Introduction

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The Great October Revolution of 1917 brought about the establishment of the Soviet Union, the world's first self-proclaimed socialist state. It was led by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, who based his political philosophy on the writings of Karl Marx. The intent of Marxism-Leninism was the development of a state where the working class (a union between workers and peasants in natural conflict with the bourgeoisie) was to be governed by a revolutionary party through the process of democratic centralism. Marxism-Leninism promoted the "dictatorship of the proletariat" and perceived political pluralism as an ineffective and dysfunctional element within society (Adams, 1993). Marxist-Leninist policy supported the abolition of private property and an education that taught citizens to abide by a disciplined and self-fulfilling lifestyle dictated by the social norms of a socialist regime; by these means, a new social order would be established (Pons & Service, 2012). This brave new world assumed workers' communal ownership and control of the means of production and their democratic participation at every level of economic and state administration, while major planning decisions were to be delegated to elected officials and administrators (Clegg & Cooper, 2008). In reality, democratic structures were soon swept away, to be replaced under Stalin by a virulent totalitarianism.

The end of World War II saw the emergence of the Soviet Union as a superpower with strong influence in Central and Eastern Europe (C&EE) and parts of Asia. Governments modeled on Soviet communism took power with Soviet assistance in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Albania, and Yugoslavia. Because communism viewed Western democracies and their capitalist economies as a threat, East–West rivalry peaked during the cold war as the world's two remaining superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, polarized

most of the world into two camps. This was characterized in the West as the *Free World* versus the *World Behind the Iron Curtain* (Jakubowicz & Miklós, 2008). Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest, Sofia, and Tirana—all of these famous cities found themselves sucked into the Soviet sphere and became subject, in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence, but also to a very large measure of control from Moscow. The term *Iron Curtain* came to represent the political, military, and ideological barrier erected by the Soviet Union to seal itself and its dependent C&EE allies off from open contact with the West. The construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 amplified the rigid East–West divide, a physical border that reinforced the ideological conflict between capitalism and communism. The Iron Curtain largely ceased to exist in 1989–1990 with the communists' abandonment of the one-party rule in C&EE (Iron Curtain, n.d.). The fall of the Berlin Wall and the social revolts that ensued throughout the Eastern bloc signaled the end of the Iron Curtain, as communism collapsed from within and freedom and democracy came to the region (Pryce-Jones, 1995). The dissolution of the USSR in 1991 freed up the former Soviet republics, many of which declared their full independence from the Soviet government.

The postcommunist era saw the unification of East and West Germany, the dismemberment of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, and the splitting (into two) of Czechoslovakia. Many of the Eastern bloc countries are now members of the European Union. The new geo-political configuration of the post-Soviet space has affected the library scene as well. The new independent states had to reconfigure their library systems, which were previously under a centralized, government-controlled system (Wołosz, 1991). New national libraries claimed their roots from prominent libraries that were well-anchored in the past and have designed development strategies for the new era (Lehmann, 1994).

Libraries as Casualties of War

In a few instances, libraries became visible players during the fight for regime change. In December 1989, during the anticommunist popular uprising that ended the Ceauşescu regime in Romania, the Central University Library in Bucharest was engulfed in flames that destroyed some 500,000 books, many of them rare and valuable, and 3,700 irreplaceable manuscripts (fig. 1). With UNESCO financial assistance and local resources, the library was restored and a new wing added to the historic building (figs. 2–3). War has also been the source of significant destruction to libraries and archives in the former Yugoslavia since 1991. In 1992, as a result of war violence, many Croatian libraries suffered damage to buildings and collections (Aparac-Gazivoda & Katalenac, 1993).

The cultural heritage of Bosnia and Herzegovina suffered major destruction (van der Hoeven & van Albada, 1996). The country's National and

Figure 1. Central University Library, Bucharest, December 1989. Courtesy of the Carol I Central University Library, Bucharest.

Figure 2. Reconstruction of the Central University Library Bucharest, 1990–2007. Courtesy of the Carol I Central University Library, Bucharest.

Figure 3. Reconstruction of the Central University Library Bucharest, 1990–2007. Courtesy of the Carol I Central University Library, Bucharest.

