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Inside Looking Out and Outside Looking In: An Approach to Bosnian Libraries

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First time – this time

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I was a boy of 14 when I entered these premises at the Skenderija Hall for the first time. It was in June or July of 1969 – I cannot remember exactly – it was more that 35 years ago. The official opening of these premises took place later that year when this grand building hosted the World Table Tennis Championship (STENS 1970).

But YES – everyone came to the June event – to see the greatest gig ever held in Sarajevo – apart from September 23, 1997 U2 Koševo Stadion concert – the live concert of Blood Sweat and Tears. Brother(*) of a friend of mine(**) took this photograph, and I later helped him develop the negative and produce some extra copies in my photo laboratory.

Miraculously, the film negative photographs survived even though my mother's apartment in Grbavica was looted back in 1992, and all my books, photographs, and record collection including some extraordinary works of Vanilla Fudge, Procol

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Harum and Frank Zappa were gone for good.

Nostalgically remembering this – let me just for a moment pretend that I am announcing the Zappa concert. As you probably know, it always started with a question “Ladies and gentleman what is a secret word for tonight?” So: What IS a

(*) Photograph by Branko Čurgus
(**) Nenad Čurgus

secret word of our conference today?

My answer should be – WE ARE TOGETHER.

Together, dear colleagues and friends, distinguished guests, my students, FOBs (standing for Friends of Bosnia) and FOHs (standing for Friends of Hillary Clinton), ladies and gentleman, is the keyword of our conference.

Together – as librarians we stand at our library median in the ocean that connects authors, through publisher, to readers.

Together – also as librarians, we are the best friends of publishers. Without us book echoes would not be heard, libraries would be empty.

Together – we share with publishers the responsibility to provide of communication and enable access to the vast contents of printed works. We are indeed spreading good news across the oceans of time and space.

Assuming the we are together here in Sarajevo – *Jerušalajem chico* – I have a duty to suggest a possible mainframe of a model for conclusions to our conference, but before that, let me just introduce you to some problems we are facing from the 'žinside looking out' (meaning looking from Bosnia and the Balkans to the rest of the world) and from the 'žoutside looking in' (meaning searching and mining data on Bosnia and the Balkans from outside).

Lessons learned – problems solved

Lesson 1: Bosna da prostiš jedna zemlja imade / Forgive me, sir, there once was a land called Bosnia (Mak Dizdar *Zapis o Zemlji / A Text About a Land*)

In his salad days a young librarian, Saša Madacki, whom you will shortly hear from after introductions by me and Professor Donia – back in the days when he was my student – approached me with a potential problem that arose while searching Internet resources on June 17, 1997.

The problem: It seems that the language of books published in Bosnia and Hercegovina is incorrectly stated in close to 50 percent of the vaunted Library of Congress catalog available online at <www.weblc2.loc.gov>

He ran a query with a simple format: place [of publication] = "Sarajevo" and duration = "0000-1997" (meaning all years since the World was born)

The search yielded a total of **2.854** records listed in short format. In the first close inspection of this list it turns out that 1.172 references or **41 per cent** of the total, wrongly identified the language, mostly identifying it as Polish instead of Serbo-Croatian.

Example:

Prorucnik za nastavu srpskohrvatskog jezika (uz udzbenik "Nas jezik" i "Zbirku kontrolnih zadatka" za VI razred esnovne skole). 1967 Minovic, Milivoje. [**Polish**] Sarajevo, Zavod za izdavanje udzbenika, 1967.

LC: PG1219 .M5

In this example the book in question is a teacher's handbook for learning Serbo-Croatian language. Apart from this, the second, more thorough reading revealed another 290 references (1 per cent) with typing errors.

Example:

Uvod u estetiku.

1972 Focht, IVan. [**Polish**]

Sarajevo, Zavod za izdavanje udzbenika, 1972.

LC: BH39 .F64

The language of works by the Bosnian Nobel Prize Winner Ivo Andrić was mostly wrongly identified, except in one instance:

Na Drini cuprija 1984 Ivo Andric. [Serbo-Croat (Cyr)] Sarajevo : "Svjetlost", 1984/1985 [i.e 1984?]

LC: MLCS 90/01779 (P)

Na Drini cuprija. 1967 Andric, Ivo,1892- [**Polish**] Sarajevo, "Svjetlost"; Beograd, "Prosveta," 1967.

LC: PG1418.A6 N3 1967

Znakovi (pripovetke). 1967 Andric, Ivo,1892- [**Polish**] Sarajevo, "Svjetlost"; Ljubljana, Drzavna zalozba Slovenije, 1967.

