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**BULGARIAN/COLORADO LIBRARY  
PARTNERSHIP PROJECT**

**A Model for Partnership**

**By**

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USA**

In 1996, the American Library Association participated in a program with the United States Information Agency called ALA Fellows program. This program brought librarians from various countries to the United States for a four month program. In the fall and spring of 1994-95, the Colorado State Library was pleased to host Iskra Mahailova, a librarian at the Bulgarian National Library.

This visit was the beginning of a partnership between two countries that has had a significant positive benefit on libraries in both Colorado and Bulgaria. Following Mahailova's time in the U.S., Nancy Bolt, Colorado State Librarian visited Bulgaria and conducted three lecture tours, including bringing other American librarians to Bulgaria for lectures and small conferences.

In the summer of 1999, Bolt met with Alexander Dimchev, President of the Union of Librarian and Information Science Officers (ULISO) and Professor at Sofia University and with Snezjana Ianeva, Director of the Information Resource Center at the American Embassy in Bulgaria and a member of the ULISO board. They were looking for a way of helping more Bulgarian librarians with a systematic program that extended beyond annual trips to Bulgaria by American librarians doing one or two conferences a year. It was becoming apparent that many Bulgarian libraries were hungry for a longer term relationship and for information and materials that would help them improve their library services. This led to a proposal to form a Bulgaria/Colorado Library Partnership Project.

The Partnership Project began with the development of a resolution by Bolt and Ianeva that was approved by both the Colorado Library Association and ULISO. A full text of the resolution follows this article. The preliminary guidelines for the project were thus:

- We would identify libraries in both countries that might become partners.
- A contact person in each library would be encouraged to exchange letters and photos of the people and the libraries before sending any materials to verify that the address was correct
- Materials requested by Bulgarian and Colorado libraries would be exchanged and information about library trends in the profession.
- Funds to ship books and other materials from Colorado to Bulgarian libraries would come from fundraising in Colorado

In 1999, Ianeva and Bolt both identified six libraries in each country to begin the partnership program. The partnerships started slowly. Bulgarian librarians were often cautious about contacting their American partner, concerned about their lack of English skills. In some cases the American partner that volunteered found they did not have the time to pursue the partnership. Over time, more partnerships were added and problems with any partnerships were addressed.

Partners were recruited in both countries in various ways. In Bulgaria, not much recruitment actually had to be done. As word of the project spread, Bulgarian librarians requested partners. Also, American Peace Corp workers became aware of the project and asked for a partner for their Bulgarian community. This turned out to be problematic in that when the Peace Corp worker left, there often was no Bulgarian librarian committed to the partnership or anyone in the local library who spoke English.

The publicity about the project indicated that there were only four requirements:

- a desire to learn about a different culture
- a willingness to frequently communicate with your Partner
- someone who speaks English (mainly a requirement for the Bulgarian partners!)
- an e-mail address (post office is too slow)

In addition, the Bulgarian librarians were to indicate to their partner the kind of books or other information they would like from their partner.

In 2000, the Colorado/Bulgarian Library Partnership Project registered with the Sister Library Millennium Project sponsored by the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Services. NCLIS created a web site that listed all the partnership projects and prepared handsome plaques for both the United States and the Bulgarian partner city and library. On a trip to Bulgaria in the summer of 1999, the plaques were presented to all the Bulgarian partner libraries.

### **Typical Activities of Partner Libraries**

Both the Bulgarian and the Colorado libraries have conducted activities in the name of the Partnership. In general, Partner Libraries have participated in the following activities:

- regular communication by e-mail and postal mail
- exhibits and programs in the libraries of both countries
- exchange of cultural information about each city and country
- sending books from American libraries to their Bulgarian partners
- sending information about Bulgaria to the American partners
- pen pals (and e-mail pals) between children and teenagers in both countries
- visits of American librarians and municipal officials to Bulgarian cities and libraries
- conferences in Bulgaria on topics of interest to Bulgarian librarians and municipal officials
- establishment of English reading rooms in Bulgarian libraries
- cross-country friendships
- visits to each other's country and libraries

First, books and more books—and CDs, videos, pamphlets—flow from the Colorado libraries to their Bulgarian partners. The arrangement with the Colorado libraries is if

they will donate the books, Bolt will see that they get sent to Bulgaria. The Colorado libraries are generous in finding good, relatively new used books, and in some cases, new books as well.

The most active partnership continues to be Eagle Library District and the Veliko Turnovo Public Library “Slavekov.” This partnership has been particularly successful because of the communication between staff at the two libraries.