University Library (NUL), a Moorish-revival-style building built in 1890 on the Sarajevo riverfront, was shelled and burned down. Before the fire, the library harbored 1.5 million volumes, including over 155,000 rare books and manuscripts and the country's national archives (Riedlmayer, 1995, 2007). Ninety percent of the collection was destroyed as a result of the civil war, with the loss of unique material for the study of Bosnian culture (van der Hoeven & van Albada, 1996). Twenty years later, the building is still under restoration, and the library has a temporary home on the University of Sarajevo campus.

In a public address in September 2012, the national librarian of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ismet Ovčina, specifically pointed to the precarious financial situation of the NUL, which, along with the other six institutions of cultural and national significance (including the National Museum and the National Gallery), remains in an unresolved legal status and therefore receives no regular funding from the government (Ovčina, 2012). The director of the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Adnan Busuladžić, states that the NUL experienced two "culturocides": the first in 1992, with its destruction; the second, twenty years later when lack of funding reduced the institution to virtual "nonexistence" (McRobie, 2012).

While this two-part special issue of *Library Trends* was taking shape, the Ukrainian conflict broke out, and only the future will tell what its outcome will be. In an environment of violence, uncertainty, and instability throughout the country, libraries have become part of the conflict. Several libraries are providing internet access to help Ukrainians across the country to keep in touch with relatives and friends escaping from the conflict zone. In addition, they are providing new services for internally displaced persons who have fled the armed conflict, as well as for injured soldiers who are being treated in hospitals. Moreover, libraries in Ukraine continue to play a critical role in bridging the communication gap between citizens and local governments to address community needs (Tangirala, 2014).

The Communist Legacy

During the communist period, power was consolidated partly through ideological campaigns in books, newspapers, radio, cinema, and, later on, television. The heavily controlled publishing industry served as a propaganda tool that supported the dissemination of Marxist-Leninist literature. Libraries of all kinds, many with a long heritage, harbored enormous collections used for mass indoctrination. There was no factory and no institution without a "red corner" library or a trade-union library that consisted of the essential readings of any proud citizen of a communist state. In order to implement and maintain the supremacy of the communist ideology, precommunist values were demoted in Russia and, later on, in C&EE. Libraries became efficient agencies that assisted communist governments in promoting their values. Communist dogmas translated into banning library items that did not meet the ideological norms of the socialist state. Books and periodicals published prior to the advent of communism were considered ideologically harmful and placed in special repositories with restricted access (Anghelescu, 2001; Sroka, 2000).

Most of the countries in the Eastern bloc had been monarchies. Their royal families were forced into exile and all writings related to their name and history were automatically removed from collections. After the communist takeover, reading the story of the Russian czars and their past was no longer deemed acceptable. The new literature promoted socialist values and egalitarian principles, and everything "noble," "bourgeois," or "royal" was considered to contravene proletarian beliefs. Another type of literature considered offensive, and therefore a good candidate for removal from library collections, was all of the anticommunist texts published in the West. Printed materials in this category, which had been subject to drastic ideological scrutiny conducted by departments specializing in censorship, were classed as "special" collections and closely monitored by zealous ideologues, who kept lists of names of those requesting access to such literature. Those authors who managed to defect to the West were instantly placed on lists of banned authors, and their works became un-

available to the public. An indication that history repeats itself is that, after the collapse of communism in C&EE, the collections previously banned by communists were opened for research and scholars gained unrestricted access to items that had been out of sight for half a century. If library collections were rigorously purged during the communist regime, the postcommunist period witnessed massive removal of communist literature from library holdings.

The communist isolation kept libraries away from the international circuit of information. Only major libraries had budgets in hard currency to purchase foreign books and periodicals. For many libraries, international exchanges of publications were the only source of foreign-language collection growth. Prior to reaching the stacks, foreign shipments were scrutinized from an ideological standpoint, and only those items that passed the censors' sharp inspection became available to the public. Banned books were sent to special repositories, which remained out of reach of the general public.

Libraries in the Eastern bloc were mostly centered on preserving their collections rather than on providing access to their holdings. Closed stacks and reading rooms were the norm. Even today, if some libraries have adopted the open-access model (those that have are mostly public libraries), many libraries continue to remain anchored in the past and favor call slips and reading-room custodians. Truly customer-oriented library services are yet to arrive in many libraries. Library services targeting specific populations, like seniors, young adults, or people with disabilities, are rare. Most public library users are school children, who come in to borrow books that are part of a bibliography of required readings.

