

## **Limits and opportunities for conducting quantitative and qualitative research in terms of the societies in transition (the example of Bulgaria)**

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**Abstract:** Societies in transition pose to the libraries some serious problems, which are new to them (compared to the previous period). The first problem concerns the financing of libraries. Along with this there is organizational change. This directly affects the relationship between the institution and library users. The situation which is created greatly hampers the study of library users and the environment. As a result, the introduction of marketing and measurement of the quality of library work is impeded.

The report puts several major emphases on:

1. The factors that determine the choice of approaches and methods of library research;
2. The modalities through which quantitative and qualitative research can be applied ;
3. The successful cases of combined use of QQM and the possibility of practical application of the results on a local and national level.

**Keywords:** factors, environment analysis, limits, opportunities, library users

### **1. Introduction**

It may sound paradoxical, but the current Bulgarian library is lagging behind modern trends of using quantitative and qualitative research methods of library activities and library environment. At that, the Bulgarian Library Association has a good past experience (from the 1960s to the 1980s various single or complex studies of readers and reading were held.

What causes this condition?

The conditions of transition, in which the Bulgarian society live after the political change in the late 1980's have a strong influence on the development in the library area – both in the activity of the libraries and library science and education. Transformations of the political system and the difficulties in the

economic field put libraries in a crisis situation, having them adapt to rapidly changing economic conditions and social environment. Negative tendencies persist, including strong underestimation of library research.

## **2. Three basic negative trends**

There are several major problems related to the development of Bulgarian libraries that create unfavorable conditions for conducting qualitative and quantitative research on the work of libraries and the public attitude towards it. They define and backlog of Bulgarian libraries to some modern practices and trends characteristic of libraries in most European countries.

A. It should first be noted the insufficient funding, which affects all aspects of the development of libraries and does not allow repairs, purchase of equipment, procurement of library resources (documents), introduction of new technologies. To satisfy the different needs of libraries it is relied mainly on financial aid, mostly from abroad (and after the country's EU accession in 2007 – EU funding) and donations. For example, the initial computerization of libraries in the 1990s became largely with the help of donations – the money or equipment. For example, in the period 2009-2013, for the supply of a number of libraries with computers and training on new technology exclusive contributed the Foundation “Bill and Melinda Gates”.

A Bulgarian common practice is to obtain library books and periodicals through donations from publishers, foundations and other donor programs. This method of financing leads to extremely uneven development of libraries, focusing on the procurement procedures of funds and participation in programs and ignoring the long-term real problems facing libraries.

Poor funding of libraries is also reflected in low salaries of librarians, which strongly impacts the reputation of the library institution and the interest of the profession. There is some reluctance of young highly qualified people to start work in libraries.

B. Another characteristic of the situation in the country is the absence of a national policy in the library field – neither as a program nor as clear priorities. This affects the work of libraries in general and especially in digitizing their collections. There is no national program for the digitization of literary heritage, nor for the implementation of free access. The actions in these areas are the result of the efforts of individual libraries and cooperation between some of them (Harizanova, 2010) This leads to inconsistency; duplication of activities; using different approaches and methods of work that are difficult to coordinate nationwide and to the fragmentation of resources and efforts.

The need for a clear idea of what the library has to do and who to do it is replaced with the understanding that the main priority of the libraries is project work. As a result, the work of a number of libraries has been activated. Projects are designed that attract media, respectively public attention and contribute to the modernization of libraries, and to engage the interest of the public. Individual libraries establish partnerships with different institutions and

individuals to participate in activities organized by the library. On a project basis is largely done the digitization of periodicals, books and documents representing literary heritage. Likewise was provided the Bulgarian participation in the project Europeana. A major problem for projects is that after their completion the performed activities are also completed and a continuing development can not be achieved.

C. The next problem is connected with the development of library education and library science, the rapidly changing issues in various publications and content of the various curricula. The new priorities do not relate to library research. Sporadic attempts remain to introduce foreign practice in the field of work and audiences and to encourage reading and attract readers (Stoikova, 2000). A similar situation is seen in library PR and marketing. PR was introduced as a discipline and there are a number of independent publications about PR (Rusinova, 2003), and marketing (Evtimov, 1999; Rusinova, 2014).

Specific problems in the Bulgarian library field may be illustrated by the example of the introduction of marketing technologies in library work. In the 1990s among library professionals were led fruitless disputes about the nature of marketing and its possibilities as a technology to improve the funding of libraries. Over the next decade the subject actually became a monologue. It turns out that there is virtually no Bulgarian library that has a plan for marketing activities or to report of such. The same can be said for library PR. It is highly underrated and confined to different contacts with the media, whose final effect is not measured and recorded. The next aspect of the library activities which are underestimated in practice, although present in different versions of the library specialists, is efficiency. In the library work there are no criteria and indicators by which performance could be measured.

A specific feature of the situation in the library field is the shift of attention from users to project activity and to the understanding that libraries can become public information centers. This development is predetermined by the complex situation in which libraries are. This is an expression of their desire to adapt to the adverse conditions in which they emerge and to technological change and innovation, with which they compete.

