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# ACTIVITIES OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF POLAND AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE BUILDING FOLLOWING THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE IN 2022

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## ABSTRACT

The authors of the article aimed at documenting the activities of the National Library of Poland connected with building social resilience of Ukrainians after the Russian invasion in 2022. Due to the dynamics of changes and the lack of written sources, the information on this subject was collected using the qualitative method, that is, interviewing the Director General of the National Library of Poland – Tomasz Makowski. The activities assessed were assigned to the following domains of community resilience: institutional, social, physical and economic, and discussed in detail. The findings presented in the article indicate that libraries can support communities by helping them build resilience also in war-related situations.

**KEYWORDS:** National Library of Poland, community resilience, Russian invasion of Ukraine

*Every national library is the expression of the spiritual force of the country.*  
Alodia Kawecka<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

The National Library of Poland in Warsaw, reactivated by the ordinance of February 24, 1928, today constitutes the central library of the Polish state. The founding of this new institution stemmed from the old 18<sup>th</sup>-century *bibliothecae patriae* idea that began with the opening of the Załuski Library in 1747,<sup>2</sup> during the Second Polish Republic. The Załuski Library's originators intended it to amass and preserve the whole of the 'intellectual output of the Polish nation expressed in writing, in print, or in any other mechanical or chemical means if applicable to printmaking; literature in foreign languages related to the Polish nation, and literature in foreign languages essential for the development of Polish mentality.'<sup>3</sup> To fulfil these goals, the Library was granted the privilege of receiving a legal deposit, which it has retained to this day.<sup>4</sup> Initially, its collection was placed at 12 locations in Warsaw. In the late 1930s, the policy of collection amassing was specified with more precision, and it was defined as the library of a multinational state.<sup>5</sup>

With the outbreak of World War II, the protection of the National Library's collections was put to the ultimate test. The building in which they were deposited was bombed at the beginning of the war, in September 1939. Several months later, on February 1, 1940, the Library was closed. Its employees, however, continued to take part in underground activity: they organised clandestine teaching, secured the collections threatened with destruction, and

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- 1 A. Kawecka, *Biblioteka Narodowa*, Warszawa 1934, p. 28.
  - 2 B.S. Kupść, 'Biblioteka Załuskich (1747-1794)', in: *50 lat Biblioteki Narodowej. Warszawa 1928-1978*, ed. Witold Stankiewicz, Warszawa 1984, p. 9
  - 3 S. Demby, *Biblioteka Narodowa*, Warszawa 1928, p. 14.
  - 4 A. Kawecka, *Biblioteka...*, p. 25.
  - 5 A. Piber, 'Biblioteka Narodowa w pierwszym dziesięcioleciu działalności (1928-1939)', in: *50 lat Biblioteki Narodowej. Warszawa 1928-1978*, ed. W. Stankiewicz, Warszawa 1984, p. 80.

ran a register of collection losses. The biggest loss took place in October 1944, when the Nazis set fire to the Krasieński Library, where antique books, manuscripts, collections of prints, musical scores, and cartographic specimens from the National Library were kept. The details of that tragic period for Polish culture have been recorded by Library employees and others.<sup>6</sup> The reopening of the Library after the ravages of the war took place in April 1946.

The National Library is the largest academic and public library in Poland. In harmony with the provisions of the *Act of 1997 on Libraries*, its tasks include conducting activities related to the library, bibliography, science, information, conservation, consultation, publishing, and display. It also provides services, particularly the amassing, studying, making available to the public, and perpetual archiving of library materials created in Poland and abroad; research related to library science, bibliology, and akin knowledge disciplines; elaborating and publishing the national bibliography; enhancing the factual operations of libraries in Poland and assistance provided to Polish libraries abroad; and running centres for standardised non-serial and serial publications.<sup>7</sup>

At the opening of the IFLA Congress in Wrocław in 2017, speaking to the largest-ever gathering of librarians, Director Makowski openly referred to the events of 1939–1945 and the slaughter of Polish libraries:

We mustn't forget the hecatomb of the Second World War, when Poland lost 70% of all its library collections through war damage, wilful destruction or theft. Including the most precious, also those stored at the National Library of Poland in Warsaw, where 50,000 manuscripts and 60,000 early printed books were burnt. This loss is unequalled in modern history.

And this is why during this Congress in Poland, we will discuss not only promoting reading and literacy, libraries as catalysts

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6 J. Kordel, 'The Decimation of Polish Libraries in the Second World War', *Polish Libraries*, 2022 no. 10, pp. 6–25.

