

**Linda Eltermane**

University of Latvia

## **The Center of Intercultural Dialogue of the Academic Library of the University of Latvia as a tool for developing Latvian-Georgian relations**

### **Abstract**

The article is devoted to the analysis of the activities of the Center of Intercultural Dialogue of the Academic Library of the University of Latvia and its role in the development of Latvian-Georgian relations in the field of science, education, culture and art. The research, on the example of the Georgian information center (founded in 2014), shows how the opening and activities of such a structure influences the exchange of information between Latvia and Georgia, the popularization and promotion of Georgia and its culture, science, art and traditions in the Latvian space.

The Academic Library of the University of Latvia was founded in 1524 at the suggestion of Martin Luther, and it is the oldest scientific library in the Baltic Sea region and one of the oldest libraries in Europe.

Since 2009 the Library is a structural unit of the University of Latvia. Nowadays, it is a “repository of historic memory, which also forms the contemporary cultural space, provides base for studies, and serves as an essential source of cultural and historical research implemented by institutes and faculties of the University of Latvia” (Academic Library of the University of Latvia, 2019, para. 1). The total stock of the Library is more than 3.3 million units of information resources, but the number of registered readers for 2018 is 16.6 thousand. The fund of manuscripts and rare books of the Academic Library of the University of Latvia includes publications and manuscripts from the 13th century to the present day. The Misiņš Library, a separate, eminent and unique part of the Academic Library, founded in 1885, is the most extensive collection of Latvian literature from the 17th to the 21st century in the world.

Despite the fact that the Academic Library of the University of Latvia is one of the oldest libraries in Europe and a center of culture and knowledge of national importance, it successfully

## Linda Eltermane

combines the classical values of the library, the latest technologies and a very active intercultural dialogue. The Library is not only a repository of information resources, but also a platform for intercultural dialogue, where friendly contacts between different countries are established and public relations are maintained.

There is the Center of Intercultural Dialogue in the Academic Library of the University of Latvia, which consists of many information centers. It is open to new ideas and expands bilateral relations in the fields of education, science and culture, and the Center is linking Latvia and Austria, Switzerland, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and other countries (Academic Library of the University of Latvia, 2019, para. 2). It cooperates with foreign libraries, educational and cultural institutions, embassies, students, researchers, national communities, and also organizes cultural and educational events, exhibitions and conferences, thus actively participating in the work of the Library and thereby developing relations between countries.

The Georgian Information Center of the Academic Library of the University of Latvia, with the great support of the Georgian Embassy in Latvia, was founded in 2014. On September 13, 2014, the Georgian Information Center was officially opened by the Minister of Georgia for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Alexi Petriashvili. Among the guests of the ceremony were the Ambassador of Georgia to Latvia Teimuraz Janjalia, editor-in-chief of the journal "Intercultural Communications", professor of the Sukhumi State University Indira Dzagania, professor of the Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University Nikolay Javakhishvili, representatives of diplomatic missions accredited in Latvia, scientists, representatives of the media and the Georgian public in Latvia (Kouçepe, 2015, pp. 4).

In addition to many interesting books donated to the new center, Professor Indira Dzagania presented a special and symbolic gift – a beautiful icon of the Holy Virgin Mary, who patronizes Georgia and protects our Center.

This is the only such structure in Baltic states, which is engaged in the preservation of the cultural heritage of Georgia, the integration of Georgians in Latvia, organizing exhibitions, international conferences, round tables, book presentations and other public events, expanding cooperation between Latvia and Georgia in the field of education, science and culture, as well as providing information services.

International book exchange is one of the most common forms of international cooperation, scientific and cultural ties between libraries of Georgia and The Academic Library of University of Latvia. Repeatedly, book exchange was organized between us and the National Scientific Library of Georgia and the Library of Sokhumi State University. Since 2007, a

### **The Center of Intercultural Dialogue of the Academic Library of the University of Latvia...**

memorandum of cooperation between our library and the National Scientific Library of Tbilisi State University has been active.

