This article explores the evolution of the audience of the National Library of Russia (NLR) from the beginning of the XIX century until the present day. The author demonstrates how political and economic factors influenced social and gender characteristics of readers of the NLR, increase in the amount of readers, strengthening of the role of the library as one of the largest cultural and information centers in the world.

Ovaj članak istražuje razvoj publike Nacionalne biblioteke Rusije (NBR) od početka 19. stoljeća do danas. Autori pokazuju kako su politički i ekonomski činioci utjecali na socijalne i rodne karakteristike čitalačke publike NBR-a, povećanje broja čitatelja, jačanje uloge biblioteke kao jednog od najvećih kulturnih i informacijskih centara na svijetu.

Keywords / Ključne riječi:
the National Library of Russia, readers
Nacionalna Biblioteka Rusije, čitalačka publika

Abstract / Sažetak

The history of any national library cannot be fully objective without information about its readers at different periods of time. Studying who were the readers of the library gives an opportunity to better understand the impact the library had on the development of the country.

The Imperial Public Library – now the National Library of Russia (NLR) was founded in 1795 and opened for general public in 1814 in the building specially constructed for these purposes in the centre of St. Petersburg – at the time, the capital of Russia. The Academy of Sciences, the Academy of Arts, as well as several higher education institutions, ministries and government departments have been situated in the city. There was a need for a free library with a universal collection of documents, formed by the legal deposit of all publications printed in the country – that is why the NLR has been created. No other library that existed in St. Petersburg at the time has met these requirements. The library of the Academy of Sciences was open only two days a week from 2 to 4 p.m., and only teachers and students could borrow books from libraries of educational institutions, and it was too expensive to use the private libraries at the bookstores.

During the early years of the Library’s work there were not only academicians among the readers, but other people of that time who needed books in the academic environment. 

Efimova N.A. 1958. “Čitateli Publichnoj biblioteki v Peterburge i organizaciya ih obsluzhivaniya v 1814-1917 gg.” in Trudy Gosudarstvennoj publichnoj biblioteki im. M.E. Saltykova-Shchedrina. Vol.6(9). (Leningrad, 1958, 13)
Likhomanov, Morozova

also other educated people of that time who needed books for academic, professional, or educational purposes. In the report for the year 1816, it was mentioned that in the reading room one could see “people of all estates.”

The information on categories of readers according to estates and professions during the early years of the library’s work (specifically 1816-1819) has been preserved the best:

It is important to mention that there were no access limitations in the rules of the Library: anyone who wanted to work in the Library could register at the desk of the librarian, who gave tickets for free entry. Footmen in uniforms were supposed to wait for their masters in the hall.

During the summertime, the Library was open for visits on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., and in winter—from 10 a.m. till sunset (taking into account that St. Petersburg is a Northern city, it could happen at 5, 4, or 3 p.m.). Also, every Tuesday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. people could visit the Library to look around and order literature for the next few days. It was not permitted to borrow books from the Library.

Note that there were no recommendations needed to register in the Imperial Public Library (unlike, for example, the British Library).

Soon after the opening of the Library, there were several rules established on how to work with the collection:

2 Ibid, 17

3 Ibid, 17

4 Grin C.I., Tret’yak A.M. 1998. Publichnaja biblioteka glazami sovremennikov (1795-1917). (Saint Petersburg.1998., 79-84)

5 Ibid, 82
Ubrzo nakon otvaranja Biblioteke uspostavljeno je nekoliko pravila o radu s zbirkom: čitatelji više nisu imali pristup fikciji, bajkama, periodici, političkim izdanjima, kao ni izdanjima "štetnim za moral". Službenici su vjerovali da bi čitatelji trebali dolaziti u biblioteku samo radi akademskog rada i sticanja "korisnog znanja".

