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**KULTURA, KULTURNA POVIJEST /
CULTURE, CULTURAL HISTORY**

PIONEERING GATEWAYS IN EUROPE RESEARCH LIBRARIES AND TRAVELLERS

Ann Matheson

*Chair of the Library Advisory Committee,
Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, University of the
Highlands and Islands, UK*

KEYWORDS:

Pan-European initiative, research library co-operation, European printed archive, pioneering women, 19th-century Scottish women travellers

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the first pan-European initiative among research libraries after the seismic political events in Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s. For European research libraries they brought the promise of enhanced contacts among research libraries; and for scholars and librarians the prospect of access to the rich historical collections of research libraries in Central and Eastern Europe. There were two influential contemporary developments: information technology as a tool for opening up Europe's cultural heritage for scholars and researchers; and a growing conviction in some European research libraries of the power of library co-operation to expand and enrich services to users. The Consortium of European Research Libraries (CERL) was the first pan-European co-operative initiative from this time: the aim was to work co-operatively on bringing together an integrated European printed archive for the period of European heritage c.1450-c.1830. It was pioneering because the concept of large-scale European library co-operation across national borders was new and unfamiliar. There were also major technical issues to overcome since European research libraries had until then followed their own (different) national standards. The pioneering technical work on the Hand Press Book database (now the Heritage of the Printed Book) was led by Mirna Willer as Chair of the Advisory Task Group from 1999 to 2007. As a

tribute, the article also includes an account of two 19th-century pioneering Scottish women travellers in Central and Eastern Europe, Georgina Mary Muir Mackenzie and Ménie Muriel Dowie.

Few would deny that the period at the close of the 1980s and the start of the 1990s was a time of dramatic political change in Europe. Events in central and eastern Europe had embraced the whole of Europe and altered Europe's boundaries once again. Looking back from the perspective of 2019, and also at the time, many of us remember these years as a very positive time of anticipated opportunity, closer co-operation and the promise of "one Europe".

For European research libraries these changes brought the promise of contacts among the wider range of research libraries in the "new Europe" which was steadily forming in the last decade of the 20th century; and for scholars and librarians these contacts brought the prospect of access to the rich historical collections of research libraries in central and eastern Europe. Opportunely, these events occurred at a time when research libraries were starting to realise the enormous potential of information technology for opening up Europe's cultural heritage for scholars and all those researching the historical past. It was also a time when research libraries began to believe in the power of library co-operation as a means of offering their own and other library users better access to a wider range of knowledge from collections in one another's libraries. Until then, research libraries had operated mainly within their own borders with little trans-border activity and very often little research library co-operation within national boundaries. "Think local, act globally" began to be the watchword in research libraries.

The Consortium of European Research Libraries (CERL) was the first pan-European co-operative initiative from this time. In Paris in 1989, imbibing the spirit of the times, Dr Michael Smethurst, Director-General, British Library, and Dr Franz Georg Kaltwasser, Director, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, agreed jointly to sponsor a conference for European research libraries to consider the issues raised in creating machine-readable catalogues of books printed in the hand press period (Smethurst, 1994, p. 1). The aim was "to induce European research libraries to co-operate in common ventures" (Matheson, 2005). The two Conferences on Retrospective Cataloguing held in Munich in 1990 and 1991 revealed that significant activity was already in hand in research libraries in a number of European countries. There was also consensus that improving access to the contents of European historical collections could best be achieved by co-operation among the libraries that were their custodians. It was European heritage and thus our responsibility.

