Modernization of Libraries in a Postcommunist State: The Roles of the George Soros, Andrew W. Mellon, and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundations in the Development of Latvian Libraries

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the most important changes in the library system of Latvia in the late 1980s, when, as a result of a nonviolent struggle, Latvia regained full independence from the Soviet Union in 1990. Particular attention is paid to contributions by private foundations in the United States—the George Soros, Andrew W. Mellon, and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundations—to fulfill the main goal of library work: namely, helping to create a democratic society in which everyone has the opportunity to express their views and be able to freely access information. During the Soviet period, libraries were mainly agents of the dominant power; they were often forced to ignore the needs of Latvian society or even to work against them. The activities of libraries were strictly regulated and controlled. Latvian independence has allowed the libraries to end political censorship and strict control, and to independently determine their future directions and work methods. Political changes occurred so rapidly that the immediate normalization of professional work after fifty years of occupation was not possible. However, US private foundations supported strategically important areas of library work: automation and access to the internet, the creation of the State Unified Library Information System (SULIS), and the professional development of library staff. The US foundations, through requirements for the cofinancing of large-scale projects, also motivated state and municipalities in Latvia to increase their investment in libraries. The interest expressed in libraries by these foundations emphasized that Latvian libraries were vital. Consequently, targeted investments shortly after independence ensured the timely inclusion of the basic elements of the national library system—the National Library of Latvia and public, school,

and academic libraries—in the modern information environment, thus allowing them to fulfill the main task of all libraries: the provision of public access to information.

Latvian Libraries from the Late 1980s through the Early 1990s

At the end of World War II (1944–1945), Latvia, like Lithuania and Estonia, was once again incorporated into the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (USSR). For four decades, all aspects of social, cultural, and economic life were subjected to complete control by the USSR. Then, in 1985, when the comparatively young Mikhail Gorbachev (b. 1931) became premier of the USSR (General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union), he supported a policy of liberalization in all sectors—at least at the public level. Soviet libraries were part of the so-called ideological front; their main task was to spread communist propaganda and to support the policies of the government and other administrative authorities. Libraries also attempted to gather and present information resources to readers that would, in addition to ideology, have educational, scientific, or aesthetic value, but they had very few options. After the 1980s, due to inadequate printing capacity and publishing policies, the output of the publishing industry experienced a sharp decrease—from 2,546 books and brochures in 1980 to 1,976 in 1987. Approximately half of the books were in Latvian; fiction was less than 10 percent of the output and hence could only modestly satisfy the needs of readers.

Each year, Latvian research libraries received a limited amount of foreign currency, which was used for purchasing foreign literature, including works from capitalist states. The main library of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR) was the State Library (Latvijas PSR Viļa Lāča Valsts bibliotēka), which became the National Library of Latvia (Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka) in 1991. Foreign currency allowed for the purchasing of a small number of periodicals and books. Although this material was related to the pure and technical sciences, it also included works that contained representations of history that did not comply with communist ideology. However, as these works reflected the actual situation in the USSR, they had to be kept in a special collection (*specfonds, speciālās glabāšanas nodaļas*), which was, in effect, a library within a library, with its own carefully selected and politically vetted staff, stock registers, catalogs, and reading rooms. These special collections were closed to other library employees and were located in the three largest research libraries: the State Library; the Research Library of P. Stučka at the Latvian State University (Pētera Stučkas Latvijas Valsts Universitātes Zinātniskā bibliotēka, now the Library of the University of Latvia [Latvijas Universitātes bibliotēka, LUL]); and the Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences of the LSSR (LPSR Zinātņu akadēmijas Fundamentālā bibliotēka), which became the Latvian

Academy Library (Latvijas Akadēmiskā bibliotēka) in 1992, then incorporated into the University of Latvia in 2009 as the Academy Library of the University of Latvia (ALUL).

Almost all literature from the first period of the Republic of Latvia (1918–1940) was stored in these collections in a set number of copies. Even in research libraries, these materials were available to the public only on rare occasions. Publications by exiled Latvians, especially memoirs about the first period of the republic and the period of Nazi occupation (1941–1944), were regarded as counterrevolutionary; they could only be stored in a safe repository within the special collection of the ALUL. These works were available only to high-level researchers and political workers who had permission from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Latvia. The small collection of exile literature in the State Library, whose task it was to create and maintain the collection of *Letonica* (publications about Latvia and Latvians), was incorporated into the special collection of the LUL in 1973. The review of the special collections and return of "harmless" books to the general-access collections started only in 1987.