7 *Ustawa o bibliotekach*, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19970850539/U/D19970539Lj.pdf> [Accessed: 30 August 2023].

of innovation, but also work with cultural heritage partners to safeguard cultural heritage in its diverse forms, including traditional, historical, indigenous and contemporary expression. And to achieve coordination of our cultural heritage activities. Polish libraries can play a unique role in rescuing heritage in danger. We are willing and want to share our experience.<sup>8</sup>

After World War II, the National Library's experiences from that period served as guidance for consolidating community resilience: to work out the economic backing and logistical strategies to be able to react appropriately in a similar armed conflict or unpredictable disaster, so that the devised routines could help people, for example, to rescue and safeguard their national heritage.

Currently, the National Library of Poland is conducting its statutory activities by supervising and co-creating the National Library Network to introduce standardised library and information activity. The Network encompasses public libraries and other libraries incorporated into it by the decision of the minister responsible for culture and national heritage.<sup>9</sup> The second entity that the National Library coordinates in compliance with Article 7 of the Act of June 27, 1997, is the National Library Council. Apart from formulating opinions on legal acts related to libraries in Poland, the Council's scope of responsibilities includes coordinating the National Library projects and stimulating the development of Polish librarianship. The Council's President is elected; the position is currently held by the Director of the National Library of Poland

Apart from tasks directly connected with books, librarianship, and readership, the National Library and the Network and Council also take actions aimed at improving the situation of libraries in Poland in relation to community expectations, which have been changing. This is best exemplified by the fact that the National Library was one of the first institutions to run a digital library:

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- 8 IFLA 2017 – Director of the National Library of Poland – Tomasz Makowski, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0P9lkyYSds> [Accessed: 30 August 2023].
  - 9 *Ogólnokrajowa sieć biblioteczna*, <https://www.bn.org.pl/dla-bibliotekarzy/ogolnokrajowa-siec-biblioteczna> [Accessed: 30 August 2023].

Polona.pl.<sup>10</sup> A very special example of the commitment of the National Library can be found in its formulation of recommendations applicable to the operations of over 30,000 libraries across Poland during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>11</sup>

Varied social expectations, changing working conditions, and unpredicted events requiring intervention all led Polish libraries, particularly during the pandemic, to reach a consensus on how they should operate so that they could serve their readers despite the restrictions. This issue forms part of the concept of ‘community resilience,’ known in foreign literature on libraries and librarian praxis at least since the 2000s, which constitutes one of the major tasks of libraries today.

This concept is most often used in the context of climate change and other disasters, both natural and man-made.<sup>12</sup> It involves adaptation and consolidation of communities in the face of many varied crises, and putting ‘adaptive capacity into urban systems, mitigating endogenous risk and strengthening capacity to respond to exogenous uncertainty associated with acute and chronic shocks and disturbances, reducing exposure within all communities to these disruptions.’<sup>13</sup> During analysis of the subject, a broader concept was identified: ‘disaster resilience’<sup>14</sup> or ‘community disaster resilience.’<sup>15</sup> To sum up, community resilience should

10 *Krajowa Rada Biblioteczna*, <https://www.bn.org.pl/dla-bibliotekarzy/krajowa-rada-biblioteczna> [Accessed: 30 August 2023].

11 T. Makowski, ‘The National Library of Poland during the Coronavirus Pandemic: A Brief History of the first nine months of the state of emergency’, *Przegląd Biblioteczny*, 2020, no. 2, pp. 38–56.

12 I. Benekos et al., ‘A Proposed Methodological Approach for Considering Community Resilience in Technology Development and Disaster Management Pilot Testing’, *International Journal of Disaster Risk Science*, 2022 no. 13, pp. 1–16; G. Deng et al., ‘Evaluation of Community Disaster Resilience (CDR): Taking Luoyang Community as an Example’, *Mathematical Problems in Engineering*, 2022, pp. 1–21.

13 J. Lindemann et al., ‘Building urban community resilience through university extension: community engagement and the politics of knowledge’, *Socio-Ecological Practice Research*, 2022 no. 4, p. 1.

14 *Disaster Resilience: An Integrated Approach: Second Edition*, eds. D. Paton, D. M. Johnston, Charles C. Thomas, Springfield, 2017.

15 A. Ostadtaghizadeh et al., ‘Community Disaster Resilience: A Systematic Review on Assessment Models and Tools’, *PLOS Currents*, 2015 no. 7, pp. 1–15.

be understood as community capacity to cope in crisis situations. Individual resilience is translated here into that of a whole community; the stress is put on preparing action strategies, as well as economic, human, and technological backing in the event of a disaster. According to Andreas Vårheim, 'community resilience' is an important element of the operations of libraries: 'local community presence gives them a prominent role in community development and in creating community resilience.'<sup>16</sup> He adds that the literature on the subject is limited; the examples he gives refer mainly to 'the efforts of libraries during disasters.' Other authors who deal with this topic include Dan Grace and Barbara Sen, Shari R. Veil, and Bradley Wade Bishop.<sup>17</sup>