A European Working Group, which had been set up to look at this issue in more detail, reported in 1991 and recommended the creation of a single central database for the period of European heritage c.1450-c.1830, to be owned and run

by the libraries that invested in it. Bernhard Fabian, the scholar/bibliographer, described it thus: “Let us think of it as the key to the integrated printed archive of Europe and as the gateway to an almost limitless universe of texts which can be traversed in all conceivable directions” (Fabian, 1998). The proposed model was the US Research Libraries Group (RLG),¹ but with the necessary adaptations to meet specific European traditions and requirements. Following the unanimous acceptance of the Report’s recommendations at the second Munich Conference in 1991, fourteen European research libraries committed themselves the following year to form an interim consortium for this purpose, and thus the foundation was laid. Following an open tender, the Research Libraries Group (RLG) was chosen as the host for the Hand Press Book (HPB) Database (subsequently renamed the Heritage of the Printed Book in 2008), and in June 1994 the Consortium of European Research Libraries (CERL) was formally inaugurated as a company limited by guarantee under English law. In a bold step the members had agreed to co-finance this European initiative as equal partners; the first files were identified in 1995; file loading began in 1996; and the database went live in 1997.

As well as bringing research libraries together, the Consortium was able to assemble very committed people from research libraries all over Europe. From the beginning, there was a special knack of being able to combine positive (but sometimes difficult) professional discussion with social concourse at dinner gatherings after the meetings were done. Colleagues from different countries, cultures and histories got to know one another better not only as professionals but as people, people who had a common goal of bringing historical collections into the light for scholars and citizens. This enabled trust to be built up and trust is a prime essential for meaningful co-operation. There was no plan or strategy for this but rather it seemed to arise naturally from shared values, the optimism of the times and pride in a common endeavour at an important point in European history. I first met Dr Mirna Willer in these very early days. I remember very well meeting this intelligent, modest young woman with the gentle smile, who came from the National and University Library of Croatia in Zagreb, in a part of Europe that was still largely unexplored to many of us. She was the best ambassador a country could have. With her intelligent and serious-minded approach to the complex technical issues of the new database, her sound judgement and her strong character and gentle approach, she was exactly the right person to advise the Consortium on the technical issues involved in the early days of its development.

1 The Research Libraries Group (RLG) was a similar consortium founded by four United States research libraries in 1974.

At the time few of those who were involved fully understood how pioneering this initiative was in the early 1990s. Integrating files from a wide range of European research libraries in a single database meant that the impact of the different formats and cataloguing conventions in use in individual European countries was a fundamental issue that had to be faced more or less immediately. Until then European research libraries had mostly followed national standards, and so merging files from different national and individual library catalogues in one database presented a number of complex technical issues to be resolved.

To guide the Consortium on technical issues, an Advisory Task Group (ATG) was set up in 1994, immediately after the organisation's inauguration. Mirna Willer joined the group at the start as a member; and in 1999 she was invited to become Chair.² A glance at the group's membership in 1998 shows how widely it was drawn from many parts of Europe: Belgium, Croatia³, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia, Sweden, and the UK. In subsequent years, its membership broadened even further to include other European countries.

Much of the initial effort in the Consortium's early days was concerned with establishing the necessary validation of each file from the originating library that provided the file to the CERL Office to the RLIN network of the Research Libraries Group (RLG). The University of Göttingen's Data Conversion Group (DCG) was asked to assist with preparing submitted files for field and character integrity after they had received an initial vetting by CERL's technical consultant. The University of Göttingen had accumulated experience and expertise in file analysis, file conversion and catalogue file merger in a variety of formats through its work with the Bibliotheksrechenzentrum für Niedersachsen (BRZN), and as host and co-ordinator of the European Register of Microform Masters (EROMM). The Data Conversion Group, led by Dr Werner Schwartz, took bibliographic files submitted by CERL members in UNIMARC and other formats and prepared them to be sent to the Research Libraries Group (RLG) for subsequent incorporation in the Heritage of the Printed Book database. Today in 2019 the HPB contains more than 7.8 million records and since January 2018 the database has been freely accessible via the web. Files have been contributed from research libraries in more than twenty European countries, as well as from North America; and new files and updates are added on a regular basis. Detailed information about all the files in the HPB can be found on the CERL website (CERL. *Content of the HPB Database*).

