

## A COMPARISON OF SELECTED ASPECTS OF FINNISH AND POLISH PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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**ABSTRACT:** The article presents and compares the general situation of public libraries and readership in Finland and Poland at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, based on selected statistical data on the topic. In order to correctly understand the library policy of Finland – a country in which it is impossible to implement cultural policy without taking into account the geographical and natural conditions of individual regions – the most important data on the country are presented and compared with data on Poland.

Statistical schedules, online reports on the activity of public libraries, libraries' homepages, legislative acts and professional library science magazines, among others, served as source materials for the conducted analysis. The comparative method, documentation analysis method and statistical method were used to achieve the assumed objectives.

Considering the limitations on the article size, a decision was made to select a few specific aspects of the topic for analysis – the most important ones in the author's opinion. Among others, these included information on public libraries made available in both countries, contemporary government policies implemented towards the institutions that the author is interested in, conducting qualitative and quantitative research, generating reports on the research, as well as the governments' compliance with international and national standards of the quality of library collections, personnel and services.



Finland is a country of success, also in the domain of readership development. It has a well-developed network of public libraries and, for many years, has maintained the leading position in PISA surveys. The aim of the author is to review and evaluate selected activities of the Finnish undertaken to the benefit of libraries development, and to compare these activities to the Polish policy applied in this field. In order to understand correctly the specific character of the libraries of Finland – a country in which

it is impossible to implement cultural policy without taking into account the geographical and natural conditions of individual regions – the most important data on the country were used and compared with data on Poland.

The article presents and compares the general situation of public libraries and readership in Finland and Poland at the beginning of the 21st century, based on selected statistical data on the topic. Statistical schedules, legislative acts, online reports on the activity of public libraries, as well as libraries' homepages were used as source materials for the conducted analysis. Moreover, a general review of professional library science magazines was conducted. The comparative method, documentation analysis method and statistical method were used to achieve the assumed objectives. Considering the limitations on the article size, a decision was made to select a few specific aspects of the topic for analysis – the most important ones in the author's opinion. These included information on public libraries made available in both countries, contemporary government policies implemented towards the institutions that the author is interested in, conducting qualitative and quantitative research, generating reports on the research, the problem of updating library collections, and the governments' compliance with international and national standards of the quality of library collections, personnel and services.

The gathered material made it possible to characterize Finland as a country in which libraries are treated as a priority and the solutions applied are reflected in the activity of the Finnish in the domain of using these institutions.

## 1. FINLAND AND POLAND: AREA AND POPULATION

Finland does not directly border Poland, but is its close neighbour. The northern part of the country is inhabited by the Sami people. The Sami can live there mainly because they breed reindeers that run in flocks carelessly, without human supervision, although people claim to be their masters. In this part of the country there are no large urban agglomerations in which libraries could be established. The only exception is Rovaniemi – the town of Santa Claus – which houses the Rovaniemi City Library. The remaining large public libraries can be found in the south of the country. Despite this, Finland is the leading country in the area of library development and modernity, and their compliance with international standards. That is why the author decided to take a closer look at Finnish libraries and compare selected data on them with data on Polish libraries.

The area of Finland is about 340 square kilometres, which makes it the seventh biggest country in Europe (after Russia, Ukraine, France, Spain, Sweden and Germany), whereas the area of Poland is slightly larger than 312 square kilometres. Therefore, both countries are very similar in terms of size.

Finland is not a heavily populated country. Its area, which is comparable to the area of Poland, is inhabited by almost eight times fewer people. It is not only due to severe climatic conditions, but also barren soil. The population of Finland is slightly over 5 million people, while the population of Poland is over 38 million, i.e. over seven times more. The average population density in Finland is 17 inhabitants per square kilometre and Finland is therefore the third least populated country in Europe, after Norway and Iceland. In Poland, 122 people live on the area of one square kilometre. The largest cities in Finland are: Helsinki, Espoo, Tampere, Vantaa, Turku and Oulu (*Ambasada Finlandii* [*Finnish Embassy*] [online]). There are a few dozen such cities in Poland.

