence of our countries' joining the EU on the LIS education (i.e. the European context and the drive of our two countries towards introducing LIS educational programs harmonized with other European universities), and in this regard the fruitful cooperation with Fachhochschule Hannover Department of Information and Communication (Germany), LIS Education Programme at the Saxion Universities in Deventer (the Netherlands), Vilnius University Faculty of Communication (Lithuania), and our both Universities for already more than 10 years.

These assumptions are being verified during mutual visits of lecturers and students of two LIS schools: Bulgarian – the Department of Library Science, Scientific Information and Cultural Policy, Sofia University, and Polish – the Institute of Information and Book Studies, University of Warsaw, between November 2005 and April 2006, within a Socrates/Erasmus exchange project.

The questions analyzed are: library's role in the society, LIS history and trends of development, its place in a classification of sciences, developments of curricula, in particular students' interests and expectations, trends in LIS research, foreign influence and effects of globalization.

Introduction

Our two countries – Poland and Bulgaria – has been perceived as “sisters” for many years. In fact – we were parts of the same political and economic structure in the second half of the 20th century, as well as members of the group called euphemistically “a family of socialist countries”. We were cooperating in the fields and according to the rules decided by the so-called “big brother”. The fact, that we actually were a family – as we belong to the same Slavonic language group (called by a few researchers “a language family”) – was less perceived that time. Sister countries were also: Democratic Republic of Germany, Romania, Mongolia, or Cuba – which actually are not Slavonic...

In this text however we would like to concentrate on these facts, phenomena, processes, etc. which join and differentiate our nations, regardless current political situation.

It is estimated, that the eldest Bulgarian-Polish contact took place at the beginning of 15th century, and concerned the activity of the Bulgarian orthodox confessor Grigorij Camblak from Tyrnow (1362-1420), on the territory of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. He was the Patriarchate of Constantinople officer, representing it in Moldova. In 1406 he arrived to Vilnius, and – after the death of archbishop Cyprian, was prince Witold's , and the Polish king Wladyslaw Jagiello's candidate to the Kiev archdiocese, which he became in 1415. Camblak was a supporter of catholics and orthodox union. Realizing this idea, he went in 1418 to the Council in Constanca, where he was introduced to pope Martin V by the Gniezno archbishop Mikolaj Traba.

The eldest Polish-Bulgarian contact was probably the Varna battle on November 10th, 1444 (Kaluski). This battle, and the death of the Polish and Hungarian king Wladyslaw III during it, was also the fundament of the first literary Polish-Bulgarian contact. The Bulgarian folk song about Wladyslaw Warnencyk was created that time – a folk Slavonic epos, describing this king as a defender against the Turkmen.

Between the end of 19th century and the beginning of the Ist World War (1914) many Bulgarians came to Cracow and Lvov for studying at Polish universities, polytechnics, and veterinary academies. Almost all pioneers in Bulgarian veterinary came from the latter.

In the mid-war period (1918-1939) Polish-Bulgarian inter-governmental and inter-personal relations were very friendly. Trade was being developed between both countries, encouraging Polish traders, and the Polish-Bulgarian Commercial Chamber was established in Sofia in 1928 (Poland imported a lot of tobacco from Bulgaria, and Bulgaria imported aircrafts, weapon, and – plenty of gingerbread from Torun). In the 30ties of 20th century a flight connection Warsaw-Thessalonica via Sofia was very exploited. Polish tourists were visiting

Bulgaria. Journalists from both countries have vivid contacts. Also cultural and research cooperation was developing. We have also many research contacts¹.

When the Nazis – at the end of 1939 – arrested professors and lecturers of the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, a few Bulgarian researchers acted in their defense, like prof. Stojan Romanski and prof. K Mirzew from the Sofia University, and also the Bulgarian Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Polish-Bulgarian contacts were kept also during the II World War. A group of Bulgarians cooperated with the Polish Home Army, and several Bulgarian diplomats organized passports for the Poles, also those most endangered by the German invaders (Watrobski).

Just these few moments from the long history of our mutual relationship testify, how close we have been to each other as Slavonic nations. We supported each other in difficult times, we have been and still are very friendly and traditionally hospitable. The Poles like very much spending holidays at the Black Sea, and the Bulgarians have always been infatuated by the Polish girls... There is a Polish stereotype, that Bulgarian language is similar to Russian (but wrong! Only alphabet is similar!), and the Bulgarians think that Polish alphabet consists only of ś, ć, ź. They are also convinced that the Baltic Sea is too cold to bath in. We both are surprised with our different methods of communicating agreement and disagreement in a nonverbal way.

