

# THE CIVIC INSPIRER

A GUIDE TO INFORMAL  
CIVIC EDUCATION  
AT (AND NOT ONLY)  
PUBLIC LIBRARIES



INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS



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PUBLIC LIBRARIES

edited by  
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WARSAW 2011



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# Be inspired !

**T**he object of this publication, as the title indicates, lies in inspiration – in encouraging readers to engage in measures directed at improving the quality of civil society in Poland.

The public debate concerning the important question of civil society, alas, continues to be lacking. This is not a topic which stands any chance of being a top story on the main television news, and it is only from time to time that experts manage to raise it in the press, on television, or in other media. And that's too bad, seeing as low levels of social commitment, a general disinclination – not to say dislike – of community work, and unawareness of own rights are measurably contributing to other, graver problems: low turnout in elections, inability to undertake joint measures, and a pervading mistrust in the law, in public institutions, and in one another.

Institute of Public Affairs experts have already grappled with these problems many times in the past – after all, research into such phenomena rests within the basic scope of activities of a think tank such as ours. That said, any decent think tank also strives to come up with ideas of its own which might inspire others to, in turn, take new measures and, thus, contribute to creative resolution of problems common to all. And this is what the present publication is all about. There has been precious little talk of the difficulties facing civil society, but even less is being done to counteract them.

The *Civic Inspirer* is an initiative designed to fortify civil society. As such, we have formulated it as an educational tool addressed to two main groups of recipients. The first group consists in those who are in a position to use this instrument to carry on educational activities of their own. Librarians are an ideal example; they work in places which are all about gaining new knowledge and, as we argue in the subsequent parts of this publication, which are basically predestined

to serve as civic education centres. At the same time, the *Civic Inspirer* is also suitable for use by other institutions operating at the nexus of the citizen and the state, and it is through libraries – the first recipients of the *Inspirer* – that they will have a better chance of reaching persons and groups genuinely interested in strengthening civil society.

The concept of informal civic education, a thematic strand running throughout this publication, is a flexible one. Its very essence is associated with the fact that it can be practiced anywhere, at any occasion. Accordingly, the different activities described here may be implemented at libraries as well as at other venues – social care or family care centres, employment agencies, cultural centres, NGOs, etc. This is the main point of the informal educational measures propagated by us – the fact that they need not be confined to the formal education system and to specialised educational institutions, and this publication is also addressed to entities of this sort.

The second target group consists in the citizens themselves – readers, beneficiaries of support provided by social aid centres and NGOs, clients of various administrative institutions, unemployed persons, etc. We urge the librarians reading this to display a copy of the *Civic Inspirer* at a prominent location in their library and to direct readers to it – perhaps one of these readers will go on to propose their own idea as to how to activate the local community in cooperation with the library or to teach some useful skill to its members?

Proceeding to the contents of this publication, its first part comprises two articles which present an introduction to informal civic education issues and explains the need for its implementation. Both these texts also include guidelines on pursuing informal civic education in practice, with especial emphasis on public libraries.

The second part of the publication is more varied thematically, opening with an article on the practical aspects of civic education and setting out the

conclusions gleaned from two events which provided a point of departure for our entire publication. The first of these was the international expert seminar devoted to informal civic education held in Warsaw in May 2010. The seminar provided a forum for presenting projects and comparing notes on propagation of civic attitudes; some of the initiatives presented and debated on that occasion are described here.

The second event informing this publication was comprised in the workshop for librarians – what we called the roundtable, convened to discuss informal civic education with the librarians themselves. The idea was to hold a brainstorming session, with the participants coming up with informal civic education projects which, in their well-informed view, might be implemented in practice. The librarians did not disappoint, submitting a long list of great ideas in the space of a mere few hours. In this way, they became, as it were, co-authors of the *Civic Inspirer* and, in order to do justice to their valuable contribution, we have named all of them on the following page.

The librarians' roundtable affirmed the authors of this publication in their conviction that informal civic education has a future in Poland and that there are many institutions around the country – to mention only the thousands of libraries – which could propagate and implement it. Just as importantly, it provided many valuable ideas which we discuss herein in hopes that they will prove inspiring to readers.

The third part of the publication, intended as a complement to *Civic education in action*, brings together descriptions of some projects presented during the international seminar held in May 2010. Some of the initiatives described here have been underway for quite some time now, others are still in their planning stages. These projects concern not only libraries, but also entities such as cultural centres and social aid centres. They all share the basic trait of universality (in the sense that practically anybody can take it upon themselves to execute them), and every

project description is accompanied by the contact details of the persons and organisations responsible for them – readers are welcome to get in touch with them. This edition discusses only some of the projects presented during the seminar of experts; their complete catalogue can be found in the Polish-language version of the *Civic Inspirer*:

In closing, a few words about the origins of the project under which this publication was produced should be in order. Its inspiration flowed from the work pursued by a number of institutions, including the Robert Bosch Stiftung and the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung as well as their brainchild, Networking European Citizenship Education (a network of civic education experts and practitioners). It is thanks to their meetings, conferences, and seminars as well as to their direct financial support that the *Civic Inspirer* was possible. Also, our project and its accompanying publication would not have been realised without assistance from the Library Development Programme, an undertaking of the Information Society Development Foundation utilising funds made available by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Polish-American Freedom Foundation. Because the experts affiliated with the Library Development Programme appreciated the value of informal civic education, the project benefited not only from financial aid, but also from direct access to the all-important target group comprised by librarians.

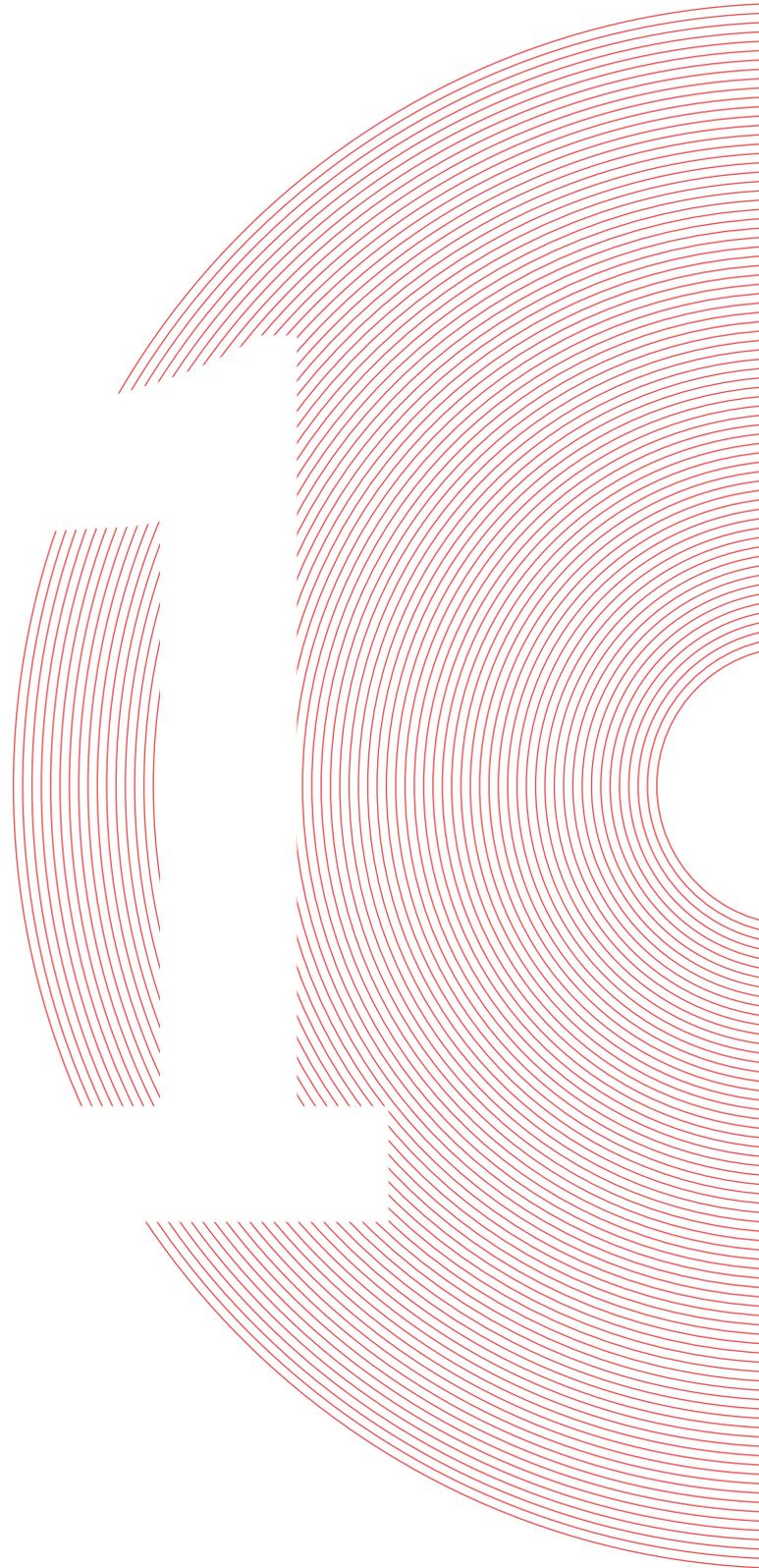
As we present the *Civic Inspirer* to librarians, we hope that they as well as visitors and users of libraries will find this publication to be of interest and decide to pursue their own initiatives directed at building a vibrant, democratic civil society.

# List of "Librarians' round table" participants

WARSAW, 14 SEPTEMBER 2010

1. Lidia Białecka, District and Municipal Public Library in Rybnik
2. Krystyna Borowicz, Municipal Public Library in Chodzież
3. Joanna Burska, Regional Public Library in Olsztyn
4. Grażyna Górecka, Public Library in the Śródmieście District of the Capital City of Warsaw, Jan Nowak-Jeziorański Information Centre
5. Beata Jadach - Zygałło, Municipal Public Library in Katowice
6. Lidia Jedlińska, Regional Public Library in Kraków
7. Justyna Lisak, Public Library in the Ochota District of the Capital City of Warsaw – "Book Stop"
8. Anna Matuszak, Community Public Library in Szczerców
9. Katarzyna Misian, Community Public Library in Deszczno
10. Andrzej Paździerz, Community Public Library in Piekoszów
11. Anna Ruszczyk, Municipal Public Library in Łódź – Polesie
12. Magdalena Turska, Community Public Library in Kłodawa
13. Beata Klaudia Waniek, Municipal and Community Public Library in Wieruszów
14. Barbara Wasiluk, Municipal and District Public Library in Golub-Dobrzyń
15. Aleksandra Zawalska-Hawel, Municipal Public Library in Piekary Śląskie

**A BIT  
OF THEORY**



# Citizenship Education and Public Libraries

## A Commentary on the Question of Synergies in Non-Formal Education

Benedikt Widmaier | Haus am Maiberg

**L**ibraries and citizenship education have something in common. Both of them are pedagogic work-fields and both try to provide knowledge for people which are already interested in something. Libraries as well as citizenship education motivate the empowerment of people and accompany them in the emancipative offer of lifelong learning.

This article is based on my introductory speech to an international expert seminar “Public libraries as centres for civic education in Europe”. It aims to present some key-notes to non-formal citizenship education in Germany and Europe and to share first reflection what these means for a future co-operation with libraries. I will do this in five steps and a conclusion at the end. In the first parts I try to define the basic terms of “non-formal learning and education” (part 1), “active citizenship” (part 2) and “citizenship education” (part 3). Then I will show the ambivalence of the popular term of “civil society” (part 4) and give you some examples for the important role of learning-places in non-formal education (part 5). In this part I will also spot the question of libraries, but only to bridge to this question, which was the main issue of aforementioned conference before I will come to some conclusions.

### **NON-FORMAL LEARNING/EDUCATION<sup>1</sup>**

Within the internationalisation of the last decade new international terms were put into the debate and became familiar in all European countries step by step. “Non-formal” (learning or education) is one of this type of terms and it is often connected with the partner terms “formal” and “informal”. Although these terms are nearly more than ten years old, they are often mixed up and misunderstood until now.

<sup>1</sup> More about three complementary categories of education (formal, non-formal and informal) and problems related to ambiguity of the basic ideas – see in G. Makowski, *Informal Civic Education, or the New-cum-Old Role of the Public Library* [in this volume] (editor’s comment).

Therefore it might be useful to start with a definition, so that we speak about the same things in our further discussion. In the context of developing guidelines for lifelong learning the European Commission published “A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning” in the year 2000<sup>2</sup>. As far as I know, the three terms were defined there for the first time:

- “Formal learning takes place in education and training institutions, leading to recognised diplomas and qualifications”. These are the classical pedagogic institutions such as schools, universities and vocational education.
- “Non-formal learning takes place alongside the mainstream system of education and training and does not typically lead to formal certificates”. A lot of civil society activities belong to this field, from sport clubs to church activities, where we find pedagogic accompanied offers without certification. In the last years the view on non-formal learning changed evidently, because based on an initiative of OECD, the question was raised, whether non-formal learning leads to skills and competences which are useful for employability as well<sup>3</sup>. Meantime institutions started to handover certificates after non-formal activities and develop special systems for such certifications, e.g. the Youth Pass in the “Youth in Action Program” of EU<sup>4</sup>. This might change the profile of non-formal learning in the future, because the profession gives up the principle of voluntary participation in parts, if their offers lead to certificates at the end.



- “Informal learning is a natural accompaniment to everyday life.... (It) is not necessarily intentional learning, and some may well not be recognised even by individuals themselves as contributing to their knowledge and skills”. In French we have the appropriate fitting term of learning *en passant* for informal learning. Reading book and using libraries is one of the most traditional form of informal learning. But also using new medias or visiting an exhibition are forms of informal

<sup>2</sup> *A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*, Commission of the European Communities, Brussels 2000, SEC(2000) 1832, 30 October 2000, p. 8 – <http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/MemorandumEng.pdf> [accessed on 15 May 2010].

<sup>3</sup> *Status of Recognition of non-formal und informal learning in Germany*, Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, Berlin 2008 – [http://www.bmbf.de/pub/non-formal\\_and\\_informal\\_learning\\_in\\_germany.pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/pub/non-formal_and_informal_learning_in_germany.pdf) [accessed on 15 May 2010]; *Validation of non-formal and informal learning in Europe. A snapshot 2007*, CEDEFOP (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training) Luxembourg 2008 – [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Upload/Information\\_resources/Bookshop/493/4073\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Upload/Information_resources/Bookshop/493/4073_en.pdf) [accessed on 15 May 2010].

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.youthpass.eu>.



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learning. Even if we are walking through the streets we are learning informal. New researches from Canada verify that obviously more than 70% of what we learn during our life we learn informal<sup>5</sup>.

From my point of view, it seems to be important

for our discussion on civic education and public libraries, what kind of learning/education libraries want to offer. As far as I understood, the intention is, to offer non-formal education (lectures, courses, seminars, workshops) with social and political topics - which means pedagogic arranged and accompanied activities at the learning-place public library<sup>6</sup>.

### ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

In the already mentioned *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* another keyword raised, which is important for the development of civic education in Europe, it is the term “active citizenship”. The Memorandum underlines “two equally important aims for lifelong learning: promoting active citizenship and promoting employability”. And further on you can find a small definition of “active citizenship”:

“Active citizenship focuses on whether and how people participate in all spheres of social and economic life, the chances and risks they face in trying to do so, and the extent to which they therefore feel that they belong to and have a fair say in the society in which they live”<sup>7</sup>.

Later on the issue was picked up again in the so called “Recommendation on key competences” of the European Parliament and the EU Council<sup>8</sup>. “Social and civic skills” were declared as most important for lifelong

<sup>5</sup> D.W. Livingstone, *Exploring the Iceberg of Adult Learning: Findings of the First Canadian Survey of Informal Learning Practices*, „The Canadian Journal for Study of Adult Education” 2000, p. 38 – <http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/depts/sese/csew/nall/res/cjsaem.pdf> [accessed on 15 May 2010].

<sup>6</sup> Author presents European implications of the civic education taking into consideration his local German experiences. However, in Germany non-formal civic education is more developed and functions in more comprehensive way. This is the reason why informal education in this country posses so unstructured form. In Poland, due to the worse development of the whole third sector, seminars and workshops that author is mentioning about (i.e. organised in libraries) can also have form of informal activities – even when they are dedicated to social and political issues (editor’s comment).

<sup>7</sup> *A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning* (2006/962/EC), „Official Journal of the European Union”, 30 December 2006, p. L 394/10–L 394/18 – [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l\\_394/l\\_39420061230en00100018.pdf](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l_394/l_39420061230en00100018.pdf) [accessed on 15 May 2010].

learning in Europe beside seven other key competences. In this recommendation “social and civic skills” were described as followed:

- „education contributes....learning essential social and civic values such as citizenship, equality, tolerance and respect, and is particularly important at a time when all Member States are challenged by the question of how to deal with increasing social and cultural diversity”<sup>9</sup>.

And later on “social and civic skill” are defined:

- “These include personal, interpersonal and intercultural competence and cover all forms of behaviour that equip individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life, and particularly in increasingly diverse societies, and to resolve conflict where necessary. Civic competence equips individuals to fully participate in civic life, based on knowledge of social and political concepts and structures and a commitment to active and democratic participation”<sup>10</sup>.

A more detailed description follows in these paper. It is honestly worthy to read this paper, if you are working in the field of civic education, because you get a lot of inspiration. The “Recommendation on key competences” was an important step to the later so called “European Qualification Framework” of 2008<sup>11</sup>.

European Commission asked one of her think tanks, the Centre for Research on Education and Lifelong Learning (CRELL) in Ispra/Italy, to work on the question

of “active citizenship” in more detailed way<sup>12</sup>. Under the leadership of Bryony Hoskins a lot of expertises were published in this project by an international community of researchers. The most important one is the paper “Measuring Active Citizenship in Europe”. Active citizenship is defined here as “participation in civil society, community and/or political life, characterised by mutual respect and non-violence and in accordance with human rights and democracy”<sup>13</sup>. I mention these here because the CRELL definition became a kind of official definition of “active citizenship” since that time. When you cheque European declarations and recommendations on our topic in the internet, you will see, that the definition is often used and repeated in such documents.

### **CIVIC AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION**

Until now I used the term “citizenship education” although I personally prefer to speak about “political education” because of my German socialisation in this pedagogic profession.

Political education played an important role in Germany since World War II. Occupying Germany the American Army brought along a worked out education program which main aims were to re-educate Germans back to democrats. This reeducation program of the Americans had a high impact on the post-war educational system in Germany. Not only in schools political education became a respected subject, but also all kind of civil-society groups felt and feel responsible

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. L 394/10.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, p. L 394/16.

<sup>11</sup> *European Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning*, Directorate General Education and Culture, Brussels 2008 – [http://http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/publ/pdf/eqf/broch\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/publ/pdf/eqf/broch_en.pdf) [accessed on 15 May 2010].

<sup>12</sup> <http://active-citizenship.jrc.it>.

<sup>13</sup> *Measuring Active Citizenship in Europe, Centre for Research on Lifelong Learning Research Paper 4*, Institute for the Protection and Security of Citizen, Ispra 2006, p. 73 – <http://crell.jrc.ec.europa.eu/ActiveCitizenship/AC-Final%20Report-December%202006/measuring%20AC.pdf> [accessed on 15 May 2010].

for political education since that time. Political parties, trade unions, churches, youth organisations of all kind built up own institutions for political education. That's the reason why we still have a rich infrastructure of non-formal political education institutions in Germany. These institutions also build up different and pluralistic umbrella structures within the framework of BAP (*Bundesausschuss Politische Bildung*), where all institutions for political youth- and adult-education are gathered<sup>14</sup>. Last but not least a public wing of political education was built up on the federal level as well as on the level of the states (*Bundesländer*) where we have the so called "centres for political education" – e.g. the Federal Agency for Civic Education (*Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*)<sup>15</sup>. Here you can already notice, that we change our German usage (political education) and start to speak about "civic education" as well, when we move to the international context.

While speaking about political education traditions in Germany it ought to be observed that because of the high political will, political education became a well defined profile in formal and non-formal education in the country. We had/have professors for political education at German Universities with the task to research in this field and to train teachers. We have several scientific magazines on the question of political education and we have a lot of educational materials for pupils and interested citizens – often offered for free by these agencies for civic education.

The aims of non-formal political education in Germany are:

- developing information, knowledge and understanding about all kind of political and social questions (political literacy),
- making people capable of independent political judgment,

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.bap-politischebildung.de>.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.bpb.de>.



- animating people to take part in any kind of political and decision making process in their surrounding and in democratic process,
- supporting people who are engaged in such processes,
- education towards democratic citizenship,
- prevention of all kind of totalitarianism and extremism.

Of course there are a lot of conflicts and discussions about aims and contents of political education. We had hard discussions especially in the seventies after the student-movements of 1968 which causes a so called "participation revolution" and the highest-point of social movements in Western European countries. The controversy especially surrounded the question, whether

it is allowed to indoctrinate pupils and participants of youth- and adult-education with single-issue and orthodox political opinions. At the end the debate leads to some kind of ethic-pedagogic agreement which was named “Beutelsbach Consensus”<sup>16</sup> after the small town where it was agreed.

As far as I can assess the “Beutelsbach Consensus” is accepted by all important players and institutions in formal and non-formal political education in Germany, and I know that this consensus is translated and discussed in many countries meanwhile – e.g. in South Korea.

The most important rules of the consensus shall be mentioned here:

- “It is not permissible to catch pupils unprepared or unawares - by whatever means - for the sake of imparting desirable opinions and to hinder them from forming an independent judgement”
- “Matters which are controversial in intellectual and political affairs must also be taught as controversial in educational instruction”
- “Pupils must be put in a position to analyse a political situation and to assess how their own personal interests are affected as well as to seek means and ways to influence the political situation they have identified according to their personal interests”.

It is not the place to start a discussion on these principles here. But let me finally add that from my point of view the last principle is one of the most important in our actually high depoliticized European political culture.

The communist countries and systems were as well familiar with the term “political education” until 1989. That’s why I understand that the term should not

be used in debates on citizenship education in Europe nowadays. On this background the Council of Europe, which felt responsible for the Pan European Question much earlier than EU, raised the question of “Education for Democratic Citizenship” (EDC) first in the European continent. In the nineties the Council of Europe started a huge programme on EDC with basic theoretical materials as well as pedagogic materials and tools for citizenship education<sup>17</sup>.

Parallel to this European development we had a new discussion in Germany about political education and “democracy education”, a term which was not used in our country up to that time. The protagonists of *Demokratiepädagogik* stress that democracy is not only a form of governance (political power) but also a form of society and a form of living (lifestyle)<sup>18</sup>. From their point of view it depends on the age of participants, which of these three forms of democracy should be especially emphasized in civic education.

### **CIVIL SOCIETY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

In the nineties of the last century “civil society” became some kind of magic word in political theory and politics for several reasons. The fact that civil society had the ability to throw the communist leaders from their throne provoke a lot of enthusiasm about the (supposed) important role civil society can play in democratic systems as well as in the communist dictatorship.

The misunderstanding was – from my point of view – that the western political systems in the industrialised countries of “old Europe” were not really prepared for such change. Germany for example had/has a lot of interest groups which traditionally try to influence politics in their direction. They are accepted as lobbyist-groups, but if we strictly divide society from the political

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.lpb-bw.de/beutelsbacher-konsens.html>.

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/edc/3\\_RESOURCES/EDC\\_pack\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/edc/3_RESOURCES/EDC_pack_en.asp).

<sup>18</sup> G. Himmelmann, *Citizenship Education in Germany, the U.K. and US*, Durham 2004, p. 18 – <http://www.learningmigration.com/files/assignment/5/Himmelmann.pdf> [accessed on 15 May 2010].

system they cannot be declared as part of this political system. State and society are usually strictly divided in theory of democracy.

At the same time the civil society movements in America but also in “old Europe” lost their political attraction for citizens compared to the seventies and eighties. In this situation some political-scientists already exclaimed “The end of history” (Francis Fukuyama) and within the European Union the discussion about “democracy deficit” became harder in expectation of a growing European Union. A lot of left-wing politicians, who lost socialism as their political project, start to count on civil society as a main important factor of political emancipation.

These is reflected in two theories which are very famous in social-sciences nowadays: the theory of “Social Capital” (Robert Putnam) and the theory of “Strong Democracy” (Benjamin Barber). There is not the space to describe these theories in details here. But I will try to summarise the most important aspects. In his empirical researches Robert Putnam found out that all kind of group activities are decreasing in American society and that there is the danger that Americans are “Bowling alone”- so the title of his most important publication - in the future. Therefore politics and society should give impulses for a higher accumulation of “Social Capital” – e.g. through civic education. Mainly based on this research and theory of Robert Putnam one of his colleagues developed a democracy-theory which follows the hypothesis that “Strong Democracy” - so one of Benjamin Barbers publication titles – should be based on a well functioning civil society and a high participation of citizens in all kind of social life and social activity.

Both theories were based on the belief that there are spill-over-effects between social and political participation. The hypothesis says that citizens who participate in civil society organisation or in voluntary services will also be interested and engaged in politics later on. But until now this expected spill-over-effects are not really verified, even if we find the correlation plausible in the first moment, there can be other explanation for that correlation. We know for example that higher educated citizens are also higher engaged in civil society organisations and voluntary services. Their higher education can also be the reason for a more extensive political participation.

In Germany the hype about voluntary engagement and civil society was quiet high in the last years. We had special Commissions and Committees in our parliament. We had Reports on Voluntary Sevices (*Freiwilligen survey*)<sup>19</sup> once again in 1998, 2004 and 2009. And we had a first Report on Civic-Engagement (*Engagementbericht*)<sup>20</sup> in 2009 - both on behalf of the German government.

For Europe one of our most important participation-researcher, Jan W. van Deth, mentioned recently that “the notion that democracies are dependent on a well-developed civil-society and a considerable stock of social capital is widely accepted. From the perspective of EU policymakers, then, civil society bodies have the potential to enhance the quality of political decision-making process by expanding the group of participants beyond the conventional borders of representative democracy”<sup>21</sup>.

However, this debate has also a great impact on the concepts of citizenship education. If you believe in the spill-over between social and political participation

<sup>19</sup> See: <http://www.bmfsfj.de/RedaktionBMFSFJ/Engagementpolitik/Pdf-Anlagen/freiwilligen-survey-langfassung.property=pdf,bereich=bmfsfj,sprache=de,rwb=true.pdf> [accessed on 30 October 2010].

