

WORKSHOP DISCUSSIONS



The conference on the history of the press on 10 December 2004 in the National Library, organised by the HAS Cultural History Committee, was the prelude to research work into press history which has been carried out partly by an academic research group and partly within departments of the library, and to work aimed at developing thorough disclosure of the full range of retrospective bibliographies of the Hungarian press. The teams involved in the work held their introductory events on these subjects on 17 May 2010 and 8 July 2010, launching at the same time a new series entitled *Workshop Discussions* with the purpose of bringing the academic work carried out in the library before expert public opinion. The two events in the first half of the year took place with great success, and we hope similar ones will follow soon.

Building a source database about the long 19th century

However we approach the matter, there is nobody who now denies that the book and the press were the main media of the history of modern and contemporary eras in Europe up to the 20th century, and an integral part of European cultural history. Uncovering their past is a branch of research which has been practised now for 70-100 years, above all in France, Germany, and Great Britain, and enjoys a special priority.

As far as historical research in Hungary is concerned, we can say that the study of the history of books, the press and reading was of good quality up to a certain point. Handbooks and book series covering several centuries of book culture have been published, some issues have been thoroughly analysed in studies, and several aspects of the press during the Enlightenment era have been analysed. Nevertheless, the same cannot be said at all for the disclosure of the 19th century as a whole. There are numerous reasons for this, but it suffices to say that up until 2007 there was no independent institutionalised academic workshop for research in this discipline. For many decades, research on the history of books and the press took and continues to take place in the traditional con-

text of literary, cultural, and library science departments. A new phenomenon has been the mushrooming during the past decade and a half of university and college departments undertaking to teach the history of media and communications over the last two centuries. The primary function of these institutions, however, is to prepare journalists and editors for the written and electronic media, and so-called public relations experts. Historical questions are continuously pushed into the background, and the emphasis is shifted towards empirical communication and media research.

At the same time and besides the literary and political history approach, it is essential to bring into the research the insights gained from so far unexploited archive and manuscript collection resources because of the relevant aspects in the fields of economic, social and cultural history. Recognising the above-mentioned contradiction and the lack of content underlying it was the motivation behind a project which undertakes a systematic examination of the long 19th century history of the written word (books and the press). Within this period the HAS-NSZL Res libraria Hungariae Research Group's 19th century workshop concentrates primarily on the 1850-1920 era, because with the arrival of mass production this is where the greatest shortcomings are found in Hungarian research. The workshop began its research activities in 2007.¹

The developed concept sets up two basic theses. One of our fundamental principles is that we understand book and press history as a part of social history in the widest sense, embracing every aspect of social life. That is to say, we consciously want to break with the practice still found in Hungary that runs counter to the general international trend, where the history of books and the press only rarely become an integral part of general history.² Our view is that contrary to this, the territory of the book and press historian, as Frédéric Barbier put it, touches on nearly every area of historical thought that is studied. In the future, books and the press should be approached with a global perspective, as joint products expressing social structures and networks and as objects of complex social practice. Our other basic thesis is that we need to examine both books and the press from the comprehensive perspective of seeing them as systematic communication processes. This approach leads to the revisiting of

¹ <http://www.fragmenta.oszk.hu/docs/liptak.htm>

² And if so then it is exclusively and primarily connected to literary history, political history and intellectual history. The press, though, most often appears as a source and illustration to highlight certain historical processes.

numerous questions, generates a huge number of new ones, and also necessitates their thorough analysis.³