The leading research libraries in Latvia—National Library of Latvia; LUL; and the State Chamber of Books of the LSSR (Latvijas PSR Valsts grāmatu palāta, which was created during the Soviet occupation from the Bibliographic Division of the National Library, into which it was reincorporated in 1993)—received copies of legal deposit materials from the state, thus enabling the creation of a current national bibliography and preservation of publications during the Soviet period. The processing of data and organization of the collections were determined, however, by the USSR's standards (GOST) for cataloging and classification. In the beginning, GOST consisted of the ideologized Universal Decimal Classification (UDC) developed by Soviet bibliographer L. Tropovsky, but during the second half of the 1980s, Soviet standards switched to a new classification, the Library and Bibliographic Classification (Bibliotekārā un bibliogrāfiskā klasifikācija, BBK). This was a mono-ideological classification reflecting the view that Marxism-Leninism was the only true theory about the general rules of development of nature and society.

The Soviet period featured an extensive library network. In 1988, the public library system (called "mass libraries" during the Soviet occupation) included 1,064 libraries, financed by the Ministry of Culture (Kultūras ministrija, hereafter MC). Among them were also 111 separate children's libraries. Public libraries were part of a centralized system whereby the management and all key library processes—for example, the delivery of information resources, processing, cataloging, distribution, and so on—were concentrated in one library. Affiliate libraries were entrusted only with the function of providing services to readers and organizing select activities; their work was supervised by the central library.

Among the public libraries were 165 trade-union libraries, twelve *kol-khozs* libraries,[1] and eighty-four libraries of other departments. Trade union and *kolkhozs* libraries played only a marginal role in providing information, however, since they were basically reproducing the function of the public libraries under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture. Because these had fewer resources and provided less service than the other public libraries, it was inevitable that they would eventually be closed.

The situation with the research and special libraries was not as clear because they were responsible to different government departments. Most of them were available only to the staff of a particular institution, visitors having only limited access to their resources. The regular collection of key indicators of the work of research and special libraries commenced only after Latvia regained its independence in 1990. This function was undertaken by the NLL. During the first year of recording, data on 229 research and special libraries was collected, including ten academic libraries and 120 technical libraries.

During this period there were more than 840 libraries in general-education institutions, for a national total of almost 2,400 libraries employing approximately 5,500 individuals, most of them (2,235) in the MC public library system (*Latvijas bibliotēku darba rādītāji 1990*, 1991). By comparison, in 2012, there were fewer than 4,000 employees serving 1,755 libraries.

During the Soviet years, libraries were financed by one source: the state. Nevertheless, the welfare of each depended on the kind of library it was and its field(s) of specialty. The various fields were financed differently. A library's budget was sufficient to purchase Latvian publications and those from other republics of the Soviet Union but was inadequate for maintaining or improving its infrastructure. According to the MC, one-tenth (107) of the public libraries were in need of repair in 1989, and twenty-two were in dire condition. Only one-fifth had reading-rooms ("Latvijas bibliotēkas skaitļos," 1989, p. 2), and none had a specially designed and constructed building. A typical example of the condition of libraries was the National Library of Latvia. The design of a new building for it was begun several times during the Soviet period, but decisions on its construction and the allocation of appropriate financing were always postponed. In 1988, the library's situation was catastrophic: more than one-third of its collections (approximately 1.5 million volumes) was packed in bags or stacked in piles and not available to readers.

The limited possibilities of improving the collection, the constant necessity of providing propaganda in support of government decisions, and systematic control from above stifled adaptation to the needs and interests of local communities. One-fourth of the inhabitants of Latvia were registered with public libraries (24.9 percent in 1989), but most (34 percent) visited the library only one to five times a year (Kalinka, 1991, p. 8). The majority of rural youth (70 percent) did not use libraries at all (Mauliņa,

1990, p. 4). The only way in which a link could be maintained with the local community was the acquisition, organization, and popularizing of resources for local history. This was popular and supported both by the State Library and the Misiņš department of the LUL. Although it was impossible to avoid some distortion or falsification of general twentieth-century history while studying local history, no restrictions were imposed on the materials. Because the local history materials were not meant to be made widely available, they were not subject to official censorship.

Library specialists acquired their professional education either at Riga Professional School for Culture and Education Workers (Rīgas Kultūras un izglītības darbinieku tehnikums) or in the Faculty of Philology of the LUL. Educational programs were ideologically based, and no contacts were possible with libraries and professionals from the capitalist states. A close, informal cooperation, however, was established among the libraries of the three Baltic republics: Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia.

The Singing Revolution and the First Years of Independence

In light of the growing official openness and transparency, 1988–1989 saw the beginnings of the anticommunist revolution (also known as the Singing Revolution). The majority of the Latvian population sought the restoration of independence. Consequently, on May 4, 1990, the Supreme Council of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), which was elected to office in free, democratic elections for the first time in fifty years, adopted the Declaration on the Restoration of the Independence of the Republic of Latvia and established a transitional period to independence. On August 21, 1991, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia adopted the Constitutional Law, which declared the de facto independence of the republic, thus terminating the transitional period. The Latvian constitution (Latvijas Republikas Satversme), originally adopted on February 15, 1922, was restored; among its tenets were universal freedom of speech and the prohibition of censorship.