Ovo je pravilo, zajedno s nezgodnim radnim vremenom, negativno utjecalo na posjećenost Biblioteke. Tek 1848. čitaonice su počele raditi svaki dan (nedjeljom i praznicima - od 12 do 15 sati). 1846. godine ulaz u biblioteku bio je zabranjen nižim vojnim časnicima; također su učenici drugostepenih obrazovnih ustanova morali dobiti posebno dopuštenje. Većina posjetitelja Biblioteke u prvoj polovici 19. stoljeća bili su civili.

In general, the audience of the Library in the first half of XIX century demonstrates that the level of education in the country was rather low at the time, and therefore – there was small demand for qualified specialists.

There was a noticeable change in that regard in the second half of XIX century. It was a period of economic growth in Russia, as well as important social changes: in 1861 serfdom was abolished, in 1860-70s the trial by jury was introduced, and the new system of public authorities and conscript army. The national economy required much more educated people who possessed professional skills than before.

---

6 Efimova N.A. 1958. "Čitateli Publichnoj biblioteki v Peterburge i organizaciya ih obsluzivaniya v 1814-1917 gg." in Trudy Gosudarstvennoj publichnoj biblioteki im. M.E. Saltykova-Shchedrina. V ol.6(9). (Leningrad, 1958, 14-15)

7 Istorija Gosudarstvennoj Publichnoj biblioteki im. M.E. Saltykova-Shchedrina. 1963. Leningrad. (Lenizdat, 1963, 41-42)

8 Ibid, 41

---

**Years** | **Amount of issued tickets** | **Issuance of literature**
---|---|---
1814 | 969 | 1341
1815-1832 | 458 | 2280
1835 | 651 | 3275
1836-1840 | 813 | 6540
1841-1845 | 887 | 7087
1846-1850 | 848 | 10716
Due to the increase in acquisition in the second half of the 19th century, two new reading rooms were created in Russia, and in 1878 the first higher education institution for women was opened – Higher (Bestuzhev) Courses in St. Petersburg. In 1870 the percentage of women among the readers was 5.4%, in 1880-1884 it was only 18.70-18.74.

An important event in the life of the Library was the fact that female readers were allowed to visit it. In 1856 in Russia, only 22 professors and teachers had registered in the Library, in 1867 their number grew to 225, and in 1895 – to 646 people.

According to the table, the increase in the number of students and decrease in some other categories of visitors, mainly, students of the universities of St. Petersburg. Simultaneously, the amount of teachers increased as well: whereas in 1853 only 22 professors and teachers had been registered, in 1867 their number was 1066, and in 1895 – 17,8%. They were teachers, students, doctors, medical attendants, nurses, pharmacists, artists and future engineers, lawyers, economists, teachers etc.

The reasons for their visits were the professional interests, studying, work. As the news performers.

Talking about the social aspect, only 20-30% of readers indicated their social category. It is important to remember, that at the time the Russian Empire was a class-divided society, with nobility as the upper class.

The following table shows the increase in the number of readers from under-privileged social classes:

| Year | Upper class | Middle class | Under-privileged class |
|------|-------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| 1853 | 22          | 1066         | 646                   |
| 1895 | 17,8%       | 1067         | 11                   |

The increase in some other categories of visitors, mainly, students of the universities of St. Petersburg. Simultaneously, the amount of teachers increased as well: whereas in 1853 only 22 professors and teachers had registered in the Library, in 1867 their number grew to 225, and in 1895 – to 646 people.

While in 1853-1861 the rate of civilians was 9.8%, at the same time during this period the amount of students was higher than 26%, most of them – the students of the universities of St. Petersburg. Simultaneously, the amount of teachers increased as well: whereas in 1853 only 22 professors and teachers had registered in the Library, in 1867 their number grew to 225, and in 1895 – to 646 people.

The following table shows the increase in the number of students and decrease in some other categories of visitors, mainly, students of the universities of St. Petersburg. Simultaneously, the amount of teachers increased as well: whereas in 1853 only 22 professors and teachers had registered in the Library, in 1867 their number grew to 225, and in 1895 – to 646 people.
book exchange and some others. From 8 a.m. till 11 p.m., developing international relations, including the establishment of the fixed work hours of the library.

