#### Kateřina Homolová, PhD

Silesian University in Opava katerina.homolova@fpf.slu.cz

# Library in intergenerational view – the meaning and purpose of library in children's and adolescents' conceptions

Biblioteka oczami pokoleń – znaczenie i cel biblioteki w koncepcjach dzieci i młodzieży

Kateřina Homolová – PhD, assistant professor at the Institute of the Czech Language and Library Science, Faculty of Philosophy and Science, Silesian University in Opava. Her main professional interest is theory and research of children's reading. Within this framework she is specialized in pedagogical and didactical aspects of children's reading, including psychology and sociology of reading as well.



#### Selected publications:

- Library user's propeadeutics [Propedeutyka użytkownika biblioteki], 2010
- Options of exploring contemporary teen readers [Opcje odkrywania współczesnych nastoletnich czytelników], 2012
- Children and adolescent reader [Dziecięcy i nastoletni czytelnik], 2013
- Young reader in the view of the mixed-method research [Młody czytelnik w świetle badań metodologii mieszanej] [w:] Antczak M., Brzuska-Kępa A., Walczak-Niewiadomska A. (ed.), Kultura czytelnicza dzieci i młodzieży początku XXI wieku [Reading culture of children and youth at the beginning of the 21st century: bibliological essays], 2013.

Kateřina Homolová – adiunkt w Instytucie Języka Czeskiego i Bibliotekoznawstwa na Wydziale Filozofii i Nauki Uniwersytetu Śląskiego w Opawie. Jej główne zainteresowania zawodowe obejmują teorię i badania czytelnictwa dzieci. W tym kontekście specjalizuje się w pedagogicznych i dydaktycznych aspektach czytania dzieci, w tym też psychologii i socjologii czytania.

### Introduction

Public libraries are currently facing a number of challenges, related to the changes of various nature. The way these institutions respond to those changes is in a large extent reflected in their perception of not only users, but also the general public. In addition to internal changes, which are dependent on the will of individual readers, are essential for libraries external changes, too.

This type of changes is based primarily on transformations of the whole society. For libraries are crucial especially changes in human needs and leisure time mode, but also different ways of finding information which goes hand in hand with the development of information technology, the Internet and electronic services. The role of libraries is to respond to these changes promptly and adapt their structure and range of offered services systematically and in long-term perspective.

The project *Library in an intergenerational perspective*<sup>1</sup> aims to offer a qualitative research-based study focused on understanding of the transformation of functions and social roles of libraries, depending on the age of its existing or potential users. Exploration of this type are main for effective training of library staff – they allow them to recognize the internal considerations and motivations of various categories of users, and thus effectively approach the concept of library as an intergenerational meeting place.

Currently, there are only partial reports or studies on the work of the library with particular generations of users. However, there is no synthetic view. Even less common is to find the opposite view — a view of members of each generation on the library. A comprehensive study devoted to understanding the changing view of the library that bind to the age of the user and determine the scope and effectiveness of library services is not processed yet.

The project *Library in an intergenerational perspective* finds by analyzing the concept of library and its associations and connotations expressed by the target group of respondents specific ways of children and adult perception of public libraries, their function and mission. Thereby the project contributes to determine the direction and to reveal the importance of this institution for the future.

One of the main assumptions on which the project is based, are ongoing changes in the general perception of public libraries. Therefore, this plan does not address only opinions of current readers and library users, but also of potential users. This strategy is related to the fact that especially public libraries are open institutions and one of the main trends in their development is to provide services not only to registered readers and users, but the public without distinction.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The project is implemented with the support of the Silesian University in Opava, SGS, reg. No. 21/2013.

The main objective of the project is to attempt a comprehensive understanding of the process and direction of children and adult respondents thinking about the library, its functions and its role in contemporary society. Such concept tries to:

- know better the stereotypes that exist between people on libraries and fight more effectively against them;
- map the main areas of interest of potential and current users and their trends for the future, and thus contribute to determine the direction that community libraries should follow to be able to meet the needs of its users most effectively;
- identify the motivation of users opinion about the library, and thereby contribute to the effective work of librarians with specific groups of users.

# Mixed-method research in library science

To investigate the issue of library in intergenerational view we have chosen primarily the qualitative approach that focuses on how individuals and groups look at outside world and phenomena present in it. This type of research uses inductive procedure, which is based on the collected data and "creates a claim from which we can then derive general conclusions" (Hendl J. 2005, p. 36). The basis of qualitative research is not testing hypotheses, but "trying to find the motives and reasons behind the behavior of people and the importance that people attribute to surrounding phenomena and things" (Idem 2005, p. 50).

