Information ethics as reflected in LIS curricula: Comparative analysis of Croatian and Slovenian learning programs

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to provide an introduction to the main concepts and resources of information ethics in Library and Information Science as well as to study different ethical issues.

Students of Library and Information Science are often not capable of solving ethical problems they encounter in a workplace. For this reason it is important to alert them to some basic ethical issues that may be useful in their work environment. "Codes of professional ethics for library organizations are mainly intended to guide the behavior of library professionals. However, these codes serve other functions as well. In particular, these codes of profes-
sional ethics inform the public about what library professionals are committed to doing. " (Fallis, 2007)

This research will attempt to study the presence of information ethics in LIS programs and compare Slovenian and Croatian programs.

KEYWORDS: information ethics, library and information science, curricula, undergraduate programs, graduate programs, Croatia, Slovenia

1. INTRODUCTION

Issues of ethics are without a doubt one of the most com-

plex issues in philosophy. This is confirmed by the fact that since the time of ancient philosophers to the present this issue is the focus of many distinguished philosophers' discussions. Ethics is taught not only in high schools, especially in the ones with more of a classical curriculum, but is also offered as a course at many universities. One can say that ethics became a major part of sociology with the publication of Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. The discipline of information ethics has developed in the context of information society and it seems that the ethical issues in the information society will be studied with increasing interest. Many social factors, such as development of mass media and global communication, have emphasized the need for questioning of the basic social values. Fundamental changes in family relations, employment, and educational values caused the change in the first rate information institutions – libraries. However, nowadays is difficult to talk about the libraries in such context. Like its functions, the way people view libraries has also changed. There is more and more talk about place as a library, rather than library as place. We can no longer talk about domination of specific user groups in libraries. Age limits have disappeared and all generations can find their place in libraries of different types. The concept of library services is widening drastically, an increasing number of services which at first glance have nothing in common with libraries use library principles in shaping their services. Ancient librarian experiences are used when establishing the balance between freedom and restriction of access to information. For all the above reasons nowadays there is no question weather to include subjects of information ethics in to the curriculum of the library schools. Rather, the question is which subjects to teach and on which level should they be taught. All of the fundamental issues of information ethics, which are essentially basic ethical questions, will be reflected in every librarian's daily work, from the one who works with parents of newborn babies to the one who works with elderly.

With the development and application of information and communication technologies (ICT) information ethics became a special field of interest and research in Library and Information Science, serving to highlight various ethical issues.
Information ethics is an area which examines and evaluates:
- the development of moral values in the information field,
- the creation of new power structures in the information field,
- hidden contradictions and internationalities in information theories and practices,
- the development of ethical conflicts in the information field. (ICIE, 2008)
Information ethics deals with many ethical issues. Some of them are: ownership and copyrights, intellectual freedom (censorship), digital divide (right to information), censorship and moral problems regarding confidentiality of information. In order for the information specialists to act in accordance with the ethical principles of the profession, it is necessary to educate them on some basic moral and ethical principles. R. Capurro considers the following topics in information ethics:
1. Ethics in research;
2. Ethics in the teaching of information science and
3. Ethics in information work. (Cappuro, 2001)

In this paper we will focus on the second topic; teaching of information science in graduate and undergraduate studies in Croatia and Slovenia. At the moment there are four LIS departments in Croatia and Slovenia with accredited undergraduate and postgraduate LIS programs; three of them in Croatia (located in Zadar, Zagreb and Osijek) and one in Slovenia (located in Ljubljana). We have conducted a research on LIS curricula to test whether graduates of these courses gain sufficient knowledge of theoretical and practical information ethics through their degrees. We also studied how information ethics is taught at these departments as reflected through curricula and available syllabi.
This study gives an overview of the course content and teaching methods used in conveying the information ethics content through courses in four of the LIS programs. The main intention of this study is to explore theses topics in Croatian and Slovenian LIS programs.

2. ISSUES IN INFORMATION ETHICS

It could be said that the responsibility of the information specialists in terms of ethical standpoint is based on the Declaration on Human Rights, or on some of its articles such as privacy, property, freedom of expression, the right to education, etc. (ICIE, 2008) However, information ethics also has to adjust to infosphere – "the whole informational environment constituted by all informational entities, their properties, interactions, processes and mutual relations." (Floridi, 2007) "The task is to formulate an information ethics that can treat the world of data, information, knowledge and communication as a new environment", (ibid) and has to be prepared to recognize and solve the ethical challenges in the new environment based on the fundamental principles of respect for information, its preservation and evaluation. This is especially important in the context of the new teaching programs, which will soon have to be evaluated and adjusted to the emerging needs. Our branch of knowledge is not static, rather it is extremely dynamic. This means that in addition to basic knowledge, there is also a part of knowledge that must constantly adapt to changes in the new environment. Such changes impose very demanding task before the teachers. Teachers in the information science disciplines are often faced with students who are very advanced in technology use. This means that the times

have passed when teachers could use their basic knowledge of a topic for teaching lectures without updating them for a long time.

