
Prologue

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In August 2010, during the IFLA Annual Congress in Gothenburg, Sweden, Alistair Black, general editor of *Library Trends*, and I first discussed the idea of preparing a special issue of the journal to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain and the development of libraries in the region since then. I would like to thank Dr. Black for giving me the opportunity to serve as a guest editor for this two-part issue of *Library Trends*, for entrusting me with this responsibility, and for being so generous with the editorial space. Without his encouragement and guidance, this project would not have materialized.

Celebrating a quarter of a century since the collapse of communism in Eastern and Central Europe and Russia seemed a milestone worthy of being marked both by the countries that were the real players in changing history, through the anticommunist revolutions of 1989, and by the rest of the world who watched history being made. “Libraries in a Postcommunist World: A Quarter of a Century of Development in Central and Eastern Europe and Russia” allows authors from every country of the former Eastern bloc to share with the international library community not only the progress and achievements that libraries in the region have recorded, but also the challenges that library systems have faced over the past twenty-five years.

A project of such complexity was always going to be challenging: the featuring of twenty-two individual countries, none of which is English-speaking; finding the right contributor from each country; encouraging a respect for submission deadlines; ensuring that each article conformed to the required word count by necessarily dampening authors’ natural desire to discuss each and every aspect of librarianship in their respective countries. None of these has been an easy task. In order to accommodate all the countries of the region, it has been necessary to spread the articles

across two numbers of the journal. No selection criteria were used for placing countries in the first or second part of the collection. The principle that operated was mainly "first come, first included." At the time the first issue goes to press, articles are still coming in for review; obviously, they will be part of the second issue.

I have tried to have local authors write about library accomplishments and challenges in their respective country as they have the insider's perspective and access to local resources and literature in the vernacular language. One exception is Ukraine. As this special issue was taking shape, Ukraine was confronted with social unrest and my e-mail correspondence with local librarians was getting grimmer and grimmer. The first librarian I contacted with the invitation to contribute an article declined my invitation with these words: "Unfortunately, due to the situation in Ukraine I am not able to write this piece. Sorry! I am still hoping that our strive [*sic*] for free speech and against dictatorship in Ukraine will bring positive results." My second attempt to secure a local contributor was answered with: "Can you imagine that in your city the government kills not just democracy but its citizens? I cannot think about the article on libraries these days. Now we have a different country and libraries will be different. . . . Dictatorship or democracy? Free speech or censorship? Prisons for those who do not agree? Sorry, but no articles these days." And for good reason! Unfortunately, as this issue goes to press, Ukraine is already at war. The history of libraries in this part of the world is being written before our own eyes. Hopefully, Ukraine's libraries will not be among the war's casualties. The article covering Ukraine is authored by an American librarian who went on a study tour in Ukraine in 2011, when the country was still at peace.

The editing work and preparation for publication of these two volumes would not have been possible without the help of a group of volunteer students from the School of Library and Information Science at Wayne State University who polished the English translations of the articles received and checked the references. These students were coordinated by Thomas Edward Gerrish, who has a bachelor's degree in Slavic studies, and while working on this project has completed his master's in library and information science. I am deeply grateful for their minute editorial work that made the articles meet the journal's publishing standards and helped bring the work to completion. I am also grateful for the additional editing that was undertaken by Dr. Black and his colleagues in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at University of Illinois.

Additionally, my thanks go to colleagues worldwide who recommended local contributors for this issue: library science educators, library managers, library historians, and colleagues I have worked with on various IFLA committees who directed me to other colleagues. Besides single-country articles, each of the issues opens with an overview article that covers two

or more countries that have been part of the Global Libraries program, generously sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation through multiyear grants.

“Libraries in a Postcommunist World” is an unbiased examination of the library arena in countries engaged in ensuring free access to information in the wake of almost half a century of its tight control by repressive governments. Through genuine introspective accounts of modest beginnings and high hopes, the authors of the articles presented here have provided both *insightful* and *inciting* perspectives on the transition to modern library services in their countries.

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