Eagle regularly sends books to Veliko Turnovo, based on a profile of needs supplied by Veliko Turnovo. At Christmas, the senior citizen club in Eagle made Christmas tree ornaments for the Veliko Turnovo library. Art students connected to the Veliko Turnovo library created art posters for the Eagle Library District. Eagle has done several programs for children and adults that include slide shows and instruction and participation in Bulgarian folk dances. Together, the two libraries have 75 pen pal pairings. Gibbons visited Veliko Turnovo and participated in the conference on *Library Service to Children and Teenagers*. She also presented presents to the Vice Mayor of Veliko Turnovo from the mayors of towns in the Eagle Library District. During that visit, Veliko Turnovo Director Ivan Alexanderov announced that they were going to create a Foreign Language Reading Room primarily stocked with books received from the Eagle Library District. He called it the “newest branch of the Eagle Library District.” In 2001, using funds they collected at their own used book sales, Eagle wired money to a computer store in Veliko Turnovo to purchase a computer for the new Foreign Language Reading Room in Veliko Turnovo. In November, 2002, I was privileged to attend the opening of this “newest branch,” so designated by the Eagle Valley logo on the Bulgarian Branch Library door.

Most exciting is the cultural understanding that has grown between the library staff, the youth, and the residents of the two towns.

Another successful partnership is between the Aurora Public Library in Aurora, Colorado and the Silestra Public Library in Silestra, Bulgaria. Aurora sends books to Silestra. Patti

Bateman, the project librarian in Aurora, has also purchased holiday decorations to send to Silestra. For example, for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, Bateman bought books on America, flags, stickers, and other red, white, and blue decorations. For Thanksgiving, Bateman purchased books, decorations, paper turkeys, thanksgiving wooden pilgrim dolls, and other symbols of the season. Neli Stoilova sent posters about Bulgarian holidays painted by Silestra teenagers to be displayed in the Aurora Public Library. For Christmas, the staff of the two libraries have agreed to share holiday recipes, cook them in each country, and share their response. Silestra and Aurora are also beginning a pen pal program.

### **Funding**

The Project is an official Interest Group of the Colorado Association of Libraries (a new Colorado association formed by the merger of the Colorado Library Association and the Colorado Educational Media Association). It has also been endorsed by ULISO. However, neither organization provides financial support for the project.

Financial supports comes in five ways. First, Bolt imports Bulgarian jewelry and crafts to sell in library venues in the United States. Twenty percent of all gross sales go for direct support of the Project particularly the cost of sending books to Bulgaria at approximately \$1.00 a pound. The remaining funds go to purchase and bring more Bulgarian jewelry and crafts to the U.S. Second, Colorado libraries donate books and other materials to their partner libraries. Third, from time to time, library vendors have made contributions to the Project. Fourth, Americans traveling to Bulgaria have paid their own expenses. And finally, the Project is applying for grants

### **A Special Visit of Bulgarian Libraries**

From the beginning, the project has enjoyed the unqualified support of Snezhana Ianeva, Director of the Information Resource Center at the American Embassy in Sofia, Bulgaria. The project could not have succeeded without her support and the support of the Embassy.

In the spring of 2002, Ianeva proposed to the Embassy that they sponsor a visit from eight Bulgarian librarians to the United States to attend the American Library Association conference in Atlanta, Georgia, and then to visit their partner libraries in the United States.

At the American Library Association conference, the librarians participated in all of the events sponsored by the ALA International Relations Round Table and in other social events at the conference. Ianeva presented a paper on the Partnership Project and together we prepared a Poster Session about the Partnership. They flew from Atlanta to Colorado to be hosted by the partner libraries.

Each Bulgarian librarian visited their partner library, at least one other library, and a luncheon at the Eagle Valley Library District. A major reception was held at the Bemis Public Library. Representatives from all of the partners were invited. Donna Jones Morris, President of the Colorado Association of Libraries (CAL), presented a plaque of appreciation to Emilia Milkova representing ULISO. In return, Milkova presented two plaques, one to the CAL and one to Bolt for her assistance over the years. At the Eagle Valley Library District luncheon, Milkova made a presentation about the Partner Library program and programs in Bulgaria. The Bulgarians were also hosted at American homes for an informal dinner and conversation.

The purpose of the trip was three fold. First, it was a continuing education experience for the Bulgarian librarians, giving them an opportunity to observe American library service. Second, it was a chance for the partners to get to know each other personally. It's easier to communicate with someone whose face you can visualize. Third, it was a cultural exchange opportunity for the librarians from both countries to get to know each other.

The trip was, by all accounts, a tremendous success. The American librarians report increased communication with their partners and more books are flowing from Colorado to Bulgaria.