The millennium turnover was another chance of binding relations and better knowledge of each other. Young generation has a possibility – and want – to benefit from this chance, offered by for example EU students exchange program Socrates/Erasmus.

LIS education – history and institutions

The library education has not very long traditions in Bulgaria – its real history begins after the II World War although bibliographical and library courses have been organized for working professionals as a specialization for years before. In 1950 the State Institute of Librarianship was created with the goal to educate specialists mainly for the public libraries. Some fa-

¹ Prof. Mieczyslaw Malecki from the Jagiellonian University in Cracow was studying (1932-1933) Bulgarian dialects from Solun and Kostur regions, becoming one of the experts in Bulgarian dialectology. Henryk Batorowski, the historian, published in 1938 the work *Panstwa balkanskie 1800-1923* (Balcan countries 1800-1923). Ch. Wakarelski received in 1938 the Polish Pen Club Prize for perfect translation the Polish novel “Chłopi” (by Wladyslaw Reymont) into Bulgarian. In 1939 honoris causa doctorate of the St. Kliment Ohridski University in Sofia was given to: Ignacy Moscicki, acting President of the Republic of Poland; prof. Tadeusz Lehr Splawinski from the Poznan University, expert in Slavonic languages, prof. Kazimierz Nitsch from the Jagiellonian University, expert in linguistics, prof. Wacław Sierpinski from Lvov and Warsaw Universities, mathematician; prof. Marcel Handelsman from the Warsaw University, historian and specialist in paedagogy, prof. Tadeusz Kotarbinski from the Warsaw University, philosopher, logician, expert in praxeology

mous Bulgarian scientists' initiative to establish the Sofia University Department of Library and Information Sciences and Cultural Policy began soon after that, in 1953, under the name of Archive Studies and Library Science under the then Faculty of Philosophy and History at Sofia University with the aim to train specialists with higher education for the needs of large public and scientific libraries in Bulgaria. The both mentioned schools were the only LIS educational institutions in the country during the socialist period and have had a rich and changeable history. After the political changes, in 1993 a separate LIS Major for MA level (5 years of education) was brought back within the Faculty of Philosophy at Sofia University, what continued the tradition of research and teaching library disciplines.

The transition from a totalitarian to a democratic society in Bulgaria has brought opening of many new universities and colleges, inclusive such offering education in LIS and connected subjects – book publishing, IT, archival and museum studies, etc. At the moment at least 9 Bulgarian higher educational institutions offer training in this field (Sofia University, High School for Librarianship and IT, University of Shoumen, Varna Free University, University of Rousse, Southwest University, New Bulgarian University, etc.

A Center for Continuing Education of LIS Specialist, established in 1992, is offering short time courses in different fields and levels for working professionals from the country.

The extensive development of the educational institutions and of the number of students is one of the trends in LIS education in Bulgaria. Another important tendency is connected with the dynamics of the institutional changes – colleges have been included in the university structures, new curricula have been developed, distance education is already introduced, etc.

LIS education in Poland has also been realized on MA level for more than 50 years (the first LIS Unit at the Lodz University was established on 1945, 20th century, the second one was at the Warsaw University in 1951). Today there are LIS units at the largest Polish universities in Warszawa, Krakow, Wroclaw, Katowice, Torun, and Lublin, accredited by the University Accreditation Commission. However, the tradition of bibliological lectures comes from the 19th century (Joachim Lelewel at the Warsaw University), and of LIS education – from the 20s and 30s of 20th century, when professional courses for the adults actually working in libraries were organized. Also today there is an educational institution called the Centre for Library, Information and Documentation Education offering such post-college courses for people working in libraries. It is sited in Warsaw, but has dozen of branches all over the country. Graduates of this Centre can start BA studies at the Warsaw University.

After political and economic changes, at the mid-90s of 20th century, most of the institutes carried on the curricula reform, concerning mostly division of the previous 5-years studies into two-level: BA (3 years – 6 semesters), and MA (2 years – 4 semesters) studies, and introduced the ECTS system². This reform was done in the Institute of Information and Book Studies thanks to the Tempus project, realized in co-operation with our colleagues from the Netherlands, Germany, and Great Britain.