The forbidden exile literature had become freely available as early as 1988; the literature of the special fund of the National Library of Latvia became available during the second half of 1989; and the special funds of the ALUL and LUL became available in 1991. Even after the integration of the special collections into the generally available collections, literature not tainted by communist ideology and censorship were in short supply. To help rectify this situation, as early as 1988, exiled Latvians began to send books back home, including to the National Library, that had been published outside of the country (Sardiko, 1994, p. 93). Various foreign embassies and foundations also made generous donations.

In 1988, another important process began. Because of public pressure, the Council of Ministers of the Latvian SSR started exploring the possibility

of developing a new building project for the National Library. The design work was done by Latvian architect Gunnar Birkerts (b. 1925), who was living in the United States. On July 3, 1991, the council adopted the resolution to construct the building.

On December 16, 1992, the first library law was adopted in the restored republic, the Law on the National Library of Latvia (Likums Par Latvijas Nacionālo bibliotēku), which regulates the legal status, management, financial activity, and main functions of the National Library. A more general law, the Law on Libraries, was adopted in 1998 (Bibliotēku likums).

In the wake of the severe national economic crisis created by the transition from a planned economy to a free-market one, strategies for social changes were, at times, vague, and only the main goal was clear—the formation of a "normal," democratic, open society. In 1991, the government's decision to discontinue price controls caused a sharp increase in the prices of goods and services, thus igniting hyperinflation, which reached 262 percent that same year. In 1992 it skyrocketed to 958 percent. To stabilize the situation, in March 1992 the Latvian *rublis* was issued, to be later superseded by the present national currency, the *lats*, in June 1993. During the transition period, the volume of industrial manufacturing sharply decreased because industry had been subject to Soviet central planning without any consideration of actual demand. Gradually, Latvia's formerly close economic relations with other former Soviet republics were ended and inexpensive raw materials and energy resources were no longer available. Consequently, the unemployment rate increased in the country's former manufacturing centers; in late 1994, it hit 17 percent (Behmane et al., 1996, p. 197).

Recovery of the library system was further hindered by the lack of a national cultural policy. In September 1995, the government issued its first national culture-policy guidelines, "Latvijas Valsts kultūrpolitikas pamatnostādnes." Before that, however, in 1992, responsibility for the public libraries had been handed over to the municipalities, despite the fact that they had no viable financial means to maintain or develop them. The majority of public libraries were released from participation in the centralized system and became independent. The centralized model of operation was retained only in the country's largest cities (Riga, Liepāja, Daugavpils, Rēzekne, Jelgava, and Ventspils), where there is one main source of financing and the distance between libraries is small. The central management of libraries, which required strict compliance with the decisions of central administrative institutions and national standards, was discontinued and replaced by a consultative model in which libraries could seek advice and opportunities for professional development from the National Library and regional central libraries. In 2004, the MC introduced a system of library accreditation, which involved implementing various guidelines and recommendations for improvement.

During the 1990s, the situation of libraries was dire. There was an acute lack of financing in all fields. To improve their collections, they had to rely upon gifts from Latvians in exile and foreign foundations; it was impossible to purchase all necessary works published in Latvia. Moreover, because of the denationalization of buildings, many libraries had to be moved to other, frequently worse premises. Under these conditions, research libraries not only had to purchase new books and periodicals but also had to fill in the enormous gaps in their collections. This was especially true of the social sciences and humanities, which featured almost no works by Western authors of the twentieth century—no sociologists, economists, psychologists, philosophers, literary critics—and virtually no literature on business management, marketing, promotion, and other fields relative to the market economy (Sardiko, 1998, pp. 45–47). This situation of the majority of major libraries—eleven in total, including the National Library, the ALUL, the LUL, branch libraries, and regional research libraries—was alleviated in March 1991 by a decision to provide them with free copies of Latvian publications through *legal deposit* (Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia, "On the Procedure of Delivery of Free Legal Deposit of the Republic of Latvia" ["Par iespieddarbu obligāto bezmaksas eksemplāru nosūtīšanas kārtību Latvijas Republikā"]). In November 1997, a new law, the Polygraphic and Other Publication Free Legal Deposit Delivery Law (Poligrāfisko un citu izdevumu bezmaksas obligāto eksemplāru piegādes likums), established a wider scope of publications to be delivered, but the number of libraries remained unchanged. In 2006, this law was replaced by the much more restrictive Legal Deposit Law (Obligāto eksemplāru likums). There are plans to review the scope of this law in 2014 so that the types and formats of legal deposits correspond to the needs of the modern information environment. It is likely, however, that there will be fewer than the ten deposit libraries existing in 2013.

