

## Crisis of Professional Identity or Challenge for Personal Development : My Story as a Reference and User Services Librarian

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### Abstract:

*The aim of this paper is to point out a gap between traditional concept of the reference and information services in current LIS education in Croatia with focus on collections, and everyday public libraries' practice focusing on patrons. Six years ago, when I started to work as a young librarian at the Adult Department of the city and county Public library in Koprivnica, Croatia, I should have started to balance between traditional tasks of reference and user services to give quick, correct and relevant information and requests to make collections, information sources and my job itself attractive to various, traditional and non-traditional user groups. Because of wide range of information sources, as well as widespread public perception of the library as place only for lending books, I was obligated to promote reference and information services in high quality, creative and attractive way, regardless of the library limited staff, budget and space boundaries.*

*I have had to acquire skills of event organizer, PR manager, graphic designer, photographer, copywriter, journalist, social media administrator, social worker, educator, literacy promoter as well. Some of promotional activities taking place inside and outside a library space are traditional (posters, leaflets, bookmarkers etc.) but there are also a lot of virtual promotions – using social networks, newsletters, e-mail, library website and especially a good communication with local and national media.*

*I would like to conclude that all what seems as a crisis of professional identity I have turned into challenge for personal development and I enjoy it.*

**Keywords:** reference and information services, education, promotion, professional skills

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### Introduction

Librarian profession has gone through many "identity crises" throughout history, primarily because of changes in the way information are transmitted and then also because of the changed role of libraries and users' expectations. With the intense development of the Internet and the new communication revolution at the beginning of the 21st century, librarian profession faced the need to develop new professional profiles in accordance with the

requirements of the digital age (Machala, 2015: 47). The scope of the librarian's work is expanding, regardless of the type of library, and there are no longer „traditional library jobs“. Traditional elementary librarian knowledge (ALA) are including searching, finding, managing, and analyzing information regardless of the medium and format. It is clear that these basic knowledge are not enough today and that many librarians, especially in the public libraries, also require new competencies. Aileen Wood defines competencies as the minimum level of performance expected of employees, enabling them to perform their work function or assignment tasks efficiently and successfully (Machala, 2015: 154). Competencies are acquired by education, training and other vocational programs through self-initiation (informal) or experiential learning.

The CILIP-British Professional Association of Librarians and Information Professionals divided expert knowledge and skills on professional skills and generic skills. Generic skills include customer orientation, service design and marketing (Machala, 2015: 165). These are skills acquired by additional non - formal and informal education, and today, considering the environment, they are necessary.

### **About „Fran Galovic“ Koprivnica Public Library**

The “Fran Galovic” Koprivnica Public Library acts as a cultural and information centre of the Town of Koprivnica, a medium - sized Croatian town with 30,000 inhabitants, regional centre of Koprivnica - Križevci County with 120,000 inhabitants. Library supports education, lifelong learning and creative leisure time activities under the slogans: *Literacy for all*, *Libraries open to everybody* and *Library is more than just books*. Although Public library of Koprivnica is not one of the largest ones in Croatia, it is still well known for its innovative projects and programs, fostering and promoting reading and literacy among its users. Its aim is to enable access to knowledge, information and cultural events necessary for lifelong learning and access to leisure information.

The „Fran Galovic“ Koprivnica Public Library collection numbers around 170.000 units of book and nonbook material distributed within three departments; Children's, Adult, Science and study Departments. There are few specialised collections as *Caproncensis - collection* of different materials on local history and publishing, *Dr. Leander Brozović Collection* (1897–1962) which is an extremely valuable and diverse private collection and *Olivija Fištrović Collection* which contains titles about history, the history of the Balkans, economy and politics. *Music Collection* covers diversified genres and *Movie Collection* consists of movies, documentaries and cartoons on DVDs. *CD-ROM Collection* consists of electronic referencing material, as well as PC games intended for use by children. *Postcard Collection* has around 500 postcards, providing an insight into Koprivnica and its vicinity, its looks and vistas from the 19th to 20th and into the 21st century.<sup>1</sup> *Collection for print disabled people* was founded in 2006 when a new service for the blind/visually impaired was introduced. *Collection of Books on Roma People* contains reading materials about Roma people as well as books written by Roma authors in the Roma languages and in other languages. Within the

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<sup>1</sup> Collection is digitized available on-line: [link](#)

Children's department, there is a „*Reading with you*“ collection of books and manuals that has been set aside as an aid for parents in recognizing reading disabilities (dyslexia) and problems with writing. *Collection Goethe* represents book and nonbook material in German language donated by Goethe Institut Kroatien from Zagreb. Adult Department of „Fran Galovic“ Koprivnica Public Library has a very rich collection of the latest fiction and literary classics both Croatian and foreign (prose, poetry, drama, etc.) and popular non-fiction works in all fields which actually includes most of the Library funds and has the largest circulation.

