

Library Trends in the Popularization of Reading

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Abstract:

Regardless of in which context we are talking about reading (either traditional or digital reading) it is an important area we need to pay close attention to.

Domestic and international research results indicate a generally declining willingness to reading in case of the young generation. The results of the survey carried out within the framework of the "Az Én könyvtáram" (My Library) project also show this. According to this, only 10% of the Hungarian population reads regularly, but the proportion of non-readers is over 50%. (Tóth, 2019)

The results of the PISA survey, which measures young people's reading comprehension skills, also show that students' reading comprehension skills are weaker than in previous years, based on the OECD average. (PISA 2018 Synthesis Report, 2019)

I am looking at the question of what measures we can take to ensure that this trend does not continue. Namely, how we can promote reading and offer initiatives to stimulate reading. While it is undeniable that the primary arena for educating as a reader should be the family, this role is increasingly shifting to schools. (Gombos, 2013) In addition to the family and the school, libraries also play an undeniably important role in promoting reading and establishing reading habits. That is why it is so important how the librarian profession views the topic, how they relate to the role of libraries.

In my research, I examine the attitude of Hungarian librarians to the topic of the popularization of reading, as well as their proficiency in the programs and initiatives designed to achieve this goal. In my presentation, relying on the results of an online questionnaire survey I compare the prevailing trends in the field of reading promotion with the help of examples, and I examine the opinion of the Hungarian librarian community concerning this topic.

Key Word: Reading, Libraries, Librarians, Reading promotions.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Today especially the younger generation shows a diminishing appetite for reading. The reason for the declining willingness to read is primarily the transformation of stimuli children are exposed to during their development. Since the principal source of information transmission implies the processing of spatial-visual stimuli, the high amount of visual stimuli hinders the ability of image formation and weakens reading comprehension skills (Gyarmathy, 2012.). It is crucial to address this issue. The potential approaches include the analysis of research results related to the reading process, exploring ways of reader education or monitoring and evaluating the effects of reading popularization programs. Regardless of how we deal with the problem libraries play a crucial role in arousing and maintaining the level of reading motivation.

II. THE IMPACT OF DIGITALIZATION ON READING

As a result of the current cultural paradigm shift the prevalence of various media led to the decline of linear reading. While the spreading of radio and TV suppressed reading, the emergence of the Internet resulted in new forms and contexts of reading.

Reading in the digital age has experienced radical changes as digital reading or browsing on the Internet implies a different reading approach including perusing or scanning the given texts with the purpose of identifying the necessary information. Although we still read, we do it for different reasons

During reading on a screen we do not take in the whole surface with our eyes. According to the research of Jakob Nielsen monitoring eye-movement we follow an F pattern while viewing the content on the screen. (Figure 1.).



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1. Figure The F pattern of reading screen-based texts (Nielsen, 2006.)

