

Libraries and reading programmes for children and young adults in Hungary: present and future

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My lecture's main aim is to show what Hungarian librarians do for children and youngsters in public libraries. I will also present and analyse other types of programmes and activities aimed at promoting public libraries, so as to make them more attractive and accessible to children and young adults, and more generally programmes aimed at promoting reading.

Hungary is a small country with a population of almost 10 million. 20 years ago a huge political change took place in Hungary and in Eastern Europe. This affected the entire Hungarian society and had a huge impact on the evolution of libraries and publishing. When the Socialist regime ended in 1990, there was a big change in the publishing sector. Under the socialist system, there were 10 official publishers run by the State. After 1990, censorship was abolished and any book could be published and purchased. The book supply raised enormously. The publishers could not meet the requirements of ?

The following year, the new government ended the tax support and the VAT raised from 6% to 12% in 5 years. As a consequence of this raise, many publishers went bankrupt after 1995, especially the small ones.

Today, there are only three major distributors left in the market, present mainly in shopping centres and plazas. It is the *Alexandra*, the *Libri* and the *Bookline*, the latter started as an on-line bookstore. This monopoly has accelerated the closing down of small bookstores: www.alexandra.hu; www.bookline.hu

Among the Hungarians favorite activities, according to a poll, reading was the sixth in 1974, 12th in 1997 and 16th in 2004. Today only 10% of the reading material comes from libraries. Unfortunately, libraries did not become more popular with the political change in 1990. The Hungarians are not great readers, this mainly being due to their long working hours. Television has become a much easier way to relax after a hard day. For people who have never set foot in a library, they consider the library as a boring and serious place, which tends to scare them rather than attract them. A silent atmosphere isn't very popular nowadays, today people are used to background music, and a library means a soundless place.

The government doesn't promote libraries, and every year we get less and less money from the central government for the upkeep and maintenance. In 2012, the Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library is in a very big crisis and we may have to close some branches. Another reason why so few Hungarians frequent libraries is because the middle class is small in Hungary. Appropriate data is not available but it is approximately 10% of the country's population, i.e. one million. The lower class do not read much, the daily struggle is their first priority and the last priority is culture. The rich can afford to buy books and therefore they do not go to the public library.

University students in the library

The university libraries are very good in Hungary but they are few in number. Lots of students need to go to the metropolitan library to get the books mentioned in their bibliography lists. Near the Budapest Central Library, there are 5 universities. However the students like to use the Metropolitan library because it is beautiful, it has big spacious rooms, and they can find almost every book there. Our acquisition policy takes their needs into account. We therefore purchase reference and academic books which they need for their studies.

The students of today want quick results. They do not have time, they want the books instantly and they think a librarian knows everything. They do not like to sit in the library and browse. They want to be able to xerox and print from databases.

It happens more and more often that the grandmother or grandfather comes with the reading list and borrows the book for their grandchild. The young generation is increasingly losing touch with paper-based resources. The other category of young adults come to the library with their own books and notes. They use the library as a social place, where they can meet their friends, use their laptops and enjoy a cup of coffee. So as to meet the need of these different users, we need to have quick answers, good databases which can be handled by each and every librarian. We need large open places, a coffee bar, wifi access and every appropriate infrastructure to be a place where they feel comfortable and at ease. In Budapest, the Central Library of FSZEK is a good example.

Books for children

The university students come to us because they have to, but children come to us because it is fun. In the Socialist era, there was only one publisher specialised in children's books. At that time, picture books containing lots of illustration and little text, were not very popular, because the Hungarian parents preferred books with lots of text and few illustrations. It comes from the previous era where the text was the value and the picture was only illustration. Only few illustrators were renowned for their drawings and picture book wasn't supported by the culture politics. Veronika Marék, László Réber, and Károly Reich are three illustrators whose works were well-known in the 1980s.

In the last few years, things have changed and parents have started to look out for the well-illustrated, beautiful or humorous books. Today there are lots of publishers who supply books for the children. The quality levels are different of course but there is big choice of educational and interesting books. Foreign books, including French titles are also available in Hungarian translations for example: Gilbert Delahaye Martine books, Jean de Brunhoff, Babar, Goscinny, Nicolas Petit.

In school, English is taught as a second language and in high school they can choose French, Spanish, German or Italian. All these languages are popular with the young people.