These researchers most frequently describe how libraries support local communities in the face of natural disasters: hurricanes or floods. The context of consolidating community resilience in the event of war, including the role of libraries in this respect, has not been tackled. The present paper intends to fill this gap. The authors aspire to describe the activities of Poland's National Library to help consolidate the community resilience of Ukrainians following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

## METHODOLOGY

When working on the methodology of this study, particular emphasis was put on its conceptualisation. It was quite a challenge to formulate the definitions of the applied concepts, to adapt the theory of community resilience or to use the domains proposed by other scholars, and to work out our own measurability indexes. Firstly, as can be seen from the critical analysis of literature, the

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- 16 A. Vårheim, 'A Note on Resilience Perspectives in Public Library Research: Paths Towards Research Agendas', *Proceedings from the Document Academy*, 2016 nos. 3(2), p. 3.
  - 17 D. Grace, B. Sen, 'Community Resilience and the Role of the Public Library', *Library Trends*, 2013 no. 3, pp. 513-541; S. R. Veil, B. W. Bishop, B. W., 'Opportunities and Challenges for Public Libraries to Enhance Community Resilience', *Risk Analysis: An Official Publication of the Society for Risk Analysis*, 2014 no. 4, pp. 721-734.

authors who deal with this topic disagree on many issues.<sup>18</sup> Secondly, the presented study results came from qualitative research, making them difficult to measure. The effects of the conceptualisation and operationalisation are presented below.

### RESEARCH CONCEPTUALISATION

In 2015, Abbas Ostadtaghizadeh and his team analysed the texts in which scholars dealt with community resilience. They conducted an overview of studies that used the resilience concept, looking for discrepancies in its understanding and in the tools and methods applied. They ascertained that scholars had actually distinguished several domains or areas within which community resilience could be analysed, including community capital, social, economic, natural, human, physical, infrastructural, and institutional.<sup>19</sup> The domain concept has been adapted for the purpose of the present paper; the following domains, with their measure indexes, have been taken into consideration:

- **Institutional** domain - indexes: effectiveness of the framework of crisis management, institutional cooperation, effective management.
- **Social** domain - indexes: activities in healthcare, education, acclimatisation of the harmed, adaptation to everyday life and morale boosting, assistance in individual, group, and collective communication.
- **Physical** domain - indexes: material aid, for example providing space for temporary shelters for people; transportation services; sharing institutional equipment, which can serve for preserving collections; providing infrastructure for media communication.
- **Economic** domain - indexes: financial assistance.

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18 See e.g., A. Ostadtaghizadeh et al., 'Community disaster resilience...'

19 Ibidem; see also J. S. Mayunga, *Measuring the measure: A Multi-Dimensional Scale Model to Measure Community Disaster Resilience in the U.S. Gulf Coast Region*, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/147134896.pdf> [Accessed: 30 August 2023].

The institutional domain was associated with intra-organizational actions taken by the National Library of Poland to serve Ukrainians and preserve their national heritage. The focus was on those projects of organisational character that resulted from crisis management. The activities undertaken by the Library to boost education, health, acclimatisation, everyday life, and morale were attributed to the social domain. Attention was also paid to assistance in communication on the individual, group, and collective levels (one-way or two-way). Material assistance was attributed to the physical domain, and financial aid was to the economic domain. The physical domain was defined as aid activities of material character related to the preservation of the cultural heritage of Ukrainians, and sharing with them the Library's space for accommodation or transportation services. It also included providing infrastructure for media communication.

The conceptualisation of research, and defining the domains connected with consolidating community resilience, allowed us to formulate the research question, which related to the **actions with respect to the following domains: institutional, social, physical, and economic, undertaken by the National Library of Poland for Ukrainians in relation to the invasion by Russian troops in February 2022.**

The choice of the appropriate research method was the essential condition for phrasing the correct conclusion. Since the activities of the National Library of Poland in this area have not so far been sufficiently documented, it was decided to collect information on the subject via an interview; that is, a bilateral talk initiated by the researcher. The person who knew most about the topic was Director Library, Dr Tomasz Makowski, who agreed to participate in the study. The interview was conducted at the National Library of Poland on January 16, 2023.

The standard option for conducting interviews was chosen, in which the conversation is based on questions prepared beforehand.<sup>20</sup> To obtain reliable and precise results, the interviewer

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20 J. Sztumski, *Wstęp do metod i technik badań społecznych*, Katowice 2010, pp. 177-182.



should thoroughly prepare for the role of asking questions, and precisely work out the appropriate research tools (in this case, the interview questions). To undertake the research via this method it was essential to specify the goal and define the interview problem, elaborate the set of questions asked during the conversation, and create an appropriate atmosphere for the situation. Research methodology distinguishes between several types of interviews. The type selected was the oral and open one in which the interviewee is informed about the purpose of the conversation and aware that they are participating in a study. Only a single interview with one individual was planned. Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to make a list of issues to be tackled in the course of the interview, in the form and order they choose. This method was selected since only one interviewee was to take part in the research, therefore, there was no need to compare responses given to the same questions by other interviewees.<sup>21</sup>