"The digital divide (DD) is the source of many of the ethical problems emerging from the evolution of the information society. It occurs between the computer literate and the computer illiterate (e-analphabetism), between the information rich and the information poor." (Floridi, 2007) What is relevant for us is that we can no longer speak of the information rich and the information poor countries. The digital divide is now present in every classroom. This is especially reflected in countries of average development such as Croatia and Slovenia where society differences are very obvious everywhere, including in the classrooms. This means we are educating students with very diverse cultural characteristics, and that the teaching techniques have to be adapted to such a situation. "The ethical problems it (the infosphere) generates are best understood as environmental problems. They include education, free flow and security of information; ethical use of ICT, etc." (Floridi, 2007)

3. TEACHING INFORMATION ETHICS

Education of future information professionals must involve courses on information ethics. Those courses should provide them with understanding of ethical theories and instructions on how to use them in practice.

Many LIS schools include information ethics in their curricula at undergraduate and postgraduate level. Some of them offer separate information ethics courses. Other schools incorporate ethical issues in their undergraduate and postgraduate LIS education by adding ethical elements to different core and elective courses.

"Teaching Information Ethics to a very diverse group of students, both graduate and undergraduate, most working towards careers as information professionals, raises a number of challenges. The challenges relate to determining the most effective methods to teach the complex subject of Information Ethics and to meeting the varied and often-changing needs of a very diverse group of students." (Carbo, 2004)

Information ethics should be an important part of education in libraries, information science university departments of and of the related professions. It should also be included in every curriculum of library and information studies program, because it teaches students:
- to be able to recognize and articulate ethical conflicts in the information field;
- to inculcate a sense of responsibility with regard to the consequences of individual and collective interactions in the information field;
- to provide the foundations for intercultural dialogue through the recognition of different kinds of information cultures and values;
- to provide basic knowledge about ethical theories and concepts and about their relevance to everyday information work;
- to learn to reflect ethically and to think critically and to

carry these abilities into their professional life. (ALISE, 2007)

Besides just being touched on in the context of some other information issues, information ethics should be offered as its own course. "There should be offered periodically one or more courses devoted specifically to information ethics. Such courses should be taught by a qualified member of the faculty and be based on international literatures from a diversity of viewpoints." (ALISE, 2007) Also these courses should "look at concrete practical cases (such as those listed above) that actually arise in the day-to-day activities of library professionals". (Fallis, 2007) It is very likely that the students of library and information science will one day have to apply their knowledge of information ethics and that is precisely the reason why it is important to ensure they acquire certain knowledge in this area.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper attempts to show the importance of information ethics, theories and practical cases for future LIS professionals. A comparative content analysis approach was employed to investigate the presence of different topics and issues in information ethics at four accredited undergraduate and graduate LIS programs offered in Croatia (Universities of Zagreb, Zadar and Osijek) and Slovenia (University of Ljubljana). We examined these institutions' web sites in order to determine whether catalogs and/or course syllabi are publicly available. We found that some of the course syllabi are in the public domain but due to the relatively low number of available course syllabi the study was limited to course descriptions published in official programs accredited by the Croatian and Slovenian Ministry of Science. The subject matter of each course was analyzed in order to determine the extent of general and specific information ethics subject coverage. All listed courses were classified according the program level (undergraduate or graduate) and mandatory and/or elective course status.

We tried to determine whether through their university classes, students receive theoretical and practical knowledge of information ethics. In order to analyze each of these teaching programs we studied the course descriptions of the offered courses and tried to establish whether the lectures are about this topic, or if the students are introduced to this topics through the study of other subject matter. We have also researched the required and suggested course readings in order to see in which way information ethics terminology is used in textbooks and study materials. Various projects, tasks and research performed by students (according to syllabi) are also studied to determine whether it is related to the topic of this research.

5. RESULTS

This study included four accredited learning programs in the field of information science, with a total of 308

courses offered to students at undergraduate or graduate level. Through content analysis we found 65 courses where the description listed at least one of the general or specific topics in the field of information ethics (see Table 1 and Table 3), out of which 27 (42%) courses were at the undergraduate level and 38 (58%) at the graduate level of study.

