

Public Libraries as Agonistic Spaces: At the Crossroads of Librarianship and Contemporary Artistic Practices

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Abstract

The paper deals with the possibilities of engaged interdisciplinary activity implemented at the crossroads of librarianship and contemporary art practices. By relying on the theoretical concepts on which critical librarianship is based on the one hand, and contemporary art on the other hand, a possibility is shown of their interference with the aim to introduce a critical perspective within librarianship through art and to establish a new methodology at the crossroads of the two disciplines. The aforementioned is demonstrated in the paper through the coexistence and activity of S. S. Kranjčević Library and Prozori Gallery (Zagreb City Libraries), the programmatic and curatorial concept of which deals with the questions of the manner in which the theoretical positions of contemporary art and their practical and discursive analysis can contribute to the visibility, importance, and cultural capital of the library, the library profession, and the encouragement of critical attitude within the framework of information and communication sciences, the branch of which being librarianship, with emphasis on the project *Uncertain Interventions: LGBTIQ Users in Public Libraries* as a case study. Finally, the paper introduces the concept of libraries as agonistic public spaces.

Keywords: critical librarianship, contemporary art, LGBTIQ, interdisciplinarity, agonistic space

1. Introduction

This paper deals with the possibility of engaged interdisciplinary activity that is implemented at the crossroads of librarianship as part of information and communication sciences, and contemporary art practices. The aforementioned is implemented through collaboration of critical librarianship with contemporary art practices and theory, and will be demonstrated in the paper through the coexistence and activity of S. S. Kranjčević Library and Prozori Gallery, the programmatic and curatorial concept of which largely deals with the questions of the manner in which the theoretical positions of contemporary art and their practical and discursive analysis can contribute to the visibility, importance, and cultural capital of the library, the library profession, and the encouragement of critical attitude within the framework of information and communication sciences, the branch of which being librarianship. By relying on the theoretical concepts of critical librarianship resulting from critical theory, the deliberations of Ksenia Cheinman, and – in the context of contemporary engaged art practices – the concepts of hegemony, antagonism, and agonistic struggle by Chantal Mouffe and the aesthetic regime by Jacques Rancière, we introduce the notion of library as antagonistic public space. The paper will refer to the activity of Prozori Gallery located in S. S. Kranjčević Library (Zagreb City Libraries), with emphasis on the project *Uncertain Interventions: LGBTIQ Users in Public Libraries* as a case study.

Openness, inclusiveness and social justice are in the focus of activity of public libraries, which is manifested in their missions, as well as in the basic library documents – manifests, standards, regulations, codices – and is demonstrated through the procurement policy, programmes and services provided by libraries. The starting point of this paper is the position of the library profession, which presupposes the ethics of information sciences, as well as the requirement for the library to be a place of social justice. Thereby we problematise the concept of library as a neutral third space, the “living room of the community,” which is a syntagm that is frequently used in professional circles. The topic of the 9th Croatian Conference on Public Libraries was *Public Libraries as a Third Space* (NSK 2018). In support of the aforementioned, Elmborg states that public libraries can no longer be regarded as neutral spaces in terms of value, which indicates that librarianship is also not a neutral profession (Elmborg 2006).

The focus on community by providing the security of the “third space” is manifested by an inadequate answer to complex social circumstances, whereas the notion of community is used uni-dimensionally instead of taking advantage of its stratification. This thesis is also supported by the 2016 IFLA Conference that posed the question “What comes after the ‘Third Place’? Visionary libraries – spaces and users,” thus confirming that the idealised image of the library as the neutral third space of the community is unsustainable. An alternative to the neutrality of the profession is provided by critical librarianship, the starting point of which should be linked to critical theories and critical pedagogy. The

aforementioned is addressed by Mario Hibert, who accentuates critical theory as a tool that enables the thematising of social reality, directing librarians toward perceiving the consequences of privatisation, deregulation, and destruction of the idea of the public as “central aspects of re-theorisation and re-politicisation of their activist role” (Hibert 2014).

This paper introduces the notion of library as an agonistic public space. Thereby we rely on the theoretical concepts of critical librarianship resulting from critical theory and – in the context of contemporary artistic practices – the theoretical concepts of hegemony, antagonism and agonistic struggle of Chantal Mouffe, the aesthetic regime of Jacques Rancière, the deliberations of Brian Holmes, and others.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Critical Theory

Critical theory is the central notion of the so-called Frankfurt School, developed in the 1930s by the then-director of the Institute for Social Research, Max Horkheimer. Alongside Horkheimer, the key theorists are Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm, Franz L. Neumann, and Jürgen Habermas. The focus of critical theory is the struggle for social emancipation, a new moral social system, and bringing to awareness and deconstruction of the coercion that is manifested in the context of everyday life and is consolidated by the political, economic, and cultural order. In other words, according to Katunarić, resistance to uniform forms of human thinking and action, struggle against the isolation and neutralisation of critical thought, making central social issues peripheral and vice versa. In that sense, it represents a counterbalance to the positivist concept of knowledge and a “new expression of the tradition of thought of Kant, Hegel and Marx, i.e. critical thinking as such” (Katunarić 1990, 21). Katunarić puts critical theory into relation to traditional hermeneutics and against scientific objectivism that exclusively insists on rational, analytical methods. When constructing the concept of critical theory, Horkheimer derives the universality of the cognitive demand for truth from the emancipatory tendency to change social circumstances (Katunarić 1990). The critique of ideology is thus fixated on the practice of class struggle i.e. the practice of antagonisms inherent to every society – applied in this paper in the context of the theories of Chantal Mouffe and Jacques Rancière – which will be analysed in detail further in this text.

