

**LIBRARIES AND  
ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION  
CENTERS  
IN CENTRAL EASTERN EUROPE:  
A LOCATOR / DIRECTORY**

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BULGARIA  
CZECH REPUBLIC  
HUNGARY  
ROMANIA  
SLOVAK REPUBLIC  
POLAND

The Władysław Poniński Foundation

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## INTRODUCTION

Barbara K. Rodes  
Czesław Jan Grycz

This directory is a sourcebook for identifying like-minded and like-interested counterpart institutions and individuals. It will become a useful resource when the information so laboriously gathered in its pages can be translated into programs and efforts at collaborative or cooperative institution building, professional advancement, or mutual project definition. These can be enhanced through any of the variety of peer-to-peer projects mentioned below. We hope the focus on such possibilities will permit the readers to overlook the many deficiencies that will be observed, and we encourage your suggestions for changes and corrections.

### I. Unique Characteristics of this Locator /Directory

At the beginning of each listing readers will find an excerpt from some correspondence with our national coordinator, a transmittal note for a file, a description of methodology, or some other note we thought might personalize the collection of the data, and the individuals responsible for this work. We have not attempted to write or commission an "introduction to the listings" nor offer an evaluation of the environmental information situation in each country. Rather, we have chosen to randomly select items that reveal to the reader of this directory the personalities behind the effort. Taken together, these introductions provide a composite of our effort and the personal approach we took to the task.

Readers should be aware that this locator / directory is a *work-in-process*, and is subject to the variety of faults and irregularities typical of such a document. As a *work-in-process*, the compilation of information is a first-ever attempt at consolidating data about already established libraries as well as newly emerging ones, and to document



collections in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) which specialize—to a substantial degree—in gathering or making available environmental information.

We hope that our judgment in publishing this work will be justified by the fact that this compilation is time-dependent, and that it is a necessary by-product of a larger goal to establish a variety of peer-to-peer projects involving the libraries listed in this directory and their counterparts in other parts of the world. This goal could not be achieved without at least a rudimentary compilation of libraries and collections from which to begin. We recognize that we do so taking a risk that inasmuch as the information we were able to gather is incomplete or it may be in error due to the constraints of budget, distance, and complexity. But we strongly feel that a start needs to be made in linking libraries with common interests in a variety of ways, and that this directory can play an important role in stimulating such activities despite its imperfections.

An additional rationale for publishing the printed locator/directory is that steps have been taken to make available the original database in electronic forms. The printed version may be thought of as an *interim* proofing stage, enabling corrections and changes to be identified and entered onto an electronic master database. This will permit those electronic versions to be rapidly updated, while subsequent versions of the printed directory will include the corrections and updates, too. In this way, the imperfections of the data may stimulate involvement. See *Technical Notes* (page xiii) for further details on the electronic versions of the master database.

## II. Background

This locator directory is the product of an effort to strengthen library and information infrastructures in six countries of Central and Eastern Europe, undertaken by an information and library-oriented team, formed within a larger Environmental Training Program (ETP) sponsored by the United States Agency for International Development under its cooperative agreement number EUR-0041-A-002-2020 with the University of Minnesota, the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Hazardous Materials Research, The Institute for Sustainable Communities, and the World Wildlife Fund.

The library-oriented project is headed by the World Wildlife Fund and its sub-contractor, The Władysław Poniński Foundation. Together, these two organizations sought advice from a variety of sources to identify appropriate national coordinators from each of six targeted countries: Bulgaria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia, who could undertake an effort to strengthen the capacity of environmental libraries and collections in their region, so they could better serve their diverse constituencies. Nominations were received from ETP field representatives, from librarians, from embassies and government officials, from scientists, and from NGO's. A balanced team of national coordinators was sought, who would *not* be particularly biased towards any single type of institution or library, and who would represent the variety of environmental information collection sources we expected to find in the region. Information science is evolving rapidly, and the integration of new international electronic networks into institutions, communities, and their libraries is changing the relationship among all. We purposely sought to find national coordinators of our project who would be from various constituencies and who would approach the task with an open mind and a generous dose of curiosity and creativity.

The names of the national coordinators appear on the title page (and elsewhere) in this book. To them all credit must be given for gathering the data for each of 300+ collection sites identified in six Central and Eastern European countries. They contributed considerable volunteer effort, beyond their modest stipend, and produced this compilation collaboratively, over the not inconsiderable barrier of huge distance and not insignificant language, cultural, and sociological differences. The success of these listings are due largely to their efforts, while the conversion errors, infelicities of translation and interpretive errors are the responsibility of the Editors.