Because of the changing needs of society in the restored Latvian republic, libraries have had to reconsider previous work methods and manage the de-ideoligization of collections of the Soviet years by selecting and writing-off the overpolitized information resources, reclassifying collections according to the politically neutral and internationally accepted UDC system, and purchasing the latest Latvian and foreign literature. New approaches were also necessary in publicity, servicing users, and placement of the collections.

The Latvian Librarians Association (Latvijas Bibliotekāru biedrība, LLA) resumed its activity in 1989 after a lapse of nearly fifty years. It has played an important role in the democratization of the libraries and the organization of the community of librarians. It was founded in 1923, but closed in 1940 soon after the Soviet occupation. In 1989, the LLA defined its most urgent future tasks as drafting a new library law (it participated in drafting and improving the law until it was finally adopted by the Latvian

Parliament, the *Saeima*, in 1998); reintroducing the UDC; and reviving Latvian libraries' international relations. Latvian librarians in exile not only shared their experiences of work in their adopted countries but also helped to organize lectures by foreign specialists in Latvia. Moreover, they have actively participated, as mentioned above, in sending exile literature and the archives of private individuals and institutions back to the Latvian libraries. Inese Auziņa-Smith, a lecturer at Loughborough University in the UK, paid Latvia's participation fee in the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) for two years in a row. Because of this generosity, a delegation of eleven Latvian librarians were able to participate in the 56th IFLA General Conference in Stockholm in August 1990.

Because of the lack of funding at the national level during the first decade of Latvia's transition period, support to libraries by US foundations and other governments has been essential in allowing the libraries to focus on increasing their collections and improving their infrastructure, technical processes, and professional training. Support by these outside foundations has also been a factor in motivating the Latvian government to invest in the further development of the nation's libraries.

The Contribution of the George Soros Open Society Foundations

By 2000, the George Soros Foundation's Open Society Institute (OSI) in Budapest, which was established in 1993, had invested US$1.2 million in the Latvian library system. The projects were partly financed by the central Network Library Program (NLP) of the foundation and partly by the library subprogram of the local Soros Foundation–Latvia (SFL). The main goal was fostering an open society through the free availability of information, the encouragement of a diversity of opinions, and the integration of various social groups.[2]

Initially, the foundation implemented a reactive approach. Grants were awarded in response to acute, immediate library needs, such as funding for periodical subscriptions. Gradually, a proactive strategy was introduced, which involved establishing particular goals, such as support for establishing centers of continuing education; in other words, as time passed, emphasis was placed on achieving particular goals instead of funding the projects and activities of many separate individuals. At the end of the foundation's library program, projects with a high potential for sustainability continued to receive support, such as the EIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries).[3] The foundation initially supported the introduction of modern technologies, then moved toward the development of professional staff competencies. At the beginning of the 1990s, the Latvian academic libraries received most of the funding, but by 1996 public libraries also began to receive their share.

In the Baltic States, support from the Soros Foundation to Estonia and its libraries was lower than in Latvia and for a shorter period, but it was higher in Lithuania. The enhanced Lithuanian support can be explained by the fact that the NLP's coordinator, Rima Kuprytė, was from the country (and is currently the EIFL's director). The community of Lithuanian librarians was better informed and also more active in developing and implementing programs and projects than their counterparts in Latvia.

The Latvian libraries were fairly active, however. During the first years of the foundation's funding, the possibility of subscribing to periodicals for academic libraries was highly appreciated, as was the opportunity to participate in international library events like the IFLA and other conferences and to improve the libraries' technological infrastructure. Soros Foundation financing for automation in university libraries began during 1994–1995. The library of the Riga Graduate School of Law (Rīgas Juridiskās augstskolas bibliotēka) in particular received strong support.

The automation of Latvian public libraries began in 1996 when the Limbaži Central Library received the municipal and state financing necessary for purchasing the integrated library system (ILS) ALISE, which was developed in Latvia. Further automation of public libraries was also supported by the SFL, which allocated financing for automation to another fifteen public libraries in 1997 (Mūze, 1998, p. 7). These libraries may be considered the capstone of the State Unified Library Information System (Valsts vienotā bibliotēku informācijas sistēma, VVBIS) and, in particular, the "network of light" that electronically links all libraries in Latvia. These developments motivated other public and school libraries to look for new solutions toward modernizing their infrastructures and communication capabilities with readers.

As mentioned above, the SFL helped finance not only library automation but also personnel training and collections development. For example, in 1996, the Viļāni town library purchased ninety-two books with SFL financing; in comparison, MC funds (35 lats) enabled only twenty-three books to be purchased (Mālniece, 1996, p. 5). In December 1998, SFL financing also supported the creation of the Continuing Education Center for Librarians of Latvia by the National Library, the LUL, and ALISE. This center became controversial, however, and is currently inactive.