Librarians' training, wherever available at the undergraduate level, was extremely traditional, mainly consisting of courses focused on library history, cataloging, classification, indexing, and bibliography. Even today, many library schools continue to offer similar courses. Information literacy, community outreach, database searching, or information-seeking behavior are still far from making their way into library school curricula (on the history of librarianship in Eastern Europe during this and earlier and later periods, see Peter Hoare [forthcoming]).

Heavily centralized library systems mirrored the communist societal organization, with national libraries at the top of the pyramid and regional libraries directly subordinate. Financially, libraries were under the jurisdiction of various ministries that acted as their direct overseeing bodies in all matters. Postcommunist decentralization placed many libraries under local territorial authorities, which became their main funding source.

OVERCOMING POSTCOMMUNIST CHALLENGES

Most libraries found themselves with dated collections, kept on their shelves only to make statistical reports look good. In many countries,

historic library legislation had to be updated in order to allow weeding. The physical removal of dated literature and ideologically focused material, which had previously been acquired through government-controlled collection-development policies, left libraries with a clearer understanding of their holdings and the gaps in their collections. In Lehmann's (1994) view, in the early 1990s, libraries, confronted with the communist legacy, were facing new challenges, "political censorship was replaced with economic censorship." Skyrocketing inflation during the postcommunist period prevented libraries from developing coherent collection-development policies. The formerly government-controlled publishing industry launched books and periodicals that libraries could not afford to purchase. Not all publishers complied with legal-deposit regulations, and many libraries designated as beneficiaries of legal-deposit rights missed items published immediately after the demise of communism.

It took time to revise pieces of legislation that targeted the publishing industry and the library field. During the past twenty-five years, all countries in the region have adopted new library legislation, copyright legislation, and many other acts that enable them to conduct business. A project developed by the Council of Europe, mainly addressed to the so-called new democracies of the former communist states in C&EE, targeted libraries and the book industry. As these countries were in the process of joining the council, they needed to reform their book and library regulations. The initiative culminated in the Council of Europe–EBLIDA Guidelines on library legislations, issued by the Council of Cultural Cooperation in 2000 (Vitiello, 2014).

In terms of buildings, many libraries continue to be situated in old edifices, unsuited for library operations. There have been renovation projects more or less successfully completed. The open-stack concept continues to intrigue many librarians, although architects are eager to experiment with new configurations of library spaces. However, there have been new library buildings erected during the postcommunist period. Every country in the region can boast of at least a handful of new library locales. The National Library of Belarus in Minsk, the National Library of Latvia in Tallin, the National Library of Romania in Bucharest, and the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg are a few examples of modern spaces recently opened to the public.

Access to databases with international coverage is still limited due to the prohibitive fees that Western vendors charge for access. When access was granted on a trial basis, librarians were not adequately trained to conduct searches and, in their turn, they hesitated to recommend the product to researchers, therefore usage remained very low. Creating databases with local content is at an incipient stage, mainly due to the lack of funding. Joining forces and fee sharing in consortia are very timid, mostly because of a variety of funding agencies that oversee libraries. Disparate attempts

to constitute small library consortia have experienced various degrees of success. As more librarians participate in professional East–West exchanges and attend international conferences, they will be able to bring back to their countries the know-how that will pave the way for the modernization of library services in their respective home countries. Micro-level change does not require extensive funding; however, macro-level change necessitates sustained involvement and financial commitment from overseeing bodies and funding agencies, which need to have a clear perception of the role of libraries in the information age.

Automation of Library Operations

The past twenty-five years have witnessed significant efforts in adopting new technologies to various library operations. Most major libraries made visible strides to ensure the transition from the card catalog to OPACs (online public-access catalogs). If, in many instances, this operation has been accomplished successfully, there are a number of national libraries that are still struggling to have bibliographic records for their entire collection available in their electronic catalog, which remains accessible only in situ. Certain libraries benefited from generous financial support from grant agencies in developed countries under various programs. Smaller libraries with scarce funding are still far from achieving this desideratum.