LIS education – curricula

There were many discussions about the academic curricula in LIS educational sphere during the last decades. The eclectic character of the LIS curricula has provoked most objections. Some main raised questions in this regard are: the humanity disciplines dominating in academic curricula, knowledge v/s skills, “soft” skills, etc.

The rapid change in the information environment, the increasing demands to the profession of the information specialist and the intense competition in the university setting in the digital era are among the main reasons that prompt some radical changes on different levels in the LIS education. There is a common understanding that the new LIS educational programs have to foresee the needs of the market (e.g. not just to answer the already existing ones) and according to these needs to offer contemporary courses that aim to prepare future professionals with innovative behavior and capability to apply new models and solutions in a complex, digital information-related content environment. Therefore, for our LIS education it is of vital importance to comply with the needs for constant market forestalling, otherwise it will become obsolete.

Factors such as these dictate changes in the names, curricula, and strategies of Bulgarian library and information science departments. One of the strategies departments choose to adopt under the present circumstances is building relations and cooperating both within an institution and with outside partners. The higher education in the field of library and information science in Bulgaria is currently in a process of transformation, the main indications of which are:

² Actually the same process happened in 1997 in Sofia University LIS education, only the ECTS was introduced just some years ago in Bulgaria.

- the changes in curricula and individual course programs, including also structural changes, like transition to offering instruction towards three educational and professional qualification degrees, namely: Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctor's (PhD)³;
- the instruction of new types of specialists, conducted parallel with conventional instruction;
- the active incorporation of new information technologies in the study process;
- the introduction of the new European Credit Transfer System (at the beginning of 2003 at most Bulgarian universities).

The technological development not only requires new subjects to be included in the LIS curriculum, but they also offer new ways of the LIS education to be conducted with the incorporation of the distance learning. Creating a sufficiently working contemporary curriculum means finding the right balance between the subjects included in the classical LIS education, providing a wide range of knowledge in different areas and the subjects related to the computer (IT) education. Similar to the other Central and Eastern European countries training library and information science specialists, we are faced with the problem of structuring curricula and training specialists so as to answer the social demand more thoroughly. To solve this problem, first we needed an in-depth research of the actual demand for library professionals and their profiles. Following are some facts from the most recent research (2006)⁴ in this regard:

- There are presently more than 6 000 functioning libraries of different types in Bulgaria. New information technologies have been introduced in a very small number of them, on account of insufficient funding, lack of a coherent government policy, and the inadequate competence of librarians. Library procedures are still carried out with the help of conventional technologies. At the same time, a number of scientific, special, and public libraries are looking for young specialists skilled in handling the newest information technology products.

- Bulgaria has ratified an Information Society Development Strategy which is currently being implemented, though at a slow pace (it's enough just to mention that still 60-70 % of the libraries don't have a computer).

- As new information technologies are being widely introduced in different public sectors, there is an increasing demand for specialists well grounded in the former's informa-

³ Not all the other LIS schools in Bulgaria started this process at the same time as the pioneer in this, Sofia University LIS Department.

⁴ The results of this National survey should be officially published during the next months.

tion searching, utilization, and management functions, as well as in their new knowledge generation potential.

LIS curricula offered to Polish students try to join tradition of university education with modern and perspective job market requirements. They reflect the tradition of humanistic education of the oldest Central and Eastern European universities, i.e. there is a significant of teaching left for fundamentals such as: philosophy, logics, linguistics, mathematics, history, literature, and sociology. There is also a “traditional” method of teaching: each course starts with definitions and history, often goes back to the ancient times, and through last (two) thousands of years come to modern solutions and current trends. It makes a really good fundament for development of thinking, linking events and trends in history, as well as for further reference and orientation in information, its sources and contents. Here our situation doesn’t differ from the Bulgarian one – same traditional courses and methods are to be observed in their LIS education also, especially at University institutions.

