

RESEARCH LIBRARIES IN POLAND IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT: This essay will assess the following: the term “research library” pertaining to world and Polish terminology, as well as to international library organisations; the role and significance of research libraries in Poland, consolidated by library acts; the difficulties in defining research work in libraries; the excessive obligation of executing research works in Polish libraries, distracting librarians from fundamental objectives of their work; the superficial “scientific nature” of some tasks; and the necessity for changing the definition of research libraries in Poland and the scope of research tasks.

The thesis of this article is as follows: the fundamental division of libraries in Polish librarianship into research libraries and public libraries is a curiosity which makes us stand out in terms of both European and world librarianship. In particular, library acts on the “scientific nature” of a particular category of libraries have resulted in imposing upon them the duty of scientific research, which the libraries – and therefore their workers – cannot fulfil for one very simple reason, namely because they have been appointed, like all libraries, for the purpose of carrying out library processes and user services, as opposed to scientific research. Let us say in advance that it is an unrealistic demand. Consequently, it is worth tracing the occurrence of the term “research libraries” in world and Polish terminologies, as well as investigating the ways in which it has infiltrated our librarianship.

The term is connected with the general divisions of libraries and their typology, which may be investigated taking into account:

1. Standards and recommendations as well as other similar documents (e.g. information languages).
2. The practice of the divisions of libraries in international library organisations.
3. Practical divisions in world and Polish librarianship.

STANDARDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The terminology we are interested in appears in two groups of standards: statistical and terminological. The necessity for a clear division of libraries into particular types is conditioned by obvious reasons, most often by the requirements of international library statistics. UNESCO insisted on the standardization of this division and nomenclature, and after many years of striving, it managed to enact the document *Recommendation Concerning the International Standardization of Library Statistics Adopted by General Conference at its Sixteenth Session. Paris 13 November 1970* (Morsztynkiewiczowa, 1972, pp. 199-205).

Within the above-mentioned *Recommendation*, the following types of libraries were distinguished¹:

- national libraries,
- libraries of institutions of higher education,
- other major non-specialized libraries,
- school libraries,
- special libraries,
- public libraries.

The *Recommendation* did not mention the type of “research libraries”.

Barbara Sordylowa, having presented the contents of the *Recommendation* in one of the chapters of her book *Z problematyki bibliotek i informacji naukowej* [Issues of Library and

¹ We only provide terms included in the *Recommendation*, omitting the characterization of particular library types.

Scientific Information], clearly attempts to belittle the fundamental discrepancies of its classification by making recourse to traditional Polish nomenclature of libraries, and such a fundamental differentiation only serves to reflect the lack of research library categories that is to be found in the *Recommendation*. Consequently, she claims that this lack results from

the criterion for using the collections [...] by specified groups of recipients (e.g. scholars and students, teachers and pupils, residents of a given town) (Sordylowa, 1997, p. 15),

which UNESCO regarded as foundational. If we attempt to interpret the author's way of thinking, then, in her opinion, UNESCO divided libraries according to the categories of their users. And so, scholars and students use academic libraries, whereas teachers and pupils use school libraries, etc. Sordylowa is convinced that

the character of research libraries is undoubtedly ascribed to libraries that are specified as universal (e.g. university libraries) and special, maintained by institutions, scientific associations and other organisations (Sordylowa, 1997, p. 15).

Obviously, nobody will deny that university libraries, for instance, are research libraries, because they cannot be anything else as they collect documents for research purposes at universities as well as literature which is essential for the didactic work of universities. The question which the author posed and did not answer was different – namely, why didn't they call such libraries "research libraries"? It pertains to other libraries as well, above all the special ones, which also cater to fields of science. Since the term "research library" is not mentioned in the *Recommendation*, one should ask what made our librarianship adopt it and endow it with such esteem. Sordylowa replies that "our" classifications assume the criterion of "the character of collections and library tasks". Those "tasks", however, are simply the satisfaction of the needs of particular circles (scholars, students etc.), which is the fundamental criterion of division in the *Recommendation*.

Adopted in 1970, the UNESCO typology found its reflection in international and national standards, which slightly modified the initial settlements of the UNESCO *Recommendation*. In those standards, obviously, the category of "research libraries" did not appear².

² These were consecutively: the ISO 2789 standard (*International Library Statistics*) from 1991 which was created in close co-operation with UNESCO; the EN ISO 2789 from 1994 which constituted a mechanical takeover of the aforementioned standard as a European standard; PN-EN ISO 2789 from 1998 – the translation

At the ISO forum, the problem of library typology emerged once again in the terminological standard ISO 5127 *Information and Documentation – Vocabulary*, which had been established in 2001. The said standard, was translated and approved by the Polish Committee for Standardization on December 14th, 2004 [PN-ISO 5127: 2005 Informacja i dokumentacja – Terminologia]. As it is the latest ISO standard, we shall discuss it in detail. In point 3.2 of the standard, they provided the definitions of 22 library types. So significant a number proves much bigger than those usually distinguished and characterised in similar documents, for the standard singles out libraries distinguished not only according to classic criteria, such as public or national libraries, but also pursuant to library tasks in particular configurations. As a result, the standard mentions, for instance, “central library”, which attends other libraries in the region, or of another organisation, and it also provides the definition of such a central library as one “where the central administrative resources and usually its largest and most important holdings are located”. Central libraries are completed with “branch libraries: the part of a library other than the central library”.

From among the multitude of library types presented in the above-mentioned terminological standard, it is possible to distinguish the following types, which correspond with the convention of already indicated standards in the field of statistics: national, special, public, academic and administrative libraries as well as research and art libraries.

Thus, in the said standard the category of “research libraries” turned up (with its French equivalent *bibliothèque de recherche*), defined as “libraries where exhaustive investigation in particular subject field can be carried out”.