For many countries, having a national, shared catalog continues to be a dream, as does the adoption of integrated library systems both at the intra- and the interinstitutional levels. In every country, there are discrepancies in terms of final outcomes within the same types of libraries. Libraries of similar size have attained different levels of performances. Some of the reasons for this are the different levels of budgets from funding agencies, various degrees of professional expertise, engagement, and commitment, and low user expectations. OCLC membership is scarce, with a number of countries not being involved at any level. Joining forces for the common good across library types has proven more difficult than expected, and often local or institutional pride has prevailed to the detriment of the general, anonymous accomplishment. Teamwork and partnerships with equally shared results are still to be learned in this part of the world.

Digitization

Some countries have better digitization strategies than others. If a number of countries are significantly and systematically involved in minutely drafted national digitization programs, others act in an ad hoc manner, with no strategy at the national level. National pride and the desire to showcase the national cultural heritage made every country digitize the oldest documents produced within their territory. Finding these documents is not an easy task for those interested. Since these old and rare items are part of various special collections, their electronic versions are

available from that particular library website and are not part of a database at the national level. The European Library Project, the Europeana, has provided the common conduit for depositing local national treasures to be shared worldwide. However, country-level contributions have been uneven, and they do not illustrate consistent strategies and standards in selecting the digital objects made available through this portal.

Local and regional cooperation among libraries, archives, and museums is almost nonexistent. One explanation might be that these agencies are under different jurisdictions, with different funding sources. In most countries, library-science and archival-science education do not intersect, and librarians and archivists do not perceive themselves as vested with similar responsibilities stemming from their attributes as information providers. Archivists perceive themselves more as independent scholars and researchers, rather than providers of information.

The European Union would be the appropriate mechanism to support East–West programs to foster know-how transfer; support midlevel library-staff exchanges, training, and education programs; push for open access to specialized literature; and level the digital divide between the haves and haves-not. The East–West dialogue regarding libraries would be best structured through various offices of the Council of Europe. A European library policy dedicated to the improvement of the exchange between East and West could best be carried out through the European Union, through programs designated to establish the framework for new cooperation patterns.

AMERICAN LIBRARIES VERSUS AMERICAN CORNERS

Established in 1953, the United States Information Agency (USIA) was in charge of US libraries overseas. Within the communist zone, their purpose was to fight the cold war and support an aggressive anticommunist campaign to "defeat" Soviet imperialism. The end of the cold war led to substantial changes in the USIA mission and its programs. Library services for "telling America's story abroad" were replaced by collections that reflected newly emerging democratic processes. In 1999, the USIA was abolished by the Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act. US libraries were dismantled and evolved into information resource centers focused on electronic resources. In 1993–1994, the US embassy in Moscow set up a network of public-access libraries across Russia, including five American Centers, with large reference and circulating collections, and twelve American Corners.

With the success of the American Corners, the State Department opened more of them throughout the former Eastern bloc countries. American Corners are sponsored jointly by a US embassy and a host-country organization; they serve as an information outpost similar to a public library reference service. The multimedia, book, and periodical

collections of American Corners are open and accessible to self-selecting audiences that are not usually reached through targeted public diplomacy outreach. Such collections can also be developed to attract a young adult readership. Where possible, reading or meeting rooms are made available to host program events and activities. While an individual corner reflects local circumstances, all share a fundamental function: they are programming platforms that make information about the United States available to foreign publics at large (Borys & Manning, 2014).

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Global Libraries Program

One of the pillars of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's (BMGF) strategy was its Global Libraries program. Seven C&EE countries have benefited from generous multiyear grants that supported technology access in public libraries, as well as library staff and patron training in using new technologies, in an age where economic, educational, health, and social opportunities increasingly depend on the internet. Lithuania, Latvia, Romania, Ukraine, Poland, Bulgaria, and Moldova have developed national programs that have enabled library associations, libraries, and librarians to become better advocates for what they stand for within the context of their emerging democracies. The goal of the program was to help libraries build public support for long-term funding at a time when the global crisis had a negative impact on many public libraries in the region. The BMGF grants enabled the reopening of many public libraries that had closed and others that were about to close because of severe budget cuts during the recession. The funding has helped reduce the digital divide between the developed and the developing countries on the European continent. The Republic of Moldova is the latest country to benefit from the BMGF's financial aid to develop a sustainable network of modern public libraries, with librarians trained in providing a diverse range of modern services.