<sup>20</sup> See: [www.familien-wegweiser.de/RedaktionBMFSFJ/Broschuerenstelle/Pdf-Anlagen/buergerschaftliches-engagement-bericht-wzb-pdf.property=pdf,bereich=bmfsfj,sprache=de,rwb=true.pdf](http://www.familien-wegweiser.de/RedaktionBMFSFJ/Broschuerenstelle/Pdf-Anlagen/buergerschaftliches-engagement-bericht-wzb-pdf.property=pdf,bereich=bmfsfj,sprache=de,rwb=true.pdf) [accessed on 30 October 2010].

<sup>21</sup> J.W. van Deth, *The „Good European Citizen“: congruence an consequences of different points of view*, „European Political Science“ 2009, No 8, p. 175–189 – <http://www.palgrave-journals.com/eps/journal/v8/n2/pdf/eps200856a.pdf> [accessed on 15 May 2010].

it might be enough to take care for a high social capital. Personally I prefer a concept of “political capital” – a term which is interestingly used in the title of a new report on youth in UK. This research is titled: *To tackle the challenges of tomorrow, young people need political capital today. An Anatomy of Youth*<sup>22</sup>. I suppose that spill-over-effects will only appreciate if you stimulate such effects with pedagogic intervention. This is exactly the great challenge of citizenship education nowadays.

One of the American social-scientists who was very much in favour of the spill-over-hypothesis between civil-services and political participation, James Youniss, corrected his corresponding conviction meanwhile and render more precisely: “Not all services is so designed and programs vary in how pointedly they are politically orientated.... Much of service is focused on charity, or the act of giving accompanied by feelings of sympathy for recipients. These programs, despite the good they do, are unlikely to generate civic involvement as one would not expect a youth to vote or protest, because they helped an autistic child acquire an athletic skill. If a political outcome is desired, then service ought to be designed to deal explicitly with the political dimension of the matter at hand”<sup>23</sup>.

#### **LEARNING PLACES OF NON-FORMAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION**

From a practical pedagogic point of view the places where people learn as well as the learning-methods are important for the learn-results. As I already said, in Germany we have a rich infrastructure of organisations and institutions for citizenship education.

Nearly every social group built up special training-centres, youth- and adult-education-centres, academies and *Bildungshäuser* (formation-houses) – as we call them



in Germany. A lot of public money was spend for the development of such places for non-formal citizenship education, even if the number went down in the last years.

*Bildungshäuser* are carefully cultivated learning places. Usually they lie in beautiful landscapes and/or in selected and, compared to many public schools or universities, well-groomed buildings with accommodation and mostly selected food. There are offers for leisure and free-time, often beautiful gardens, libraries and offers for informal-learning (e.g. exhibitions, book-stores).

The profiles of these learning places are similar in their basic orientation: First of all they work on the

<sup>22</sup> C. Hannon, Ch. Tims, *To tackle the challenges of tomorrow, young people need political capital today... An Anatomy of Youth*, Demos, London 2010.

<sup>23</sup> J. Youniss, *The Role of Community Service in Reform of Civic Education*, [in:] *Vom Gelingen und Scheitern Politischer Bildung. Studien und Entwürfe*, (eds.) H. Biedermann, F. Oser, C. Quesel, Verlag Rüegger, Zürich 2007, p. 230.

principle of voluntary participation, a big difference compared to formal education. At second they are participant-orientated, which means that participants are asked to participate as much as possible and to offer their ideas in the preparation as well as in a mostly process-orientated learning-format. Non-formal citizenship education works with a variety of methods in seminars, workshops, conferences.

The qualification-profile of pedagogues working in non-formal citizenship education is difficult to define. E.g. when I search for a new colleague I usually look for a social-scientist with pedagogic orientation and experience. But I know that this is sometimes not enough. For example when you offer a seminar about global warming one needs a high knowledge in chemistry.

Summarizing this, the forms of non-formal learning can be characterised as “new learning culture”. It is not by chance that *Bildungsstätten* describe themselves as “learning organisations” because during our institutional qualification development and certification processes we feel ourselves as learner who are developing and learning according to needs of participants and society.

If you compare these demands towards *Bildungsstätten* you can easily imagine that libraries can be good learning-places for non-formal education as well. I am not a specialist in libraries but as far as I can judge, the qualification of the personnel is what has to be improved and trained. A librarian must not necessarily have the skills to teach in non-formal (citizenship) education on the basis of a “new learning culture”.

When I think about examples were libraries and non-formal learning was/is already combined, two examples are coming to my mind:

- In Germany we have so called *Amerika Häuser* (America Houses) in some of the bigger towns. Those America Houses were found in post-war Germany as part of US re-education program, which I already mentioned above. Libraries specialized on questions of history and politics were their first mission before they started to offer a more diverse program with concerts, lectures, conferences, book-presentations, discussions and other things. The one I know in Heidelberg is actually one of the most important player in non-formal education in my hometown<sup>24</sup>.
- The second example is a Bulgarian institution called *Čitálište* (Reading-Place, Reading Room). *Čitálište* have a long and important tradition in Bulgaria especially for the intellectual and political emancipation of Bulgarians living in the landscapes and smaller towns. They were not only libraries but also centres for non-formal education in the best way<sup>25</sup>. *Čitálište* existed long before the socialist area of Bulgaria, a time where they were abused as communist propaganda institution. After 1989 they went down because of the lack of money and public support. But since some years the *Čitálište*-movement experiences a kind of renaissance in the lee of lifelong learning discussion in Europe. As far as I could find it out, citizenship education plays no role in *Čitálište* in the last years. They offer standard programs of adult education, such as language-, computer- or dance-courses. *Čitálište* have an umbrella structure in Bulgaria and they are present on an own internet-platform.
- Looking for other good-practice examples which

<sup>24</sup> <http://www/dai-heidelberg.de>.

<sup>25</sup> Ch. Geiselmann, J. Theessen, *Adult Education and Education Policy in Bulgaria*, Bonn 2007 – [http://www.dvv-soe.org/images/dvv/Docs/Publications/Adult\\_Education\\_in\\_Bulgaria\\_\(ed2007\)\\_IPE48\\_EN.pdf](http://www.dvv-soe.org/images/dvv/Docs/Publications/Adult_Education_in_Bulgaria_(ed2007)_IPE48_EN.pdf) [accessed on 15 May 2010]; *The Bulgarian Chitalishte. Past, Present und Future*, Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Bulgaria/Government of the Netherlands, Sofia 2007, p. 78.

can be useful for this project, it seems that especially in Sweden and neighbour-countries exists a long tradition in using libraries as places for lifelong learning<sup>26</sup>.

### **CONCLUSION AND PROSPECT ON THE ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES**

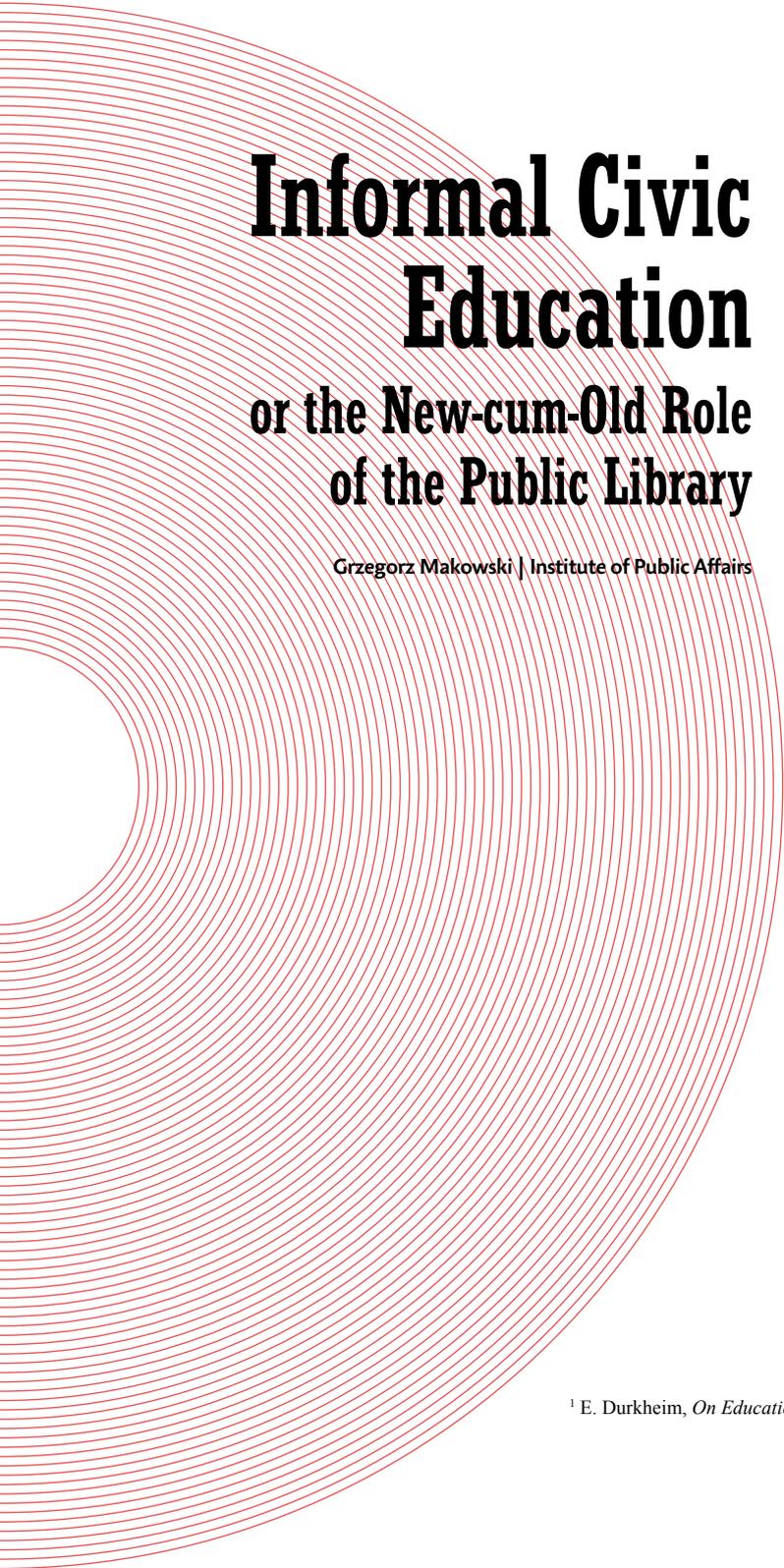
What are the main messages of my previous statement. I try to sum that up in some suggestions on how to combine the important role of libraries in education with the advantages of non-formal learning under the content of citizenship education:

- For the future participants it should be clear that non-formal education has nothing to do with their often bad experiences in the formal-educational-system. Non-formal learning must present itself as an event with lust and fun. Otherwise no one will join voluntarily.
- In a project with “citizenship” in the title, one should also find “citizenship” inside. Maybe the needs of my country and the needs of post-socialist countries differ in the question of the civil-society-orientation. But my principle is that within citizenship-education questions of politics have to be focused and not questions of civil-society, social learning or voluntary service. Of course we need people with democratic habits (democracy as a form of living) and we need a democratic civil-society (democracy as a form of society). But these two things are challenges for education in general. Citizenship education has to concentrate on its own mission.
- The combination of public libraries and non-formal citizenship education demand a lot from the libraries. I expect that they need

a reorganisation of rooms and a training of the future personnel specialised on non-formal (citizenship) education. I am not so familiar with the development of institutions of non-formal citizenship education in Poland but I think that the co-operation between such organisations and libraries will bring up the synergies, which are necessary for a developing project like the one presented in this publication.

- Last but not least I like to come back to my starting point. It will not be enough to buy a lot of books with political contents and present them as new purchase of a library. Maybe a few people will be interested in this offer for informal learning or scientific research – but I call in question doubt in these depoliticized times. You need to awake appetite in such a complicated and complex question like politics.

<sup>26</sup> *The Role of Libraries in Lifelong Learning. Final report of the IFLA project under the Section of Public Libraries*, (ed.) M.B. Häggström, Baerum 2004 – <http://archive.ifla.org/VII/s8/proj/Lifelong-LearningReport.pdf> [accessed on 15 May 2010].



# Informal Civic Education or the New-cum-Old Role of the Public Library

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**I**n its essence, citizenship amounts to participation in a political community. If we were to narrow this definition down, we would probably say that citizenship amounts to a specific type of bond between the individual and the state and is a key institution of any political system. Much in the same way that no social structure can exist without people, any state must be basically meaningless if it doesn't have citizens. This seemingly simple question of the relationship between the individual and the state has weighed heavily on the great minds of the social sciences – Plato, Thomas Hobbes, and John Locke, Ferdinand Tönnies, and contemporary authorities. Sadly, considerations of time and space prevent us from embarking on a more detailed discussion of their fascinating deliberations<sup>1</sup>.

Yet having made the initial statement set out above and bearing in mind the rich heritage of reflection on citizenship, let us note one more basic truth, namely the fact that the existence of a discrete group of people does not, in and of itself, mean that that there exists a state, or that there exist citizens. Both these institutions rely upon a substructure of rules, covenants, rights, and duties connecting individuals to one another. In modern democracies – where it is only in exceptional circumstances that an individual is subjected to direct physical coercion by the state or by other individuals, where the individual enjoys exceptional (as compared with other social systems) freedom, and where conformity usually isn't exacted by force – the individual must have a deeply ingrained conviction that some manner of connection with the group and the institutions created by individuals is necessary and must be maintained. One might cite Emil Durkheim, one of the classics of sociology, and state that society at large as well as individuals have a need for a certain amount of mechanical social solidarity, understood as absolute acceptance of certain basic values, ideas, and views which

<sup>1</sup> E. Durkheim, *On Education and Society*, ed. J. Karabel, A. Halsey, Routledge, London 1977.

bind individuals to one another and which enable them to conceptualise something higher, something which transcends their individuality. Without such an abstract “togetherness”, maintaining a bond between the individual and the state would not be possible<sup>2</sup>.

Research into socialisation processes indicates that such basic values and ideas do not arise and thrive spontaneously, and likewise that they do not in and of themselves shape individual attitudes. They must be nurtured and propagated by us. And it is in this way that we come to the question of education – meaning, in this particular context, passing on to others the information and knowledge needed to function as active, responsible entities who are aware of their rights as well as of their duties vis a vis democratic society and the state and who are capable of establishing and maintaining relations with the state and with their fellow citizens<sup>3</sup>.

### **THE DIFFERENT FACES OF CIVIC EDUCATION**

The term “education”, rightly or wrongly, usually connotes school or, more broadly, the official system of learning spanning the successive levels from pre-school to universities. Accordingly, “education” is first and foremost associated with measures addressed to the young. In light of the issues of interest to us here, however, we need to recalibrate this definition in favour of a more detailed one which is better suited for tackling the complex questions we are dealing with here. And, thus, experts and researchers who work with civic education issues distinguish between three basic types of education:

- **Formal civic education** – carried on within the educational system and directed at children and youth (also at university level), and also as part of the vocational training for certain employee groups;
- **Non-formal civic education** – pursued in an organised manner, but outside the educational system (for instance by NGOs); may be directed at all age and vocational groups;
- **Informal civic education** – pursued in a deliberate fashion, but – usually – outside any system, and not necessarily as part of the core activities of the specific entities offering it. May assume the form of, for instance, one-time happenings or events; informal education may also be pursued on an ad hoc basis by institutions for which education is not part of their basic mission (e.g. social assistance centres, jobs centres, libraries, cultural centres, private enterprises)<sup>4</sup>.

Before proceeding to the main subject of this text, i.e. to consideration of informal civic education, let us consider for a moment the ways in which the formal education system nurtures individuals so that they may build correct relationships with the state. Poland presents a particularly interesting example in this regard.

### **THE SHORTCOMINGS OF FORMAL CIVIC EDUCATION IN POLAND**

Formal civic education in Poland is essentially limited to social studies / civic knowledge instruction first offered

<sup>2</sup> Issues of human and institutional interrelationships were one of the main subjects of Emil Durkheim’s work; he can also be said to have been a precursor of civic education. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, he involved himself in reform of the French educational system, drawing upon his academic achievements to advise the French government. He recommended solutions such as inclusion of sociology instruction in the curriculum which, in his view, would guarantee cohesion of society and strong bonds between the individual and the state (which he considered to be threatened by the intensive political and economic changes then underway in France).

<sup>3</sup> See *Citizenship Education at School in Europe*, Eurydice, Brussels 2005.

<sup>4</sup> This classification draws upon the definition by Eurostat. It must be borne in mind that some Polish translations of these definitions speak of formal education [edukacja formalna], informal education [edukacja nieformalna], and unofficial education [edukacja nieoficjalna]. The author prefers this particular term as best suited to Polish circumstances and conditions, believing the term “official” to be more a more general one. Something which is “official” is also “formal”.

to secondary school pupils and then taken up again at successive stages of formal education. The volume of materials which pupils are expected to master is increasing, as is the degree of its complexity. The curriculum followed in the context of social studies / civic knowledge instruction has also evolved since 1989. As at the writing of this article, a fairly large selection of textbooks on this subject was already available on the market; these texts touch upon a variety of issues associated with the relationship between the individual and the state, such as institutions, human rights and civic rights, and activities of NGOs. There also appeared non-governmental organisations which make civic education issues a part of their core mission, such as the Center for Citizenship Education or the Education for Democracy Foundation. Despite this incremental progress, however, it would still be difficult to state that Poland has a system for civic education.

The teachers who lead these classes are not necessarily well prepared to offer instruction on these topics; all too often, they are actually specialised in teaching all and sundry other subjects and find themselves teaching social studies / civic knowledge courses because they were pressed into service, and they have little inclination or possibility to further their qualifications in this particular area. Precious little is done to increase this inclination – to encourage these teachers to develop their skills in teaching the young about how they ought to develop their relationship with the polity, how to exercise their rights, fulfil their duties and play an active role in public life<sup>5</sup>. And, after all, we are talking about civic education within a purely scholastic framework, nothing more...

As we discuss the failings of the formal model of civic education in Poland, it is worth noting how, in this respect, schools cooperate with other institutions (such as NGOs or libraries) only to a limited extent. Formal civic education is basically confined to the educational system and does not venture outside. Another point which merits mentioning is that there are no national civic education programmes for secondary schools or universities, let alone for adult education courses (even in the public sector). In like spirit, civic education does not seem to weigh too heavily on the minds of Polish decision makers, and it is only rarely that it surfaces in the public discourse<sup>6</sup>.

In juxtaposition with, say, the model in place in Germany (where teaching citizens to act to the benefit of a democratic state is a mission and a major political priority), the Polish solutions in the realm of civic education hardly add up to a system. Germany – mindful of its experiences under Nazism and under the communist regime before reunification – devotes a great deal of attention to educating citizens so that they will go on to contribute their efforts for the good of the democratic state. The country's authorities are well aware that, without such an educational effort, not only will they be unable to forge a vibrant and cohesive civil society, they also risk a relapse into the noxious ideologies of the past. Accordingly, civic education issues are regularly discussed in the public sphere, and civic education is pursued within the educational system as well as in other spheres, with recourse to contributions by an assortment of social partners – universities, organisations, and private business. Civic education programmes are addressed to youth and to adult citizens (at educational

Accordingly, in constructing the hierarchy of types of education, it is more logical to adopt the premise that official education (sanctioned by the state) is the most formalised in terms of teaching programmes. “Unofficial” education (as in “not offered by public institutions”) may still be formalised by virtue of specific projects or of the textbooks used. Educational measures which are, by their very essence, spontaneous and unorganised, meanwhile, will be informal in character, even if they are pursued at public institutions.

<sup>5</sup> See *Edukacja obywatelska w Polsce i w Niemczech*, ed. K.E. Siellawa-Kolbowska, A. Łada, J. Ćwiek-Karpowicz, Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw 2008.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.



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institutions as well as in the workplace). All the forms of civic education mentioned above – formal, non-formal, and informal – are well developed in Germany, and individuals and institutions pursuing work of this sort can always look to the German state for assistance. At the political level, these values and this approach are testified to by entities such as the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (the Federal Centre for Political Education), a government agency which – as its name implies – is charged with civic education issues and administers a vast budget out of which it supports entities working to foster pro-democratic attitudes and civic involvement. Its programmes are executed primarily in Germany, but it has also lent its support to civic education initiatives in other countries. We in Poland can only look on in envy.

Despite these shortcomings, analysis of the available results of international comparative studies indicates – perhaps surprisingly – that Poland is actually doing a fair job in fostering civic attitudes among her citizens. Over the years 2004–2005, a study of in-school civic education systems was conducted, commissioned by the European Commission at the recommendation of the Dutch Presidency of the Council. The project involved analysis of the systems in place within the European Union as well as in what were then still candidate countries; part of the impetus behind this study was accounted for by the fact that 2005 was proclaimed as the Civic Education Year<sup>7</sup>.

The report published in the wake of this study indicates that, when compared to other countries, the quality of civic education at Polish educational institutions is quite decent, even if it is a little quaint in nature, focused as it is on narrowly defined patriotic values and attitudes as well as on theoretical knowledge of the “thou shalt” and “thou shalt not” at the formal level of a democratic state’s operation. While the final conclusions noted that the civic knowledge and skills of pupils are not sufficiently verified, Poland garnered praise for some of the solutions in place in the country, such as the possibility of choosing social studies / civic knowledge as an examination subject for the baccalaureate or the highly visible work of NGOs in the area of civic education. So, one is tempted to conclude that the situation isn’t all that bad.

Yet the cold, hard facts and the results of other studies gauging the state of civil society in Poland paint a less rosy picture. Suffice it to consider how Poles behave during elections. The fact that the presidential elections of 2010 drew 55% of eligible voters, much like previous elections, despite the extraordinary set of circumstances (this was an early election held consequent to the sudden death of President Lech Kaczyński and, at the time, some citizens were afflicted with floods brought by an

<sup>7</sup> See *Citizenship Education at School in Europe*, op. cit.

unusually wet summer while others were trying to enjoy their summer holidays), may be a cause for satisfaction. If one considers this figure in the international context, however, Poland no longer looks so good – to mention only France, where the presidential election in 2007 drew 84% of eligible voters.

The situation is very similar as regards parliamentary elections in Poland. In 2007, the fact that more than 53% of eligible voters stepped forward to choose their representatives to the national assembly was taken as a cause for happiness. In Sweden, by contrast, turnout during the most recent parliamentary elections exceeded 80%. Leaving the national level and looking at elections to the local self-governments, council elections elicit considerably less excitement among Poles. In 2006, turnout for the local self-government elections just barely reached 45%. If one considers that it is the decisions taken at the local level by mayors, councilmen, etc that most affect the typical citizen, this comes as some surprise. And participation by Polish voters in the elections for the European Parliament – which, let us bear in mind, plays an important role in shaping EU policy, whose important implications for Poland are manifest and beyond dispute – best remains unmentioned.

Polish participation in nationwide referenda – that basic form of direct democracy – is nothing less than pathetic; of the four referenda held after 1989, in most cases, the minimum turnout of 50% was not achieved and the vote was thus invalid. The only positive stand-out in this context is the referendum from 2003 in which Poles voted on accession to the European Union; voter turnout reached 58%, although ballot booths were kept open for two consecutive days in what was a one-time solution designed to boost voter participation.

Participation in elections and referenda is, if you will, the very salt of democracy – a basic right extending to every citizen which that citizen ought to exercise is

she/he wants to somehow shape the surrounding political reality. Voting is a ritual which binds the democratic political community in the same way that joining in a religious service contributes to the togetherness of the faithful. This might actually be a part of the problem – elections are so obvious and so mundane that we fail to appreciate their true meaning. But we would do well to worry when voter turnout drops below 50% much in the same way that a religious leader is worried when he finds himself preaching in a half-empty temple. To the preacher, plunging attendance is a signal that his flock is losing faith in religious dogma. In the political sphere, falling numbers of active voters bespeak a certain dispiritedness and loss of trust in the bedrock values of the democratic state. For the moment, more than twenty years down the road of political and social reforms in Poland, we still haven't learned to recognise these symptoms.

Malaise of civic society in Poland is also testified to by the results of studies of the activity levels of Poles in the public sphere. As we consider the civic-mindedness, or otherwise, of a society, a key indicator is that of trust; it is hard indeed to imagine good relations between the individual and the state if people do not trust each other or the public institutions. According to the *Social Diagnosis* from 2009, only 13% of the respondents agreed with the statement that “most people can be trusted”, making for but a small increase since the previous editions of the study held over the years 2003 through 2007 (when this indicator oscillated between 10 and 11%)<sup>8</sup>. In other words, this deficit of trust amounts to an ingrained feature of Polish society and, absent a concentrated effort, it will not go away anytime soon. Polish trust in public institutions likewise isn't high. Just slightly more than half questionnaire respondents declare trust in their local self-government and in their public administration<sup>9</sup>; the rest speak either of caution or of an outright lack of trust.

<sup>8</sup> *Diagnoza społeczna. Warunki i jakość życia Polaków*, ed. J. Czapiński, T. Panek, Social Monitoring Council, Warsaw 2009.

<sup>9</sup> R. Boguszewski, *Zaufanie społeczne. Komunikat z badań*, Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej, Warsaw 2010.

Other data related to the condition of civil society in Poland likewise fails to impress. Citizenship, among its other elements, concerns a readiness to make an effort for the common good, for instance through self-organisation, social / volunteer work, or philanthropy. In the meantime, according to a CBOS survey from 2010, only 20% of Poles admit to having in any way contributed to the life and work of their village, town, or parish. Research conducted by the Klon/Jawor Association in 2009 indicated that, aside from participation in Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy – Jurek Owsiak’s annual charity drive (unique by virtue of its sheer scale and of its high media visibility), only 20% of Poles have made any bequest to any organisation, civic initiative, or religious group<sup>10</sup>. In reality, this figure may be even lower in that, according to Ministry of Finance data, tax deductions associated with charitable bequests were claimed by a mere 1% of Polish taxpayers. The Klon/Jawor research indicates that only 13% of Poles declare involvement in volunteer work<sup>11</sup>; *Social Diagnosis* 2009 gives the same percentage for respondents declaring membership in any organisation, party, voluntary association, or committee. These are hardly figures attesting to high levels of civic-mindedness in Polish society.

To put it briefly, we are facing a problem with the quality of Polish democracy, and the evidence cited above only begins to paint a full picture of its scale. The fact is that we don’t trust each other and that we can’t be bothered to exercise even the basic civic rights, or to fulfil the basic civic duties. Poles are not in the habit of joining in organisations and working together towards any common goals. Also, they do not display the hallmarks of an internally organised society connected to its institutions. As much is clear from the outside. But these symptoms also have a less manifest underpinning – this dearth of civic activity must be caused by a weakness of attitudes, value systems, and norms. This is the case even though the studies of the Polish educational system, as summarised

above, indicate that formal civic education is fairly robust, teaching young Poles about the hows and whys of their state and of civil society. There thus arises the conclusion that the formal civic education system fulfils the formal minimum as regards providing youth with the bare facts about operation of basic democratic institutions, but it does not inspire in them a desire to partake in them. They leave school without the attitudes, values, and convictions which they might translate into civic activity in practice, in their daily lives. But reality demonstrates that “dry” knowledge about the democratic state and democratic society is insufficient for competent, proactive citizenship. Simply put, the formal civic education system in Poland is ineffective. Seeing as it is ill equipped to shape citizens who harbour strong convictions about the meaning of democracy and actively exercise their rights and discharge their duties as citizens, there arises the need to consider other solutions, such as informal civic education.