For the realization of our research was elected specifically phenomenological approach. It is focused on describing and understanding the experience of the individual or on the causality of phenomena and facts. It works with a relatively small samples of respondents, most often it is 10-15 people. The aim of the phenomenological study is not to generate new theories, but rather to bring new topics for further research. The outputs from this type of study are therefore rather inspirational, but then can be further tested quantitatively. Qualitative approach is, in the most general terms, a series of procedures conducting to understand the world, particularly social facts or issues. Disman (2011) characterizes qualitative research as a non-numerical investigation and interpretation of social reality. According to Hendl (2005) it is a process of seeking understanding of selected social and human problem. From this it follows that the qualitative approach offers the possibility of obtaining relatively deep insight into the area researcher has determined in advance. It allows to uncover and understand what is the nature of the phenomena that we do not know much yet, too (Strauss A., Corbin J. 1999). According to the criteria by Švaříček and Šeďová (2007) the qualitative approach corresponds beside the explored topic itself also the technique of data collection,

the reasoning method, data type and the system of their analysis and results, which are subsequently discussed, and conclusions which are made.

Secondarily, the project also included quantitative techniques (methods of behavior research) by which we tried to convert qualitative information obtained by individual in-depth interviews to data with quantitative dimension (Connaway L. S., Powell R. R. 2010, p. 47-51). We decided to measure individual psychological meanings of the concept of a library and related concepts for individuals and to quantify their closeness or distance to one's semantic space. On the other hand we were interested in value of library in people's (not only active user's) lives. That's why we have used semantic differential in addition to Q-methodology (Homolová K. 2006; Smékalová L., Homolová K. 2013).

### The research basis - individual in-depth interviews

To obtain relevant essential data we used a semi-structured interview. This model is based on the development of several basic topics by the interviewer. The interview is then structured in the following thematic areas, but only to the extent stated by the respondent. Such interview has "clearly defined purpose, but flexible structure of information retrieval" (Hendl J. 2005, p. 164). Emphasis is placed on answering the questions on "experiences, behavior, opinions, feelings, perceptions and overall context of the studied phenomenon" (Patton M. 2002, p. 169). This type of obtained information is typical for the phenomenological interview which is primarily focused on "getting the details of individual's experience in the context of the history of his life" (Patton M. 2002, p. 180). Interpretation of data proceeds by describing the "so-called essence of the experience of individuals" (Patton M. 2002, p. 267). The purpose of this part of so conducted research is to understand certain phenomena in order to better responding to them and to take action in certain ways.

Data obtained from individual semi-structured interviews have always textual nature, therefore can be – in the spirit of a realistic approach to the analysis of qualitative data – processed according to Silverman (Švaříček R., Šeďová K. 2007) as a description of external reality and inner experience of the respondents. Basic analytical tools don't stand on quantification, but mainly on the creation of semantic categories and their description. The purpose of qualitative analysis is to provide evidence that the phenomenon exists and is structured in a certain way.

Our work with the textual data so consistently with the recommendations published by Švaříček and Šeďová (2007) was started with open coding – quite versatile and very effective way of their initial treatment. The respondents' answers were analyzed (texts distributed to units), conceptualized (units were assigned with names) and composed in a new way. In our case, the units were formed not

by formal, but by semantic units of varying size (words, phrases, sentences). Each unit was then assigned with code (a word, short phrase) that described the type of unit, respectively the phenomenon that certain unit presented, and distinguished it from the others. Some codes have been chosen ad hoc, in the choice of others we used professional terminology, but we have also used in vivo codes where the testimony of our respondents were clinging to developmental characteristics. The set of codes we have categorized and these categories hierarchically organized.

The aim of the project *Library in an intergenerational perspective* was to determine the attitudes and connotations related to the concept of a library. For this purpose we used the basic structure of only two questions *what is a library* and *what is it for.* Additional questions were elected adequately to developmental characteristics of asked respondents, their life and reading (library using) experiences.

### The sample

First part of the project *Library in intergenerational perspective* focused on the youngest generation of existing or potential library users – on children at a younger school age (children 1 to 5 classes of primary school) and young adolescents (high school students). Second and third part of the project focused on adults and seniors.

