

Challenges and Activities of Professional Librarians' Associations, Particularly for Association of Hungarian Librarians before and during COVID aera

Ágnes HAJDU BARÁT¹

Article history: Received: 15 March 2022; Reviewed: 20 March, 2022; Accepted: 13 May, 2022

ABSTRACT

This paper studies the influence of the international and national trends, changings, and challenges to professional librarians' associations. It summarizes basic endeavours of management and summarizing permanent updated visions of Association of Hungarian Librarians (AHL). I try to collect different aspects from the specific and general viewpoints.

In this study we would like to introduce some national and international initiatives, including possibilities for mutual cooperation. We will introduce the vision of AHL, focus on up-to-date knowledge and adequate competencies before and during COVID aera.

KEYWORDS: *Association of Hungarian librarians (AHL); Library Strategy; Library Professionalism; Competencies; COVID*

1 Historical overview

The Association of Hungarian Librarians (AHL) is a non-governmental, public utility organisation for Hungarian librarianship. Our association is celebrating its 82nd anniversary in this year. History of the AHL has crossed over 20 century and represented, visualized its endeavours and characters. There have been many social and government changing since establishment, but basic principles and conceptions have remained for us and the actual work and mission of the Association of Hungarian Librarians based on these main stones.

1.1 Establishment and significant events

First library associations established the US (American Library Association 1876) and the United Kingdom (Library Association 1877). The second waves were Swiss and

¹ **Prof. Agnes Hajdu Barat, PhD** works at Eötvös Loránd University Budapest, Hungary. She is the current president of Association of Hungarian Librarians (AHL). She can be contacted at <hajdu.agnes@btk.elte.hu>

Challenges and Activities of Professional Librarians' Associations, Particularly ...

Austrian Library Associations (1897). There were some initiatives related library association in Hungary also (1885, 1890, and 1907), but the International Library and Bibliographical Committee (ILBC), former of IFLA was established firstly (1927-1928). Bálint Hóman suggested the necessity of Hungarian library association at 1929 and participants established arranging committee. At the end the statutory assembly of the Association of Hungarian Librarians and Archivists at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (AHL AHAS), at the initiative of the Minister of Culture and Religion, Bálint Hóman was established at 26 June 1935.

The new association announced it to join FIAB–IFLA at 30 June 1935. First president was József Fitz, director of National Széchényi Library. Later the Association became a member of FID (International Federation for Information and Documentation). Members of the Associations were about 380 by 1941. The first annual conference was at 1969 in Tata. Since then annual conferences have continued as the most popular meetings of the profession until now. One of the biggest international events of the AHL was the 38th IFLA general conference in Budapest with over 1000 participants at 1972.

The Association of Hungarian Librarians takes pride in the traditions of Hungarian librarianship, and looks with respect upon the great librarian predecessors: József Szinnyei, Zoltán Ferenczi, József Fitz, Ervin Szabó, Béla Köhalmi, Pál Gulyás, Béla Varjas, Ákos Domanovszky, Máté Kovács, Csaba Csapodi, Géza Sebestyén, István Sallai, János Szentmihályi, Géza Fülöp and others.



Fig. 1 József Fitz



Fig. 2 Géza Fülöp

2 Membership and International relations

The number of individual members in the Association is approximately 2200-2400, and the number of institutional members exceeds 60.

2.1 Steering bodies

General Assembly (the highest decision-making body of the Association)

Board (leader and organiser of the Association's activities – 9 members)

Challenges and Activities of Professional Librarians' Associations, Particularly ...

Council (consists of the representatives of the branches, the advisory body of the board; it assures the relationship with the branches – 28+3 members)

Supervisory Committee (5 members)

2.1.1. Actual Steering Body

President: Ágnes Hajdu Barát

Secretary General: Judit Gerencsér

Vice Presidents: Gábor Kiss, Károly Redl

Board members: Mária Eszenyi-Borbély, Katalin Kiss-Haszon, Sándor Oros, Péter Szóllás, Margit Makrányi- Venyige

President of the Control Commission: Aczél-Partos Adrienn

President of the Council: Tamás Horváth

Executive Secretary: Zsófia Hantal

2.2 Structure of AHL

The Association of Hungarian Librarians is subdivided into regional and specialised branches

