

**Изучение практики представления библиотечно-информационной профессии на примере ежедневной газеты Словении**

**Researching the Representation Practices of the Library and Information Science Profession:  
The Case of a Slovenian Daily Newspaper**

**Вивчення практики представлення бібліотечно-інформаційного фаху на прикладі щоденної газети Словенії**

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В докладе представлено исследование, в котором концепция представления принята в такой форме, которая позволяет всесторонне изучить значения библиотечно-информационной профессии и ее существование в социокультурном контексте. Исследование призвано дать ответ на следующие вопросы: как представлена библиотечно-информационная профессия в конкретном медийном издании и как она встроена в сеть соответствующих социальных практик? Было собрано и проанализировано свыше 300 статей из ежедневной словенской газеты, выходящей самым большим тиражом. Результаты количественного и качественного анализов показывают основные значимые практики, такие как характер сообщества людей данной профессии и преобладающий имидж библиотечного здания, как дифференциаторы «старого» и «нового». Исследование именует библиотекарей «органическими интеллектуалами».

The paper presents the study where the concept of representation is adopted in a way to research the accumulation of the meanings of the library and information science (LIS) profession and its activities in the social-cultural context. The aim of the study was to explore: how is the LIS constituted in a particular media form and how it is embedded in a network of the related social practices? More than 300 articles from a Slovenian daily newspaper with the largest circulation were collected and analyzed. The results of quantitative and qualitative analysis show main signifying practices such as the LIS' community nature and the prevailing image of a library building in differentiation between the «old» and the «modern». The study also pointed to the librarians as the «organic intellectuals».

Йдеться про дослідження, у якому концепція представлення прийнята у такій формі, котра дозволяє всебічно вивчити значення бібліотечно-інформаційного фаху та його існування в соціокультурному контексті. Дослідження має на меті дати відповідь на такі питання: як подано бібліотечно-інформаційний фах у певному медійному виданні, та як він вбудований в мережу відповідних соціальних практик. Було зібрано та проаналізовано більш ніж 300 статей із щоденної словенської газети, що має найбільший наклад. Результати кількісного та якісного аналізів показують головні вагомні практики, такі як характер спільноти людей цієї професії, та вагому роль іміджу бібліотечної споруди як диференціаторів «старого» та «нового». Дослідження називає бібліотекарів «органічними інтелектуалами».

## Introduction

There has been a great interest in the image problem within the library and information science (LIS) community since there seems to be a general agreement on its negative connotations. In some views it is argued that the «unreal» image is the main reason for low professional status and an obstacle for fulfilling the professional mission of LIS. The central professional discourse emphasizes that the public does not recognize the «real» meaning of the profession sufficiently. This is nicely visible in the following question: «Do users even know what world of knowledge, leisure and democracy do ‘we’, the professionals offer?»<sup>1</sup> This question was posed by a Slovenian librarian, but the connotation is characteristic for LIS community in general.

The two approaches, which are mainly focused on repairing the negative image, can be identified in professional literature. The first approach deals with the core problems of profession such as the improving of the status through the paradigmatic orientation to «information science» and the abandoning of the archaic librarianship by adopting «challenges» of new information technology. The second approach comprises the media stereotypes. The main conclusion based on the oversimplified descriptions of characteristics of the so called «old maid» is that it is in no accordance with the modern «real» librarians’ figure. Finally this approach discloses that the mass media and popular culture are main producers of such negative perceptions<sup>2</sup>.

However, it seems that there is no basic consensus on what the real image is. Many groups of librarians which appeared in the last decade tend to show a heterogeneous public picture of librarianship in such manner dispersing and distancing the representation from the bureaucratic professional figure (for an example *The Bellydancing Librarian*<sup>3</sup>). Furthermore, several critiques are expressing doubt in strategies where only new information technology can resolve the stereotype «problem»<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, as professional community is less interested in understanding the issue in broader social contexts; it seems that the profession is contradictory in a way, concerned more with its own legitimation than with the reasons why the public has a certain representation of LIS or why the public does not use LIS services.

## Problem statement

To understand LIS in its social environment perspective, we have conducted a study by adopting the concept of representation from the cultural studies viewpoint<sup>5</sup>. In this strain the objects (e. g. events, groups, and phenomena) have no natural appearances but are shaped by the mode of «re-presenting». Namely in the social processes the concrete forms of an object get ideological conceptions, which then give them the meaning.

