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A new role for reference librarians in Polish academic libraries in the new age of democracy.

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Abstract:

The author details new technological changes, especially automation of libraries, which were made possible by grants received from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The major changes in reference departments involved in modernizing services: collaboration with peers, access to e-journals, Internet access to on-line catalogues, databases and the creation of the first Polish on-line journal for librarians-EBIB, Electronic Information Bulletin for Librarians. A new initiative of a Distributed Catalogue of Polish Libraries KARO is also introduced.

After a difficult period of time in the 1980's when martial law was imposed in Poland, there were many arrests of the intelligentsia. This resulted in the emigration of a significant number of educated Poles. But, finally by 1989, there was a change in the political climate in Poland. This year was of noticeable importance in the country's long history. Radical changes in the political system as well as democratic and economic reforms were implemented. 1989 is associated with the beginning of the end of a totalitarian regime that had influenced the entire social fabric of institutions, including the libraries of

Poland. The new government abandoned old ineffective and restrictive controls on information dissemination to all media - the press, publishing houses, and libraries. This liberalization accommodated the growth of new democratic conditions and financial arrangements.

Although the changes were difficult in the beginning, gradually, step by step, very active librarians and eager information specialists perceived many new opportunities. They did not wait for new formal legislation concerning libraries and took many matters into their own hands. It soon became possible for libraries to be able to receive more publications from Western countries. Because libraries began to offer important new materials, the very role of university libraries began to change and they became more vibrant and essential. In addition, foreign programmes such as TEMPUS –Trans – European Cooperation Scheme for Higher Education developed by the Commission for the European Communities facilitated travel for Polish librarians to visit and receive training in various academic libraries in Spain, Great Britain or Germany. Thanks to a grant from the Soros Foundation Library Programme, I was selected along with four other Polish librarians to visit many American libraries, take part in a workshop for reference librarians at the Library of Congress, and to attend the Special Libraries Association Annual Meeting. After being exposed to new techniques and technologies, newly educated colleagues were now able to apply these methods in their work with library patrons. Also there emerged new possibilities for various courses for librarians within Poland itself. It was very important to be aware of organizational changes, too. Successful implementation of services and products depended on a series of strategies not taken into account in previous years. They are as follows:

1. Identification of users, their needs and expectations,
2. Quality of services offered by the library,
3. Continuous improvement of the standards of service by measuring strong and weak points of the library services.

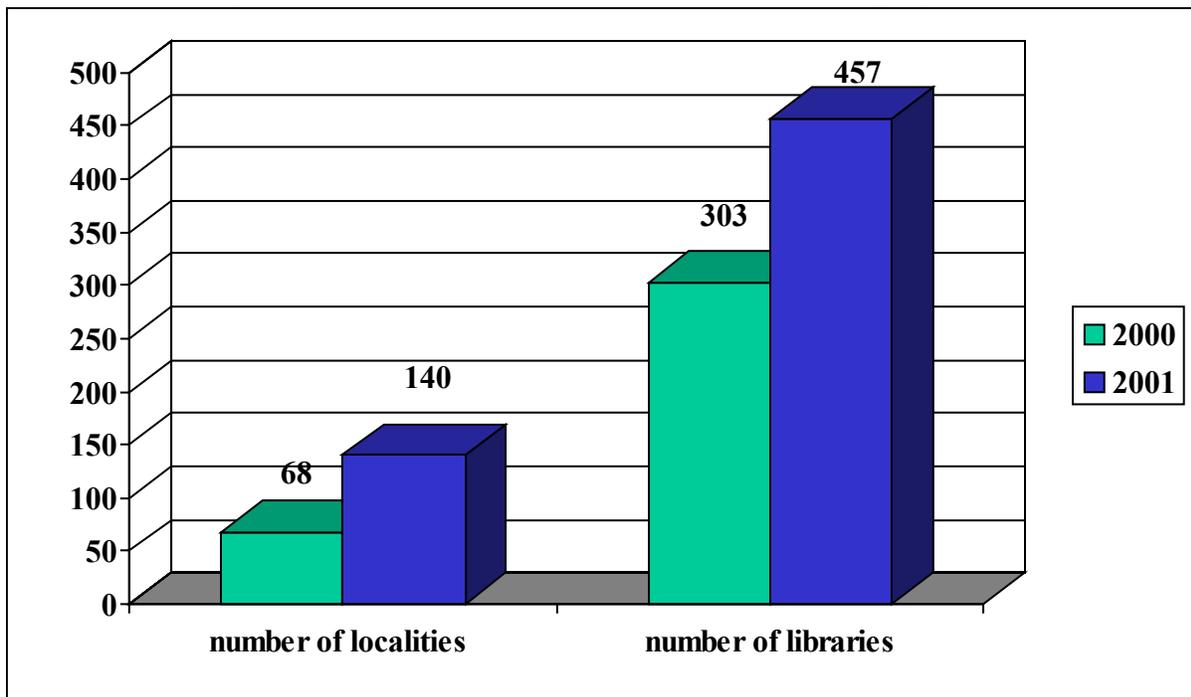
Workshops on new databases and CD-ROM applications were very popular in the 1990s and these meetings quickly became a very good source of various other kinds of information exchange and they provided a chance for librarians to network, informally, among themselves. With time the courses had to be more selective so as not to overload and overwhelm the users.