### **3. Attempts to overcome crisis**

However, a significant part of the libraries (mainly regional libraries, i.e. libraries in regional centers and some city libraries) pay considerable attention to various campaigns to put libraries in the public eye and, at the same time to involve in reading, promoting their activities. So libraries, especially from the middle of the first decade of the century, became the major initiators and active participants in events in popularizing of books and reading such as “Reading Marathon”; days of books and reading; days of children's books; festivals; Day of the book; open days, etc. (Rusinova, 2011) Most of them have a positive impact and attract strong media attention. Some are emerging as a major public activity of librarians. Their direct results are attracting new readers and increasing the support from the authorities. Diverse experience has been gained

in the form of good practices shared and discussed at various forums of library professionals. However, it should be noted that there is a trend in these activities to underestimate feedback. There are no applicable criteria for assessing the performance of individual events and campaigns. Only individual libraries (e.g. Sofia City Library, Regional library "P. R. Slaveykov" in Veliko Tarnovo) analyze the quantitative data obtained from participation in different events organized by them and the readers' activity.

Although in Bulgarian conditions the topic of library effectiveness has been popular since the early 1980s, its periodic appearance in the agenda of the library community does not lead to specific practical results. Effectiveness is not measured, quantitatively and qualitatively. The main criterion to be applied in terms of effectiveness, in terms of library work is what the amount of events held is and how many participants were involved.

In the first decade of the 21st century topic of quality management is gaining popularity.

In the case of PR, marketing, determining the efficiency and measurement of quality can be found the positive attitude of the library staff to their study. Undoubtedly, this is a favorable factor for conducting qualitative and quantitative research. However, what really is done is limited to presenting some statistics.

Strength of the Bulgarian situation is the significant interest in conducting surveys. Such studies are the main focus of university theses in library science in dissertations or as a basis for separate publications on the work of individual urban or rural libraries. With minor exceptions, however, surveys are not representative.

SWOT analysis is also popular among library professionals, but practical application is very limited; systematization of different signs is often done quite formally. Episodic cases are seen of its application to describe the status of a library and for the formation of concept for the development (e.g. Regional Library "Pencho Slaveykov" Varna) (Milkova, 2005)

The least applied in Bulgarian practice is the analysis of the situation. Therefore, funds are insufficient, nor is there any experience or the understanding of the need for it. Although theoretically known, outsourcing is not used. Similar is the situation with content analysis. The attempt to develop a system of indicators for library activities is still only in the field of theory (Arsenova, 2004).

All these negative trends outlined determine the complete underestimation of quantitative and qualitative research in the library field are criticized in a number of papers presented to the annual conferences of the professional organization of Bulgarian librarians - "Bulgarian Library and Information Association". However, a quantitative study of the situation in Bulgarian libraries from 2010 shows the main opportunities as well as the critical points of development (Harizanova, 2010). On the basis of the accumulated data in and the criticism and recommendations of BLIA conferences and own observations

and studies on regional libraries in Varna, Shumen, Veliko Tarnovo, Targovitse, Vratsa, Kyustendil, Pazardzhik (i.e. ¼ of all regional libraries in the country) the possible directions of development can be outlined for the implementation of quantitative and qualitative research in the Bulgarian library field.

A major shortcoming of library development in the country is the lack of relevant quantitative data and qualitative analyses of user libraries. The research on library users in Bulgarian conditions is possible only for several major libraries in the country

#### **4. Several steps to update the library activities**

An emerging current trend is to carry out cooperative efforts of various regional libraries. For the realization of a single or comparative research the following steps are needed, however, which the professional circles treat with consensus:

1. Coordinating the study of library users and library environment. This can be done only by some national research bodies, for example by BLIA. Experience of conducting marketing research of the German Deutsche Bibliotheks Institut of the late 1980s and early 1990s of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century for example could in many ways be applicable to the Bulgarian conditions. Cooperation would compensate for the lack of funds, and would allow the development of a strategy for working with different library audiences. It would allow coordination of different initiatives, programs and actions. At the same time it would enable the provision of empirical data on the state of the library field. Only then would be created conditions for conducting qualitative and quantitative research, not least through the establishment of a core group of experts in this field;
2. Introduction of a system of quality control of library work (TQM)
3. Introduction of marketing practices in all types of libraries;
4. Guidance of library research toward the analysis of library resources, the situation and consumers.
5. The referred to in items 2 and 3 require:
6. Developing a system of criteria and indicators as well as methodologies for evaluation of library activities and mainly the work efficiency in the library field
7. Organization of pilot studies in connection with the formation of marketing strategies, studying the quality and efficiency of library work.
8. Studying the foreign practice relevant to the conditions in Bulgaria.

#### **5. Conclusions**

Such steps will help overcome the vicious circle in which the Bulgarian library area is, a situation which is as follows:

- Ignorance of users' interests
- Lack of strategy for working with library audiences

- Inability to achieve the effect of marketing and PR activities

It should be pointed out that besides the willingness for carrying out and coordination of library quantitative and qualitative research, there are positive factors for implementing such activities. At the University of Library Studies and Information Technologies Sofia (specialized higher school for library specialists) there are courses such as library sociology, sociological methods in the library field and the PR, where attention is paid to the quantitative and qualitative research in the library field, which are required to students from the Faculty of Library Sciences.

On the other hand, a major part of the library leading specialists - researchers, experts and directors of many regional and local libraries have attended various specializations abroad. Basic texts of IFLA have been translated into Bulgarian language. In the country in the period 1998-2004 were conducted several major international forums in the field of library practice.

*All this creates a good basis for overcoming the lag in the field of library research.*

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