We have decided to explore the representation of LIS in the daily newspaper. Two research questions were raised. The first one researches the representation of the LIS and its activities regarding this media form. In the context of understanding the representation practices we partially abandon the idea that the media actors are the principal and the only creators of representation(s) in the daily news. On the contrary; LIS profession has a more direct influence on representation practices in such media. The LIS professionals as the main journalists’ source are trying to justify their meaning (role) in society by putting out all the «glamour» of the profession. That has been already indicated in Dilevko and Gottlieb study on the portrayal of librarians in obituaries published in daily press<sup>6</sup>.

The same authors have also concluded that representation practices are positioning the librarians as organic intellectuals. This presumption is adopted in our second research question on how LIS is embed-

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<sup>1</sup> Kovář, B. (2003). Javna podoba knjižnic [Public Image of Libraries]. In Frlež, J. & Legat, D. (ed.). Podobe knjižnic [Images of Libraries], Maribor: Univerzitetna knjižnica Maribor. pp 59–82.

<sup>2</sup> For an example: Stelmakh, V. D. (1988). Image of Library. 54th IFLA General Conference, Sydney, Australia, 30.8-3.9.1988, pp (5) 1-3.

<sup>3</sup> <http://sonic.net/~erisw/bdlib.html>H. (accessed in April 2009)

<sup>4</sup> Adams, K. C. (2000). Loveless Frump as Hip and Sexy Party Girl: A Reevaluation of the Old-Maid Stereotype. *Library Quarterly*, 70, 287–301.

<sup>5</sup> The approach of the cultural studies was nicely introduced in the article by Radford, M. L. & Radford, R. P. (2003). Librarians and Party Girls: Cultural Studies and the Meaning of the Librarian. *Library Quarterly*, 73, 1, 54-69.

<sup>6</sup> Dilevko, J. & Gottlieb, L. (2004). The Potrayal of Librarians in Obituaries at the End of the Twentieth Century“. *Library Quarterly*, 74, 152-180.

ded in a network of social practices. Namely the professional discourse and the library as a place are also mobilized and consumed in hegemonic struggles. The assumption is based on Gramsci's notion of the hegemony, which refers to the ability of the dominant social class (group) to get as much consensus as possible on other subaltern and marginal social classes (groups) in the society. Therefore there is no total control by one party over another, but a constant struggle, particularly in the public sphere. The organic intellectuals are groups of professionals which support the strategies of the dominant class, though this role can be ambivalent. LIS professionals can be positioned between the hegemony of the ruling classes and the subjects who would challenge them. Namely LIS can be a source for both; support as well as resistance to existing hegemonic relations<sup>7</sup>.