#### **SO WHAT IS INFORMAL CIVIC EDUCATION ALL ABOUT ?**

Of course, the concept of civic education outlined above constitutes but one of the possible perspectives, and it is actually a fairly simple and user-friendly one which lends itself to use by, for instance, Eurostat sociologists for expedient organisation of their observations so that they may serve as a basis for tracing the tracks along which civil society develops. For our purposes, meanwhile, we will require a slightly deeper insight into the informal civic education question in order to get at the heart of the problem. Accordingly, we shall try to approach the problem from a different – and wider – perspective.

In their endeavours to devise an index which would gauge the level of informal civic education among Europeans, sociologists working at the University of Surrey adopted two premises. First of all, informal education as such is, by its very nature, a process which continues throughout our whole lives. As time goes on, each one

<sup>10</sup> Klon/Jawor. *Czy Polacy są filantropami? Komunikat z badań* – <http://wiadomosci.ngo.pl/wiadomosci/505405.html> [accesssccess: 2 November 2010].

<sup>11</sup> J. Herbst, M. Gumkowska, P. Radecki, *Podstawowe fakty o organizacjach pozarządowych. Raport z badań 2008* Klon/Jawor Association, Warsaw 2010.

of us assumes new societal roles, proceeds through successive stages of the formal educational system and of our professional careers, acquires new skills/qualifications or perfects previous ones. We learn all the time, and at every occasion, getting to know the world around us and the people we come into contact with. Thanks to new technologies, we are immersed in – not to say inundated by – information; we have access to media from all around the world and in all languages, we can read any books and watch any television shows we choose – not to mention the internet. We travel more often, and we thus get to know other societies. All this adds to our life experience and to our knowledge of the world. Civic knowledge and civic skills can be gained in the same general way<sup>12</sup>. Once we adopt such a perspective, it is easy to see how we can approach civic education from a wider perspective. As a consequence – and this is the second premise adopted by the University of Surrey sociologists – we have the position that civic education needs not necessarily be a deliberate process. It can be furthered, as it were, “by the way”, as we go about various other tasks and activities – just like knowledge in any other realm!

In its broadest meaning, then, the term informal civic education will be considered by us as a not necessarily formalised or planned process which unfolds outside the official educational system – a process by which individuals gain the knowledge and skills enabling them to maintain and strengthen their ties to the state and to society. Adoption of such a perspective facilitates an appreciation for where, and how, informal civic education might be practiced.

#### **WHERE CAN INFORMAL CIVIC EDUCATION BE PURSUED ?**

The vision of universal informal civic education as a spontaneous, unorganised – almost natural – activity is certainly an alluring one. For what could possibly beat

a self-perpetuating process thanks to which people might improve their civic skills without effort? But, of course, such a vision amounts to a utopia. In practice, things can not go forward without a certain degree of deliberate intent; in like spirit, any informal civic education activity must involve some degree of organisation. The very awareness that people can learn about civic attitudes while engaging in other tasks will lead those who wish to put this mechanism to use to channel information and messages in a certain way – i.e. to act deliberately. Furthermore, we can point to at least a few areas of social life in which informal civic education might be practiced in a simpler, yet more effective manner.

The area of operations of non-governmental organisations constitutes a natural habitat for informal civic education. By their very definition, non-governmental organisations are entities brought to life by active citizens wishing to satisfy their needs, solve their problems, and further the common good in an organised way (for instance for the local community). Associations are particularly well-suited to serve as informal civic education centres. The very process of establishing an organisation and contributing to its work amounts to hands-on civic instruction for those who are willing to make that effort. From the moment when they first come together to discuss issues of shared concern, through appointment of governing bodies, completion of the registration procedure, etc people who set out to found an association soon receive object lessons in concepts of paramount importance in a democracy, such as “consensus” or “compromise”, and learn how to make decisions within their group. They draft a charter and vote upon it, debate and adopt resolutions, appoint officers, and generally function as active members of civil society, interacting with governmental institutions, executing projects, and propagating them within their communities. Of course, NGOs not only constitute

<sup>12</sup> J. Holford, R. Patulny, P. Sturgis, *Indicators of Non-formal & Informal Educational. Contributions to Active Citizenship*, University of Surrey, Surrey 2006.

natural centres of informal civic education, they also engage in activity of this sort in a deliberate manner.

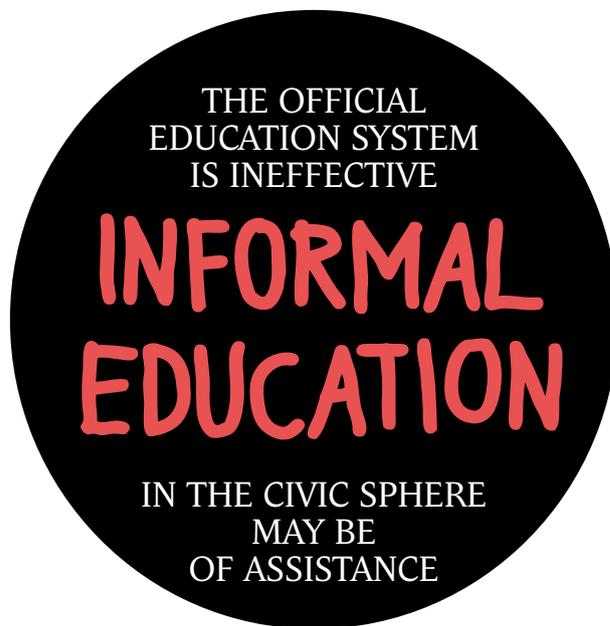
The third sector is a place where people learn civic skills almost in spite of themselves. But there are more such places, to mention only the operating sphere of public institutions (other than educational institutions, where civic education is primarily official in character). Possibilities for practicing informal civic education abound wherever we are dealing with any sort of public, official body, whether at the central or local/self-government level (e.g. employment centres, social aid centres, or cultural centres). At all points of contact between the state apparatus and the citizen – and the public sector comprises myriad such points – there appears a particularly good opportunity for informal civic education.

This is only natural. Even when the citizen must appear at a public authority to attend to some mundane piece of business – renew her driver’s license, pay his taxes etc – she/he must have a rudimentary feel for her/his rights and duties and dispose of a basic knowledge about administrative acts, such as writing a simple application. In such a context, the citizen should know how to deal with the state; he ought to be aware of his rights and of the duties of the state officials so that he may establish an appropriate relationship with the state – the main point of civic education. The citizen should be conversant with the rudimentary instruments of the application, the complaint, and the petition – the basic forms of interacting with state authorities. How do we cause people to make better, and more frequent, use of these institutions? How do we motivate citizens to develop a better feel for them? There are the traditional means, such as “open house” days at the Sejm and the Senate during which visitors, apart from touring the seats of the national assembly, can also learn about its operations, chat with prominent politicians, and even learn something from them or from their staffers.

An example of an undertaking combining elements of formal and informal education would be

presented in the legislative initiative put forth by the Polish Senate in 2010 – the draft legislative act regarding petitions. Leaving aside for a moment the substance of this document, the very fact that work on such a project was undertaken brought a good opportunity to launch a wider debate about the role of citizens in administrative functions and about the role of petitions in the democratic system. In like spirit, discussion of the draft statute and of openness of the legislative process had much educational value for direct participants in the drafting work as well as for the broader audience. There are also slightly less conventional methods which institutions associated with parliament occasionally employ.

The process of gaining such skills may be very formalised, pursued – for example – in the context of school instruction or various courses and training events. Yet an equally important educational factor will be comprised in the possibility to gain similar knowledge



in a spontaneous, unorganised way – through quotidian interactions with state institutions. Of course, this could not come to pass without some degree of deliberate effort. If the public administration is to serve a civic education function, it must adopt an open, customer-friendly attitude and work ethic. Officials must not only hand down administrative decisions, but also have an earnest desire to furnish citizens with information and to teach them how to bear themselves when dealing with the state (as represented by these very officials). Such a process always requires a bit of conscious shaping and steering. One example would be provided by the new initiative – just now in its early implementation stages – by Jonas Büchel, the social worker, animator, and activist with extensive experience realising projects in Latvia.

Jonas Büchel proposed that the question of organising and extending social aid be organised in an entirely different way than has hereto been the case in the former Soviet bloc. In Latvia, much as in Poland, this sphere is largely dominated by government agencies (whether at the central or at the local levels) which specialise in doling out benefits and, hopefully, in monitoring their recipients – in short, in administering social aid. This traditional take on social work does not pass muster when put up against the problems prevalent today, such as drastic shrinking of rural populations, aging of society, and migration of the young – the problems which are particularly pressing for countries such as Latvia or Poland, working to build their economies and their democratic polities after decades of totalitarian communist rule. According to Jonas Büchel, these problems can be addressed by a holistic conception of social work which he dubs “cultural social work”, centring on counteraction of social problems by working with all the groups at risk of social exclusion at the same time and through the same means. Such a perspective presumes an interdisciplinary approach which adopts the existing institutions subordinated to the public administration – social aid centres, job centres, libraries – as a foundation for social integration

work. In practice, this would mean that the hypothetical qualified social worker would no longer be “merely” an official or a specialist in her/his narrow field, but also an educator. Her/his official duty will no longer be limited to assisting individuals or families so as to keep them above the minimum subsistence level; she/he will also affirm them in the belief that society and the state still need them and that they should try to raise themselves out of the exclusion zone also because, once they do, they will be in a position to better avail themselves of their civic rights. Thus, the cultural social work specialist simultaneously counteracts the immediate and manifest problem (such as long-term unemployment and attendant issues of impoverishment or dependency) as well as cultural, digital, or public exclusion of the sort associated with lack of awareness and reluctance to exercise basic civic rights. A fitting illustration of the phenomena to which Jonas Büchel refers is presented in e-administration (as discussed in more detail below). What’s the point of establishing IT facilities for online access to administrative offices handling matters such as issue of identity and travel documents or vehicle registration if a large percentage of the citizenry still does not have computers and/or broadband in their homes or the knowledge needed to use them for such a purpose? Such citizens will be in no position to avail themselves of the facilities offered to them – to the detriment of their civic rights and skills. Detached as the vision of such social aid may seem from the realities of everyday life – where “social aid” continues to conjure up images, first and foremost, of dole disbursement – Jonas Büchel has shown it to be viable in practice, realising it in his own work as well as through state social workers whom he trains and whose eyes he opens to the fact that their work has a broader social, political, and cultural significance. Büchel’s vision, adapted especially for application at libraries, is one of the best practices presented in this volume.

Let us now proceed from these fairly obvious examples of informal civic education practiced by NGOs

and public institutions to somewhat less straightforward situations, to consider only the area of culture. As already stated in the introduction to this text, citizenship is all about the bond between the individual and the state, and this bond may rely upon different values and convictions. So, as we consider citizenship from a wider perspective, we must devote at least some attention to what is known as the national heritage.

Without prejudice to the fact that, at the heart of every democratic system, there lie certain universal values such as respect for freedom and for human rights, every state builds the identity of its citizens in reference to the culture, as shaped by past generations. This heritage oftentimes hearkens back to times much earlier than the founding of the state as such, or in a democratic form; it may, for instance, draw upon the traits or achievements ascribed to a certain ethnic group<sup>13</sup>. Every Pole ought to visit Wawel castle, the symbolic cradle of Polish statehood, at least once in her or his lifetime, in the same way that every Italian ought to visit Rome to get in touch with the spirit of her or his ancient ancestors. The modern concept of citizenship is deeply rooted in the idea of the nation state, and even if, nowadays, this concept often transcends a single state or ethnic group (as manifested clearly in the current drive towards institution of European citizenship), the trope of the national culture – or of culture in general – retains its importance.

For universal citizens' rights also concern unfettered participation in culture. Art 73 of the Polish constitution, for example, provides that everybody shall benefit from freedom to enjoy cultural assets in the same way as freedom of artistic or scientific pursuits. Another part of the constitution guarantees maintenance and upkeep of cultural identity for national and ethnic

minorities. So, all democratic states regard access to cultural assets as a basic right of all citizens.

If, in addition, we recognise that culture's capacity to unite people in joint action for the common good amounts to its universal value, why should we not put this to constructive use? Approached in this way, culture is an excellent carrier of information – for instance of awareness of the importance of social cooperation and solidarity. Whether we appeal to the cultural achievements or the symbolism of a specific country, ethnic group, musical genre, or of abstractionist painting is beside the point here – what's really important is the integrational aspect of culture and the fact that it lends itself to use as a vehicle for imparting more universal ideas which may boost their civic skills.

A good illustration of this issue is provided in the work of Richard McNicol. Over the years of 1993 through 2006, he was one of the leading musicians of the London Symphony Orchestra, and he also served as an animator charged with facilitating reception and interpretation of the music by the audience (for instance by describing the circumstances and history of a given composition's creation). On the side of the artists, meanwhile, the animator helps the musicians to reach the audience, for example by preparing arrangements which are most attractive to the given group of listeners. In 1977, Richard McNicol established the Apollo Trust with the main mission of creating platforms for cooperation between schools and symphonies across England. Over the decades of his work, he has executed hundreds of educational projects in the United Kingdom and in other countries in Europe and around the world. His numerous initiatives were geared at fostering civic-mindedness and social attitudes, as exemplified by one of his projects described below<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> See D. Gosewinkel, *Historical Reflections on Citizenship in Europe*, [in] *The Making of Citizens in Europe: New Perspectives on Citizenship Education*, ed. V. Georgi, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Bonn 2008.

<sup>14</sup> The part presenting best practices in the area of civic education describes a similar project, likewise executed by British classical musicians, as an example of how music can bring together different generations and activate the local community – please see L. Forde, *sinfonia ViVA: projekt IDENTITY* below.

Working together with the Gerhard Lembruch Contemporary Art Museum in Duisburg, Richard McNicol executed a project in which children were encouraged to play their own interpretations of *The Song of the Whale* by George Crumb, a musical treatment of issues relating to nature and humanity. In rendering the music, the participating children were free to use any objects they liked other than professional instruments. The role of Richard McNicol was primarily one of encouragement and facilitation. Yet the objectives of this project were not limited to musical and cultural education. The participating children were selected so as to ensure representation of the different communities living in Duisburg – native Germans and immigrants, Catholics and Protestants, Muslims, and atheists. Children from these various groups worked together on the project in order to present the results to their parents, and the project finalists were invited to a gala event combined with a concert. The idea was to show children and, subsequently, their parents that, despite their different social, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, they can work with one another in the service of a common good – in this case, music. In this way, the project became an illustration for how, even in a multicultural and diverse community, we can all belong and work together for this community's betterment.

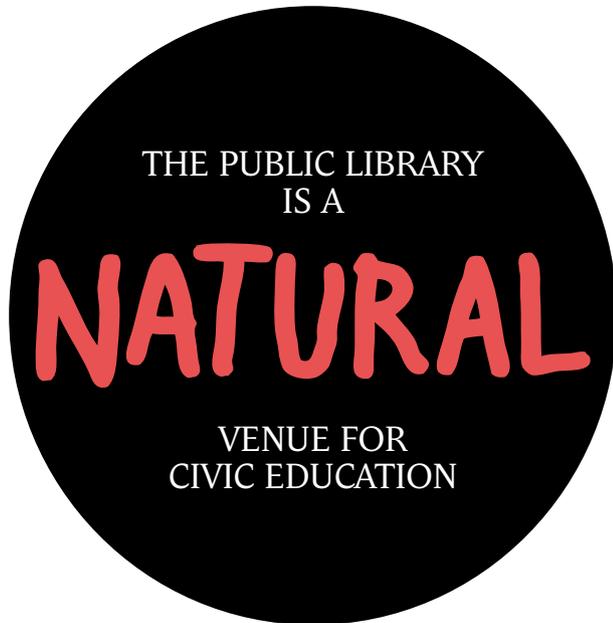
### **THE PUBLIC LIBRARY AS A PLACE FOR INFORMAL CIVIC EDUCATION**

This brings us to the main theme of this text. If informal civic education can be pursued within the context of the operations of NGOs, if the knowledge and information enabling individuals to boost their civic skills may be imparted by administrative offices or social aid centres, if a classical musician can contribute to the fostering of civic attitudes, why shouldn't libraries play a similar role? Even at first glance, the public library strikes one as the ideal site for informal civic education – for at least two reasons.

First, the public institution formula, at least at the conceptual level, means that the library is an open place, accessible to all. Second, its public (as the name implies) character means that it is a nexus of individual and state. The original motivation informing the state as it established libraries was first and foremost an educational one, associated with bringing knowledge out to the people. These days, however, there is nothing to prevent a wider perspective on the mission of public libraries. With reference to the points already made above, the library is an ideal place in which the citizen and the state may come together and establish a relationship. And, of course, the library is a perfect repository of knowledge and information. This, in itself, would already be sufficient to make the library an ideal venue for civic education, informal or otherwise. We might refer here once again to the Polish constitution and its provisions to the effect that every citizen shall be entitled to education and to participation in culture. In fact, fashioning the library into a place where, as she or he peruses the books, a citizen may increase her/his civic skills does not require much effort.

The executors of the Library Development Programme in whose context this publication was produced discerned the civic education potential of libraries from the very outset. This issue was addressed, among other places, in the advisory manual on the role which libraries might play in propagation and practical implementation of e-administration solutions drawn up by Beata Kozłowska and Szymon Ossowski<sup>15</sup>. This publication presents a number of simple, yet material ways in which the library space can be used as well as proposing actions which libraries may undertake in order to facilitate reader contact with the public administration. These include diversification of the libraries' holdings to encompass information leaflets and advice manuals concerning the operation of administrative offices (especially those on the ground, closest to the citizens,

<sup>15</sup> B. Kozłowska, *Aktywna biblioteka. Miejsce dla obywateli: e-administracja*, Information Society Development Foundation, Warsaw 2010.



such as the local social aid centre) and performance of the most simple administrative tasks (such as filing of complaints or applications), installing computer work stations which readers might use to attend to their administrative business, and providing readers with basic assistance with use of e-administration (comprehension of the procedure and of the legal requirements and prerequisites, filling out forms). Involvement of libraries in such activities is a perfect fit with the concept of informal civic education. If library staff are to assist others in use of e-administration tools, they must first increase their own qualifications in this respect, getting a feel for these new forms of interacting with the state apparatus. Later on, in the context of their day-to-day work at the library, they will not only pass on to the readers practical knowledge about dealing with the authorities via the internet, but also propagate the very idea of e-administration. And

this idea, let it be recalled, is founded on the premise that, if citizens are to exercise their rights and fulfil their duties to a fuller extent, the state should facilitate navigation of its bureaucracy.

The Library Development Programme, in operation since 2008, has also initiated a number of its own innovative measures in the informal civic education mould. Worth mentioning, for instance, is the “Law at the Library” programme being implemented by the public library in Pruszcz. The library set up an information stand at which readers can access archives and current data bases assembling legal instruments, official journals, court decisions, etc. The library’s staff also provides assistance in searching these sources of legal information and in understanding their contents. The library in Nowy Tomyśl, meanwhile, has decided to make its rooms available for use by all and sundry local associations, formal and otherwise (including travellers’ clubs and fans of music and of literature). Laudable as these initiatives are, the role of libraries as informal social education centres – considering their potential and the existing needs – could be even greater.

From the perspective of the weakness of civil society in Poland and the failings of the formal educational system in this regard, as discussed above, greater involvement of public libraries in informal civic education would be very welcome indeed. The first experiences in cooperating with them as part of the Library Development Programme have been very promising, and the project of which this publication is an element demonstrates that libraries could in fact pursue informal civic education work on a wider scale. So, what else could libraries be doing in the sphere of informal public education?

First of all, it should be pointed out that a desire for action which strengthens civic attitudes among society at large, and within local communities, is certainly there among the librarians themselves. All that they still need are pointers as to how they should approach the topic as well as inspiration with respect to

specific projects which they might implement at their own libraries (as set out, incidentally, in these pages). In this connection, there are two essential points which deserve mention.

The first of these is that the questions of citizenship and of civic-mindedness should be regarded from a wide perspective, for it is only then that we can come up with creative informal civic education measures. As much has already been stated in the opening remarks to this text, but this point can not be overemphasised. Being a citizen is not only about knowing the basic rules and institutions, but also about active involvement – voting in national and local elections, daily use of the right to information and of complaints and applications. Citizenship is also about taking part in public life and about working for the common good in any of its myriad definitions. It is about dialogue with others, about agreeing on goals and interests and taking joint action in pursuit of them, about

association, about selfless action, and about reaching out to help others. It is also about use and enjoyment of all the blessings of a modern democratic state – information, technology, science, culture, and the arts. Thus, informal civic education may have many different shades, depending on which aspect of citizenship or civic-mindedness we choose to emphasise. Concentrating on the obvious – on the laws currently in force, on the workings of the state apparatus – misses the point, really. The special workshop for librarians organised in conclusion of this project generated many specific ideas as to how informal civic education should be pursued, all in the space of a mere six hours. These projects will be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

Secondly, there is the fact that the world of libraries – much like any other community – tends to close up within itself. As we discuss civic education in this world, it is worth the while to break down not only the resistance against new concepts, but also against accepting new concepts from other communities and institutions. If public libraries are to play a greater role as civic education centres, they must, of course, open themselves towards readers and citizens, but they should also invest in cooperation with non-governmental organisations and with other public sector institutions (especially with the local self-government and with schools) from which they may derive the knowledge, ideas, and inspirations needed to launch activities. If there is one thing that civic education really needs, it is partnership; the effectiveness of such educational initiatives is always compounded by cooperation. To return for a moment to the musical project by Richard McNicol described above, its implementation called upon the efforts of at least a dozen participants – the municipal authorities, the directors of the museum and of pre-schools, McNicol's own NGO, parents and, first and foremost, the children themselves, who – apart from playing music – also imparted the important message that it is worth the while to disregard differences in striving towards the common good.



In other words, it is important that the question of informal civic education be considered in the context of cooperation with other partners who may also engage in similar activities. Sometimes, such a perspective may be slightly discouraging, but it is necessary. In order to fully grasp this, let us return once again to the workshop with the librarians already referred to above.

One of the projects conceptualised in the course of this session referred to increasing the economic awareness of senior citizens. The group responsible adopted its deliberations of civic education as a point of departure for the perfectly legitimate thesis that these issues also have a consumer rights element. At the same time, this group took into account the challenges of the modern world, specifically the plethora of banking products (credit facilities, loans, accounts, investment funds, debit cards, and the like) which, increasingly often, are marketed to older persons, who aren't always well placed to assess whether purchase of this or that product will be beneficial for them. Some end up losing their savings and falling into debt through imprudent use of the newfangled banking services; others, quite on the contrary, do not use their debit cards or internet accounts at all, either from inability or from fear. Their consumer rights (to full information, to assistance, or to termination of the contract for provision of the given service) are disregarded, or violated outright. This situation could be improved if senior citizens gained more awareness as to what they are buying from banks, and how to use what they have bought. So who is supposed to teach them this? The workshop participants wasted no time in coming to the conclusion that they themselves, rather than the library, might initiate and coordinate such a process, drawing on the help of secondary school pupils (who, presumably, are much better informed about new banking services and will have an easier time making up any deficits of knowledge in this regard using the library's resources).

In short, then, the idea boiled down to organising at the libraries a series of inter-generational meetings,

bringing together senior citizens and secondary school youth. The latter could then help the former to understand their rights as customers and consumers of banking services and teach them how to use these services to their benefit rather than their detriment. A civic education exercise, in other words: increasing consumer rights awareness among a demographic group facing a real threat of exclusion due to their unfamiliarity with new products, financial services, and technologies. The role of the library would be a vast one indeed. Apart from initiating the project in cooperation with secondary schools (which, conceivably, could award participating pupils some form of credit in recognition of their volunteer work, and which would probably give rise to many groups of young people eager to help others), they could also help to assemble the requisite information about banking services and help to organise the actual meetings with senior citizens, if only by providing a venue.

Yet this seemingly simple, inexpensive project will not be so easy to execute if the library is not effective in reaching out to youth. This, in turn, is to be accomplished with the help of the school. It is the secondary school pupils who will then approach the senior citizens. And it would be only logical if such a project were to receive the support of a local bank, a regional consumer rights ombudsman, or an NGO which deals with similar issues in its own work.

### **SUMMARY**

As we conclude with this constructive proposal formulated by librarians themselves – tangible proof that the theory set out above is perfectly capable of being put into practice – a few more points should be in order. First, we would once again reiterate the proposition that Polish society is in need of informal civic education pursued outside the official educational system and outside less official, yet fixed frameworks provided by entities such as NGOs.