Sometimes book exchange led to great consequences. In 2014, the Latvian Ambassador to Georgia, Elita Gavele held a meeting with the head of the Department of International and Intercultural Relations of the Sukhumi State University Indira Dzagania, in order to hand over books presented by the Academic Library of the University of Latvia to Sukhumi State University. In total, our library presented about one hundred and a half different books. These books were placed in a special corner for Latvian literature, which is available to all students and teachers (Кочере, 2015, pp. 4; Embassy of Latvia in Georgia, 2013, para.1). But on November 2015, the Latvian audience at Sukhumi State University was opened. It became possible because of insistence efficient long-term cooperation between the Academic Library of the University of Latvia and the Sukhumi State University and, of course, with the participation of the Embassy of the Republic of Latvia to Georgia.

Cultural and informational events, organized by our Library, are an important form of cooperation between Latvia and Georgia. Before the foundation of the Georgian Information Center, a large number of different events were also held, but in my research I will pay attention to some of the events that have been held after its opening.

On April 29, 2014, with the support of the Embassy of Latvia in Georgia, the National Scientific Library of Georgia hosted the grand opening of the mobile exhibition “A collection of drawings and descriptions of Livonia Johann Christoph Brotze (1742-1823) at the Academic Library of University of Latvia” (Johann Christoph Brotze: The collection of Johann Christoph Brotze's drawings and descriptions on the Baltics at the Academic Library of the University of Latvia, 2014, pp.1-8; Jakobidze, 2013, para.1; Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Center, 2014, para.1-4; Lomadze, 2014, pp.7). The uniqueness of the collection of drawings and descriptions devoted to the Baltic countries is taught by a teacher of the Riga Lyceum, historian of Baltic - German descent, and an ethnographer, local historian I.K. Brotze, lies in a multilateral and comprehensive description of historical motives. The heritage of I.K. Brotze totals 10 volumes, more than 3,000 sheets of drawings and descriptions, where accurately displays the types of settlements of the former Livonia, residents of cities and villages, various technical devices, coats of arms, seals and coins (Кочере, 2015, pp. 6-7).

The big event in 2015 was the official visit of the President of Georgia, George Margvelashvili, to Latvia. On April 16, the President of Georgia visited the Academic Library of the University of Latvia, got acquainted with the Georgian Information Center, presented excellent books and presented the Order of Honor to Director Venta Kocere for developing

## Linda Eltermane

cultural relations between Georgia and Latvia (The President of Georgia Awarded our Latvian Colleague with the Order of Honor, 2015, para.1). On the same day, Georgian ethno-jazz diva Nino Katamadze visited the Academic Library of the University of Latvia to acquainted with Georgian artist Nugzar Paksadze's exhibition and Georgian Information center.

The opening ceremony of the book "An Insight into the History of Relations between Georgia and the Baltic Nations" (in Russian) by Latvian Acedemy of Science Honorary Doctor Ivan Jawishhishvili Tbilisi State University Professor Nikolai (Niko) Jawawhishvili was held on 7th of September 2015.

On 19th of January, 2016, the Academic Library the University of Latvia participated in the discussion on Georgia's political priorities and international challenges during the official visit of the Speaker of the Georgian Parliament David Usupashvili and the opening of the exhibition on the Georgian Alphabet.

On 20th of April 2016, our Library with the support of the Georgian Embassy in Latvia presented a book "Five fingers" of famous Latvian writer Mara Zalite and opened the exhibition devoted to the Georgian Alphabet in our Library.

On September 13, 2019, during the opening of an exhibition dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the University of Latvia, there also was opening of the second edition of the book "An Insight into the History of Relations between Georgia and the Baltic Nations" by the professor of the Ivan Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University Nikolai Javakhishvili.

### Cooperation with the Georgian community in Latvia

The Georgian community in Latvia "Samshoblo" was founded in 1993, when students from Georgia living in Latvia decided to unite all Georgians and people who belong to Georgia. Samshoblo is a member of the Association of Cultural Societies of Latvia together with 25 other minority societies. The company's activity is popularization of the Georgian culture, promoting integration, incl. teaching the Latvian language to Georgians living in Latvia, translation from Georgian language to Latvian and vice versa, organizing charity events. "Samshoblo" cooperates with the Latvian society in Georgia "Ave Sol" (Latvian Georgian Community "Samšoblo", 2019, para. 1-7). Since 2015 there is a memorandum of cooperation between our library and "Samshoblo", but members of the community often attend various events in the Library.