LC: PG1418.A6 Z35 1967

Travnicka hronika. Konzulska vremena. 1967 Andric, Ivo,1892- [**Polish**] Sarajevo, "Svjetlost"; Beograd, "Prosveta," 1967.

LC: PG1418.A6 T7 1967b

Ex ponto; 1975 Andric, Ivo,1892- [**Polish**] Sarajevo : Svjetlost, 1975.

LC: PG1418.A6 A6 1975

Whom to blame? Probably no one is to be blamed. Is there anything we (inside

Bosnia) can do about it? Theoretically yes, but practically there is nothing that we can do about it.

Lesson 2: Bosnian Virtual Library

One of the most promising initiatives ever launched for was that to reconstruct the Bosnian national bibliography. Kindly note that the total destruction of the National and University Library on August 25. 1992 left us also without the library catalog so we did not know exactly what we are searching for. Mrs Tatjana Lorković at an *ad hoc* session in Prague of the UNESCO – sponsored Task Force for Reconstruction of National and University Library suggested that a core search of OCLC WorldCat resources would be a good starting point on a long journey of both constructing a bibliography and reconstructing the collections.

And indeed it was. Database specialists from OCLC shortly thereafter downloaded 103,983 potentially interesting bibliographical records for a retrospective bibliography. This happened in 1996.

Records of this research came to Bosnia in June last year – ten years after launching a project, and 8 years after job was done, mostly thanks to enthusiasm of Jeffrey Spurr, who had helped me not to forget that that great task that was done so long ago.

It might sound ridiculous to tell you the main reason that this Bosnian Virtual Library was not send to Bosnia before. It is of purely administrative nature. The National and University Library is not (and cannot be) a member of the OCLC consortia. *De facto* I now have illegal copy

of the long-abandoned OCLC research. (My personal thanks go to Richards Bremer and Douglas Perkins who technically make this happen.)

This CD package – to add a bitter ending – arrived in Sarajevo on a same week when our cooperative Library Information Service (COBISS) was down, and no one could read the complicated structure of MARC21 records any more. But we will – hopefully – breath new life into give a new life to this project. Visit: www.openbook.ba/oclc_bosniaca for details.

Last lesson

Before leaving for a conference in Toronto (Canada) – in March last year – dedicated to a problems of museums and national identities to present a paper entitled, “Rebuilding National Collections in Post-War Bosnia and Herzegovina,” I was wondering what someone in Canada knows about Bosnia, based on holdings of their library. Here are the astonishing results of a simple query(es) in parallel with some other US based library collections (Arizona, Michigan, and Library of Congress). The table shows the topics searched.

Query (keyword – KW or search phrase – SPh)	Toronto (U of T)	Ann Arbor (U of Mich)	Phoenix (U of A)	Washington (LC)
Total number of records retrieved by search	1.433	1.171	737	3.269
KW War	496		330	824
KW Yugoslav war (LC SH)	506	485	350	878
SPh Genocide	35	46	42	40
SPh Ethni* conflict	105	162	135	156
SPh Muslim*	115	128	46	164
War, crime	496	486	343	830
War, crimes	498	489	333	826
SPh War, cri*	563	529	372	933

- Close to half of the documents on Bosnia are related to war crimes and the recent Bosnian conflict (Yugoslav war 1991-1995 LC Subject heading)
- List of close to 50 items are related to genocide.
- Apart from the Library of Congress, with 40 percent, and the University of Toronto, with 50 percent of materials on Bosnia before 1991, the other two

university libraries (Arizona and Michigan) have mostly material related to the recent situation in Bosnia. (Perhaps these statistics should take into consideration that the subject headings for Bosnia in particular were introduced in the early nineties, so Bosnian books covering the years before 1991 were hidden under some other headings.) and most importantly

- Bosnian culture and literature on original languages of rare translations were partially present in all these collections.

It seems that regardless from one's viewpoint – 'inside' or 'outside' – a better collaborative future for all of us – librarians, publisher, historians, museum or achieve specialist – lies in defining:

Ways, services, contact points and exchange in which we will work together and get to know each other and our institutions better.

Ways – let us discuss what communication channels we will use (perhaps association, international association, web-based discussion group, dedicated web site)

Services – could we develop new library / bibliography / vendor services that will bring us together in building our collections both inside and outside?

Contact points – could a regular annual conference or a peer-reviewed journal help us keep in contact more effectively?

Exchange – where shall we meet and with whom we should share our problems, reality and ambitions?

I am most certain that you know these answers. It is so good to see you and welcome all of you to Sarajevo.

Both inside and outside.

Together.