In this text we want to adress the question of library perception by the youngest generation. Despite the rules on designing the sample for phenomenological interview, we were working with broker sample of child and adolescent respondents because of their specific way of thinking and formulation of responses. Finally, in-depth individual interviews were conducted with a sample of 60 respondents falling into this youngest generation, namely with 35 younger school children and 25 teens. For the most varied sample were selected respondents from smaller and larger towns (from 1 000 to 250 000 inhabitants) and of different types of schools.

## Summary of individual questioning results

Using three-phase conceived research (interview, semantic differential, Q-methodology), we wanted to know "live" thinking of children and adolescents about the library. Below is an overview of the main results, to which we have come in the first phase of exploration of the intergenerational concept of libraries, ie. after analyzing data collected from interviews with children and adolescent respondents. For each of the respondents were set out major trends that are occurring in his or her replies, which have represented his or her views and attitudes and expressed both positive and negative connotations of the investigated concept.

To maintain the vital nature of the data we offer a verbatim transcript of authentic sayings (without grammatical and stylistic adjustments, text in italics).

By adressed children – respondents at younger school age – the library as an institution was perceived positively. Children saw in the library very often the ideal place in which they would not change anything. During the questioning most of these youngest respondents also actively attended some public library, too. Though supplementary questions, we measured the motivation for such claims.

The main positive aspects of the library that younger schoolchildren saw, were first developing knowledge (useful for school), as well as obtaining information from reading (usable in different social situations and in life outside of school, ie. social know-how and skills) and last but not least, the development own reading (reading techniques' improvement, strengthening the reading habit and forming the reader's taste). There was also a series of less frequent statements about the library as a place whose mission is to organize fun events (especially nocturnal visits, excursions and small theatrical performances) and give space for leisure in less traditional way.

Younger pupils also perceived the library as an institution naturally associated with the rules, but not negative emotions. The majority of respondents, both boys and girls, automatically associate with the library study atmosphere and claim that the library must be silent, too.

The most common answers of younger schoolchildren to the questions "what the library is" and "what it is (good) for":

The library is a big house, where is a lot of books.

Library is here for reading and borrowing of books and magazines home.

The library is used to borrow books sorted alphabetically.

Using the library, we do not have to buy books.

We learn to school there.

We will learn to read the books there.

We develop a fantasy there and get information.

The library is good for rest and relaxation.

You can play games there and miscellaneous discussions are hosted there as well.

From interviews with teenage respondents – young adolescents – emerged that they also characterize the library first externally, ie. as a building or a room where books are kept. Others perceived library as a place where people can obtain information necessary for education and at the same time as a place which serves to develop other people's reading. The primary function of the library, according to the surveyed adolescents' meaning, was clearly borrowing books to people. Among the most frequent answers were also claims that in library people can

work on the computer or use the internet for free. Another important feature of this institution in the view of teenagers – and in full conformity with younger respondents – was the fact that the library is a place of quiet and relaxation. Thus seen library offers them either pleasant spending free time (mostly reading), or a place for concentrated doing homework to school.

Upon further questioning teens specifically labeled as the specific symbol of library books sorted alphabetically, or by genre (depending on the particular experiences of popular libraries). Adolescents mentioned already more generationally tuned characteristics, such that there are "books for young people" and "books for old people". Resolution of "young" and "old" characteristics of library users, and thus the library itself, occurred more frequently in statements about the meaning of the library and its role in people's life. In this vein, one of the surveyed adolescent girls claimed that the library can be used for leisure, especially if older people do not know what to do – therefore they borrow a book and read something that interests them. The same girl added, that a lot of stories is easy to find on the internet instead of going to the library, but old people do not even know what the internet is and prefer to go to the library to borrow books.

Boys and girls from the sample of teenage respondents expressed both the positives of the library. In the perception of its negatives boys' statements were stronger. Some addressed adolescent girls saw library solely as the old building, with dark rooms, crammed with books on the shelves. Some adolescent boys perceived the library as a space mostly small, poor, dark, dingy, although where they can find resources for their school work and attractions for leisure activities, but where they do not want to spend a longer time.

Adolescents also more than children respondents pointed out the possible improvements of library services (in most cases towards a higher share of attractive events and competitions for users at a young age), including requirements for the profession of librarian (predominantly in the sense of giving advice and tips for leisure reading).

The most common answers obtained from surveyed adolescents to the questions "what the library is" and "what is it (good) for" represent following statements:

Library used to borrow books.

There are chairs and tables, and shelves full of books.

It's a room with books that are sorted in alphabetical order.