In most countries, the BMGF grants were administered by IREX (International Research and Exchanges Board), a Washington-based nonprofit organization specializing in education, independent media, internet development, and civil-society programs. The BMGF funding amounted to $30,000,094 for Poland, $28,852,233 for Romania, $25,917,606 for Ukraine, $20,242,121 for Latvia, $15,430,396 for Lithuania, $13,421,109 for Bulgaria, and $10,928,437 for Moldova. These figures represent both the minigrants for the pilot phase and the multiyear funding. In support of the program, the Microsoft Corporation, a partner of the BMGF's Global Libraries initiative, donated significant amounts in software to support shared access to computing in public libraries and sponsor e-skills training for librarians. The future will tell how decision makers in the respective countries will ensure the sustainability of their public library

system in order to reach the Global Libraries program's goal "to support the transformation of libraries as engines of development . . . foster innovation in libraries . . . [and] advocate for policy changes that benefit public libraries" (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, n.d.).

In 2012, the BMGF funded a study of seventeen European Union countries to measure users' perceptions of the benefits of information technology in public libraries. It found that nearly one-in-four adults had used a public library during the twelve-month period before they were surveyed, and that those countries with the highest levels of per capita spending on libraries have the highest levels of usage. The study ranks Finland and Denmark at the top, with 67 percent and 57 percent public library usage, respectively, while Southern and Eastern Europe occupy the lowest levels: Romania (16 percent), Bulgaria and Portugal (12 percent), and Greece (9 percent). Belief in the importance of libraries' provision of free computers and internet access was high among both users of computers with public access and library users in general. About seven-in-ten library users felt that "free access to computers" and "free access to the internet" in libraries were either very or extremely important. Although nearly three-in-ten respondents felt unable to express a view (presumably because they were unfamiliar with their local libraries), the majority of the others felt that their library was at least "fairly effective" in meeting community needs. Forty percent of the public felt that public libraries merited more financial support than they currently had (Quick, Prior, Toombs, Taylor, & Currenti, 2013). It is to be noted that the availability of computers with public access made possible through the Global Libraries program has helped the countries of the former Eastern bloc to score better. One can only hope that the long-term impact of the program, once the BMGF funding runs out, will continue to have an ascending trend. All will depend, of course, on these countries' policymakers including libraries high enough on their governing agendas.

Library Statistics

Gathering consistent information about libraries in C&EE is a difficult process. If, in the past, official statistics had to be gathered from printed publications, today more and more countries make their statistical data available as subscription databases, which renders a comprehensive comparative analysis nearly impossible. In the last decade of the twentieth century, the European Commission and the Council of Europe invested in cross-national projects aimed at collecting data regarding library activities and operations.

Two library economy (LibEcon) projects were funded for data encompassing the periods 1985–1990 and 1991–1995. The purpose of the LibEcon study was "to reveal the scope, scale and dispersion of libraries and relate these to the resources they consume, so their value can be better under-

stood"; it was "hoped that the data would inform continuing policy review. In the meantime, the study provided a snapshot of the state of European libraries at the start of a new millennium" (Sumsion, Ramsdale, & Fuegi, 2000). After that, however, the project was discontinued, and the data are no longer accessible. The LibEcon (Millennium) study published in 2000 represented a significant attempt to standardize and compare library statistics among twenty-nine European countries.

The Eurostat website provides access to a multitude of statistical data. The cultural sector, however, seems to have been neglected by the European Commission. Unfortunately, under the "Cultural Statistics" section, one reads that

> culture has been an utmost important aspect of human development for centuries, be it as an economic activity or as a potential for developing well-being and social cohesion. European cultural statistics presenting data on enterprises in cultural sectors, employment in cultural sectors and occupations, external trade in cultural goods, cultural participation and other cultural statistics will be made available on Eurostat's website as from 2015 onward (European Commission, Eurostat, n.d.).

