



The essence of modern LIS professionals

Teemu Rauhala

Education Manager
University of Tampere
School of Information Sciences
Tampere, Finland

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Abstract:

Novel virtual and physical spaces challenge libraries to promote new services and require new skills for the profession. The role of a librarian has become more and more complex. This paper consists of two parts. It will discuss how and where graduates from the University of Tampere, School of Information Sciences have found employment in the years 2000-2008. The discussion will show the variety of job opportunities offered for LIS professionals. University of Tampere is one of three universities in Finland that have information studies in their curriculum. This paper gives a look into the job opportunities available for new graduates in Finland.

This paper will also focus on how new services and roles of public libraries in the information society set new requirements for skills of LIS professionals. In addition to the traditional services, communality, information technology and social media extend the variety of services offered by the libraries. Especially social media makes the production of digital contents possible together with the library customers. Along with these new services, the role of libraries and LIS professionals is changing rapidly. The paper will provide an insight to a Finnish national development project, in which three regional public libraries have developed new innovative services for their customers. These new services have required comprehensive training for the staff of these libraries. The training of the staff has been organized by the University of Tampere. This paper will discuss what have been the core training needs among LIS professionals that are already working in the libraries and there has been a long time since they have graduated from a university.

This paper will also discuss the pitfalls and success stories on staff training. Without the above-mentioned project these libraries would not have been able to experiment and pilot such new services. Also the training would not have been possible without this project. This paper will thus also focus on how to achieve professional development in the libraries in difficult financial times and through co-operation with universities.

Employment opportunities of graduates from the University of Tampere, School of Information Sciences in the years 2000-2008

The recruiting services within the University of Tampere collect regularly information on how graduates find employment after graduation. This data is collected one year after graduation. It usually takes a little while before a graduate finds a job. One year gives a better picture on employment, compared to a survey done right after graduation. These surveys have been done regularly and comprehensive since 2000. Information gathered before that is not as comprehensive. The job opportunities that I shall discuss next are based on surveys completed in 2000- 2008.

Figure 1 shows what the status of graduates is one year after graduation. 84% of 199 graduates are employed and 8% are unemployed.

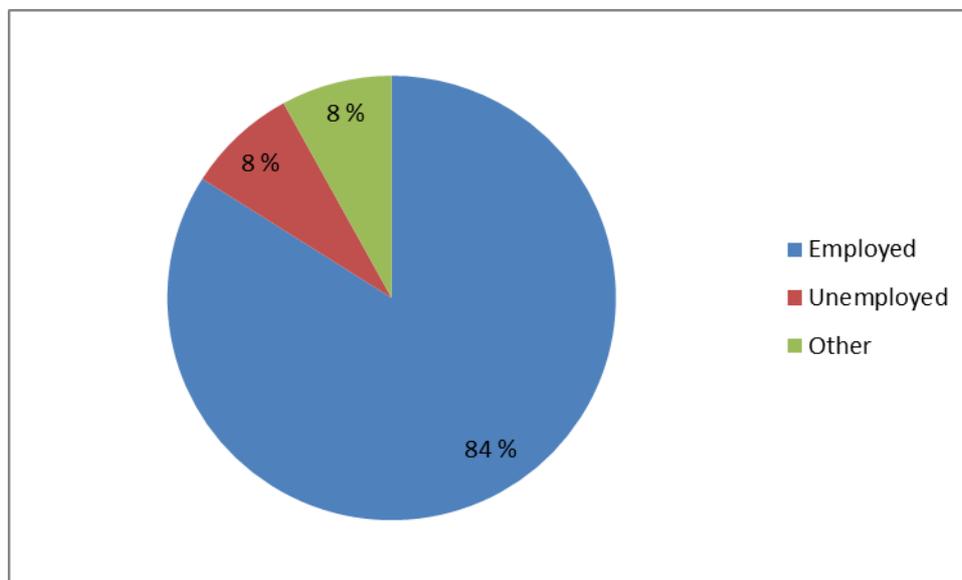


Figure 1 Situation one year after graduation (n=199)

Graduates of information sciences find job opportunities from a variety of sectors. Nature of work includes research, education, management, customer service, marketing and sales, administration, communication and media (Figure 2). This shows that a degree in information sciences is general; it gives a wide variety of possibilities for employment. On the other hand, it puts more responsibility on graduates who have to find out where their professional passion lies. Also choices they make during their studies do define their future professional path. Libraries, public and scientific, are still the major employer as it can be seen in figure 2. Most of the graduates find themselves in customer service type of work or in administration work. It is natural, since customer service is a typical entry-level job, especially in libraries. It is, however, interesting to see that some of the graduates are recruited into management positions. This is more like in small libraries, where the director's work includes tasks of librarians, too.