In the text “Librarian’s Views on Critical Theories and Critical Practices”, Robert Schroeder and Christopher V. Hollister highlighted the fact that the activity of numerous French theoreticians builds on critical theory – Roland Barthes, Henry Lefebvre, Michael Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Pierre Bourdieu – and, in the second half of the 20th century, many theories intertwine with critical theory – feminist theory, critical pedagogy, queer theory, postcolonial

theory, etc. (Schroeder and Hollister 2014). All of them are directed toward understanding and recognising the manners in which different social groups are oppressed. The aforementioned is also recognised in the context of information and communication sciences within the framework of the discourse of critical librarianship that deconstructs the concept of neutrality.

2.2. Librarianship and Critical Theory

Different critical theories have entered the discourse of librarianship; this section will present a brief review of some of the researchers within the domain of critical librarianship i.e. critical theory. Although we can trace back the development of critical theory to the 1930s, as Schroeder and Hollister emphasize, its entrance into the field of information and communication sciences can only be traced back to the 1970s (Schroeder and Hollister 2014). Therefore, in 1972, the book "The Purpose of the American Public Library in Historical Perspective: A Revisionist Interpretation" by Michael Harris was published, in which the author problematises the romanticised view of American libraries, thereby exposing their authoritative and elitist concept (Harris 1972). In the article "The Dialectic of Defeat: Antimonies in Research in Library and Information Science," the same author problematises the positivist and pluralist approach in information and communication sciences, and advocates the critical and empirical approach (Harris 1986). On this same track, in the text "A Critical Inquiry into Librarianship: Applications of the New Sociology of Education," authors Buschman and Carbone stress the need to recognise the social, political, and economic circumstances within which libraries as institutions operate, thereby problematising the postulates of pluralism and positivism, referring to Harris who problematises the aforementioned in the contexts of libraries in the US. According to Harris, certain postulates, on which the American society is based, are the characteristics of both libraries and librarianship. For instance, it is implicit that the US residents have the freedom of opinion and expressing own attitudes, that the media report objectively, neutrally and fairly – thereby representing the interests of all social groups – and that libraries and librarianship represent the rights and interests of their users through the neutrality of their holdings, library departments, and services. In that sense, pluralism rests on the postulate that the current social system is the result of a democratically-achieved consensus; pluralism therefore does not recognise different social issues as possible symptoms of fundamental social conflicts. Furthermore, pluralism disregards the differences that exist in relation with distribution of social power, access to information, and class. It follows from the aforementioned that the neutrality to which it refers is not able to provide a structural solution and remains on surface only (Buschman and Carbone 1991). Gary Radford also problematises the positivist concept of knowledge, meaning, and communication that is dominant within information and communication sciences, and paves the way to alternative postmodern epistemology, with the help of which the scientific community can redeliberate the traditional concepts of librarianship, libraries themselves, as well as their users.

Using Foucault's essay "La Bibliotheque Fantastique" as an example, he shows that one part of academic librarianship researchers – Harris, Thomas, Toumien, Budd – have linked the tensions and stereotypes that characterise librarianship to positivist epistemological foundations, and stresses Foucault's contribution to the subversion of the domination of positivism in social sciences, as well as his significance in the understanding of alternative epistemological foundations of librarianship (Radford 2014).

Moreover, Schroeder and Hollister indicate Pawley, Budd, Benoit and Pyat as authors who – in texts from the late 1990s and early 2000s – build upon the theory of Gramsci, Bourdieu, Habermas and Marcuse, through which they question the curriculum of information and communication sciences. Also, as important works from this field they mention "Critical Approaches to Information Technology in Librarianship: Foundations and Applications" by John Buschman – as well as its extended edition from 2009, which re-examined the manner of using information technology in libraries – and texts by authors such as Troy Swanson, James Elmborg, and Heidi Jacobs (Schroeder and Hollister 2014). The aforementioned speaks in favour of the literature corpus that is already significant today, which examines the possibilities of introduction and application of critical theory in the field of information and communication sciences.

2.3. Theoretical Framework of Gallery Activity

Post-Marxist theoretician Chantal Mouffe also stresses the pluralism of the social world. It is characterised by antagonism and not – as we are persuaded from the position of hegemonic neoliberalism – by the possibility of final harmonisation in the universal consensus based on reason. According to Mouffe, societies are structured through an "agonistic struggle" that results in a certain configuration of the relation of power and domination of one hegemonic project over the other. "Every hegemonic order is susceptible of being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices which attempt to disarticulate it in order to install another form of hegemony." (Mouffe 2008, 223) However, not all social contracts are brought into question simultaneously, and new spaces of negotiation are constantly re-established. Thereby the borders of political and social areas overlap and evade, whereby sedimented theoretical categories are distinguished, i.e. those that hide the acts of their initial foundation, whereas the reactivating moment makes them visible again (Laclau and Mouffe 2005).