It is important to note that the team of national coordinators who were ultimately invited to participate in the project met each other only once, in person, prior to the publication of this directory. Thenceforward, all communication between the general editors in the United States and the national coordinators, and among the national coordinators in each of their home countries, was conducted on the telephone (when connections could be made), via FAX, by postal correspondence, and through the facility of E-Mail.

This is not always as facile as it may be in the United States. The following is an excerpt from a letter received in the course of this effort:

"Thank you very much for your FAX. A strange and sad thing happened with this FAX: you sent it on March 29 and my colleague who works with the FAX machine gave it to me on May 20, so with a (two) month delay! Can you imagine that? I was very indignant, but it was nothing I could do."

While this is not typical, it is true that communication with CEE still takes considerable patience, understanding, and perseverance, a point to be noted by those who will engage in communication with some of the libraries listed in the directory.

The fact that this compilation was assembled, therefore, attests to the high degree of personal motivation and commitment which permitted team members to work in relative isolation on a project whose vision and value was nevertheless shared.

## III. Partnering Strategies

The ETP Library Project will provide an "umbrella" under which the peer-to-peer relationships can be fostered, but project leaders will not control the types of projects which can be imagined or might be implemented. Once the initial relationships are launched, however, the project will advertise, encourage, and foster the replication and multiplication of successful projects to new potential participants.

The overall design of the library project took shape from its primary goal of fostering peer-to-peer activities. We believe that such peer-to-peer activities—at whatever level they are undertaken—can be instrumental in providing professional alliances, personal enrichment, and flexible responsiveness that can be powerful assets for all participants.

Several types of actions can be undertaken by individuals and institutions willing to engage in peer-to-peer efforts. They can be of spontaneous or durable duration, and of varying degrees of formality. Once begun, the projects may be expected to sustain themselves and can be easily replicated. Each will have different characteristics, depending on the particular partners involved. Among specific peer-to-peer activities possible are the following:

- Donations of Library Materials
- Providing Specific Journal Subscriptions
- Supporting Translations
- Engaging in Staff Exchanges
- Assisting in Document Delivery
- Providing Access to Subject Specialists
- Giving Professional Advice
- Facilitating E-Mail and E-Conferencing
- Assisting in Grant-Writing
- Promoting Successful Library Management Techniques

We expected that certain institutions and libraries in CEE would be ready to participate in such activities. Further, we expected that many of the CEE libraries would—themselves—be able to provide useful information, information resources, and professional expertise which could be of value to their American counterparts. From the beginning, we sought a peer-to-peer emphasis, which countered the usual donor/receiver pattern.

## IV. Directory-Building Efforts

As a result our Year One priority became self-evident; so we began the effort of gathering data about environmental information centers in CEE.

Collecting the information contained in this book was a largely manual process. Surveys (Appendix VII) were sent to librarians and environmental specialists throughout the region, asking them to identify the locations where important environmental collections were to be found. Some of these—as might be expected—were the traditional university or national governmental libraries. We did not want to neglect the sometimes more specialized collections that were to be found in less-traditional repositories, so an effort was made to identify smaller scientific laboratory collections, corporate or industrial archives, and the increasing phenomenon of specialized NGO document collections.

For a variety of historical and sociological reasons, one often finds in Central and Eastern Europe significant bibliographic resources in personal and private libraries. Some personal libraries have been made "public" to appropriate specialists, though are still held as private collections. Alternatively, teams of individuals involved in redressing environmental problems have assembled their own collections of data and documents, starting an *ad hoc* library that may become a kernel of a future more substantial collection. For example, one of our respondent libraries noted that "what materials there are, are private —



personal copies from the staff." (page 130). Yet, their collection already numbers 600 volumes!

## V. Duration and Methodology

The effort to identify the most significant collections of environmental information from among all the possible variety of libraries and categories involved a time span of only one year.

The first meeting of the national coordinators with the project directors was in October 1992, at the Biblioteka Narodowa (National Library) in Warsaw, Poland. During that meeting, a plan was established, surveys were designed, and the project outlines were established. Subsequently, survey questionnaires were distributed by each national coordinator, data recovered and collated, and follow-ups were made by phone and correspondence. The data was recorded in a unified format on computer, using the UNESCO software program, *Micro CDS/ISIS*. The database was structured by one of the national coordinators, Pavla Stancikova. Diskettes or computer files were then sent to the project leaders in Washington, D.C., and in California, where the files were merged, collated, and prepared for print output.