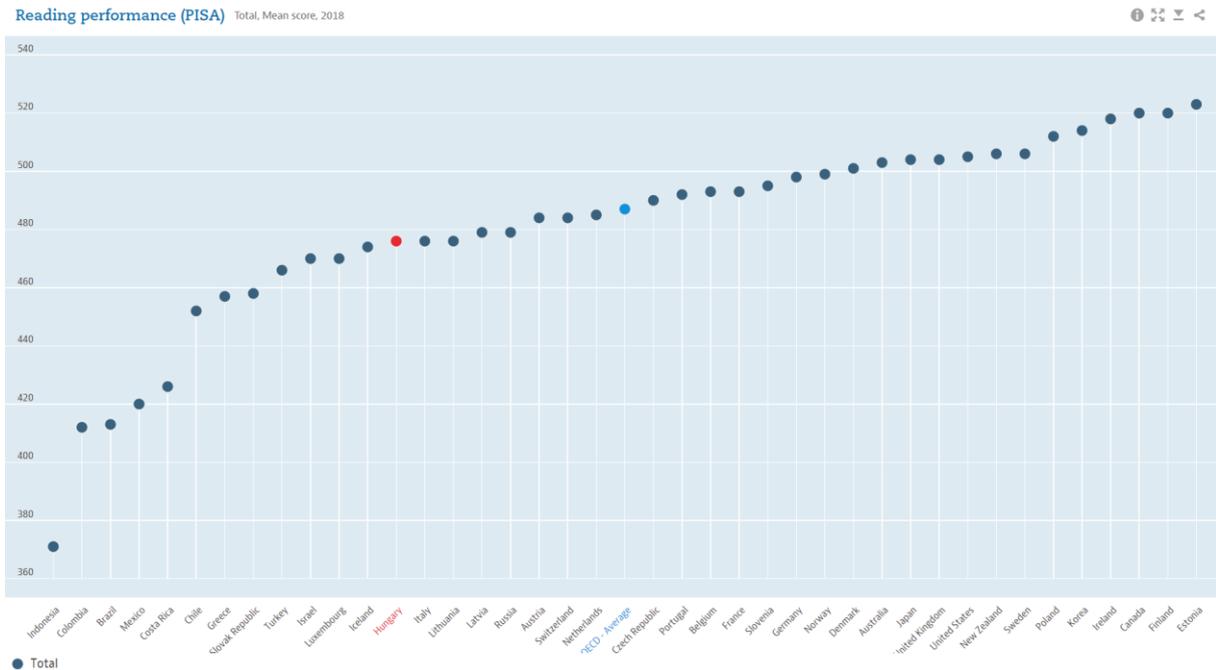
Traditional and digital reading differs according to the respective neural processes. While in case of traditional reading the left hemisphere of the brain plays a dominant role and promotes analytical processing, during digital reading the right hemisphere becomes prevalent while facilitating the image-based, holistic processing of information. In the digital age the human skills change as well. Although digital natives are exposed to such changes from their early childhood, digital immigrants also feel the given impact. The human brain adapts to the changes and it is transformed in response to the external environmental influences (Tószegi, 2009).

While traditional literacy promoted linear, logical, and analytic thinking, the digital age calls for holistic, transparent, and intuitive thought processes. The changing thought patterns brought on by the cultural paradigm shift resulted in the weakening of memory along with that of the writing skills. A positive outcome is that the members of the digital generation can easily process a high amount of stimuli, can multitask, or perform several activities simultaneously and make decisions faster. However, their linear, analytical thinking skills and reading comprehension became weaker (Gyarmathy, 2012.).

Henceforth it is worthwhile to survey research results and survey analyses focusing on the changes impacting reading skills and habits.

III. INTERNATIONAL SURVEY RESULTS

The PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) survey is administered to 15 year old students in three areas: reading performance or comprehension, mathematics, and natural science. Compared to that of the OECD countries, reading comprehension results of Hungarian students show a steadily declining tendency. This tendency is not limited to Hungary. The score of OECD average 496 achieved in 2012 fell to 493 in 2015 and by 2018 it plummeted to 487. (OECD Data-Reading performance, PISA n. d.) Apart from 2009 the reading performance scores of Hungarian children have not reached the OECD average (PISA 2018 Summary report)



2. Figure The Results of the 2018 PISA test on reading performance (Source: OECD Data – Reading performance <https://data.oecd.org/pisa/reading-performance-pisa.htm>)

Taking a broader age-related perspective with a more restricted thematic scope we can take a look at reading and library use habits of Hungarian people. Since 1964 the given data have been regularly obtained and the latest research was performed during the term of the My Library project with a nationwide representative survey carried out in 2017 and 2019.



3. Figure The results of the 2019 nationwide survey (Tóth, 2019)

The research results show (Figure 3) that the proportion of regular readers (reading at least one book per month) gradually decreased until 2017. While in 1964 the respective rate was 23%, in 2017 it sank below 7% (6,9%). However, in the past two years this figure increased as in 2019 10,7% of the population considered themselves regular readers. The rate of the non-reading population was the highest in 2005, exceeding 60%, and in 2017 the figure decreased to 50%, but in 2019 the figure started to grow again reaching 53,5% (Tóth, 2019). Both the PISA and the other survey results indicated that the reading skills and reading motivation of the younger generation change according to their information consumption practices. Educating readers can be a way to keep this tendency within acceptable limits.