These are just some of the separate collections and it is apparent that some of the collections are formed with the aim of preserving the heritage, part of the collection encompasses digital media, while a part is intended for special, deprived user groups. Blind and visually impaired, Roma people and people with reading difficulties and dyslexia are recognized as a community members whom the library can offer materials, programs and services which will meet their needs for knowledge and information, inform, educate and raise awareness of the general public on their needs and support social inclusion and equal participation in the community and society.

The differences between the collections and services of particular departments and target user groups are indicative of jobs that librarians perform on a daily basis and which, in their essence, require different levels of librarian competencies. At the moment, we will not consider the traditional jobs such as selecting, procuring, processing, storing and providing reference desk staffing, and addressing issues related to the promotion of library collections, services and programs. The focus will be on new reference and information services and requisite competencies for librarians.

### **Promotion of collections and services / marketing competencies**

(Kotler, 2007) claims that marketing is one of the most neglected and the most unexplored areas by public sector officials and usually that's really the way it is. The use of marketing tools and mechanisms traditionally applied in the private sector can enable us to increase citizen and user satisfaction with our programs and services, but also to create new values for them. But, very little has been done about the marketing of regular education programs.

Librarians should be aware of the variety of library programs and services, when considering the marketing. Hence knowledge of marketing tools enables them to create better quality products targeted at users' needs, greater use of our products and ultimately a better visibility of the library in the community. At times when libraries as a public services are faced with various restrictions, from financial to personnel, these mechanisms are important in fighting for better status and survival.

In "Fran Galovic" Public Library Koprivnica we are well aware of this, so big part of information and reference services work refers to promotion of our rich collections, numerous programs and services in many different ways (personal recommendations, public relations and direct marketing) inside and outside of the library. Some are traditional like

exhibitions, posters, leaflets with the services, bookmarkers, etc., but we also recognized the great potential of virtual space and social networks for promotional purposes as well.

### Using old and searching for new promotion channels

#### *Library material exhibitions and recommendations*

Due to the excellent position of the library building located on the main city square and large exhibit windows, we used this exhibition potential, so every 10 days we make books and non-books exhibits and thus promote our collections. Books and other materials are also displayed on various exhibition stands and shelves in the library space, which is very limited, but we noticed that although such exhibitions are nothing new or unusual, they have a positive influence: Book lending has increased. Occasionally, we separate some of the material from certain collections to make users aware of the existence of the material they may not know.



Picture 1. Library material exhibitions and recommendations

The role of the recommendations in a promotion of the library material is great because of the lack of media space for the promotion of books and reading. Besides that the material is personally recommended to patrons, what requires a high level of knowledge of the fund and the wishes, needs and tastes of patrons, librarians regularly write recommendations that are published by local weekly newspapers. Our recommendations can also be seen on TV screens in the library departments and published on our website, Facebook and Pinterest, as well as in the newsletter.

The thematic lectures that we organize in the library under the *Green Library program*<sup>2</sup>, *The Health Information program*<sup>3</sup> and *Psychology workshops* or *Program for unemployed people*<sup>4</sup> we use to present manuals related to the topics being discussed and which can be borrowed from the library. Likewise, during the „Storytelling for babies and toddlers“ that are organized once a month for babies and toddlers up to 3 years old, which are also thematic, librarians recommend handbooks and picturebooks for parents which can help them in the

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<sup>2</sup> Program has been implemented in collaboration with non-governmental organizations and associations, interested citizens and bodies of local self-government with the aim supporting discussions on various topics relevant to the development of the community and civic engagement

<sup>3</sup> Program in collaboration with the public hospital, the County's Health Institute and other health professionals and NGO's

<sup>4</sup> Program in collaboration with the Center for Information and Career Counseling (CISOK) of the Croatian Employment Service. The aim is supporting better chances for employment and business running by using the library infrastructure – books, computers, internet access, librarians knowledge and the library space

upbringing or answering some issues related to the development of their children. Literary evenings with authors are another way of promoting the book and are organized several times a month.