The view of Chantal Mouffe – that societies are politically founded as temporary and uncertain articulations of contingent hegemonic practices – implies that the order can always be different and that the core of democracy is not consensus, but rather the agonistic struggle. This perspective is important to us as it implies the dynamic and variable structure of the positions of power, and the need for it to be brought to awareness. However, it often remains blurred under the suggestion of dominant ideology on the need for the current order, as if it results from an outer logic and not from political decisions, while the

institutions that normalise the cultural paradigm – such as museums, schools, theatres, or libraries – support this image.

When Mouffe thematises public space – the public library certainly being one – she speaks of it as a manifold, striated space in which the agonistic confrontation occurs in the multiplicity of discursive levels. A specific hegemony of public space arises from the specific articulation of the diversity of space, which means that the hegemonic struggle is also constituted of the tendency to create a different form of articulation between public spaces, in which its aesthetic function is manifested. The agonistically-comprehended public space articulates that which is suppressed by dominant consensus, even when this consensus is considered critical. According to agonistic approach, says Mouffe, critical art is that which stimulates disagreement, and exposes that which the dominant consensus seeks to overshadow and eliminate (Mouffe 2008).

On this same track, we believe that public libraries must redefine their position in direction toward the re-politicisation of the public space of the library, on the basis of the postulates of the profession and the critical theory they are inclined to, and find in practice a channel for an activating operation. In this sense, we redefine the space of the public library as an agonistic public space. With regard to the places of overlapping of critical librarianship, agonistically-comprehended public space and contemporary art, we see one of the possible paths toward the activating operation in the interference of the library with gallery practice.

Although it is by itself part of the hegemonic order, art seeks with its engaged practices – as already mentioned above – to expose that which is hidden by dominant consensus. Due to its resources, it can open up channels toward the public for those who are underprivileged, silenced, and scorned. By managing tactics and strategies such as interdisciplinarity, participation, different forms of disguise and methods of mimicry, it can initiate processes of new subjectivations and create new paradigms, thereby exposing problematic points of the governing hegemony.

In the context of engaged art practices conducted at the library – which implies an interdisciplinary approach and overlapping with everyday life – we will rely on the concept of the ‘aesthetic regime’ by Jacques Rancière. Specifically, he speaks of the tension between opposing policies within art aesthetics: the first, which defines art as an autonomous and self-sufficient aesthetic practice separated from other forms of sensory life, and the second, which brings it closer to life even at the expense of complete alignment and abolition in non-art (Rancière 2009). In the negotiations between the logics of the two policies, as well as between the aesthetics of the art and non-art system, on their curves a heterogeneous field of reality is established, i.e. new forms of sociability articulation. These are also new zones of comprehension of different social actors, which opens up space for new dispositives.

2.4. Libraries at the Crossroads of Disciplines

Schroeder and Hollister pose the question of the application of critical theory in the context of actual library activity-practice, whereby they define the critical practice “as the application of a critical theory to one’s professional life as a librarian in a specific library, or to library or librarianship in general” (Schroeder and Hollister 2014, 4). By using critical theory as basis, many authors stress the importance of its application in the sense of resolving social and political problematics; in the context of feminist theory, queer theory, postcolonial theory, critical pedagogy etc., the efforts that are historically considered theoretical have thus resulted in actual possibilities of their critical application and real progress in practice. For instance, in the question of the equality of persons identifying as queer with heterosexual persons, by introducing different forms of critical pedagogy in some form into educational systems, with social policies that take into consideration the theory of intersectionality, etc. The application of critical theory within the framework of information and communication sciences is possible “at the most basic level, for an academic librarian, a critical practice might be in choosing to base her or his scholarship (i.e., research, writing, and presentations) upon aspects of critical theory (...)” (Schroeder and Hollister 2014, 5). As an example of critical activity based on critical theory, we would like to mention the book “Feminist Pedagogy for Library Instruction” (2013) by Maria Accardi, collection of papers “Critical Library Instruction: Theories and Methods” (2010), and collection of papers “Progressive Community Action: Critical Theory and Social Justice in Library and Information Science” (2016). By following the analogy of application of feminist and pedagogical theoretical insights that confirm the possibility of their application in the context of librarianship, in this paper – while relying on the aforementioned described theoretical concepts – we show the possibility of the interference of contemporary art and theory and practice in librarianship with the aim to introduce a critical perspective, theory and practice within librarianship through discourses of contemporary art and the establishment of new methodology at the crossroads of the two disciplines.

3. Research Questions

Alongside a brief review of the activity of Prozori Gallery, in this paper, we will present in detail the project *Uncertain Interventions: LGBTIQ Users in Public Libraries* as an example of direct contribution of contemporary art in librarianship. The project poses the question of inclusivity of LGBTIQ persons in programmes, services, and holdings of public libraries, and the level at which they fulfil the information needs of LGBTIQ persons; at a parallel level, it poses the question of the possibility of intervention in the field of information and communication sciences, and indirectly in society through art, i.e. poses the question on the transformation potential of libraries.