Perhaps owing to the specific character of the life of Finnish people, long distances, low population density, as well as long, dark and cold winters that are typical for Finland, and maybe because of the Finnish policy on public libraries, using them is only natural for most Finnish citizens. It is impossible to deny that constant financial – and not only financial – support given to libraries by the government and local authorities is conducive to their development and raising the quality of their services. Libraries are supervised by communes and financed mostly by their authorities. The government supports public libraries with yearly subsidies. The Finnish have achieved a lot in the field of managing public libraries, which is reflected in the results of their research, presented later in the article. The institutions described are well-supplied and use modern equipment, their personnel is professional, and Finnish citizens are active readers who very often visit libraries and use the services that they offer.

## 2. INFORMATION ON PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN FINLAND AND POLAND

Finland has taken care of providing reliable information on its libraries, including public ones. For example, in the capital city of Finland there is a separate website dedicated to this purpose: *Helsinki City Library* (*Helsinki City Library* [online]). The text which is published there can be downloaded in 16 languages. Unfortunately, there is no Polish translation.

The opening statement of the document is: “Public libraries – doors to knowledge.” At its very beginning we read that doors of public libraries are open to all citizens. There is also information that library collections and well-qualified personnel constitute a basis for library users that enables their lifelong learning, but also that the purpose of these institutions is to initiate and organize cultural events for all – potential and real – users (*Ibidem*). Then, the document quotes excerpts from the *Public Library Manifesto* (1994), which was the outcome of the work of UNESCO (*Public library...* [online]). In Poland there is not a similar website whose aim would be to promote public

libraries in the whole country, although there is a comparable statistical publication which has been issued for over ten years, presenting the most important data related to public libraries in Poland. It is prepared by the team of the Unit of Library Science of the Institute of Book and Readership from the Polish National Library (compare: *Biblioteki Publiczne w liczbach...* [*Public libraries in numbers...*] [online]). It constitutes the basic source of quantitative data on the institutions discussed in the article. Due to the fact that there is also an electronic version of the publication, the data can be compared to the data published on the website of the Helsinki Library.

Another important source of information on public libraries both in Finland and the whole Scandinavia is the *Scandinavian Library Quarterly* (published since 1968; until 2012 under the title *Scandinavian Public Library Quarterly*). The members of its editorial board also include representatives of the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. The quarterly is published in cooperation with Denmark, Norway and Sweden, and the editorial boards representing these countries change every five years (currently, the editorial committee has its seat in Stockholm). The aim of the periodical is to provide information on current trends and the strategies of Scandinavian libraries, available to everyone who speaks the English language. The magazine constitutes a forum for a constructive dialogue between representatives of the library circles. Since 2012, the quarterly has had its own website: [http://slq.nu/?page\\_id=539](http://slq.nu/?page_id=539) (*Scandinavian Library Quarterly* [online]).

In Poland there are two similar magazines with a long tradition: *Poradnik Bibliotekarza* [*The Librarian's Guide*] and *Bibliotekarz* [*The Librarian*]. They are addressed mainly to librarians, but also to bibliotherapists, students, literary scholars and all cultural industry employees in general. It publishes articles written mainly by practicing librarians, but also by representatives of the world of science – bibliologists and information scientists. As we can read on the website of *Poradnik Bibliotekarza* (operating since 2008), the magazine is a Polish nationwide monthly publication for public, school and pedagogical libraries, published by the Polish Librarians' Association (PLA). It has been published since 1949 – that is for almost 20 years longer than the Scandinavian periodical. Over the 65 years, the magazine has served an important educational, culture-forming, methodological and informative role in library science, being a propagator of the innovation, development and modernity of Polish libraries (*Poradnik Bibliotekarza* [online]). The above-mentioned monthly publication *Bibliotekarz* is also a professional magazine that is addressed to librarians working in different libraries, especially in public and scientific ones. The contents of the magazine are related to both the theoretical and practical aspects of contemporary problems of Polish and worldwide librarianship. The magazine has been published since 1929 (for about 40 years longer than the Scandinavian periodical) and is issued by the PLA

and the Public Library of the City of Warsaw (*SBP Ogólnopolski Portal Bibliotekarski [The PLA, Polish Nationwide Librarians' Portal]* [online]).