During the second half of the 1990s, the NLP was expanded and transformed. In order to provide free access to information outside of large cities, the SFL financed establishing internet connections at public libraries. From 1999 to 2002, with its support, internet-access points (Sabiedriskie interneta pieejas punkti, SIPP) were established in fifty municipal institutions, mainly public libraries.

The role of the SFL started to diminish in 1998 when the Culture Capital Foundation of Latvia (Valsts Kultūrkapitāla fonds) was established.

Through participation in the foundation, libraries could receive financing to improve their infrastructure, digitize separate resources and collections, and take part in various culture events. Furthermore, in 1998, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation began supporting the implementation of the Latvian library information network LATLIBNET, the early phase of what was to become the VVBIS.

In November 2000, it was decided to integrate the Soros Foundation's NLP with a new OSI information program. The SFL gradually terminated its support for libraries in 2010. Nevertheless, several of its activities continue to be linked with libraries' staff and infrastructure. In 2007–2008, the SFL financed the project School Libraries: Promoters of the Dialogue of Cultures, which aimed at strengthening the unification of civil society in Latvia by promoting cooperation among the libraries of schools that used different languages for instruction. In total, thirty-six school librarians from the Daugavpils, Liepāja, and Riga regions participated in the project, whose main activities were the development of the program Reading Strategies for Promoting Cultural Dialogue, creation of seminars for school librarians, preparation and dissemination of information and experience-sharing materials, and public-relations activities. Planned is the creation of a network of school libraries that will operate as local centers for promoting a dialogue of cultures, serve as a source of program experience, and offer a continuing education program available to all librarians of school and public libraries in Latvia. As part of the implementation of the project, the SFL supported programs such as The Open School, Reading and Writing for Developing Critical Thinking, and School as Multi-cultural Democratic Community.

From 2001, Latvian libraries, in cooperation with the EIFL and with financing by the OSI, have been receiving considerable support in their subscriptions to databases of foreign scientific publications. In 2013, the National Library, with the support of the EIFL, started a proactive project to develop best practices for initiating e-books in public libraries.

The effort to strengthen freedom of speech in Latvia with the assistance of libraries has not always gone smoothly. In 2010, the SFL terminated its financing for the program titled Latvia: 2010–2014, which had been organized by the Rural Library Support Association (Lauku bibliotēku atbalsta biedrība). The association, however, also had accepted financing for its activities from political parties, therefore compromising its neutrality.

The Contribution of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's library focus in Eastern Europe has been on providing support for higher education (such as the modernization of academic libraries and databases for academia) and establishing consortiums for library information networks (for example, the Kraków

Library Group, LATLIBNET and CASLIN, Czech and Slovak libraries). Projects were implemented according to a principle of proportional cofinancing when the foundation and the cofinancer agreed on a program; for example, software, computers, and the training of system librarians by the foundation, and remuneration, internet connections, and computers by the government. These were complex, large-scale projects. All decisions were made by the foundation's board of directors in New York.

In 1995, the foundation decided to support libraries in the Baltic States (Lass & Quandt, 2000, p. 265). Initially, the creation of a single consortium for Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian libraries was planned, but when these states organized their own working groups (the prototypes of consortiums) and submitted the first descriptions of their projects, it became clear that a single consortium would not be possible. The Lithuanian consortium (LIBNET) proposed the development of the local ILS LIBIS system and was not willing to consider other systems that would suit all participants; moreover, the costs of this system were high. Consequently, the foundation decided to provide support only to the consortiums of Estonia and Latvia (p. 266).

Latvia had started the Latvian Library Information Network (LATLIBNET) project before Mellon's involvement. The Mellon Foundation proposed the participation of the three main libraries: the National Library, ALUL, and LUL. At this point, the Law on Libraries was being prepared and eight libraries met its criteria for national status, all eight forming the basis of the consortium. There was a plan to introduce a united automatic system within three years that would ensure the processing, collection, dissemination, and exchange of information among these libraries. Also, remote access to library databases would be ensured. For this purpose, a nonprofit governmental organization, the Library Information Network Consortium (SIA Bibliotēku informācijas tīklu konsorcijs, BITK), was established by ministerial decree. For the consortium's implementation, the BITK received 1.2 million lats from the state investment program. The Mellon Foundation invested US$840,000 to purchase servers and software and to cover system maintenance costs for two years. In 2004, the MC, using the BITK as the basis, created the Culture Information Systems (Kultūras informācijas sistēmas, KIS [renamed the KIS Center in 2013]) agency. Initially, the BITK's decisions were made by a council of directors, but later, because of disagreements among the libraries, the consortium was independently administered. Consequently, at present, the Latvian consortium is managed differently than in most other countries.