Therefore, according to this standard, the task of a research library is the organisation of workspace for researchers. In the understanding of the standard, research libraries may also serve as national, academic, special or administrative ones. Let us provide one of the Polish examples. The libraries of the institutions of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) are typical libraries which create workspaces for the scholars of particular institutes, and so they are research libraries in the understanding of the standard. Yet, at the same time, they are

of the European standard into Polish. The new, significantly expanded version of the EN ISO 2789 standard of 2003 was approved by the Polish Committee for Standardization on 2nd December, 2004, and it will come out without the translation into Polish.

special libraries since they specialise in sometimes very narrow scientific fields of study. Thus, they meet the definition of a “special library” given in the standard as a library “covering one discipline or particular subject field”. The mentioned Polish Academy of Sciences libraries are, then, “special research libraries” in the understanding of the standard.

That is it as far as international recommendations and standards are concerned. The ISO standards are currently being adapted in Poland by the correspondent team (Technical Committee no. 242 Information and Documentation of the Polish Committee for Standardization), as the era of establishing “native” standards by the Polish Committee for Standardization, Measures and Quality Control³ has come to an end. One of the latest standards of this kind, essential to our subject matter, was the Polish standard PN-91/N-01226 *Bibliotekarstwo i bibliografia. Rodzaje i działalność bibliotek. Terminologia* [Librarianship and Bibliography. Types and Activities of Libraries. Terminology] developed at the National Library (BN) of Poland (i.e. at the then Centre for Bibliographic Standardization of the Bibliographic Institute) and approved in 1991. It also included the typology of libraries (the sequence I provide here is different from the one in the text of the standard, where the alphabetical order is applied): general, special, national, public, research and special libraries.

A couple of terms are of key importance here: “general” and “special”, taking into consideration the scope of collections, and “research library” is defined as “a general or special library whose collections and activities serve scientific needs above all”.

It seems possible to take the liberty of judging that our “native” standard – which has been withdrawn by PN-ISO 5127:2005 – managed to escape intricacy better than those international standards.

THE DIVISIONS USED IN INTERNATIONAL LIBRARY ORGANISATIONS

The standards and recommendations reflect the actual divisions of libraries only to a certain degree, for their provisions largely reflect the viewpoints of the authors of such regulations,

³ Used up to 1994, the Polish Committee for Standardization, Measures and Quality Control is the former official name of the Polish Committee for Standardization.

who wish to name and define these libraries according to the concepts they consider equitable. And so, the already mentioned “other universal libraries”, or “prominent universal libraries”, are introduced as a separate type of libraries or not; “research libraries” were introduced in the translated standard PN-ISO 5127 and in the original Polish standard PN-91/N-01226, so only in terminological standards, not in statistical ones.

We might ask, then, how the system of recommendations and standards refers to the actual, contemporary divisions in librarianship. The answer to this question is provided, among others, by the practice applied by IFLA. It distinguished several types of libraries, which were grouped into three Divisions:

- I. General research libraries.
- II. Special libraries.
- III. Libraries serving the general public.

There are three sections that function within Division I:

1. National libraries.
2. University libraries and other general research libraries.
3. Library and research services for parliaments.

The following sections function within Division II:

1. Government libraries.
2. Social sciences libraries.
3. Geography and maps libraries.
4. Sciences and technology libraries.

Consequently, research libraries were classified into two divisions. Within Division I, IFLA includes national libraries, university libraries and other general research libraries as well as libraries for parliaments as general research libraries. None of the libraries in Division II is called a “research” library, although all of them undoubtedly serve science to a great extent and seem to crave for the term “special research libraries”. In passing, another question arises concerning the choice of such special libraries, for there are no sections of medical and

biological sciences libraries or church libraries. Such a choice is probably determined by practical reasons: IFLA does not arbitrarily introduce library categories it wishes to occupy itself with, and within its sections there are representatives of those library types, which express their will to unite and work together on common problems in a specific section. We may only presume that these were the motives for creating such sections.

The analysis of the division conducted by IFLA shows that practical divisions of libraries, which to a considerable degree influence IFLA divisions and terminology, differ significantly from the majority of standards and recommendations. Even more harshly do theoretical concepts verify divisions in world librarianship and in particular countries. Enjoying deserved esteem and popularity, Saur's *World Guide to Libraries* classifies libraries, within particular countries, according to nine types:

- national libraries,
- general research libraries,
- university, college libraries,
- school libraries (including libraries of certain higher education schools),
- government libraries (including libraries of parliaments, ministries, armed forces etc.),
- ecclesiastical libraries (including monastery libraries),
- corporate and business libraries,
- special libraries maintained by other institutions,
- public libraries.

Thus, in Saur's *Guide*, there is no separate category of "research libraries" which would encompass both general and special research libraries. As far as general research libraries are concerned, the analysis of the *World Guide*... shows what libraries are included in this category. There are not many of them, in France only one such library was identified: the Library of the Arsenal in Paris, whereas in Poland there are six of them: the Library of the Ossoliński National Institute, the Kórnik Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences, the Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) and the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences (PAU) in Cracow, the Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, the Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Gdańsk as well as the Silesian Library in Katowice. We presume that the majority of research libraries in the Polish understanding

of this term are included in the type of university libraries, which encompasses all academic libraries, including those of medical academies and vocational schools with the status of an academy, and then in the category of “special libraries maintained by other institutions”.