In 1914-1924, St. Petersburg Library in Petrograd (Petrograd was the name of St. Petersburg) was created, where Lenin planned several measures to improve the library's work, including the enhancement of the Library's role in academic, cultural, and public life of Russia.

Efforts were made to serve the readers in various purposes as well. Lenin wrote a note "On the objectives of the Public Library" in Petrograd in 1917, where the Soviet government head, Vladimir Lenin, stated that the Russian Public Library was supposed to serve illiteracy, preparing the qualified professionals for manufacturing industry and agricultural sector as well as the development of science and technology.

In 1896-1916, the amount of students among the readers of the Library was 33.8%. The number of students among the readers of the Library decreased only in 1916 when many of them were called up for military service during the World War I.

In 1917, the Head of the Soviet government, Vladimir Lenin, wrote a note "On the objectives of the Public Library". In this note, Lenin stated that the Russian Public Library was supposed to serve the readers to get fiction and some other types of publications, as well as the development of science and technology.

In the beginning of the 20th century, outstanding Russian scientists, artists, and composers, including Vladimir Lenin and Georgiy Plekhanov, were among the readers of the Library.

In the second half of the 19th century, Russian revolutionaries, such as Vladimir Lenin and Georgiy Plekhanov, planned to modernize the Russian educational system and increase the number of engineers and technical specialists. The number of engineers and technical specialists grew, and the number of students decreased from 9.8% to 6.8%.

In 1920, the number of students among the readers of the Library decreased from 10.7% to 9.2%. At the same time, the number of readers decreased from 9.8% to 6.8%.

In 1921, the Head of the Soviet government, Vladimir Lenin, stated that the number of students among the readers of the Library decreased only in 1916 when many of them were called up for military service during the World War I.

In 1917, the number of students among the readers of the Library decreased from 9.8% to 6.8%. At the same time, the number of students among the readers of the Library decreased only in 1916 when many of them were called up for military service during the World War I.

In 1921, the number of students among the readers of the Library decreased from 9.8% to 6.8%. At the same time, the number of students among the readers of the Library decreased only in 1916 when many of them were called up for military service during the World War I.

In 1921, the number of students among the readers of the Library decreased from 9.8% to 6.8%. At the same time, the number of students among the readers of the Library decreased only in 1916 when many of them were called up for military service during the World War I.

In 1921, the number of students among the readers of the Library decreased from 9.8% to 6.8%. At the same time, the number of students among the readers of the Library decreased only in 1916 when many of them were called up for military service during the World War I.

In 1921, the number of students among the readers of the Library decreased from 9.8% to 6.8%. At the same time, the number of students among the readers of the Library decreased only in 1916 when many of them were called up for military service during the World War I.

In 1921, the number of students among the readers of the Library decreased from 9.8% to 6.8%. At the same time, the number of students among the readers of the Library decreased only in 1916 when many of them were called up for military service during the World War I.

In 1921, the number of students among the readers of the Library decreased from 9.8% to 6.8%. At the same time, the number of students among the readers of the Library decreased only in 1916 when many of them were called up for military service during the World War I.
where the comfortable conditions were created – a reading room for academic workers and specialists. There was an academic public library in 1927. The Russian proletariat came to read, whereas previously they had been arrested for their thirst for knowledge.

The American writer Theodore Dreiser, who visited the Library and the service, wrote: “Now Russian proletarians come here to read, when previously they had no workers among the readers, by the middle of the 1920s dozens and hundreds of working class men were coming to the Library. In 1927 821 workers were registered in the NLR, in 1928 – 1592. In 1929 it was interrupted by war of 1941-1945. Later a different solution for this problem has been found.

Most of them came there for self-education. Social characteristics of its audience and widening of the readers' interests.