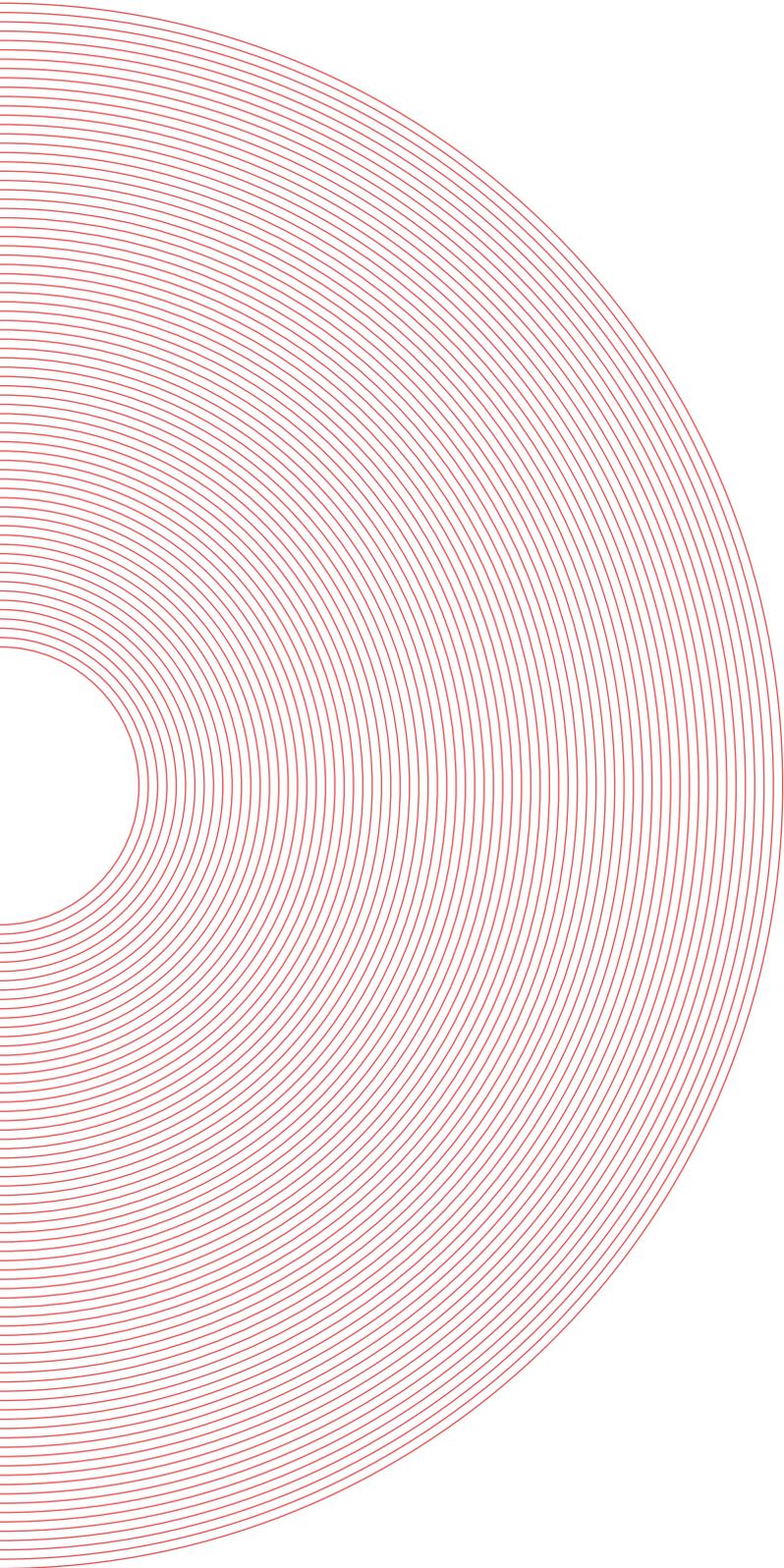
Public libraries are predestined to serve such a function. They are natural sources of knowledge,

and there are many of them, in almost every local community. A library which sets out on an informal civic education project should always adopt a wide approach and seek to involve a variety of partners – schools, local self-government bodies, NGOs, and private businesses.

Activities of this sort promise to bring great results without the need to commit extensive financial or labour outlays. The subsequent chapters present possibilities of informal civic education projects by libraries as well as actual examples of such work.

**CIVIC  
EDUCATION  
IN ACTION**





# Towards a New Role of the Library

## on Relations Between Civic Education and the Development Challenges Facing the Society

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**F**or over a decade, Poland has been undergoing root-and-branch social transformation, a process which was triggered by the systemic transformation, and accelerated by increased openness to the West and its accession to major international organisations such as NATO and the European Union. Another important factor has been the continuous influx of substantial funds intended to spur the country's socio-economic development, which were made available as a consequence of Poland's EU membership. The development processes which were initiated with the support of these funds produced visible changes in major economic, cultural and administrative centres of Poland. One of the challenges that Poland is facing now is to step up those changes in the remaining areas of the country, as it is stipulated by such government documents as the report *Poland 2030. Development Challenges*<sup>1</sup>. The overriding goal is to transfer the good results achieved down to the local level, with the involvement of the local community.

According to the authors of the project "Public libraries as centres for civic education in Europe", public libraries, as institutions of culture with the most widespread presence in Poland, can play a major role in the diffusion of development processes among local communities (under the regulations in force, a public library must operate in every municipality). Altogether, there are some 8 500 such libraries nationwide<sup>2</sup>. Activities which are broadly encompassed by the notion of informal civic education offer tools which can be used by libraries to increase citizen participation in the local communities<sup>3</sup>. The aim of this study is to examine

<sup>1</sup> *Polska 2030. Wyzwania rozwojowe*, Warsaw, July 2009, pp. 2-3 – [http://www.zds.kprm.gov.pl/userfiles/PL\\_2030\\_wyzwania\\_rozwojowe.pdf](http://www.zds.kprm.gov.pl/userfiles/PL_2030_wyzwania_rozwojowe.pdf) [accessed on 4 November 2010].

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Biblioteki publiczne są obecnie jedynymi placówkami kultury pracującymi na obszarze całego kraju* – Portal Księgarski rozmawia z Elżbietą Stefańczyk, *Przewodniczącą SBP* 4 August 2009 – <http://www.ksiazka.net.pl/> [Accessed on 12 November 2010].

<sup>3</sup> For more information on how this category is understood in this particular project, see B. Widmaier, *Citizenship Education and Public Libraries. A Commentary on the Question of Synergies in Non-formal Education* [in this volume].

in greater depth how such activities could be launched at libraries, what obstacles may be encountered in the process and what existing library resources could be used in this exercise.

The paper tackles the aforementioned issues and discusses the results of two expert meetings, organised in Warsaw as part of the project “Public libraries as centres for civic education in Europe”<sup>4</sup>. The first such meeting was the international seminar “Public libraries as centres for civic education in Europe”, which took place on 17–18 May 2010. On the second day of the seminar, four thematic workshops were held: “Building local partnerships for initiatives in the field of civic education”, “How to involve the local community in the project? How to activate passive citizens” and two workshops on “Civic education in the libraries. Ideas of projects and effective techniques to achieve the goals set”. A report was published from each of these workshops, by the following authors: Olga Napiontek, Anita Baschant, Aleksander Tarkowski and Judita Akromiene. In addition to the findings from the workshop reports, the present study draws on other remarks and comments concerning the role of libraries in civic education, which were made by the participants during an open debate closing the first day of the seminar.

The second meeting, the “Librarians’ Round Table” organised on 14 September 2010, addressed the issue of informal civic education and was aimed to provide reflection on the role of libraries in the transforming of the Polish society from the perspective of its growth-related challenges. The participants were able to share experiences about various civic education initiatives undertaken by the library staff. The critical remarks and observations concerning the future role of public libraries put forward by the librarians present at the meeting as well as the ideas of projects proposed by them form an extremely interesting part of the source material which informed the analysis provided further

in the text. For this reason, all the participants of the “Round Table” were listed by name in the part directly following the introduction to this publication, as its co-authors.

The present paper consists of five major parts. The first part provides information about the current situation of the library resources and offers comments about their perception both by the general public and by librarians themselves, based on the opinions ventured by the participants of the international seminar. We can say therefore that this is an analysis of the existing situation, which provides a starting point for the opinions offered by the same participants on the potential role of libraries as venues for pursuing informal civic education, and discussed in the second part of the paper. It also discusses the question of expectations in the society at large which local libraries – according to the authors – will have to address in the coming years. The second part of the paper also reflects on the criteria on how local partners can be chosen and engaged in cooperation with libraries to enable them to discharge their new tasks in an effective manner. The third part summarises the views of the Polish librarians invited to the “Round Table” on cooperation with local partners. In the fourth part, comments and observations made during the two meetings are recapitulated, including a description of various forms of activities promoting civic education which can be launched by libraries. This part of the paper also outlines those areas of activity which could be of interest to libraries, as well as offers several ideas for projects or initiatives in the field of informal civic education. The fifth part supplements the above recommendations with specific informal civic education projects carried out by libraries (and by their staff), and developed by the participants of “Librarians’ Round Table”. These prove that the libraries in Poland are already sufficiently well equipped with the culture capital and know-how, to conduct civic education

<sup>4</sup> For more information about the project and its individual stages see: <http://isp.org.pl/biblioteki/> [Accessed on 14 November 2010].

activities. There exists a sound foundation for the development of systemic solutions which will make it possible to disseminate such activities at public libraries all over Poland.

#### **THE ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND THEIR PERCEPTION BY THE PUBLIC**

Any reflection on how to increase the role of libraries in the future should begin with an analysis of their situation today. The contemporary mission of the library is certainly among its main defining factors. The participants of the third workshop observed that such a role is sufficiently defined in the applicable legislation as it comprises three components, viz.: access to recorded knowledge, provision of information services and ensuring access to culture. They are of the opinion that, in practice however, librarians tend to restrict their activity to the first component. They believe that the development of the remaining spheres of library activity as defined by law could involve civic education activities. To make this happen, librarians should be given opportunities to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills<sup>5</sup>.

Even if the traditional nature and the mission of the libraries is sufficient for them to initiate civic education activities, it should be considered whether any expansion of such a mission which would lead to a change in the operating principles of these institutions would indeed promote embarking on such activities more intently. At this point, one should weigh all the pros and cons of choosing one course of action: either respecting and leaving the traditional role of the library unchanged or modifying it to suit the needs of the contemporary society. As the participants of the third workshop observed, “the



librarians’ community is about to start a debate similar to one which has been going on for some time in the museologists’ community”. And the situation of libraries to some extent resembles that of museums. Librarians should also consider whether they could redefine their role depending on the answer to the question whether their ultimate focus is on building a book collection or is it the community that is to use such a book collection”<sup>6</sup>. The motif of redefining the contemporary roles of public cultural institutions also surfaced on the first day of the seminar, with the discussion of two projects implemented in the museums which aspire to play a more prominent role in their local communities<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Based on: A. Tarkowski, *Raport z warsztatu nr 3: Edukacja obywatelska w bibliotekach. Pomysły konkretnych działań*, s. 1 – <http://www.isp.org.pl/biblioteki/> [Accessed on 10 November 2010].

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>7</sup> See the descriptions of the project “The Museum of Warsaw’s Praga” (Konrad Pruszyński) and “What are you doing later, Yasmin? Endeavour: future” (Rita Klages) [only in Polish edition of this volume].

The discussions held on the third day of the workshop tackled yet another aspect of the traditional mission of the library, which could become their valuable asset in terms of civic education capability. Public libraries are universally viewed as neutral venues which offer access to knowledge without imposing any point of view or attempts at indoctrination. Similarly, a *sui generis* cult of knowledge and the concept of providing access to knowledge are factors which can foster conducting civic education in libraries.

The aforementioned attributes of libraries were also discussed during the first workshop. Its participants confirmed that public libraries, being institutions of a unique nature locally, can foster the development of the local community, also through activities in the field of civic education. Their functions include facilitating access to knowledge for individuals, including knowledge which enables them to function as citizens. Due to their egalitarian character (with the offer directed to all the residents irrespective of their age, education, interests, assets), libraries also “represent one of the few places which can serve as venues for meetings and for integrating the local community”<sup>8</sup>. On the other hand, however, there are several aspects pertaining to the present library activity which not only perpetrate the negative image of these institutions among the general public but can also be viewed as obstacles to expanding their functions by civic education activities. The most exhaustive list of challenges to be addressed if libraries are to become engaged in civic education activities was proposed by the author of the report from the fourth workshop<sup>9</sup> (even though many of the remarks presented below were also voiced at the discussions held during the remaining workshops and in an open debate summarising the first day of the seminar). According

to the participants, the key issues involved include the following:

- The libraries’ being entrenched in their traditionally perceived social functions – the contemporary social development trends require that both libraries and librarians should move beyond stereotypes and habits which limit their present performance. The staff of such institutions should believe that they are capable of conducting practical civic education sessions, which should involve their engagement in the development of activities and launching initiatives in the sphere of informal civic education.
- Lack of faith in reaching out to potential social partners with initiatives related to joint educational activities – even now, when they are invited, libraries are very willing to become involved in civic education initiatives; however, they should be encouraged to take a more proactive stance. By starting off with an analysis of the local needs, they should decide how they can satisfy such needs themselves, and thus foster the development of their local communities.
- Staff shortages at libraries – the staffing of local libraries is in many cases limited to only one or two employees. As a matter of course, these people cannot perform several functions at the same time and act as educators, animators of the local community, initiators of activities to promote local growth and organisers of other forms of communal activities. First and foremost, librarians should discharge their professional tasks, but they should also be able to refer those interested in other forms of activities to relevant, specialised organisations and institutions.

<sup>8</sup> Based on: O. Napiontek, *Raport z warsztatu nr 1: Tworzenie lokalnego partnerstwa na rzecz edukacji obywatelskiej*, p. 1 – <http://www.isp.org.pl/biblioteki/> [accessed on 10 November 2010].

<sup>9</sup> Based on: J. Akromiene, *Raport z warsztatu nr 4: Civic education in the libraries. Ideas of the projects and effective techniques*, p. 3 – <http://www.isp.org.pl/biblioteki/> [accessed on 10 November 2010].



- Motivation, ability to make use of various sources of information, remuneration levels and a traditional librarian mindset – all these factors may hinder members of this professional group from undertaking activities which go beyond strictly professional tasks (and this could be true especially for libraries in smaller towns, owing to a smaller stock of cultural and economic capital).
- An unfavourable perception of libraries among the public at large – these institutions are typically viewed as unexciting places, an opinion which is most certainly affected by the low readership levels in Poland. Children and youth may frequently steer clear of libraries being forced by teachers and parents to borrow books, and this does not convey to them an image of the library as a place which can be useful in the cultivation of one's interests or passions.

- Sense of self-esteem among librarians – what hinders their credibility as those who would perform extended functions in the local community is not only their traditional, stereotyped perception, but also the way librarians themselves perceive their own professional group. The sense of self-worth of the library staff should definitely be reinforced because they might find themselves lacking the self-confidence needed to promote the library facilities, its services or activities (and all these resources could be employed to expand the civic awareness of library users).
- Increasing the visibility and attractiveness of their activities – even though libraries are already undertaking many initiatives that could be hailed as informal civic education, such as meetings with authors, book promotion events, exhibitions, discussions with invited guests, in many cases these activities are not sufficiently visible or interesting for the outsiders. This is inter alia due to the use of traditional methods of work which fail to address the actual needs of members of the local community.
- Lack of sufficient promotion of the library activity at various levels, and lack of experience in disseminating their own activities among librarians themselves – local libraries should be also involved (albeit on a certain scale only) in promoting their services, and in particular should demonstrate the difference in quality between the library offer and that of other entities providing similar services locally. Since potentially this sphere may be open to substantial competition, libraries should try and show the added value of their activities and not limit themselves merely to offering the available space or the accumulated facilities and equipment.
- The libraries' infrastructure is not sufficiently equipped for their new functions – if the libraries' goals are to be redefined to turn them into venues



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for meetings, learning and local communication centres, some investments are needed to revamp their image and to adapt the library space to the needs of individual communities. In most cases, the library buildings were designed many years ago (and frequently buildings with a completely different functions were converted) and the internal layout may not allow for organising open meetings or group work (without other library users being disturbed). In many cases, the space in the public libraries will need to be redesigned.

Merely overcoming the aforementioned obstacles will not suffice. The redefining of the role of public libraries in the local communities, discussed above, will not be possible without making specific improvements in their infrastructure and without enhancing the cultural capital of their staff. Relevant training should inter alia improve the librarians' competences related to ensuring access to

a greater number of services to the library clients, which will make it possible to improve citizen competences of the members of the local communities who are library users. Given the needed support, libraries could become animators of civil life in the local communities. In a way, they are predestined to perform this role due to their neutral status. However, the participants of the discussions taking place during the various workshops could not agree whether it is realistic to expect that the libraries will become initiators of such activities conducted by groups of local entities. It was suggested that they should restrict themselves to taking part in partnerships built by other actors on the local social scene.

### **LIBRARIES AS ANIMATORS AND PARTNERS FOR THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

#### ● **THE ROLE OF THE LIBRARY IN LOCAL CITIZEN PARTNERSHIPS**

One of the main tasks set for the participants of the international seminar was to discuss the ways in which libraries can get involved in increasing the participation of passive citizens. It was proposed on many occasions during the debates that libraries do not have to, and indeed should not, undertake such activities on their own because their work will produce more value and be more effective if they establish cooperation with suitable partners from among the key actors of local public life. In this sense, libraries could become initiators or participants (if given more modest tasks) in local partnerships, formed with a view to satisfying the vital needs of the local community. This issue was analysed in depth by the participants of the first workshop, who concluded that libraries will only be able to operate efficiently in the sphere of civic education if they start regular cooperation with other entities present in the municipality, such as: local governments, schools, community culture centres, social welfare centres, NGOs, informal groups or even individual citizens. First and foremost, such activity should involve an exchange of information and knowledge about civic education activities, which would help ensure the complementarity of initiatives undertaken by individual

entities. A partnership would also make it possible to employ a more extensive set of the local resources, both in terms of human and technological capital, and would in effect ensure the provision of a broader offer of civic education services, particularly those which call for more substantial outlays. Cooperation with other entities also helps better tailor the actual activities to the needs of the residents since the partners' knowledge and any analyses they may have already conducted can be put to use. Last but not least, a partnership would help broaden the scale of activities due to capitalising on the potential of various people, their experiences, skills and passions<sup>10</sup>.

The participants of the third workshop stated expressly that, in view of the limited resources at libraries, including libraries in civic education tasks "would call for local cooperation of three partners: the library (which is in charge of issues related to access to information), the school (whose teachers bring pupils to the library) and an institution with some experience in research and educational projects relating to history or civic issues", and resolved that "this necessary set of competences can hardly be acquired solely at the library"<sup>11</sup>. However, it was observed during the workshop that "in many cases libraries have found it difficult to identify such partners, and therefore it is necessary to support libraries in establishing contacts and cooperation with other institutions with a view to carrying out civic education projects"<sup>12</sup>.

All activities aimed to reach the broadest circles of beneficiaries and involve them in the library work should be performed while respecting their neutrality. This motif was well visible both during the work debates and in the course of the plenary sessions. The opening of the library space to representatives of various social groups

should not be regarded as tantamount to giving approval either to extreme views or to any ideology. Meetings or discussions must be organised while observing the basic democratic rules, maintaining objectivity and respecting the differences of opinion. If libraries open their doors to only one side of the local public scene, they might lose their credibility. It should also be observed that in the Polish context, where libraries are incorporated into the local administration structures, their staff may have neither the legal means nor the capabilities to defend the neutrality of these institutions.

Two distinct stances evolved during the discussion held as part of the third workshop which dealt with the threat that libraries which embark upon civic education could become overly political. According to the first view, every type of civic education must have a political dimension, and therefore those activities which are only apparently cultural should contain a political goal (for example provide relevant knowledge or develop critical thinking about politics). The second view suggests that civic education should focus more on cultural activities which stand in no relation to politics. Such a mode of thinking is characteristic of the operation of Centre for Citizenship Education - CEO<sup>13</sup>. CEO sets off with activities associated with the culture of a given local community and only then does it shift its interest to the sphere of civic and political initiatives which serve to foster attitudes that take responsibility for the well-being of the whole community. Understood in this way, civic education involves encouraging people to think critically about the world around them<sup>14</sup>.

The participants of the discussion in question were not able to reach consensus on the type of civic activities which can be initiated at the libraries. As

<sup>10</sup> For more information see: O. Napiontek, *Raport z warsztatu nr 1*, op. cit., p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. A. Tarkowski, *Raport z warsztatu nr 3*, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.ceo.org.pl>.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. A. Tarkowski, *Raport z warsztatu nr 3*, op. cit., p. 3.

a result, no uniform stance was agreed on whether libraries should start civic education activities which have a political dimension or not. Three dissimilar views were expressed on this topic. Firstly, it was stated that this would be too risky at the local level. Secondly, it was emphasised that projects dealing with political issues such as participation in elections should certainly be implemented. Thirdly, it was pointed out that “being political” could be considered as a question of solving local problems (without being entangled in politics), which is exemplified by projects similar to the British FixMyStreet programme<sup>15</sup>.

The participants of the fourth workshop identified yet another interest group which should be incorporated by libraries into their civic-related activities. It would be desirable if the largest possible number of members of the local community with varied competences would become engaged in initiatives aimed to increase participation of their fellow residents. They could become involved in such work not only in an active manner but also creatively, by bringing in new ideas. From among such groups, libraries should also recruit volunteers who would for example get books (or even read aloud) to the elderly people and those in need.

#### ● LIBRARIANS AS ANIMATORS OF LOCAL CIVIC LIFE

In view of the above, what new role could librarians assume in the local communities? By engaging all the above-mentioned entities into cooperation, particularly representatives of the local community, they should have an active presence in the life of the local communities and become leaders animating their social life and engaging passive members of the community. These issues were discussed during the second workshop. Its participants outlined several ideas of specific initiatives<sup>16</sup> which could help librarians proactively address the needs of their

local communities and engage their representatives in their activities:

- **Interactive communication board in every library**  
– using the example of “Street Blog”, a project implemented in the streets of Vilnius, a board can be installed in the library where every visitor could post their remarks, ideas or comments about the ideas or thoughts written by other visitors (including reviews of their favourite books or records); all entries would be photographed and later transposed into an internet blog. Librarians could also post information about their own activities (e.g. info on the most popular book most frequently borrowed in a given month or reviews of selected book titles). Such a tool would in effect facilitate communication with the beneficiaries of the library’s activities, popularise the projects and ideas proposed by the library as well as suggestions offered by the representatives of the local community. The board, administered by librarians, would become a genuine “treasure trove” of information about major events taking place in a given community, as well as a place where expectations or interests may be voiced or communicated by any library member wishing to do so. Its role could be compared to the Facebook’s wall where a given user may post issues or events which are of greatest importance to him or her and communicate with friends interested in what they have to say. Such a board placed in the library could become a useful communication tool for the entire local community. As part of this initiative, librarians would on the one hand represent a channel of communication used by members of the community to transmit knowledge, and on the other hand they could support ideas and

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem. Cf. <http://www.fixmystreet.com>.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. A. Baschant, *Raport z warsztatu nr 2: How to involve the local community in the project? How to activate the passive citizens?*, pp. 3–4 – <http://www.isp.org.pl/biblioteki> [accessed on 10 November 2010].

initiatives proposed by members of the local community. Librarians would get an opportunity not only to popularise the board, collect information posted on it and publish it on the Internet (e.g. on the library's blog) but could also enter into dialogue with the public at large and try to connect people with similar interests or ideas for action and support them in putting these ideas to life, as projects or one-off initiatives. The use of such a tool would also help identify the needs of the residents of a given territory and develop the measures implemented later by the library.

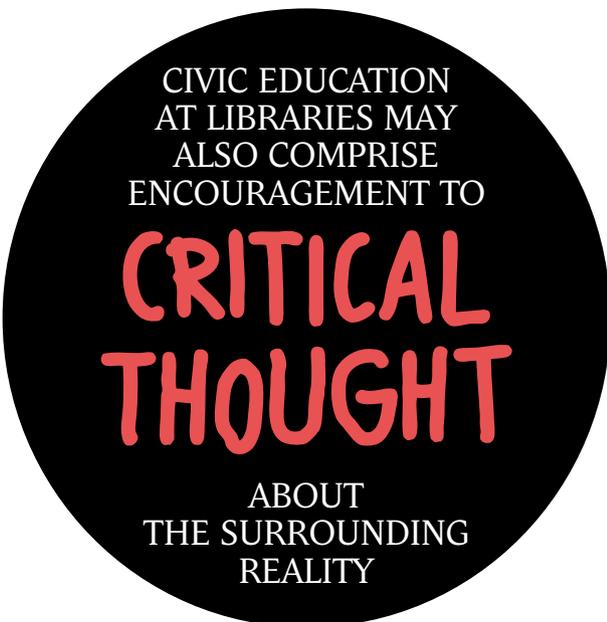
- **Workshops on analysing the residents' interests** – such workshops organised at the library would make it possible to acquire information about the hobbies and interests of the representatives of the local community and about specific topics they are enthusiastic about. The library's activities

could later revolve around such identified issues. The tasks of librarians would include organisation of meetings for people having similar interests and motivating them to launch joint initiatives.

- **Librarians as animators** – in this role, librarians could identify people interested in similar topics on the basis of the books that they borrow. If such people, who might be unaware of their existence, could meet, this might lead to a debate on a given topic, which could also be open to other interested participants and held on the library premises. Such a meeting would also make it possible to disseminate knowledge and skills acquired earlier by the library members, also through using its book collection.
- **Librarians as community members** – the library employees, as members of the local community, may also be active during informal meetings (e.g. conversations with neighbours), drawing on their personal relationships and the trust they have among the other members of the community. These can also become a foundation on which further cooperation will be later developed. In some cases it is sufficient to involve just one representative of a given family (e.g. a child) in the library's activities to engage their parents or other relatives interested in such actions.

Promoting citizen participation of the members of local communities should take into account the specific nature of the recipients of services offered by the library. Both needs and expectations of individual social groups should be taken into account. The participants of the second workshop organised during the international seminar pointed out that every local community has a different residents' structure<sup>17</sup>, which should be taken into account when defining the groups of beneficiaries for civic education activities planned by libraries. The

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, pp. 1-2.



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fundamental thing is to identify passive members of the local communities in terms of civic (and social, as these two will often overlap) activity. Not only the group's structure but also the needs of its members should be analysed. This can be done using several methods, such as:

- Analysis of official data concerning a given community (many statistics open to the public should be available at the municipal office or in various social institutions operating in the municipality);
- Surveys and interviews among representatives of the local community;
- Organising a local meeting of neighbours and an open discussion which will provide space for social dialogue about shared areas of interest, needs and concerns (problems, challenges) of the community at large, with the planned participation of representatives of its various factions and entities;
- Holding a meeting devoted to the aforementioned topics based on the workshop method, using such techniques as group work or brainstorming in order to analyse the challenges facing a given community, to make a tentative assessment of the resources at hand which could be used to carry out relevant measures, and to discuss threats which will need to be addressed jointly;
- Similarly, activities aimed to build partnerships within a given local community can be initiated. As the debaters observed during the first workshop, such activities should begin with the identification of the partners and inviting them to define the substance of joint actions. Addressing an open cooperation offer to all local entities can help explore also the unknown institutions which are interested in a given form

of activity. A meeting to be organised later will provide an opportunity to discuss specific ideas of common actions, identify the resources at hand and define the goals of the partnership. At that point, it would be desirable to prepare a “social map of the municipality”, that is to compile the knowledge of the partners on the existing social groups, their problems, the challenges facing them and the local resources<sup>18</sup>.

Employing the last three methods may help involve residents who have been passive before into the activities of the library. The key to success will be to convince such people that embarking upon such an activity will also help satisfy their own needs. If the residents are engaged in the decision-making process at the earliest possible stage of defining the actions needed, they should be much more willing to get involved in the work, having a sense of their “ownership”.

#### ● LONG-TERM STRATEGY OF CITIZEN ACTIVITIES AT LIBRARIES

Libraries should not plan their initiatives without first setting their own goals, which can be furthered by starting civic education activities. Librarians should also start by asking two key questions:

- “What should the library and its staff achieve by these activities and what can they achieve?”
- “What is the potential of the library and what of the resources that it has can be used in the delivery of these activities?”