In 2013, in an attempt to collect data on libraries in the countries of the European Union, the European Bureau of Library, Information, and Documentation Associations (EBLIDA) invited library associations to participate in a multicountry survey covering thirty-six European nations. Only twenty-three countries responded, nine of which belonged to the former Eastern bloc (EBLIDA, 2013).

Based on disparate articles and library literature, some in the vernacular languages, and data available on various websites, one can generalize that the demise of the communist regime in C&EE and Russia found a significant existing amount of libraries in terms of numbers and collections. Country-level statistical data for the postcommunist period indicate a considerable decline both in the number of libraries and in their holdings. Many so-called red-corner libraries—that is, libraries with Marxist literature—as well as trade-union libraries, artificially maintained during the Soviet era, were closed, and library collections were purged of items that had been emblematic of Marxist-Leninist ideology and therefore no longer "morally fit" to operate in the new era.

Whenever available, statistics of library usage maintained during the Soviet period need to be examined with caution. Since one of the features of communism was to report success stories and ever-ascending curves in any field, library-usage statistics were doctored to fit this general expectation. Numbers reported at national levels are to be interpreted prudently. Postcommunist library statistics, which are more realistic, indicate declining trends in acquisitions and library usage. Collection-development funding has been affected by postcommunist inflation and the global recession in recent years. Reduced library budgets and rising book prices led to

stagnant numbers in library holdings for years. Library usage, already low during the communist period, remained low due to the image of the public library, which was generally perceived as a mass-indoctrination institution, and also due to increasing competition from leisure media like uncensored cinema, television, and theater and live musical performances. Timid efforts in advocacy for libraries and community outreach are yet to yield tangible results.

The shift to digital collections has been slow. Most library statistics retained a traditional format, reporting only on print collections, physical users, and in-person transactions. Including electronic collections, virtual users, and virtual transactions in statistical-data reporting has not been embraced in C&EE, despite IFLA's efforts to standardize library statistics, analyses, and evaluation. As the e-publishing industry evolves, libraries will become engaged in adding e-books and online journals to their collections, thus generating e-lending traffic. From this standpoint, there continues to be a significant East–West gap, which only the future will attenuate.

Conclusion

Communism, as an ideological and political force and the enormous role it played in world history from the Russian Revolution through the collapse of the Soviet Union and beyond, remains a thing of the past in C&EE. As the ongoing legacies of the cold war fade in C&EE and Russia, there is hope for increasing social and civic confidence through library usage. Libraries have transitioned from indoctrination agencies to information centers; highly centralized management schemes have been replaced by more participatory managerial styles. Libraries have also been shifting their role from repositories of cultural values and custodians of national heritage treasures to information centers open to all. Adoption of new information and communication technologies has enabled C&EE and Russian libraries to maintain their presence on the internet and to begin sharing their digitized resources worldwide.

Political culture has been playing a significant role in the democratization process of the region. Free access to information has ensured the consolidation of new social values, civic attitudes, and educational trajectories. Much has changed in C&EE and Russia during the past quarter of a century: the multiparty systems and emerging political structures in the region are an expression of the consolidation of democracy in a post-communist setting (Berglund, Ekman, & Aarebrot, 2004). The transition to market economies will ultimately lead to progress and prosperity. As politicians, legislators, and decision makers perceive libraries as fundamental partners in the continuing education of their nations, libraries will continue to develop and assume new responsibilities and functions specific to the information age.

The development of an information infrastructure has created new conditions and prospects for libraries that are substantially different from the traditional library model. The implementation of new information and communication technologies in library operations, so widely spread in developed countries, is on its way to making significant changes that will affect the provision of library services and strategies in the former Eastern bloc. Librarians can truly be innovators and catalysts for positive change in their institutions and communities. The role of libraries in the promotion of the twenty-first-century knowledge-based society stems from the transformative role they have always played in the production, preservation, and dissemination of knowledge.

As more C&EE countries become part of the ongoing European integration process, one can only hope for better knowledge transfer to, and support from, countries with developed, modern library systems. Cooperation programs will reduce the gap and help libraries in C&EE catch up and be on a par with their counterparts in the West. Libraries are not static warehouses of published materials, but change-agents actively engaged in the educational, social, economic, and political life of the communities they serve.

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