The largest number of courses dealing with some aspect of information ethics is offered to the students of the Zagreb Department of Information Science, 24 in total. It is important to emphasize here that Zagreb Department of Information Science is the oldest of the four programs we analyzed; also they enroll the largest number of students, employ the highest number of teachers, and so far this is the only department that offers a doctorate program in Information Science. The number of courses at other academic institutions that discus the topic of information ethics varies from 13 at the Department of Library and Information Science in Zadar and the Department of Information Sciences in Osijek, to 15 at the Department of librarianship, information science and publishing in Ljubljana.
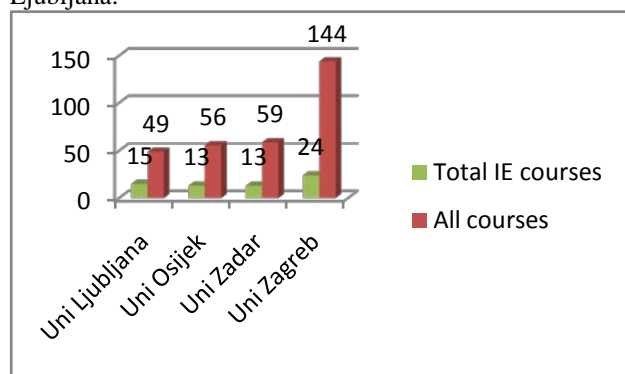

Chart 1: Courses on information ethics (IE) in four LIS programs

Further analysis of the content showed that the information ethics topics in Osijek and Zadar programs are relatively evenly distributed and represented at the undergraduate and graduate level (see Figure 2). However, Ljubljana program puts more emphasis on information ethics at the undergraduate level (60%), while Zagreb program offers topics of information ethics mostly at graduate level (79%).
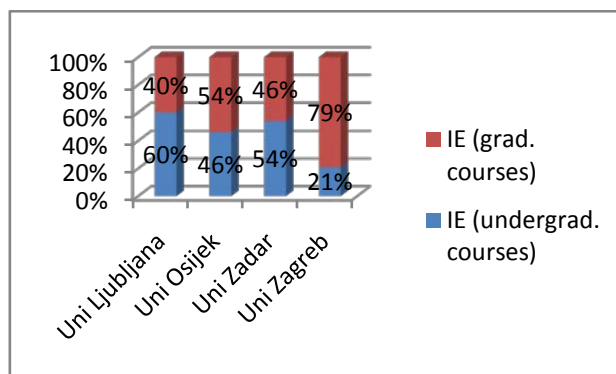

Chart 2: Undergraduate and graduate courses on information ethics (IE)

We noticed more of a difference in the titles of the courses that cover topics related to information ethics (see Figure 3). Analysis of the words from the titles of courses showed that the term "information" appears 13 times, while the word "ethics" appears only twice. In our sample of researched courses we found only one course with the title that contains both terms (Information legislation and ethics), and one course with the title that contains the term "ethics" only (see Attachemnt 1).
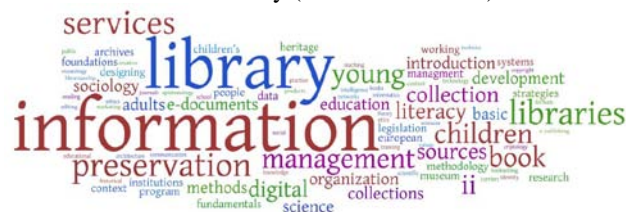

Figure 1: Course title words frequency analysis

The descriptions of courses from the four learning programs were used as indicators of popularity of certain topics in information ethics.

By analyzing the content descriptions of the surveyed courses we noticed a very wide range of general and/or specific issues (39) directly or indirectly related to information ethic (see Table 2). Table number 2 shows that the most popular topics are: intellectual property and copyright (13), free access to information (9), professional ethics (9), availability of information (6) and morality (moral values, moral intelligence, moral crisis) (4) belong to the group of the most popular and most frequently represented in the sample analyzed the course.

As we continued our research, intending to further our understanding of the subject matter of the classes offered to students in Croatian and Slovenia, we collected data on required and elective course materials (textbooks, journal articles, etc) related to the information ethics issues. We recognized the total of 95 bibliographical units, most often focusing on specific topics in information ethics (such as digital libraries, professional ethics, ethical codes, the right to access information, etc.). Unfortunately the search for publications which could represent a

basic textbook or a handbook of information ethics, was unsuccessful.