#### RESEARCH OPERATIONALISATION

At the outset, the research goal was formulated: documenting the activities of the National Library of Poland with respect to Ukrainians following Russia's invasion in 2022, in the context of using this experience to consolidate the community resilience of the Ukrainian people. A request to participate in the research was addressed to Director Tomasz Makowski, PhD, in an email on November 29, 2022, justifying the intent of the research and

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21 See e.g., A. Gregulska-Oksińska, 'Użyteczność poznawcza wywiadu jako metody badawczej zagadnienia kontroli zarządczej w jednostkach samorządu terytorialnego', *Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu Research Papers of Wrocław University of Economics and Business*, 2021 no. 3, pp. 26 - 36; *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research. Wyd. 5*, eds. N. K. Denzin, Y. S. Lincoln, Sage, Thousand Oaks 2018; S. Kvale, *Prowadzenie wywiadów*, Warszawa 2010; S. Kvale, *InterViews. Wprowadzenie do jakościowego wywiadu badawczego*, Trans Humana, Białystok 2004; S. Kvale, *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*, Sage, Thousand Oaks 1996; R. S. Weiss, *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*, Free Press, New York 1994; I. E. Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*, New York 1991.

briefly discussing the planned effect. Additionally, a pre-prepared question scenario was sent to allow the interviewee to prepare for the interview.<sup>22</sup> The interview was to be conducted in the form of a natural conversation, following the question list prepared beforehand. The interview was recorded on a Dictaphone and simultaneously on Microsoft Word using NLP (Natural Language Processing).

The material obtained from the interview was grouped into four sections, reflecting the community resilience domains. Below, the major facts described by the Director during the interview are laid out, accompanied by quotes.

#### PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS

The day of February 24 is associated by Poles with the reactivation of the National Library by President Ignacy Mościcki in 1928. Therefore, on that date in 2022, a grand celebration was planned: the reopening of the Library reading room after renovation. Having invested sizeable resources, and entirely modernised the Library's indoor space, the staff had anticipated crowds at the event. As it turned out, according to Director Makowski, at that moment everybody was at their TV sets. Russia's invasion of Ukraine took place that same day. The bookcases at the entrance to the reading room were immediately filled with books on Ukraine, and the celebration was postponed. In anticipation of Russia's attack, the National Library declared their support for Ukraine, and the Director contacted his Ukrainian counterpart on a mobile phone, since landline phones were inoperative for some time, as the server had been destroyed. 'That contact with me,' recalled Tomasz Makowski, 'truly was one of the unique contacts for her in the first days of the war; it was safe.'

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22 See e.g., K. Konecki, *Studia z metodologii badań jakościowych. Teoria ugruntowana*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2000; J. Sztumski, *Wstęp do metod...*; S. Kvale, *Prowadzenie wywiadów...*; S. Kvale, *InterViews. Wprowadzenie...*; S. Kvale, *InterViews: An introduction...*

Community resilience building is a lengthy and tedious process. For it to be effective, experience is needed. Experience helps a community prepare effectively for subsequent disasters - and wars. The National Library substantially contributes to building community resilience in Poland. It has the necessary experience, gathered and described in memoirs and diaries of its staff from World War II, to allow its future administration to prepare better for similar developments. Although, in this case, it was not Poland that was attacked, thanks to appropriate preparation, it could contribute to preventing negative results from the current events and assist the Ukrainian people:

I can claim with satisfaction that the reading of the war archive of the National Library and memoirs of librarians from World War II proved very useful under the circumstances. We didn't feel helpless. Fortunately, we didn't need to apply the guidance written down there, and hopefully, we won't have to, yet we are prepared for such developments. Also, with respect to the National Library.

Libraries didn't wait idle. Following the example of the United States or other Western countries, libraries have to react to the current needs of citizens, and no longer only implement work plans known from the 1980s. The library is a service. We aren't a part of a noble past. If libraries are to survive, they will only if people know that libraries benefit them.

The Library also undertook activities related to the protection of Polish cultural heritage. For example, following the invasion, each Polish library forming part of the National Library Resource updated its Collection Security Plan, defining activities in reaction to different threats. The Director of the National Library requested this update so as to provide for the current developments. Also, evacuation procedures in the event of a terrorist attack were analysed. It was borne in mind that certain libraries, being symbols of Poland's independence, could be targeted in such attacks. These results of the current experiences are the basis for building solutions and strategies that will help citizens at present and in the future.

