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A Modern Library as a Cause of Changes in the University Education in Poland

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Abstract

Poland, alongside other countries from the former Soviet Union, is making an effort to overcome the civilization delay resulting from political and cultural isolation during the communist period in polish recent history. Profound changes take place in the university-level education, especially provincial universities from smaller towns are facing a challenge to adopt modern standards of schooling and embrace emerging trends in education. A real chance to accelerate modernization has appeared for these countries which have joined the European Union, includes Poland. The EU funds and grants provide unprecedented opportunities for sustainable development not only of the economy but also of the science and the education. The Jan Kochanowski University has been taking advantage of the money offered by the UE structural funds for its development and infrastructure extension since 2007. The one of the most important accomplishments was certainly building the University Library which opened in 2013. Having embraced new possibilities including extending traditional collections and electronic data bases as well as implementing state-of-the-art technical solutions, the Library has truly become a "second lecture room" - a place where both lectures and students may find a rich and stimulating environment for studies, research, reflection and personal growth.

1. Introduction

The Jan Kochanowski University has been taking advantage of the EU funds and grants providing unprecedented opportunities for sustainable development not only of the economy but also of the science and the education. For over eight years now, we have been under extensive improvement of our didactic and research structures: advanced, state-of-art laboratories for chemistry, biology and medical studies have been built, furnished and equipped. Erecting a new library edifice and opening it to the public in 2013 is yet another vital achievement.

2. Public Libraries Investments in Poland Between 2004 – 2013

The role of libraries, especially university libraries, is increasingly more valued in Poland as they have fundamental importance for the development of society as well as existence and progression of the nation. Using the EU funds between 2004 – 2013, there have been built as many as 25 new university libraries, 15 libraries have been expanded or modernized, finally, a total of 182,234,700.99 PLN has been invested in the development of the IT infrastructure (e-library, computer network) in 21 locations.

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Table 1. List of investments in library facilities in 2004-2013.

no.	Field of investments	Investments number	Value (PLN)
1.	Building new edifices	25	1,465,047,135.72
2.	Restoration, enhancement, renovation of existing libraries	15	79,920,188.46
3.	IT infrastructure, e-library	21	182,234,700.99
	Total	61	1,727,202,025.17

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This program included both "old" university libraries which have already a great history, but also provided substantial resources for construction of new facilities and modernization of these university libraries which have been created relatively recently and are functioning outside of large academic centers. Library in Kielce is an example of a fairly young institution. It is located in the capital city of Swietokrzyskie Province, in the center of Poland; however, the voivoideship belongs to the economically less developed, with fairly fresh academic traditions.

3. School and Public Libraries

The modernization process included public and, to a lesser extent, school libraries. Currently, there are nearly 8,300 public libraries, 6,000 of which are situated in small towns. Apart from that, there are also numerous town libraries. Majority of these establishments is maintained by local governments, and, unfortunately, often under-funded. Therefore, various endeavors and special help programs to improve the situation have been commenced in recent years. One is the Library Development Program, for which the foundation of Melinda and Bill Gates has allocated 30 million USD. Said project supports small town libraries providing them with computer equipment and offering IT trainings for the librarians. Between 2009 – 2013 as much as 3,780 entities benefited from it nationwide. Simultaneously, another program is being implemented. This is the Library+, with a budget amounting to 150 million PLN, financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. Additionally, Poland runs "Readership Promotion" program allocated with 5 million PLN. The campaign encourages reading a leisure activity referring to a research showing that people who read are more satisfied with their lives, careers, they earn promotions sooner and, which may be surprising, play sports more often [7].

4. University Library in Kielce – a Characteristic

The edifice of the Library is a compact four-storey block, subtly fused into the hilly terrain adopting the natural topography. An amphitheatric square faces the front of the building. This unique setting of the library will undoubtedly be used for organization of a variety of cultural and sporting events that shall integrate different communities, not just academic ones.

Fig. 1. The library building.

Fig. 2. A two-storey general reading room.

The primary user of the edifice is the University Library, which occupies three floors and a part of the fourth floor using a total of 6,961.6 m². The remaining space, 518,9 m², is used by the University Data Center. Each of the four floors here has a slightly different spatial arrangement and offers different functionality. On the ground floor there are some public areas including: a lobby, an information point, book rentals, a conference hall, a seminar room, a locker room and toilets and a book storage. On the first floor there are: computer catalogs, a University Gallery, the monographs free-access department and a two-storey general reading room. This floor also houses: an advanced reading room for the visually impaired, Inter-library Lending Department and

a collection of nineteenth-century books.