LIBRARY TYPES IN GERMAN LIBRARIANSHIP

In Polish literature there is a prevailing viewpoint that we adopted German patterns in library classification because the divisions into research and public libraries are embedded in the tradition and contemporariness of German librarianship. This division is indeed present in German librarianship, and it began forming in the first half of the 19th century. The term “division” is not accurate in this case, though. At that time, a network of public libraries was being created, accompanying research libraries which had sometimes existed for hundreds of years. The initiator for creating and distinguishing those libraries was a Saxon, Karl Benjamin Preusker (1786-1871). A practitioner and theorist, Preusker justified the necessity for developing educational librarianship (*das öffentlichen Bibliothekswesen*) with the aim of educating all social classes, especially the newly created class of industrial workers⁴. Preusker was active in the 1830s and that is when his concepts were adopted by other German countries, such as Prussia. On his initiative, a network of educational libraries was created as being complementary to research libraries, and this division prevailed in the 19th and the 20th centuries. In GDR, for instance, the Methodical Centre of Research Libraries functioned in the Ministry of Higher and Vocational Education, which research libraries were subordinate to. For educational libraries, subordinate to the Ministry of People’s Education, the Central Institute of Librarianship was created in Berlin, which occupied itself with theoretical guidance for educational libraries. The above-mentioned division raised certain doubts for a number of reasons, so the GDR authorities decided to level the said division, citing the ideological motivation.

The scientific and technological progress – it was explained – just as the socialist culture revolution, set high expectations for all types of libraries, and all areas of social life should be regulated in a scientific way (quote after: Thauer & Vodosek, 1978, p. 150),

⁴ Trying to translate the term *öffentliche Bibliothek*, we encounter another difficulty, which we will not settle here since the subject of this article is different. *Öffentliche* is unhesitatingly translated in Poland as “public”, whereas they can be called “common” or “educational” – such terminology was used in Poland during the interwar period.

preferably within the framework of a uniform library system. The legal limits, which delineate this system, were created by the *Regulation of the Cabinet on the Tasks of the Library System in Forming a Developed System of Civil Socialism in the German Democratic Republic*. The authors of the book, Western German librarians, who cited these facts and quotations, write about this fact with a certain appreciation:

For the first time in the history of German libraries, legal foundations were laid, which made it possible to create a state library system (Thauer & Vodosek, 1978, p. 150).

In West Germany, after the Second World War, despite the efforts of theoreticians and activists, “the dualism in German librarianship was preserved” (Thauer & Vodosek, 1978, p. 141). The differentiation between research and educational libraries was clear in both parts of the divided Germany, but at some point they started being questioned in terms of their different aspects. Doubts were aroused in lexicons:

In the past, in Germany there was a clear demarcation between research libraries and other types of libraries, especially educational libraries. Such a demarcation does not appear in other countries to such an extent, e.g. in the field of English language, because the educational libraries there also carry out research and educational tasks (Kunze, ed., 1975, p. 677).

For a change, the entry “educational libraries” in another lexicon included the following remark:

The features ‘public’ and ‘research’ should not be ascribed to only one type of library. Nowadays, a lot of public libraries collect scientific literature, and research libraries are ‘public’ as long as they are financed by public institutions (an association, a country or a city) and their collections are publicly available (even if, contrary to public libraries, with certain limitations) (Rehm, 1991, p. 206).

In the dissertations of German theorists, we may encounter even more diversified standpoints, which in no way simplify the issues discussed in this article. In 1983, Bernhard Fabian, the guru of German librarianship, wrote a book entitled meaningfully *Buch, Bibliothek und geisteswissenschaftliche Forschung* [Book, Library and Humanistic Research]⁵. Fabian

⁵ This publication was noticed and reviewed by Zbigniew Żmigrodzki in *Przegląd Biblioteczny* [Library Review] 1987, no. 1, pp. 86-89.

is mostly interested in great German university libraries, defining them as “exploratory libraries” (*Forschungsbibliotheken*), and rarely does he introduce the term “research library”.

Fabian wrote his book protesting against the decline of university libraries as the centres of research on books and bibliological processes. In his opinion, the aforementioned decline commenced after the First World War, and escalated after the Second World War as universities placed greater emphasis on increasing the number of students and on their education, following the example of USA. These functions are assumed by institute libraries, connected with the decline of the significance of main libraries, as it diminishes their competences. This state of affairs has not changed in spite of many individual achievements on the part of certain individuals. That is because librarians as a group, although well educated, have stopped being scientifically active.

Temporarily disregarding Fabian’s standpoint, let us ponder the usefulness of the term *Forschungsbibliotheken* (i.e. “exploratory libraries”) he uses, for it is the exact translation of the English term “research libraries” (by the way, Fabian was a graduate of English studies). Exploratory, and therefore those which constitute a workspace for researchers, but also do research on their own. Doesn’t the Polish misunderstanding result from the fact that we translate the English term “research library” as “scientific library” (Pol. *biblioteka naukowa*), whereas “research” means exploration, investigation or search, but not a “science” (Pol. *nauka*)⁶. It is beyond doubt that we translate it that way because we possess evidence in the form of Polish translations of international standards. Obviously, finding an adequate equivalent term, just as Fabian did, would be difficult, but it is worth noting that our “scientific libraries” (Pol. *biblioteki naukowe*) are not the equivalent to “research libraries”.

To test the aforementioned hypothesis, let us refer to Anglo-Saxon terminology. This is not an easy task as the issue of research libraries has not been widely discussed in this regard. In the latest international encyclopaedia of librarianship, which I am acquainted with, a concise entry “Research libraries” was dedicated to this issue, whose author is Kenneth E. Carpenter of Harvard University (Feather & Sturges, eds., 2003). The contents of the entry are surprising, beginning with the general definition of research libraries which diverges from the thorough German definitions. And so, according to the *Encyclopaedia*, these are libraries

⁶ An obvious misunderstanding is the term “scientific libraries” used as the English name of the type of “research libraries” in *Rocznik Statystyczny* [Statistical Yearbook].