On the other hand, with this project – as with some of the others that were presented at Prozori Gallery – we question the art methods and the tactics that they can produce, not only the aesthetic or discursive questions of everyday life, but the ability to transform everyday existence in the sense of creating new forms and organisations of life (Holmes 2012). When addressing the aforementioned, theoretician and art critic Brian Holmes introduces the term ‘Eventwork’. This is a four-fold matrix on which rests the possibility of social change that includes the convergence of art, theory, media and politics in a mobile power that surpasses the boundaries of individual disciplines and their fields of knowledge. To quote Holmes himself: “critical research is fundamental to today’s movements, which are always at grips with complex legal, scientific, and economic problems” (Holmes 2012, 74).

Finally, we pose the question as to which strategic points and methods in librarianship serve to establish new dispositions. According to David Carr, “if learning is the admission of the possible to our thinking, it means that we must learn to construct new contexts – we might call them transitional zones – where unusual and perhaps unexpected knowledge can be temporarily organized” (Carr 2006, 138).

4. Methodology

4. 1. Prozori Gallery – a Gallery in a Library

Prozori Gallery has been operating at S. S. Kranjčević Library since 1978; it is listed as a relevant art space in the Republic of Croatia, and is continually financed by the Ministry of Culture and the City of Zagreb. The space of the Gallery is basically an approximately 30-meter long sequence of windows alongside a ground-level pedestrian zone; depending on the artwork that is being exhibited, however, it expands into the interior of the Library, i.e. the neighbourhood exterior. The fact that the Gallery shares its space and operates in the Library requires from us to respond to at least two things with the programme: that we are aware of the political potential of the Library’s public space, that we activate it as such, and that we direct the programme toward non-professional audience.

In that sense, and regarding the previously outlined theoretical postulates, we develop the exhibition and educational programme of the Gallery and constantly question social situations and relations while opening spaces for new dispositions to specific socially engaged art projects. Specifically, art ceaselessly poses questions, and the mastering of artistic *imaginaria* and participation in new forms enables us to approach society in a conscious and engaged manner, i.e., as Brian Holmes points out, “it brings public responsibility into private passion. That’s living as political form.” (Holmes 2012, 79).

With the coexistence of the Gallery and the Library, a hybrid space is established that is close to the concept of alternative art libraries addressed by Ksenia

Cheinman in her text "Creating Alternative Art Libraries." She indicates the need to establish a new kind of space outside of the canon of defining institutions such as galleries, libraries, or libraries within museums/galleries, specifying the communication and dialogue aspect of both institutions as the basis for permeation of gallery programmes and library activity. Furthermore, she stresses the educational potential and creative strategies of alternative art libraries characterised by "unusual, one-of-a kind, and up-to-date resources in creative settings that are less intimidating than traditional art libraries and that promote new avenues for learning," thus bringing into focus the very educational and communication potential of spaces established in such manner (Cheinman 2014, 44). Although Cheinman addresses exclusively the activation of libraries within gallery and museum spaces, there is evidently an analogy with the need to radicalise exhibition activity within the library. More precisely, if all libraries in a particular geographic and cultural space organise their holdings in the same manner, they represent an identical narrative and complete the same paradigm instead of indicating the equality of parallel narratives, and act toward understanding variety and creating own critical approaches to knowledge. This can be achieved by creating new and variable productive surroundings that stimulate dialogue by juxtaposing the holdings, different points of view and contextualisation, as well as unexpected visualisations. Interdisciplinarity, and especially collaborations with contemporary art to which the questioning of controversial and problematic social topics is inherent, therefore should not be – as also stated by Eilean Hooper Greenhill – merely a coincidence, but rather a devised strategy in creating new forms of living (Cheinman 2014).

Before we present in detail the project *Uncertain Interventions: LGBTIQ Users in Public Libraries* as a case study, in the context of the abovementioned, we will mention two projects of Prozori Gallery.



Fig. 1 Photo by Toni Meštrović

First we will mention the gallery setup of the work “2 and 2” by artist Nadija Mustapić, as this project suggests possible alternative organisations of library holdings addressed by Cheinman. In particular, while dealing with questions of the fragility of truth and the credibility of contemporary political and personal narratives, the artist used the statements “ $2+2=4$ ” i.e. “ $2+2=5$ ” by singling them out from the dystopian novels by Orwell, Dostoyevsky, and Zamyatin. By creating a spatial audio installation and putting it in the reading room space as a simultaneous obstacle and accent, she offered new contextualisation of familiar holdings (Fig 1).

The work by Ana Kuzmanić is also interesting as an example of direct interference of critical librarianship and contemporary art which, along the lines of critical pedagogy in an interdisciplinary collaboration with experts in children’s literature, questions picture books as social representations and pedagogical paradigm intended for children. With an authorial selection of picture books intended for critical reading, which she includes in library holdings thus supplementing them with her donation, she introduces the focus on different pedagogies through art (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2 Prozori Gallery team

4.2. Case study – *Uncertain Interventions: LGBTIQ Users in Public Libraries*

The project *Uncertain Interventions: LGBTIQ Users in Public Libraries* can be positioned at the point of refraction of library and artistic activity. In that sense, it represents a direct response to the aforementioned position of gallery operation within the library, as to its spatial, symbolic and theoretic specificities. The project articulates the problematics of LGBTIQ persons and their position in the context of public libraries as public cultural institutions, in the context of information and communication sciences and in the context of the society in general (the acronym LGBTIQ refers to the collectiveness of lesbian, gay, bisex-

ual, transsexual/transgender, intersexual, and queer persons) with the aim of indicating the heteronormativity of librarianship in Croatia, problematising the question of procurement, programmes and services aimed at LGBTIQ persons as the group that is still invisible within the library system in Croatia, and directing the academic and professional community toward this group of users.