Going up, on the second floor, one shall find the following: card catalogs, Reference Reading Room, Multimedia Reading Room, Special Collections Reading Room and Press Reading Room. A substantial part of this floor is dedicated to the periodicals free-access department. Finally, the third floor, inaccessible to visitors, holds, apart from the University Data Center and servers room, a library branch of IT. One final room on said storey is reserved for a doublets storage [2].

4.1. Library System and Catalogs

The Library relies on an advanced library system called ALEPH (Automated Library Expandable Program). It is the primary source of information about the collections of the University Library. ALEPH catalog can be easily accessed at lib.ujk.pl. While using the on-line service, you can: perform multifaceted search. Moreover, one may access and manage his or her individual library account. Within the library building, the on-line catalog can be visited from any of over fifty computers intended for our readers. Complementarily to the on-line catalog, there are also card catalogs, which contain: an alphabetical list of monographs published between 1801-1992 and an alphabetical list of periodicals and series.

4.2. Lending Collections

The library renders its resources available: locally, in reading rooms; lending them for home use, making them available for inter-library circulation, by performing microfilms, photocopies, scans and other forms of reprography. Naturally, we offer access to electronic versions of journals and databases on optical discs and via the Internet as well. Guests may enjoy freely a part of our library collections in, so called, free access zones, where readers can browse both books and periodicals.

4.3. Modern Library – Equipment Befitting the XXI Century

The library has been equipped with various state-of-art devices including modern computers and audiovisual equipment. On the premises, our guests can freely use as much as 57 PC workstations, all of which are connected to high-speed broadband Internet. We also provide a free WIFI network. Complementarily, there is a possibility to borrow a laptops or a tablets. Two terminals for self-service book borrowing are located on the first floor. Apart from that, our guest may use three ecological photocopiers which allow scanning to digital formats. What is more, our readers can now return their borrowings round the clock: at the library's main entrance, there is a self-service books return terminal featuring touch interface.

Fig. 3. A self-service books return terminal.

4.4. High-Tech Devices in Aid of Didactic Process

Hosting multimedia conferences, giving lectures and speeches, conducting conversational classes; it's been made easy with the library's modern audio-visual equipment: automatic screens, interactive whiteboards, multimedia overhead projectors or an automatic copy whiteboard capable of making instant printouts of its contents. Preparing and conducting various types of interactive knowledge tests, quizzes or voting polls is a trivial task using a specialized voting system. Moreover, Moodle platform has been adopted and launched. Using this solution, tutors may upload materials and courses for either open and closed groups

4.5. State-of-Art Equipment and Software for Collections Digitalization

Our digitalization lab is meant to convert both: valuable and unique books (in order to protect our cultural heritage) but also teaching materials and publications on the Swietokrzyskie region. The workshop has been equipped with an advanced scanner by Zeutschel. Said device is well geared towards processing special collections, such as manuscripts, maps, atlases or XIX century volumes. The laboratory is also equipped with a quality microfilm converter Zeutschel OP500 and Microform FP505 developing machine.

4.6. University Library – a Library Without Barriers

The University Library is a friendly place for people with disabilities as it features: a wide driveway suitable for wheelchairs, automatically opened doors or hands-free elevator system. We also have toilets for people with physical disabilities. The library offers ten PC terminals adapted to the needs of people with various impairments. Visually challenged guests may use: Focus 40 Blue – a specialist

braille display; Index Everest D – a braille embosser; an auto-reader (a device that automates the process of converting written text into audio formats; portable electronic magnifiers or stationary screen enlargers. Naturally, all disabled readers can always count on friendly and professional assistance of trained library staff [3].

4.7. Collections

The University Library gathers all kinds of traditional collections, including: books, periodicals (magazines: Polish and foreign), special collections (rare books, manuscripts, cartographic documents, iconographic documents of social life) as well as scientific literature on disciplines taught in the University. Overall, our collection comprise ca. 600,000 items. Apart from traditional, printed sources, the library offers access to electronic resources, to interdisciplinary databases (e.g EBSCO – Academic Search Complete, Science Direct (Elsevier), Springer, Scopus) and to specialized, branch-oriented databases (Agricola, MEDLINE, GreenFile).