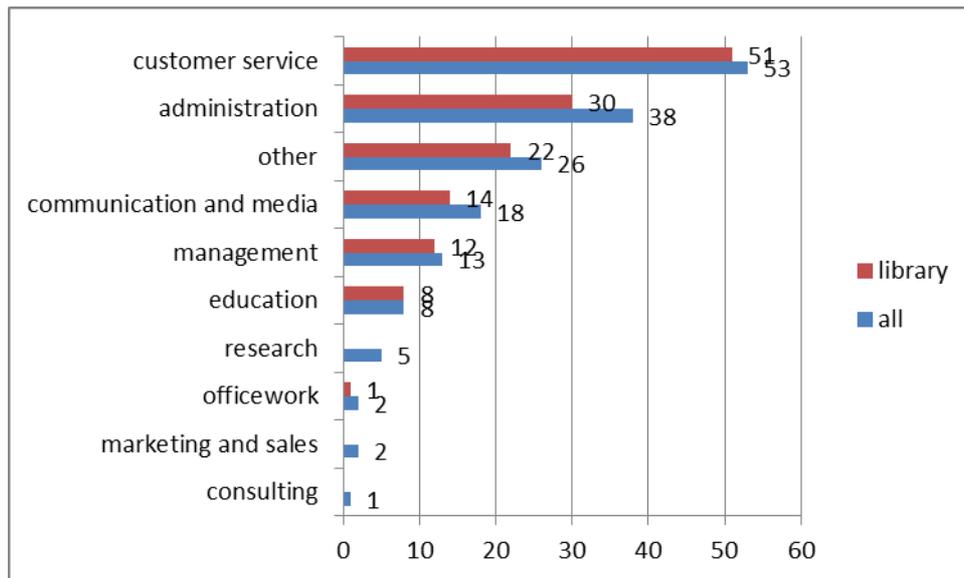


Figure 2 Nature of work (n=166)

More than half of the graduates have permanent contracts, as figure 3 shows. In general, fixed-term and part-time contracts have become popular in Finland. It is common that young professionals are forced to accept these kind of contracts in the beginning of their professional career. It seems that libraries make a difference in this trend. Permanent and fixed-term contracts prevail in libraries.

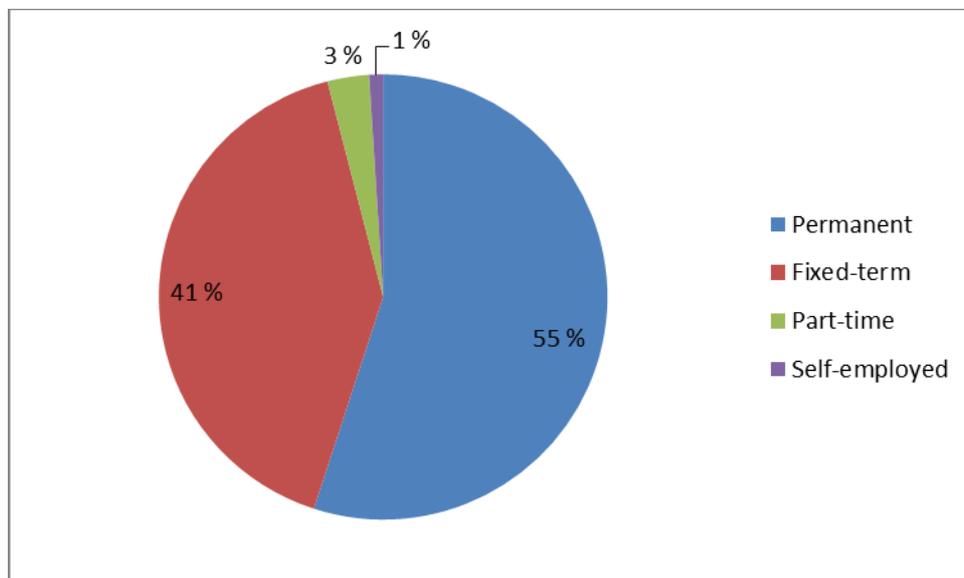


Figure 3 Type of contract (n=167)

Majority of graduates are employed by public organizations (Figure 4). This is self-evident, since libraries are public organizations in Finland. The amount of private organizations shows that graduates of information sciences find job opportunities outside of libraries, too.