[...] Which provide materials and facilities for research usually in the humanities, The words 'research' and 'library' have become tightly linked in a commonly used phrase only since the formation of the Association of Research Libraries in 1932. The goal of that organisation was to provide a framework for co-operation among **large** libraries [emphasis: A.M.] that were seen as being similar even though sources of support – university, municipality or nation – differed.

And so, according to the *International Encyclopaedia of Information and Library Science*, research libraries are, above all, large humanistic libraries, whereas the very term – 'an umbrella term of practical utility rather as a concept' – arose then out of practical needs, when they decided upon the cooperation of libraries of different types in a specified area.

In other words, research libraries which are defined in this way constitute only a certain subgroup of Polish *biblioteki naukowe* or of German *wissenschaftlichen Bibliotheken*.

The author does not leave any doubts that smaller libraries do not deserve this name and is very categorical about this:

College libraries, as well as specialized but **small** libraries [emphasis: A.M.], are, of course, used by researchers, but here the scholar cannot carry out the type of investigations that merit use of the term "research library".

Furthermore, the author of the entry did not find libraries named with that term in Great Britain, the only exception occurring in the nomenclature of Swedish libraries, whereas in Germany the term itself appears in the names of two libraries only. Nonetheless, in Europe, he encountered this term in the name of Consortium of European Research Libraries, created for the purpose of developing an union catalogue of early printed (database) of pre-1830 printed books, which meant an association which had been brought into being, as Carpenter claims, for the practical purposes similar to those of the Association of College and Research Libraries.

In his article, Carpenter refers to B. Fabian, unconditionally supporting his understanding of the essence of research libraries, basically consistent with his own aforementioned definition, although I am unsure if he understood Fabian completely. He presents Fabian's view as follows:

The research library is the humanist's laboratory, a place where the scholar, beginning with a thesis or with a question, can pursue it wherever it leads among both primary and secondary materials. At the same time that the humanist's laboratory allows the researcher to follow – with efficiency – an idea that spontaneously arises. It also supports accidental discovery, as, for instance, through exploring a large body of material in search of the relevant item (Feather & Sturges, 2003, pp. 556-557).

Both authors are unanimous: for Fabian, research libraries are humanistic libraries, whereas for Carpenter they are “mostly humanistic” libraries. In this way, they exclude from research libraries an enormous part of librarianship, i.e. special libraries in the field of mathematical, natural, technical and medical sciences. Nevertheless, it is consistent with the authors' assumptions since in the aforementioned disciplines (e.g. biology) relevant research is carried out in laboratories, not in libraries. Only humanistic research is done in libraries. Fabian, however, which Carpenter did not notice, deplored the disappearance of research conducted by librarians **themselves** and advocated the return of librarians to their traditional work tasks, and, therefore, to the traditions of the great 19th-century German university libraries.

Despite the fact that the traditional division of libraries into research and educational began raising doubts in Germany a long time ago, and although, for instance, B. Fabian is interested in different subject matters, this division has not disappeared completely. In 2003 the German librarian Claudia Lux published in “IFLA Journal” an article about German librarianship *The German Library System: structure and new developments* (Lux, 2003, pp. 113-128). In the introduction she provided some figures: in Germany, consisting of 16,200 communities, there are over 12,000 public libraries, as well as about 2,000 general and special research libraries. A riddle for the reader, because it is not one for the author, is the question as to how she managed to single out those research libraries as she did not provide any sources⁷. Having briefly presented, and failing to comment on, this general division of German libraries, the author goes on to present a division of German libraries according to a peculiar criterion, namely the “levels of service provision”. She distinguished four levels, ranked according to the rising scale of information requirements and specializations. At each level there are

⁷ *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Bibliotheken* (Bd 57, 1997/1998, pp. 19-338) provided names and characteristics of 703 research libraries in Germany. The difference with regard to the data provided by C. Lux is therefore significant. The Editorial Staff of *Jahrbuch* makes a stipulation that in their specification they took into account only those libraries which had at least 50,000 books, and in the case of university libraries – 100,000 books. The collections also have to “possess special scientific contents”. The specification disregarded libraries about which the Editorial Staff had received no information.

libraries of different kinds. The first level, satisfying basic needs, is attended by small and medium public libraries in the countryside and in towns along with their branches, also including library buses. The percentage of research libraries increases at subsequent levels. At the fourth level, where only “highly specialized needs” are attended, the information is collaboratively provided by special research libraries, university libraries along with their special collections and national libraries (*Staatsbibliotheken*).

This “sophisticated” division of German libraries, assuming their collections and information possibilities as the bases of differentiation, emphasises the dominant role of research libraries. It is they that, most often, generate and provide specialized information in various fields. It cannot be denied, then, that in German librarianship research libraries exist, or even prevail, in the library consciousness but they are not singled out as a separate type.

The list of libraries in German-speaking European countries, *Handbuch der Bibliotheken: Deutschland, Österreich, Schweiz* (K.G. Saur München, 12. Ausg. 2006), distinguishes thirteen types of libraries, appearing in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. One of them, as it can be expected, is “public libraries”, but there is no common entry concerning the type of “research libraries”. However, though never called “research libraries”, they are scattered in various types of libraries: “central university libraries, their faculty libraries” or “libraries in extra-university research institutes, museums and archives, academies and scientific associations, economic associations, industrial and commercial chambers, foreign cultural institutions, and also in medical institutions in hospitals”.