Initially, the information network included the National Library, ALUL, LUL, Patent and Technology Library (Patentu tehniskā bibliotēka), Medical Research Library (Medicīnas zinātniskā bibliotēka), Scientific Library of the Riga Technical University (Rīgas Tehniskās Universitātes zinātniskā

bibliotēka), and Library of the Medical Academy of Latvia (Latvijas Medicīnas akadēmijas bibliotēka (now the Riga Stradiņš University Library [Rīgas Stradiņa universitātes bibliotēka]), as well as the Fundamental Library of the Latvia University of Agriculture (Latvijas Lauksaimniecības universitātes Fundamentālā bibliotēka). The goal of the consortium was to create a unified automated library information system throughout the country.

When choosing the system to be adopted for the consortium, seven libraries replaced the existing system (ALISE and VTLS) with ALEPH 500, in effect creating a genuine union catalog. The majority of the entries conform to accepted bibliographic standards. Information on authorship is established mainly by the National Library. One of the eight libraries, the LUL, retained the LIBER system that had been developed under the name LIBER Media in 1998. A national bibliography database used by all other libraries in Latvia is maintained, and in 2013, the joint catalog included twelve libraries. The Patent and Technology Library withdrew from the project, and the Medical Research Library has been incorporated into the Riga Stradiņš University Library.

The Contribution of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

The Global Libraries program of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) was first launched in libraries in the United States and Canada, later expanding to Chilean and Mexican libraries. Its Latvian project, Father's Third Son (Trešais tēva dēls, or 3TD), was the foundation's pilot project in Europe. In general, the project mirrored the goals of the VVBIS development strategy during the 2000s and addressed the most immediate problems. In 2000, the framework of the VVBIS encompassed the union catalog of academic and research libraries (so-called libraries of national importance), which had already been introduced with support from the Mellon Foundation; a separate union catalog for public libraries; and public internet-access points in all libraries. After the implementation of the 3TD project, all libraries not only acquired broadband internet access but also were linked together in a closed network (called the "network of light," or "Lightnet"), which enabled the sharing of licensed and copyrighted materials within the network.

Latvia's advantages were that the VVBIS had been implemented with a significant potential for cofinancing; complete coverage of the network of the public libraries within the country; and an established project-management structure (KIS). But its levels of computerization and internet access were inadequate. A survey conducted in June 2000, in which 875 out of 974 (90 percent) public libraries participated, revealed that only 234 computers were available to a total of 1,878 employees plus all readers in these libraries (*Valsts vienotā bibliotēku informācijas sistēma*, 2000, p. 13).

While the Mellon Foundation's focus was education and academic libraries, the Soros Foundation and the BMGF placed more emphasis on serving public library users. The objectives of the 3TD project were

- the installation of computers and software in all public libraries;
- the installation of special equipment for visually impaired users in specialized and main regional libraries;
- the improvement of internet access in all public libraries;
- the implementing of training programs for employees; and
- the dissemination of project results and project-impact assessments.

The BMGF expanded the range of its activities by introducing a client-training program. The fifteen projects for library automation financed by the Soros Foundation had provided for the establishment of cooperation and a networking model among several libraries. The BMGF set up training centers as a basis for a training system to be developed as part of the 3TD project. Unlike the SFL and the Mellon Foundation, the BMGF stressed the computer and internet literacy of users; it did not invest in the development of library information systems and computer hardware so much as focus on training to develop the requisite skills to serve clients.

In 2006, the MC received US$16.2 million from the Global Libraries initiative for expanding no-cost access to computers and the internet in public libraries and for providing the necessary training to librarians. In addition, the Microsoft Corporation donated another US$7 million for computer software. The BMGF's grant for the 3TD project was matched by funds from the Latvian government and municipalities, which invested US$21.1 million. In 2008, the BMGF allocated another US$2 million to Latvia to broaden access to the new technologies in libraries, continue the training of librarians, and support assessments of the project's impact. It should be noted how important these grants were, in that the population of Latvia was 2.29 million in 2006 and there were 870 public libraries. With the generous cofinancing by the state and municipalities, all public libraries in Latvia were covered by the 3TD project.

In several other countries where the BMGF library-modernization projects were implemented, they were carried out according to a similar plan. The introduction of modern information technologies, broadband internet, and free internet access for readers was followed by the establishment of a librarian-education network consisting of regional training centers, where professionals not only learned to use computers and the internet but also acquired basic knowledge in library management, library advocacy, and other subjects. In several countries, such as the Ukraine and Romania, special attention was paid to strengthening the sustainability of professional nongovernmental organizations, but this did not occur in Latvia.

A significant part of the BMGF financing was allocated to publicity for the 3TD project and assessments of its impact. To disseminate project results and provide other current library information, library portals were established in all countries. In Latvia, the project was promoted by a specially designed website, and for in-depth and professional library information, a second portal was created. After a change in 3TD administration, the initial 3TD website is no longer being updated; however, the library portal remains active and is awaiting modernization in 2014. It provides sections for librarians and library users to have discussions and ask questions, among other services. The portal features library profiles, which can also substitute for individual websites for very small libraries.