We have a good editor, the *Pozsonyi Pagony* (the name comes from Winnie the Pooh) who publishes books written by contemporary Hungarian writers for children. (www.pagony.hu) The most popular is Erika Bartos who created characters such as Anna, Peti and Gergő and the stories are about a family. Although these books are quite successful, critics, librarians, and other writers say they are too simplistic. The family's life is too perfect to be true and the drawings, too primitive. A part from these commercial successes, there are other children books writers, such as Judit Berg and Petra Finy. For teenagers, Laura Leiner is one of the favourite. We also have the Hungarian Harry Potter: *Gergő* by Gyula Böszörményi. These books are about Hungarian legends and shamans.

Children library work

The Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library network has 49 smaller libraries and the main central library. Budapest is a big city with a population of 1,7 million, and every branch library has to be adapted to the needs of the district population, because there are huge differences between the standards of living from one district to another.

But for all the libraries, meeting the needs of children and teenagers is one of their top priorities. Our children librarians have to be very inventive, because young people are now accustomed to the TV, the computer, console games. That is why we organize groups for schools to visit the library and show them our services and activities. We have to contact the school librarians and literature teacher to invite them to the library.

When the school children come to the library, we organise quiz contests. The librarians look for interesting facts in books related to the subjects that they are learning in school. The aim of the game is to find the books in the library with the help of the catalogue and then to find the answer to the questions. The children are encouraged to work in groups. The winner is usually rewarded with a small present such as a calendar, a pen, a bookmark, etc. The purpose of this quiz is to show them some interesting books. The reward is a very good motivation for children. For smaller children we organize story-telling sessions, which stop before the end... In groups, the children then have to finish the story. The librarian then reads out loud all the different versions after which the children have to choose the best one. After the writing session, they can also make illustrations out of the story.

Some of our colleagues use the theater pedagogy method, especially for historical themes. The point is that it must be an enjoyable and educational experience for the kids. We always keep in mind that this could be the only occasion for them to visit a library. If we do not manage to make the library an interesting and attractive place, then they wouldn't like to come back here.

Another activity is showing the children the popular books. In Hungary, TV and the movies are very popular activities. When children watch a TV programme, they may want to read more about it: *Twilight*, *Hunger Games*, *Geronimo Stilton* have become very popular. Two Hungarian series are also quite successful: *Szent Johanna Gimi* by Laura Leiner (St Johanna high school) and the other is *Rumini* by Judit Berg. It is about the adventures of a little mouse who became a pirate.

Programmes for babies

Hungarian mothers usually take maternity leave until their children are 2 or 3 years of age. It is very important in this period to give them the possibility to come to the library. At the Metropolitan Library, we organize a club for mothers and their babies. We sing nursery rhymes accompanied with musical instruments. After the singing session, we show the group books for babies and for mothers. This is a good opportunity for mothers to meet each and to discover the library. In other library branches, the librarian invites experts to talk about games and books for the babies, as well as about health and other useful issues.

Programmes for pre-school children

For children between 3 to 7 years old, we organize puppet theater shows as well as arts and craft classes in the afternoon and music sessions. These activities are very popular, and of course the participants borrow books after the event. Story-telling sessions are usually on Hungarian folk tales because we are very rich in folklore. Between 1930 and 1950, ethnographers went to the villages to collect the folk tales from the story tellers in their

tradition environment. It was a huge work but it was worth it because now we have approximately 600 folk-tale collections in the library. The most popular theme is about a poor boy who managed to kill the dragon and save the princess. Miracles happens in these stories but it is not coming from a magic wand but from the behaviour of the hero. It has a good effect on children, because these kinds of stories encourages them not only to use their imagination but also promotes positive values such as bravery, courage and honesty.

School children

For students, there are more sophisticated programmes, where they use books and learn art and craft techniques. They have to use their brains and their hands. For example there is a Geronimo Stilton club where every occasion is an adventure with a combination of books and imagination. Geronimo Stilton is a best-selling children's book series published by Edizioni Piemme of Milan, Italy, since 2000. It has been translated into Hungarian and it is now one of the most popular books amongst children. In another public library in Budapest, there is a video group where teenagers film short crime stories. These are regular programmes and lot of children come to these events. The goal is that they remember the library as a cool and exciting place and when they grow up, it will be natural for them to come to us.