IV. READER EDUCATION

In order to establish a lifelong commitment to reading children should be exposed to books or tales from an early age (Husztí 2018). Direct and positive experience with books, reading, literature, and stories leads to the formation of a favourable book image (Dömsödy, 2003). While the family and the home should be the primary agent of reader education, according to reading sociologist Péter Gombos "the family is not or at best partially able to fulfill this reading socialization function. Consequently the school becomes the primary arena of reader education" (Gombos, 2013).

In addition to the family and the school libraries also play an instrumental role in educating readers and promoting reading.

V. READER PROMOTION CAMPAIGNS

EURead

Established in 2000, the EURead is a consortium of European organizations dedicated to the promotion of reading. The consortium regards reading as a prerequisite for full participation in the current media driven society. Their main aim is to elaborate new strategies for the promotion of reading. The EURead supports and encourages efforts aimed at the development of reading programs and campaigns addressing all age groups. (EURead-About Us, n.d.)

Lifelong Readers

The Lifelong Readers project was launched with the support of the European Commission and it is geared to enable teachers and school librarians to promote reading and lifelong reading habits in the 6-12 age group. Lifelong learning is closely connected with reading and the project addressing both concerns aims to achieve positive changes via coordinated efforts. (Lifelong Readers - Overview, 2012)

My library

The My library project was launched in 2017 and its goals include the improvement of reading culture, digital literacy, library use, and information search, along with supporting reading comprehension with special attention to the processing of digital texts (Fehér, Koglerné, Hernádi, 2019.). Furthermore, at the beginning of 2019 a national campaign was launched aimed at the popularization of libraries and reading. The campaign includes four short films. The film titled "The more you read, the more special experiences you can gain!" emphasizes the importance of reading. As a social service message it was aired in the public media 300 times and reached altogether 5,2 million viewers while approximately 12 million people received this message via the on-line campaign titled "The future begins in the library 2020!" taking place in various forms of social media. In light of the fact that the population of Hungary is only around 10 million people such high rate of exposure is more than encouraging.

POKET

The POKET program is a grass roots initiative started by a group of young actors. The project targets the young generation and enables participants to acquire a wide selection of contemporary and classic literature from book dispensing machines. Although at first only 8 such automatic machines were installed and all of them in the capital, nowadays book dispensing machines are found in 29 locations nationwide and books can be acquired even online.



4. Figure The POKET automated book dispenser (POKET: A travel companion in your pocket project 2018)

Libraries, governmental organizations, and the non-governmental sphere including civil organizations launch reading popularization programs all over Europe and reading habits are assessed by various surveys. In order to gauge the opinion of the Hungarian library community on reading, the popularization of reading, the overall state of reading and the respective role of the libraries I carried out an on-line questionnaire based survey.

VI. QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

The survey targeted the Hungarian library community in order to identify the views of the library profession concerning the reading propagation efforts. The survey was a pilot research program that could be continued in the future. Altogether 181 librarians responded to the online questionnaire containing 18 questions.

Hypotheses

1. At least half of the librarians surveyed consider not only traditional reading, but any reading of texts as part of the reading process.
2. Most librarians (at least 75%) believe that reading should be continuously encouraged.
3. At least 90% of the librarians agree that libraries should take part in the popularization of reading.
4. According to librarians children's libraries and school libraries should play the greatest role in the popularization of reading.
5. At least half of the librarians surveyed believe that new initiatives are needed for the propagation of reading.

The measuring device

Table no 1: Survey questions grouped according to topics.