RESEARCH LIBRARIES IN POLAND

The divisions of libraries, adopted in Polish practice, differ significantly from the above-mentioned world divisions, and also from those used in Germany. The division into research libraries and public libraries is codified here and results in specific consequences. *Rocznik Statystyczny* [Statistical Yearbook] provides basic data concerning these libraries in a separate table, “Research Libraries”. At the end of 2003, it demonstrated 1,276 libraries (*Rocznik Statystyczny*, 2004, p. 335). It may be added that this relatively high number (comparable with the state of German librarianship – 2,000 research libraries) has appeared in the *Rocznik Statystyczny* [Statistical Yearbook] since 1992. Formerly, for many years, we were convinced

that in Poland there were about 200 research libraries operating (218 in 1989). Since 1992, the statistics have also included faculty, institute and branch libraries of particular universities, which has increased the number noted in the statistics by about 900.

The second category distinguished in the *Rocznik Statystyczny* [Statistical Yearbook] is public libraries. At the end of 2003 there were 8724 public libraries (*Rocznik Statystyczny*, 2004, p. 310).

The term “research libraries” functioned over a period of twenty years between the First and the Second World War, though this category appeared rather exceptionally in the official statistics. Jadwiga Bornsteinowa used it in her article published in 1928 (Bornsteinowa, 1928, pp. 283-299), in which she singled out 451 research libraries, recognized as such as long as they included “works from the scope of theoretical or applied sciences, or from the field of fine arts”. Therefore, the author considered this sort of a book collection to be the “research” criterion, whilst completely disregarding its functions. She also regarded as research libraries those whose collections consisted only partially of scientific literature, and that is why the number of research libraries in her study was so substantial⁸. It may be surprising to know that as many as 37.3% research libraries were founded and maintained by associations of different kinds, whereas the second place belonged to ecclesiastical libraries (29.9%). However, the basis of research librarianship constituted state libraries, whose collections and functions were the most important: the National Library of Poland and six university libraries.

Another argument which proves that research libraries constituted important elements of interwar librarianship could also be library categories shown in the balance of war losses, made just after the Second World War. Józef Grycz, who secured and revindicated library collections on behalf of the Ministry of Education, announced in 1946 the numbers of books lost during the war in six categories: libraries of primary, secondary and vocational schools, universal local governmental libraries, universal communal libraries and research libraries (Grycz, 1946, pp. 4-24; Mężyński, ed., 1994, p. 51). Józef Grycz, one of the co-founders of interwar librarianship, must obviously have known the divisions of libraries used before the

⁸ Bornsteinowa’s article and its weaknesses were discussed in: Z. Gaca-Dąbrowska, *Bibliotekarstwo II Rzeczypospolitej. Zarys problemów organizacyjnych i badawczych* [Librarianship in the Second Polish Republic. An outline of organizational and research problems]. Wrocław 1983, p. 23.

war. Grycz, as a co-author of *Dekret o bibliotekach...* [Decree on Libraries] dated April 17th, 1946, also influenced a special article devoted to research libraries (art. 12), which had some influence on the contents of similar articles in two acts on libraries: from 1968 and 1997.

Article 12 of the *Decree* specified the functions of research libraries as follows: “Research libraries (general and special ones) serve above all scientific and research purposes, formation and expansion of knowledge, general and vocational higher education [...]. Research libraries can be at the same time special institutions, doing research connected with books as well as carrying out bibliographical work”. The *Decree* goes on to recommend dividing the specialisations of literature and doing any possible interchanges of collections among libraries.

Ustawa o bibliotekach [Library Act] dated April 9th, 1968, provided the following definition of research libraries:

Research libraries serve the development and needs of science and education by means of research and services [...]. They carry out didactic, information and popularising works, whose objective is to disseminate knowledge and cultural development in society (Chapter 4).

What is striking about this definition is that the fundamental role of research libraries, i.e. “serving development and science”, is equivalent to, and perhaps even a bit overshadowed by, the library’s own works wherein the library “does research and carries out didactic, information and popularising works”. It basically changes the sense of the provisions of the *Decree*, which aptly pointed to the essence of the tasks of these libraries, which were supposed to “serve above all scientific and research purposes, formation and the expansion of knowledge”. The *Decree* says: they serve science; the *Act* says: they serve by means of doing research. The differences, then, are fundamental.

The new library act, dated June 27th, 1997, devoted chapter 6 to research libraries. Their tasks were specified as follows (paragraph 1, point 1 and 2):

[...] they serve the needs of science and education, ensuring access to library materials and information sources necessary to carry out works in research and science and including research results, they also do research in library science and related fields, as well as relating to the disciplines they attend.

Subsequently, the *Act* specified which libraries were to be ranked as research libraries: the National Library of Poland, higher education school libraries, libraries of the Polish Academy of Sciences, research and development units libraries as well as others, a list of which is created by the Ministry of Culture and Art.

The tasks and functions of research libraries in the *Decree* and the 1997 *Act* were determined in a way which does not require any polemics. Let us draw a curtain over the 1968 *Act*. Both acts decided that the task of these libraries was serving science, i.e. creating the workspace for research and education. This workspace, we may add, includes book collections and other library materials as well as the user service system. The essence of the functioning of a research library is the scientific character of its collections as well as its reader – be it the scholar, student or any other user searching for scientific information.

Fundamental questions appear while interpreting the sentence about the tasks of research libraries as “special institutions, doing research connected with books as well as carrying out bibliographical work” – as specified by the *Decree*. What does this desideratum actually mean and, what is more, is it an obligation (or an order) for libraries to do such research? Let us remember that the *Rocznik Statystyczny* [Statistical Yearbook] estimates the number of research libraries as amounting to 1,225, so do they all have to be engaged in research connected with books and, consequently, their history, bibliological processes, former and contemporary readership, etc.? As the majority of special research libraries concentrate on the subject matter of disciplines they attend to (e.g. mathematical and biology sciences), it is difficult to imagine the management of correspondent research units allowing library workers to do research which would not be connected with the designated activity of these units. The 1997 *Act* seems to be even more categorical than the *Decree*. Whereas in the *Decree* it is said that research libraries

[...] can be at the same time special institutions [...].

the *Act* is resolute:

[...] research libraries do [emphasis: A.M.] research in the library science and related fields, as well as relating to the disciplines they attend.