## THE INSTITUTIONAL DOMAIN

*It has turned out that the librarians' community operates really effectively. I'm aware of the fact that many consider the situation to be bad, yet if looking from the government's perspective, in the course of the SARS-COVID-19 pandemic, we were one of the groups of professionals who organised themselves. Others waited for guidelines. But we were prepared.*

Tomasz Makowski

The coordination performed by the National Library concerned the libraries which form the National Library Network; that is, mainly those run by local governments - communities, counties, and voivodeships - as well as those that cooperate with them. The second coordinated area was the National Library Resource. Next to the concerns about Ukraine, particularly in the first phase of the war, people were also apprehensive that the aggressor would not stop at violating the Ukrainian border; that Russia would also try to attack Poland. 'Happily, today we are stronger, we are no longer worried about it, but then it was a real concern,' said Tomasz Makowski.

Thus, communication was maintained with large libraries, firstly those composing the National Library Resource; some of them, such as the Elbląg Library, are on the border with the Russian Federation. However, the procedure also applied to other libraries. As Makowski put it, 'Evacuation scenarios to western Poland are in place. As librarians, we clearly recall 1939 and today we have repositories for evacuated collections prepared.'

The assistance provided to the Ukrainian community would not have been possible without cooperation with charities, associations, publishers, and government circles. The activities included libraries making Ukrainian books available, book crossing, and actions promoting readership:

We quickly established cooperation with different charities, such as the Universal Reading Foundation, which raised resources from private sponsors to purchase Ukrainian books. Poland's First Lady, in communication with Ukraine's First Lady, ran the action to distribute books in Ukrainian to children ... we also started digitising available publications, not waiting for their print. This gave a stimulus to many libraries; also, the Polish Librarians Association

contributed, and so did many publishing houses, which ‘freed’ various texts. This helped us to be much more flexible. Children at the border or on trains could be read to.

The support actions were also a test for Polish librarianship, since they required work coordination:

My role consisted of explaining to directors that certain overzealousness is sometimes worse than self-restraint. Uncoordinated actions resulted in situations when suddenly hundreds of pushchairs appeared at one place where actually, for example, nappies were needed. We had to teach libraries to cooperate with Voivodeship Teams for Ukraine to learn from them what the Ukrainians’ current needs were, and not to rely on those from a week before. And we were successful.

The National Library of Poland closely cooperated with other institutions in the assistance provided to Ukrainians. Makowski participated in the Crisis Staff for Ukraine at the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, which coordinated the actions of cultural institutions.<sup>23</sup> One of the Library’s Ukrainian employees was sent to work as a coordinator at the Ukrainian House in Warsaw, the main Ukrainian NGO in Poland, which coordinated volunteers, accommodation, meals, and so on. The same employee was Makowski’s interpreter in his Polish-Ukrainian contacts: ‘As of 24February, we didn’t speak Russian with my counterpart in Kyiv, only Ukrainian.’

The assistance to save Ukraine’s national heritage was also planned:

If the Russians had entered Kyiv as they had planned, then obviously, similarly as with Georgia, we would be ready to receive treasures of Ukrainian libraries, organising transportation, and having already prepared space in the National Library building. It was obvious that we had to provide rescue to those treasures, just as in 1939 we transported the treasures of the National Library to Canada: thanks to this, Chopin’s manuscripts and the *Old Annals of the Holy Cross*

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23 *Dla Ukrainy*, <https://www.gov.pl/web/kultura/pomoc-dla-ukrainy> [Accessed: 30 August 2023].

survived, or the Germans would have burnt that collection. Similar aid was offered to Ukrainian libraries.

The Library proved to be a good organiser of assistance to Ukrainians in the care of their national heritage preserved in libraries. A week before the invasion, Makowski had contacted Dr Adolf Juzwenko, Director of Ossolineum National Institute, asking him to take care of libraries in Lviv. At that point, it was not certain where Russia would attack. It was assumed that both Kyiv and Lviv would be targeted. The responsibility was split in such a way that the National Library would assist eastern Ukraine, while Ossolineum would focus on Lviv. The first talks with Ukrainian colleagues had been conducted after 2014: 'It was expected that the seizure of Crimea would just whet the invaders' appetite, and sooner or later a similar situation would happen again.'

Ukrainian libraries have suffered during the war. The collection of the Kharkiv Korolenko State Scientific Library has suffered substantial damage, also having been flooded with water. Part of this collection cannot be saved. This implies another job that the National Library assumed: registering losses and effects of barbarity. The concern was that Ukraine, being involved in fighting, would not have the time, forces, and means to do so. Translators were engaged; their task was to register destruction and personal losses in Ukrainian librarianship. However, with time, it turned out that Polish assistance was not needed: Ukraine did the necessary work with its own resources. The first reports, for example, by Prof. Iryna Zhuravlova of Kharkiv, have been included in the most recent issue of *Polish Libraries*.<sup>24</sup>

All the above activities were meant to achieve what was not fully achieved with Polish collections during World War II. Additionally, Polish libraries amassed material aid for Ukraine: clothes, blankets, quilts, food, hygiene products, and so on. The National Library asked Polish libraries to carry out such actions; many were

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24 I. Zhuravliova, 'The Central Scientific Library of the Karazin Kharkiv National University under Russian Attack', *Polish Libraries*, 2022 no. 10, pp. 272-285.

extremely effective. When a group of refugees crossing the border needed pushchairs, cosmetics, nappies, or hygiene products (Ukrainians often arrived empty handed), many libraries organised collections, which they subsequently transported to the border. Special mention in this respect should be given to the libraries from the Subcarpathian, Lesser Poland, Lublin, and Mazovian Voivodeships.