It is intended for education and obtaining information.

It is used by students for seeking the compulsory literature.

The library is a place of tranquility and relaxation.

The library is convenient because you do not have to buy books you want to read. It is used for exhibitions.

We can go there to work on the computer and internet.

Library serves people who like to read and have enough free time.

Library can visit children as well as adults, but especially the elderly people do it.

### What is a library and what is it (good) for?

After summing up the data obtained from exploring the concept of the library from individual interviews here are synthetic answers to two basic questions. Among respondents at a younger school age library is seen as a building, which children and adults attend mostly during public excursions, school projects and special events the library creates for them. Children perceived the library as a place where people educate themselves not only because of school or work, but they receive there information important for life. And for this purpose people in library borrow books and magazines, without having to buy them. From the perspective of children the library is a place where should be quiet and where it especially is, but there may be possibility to relax and play games with friends.

Through categorization of in vivo codes collected to identify the library basic-ly (what the library is), we created a triad of the most common signs of library: building – rental – playroom. Through categorization of in vivo codes relating to the meaning and significance of the library (what a library is good for), we came to the triad of knowledge – skills – habits. It reflects the basic characteristics of the library perceived by adressed younger pupils 1. as a learning institution, 2. as an institution developing functional literacy with an emphasis on reading literacy and 3. as an institution cultivating personality (not only) as a reader. As thus described institution, the library was by younger pupils we interviewed generally perceived as accessible, friendly and welcoming.

Adolescent respondents in conformity with adressed younger children characterized library also by external characters and its elementary functions at first. Furthermore, in their testimonies, these basic characteristics were supplemented by personal dimension of library, respectively by its subjective reflection in the spirit of ambivalence between "library in general" and "library and I" (about this kind of ambivalent relationship between objective and subjective value of reading and related conceptions see also Homolová K. 2008, 2012, 2013).

Interviewed high school students evaluated positively silence in the library and they emphasized the relaxing atmosphere in the library, too. These respondents mentioned that the library is a good place for various exhibitions. Other activities offered by the library weren't mentioned because adressed teenagers didn't know them from personal experience. Paradoxically, they were missing in the library competitions or games. If the library on adolescents worked negatively, it was because it seemed to them very static, like a place that is just hard to change.

Library was then taken as a serious old institution that lacks charge for take just this age group.

Through categorization of in vivo codes collected to identify the library primarily (what the library is) we have created from adolescent testimonies a triad of most common indication of library:  $rental - workroom - rest\ room$ . Through categorization of in vivo codes relating to the meaning and significance of the library (what a library is good for) we came to the triad of names motivated by activities: accumulation - relaxation - compensation. According to interviewed adolescents the library accumulates and treasures knowledge for future generations. That makes it an institution perceived as important despite the current development standards of youth. The library also offers peace of mind for work or recreation. That characteristic feature were appreciated by those adolescents who were accustomed to do homework to school in the space of the library, or who wanted to get out from the dynamic stream of current life experiences for a moment. Nevertheless, the library in their eyes is still more focused on older people who have the time for such an institution which offers a kind of compensation for not so "fully lived real life".

#### Conclusion

Exploring the library concept in children's and adolescents' perspective was motivated essentially by only two elementary questions, what is a library and what is it good for. After a closer insight into the semantic and value spaces only through phenomenological interview was however obvious that the triviality of these questions and suspected clarity of possible answers are only apparent. Further exploration phase (data are processing at this time) will gradually reveal specific aspects of attribution of meaning and beholding the sense of libraries not only in the lives of children and adolescents, but also in adults' and seniors' lives. After all, we will be able to recognize the development of the relationship to the library in the background of psychosocial changes of the user. And this aim fully corresponds to the ideas of community library open to intergenerational meeting of values.

Already this stage of the processing of the acquired data also shows that the choice of above basicly descripted research strategy is for exploring current trends in library user attitudes more than suitable. It brings a lot of data with which we can work on several levels of difficulty, as the analysis and interpretation. However, this approach is always associated with the reality of community library practice the firmest way – by the user and his/her opinion.

Being a library user is an integral part of reading culture, not only of the young generation. Through this role we can work on strenghtening reading habits of children and teenagers as well. And it is necessary to know that the reading culture is always a personality culture. So to get to know young readers as people is overriding task.

