

## **The Finnish Art Libraries and the Baltic co-operation**

Small Countries – small libraries: is it possible to benefit from co-operation? Finnish art libraries have been establishing a co-operative network with the art libraries in the neighbouring Baltic countries throughout the 1990s. One of the aims has been to get Baltic and Nordic art libraries to work more closely together.

### **Background**

The Working Group of Finnish Art Libraries, part of The Finnish Research Library Association<sup>1</sup>, began its activities in 1987. The members in the group work in libraries within the subject areas of art, industrial art and design, architecture, photography and related fields. The libraries are those in museums, in archives, polytechnics, and universities or in administrative organisations (such as the Arts Council of Finland), or public libraries that have a section or a specific collection on art.

The Group aims to further every aspect of art librarianship. It gets together on a monthly basis and organises events such as study tours and training days on topics like the Internet or copyright.

The Group also functions as a background organisation for the association of Nordic art libraries and librarians, ARLIS/Norden<sup>2</sup>, which was founded in 1986. Amongst other things, it puts forward two representatives to the board of ARLIS/Norden, takes turns in editing the journal of the association, *ARLIS/Norden Info*<sup>3</sup>, and organises the annual conference of ARLIS/Norden in rotation with the other Nordic countries.

### **The Baltic Project**

After Nordic co-operation had been established within ARLIS/Norden the next item on the agenda was a plan to expand co-operation to the Baltic countries. This issue became topical when the political situation in the other neighboring countries changed: the Soviet Union was dissolved and Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania got their independence in 1991. As early as 1992 the plan of action of the Working Group mentioned the possibility of creating a co-operative network with the art libraries in the Baltic countries. This activity was entitled The Baltic Project. The establishment of the network started with visits to the central art libraries in each of the countries concerned and the custom developed of organising a meeting during the visit so that the hosts and their guests could present the work of their own libraries and discuss a variety of other topics. During these trips the function of The Working Group and the activities of ARLIS/Norden were also described.

One of the aims of setting up a network was to get the Baltic art libraries to join in co-operation with the surrounding Nordic countries and to revive activities such as exchanges and inter-library loans. The Group also attempted to encourage co-operation by art libraries within each Baltic country, as well as between the Baltic countries. Naturally the Group had purely selfish aims as well. The establishment of contacts makes it easier to get information about Baltic art and design and makes practical co-operation simpler as well. The Group saw this as a very important factor. In addition there has been the opportunity to get a closer view of Baltic architecture and culture from a wider perspective. The development of Baltic co-operation is also part

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<sup>1</sup> The Association, founded in 1929, aims as a scientific society to make the vital role of library and information services in research and education better known. It strives to encourage research and information in the field as well as to promote the professional skills of those employed. At present it has nine working groups. Homepage: <http://www.juy.fi/~library/STKS/english/english.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> ARLIS/Norden consists of both institutional and individual members in the five Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. Homepage: <http://www.uiah.fi/arlis/index-eng.html>.

<sup>3</sup> ARLIS/Norden Info (ISSN 0284-7027) is published three times a year, one issue being a double issue, and is sent to all subscribing members of ARLIS/Norden.

of the strategy of the parent organisations of many Finnish art libraries, especially in the higher education and museum sectors.

## **Latvia**

Every trip in the Baltic Project was carried out in a slightly different way, in terms of their planning, realisation or funding. The first visit, by ten art librarians, was made to Latvia in April 1994. On our five-day trip we got acquainted with, among others, the libraries of the Latvian Academy of Arts and the State Museum of Fine Arts in Riga. The art department of the National Library of Latvia was introduced by its librarian, Aivija Everte. We spent the evening with our hosts from Riga within the premises of Museum of Decorative and Applied Arts, discussing such topics as OPACs and acquisitions, as well as the services our libraries offer. During our visit we were also shown the Turaida castle in Sigulda, and the interior decorations by the architect Bartolomeo Francesco Rastrelli (1700-1771) in the Rundal and Jelgava palaces, as well as the villa architecture in Jurmala. The success of the trip was largely thanks to Ingrida Peldekse, who works for the Nordic information centre in Riga. Latvia's ambassador to Helsinki of the time, Anna Zigure, also helped with the planning of the trip.