#### *Reading programs promotion for early childhood*

Information and reference services librarians in our library noticed that there is an obvious lack of support in early literacy programs development in Croatia on national political and strategic level. Research findings have shown that in general public perception, importance of libraries for the personal development of babies and toddlers is the least important in comparison with those of students and adults. Despite this fact, there are very vivid local initiatives and public libraries practices aiming to create a reading culture in local community from an early age.<sup>5</sup>

The program “Books for babies“ is the oldest one program on early literacy (since 1999), for every newborn in local hospital as the first step in developing love for reading and lifelong learning process. Establishing of „Small libraries“ in pediatric clinics, kindergartens and community center for children at risk, storytelling hours in community center for children at risk and visits to kindergartens are tools for library promotion and yet the benefits of this are not sufficiently recognized.



Picture 2. “Books for babies” promotional material

Modern technologies are also implemented in the library literacy programs. Except different web tools, librarians use tablets applications in promoting pre-reading skills, robots in storytelling hours for preschool children, social media services to notify parents and public about importance of early literacy, etc.



Picture 3. We learn so that we could teach – Robotics program in library

*“E-book and Sugar at the End” - promoting e-books and new technologies*

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<sup>5</sup> More about this programs: [link](#)

In 2013, we conducted an interesting "E-book and Sugar at the End" event aimed at popularizing e-books and reading in a different way. As part of this event, Koprivnica cafes shared sugar packets with QR code which allows downloading free e-book. In addition to the "E-book and Sugar at the End" event, the Library also conducted education during which all interested users could find basic information on the Kindle Touch e-reader and on the terms of its landing in the Library. The aim was to popularize the e-book as a new learning medium, as well as promotion of our new services. Information on this action was promoted on some of the most important internet portals in Croatia, so this action was the promotion of our library as well.

### *"Towards a new Public Library building in Koprivnica" campaign*

The building of the Koprivnica Library has become too small for all the materials, programs and services, energy-inefficient and, because of architectural barriers, unavailable for the citizens with mobility difficulties. For a couple of years now, we tried to find a solution for a new building, and for that purpose, the library organizes public forums "Towards a new Public Library building in Koprivnica" on the concept of a new library involving experts from different areas, librarians and members of the city government, as well as all interested citizens. Last summer, a survey was conducted targeting a wider circle of citizens. The purpose of which is to get from the public a new library concept and gathering their wishes and ideas. The survey used social networks as a tool, and 250 people participated with more than 400 ideas.<sup>6</sup>



Picture 4. "E-book and Sugar at the End"

### **Library programs, coordination, cooperation, reaching target groups**

I have already mentioned some of the programs that the library regularly performs such as literary events, book presentations, lectures on various topics, workshops, storytelling, etc. There are many programs, intended for various groups (children, young adults, blind and visually impaired people, Roma people, unemployed, people with reading difficulties, etc.). Needs and problems of a community analysis is a key when introducing new programs and services, as well as revision of the existing ones. Cooperation with various organizations, associations and institutions in organizing and implementing the programs make it easier for us to reach specific target groups.

All library programs and activities are planned monthly in advance and they form a guide of events, which is a great base for planning promotional activities. Once the guide is completed, we create promotional materials (invitations and posters) in digital format for each event and newsletters for all events.

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<sup>6</sup> Survey participants: [link](#)

## New technologies and graphic design competencies

In order to create newsletters, invitations, flyers, posters and other promotional materials we usually use the free online tools (MailChimp, Canva, etc.) Although the use of such tools is relatively simple and intuitive, it takes a lot of time and effort to reach the full potential they offer, so promotional materials could reach high visual quality. Although the invitations in some elements are mutually different, some elements such as the format, structure and layout of information are being retained to preserve our visual identity. Once designed invitations for a particular event, they are multiple used for the same event (facebook, website isl.).

Newsletter<sup>7</sup> is a promotional tool that we use in the library since 2014. It includes announcements of all events for children and adults, especially important information (changes in working hours, special actions, etc.), exhibition schedule, library attendance at professional conferences and librarians book recommendations. The promotional materials (invitations and posters) that we have previously created are used in the newsletter to save time and reduce the efforts associated with graphic design of the material, but also to make them unified for each particular event. This gives an overview of all events and we send it to the subscriber`s e-mail addresses at the beginning of the month, while invitations with additional event information are sent separately a few days before each event.