Main Library of the Wroclaw University of Technology uses and still improves its own automated library system that unfortunately is not compatible with newer popular and professional library systems. Some academic libraries without any library systems (as was the case, in the beginning in Gdansk, Warsaw and Cracow) received financial support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to automate library processes and to implement the VTLS system. The next dramatic innovation was the ability to connect to the Internet. These major technological changes have had a multiple effect and have led gradually to the growth of an "information and knowledge-based society". The tasks of library automation and connecting to the Internet in the mid-1990's were heavily dependent on mastering and applying major technological advances. Mastery of these innovations empowered library staff and reference service departments to be knowledgeable information providers. Their competence gained them new respect since they were able to deliver quickly what patrons actually needed. Reference departments began creating their own web sites displaying their new services. In most modern libraries their homepages became advertisements or promotions for their libraries. Here is the Main Library's home page <http://www.bg.pwr.wroc.pl/> .



The quick increase in the number of Polish web sites is illustrated in this slide. Our data compares only two last years.

Comparison of the number of Polish Libraries Home Pages (2000-2001)



Links to databases, information about new acquisitions in the library and to University curriculum became possible. Also, the provision of Internet access to other library catalogues distributed throughout the world, to e-journals and also to free exchange of all kinds of information using e-mail and mail-based discussion forums opened many doors for Polish libraries.

At discounted rates possible through negotiated site licenses , major publishers such as Elsevier , EBSCO and Springer began offering to new consortia of cooperating university libraries their highly valued and expensive electronic journals. Also, the Main Library of the Wroclaw University of Technology is the coordinator of a consortium of 17 university libraries which now receive *Chemical Abstracts* and among 17 ones plus many scientific institutes of the Polish Academy of Sciences which explore *Science Citation Index Expanded (SCI Ex)*. The reference service staff of the Main Library of the Wroclaw University of Technology is very experienced in preparing citation analyses on the basis of *SCI (Science Citation Index)* and *SCI Expanded*. Every year all University professional workers receive a customized e-mail from the library, which lists citations to all their published papers for that year, including where (in what journals) and by whom (what authors) they were cited.

An example of citation analysis according to SCI Ex 2000 for W. Bartkowiak :

BARTKOWIAK W J PHYS CHEM A v.102 p. 5236 1998

Hogiu S, Dreyer J, Pfeiffer M, et al.

Vibrational analysis and excited-state geometric changes of betaine-30 derived from Raman and infrared spectra combined with ab initio calculations

J RAMAN SPECTROSC 31: (8-9) 797-803 AUG-SEP 2000

LIPINSKI J, BARTKOWIAK W J PHYS CHEM A v.101 p.2159 1997

Spange S, Vilsmeier E, Fischer K, et al.

Empirical polarity parameters for various macromolecular and related materials

MACROMOL RAPID COMM 21: (10) 643-659 JUL 7 2000

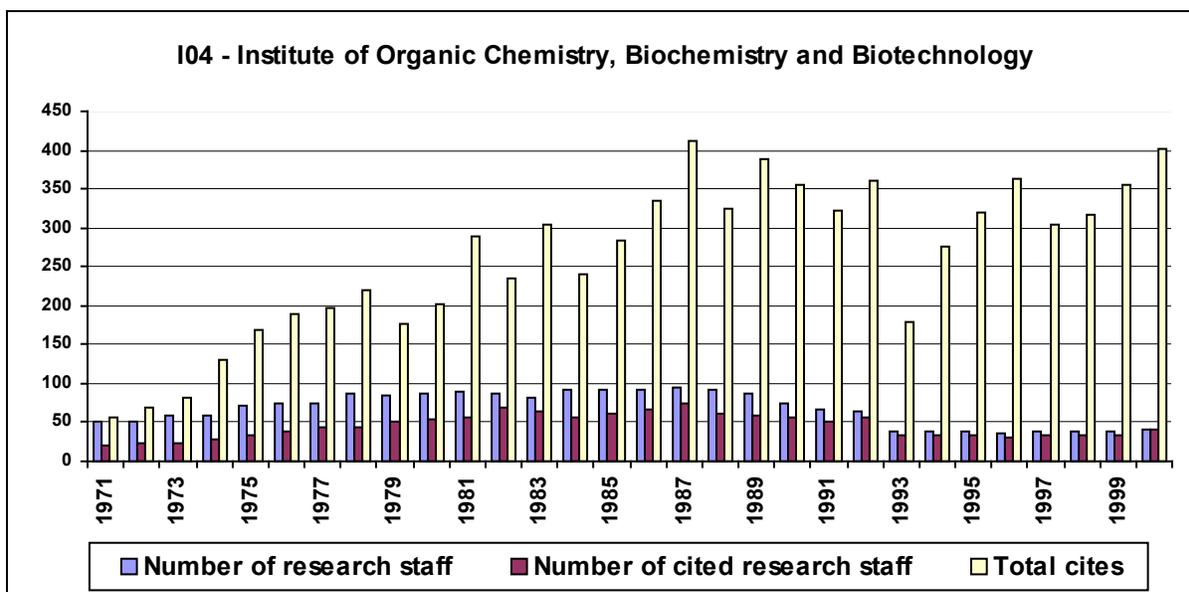
Li J, Cramer CJ, Truhlar DG

Two-response-time model based on CM2/INDO/S2 electrostatic potentials for the dielectric polarization component of solvatochromic shifts on vertical excitation energies