The answers provided to these questions by the library staff should constitute the basis for defining a strategy (vision) for the development of the entire institution. Based on the needs of the local community identified earlier and on all the threats and concerns related to embarking on a new line of activity on the one hand, and on the other – on the catalogued

<sup>18</sup> Cf. O. Napiontek, *Raport z warsztatu nr 1*, op. cit., p. 4.

resources, the strategy should specify the view the institution has on its own role in the local community. In such a document, the library should also define the goals of its own commitment in civic education and the beneficiary groups concerned. When a **clear vision of the library's role** is developed on the basis of such premises, it can provide a foundation for its long-term operation. It will also facilitate the identification and finding of new partners, as a result of which it will be able to carry out longer-term activities. The adoption of a longer-term time horizon will improve the efficiency of encouraging citizen participation in the local community, a process which is lengthy by its very nature. It is easier to encourage individuals to take part in actions which have a clearly defined purpose, logically identified stages of how to reach this purpose and a clear follow-up perspective. Such a consolidation of activities is also likely to stimulate interest in them among the representatives of the local community. This is bound to be reinforced by placing more emphasis on the quality, and not quantity, of civic education work.

When planning their activities and presenting them in a programme document, librarians should categorise the target groups to which they plan to address their offer. Proposing the same services to all beneficiaries is fraught with the risk that no expectations will be fulfilled and nobody will be interested at the end of the day. In identifying beneficiary groups, the interests and skills of their members should be taken into account. For example, if these activities were to target young people who like the cinema, the library could propose such actions as organisation of workshops or open discussions on movies which are most popular with the participants. Another way to encourage young people to come to the library is to propose computer work in groups. During such computer classes, the participants could also receive information on other thematic

areas, e.g. principles governing the functioning of civil society. When using the computer for work or play, young people could also acquire knowledge from many spheres of life and get accustomed to spending time in the library. Likewise, if the elderly were to form a target group, and it would be ascertained that many women in this age group like sewing or crocheting and are interested in the local culture, they could potentially be interested in lectures or workshops on regional clothes or even on how to prepare such clothes themselves<sup>19</sup>. Similar initiatives could certainly be prepared to cater to specific men's interests.

Taking into account the fact that the beneficiaries of such activities may differ from municipality to municipality (owing to the specific nature of a given community), the participants of the second workshop listed the following examples of target groups of the library activities:

- Children
- Youth
- Young mothers
- Long-term unemployed
- The elderly
- People of foreign origin (immigrants)
- Religious, national and ethnic minorities
- People with disabilities.

When trying to reach selected groups with their offer, libraries should also remember to differentiate the content and means of communication in such a way as to adapt them to a given group of beneficiaries. Representatives of the younger generation may be reached through schools, special interest groups, youth clubs or networking websites such as Facebook or Internet chats. Older residents may be notified via advertisements published in the press and directly via community centres for senior citizens. Yet another channel of communication which is particularly

<sup>19</sup> Cf. A. Baschant, *Raport z warsztatu nr 2*, op. cit.



effective in reaching elderly people is the spoken word (interpersonal transmission).

Library activities may also be communicated to the wider public via different entities operating in a given municipality or district. These include the local mass media (newspapers, radio or TV stations), which can be persuaded to take part in joint social campaigns and requested to publicise civic activities carried out by the libraries. Libraries should also try to establish cooperation with various community organisations or institutions which are interested in the same target groups (youth or sports clubs, charity organisations, social welfare institutions). In many places in Poland, local church institutions may also be engaged in cooperation, while observing the principle of ideological neutrality. The

library activities can also be publicised by individuals who serve as recognised local authorities and local community leaders – representatives of the local government (heads of municipalities, mayors, councillors), parish priests, heads of the local service institutions (Volunteer Fire Service, Community Culture Centre) or presidents of the local community organisations. This should increase the scope of impact and promote the initiatives launched by the libraries. It should be ensured however that the work of the library is not dominated by people representing only one side of the local public spectrum as this may discourage people with different views from using the services of the institution.

#### **PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN POLAND IN 2030**

The discussion involving the seminar participants from other countries was continued during the “Round Table” for Polish librarians. On the one hand, the conclusions from the May meeting were discussed, and on the other some reflections were offered on the future role of the library in the changing Polish society. During one of the sessions organised for the “Round Table” participants, the librarians were asked to discuss the following three issues:

- How can the role of the library change in the local communities (from the development perspective of the Polish society)?
- What resources do libraries have and what else do they need to successfully fulfil their new role?
- What are the threats related to such activities and how can they be prevented?

These questions were intended to encourage the participants to come up with their own ideas on the new goals libraries should adopt to address the changes taking place in the Polish society<sup>20</sup>. As a result, on the basis of such an anticipated goal of activity, the participants were

<sup>20</sup> To make them better prepared for the discussion, all the participants of the “Round Table” were provided with relevant materials, including selected fragments from the report *Poland 2030. Development Challenges* outlining the prospects of social capital development in Poland.

asked to define the library resources which can be used to achieve such a goal, as well as possible threats. Upon completion of the analysis, activities should be planned to eliminate or minimise the identified threats. Streamlining the discussion into the above three issues was intended to prepare the participants for project work. As it turned out, however, this led to a heated discussion among the librarians, which in effect produced many valuable insights and ideas, in many ways conformant with those produced earlier, at the international seminar.

According to the participants, libraries can definitely expect a change of their function in the society and a redefinition of the way their staff look at their work. While discussing the former topic, the following issues came to the fore:

- A new role of the library in the local community will be developed. In their work, libraries will forgo the term of the “reader” and instead will provide “services to the local community” and address their offer to all members of the community. As a result, librarians will devote more attention to the needs of the residents, and not only of individual readers. Members of the local community will in turn be able to have more say as regards the work of the library. The new libraries will focus on individuals (their needs) and will become a venue of meetings and interaction, and in consequence – a venue of integration for the local community, a platform for an exchange of ideas, information and initiatives. They will strive to satisfy the need for interpersonal contacts and for access to education and culture. In pursuing such activities, libraries will also be engaged in the development of volunteering and philanthropy.
- The aforementioned activities will change the image of the library and the librarians in the society (and the way they are perceived). The library will become a genuine centre of culture, while the librarians will act as moderators of the

activity in the local community, and even as its leaders. From the “simple worker”, someone who merely lends out books, the librarian will turn into a person cementing the local community, an important community actor cooperating with various entities operating on the local scene. Librarians will also demonstrate the ways in which community members can exercise their citizen rights. No less importantly, the mentality of librarians will also change, which can lead to a better use of the potential and ideas of their staff by libraries.

- One of the groups pointed out that in the future libraries can become something entirely new, also because of the ongoing civilisational and technological changes. In effect, the library staff will have to change the way they look at recipients of their services, if these start to borrow e-readers for example, and find a new role for themselves.
- In view of such changes, librarians will be forced to improve their qualifications because the cultural competences of visitors will also grow, and new technologies will be increasingly introduced into the libraries.
- The more and more frequent interactions with representatives of the local community will also result in the need to introduce many procedural and technical changes in the mode of the libraries’ operation. Libraries will more frequently employ various methods to evaluate their work, and will use the feedback to inform the directions of their future work. Cooperation with other entities operating in the same area will certainly become a necessity. On the one hand, libraries will also engage in setting up partnerships to perform tasks (finding partners for carrying out specific tasks), where the library and its staff will act as participants enjoying equal rights. On the other hand, however, they will involve adults, who are not traditional library users, into their activities



(they can be reached by addressing the initial offer to their children or proposing attractive multimedia). Establishing cooperation will also be aimed to strengthen the local community leaders; exchanging views and opinions with other libraries implementing active citizenship programmes will also allow for lobbying on their behalf.

- Libraries will learn how to promote their activity (offer) in an appealing way – not only with regard to the forms in which the new media will be used but also to content. With regard to content, libraries will need to publicise their new role in the local community. The purpose of these activities will also be to increase social awareness.
- Participants of the debate in one of the groups emphasised the new role of the library, which is to convey information using a variety of means; in this line of thinking, the library is to become

a place where information is exchanged, a kind of an “information exchange board”.

The second question posed to the “Round Table” participants was to initiate a discussion on what attributes of libraries make them particularly well disposed to assume new roles in their communities. The debate on this topic helped elicit information from library employees on what else the libraries need to be able to expand their scope of activity. The discussions held in groups brought many interesting comments and remarks. In the librarians’ opinion, the following factors will determine how libraries perform their new roles:

#### ● RESOURCES

- **Staff.** Employing qualified, well-educated staff, motivated to work with passion (this is certainly true for very many if not for all librarians), and enjoying trust in the community (but on the other hand with little prestige). These competences

should be put to a good use – these employees are very often “positive freaks” (libraries would not be able to operate without such enthusiasts), and teem with ideas.

- **Users.** Direct contact with potential beneficiaries, but also with organisers of various activities who have an easy access to libraries owing to their sheer number across Poland – there should be at least one library in each Polish municipality. As a result, employees of these institutions can directly interact with the recipients of their services, invite them to cooperation and use as partners.
- **Location.** Libraries have public space at their disposal, but how they use it depends on the quality of cooperation with the local authorities and how councillors and the local community understand the function that the library performs.
- **Information.** Access to various sources of information, both printed and electronic (including knowledge where and how such information can be found).
- **Contacts.** Having important and useful professional contacts, which can be used and shared with partners as part of joint activities and contributed as an asset to such partnerships. Ability to cooperate with other institutions, especially when organising jointly various initiatives (but only on the assumption that there is no unhealthy competition between the libraries from the neighbouring communities or other institutions promoting culture at the local level, e.g. municipal culture centres).
- **Technology.** Access to computers and other modern technologies (although varied across the country because some libraries are better equipped and their staff have the necessary competences, and some are not so well equipped – in their case, new technologies can be

categorised as “shortcomings”).

#### ● WEAKNESSES

- **Library development strategy.** The lack of such a strategy at the local and regional level is the consequence of the inadequate identification of the libraries’ needs by the local authorities and of not using a project-based approach in planning their activity.
- **Inadequate premises and facilities.** Many libraries clearly lack the required space and state-of-the-art computer equipment. The libraries’ space is not used in a way which ensures that the existing needs will be satisfied.
- **Financial stability.** Difficulties in the provision of financing do not allow for the development of long-term strategies. Modest funds allocated to new activities, and to maintaining the stability of the work (in effect, there is a lot of uncertainty as regards the future of individual institutions and stability of employment).
- **Low pay in the sector.**
- **Ability to articulate needs.** The library managers do not seem very capable of arguing in social terms, i.e. demonstrating that their needs are in fact the needs of the whole resident community. In many cases librarians are not sufficiently prepared to conduct negotiations with the authorities.
- **Project-based approach.** Insufficient in some representatives of the profession.
- **Training for librarians.** Lack of a wide training offer, both specialised (transmitting knowledge about the skills needed to implement new tasks and greater openness to the readers’ needs), but also interdisciplinary skills facilitating contacts with other professional groups.
- **Potential for cooperation with other social or professional groups.**
- **The perception of librarians in the society.** The widespread perception of this profession

is incomplete; this is true for both librarians and beneficiaries of their work. Librarians are not treated as potential leaders for the local community (library employees enjoy trust in the community, but their status is low).

The third question was intended to encourage librarians to reflect on various issues related to their practical activities in the future. On the basis of discussions concerning the role of the library in the future society and the related resources, the participants were supposed to identify threats which can prevent libraries from achieving these new goals. Finally, the respondents were asked to reflect on the ways in which those adverse circumstances could be avoided. In effect, the following conclusions were offered:

#### ● THREATS

- **Reluctant attitude of the authorities to adding new tasks to libraries.** This applies both to the central and the local authorities. In the latter case, it could be the source of more problems due to the dependence of the library manager on the local authorities, hence libraries will need to skilfully articulate their needs in terms of deficiencies which could be identified in the local community. This could be associated with the terminated influx of funds for the libraries' regular activity in case it was necessary to make severe budget cuts, shortage of funds for staff development or investments in the existing human resources.
- **Such prioritisation of the state's cultural policy (and its later implementation at the local government level), which leaves no room for libraries and their activities (development), coupled with the authorities' inability (reluctance) to look at libraries from a new perspective (overcoming stereotypes about them).** Some distinct shortcomings in the state's cultural policy and patronage over libraries and culture on the part of its institutions are visible even today (at least librarians are not aware of any such policy). This situation is aggravated by the complicated legal situation of libraries as they are dependent on both the central administration and local governments, and the legislation governing their activities is inadequate (for instance the provisions of the Accounting Act<sup>21</sup> and the Local Government Acts<sup>22</sup> relating to institutions of culture at the local level). If these are not changed, the situation of libraries will remain uncertain.
- **Side-effects of political decisions made at the central level.** For example the VAT rates rise without exempting libraries from this obligation may adversely affect their capacity for expanding their book collections (shortages of funding can be observed even without such a rise).
- **The likely prospect that paper books will disappear in the future.** Owing to increasing production costs and civilisational development (including technological change), paper books may be replaced by other forms of communicating information, e.g. via DVDs or e-books. If this scenario is fulfilled, libraries will be forced to assume a new role. Such changes may also lead to more far-reaching transformations in the development of future societies, for instance a *sui generis* "illiteracy", related to

<sup>21</sup> The Accounting Act of 29 September 1994 (*Journal of Laws* No. 121/1994 item 591 as amended).

<sup>22</sup> The Local Government Act of 8 March 1990 (*Journal of Laws* No. 16/1990 item 95 as amended); The District Government Act of 5 June 1998 (*Journal of Laws* No. 91/1998, item 578 as amended).

the current impact of children's contact with books (also understood as physical items) on their development (particularly with regard to stimulating imagination, ability to articulate their thoughts and to reason). Seen from such a perspective, libraries should concentrate on responding to people's needs, and not on forms in which they could be satisfied. Even if at some point in the future books are superseded by other forms of conveying information, people will still need to read and to communicate with other human beings. Librarians will have to adapt their activities to the emerging new ways in which these needs can be fulfilled.

- **Lack of community integration.** It is encountered both within the librarians' community (no networking, no telephone conversations or other possibilities for exchanging information about the implemented activities), and in case of other entities operating in the same area (lack of cooperation). As regards the former, the participants of the "Round Table" observed that librarians themselves can be blamed for this situation because discussions on various problems relevant to them are only conducted in their own circles, in smaller groups which later get dispersed, and the conclusions which may have been reached remain privy to the participants who earlier had the necessary knowledge anyway.
- **Unhealthy competition between libraries.** If one library engages in an activity (and will receive a lot of coverage in the media), other libraries in the vicinity may feel threatened that for example the head of the municipality or the mayor will blame them for the absence of a similar activity. This could unnecessarily divide the librarians' professional community locally.

- **Lack of motivation to engage in more activities.** Many librarians may not show interest in starting various activities or enhancing their knowledge and skills.

#### ● PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- **Consolidation of the professional librarian community and creating a platform for cooperation with representatives of other institutions operating locally.** Participants of the "Round Table" observed that a lack of wide-ranging and horizontal contacts between various actors of local social life can be observed in all communities. Such contacts should be developed through organisation of meetings, workshops, various forums for exchanging opinions which could attract people representing different professions (to start with, discussions between librarians, representatives of NGOs and local governments could be organised). Such exchange of information would be most effective and as a result could produce most viable solutions addressing the needs of all the stakeholders (e.g. the Third Age Forum organised on the occasion of the Economic Forum in Krynica Zdrój, with its interesting formula for listening to opinions and then listening to comments). When establishing cooperation with other actors, it is good to observe the "give and take" principle which shows that both parties involved can gain from the interaction.
- **Librarians should make an effort to ensure that their opinions are heard.** In very many cases, decisions concerning libraries are made without any consultations with representatives of the librarian circles (this was the critique of the Congress of Polish Culture offered by participants of the "Round Table" and by the

report prepared on the occasion of the Congress which inter alia analysed the situation in local libraries<sup>23</sup>). As a result, librarians do not even try to protest against the separation of libraries and culture which is so frequently encountered in the public discourse and they do practically nothing to change this way of thinking.

- **Effective lobbying.** Employing the above strategies will form a component of an effective lobbying for the interests of the community at the central and local level. It would also be desirable to set up an interest group or, at the very least, find an advocate of the librarian community's interest among the policy makers.
- **Establishing a platform to facilitate the forming of partnerships, making efforts to improve the flow of information,** introducing healthy competition and cooperation between representatives of the librarian community. Librarians should work to overcome a sense of their position being threatened due to activities of other members of the group, and encourage cooperation (more can be achieved when acting together!), arguing that every library has its own local milieu and individual institutions do not have to clash or overlap.
- **Creating a discussion forum for librarians.** This will allow for an exchange of knowledge and launching joint initiatives.
- **Increasing the visibility of libraries and their staff,** publicising their work constantly and skilfully (i.e. in a captivating manner!), because at present it is not visible to the public at large. Such a message addressed to the local authorities (heads of municipalities, mayors, councillors)

should communicate that the library not only promotes reading and book borrowing but also involves other tasks which bring benefits to the society, also locally. Such activities can also win the support on the part of the local community.

- **Diversification of the sources of financing.** This should include seeking budgetary subsidies, grants and private funds (project activity should help eliminate staff shortages).
- **Making the necessary personnel changes.** In addition to that, supporting the staff by organising training and other forms of professional development for them (however, in some extreme cases only staff changes can help).

#### **THE NEW ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN THE SOCIETY AND INFORMAL CIVIC EDUCATION**

The issue of the emerging role of libraries in the process of civil society development locally was a leitmotif of the international expert seminar. One of the most interesting and inspiring proposals was the proposal to turn libraries into active, open spaces supporting many varied activities by all members of the local community. A similar idea underpinned the reflections offered by the librarians taking part in the "Round Table". In the Polish context, where local social ties and civil society structures are extremely weak, they could be strengthened if libraries became places where people spent their free time (for recreation and hobbies or interests) and where citizenship activity is carried out.

To make this possible, the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage must alter its approach to libraries and put relevant legislation and structures in place. If the policy makers concerned are not persuaded to treat librarians as real partners who have genuine interest in

<sup>23</sup> Cf. P. Dobrołęcki, K. Frołow, Ł. Gołębiewski, J. Hetman-Krajewska, E. Tenderenda-Ozóg, T. Nowak, P. Miodunka, *Raport o stanie kultury: Przemysł książki*, Warsaw, December 2008 – [http://www.kongreskultury.pl/library/File/RaportKsiazka/ksiazka\\_raport\\_w.pelna.pdf\(1\).pdf](http://www.kongreskultury.pl/library/File/RaportKsiazka/ksiazka_raport_w.pelna.pdf(1).pdf) [Accessed on 12 November 2010].

the growth of libraries, it will be difficult to entice the “men in the street” to come to the library. Only librarians whose status and self-esteem are enhanced by relevant programmes and legislation, who believe in the value of their work, will be able to undertake promotion activity to reach their potential beneficiaries.

According to the participants of the international seminar, all changes should be introduced gradually and smoothly. At every stage of the process, its results so far should be evaluated on a regular basis (also together with the participants), and the subsequent stages should take into account the feedback received from the stakeholders. Evaluation involving the participants will help to know their opinions about the implementation and the topical content of individual projects. It will also make it possible to develop the activities further and to maintain interest in them on the part of the local community members.

To sum up the results of the two meetings, it can be said that some changes, if introduced, could help libraries assume the following roles in the local communities:

- **Activising, strengthening the local community and increasing the scope of its potential activities** – an additional goal of such an activity should be to facilitate the development of well-informed and well-educated citizens, aware of their roles, who will not only know how to “plant trees but will also be aware of their being a part of the land that they live on and the community therein”. This could be the added value from the library’s operation for the local community.
- Providing a **neutral, open space** with a free access (both physical and intellectual) for all members of the community. It can be an experimental ground for various kinds of activities (e.g. setting up animal care centres, launching practical initiatives addressed to the local community or participatory activities). The majority of Central and Eastern European countries do not have



this kind of space, and therefore libraries could embrace this opportunity and fill in the niche. Suitable space is also needed for resolving conflicts which originate due to tensions invariably associated with diversity and population density in affluent and prosperous communities.

- Providing a **space for the activities of people with different needs**, e.g. quiet study rooms, rooms converted into bars, cafes, with cheap printing facilities, Internet hot spots and access to information free of charge.
- In addition to their attractive layout and opportunities for having a hot drink, libraries should also provide a **space for local debates and disputes**. Libraries are places ideally suited for meetings, and therefore for integrating the local community.
- Libraries can become involved in civic education at the local, national and Community level, also without any larger-scale organisation offer, by developing and disseminating information materials. In this way, they could become **information centres** offering access to relevant (factual) knowledge and carrying out promotion and public relations activity.
- **Cooperation and partnership** are among crucial aspects of the library work. Libraries should not undertake new activities on their own but rather build partnerships with different actors who could ensure that joint activities are publicised. Libraries cannot forgo their traditional functions



such as provision of books or promotion of book reading, but they should also act as **ambassadors, and engage various local actors into cooperation.**

- It is extremely important to actively engage not only organisations and institutions into such proposed new activity of libraries but also, perhaps even more importantly, to involve **representatives of the local communities, particularly if such communities are small.**

Having agreed the framework in which libraries might engage in civic education activities (also informal), the participants of both meetings discussed specific activities which could be implemented by libraries. In their way of thinking, the participants were visibly influenced by the presentations of actual projects made

on the first day of the seminar. Since they are discussed in more detail by their authors further in the report, let us only enumerate the concrete thematic areas for such potential initiatives which were mentioned during the discussion. They were extensively summarised by the participants of the fourth workshop<sup>24</sup>, who indicated the following types of activity:

- Ecological initiatives which help integrate the local society and various social and local government partners (i.e. those based on tree planting);
- Initiatives which facilitate contacts with the local community and integration of its representatives from different walks of life (and different age and cultural groups), where the library can provide the space, facilities and competences of staff, and the members of the community are free to select the specific topic of joint activity;
- Initiatives aimed to disseminate knowledge about the region (its culture, natural environment and other attributes), where libraries should serve as active organisers;
- Initiatives in the field of civic education and addressed to young people, which offer possibilities for discussions on the directions of change in the region and which increase knowledge about the regional identity;
- Initiatives launching mobile libraries (“libraries on wheels”) which will help share information between members of various communities;
- “Live” library initiatives, including meetings with people who can share their interesting experiences or knowledge with others;
- Activities promoting intercultural dialogue which will facilitate better contacts between members of the local community coming from different ethnic and social groups, and thereby stimulate

<sup>24</sup> Cf. J. Akromiene, *Raport z warsztatu nr 4*, op. cit., pp. 4–6.

integration in the community at large. Such activities can also be addressed to children of immigrants living in a given area and publicise the positive example of local immigrants-entrepreneurs who have been successful in business and have blended well with the hosting society;

- Activities aimed to bring more life to reading rooms, e.g. organising thematic meetings with experts for children or the elderly, devoted to a specific topic or book;
- Activities which help make libraries centres for communication between people, by offering good conditions for meetings, exchanging opinions, etc.;
- Computer and Internet classes for senior citizens;
- Organising training programmes for librarians, such as study visits to other countries where libraries successfully perform such extended functions in the local community;
- Encouraging representatives of the local community to take part in various kinds of work for the library (such as renovating the interior or painting graffiti);
- Arranging some space at the library where passers-by could enter and have some rest or a drink (for example a bar or a cafe).

More ideas for specific projects proposed by the participants of the first workshops are discussed in Olga Napiontek's report<sup>25</sup>. Some of them are summarised below.

#### ● CULTIVATING KNOWLEDGE AND MEMORIES OF LOCAL HISTORY

“The aim of civic education is to increase people's interest in local matters, so that they can feel that they are more active citizens. [...] Nevertheless, it seems that mere knowledge of procedures, ways of being involved in local politics and promoting active attitudes may prove

insufficient if people do not feel a sense of bond with the place where they live, if they do not like it and do not know it. Such a negative approach is a huge obstacle to active citizenship. For this reason, all activities which enhance knowledge about the place of residence and the region, offer insights into their past and help getting to know people living there are so important. Discovering the indigenous resources of a given society is the foundation on which a positive approach to the place of residence can be built, and thereby a sense of identification with the local community.

Libraries as local knowledge centres can carry out projects related to the creation of a local historical archive, which would involve collecting information, items and artefacts documenting the history of the local community, such as momentous events, persons or places. Such documentary activity should be accompanied by the dissemination of the search results: exhibitions, albums, Internet websites. This type of activity is a never-ending one; it is a continuous process.

Whether such initiatives are successful or not depends on the cooperation of the library with the local residents and local institutions. The involvement and participation is of crucial importance: to arouse a searcher's or a documentalist's passion in them and to convince them that their observations and knowledge represent valuable assets for the local community.

The school can be an important partner, if it includes the dissemination of knowledge about the history of the local community into its history education curriculum. This may have an additional point of interest as it will allow for including original items of artefacts and source materials, and not only textbooks, into the learning process”.

#### ● READERS - CITIZENS

“One important function of civic education is to prepare individuals to act as critical observers and analysts of

<sup>25</sup> O. Napiontek, *Raport z warsztatu nr 1*, op. cit., pp. 1-4.

public life. It seems that libraries can play a prominent role in this regard, as places where readers can find not only books but also newspapers, magazines or use the Internet. The library can serve as an ideal place for local residents to seek reliable information on current social, cultural, political and economic events. Access to diverse, dependable, objective information is crucial for forming an opinion and acting upon it. The task of the librarian as a guide to knowledge is to provide direction and indicate the mass-media which present various points of view.

The role of the library as a source of diverse and independent knowledge about local problems is particularly important in those municipalities where there is no local press, and only information bulletins published by municipal offices, which as a rule do not offer any criticism of the local authorities.

The library's initiatives aimed to enhance the critical thinking of local residents could involve organisation of workshops for various groups of residents, during which they could learn how to distinguish opinions from facts, what kind of mass media there are and how to reach them. Organising workshops for different types of trainees could help profile the workshop content to suit their interests and styles of learning and reading. Groups could be organised on the basis of age (for young people, for senior citizens) or topics (e.g. how to collect reliable information on healthy diets, healthy life, bank loans or mortgages, etc.). Residents with expertise in a given discipline that they could share with other residents could be involved in the organisation of such workshops".

#### ● PUBLIC E-SERVICES (E-GOVERNANCE)

"More and more official matters can be resolved via the Internet. This is a medium which can serve as the source of information about the municipality, activities of the local authorities, local institutions and, increasingly, a customer service centre which has the form of an electronic registry. It can be said that the municipal

authorities communicate with the residents via the Internet.

At the moment, municipal offices are introducing e-governance into their activity because it is economic and speeds up the time of processing. Municipal officials are taking part in various training programmes in this area. The question remains who will prepare citizens to use electronic public services. Municipal libraries seem a good solution as they offer Internet access to citizens. The role of the librarian would be to help residents to develop their e-office skills.