	Relevant questions	Total number of questions according to the given topic	Areas surveyed
Sociometric questions	1-3	3	Sex, age, education level
Reading habits of librarians and their attitude to the reading process	4-8	5	What do they consider reading, reading habits, their evaluation of the state of reading
Reading popularization	9-18	10	Role of libraries, familiarity with programs

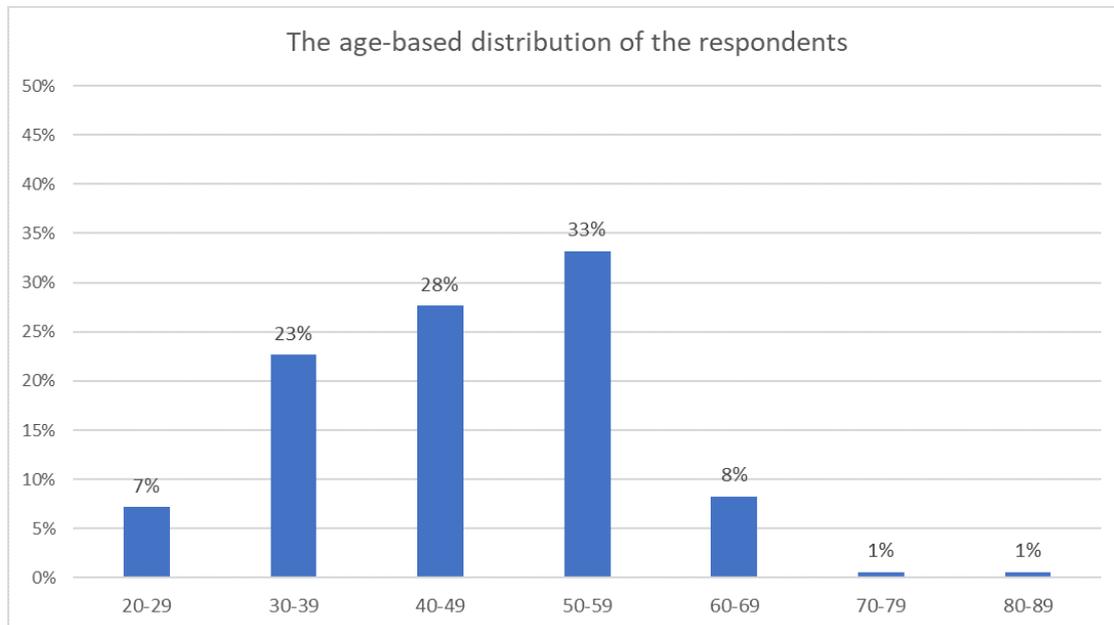
Sample selection strategy

The sample population included librarians in Hungary and from the non-probability sample taking methods I relied on the snowball approach.