2 Mirna Willer led the Advisory Task Group as Chair from 1999 to 2007.

3 Another able occasional consultant of the Advisory Task Group at that time was Dr Tinka Katić from the National and University Library, Zagreb, the co-editor of the present volume.

Under Mirna Willer's leadership, the ATG was actively involved in guiding the development of the database and a number of other CERL tools and services. These included the CERL Thesaurus, a unique facility created in order to address a particular European issue of place names and personal name forms, which varied from country to country in the period of hand press printing, and where national forms held equal sway within national boundaries. A thesaurus that would be hospitable to variant forms of place, personal, imprint and provenance names, and which would respect multi-lingual forms used in countries in Europe, was needed. In 2000, the Data Conversion Group (DCG) was commissioned to build the CERL Thesaurus as a source of forms of place, author, imprint and provenance names found in printed material up to 1830. The Thesaurus was implemented in 2001, and since then it has been steadily built up from authority files contributed by CERL members. At present, it comprises 1,176,878 personal names and 24,443 corporate names (CERL *Thesaurus*).

In 2000, the Consortium began to consider how to develop a facility that would allow users of early printed material to search across the contents of online manuscripts databases, while, if possible, including the Hand Press Book Database and the CERL Thesaurus within the search. From the start European manuscripts curators and specialists were involved and scholars and researchers were solicited for their views. By 2004 a pilot demonstrator for a federated search facility for online manuscripts databases had been constructed, and at the 2005 CERL Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Rome, on the advice of the ATG, it was decided to opt for the system developed by the University of Uppsala in Sweden, which was based on Open Archive Initiative (OAI) protocols. From then, the CERL Portal has been built up as a tool for scholars and researchers, offering cross-searching of manuscript databases and the facility to combine these with searching the HPB and the English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC) (CERL *Portal*).

In 2002 Dr Claudia Fabian of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, chaired a Services Working Group set up to identify services CERL members wished to see developed, and to explore the scope for joint services with other European organisations. The 2003 CERL AGM endorsed the Group's report and in 2004 a follow up consultation with members by questionnaire gave a clear indication of views on the highest priorities for development: cross-file searching of databases (such as ESTC, VD17 and EROMM) with the HPB; reciprocal access arrangements for researchers of early books in member libraries; a register of early book specialists in member libraries; a role for the Consortium as the central focus for discussion of early book cataloguing policies and procedures in Europe; and

a register of digital projects in member libraries. The 2005 AGM approved the short-term and medium-term priorities for development and the Consortium's work proceeded on this basis. These were initiatives that all took place during Mirna Willer's time as Chair of the ATG, and the ATG's technical expertise and input and Mirna's own contribution as Chair were invaluable.

I got to know Mirna Willer well during the period when I was Chairman of the Consortium from 2000-2006, in succession to the late Michael J. Smethurst, the Consortium's first Chairman. The young Consortium had to face many issues at the start, financial, political but technical issues were the greatest obstacle the Consortium had to try to surmount. Already well-equipped with expertise, and with her calm demeanour and gentle but firm approach, Mirna Willer was well suited to taking on her pioneering role and for starting on this new road with forthrightness and enthusiasm. Her strength of character brings to mind the pioneering and fearless women travellers of the 19th century. Two 19th-century Scottish women travellers, Georgina Mary Muir Mackenzie and Ménie Muriel Dowie, loved the part of Europe that is most familiar to Mirna Willer, and an account of these ladies and their travels is included here as a tribute.