The dispatched aid included other equipment necessary during a war: first-aid kits, fire extinguishers, and fire blankets. The places where, regrettably, damage had already occurred, particularly due to pumps bursting after windows had been broken in freezing temperatures and books were flooded, were supplied with various conservation means. The Director of the National Library stayed in close touch with his Ukrainian counterpart in Kyiv.

#### THE SOCIAL DOMAIN

*If the state or the local governments had been unable to host all the refugees,  
we would have opened our reading rooms.*

Tomasz Makowski

Among the most important activities undertaken by the Polish librarian community to assist Ukrainians who arrived in Poland after 24 February 2022, was the organisation of classes in Polish and workshops designed to make participants familiar with Polish history and customs. A good example was the workshops dealing with Easter customs in Ukraine and Poland. Such activities, conducted by many libraries in Poland, targeted one goal: to get to know the people who had arrived from Ukraine, and reduce their stress after a sudden arrival at a new domicile:

Libraries really quickly reacted to my request to organise classes in Polish. Not everybody in eastern Ukraine could speak it; they had to be quickly taught it. Many libraries were involved in these welcomed activities. Some of them organised workshops straight away before Easter, as well as classes for women with children. What worked perfectly fine was showing how Easter was celebrated in Ukraine and in Poland. Thanks to that, we managed to culturally integrate other

groups. It turned out that we have a lot in common. The level of fear on both sides lowered. I'm certain that the libraries which conducted such workshops won a very good opinion, but they also found new readers among the Ukrainians.

These activities also consolidated the social perception of Polish libraries:

They showed the residents of little and middle-sized towns that they are needed, that libraries are places which prove greatly useful in a crisis. Since we must realise that besides the postal network, the police, the parish network, and school, there are actually no other networks than that of libraries.

Alongside many other public libraries, the National Library of Poland was involved in teaching Polish. A total of 1,700 course candidates studied there, mainly selected by the Ukrainian House in Warsaw. Currently (2023), there is less demand for classes in Polish. Our interviewee is of the opinion that, at present, libraries should support the Ukrainian community, particularly children, in maintaining contact with Ukrainian culture: 'This is our task if the war continues.'

The linguistic support also included English classes. This applied mainly to those librarians from Ukraine who wanted to represent their country and share their war experiences in international arenas. As there were among them individuals not sufficiently advanced in their English skills, they were offered linguistic guidance, and their texts were revised by an English native speaker.

The support provided to the whole creative sector in Ukraine was of major importance for the National Library, and for the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. The intention was to secure conditions in which writers and book dealers could continue their creative work. As is generally known, men could not cross the Ukrainian border, but this did not apply to women, who were given employment in Poland in various positions. It was much harder for writers and publishers who stayed behind in Ukraine to earn money, but it was of crucial importance for them to be able to make a living from their work, for them not to give up culture and



to continue using their talents in harmony with what they used to do before the war.

Russia's invasion caused many librarians, or strictly speaking female librarians who crossed the Polish-Ukrainian border, to lose their jobs. The task was to identify all those who were in need; as it turned out, there were not many of them. Tomasz Makowski contacted the group of directors composing the National Library Network; meetings were also held with the group of libraries forming the National Library Resource. The National Library Network promised to look for all the librarians who needed assistance. The task was to find for them accommodation and a job, even if only volunteering, to 'occupy their mind with something,' so that they could start making money and deal with the trauma. Obviously, those who arrived from Bucha or Irpin had suffered a totally different experience to those who came from Lviv or Odesa. The professional group of librarians was not numerous, so whenever one was identified, Makowski or his representative phoned the director of the local library, asking for assistance to be provided to that individual. It is important to note that the majority of incoming Ukrainians had a place they could go to; that is, some relatives already working and living in Poland.

An important part of the activities within the social domain were those in the international arena aiming at excluding Russian representatives from international organisations. As Makowski stated:

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we can't have it that one country invades another, slaughters people, destroys culture, different facilities. We can't agree to that! The experience of World War II, and not only, teaches us that in civilised countries there must be no tolerance for this kind of aggression. And just as I imagine that between 1939 and 1945, as a representative of librarians, I would not have sat at the same table with Nazi German librarians, I can't imagine now sitting at the same table with the aggressor, although we used to be on very good terms with Russian libraries, and it was a very difficult decision for us.