### **Project Evaluation**

In 2002, Lisa Cole, Denver University library school student and staff member at the Arapahoe Library District conducted an evaluation of the Partnership Project. The goal of this study was to collect evaluative information about the Bulgarian/Colorado Library Partnership Project and determine if there are reasons why some partnerships have been more active than other partnerships. In addition, it was hoped that some possible strategies for improving the partnership project might be discovered. Finally, it was hoped that the benefits of the partnership project would be more clearly defined.

A combination of methods was employed to gather evaluative information about the partnerships. Between May, 2002 and August 2002, Cole conducted interviews and surveys with eight partner library pairs to gather information from partner participants about their experiences as partner libraries.

A full report of the evaluation is available at [www.cal-webs.org](http://www.cal-webs.org). This paper will highlight some of the findings. One overarching finding was the potential impact of cultural differences between the two countries. This cultural difference was reflected in the responses to several questions.

One important question asked what factors impede involvement in the project. Table 1 shows the results. Language was a problem for librarians in both countries. An early requirement was that there be an English speaking librarian in the Bulgarian library. As a result of this evaluation, the Project began to provide translation services to facilitate communication. Lack of money was also a major problem for the Bulgarian librarians. The lack of funding impacted their ability to send books and other material to their American partner and sometimes to even maintain Internet service.

| <b>Table 1</b>                | <b>Bulgaria</b> | <b>Colorado</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Lack of time                  |                 | 3               | 3            |
| Lack of money                 | 8               | 3               | 11           |
| Lack of interest              |                 | 1               | 1            |
| Language barrier              | 7               | 5               | 1            |
| Internet problems in Bulgaria | 2               | 1               | 12           |

|                           |  |   |   |
|---------------------------|--|---|---|
| Lack of community support |  | 2 | 2 |
|---------------------------|--|---|---|

Another question asked what the library would like their partner to do? Table 2 shows the results. The evaluation discovered that the Bulgarians felt their Colorado partner email frequently enough while the Colorado librarians wanted more communications. Bulgarians seem to send email when they feel something important can be communicated. Americans send email all the time. Colorado librarians do not expect to receive books from Bulgaria since there are too few people in Colorado who read Bulgarian. Bulgarian librarians, however, would like to receive more books from their American partner. This evaluation took place in close proximity to the visit of the Bulgarian librarians to the United States so it is not unusual that they would like their partner to visit Bulgaria.

| <b>Table 2</b>                        | <b>Bulgaria</b> | <b>Colorado</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Email more frequently                 | 3               | 6               | 9            |
| Send more books or gifts              | 6               |                 | 6            |
| Visit                                 | 7               | 1               | 8            |
| Displays and programs                 | 4               |                 | 4            |
| Provide information about what wanted |                 | 2               | 2            |

Another question asked what the partners felt was important about the project. Table 3 shows the results. The results clearly show the interest in sharing ideas and the cultural information. Again, the librarians saw the receipt of books and other materials as very important.

| <b>Table 3</b>          | <b>Bulgaria</b> | <b>Colorado</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Sharing ideas           | 8               | 8               | 16           |
| Gifts and books         | 7               | 3               | 10           |
| Knowing another culture | 8               | 8               | 16           |
| Helping others          |                 | 3               | 3            |
| Friendship              | 1               | 1               | 2            |

A final question asked if the project had improved library development in Bulgaria? Only the Bulgarian librarians were asked this question. Eight said yes and only one said no.

### **Future Plans of the Project**

The project has several goals for the future. Future trips by Americans to visit their partners are planned. Both Colorado and Bulgarian librarians have asked for a website of resources that can be used by Bulgarian librarians in their work. The Bulgarian wish and the American intend to donate more books and other materials. A recent plan is for Colorado librarians to answer reference questions received by email from Bulgarian librarians. The Colorado librarians have also offered to provide non-returnable interlibrary loan material to their partners.

*. (Author's note: Subsequent to this presentation, the Project received a grant of \$198,000 from the U.S. Department of State to bring Bulgarian librarians to the United States, develop more partnerships, train librarians in Bulgaria in how to become Community Information Centers, and take American librarians to Bulgaria to visit their partners.)*

### **Conclusion**

Anecdotal and informal reports from participating librarians as well as the formal evaluation done by Cole indicate that the Partnership Project has been a success. It has helped Bulgarian librarians develop their libraries and it has helped Colorado librarians share a cultural experience with their users. The problems of communication and language are being solved over time. The project will continue to develop with new partnerships formed as possible.

The participants themselves have commented on the value of the project. This paper will end with their quotes.