Tab. 1 List of the branches

Regional branches	Specialised branches
Bács-Kiskun County Branch	Section of Bibliography
Békés County Branch	Section of Children's Librarians
Borsod County Branch	Section of Law Librarians
Fejér County Branch	Section of Local History Librarians
Hajdú-Bihar County Branch	Section of Public Libraries
Heves County Branch	Section of Agricultural Librarians
Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County Branch	Section of Museum Librarians
Komárom-Esztergom County Branch	Section of Sci-Tech Librarians
Nógrád County Branch	Section of Reader Services Librarians
Pest County Branch	Section of Research and Special Libraries
Somogy County Branch	Section of Social Science Librarians
Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County Branch	Section of Music Librarians
Tolna County Branch	
Vas County Branch	
Veszprém County Branch	
Zala County Branch	
Zemplén County Branch	
Partner library associations	
Association of Librarians in Csongrád County	Association of Librarians and Libraries in Kisalföld
Association of Teacher-Librarians	

2.3 International relations

Since the establishing the AHL have considered the international relation important.

Our Association is member of IFLA from the beginning and associated member of EBLIDA. We have close relationship with Hungarian librarians living in the neighbouring countries, and with the library associations of European countries, mostly with neighbouring countries: Slovakian Library Association, Croatian Library Association, Serbian Library Association, Romanian Library Association, Slovenian Library Association, Austrian Library Association, Ukraine Library Association. The V4 countries play crucial role also. Represents of these associations participate in official meetings, conferences and other events mutually and regularly. Sometimes we have common projects and support us in the international level, for example in IFLA or via ERASMUS+ programme.

3 Vision, Objectives and Tasks of the Association of Hungarian Librarians

Since the establishing AHL objectives and task have treasured the original value and heritage, but it has developed and answer for actual challenges continuingly.

Vision of AHL:

- Libraries are staffed by professionals with up-to-date knowledge and adequate competencies.
- Modern libraries are organisations ready to provide quality services which reply to questions in all stages and fields of human life.
- Libraries are able to reduce the differences in chances through its democratic information services.
- Libraries are culture-mediating institutions ready for renewal which improves the quality of life using most modern technology.
- Libraries are places of work, life-long learning, culture, entertainment and information acquisition.

Main tasks:

- to act with responsibility to preserve the intellectual heritage;
- to strengthen the role of libraries and librarians in society;
- to guarantee unlimited and equal access to information;
- to co-operate in enlarging and sharing information resources, to strengthen professional relations;
- to support the creation of a harmony between library infrastructure and modern services;
- to raise the library profession onto the highest professional and moral niveau, to protect professional interests;
- to take a professional stand in determining the strategic directions of Hungarian librarianship, in formulating its vision.

Challenges and Activities of Professional Librarians' Associations, Particularly ...

Hungarian libraries were benefiting from additional state funding if they held status as "open to all users" that help them evolve their services, collections, technological tools and training for librarianship. Between 2007 and 2013, new objectives were set in purpose to meet the National Strategic Development Plan that had one of the most important focuses on digitization of collections and collaboration, partnerships between public, academic and National Széchényi Library (NSZL) which is the major actor in the restoration of the Hungarian heritage in all its formats in Hungary.

4 Areas of main activities

Related with visions and tasks we organized many projects, events and programs. Our activities focus on the following areas:

- participation in preparing decisions relating to legislation, administrative society;
- participation in developing library education and extension training;
- building relations with professional and other organisations in Hungary and abroad;
- co-ordination of the relationship between libraries and librarians working in similar fields, in the same region, in communities and over the Hungarian borders;
- organisation of professional fora to get acquainted with modern theory and practice, to promote a higher standard of professional work;
- organisation of consultations, exchanges of experience, extension training events, conferences, lectures, study tours;
- supporting the activities of specialised professional cooperatives;
- organisation of annual conferences on the current issues of professional policy;
- presentation of the events and achievements of the profession;
- taking a stand in issues of professional ethics.

Accordingly, and with the new situation of COVID-19, librarians and information professionals have changed, because of the valuable role that they played and are playing in literacy information and developing tools and platforms to meet with the users' needs. Therefore, the AHL has published a guideline about the reopening after COVID-19 in order to help libraries and librarians in their work during the pandemic. (Otiye, Fredrick Wawire et al., 2021)

Reopening, Recommendation from AHL, 2020

It is recommended that (public) libraries should start their public service activities as soon as possible, even with reduced services, during reduced opening hours, since libraries are obliged by law to perform their specific tasks on the one hand, but on the other hand they are contractually obliged to meet the needs of enrolled library users.