Since 1918 the audience of the Library started to change. Red Army soldiers and workers became active library users along with the scientists, professionals and students. Despite many difficulties the serious changes in social and professional characteristics of its audience and widening of the readers' interests.

Outstanding avatars of the intelligentsia were also coming mainly from the working class or peasantry. Outstanding professionals from the intelligentsia were also coming mainly especially by the end of the 1920s. New representatives of the intelligentsia were coming mainly from the working class. By the end of the 1920s metal workers and textile workers prevailed among the readers of the Library who belonged to the working class.

A composition of studentship has also changed a lot, most of them came there for self-education. Social characteristics of its audience and widening of the readers' interests.

Changes in the work of the Library were caused by the serious changes in social and professional characteristics of its audience and widening of the readers' interests. There were arrested for thirst for knowledge.

Whereas before the Soviet period there were almost no workers among the readers, by the middle of the 1920s dozens and hundreds of working class men were coming to the Library. In 1927 821 workers were registered in the NLR, in 1928 – 1592. In 1929 it was interrupted by war of 1941-1945. Later a different solution for this problem has been found.

In 1929 it was interrupted by war of 1941-1945. Later a different solution for this problem has been found.

Since 1918 the audience of the Library started to change. Red Army soldiers and workers became active library users along with the scientists, professionals and students. Despite many difficulties the serious changes in social and professional characteristics of its audience and widening of the readers' interests.

Outstanding avatars of the intelligentsia were also coming mainly from the working class or peasantry. Outstanding professionals from the intelligentsia were also coming mainly especially by the end of the 1920s. New representatives of the intelligentsia were coming mainly from the working class. By the end of the 1920s metal workers and textile workers prevailed among the readers of the Library who belonged to the working class.

A composition of studentship has also changed a lot, most of them came there for self-education. Social characteristics of its audience and widening of the readers' interests.

Changes in the work of the Library were caused by the serious changes in social and professional characteristics of its audience and widening of the readers' interests. There were arrested for thirst for knowledge.

Whereas before the Soviet period there were almost no workers among the readers, by the middle of the 1920s dozens and hundreds of working class men were coming to the Library. In 1927 821 workers were registered in the NLR, in 1928 – 1592. In 1929 it was interrupted by war of 1941-1945. Later a different solution for this problem has been found.
...and exploitation of hospitals, garages, asylums, defensive constructions, arrangement, equipment often needed: books about urban combat, building materials on issues of the defense of the city were lecturers and the radio and cinema specialists.

The readers). Library was also popular among the increased drastically (in 1942 they were the 40% of specialists, doctors, and nurses among the readers...)

People of different occupations turned to the Library: engineers, technical specialists and workers, more than 25 factories with foreign technical literature Library “provided engineers and workers from...”

Thus, a branch office “Library of Local Economies” was formed, with an audience of policy planners, economists, diploma students. Another branch of the Pioneers, was very popular among the 6 to 10-year-old school pupils. An office branch “World Literature Library” provided engineers and workers from...
warehouses etc. Participants of the partisan movement also were the readers of the Library. For example, in 1942 the commanding officer of one of the partisan units used the illustrative material about Pskov, needed for the combat mission.

Medical workers were interested in literature on fighting against hunger, wild edible plants, and calorific capacity of glucose. In the spring of 1942, when the parks and squares of Leningrad started to turn into vegetable gardens, demand for literature on gardening and growing mushrooms increased.

18 Heroic work of the Library’s staff on saving the unique treasures and serving the readers made it into the history of USSR’s fight against fascism.

After the war the USSR started to repair the damage that Germany caused to its economy; enterprises, academic institutions and higher education institutions that had been evacuated inland came back to Leningrad. By the end of the war the main reading rooms were opened and their supplementary collections were put into order. In 1946 the amount of readers and the circulation increased one-and-a-half times comparing to 1945, and the amount of visits was almost twice as many. In 1948 the amount of readers reached the pre-war level – 74 thousand people. In 1950 Children-and-Youth Hall was organized for the schoolchildren from 13 to 17 years of age. A good supplementary collection and experienced librarians offered their help in the search of the literature and working with it.