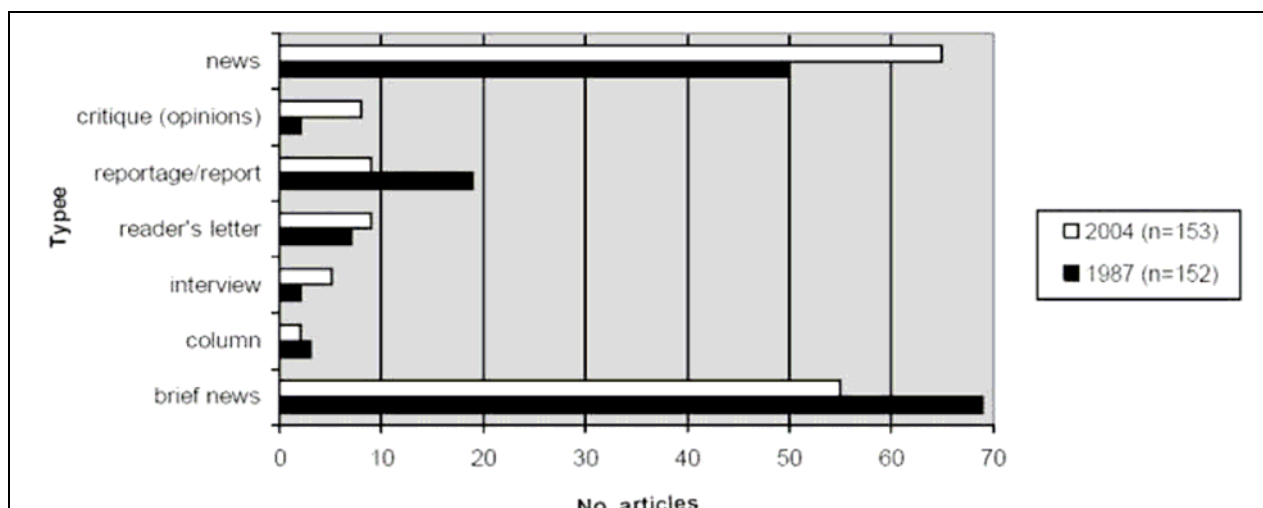
### Research methodology

For the purpose of this study, which was carried out in 2005, we chose *Delo*, the newspaper with the largest circulation in Slovenia. The research sample included all the articles published in 1987 and 2004 (in 1987 the university level of LIS education was introduced, while the latter – 2004 – should reflect the process of professionalization). The chosen years also present different political and economic conditions in Slovenia. The chosen period is positioned at the end of the constituent republic of the Socialist federation of Yugoslavia, followed by the Slovenian secession in 1991 and a transition period which culminated with the European Union (EU) accession in 2004.

More than 300 articles (152 from 1987 and 153 from 2004) were collected. They contained either the word «library» in a broader context or the word «information» in the narrow terms of definition in information science. The selected material was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative part explored the production features. The qualitative analysis was based on the constructivist approach in terms of understanding the representation practices, positioning them as part of the circuit of culture. This approach was introduced by S. Hall. It incorporates the semiotic and the discursive model<sup>8</sup>. The goal of the first model was to explore the main signifiers (denotative and connotative level), while proceeding from the second model we explored the practices in accumulation of the meaningful statements in the existing discursive formations. The results of both analyses offered plenty of material for quite a complex discussion. Here just few significant observations are presented in the most simplified manner.

### Results

The quantitative analysis firstly showed that LIS mostly tends to be represented in objective manner. There was an overwhelming presence of brief and classical articles for both years (see Figure 1).



**Fig. 1:** Distribution of articles according to the type of articles

<sup>7</sup> Raber, D. (2003). Librarians as Organic Intellectuals: a Gramscian Approach to Blind Spots and Tunnel Vision. *Library Quarterly*, 73, 33–35.

<sup>8</sup> Hall, S. (1997). The Work of Representation. In Hall, S. (ed.). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London: Sage. pp. 13–74.

In the analysis of the articles position in the newspaper schema<sup>9</sup> we found out that LIS is closely associated with the local community issues. The articles were mostly published in the sets of «domestic local events», followed by the sections dealing with culture in general. Interestingly, there was just one article in the information technology thematic section (present only in 2004). The «information part» was more extensively covered in 1987 in the science thematic section, where mostly the issues of automation and modernization of library catalogues and work processes were presented.

The articles were mostly published during the spring and autumn season, in connection to the most prominent national and cultural events. The articles were mostly signed by acronyms (42% – 1987; 40% – 2004), while the analyses of others articles showed a bit higher degree of authorship density. This can lead to conclusion that LIS area could be a specific journalists' subject. However, the nature of our study which also covers indirect issues cannot confirm this assumption.

The first descriptive level of qualitative analysis revealed some of the typical article features significant for both periods. The typical article is a brief article, which deals with the problems of financing, lack of physical space or is describing some new achievements (new building, computers, etc.), such as the following example of article title: «*The library doesn't have money for books*». The next most interesting feature is the practice of applying the numbers while presenting the content of the news (such as oversimplified statistics on book, reader, circulation). Interestingly, these statistical data has little or almost no value for common reader as there is no comparative model offered in interpretation.

The meaning of LIS representation can be identified when the interpretation of the news takes place. Two main binary oppositions are significant for LIS presentation: the «old» and the «modern». For both representation practices the library building is a central signifier. The library building appears as existential requirement for LIS profession. In the «old» perspective there is a strong tendency to represent LIS in from the perspective of the value of libraries and their materials as cultural-historical objects («temple of knowledge», «precious heritage»). This can be identified as a classical representation, where the building still manifests the knowledge itself<sup>10</sup>.