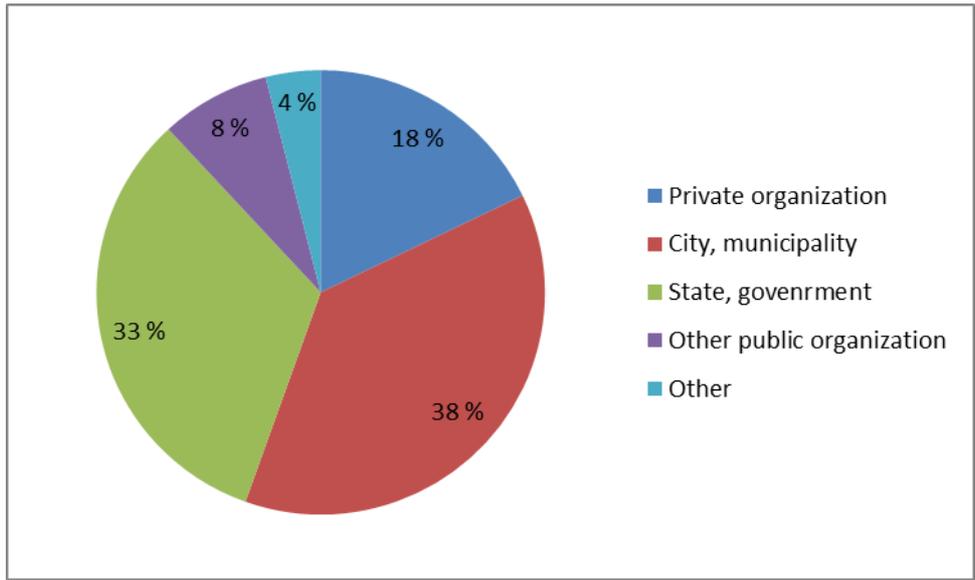


Figure 4 Employer (n=171)

Graduates are also asked if their job requirements respond to their academic degree (Figure 5). This is to find out how well they are working in a job that they studied for. Only 5% of graduates are working in a job that does not require academic degree. This situation is good; it is not unusual for a young professional to work in a non-academic job early in their professional career.

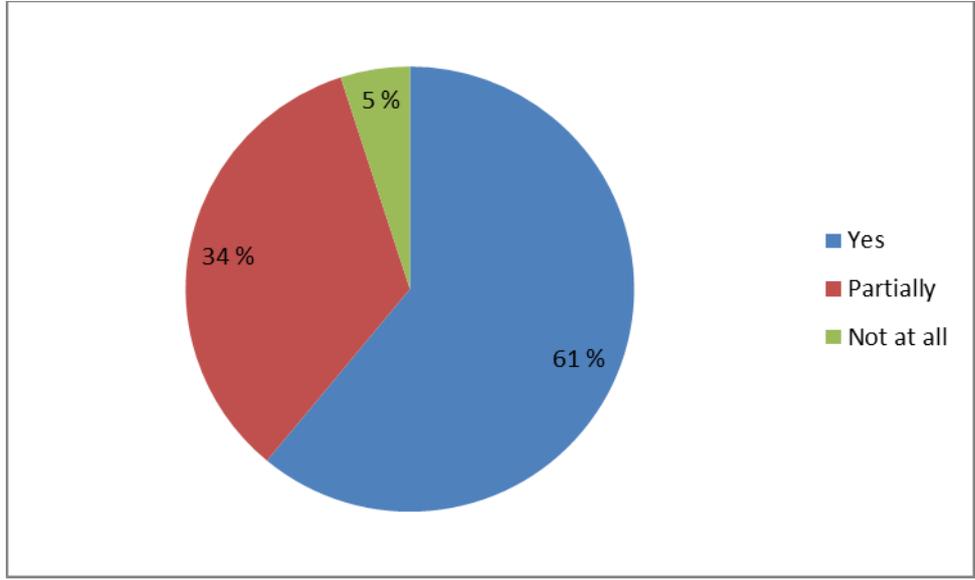


Figure 5 Do your job requirements respond to your academic degree? (n=175)

It is predicted, that nearly 30% of the workforce in libraries will retire between 2005-2013. 52% of these hold an academic degree (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, survey conducted in 2004). This partially explains why graduates have been employed rather well. However, it is not the whole picture. There is still unemployment among librarians. The recent economic recession has forced libraries to make cuts in budgets. This has had effect on recruiting, too. Retirement of personnel has not always led to new recruiting.

