From Dusty Storage to Library Without Walls: Librarian in Wonderland

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From dust till...

[1] Robert R. Janes: Museums and the Paradox of Change: A Case Study in Urgent Adaptation, Glenbow Museum, 1995, p. 10

One sentence by Robert R Janes was the first one that came to my mind when I was thinking how to begin this paper in order to describe the journey we have passed from dusty storage to library without walls. He said that *Canada's major museums are standing on the edge of a cliff, holding hands and peering over the edge. Glenbow(Museum) is part of the group, but just put on a parachute and jumped. Everyone else is still standing at the edge, both terrified and elated at the act, and the possibilities*[1]

. Not only that Sarajevo Human Rights Center Library put on a parachute and jumped, but we did it fast, without too much contemplating and thinking about it. All what we were aware of was that inevitable change will affect us anyway. Of course, no one could know what was under the dark clouds around a cliff. Still, we had three extremely important things: dedication, faith and hope. After getting on the ground we started to walk through rocky path, and now we are in a mountain oasis. For sure some of us will return and bring good news to others who are still waiting on the edge. For sure. Here I will speak about our adventure.

At the very beginning of my engagement at the Human Rights Center, March 1999, I was surrounded with two cardboard boxes containing a card catalogue, one inventory list, a thousand dusty books and a pile of documents. For someone who likes idyllic pictures, this was really a good one. A Librarian sitting in the centre of the room (library?) surrounded by stacks of paper with the goal to create an efficient information resource center. Scary. Previous to my appointment, due to some unlucky circumstances, the library was without a librarian for more than a year. I had serious doubts from where to start. However, during that time, two major advantages worked for us: the management of the Center was more than eager to help (what is really rare), and furthermore, we had some "space" within the budget to appoint library assistants (extremely rare). So, two students of law were engaged, as well as one advanced student of library science (as Assistant Librarian). One could say that a team was created.

Being on the edge

[2] Recommendation No R (79) 16 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the Promotion of Human Rights Research in the Member States of the Council of Europe, adopted by the

In the Statute of the Center it was clearly stated that the *Aim of the Center is to contribute to the realization of internationally recognized human rights. This should be accomplished through information and documentation, teaching, counseling, research and reporting.* The Library part was information, documentation and research. Also at the back of our necks we had the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe R (79) 16 stating that "research in this field should not necessarily be limited to

Committee of Ministers on 13 September 1979 at the 307th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies

legal studies but also concern the historical, sociological, psychological and economic aspects of human rights and the relationship of human rights to professional ethics and, where appropriate, should be carried out on an interdisciplinary basis"[2]

[3] Donald Urquhart, The Principles of Librarianship, Wood Garth, Leeds, 1981

Pretty clear, but how? With dusty books and a pile of unsorted documents? Certainly not. We had two possibilities, the first was to continue with traditional librarianship: filing the card catalogue, updating the monograph and documentation collection, sitting down and waiting for patrons with ignorance towards new technology; or to redesign the library services following contemporary trends in the world with high respect for the (never outmoded) Urquhart's principles[3].

During one of the very first meetings of the library staff my colleagues stood firmly for changes. It was not easy, or better said; it was a very hard decision to abandon the safety of traditional services (I call them - not offensively - the leisurely position). Certainly not because of a lack of enthusiasm but due to objective factors -- lack of funding and equipment combined with a working environment in a post-war period when you simply have other priorities. But we decided to go straightforward following modern trends. We behaved just as we were following Margaret Wheatley idea: *It is too late and far too bad to be pessimistic any longer.* And naturally, we jumped from the edge of a cliff.

Jump and the Journey

[4] Role, Mission, Aims and Objectives are based on Guidelines for College Libraries by the British Library Association

Prior to remodeling the library collections and services, we created set of basic documents such as the library role, mission, aims and objectives. In all of these documents[4] we placed the client (patron) in the center of our universe. In new settings we were no longer a Ptolemaic but Copernican library following a basic idea that the reason of our existence is the user, and not the library itself. To increase the usage frequency of our collections we refined a clear collection development policy and continued with updating the collection of books and documents relating to human rights, international law, humanitarian law, gross violations of human rights, historical and sociological studies with a focus on the Balkans region.