This project is legitimised through several levels. Through the theoretical concept, whereby we refer to Chantal Mouffe, its legitimacy is established through the idea that it is necessary to introduce the notion of library as an agonistic public space that is implemented through the presented project with an interdisciplinary approach, i.e. the refraction of critical theory on which critical librarianship and contemporary arts are based. Therefore, the initial questions posed by the project related to the inclusivity of librarianship, and resulting from critical theory, are the following: Which user groups are privileged, and which are overlooked? How are the relations of power established, and how are they managed? How is the inclusion of specific user groups established? Which user groups have been omitted in the current library constellation?

The public library that is perceived as an agonistic public space articulates that which is suppressed by dominant consensus, even when this consensus is considered critical. In the context of librarianship, however, the situation is the following: it recognises and addresses sensitive social groups; therefore, we have guidelines for library departments and services for the hearing impaired, hospital patients, senior citizens and persons with special needs, multicultural communities, etc. However, the aforementioned social groups do not represent danger in the sense of countercultural resistance or subversion of the dominant hegemonic structure. On the contrary, the care they receive from the privileged only serves to additionally confirm the relations of power within society as it remains within the framework of the norm, of the set order, and supports the hegemonic order in which the stronger dominates the weaker. On the other hand, LGBTIQ culture represents a permanent place of resistance and subversion that is both political and social, endangering and questioning the structures of relations in society and the social system, and inserts moments of its destabilisation. It is perceived as a controversial subject even in the context of librarianship: as an uncertain intervention, which will manifest itself as the correct title of the project once it is finalised, while the project as a whole will be the confirmation of the unsustainability of the concept of neutrality. In particular, within the expert bodies of the Croatian Library Association, there is no workgroup or committee that would engage in the information needs of LGBTIQ users. It follows from the aforementioned that the introduction of the issue of LGBTIQ users manifests itself as necessary in the context of librarianship as part of information and communication sciences. Therefore, regarding the points of overlapping of critical librarianship, agonistically-comprehended public space and contemporary art, one of the possible paths toward critical librarianship, i.e. public library as agonistic public space, we see in the interference of the

library with gallery activity, which is manifested through the project *Uncertain Interventions: LGBTIQ Users in Public Libraries*.

What the project also establishes its legitimacy on are basic library documents. According to IFLA's Guidelines for Public Libraries (2011), they should be at the disposal of all members of the community and, according to IFLA and UNESCO's Manifest for Public Libraries (1994), its holdings and services must not be exposed to any kind of ideological, political, or religious censorship. The Glasgow Declaration on Libraries, Information Services and Intellectual Freedom (Belan Simić and Horvat 2002, 166-168) is also important in the context of LGBTIQ users and public libraries; it stresses that the discrimination against gender or sexual orientation must not be permitted. Also, in December of 2013, IFLA's Expert Committee approved the forming of the Special Interest Group – SIG for LGBTIQ users (2013).

The project also establishes its legitimacy on the Croatian legal framework. LGBTIQ community is protected by law from discrimination, hate, and violence – the Anti-Discrimination Act, Criminal Code – which regulates the right to the protection of family life of LGBTIQ life partnerships – and Life Partnership Act for persons of the same sex, whereby life partnership is equalised with marital partnership, but not in the field of the right to adopt children. It is also important to mention the Gender Equality Act, Article 6 of which prohibits discrimination against sexual orientation, while Article 16 prohibits women and men to be publicly displayed and presented in an offensive, degrading or humiliating manner with regard to sex and sexual orientation. On the other hand, as noted by Barbarić and Pikić, even though some parts of the legal framework protect the rights of LGBTIQ persons, the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia simultaneously prevents the implementation of complete marriage equality of homosexual and heterosexual persons (on the basis of the referendum conducted in 2013) (Barbarić and Pikić, 2017, 61).

In the broader social context, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression still present one of the most common bases for discrimination and violence in society. The aforementioned is also illustrated by the results of the comprehensive study authored by Marina Milković and conducted in Zagreb in 2013, in collaboration of Zagreb Pride with Lesbian Association Rijeka – LORI and Queer Sport Split, which shows that as many as 73,6% of the persons surveyed have experienced a form of violence due to their sexual orientation, sexual/gender identity and/or gender expression since 2006. These are most commonly different forms of psychological violence, followed by sexual, and finally physical violence. An alarmingly small percentage of persons have reported the violence they experienced to the police, and an approximately same percentage have reported it to one of the organisations engaged in the protection of rights of LGBTIQ persons. In the context of problematising the aforementioned topics within librarianship, it is also interesting to note the fact that most of the persons surveyed visit locations recognised as LGBTIQ-friendly. Among various services,

web content is most commonly used frequently or occasionally by 74.7% of the persons surveyed, followed by socialising venues that are used occasionally or frequently by 72.6% of the persons surveyed. The aforementioned can serve as a good incentive to public libraries to actively turn toward this group of users (Milković 2013).