At the same time the professional stance is persistently stressing out that LIS is not only the gatekeeper in ancient storehouses but has been actively transformed to modern profession, which is especially important for the progress of society in general or for a certain nation. Herein the new information technology and new management approaches are used to represent the advanced development of LIS profession and its activities. The coming digital library is promising to resolve the problems of the inaccessible old storehouses. Furthermore, the librarians themselves also have new competencies to support the process of the economic progress. They are usually presented as a group and signified as the «zealous» librarians. Paradoxically to the promises of the digital library, the central issues in the representation of LIS modernization are the physical buildings. The changing point is that there is not only the new library built; but it is built by some professional standards. This modern library is functional, while LIS professional is highly effective. The glamorous new walls are in this context the most important professional indicator, stressing out the importance of LIS profession in the society.

Furthermore the analysis showed that the LIS profession justifies itself in two aspects (semantic fields): as «civilized» (to have libraries means to have a civilized society) and as «progressive» (to have libraries means greater social progress), with certain nationality affect. These two notions are nicely visible in the indirect thematic block of articles analyses, where LIS discourse and practice are mobilized and transformed. One of the examples is changing the object of exemplifying, comparison and positioning the LIS activities and their meaning. The meaning of LIS and related media events are not placed in the discursive formation of the «former» Yugoslavia any more but are referring to the «new» European Union situation.

Two most exposed events in 2004; the exhibition of the nationally important books and the implementation of the library remuneration model, also showed some interesting points which could support the thesis about the organic intellectuals. Both cases have a common key comparative destination: the Euro-

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<sup>9</sup> There were the following categories: chronicle (crime), world (international news), back page, front page, daily news and daily news in brief, reportage (entertainment), Saturdays' supplement and letters, sport, science, domestic local news in brief, domestic news, Ljubljana (domestic news of the capital city), culture, culture in brief (just in 2004), literary sheets, comments (in general), information technology (just in 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Hart, C.; Bains, M. & Jones, K. (1996). The Myth of Material Knowledge: Reading the Image of Library Buildings. *New Library World*, 97, 23-31.

pean Union. Both tend to create the meaning of the civilized and the progress of a nation in this new social situation. LIS is therefore an affirmative institution which prepares the terrain for exercising the activity on its basic level. So, from the institutional viewpoint LIS is supporting a broader and more or less accepted policies and discursive formations, without being involved in a public debate. But when this process is more or less finished, the profession exposes itself as a facilitator or a stabilizer. The profession is only arguing about its position when its role is questionable, but this is not common rule. Although a social event or a certain practice takes place inside the library walls it seems that the profession does not have or has a limited voice, because it is preoccupied with buildings, circulation, cataloguing and other specific professional matters.

## **Conclusions**

The study did not attempt to find out whether the representation practices have negative or positive connotations. The purpose of our study was to introduce those research questions which emphasize the understanding of LIS profession in a broader socio-cultural context. We believe that this kind of approach could bring about a greater and more critical self-reflection which is in fact necessary for in professional discourse, though this kind of the studies can be more complex.

To summarize some of the results we can conclude that the representation of LIS in daily press is closely associated with the formal professional discourse. There is a high tendency to show the professionalization and its successful activities through statistics. The library presents a common good which especially demands the presence of a physical building in local community environment. The meaning of LIS is basically legitimized in a social value of «knowledge is power». It is either positioned in the notion of being civilized or in the idea of social progress. These positions are clearly recognized in two main representation practices differentiating «the old» and the «modern» LIS. Though it seems that the profession wants to be move more towards the second pole, it still uses the already well recognized classical perceptions.

The analysis also showed that LIS discourse and library spaces are consumed for hegemonic struggles. LIS activities are mostly presented as supportive to the already affirmed policies by the dominant class or social groups. The ambivalences on its neutrality that are so likely to be stressed out in various manifestos, mission statements and similar documents are therefore demonstrated. These indicators cannot confirm the assumption on librarians as organic intellectual as we did not fully research the historical block and the stability of social conditions. However it does open the question on media representation practices and it directs towards the possible re-thinking of LIS' actual activities and professional discourse.