Research libraries have no choice, then, but fortunately they can choose from a vast range of options. As a result, they may do library science, which entails investigating and establishing the conditions and rules of efficient library work, including all structural elements which a library consists of as an institution: collections, readers, workers, organizational systems and material base. Related library science fields include bibliology, scientific information, bibliography and social communication. Let us assume that while satisfying the conditions, which we shall discuss below, such tasks can be done by librarians – mostly library science graduates and certified librarians. However, the stipulation expressed in the second part of the sentence pointing to the research tasks of libraries, which “do research relating to the disciplines they attend to”, proves difficult to be satisfied. The intention of the authors of the *Act* was to enable research work to those librarians whose education coincides with the scientific specialization of the library. In practice, however, librarians are humanists and only in such libraries can they activate themselves scientifically.

Librarians (libraries) are then obliged by legislation to do research but not only by these acts. The magic of the term “research library” is powerful. In the Statut Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego [Statute of the University of Warsaw] of 1997, in paragraph 25 point 1, the tasks of the University of Warsaw Library (BUW) were specified as follows:

BUW is a general academic organizational unit with research and didactic tasks.

The University authorities remember about this entry and once in a while they summon the BUW managing director to report on research in BUW, causing some trouble in that way.

ATTEMPTS AT DEFINING RESEARCH WORK IN POLISH LIBRARIES WITH ATTENDANT EXAMPLES

In the light of the doubts raised above, we have to ask and attempt to establish what research, or scientific, work in a library actually is. The answer is connected with the answer to the general question of what science is, and consequently it leads to complicated deliberations on its essence, for which there is no space here, even for the simple reason that definitions of science are different. The authors of the chapter on research works in libraries, inserted in an academic handbook of librarianship *Bibliotekarstwo* [Librarianship] (Gębołyś &

Ratajewski, 1998, pp. 328-333), tried to answer those questions. According to them, research work in a library “may practically concern all fields of library work”, and research methods applied should be “clear and comprehensible, unambiguous, goal-oriented, effective, fruitful and economical”. Then, the authors described the order of research procedure stages. The fundamental issue is, according to them, posing the problem, i.e. a scientific question: “why this or that subject is like that”.

All these remarks are theoretically reasonable but the authors suspended them in a space which is completely devoid of examples, which does not help to understand the essence of research works in libraries. In particular, how is it possible for the directive which in the course of research assumes examining a research object from the point of view of its “genetic properties, or how and in what conditions a given object was created”, to refer to e.g. actions connected with the subject cataloguing of documents, a skill which the authors consider to be research work in libraries. Subject cataloguing is, according to them, doing science since it has the character of “independent conceptual work which requires in-depth knowledge of mutual relations between particular disciplines and of the methodology of information languages”. Fair enough, but what “genetic properties” of a catalogued book influence the fact that its study is a research work? There is probably no sense in posing such a difficult question for no one is seriously interested in the answer, but we formulate this in order to prove that the use of the paradigm which tests the “scientificity” of particular library functions, suspected of being “scientific”, brings doubtful results. If we want to prove that libraries do carry out research, we should clearly indicate the “scientific” features of particular works and attempt to specify and motivate the **borderline** between other library functions, which cannot be scientific in any sense. If the subject cataloguing bears the hallmarks of scientificity, as some authors want it to, then why doesn’t descriptive cataloguing bear these same hallmarks also? Or maybe it does? There are also some ambitious cataloguers who want their work to be considered scientific. What kind of doctrine is that? Where are the parameters of “scientificity”?

Let us specify, then, in what areas library works lawfully have, or may have, a scientific character. What fields can it concern and what kind of libraries can it be connected with? It is beyond doubt that it is probably about research libraries only. These, in turn, have to be divided into two categories: libraries storing historical (special) collections and libraries with new collections, whose scientific work is oriented toward issues connected with the

widely understood field of library management. It does not exclude the situation when libraries with historical collections, getting modernized, develop research trends connected with their contemporary situation: automation and co-operation between libraries (union catalogues). A good example is the work of the University of Warsaw Library, which, being in possession of valuable special collections, does relevant research in their subject matter, organizing at the same time the NUKAT – an union catalogue of Polish research and academic libraries and preparing a series of handbooks indispensable for proper cooperation of participating libraries, published by the Stowarzyszenie Bibliotekarzy Polskich (SBP) [Polish Librarians' Association].

The collections of historical libraries have necessitated the undertaking of special works. Their crucial tasks have been to study and publish (also electronically) the catalogues of special collections. It is known that no Polish library has completely mastered its special collections in terms of so-called “research catalogues”. Works on catalogues are, then, a fundamental task of these libraries, and readers' or even superiors' appeals are justified here. The compilation of these catalogues creates various degrees of difficulty, the most difficult being the cataloguing of medieval manuscripts. Their authors have to demonstrate their knowledge of history, medieval Latin, palaeography, sphragistics and many other auxiliary historical sciences⁹. An exceptional example in this scope in Poland is the monumental catalogue of manuscript codes of the Jagiellonian Library (*Catalogus...*, 1980-).

The first question which arises is whether the compilation of such a catalogue can be considered as research work. It would be a heresy if I decidedly claimed that it is, in fact, a catalogue, which provides and describes the contents of particular codes, specifying their formal characteristics, the author's surname, title, place and year of creating the manuscript. It is not so in this case, since the cataloguer has to set himself two research tasks: description and explication, and this requires using methods concerning the identification of authors, specification of places and circumstances of the code's creation, analysis of provenance entries allowing for the supervision of the dissemination of the manuscript and its readership.