Two other reliable, popular and renowned sources of information on Polish libraries are also: the Polish library science magazine *EBiB* and the web portal *Elektroniczna Biblioteka [Electronic Library]*, available at: [http://www.ebib.pl/?page\\_id=2](http://www.ebib.pl/?page_id=2). The aim of these two information sources is to spread knowledge of library science. The *Elektroniczna Biblioteka* portal has been created since 1999 by librarians and for librarians, and information scientists. Since 2001, the editors of the portal have been working as part of the Electronic Publications Commission of the PLA. Since 2010, the portal has been edited by the independent EBIB Association. *Biuletyn EBIB (The EBIB Bulletin)* is a magazine which has been published only in an electronic form since 1999. (*EBiB* [online]). Although EBiB is not published on the initiative of the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education, it has managed to obtain a grant for the promotion of science from the Ministry.

To sum up, information on public libraries in Finland and Poland is professional, systematic and reliable. The periodicals and websites are prepared and maintained with utmost care. The only shortcoming of the information policy in Poland that has been noticed is a lack of information promoting public libraries in English, which would make it available to a wider group of users.

### 3. FINNISH AND POLISH POLICIES ON PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN THE NEW CENTURY

Information on the Finnish policy towards public libraries can be found, for example, at: <http://www.libraries.fi>, in the *Library Policy* document available on the websites of the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, in the *Finnish Public Library Policy 2015* (2009) booklet, and in a comprehensive report published on the IFLA websites (2012 [online]), written by Barbro Wigell-Ryynänen who, among others, works as the editor-in-chief of the *Scandinavian Library Quarterly* and the library advisor for the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. Such information is also available in Polish, thanks to an article by Elżbieta Barbara Zybert, published in *Przegląd Biblioteczny* (2012:494-506).

Public libraries in Finland are subject to the Ministry of Education and Culture. One of its departments is the Department of Culture, Sport and Youth Policy with the Division for Cultural Policy as one of its five units. When the Ministry entered the new century, it prepared an outline of the library policy. The governmental program on public libraries comprised the following four main documents:

1. Library policy: vision for the year 2015 – which outlined the main courses and aims of actions related to public libraries for the next few years; the document constitutes a basis for the government's financial policy in this domain.
2. Program of libraries development for the years 2006-2010 – which explained the role and importance of public libraries, especially for regions and provinces (until January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010, Finland was administratively divided into 6 regions).
3. Library strategy 2010 – which presented the vision and aims related to the access to knowledge and culture, as well as educational-cultural needs and challenges; it also provided a detailed list of actions aimed at ensuring safety in using information sources and defined the role of both local authorities and the government in financing libraries.
4. A program of library policy for the years 2001-2004, which included the proposal of a model of a library functioning in the information society; it also provided a basis for developing the strategy of public libraries in those years (*Library Policy* [online]).

Finland is famous for a well-developed network of libraries and the effective use of information and communication technologies in them. Municipal, scientific and specialist libraries in educational institutions constitute part of the national and international networks of information services.

Public libraries in Finland have been divided into three groups: 1) central libraries: the Helsinki City Library and the Central Public Library; 2) provincial libraries and 3) public municipal libraries (compare: *Finnish Public Library...*, 2010 [online]). Both municipal and scientific libraries are open to everyone. In Finland, the main rule in public libraries is to provide easy access to sources of culture and information for everyone, regardless of their place of residence and financial situation. Citizens are not charged for using library collections (*Library Policy* [online]). Libraries are financed by local authorities which, for this purpose, receive government subsidies regulated by an appropriate law. Local authorities decide themselves what funds to allocate to libraries, but the higher the amounts are, the more money local authorities can expect from state subsidies. The amount of a subsidy is calculated in proportion to the number of inhabitants.