Novel Virtual and Physical Spaces Challenge Libraries to Promote Media Literacy

I shall next take a look at what are the core training needs within LIS professionals that are already working in the libraries and there has been a long time since they have graduated from a university. These training needs are based on a project carried out by the University of Tampere.

University of Tampere is coordinating a large-scale training and development project for public libraries. The project is called Library Spaces and Concepts in the Information Society. The project provides support for co-operation between libraries and other service providers to help develop the aggregate IT skills of the workforce. The project also creates and develops new library 'best working practices' and other models for co-operation. This project started in August 2008 and will last until December 2011.

The aim of this project is to create facilities where library and educational professionals can utilize the mass of IT skills available in the information society. In so doing, the project will promote an interactive, multicultural web-democracy by providing and developing skills, tools and model practices for the development of library media education.

New services created in libraries and roles of public libraries in the information society set new requirements for skills of LIS professionals. This has become more and more evident as the society around libraries changes.

To meet these new requirements, libraries need staff training. Recruiting is one way to acquire new skills, but it is not sufficient. This means that libraries have to provide training for the staff. Lifelong learning is needed here, too. Library Spaces and Concepts in the Information Society –project has arranged comprehensive in-house training for the staff of the libraries that participate in the project. These libraries are City Library of Hämeenlinna, City Library of Kouvola and City Library of Tampere.

In-house training has been an effective way to train staff. It is also cost-effective. The staff of small libraries has better possibilities to attend training if it is arranged nearby or in the premises of the library. The project started out by surveying training needs of the library staff. This happened at the same time as social media was making its breakthrough. So it is not a surprise that most of the training needs were addressed to social media. Libraries in Finland were early adopters of social media tools such as blogs and Facebook. The development at early stage came from bottom-up: there were librarians who were keen to try out and experiment with these new tools. It was not necessarily a decision made by the managers in the organization nor it was written in a strategy. In 2009-2010 most of the libraries have adopted social media as part of their web-presence. This has led to a situation where social media has become part of almost every librarian's job. It is obvious that comprehensive training is needed for the staff to actively use social media in their daily duties. It has also become obvious that libraries have to make a strategy for social media. There are questions such as what social media tools to adopt and why they should be addressed in order to harness social media to its best use in the libraries.

This project has helped libraries to promote media literacy by offering staff training. New and innovative ways of working, including social media, have become familiar with the training.

The staffs have been introduced new ways of working and also new tools. They have been encouraged to adopt these new ways and techniques by training. Their ability and willingness to adopt new ideas have developed by training. These are all significant issues in transforming libraries into a modern actor in the 21st century. Libraries need to re-establish their position in the society and training offered to the staff helps in this process.

In two years' time the project has arranged more than 50 trainings for nearly 800 people. The subjects covered are numerous. However, most of the training has been about social media. The topics include social media training programme (as in 23 things), webwriting, digital storytelling, copyrights and privacy protection, media literacy, digital photography, video photography etc.

Discussion

In these days lifelong learning is necessary in order to succeed in work. Change has become dominant. One cannot pursue a professional career without continuous training. This sets a lot of pressure on employers. They should provide at least some of the training needed. Staff training is not an easy task to do. Evidence based on the development project Library Spaces and Concepts in the Information Society shows that while the training needs are numerous, it is not always easy to answer these needs. Libraries do not necessarily have the resources needed for the training. They do not have the money for the training, they do not have the personnel to define training needs and arrange training, and they do not have the time to attend training.

In the time of economic recession it has been crucial for libraries that the government has funded training and development projects, such as Library Spaces and Concepts in the Information Society. Cooperation between the libraries and University of Tampere has benefited both sides: libraries have been offered staff training and University of Tampere has been given an insight on the training needs of LIS professionals. This will help in future curriculum planning.

What is the essence of modern LIS professionals, then? Through these experiences, a picture of a modern LIS professional emerges. I started out describing how new professionals have found employment in 2000-2008. Majority of them are working in libraries, but other careers are also possible. I went on discussing training needs among those already working in the field. There are the new professionals with the latest education and the use of modern information technology on one side, and old professionals with hands-on knowledge of the profession and tacit knowledge on the other side. They both are needed, of course. It is through interdependence between these two groups that libraries develop. Communication skills and the ability in dialogue are needed here to promote growth.

Library profession can be described as knowledge-intensive. In a modern society, the amount of knowledge-intensive jobs is increasing. We live also in global society. In global society media literacy becomes essential. Promoting literacy has always been in the core of libraries' tasks. In this global society, one of the most important tasks is to promote media literacy. It is media literacy through what sustainable globalization can be reached.