

## *EUROPEAN AND NORTH AMERICAN ENCYCLOPEDIA CONFERENCE*

The second European and North American Encyclopedia Conference, organised by the Miroslav Krleža Institute of Lexicography and presided by the Institute's director general, Bruno Kragić, was held from 6 to 8 October 2022.<sup>1</sup> It brought together representatives of general encyclopedias from Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Norway, Slovakia, Sweden, and Ukraine. The first European Encyclopedia Conference was held in Brussels in 2019, organised by the *Great Norwegian Encyclopedia*, the European Parliamentary Research Service, and the Mission of Norway to the EU. It was attended by encyclopedia editors and publishers from 17 European and North American countries who discussed the role of professional encyclopedias in the digital age, which is characterised by a constantly growing amount of information from various, often unreliable sources with free access. Encyclopedia publishers therefore face many challenges, from the financial sustainability of projects and institutions to threats of their 'extinction' and replacement by new, digital sources of knowledge. The goal of this conference was to share experiences about the current status and operating models of national encyclopedias and identify possible areas of collaboration.

The second European and North American Conference aimed to further examine the role of encyclopedias in providing access to reliable and verified information of general interest in the user's native language, thus playing an important role in combating the spread of disinformation, misinformation, and fake news, as well as their role in the preservation of national and cultural identity. Furthermore, the conference opened the floor to discussion on various types of collaboration among encyclopedia publishers, which could contribute to their reliability as well as their sustainability.

Introductory talks were given on 6 October by Bruno Kragić, director general of the Institute and chief editor of the *Croatian Encyclopedia*, who tackled the role of the encyclopedia as a system of ordering and presenting knowledge in the digital age,

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<sup>1</sup> The Conference was financially supported by the the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia. It took place on the premises of the Miroslav Krleža Institute of Lexicography, on 6 and 7 October, while 8 October was dedicated to the study trip to Krk island. The Conference booklet, session recordings and photogallery are available at: <https://www.lzmk.hr/en-us/projects/european-and-north-american-encyclopedia-conference>

and Filip Hameršak, director of the Institute, who discussed several points concerning the historical development of the Croatian encyclopedistics, and the need of trans-national cooperation in the field. In her keynote address Naja Bentzen, senior policy analyst at the European Parliamentary Research Service, talked about the role of encyclopedias in strengthening our knowledge supply chains in an age of ‘truth decay’. The presentation of the new participating encyclopedias followed; Victoria Lazova, director of the Bulgarian Encyclopedia Scientific and Information Centre of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, presented her Institute and the general *Bulgarian Encyclopedia*, while the Encyclopedic Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences and the *Encyclopedia Beliana* were presented by Tatiana Šrámková, the Institute’s director. The conference proceeded with a panel discussion on the activities and achievements that encyclopedia editors and publishers faced in the past three years, since the first European and Encyclopedia Conference in Brussels. The introduction to the discussion was given by Erik Bolstad, chief editor of the *Great Norwegian Encyclopedia*, who described its history, status and production model as well as lessons learned and things done in the past three years. The participants then presented their national encyclopedia projects and addressed experiences, obstacles, and challenges in the era of misinformation as well as global crisis, especially given the COVID-19 pandemic and armed conflicts. They discussed how this situation affected their daily work, focusing on the number of users and visits to their websites as well as the most viewed content. In addition, given the increased availability of alternative online sources, the participants discussed how encyclopedias could contribute to building trust in reliable online sources of information, and how to ensure their sustainability. At the end of the first conference day, Oleksandr Ishchenko from the Institute of Lexicographic Research of the National Academy of Sciences in Ukraine addressed the participants virtually, talking about challenges that the *Encyclopedia of Modern Ukraine* faces in wartime. Despite the war, another volume of Encyclopedia, with 3000 articles, was printed and published online in 2022.

The first panel discussion on 7 October analysed the findability and visibility of encyclopedic contents when using internet search engines; the introduction to the discussion was given by Niels Erik Koch (chief editor), and Erik Henz Kjeldsen (head of development) from the Danish national encyclopedia *lex.dk*, who pointed out the necessity of equal access to validated information; they warned about prioritising Wikipedia by the dominant search engine Google, which puts national encyclopedias, as trusted sources of verified knowledge, in an unfair situation. Furthermore, Per Söderberg chief editor of the Swedish *National Encyclopedia* introduced the topic of the usability of encyclopedias in various target groups, primarily their adaptation to the school population. The second panel discussion was dedicated to the recognisability and networking of encyclopedias. Nataša Jermen, assistant director at the Miroslav Krleža Institute of Lexicography, gave the intro-

duction to the discussion on the possibility of recognition of encyclopedias as scientific publications as well as encyclopedia publishers as academic publishers. Subsequently, Valters Ščerbinskis, chief editor of the Latvian *National Encyclopedia*, opened the discussion on the perspectives and possibilities for cooperation and networking among national general encyclopedias.

Striving to define potential areas of cooperation, which would in the near future enable sharing experiences about the current state and functioning model of encyclopedias, implementation of inter-institutional projects, exchange of encyclopedia content (especially on specific national topics), and joint activities with regard to the recognisability of encyclopedias in a European context, an agreement was reached to establish the European Encyclopedia Network under the leadership of Bruno Kragić.<sup>2</sup> The first agreed activity of the newly established Network, suggested by the Danish *lex.dk*, was to send an open letter to the Executive Vice-President for A Europe Fit for the Digital Age of the European Commission, Margrethe Vestager, addressing the problem of Google's favouring of Wikipedia, which has a significant negative impact on the possibilities to position trustworthy information in the market as well as people's ability to search for and find reliable knowledge and information.

Besides two introductory talks given by the Miroslav Krleža Institute's director general, Bruno Kragić, and its director, Filip Hameršak, three conference contributions are presented in this issue of the journal *Studia lexicographica*. Naja Bentzen's conference paper tackled the important role of national verified encyclopedias in strengthening the information supply chains in an era of 'truth decay', which is characterised by the following core trends: growing disagreement about facts, blurred lines between opinion and fact, increasing influence of opinion over fact, and declining trust in formerly respected sources of factual information. In their conference paper, Milena Todorova and Victoria Tomova described the heritage and the development of the Bulgarian Encyclopedia Scientific and Information Centre, specialised for the compilation and publication of encyclopedias and encyclopaedic reference books. Mykola Zhelezniak and Oleksandr Ishchenko prepared a scientific review paper on Ukrainian encyclopedistics in wartime, presenting the *Encyclopedia of Modern Ukraine* as one of the priority Ukrainian academic publications in the context of the ongoing war, and outlining the editorial team priorities as a response to new challenges.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://encyclopedia-network.eu/>