The results of the questionnaire-based survey

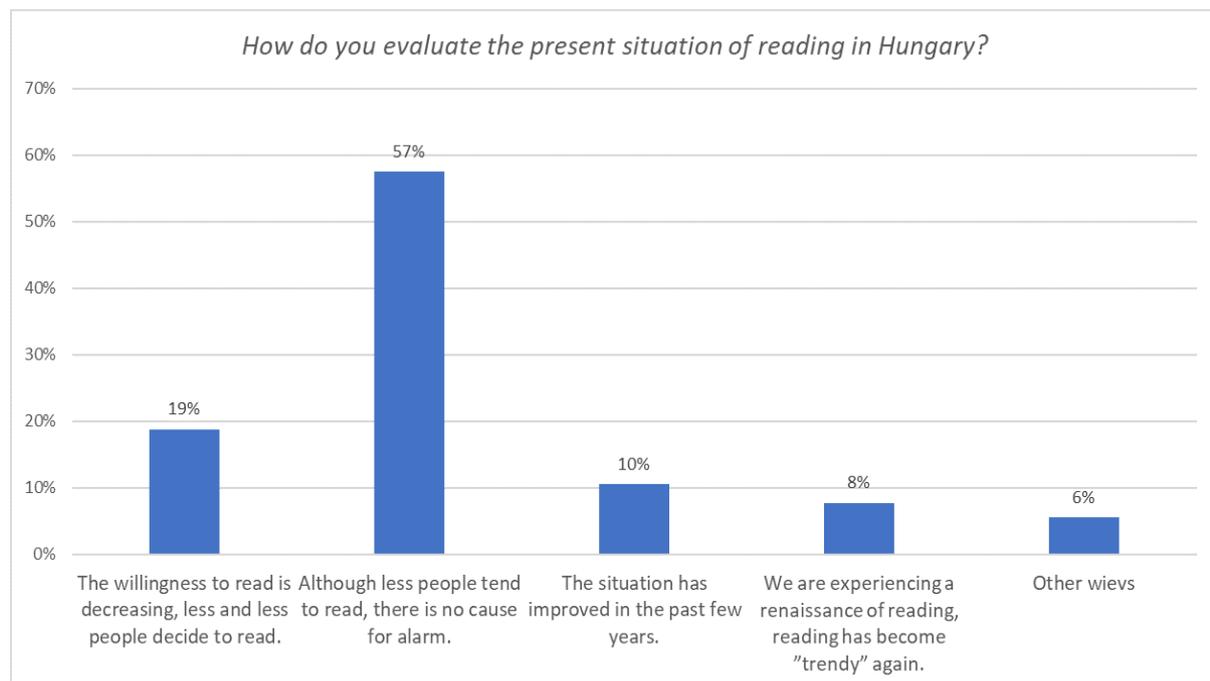
The sex-based distribution substantiates the general perception, namely that the majority of librarians are women. The same conclusion is suggested by the sex of the respondents as the clear majority, 87% (N=156) were women and 13% (N=25) were men.

The answers strongly vary according to age as well. The youngest respondent was 21 and the oldest respondent was 80 years old. The average age of the sample was 46 and the dominant age group was the 50-59 year old segment. The majority of the sample, 60 people, that is, 33% of the respondents were in their fifties.



5. Figure The age-based distribution of the respondents

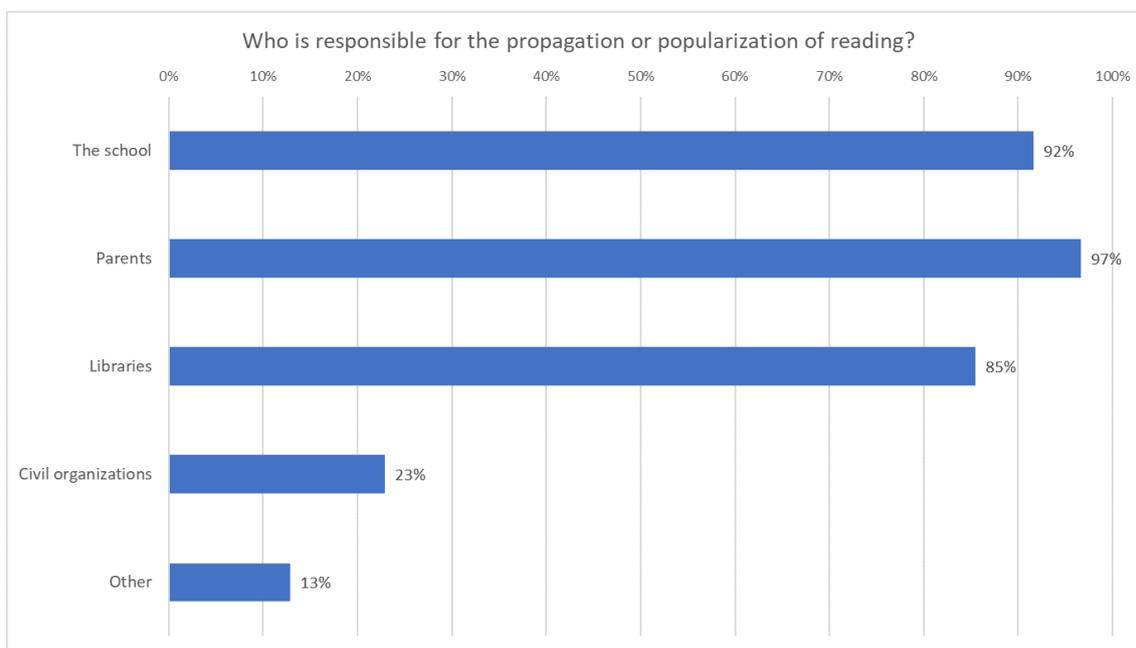
More than half, that is, 57% of the respondents, selected the answer: "Although less people tend to read, there is no cause for alarm." Almost 20% have a more negative view and only a small segment of the respondents have a positive outlook.