[5] With a person who read only one book any discussion is impossible, because he knows of only one aspect, position or attitude

It is also worthy of mentioning that the War in BiH also had a certain impact on the collection development. In order to avoid a situation where the library offers books and documents (information) reflecting just one-side-of-the-story (*Cave ab homine unius libri!*[5]), we exerted quite a lot of efforts to collect a wide variety of information from all parts of the Balkans giving opportunity for a comparative approach to researchers. "Its [the Center's] role is not human rights activism or the persecution of human rights crimes. This should be left to the competent institutions and human rights NGO's, which the Human Rights Centre, with its resources, can support in their work"[6]. Collecting and studying all available information from any side has priority. The unwritten deal among library staff was to leave personal beliefs and prejudices in front of the Library aiming to create proper library services based exclusively on pure professionalism. Two documents played a crucial role in setting the ground rules. The first was the Code of Ethics of the BH Library Association, and the second was the Library Bill of Rights proclaimed by ALA (LBR). LBR was later on adopted by the Human Rights Center's Steering Committee as an official document of the Library. Basically that means that a violation of any postulate in LBR will not have only ethical consequences, but legal ones as well.

[6] Wolfgang Benedek, History and Objectives of the Human Rights Centre of the University of Sarajevo, In: Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina After Dayton: From Theory to Practice, Kluwer, The Hague, 1998, p.3

[7] Can be accessed at

An example for this *multiple source - bias alleviated* action was the creation of

http://www.media.ba

a special collection on Bosnia and Herzegovina. We collected 1.814 articles from 43 journals and magazines across Europe and the US (time frame 1992-1999). Furthermore, through cooperation with Soros Media Center in Sarajevo (now Media Center[7]), which possesses an extensive collection of journals and newspapers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and FR Yugoslavia, we identified and located articles related to BH, and through this we became able to offer a possibility to researchers to have unlimited access to all kinds of information. This was our attempt to alleviate the possibility of bias. Also, a similar procedure was repeated during the Kosovo crisis. In creation of these resources our guidance was that *Una lectio non facit doctorem (One reading can not create an expert*, a book or a piece of information), as well as the fact that our community was divided - so the offering of multiple sources can be a support to the idea that *Prudentis est, cum adsit causa, mutare consilium (A reasonable man has to change his opinion if there is a reason for that) but also Discas a prudentibus, quid sit faciendum, A salutis similiter, quid sit fugiendum (From a reasonable one, learn what you have to do, but from the insane what to avoid).*

The creation of electronic resources was one of the major tasks. Due to the fact that only 8% of the youth population in Bosnia and Herzegovina is using Internet as a tool (80% never)[8], we started to collect information available on the Web and include it into an offline database available within the library. CHRIS (Center for Human Rights Information System) contains 5 categories. These are: CHRIS *Basic* (basic human rights documents: conventions, declarations, protocols, charters, etc.), CHRIS *Case*(Cases of the Human Rights Chamber for BH, International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia, Ombudsman and Ombudsperson Cases, selected cases from European Court of Human Rights), CHRIS UNDoc (Resolutions of UN General Assembly and Security Council relating to former Yugoslavia territory), CHRIS *EuroDoc* (Resolutions, Recommendations, documents and adopted texts by the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe), CHRIS *Specific* (Documents on the following topics: genocide, development, women, education, medical ethics, rights of the child, freedom of speech and of the press, labor and trade union rights, minorities, privacy rights, refugees, migration, torture and terrorism), CHRIS *Report* (Report of international, governmental and inter-governmental organizations relating to human rights issues). At this very moment the process of revision of CHRIS interface has been completed, and the collected data have just to be included into categories (currently stored in five computers within the Library).

The task is already assigned to one librarian and the expected date for full capacity function is September 2001[9]. One part of CHRIS (Category BASIC) is already available under a different name: LightHouse -- a Balkans database. The LightHouse System includes delivering both, electronic and printed, information human rights instruments. It is now an official database of the Balkans Human Rights Network[10]. Also, LightHouse is available in offline version. CD ROM containing all instruments has been created, and it is obtainable for free to all members of Balkans Human Rights Network.