Of course we also teach current solutions and research topics in LIS and related sciences⁵. On BA level a professional knowledge is emphasized, i.e. bibliographical formats, indexing, information processing, users’ needs, history of books and libraries, information systems, library automation, knowledge organization, etc. On MA level research skills are priority, and specialized knowledge in specific offered areas, among which the most popular are: Knowledge Management, Business Information, Old and Rare Books, Editorship, Library Organization and Management. What is changing now in our curricula is the proportion between obligatory and optional courses, for the benefit for the latter. Students can choose from among different subjects being taught not only in the Institute, but also in the whole University. This gives them a chance to enrich their CV and present many different interests, experiences, and qualifications to the potential employers. It is also a general tendency in Polish education – to offer the students possibility of developing their own curricula, according to their interests and needs. This trend is reflected in the “hot new” standards for LIS education, accepted by ministerial authorities at the end of April 2006. They define several main areas of discipline which shall be taught, and leave many others for the decision of particular institutes. However, they reflect two trends in LIS development in Poland: the one is focused on the ICT development potential for information management goals, the other – on social responsibilities referred to information, like e-inclusion, information literacy, information behavior, ethics, etc. They also indicates on BA level several “basic” courses for the group of

⁵ More information about the curriculum at the IIBS WU: <http://www.lis.uw.edu.pl>

sciences (humanities), which shall be quite the same or at least similar for different disciplines, to enable students easy change of studying field at MA level. Nevertheless, it still seems to be indispensable to teach such a “new student” indispensable LIS skills, like references, formats, indexing, information processing.

Another question are internships, which – on difficult Polish job market – give the students possibility of gathering experiences and training practical skills based on contemporary LIS knowledge. It also often happens, that after such a “training and trial” period the students are being employed by these organizations.

LIS education – international cooperation

Seeking to create international contacts after the political changes in 1989⁶, LIS Department at Sofia University has been able to realize cooperation with The University of Applied Sciences in Hannover, Germany, The University of Professional Education in Deventer, Holland, The University of Warsaw, Poland, and the University of Vilnius, Lithuania, Parma University, Italy, University of Bordeaux, France, as well with American and Asian universities.

International academic co-operation in Poland has strengthen after 1990. The Warsaw University cooperates closely with universities in Deventer, Hannover, Sofia, Bratislava, and Vilnius. We have learned many about quality assurance as an indispensable and crucial factor of discipline’s acceptance and funding by higher education resort authorities. Quality assurance and accreditation has become important at the end of 90s in Poland as well.

In the last five years, students and lecturers from the mentioned European universities have taken part in the Socrates-Erasmus Mobility Program. The forms of exchangeable learning and instruction promoted by such programs have served both students and lecturers through giving them a chance to compare their level to that of European colleagues, function in a competitive environment, mediate the introduction of new programs and methods of instruction, and participate in teams to find solutions to predefined problems. We appreciate greatly our partnership with colleagues at the above mentioned universities, thanks to whom scholars at those universities are annual guest lecturers in courses featured in our Bulgarian and Polish specialties.

⁶ Before the changes Bulgarian LIS schools have worked very close in the above mentioned “family of social countries”. Unfortunately many of these wonderful and fruitful contacts “died” after the changes, but the contacts with Polish schools were preserved, although with some period of interruption.

LIS Students, participating at exchange programs with the partner LIS schools, consider that studying in an international environment is improving not just their professional knowledge and skills, but also their communicative skills, their flexibility and that it is making them respond positively to challenges. The analysis of students' reports of their stays abroad shows that the established relations with people from different cultural backgrounds opened their understanding for contemporary social relations and made them adaptive and willing for knowledge and experience. Polish students liked the practical method of teaching museum work, like visiting the most important for Bulgarian history and culture museums and libraries. Bulgarian students find it great that Warsaw University offers an immense amount of activities which integrated them in society and in the LIS field. Bulgarian students have had a lot of trips in Poland where they met Polish people, Polish national heritage, and way of life outside the capital.

What they consider really great about academic life is that there, at the University of Warsaw, there is more seminar work with students which involves them in discussions and helps them get knowledge easier. As Bulgarian and Polish exchange students say in both countries teachers tried to integrate them in their surroundings and gave them as many chances as possible: for example taking part in conferences, meetings with professionals who work in libraries and information centers, involving them in different activities and so on. Home works like comparing Bulgarian and Polish information users, or researching for projects for digitalization in libraries made them rediscover how much in common our countries have but also made them aware of the existing differences.

“Learning an unknown foreign language, meeting new people, seeing new places, new attitude toward life is something that can not be described it should be experienced. To be an exchange student makes you find out so much about yourself as you would probably never at home.”; “What do we recommend these kind of student exchange programs?”- To engage more students for the integration of the foreign students in the host country. Also to enhance the number of the participating countries so that more young people will have this unique lifetime chance!” – these are just parts of exchange students' opinions.