Challenges and Activities of Professional Librarians' Associations, Particularly ...

Experience has shown that in several places in small settlements there is a problem of interpretation as to whether the 46/2020 also applies to library, information and public spaces. Order of the Government, Section 5. In the relevant legislation, it would be worth clarifying that in the epidemiological situation they are subject to the same rules as public libraries in relation to closing and opening hours and the provision of services.

In the case of libraries operating within an integrated institutional framework, it is very important that the reopening of the library is based on solutions that fit the full profile of the institution, in accordance with the maintenance provisions.

Protect co-workers and users

When considering the provision of services, guaranteeing the health safety of library staff is an essential aspect. Employees of at-risk age (over 60 years of age) and higher health risks are still recommended to be employed remotely, in the form of working from home, and to minimize personal contact by rotating work.

The mandatory wearing of masks may have a protective effect on employees who work with users and are in reading spaces, and users should also be required to do so. It is especially recommended when administering reader administration, using it locally and in public spaces.

Particular attention should be paid to workers who are particularly at risk and who have serious health problems, in their case teleworking, working from home is recommended.

The number of people in the reading spaces should be maximized. In determining the area per reader, in addition to the mandatory distancing rules, local circumstances must also be taken into account (e.g. 10 m²/person is not necessarily justified in case of high ceilings).

It is recommended to solve the distancing in all libraries, e.g. by drawing long-distance stripes or by one-way. If necessary, the long-distance strip can also be painted for those waiting outside the entrance.

Readers/library users are required to use masks and hand sanitizers, without which entry is not allowed. The possibility of hand disinfection and the collection of waste from infected devices should be solved by the institution. For hand disinfection, it is recommended to use a contactless feeder.

It is recommended to appoint employees who supervise compliance with safety regulations and warn those who violate them.

Library spaces

Before reopening, it is recommended to disinfect the institution, especially with regard to objects and devices that are touched during transport, and then to carry out the daily cleaning/disinfection at each stage.

Challenges and Activities of Professional Librarians' Associations, Particularly ...

Air conditioners can only be operated in accordance with the current legislation, after complete cleaning and maintenance, because they are a hazard in a closed space - frequent ventilation, air exchanges are strongly recommended.

Library tools

In connection with the common use of machinery by users (reader copiers, computers), frequent per-user disinfection and the placement of hand sanitizers in addition to them may be mandatory.

In connection with the copying service, it is recommended to order online and send copies online and also to provide users with a computer with a printer, preferably in a separate location. Or the user can only use the designated machines, but here too, in compliance with specific rules e.g. time limit, flash drive restriction, disinfection per user, etc.

In the use of the reader computer, it may be justified to introduce a two-step service system: in the first round, search engines that provide searches in the catalogue and the start of warehouse requests would be available only to readers. However, this should be ensured, as this is one of the basic legal obligations of libraries.

Only your own tool can be used for research work; then, the next step would be to reintroduce full reader computer use.

The principle of phasing-out in the relaunch of services should be followed.

In all cases, with regard to library programmes, the applicable laws and government regulations must be followed.

Building trust and communicating about reopening

We consider it extremely important to provide correct, unambiguous information about the opening and the conditions of use.

Building trust, both internal and external communication, is extremely important. Not only the readers, but also the employees are affected by this difficult situation. Separate marketing communication is recommended for both groups.

Recommended steps and tasks:

- structure of communication prior to opening
- description of the new usage system (inscriptions, vignettas)
- involving social media sites
- ensuring uniform communication within the institution
- information on how to expand opening hours and available services
- promotion of amenities (book booking, book packages)
- grace period, extension of enrolments and communication thereof .