The Ministry of Education and Culture supports the construction and renovation of libraries, and the purchase of bookmobiles – means of transporting books and other collections. The transport of library collections in Finland – a country in which the distance between the place of residence of many Finns and a library can be as long as hundreds of kilometres – is very

popular. Moreover, government financing also includes all special projects, for example the Helsinki Multilingual Library or the Sami Library (Ibidem).

In Poland, public libraries are supervised by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. They are organized, financed and run mainly by local government units. The ministry allocates, for example, grants-in-aid to purchase new collections, among others. The state policy on public libraries is implemented on the basis of, among others, the *Ustawa o bibliotekach* (*Libraries Act*) of 1997.<sup>1</sup> An equivalent document in Finland is the *Library Decree* of 1998.

In Poland, in January 2014, the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage published a proposal of the *Narodowy Program Rozwoju Czytelnictwa 2014-2020* [*National Program of Readership Development 2014-2020*]. The ministry designated 650 million PLN to implement it. 350 million PLN will be donated by the program beneficiaries – local governments and institutions, among others. The program has been developed as a result of work of the team for the promotion and popularization of readership, appointed by the Minister of Culture and National Heritage in accordance with the contents of the *Pakt dla Kultury* [*Pact for Culture*] and the *Strategia Rozwoju Kapitału Społecznego 2020* [*Strategy for the Development of Social Capital 2020*]. Three national cultural institutions were involved in the preparation and coordination of the document: the National Library, the Book Institute and the National Centre for Culture. The program covers the most important areas connected with readership and the presence of the book in the market: promotion and popularization of readership and the book among non-readers, support for the publishing of valuable literature and cultural magazines, training of librarians, and legal regulations related to the book market. An important element of the program will be actions aimed at changing and reinforcing the role of the library as the basic space of contact with the book. In connection with that, there are plans to modernize library buildings, upgrade library service, purchase new releases and organize training for librarians. The biggest drawback of the program seems to be a lack of defined cooperation with school libraries, which was clearly pointed out in *Biblioteka w Szkole* (*Library at School*) by its editor, in the first issue of 2014 (Wasilewski 2014:4).

Unfortunately, in Poland there is no coherent policy pursued by the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage to the benefit of public libraries. Due to the fact that the cultural institutions discussed are supervised by different bodies, public libraries

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<sup>1</sup> A list of all legal acts in force in public libraries has been created by the EBiB team and is published on its websites (compare: *Ustawy i rozporządzenia biblioteczne* [*Library acts and regulations*] [online]).

in Poland are not treated as an important element of the educational process, as they are in Finland.

All in all, it should be stated that the main drawback of the Polish policy on public libraries is a lack of a common, coherent, educational-cultural concept of both ministries, which results in a lack of promotion of public libraries as institutions that accompany us in both lifelong learning and self-education. In Finland, entrusting libraries to the ministry which deals both with cultural and educational issues has had positive effects. The Finnish have created special projects aimed at developing their citizens' habits of using public libraries their whole life and treating them as indispensable in continuing education. The effectiveness of this policy is demonstrated by specific indicators. In Finland, 40% of inhabitants are library users, in Poland – over two times fewer (17%). It will be possible to assess the results of implementing the new Polish project at the end of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### 4. SELECTION OF BOOK COLLECTIONS OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES

The Finnish have their National Repository Library, which serves an important function in supplying older materials that are no longer in use and have been placed there as a result of selection (*Quality...* [online], 2010:31-32). It must be added here that the Finnish take very good care of updating their collections and carry out selection regularly. According to directives, new open-access collections should comprise 40% of all open access collections (*Quality...* [online], 2010:17).