## **Estonia**

According to our plan, the next visit was going to be to Lithuania, but for several reasons – no local contact person, the arrangements for the ARLIS/Norden conference in 1996 - this trip had to be postponed. The impetus to continue our Baltic Project was provided by Mari Sibul, the head of the Fine Arts Department in the National Library of Estonia. During the ARLIS/Norden meeting in Helsinki she extended an invitation for the Working Group to come to Estonia<sup>4</sup>. Planning for the visit, which took place in May 1997, was based on Mari Sibul's thorough preliminary preparations in Estonia. On the two-day trip there were 14 participants from nine different Finnish art libraries.

We spent the first day in Tallinn, starting our tight schedule with a visit to the library of the Estonian Academy of Arts. From there we went to the Soros Center for Contemporary Arts (SCCA) where Mare Pedanik, the programme co-ordinator, introduced us to their interesting projects for documenting contemporary Estonian art. Our third visit was to the National Library of Estonia. Here, after the general introduction to the library, we took a closer look at the collections of the Fine Arts Department and, with the assistance of Mari Sibul, were shown examples from the library's large map and picture collection. The National Library was also the venue for the evening's discussion on library co-operation with our colleagues from Tallinn.

On the second day of our trip we visited some of the architecturally valuable mansions in northern Estonia. Our destinations were Palmse, Sagadi, Vihula and Kolga<sup>5</sup>. On this day-long bus tour we had an expert guide, Ants Hein, an art historian from the Estonian Academy of Sciences. Not only did he inform us about the manor houses, but he also told us a great deal about the history of Estonia and the current situation there.

On the journey back, the Group decided to ask their Estonian colleagues to make a return visit to Helsinki. This took place in October 1997. We had guests from the National Library of Estonia, the Estonian Academy of Arts, the Art Museum of Estonia, and the Soros Center for Contemporary Arts, as well as from the library of the art history department of Tartu University. There were also two students of interior architecture from the Estonian Academy of Arts. During the two-day visit we showed our guests different art libraries in Helsinki and visited some art exhibitions together.

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<sup>4</sup> Estonia is the nearest Baltic country to Finland and there is a close linguistic relationship between the two countries. The result is that there has always been co-operation between Finland and Estonia.

<sup>5</sup> More information about the manor houses and a map can be found at <http://www.muhi.cs.helsinki.fi/Estonia/lahemaa/>.

## **Lithuania**

In May 1999 we finally got the chance to go to the last destination of The Baltic Project - Lithuania. Because of widespread interest throughout the Nordic countries we decided to carry out the trip as a joint Nordic project. The trip was announced both in the ARLIS/Norden board meetings and in *ARLIS/Norden Info*. A large grant which the Working Group received from the Finnish Cultural Foundation helped greatly in realising the project.

There were 19 art librarians altogether on the five-day trip to Vilnius and Kaunas. Many Nordic colleagues were interested in going but in the end only two could make it: a librarian from Denmark (the Danish National Gallery) and one from Sweden (the Royal Academy of Fine Arts). Both of them, however, are Finns by origin.

Since there were no local contact, the homepages of the Lithuanian art organisations and their email addresses were used as a source for the preliminary preparations. In Vilnius we visited the Lithuanian Art Museum, whose library and collections were demonstrated to us by the director of the museum, Viktoras Liutkus. At the University of Vilnius, founded in 1579, we started our tour from the magnificent F. Smuglewicz Hall, where part of the library's large collection of rare books is now on display. This hall, which is of great cultural historic importance, is also part of the programme for visits by heads of state. In the manuscript collection of the library (containing over 226 000 documents!) there are several incalculably valuable items, the oldest one dating from 1209. We were shown, for example, a bill of sale dating from 1536, with which a Franciscan monastery sold land to a private person. We were also introduced to the library's graphics department, where prints, watercolours and other pictorial material are kept. At the moment the continually growing collection has over 73 000 works and the library tries also to add contemporary graphic work to its holdings. The library is in the process of digitising manuscripts, maps, rare books, etc. and examples can be seen on the web page: <http://www.mb.vu.lt/unesco/index.htm>.

In Vilnius we also visited the National Library of Lithuania and the library of the Vilnius Academy of Arts, whose activities were still curtailed because of flooding a couple of years previously. Luckily the library's historical rarities and its book collection of approximately 10,500 items, its journals and its photographic collection, remained virtually unharmed.

The programme in Kaunas included a visit to the M. K. Ciurlionis State Museum of Art and its library, as well as to an art gallery exhibiting contemporary art.