### References

- Connaway L. S., Powell R. R. (2010), *Basic research methods for librarians*, Santa Barbara (CA), ABC-CLIO, LLC, ISBN 978-1-59-158865-8
- Disman M. (2011), *Jak se vyrábí sociologická znalost*, Praha, Karolinum, ISBN 978-80-246-1966-8
- Hendl J. (2005), Kvalitativní výzkum: základní metody a aplikace, Praha, Portál, ISBN 80-7367-040-2
- Homolová K. (2006), Q-metodologie a sémantický diferenciál v pedagogickém výzkumu dětského čtenářství [in:] Současné metodologické přístupy a strategie pedagogického výzkumu, Plzeň, PdF ZČU, s. [120-129]
- Homolová K. (2008), *Pedagogicko-didaktické a psychosociální aspekty pubescentního čtenářství*, Ostrava, Ostravská univerzita v Ostravě, ISBN 978-80-7368-641-3
- Homolová K. (2012), *Možnosti zkoumání současného dospívajícího čtenáře*, Opava, Slezská univerzita v Opavě, ISBN 978-80-7248-808-7
- Homolová K. (2013), *Dětský a dospívající čtenář*, Opava, Slezská univerzita v Opavě, ISBN 978-80-7248-952-7
- Patton M. (2002), *Qualitative evaluation and evaluation methods*, Thousand Oaks (CA), SAGE, ISBN 978-0-76-191971-1
- Strauss A. L., Corbin J. (1999), Základy kvalitativního výzkumu: postupy a techniky metody zakotvené teorie, Brno, Sdružení Podané ruce, ISBN 80-85834-60-X
- Smékalová L., Homolová K. (2013), Metodologická argumentace M. M. Bergmana v kontextu užití Q-metodologie a sémantického diferenciálu ve výzkumu smíšeného designu [online], "Paidagogos", [access: 20.06.2014], available in the Internet: <a href="http://www.paidagogos.net/issues/2013/2/article.php?id=17">http://www.paidagogos.net/issues/2013/2/article.php?id=17</a>>
- Švaříček R., Šeďová K. (2007), Kvalitativní výzkum v pedagogických vědách, Praha, Portál, ISBN 978-80-7367-313-0

#### Abstract

The paper presents the research project which is carried out by teachers and students of the Institute of the Czech Language and Library Science, Faculty of Philosophy and Science, Silesian University in Opava, and is focused on determining the meaning, purpose and role of a library in an intergenerational perspective. In the first part of the contribution the philosophy and methodology of the research project, the main goals and subtargets are presented. There are also analysed basic motivation for choosing a qualitative approach and reason for the use of the behavior research methods (psychometry) for data acquisition. The advantage of using mixed-methods strategy for data analysis in this kind of library research is discussed as well. In general, the first part of the paper offers the way,

which can be very effective in exploring both general and specific library user's attitudes. The second part of the paper is focused on main results obtained from the qualitative research section – individual interviews. Data obtained from elementary school children and teen adolescents are presented and interpreted. At the end of the paper the research project and all presented outcomes are related to the ideas of community library open to intergenerational meeting of values.

#### **Abstrakt**

Tekst informuje o projekcie badawczym prowadzonym przez nauczycieli i studentów Instytutu Jezyka Czeskiego i Bibliotekoznawstwa na Wydziale Filozofii i Nauki Uniwersytetu Śląskiego w Opawie. Jest on skoncentrowany na określeniu znaczenia, celu i roli biblioteki w międzypokoleniowej perspektywie. W pierwszej części została zaprezentowana filozofia i metodologia projektu badawczego, podobnie jak cele główne i czastkowe. Przeanalizowano również podstawy motywacji do wyboru podejścia jakościowego i powód zastosowania behawioralnych metod badawczych (psychometria) do uzyskania danych. Omówiono również zalety stosowania strategii mieszanych metod w analizie danych w tego rodzaju badaniach bibliotecznych. Ogólnie rzecz biorąc, w pierwszej części artykułu autorka chce pokazać drogę, która może być bardzo skuteczna w badaniu postaw zarówno ogólnych, jak i konkretnego użytkownika biblioteki. W drugiej części artykułu skoncentrowano się na przedstawieniu głównych wyników uzyskanych z jakościowej części badania – wywiadów indywidualnych. Przedstawiono i zinterpretowano dane uzyskane od uczniów szkół podstawowych. Na końcu artykułu zaprezentowano relacje między projektem badawczym i wszystkimi przedstawionymi wynikami a ideą biblioteki otwartej na międzypokoleniowe spotkanie wartości.