The Russian librarian community must get the signal that their country's aggression on another free state, and the atrocities

their soldiers commit there, cause them to be excluded from the community of free countries. And that this also applies to the librarians as long as the war continues.

Makowski claimed that contacts with Russian partners have not been maintained since 24February, and the partners have not tried to resume them, perhaps because they are aware of the war's consequences for them.

In the joint activities of librarian communities, Russians have been excluded from the Bibliotheca Baltica, then subsequently from the Consortium of European Research Libraries and the Conference of European National Librarians. The situation was different in the case of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), which for quite some time did not release any relevant statement, trying to stay out of the dispute. After numerous pressures and meetings, for example from Poland's National Library, it finally made its position clear; no representative of Russia attended the IFLA Congress in Dublin in 2022.

#### THE PHYSICAL DOMAIN

*We were scared that the war started on 24 February would be dehumanised, that the falling bombs, dying people would be treated just as mere numbers. This is what the Russians wanted to achieve by calling the war a special operation and speaking of the fallen people as its costs. We took the responsibility to publish illustrations from the places where bombs fell, so that people would associate the front with a place which was once peaceful.*

Tomasz Makowski

*We were ready to transport the most precious objects.*

Tomasz Makowski

The physical domain involves assistance of material character. The Library arranged actions aimed at organising accommodation in preparation for the inflow of an estimated 4 to 10 million individuals. The National Library of Poland was ready to open its reading room to people seeking shelter. The advantage of the Library was its large number of toilets and bathrooms, and the availability of the kitchen. Plans were made to put up tents with showers. In the event, such far-reaching plans were not necessary, since, as observed by Dr Makowski, 'Fortunately for us, both the local government and the gov-

ernment, yet mainly Poles, welcomed the refugees to their homes. There was no need to implement the actions planned in this respect.'

Another way to deal with the effects of the war was to open public libraries to meet refugees' needs; they were made available mainly to women with children. Some, including the National Library, opened up their spaces; fortunately, it proved unnecessary to use most of them. An agricultural commune near Łomża, which had an auditorium, prepared it for refugees' use. They built bathrooms so that refugees could be put up in a temporary shelter. Many Ukrainians flocked to that region, yet all of them found homes with relatives who worked there, or with Poles. In the end, nobody had to use the specially prepared library space.

Media communication is a very important aspect of building societal morale. From the point of view of community resilience, such communication could be enabled by offering an appropriate backup in the form of online spaces on websites and social media (physical domain). This can also be placed in the social domain; with respect to the latter, we would talk of activities such as elaborating special materials. At the National Library, care was taken to provide the infrastructure for the functioning of Ukrainians in the media space. Daily, or almost daily, contents related to Ukraine were posted on the Polona.pl fan page and the fan page of the National Library of Poland. This was not easy, owing to the challenging Polish-Ukrainian history; sometimes, it was difficult to show facilities from a non-Polish perspective. Photographs, postcards, and books were published whose authors described old Ukraine. It was shown that little Ukrainian towns continued to 'live,' that children were stillborn there, people fell in love, went for walks; that they were definite places, not merely war statistics.

From the very beginning, the Ossolineum National Institute greatly contributed to assisting librarians in Lviv. For example, it purchased chests to transport collections, armoured cabinets, and so on. The action to buy the books of certain Ukrainian publishers was an organizationally and logistically advanced undertaking. The Head of the Ukrainian Book Institute came to Poland together with

her family, and served as the intermediary in contacts with the Ukrainian party. On the Polish side, the Polish Book Institute participated. In June and the autumn of 2022, large volumes of books were either bought or printed, and reached the Polish libraries that were taking care of Ukrainian refugees. First, a close collaboration was established with various organisations, such as the Universal Reading Foundation and All of Poland Reads to Kids. Books were transported to Warsaw via Lublin. Occasionally, Director Makowski would ask a library to temporarily store some resources. Voivodship libraries would effectively distribute those books among libraries.

The National Library also asked the Ukrainian party about medicines that ought to be sent over. It was expected that Ukraine would suffer supply difficulties; fortunately, everything was operating faultlessly, and there was no need to dispatch medicines, but the proposal was welcomed.

#### THE ECONOMIC DOMAIN

*We wanted to provide real assistance.*  
Tomasz Makowski

‘Ukrainians are very brave indeed,’ emphasised Tomasz Makowski. ‘They want to cope by themselves in Ukraine. Money could not be sent, yet the Library asked to identify some individuals who were in a difficult financial situation to maybe offer them some help. There were few such individuals. The Ukrainians replied to the financial help offer by saying: ‘let’s wait for a tougher moment, maybe then we will use your help.’”

