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Professional values revisited: the case of Croatia

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Abstract

The revival of interest for the ethical issues in the library community is related both to the changes brought about by the application of new technologies in libraries and the societal changes taking place in the countries in transition. A survey of five ethical codes of national library associations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia, Serbia and Montenegro was made and professional values emphasised in the codes were compared. In order to find out whether the professional values proclaimed in the codes agree with the personal attitudes of librarians an investigation of the professional values of Croatian librarians was conducted. The preliminary results point to the conclusion that Croatian librarians share at least some of the values with their colleagues in other parts of the world, while some of the values have not yet been fully recognised.

Introduction

The revival of interest for the ethical issues can certainly be related to the changes in the library environment brought about by new technologies, whose introduction has deeply affected and transformed the library work. Although there is no agreement on whether or not new technologies have introduced new ethical issues, (1) ethics seems to have become an interesting topic for the information profession. Even if it is true that the debate on ethics started among computing and philosophy professionals in the early 1990s and that librarians followed later, (2) the library profession current interest in ethics is easily confirmed by only a superficial glance in a bibliographic database, such as Emerald, that reveals 25 articles on library ethics published between 1996 and 2002.

In the last few years Michael Gorman published his book on librarians' values, (3) Robert Hauptman his *Ethics and Librarianship* (4) and Robert Vaagan was asked by IFLA to prepare and edit an international survey on the professional ethics. (5) Seventeen countries from all over the world were included in the survey. IFLA/FAIFE interest in the ethics goes back to the nineties when it started encouraging the national library associations to translate their codes of ethics into English and send them to the FAIFE office to be mounted on its webpage. Twenty-six codes are displayed on the IFLA/FAIFE webpage at present. Although, as R. Vaagan has shown in his survey, there are still some national library associations in the world that do not have a code of ethics, it is likely that the number of codes on the webpage will increase in time.

Also, a growth in ethics courses in higher education has been observed. (6) Once mentioned in passing, often in a library management course, ethics is now normally the topic of a whole course or module in LIS graduate or postgraduate education.

The countries in transition might have reasons of their own to deal with the professional ethics issues. They have to transform their societies from closed communities where information vital for decision making was circulated mainly by word of mouth and was available only to the elite into democratic societies with active citizens who are ready and willing to initiate changes. In another words these societies have to reappraise the value of information and make it accessible to their citizens. Also, professional associations, that up to the beginning of the nineties were organizations run and controlled by the state, have to develop into non-government organizations based on professionalism. The fact that national library associations in those countries either composed their codes of ethics for the first time or adopted new codes in the beginning of the 1990s shows clearly that ethics is considered relevant and closely related to professionalism.

Professionalism is a way of behaviour characterized by the feeling of responsibility in providing services and products to the clients. (7) Professional conduct of the library profession comprises provision of free and equitable access to accurate and reliable information, protection of the confidentiality of users, observance of the intellectual property rights connected with information products and care of the common cultural heritage.

Code of ethics as a basic professional document

The professional code of ethics is a document in which professional conduct is described as based on professional values that are normally defined and enumerated in the code. The code can be regarded as a kind of contract made between the profession and its clients by which the quality of services offered by the profession is guaranteed. Also, the code provides guidance on the behaviour towards colleagues. The library code of ethics also describes the conduct of a professional towards information and library materials. Every code thus attempts to cover at least three kinds of relationship: relationship between professionals and users, relationship among professionals and relationship between professionals and the material in their custody.

Regional codes of ethics: a survey

An analysis of contemporary codes of ethics of five national library associations of the countries in transition has been made in order to find out what professional values are considered important. The analysis includes the codes of the national library associations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia. All the codes were composed and adopted in the nineties. Although no attempt was made to verify the initial assumption that writers of the codes had consulted one or several of the codes of their

neighbouring library associations, prior to writing their own codes, similarities in the content, phrasing and style applied in the codes, point to the conclusion that our initial assumption was correct. What follows is the presentation of the values that appear most frequently in all or the majority of codes. For the purpose of the analysis values were identified in accordance with Michael Gorman's names of values. (8) Guidance to the behaviour towards colleagues and towards library materials contained in the codes are shown in the separate tables.