⁹ The authors of the above-mentioned article in *Bibliotekarstwo* [Librarianship] believe that while compiling “valuable and rare” collections, it is necessary to know “scientific methods and techniques” (p. 329). True, they are useful but the basis for this work is the in-depth knowledge of the subject, i.e. historical erudition and the ability to use auxiliary historical sciences (sphragistics, palaeography etc.).

By granting the status of research work to the cataloguing of medieval manuscripts, we are falling into a certain trap. The catalogues of manuscripts are created also for objects from the 16th to the 21st centuries. As we approach the modern era, the scale of difficulties in describing and the scope of posed questions become even easier. The catalogues of the latest manuscripts sometimes describe copies which are simply legible typescripts, with all data specified on title pages. Creating such a description does not present any research difficulty, and so is such an activity deserving of the classification of research work? Obviously, they are not, but it is a matter of methodology and prestige. From what moment, then, or from what epoch, do manuscript descriptions stop being the effect of research work but rather the result of routine library work? The 16th-18th centuries (the Old Polish manuscripts) – yes, but the 19th century – not? How about the difficult foreign manuscripts from the 19th century? Maybe yes, after all?

Similarly, we may consider works on other categories of special collections. The highest qualifications, also research ones, are required to catalogue incunabula. However, we may sceptically add, this problem does not actually exist in Polish libraries anymore since there are union catalogues of both Polish and world incunabula, so the cataloguer's principle task is to identify the copy. Nonetheless, there are also the spheres of their provenance and displacement to be investigated, if the latter happened during and after the Second World War.

What about work on the other catalogues of old prints? We know examples of superb catalogues, such as the catalogue of 16th century *Polonica* held in the Kórnik Library, and compiled by Kazimierz Piekarski (Piekarski, 1929). Here Piekarski used the so-called typographical method, marking out the direction of research in old books in Poland. Arriving at such a concept undoubtedly constituted an act of creation, and although partially adapting German researchers' experiences, it marked out an exemplary model for cataloguing old prints. Still, Piekarski's successors, the authors of numerous catalogues of 16th century old prints, have simply continued to catalogue old prints in accordance with his steps. Such catalogues can be enriched, of course, with valuable elements of description.

Research into the provenance of copies and entire collections became the speciality of the University of Warsaw Library. The initiator of this course of research was Maria Sipayłło (1905-1990), working in BUW between 1957 and 1990, who organized research workspace,

ran suitable trainings, and established the method of practical research in provenience. She also collected and worked out most of the proveniences placed in the published two volumes of the catalogue of the 15th and 16th centuries prints in BUW (*Katalog druków...*, 1994, 1998).

The research in provenience in old prints, as well as in manuscripts and other special collections, bears the marks, or even satisfy the requirements, of a research work. Apart from such skills as the ability to decipher handwriting (very often some illegible initials) or to identify people or seals, it requires knowledge of the epoch and the institutions functioning within it, in other words – thorough historical erudition.

To sum up, the high standard catalogues of special collections characterized above (also those of cartographic, graphic and musical collections) “exhaust the grades” of research work. The catalogued “object” is a perceptive challenge for the compiler if he chooses to accept it, both its description and all its related explications. Where do the doubts come from then, those that are raised and those which I have raised myself? Some of them have been mentioned above, it is mainly about the diverse level of this challenge and, consequently, about the differing scales of difficulty. cataloguing a contemporary manuscript, or – on the other hand – an incunabulum already described authoritatively in reliable union catalogues does not constitute a scientific task. We cannot state, then, that “the catalogues of special collections are research works” because if they are, then not all of them attain this status. And here another problem emerges: where is the borderline and who should demarcate it?

The compilation of catalogues is an evident duty of the departments of special collections. Rich source materials also tempt to undertake editorial and historical work, which is evidently considered research. Exactly, whom do they tempt? The preparation of an edition is not connected with the routine work of these departments and some really favourable conditions have to occur in order to facilitate such work. A good example is the Kórnik Library. In the 19th century, it issued several multi-volume source publications, some of which were not completed, whereas some of them require re-editing as the level of contemporary knowledge has outstripped 19th-century editorial achievements. In the 1980s, a three-person team was formed to work on the edition and publication of *Lites*¹⁰. Their activity was short and came

¹⁰ Documents concerning the trials between Poles and the Knights of the Cross from the 14th and the 15th century came out in 1855-1856 on Tytus Działyński's initiative, entitled *Lites ac res gestae inter Polonos Ordinemque Cruciferorum*. The edition was continued in the 19th century but it was not terminated. In the 1980s the Kórnik

to an end after a few years. The reasons were prosaic: the coordinator of the team *Lites*, Professor Helena. Chłopocka has retired.

Such a situation is, unfortunately, typical of such library initiatives and, sadly, understandable. Librarians themselves have neither the time nor the expertise to manage the edition of medieval or 16th-century texts. Creating special units for such works requires extremely complicated procedures: acquiring qualified employees, funds, and premises. The lack of a single factor decides upon the failure. In BUW, no further conceptual research on the provenance of old prints has been undertaken out of personal reasons. In Kórnik, in turn, for the same reasons they cannot complete two noteworthy publishing initiatives which began in the second half of the 19th century.

This does not mean that some impressive publishing initiatives were not successful, which relied on materials from particular libraries and were conducted by workers within the framework of the works of particular sections. For instance, the workers of the Manuscript Department at the National Library of Poland, Bogumił Kupść and Krystyna Muszyńska, published Józef Andrzej Załuski's correspondence from 1724-1736 (Wrocław 1967) – a volume which impresses with its size and erudite annotations. The BUW Section of Graphics publishes perfectly prepared and graphically impressive albums of its collections (Kossecka, 2000; Talbierska, 2001), and there are obviously more of such examples. Still, they will not change the basic fact that it is not a rule but a fortunate coincidence. Such accomplishments appear where they manage to form an appropriate team, or train or acquire a gifted specialist librarian, and the management creates suitable work conditions and guarantees that the publication will be issued.