Due to the relevant aspects of economic, social and cultural history, one main task of our workshop is the systematic research and evaluation of archive sources relevant to the book trade, book publishing, and the history of the press and reading. The work takes place simultaneously in two locations, the Budapest City Archives (BFL), and the National Archives of Hungary. Until now, the examination and organisation of documents relating to the 1850-1873 period took place in the BFL council and presidential document section. The selection of sources from the so-called council and presidential document material for 1873-1901 belonging to the Budapest Mayor's Office is proceeding according to plan, as is the examination of the relevant documentary material belonging to the MOL Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The colleagues working in the workshop were aware from the outset that as the research moved forward in time the number of documents would grow exponentially in proportion to the flourishing of the book and press industries through capitalist mass production. For this reason, the vital first step was the creation of a working database available far into the future for the widest specialist audience. The database should contain the following information: the name of the institution, (the place the document is stored), the access details (archive and registration number), a description of the subject of the document, the document year, the type (e.g. statute, duty, etc.), the individuals (with their occupations) and associations involved, place names found in the document, the type of document and a photograph of the document. With a view to looking into this work process, the Res Libraria Hungariae research group's 19th century division initiated and launched the NSZL *Workshop Discussions* series with the support of the Academic Directorate, at the opening of which in May 2010 we gave an account, in four lectures, of the current phases of the database construction. The head of the 19th century workshop expounded on the theme that her colleagues' lectures had followed. In her lecture entitled "Budapest City Archives, President's and Presidential Department of the Mayor's Office 1874-1901 – the processing of sources connected to printing and press history", Rozália Márkus Bódyné presented the main types of sources from the 1874-1901 period in the BFL, as well as the approaches and methods used to process them. In her lecture entitled "The Process of Constructing the Database in Practice – Work Process", Franciska Dede shed light on the uncovering and processing of sources found in the

BFL 1850-1873 council and presidential document material, as well as solutions to problems arising during the work. At the end of the lecture, she used data which had already been uploaded to present the various functions of the database and the amount of work done, as well as to indicate what work phases still had to be completed. After this, Szabolcs Gyorffy, who constructed the database, used some concrete examples to show how to access information for a given research subject, look for data using the flexible criteria system, and how to categorise items of data and form connections between them in terms of the individuals, institutions, documents, etc. involved.

We are convinced that the database provides us with a useful context for historical political, economic history, cultural history, book and press history, and biographical studies. The lines of research indicated above, along with the other databases being constructed at the National Library and the retrospective national bibliographies being prepared for the period, are expected to open up new routes and provide a well-founded knowledge base for research at any time for many decades to come.

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Disclosure of Retrospective Hungarian Press Bibliographies

In the second series of *Workshop Discussions*, colleagues from the NSZL Press History Department initiated a constructive discussion about Hungarian retrospective press bibliography work and basic principles, and also introduced their work, aspects of planning to date, and the results which could already be presented. As expected, questions, problems and attempts made to address them were also discussed.

In the introductory lecture, Johanna Vass touched upon the aspects of planning which have the greatest influence on the durability of the project, and its effective long-term usability. Planning does not begin with the definition of data content, but with decisions about questions such as the choice of data exchange standards, and the application of current rules on library document-description standards, keeping in mind the rapid succession of paradigm changes characteristic of libraries and information technology nowadays, which imposes the need for ever more frequent system switchovers.

However, using the same standards for the entry of data (to ensure certain identification) the results of a retrospective press bibliography will also be usable for

³ The leader of the workshop described the detail research programme at numerous foreign and domestic conferences. Dorottya Lipták: Zum Konzept einer historisch-sozialwissenschaftlicher buch-und pressewissenschaftlicher Forschung in Ungarn.(Paradigmenwechsel, Problemfelder, Perspektive) In.: Contribution à l'histoire intellectuelle de l'Europe: Réseaux du livre, réseaux des lecteurs. Edité par F. Barbier et I. Monok. Universitätsverlag Leipzig 2009. Bd. 5. S. 253-268.; Dorottya Lipták: The Status of Modern Book and Press History Research. In: The History of Communication. The István Hajnal Circle Study Volume. Editor: Gábor Gyáni, Budapest, 2010 (awaiting publication).

current projects such as the formation of a national document location registry and various digitisation projects. If every library were to enter its collection of a particular title, there would have to be a reference registry providing credible data about whether the stock represented by the entry includes every issue of the publication. Moreover, the bibliography could not only induce the investigation necessary to resolve the lack of certain units, it could also detect the one-time existence of and/or current lack of cover sheets bearing important data, and other “accessories”. It is clear to see that the digitisation of some publications is only worth planning and beginning when we are sure that we have information on their whereabouts and that they are complete.