In Poland there is not a central repository library. It can be noticed that for many years there has been a decline in library collections, which means that more publications are removed from libraries than bought (*Biblioteki publiczne w liczbach...* [*Public libraries in numbers...*] [online]). Unfortunately, there is a lack of Polish nationwide data on the criteria for selection and it cannot be determined what the dominant reason is – destruction, loss, damage due to intensive use, year of publication, or maybe the fact that a given position has not been borrowed in recent years?

#### 5. PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN REPORTS

Finnish libraries are obliged to prepare annual activity reports that should be accompanied by detailed statistics. The statistics and reports, as well as the results of research that Finnish libraries carry out, and analyses conducted on its basis have to be widely available and published online. Due to the fact that the conclusions drawn from the documentation are the source of pride for the Finnish, some of these materials are sometimes translated into English (at least



in a shortened version), which contributes to a significant rise in the number of people who use and analyse them. Statistical data on public libraries in Finland can be found on the English-language website: <http://www.libraries.fi>.

In Poland, these issues are regulated by the *Ustawa o dostępie do informacji publicznej* [Act on access to public information] which outlines the material and personal scope of access to public information. (*Ustawa z dnia 6 września...[Act on access...]* [online]). First, the act specifies the procedures of publishing public information, including public documents, in the *Biuletyn Informacji Publicznej* [Public Information Bulletin] (BIP [online]). Public libraries, among others, were obliged to create their own websites in BIP.

According to statistics for the year 2010, the Finnish appear to be one of the most active nations of readers and library users. That year, almost 100 million library units – that is, 18 volumes per person (an inhabitant of Finland) – were borrowed (75% of that amount were books and music recordings) (*Basic statistic... [online]:1-2*; Wigell-Ryynänen 2012). In Poland, in 2010, over 100 million (123 million) library units were borrowed, which, taking into account the population (and the proportionally higher number of readers), resulted in the index of loans (borrowings) of 3 volumes per person (*Biblioteki publiczne w liczbach... [Public libraries in numbers...]* [online]: 49-52). It must be mentioned that, considering the structure of Polish collections, the recorded loans refer to printed publications. Audiovisual and electronic recordings comprised only about 3% of the total amount of loans that year. If this was taken into account, it would appear that the Polish and the Finnish borrow a similar number of printed publications from libraries. As it was stated in Polish statistical data, printed collections comprised 96.5% of all library materials in 2010, while the percentage of audiovisual and electronic documents in library collections has been as low as less than 2% for years (*Biblioteki publiczne w liczbach... [Public libraries in numbers...]* [online]:37).

In 2010, the statistical Finn visited a library about 10 times. Internet services in libraries were used 57 million times. A public library can be found in almost every commune and such libraries usually have their branches. In total, in Finland there are about 800 public libraries. In Poland there are ten times more of them – over 8,000 (210 per million inhabitants, which still makes Poland the leader in the field), whereas Finland has 160 libraries per million inhabitants (compare: *Basic statistic... [online]:2*; *Statistic... [online]; Ministry... [online]; Quality... [online]*, 2010:26-27; *Biblioteki publiczne w liczbach... [Public libraries in numbers...]* [online] 2010).

In December 2011, a report discussing the results of a survey carried out in Finland, concerning the role of public libraries in everyday life of the Finnish, was published on the websites of the Finnish Ministry of Culture and Education. The document was prepared by Sami Serola

and Pertti Vakkari ([online], 2011). It is the first report of this type; earlier ones only contained indexes of library collections use and readership.

The aim of the survey was to verify to what extent public libraries meet the needs of the inhabitants of Finland when it comes to supplying information, creating conditions for successful interpersonal communication and providing a cultural-recreational offer in everyday life of the people (education, work, hobby, interpersonal communication, etc.). The research sample consisted of randomly chosen inhabitants of Finland aged between 15 and 79, whose contact information was found in the general registry. Research questionnaires were developed in the spring of 2010 and sent to 6,000 people, among whom 1000 people responded.