## VI. Volatility of Information in CEE

Furthermore, the information infrastructure in Central and Eastern Europe, whether at the physical, fiscal, or electronic level, is undergoing significant change, modification, and modernization. These ongoing changes result in highly volatile data, which further argued against delaying publication of this directory.

*Change.* Even as we gathered our data, telephone numbers which had stayed the same for decades were being plugged into new central switching networks necessitating new dialing conventions.

*Modification.* Much effort is being exerted by far-sighted library supervisors and managers to connect their institutions with global electronic information networks, a decision which involves staff reassignments and considerable training efforts.

*Modernization.* Another organizational effort, widespread in the region, involves re-structuring passive library archives into more dynamic (read "fiscally self-sufficient") re-

sources for their new free-market constituencies.

More than once, the national coordinators reported statements from their respondents: "...make this data available quickly... time is of the essence." "There has never been an effort of this kind that we know about." "If the data became widely shared it would possibly help us consolidate our own local efforts..." "Peer-matching with an American library interested in our materials would be enormously beneficial..."

## VII. Observations

Some observations result from examining the data that merit reinforcement, since they may not be immediately apparent to the reader. These include the following:

- identification of collection deficiencies;
- need for library management materials, with an expressed interest in standards, library automation, classification systems, and contemporary library and information management business strategies;
- emphasis on electronic connectivity and electronic resources, with a significant penetration of CD-ROM databases;
- wide discrepancy in the levels of automation;
- a consistent indication on the value of translations;

*Collection Deficiencies.* There is no lack of evidence of the neglect of collection in environmental subject areas. These may be variously attributed to budgetary constraints, political expediency, or lack of social awareness. Whatever the prior causes, librarians and information specialists in CEE are eager to increase their collection strengths in these areas. Projects aimed at redressing these limits are met with enthusiasm, and several are highly successful. It is clear, however, that focused individual collection development programs can be more useful than general-purpose shipment of undifferentiated publications and overstock items. Peer projects aimed at filling out the specific collection deficiencies of a given library would be particularly important. One should say that the value/need for English language materials is somewhat problematic. While English is increasingly spoken, it is by no means a ubiquitous language and many works will need to be translated in order to achieve their maximum impact. Funds for translation activities are, however, dear. Not many agencies appear to value the effort required to support translations.

*Library Management.* Efforts are underway in CEE to restructure the library along modern information-access and patron-service models. This is a fundamental structural change, and needs to be supported by clear textbooks, curriculum training materials at the library school and professional level. There is great interest in adopting international standards and in consistent bibliographic record building, all of which depend on the availability of textbooks, professional handbooks, and guides.

*Electronic Connectivity.* At present, discussions about standards seem principally to be confined to efforts at national coordination and standards-building. Increasingly, however, the importance of identifying and acceding to international standards and protocols is included in such discussions. This is important so that CEE libraries can participate in the emerging international and information networks. A substantial effort is underway to finance and achieve connectivity, led primarily by the Technical Universities and their computer centers. How the relationship evolves between these "centers for informatics" and traditional libraries is yet to be determined. At present, there appears to exist a good cooperative spirit between the two.

*Automation.* Library automation is seen to be a very high priority among institutions of various sizes and categories. Sometimes the smaller libraries can be the most innovative in this area. What is observable, however, is the general lack of cooperation in adopting to standard automation protocols, programs, or systems. This is partly due to the varying level of automation listed by our respondent libraries, some of whom listed involvement with mainstream automation systems providers, while others identified themselves as possessing PCs, copiers, video cameras, and even automobiles (P. 151) in response to the question about automation. Considerably more work needs to be done in this area, especially inasmuch as automation efforts typically involve considerable staff resources and comprehensive training efforts. As elsewhere, the availability of information resources on international electronic networks—even for end-users of information—suggest that libraries and managers of environmental data collections in CEE must develop strategic plans for long-range implementation, training, and interoperability among the libraries of the entire region.

*Translation.* It is clear that English is the predominant language of information networks,

whether of the traditional or the electronic variety. Many respondents reflected this opinion, some by overtly requesting language-training aids. It is also clear that beyond a certain level of management, the language of library operations will continue to be the national language. This suggests a short- to medium-term need for books in translation, whether these be on topics of environmental information or on topics of library management. Such translations will promote the rapid assimilation of new approaches to the husbandry and access of environmental information in a region that desperately needs not only collection and gathering, but access and application by change-makers, scientists, businesses, and government officials.