6. CONCLUSION

In this paper we attempted to show to what extent the issues and problems of information ethics are represented in undergraduate and graduate LIS programs in Croatia and Slovenia. In the past few decades a significant number of papers have been written on the topic of information ethics and it is still today a current topic of discussion within the information science field. Our research has shown that Croatian and Slovenian academic community are aware of the need for introducing the future information specialists to the topics of ethical issues and problems related to the process of production, collection, mediation, management, use and protection of information. However, there are significant differences among the analyzed learning programs, especially in the contents, topics and issues, as well as in the required and elective reading materials on information ethics. We distinguished the total of 39 general and specific topics related to information ethic trough out 65 courses.

Through the analysis of the words in the titles of the classes we got interesting results. The analysis showed that only one of the courses has both terms "information" and "ethics" in its title. This fact indicates the lack of general classes that introduce the students to a complex issue such as as information ethics. There are two possible reasons for such scattered way this topic is represented in the curriculum. On one hand there is the possibility that designers of learning programs did not recognize the importance of this topic in the education of a modern information expert so they atomized the topic and used its fragments to supplement the traditional topics in information science. On the other hand the results of this research demonstrated that the topic of information ethic in the countries we studied is still in the process of social and cognitive development. The presences, or lack thereof, of the topic of information ethic in the learning programs stand in support of this fact. Topics that have for decades been the focus of information science researchers' interest such as intellectual property and copyright, free access to information, professional ethics, availability of information and morale (moral values, moral intelligence, and moral crisis), etc., are still the most present topics in information ethics. More current topics, such as the ethical issues associated with the development and application of information and communication technology (ICT) are noticeably less represented. This research should be extended to studying the presence of information ethics topics in the wider European context. Such a research would require a larger sample of learning programs, more complex methodological framework and more research methods.

7. REFERENCES

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8. ATTACHMENTS

Table 1: Courses in or about information ethics (IE) in four LIS programs

	Uni Ljubljana			Uni Osijek			Uni Zadar			Uni Zagreb			Total	of IE %
	N	*% of all*	*% of IE*	*n*	*% of all*	*% of IE*	*n*	*% of all*	*% of IE*	*n*	*% of all*	*% of IE*	**Total**	of IE %
IE (under-grad. courses)	**9**	18%	60%	**6**	11%	46%	**7**	12%	54%	**5**	3%	21%	**27**	42%
IE (grad. courses)	**6**	12%	40%	**7**	13%	54%	**6**	10%	46%	**19**	13%	79%	**38**	58%
Total IE courses	**15**	31%	100%	**13**	23%	100%	**13**	22%	100%	**24**	17%	100%	**65**	100%
All courses	**49**	100%		**56**	100%		**59**	100%		**144**	100%		308	100%

Explanation:

* the number of courses where the description refers to general or specific aspects of information ethics (aka IE courses)
** IE presence in the course learning program
*** IE presence in undergraduate and graduate level studies

Table 2: Information ethics topics included in four LIS programs

Course topics	No. of courses
Copyright (author rights)	13
Free access to information	9
Professional ethics	9
Availability of information	6
Moral (moral values, moral intelligence, moral crisis)	4
Information access rights	3
Intellectual property	3
Ethical codes	3
Information literacy	2
Research ethics	2
Information accuracy	2
Availability of information technology	2
Digital divide	2
Censorship	2
Open access (OA)	2
Data confidentiality	2
Preservation of personal data	2
Responsibilities	2
Children rights	2
Human rights	2
Mobbing	1
Preservation ethics	1
Computer criminal	1

Data security	1
Education rights	1
Ethical problems	1
Computer pirates	1
Ethical principles	1
Individual and collective right of interest	1
Social heritage ethics	1
Free speech rights	1
Access to information for children	1
Decision making ethics	1
Civil rights	1
Freedom of expression and freedom of speech	1
Ethical question in selling information services	1
Unauthorized access	1
Data disguise	1
Data abuse	1

Table 3: Information ethics readings (course reading lists)