Based on the gathered material, it was found that libraries most often met the expectations of readers when it came to borrowing fiction, and as places to spend one's free time and pursue a hobby. The respondents thought that, although there were other communication channels and a broad offer of access to literature (purchasing, borrowing from one another, internet libraries), public libraries did not cease to be, considering the factors mentioned, attractive to them. Public libraries most often met the respondents' demand for fiction, which was confirmed by 71% of the people questioned, and non-fiction (67%), and they constituted a repository of materials for self-study – 58%. Using library collections and services, as well as the cultural-recreational offer in everyday (also professional) life was most often mentioned in questionnaires by middle-aged, working people, especially in managerial positions. Cultural proposals also suited young people, students and pupils, but also more often women than men.

In the opinion of the people questioned, libraries did not manage to fully provide everyone with equal access to information. Activities aimed at the development of reading interests and promotion of lifelong learning were low-rated. It must be added that public libraries in Finland should, according to guidelines, aim at acting in accordance with the rules of democracy and thus ensure equal opportunities for people using literature, art, etc. (libraries were regarded as institutions respecting the rules of democracy by 64% of respondents) (Serola & Vakkari [online], 2011; *Library Policy* [online]; *Quality...* [online], 2010:27).

During the week, it is difficult for libraries to compete with more accessible information channels, such as the Internet, television, press or radio. However, the Finnish appreciate libraries as an important source of data and 49% of the respondents claimed that they visit a library at least once a month, whereas as many as 81% said that they visited one in the year 2009. The aim of the visit was most often to borrow books. The library users claimed that free access to collections and the reliability of information were the main advantages of libraries. The respondents thought that having the Internet

access in their lives only to some extent made them give up using library services. Interestingly, elderly and less educated people who most often declared that they did not use libraries at all, or did it very rarely, at the same time did not also use the Internet and other information sources, maybe except for television. Therefore, these phenomena should be regarded to be related.

In the research report discussed, prepared by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture and the University of Tampere, it can be read that libraries assisted 80% of the respondents in self-study, whereas 87% of the respondents were satisfied with obtaining the information that they needed or being assisted in searching for it (*Quality...* [online], 2010:27).

Finnish libraries cooperate in the field of developing an acquisition policy. The supply is adjusted to the demand on the basis of continuous monitoring. For example, booked collections for which customers have to wait for a longer time, constitute a purchasing tip. In 2010, an average of 339 books per 1000 inhabitants were purchased by libraries. The purchases were justified by the policy of borrowing (*Quality...* [online], 2010:16-17).

Summarizing the part of the article on the publication of statistical data and the results of quality research in both countries, it must be observed that the Finnish have taken care of providing access to their reports to more people by creating the information service in English. Undoubtedly, this results from the pride with which they talk and write about their public libraries. However, it seems appropriate to implement a similar policy in Poland as well, especially considering the fact that there are countries whose achievements in the field are not as great as the Polish successes. The Polish can be proud of, among others, the number of libraries per one inhabitant in Poland. Although the value has been dropping, it is still high, even in comparison to Finland.

## 6. QUALITY STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Since 1998, public libraries in Finland have been legally obliged to perform self-assessment.<sup>2</sup> The assessment is related to collections and library services, but also their cost-effectiveness and financial issues, etc. The aim of conducting self-assessment is evaluation – an improvement of access to information and the provision of better quality services. According to the Finnish law, it is required that the key assessment results are made public.