Today our co-operation is expressed in the Socrates/Erasmus exchange of students and lecturers, as well as students' summer schools (organized for 14 years in different countries) and international conferences. The annual international students summer seminars organized by the universities of Hannover, Deventer, Warsaw, Sofia and Vilnius, have proven especially interesting to our students. The Library and Information Science specialty recently concluded

a cooperation contract with The University of Bordeaux, France, under the Socrates-Erasmus Program.

Over the following years, our cooperation with similar specialties in European countries will have to enlarge and start playing an operative role in the overall educational and scientific strategy of the specialty. Such a necessity is partly determined by the ongoing processes of European integration. However, it is advisable that European cooperation focus should shift from projects and programs promoting mobility, to using the resources of the various international cooperation programs to implement and coordinate joint scientific research projects and base scientific researches.

LIS education – perspectives

What is the “state of the art” LIS education in our countries? Our students graduate with many new competencies and skills to fulfill a set of processes that add value to Internet resources, including ICT skills, social responsibility, legal requirements (copyright, intellectual property rights). Almost all library programs offer Web design courses. A special course titled “Managing Electronic/Digital libraries” is in preparation at Sofia University library school, what will be taught for MIM students (Masters’ degree in Information Management) covering the developing direction of the library use under the network environment and management of electronic library resources etc. Similar courses will soon be taught at the Institute for Librarianship and Information Technologies in Sofia. The Veliko Turnovo University started last year a course titled “Digital Libraries and Electronic Books”. In Warsaw there is the MA course in “Information and Knowledge Management”, including both technological and human topics referring to managing knowledge sources in different types of organizations.

Two central characteristics describe the status of Bulgarian LIS schools and their likely evolution. The first is the depth and range of their programs. Most of the 9 LIS schools offer only one generalized degree titled “specialist in LIS” (with 2 or 3 years study) or the BLS (Bachelor’s degree in Library and Information Science). Just 3 programs have multiple degrees and specializations at the undergraduate and graduate levels; (only the Sofia University Department of LIS provides BLS and MLS, but also PhD program, and the Veliko Turnovo University has BLS and MLS program and the recently created High School for Library Sciences and Information Technologies - Sofia). The second characteristic is the program perspective. Some LIS programs begin with the presumption that the school is molded by the disciplines of library science and related humanity disciplines. Others begin with the presumption that they are defined by the evolving information professions. In order to meet the

new requirements of the market and the needs of existing/evolving information professional niches, LIS schools must develop a wider range of program specializations that are able to offer many new disciplines and to be able to integrate a diverse range of information from other disciplines into a coherent, focused program for "information studies".

This trend can be also found in a general attitude of Polish education authorities to education as an offer of collecting different knowledge and experiences in a flexible way, which is to prepare a modern, open-minded professional. However, this differentiation is gained thanks to cooperation of universities and other institutions of higher education, both internationally (among faculties), nationally (in Poland there is the MOST⁷ Programme of students exchange), and internationally (Socrates/Erasmus).

Conclusions

In the last decades, we have witnessed the development of the new information age. IT, the primary vehicle of the information age, has transformed the modern workplace and is pervasive in the development of new knowledge and wealth. It has also dramatically influenced our capacity to educate and to do research.

Librarianship as a profession requires a very broad and amorphous type of set skills, which is recognized more and more by employers in a wide variety of fields. Library schools have for many years been trying to provide education covering both "hard" and "soft" skills to develop the breadth of skill strengths that librarians and information professional are now recognized as holding. Librarians who have taken the plunge and moved into a variety of other professions have begun to have a significant impact upon how information professionals are perceived, outside of the traditional library setting.

The greatest challenge the new technologies set for the future information professional is to respond constantly in adequate way to the extremely dynamic environment requiring from him/her perseveringly to obtain new knowledge and competences. The role of the LIS education in these circumstances is primary. It is called to guide and to help librarians to tackle with the difficulties they encounter in their work when new knowledge and skills are required. The effective management of the knowledge in every country is a major factor for the good development of the science, it helps the business innovations and it promotes the development of the society as a whole. The investment in better technological equipment and

⁷ A *bridge* in English (but same word in Bulgarian and Polish language).

high quality education of the information professionals will foster the knowledge circulation and eventually will lead to material and non-material benefits for the country.

Introducing more and more international standards and guidelines, like IFLA documents, Dublin Core standards, open source software, adapting curricula to the EU strategies, like the Bologna process, it is becoming difficult to find more local specifics. Hopefully, that can still be found in the contents of our information sources.

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