4.3. Project *Uncertain Interventions: LGBTIQ Users in Public Libraries* as an Interdisciplinary Platform: Project Stages

The project included collaborations and partnerships with experts from different fields; in other words, the curatorial, librarian, sociological and artistic elaboration of the subject was conducted through collaboration of Prozori Gallery, i.e. S. S. Kranjčević Library with Domino Association, the Centre for Women's Studies Zagreb, research experts from the field of sociology and information and communication sciences, and the independent art scene. In this manner, a platform was created with the aim of finding a theoretical, educational, and artistic articulation of the aforementioned problematics of the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, and intersexual population in public libraries, their programmes, departments, and services.

The project was conducted in several interconnected stages encompassing scientific research, a roundtable, artwork production, public programme, and the accompanying art documentation. The focus of the project in 2016 was the implementation of the scientific study authored by dr. sc. Ana Barbarić and dr. sc. Aleksandra Pikić, which sought to collect the data on the needs, attitudes, and experiences of LGBTIQ persons toward public libraries in Croatia. The study was preceded by the meetings of the focus-group.¹

The meetings of the focus-group (Fig. 3) resulted in defining the field that is sought to be studied, as well as the approach and purpose of the research. The results and the project itself were presented at the roundtable *Uncertain Interventions: LGBTIQ Users in Public Libraries*.² Furthermore, the results of the conducted study would be made available to the library public in the paper intended for publishing in 2018 (Barbarić and Pikić, 2017, 63). For the purpose of this paper, the conclusions of the first, research stage will be presented further in the text.

1 The participants of the focus-group were Irena Bekić, Head of Prozori Gallery, Petra Dolanjski, Curator of the project *Uncertain Interventions*, artist Helena Janečić, dr. sc. Ana Barbarić (Department of Information and Communication Sciences at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb), dr. sc. Aleksandra Pikić (sociologist and Senior Librarian), Zvonimir Dobrović, representative of Domino Association, Jasminka Pešut, Head of the Library of the Centre for Women's Studies, and Andreja Gregorina, Educational Programme Coordinator at the Centre for Women's Studies.

2 The roundtable *Uncertain Interventions: LGBTIQ Users in Public Libraries* was held on December 2, 2016 at MaMa Multimedia Institute as the discursive and theoretical part of the project, with an open discussion for expert audience and the broader public.



Fig. 3 Illustration by Helena Janečić

Conclusions of the research stage of the project in 2016

The first, research stage of the project was finalised in 2016; it included meetings of the focus-group, a study on the information needs of LGBTIQ persons in Croatia, and a roundtable with a discursive analysis of the subject and public presentation of the study results and the conclusions of the research phase of the overall project. The conclusions of the research phase of the project are the following:

- In the context of the project, the gallery activity has manifested itself as the manner in which the problematics of LGBTIQ persons and public libraries can be articulated and brought into focus more rapidly rather than problematising it only within the library community: art communicates its positions to the audience more easily and directly, and can make them more visible within the framework of the public sphere.
- Through a curatorial, librarian, sociological, activist and artistic analysis, the problematics of LGBTIQ persons and public libraries is perceived from more aspects with the aim of a comprehensive, inclusive approach, and critical evaluation of own approach and work.
- With the inclusion of the historical feminist legacy in the library discourse, the critical and pedagogical positions for public activity of public libraries have been brought into awareness, which is of interest to the underprivileged social groups. It is important in the context of contemporary activity of public libraries.

- As an alternative library outside the library system of Croatia, the Library of the Centre for Women's Studies meets the information needs of LGBTIQ users, and participates as the actor of critical and activist librarianship by merging theoretical knowledge and activist experiences related to the feminist movement and feminist theory and practice in all aspects.
- By connecting alternative libraries (Library of the Centre for Women's Studies) and public libraries, a way has been paved for joint activity that could meet the information needs of LGBTIQ persons in a more adequate manner.
- The procurement policy of public libraries should be critically positioned with regard to the publishing sector and the society in which it operates, and should include publications of small independent publishers.
- An engaged and activist artistic activity, presented through the work of Prozori Gallery / S. S. Kranjčević Library and Domino Association, communicates different art strategies and operational tactics with the aim of sensitising the public and popularising queer culture.
- The concept of the library as a neutral third space, the 'living room' of the community, is not adequate under the current economic, political, and social circumstances; the myth on the neutrality of librarianship and library profession needs to be deconstructed, while the position of libraries in society needs to be redeliberated in relation to the dominant distribution of social power.
- Public libraries should take an active and critical position towards the reality in which they operate, but also in relation to own activity and inclusivity.
- Public libraries have the potential to operate as empowering and activist/activating spaces for different marginal and sensitive social groups.
- The results of the conducted research pave the way for an active introduction of the issue of LGBTIQ persons and public libraries in the focus of librarianship in Croatia.
- The results of the conducted research have shown that public libraries largely do not meet the information needs of LGBTIQ persons.
- The results of the research have shown that public libraries are not recognised as sources of information related to LGBTIQ identities: public libraries have been positioned only in the fourth place, after internet, friends, and LGBTIQ organisations.