4.8. Educational Functions of the University Library

Modern architecture, state-of-art equipment, innovative information technology used in our library enabled us to make a qualitative leap in terms of collecting, processing and sharing information and knowledge. In this new and broader understanding, the library has become "a second lecture room" [5]. Provided with these potent tools, we have become able to influence both organization and quality of education offered by the university significantly. Moreover, we are an invaluable support in scientific research, especially in the fields of social sciences and humanities.

Observing the overall trends and directions towards which the modern society develops, understanding its role in shaping of the future of universities, the University Library endeavors not just to respond passively to emerging needs of the academic society. Our wish is to actively promote beneficial educational trends, as well as stimulating various creative ideas [1]. The Library operates on the principle: "Think locally, act globally". We embark on focusing on the external, global environment as to determine and present our unique strengths, but also communicate our particular needs.

B. Shaw famously asked "How can you think without books?". His paraphrased words: "How can you study or conduct researches without specialized literature?" were a spark that lead to creation of the Scientific Book Society in Darmstadt, which quickly gained global recognition and numerous members [9]. Today, we shall ask again the very same question. This time, however, we do so in reference to books, to the modern information sources and to the

contemporary ways of acquiring information. Thus, the Library acknowledges its duty to meet and educate high school pupils. Therefore, we engage a variety of educational activities: these range from showing people round the library, preparing multimedia presentations, to organizing library lessons taught by faculty librarians.

The Library perceives the opportunity to play a significant role in the education of the university students. We encourage lecturers to conduct selected classes and doctoral seminars within our walls as well as using our unique collections and modern technical equipment. Moreover, the Library wishes to provide any help necessary in getting to the essential and trustworthy information our readers require. In the multitude of different information sources, there is a growing demand for more academic approach to subjects of data discrimination, evaluation and acquisition [6]. Well organized and structured study of these emerging issues must lead to improved efficacy of the higher education. Thus, it is our mission to win the attention of students and support of lecturers for this effort we make since it is the librarians who shall have a key role to play in creating strong inter-information connections (combining different data sources) [11]. We believe that established cooperation with the local media shall prove to be increasingly helpful in achieving our objectives in teaching, but also in promoting the library.

5. Library –Where Social Memory Lives on

Libraries are often referred to as "dormant shelves of remembering", places where social memory lives on. Sociologists talk about "social memory", understood as "socially created, transformed, or consolidated, assumed knowledge, referring to the past of the community. This knowledge covers a variety of content, has different functions, continues through various means and reaches individuals from various sources." Furthermore, carriers of memory can be divided into several general categories "(1) technical means of storing data (writing, art, photography) and (2) institutions that serve the accumulation of products of the past (libraries, archives, museums, and even certain social classes or environments—the aristocracy, the intellectual or artistic elites, etc.). Celebrated anniversaries (3) are another, very special, type of a carrier of memory." [3]. Adopting above mentioned division, I would further extend it onto "national memory" as well. Library, seen in this modern and multifaceted way, is no longer just to deliver knowledge about the present. It is not limited to utilitarian nor pragmatic aspects only. Its mission does not stop at shaping civic attitudes. The modern library is also a guardian of patriotism in relation to "little homelands" but also the whole of the nation.

6. Library – a Safe Haven of Brooding

In the light of what has been written above, the final objective of our activities is to support the intellectual functions of the academic and local communities. Therefore, we may picture the library as "a safe haven of brooding". Providing secure, quiet place for intellectual pursuits becomes ever so important nowadays, when there are myriads of threats awaiting young people, but not only. Health hazards, violence, intimidation, poverty; all of these factors create a sense of personal insecurity, and this, in turn, is not conducive to learning or generating innovative ideas therefore to gaining knowledge [11].

Finally, speaking of knowledge society, or in a broader social perspective, information society, the Library assumes the task to stimulate creative potential of the citizens. Undoubtedly, easy access to information and culture is necessary to promote integration, social inclusion and engagement. This role is effectively served by libraries. Sensible as it is, the idea that funding libraries is contribution to democracy and development of the country, it still remains quite an uncommon outlook [10]. However, regardless the odds, the University Library in Kielce is determined to succeed in its endeavors for better education.

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