The library should also offer civic education as regards access to public information, administrative procedures, administrative laws, rights of citizens in their dealings with the office. This could be done via training programmes, lectures or by facilitating access to relevant textbooks, legislation or information guides.

The municipal office seems a natural partner for such projects since the success of local e-administration depends on the competences and readings of the local residents to use such possibilities for handling official matters".

#### ● LOCAL INFORMATION CENTRES

"Partnerships for civic education can help create a local information centre on the basis of the library's space and facilities. Municipalities frequently have a problem with the flow of information between the residents and various local institutions. The consequence of such communication difficulties is the residents' ignorance of what these institutions do and what activities they initiate for various community groups.

The library can serve as a place where diverse information is collected about different spheres of the local life: announcements on cultural events, information on NGO activities, invitations to participate in various projects. In this context, the library staff would have an important role to play: to reduce the chaos of information, to collate information and pass it on to the relevant addressees.

The library can play the role of the local information centre through increasing the visibility of announcements and notices on the information board. It should be a permanent spot, one to which the residents will get accustomed to and where they will look for information. The function of the local centre can also be performed by helping the library visitors to use the websites of the local institutions. Such a local information centre is in fact a proposal of partnership between the local institutions to ensure better communication with the recipients of their services”.

#### ● THE LIBRARY AS A PLACE OF REFLECTION AND DEBATE

“The role of civic education is to create opportunities and offer space for debate and reflection on local public matters. The library could provide such a space for discussing problems and challenges facing the municipal community based on sound arguments and knowledge. The library evokes associations of a neutral, rational and civilised place, and these should be the attributes of the discussions held there. Currently, municipalities often lacks the adequate space for meetings with other residents and debates on the topics of interest concerning their municipality.

The function of the library as a venue for debate and exchange of opinions about local public matters can be discharged in the form of regular discussions about the pertinent matters of the municipality such as the local transport network, the community culture centre’s activities or ecological issues. Very importantly, such meetings should be moderated over by the library staff or guests invited by them. An important task to perform before the debate would be to suggest sources of information about the topic at hand to the residents wishing to take part in the debate.

The library can also host regular meetings with representatives of the local authorities with a view to building a systematic dialogue with the citizens. Such meetings offer an outstanding opportunity for the residents to pose questions and share their observations

and remarks. For the heads of municipalities and village leaders, this is an invaluable source of information about problems, needs and ideas of solutions which are good for the municipality and are proposed by the residents”.

#### **LIBRARIANS FOR LIBRARIANS – PROPOSALS OF SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES IN THE AREA OF INFORMAL CIVIC EDUCATION**

At the end of the “Round Table”, also the Polish librarians were asked to prepare, in groups, their own ideas concerning informal civic education projects. Their task was not only to come up with a topic and the identify the required tasks but also to propose the target groups, plan subsequent stages of the work and indicate partners which could be involved in the implementation of the project. In proposing their ideas, the librarians could draw on the results of the earlier debates and workshops. In their work, they referred to their earlier analyses of the anticipated development of libraries, discussed the available library resources and their revealed shortages, identified specific obstacles to the implementation of specific tasks and debated on how they could be prevented. Such a framework adopted for the group’s work was intended to encourage the participants to think in project terms. In effect, the participants proposed four ideas of initiatives which could be implemented in public libraries in Poland and which can help develop citizen competences and attitudes of the participating individuals. The short descriptions of all the projects proposed by the participants of the “Round Table” for librarians based on the following criteria are provided below.

# PROJECT 1 VANISHING (?) TRADES FAIR

How can libraries initiate activities aimed to preserve and develop the local communities' identity? Should the cultivation of knowledge and memories of the histories (also relating to everyday life) of the local residents be among their tasks? With such questions to answer, the librarians prepared a project which deals with the issue of preserving knowledge about the so-called vanishing trades. Its basic framework is presented below:

## PREPARATION

- Identification of needs in the region and making an inventory of:
  - vanishing trades (people who pursue them);
  - those who are interested in the implementation of the project.
- Reaching those interested in the project and obtaining their consent to participate.

## BENEFICIARIES

- students from lower and upper secondary schools
- senior citizens (50+)
- local community

## AIMS OF THE PROJECT

- to promote intergenerational integration
- to learn about the history of the region and the trades and professions associated with it
- to enhance knowledge about vanishing trades
- to learn the skill of dialogue between generations
- to make use of the potential of young people and senior citizens
- to encourage active participation of both groups in the life of the local community

## MEASURES

- ensuring co-financing for the implementation of the project
- allocating tasks to the individuals involved in the project
- writing the plan of activities and adopting the budget
- recruiting participants
- contacts with other participants (senior citizens)
- workshops and meetings
  - seeking information in the sources (local archives, library resources, the Internet, interviews with the residents, etc.)
  - notes (learning how to prepare documentation from the research work done)
- Organisation of trade fairs:
  - preparing young people to make presentations on selected regional trades (based on the collected materials depicting the selected trades typical of the region)
  - technical preparation (preparing decorations and clothes and a relevant exhibition)
  - promotion
  - holding the fair
  - preparing a publication on vanishing trades

## PARTNERS

- schools
- local authorities
- sponsors
- local institutions
- local community
- the media (not only local)

## ROLE OF THE LIBRARY

- initiator
- coordinator
- organiser
- using the available resources: book collection, Internet, qualified staff

## ANTICIPATED DIFFICULTIES

- lack of interest (on the part of the local community, including young people)
- difficulties with reaching out to senior citizens
- lack of sponsors or funds

## RESOURCES AND SKILLS OF STAFF

- The following resources and competences of staff will be helpful in performing the aforementioned tasks by the library:
- knowledge of the needs of the local community
  - good organisation, division of tasks
  - ability to conduct interviews
  - ability to promote the project
  - ability to find the partners and win them over to the project
  - access to funding:
    - receiving grants
    - partners and sponsors

# PROJECT 2 THE A TO Z OF THE MUNICIPALITY / THE LIBRARY SEEKS ADVICE

Libraries may enhance citizens' awareness of those who use their services by supporting them in becoming critical observers and analysts of public life. For this, they have relevant materials which can provide readers with objective knowledge about the world. Libraries also have the required space and contacts among the local authorities which are needed for the organisation of meetings and debates for the residents on the most pertinent issues of the community. The implementation of such tasks can be facilitated by drawing on the framework presented below:

## AIMS OF THE PROJECT

- to raise political awareness of the local citizens
- to inspire a sense of the citizens' shared responsibility – an informed election of their representatives
- to foster the bonds between the councillors and the local residents – the library as a platform for contact

## RESOURCES

- human: persuasion and organisational skills of the library staff
- premises
- facilities

## PARTNERS

- schools
- local government
- NGOs
- volunteers
- mass media

## FINANCING

- own funds
- non-budgetary funds (raised by the library from foundations, local businesses and from local government and central administration funds)

## THREATS

- no willingness to cooperate on the part of the councillors
- lack of interest on the part of potential beneficiaries

## IMPLEMENTATION VENUE

- the library premises (with the library acting as coordinator)

## MEASURES

- Offer for the Municipality Council
  - meeting of the Council's representatives with readers
  - launching a dedicated e-mail address to which questions on various matters within the competencies of the local government can be sent
  - interview with councillors conducted by young people
  - councillors' duty hours to meet with residents (perhaps even organised in the library)
- "Candid questions box" relating to such issues as:
  - problems, expectations, proposed activities
  - All the proposed topics will later be analysed and sent to the relevant addresses by the library, which will also subscribe to the questions posed.

- Paint a poster / Draw a cartoon
  - young people design a poster and the councillors assist in writing the caption for it (the process is intended to reduce the barrier existing between these two groups)
  - at the end of this stage, a joint activity will be organised (an integration event), which could include the following forms of activity: public reading of texts, a sports match (in a selected discipline) between representatives of different social groups, recording a joint DVD documenting the event, painting a graffiti
- Councillors on camera
  - a course in seeking information allowing for an objective evaluation of the work of the local communities (for the local community)
  - creating a web page for the project (with all the materials collected under the project and a guide to observing and evaluating the work of the elected local government representatives).

## PROJECT 3 BRIDGE BETWEEN GENERATIONS

The library can also work towards obliterating the divisions between representatives of different generations. The resultant integration of local residents will make it easier for them to form a community that can take better care of its interests. In this way, they can become more informed citizens engaged in matters of the community and pursuing them while observing the principles of participatory democracy. To be effective, the implementation of the project should stipulate the following stages:

### BENEFICIARIES

- representatives of the 50+ generation and youth aged 16+

### AIMS

- to acquire knowledge and practical computer skills by people aged 50+
- to enhance communication skills between the generations
- to create an educational game (city or town history)

### NEEDS (RESOURCES)

- four computers
- two trainers from the Secondary School for Information Technology
- room with Internet access and catering (external)

### PARTNERS

- Secondary School for Information Technology
- mass media
- patisserie
- Internet provider

### SPONSOR

- city mayor (cooperation with the mayor may help increase the project's stature and encourage more people to participate)

### THREATS

- potential beneficiaries (it is likely that few people will express their interest)

### PRIZES

It would be worthwhile to remember to express appreciation to all persons involved in the project, especially if they volunteered their own time to do this. This could be done by:

- congratulation letters to senior citizens
- diplomas for the trainers
- trip (a joint excursion for all the participants in the project)

### MEASURES

Afternoon classes on basic computer skills and Internet surfing will be held for six weeks in the library or in the computer room of a school. Their participants will include both senior residents (i.e. people aged 50+) and young people over 16 years of age. An important component of the classes will be to use the Internet to evaluate the activities of the local and central authorities and to practise performing various official procedures using the Internet by the participants (familiarity with e-administration).

### OUTPUTS

Participation in the project will allow senior residents to acquire new competences related to using multimedia and Internet surfing with the support of representatives of the young generation. On the other hand, young people will have an opportunity to acquire a great deal of valuable information on the functioning of social world as well as evaluate the activities carried out by the authorities. In this way, both groups will be familiarised with problems that representatives of the other age group have to deal with. Their working together will enhance the integration of the different generations and will foster citizen participation of young and elderly people, thus preventing social exclusion of the latter group.

## PROJECT 4 “ECONOMIC AWARENESS”

The assumptions underpinning this project, intended to address the poor knowledge of financial products among the Polish society at large, have been discussed in detail in the paper by Grzegorz Makowski. Their key elements which should be included in the implementation of such projects are itemised below.

### BENEFICIARIES

- lower-secondary school pupils (doing voluntary work, for which they can get credits in their school certificate)
- senior citizens (people aged 50+)

### AIMS OF THE PROJECT

- to convey knowledge about consumer rights and operational principles of commercial banks and their products
- to convey knowledge about citizen rights through the development of economic awareness related to using cash and bank products as well as related consumer rights
- to develop practical skills to evaluate individual financial tools available on the market
- to foster exchange and integration between generation owing to cooperation of representatives of various age groups
- to develop social participation attitudes among young people (working for the benefit of others)

### PARTNERS

- school
- Office of Competition and Consumer Protections
- commercial banks
- citizen advice bureau
- social welfare centre
- senior citizens club
- university of the third age

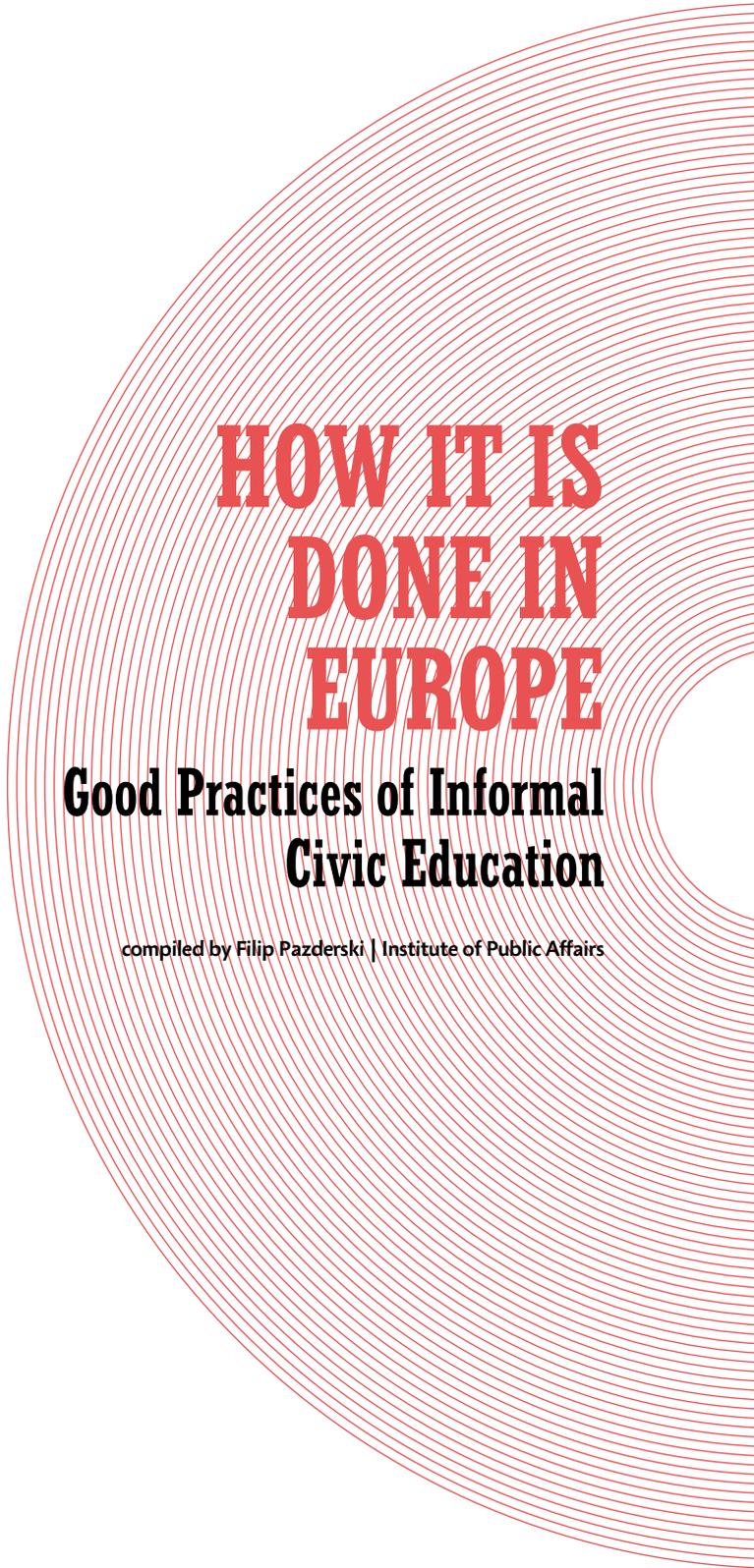
### MEASURES

- Economic diagnosis (related to the knowledge of senior citizens about various financial tools):
  - preparing a survey addressed to the elderly participants
  - working meetings with a sociologist and NGOs to prepare the topical content of the research
- Knowledge exchange (an open meeting to provide information on different financial products)
- Workshops (including role-playing) under the name “The devil’s not so black”, addressed to two age groups:
  - training of young people so that they can later teach elderly people how to use banking products (young people will more easily grasp the overall context)
  - after that, training of senior citizens (young people pass knowledge to senior citizens, also with the use of computer equipment)
- Setting up a youth club and a senior citizens – an Intergenerational Bank Club

### THREATS

- Attitudes opposing cooperation as part of innovative activities proposed by the school
- Lack of willingness to engage in the proposed activities on the part of young people

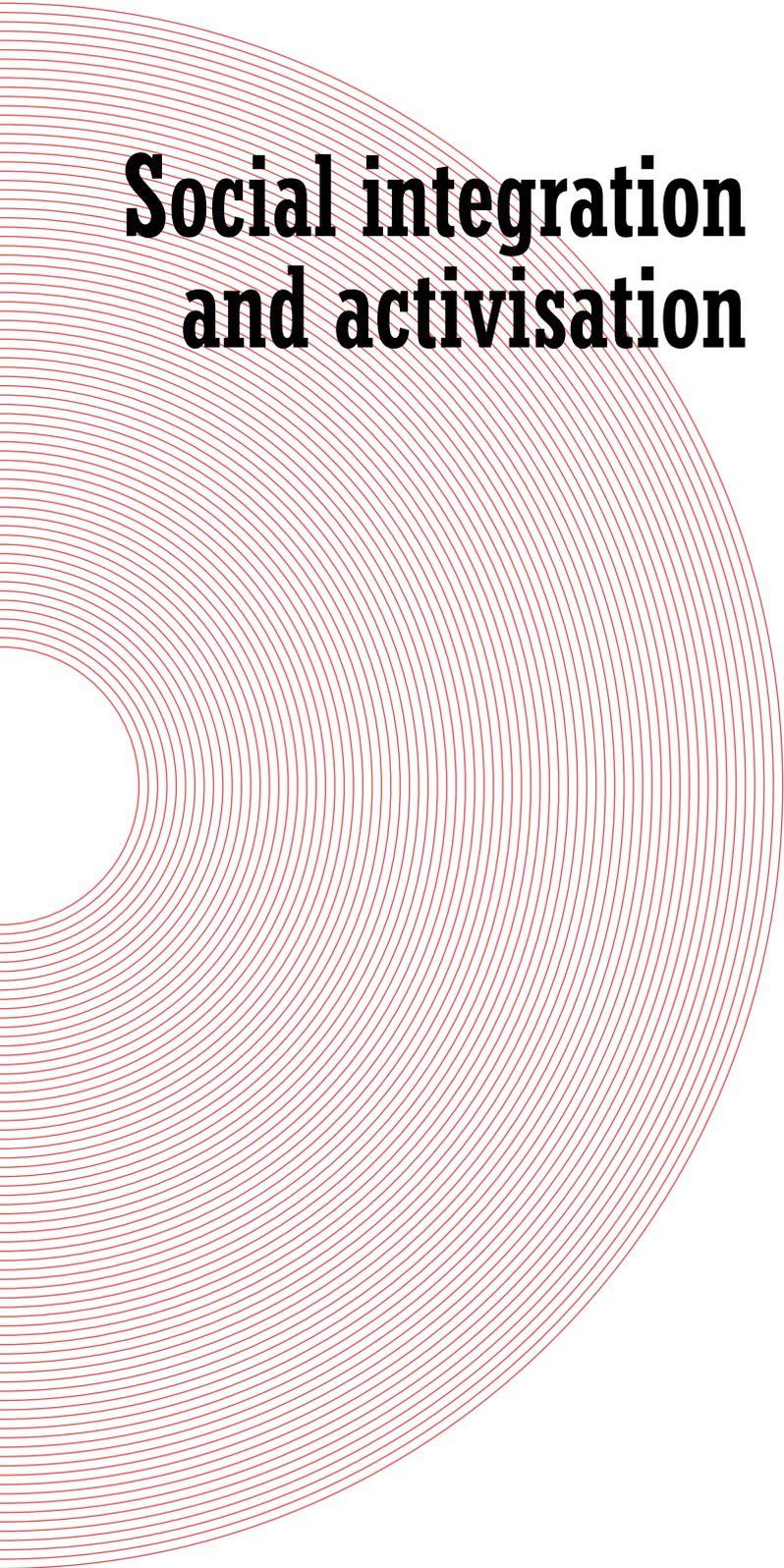




# **HOW IT IS DONE IN EUROPE**

## **Good Practices of Informal Civic Education**

compiled by Filip Pazderski | Institute of Public Affairs



# Social integration and activation

**T**he basic principles of democracy provide for establishment within the democratic system of rules for functioning of the community which ensure respect for the rights of minorities. One commentator actually noted that democracy may be defined as “a system which reasonably combines majority rule with protection of the rights of minorities”<sup>1</sup>. Societies of the European Union, Polish society included, are being subjected to progressing diversification, meaning that there is a growing number of all and sundry minorities arising in their midst. This state of affairs has already received legal sanction. At the European level, this occurred by way of two EU directives – one mandating equal treatment for all persons irrespective of their racial or ethnic origin<sup>2</sup>, and the other mandating equal treatment in the context of hiring and employment<sup>3</sup>. These directives take into account many protected traits, including ethnic and racial origin, religious affiliation and belief, disability, age, and sexual orientation. The overarching principle is that no individual should suffer poorer treatment (i.e. discrimination) on account of having one or more such traits. The mechanics of the European Union’s legal system mean that, by way of appropriate legal regulations, analogous protections should apply within the national jurisdictions of every EU Member State. Implementation of such protections is an expression not only of respect for the representatives of a minority who may suffer discrimination on account of having a protected trait, but also of the

<sup>1</sup> See M. Rymcza, *Edukacja obywatelska w systemie demokratycznym*, “Trzeci Sektor” 2009, no 17, p 4.

<sup>2</sup> European Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, OJ L 180/22, 19 July 2000.

<sup>3</sup> European Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation, OJ L 303/16, 2 December 2000.

significance of tapping the energies, skills, and resources of all members of society for purposes of the European economy.

It is representatives of exactly such a minority social group – immigrants (defined for these purposes as residents of a country of an ethnic origin other than the one predominating in that country) – who are the recipients of the project presented below. Presentation of actions addressed to immigrants in this publication is also associated with two major issues now arising in various European societies (for the moment, to a lesser degree in Poland than in some other countries), namely the global increase of migration trends<sup>4</sup> and the pronounced aging processes which are driving up the median age of many Western societies<sup>5</sup>. Under this set of circumstances, skilful, well-considered management of the migration process and inclusion of foreigners in the economic systems of individual Member States becomes a key objective the attainment of which will enable European Union countries to keep up their economic growth<sup>6</sup>. This will contribute to stability of their labour markets and, consequently, of their pensions and social security systems and, in the longer term, enabling members of these societies to continue enjoying a high standard of living.

These points eloquently testify to the value of projects geared at activation of representatives of

social groups whose opportunities for betterment and growth are smaller (and whose risk of discrimination is greater) and at their deeper integration within the dominant society. Such projects may centre on cultivating certain (cultural, social, and/or vocational) skills among minorities, providing them with opportunities for contact and exchange of experiences with representatives of other groups (including the ones predominating in the given sphere), and on cultivating their self-esteem (for instance through sharing their own skills or social assets with others). Significant result of such actions include inclusion of the minority group members in decision-making of local or nationwide political groups to which they belong (or to which they would like to belong). Such measures are bound to make them more active members of the community, which is one of the basic goals of civic education, also as pursued on an informal basis. It was considerations such as these which lay at the heart of the Czech project presented below.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Economic and Social survey 2004: International Migration*, E/2004/75/Rev.1/Add.1, ST/ESA/291/Add.1, p 30 – <http://www.un.org/esa/policy/wess/wess2004files/part2web/part2web.pdf> [access: 29 September 2010].

<sup>5</sup> According to some estimates, without immigration, the population of Europe may shrink from 728 million registered individuals in 2000 to 589 million in 2050 – please see the United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Economic and Social survey 2004*, op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>6</sup> Quantitative data indicates unequivocally that the European economy benefits from immigration to our continent (as well as from the free flow of workers within the continent), and also that European economic growth is increasingly dependent on immigrants. According to some estimates, were it not for immigration, the population of Europe would have shrunk by 4.4 million persons during the 1990s (over 1990 through 2000, immigration accounted for 89% of the increase of the European population) – see Global Commission on International Migration, *Migration in an interconnected world: New directions for action. Report of the Global Commission on International Migration*, Geneva 2005, p 14.

LIBRARIES MAY  
PROVIDE SERVICES ENABLING

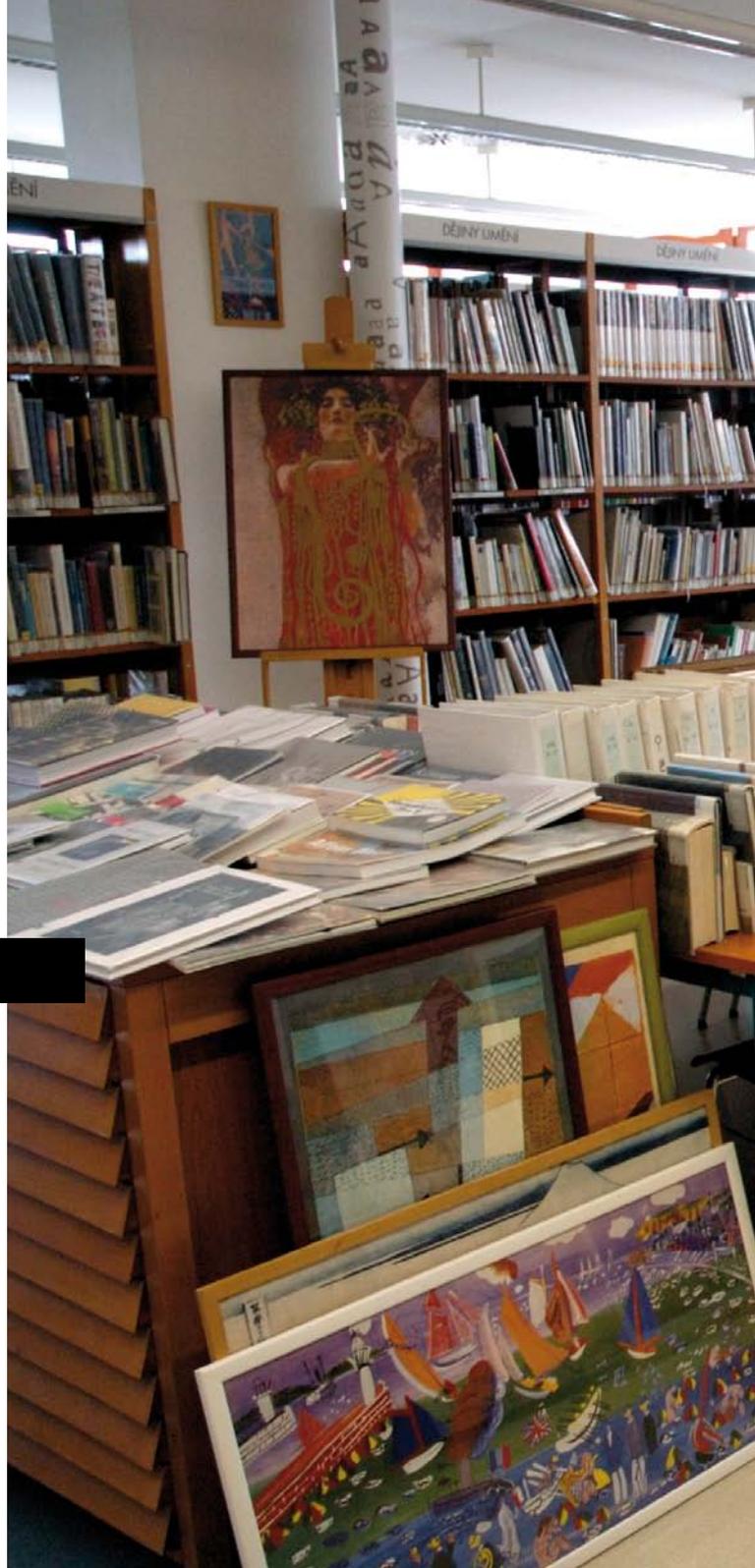
# INTEGRATION

OF SOCIAL GROUPS WITH  
SMALLER CHANCES  
FOR GROWTH

## “LIBRARIES FOR ALL”

Veronika Chrušćová | Municipal Library of Prague, Czech Republic  
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The main theme of the international project entitled “Libraries for All” (Knihovny pro všechny) lies in motivating libraries to develop and implement new services for the benefit of supra-local communities. For quite some time now, the European Communities have provided a venue and a forum in which the paths of representatives of different nationalities and cultural circles cross. However different their backgrounds may





ELEKTRONICKÝ  
KATALOG  
OBJEDNÁVÁNÍ



▲ **Veronika Chrušćová** – since 2008, works at the Municipal Library of Prague (MLP) at the Communication Department. She has coordinated several international social projects related to issues like book illustration and new ways of opening up libraries for vision impaired people and foreigners. Established a library theatre ensemble, *Výstředník* (Eccentric).

be, these various people share the common desire to build a new, friendly home for all. Libraries are well placed to address this need, being as they are centres for pursuit of various studies and research and a meeting place for people of different generations, with various interests or with shared hobbies. Libraries ought to open their doors to all, not only to people wishing to educate themselves or to search for information, but also people seeking relaxation or entertainment.

