

MODEL OF THE MULTICULTURAL LIBRARY

Introduction

Multicultural library is not a new idea. The Manifesto stating the necessity to adapt the institution to the needs of a constantly changing, diverse society was announced in 2006 by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). In the Manifesto the following definition of multiculturalism was adopted: *“cultural diversity” or “multiculturalism” refers to the respectful co-existence and interaction of different cultures, where culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group [...]. it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems traditions and beliefs”¹.*

Following this definition, we believe that the multicultural library’s activities should encompass broadly defined diverse cultural groups. Using the term “cultural minorities” in this document, we primarily refer to representatives of various nationalities, ethnic, ethnographic, linguistic and religious groups, immigrants and refugees temporarily or permanently living in Poland. However, this is not and it should not be an exhaustive list. It may also include minorities which used to live in the region in the past, as well as representatives of such groups as youth subcultures.

The need to care for cultural diversity stems not only from the obligation to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular the rights of persons belonging to minorities. We believe that cultural diversity is primarily a value and [...] *as a source of exchange, innovation and creativity of the human race is as essential as biodiversity for nature.*². Respectful co-existence, cross-fertilization, dialogue of representatives of different cultures contribute to the peaceful development of society, both on a local and global scale.

The legislator says that the right to use the library is universal, and the public library should meet the educational, cultural and public information needs³. Therefore, everyone should have the possibility to use the full range of library services - including educational, cultural and information services. This means that [...] *in addressing cultural and linguistic diversity, libraries should:*

- *serve all members of the community regardless of cultural, ethnic and linguistic heritage;*
- *provide information in appropriate languages and scripts;*
- *give access to a broad range of materials and services reflecting the community and need;*
- *employ a culturally diverse staff, trained in working with and serving diverse communities*⁴.

Implementation of various projects aimed at librarians across Poland showed us that the library is a meeting place for people of all ages, of diverse needs, interests, problems, and from different backgrounds. The library is perceived as a friendly, open, secure place for everyone. We are convinced that libraries may be (and often already are) a meeting place of many cultures, and thus may contribute to the integration and diversity growth of local communities.

Team of the Information Society Development Foundation

¹ IFLA/UNESCO Multicultural Library Manifesto . The manifesto was approved by IFLA Board in August 2006 and adopted by the UNESCO General Conference at the 35th session in October 2009 in Paris. In December 2009 the Polish Librarians Association General Board adopted the Resolution on the application of the Manifesto. The definition of multiculturalism refers to the definition of culture contained in the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity of 2001.

² UNESCO Universal Declaration of cultural diversity.

³ Libraries Act of 27 June 1997.

⁴ The IFLA/UNESCO Manifesto...

Introduction to the model

The multicultural library model described below is a preliminary one and it will be verified during the training courses and activities implemented under the project “Library as a meeting place for many cultures”. As a result, in the second half of 2014 a publication containing a final version of the model, including also good practices and scenarios of multicultural activities will be completed.

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The preliminary model was created by Dominika Cieřlikowska and Maja Branka, and the frames of the model were consulted during the three-day meeting in June 2013 which was attended by librarians from Poland and Norway, representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) acting in the area of multiculturalism and representatives of cultural minorities. After the consultation model was supplemented by an additional pillar - cooperation. The final version of the presented model is also a result of work of team members of the Information Society Development Foundation.

