



International Leads

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Libraries and Archives in Kosovo: A Postwar Report

By Andras Riedlmayer

In October 1999, two architects and I spent three weeks in Kosovo conducting a postwar survey of the state of cultural and religious heritage. Our Kosovo Cultural Heritage Survey, supported by a grant from the Packard Humanities Institute, was undertaken, in part, to assess wartime damage and to identify projects and institutions in need of assistance.

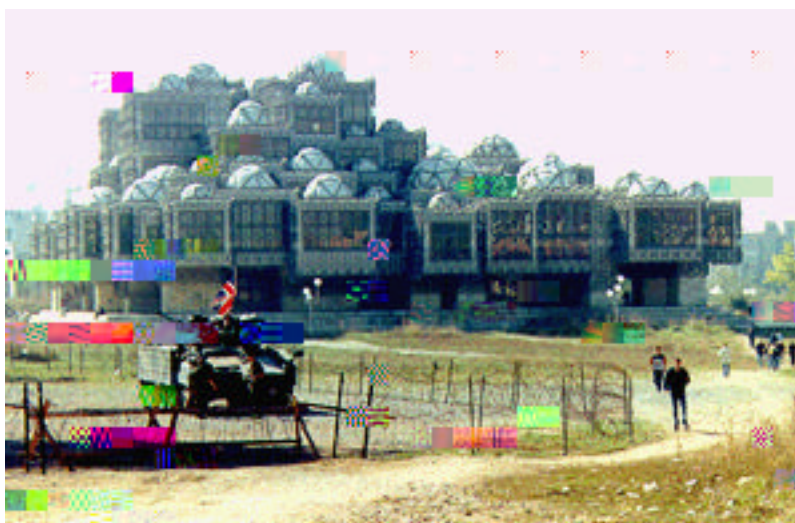
In reading the following account, one should keep in mind that Kosovo is a small place, half the size of Slovenia but more densely populated, and was poorer in resources than other parts of the former Yugoslavia.

It should also be recalled that the Milosevic regime's imposition of direct rule over Kosovo in 1989-90 was followed by a decade of systematic neglect of all public services and institutions, including libraries and archives.

Beginning in October 1990, ethnic Albanian faculty and students were ejected by Serbian police from classrooms and offices at the University of Prishtina, which became an apartheid institution reserved for ethnic Serbs only. At the same time, non-Serb readers were banned from the National and University Library, which serves as the central research library for the university and as Kosovo's national library of record. Kosovar Albanian professionals were summarily dismissed from their positions at academic and public libraries and other state-supported

institutions. The acquisition of Albanian-language library materials effectively ceased. In the mid-1990s a number of library facilities in Kosovo were converted to other uses. Parts of the National and University Library building in downtown Prishtina were

Institute of History, were taken over and used as command and control centers by the Yugoslav Army. Fortunately, neither the State Archives nor the National Library building were hit by bombs or missiles during the air war, but when the Yugoslav military departed, it



The National and University Library of Kosovo, Prishtina, with a British KFOR armored vehicle in front. (Photo: Tania Vitvitsky, October 1999)

turned over to a Serbian Orthodox religious school; library offices were used to house Serb refugees from Croatia and Bosnia. For almost a decade 1.8 million Kosovar Albanians, 90 percent of the population, were not allowed to set foot inside libraries in Kosovo.

Libraries and Archives at War

During NATO's air bombardment of Yugoslavia (March-June 1999), the National and University Library and the building that houses the Kosovo State Archives and the Archives of the

left a mess behind.

At the National and University Library, equipment had been stolen, reading room furniture smashed, and the card catalog had been dumped in the basement.

Items from special collections had been scattered throughout the building; 47 rare volumes are reportedly still missing. Discarded military uniforms, sniper rifles, and hand grenades were found in the stacks. KFOR peacekeeping troops kept the librarians out for a week while

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police records, and the working documents of many other state institutions were either evacuated to Serbia or burned in situ.

On 22 November, the Ministry of Justice in Belgrade announced that public records in Kosovo had been removed to Serbia “to prevent the Albanian secessionists from destroying or forging [them].”

Presumably, control of these records will also make it possible for the Belgrade government to selectively add to, remove or alter documentation to suit its own purposes. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of Kosovars who were deprived of their personal documents when they were expelled in the spring of 1999, whose passports or licenses have expired, who wish to register a



Torn-up and burned religious books and manuscripts in a village mosque, Crnoljevo. (Photo: Andras Riedlmayer, October 1999)

librarians and archivists have returned to reclaim their institutions and have begun to assess the damage.

Archives: The Loss of the Public Record

During the withdrawal of Serbian military and police forces, public records and archives comprising almost the entire documentary base for the orderly functioning of government and society in Kosovo were removed on orders from Belgrade. Registries of births, marriages and deaths, citizenship, probate and property records, as well as judicial and

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Greetings to all International Relations Round Table members and aficionados in 2000. Midwinter in San Antonio was an encouraging and

Library Conferences Around the Global

Intellectual Property vs. the Right to Knowledge?

8th International BOBCATSSS
Symposium

By Barbara Kile

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the BOBCATSSS symposium on Library and Information Science was initiated by Dr. Ruud Bruyns from Hogeschool van Amsterdam to stimulate understanding and cooperation between the library profession in Western Europe and the former Eastern European countries. These conferences are unique as a professional event because they are planned, organized, and implemented by students.

