

RAMŪNAS ČIČELIS

Municipal public library of Jonava district

**LIBRARY AS A MEANS OF OVERCOMING ALOOFNESS: GOOD PRACTICES BY THE
PUBLIC LIBRARY OF JONAVA**

In his book "Parallel Realities", the philosopher Leonidas Donskis describes the phenomenon of our day, characterized by the fact that two different or even opposing trends in thinking and in reality phenomena exist side by side, but do not contact in any way. In societies of parallel realities, people are condemned to solipsism and loneliness. Argentinian prose writer Jorge Luis Borges in his short story, or "fiction", as he calls this genre, describes those times of the Babylonian city and state, when the library and the physical and everyday world of ideas were not parallel realities. The writer compares the library with the universe, which, contrary to what is now often believed, involves the whole world with its people, objects, language and thoughts. It is more commonplace and acceptable for a person today to think that the world involves the library in itself, and each person decides individually whether (s)he needs it. The aim of this report is to analyze whether the Municipal Public Library of Jonava District, with its regional significance, helps the people of the town and the district to overcome aloofness, and whether the library is not something that the population refuses, or maybe actually engages in its activities.

Last year, the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania announced it to be the Year of Libraries. Few parliamentary initiatives, when the year is designated to one or another occasion or field of social life, have been as beneficial as was the Year of Libraries. The Jonava Public Library hosted a number of events each month, with the participation of writers and publishers of high culture, not of the readily accessible mass literature. It

should be noted that the attendance of meetings with writers varies greatly between libraries in big cities and smaller towns or villages. In the cities, people with literature related to their work, students and lecturers from higher education attend those events. Meanwhile, in the province, there is rarely a lack of events involving people who read on a daily basis: not for their practical, working needs, but rather, for the sake of their beliefs and values. Do we really understand what life is like in regions as areas far-off from the centres? The experiences of the Jonava Public Library have shown that it is possible, even being far off from the concentration of power, authorities and material resources, to create the Borgesque Universe – a minor center of the world, which might be small to the observers in the capital, but not to the very people living in Jonava. Most of the innovative events and projects of the Jonava Public Library are intended to raise a reader who will not practice fast reading or consuming literature by turning over the pages of popular novels or intriguing autobiographies, memoirs and other ego literature. The objective of the Jonava Public Library is to draw the public attention to that which is more valuable, less casual, and more special.

Who is attending the town and district libraries today? In this respect, the situation in Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Panevezys and small town libraries is not very different: children and the elderly prevail. Schoolchildren need the library as a tool for learning, students come there to write their academic papers required by universities, and seniors go to the library to turn the pages of newspapers, meet their acquaintances, neighbors, and former colleagues. Among other regional libraries, the Jonava Public Library, due to the town life and activity, stands out by the fact that here, the middle-aged generation (people from 30 to 50 years old) attend the library more often – the main factor of this tendency is the rapid development of the town infrastructure: Jonava, according to population surveys, is a town where living keeps getting better. Most commonly, mature people in Lithuania are preoccupied with their

money, credits, homes and children; they have no time to think about books or especially to read them. When such people want some culture, they go to a concert, the cinema, or a theater performance, but they buy books in bookstores by paying really large amounts of money. Regional public libraries, and namely, the Jonava Public Library, due to the lower purchasing power of the population, provide a solution for people who want to follow the literature news and read continuously – this trend is also proved by the fact that book sales in bookstores based in Jonava have been very inactive.

Jonava has a library that is located in a cultural heritage building in the town center, so everyone knows where this building is. But that is not enough. The Jonava Public Library readers actively use the resources it has – these are the information databases accessed only by the library. Indeed, more than one expert in any field can gain valuable knowledge through these databases. This also saves time, otherwise spent searching for information on the Internet, while it has been already classified and presented to the reader as if it were on a platter.

More than that, libraries are memory locations. However much we would strive for living for the present day (and this is the current society's orientation), cultural archives are needed not only for those who work in the field of public memory (museologists, historians and other humanities), but also for a wider part of social medium. Where cultural memory is gone, society dies. It dies when it has been forgetting too much. The project of the Jonava Public Library last year, the Skype seminar series *Literature of the Emigration – In Our Library*, helped to maintain contacts between those who have stayed in the homeland and the emigrants. This is also a matter of memory. It is no secret that those who have left Lithuania are considered to be lost by others. By this project, the library did not seek to contribute to the return of the emigrants, but only to maintain contacts and connections, so that Lithuanians

finally perceive themselves as a diasporic nation whose part is spread throughout the world, but not really lost. Finally, the largest contribution of all libraries in the country, including the Jonava Public Library, to the readers' competencies is their computer literacy training courses, in which hundreds of people in Jonava have participated in recent years, who are now able to search for information and perform daily work on the Internet.

The statement of that the library is an unfamiliar place will soon become anachronistic, as it is increasingly meets the needs of the society that have been growing. It is usual in Lithuania that changes in cities and towns begin with renovation of buildings and facade restoration. For libraries, this stage is already the past (as for the Jonava Public Library, the renovation of the main building is almost completed). The time has come when the library forms the face of the town; it brings together communities not to protest, but to engage in creative activities – this statement is supported by a number of creative workshops and clubs that operate in Jonava Public Library. The library is undoubtedly the basis of such a creative foundation. The library itself, like those in many other countries with a long history of democracy and peaceful life, has gradually been becoming a centre where one may stay for the whole day, engaged in various activities, and not feel the lapse of the hours. This is also confirmed by the permanent practice of the National Library of Lithuania and the Jonava Public Library, which has been creating the identity and status of a regional library as an intelligent institution.

In summary, the Jonava Public Library, as part of the network of Lithuanian public libraries, has been shaped in two ways: on the one hand, it has adopted the changes that took place throughout the country, but on the other hand, has been constantly capable of treating the readers' needs in very creative ways. The Jonava Public Library is an institution that forms the people's daily habit of reading and their routine

preoccupation with and goal of visiting the library on a regular basis. In Jorge Luis Borges' manner of speaking, it is not Jonava that involves the library, but the library constantly seeks to involve Jonava by its initiatives, cooperation with other institutions, projects, club and educational activities, and meetings with less visible – but, therefore, only more compelling – writers (while the demand for mass events in Jonava is satisfied by the local cultural center).