(Magyar Könyvtárosok Egyesülete. Újranyitás. Ajánlás, 2020)

4.1 Projects and Conferences during last years

- 2012 National Conference of Librarianship
Topic: Libraries for renewal of society. Development, Sustainability, Prospect
- 2013 Road show related with thesis of National Conference of Librarianship
- 2013 Discussions before new national strategy for libraries
- 2013 Web magazine
- 2013- Creative librarians - series
- 2014 Hungaricum projects
- 2014 Carrier management of librarians and calculated professional carrier
- 2014 Information literacy, digital literacy – National Conference
- 2016- International Scholarly Conference about Competencies**
- 2016 Development, Sustainability, Chance concerning to IFLA Trends and Lyon Declaration
- 2017 Advocacy concerning to Agenda of UN 2030. Events and publication about Sustainability and UN SDG. Publication of brochure on how libraries can contribute to SDGs and IFLA's actions is https://mke.info.hu/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/SDG_sztorik_ENG.pdf
- 2018 Let's work together on library advocacy! International workshop organised by the Association of Hungarian Librarians (Czechian, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian, Slovakian, Ukrainian colleagues). This workshop was part of IFLA International Advocacy Programme project / 2017-123. There were ten supported projects from the World and the Hungarian one was one of them.
- 2018 GDPR Conference
- 2019 Marketing and Advocacy Conference
- 2020 UN SDG Conference
- 2021 MKE Academy (AHL Academy) – online series

In February 2021, our association will launch its MKE Academy series under COVID conditions, because we couldn't organize face to face events and conferences. The performances can usually be viewed on MKE's Youtube channel from 10 a.m. on the third Wednesday of each month. Each event consists of 2 presentations, which on the one hand deal with current issues of interest to a wide range of librarians, and on the other hand present the results of Hungarian and international library affairs.

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLUJTJTJ3Jf3-ZEkqaPAgkaZgkAcQ6kA2q>

Until now 19 presentations have been presented on this platform, but we use this forum to arrange any other events, conferences, too.

Challenges and Activities of Professional Librarians' Associations, Particularly ...

International and Scholarly Conference Serials about competencies has been yearly since 2016. The topics have changed yearly:

- 2016: The changes and appearance of librarians' competences in the training practice of the European Union
- 2017: Professional skills and competencies – changing role of library professionals
- 2018: Professional skills and competencies of librarians – challenge and solution again
- 2019: Competencies and trends. Professional skills and competencies of librarians
- 2020: Challenges and Competencies. Professional skills and competencies of librarians. We should transform from face to face conference to online on AHL YouTube channel. <https://youtube.com/channel/UCJ81GBo0wptHVgpHz2BFbTQ>
Foreign language lectures can be followed with Hungarian subtitles.
- 2021: Cancelled
- 2022: New ways during and after COVID-19. Transformation of our professional competences

4.2 Annual Conferences

Annual conferences are the most crucial events of AHL. These occasions are very popular among our members. General numbers of participants are between 600-800 librarians generally. We organize these programs in the different Hungarian cities each year. Annual conferences give opportunity to discuss current and comprehensive professional issues; to get acquainted with novelties in the profession; to build professional relations. Topics are very relevant for the local, national and international trends and questions usually.

Tab. 2 Topics of recent annual conferences (1995-2022)

Year	City	Topics
1995	Eger	The library and its owner. Questions of library maintenance
1996	Debrecen	Library-communication-society
1997	Kecskemét	Services, fees, sponsoring
1998	Salgótarján	Co-operation of libraries to serve the information society
1999	Pápa	The author, the publisher, the bookseller and the library. Tradition and modernity
2000	Esztergom	Our National Traditions and the modern service-based libraries
2001	Nyíregyháza	School in the Libraries and Library in the schools
2002	Budapest	The Nation and its Library
2003	Nagykanizsa	Library - a Gateway to World
2004	Miskolc	Library – chance for the future
2005	Gödöllő	Profession: librarian
2006	Kecskemét	The citizen in the centre. Libraries as community service providers
2007	Szeged	Digital library. Resource possibilities of the New Hungary Development Plan
2008	Szombathely	Permanent Renaissance of Libraries – from Corvinas of Matthias to knowledge centres in 21 centuries –
2009	Debrecen	Librarians for Talents – from Reformation to Nowadays
2010	Baja	Meeting of Cultures: Libraries and Librarians at the Service of Mutual Understanding

Challenges and Activities of Professional Librarians' Associations, Particularly ...