The youngest of a family of nine, Georgina Mary Muir Mackenzie (1833-1874) was born on the Delvine estate in Perthshire, the daughter of Sir John William Pitt Muir Mackenzie and Sophia Matilda Johnstone of Alva. Georgina, their eldest child, had unfortunately inherited the family tendency to consumption and was a delicate child. In 1855, as a young woman of twenty-two, she moved south to London with her mother after her father's death. There she encountered another pioneering young Englishwoman, Adeline Paulina Irby.⁴ Two years later in 1857, they set off alone across the Carpathians from Vienna and Krakov travelling by cart. The account of their travels was subsequently published anonymously (as was often the custom for women writers at that time)⁵ in *Across the Carpathians* in 1862. The book was deliberately presented as an account of a woman travelling with her aunt rather than as two young women travellers. It describes their adventures on their travels, the intriguing sights they saw and the people they met. Although both women were from well-endowed backgrounds, and were accustomed to lives of relative comfort, their travels were anything but luxurious: they made long journeys in carts of varying condition and they mostly slept on bundles

4 Adeline Paulina Irby (1831-1911) was born in Nottinghamshire in England, the daughter of Rear-Admiral Frederick Paul Irby and Frances Wright. After her travels with Georgina Muir Mackenzie, she devoted most of the rest of her life to establishing and running a school for young girls in Sarajevo, where she died in 1911, leaving her estate to fund education in Bosnia.

5 For example, *Christmas in Montenegro* appeared in 1861 under their joint pseudonym "I.M."

of hay, with very occasionally the luxury of a sheet placed over the hay. They endured all their privations with fortitude, however, and did not complain. This was partly a matter of upbringing but also a reflection of their belief that whatever men could do, women could do too.

At one point on their journey when they were in Schmöcks, they were apprehended as Russian spies. Letters posted by the so-called ‘aunt’ had attracted suspicion and had been sent on to the police. One letter in particular addressed to the pastor of Szent Miklos had referred to an interest in the “Slavonic nation”. This was sufficient to arouse the suspicion of the authorities and shortly the women found themselves escorted by two gendarmes with fixed bayonets to an official who sent them on to Leutschau as persons suspected of “Panslavistic tendencies”. When their luggage was examined, it was found, however, to contain nothing more dangerous than miscellaneous purchases from museums and books, and they were allowed to pass on their way with an apology from officialdom. Innocent as it turned out to be, this incident nevertheless sparked off both women’s interest in Slavs and a lifelong sympathy for their situation.

The two travellers were enchanted by the people they met with their distinctive costumes and ways of life. Everything was strange to them. They spoke very favourably of the people who “loved to be civil to strangers” (*Across the Carpathians*, 1862, p. 143). They admired the clergy they met since they were “well informed and intelligent in their interest in foreign countries”; and their most lavish praise was reserved for their behaviour: “the great thing was that they were unaffected and that they were grave. No joking, no compliments, no facetious allusions to ‘the ladies’ and no inquisitiveness” (p. 61). One can sense the unspoken comparison with the condescension of their social life in Britain. These were women with their own views, capable of asserting them and confident about holding their own in any situation. On their route, they enjoyed visiting libraries such as that at Kubin, which had been established by a private individual, and where the librarian showed them “the Lord’s Prayer in a hundred languages” (p. 90).

Throughout the book Georgina Muir Mackenzie refers back to her childhood years spent in Scotland, and she regularly brings in references and comparisons with Scotland. Her “aunt” [i.e. Adeline Paulina Irby] had gone to the Post Office in Trentsin (Trenčín) “to speir, as the Scotch say, after her lost property” (p. 48).⁶ She describes the Castle of Szulyó as like “descending the ‘long way’ down Quiraing in the Isle of Skye” (p. 63).⁷ Jelačić, the Ban of Croatia, *primus inter pares* of the

6 The word “speir” (various spellings, including speer) means to ask or enquire.

7 The Quiraing Walk is a spectacular ridge on the north-east of Skye.

Slavonic chiefs, and a leader renowned for his nobility and intelligence, is compared to an Austrian “Montrose”. Widely admired by his people, they had “heard from a lady in Agram [Zagreb] at the time of his [Jelačić’s] death, that his Croats wept for him as for a father” (p. 124-126).⁸ As they travelled the countryside, the women noted that they repeatedly encountered the strong belief among the people they met that Jelačić had been poisoned by order of the Austrian Government.