### **THE IDEA OF THE PROJECT**

The project under discussion has the goal of transforming local libraries into points of integration for different communities and groups by introducing a new system for serving foreigners and by adapting the services currently offered to the needs of immigrants. The project, underway since 2008, is financed by the European Union and is subsumed under the European Strategies of Multicultural Education (ESME).

Implementation of the project is proceeding at the international and local levels. At the international level, the partner countries comprise Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, and Sweden, with every partner country represented by an organisation (usually an NGO) which cares for foreigners. In the case of Germany, this is a library.

#### ● **THE PROJECT COORDINATORS ARE AS FOLLOWS:**

- Austria – Social Architecture Team Three/okay. *zusammen leben*/Advice Center for Migration and Integration;
- Czech Republic – Multikulturní centrum Praha (Multicultural Centre of Prague);
- Germany – Stadtbücherei Frankfurt am Main (The Public Library of Frankfurt am Main);
- Sweden – Immigrant-institutet (Immigrant Institute).

The project coordinators have convened an advisory committee which oversees due implementation of the project in all the partner countries. The group of experts assembled within this committee has drawn up a set of instructions on working with foreigners and circulated it among the libraries; it also administers the project's internet portal, [librariesforall.eu](http://librariesforall.eu).

At the local level, the coordinators partner with libraries in each country, working with them to devise means of attracting foreigners to these institutions. The institutions chosen to take part in the project are typically located in places with large migrant populations, e.g. on the outskirts of cities, and belong to the category of generally accessible public libraries. At this level, participants in the individual countries include:

- In Austria – Lustenau and Götzis (Vorarlberg);
- In the Czech Republic – Městská knihovna v Praze (Municipal Library of Prague);
- In Germany – Internationale Bibliothek in Gallus und Sindlingen (International Library in Gallus and Sindlingen);
- In Sweden – Biskopsgården (Göteborg).

## **ACTIONS PURSUED AT THE LOCAL LEVEL IN THE INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES**

### ● AUSTRIA

- New books in Turkish, Serbian, Croatian, and Spanish;
- New language courses for women – Deutsch zum Frühstück (German for Breakfast);
- Turkish-language reading instruction for children, consultations for women;
- Translation of books into German and bi-lingual editions (Sprich mit mir und hör mir zu! – Speak with me and listen to me!).

The Austrian project partners provide women with courses as well as with consultation services. These measures are geared to encourage Muslim housewives to take a break from their daily routines in a friendly, helpful library where they can learn useful skills in a welcoming atmosphere. Another interesting proposal is comprised in Turkish-language reading sessions for children. On the one hand, the point of these exercises is to keep children of Turkish parents living in Austria in touch with their language and their roots; on the other, by employing bilingual texts immigrants benefit from help with learning German.

### ● SWEDEN

- The Language and Book cafe (in Swedish and Kurdish);
- Computer courses;
- English courses;
- Help for pupils and children with their homework assignments;
- Art workshops;
- Access to foreign-language literature.

The breakdown of the immigrant communities of each country participating in the project is different. Scandinavia is a destination primarily for immigrants from Africa, and it is with them in mind that the Language and Book cafe, staffed by disabled persons, makes available 92 different periodicals in Swedish as well as in other languages. Another activity worth noting in the context



of the Swedish project is comprised in the art workshops; participants can try their hand at different techniques, and the works produced by them are displayed in the library, which makes for a strong incentive to the participants.

### ● GERMANY

- Assistance for pupils with German lessons;
- New activities for all family members.

In Austria as well as in Germany, the largest immigrant population is that of Turks. The library offers support to all the members of families of Turkish origin; as the children do their homework or paint under the tutelage of trained librarians, their parents can take German classes.

## ● CZECH REPUBLIC

There are 432,000 foreigners legally residing in the Czech Republic, accounting for 4.2% of the country's population. Immigrants from Slovakia, Ukraine, Vietnam, Russia, and Poland predominate. The local Czech partner of the project is the Municipal Library in Prague, the biggest institution of its sort in the country. The Municipal Library in Prague actually comprises forty-four branches plus four travelling libraries; it offers 2.2 million volumes to 200,000 registered users served by 500 employees. Aside from its typical library functions, the Municipal Library in Prague also organises concerts, workshops, meetings with writers, theatre performances, and debates open to adults as well as to children.

### **REGISTRATION OF FOREIGNERS AS READERS**

Registration at the Municipal Library in Prague is open to anybody who presents a permanent residence permit issued by the Czech authorities or, in the case of EU nationals, proof of identity. The annual readership fee is CZK 60 (approximately EUR 2.50). Foreign students may register on the basis of other documents, such as an ISIC card or an ERASMUS card, as long as these documents indicate that they study in the Czech Republic. Other foreigners should present a residence permit specifying a fixed address or, alternately, make a deposit of CZK 1,000 (approximately EUR 40), which is refundable after one year. Registration through a guarantor is also possible. The Czech rules governing use of libraries by foreigners are quite relaxed; as at launch of the "Libraries for All" project, no other country offered such a liberal registration regime.

In 2009, our library began cooperating with other organisations. In June of that year, we joined the Prague Multicultural Centre in convening an advisory committee composed of linguists, librarians, and representatives of NGOs and of other institutions. The committee came to the conclusion that the library as well as the Prague immigrant community stand to benefit from:

- Basic Czech courses;
- Computer courses;
- Access to two information counters;
- Information materials in foreign languages;
- Training for readers;
- Cooperation with the Berkat organisation.

**The basic-level Czech language courses** were launched at Prague's Central Library in January 2010. They are offered in collaboration with the Centre for Integration of Foreigners, recipient of the European Language Award LABEL in 2009. The first lessons drew between 50 and 60 participants. Initially, the course sessions were led by two instructors, but it soon became apparent that this is not enough in the face of such demand; another course at another branch of the Municipal Library of Prague was promptly organised, and some of the participants were transferred there. These additional courses are led by one instructor only, but the class size varies between 15 and 20 participants. All groups meet twice per week for sessions of 90 minutes each. The fee is CZK 50 (approximately EUR 2) per lesson – quite a favourable rate if one considers that the going rate for one hour of language instruction in the free market approaches CZK 300 (approximately EUR 12). The didactic process employs special teaching methods. Every lesson has its separate theme (for example "the hospital", "shopping", or "the office") and is devoted to vocabulary and phraseology associated with that theme. Most of the participants hail from Western Europe and from the United States; this is at variance with projections of the organisers, who were expecting greater participation by immigrants from Eastern Europe. Completion of the language course is attested to by a certificate (every participant who attended at least 20 lessons is eligible to receive one).

**Evaluation of the language courses.** The Centre for Integration of Foreigners has devised a course evaluation system which makes use of input from the participants. The results of these evaluations confirm the high quality of the courses organised at the library,



FORMANKA • RESTAURACE • PIVNICE  
ZAHRADNI RESTAURACE • TERASA •

# KNIHOVNA

MESTSKA KNIHOVNA  
V PRAZE

with the participants praising the instructors for their methodology and their communication skills as well as expressing appreciation for the means of organising and propagating the courses and, importantly, for their price.

In their replies to the questionnaire, the course participants also indicated that they will recommend the courses to their friends because they have been receiving positive feedback from social circles in which they move – their families as well as their colleagues at work or school have noted that, since they began attending the courses, their Czech began to improve. Also, all the participants declared that they wish to continue learning Czech (the library duly launched an additional summer course over July and August, which was joined by 40 people) and that they would also like to join in design, computer, and cooking courses.

Apart from feedback on the course, the questionnaires also provided interesting demographic data about the course participants. Many, as it turns out, are educated to secondary or university level and work in the Czech Republic as journalists, photographers, visual artists, or even managers, with considerable diversity in the specific jobs held by them; others are still students.

Worth quoting here are some of the comments written in the questionnaires by way of a thank-you to the course instructors: “I love the sessions and the instructors themselves!”, “Special thanks are due to Ms Alena – she’s a very good instructor, and I would like to continue my studies under her care”, “I now have a better understanding for the rules of life in the Czech Republic”, “I want to study economics”, “Thank you for your big-hearted approach!”.

The **computer course**, meanwhile, was launched in October 2009 at the Orator library in Prague’s 11th district, home to many immigrants from Vietnam and from Ukraine. The course fee was set at CZK 50 (approximately EUR 2), and the curriculum was structured for participants with little or no previous experience using computers. The courses are held in

Czech, so participants are expected to have at least a basic working command of this language, although they may also draw on the assistance of a translator (who is exempted from the tuition fee).

The issue of charging fees for the courses has been the subject of much debate. In the end, the view that, given the high quality of the courses, they should not be entirely free of charge prevailed. The fee charged is hardly a usurious one, so the courses should still be affordable for anyone wishing to take part; the library passes all tuition receipts on to the course organisers, and it makes its facilities available free of charge. The courses take two hours every week, and most of the participants are women..

At the two **information counters**, foreigners can obtain the information needed by them and collect materials of interest furnished by non-governmental organisations, administrative authorities, and an assortment of private and state institutions. The organisers have noticed that the information counters provide valuable services not only to immigrants, but also to the organisations themselves, which receive an outlet for distributing their own materials as well as for gathering those published by other organisations, which they can then pass on as part of their own work. The information counters also offer access to a computer with e-learning facilities and to foreign periodicals. The information counters at the Central Library and at its branch in the Opatov district offer internet access, which is used mainly by foreigners.

Visitors to the information counters can also avail themselves **of library materials with basic information**. All the texts in question have been translated into Russian, Ukrainian, Mongolian, Vietnamese, Chinese, English, and German.

An important element of the entire project is presented in **training for librarians**. October 2009 witnessed an information seminar about migration in the Czech Republic; the workshops organised in February 2010 likewise enjoyed considerable interest.

Seeing as the specialised designations and phrases used by librarians in their daily work may be difficult to understand for non-specialists, it is important that librarians make a conscious effort to use simple language – especially when dealing with foreigners. Towards this end, in the course of the workshops the librarians learned certain easily comprehensible phrases and then received an opportunity to practice using them in conversations with foreigners.

The library is now pursuing cooperation with the **Berkat organisation** (Happiness and mercy in Chechnya), which cares for immigrants from Chechnya and Afghanistan. Our joint undertakings have included an introductory gathering accompanied by contests for children.

The library maintains a website dedicated to the project at [www.mlp.cz/libraries](http://www.mlp.cz/libraries). Visitors to the site can read course curricula and schedules, the themes of upcoming Czech courses, all the foreign language materials (in printer-friendly format), and ads for foreign artists (these were added during the last phase of the project).

### **OPINIONS OF LIBRARIANS ABOUT THE PROJECT**

In May 2010, librarians were invited to fill out a questionnaire about the “Libraries for All” project and about foreigner attendance at their institution. The replies to this questionnaire have indicated that Municipal Library of Prague personnel think highly of the project, and that they have taken due note of the fact that it has opened the library to readers from new social groups.

The respondents have also suggested that the libraries might consider expanding the scope of their activities tailored for immigrants (by adding, for instance, clubs, social and cultural courses, or childcare). In this regard, alas, financial restrictions continue to make themselves felt.

The librarians were in agreement that the institution employing them has done well by embarking

on a path of change, and that it should persist in this direction. The library should not limit its activities to lending out books and enforcing their timely return; it should also offer other services, and it is such “new and improved” libraries which will be more likely to attract foreigners. The library should not tarry in taking measures to attract this new demographic; otherwise, it risks losing the foreigners to other institutions, such as language schools or book clubs operated by bookstores.

The library should be a place at which an immigrant can find not only competent and efficient service, but also a friendly atmosphere conducive to contact with helpful organisations and with other members of her/his ethnic group.

### **PLANS FOR THE FUTURE**

The project concluded in September 2010 with an exhibition entitled “My Home”. Foreign artists and creative craftsmen from abroad who had not yet had the opportunity to show their works received the opportunity to offer them to the library. An exhibition of works executed in various techniques was thus brought together and displayed at the library’s Opatov branch; works by the youngest contributors to the show were displayed in the children’s section of the library.

Although the original project is now finished, the Municipal Library of Prague plans to continue working with the Centre for Integration of Foreigners in offering Czech language courses under a different formula. The library will now make its facilities available in return for a symbolic fee but, in return, will expect more training for its staff. The plans of the Centre for Integration of Foreigners provide for Czech language courses addressed to housewives.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

By joining in this project, the library is cultivating its own image in what is an increasingly multi-ethnic society, but this is far from the only benefit accruing to the Municipal Library of Prague. Thanks to its involvement in the project, it has gained many new co-workers (the library

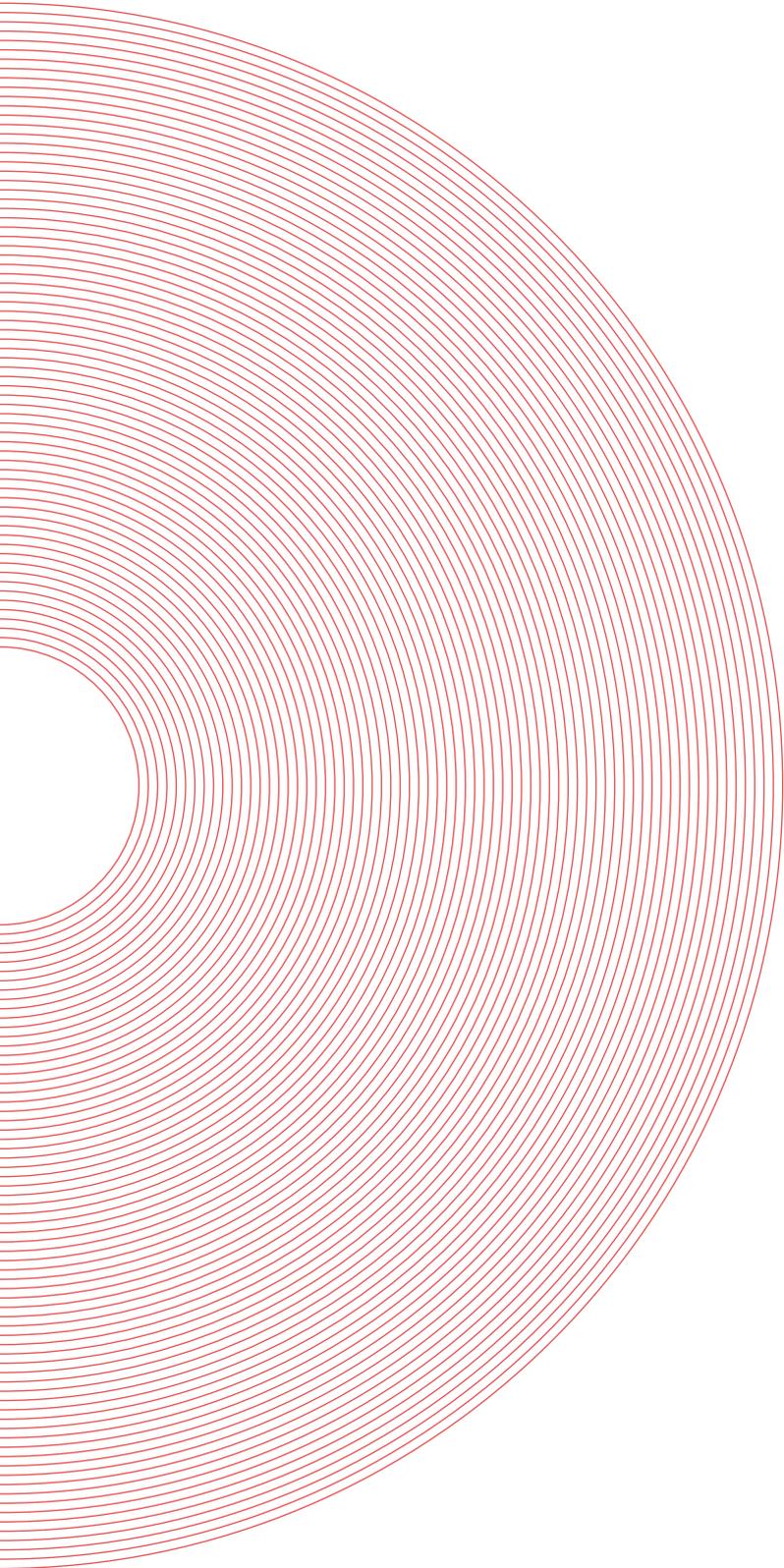


could not execute such a multi-faceted project without contributions by outside experts) without incurring any own costs (out of the library's budget). The employees involved in the project agree that activities of this sort constitute a valuable experience for the library, if only because it makes for a greater circle of readers. Given these various benefits and the risk-free nature of the entire undertaking, the decision to continue some of the activities hereto subsumed under the project was a relatively simple one.

The fact that some of the other project partners have not been sitting on their hands only made for added incentive to continue work. The Central Library houses a coffee shop which will be decorated and organised along the lines of similar establishments operating in Sweden; also worth noting are the planned measures addressed to entire immigrant families.

It merits emphasising that the activities described herein are not limited in their ambit to immigrants – Czech citizens have also been taking part. A Czech-Vietnamese translator, for instance, has approached the library with a request for assistance in establishing its Vietnamese branch at a marketplace at which many Vietnamese work; in exchange for its help, the library has been receiving support in sourcing Vietnamese literature.

Yet the most positive aspect of these efforts lies in the opportunity for a bringing together at these European crossroads of people who may come from different backgrounds but who share a similar outlook and similar objectives, people who are happy to work together in building a new, shared home. Or, in the specific case of the Prague library, of forty-four homes!



# Civic cooperation

**E**ffective civic operation depends, among other elements, on group action skills – or, in this specific case, on the ability to effectively work within a group of fellow citizens. On the one hand, this enables the individual members of a community to develop a feel for their power to shape the reality of a liberal democracy through the political rights extending to each citizen and through the political decision-making process which provide the basis for the rule of law. On the other hand, much importance attaches to identifying a group – the broader, the better – of entities with which the individual shares the same objectives and the same world outlook; establishing cooperation with such entities amplifies the individual’s voice and facilitates attainment of these assumed objectives.

Not only do activities in the realm of informal civic education facilitate gaining knowledge about individual rights and about the procedures in place within the democratic system, they should also contribute to awareness of the value of cooperation with other members of the given community and of the need to solicit appropriate institutional and organisational partners. Practical knowledge of this sort is best gained through hands-on experience in the context of shared initiatives.

A good opportunity to develop such skills is associated with such issues as are of especial interest to the members of the given community or to residents of the given locality. A typical example would be comprised in environmental protection, for this area perhaps more than any other calls for joint effort by all the members of the given community, young and old alike, and requires that they all share the same basic values. Even one incorrigible litterbug can do vast amounts of damage to the achievements of others. The same basic rule, incidentally, applies to many other problems of the community which are best resolved in cooperation with other individuals and entities. Attitudes of openness towards such cooperation for the common good should be cultivated, for instance through shared care for the natural habitat. An example of this sort of activity (pursued in cooperation with many partners on the local as well as the nationwide scale, and also in other countries around the world) is presented in the project discussed below.

EFFECTIVE CIVIC  
OPERATION IS ALSO ABOUT

# GROUP WORK

SKILLS

## "TREE DAY" EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME

Jacek Bożek | Klub Gaja, Poland  
[klubgaja@klubgaja.pl](mailto:klubgaja@klubgaja.pl), [www.klubgaja.pl](http://www.klubgaja.pl)

### ABOUT KLUB GAJA

Klub Gaja is a leading civic and social organisation working towards protection of the natural environment and of animal rights in Poland. It was founded in 1988 by Jacek Bożek; since 2004, it is officially recognised as a public usefulness organisation.

Klub Gaja has the mission of protecting the Earth, of its natural environment and its biodiversity, for the







benefit of its current inhabitants as well as of future generations.

Klub Gaja **is active in the field of environmental protection**. It pursues nationwide programmes and campaigns devoted to protection of rivers, riverbeds, and trees and to forest development geared at minimising the impact of climate change. In its work, it tries to remind the general public about the environmental damage wrought by man in his myriad activities and about our responsibility for the natural environment. Klub Gaja also sets itself the objective of increasing general awareness of the importance of protecting animals, reminding people that respect for animal rights is an integral part of environmental protection in the broader sense as well as having a direct influence on the quality of life of us humans.

The organisation **also pursues educational activity**, inspiring children, youth, teachers, businesses, local communities, and administrative bodies at central level to protect the Earth. Participants of Klub Gaja's various programmes plant trees, clean rivers and streams, gather trash, and care for animals. In their educational work pursued in the context of various meetings and workshops, the organisation's members rely on unconventional methods and on various forms of art.

#### **THE IDEA BEHIND THE "TREE DAY" PROGRAMME**

"Tree Day" is an educational programme of Klub Gaja launched in 2003. On 10 October of that year, people all around the world set out to plant trees; the organisation's message "Let's plant a tree for peace" reached 35 countries.

The programme is educational in its character – it aims to increase awareness of ecological issues, specifically in the aspects of environmental protection and climate change. The joint tree planting undertaken as part of the programme contributes to preservation of forests, thus helping to reduce the side effects of climate change.

“Tree Day” presents an example of educational activity which is geared at active participation and is devised to foster a sense of social responsibility directed at sustainable growth and at cooperation, always with due respect for the natural environment. The programme relies on local activity, especially among children and youth, and aims for wide social impact, starting with local communities and self-government structures and proceeding to social organisations and business entities. The “Tree Day” programme integrates society on the following levels:

- **Environmental protection** – educational and informational activities with respect to planting and protecting trees and ecological education geared at human use of natural resources in a harmonious, sustainable way which guarantees their renewal and preservation for future generations;
- **Economic** – planting trees and forests reduces the negative impact of climate change, reduces micro- as well as macro-economic costs, and reduces the debt burden on future generations;
- **Social** – the programme provides for multi-faceted international cooperation in the area of environmental protection through broad social commitment.

Klub Gaja’s various activities based on the above premises have won it plaudits by Poland’s leading environmental protection authorities. Maciej Nowicki, former minister of the environment, stated, “it is my deep belief that the ‘Tree Day’ project is an excellent one from the perspective of educating people about balanced development. It attracts local communities, especially children and youth, and increases awareness of our joint responsibility for rational use of natural resources, for safekeeping them for future generations. I am convinced that this project will contribute to improved awareness and understanding of the significance of environmental protection and of biodiversity in the climate as well as contributing to the development of pro-ecological attitudes. Accordingly, I am happy to become the honorary patron of this programme, and I extend my



▲ **Jacek Bożek** – social entrepreneur, founder and, since 1989, president of Klub Gaja. He has completed many courses (in Poland and abroad) dealing with ecology and social issues. Creator and organiser of many social activities related to environmental protection and promotion of animal rights. Repeatedly honoured for his activities, e.g. by the Foundation Polcul, the General Director of the Polish national forests service, and the Polish Minister of the Environment.

wishes for success and for satisfaction from their work to all its organisers and participants”.

#### **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE “TREE DAY” PROGRAMME – DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS**

● **OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS, IMPLEMENTATION OF THE “TREE DAY” PROGRAMME IN POLAND HAS YIELDED THE FOLLOWING RESULTS:**

- In 2008, the overwhelmingly positive reaction of society at large made it possible to plant 73,700 trees which were then entered in the “One billion trees for the planet” database of the United Nations. Pupils of schools around the country gathered a total of 270 tonnes of scrap paper. The participants numbered 61,400, including schoolchildren and persons enrolled in various educational programmes, members of local communities, public agencies, local government and business sectors;
- The positive response continued into 2009, when another 63,000 trees were planted and entered in the “One billion trees for the planet” database.

Schoolchildren assembled 377 tonnes of scrap paper, and the aggregate number of participants reached 40,000;

- In 2008 as well as in 2009, the slogan “Let’s plant a tree for peace” was heard in 35 countries around the world.

#### ● INVOLVEMENT IN ACTIVITIES

Apart from planting saplings, “Tree Day” involves landscaping work, identifying old trees which were already standing during historic events, gathering seeds, gathering scrap paper (with the funds thus generated earmarked for saving horses from culling), workshops and sessions with thematic groups, and field activities.

By encouraging participants to engage in role playing exercises, create artworks, take photographs, or write, the “Tree Day” programme also fosters ingenuity and creativeness as well as encourage participants to explore the relationships between the natural environment, society, and culture.

#### ● GATHER SCRAP PAPER AND SAVE HORSES - AN EXERCISE IN SYNERGY

As we go about our daily lives, all of us generate waste. The most simple, quotidian ways of caring for the environment comprise economising on paper, water, and energy. In this spirit, anybody can contribute to keeping the planet clean – and make life easier for others – by dropping a used piece of paper in a dedicated container, not in the general trash. The “Tree Day” programme includes the component “Collect wastepaper and save horses”, which – thanks to the positive response of all and sundry participants – has made it possible to spare many horses from the butcher’s knife and to let them live out their natural spans at horse therapy centres, on farms, and in horse shelters.