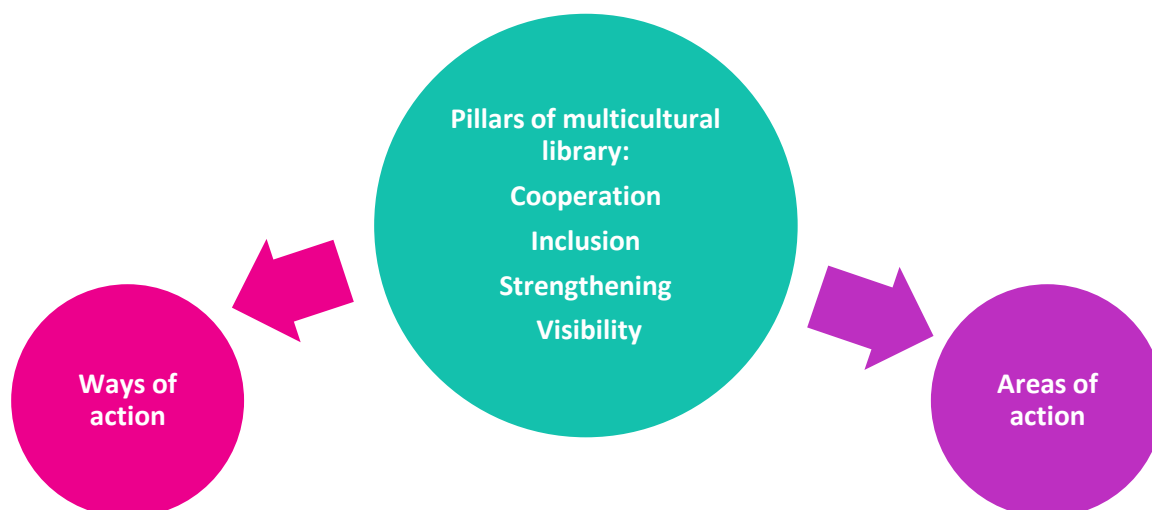
This is a comprehensive model, i.e. it has been prepared taking into account three perspectives: library as the institution, library as a place for providing services and the model implementation process. The so called pillars of the multicultural library are crucial for the comprehension of the model. They are the way of carrying into effect values which the multicultural library should follow.

The basis for the creation of the multicultural library or strengthening of their activities in this area is acknowledging that a library is a public institution functioning in a diverse social environment. It is necessary to be aware of existing social inequities, that not all groups of actual or potential users are in similar situation. Minority groups may be at risk of marginalization, and their position is less privileged. This affects, among others, the access of this groups to goods and public services. To accomplish the mission and realise the vision of the multicultural public library available to everyone, the way the library functions should be considered. It should be checked to what extent its services are available to representatives of cultural minorities (and others) and to what extent cultural minorities use those services, or, what changes and/or additional activities need to be introduced so that the library could become a fully public place.

The prepared model is intended to be universal, i.e. it is not recommended for a specified type or size of a library. In accordance with its assumption, depending on the size of the institution, its capabilities, readiness and willingness, each library will decide on the degree of implementation of individual components of the model.

The model consist of four parts:

- pillars of multicultural library;
- ways of action of the library as an institution;
- areas of action of the library (areas of library services);
- process which enables implementation of the model of multicultural library.



Implementation processes - 5 steps to multicultural library

PILLARS OF MULTICULTURAL LIBRARY

1. **Cooperation – partnership-based treatment of minority groups, recognition and respect for cultural diversity, examination of needs and establishing objectives and activities jointly with the group (rather than for the group). Cooperation with the community and organisations associating cultural minorities.**

The multicultural library should both plan and implement activities in cooperation with the community and target groups. An important aspect of the cooperation is, on the one hand, building mutual responsibility and subjectivity of both groups (cooperation as a value and a way of action), on the other hand - establishing relations with the community and organisations associating minority groups, creation of institutional cooperation networks (cooperation as a form). The result of such cooperation should be mutual education and joint activities and the development of the library offer in commonly set directions.

2. **Inclusion - addressing the needs of various groups in library activities at all possible levels of its functioning.**

Thinking of multiculturalism and the needs of representatives of minorities should be systematically incorporated into functioning of the multicultural library and areas of its actions. Due to the fact that the mission of the public library is to ensure all residents of a given place or a community an access to the services, the inclusion will consist in verifying whether the library offer is useful for people of this groups. For example, it may be checked whether the information about, and the possibility of participation in activities for children organised by a library is available for every potentially interested person, irrespectively of a cultural group they belong to. If it is found that only people from only majority groups (e.g. Polish children) are able to participate in those activities in the library, and the courses are

not attended by children of Roma origin whose parents do not know about such an area of activity of the library, the library should take actions to provide information on the library activity to people from minority groups and so that they could use the offer in the most convenient way, taking into account their cultural specificity. The easiest way to describe the inclusion is to say that it does not necessarily involve doing something special or exceptional, and what counts here is the evaluation of the previous actions of the library and possible modifications of the hitherto actions in the library - so that it could be available to various social and cultural groups.

3. Strengthening - equalising opportunities for minority groups, facilitating access, including special actions such as Polish lessons, access to the information addressing the needs of cultural minorities.