Picture 5. Invitations

## Website and social media administration

Apart using the web site<sup>8</sup> to provide basic information about the library and all library programs, services and activities, we also recognized the great potential of social networks. The library has a Facebook page,<sup>9</sup> which is used for communication with patrons, promotion of events, publication of activities related to library, but also various interesting staff that might attract the attention of our followers.<sup>10</sup> The library's Facebook page is linked to the Library's Twitter profile<sup>11</sup>, so all information published on a single network is automatically advertised to another, which reduces administrators the time and efforts. We use Flickr account<sup>12</sup> to post photos from all library events, while we use Pinterest<sup>13</sup> as a virtual library

<sup>7</sup>Our newsletter example: [link](#)

<sup>8</sup> Available at: [link](#)

<sup>9</sup> Available at: [link](#)

<sup>10</sup> Along with the main facebook page of the library there are some separate pages such as the Mobile Service page, TEDxKoprivnicaLibrary page and the "Fran Galovic" Koprivnica Library reading club page

<sup>11</sup> Available at: [link](#)

<sup>12</sup> Available at: [link](#)

<sup>13</sup> Available at: [link](#)

bookshelf, where users can see some highlighted book covers distributed in thematic groups and associated with records in the online library catalog. Web site and social networks administrators are reference and information services librarians which update web site and social networks regularly.

### **Cooperation with the media / public relations skills**

Koprivnica Public Library has an excellent cooperation with local media (newspapers, radio stations, internet portals, local television stations). We are aware that none of these media has culture as a priority and that if we do not share information ourselves, they will rarely ask for it. That is why we send announcements and promotional materials before each event and reviews with photos after events and the media often publish them. Some radio stations occasionally organize prize games in collaboration with publishers and writers who are visiting the library, while TV stations attend some of the events in the library. Few times a year, usually before the summer programs or after them, we have a press-conferences in the library.

### **TEDxKoprivnicaLibrary conference / production, fundraising, organizational competencies**

We should specially highlight TEDxKoprivnicaLibrary<sup>14</sup> conference, which has been organized in the library since 2013 under the TED licence and with motto "Great Ideas in a Small Town". This conference brings together individuals with valuable ideas worth expanding. Since the very beginning, it has been very well covered by the media, we are grateful to the media for being our sponsors. The great public attention that the conference has caused has also provided us with support from sponsors without whom it would be impossible to organize events at such a high level. The TEDxKoprivnicaLibrary conference is organized by librarians with the help of volunteers. Unlike other library programs, this promotional material is not created by librarians but by professional associates.



Picture 5. Press-conference - implementation of new service

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<sup>14</sup> Available at: [web](#) and [Facebook](#)



Picture 6. TEDxKoprivnicaLibrary conference attracted a lot of young people to the library / An excellent design attracted the attention of fans and they are happy to buy and wear our T-shirts and bags

## Conclusion

In this paper, a few promotional activities were mentioned, carried out by the library to inform the publicity about what it offers, as well as to awake the public to the new, changed roles of modern public libraries and to increase their visibility in the community. It is extremely important to analyze the needs of the library community and to collaborate with different institutions and organizations in organizing and implementing the program not only for quality enhancement but also for easier access to target groups.

We use traditional promotional materials and new technologies to spread a word about everything that we do. We strive to produce high quality, creative and attractive promotional materials despite limited budget. Graphic design of promotional materials, writing press releases, production of high quality event photos, web sites and social networks editing, communication with media and associates, organization and coordination of events, creation of new and attractive programs and services, user training, work with different vulnerable groups of users, etc. are every day duties of reference and information services librarians in our library. Libraries that employ professional marketing and PR staff are rare, so each of these jobs that require a high level of knowledge and competencies should be provided by librarians at a high quality level. Quality is important because all these activities are publicly visible. They open libraries to the public and create the library's image and influence the public perception.

We can state that all of these activities include the development of new competencies, as well as lifelong education for librarians.

Continuous education and improvement of librarian's knowledge and skills are the basis for the professional development of librarians, which is recognized in the "Fran Galovic" Koprivnica Public Library and which we are striving for. Not every working environment is stimulating for the professional development of librarians, but this one certainly is. The programs of Center for Continuous Professional Training of Librarians, different courses, participation in professional conferences and workshops in the country and abroad, learning from others, bench-marking and self-education allow us to acquire knowledge that we do not have and to develop professionally.

Although our work is hard and demanding, it is both creative and challenging at the same time. Koprivnica Public Library is one of those public libraries that have chosen a proactive strategy in the society besides their traditional role in providing book loans and free access to information. Our approach to the librarian profession is proactive as well, because, you must admit, it would be quite boring to read books all day long.

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