The colleagues from the department dealt with a randomly selected but characteristic aspect of the press bibliography planning, which had not yet been discussed from the point of view of retrospection. Sándor Perjámosi showed that the demand to fit in with the content structure of other library databases unavoidably raised the question of the treatment of yearbooks as periodicals and of their belonging to the field of press bibliography. Hilda Turai implicitly proved the need to apply the descriptive regulations, relating our experience that various sources often describe and approach the same publication in different ways – whilst one of our most important tasks is to look for addresses and publications from press bibliographies printed to date with which we can expand the amount of title material available for use. I would like to emphasise that we are in an exceptionally favourable situation because with respect to the title material that is available and can be expanded – the National Library’s index card catalogue – “retro-conversion” has taken place and we can start from a database of records. However, the differences between descriptions of documents which are the same or thought to be the same can only be resolved via an autopsy or standardised data entry. This is the case even if we add that when the database records were created during the retro-conversion of the NSZL periodical catalogue, the standard rules were used on index-card material which had not been prepared with the same approach. What then can our growing bibliographical database offer to press history researchers? The questions discussed so far are barely related to the catalysing requirements of researchers mentioned in the preamble. Afrodité Kürti presented results that dispel the nearly two century long bibliographical uncertainty connected with, for example, the closing year of the *Neues Ungarisches Magazin*; and also cast light on the existence of further editions of the *Wegweiser und Anzeigeblatt im Gebiete der Literatur, Kunst, der Industrie und des Handels*, not registered until they were handled. If we are talking

about press bibliography, we must not leave unmentioned our illustrious predecessors who worked in this field before us. Institutional initiatives launched in the 20th century were not completed, despite having the adequate background and support, and so in 1990 at the Second National Biography Conference, Endréné Ferenczy, in her overview of the retrospective bibliography situation in Hungary, alluded to the obvious lack of a press bibliography – whilst at the same time praising the many results that had been achieved.⁴ This was in part a warning that only a firm decision on the part of the National Library to take on the press bibliography issue could ensure the achievement and presentation of further results; it was also encouragement to seek new recommendations for optimal solutions. The key topics of today include the sharing of tasks between libraries, shared work carried out on the network, etc. It is obvious that the National Széchényi Library is not capable of successfully completing this long called-for undertaking by itself – not only because of its limited resources but also because of real stock deficiencies – and that professional co-operation both at national level and in the longer term with the involvement of libraries outside Hungary must be organised. There are examples of this on the international scene: CONSER (Cooperative Online Serials Program) is a shared American online cataloguing program, and the professional experience and achievements of this program would definitely be of great use to us when we are producing the retrospective press bibliography. The community work indicated by the model is not enough though, and from this point of view it will be useful to study the cataloguing training documents organised by CONSER.

Finally, we cannot conclude without mentioning that we envisage our database, planned services, and indeed the whole of the retrospective press bibliography as part of the Hungary National Bibliography (MNB). The issues now raised include those – periods covered, document typology – where the managers responsible for the editorial teams building the MNB system must arrive at a common position, and they must also plan the services of the national bibliographical portal-website, which are under construction, in accordance with these decisions. In short, if the complete retrospective Hungarian press bibliography were finally to be realised then besides providing a long-awaited research basis for the social sciences, it would also result in substantial progress for library science and connected fields of library practice. The keys to the success of the project are up-to-date library description rules, a suitably flexible data exchange format, the autopsy that has been delayed until now and, of course, the co-operation of the experts involved.

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⁴ Cf. Endréné Ferenczy, *The General National Retrospective Bibliography: Achievements, Tasks and Techniques*. In: *The Library Observer*. Year 36, No. 5-6 (1990) pp.453-464.