INT J QUANTUM CHEM 77: (1) 264-280 MAR 5 2000

Such citation analyses have been prepared at the Reference Department of the Main Library since 1971. The result of this work is a report elaborated for authorities of the University including data on citations for each organizational unit.

Here is an example of a chart from this report:



The scientists are then able to document the value of their work and use these data for promotion to a higher rank. Similar analyses are also available for the researchers of other universities in Poland.

Newly entrepreneurial librarians developed a brave and spontaneous idea. They organized a group of librarians and information specialists who had been involved, collaboratively, in creating and freely distributing service and a journal **EBIB - Electronic Information Bulletin for Librarians** <http://ebib.oss.wroc.pl/>.

Electronic Information

Bulletin for Librarians

ISSN: 1507-7187

[What is EBIB?](#)

[General information for authors](#)

Publisher:
Polish Librarians Association

[Team of Editors](#)

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Electronic Information Bulletin for Librarians

Welcome to the first Polish on-line library journal.

[Selected articles](#)
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[Distributed Catalogue of Polish Libraries](#)
[Links](#)
[Periodicals](#)
[Reports, projects](#)
[Law - Act on libraries](#)

Abstracts:

2002

[EBIB 1/2002 \(30\) - January - Quality in libraries. Part I. Theories, projects, education](#)

From the very beginning this was a very successful and progressive enterprise, linking cooperation and exchange of ideas and the experience of various types of libraries. The editorial board communicates easily via Internet. Innovative ideas could be generated and disseminated on the Internet in a way completely unknown before the year 1990. EBIB is a monthly on-line journal which consists of (between others):

- Articles;
- Reports;
- Communications;
- Letters;
- Polemics;

and permanent chapters:

- Conferences (information on Polish and foreign conferences for librarians);
- Law (full texts of legislation law concerning librarianship);
- Education (centres of library education on various levels);
- Periodicals (a list of Polish journals for librarians, foreign e-journals, ect.);
- Links (Polish and foreign libraries and on-line catalogues via Internet, bookstores, various library organizations or publishers);
- Grants (supporting organizations where librarians can apply to);
- Editorial news (short information about people involved in EBIB)

This is the example of one of the permanent chapter – LINKS :

EBIB

Links to Internet sources concerning libraries and librarianship

- **Polish libraries**
 - Polish libraries - arranged by the cities
 - Polish libraries - arranged by the type of a library
 - Polish OPACs - arranged by the cities
- **World libraries OPACs**
- **National libraries**
- **Virtual libraries**
- **Books**
- **Bookshops**
- **Librarianship organisations**
- **Library services**
- **Library computer systems**
- **Publishers**

EBIB

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Another new initiative that has been undertaken is KARO - a Distributed Catalogue of Polish Libraries <http://karo.umk.pl/Karo>.

NCU Main Library
Distributed Catalogue of Polish Libraries

Search

Author and

Title and

Publisher

*Restrictions on publication date work only in some librabries
the others are searched without restrictions*

published since till

Libraries selected: Clear selections

[Nicholas Copernicus University Torun](#) (Horizon)

[Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan](#) (Horizon)

At this site, users can check for titles simultaneously, in 57 Polish libraries and some selected foreign ones. Having no access to the U.S. based OCLC or other such services yet, this distributed catalogue is also very helpful for procuring interlibrary loans.

Once libraries loaded their collections into integrated library systems such as VTLS, ALEPH, TINLIB or HORIZON they could then work on authority files. This work was not possible before in Polish libraries. With standardized authority files, it is now possible to become partners with other foreign libraries to exchange records and in this way to become more efficient and avoid duplicating descriptive work already done. Librarians, especially academic ones, now work diligently to present new media and

formats such as music files <http://bg.uwb.edu.pl/> and even the full text of student books. <http://victoria.uci.agh.edu.pl/BG/skrypty/> .

What were once only considered to be “Libraries of the Future” are now operative and providing full-media formats. Post-communist countries such as Poland have had to work especially hard to achieve modernization and to compensate for lost possibilities and lack of opportunities in the past. Information both about and found in Polish libraries is accessible thanks to new tools and this information is available with the same ease as in other Western countries. The hard work and continual technical training of librarians, their new ability to take part in international conferences such as IFLA, and the opportunity to cultivate wider contacts have all led to many modern and sophisticated changes which are benefitting users. There have been many benefits to librarians as well. Collaboration, not always easy, has brought them both personal satisfaction and rewards. Reference librarians now enjoy enhanced roles as information brokers and the library profession enjoys a new prestige.

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