

Library Wars: Impact of Bosnian Independence on Libraries Worldwide

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Sleepers on the shelves

Long after the name of Yugoslavia itself has disappeared from the geo-political scene, its painful, continuing dissolution continues to present challenges not only in political, sociological or legal arena, but also in library one.

During the past ten or fifteen years a lot was written about collections rebuilding, assistance to burned National and University Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Oriental Institute etc., about great efforts of individuals and institutions that were collecting books and other library materials to fill the gaps in our heritage.

We heard about these efforts by the media which are the loudest information carriers. But those books and another materials are the carriers of the identity, and they speak for itself. Their speech apparatus is the catalogue. If apparatus is mute, there are no chance to hear voices of the past. If apparatus is compromised the past can be misunderstood and collective memory will never be the same

Can books be identified without proper bibliographic record? Can they speak from

the shelves, calling to be taken? No. Here I will speak about the records, those silent keepers of the gateway to the heritage.

Librarian on a Hot Tin Roof

When I was in those „salad days”, as professor Bakaršić said, I was intrigued how to reconstruct catalogues of burned National and University Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We had a number of destroyed items, several bibliographies and a confusion. First trigger for me was a research done by Janet Crayne and Donna Parmelee, both from University of Michigan, and published in 1997 as *Bosniaca: A Bibliography of University of Michigan Library Holdings*.

They investigated their catalogues in search of items that may be identified as *Bosniaca*. Then I remembered Donald Urquhart's *Principles of Librarianship* stating that no single library is an island. Then I decided to investigate several OPAC's and try to gather as much records as I can. Experiment *Bosniaca* started.

During seven months long research I have investigated 114 catalogues around the world and have located 21.742 bibliographic

records that match Bosniaca criterion. I was so happy and obsessed with quantities. My euphoric idea was to extend research and locate “almost everything”. But, then I was suggested by a Professor Bakaršić to reexamine already retrieved records, and to postpone further research. I was thinking: Why? All records are properly formatted in MARC, have all auxiliary information, they are complete. WHAT TO REEXAMINE? But then surprises came.

Bugs, Catalogs and Transparency

Decision was made to start with largest file, that of Library of Congress containing 2.854 records. Details of that search you have already heard from Professor Bakaršić, and I will not repeat it here. I have revisited Library of Congress catalogue to recheck again, and today they have 3.482 catalogue entries on books published in Sarajevo in time span 0000-2005. There are errors that still remains in the catalogue.

Search query was: PLACE OF PUBLISHING: SARAJEVO, DATES: 0000-2005.

Checked is field 008, character positions 35-37 (A three-character MARC code that indicates the language of the item). Now situation is as follows (in Table).

I would like to say here that this research will not be possible that LoC have not well organized and structured catalogues, and as well transparent ones. From the short catalogue card this errors are not visible, you can see them only if you dig into 008 field. As it was said before this is not targeted criticism, but starting point for discussion on content of our catalogues, and access to library materials by our patrons.

Language	MARC Language Codes	Number of items
Croatian	scr	2030
Polish	pol	717
Bosnian	bos	199
Serbian	scc	327
English	eng	79
German	ger	64
Slovenian	slv	12
Czech	cze	10
Undetermined	und	10
///	scro	7
Russian	rus	6
French	fre	3
Slavic (Other)	sla	3
Italian	ita	3
Multiple languages	mul	3
Church Slavonic	chu	2
Hungarian	hun	1
Latin	lat	1
Hebrew	hebr	1
Ladino	lad	1
Cornish	cor	1
Albanian	alb	1

Our patrons, our raison d'être

Social differences and conflicts echo in the halls of the library. To what extent could library help in surmounting them? Could the library, functioning as provider of communicative space, facilitate social integration?

After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and horrible war we are facing with massive displacement of people, extensive migration and integration of those people into new communities. Besides “property” they are bringing with them their identities. They are organizing themselves in diaspora

clubs, trying to preserve at least part of identities that they constructed over years in their home countries. One of the sanctuaries are of course libraries.

Worst case scenario

One family left Bosnia in 1992 and immigrate in USA. They are living now in Washington DC and try to follow American dream. At home they speak Bosnian. They kids are growing up asking parrents about their homeland. Parents sign them in the local library, hoping the somebody else will know the answers. Those kids ask a librarian for books in bosnian language with aim to stay in touch with recent develolments in literature or history or to explore the past of the home country. Librarian will open Advanced search mode in OPAC and enter MARC code for Bosnian – bos. Result will be limited to several books. But there are certainly a lot of books printed in complementary languages that will remain silent on the shelves. Patron asked for code bos, librarian entered bos, computer offered bos books. Computer have no power of offering possibilities, librarian may be too bussy, and patron not enough experience in searching catalogues. The result is: more than two thirds of collection will remain unreaded despite the fact that she or he can understand it. They will probably never have a chance to compare the books, and they will leave library with one truth of many. Patron is not guilty because she or he did not grow up with term “serbo-croatian”.

We, the librarians have to offer solutions. We are the keepers of the temples of knowledge, and our role is to guide, educate, inform and provide.

The User’s & Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy

For the end allow me to make one more metaphor.

I wish to think about us librarians, as of seekers who helps the patron, boldly go where no one has gone before.

Let’s think of the librarian as an astronomer whose mission is to put knowledge to work to help the user-astronaut, attain his/her goals. We the librarians will not tell patrons what to do or what to think, but we can give them a broader picture, environmental background and detailed map of that metaphorical Milky Way. If our maps are not adequate, astronauts may be lost in space.

When users return from the mission (reading, authoring, publishing) librarian can take all the information they collected and process it, including it in a collection or database that others can access.

Librarians can also guide our beloved patrons through the multidimensional collective human memory, stored not only in libraries and cyberspace, but also in documents and collections that are still under wraps of private collections or undescribed archives.

We should pay attention to lot of things that ordinary people usualy barely noticing.

“To think like a librarian is not to think differently from a nonlibrarian, but it is to concentrate the mind on problems most nonlibrarians don’t think about.”

We are the keepers of the gateway.