6. Figure How do you evaluate the present situation of reading in Hungary?

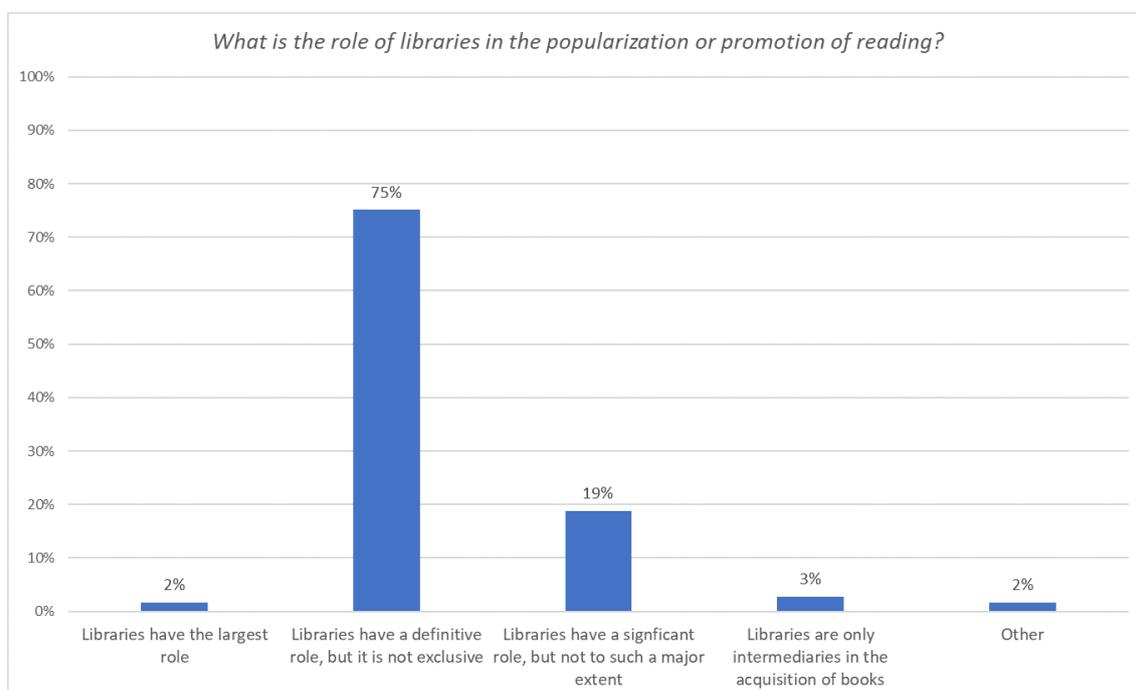
The respondents gave a unequivocally positive answer regarding the need for promoting the willingness to read as only 2 out of the 181 librarians answering the question stated it was not necessary.

The opinions concerning who has the responsibility to address the problem tended to be identical as almost everyone, 173 respondents (97%) believe it is up to the parents to promote reading, while 92% or 164 respondents are on the opinion that the propagation of reading is a task schools should be involved in. 153 respondents ((85%) felt that libraries are also responsible for the popularization of reading (Figure 7).)