The codes surveyed

<i>Code</i>	<i>Date of adoption</i>	<i>Abbreviation</i>
The Code of Ethics of Slovenian Librarians	1995	SLO
The Code of Ethics of Librarians of Bosnia and Herzegovina	1997	BOS
The Code of Ethics of Macedonian Librarians	1997	MAC
The Code of Ethics of Serbian Librarians	1998	SER
The Code of Ethics of Croatian Librarians	2002 (1 st code adopted in 1992)	CRO

Professional values emphasised most frequently in the codes

<i>Value</i>	<i>Phrasing</i>	<i>Code</i>
professionalism	a librarian constantly improves her/his knowledge	SLO, SER, BOS, MAC, CRO
	is guided by professional considerations (only)	SLO, MAC, CRO
service	should ensure the best quality of service	SLO, SER, BOS, MAC, CRO
intellectual freedom	opposes any kind of censorship	SLO, SER, BOS, MAC, CRO
	should strive for free transfer of documents and information, but is not responsible for any consequences resulting from its use	SLO
	should strive for free transfer of documents	SER
	should strive for free flow of information	MAC
privacy	behaves in accordance with intellectual freedom principles	BOS CRO
	protects privacy of the users	BOS CRO MAC SLO SER
intellectual property	respects the intellectual property rights	BOS CRO MAC
rationalism	helps develop library collections, processes, stores and protects material and makes it available	MAC SER
stewardship	protects and promotes national and international heritage	CRO

Behaviour towards colleagues

colleagues should be supported and respected	SER SLO
behaviour should be the one of support, sincerity and honesty; colleagues should be helped in professional development	BOS
librarians should not act against the interest of colleagues	MAC
co-operation and the professional conduct with the members of the library and other professions	CRO

Behaviour towards library materials

librarians should not abuse their position for the individual gain	BOS MAC SER SLO
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Respect for values

There is no doubt that the library associations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia have modern codes of professional ethics and the professional values of librarians in the region seemingly correspond to the contemporary professional values of the international library community. Whether the professional values emphasised in the codes are really recognised and respected in the everyday life is another issue. A few instances contrary to the professed values occurring in the Croatian library community are briefly described in order to explain why a more detailed research into the personal beliefs and values of Croatian librarians was considered necessary.

Privacy

In an earlier paper the inadvertent revealing of personal data on library users in Croatian libraries was described (9). Further examination of library practice revealed that personal data were easily accessible not only to the members of the library staff, but also to the users. Privacy of internet users could not be guaranteed in all libraries because of the space restrictions. The paper called for the introduction of legislation on data protection that could possibly improve the present situation.

Intellectual property rights

Respect for the intellectual property rights included among the professional values in the three of the codes investigated is hardly an accepted value shared by all. The practice of “cut and paste” creation of texts found not only on websites, but also in other sources is quite common. An academic librarian and a postgraduate student at the University of Zagreb copied literally the full text of his professor found on an official website and handed it over as his own. When asked why he did that he replied that he was very busy and did not have time to write his own text. His case was briefly discussed at the faculty meeting, but no sanctions of any kind were applied and no remorse was felt on the part of the colleague.

Professional relationship with colleagues

All regional codes inspected in our survey contain some statements concerning the proper conduct to colleagues. The Croatian code seems to be the most formal and refers to the need for co-operation and professional conduct. Other codes mention honesty, sincerity, support, etc. As far as the Croatian library community is concerned, the lack of empathy is easily observed. Cases of bullying in both library and academic environment occur but are admitted only in private conversation and sometimes perhaps not even recognised for what they are.

The profession has accepted the concept of knowledge organisation as an important component of library management, at least nominally. Knowledge organisation assumes knowledge sharing and recognition of the specific potential and skills of each member of the organisation. In practice, especially in large libraries, information is not shared, and full potential of human resources is not used. Such behaviour contradicts professionalism and may even raise serious doubts about the recognition of the publicly proclaimed professional value of intellectual freedom or of support and respect for colleagues mentioned in the majority of the codes.

Professional values of Croatian librarians

The apparent gap between the professionalism proclaimed in the code of ethics and the real life situation might easily lead to a suspicion that personal beliefs and values of Croatian librarians are at variance with the values stated in the code of ethics. To explore this assumption an investigation concerning the professional values of Croatian librarians was conducted in the autumn of 2002. It was based upon the previous research described in the professional literature by Koehler et al. and Dole and al. in 2000. (10, 11) In this previous research a clear set of professional values was used, which seemed quite usable for the purpose of our investigation on condition that adequate equivalents of concepts and terms in Croatian are found. To the original set of 11 values we added a few more traditional ones, such as “creation of records of quality”, “support of lifelong learning”, “collection development”, “efficient organisation of library work”. In the end 15 values were identified and included in the questionnaire and librarians were asked to mark the three they considered the most relevant and to rank them as 1, 2 or 3. Additional questions in the questionnaire concerned gender, professional education, library experience and type.