The economic domain - that is, financial assistance - could not be the main form of assistance by the Library: it was impossible to transfer definite sums of money to other entities. However, one of the Library’s most spectacular actions was the shipment of fire extinguishers to libraries in Kyiv and Kharkiv. To have legal grounds to assign money to assistance, actions were concentrated on those libraries where Polish collections were amassed, for example, in Kyiv and Kharkiv. When 300 fire extinguishers arrived at the National Library in Kyiv, it was really an impressive event, recalled Makowski.

This boosted the morale of the community, who felt that Poles not only made promises, but fulfilled them without delay.

## CONCLUSIONS

*We made a major mistake in the 1990s, claiming that libraries were only places where you borrowed books. Today, we're paying for that mistake. The example of the US or other countries makes it evident that a library deals with anything a man needs.*

Tomasz Makowski

The war is still raging; therefore the process of counteracting its results, started immediately after its outbreak, will last for years to come. However, Makowski has already declared:

We're also preparing to help Ukraine in its reconstruction. The application of Poland's experience from 1945 is very important for Ukrainians. We have prepared a library package for implementation: the mass digitising in Ukraine on the example of Polona.pl or the digital library like Academica after the destruction of small school libraries, or university ones. It is very important, because, in this way, Ukrainians would not have any interruption in their access to library resources. We will assist them in this as much as we can.

The activities of the National Library of Poland, as well as librarians, to help Ukrainians covered a number of initiatives, which can be placed in four categories: 1) institutional; 2) social; 3) physical, and 4) economic. At the stage of conceptualisation, the following indexes were identified:

- 1) Efficiency of the framework of crisis management; institutional cooperation, effective management.
- 2) Actions to assist refugees in the areas of healthcare, education, acclimatisation of the harms, adaptation to everyday life and building morale, and facilitating or enabling communication.
- 3) Providing library spaces for temporary shelters; securing the possibility to preserve and protect cultural heritage, including its transportation; material assistance; providing infrastructure for communication.
- 4) Financial aid.

To sum up, in the institutional domain, the National Library supported Ukrainians' community resilience National Library of Poland through coordination of the activities of the National Li-

brary Network and the National Library Resource; cooperation with charities, associations, publishers, and governmental circles; and the central cataloguing of Ukrainian books. Its activities also contributed to consolidating Polish community resilience; for example, the continuous communication with large libraries such as the Elbląg Library on the border with Ukraine, whose evacuation was at one point considered necessary.

The National Library also played an important logistical role. It provided space and assigned its staff to supervise the collection of the most useful things: clothes, hygiene products, blankets, first-aid kits, fire extinguishers, helmets, power banks, and chests to transport collections. It also fulfilled tasks such as the purchase of books from Ukrainian publishers for Polish libraries.

Activities consolidating Ukrainians' social resilience also included Polish classes organised by libraries for Ukrainians, English courses for those who wished to speak in the international arena, job offers for Ukrainian librarians, support for book dealers and publishers in Ukraine, and efforts to exclude Russian librarians from international bodies.

The physical domain of activities undertaken or planned by the National Library of Poland concerned providing conditions for protecting Ukrainian collections, and Polish collections in Ukraine, including their potential transportation. Plans were also made to register losses and Russian atrocities within Ukraine; however, the Ukrainians coped with this themselves. Additionally, accommodation in libraries was provided to refugees. Refugees were also given a share in the infrastructure that would enable them to publish daily Ukraine-related content on the Polona.pl fan page and that of the National Library.

Owing to law, the National Library faced its greatest restrictions in implementing the economic domain. It could not transfer money to other entities, and was therefore definitely more effective in the institutional, social, and physical domains. Despite this, it tried to carry out certain actions of economic support to the Ukrainian community, while remaining within the legislation.

The unpredictability of war effects and the necessity to react promptly and organise immediate assistance made it impossible to record all the Library's activities; many were not even easy to register, such as assistance in relocating refugees. In Director Makowski's view, it would be difficult to 'translate such initiatives into figures, owing to the massive scale' of millions of people crossing the Polish border.

The range of the implemented activities, and the peculiarity of the situation in which Polish and Ukrainian libraries and Ukrainians found themselves, raise questions about the new tasks that libraries face. Our interlocutor is convinced that 'it is best to answer that libraries shall perform all the social functions which might be necessary ... Libraries are simply places of social trust and should stay as such.'

The activities of the National Library of Poland, and of the whole Polish librarian community, can undoubtedly serve in the future to build the community resilience of the Ukrainian people. Preparing the appropriate material and technological backup, setting up a contact network, and working out modes of action in the event of a disaster, such as a war, have proven to be essential elements of an independent state. The findings presented in the article demonstrate that libraries can support communities in building their resilience, including in war-related situations. This proves that libraries are now more needed than ever before. In this respect, the worked-out modes of reaction to the ensuing war situation may inspire systemic solutions.

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*Translated by Magdalena Iwińska*