An important element for project publicity and impact assessment in Latvia was the success stories of library users. Numerous stories were told of how free access to library information, particularly the internet, has improved people›s lives. Since the implementation of the BMGF project, these anecdotes, along with librarians' stories about especially successful innovations, have become a part of the annual reports of the Latvian libraries, thereby showing the impact of libraries in more personal perspectives.

In total, 3,833 computers have been installed in public libraries in the country—three computers per library on average—including computers for visually impaired users. All libraries were provided with faster wireless internet access. In seventeen libraries, internet access was established for the first time, and access has continued to be free of charge to all library users. Training centers with mobile classrooms have been established in nine of the main regional libraries and the National Library. These centers provide training for both librarians and library users. According to project data, nearly 1,800 librarians have been trained in the use of computers, internet literacy, and other information skills necessary for serving all library users.

From September 10 to October 9, 2010, twelve librarians from different regions of Latvia participated in The Leaders and Innovators Training Program at the University of Illinois library, where they learned about US library practice—information about creative solutions that have been widely promoted in the mass media and in meetings after these librarians returned home. At the end of the program, three cooperative pilot projects were launched in Latvia—Bibliotēka nāk pie lietotāja (The library comes to the user); Photovoice stiprina ģimeni un aktivizē sabiedrību (Photovoice strengthens the family and activates the community); and 3i—ieraugi, iekadrē, ievieto! (3i—see, capture, share!), in which communication technologies are used in ways that are new to Latvian libraries. Each project received financing from the BMGF and the EIFL in the amount of US$10,000.

The 3TD project has stressed publicity and advocacy. Employees of public libraries have learned how to support the interests of their libraries

and the information needs of their communities. The training occurred during a time of economic recession in Latvia, so that the knowledge involved has contributed to the development and implementation of advocacy strategies both for individual libraries and for the library sector as a whole. Unfortunately, when compared with several other countries, the programs in Latvia did not provide the consistent training that could have helped to continue to effectively disseminate skills and knowledge among library professionals.

Seven consecutive library studies were conducted during the 2007–2013 period to assess the BMGF project's development and impact. For the first time in Latvia, the entire public library system was studied: the condition of infrastructure, the quality and popularity of basic library services, and the changes in public attitudes toward libraries after the introduction of the modernization program. The 2011 study covered the direct and indirect economic influence of Latvian public libraries. Such research, because it focused on the entire system, is rare, even throughout Europe ("Economic Value and Impact of Public Libraries in Latvia," 2012).

CONCLUSION

Initially, the needs and goals that motivated Latvian library partnerships with US foundations were quotidian at best; that is, the financing received in such partnerships was used for obtaining information resources like books and periodicals, databases, computers, copiers, furniture, and bookmobiles. Funding was also sought to support repair work on infrastructure and even construction, for the maintenance and restoration of cultural monuments, and to allow librarians to visit foreign libraries and to participate in conferences. The perspectives of the US foundations were much broader, however; their motivations for support were based on the desire to foster the free flow of information, provide maximum accessibility to information (including the artifacts of the country's cultural heritage), strengthen science and higher education, and advance cooperation among libraries.

The main benefits from the contributions of US foundations in the Latvian library system were that it wrought changes in the attitudes of various social groups and in state and municipal attitudes toward public libraries. Libraries were finally perceived as investment-worthy institutions and were able to prove that investments in them benefited the entire society. Large-scale private investments in the library sector have motivated state institutions to pay more attention to these accomplishments and to consider the development potential of libraries. Public libraries are regarded as the main internet-access points for the public, places where socially disadvantaged groups can not only acquire digital skills and improve information literacy but also access Latvia's native technological infrastructure freely and without cost. Readers in large cities and rural regions alike now

have wider opportunities for searching for information, including using international databases of scientific publications.

By developing, managing, and implementing projects in Latvian libraries, by learning from their experiences in foreign libraries, and by gaining new knowledge in various training courses, library personnel have increased their professional qualifications. This includes the acquisition of language skills, drafting grant proposals for projects, and the development of management skills. Also, the formal professional-education system has improved. The National Library's training center offers training starting at the third qualification level, and at the first level of higher education at the Latvian Culture College (Latvijas Kultūras koledža).[4] Since 1998, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees can be earned in library science at the University of Latvia. Regional training centers also offer many possibilities for professional development. The expanded educational system has already covered 80 percent of specialists in the field.

The ability of Latvian libraries to cooperate both on the national and international levels has also increased. After more than twenty years of independence, the country has succeeded in regulating libraries through legislation and standardized their work. The basic elements of the library system created by the US foundations' investments have been retained. Library data are being created, collected, and made available according to international standards. All libraries of national status in Latvia have become completely automated, and the public libraries are striving to achieve the same.