#### ● ART FOR EARTH

In its activities, Klub Gaja makes use of different forms of art. The “Tree Day” programme inspires us not only to simple activities such as planting trees, but also to

Pre-school teacher  
from Gniezno:  
THANKS TO PARTICIPATION  
IN THE “TREE DAY” PROJECT,  
OUR PUPILS LEARN TO

COHABITATE  
WITH NATURE

creative debate on various subjects, conducted in a happy atmosphere and employing means of expression such as painting, theatre, happenings, and street events. Art is put to use as an instrument. By appealing to people’s emotions with symbols, we take them on a journey to a multi-dimensional world. As individuals or as groups, we perceive the world in our own way; in a better world, the Earth, man, and faith become one.

#### The multinational dimension of the “Trees for Peace” programme

Every year, Klub Gaja takes its message of “Let’s plant trees for peace” to 35 countries around the world, including Poland, the Czech Republic, Italy, Columbia, Pakistan, Peru, Venezuela, Ecuador, Argentina, Hungary, Latvia, Holland, Japan, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, India, and Iceland. Everyone is welcome to plant a tree for peace. Our call to action has been answered by the membership of Ashoka



(the international fellowship of social innovators) and by many governmental agencies and human rights organisations. In many instances, “Tree Day” activities have come to include not only planting, but also all and sundry projects dealing with environmental protection, cooperation, and tolerance.

### **“Tree Day” as part of the international “Billion Trees for the Planet” campaign**

Since 2007, the “Tree Day” programme is part of the “Billion Trees for the Planet” programme of the United Nations Environmental Protection Program (UNEP) – an international tree-planting initiative designed to address the challenges posed by global warming.

The campaign goals for 2008 and 2009 called for planting 7 billion trees. “Now that we have achieved the goals of our campaign, we appeal to private individuals, businesses, civic and social organisations, and public administration bodies to ensure broader publicity for this initiative before the climate change conference which will be held in Copenhagen in late 2009”, said Achim Steiner, Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations and director of UNEP, in the course of the campaign.

In appreciation of Klub Gaja’s contribution, Achim Steiner wrote, “it is my pleasure to send you the album Billion Tree Campaign published recently by United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) featuring Klub Gaja Tree Day – Trees for Peace project. I wish you many achievements in the realization of the Tree Day program and congratulate you on the success in mobilization of participants in 35 countries of the world to join in planting trees with the intention to promote peace on earth”.

### **HOW TO MAKE USE OF COOPERATION WITH VARIOUS PARTNERS AND OF THE RESULTS OF THE ACTIVITIES UNDERWAY**

#### **● INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

By its very nature, the “Tree Day” programme inspires international cooperation. In its implementation

over the years of 2008 through 2010 with assistance from Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway, Klub Gaja cooperated, among other entities, with Skógræktarfélag Grindavíkur, an Icelandic social organisation working to plant trees in Grindavik in Iceland’s south east. Our other partners include Angus Council Parks Services and Rosehill Farm in Scotland, Club Gaya in Great Britain, and the Barsnley Youth Service which organises annual tree planting drives in England with the participation of volunteers and schoolchildren.

#### **● COOPERATION WITH LASY PAŃSTWOWE**

Lasy Państwowe, Poland’s national forestry service, has been a strategic partner of the “Tree Day” programme since its inception in 2003. Lasy Państwowe operates 428 forestry inspection units, bringing to bear more than 80 years of experience in protection and development of the Polish woods (which, under Polish law, are owned by the state and, more broadly, are regarded as part of the national patrimony). The institution assures continuity in development of forests and sustainability of forest use in keeping with the rules of ecology and environmental protection dictated by modern science.

Every year, as part of its social education work, Lasy Państwowe calls upon its inspectorates around the country to provide free saplings to “Tree Day” participants. The forestry inspectorates have also obligated themselves to work with a number of educational institutions.

#### **● COOPERATION WITH BUSINESS**

We also cooperate with business enterprises which implement new strategies and solutions in environmental protection and which commit themselves to social actions in this field. The work of our corporate partners in the “Tree Day” programme such as LeasePlan, Troton or Eco Service contributes to increasing forestation and work to increase social awareness about the need of recultivating forests in the context of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) absorption. LeasePlan Fleet Management Poland

contributed to the “Tree Day 2006” celebrations by recruiting its employees and clients to take part in the programme via its own “Green Plan” offer. Troton has earmarked 1% of its ECOLINE fund to a tree planting drive.

“Collect wastepaper and save horses”, meanwhile, was joined by TNT Express Worldwide Poland. Taking part in the “Planet Me” programme for reducing paper consumption, the company assembled 49 tonnes of wastepaper during the sixth edition alone and passed the money from its sale on to Klub Gaja to help save horses. This collaboration has been highly rated in the annual report *Responsible Business in Poland. Good Practices*.

#### ● COOPERATION WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES AND CIVIC SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

Joint activities with local government authority provides another example of fruitful cooperation. Klub Gaja is proud to work together, among other local government authorities, with the local administrations of Drobin, Rumia and Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski. The annual actions of the Environmental Protection Department of the Limanowa local authority involve not only schoolchildren, but also local activists and the authority’s own officials. During the fifth edition of the programme, the participation record – at 3,800 people – was broken by the municipal office of the City of Koszalin, which was able to secure the participation of 35 organisational entities, including the Penitentiary Facility of the Air Force Training Centre.

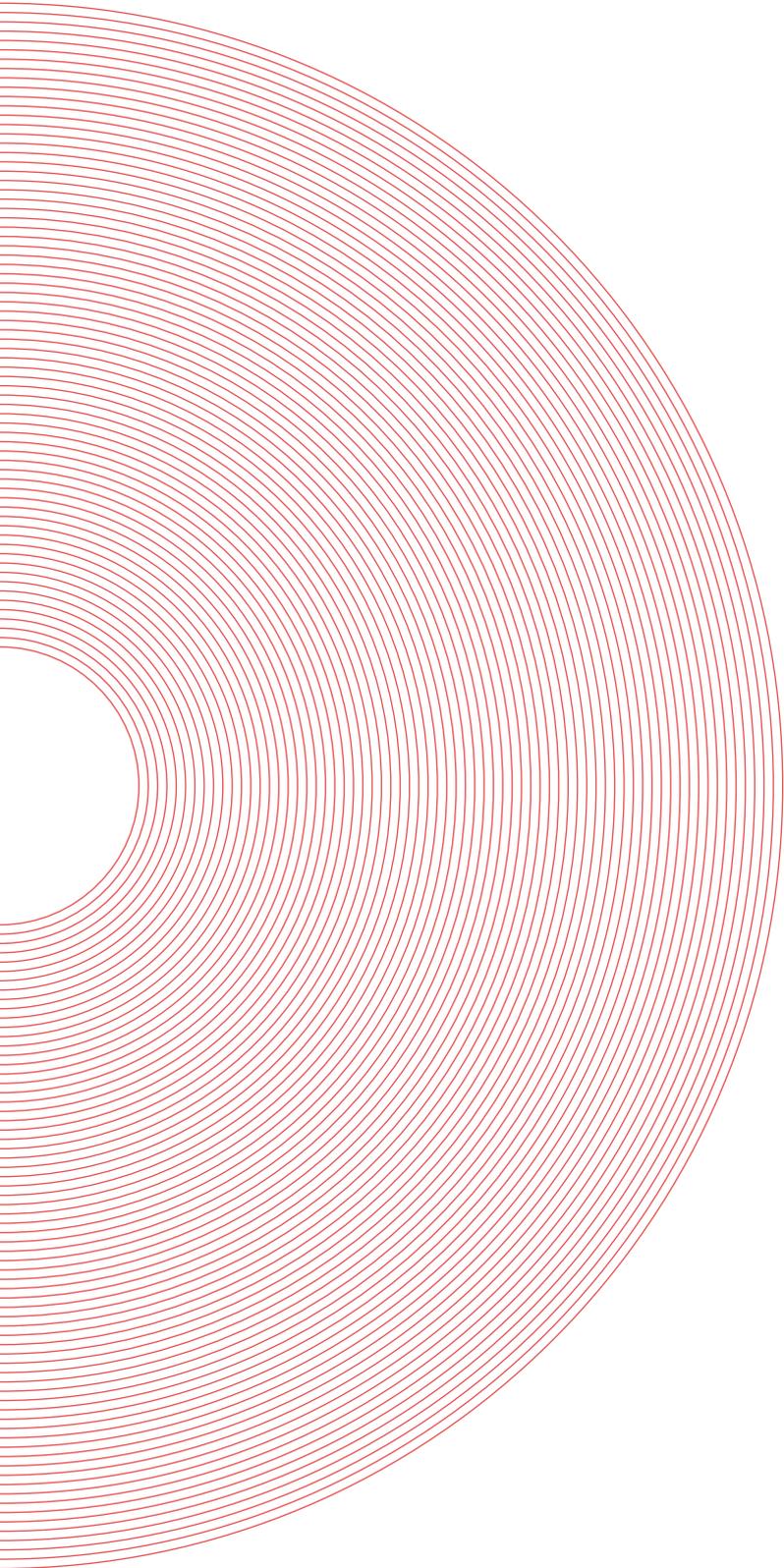
“Tree Day” also involves civic and social organisations. The People for People social foundation, for instance, joined in the fifth edition of the programme, planting one hundred trees together with its homeless beneficiaries.

#### ● “TREE DAY” AND PARTICIPATION OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The local communities joining in the “Tree Day” programme invariably impress with their inventiveness.



Thanks to these, as it were, organic contributions, “Tree Day” is consistently able to rise above borders, geographic and otherwise, involving lots of people from associations, institutions, and informal groups. Also worthy of note is the disparity in age of the participants, from toddlers to senior citizens who have been infected with enthusiasm for the programme by their grandchildren.



# Opening up the Public Discourse Space

**T**he last of the projects presented here provides something of a coda to this publication; it was cited (and briefly summarised) by Grzegorz Makowski in his introduction to the issues associated with informal civic education.

It is nonetheless worth bearing in mind that the author of the project described below proposes a new, systemic means of counteracting the problems which ail local communities across Central and Eastern Europe. His approach relies upon appeal to culture in the broader meaning of the term, so the public library stands to be of some assistance. Libraries are one of the more common institutions – they can be found even in the smallest towns. Having taken note of this, Jonas Büchel calls for embarking upon a new type of activity with libraries which he calls cultural social work. He points out that libraries dispose of the requisite space and the human resources which may be used to animate civic life in their local communities. In this way, libraries may become a forum of public debate open to all members of the community and a source of valuable assistance to persons at risk of various forms of social exclusion.

This proposal – being as innovative as it is, it is only in its planning stages – was presented by its author during the international seminar constituting the first stage of the project entitled “Public Libraries as Civic Education Centres in Europe”. We urge you to analyse this idea by Jonas Büchel and to consider the possibilities for its practical implementation. For our part, we will be happy to embark on a debate of this subject, especially where such a debate is inspired by the project description set out below (or by the other best practice examples presented in this publication).

DEMOGRAPHIC  
TRENDS, STAGNANT  
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND  
THE FINANCIAL CRISIS ARE  
ENDANGERING THE VERY

**EXISTENCE**

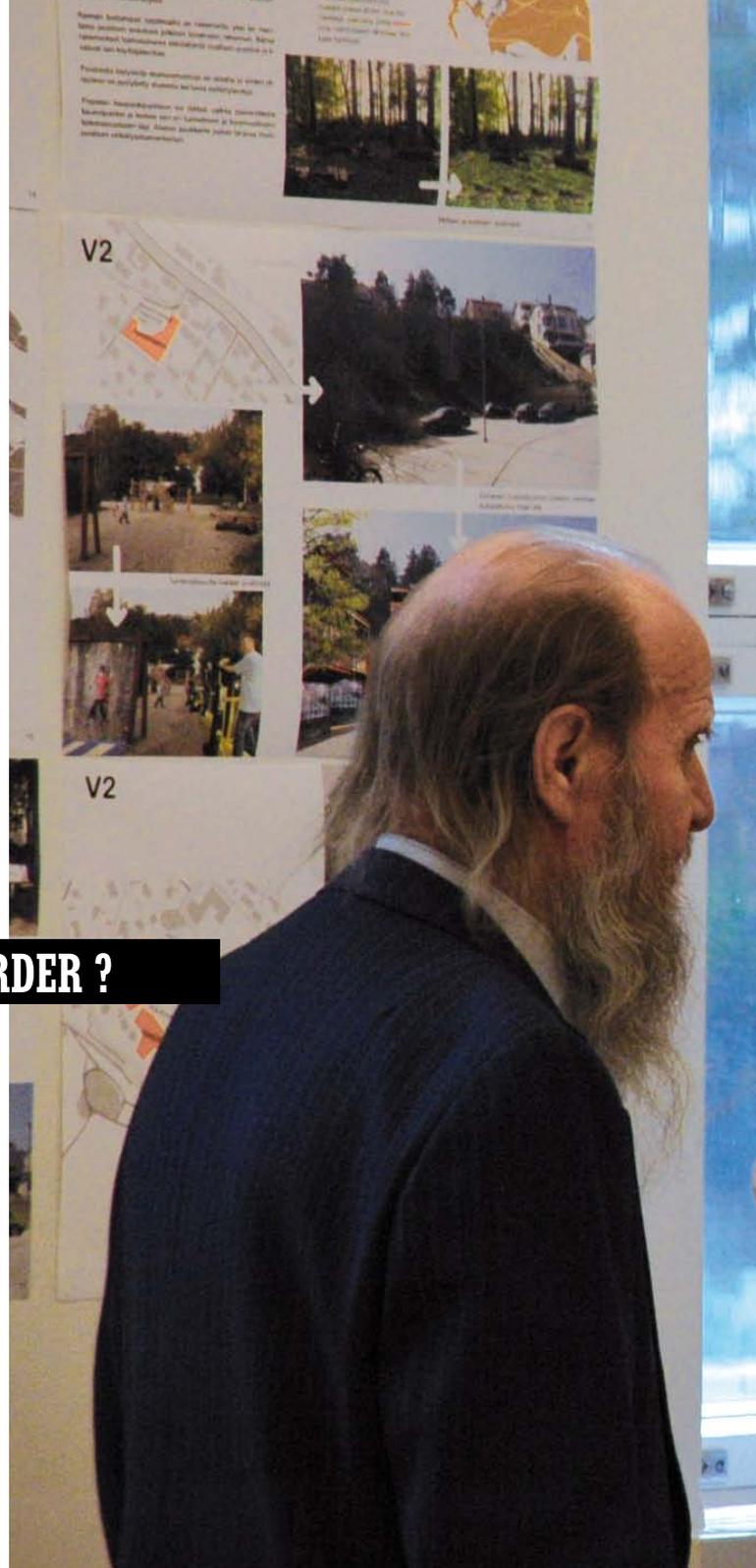
OF SOCIAL STRUCTURES  
AND, THUS, OF LOCAL  
COMMUNITIES

## CULTURAL SOCIAL WORK – A NEW ORDER ?

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### DIAGNOSIS: COMMUNITIES AT RISK

Our communities are faced with risk. Smaller towns, villages, and isolated localities, places far removed from the major urban centres – in Eastern Europe and, conceivably, also in other regions affected by the economic crisis – must come to grips with what are often huge, potentially dangerous problems.





Just like any other country, Latvia must promote the interests of its own communities. Ten years of rapid economic growth followed by two years of dire difficulty brought on by the international financial crisis have brought about a situation where myriad problems are clamouring for urgent solutions. Some thought must also be given to the question of whether implementation of new methods for direct social communication and encouraging participation in community life have not taken on a new importance.

For many years on end, the main focus has been on economic growth, with questions of broader social growth and development going largely unheeded. Now, individual communities are intensively seeking other solutions which would enable them to establish a stable social structure which they might use to satisfy the most basic needs while still hoping for some degree of sustainability in these times of retrenchment and bankruptcies.

Given that young people and persons of production age are either leaving their countries in search of a better life abroad or sitting around without jobs, and that birth rates are declining across the Baltic region, nothing less than the very survival of social structures, communities, and entire localities is at stake.

● **THE BIGGEST THREATS ARE AS FOLLOWS:**

- Depopulation;
- Unemployment and lack of perspectives for citizens, difficulty with self-identification;
- Falling birth rates coupled with rapid ageing of society as a whole;
- Local self-government bodies are finding themselves on the brink of bankruptcy, with the attendant risk of shutting down of administrative, social, educational, and cultural institutions;
- Lack of growth strategies for local communities leading to lack of perspectives;
- Threats to social integration, lack of cohesiveness within the communities themselves;

- Risk of a reversion to oligarchic and other autocratic structures, neglect of the achievements of democratic development.

If no comprehensive programmes for social integration and for improving cross-cultural communications are put in place, there ensues inactivity in the social and cultural spheres – virtual (programmes, methods, instruments) as well as actual (application of creative, modern social, cultural, and educational measures enabling integration of all social groups). Social inequality becomes more pronounced and cultural isolation and marginalisation in our communities deepens.

Civic commitment and social activity have been developing in a quiet, unassuming way, keeping societal growth at a minimum level. Now, these fragile and sensitive organisms – much like the public and state services – are faced with grave risk and require immediate support.

**THE IDEA: LIBRARIES AS SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT CENTRES**

Libraries, in their very essence, are social and cultural institutions. As such, they are well placed to pursue innovative, change-accommodating, modern, and accessible cultural activities, building a space for social integration and for inter-cultural dialogue. Libraries foster the development of a community at its very core and contribute to its fortification.

For five years, the initiators of the project have been observing and assessing the role of libraries, of the adult education network, and of local museums in the Prikanmaa region (Tampere district).

Implementation of three projects in the cities of Akaa (late 2006 and early 2007), Tampere (2006–2009), and Mänttä-Vilppula (since 2009) has demonstrated just how much local communities benefit from the assistance of libraries:

- Local civic organisations and the participants of informal initiatives can use the library's rooms and technical facilities, which are always available;

- Libraries often serve the function of contact centres and information sources for the entire community and for the local authorities;
- Local libraries often serve as a meeting place for different social groups from the community, enabling them to bond with one another;
- The opening hours are in tune with the needs and routines of the community, making for easy access;
- Apart from their ordinary activities, libraries also provide the venue for exhibitions of works by local artists and for cultural events;
- Close cooperation between libraries, local self-government authorities, schools, and even healthcare entities guarantees rapid access to any and all manner of important information;
- Libraries tend to maintain close working relationships with local and/or regional adult education institutions and to be involved in unemployment counteraction programmes;
- Librarians tend to be people with extensive knowledge and skills who do a fine job serving as moderators of social activities;
- Libraries are entirely free of barriers, whether architectural or social and psychological, rendering them perfectly suited as a location where social tensions can be eased.

For every project, the libraries provided a venue for workshops and various civic education activities and acted to foster growth of the community along with various groups affiliated with them on an official or informal basis.

#### ● GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

Drawing on our long years of experience in northern European countries where libraries are established centres of local civic initiative as well as on thirty years' worth of participation in modern programmes for developing local communities in Western Europe, and with due heed for the lingering effects of the financial crisis still being felt around north eastern Europe, we

would like to propose a strategy for development of local communities which is based on mutual cooperation and encompasses culture, civic affairs, operations of the libraries themselves, and adult education.

Libraries, for their part, have found social work in the cultural field to be an effective instrument for direct shaping of the development of local communities, especially in rural /loosely populated areas. This provides grounds for seeking establishment of a libraries network in the Baltic countries which would serve as social and cultural centres and foster social integration by way of activities in the field of culture and civic education.

#### ● CULTURAL SOCIAL WORK

Based on past experience with work to the benefit of local communities in a number of European countries, we believe that the first steps should concern implementation – as a matter of urgency – of an activising social and cultural programme with the primary goal of inclusion of marginalised groups in the life of the community. Over the past four decades, international partners have made effective use of cultural social work methods.

In Latvia, the catchphrases “culture” or “cultural activity” evoke connotations of, first and foremost, “high” culture and of works created as a result of an artistic process. Latvians are proud of their country’s achievements in the fields of song and dance, performance art, the visual arts, literature, and architecture. High culture and performance art are held in high esteem in Latvia and in the other Baltic countries, and the authorities do what they can to foster this trend. At the same time, questions such as methods of making culture a part of the daily lives of ordinary citizens or facilitating general access to cultural assets yet have to become the object of public discourse. The same holds true for questions as to how cultural activity may be used as an instrument for social integration and intercultural dialogue, how to integrate communities separated by cultural and social differences and to connect the



▲ **Jonas Büchel** – social worker, cultural manager and mediator. Founder of bb<sup>2</sup>, an agency for city culture and communication in Riga, Latvia. bb<sup>2</sup> works to develop alternative social planning methods and to foster strong, active communities characterised by high levels of social participation.

different realities in which they function, how to identify and support social movements and the identities which they express? How to support initiatives of a subcultural nature, taking into account their potential to exert a significant influence on increasing social integration? How can social integration become a practical tool for social and cultural development in Latvia and in the other Baltic countries? To date, these questions remain unanswered.

At implementation of the first Latvian social integration programmes, experts in the relevant fields took the view that the actions underway should target not only adolescent youth (as is usually the case) but, rather, should follow a cultural social work concept

which takes into account the environment and social ties. Accordingly, the target should be expanded to also include youth, students, families, individual households, the elderly, peers, educational establishments, public administration bodies, and the urban landscape in which they live and work. Thus, cultural social work offers more possibilities than standard social services, exerting an impact on the entire community along with all its members.

Seeing as most Eastern European countries do not, at least for the moment, have institutionalised cultural and social centres (whether independent or operated as public institutions), experts, local social activists and, first and foremost, the citizens themselves suffer from a lack of places in which local communities and their individual constituent groups (social or cultural) might pursue creative activity and have a chance to be noticed, accepted, and appreciated by their co-citizens.

Albeit cultural social work still does not have its developed structures, representatives of individual social currents have been yearning for change in the prevailing approach to development of local communities and to propagation of an independent understanding of cultural social work. The goal of this project is to achieve a shift in the extant trends and ideas in favour of a well-considered conceptual strategy for cultural social work in Latvia and, perhaps, also in the neighbouring countries, thus establishing structures which enable cultural social work.

#### **ACTION: PROJECT PROPOSAL**

The project ought to be devised by way of an interdisciplinary approach which combines fields such as culture, cultural activity, cultural management, social work, pedagogics, and development of local communities and towns.

#### ● **GENERAL OBJECTIVES**

- One social-cultural worker per public library in Latvia so that every library – and, consequently, the

community assembled around it – has the support of one such worker specially trained in local community development;

- Local community development and civic education as a transparent nationwide strategy and policy;
- A pro-employment integration programme drawing on European funds – support of unemployed persons by individuals who combine high qualifications with empathy;
- The project shall be executed in close cooperation with various institutions charged with regional and local development and with employment policy in Latvia, state employment agencies, municipal patronage agencies, library institutions and unions, research and development institutions, and domestic as well as international adult education experts;
- Implementation of the project and the first (pilot) cascade training sessions for a number of test regions (chosen from among smaller conurbations) will require assistance from private sponsors supporting civic education development and political education;
- Subject-specific, short-term training pursued through international cooperation.

#### ● TASKS TO BE PERFORMED

Attainment of a situation where culture is generally accessible to all members of the community and to all social groups and where the project:

- Gives rise to a broader awareness that activities centring on libraries and cultural activities can play an important role in the development of local communities towns covered by them;
- Propagates the conviction of its initiators that culture is a potent tool for strengthening social integration which propagates inter-cultural dialogue among its various target social groups and that, accordingly, it should be put to more extensive use in fostering European values such as tolerance, dialogue, active counteraction of xenophobia, counteraction of poverty, marginalisation, and exclusion of individual social groups.

#### ● WHY DO LIBRARIES PROMISE TO BE WELL-SUITED FOR CULTURAL SOCIAL WORK AND FOR FOSTERING DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES ?

- Libraries are generally perceived as being independent and, thus, as being open to all;
- Libraries can be found in almost all communities;
- Libraries are generally willing to open their facilities for use in training sessions, meetings, etc;
- Libraries are a meeting place for youth and adults, which gives them a multi-generational and inter-cultural character;
- Libraries often offer access to computers and to the internet;
- Libraries generally cultivate strong ties with formal and informal institutions active within the given community;
- No other institutions are better placed than libraries, cultural centres, and local museums to influence and convince artists and cultural workers and to increase



awareness levels. Employees of these institutions should be encouraged to actively involve themselves in work furthering social integration and dialogue.

What benefits might libraries derive from cultural social work on the ground in a win-win situation ?

- Libraries will attract more people, so the number of their “regular” users can also be expected to grow;
- The given locality might become an important independent social centre and, as such, attract new projects. Such activities, in turn, may contribute to overhaul and upgrade of the library’s physical and ICT infrastructure;
- Libraries will be better placed to achieve their educational objectives. The greater number of social groups and their greater differentiation can be parlayed into a broader audience and a higher number of users;
- Seeing as the project involves seeking out unemployed individuals with a pedagogical, sociological, or similar educational background who will be prepared for work as social and cultural workers, thanks to the presence of such individuals at the library, the librarians will have a reduced workload;
- Through introduction of the salaried position of social and cultural worker and appropriate equipping of the institution, more advanced technology will become available;
- Organisation of events and actions – exhibitions, concerts, educational, social, and health awareness campaigns;
- The project may contribute to financial stabilisation of libraries, actually saving some of them from liquidation on account of the difficult financial situation presently faced by some municipalities and regions.

Cultural social work, civic and political education, and development of local communities ought to proceed in parallel so as to generate strong democratic

resonance within the community. As matters stand at the moment, social cultural centres, libraries, and museums are underestimated and unappreciated social communication centres and must receive strong support.

### **THE PROJECT INITIATORS**

bb2 – A municipal culture and social communication agency based in Riga, Latvia which:

- Applies inter-sectoral, inter-cultural, interactive, and transparent working methods;
- Pursues realistic programmes for development of local communities and applies unconventional social planning methods;
- Plans, leads, and assesses public debates and planning processes;
- Focuses on conurbations, but also on rural communities and on isolated areas;
- Conducts most of its activities in the Baltic countries.

The agency is composed of Guna Garokalna-Büchel and Jonas Büchel, a social worker and cultural management specialist.





## INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

This publication was prepared in the “Local Libraries as Civic Education Centres in Europe” project pursued by the Institute of Public Affairs within the Library Development Program.

Issue was possible thanks to the funding from the Robert Bosch Stiftung and the Information Society Development Foundation, with the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (bpb) and the Networking European Citizenship Education (NECE) involved as project partners.

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Project coordinators: Małgorzata Fałkowska-Warska, Filip Pazderski

Photos: J. Bożek, J. Büchel, V. Chruščová, Institute of Public Affairs

Layout, design and typesetting: rzeczobrazkowe.pl

Published by

The Foundation Institute of Public Affairs

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ISBN 978-83-7689-093-7

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The Information Society Development Foundation is pursuing the Library Development Programme with the goal of facilitating access to computers, the internet, and to relevant training for Polish public libraries. The Library Development Programme in Poland is a joint undertaking of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Polish-American Freedom Foundation.





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