- The results of the research and of the overall project indicate the need to establish a separate body that would engage in the needs of LGBTIQ persons within the Croatian Library Association.

Exhibition as presentation, aestheticisation, and communication

The final phase of the project was implemented through the exhibition *Flowerworks* by visual artist and designer Silvio Vujičić. By visually designing the deliberations, results and conclusions of the project and transposing them into artwork, the exhibition presented a symbolic, aesthetic and communication aspect of the inclusion of and deliberation on the LGBTIQ theme in the context of public libraries.

The work was developed in three interconnected aspects: a poster, with the purpose of distribution, functioning as an invitation to libraries to approach the subject together and in solidarity; bookmarks, which the artist inserted in the library holdings in a guerrilla manner; and the central part of the exhibition: an oversized herbarium, flower compositions installed in the windows of the gallery/library. This is a radical artistic gesture, whereby the author removed the window glass of the gallery and replaced it with a new one (Fig. 4 and 5).



Fig. 4 Photo by Karla Jurić



Fig. 5 Photo by Karla Jurić

In this way, the work literally became incorporated and inscribed as a structural part of the library, and simultaneously a zone that separates the inner institutional space from the outer public one both spatially and symbolically. It is exactly at the point of their interference that the question of LGBT identities is made present: the glass diaphragm of the windows thus lost its representational function through the deconstruction of the garden as microcosm, as Foucault's heterotopia of symbolic perfection, which is elusive in this case, and becomes a substitute, reflection, and its negation. Presented in the form of a modernised herbarium – refracted through the representative form displayed

on the windows on the one hand, and through the minimalist intervention of the bookmarks hidden in books on the other hand (Fig. 6), Vujičić's approach to the subject includes, apart from the conceptual dedication, also a scientist's dedication to the subject of study, the laboratory conditions that require a fully-planned, detailed, precise approach to work, the delicacy in the processing of fragile artistic material that is exposed to disintegration and is simultaneously interpreted as a carnal moment and a poetic depth that mediates and organises a new manner of viewing.



Fig. 6 Prozori Gallery team

However, the flower composition displayed in the windows by using the method of pressing and drying also brought to awareness the subject of viewing. In particular, the rose, daisy and pansy floral wreaths functioned as a light-hearted distraction at first glance, a pleasant, alluring image set up in the gallery, but each is accompanied by an entry from internet dictionaries on their possible meaning and symbolism. The author thereby disturbs their generalised meaning, used and enlivened through the different spheres of life, sociability, ritual and art. By introducing the element of wondrousness, the innocence, fragility, transience and aesthetics of flowers became representative of corporeality, sexuality, identity determinants, desires and choices that are not normed as desirable, but are rather a deviation, and are implemented through the artwork as communication practices. By challenging the expectations and perception of the audience, the author thus directed it, as interpreted by Emmanuel Levinas, toward the "face-to-face encounter with the Other," in the eventuality of which individual freedoms are not endangered but are rather confirmed, simultaneously provoking the responsibility of the one whose perspective is privileged (Levinas 1976). The innocent perspective of the observer – directed toward a subject that is innocent at first glance – is thereby abolished through the accompanying dictionary text that directly introduces into focus the question of

identity, freedom of choice and sexuality: it makes LGBTIQ persons visible as a social group to which the professional body turns a blind eye. Paradoxically, however, the situating of the subject within library/gallery space is also a logical step forward that brings the aforementioned group out of their archived interior and into the sphere of visibility. To be more precise, library holdings are essentially open to the totality of knowledge, contents and subjects. However, some of its segments are silenced, obscured and, speaking in librarian terms, shelved. In that sense, the position of LGBTIQ identities is twofold; although they are part of the system, they remain outside its focus, and are neglected and suppressed in the current constellation of library activity. The irony is exposed in the following manner: although the logic of identity, which seeks to reduce the differences to uniqueness, is represented through the ideal of unbiasedness; the aforementioned theme remains present even after the end of the exhibition: incorporated, entered and classified in library holdings, which are circular in their essence, it is only a matter of time when it will become visible again. Therefore, the incursion is also twofold: on the one hand, the site-specific installation is a direct critique, a warning, an impetus to librarianship and its structures, and, on the other hand, by recognising the political potential of the library as a public cultural space, the latter is used as a reference point from which the message is interpreted as legitimate and trustworthy once it is sent out.

Finally, it may not hurt to remind ourselves that such intervention in the system is possible only from the artistic perspective. More precisely, art is uninhibited by the limitations of the discipline so it can intervene in other disciplinary fields, offer new points of view and, perhaps, push the boundaries. By continually posing questions, it shows us that the process of understanding and perception of the world is contextually conditioned and complex, and that there are no definitive answers. Therefore, the mastering of artistic *imaginaria* enables us not to master the world, but rather to see it in relation with ourselves (Dolanjski 2017).