The two women’s next journeys in the region were undertaken in the period 1861 to 1864. In 1865 Georgina Muir Mackenzie published *Notes on the South Slavonic Countries in Austria and Turkey in Europe*, which was based on a lecture she had given to the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1864. A fine copy of the *Notes* in original wrappers is in the John Francis Campbell of Islay Collection in the National Library of Scotland. The preface to the published *Notes* was contributed by Humphry Sandwith (1822-1881), an English army physician, who had played a prominent role in the siege of Kars, the last battle in the Crimean War in 1855. Sandwith had met the two women travellers on the Danube and was later asked by Georgina Muir Mackenzie to review her paper before its presentation at the British Association for the Advancement of Science. In her lecture Georgina Muir Mackenzie speaks very favourably of the Croatian people noting that they were desirous of rising “in the scale of civilization” and giving their children education: “in Croatia and Serbia much has been done for public instruction” (Mackenzie, 1865, p. 44). Of the principal towns, Ragusa (Dubrovnik) was considered the most interesting “for the beauty of situation, of architecture, in the picturesque costumes and reformed manners of her country population ... her literature and many distinguished citizens earned for her the name of the Slavic Athens” (p. 50). Agram (Zagreb) “was the focus of such South Slavonic patriotism and literature as are to be found in the Latin church” and its literature offered “epic poems which display an objective simplicity of style, a national vigour of sentiment and detail, favourably contrasting with the unreal and sensuous tone of German poetry of the present day” (p. 51).

Georgina Muir Mackenzie was again the principal author when the two women travellers published the first edition of *Travels in the Slavonic Provinces of Turkey-in-Europe* in 1867. The second edition published in London in 1877 (after Georgina’s death) carried a preface by the Rt Hon. William Ewart Gladstone MP,⁹

8 The Ban was Count Josip Jelačić von Bužim (1801-1859). Montrose was James Graham, 1st Marquess of Montrose (1612-1650), Scottish nobleman, soldier and poet, known in Scotland as “The Great Montrose”.

9 William Ewart Gladstone (1809-1898) was British Prime Minister for four terms. He was born in Liverpool to Scottish parents, the Gladstones from the Lowlands and the Robertsons from the Highlands, leading one of his biographers to deem him “a highlander in the custody of a lowlander”. Gladstone was very sympathetic to the rising

later Prime Minister, in which he stated that “in my opinion, no diplomatist, no consul, no traveller, among our countrymen, has made such a valuable contribution in this important matter than Miss Mackenzie and Miss Irby” (Mackenzie and Irby, 1877, p. ix). In 1870, appalled by the low state of literacy in Bosnia, and the lack of schools there, they set up a school for girls in Sarajevo, which was open to children of all nationalities and from all parts of society. The school was supported by philanthropic donations from the two women’s supporters back home. The indifferent state of Georgina Muir Mackenzie’s health caused her to resign on health grounds after only two years there. At that point the two women came to an amicable parting of the ways: Adeline Paulina Irby continued to work on in Bosnia and became a “national hero” while Georgina Muir MacKenzie married. Earlier in 1862/1863, when on holiday on the small island of Santa Maura, she had met Charles Sebright, the Baron d’Everton (1807-1884), a fellow Scot from Aberdeenshire. Sebright had been demoted from his post as Resident of Cephalonia to the less prestigious posting at Santa Maura following imputations that he had supported the people of the Ionian Islands rather than the British state, although this charge remained unproven.¹⁰ Earlier in 1842, while acting as his Equerry and Secretary, the Duke of Lucca¹¹ had bestowed on him the title of Baron d’Everton on Sebright in honour of his birthplace in Aberdeenshire. Sebright was then posted to Corfu in 1870 and they married in 1871. Only a few years later, his wife succumbed to her delicate health and died on the island in January 1874. Sebright, who was later appointed Consul-General for the Ionian Islands and was knighted by Queen Victoria, was an avid book collector throughout his life. His collection was gifted by his brother to the Presbyterian College in Montreal in 1886, two years after Sebright’s death, from where it was later transferred to McGill University Special Collections in 1987 and 2014.