In order to secure access to other rich information sources, in November 1999 we started to collect offers from commercial database providers. The price lists we received were astronomical, and normally our budget was so limited

Statistical data based on the United Nations Development Programme Report on Human Development for 2000, Sarajevo, 2000.

Interface can be seen at http://.hrc.uni-sa.biharnet.ba/dir/pages

1[0] Can be accessed at http://www.balkan-rights.net

that we cannot afford any of these. But, unexpectedly, a few days after our inquiry we received notification from EBSCO Publishing that the largest consortium in the world was established under the name EIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries Direct) and financed by Soros Foundation. So, six valuable databases became available for libraries in 39 countries, and we were one of them. As part of the EIFL Direct Project through EBSCO Information Services, particularly through EBSCO host databases, we are accessing more than 3.500 journals in full text. The estimation was that if one should subscribe to the printed editions of all included magazines, the price would be roughly 4.000.000 $, and we got it for free. Our happiness was endless, and a joke among the staff was that inter-library loans are a part of Stone Age librarianship. In the first period of the project I can remember the faces of my colleagues: smile, passion for research...When I would remind them that it is 5 pm, and that the work day is over, they would usually reply: Don't worry, no one will claim overtime... The time coverage of journals is roughly from 1991 to present. That database is available for the online search, as well as for offline (CD ROM), which we received on a regular basis. Just to illustrate to what extent we benefit from this service I will demonstrate some figures: from December 1999 when we joined EIFL until May 2001 patrons and library staff performed 9826 searches, obtaining from the database 31.289 abstracts and 18.617 full text articles, in total an amount of 165.366 pages of full text. Besides, this library staff received 1.934 research requests, which have been resolved. In total 11.760 inquiries.

In order to ensure open access to collections, library and archive materials have to be classified, so that the user can freely go from shelf to shelf selecting the book s/he needs. That is how the question of classification was raised. Standard classification schemes such as the Universal Decimal Classification and the Dewey Decimal Classification have more than limited possibilities for a successful classification of human rights literature. After reading, more reading and analysis, we realized that the entire library could be divided into only three indexes. We decided to develop our own classification system and the model we used was the Classification from the Raoul Wallenberg Institute for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, the library of which is also human rights oriented. The Assistant Librarian, Mr. Miroslav Zivanovic, successfully completed this task.

Alongside with that, an integrated library system (MetelWin by Point Company) was introduced, and all the tasks were automated. All monographs were catalogued in UNIMARC format (till now 1600 records), bibliographic databases were created for document collections, and an analytical catalogue of domestic legal periodicals was also introduced. We became the second library in Sarajevo with a fully operational library automated system (the first is the British Council Library). In an environment where a traditional card catalogue is the cruel reality and library automation is at the beginning, the establishment of this system could be considered an incident. Two librarians now have more time to deal with patrons, more time for education and professional training, more time for developing client-oriented services. And finally we are ready to implement professional competencies for special librarians affirmed by the Special Libraries Association. Acquisition, cataloguing and circulation are now paperless jobs in comparison to the dust in the beginning.

...Oasis

A traditional and slow library is a past tense at our working place. From the beginning when we had 1000 books, a card catalogue and a pile of documents, during a one year journey we succeed in achieving an integrated library system, a core collection of human rights literature, organized documentation and special collections, electronic collections, web access, identified and evaluated internet sources, and our own classification scheme. All in all, access to more than 12 million items today, in comparison to 3.000 items at the beginning.

Besides library work, we organized training sessions for future human rights librarians (trained 12 librarians from Bosnia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Austria) in cooperation with the European Training Centre in Graz, Austria, provided consulting and help to partner institutions in establishing and maintaining libraries, delivered lectures on human rights information during many human rights seminars...

A short history of our institution and who we are and what we did in the past years can be seen at http://www.hrc.uni-sa.biharnet.ba .

As a result of this effort we can offer to the patrons what they want, in the sense of an ideal expressed by Hary Goodwin in 1959, when he said that users want to:

Get the information they desire
At the time it is desired (not before or after)
In order of importance
With auxiliary information attached
And indications of reliability attached
And authority of the information source indicated
Exert minimum effort to get the needed information

With all mentioned, at this moment we can say that from our perspective we have reached our Wonderland, what is for our western colleagues Normal-land.

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