4.4. Results of the project *Uncertain Interventions: LGBTIQ Users in Public Libraries*

The results of the project *Uncertain Interventions: LGBTIQ Users in Public Libraries* somewhat coincide with the research questions of this paper. Principally, the results of the survey conducted within the framework of the project have shown that public libraries are not recognised as sources of information and a safe place related to LGBTIQ identities; that their exclusion is an evasion of confronting the subject that is still considered controversial; that it is necessary to open up space for an active introduction of the subject in the focus of librarianship, and thus to redeliberate the position of libraries in relation to heteronormativity i.e. dominant distribution of social power. One of the important repercussions of the project was the application for the establishment of a workgroup for LGBTIQ users within the Croatian Library Association. However, this application has

been rejected and – immediately prior to the decisive session of the Croatian Library Association – publicly reproved through media by the extreme right-wing politicians.³

The project has nevertheless paved the way for the deliberation on the introduction of LGBTIQ users in the focus of public libraries; this intervention has destabilised the dominant paradigm in librarianship, indicating the existence of equally-important parallel narratives on the one hand, and the implementation of the subversive and transformation potential of public libraries by raising awareness of the aforementioned narratives on the other hand. Being aware of the complexity of protocol and the possible obstacles in the attempt at thematising LGBTIQ identities, we pursued the idea by using art as channel, method, and tactic: by recognising and indicating the heteronormativity of librarianship as a weak point, oversight, curvature, the idea is to intervene in its structures with the aim of opening up space for new discursive, political, artistic and, finally, library activity. On the one hand, it is exactly through reading, application and understanding of the subversive potential of art that the territory of librarianship 'struggle' is expanded; on the other hand, the spaces which art enters, thus expanding the scope of own activity, are opened up by the mutuality that is actualised at the point of their permeation.

Due to the financial resources at its disposal, the flexibility of the method, the power of transformation, and a certain level of autonomy in relation to the system, art has shown that it can be a channel for transformation and introduction of underprivileged identities into the space of dominant culture.

And finally, the interference between art and librarianship, as well as other disciplines, emerges as a strategic curve in the field of librarianship that is neither fixated by methodology nor tamed by hegemony. Precisely from this position it is possible to spin perspectives and build new spaces of knowledge and manners of learning. This brings to mind the following statement by David Carr: "If learning is the admission of the possible to our thinking, it means that we must learn to construct new contexts – we might call them transitional zones – where unusual and perhaps unexpected knowledge can be temporarily organized." (Carr 2006:138)

3 Representative of the right-wing ultraconservative party HRASHT Hrvoje Zekanović made several public appearances on national and several local television stations, making an appeal to the expert and broader public not to allow "the introduction of LGBTIQ sections in public libraries," whereas journalist Ivica Šola authored a lengthy text "Why the Government Sought to Push LGBTIQ Ideology into Libraries" in the national weekly magazine *Globus* (February 23, 2018, no. 1420). Thereby they both cited the work materials that were sent out to the Section for Public Libraries that approved the formation of the workgroup and referred the application together with corresponding documents to the Expert Committee of the Croatian Library Association. It remains unknown as to how they acquired these materials.

5. Conclusion

Exhibitions, community-based projects, different forms of education and similar methods with which we seek to develop the field of critical thinking as a foundation for social intervention, are all in the focus of gallery activity.

Uncertain Interventions: LGBTIQ Users in Public Libraries is an attempt at introducing and deliberating the subject of the position, visibility and representation of LGBTIQ persons in the holdings and programmes of public libraries with the help of art. Simultaneously, the project represents an actualisation of the discourse of critical librarianship as the legitimate route within the field of information and communication sciences, thus deconstructing the myth on the neutrality of the profession and questioning the transformative and subversive character of the public library in relation to the established hegemony.

By perceiving the public library as the agonistic public space in the manner addressed by Mouffe, it becomes a place of hegemony subversion. In collaboration with art, it opens up new transition zones of knowledge and learning, and inscribes parallel narratives. The joint space of the gallery and library is promoted into an alternative hybrid space, the potentials and possibilities of which are yet to be explored by librarianship.

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Sažetak

Rad se bavi mogućnostima angažiranog interdisciplinarnog djelovanja koje se realizira na sjecištu knjižničarstva i suvremenih umjetničkih praksi. Oslanjajući se na teorijske koncepte na kojima se zasniva kritičko knjižničarstvo s jedne i suvremena umjetnost s druge strane, pokazuje se mogućnost njihove interferencije s ciljem uvođenja kritičke perspektive unutar knjižničarstva putem umjetnosti te uspostavljanja nove metodologije na sjecištu tih dviju disciplina. Navedeno se u radu prikazuje kroz supostojanje i djelovanje Knjižnice S. S. Kranjčevića i Galerije Prozori (Knjižnice grada Zagreba), čija se programska i kustoska koncepcija bavi pitanjima na koji način teorijske pozicije suvremene umjetnosti i njihova praktična i diskurzivna razrada, mogu doprinijeti vidljivosti, važnosti i kulturnom kapitalu knjižnice, knjižničarskoj struci te širenju kritičkog stava u okviru informacijskih i komunikacijskih znanosti, grana knjižničarstvo, s naglaskom na projektu „Nesigurne intervencije: LGBTIQ korisnici u narodnim knjižnicama“, kao studiji slučaja. U konačnici, rad uvodi koncepciju knjižnica kao agonističkih javnih prostora.

Ključne riječi: kritičko knjižničarstvo, suvremena umjetnost, LGBTIQ, interdisciplinarnost, agonistički prostor