Of course, these developments have not been without problems. Management functions, which are divided among the three most important institutions (the MC, National Library, and KIS Center), have not been sufficiently balanced, for example. Libraries still lack the means for purchasing information resources and for the sufficient remuneration of staff. There is still no center for paper conservation and restoration, which was originally planned to be included in the new National Library building. One of the reasons for this lack of money was the economic crisis of 2009–2010, when library funding was cut by nearly 40 percent. State-financed libraries (the National Library, ALUL, and the libraries of educational institutions) suffered most. The budget of the National Library was reduced by 45 percent, and libraries of educational institutions were hit harder, some by as much as 54 percent (*Latvijas bibliotēku darba koprādītāji [2008–2011]*, 2012). During these years of crisis, however, the construction of the new National Library building was not delayed, the foundation being laid in 2008. Furthermore, the renovations of other library premises and improvements to infrastructure continued. The flexibility of libraries in adapting to the needs of various user-groups has helped in enhancing their prestige in Latvian society, to which the growing numbers of visitors attest. These numbers have forced politicians in both the

municipalities and national government to gradually restore library funding to its precrisis level. Public libraries recovered first; their budget for collections has now returned to it prior level. The salaries of library staff members are also increasing. In 2014, the newly built National Library opened its doors with an extensive program of cultural and educational events. Its completion has fostered the renovation of other libraries and the development and implementation of construction projects for new library buildings. Several important regional libraries have been renovated or moved to more suitable premises (the inadequate conditions of some of them having been recognized as far back as the Soviet period; for example, the Cēsis and the Limbaži central libraries).

When assessing the role of Western foundations in the development of the libraries in Eastern Europe, it has frequently been asked how their modernization would have proceeded without such support. Normally, it is thought that the libraries' modernization, in the form of automation and computerization, would have ensued anyway, although perhaps several years later. Nevertheless, in Latvia, these several years were crucial. Internet access in public libraries was ensured at a time when it was most needed. Later on, the implementation of such projects would gradually become less significant, given the fact that many households would have acquired computers and become connected to the internet at some point. Also, the foundations' funding for the acquisition of international scientific literature was of especial importance during the 1990s and early 2000s because back then there was less capacity for purchasing even comparatively inexpensive scientific publications by individual libraries. At the turn of the millennium, long queues of readers at the National Library were common.

The creation of the first electronic databases and union catalogs coincided with the development of competencies related to their use, thus ensuring further development and, subsequently, the digitization of Latvia's cultural heritage. Time, knowledge, and experience can only be acquired incrementally and are necessary preconditions for implementing mass digitization projects. Thanks to state support and the financing from the EU through the European Regional Development Fund programs and programs administered by the European Commission (eContent Plus, ICT-PSP, FP7), Latvian libraries, with the National Library of Latvia at the frontline, have become leaders in the digitization of cultural heritage and the creation of digital content and e-services. During 2010–2012, a study within the subproject National Identity in the Digital Environment (Nacionālā identitāte digitālā vidē) of the program National Identity (Nacionālā identitāte) identified digital collections in ninety-seven libraries. Among them, the most important and extensive collections have been created at the National Library, which has assumed the role of coordinating digitization processes at the national level.

NOTES

1. A *kolkhoz* was a form of collective farm in the Soviet Union.
2. According to the Open Society Foundations website, "the Open Society Foundations are a family of offices and foundations created by philanthropist George Soros. . . . [They] work to build vibrant and tolerant societies whose governments are accountable and open to the participation of all people." See http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/about.
3. The eIFL.net name was changed to EIFL in 2010 and stands for Electronic Information for Libraries. A new strapline was added in 2010: "Knowledge without boundaries," which, according to EIFL's website, "conveys both the end result of our mission—enabling access to knowledge—and our work across five programme areas to remove all boundaries to knowledge, whether economic, technical, or legal." See http://www.eifl.net/who-we-are.
4. The long story behind this passage is that the National Library's training center offers continuing professional education for library professionals without regard to prior education. Some courses are for beginners in the profession, others for experienced library specialists and managers. The third-level professional qualification is the one in the five-level system used in evaluating all stages and kinds of vocational education. The third level provides the competence to execute complicated tasks, and to do some basic planning and organizing. The highest (fifth) level qualifies an individual to conduct and organize research. Regarding the Latvian Culture College, colleges are not universities in Latvia. College education comes after high school, so it is a form of professional higher education, but it extends for only two to three years, and students do not receive a bachelor's degree when they graduate. This is called the first level of professional higher education, which has two levels in toto. A college education confers the fourth-level professional qualification. Graduation from a university or academy is required to obtain a degree and fifth-level qualification. Note that there are two kinds of "levels" in place here: the level of qualification, and the level of education. In college you are in the first level of higher education, but have obtained the fourth-level professional qualification.

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