This year's symposium was held in Krakow, Poland, from January 24-26, 2000. Students from the Royal School of Library and Information Science in Copenhagen, Denmark and Jagiollan University in Krakow, Poland were responsible for the 8th symposium on the topic "Intellectual Property vs. the Right to Knowledge?" There were over 200 participants, librarians and library

school students from Europe including Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom. I was the only person representing the United States.

Charles Oppenheim, Professor of Information Science at Loughborough University, UK and Mogens Damm, President of the Danish Library Association, presented keynote speeches. In their presentations they focused on the future of intellectual property in the information age and the importance of accessibility to information for the individual. Both speakers stressed the need for librarians to be involved in the political process through library organizations and their own efforts. They encouraged the students to lobby for the individual right to access to information.

In addition to the formal presentations,

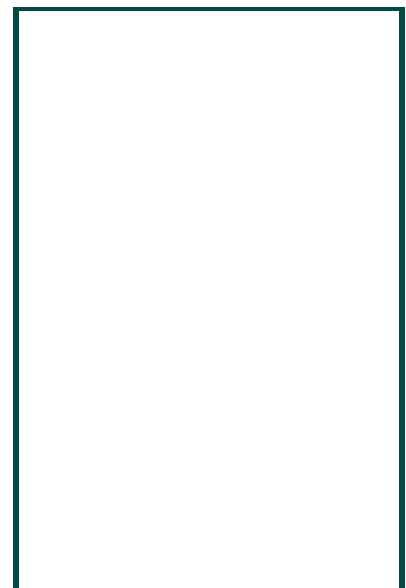
Library and Information Science, the

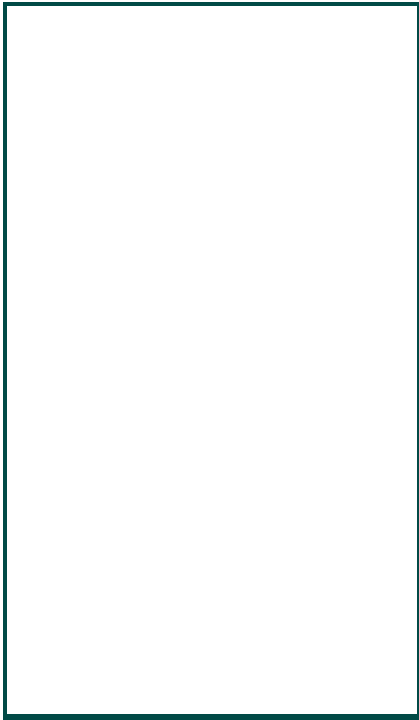
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Almost 300 delegates from over 20 countries participated at NIT '99, including high-level administrators from national libraries and national science and technology documentation centers in over 15 countries. Those who came from countries outside the Asian Pacific region include Botswana, Kenya, South Africa, Latvia, Lithuania, Holland, and United States. NIT '99 was sponsored by the U.S. National Commission of

The International Relations Committee (IRC) met twice during the ALA Midwinter Meeting in January 2000. Following a report on International Relations Office activity by Michael Dowling, the committee heard from Rick Weingarten, director of the ALA Office for Information Technology Policy, on OITP activities and their relationship to international affairs. Mr. Weingarten mentioned the importance of keeping inclose contact with the IRC as critical technology policy issues come to the fore,

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UNESCO Program --

UNESCO is creating a new program for contributing to a just and free information society with universal benefit. UNESCO's Member States wish that the new program, which will replace the General Information Program (PGI) and the Intergovernmental Informatics Program, promote free and universal access to information which individuals need to participate equitably in the global information society. The program should also provide an appropriate

Libraries and Archives in Kosovo:

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— The need for professional training. While the library’s current staff includes some library professionals, their training predates the 1990s and they had been cut off from the profession, unable to work for the past decade.

— The lack of financial support. Staff at the National and University Library and other libraries in Kosovo have been working without salary for more than six months since the end of the war. The United Nations administration in Kosovo (UNMIK) has promised support, but has been unable to provide it because member countries have not lived up to their financial commitments.

During our stay in Prishtina, we met with the National and University Library’s director, Mehmet Gerguri, and his staff. Mr. Gerguri had worked at the library since 1968 and was appointed as director in 1989. After the imposition of the Serbian apartheid regime in October 1990, ethnic Albanian

librarians were dismissed and barred from the premises.

Mr. Gerguri and his colleagues were able to re-enter the library after the arrival of NATO forces (June 1999) and resumed the work that had been interrupted nine years previously. Among their first tasks, after cleaning up the premises, re-shelving the scattered books and re-filing the library’s dumped card catalog, was to take stock of the condition of libraries throughout Kosovo. Although the survey was still in progress, Mr. Gerguri was kind enough to share the data in hand and has since provided me with an update.

The survey includes complete data for public libraries in 25 of Kosovo’s 29 municipalities, with combined pre-war holdings of 2,015,000 volumes (as of 1990). Of the 25 main public libraries, 10 have survived intact, 12 suffered damage of varying degrees and three were burned down. However, 62 of the 158 branch libraries serving neighborhoods and villages were completely destroyed. The combined holdings of all of these public libraries after the war were

reported at 1,114,000 volumes. This represents a drop of more than 900,000 volumes from the pre-war total — a loss of 44.7 percent of the collections held by public libraries in Kosovo. (*Andras J. Riedlmayer is a Bibliographer at Fine Arts Library of Harvard University; this report will continue on IL June 2000.*)

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