The big event in cooperation with community "Samshablo" was presentation of the book "Modern Latvian Short Prose" in Georgian (Gogoladze, 2012, 129). The book includes short stories by six Latvian authors. Translator Maya Gogoladze, whose work began during her stay in Ventspils in the House creativity of writers and translators. This visit was a good incentive to get to know Latvian literature and start translating works of Latvian authors.

## The Center of Intercultural Dialogue of the Academic Library of the University of Latvia...

This year, on September 13, the community supported our library and university in an important event - the opening of an exhibition dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the University of Latvia. The chairman of the community Nurgazar Mdzinarashvili noted the importance of the work of the Georgian information center in the development of Latvian-Georgian relations.

We also have good cooperation with Georgian community in Latvia "Georgika". Their goal is preservation of ethnic identity and promoting inter-ethnic dialogue. For example, in 2018 they gave us some valuable books.

The Center of Intercultural Dialogue of the Academic Library of the University of Latvia has close contact with The Georgian Latvian Society "Ave sol!". "Ave Sol!" dates back to 1992, when Latvians living in Georgia began to meet regularly, but informally. The association was registered in the autumn of 1994. Following the change of law, the Society was re-registered in 2005 as a continuation of its previous activities. The Georgian Latvian Society has about 100 members. Since the beginning of the cooperation many interesting events have been held together, for example, on November 15, 2007, the exhibition "Georgia - Latvia: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow", dedicated to the 89th anniversary of the proclamation of the Republic of Latvia, was opened at the National Scientific Library of Georgia in Tbilisi. Exhibition created by The Academic Library of the University of Latvia in cooperation with Latvian Embassy in Georgia, Latvian Academy of Sciences and Latvian Society in Georgia "Ave Sol!". But on April 27, 2014, a book "Latvians and Latvia" was presented to the Georgian Latvian Society "Ave Sol!" in Tbilisi by Venta Kocere, Director of the Academic Library of the University of Latvia.

Collaboration agreements include the exchange of library specialists, their participation in meetings organized in Latvia and Georgia.

Director of the National Scientific Library of Georgia Irakli Garibashvili repeatedly visited the Academic Library of the University of Latvia, participated in the international seminar of academic libraries of the Baltic countries "Bibliopolis" (Коцере, 2015, pp. 6).

In April, 2014, a seminar for senior employees was held in the National Scientific Library of Georgia, where the director of AB LU gave a lecture on the topic "The Academic Library of the University of Latvia and Intercultural Dialogue", and Project Manager Valdis Mazulis gave the audience a presentation on "Digitization of the funds of the Academic Library of LU and copyright issues", but a round-table discussion on intercultural dialogue and exchange of experience between colleagues of the two countries - Latvia and Georgia, took place in Sukhumi State University (Коцере, 2015, pp. 6).

### **Linda Eltermane**

On June 27, 2017, Rector of the University of Latvia, professor Indriķis Muiznieks was awarded with the medal of Tbilisi State University for his contribution in the development of scientific cooperation between thw Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University and the University of Latvia. In continuation of this event, guests from Georgia were introduced to the new academic center of our university.

Relations between Latvia and Georgia are friendly and constructive. Georgia is one of Latvia's priority countries in the European Neighborhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership, as well as in the context of Latvia's development cooperation policy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019, para.1). So the activities of the Georgian information center are consonant with the guidelines of the Ministry of foreign affairs of Republic of Latvia, so we can count on intensifying relations in the field of education, science and culture. We plan to make a visual transformation of our center, which will make it even more attractive to visitors. Without a doubt, we will continue to organize cultural and informational events in cooperation with the Georgian Embassy in Latvia, Georgian communities and our partners in Georgia. There is an idea about organizing free Georgian language courses for everyone – we already have positive experience with such an initiative – the Azerbaijani language has been taught at the Center for Intercultural Dialogue for the second year now, and the Kazakh language courses will begin in the next month.