A broad document consisting of several dozen pages – the *Quality Recommendation for Public Libraries* – was published by the Finnish Ministry

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<sup>2</sup> “[...] local authority shall evaluate the library and information service it provides. The purpose of evaluation is to improve access to library and information services and to promote their development. Evaluation shall monitor the implementation of library and information services and the quality and cost-effectiveness of the services.” (*Section 6, Library Act 1998/904*), quoted from: *Quality...* [online], 2010:6).

of Education and Culture in 2010 (*Quality...* [online], 2010). It included guidelines for the quality of the operation of Finnish libraries. Among others, the issues of evaluating library-information services, as well as assessment and quality control tools were discussed in the four main chapters of the document. Moreover, the document outlined quality recommendations for library services, competencies of the personnel employed and collections, as well as for equipping libraries with appliances and devices. The paper presented quality management guidelines and provided an analysis of the involvement of library administrators (local authorities) in supervising and taking care of libraries. The last chapter – *Finland, a Land of Libraries* – discussed the influence of urban development and population structure on libraries, legislation related to libraries and government administration, the financing of library activities and the centralisation of services, the aim of which would be to support the library network and its users (*Quality...* [online], 2010:26-31).

The document was prepared by a working group appointed by the ministry. The group consisted of representatives of regional state administration and librarians from various libraries (smaller and bigger ones), as well as university teachers and scientists carrying out research related to libraries. Quality standards for public libraries were published in the Finnish language. An English version was compiled and prepared specially for interested users from abroad (*Quality...* [online], 2010).

According to the *Library Decree* [online], at least 70% of city public library employees should complete studies in the field of library science and at least 45% ought to have a bachelor's degree (with 60 ECTS points). Moreover, a person in charge of running a library or managing a library and its departments, should, according to the guidelines, have a master's degree, obtained after completing a master's degree program of studies.

The development of information society, an improvement in the level of education of the citizens, cooperation with schools, as well as the activities of a network of libraries make it necessary to employ specialist personnel in libraries. In Finland, however, the number of competent employees with a higher education is not sufficient and has been decreasing in recent years. In the nearest future, a significant number of experienced employees with a higher education is going to retire. Therefore, it has not always been possible to respect the provisions of the Decree. Because of that, on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010, the provisions on personnel qualifications were changed. The requirements were reduced.

In Finland, the number of library employees depends on the area of the given commune, and especially on the number of its inhabitants, but also on such factors as the size of the library and its collections, as well as its position in the library network. In 2010, there was an average of 0.79 library employees per 1000 inhabitants. Efforts are made to maintain this level or even raise it

to 1 library employee per 1000 people. According to Finnish standards, even a small library should have at least two librarians. A lot of attention is paid to improving the qualifications of library personnel by encouraging employees to pursue any kind of continuing education. The personnel not only can, but also should participate in different forms of professional development and courses, as well as take part in supplementary studies and workshops. The level of qualifications is constantly monitored. At least 6 days per person a year are assigned for professional development purposes (according to research, the number is about 4 days per person and it has been considered to be unsatisfactory). Information on the forms of the undertaken professional development may serve as a trump card for a potential employee and constitutes an element of competition (*Quality...* [online] 2010).

There is a chance that documents similar to the Finnish document discussed above will be published in Poland, thanks to the publication of 2002, entitled: *Działalność bibliotek publicznych. Standardy międzynarodowe IFLA-UNESCO [The Public Library Service: the IFLA-UNESCO Guidelines for Development]* edited by Philip Gill, translated into Polish and edited by Małgorzata Kisilowska, Jadwiga Woźniak-Kasperek and Elżbieta Barbara Zybert (Gill 2002). Another publication that should facilitate this is the material from the year 2010, gathered by the team appointed by the PLA General Board to carry out the task: “Testing the efficiency of public and pedagogical libraries” – *A set of functionality indices for public libraries in Poland*. The work was coordinated by Lidia Derfert-Wolf. Due to the unification of indices, it is possible to compare them and it is also possible to strive to meet international standards. In the introduction to the document quoted we can read that its aim is to:

[...] provide the people who manage libraries with a tool for management, including quality assurance, quality improvement, monitoring the progress of activity and the assessment of tasks completion with reference to all areas of library operation, support for creating strategic plans of library development, providing superior authorities and organizers with a tool for monitoring the progress of activity and for assessing the completion of tasks, providing a tool for benchmarking of libraries, providing materials necessary to carry out promotional activities the benefit of libraries (on a local and larger scale), providing materials for preparing grant applications. (*A set...*[online]).