From Rosita Poparkova in Gotse Delchev: *First, I'd like to thank you for the wonderful time I had in Colorado as well as for the opportunity to visit and get acquainted with my American colleagues. The knowledge and experience I gained, during my stay in the U.S., have stood me in good stead and have broadened my horizons as well. I learned a lot about the way American librarians work and have been bringing all this to the knowledge of my Bulgarian colleagues ever since I came back from the U.S. ... Owing to the book donations from the Koeble Library the number of our readers is on the increase. The books are of great service to students, undergraduates, and the culturally - minded public. We are much obliged to you for all you have done for our library.*

Diana Stefanova from the Sofia Public Library writes: *This visit was kind of wonder for me. I've never thought that I will see America. And I am very grateful that I've been given that chance. These three weeks were important experience for me. I liked Denver most because you and the other librarians were very cordial and generous hosts. I really miss this friendly atmosphere and I will never forget these days there. I was very impressed of the fact that librarians can work hard and make fun at the same time. If you need some information from me personally, please, let me know. Sorry for mistakes. I hope when I see you again my English to be better. Thanks again and take care. Diana*

Radka Kalcheva from Varna writes: *I want to express my great pleasure to know all these wonderful colleagues and people we met during our visit to America and especially to Colorado. I really enjoyed my visit to Boulder public Library and felt happy to meet Mary and the rest of our sister's staff personally. I think Denver and Rocky Mountains are amongst the most magnificent places I have ever visited. I keep vivid memories about the gorgeous nature of the Rocky Mountains. Radka*

One example of how they have used the information is a request from Neli Stoilova from the Silestra Public Library. In addition to being the Library Director, Neli is also on the Silestra Town Council where she lobbies for library support. She recently wrote to me and her partner library requesting “ *experience by American libraries in work with volunteers and lobby as a politic in the public library.*”

On their return to Bulgaria, the Bulgarian librarians planned a conference to tell their fellow librarians about their trip. The conference was called “*The Public Responsibility of the Public Libraries and Their Part in a Democratic Society* “, a concept I never heard mentioned three years ago.

The American librarians also felt very positive about the trip. Patti Bateman from the Aurora Public Library said “*It was wonderful to meet my partner face-to-face and get to know her. I now know what her library needs and better understand the Bulgarian culture.*”

Barbara Stover from the Lone Tree Library said: “*I’m very impressed with the range of services offered by Bulgarian libraries and their curiosity about what we do. I look forward to sharing more information in the future.*”

Finally, Patty Gibbons from the Eagle Valley Library District wrote: *This project has changed my life. I’ve learned more about another country than I ever thought I would and I’ve had a chance to visit Bulgaria and meet wonderful librarians. We now have 75 pen pal partners with our Bulgarian partner library. We are raising the awareness of Bulgaria in our whole town.*

## **Bulgarian Library Project**

### **COOPERATION BETWEEN COLORADO LIBRARY ASSOCIATION AND BULGARIAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION**

**Nancy M. Bolt, State Librarian and  
Snezjana Ianeva, U.S. Information Agency, Bulgaria**

#### **RESOLUTION**

Colorado Library Association  
Bulgarian Library Association

**WHEREAS** Bulgarian librarians are dedicated professionals seeking to improve their ability to deliver library service to work now to develop a civil society and,

**WHEREAS** Bulgarian libraries are suffering financially from the depressed Bulgarian economy, and

**WHEREAS** Bulgarian library budgets have been cut and they have difficulty purchasing new library materials or periodical subscriptions, and

**WHEREAS** the Bulgarian Library Association is currently attempting to pass national legislation to delineate the status and support of Bulgarian libraries, and is interested in sharing information about library law, and

**WHEREAS** Bulgarian libraries have a rich tradition of publishing bibliographies, indexes, and information about Bulgaria in both Bulgarian and English, and

**WHEREAS** current information about Bulgaria is difficult to obtain outside of Bulgaria, and

**WHEREAS** Colorado libraries lack up-to-date information about Bulgaria, particularly since the end of Communism, and

**WHEREAS** there are opportunities for librarians from Bulgaria to contribute to Colorado libraries and opportunities for librarians from Colorado to contribute to Bulgarian libraries,

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Bulgarian Library Association and the Colorado Library Association will become partner organizations in the sharing of resources and information between Bulgarian and Colorado libraries and librarians, and

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that there be no automatic financial obligation on the part of either Library Association, but rather any cooperative project include a budget for that project and the source of supporting funds, and

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that regular communication be established between the Colorado Library Association and the Bulgarian Library Association through various methods of sharing information.

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that one or more liaisons be appointed each year by each Association to facilitate communication and resource sharing among the two Associations and the libraries they represent.