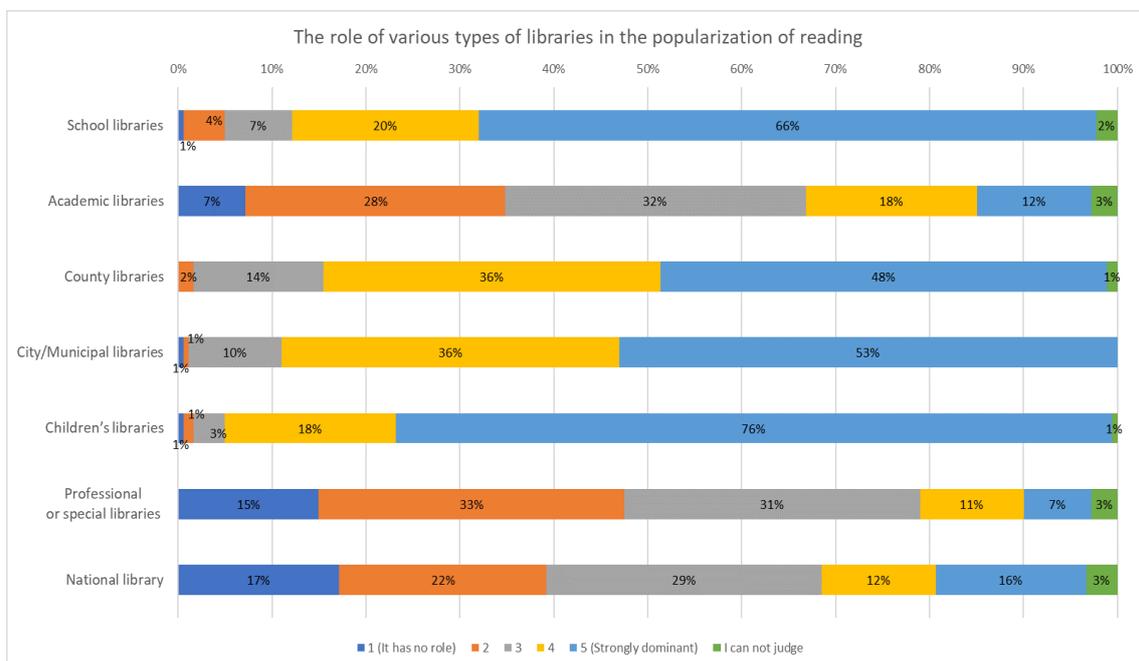
7. Figure Who is responsible for the propagation or popularization of reading?

The answers to the next question: “What is the role of the libraries in the propagation of reading?” most answers, 75% of the respondents, indicated that the role of libraries is definitive, but not exclusive. Only 3% assigned a minor role to libraries.



8. Figure What is the role of libraries in the popularization or promotion of reading?

Having refined our inquiry further, we can explore whether institutional type plays a role in determining the extent of a library's participation in the reading promotion effort. Respondents had to indicate on a five step scale their views on what role the given type of library plays in the propagation of reading. It is hardly surprising that the participants assigned the greatest role to the school library and the children's library in the popularization of reading (Figure 9).



9. Figure The role of various types of libraries in the popularization of reading

In my survey I listed 10 current initiatives or campaigns launched in Hungary designed to promote reading. I have surveyed the level of familiarity with the given programs. The five best-known or most popular programs included three projects initiated by libraries. The other two were a television program and a grass roots effort.

Finally, as far as new initiatives promoting reading are concerned, approximately one quarter (26%) of the respondents do not think such efforts are needed anymore.

I believe the main reason for this is that currently available reading promotion programs are considered sufficient both from the point of view of quantity and quality.

VII.SUMMARY

While due to the small size of the sample long term consequences cannot be drawn, the issue should be given more attention and the reading promotion efforts should be continued along the line of the present initiatives while applying the respective best practices. The primary target group of reading promotion campaigns should be the children or the young generation. They should be addressed with age specific methods designed to arouse their interest. At the same time in addition to a holistic approach emphasizing the larger picture, local initiatives ought to be promoted as well.

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