## **The results of the trips**

The visits have had a number of different outcomes. The members of the art libraries' Working Group have acquired new contacts with colleagues in the Baltic countries, which makes co-operation and the exchange of information easier. Communication and visits between Finland and Baltic countries have greatly increased in the 1990s. Our knowledge about the art and artists in Baltic countries has both widened and deepened and the collections in our libraries now have better supplies of books and exhibition catalogues about Baltic art. We have also from our side taken material such as books and journals to the libraries in the Baltic countries. The visits have had a motivating and tightening affect on our Group as well. Hopefully they have been equally useful to the libraries we have visited!

As a concrete result of our visits, we published an Estonian supplement to *ARLIS/Norden Info* (1997 3/4). Within this English supplement we published articles written by Estonian art librarians, and the addresses to the Estonian and Latvian art libraries. And a later issue of *ARLIS/Norden Info* (1999:4) contained an article

by Elona Malaiskiene about the collection of graphic art in the library of the University of Vilnius. With our Lithuanian colleagues in mind we also published a guide to Finnish Art libraries in 1999<sup>6</sup>.

During the Baltic Project we saw many very different art libraries – both large and small. As a general comment one could say that the Baltic countries have some immeasurably valuable collections, and a great enthusiasm about developing their libraries. However, financial problems, the lack of space, and partly also the lack of skilled personnel, is slowing down development especially in the smaller art libraries. In other words, these are the same problems that all of us librarians encounter!

In many of the smaller museum libraries the collections rely on exchange and donation and there is hardly any possibility of purchase in order to replenish the collections. The lack of acquisition is often a particular problem in art institutions higher education. By contrast, the bigger libraries already have their OPACs on the Internet and are in the process of digitising their collections.

### **Exchange, visits, training**

In addition to the Baltic Project, Finnish art libraries have other projects connecting them to the Baltic countries, such as publication exchange activities. The library of the University of Art and Design UIAH (Helsinki) has participated in the training of Estonian and Latvian art librarians as part of EU-financed TEMPUS project. This project's participants also include the libraries of the Sibelius Academy in Finland, the Utrecht School of the Arts in the Netherlands and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, as well as similar educational institutions in the Baltic Countries. The project is called "Development of Library Management in Art and Music Universities". In 1996, in connection with the training period in Finland, three librarians from the Estonian Academy of Arts came to the library of the University of Art and Design to familiarise themselves with the library system, different databases, information services, acquisition policy and cataloguing. Similarly, in October 1999, the library received three guests from the Latvian Academy of Arts.

### **The Future co-operation**

The Finnish art libraries' long Baltic Project is by no means finished yet. We are now in the process of planning a meeting/seminar with our Baltic colleagues, possibly in Tallinn. The key themes, in addition to the development of the co-operation, will be practical issues within the library, such as the acquisition process, classification, the virtual library, and so on. The timetable for this seminar is still being discussed. For some time now we have also been discussing the possibility of starting a similar project with Russia. There has been an excellent opportunity to start discussion, since an art librarian from the State Hermitage Museum, Natalia Martynenko visited us last autumn.

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<sup>6</sup> Lindberg, Satu, ed. The Finnish art libraries. Helsinki: Arts Council of Finland, 1999. The 2<sup>nd</sup> edition was published in 2000 and can be ordered from the editor, Satu Lindberg, The Arts Council of Finland (email:satu.lindberg@minedu.fi).

## **A selection of Internet addresses**

### **Estonia**

The National Library of Estonia

<http://www.nlib.ee/>

Estonian Academy of Arts

<http://www.ArtUN.ee/index.shtml>

Soros Center for Contemporary Arts (SCCA)

<http://www.scca.ee/>

### **Latvia**

The National Library of Latvia

<http://vip.latnet.lv/LNB/>

State Museum of Fine Arts

<http://vip.latnet.lv/LMA/Regions/Riga/finearts.html>

The Museum of Decorative and Applied Arts

<http://vip.latnet.lv/LMA/Regions/Riga/decorative.html>

### **Lithuania**

The National Library of Lithuania

<http://www.lnb.lt/>

The University of Vilnius

<http://www.vu.lt/english/>

Vilnius Academy of Fine Arts

<http://www.vda.lt/index.html>

Lithuanian Art Museum

<http://ldmuziejus.mch.mii.lt/>

M. K. Ciurlionis State Museum of Art

<http://www1.omnitel.net/kaunas/museums/ciurlion.htm>

Museum of Applied Art

<http://ldmuziejus.mch.mii.lt/Muziejusirpadaliniai/Tdmuziejus.en.htm>