Last year, we had organised a Manga drawing competition which proved to be very successful. You can see the drawings on the web (show the website). This Japanese genre is becoming more and more popular in Hungary and lot of young people find it a good way to express themselves. We held several sessions about manga and anime. We invited experts who gave a lecture on Japanese traditions, on different types of manga and cosplays (costume plays). It was very interesting for adults as well.

We have also created a mentor program for orphan children. We visited several orphanages, and we presented the library and the possibilities that await them here. We showed them the chat service through which they can chat with the librarian. It is an on-line service. A librarian answers questions about the library service, or helps out with homework. Some people also contact the librarian when they can't find the answers to questions on the web. In this case, the librarian provides the answer with the help of books.

To come back to the mentor programme for orphan children, we brought them some interesting books from the library and then we invited them to visit us. When they came to visit us, we showed them the storage space, the neo-barocco rooms and told them stories about the library building. After that we showed them how to do a search in the magazines. They could request a copy of the old daily newspaper which was published on their date of birth. They made a xerox and went home with this souvenir. For orphans, it is often a big problem to get a job. That is why we organized special courses for them: how to write an appropriate CV and how to search for jobs on the Internet.

Other events for families

Every October, the central library organises a big contest between groups of friends or families. They have to walk through the whole library which has six floors and solve a task. The theme of the contest changes every year. Last year we chose the origin of proverbs. At every station there was a Hungarian proverb and a question about it. For example the proverb was The apple doesn't fall far from its tree. Here, they have to drop apples in a basket. The best group wins a big prize for example a week-end in a country hotel, a cooler bag full of food, valuable books. We always manage to find sponsors for this event.

Activites for the elder generation

We organise many Internet courses for retired people. For them, Internet is a strange thing but most of them would like to use it, to keep in touch with their friends, relatives or just for surfing the web. After the course, they come and use the library's computers and it becomes a new hobby for them.

We organize different clubs in each library, esoteric club, crime story club, joke club. In the music department, we organise musical concerts, singing sessions, and programmes for babies and mothers.

In the 10th district branch, we organize contests in which we seek the person who reads the most. This competition is supported by a major advertising campaign in local newspapers, on Internet, and on Facebook. We leave information leaflets in doctors' waiting rooms, shops, at the post office branches and in schools. Unfortunately we do not get money for the advertising. But we are struggling to survive and would like to attract more users. We hope to conquer many new readers.

All programmes and activites are free of charge and it is an important element in this very serious financial situation. Readers can be sure of receiving a quality programme in a library and we make great efforts to constantly improve our programmes.

Library on the Internet

Our website is an information website and also a page of cultural knowledge. The site contains a calendar of cultural events, blogs, a database of historical photos of Budapest. Readers can extend the loaning period and create an event in their google calendar to inform them when their loaning will expire. They can search in the online catalogue as well.

There are thematic sub-sites under the main site. For children, the web site contains recommended books page, programmes, list of recommended websites, information about schools, parenting tips and books.

For young people, these are the same categories. And for the 50 + there are programmes, curiosities: www.fszek.hu

There are two main blogs, and many smaller ones. I am personally in charge of a blog entitled "I'm not boring". This blog is aimed at young people. It presents books, programmes as well as films. Members can post their comments, and many of them do if they have a different opinion. The other is a literature blog, and it is edited by the librarians of the literature department.

www.nemunatkozom.blogspot.com
<http://irodalmiolvasoterem.blogspot.hu/>

On Facebook, almost every library branch has it's own profile. We post programmes, information, interesting pictures, book recommendations as well as interesting news. It depends on the librarian what they post. I usually take book photos, quotes from books and information. My library has 816 followers, and the central library has 1600.

<https://www.facebook.com/fszek1704?fref=ts>
<https://www.facebook.com/kobanyai.konyvtar?fref=ts>

The hardest challenge of today is the e-book. How can the library join in this this new world without violating the rights of writers and avoid copies and hackers.

In the library we have to offer a wide range of services to meet the needs of all kinds of users, young or old. A good library preserves the heritage of the past with today's tools and ways. Librarian must speak the language of the youngs, but they must not forget the elders. We have to change our thinking about paper-based resources but we do not have to forget our major task: Preserve the culture and spread it. There are many ways of acheiving this goal. I have just presented a few of our programmes and activities at the Metropolitan Library. But everyone can take part and make a difference.

Thank you for your attention.

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