No.	Course readings	f
1	Pace, A: The ultimate digital library : where the new information players meet. Chicago : American Library Association, 2003. (Strategies and tools for the digital library)	3
2	BUILDING and sustaining digital collections : models for libraries and museums. - Washington : Council on Library and Information Resources, 2001.	3
3	Schneier, Bruce, Secrets & Lies. Digital Security in a Networked World, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., USA, 2000	3
4	Borgman, CL: From Gutenberg to the global information infrastructure : access to information in the networked world. Cambridge (Mass.) ; London : MIT Press, 2000. (Digital libraries and electronic publishing)	2
5	ETICKI kodeks arhivista // Zagreb: HDA, 1997; ETICKI kodeks Hrvatskoga knjižnicarskog društva. // http://www.hkdrustvo.hr; ICOM-ov Kodeks profesio-nalne etike. http://www.hrmud.hr/.	2
6	Eticki kodeks Hrvatskoga knjižnicarskog društva. Dostupno na mrežnoj adresi: http://www.hkdrustvo.hr	2
7	Informacijsko opismenjevanje : prirocnik za delo z informacijskimi viri, (ur)M.Steinbuch,(2004) Ljubljana: Zavod Republike Slovenije za Šolstvo.	2
8	Jones, B. M. Libraries, access, and intellectual freedom : developing policies for public and academic libraries. Chicago, Ill. : ALA, 1999.	2
9	Konvencija o pravima djeteta. Zagreb : UNICEF, 1993.	2
10	Libraries and democracy : the cornerstone of liberty / ed. by Nancy Kranich. Chicago, Ill. : ALA, 2001.	2
11	Nacionalni program odgoja i obrazovanja za ljudska prava, Vlada Republike Hrvatske, Zagreb, 1999.	2

12	Pace, A: The ultimate digital library : where the new information players meet. Chicago : American Library Association, 2003. (Strategies and tools for the digital library)	2
13	Stipcevic, A. Cenzura u knjižnici. Zagreb : Filozofski fakultet, Zavod za informacijske studije, 1992	2
14	Stipcevic, A. O savršenom cenzoru. Zagreb : Matica hrvatska, 1994.	2
15	Stricevic, I. Pravo na slobodni pristup informacijama u knjižnicama za djecu i mladež. // Dijete i društvo, casopis za promicanje prava djeteta. 3, 4(2001), str. 455-466.	2
16	Stricevic, I. Promicanje prava djeteta u djecjoj knjižnici. // Dijete i društvo, casopis za promicanje prava djeteta. 2, 1(2000), str. 65–71.	2
17	Temeljni medunarodni dokumenti iz podrucja odgoja i obrazovanja za ljudska prava, Vlada Republike Hrvatske, Zagreb, 1999.	2
18	UNESCO. Manifest za narodne knjižnice. // HBD Novosti.	2

Table 4: List of courses with information ethics topics

code	Course title
LJD1	Organization of information
LJD2	Designing digital libraries
LJD3	Information literacy
LJD4	Managment of information sources
LJD5	Editing technics
LJD6	Information sources and copyright
LJP1	Introduction to research
LJP2	Foundations of librarianship and library organization
LJP3	Foundations of information science
LJP4	The book in historical and social context
LJP5	Information sources and services
LJP6	Organization of library collections
LJP7	Digital library
LJP8	Formats and Carriers of Book content
LJP9	Bibliopedagogical work
OS-D1	Management of information institutions ii – public libraries' networks
OS-D2	Children's collection development
OS-D3	Strategies and methods of working with children and young people in library
OS-D4	Preservation of e-documents
OS-D5	Collection management
OS-D6	Marketing of library products and services
OS-D7	Libraries architecture

OS-P1	Sociology of book and literacy I
OS-P2	Theory and practice of information services
OS-P3	Designing digital libraries
OS-P4	Library program and services for children and young adults
OS-P5	Educational methodology
OS-P6	Ethics
ZD-D1	Management of library collections
ZD-D2	Basic knowledge on education and training
ZD-D3	Education in the context of European values
ZD-D4	Children's collection development
ZD-D5	Strategies and methods of working with children and young people in library
ZD-D6	Preservation of e-documents
ZD-P1	Information sciences I
ZD-P2	Sociology of book and literacy I
ZD-P3	Information technology II
ZD-P4	Heritage institutions
ZD-P5	E-publishing and bookselling
ZD-P6	Library program and services for children and young adults
ZD-P7	Sociology of book and literacy II
ZG-D1	Archives legislation
ZG-D10	Libraries for children and young adults
ZG-D11	Library management
ZG-D12	Methodology of informatics II
ZG-D13	Basic of library science
ZG-D14	Creative teaching in school libraries
ZG-D15	Identity managment
ZG-D16	Basic research methods
ZG-D17	Introduction to intelligence systems and services
ZG-D18	Preservation of e-documents
ZG-D19	Data preservation
ZG-D2	Heritage and development
ZG-D3	Journals and scientific communication
ZG-D4	Digital library II
ZG-D5	Epistemology of information science
ZG-D6	European education
ZG-D7	Information sources and systems in archives
ZG-D8	Information legislation and ethics
ZG-D9	Books and reading
ZG-P1	Data preservation
ZG-P2	Introduction to museology

ZG-P3	Museum collection preservation fundamentals
ZG-P4	Museum collections management fundamentals
ZG-P5	Criptology