In the beginning we believed that the relatively small sample of librarians, easy to handle, would still be statistically relevant for the small library community in Croatia. In other words we hoped to be able to obtain conclusive evidence from a small sample taking into account the fact that the total population of librarians in Croatia according to the official statistical sources was 1983. (12). Soon we understood that our results would have to be non-random and therefore would not be statistically relevant. The lack of a reliable directory of libraries and librarians was the main cause for our decision to refrain from using the random sample. The population investigated were librarians from three regions in Croatia (Istria, Dalmatia, Slavonia) and the city of Zagreb. Questionnaires were circulated at the professional meetings of regional library associations or were sent to a colleague in a region who then distributed them further. The element of bias was thus introduced, because a greater number of librarians active in their regional library associations were included in the survey. 399 valid questionnaires were returned, what represents 20.1% of the total number of librarians in the country (Table 1). The results of the research will hopefully be published. In this presentation only the preliminary results that might be of interest for our topic are shown (Table 2).

Table 1. Librarians according to the library type

	No. of respondents	%
Public	219	54.9
School	80	20.1
Academic	50	12.5
Special	18	4.5
National/scientific	32	8.0
Total	399	100

Table 2: The first three values selected by Croatian librarians in all types of libraries

	Selected as 1, 2 or 3	Selected as the first	Selected as the second	Selected as the third	Not selected
Preservation of book heritage	39.8%	14%	12.8%	13%	60.2%
Free access to information	49.1%	23.6%	10.5%	15%	50.9%
Service to users	46.1%	24.6%	13.5%	8%	53.9%
Literacy	6.5%	2%	3%	1.5%	93.5%
Information literacy	11.6%	1.3%	4.3%	6%	88.4%
Promotion of reading	37.6%	14.8%	13.3%	9.5%	62.4%
Equality of access	7.3%	1%	3.5%	2.8%	92.7%
Cultural diversity	6%	0.5%	2.3%	3.3%	94%
Lifelong learning	26.3%	5%	9.3%	12%	73.7%
Creation of quality records	8.8%	1.8%	1.8%	5.3%	91.2%
Intellectual property rights	1.8%	0%	1.3%	0.5%	98.2%
Collection development	33.3%	7.3%	16.3%	9.8%	66.7%
Organisation of library work	15%	2.3%	6.5%	6.3%	85%
Privacy	0.5%	0%	0.3%	0.3%	99.5%
Professional neutrality	8.5%	1.8%	1.3%	5.5%	91.5%

In the first column of the Table 2 all values marked either as the 1st, 2nd or 3rd have been observed as being equally important. Free access to information is chosen by all librarians as the most important professional value (49.1%). Providing services to users is the second (46.1%), and preservation of book heritage is the third most important value (39.8%). But the order of values changes when the value marked as the first most important only is observed (see column 2 in Table 2). In that case more librarians choose providing service to users as their top value (24.6%). Free access to information is chosen by 23.6% of librarians as the

second value and promotion of reading by 14.8% as the third value in rank. In general, the results correspond to those obtained in the previous research by Dole and Koehler.

It is also interesting that our initial suspicion proved right: there are some values declared in the code of ethics as important professional values, but not felt as such by the majority of the library population. In our research intellectual property right and privacy have been selected as top values extremely rarely. In fact 99.5% of the librarians did not select privacy as one of the three values and 98.2% of librarians did not select intellectual property rights. Surprisingly enough, the third least selected value has been literacy. This last ranking would require a more careful interpretation, especially if compared with the results obtained in Dole and Hurych research. (13)

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the library associations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia have modern codes of professional ethics and the professional values of librarians in the region seemingly correspond to the contemporary professional values of the international library community. The existence of a code of ethics does not mean that all professional values proclaimed by the code have really been adopted and accepted by the members of the profession. The research on professional values conducted in Croatia has confirmed that Croatian librarians share some of the values with the rest of the library community, but that some values are less recognised and less respected.

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