Let us now ponder the possible areas of research activity in libraries which have nothing in common with traditional special collections and let us discuss two of them. A responsible task of every large library is to set out the rules of collection policy, enshrined in a suitable document specifying those rules. To properly specify the acquisition policy of a given library, there has to be a substantial team effort¹¹. The library has to define its mission, analyze the tasks resulting from its statute or other similar legislative statement, study users' needs, and

Library decided to publish the whole documentation properly and to finish the publication. The first volume of the third edition of *Lites* came out in 1970; it was edited by H. Chłopocka.

¹¹ Such works are undertaken in the USA, where they codified methods constituting the basis of the construction of acquisition policy statement in the document called *Conspectus* (Grala, 1996).

then specify how many and what documents it will be gathering within the framework of a given field. Techniques used in such work should be varied, starting with bibliometric research (establishing in a statistical way e.g. the most popular scientific journals which fall within the scope of activity of a given library), through sociological methods (studying users' needs) and, finally, to bibliographical ones, allowing for the adequate choice of literature.

Wishing to specify this type of work, we find ourselves in a similar dialogue to that of the cataloguing of special collections, namely: does the formulation of collection policy rules while using some (e.g. bibliometric) research methods automatically prejudge a scientific act of creation? The standpoints will be different here but if we admit that it is so, then we have to add with regret that our libraries do not undertake such work as a rule. The only written and published principles of collection building in the National Library that I am acquainted with came out in 1974, whereas some university libraries prepared such guidelines in a provisional form, but no Polish library has specified the rules of their acquisition policy reliably or thoroughly enough so as to create a document, described in E. Grala's article.

Nowadays, the crucial task of Polish libraries is the choice, implementation and launch of automated integrated library systems. Libraries has accepted this challenge since the early 1990s and, on the whole, successfully accomplished it. Carrying out the automation of a library requires a series of intellectual skills and high qualifications. These actions are usually preceded with the system analysis of the library, connected as a rule with the reconstruction of its structure. The choice and purchase of the system requires the knowledge of particular systems; it is necessary to understand the IT essentials of the system in order to establish a dialogue with IT experts implementing the system, and it is crucial to master the rules of the bibliographic and subject description in computer environment.

This impressive set of library and IT skills, which are necessary to implement, maintain and improve the automated systems in libraries, obviously provoke us to decree that we have to do with research activity. However, there are some doubts arising. All actions listed above are, to a great extent, managerial actions and require the knowledge of numerous issues, but they do not lead to "posing a problem or a scientific question", which is considered to be a fundamental condition to do research, stipulated by the above mentioned authors (Gębołyś & Ratajewski, 1998, p. 331). However, we could wonder if the creation of an integrated library system is not a research effort. Yet, such systems used to be created not in libraries but in large companies, and formats of records are most often adopted from the

USA, bibliographic standards (adopted from relevant international regulations) are simply acquired and used, so where is this research contribution of particular libraries?

Similar examples can be multiplied. The work on bibliographies in some libraries is traditional, enjoying respect and automatically considered to be research work. However, again, we come across the same question: what determines the “scientificity” of this work? The very compilation and selection of items and their correct description in the accepted order? Rather not. But in terms of the elaboration of the concept of some bibliography – then we may say, rather yes.

We gradually approach the question that bothers us. There are fields of library activity which we will preferably call research work, whereas of others we will speak with doubt, and some will be denied this status (e.g. descriptive cataloguing). The preparation of action programmes, creation of theoretical grounds and methodology of work get closer to research activity but their implementation does not. All decisions can be, and are, arguable, and they may even arouse vehement emotions and protests. But the question is, who needs these discussions and decisions? Libraries work independently of how the authorities evaluate their research status, and the users of research libraries are only interested in adequately selected collections and service efficiency. They do not care about librarians’ scientific activity if it does not lead to the improvement of information services.

Authorities’ pressures go right past fundamental library challenges but they concern individual or team research work. These pressures are frustrating for librarians, who usually cannot satisfy these requirements. Authorities’ requirements are rarely accompanied by organizational steps, which could enable such work. In 1964, sections of research work were introduced into the structures of university libraries. They did not fulfil their role so they were consecutively liquidated. At present, as far as I know, only the Poznań University Library (UAM) has the Section of Research, Publishing and Didactic Work, which is focused on organizational activities, carried out by Research Secretariats (or research secretaries) in some larger libraries. Therefore, if we want to assign research tasks to libraries, we should create structures obliged to their execution (just as the Books and Readers Institute of the National Library of Poland) but we should not force librarians into working on research within the framework of hitherto office duties.

The conclusions from the analyses presented above can be formulated as follows. The term “research libraries” (Pol. *biblioteki naukowe*) is embedded in Polish library typology, although it is difficult to find a country where it is of such importance. In the Anglo-Saxon area “research libraries” are understood as simply humanistic libraries, constituting workspace for researchers.

Our divisions of libraries into research and public ones undoubtedly derive from the tradition of German librarianship, although in Germany those divisions begin to fade away and the term “research library” describes the **characteristic** of a library rather than its **type**.

The Polish persistent use of the term “research libraries” as the name of the **type** has been consolidated by legislative acts. The acts imposed on libraries the duty of carrying out their own research work, which often leads to inconvenient, almost amoral situations, since in their reports libraries describe actions which have nothing in common with science. We may wonder whether all these problems are necessary and whether they are not caused to a great extent by the ambition factor. After all, a “research library” has a certain ring to it that sounds proud.

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