Another comparable, but a smaller-scale Polish document is Hubert Borowski's paper published in the year 2011: *Wizerunek i użytkowanie bibliotek publicznych (The image and use of public libraries)*. The report was compiled thanks to the Polish-American Freedom Foundation, which is a partner of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in a project aimed at facilitating the access of Polish public libraries to computers, the Internet and training. The *Program Rozwoju Bibliotek w Polsce (Program of Libraries*

*Development in Poland*) is being implemented by the Information Society Development Foundation on whose request the document was prepared. The report presented the results of research on the image of public libraries, but also on the image of a reader and a librarian, user expectations of public libraries and customer satisfaction with using these institutions.

The implementation of quality standards in Finland and Poland is not comparable, for example (or mainly) because of the fact that in our country there is a lack of approved guidelines to be followed by public libraries. However, it does not mean that nothing is being done to achieve these objectives. As it has been documented, a lot of papers are being written on the basis of quantitative and qualitative research, which discuss and diagnose numerous national initiatives undertaken for the purpose of developing public libraries. It is possible that quality standards for libraries will also be approved by Poland. It is definitely an objective to be pursued in the future.

## CONCLUSIONS

The article presents the situation of libraries and readership in Finland and Poland, focusing mainly on the contemporary times. The information is supported with statistical data that makes it possible to present the problems discussed in a quantitative form and, in this way, to illustrate their scale. The author also uses library reports, as well as analyses the contents of legislative acts, websites providing information on libraries in both countries and professional library magazines. Undoubtedly, the presented material makes it possible to characterize Finland as a country in which libraries and their development are treated as priorities in the state policy, and the solutions used are reflected in the activity of the Finnish in the area of using these institutions.

While comparing both countries, it is impossible not to notice that in Poland there are more libraries (also per 1 million inhabitants), but also two times fewer employees serving their users. Another important indicator is the number of readers: in Finland – almost every second citizen is a reader, in Poland – not even every fifth.

As far as reporting and the promotion of public libraries on the Internet is concerned, the achievements of both countries are similar, with the difference that the Finnish have taken care of popularizing their information in English, thanks to which it is available to most people worldwide.

Implementing a coherent cultural-educational policy is definitely another great Finnish achievement. It has been possible due to the appointment of one ministry responsible for these two separate, but closely related fields.

The care taken by the Finnish government to ensure high-quality library services, provide properly educated library personnel, and encourage practicing librarians to complete their education and raise their qualifications

makes us reflect on the issues discussed, especially considering the present policy of deregulation of the profession of the librarian implemented by the Polish government.

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## ANNEX

Country	Finland	Poland
Area	ca. 340,000 square kilometres	ca. 312,000 square kilometres
Population	ca. 5 million	ca. 38 million
Population density	ca. 17 people per sq km	ca. 122 people per sq km
No. of public libraries (including branches)	798	8342
No. of libraries per 1 million inhabitants	160	210
Supervision of public libraries	Ministry of Education and Culture /with the Department of Culture, Sport and Youth Policy and its Division for Cultural Policy/	Ministry of Culture and National Heritage
Index of public library readers	40% of inhabitants	17% of inhabitants
No. of borrowings (loans)	100 million	122 million
No. of borrowings (loans) per inhabitant	18 volumes per person	3 volumes per person
No. of bookmobiles	154	no data available
No. of librarians per 1,000 inhabitants	0.8	0.4 (the author's own calculations)

Table 1. Public libraries in Finland and Poland: a comparison (Antczak 2014:147).

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