Another keen woman traveller in this part of Europe was Ménie Muriel Dowie (1867-1945). She was born in Liverpool to a Scots corn merchant’s family, and on her maternal line she was descended from Robert Chambers (1802-1871), the distinguished Scottish publisher and author. She was raised in Scotland, receiving a home schooled education, followed by further study on the Continent. In 1890, at the age of twenty-three, equipped with a tweed suit and knickerbockers, she set off alone on a journey on horseback through the Carpathian Mountains (which were

sense of national sentiment in eastern Europe in response to oppression by the Ottoman Empire.

10 For further information, please consult: <http://blogs.library.mcgill.ca/rbcs/sir-charles-sebright-the-book-collecting-baron-2/#more-2013>, blog by Jason Rovito, McGill University (29-03-2019).

11 The Duke of Lucca was Carlo Ludovico di Borbone Parma, a keen bibliophile whose interest in book collecting was thought to have influenced Sir Charles Sebright.

at that time under Austrian rule). She published an account of her travels in *A Girl in the Karpathians* in 1891. Her book was immensely successful and rapidly went into numerous editions. In 1891, the year of publication, there were five British editions, four American editions and a German edition.

Ménie Muriel Dowie was a member of the “New Woman” movement,¹² which was based on a feminist ideal that came to prominence in Britain in the late 19th century. The “New Woman” was intelligent, educated and emancipated and she no longer subscribed to views of male supremacy. Independent travel in unknown lands underlined this sense of emancipation. In *A Girl in the Karpathians*, Ménie Muriel Dowie refers approvingly to the belief that “What is right for a man is equally right for a woman” (Dowie, 1891, pp. 101-102). On her travels, just as a man might, she carried a revolver with her as a protection for frightening off bears should she encounter any, and she enthusiastically smoked cigarettes, slept on beds of hay and was frequently infested with fleas along the way.

Like Georgina Muir MacKenzie, Ménie Muriel Dowie made numerous comparisons on her travels between the Carpathians and Scotland. She encountered “hills like the West Highlands” (p. 31) and saw “flowers as in the West Highlands” (p. 42) and the weather was like the Highlands (p. 42). As with Georgina Muir Mackenzie, she was struck by the strong patriotism of the Slavs and compared Scotland unfavourably: “Patriotism never bothers me in Scotland ... but, once away, I seem to secrete quite an alarming quantity, and it is bound to come out somehow. Slavs are different in this respect; they can rave over the land, even when submitting to the inconveniences of living in it... I admire and wonder about it since it is so different from ours, and I like it in them” (pp. 57-58). She met children on the road to Délátyn “with straight fringes and the long upper lip which is as Scotch as their high cheek-bones” (p. 22); a schoolmaster she met was “a Sir Walter Scott’s character” (p. 106); and she referred to going for a walk at church time and returning “to see the Kirk skale, as we say in Scotland” (p. 155).¹³ She must have seemed an unusual sight to bystanders, wearing a tartan plaid and a Tam o’ Shanter bonnet.¹⁴

By the time of her travels in the Carpathians, Ménie Muriel Dowie had already published numerous articles and poetry. In 1891 she married Henry Norman, a journalist and travel writer. Her life then took a different turn. In 1895, she wrote a novel *Gallia*, which created something of a sensation in its day because of its

12 The term “New Woman” was coined by the English writer Charles Reade.

13 To skale (or skail) is the Scots word for the dispersal of a church congregation after the service.

14 A bonnet traditionally worn by Scotsmen named after the eponymous poem by Robert Burns.

explicitness. Thereafter, she surrendered her literary tastes and turned to cattle breeding in England. After two unsuccessful attempts at marriage, she emigrated from England to America, where she died a few years later.