2011	Pécs	Learning, Knowledge, Literacy – Librarians at the Service of Future
2012	Győr	"Stability – Innovation – Inspiration: Libraries in Changing Circumstances"
2013	Eger	Open knowledge flow, equal access – Libraries for European citizens
2014	Sopron	Intelligent Service – Intelligence of Services
2015	Szolnok	Dynamism of Quality: Developing Library
2016	Veszprém	Connection – Library - Collaboration
2017	Miskolc	The quality of Life – Librarians for the Society
2018	Keszthely	Our values shape the future – the legacy of our annual conferences
2019	Székesfehérvár	Library as an authentic place, everywhere and for everybody
2020	Budapest	Service for Generation – cancelled
2021	Budapest	Service for Generation – OSZK, online
2022	Kaposvár	Sustainability, responsibility and awareness-raising



Fig. 3 Logo of 47 annual conference, Szolnok 2015

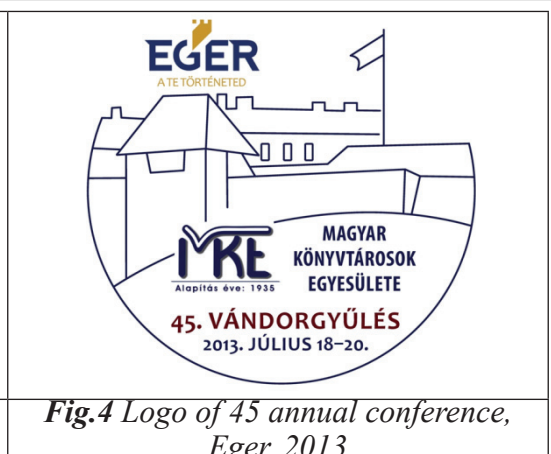


Fig.4 Logo of 45 annual conference, Eger, 2013

5 Conclusion

“It is apparent that COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it a big universal change, as well as a new insight into the library profession and the education system at large. The shifting in the usage of information had established the relevance of libraries that were and are required by individuals, institutions and societies for accessing information and resources. It is, however, important that librarians, across the world, forge new and innovative ways of providing library services to all and in different settings, a system that will be able to cater for both the disadvantaged and the normal users. [...] It is clear that the library will have to adjust and that after Post-Covid-19 our library will never be the same again, in terms of physical technologies that should be available within library institutions, but also the perception of librarians and information professionals when communicating with their users. [...] Hence, libraries and librarians must move out of their comfort zones, and ensure they are with them.” (Otiike, Fredrick Wawire et al., 2021)

References

- Bényei, M. (Ed.). (2011). *History of the Association of Hungarian Librarians 1935-2009*. Budapest : Association of Hungarian Librarians. 758 p.
- Hajdu Barát, Agnes (Ed.). (2020). Szakmai ismeretek és készségek – átalakuló hivatás. Válogatott könyvtártudományi tanulmányok. Budapest: Magyar Könyvtárosok Egyesülete, 2020. 270 p. ISBN 978-963-89260-3-6, ISBN 978-963-89260-4-3 (pdf), <https://doi.org/10.46280/KOMPKONF.2020>; <https://mek.oszk.hu/21500/21559>
- Homepage of the Association of Hungarian Librarians. <http://mke.info.hu> [2022.03.02.]
- IFLA (2020). “COVID-19 and the global library field”. <https://www.ifla.org/covid-19-and-the-global-library-field/#handling> [2022.03.02.]
- Librarians (2018). *Librarians for implementing the UN 2030 Agenda and sustainable development goals – Response of MKE to the IFLA initiative*. Budapest : Association of Hungarian Librarians. 17 p.
- https://mke.info.hu/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/SDG_sztorik_ENG.pdf [2022.03.02.]
- Magyar Könyvtárosok Egyesülete. Újranyitás. Ajánlás. Budapest : MKE, 2020. May [Association of Hungarian Librarians: Reopening. Recommendation] https://mke.info.hu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/MKE-%C3%9Ajrakezd%C3%A9si-AJANLAS_vegleges.pdf [2022.03.02.]
- Otike, F. W. (2021). Otike, Fredrick Wawire; Bouaamri, Asmaa; Hajdu Barát, Agnes; Kiszl, Péter: Emerging Roles of Libraries and Librarians During and Post COVID-19 Pandemic: Challenges and Opportunities. In: *Handbook of Research on Information and Records Management in the Fourth Industrial Revolution*. Chapter 1. Ed. Josiline Phiri Chigwada, Godfrey Tsvuura (Chinhoyi University of Technology, Zimbabwe) (Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe). Zimbabwe, Chinhoyi University of Technology- Zimbabwe Open University, 2021, 1-16. p.
- DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-7740-0.ch001
- <https://www.igi-global.com/chapter/emerging-roles-of-libraries-and-librarians-during-and-post-covid-19-pandemic/284714> [2022.03.02.]