In the following years a steady growth of all performance indicators has been registered in the NLR. It was during the post-war period when the tendency of prevalence of readers with higher education occurred. This tendency existed until the 1990s.

Next table demonstrates the correlation between the main groups of readers and the dynamic of their growth in 1950 – 1962:

| Categories of readers | 1950 | 1955 | 1960 | 1962 |
|-----------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Students and pupils | 45.2% | 62.0% | 46.2% | 51.6% |
| Specialists with higher education | 22.1% | 30.4% | 31.7% | 35.5% |
| Workers and employees without higher education | 5.5% | 7.6% | 11.6% | 12.9% |

18 Ibid, 297
19 Ibid, 318
Also, before the 1990 the majority of specialists with higher education among the readers were engineers and technicians working for research centres, technical institutions, manufacturing enterprises. For instance, from 171,251 readers with higher education who registered in the Library in 1985 – 1990 about 70% represented such fields as industry, transport, communications, construction, design and scientific organizations.

The dissolution of the USSR led to closing of many factories and plants, design and scientific organizations, increase in the number of students – that was in turn caused by increase in the number of education institutions including non-state ones. This table demonstrates this tendency:

| Year       | Percentage of Readers with Higher Education |
|------------|--------------------------------------------|
| 1985-1990  | 59.9%                                      |
| 1991-1995  | 47.2%                                      |

In 1995-2000 this tendency continued to develop. Also, a slight increase in the amount of readers with higher education took place, generally because of the engineers, who studied for other specialties, such as accountant or economist. The readers who needed literature on humanities prevailed among the students.

Of course, in XXI century the work conditions improved: automated working stations were available, as well as digital library and catalogue, virtual enquiry service and databases etc. Nevertheless, the demand for hard copies of books is still rather high.

Talking about the readers of the NLR in XXI century, the majority of them were students and postgraduates. Among the reasons are not convenient working hours of university libraries and lack of needed literature there, and also the need to check graduation qualification works using the system “Antiplagiat” and to work with the original sources.

For example, in 2016 the NLR registered 29,7 new library cards (a library card is valid for 5 years), from which 29% have been issued to people with higher education, 68% - students and people with secondary education.
higher education, 68% - to students and people with secondary education, 3% to school pupils younger than 17 years old. Nowadays the majority of readers of the NLR work with materials on humanitarian studies. The highest demand is for literature on philology, history, economics, culture studies, law studies, medicine etc. and only 20% of the inquiries are for technical literature.

This is what the audience of the NLR used to be and is today, and that is how the Library has actively been supporting the development of science, culture and education in Russia throughout its existence.

Bibliography

- Efimova N.A. 1958. “Chitateli Publichnoj biblioteki v Peterburge i organizaciya ih obsluživaniya v 1814-1917 gg.” in Trudy Gosudarstvennoj publichnoj biblioteki im. M.E. Saltykova-Shchedrina. Vol.6(9). (Leningrad, 1958)
- Grin C.I., Tret’jak A.M. 1998. Publichnaja biblioteka glazami sovremennikov (1795-1917). (Saint Petersburg, 1998)
- Istorija Gosudarstvennoj Publichnoj biblioteki im. M.E. Saltykova-Shchedrina. 1963. Leningrad. (Lenizdat, 1963)
- Rossijskaja nacional'naja biblioteka. 1918-1995 gg. 2002. (Saint Petersburg, 2002)
- Rossijskaja nacional'naja biblioteka. 1996-2000 gg. 2003. (Saint Petersburg, 2003)
- Rossijskaja nacional'naja biblioteka v 2016 g. Publichnyj otchet. 2017. (Saint Petersburg, 2017)