These two women travellers came from similarly comfortable and confident backgrounds. They were intelligent and educated and hence of an independent turn of mind. Travelling on their own as women was a way of expressing their independence and adopting the traditional role of men as explorers and adventurers. Since women were not perceived as having any agenda on their travels, they were generally treated more as an object of curiosity and with respect. In 1912 in an article on why women were attracted to central and eastern Europe, *The Graphic* argued that, “The Balkans are a gateway to the East ... the East attracts women because it is feminine to the core, just as the West is essentially masculine” (*Why the Balkans Attract Women*, 1912).

In turn, on their journeys these women travellers took an intelligent interest in the life of the people they came across, whom they saw with a feminine eye so they placed a strong emphasis on domestic circumstances, dress and food. They were also linguists and were therefore in a position to engage fully with those they met. Through their lectures and publications, they helped to record for posterity the minute details of daily life as they encountered it, and back at home they acquainted their readers with lands of which the general public knew little. Both women were invited to give presentations to the British Association for the Advancement of Science: this was an indication of the serious interest there was in finding out more about what they were able to report from this part of Europe. They were strong advocates for the freedom of the peoples of this part of Europe, and they were fearless about repeating criticisms of British foreign policy from people they encountered. Perhaps inevitably, their imperial assertiveness did occasionally gently manifest itself from time to time but it was always countered by their genuine interest and affection for the people they met.

Georgina Muir Mackenzie and Mènie Muriel Dowie were pioneering women, who made an important contribution in creating new gateways for travellers to a part of Europe unfamiliar in their country at that time, and who used their strength of character, resourcefulness and intelligence to create paths to a greater understanding of peoples across Europe. Mirna Willer has shown the same admirable characteristics in her life’s work at a European level and internationally, and those of us who were involved with the Consortium of European Research Libraries in its early days owe her a very great debt of gratitude.

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OTVARANJE EUROPSKIH PUTOVA ZNAJSTVENE KNJIŽNICE I PUTNICE

KLJUČNE RIJEČI:

pan-europska inicijativa, suradnja znanstvenih knjižnica, europski tiskani arhiv, pionirke, škotske putnice 19. stoljeća

SAŽETAK

U središtu je ovog rada prikaz prve pan-europske inicijative znanstvenih knjižnica koja se pojavila u vrijeme tektonskih političkih događaja u Srednjoj i Istočnoj Europi kasnih 1980-ih. Ti su događaji obećavali europskim znanstvenim knjižnicama pojačane međusobne kontakte, a znanstvenicima i knjižničarima mogućnost pristupa bogatim povijesnim zbirka znanstvenih knjižnica Srednje i Istočne Europe. Na ondašnje promjene utjecala su dva čimbenika: informacijska tehnologija kao alat za otvaranje pristupa europskoj kulturnoj baštini znanstvenicima i istraživačima te rastuće uvjerenje nekih europskih znanstvenih knjižnica u snagu suradnje na proširenju i jačanju korisničkih usluga. Konzorcij europskih znanstvenih knjižnica (Consortium of European Research Libraries: CERL) bio je ta prva pan-europska suradnička inicijativa, a cilj mu je bio suradnja na okupljanju integriranog tiskanog arhiva europske baštine nastale u razdoblju od oko 1450. do oko 1830. Bio je to pionirski posao jer je koncept opsežne europske knjižnične suradnje preko nacionalnih granica bio nov i stran. Budući da su europske znanstvene knjižnice do tada koristile svoje vlastite (različite) nacionalne standarde, trebalo je savladati i značajne tehničke probleme. Tehnički posao na bazi podataka *Hand Press Book* (sada *Heritage of the Printed Book*), koji je uistinu bio pionirski, vodila je Mirna Willer kao predsjednica Savjetodavne grupe (Advisory Task Group) od 1999. do 2007. Mirni u počast, rad donosi i priču o dvije škotske pionirke koje su u 19. stoljeću putovale Srednjom i Istočnom Europom, Georgini Mary Muir Mackenzie i Mémie Muriel Dowie.