In conclusion, we saw, on the example of the Georgian information center, how the opening and activities of such a structure influences the exchange of information between Latvia and Georgia. The Georgian Information Center of the Academic Library of the University of Latvia is a great tool for popularization and promotion of Georgia and its culture, science, art and traditions in the Latvian space.

**References:**

- Georgia Suhumi State University receives a book donation from Latvia=Gruzijas Suhumi Valsts universitāte saņem grāmatu dāvinājums no Latvijas (online): (LU Akadēmiskās bibl. grāmatu dāvinājums 2013. g. 27. nov. plānotajai Latvijas literatūras lasītavai Suhumi Valsts universitātē). Tbilisi: Embassy of Latvia in Georgia = Latvijas Republikas vēstniecība Gruzijā, 2013. Available: <http://www.am.gov.lv/lv/georgia/zinas/2013/11-27/?print=on>
- Gogoladze M., (2012).** The Latvian modern little prose = Tanamedrove latviuri mcire proza: Aija Lace, Andra Neiburga, Gundega Repse, Janis Einfelds, Nora Ikstena, Inga Abele translated by Maya Gogoladze. Text in Georgian.
- Jakobidze R. (2014).** Johana Kristofa Broces izstāde (tiešsaiste): (sakarā ar LU AB izstādes "Johana Kristofa Broces (1742-1823) Livonijas zīmējumu un aprakstu kolekcija Latvijas Universitātes Akadēmiskajā bibliotēkā" atklāšanu 2014. g. 29. apr. Tbilisi Valsts Universitātes Nacionālajā zinātniskajā bibliotēkā). Tbilisi: Gruzijas Latviešu biedrība "Ave Sol". Available: <http://avesolge.blogspot.com/>.
- Also:** Tbilisi atklāta Broces izstāde/pēc Ārlietu ministrijas inform. Pieejams: <http://www.la.lv/tbilisi-atklata-broces-izstade/>. Tbilisi atklāta Johana Kristofa Broces Livonijas zīmējumu ceļojošā izstāde/Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Center = Ārlietu ministrijas Preses centrs. Available: <http://www.leta.lv/archive/>; <http://www.biblioteka.lv/News/ArticleItem.aspx?article=27035&type=0>; <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/georgia/aktualitates/36004-tbilisi-atklata-johana-kristofa-broceslivonijas-zimejumu-celojosa-izstade>.
- Johann Christoph Brotze:** The collection of Johann Christoph Brotze's drawings and descriptions on the Baltics at the Academic Library of the University of Latvia: (also about exhibition of J. Ch. Brotze's collection of paintings and descriptions at the Tbilisi

**Linda Eltermane**

State University on Apr.-May 2014) / design A. Plotka. Riga, 2014. 1 p. fold., 8 lp.: ill. Text in Georgian.

Latvijas Universitātes Akadēmiskā bibliotēka=Academic Library of the University of Latvia. Rīga: LU AB, 2019. Available: <https://www.lu.lv/en/studies/libraries/ul-academic-library/>

**Lomadze M. (2014).** Photographic precision of old Baltic capitals. Weekly Georgian Journal: complimentary iss. N 16 (1-7 May 2014), p. 7, 17. Available: <http://georgianjournal.ge/arts-a-culture/27072-photographic-precision-of-old-balticcapitals.html>;  
<http://georgianews.ge/arts-a-culture/27072-photographic-precision-of-old-balticcapitals.html>;

The President of Georgia Awarded our Latvian Colleague with the Order of Honor (online): (submitted by Irakli on Fri, 04/17/2015 - 22:57). Tbilisi: National Scientific Library, 2015. Available: <http://www.sciencelib.ge/en/>

**Коцере В.,** Роль Академической библиотеки Латвийского университета в развитии научных и культурных взаимоотношений Латвии и Грузии, Intercultural Communications, No. 25, 2015, p.3-13.