Strengthening consists in taking actions "tailored" to the needs of a specific minority group to fill gaps and support minority groups in the areas in which they have fewer opportunities than other social groups. In relation to immigrants it may mean organising special discussion groups helping learning Polish. This will allow them to freely communicate in the foreign language which, in turn, will facilitate their daily functioning in the new country and may, for example, help find a better work.

4. Visibility - noticing, appreciating and promoting achievements and heritage of minority groups, including education for majority groups about minorities.

The basis of this pillar is noticing of minority groups, their specificity and creation of secure, favourable conditions for them so that they could cultivate, develop and present their culture, language, religion and other important aspects of their identity. As a consequence, those groups and their "culture" should become (more) visible for the whole society, and the library should be a place where one can learn about those groups and their culture or religion, both representatives of those groups and people of majority groups. In the context of the Roma community it may be more practically expressed through organising a literary event with Roma poets and their poetry which would be an opportunity for the Roma to present their own culture to no-Roma people (not only the art but also the lifestyle of Roma poets and the Roma community), at the same time allowing the representatives of the Roma community to involve in learning about their own traditions and culture.

WAYS OF ACTION OF THE INSTITUTION

The pillars of the multicultural library, i.e.: cooperation, inclusion, strengthening and visibility should translate into the way the library as the institution operates. They should be taken into account in particular in relation to:

- strategic planning;
- team building and improving its competence;
- partnership cooperation with the community and inter-library cooperation;
- communication and promotion;

- infrastructure and space planning.

Strategic planning

The activities of the library should involve implementation of long-term plans, taking into account diversity of a local society, developed on the basis of examination of the needs of various social and cultural groups. Mission, vision and values of the library and its employees should recognize the existence and needs of these groups. For this to happen, representatives of local minorities and NGOs should not only be among the target group of conducted studies but also act as consultants on the strategy developed by the library.

The library team

Building and developing of the multicultural library largely depends on the awareness, knowledge and skills of its team. People who manage the library should encourage their employees to continuously increase their competence in the area of multicultural communication, to broaden knowledge about cultural practices of diverse groups, to participate in language training or anti-discrimination workshops. The team composition should also reflect diversity of a local society - it would be valuable to employ an employee or to cooperate with a volunteer who is a representative of a minority.

Partnership

The attainment of the objectives of the multicultural library should be based on the widest possible cooperation with individuals, formal and informal groups, organisations and institutions (including: other libraries) which conduct or are willing to conduct activities for multicultural societies. The library offer may be enriched for example through language classes conducted by students from China, and a collection of books may be adjusted to the needs of a local society - including immigrants who cannot speak Polish well - or through inter-library loans. It is also worth to think about broader cooperation in the implementation of undertakings or projects which cannot be implemented by a single institution or organisation.

Communication and promotion

The library should communicate with the environment and promote its services in a way enabling it to reach every member of a given society with its offer and taking into account its cultural diversity. Therefore, logotypes of the library, its website as well as its seasonal promotional materials, leaflets, holiday cards sent by the library (also on the occasion of holidays in other cultures) should be not only in Polish but also in a language of a minority present in a given region.

Infrastructure and space

Multiculturalism is also connected with various needs in the area of the space and infrastructure, and a systematic approach should assume taking into account this aspect of functioning of the institution when adjusting its specificity to different groups. Library collections should be arranged in a way facilitating the access to the most needed publications (e.g. to the Ukrainian literature) to members of minority groups, so that the library is also “their” place. Where possible - it would be valuable to purchase computer keyboards enabling the users of different alphabets, for example Cyrillic alphabet, to use the equipment.

AREAS OF ACTIONS OF THE LIBRARY

At the present time, the library is the institution with a rich and diverse offer. Traditionally, we may indicate four areas of actions of the library⁵:

- knowledge and information,
- culture,
- education,
- community integration.

When providing services in the area above the library should also remember of the pillars of the multicultural library: cooperation, inclusion, strengthening and visibility. Current actions should be reconsidered and it should be checked whether broadly defined library offer also reaches members of cultural minorities, whether they participate in the library activities, whether members of minorities need some activities to be specially targeted at them, whether, due to the activity of the library, the multiculturalism of a local society is visible, and - finally - whether the activities are planned and implemented in cooperation with the whole community, whether the members of minorities are treated here as partners.

Knowledge and information

Providing access to knowledge and information is the key function of the library. The library provides services in this area both through making specialist book collections or multimedia books available, through providing the opportunity to use the Internet and its unlimited resources, as well as through organising meetings with experts in various fields. The library also performs the function of a local information centre - it is a place where knowledge of local events, undertakings of various institutions, opportunities in the labour markets is transferred. It is important that the members of minority groups in this kind of maze - with a support from the librarian-guide - could reach the required information and also that the representatives of majority groups could increase their knowledge about minority groups. On the one hand, in this area, e.g. information tabs for the "newcomers" may be found on the website of the library or meeting concerning the rights of refugees, consultation with a lawyer, a social worker, an employee of the Labour Office or a teacher. On the other hand, it may involve extension of a book collection relating to the history of the region, with special attention paid to the minorities which used to lived there and organisation of bike trips to search for traces of those minorities in the area.

Culture

The libraries act as local cultural centres not only through providing access to literature in traditional form but also to e-books, audio books as well as music and films. In addition, the libraries organise or co-organise also various cultural events, such as exhibitions, competitions, photographic, art or theatrical workshops. It is important that the representatives of various minorities could found in their library also collections representing their culture and language. On the other hand, representatives of majority groups, for example through an access to Kashubian literature and music will have the opportunity to get better acquainted with this culture. Also exhibitions or performances

⁵ The authors of the model proposed a division into five areas: (1) a book and all events associated with it, (2) cultural animation, (3) knowledge of the region, (4) information and (5) education. However it was decided to return to the division applied in the publication of the Information Society Development Foundation „Biblioteka z wizją” (“A library with a vision”) (2012), similar to the division proposed during the training under the Library Development Programme.

of local artists from different cultural (majority and minority) groups, as well as dance workshops where participants learn, for example, Jewish dances may be considered.

Education

A lot of educational activities carried out by libraries may be also aimed at representatives of minorities (e.g. computer courses, learning English). "Special" strengthening activities may be Polish lessons for foreigners. Also those broadening knowledge and improving skills of residents in the context of multiculturalism may be considered, including: multicultural skills workshops or anti-discriminatory workshops both for members of majority or minority groups. It should not be forgotten that also minority groups or organisations acting on their behalf may make the library offer more attractive, conducting educational activities, such as activities for youth concerning the culture and customs of the Roma minority.

Community integration

The library is a meeting place where people feel safe. The library through its activities should build a common ground for people from different - not only in terms of culture - groups, enable people mutual understanding, preventing divisions, exclusions or marginalisation. This may take place through the examples of activities indicated above, but organising activities which would promote overcoming stereotypes is also worth considering, such as "human libraries", where one may "borrow" a "human" book i.e. representative of a minority group (not only a Jew, Roma or a Ukrainian but also a priest, atheist or a gay) for a half-hour talk. It is important that the activities taken by the libraries are conducive to building local identity, so that they – despite of visible and treated as values cultural divisions - provide members of a society with a sense of community.

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES - 5 STEPS TO MULTICULTURAL LIBRARY

Supporting multiculturalism in the library is an innovative action, requiring involvement in the idea. Implementation of the multicultural library model should be based on **a conscious decision** resulting from noticing the multiculturalism of a local community and readiness for change and challenges which are associated with them. **Diagnosis and analysis of a community/region** in terms of multiculturalism should be a second step. It is important to identify a specific nature of the multiculturalism of a given area (presence of ethnic or national minorities) and to reach specific needs of different groups. Next, **an action plan** should be developed - by setting objectives/directions and considering what needs and by what means the library should, may, and wants to, address. In a third step, the planned process should be reviewed through the prism of collaboration, inclusion, strengthening and visibility. A fourth step involves **the delivery of the planned activities and set objectives**, i.e. the essence of the implementation process. A fifth step - **monitoring and evaluation** - is a stage spread over the time. It should be planned so as to create the possibility to check the quality and effectiveness of the activities conducted and to achieve the objectives and indicators.

The effectiveness of the implementation process is associated with awareness of diversity and requires knowledge about the multiculturalism, in particular the knowledge of processes and mechanisms taking place at the crossroads of cultures, religions and languages. Staff competent in

the field of anti-discrimination and multiculturalism is a crucial component of efficient building of the multiculturalism-sensitive institution.

