



The EUI Library Traineeship
Programme:

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"... le souvenir d'une certaine image n'est que le regret d'un certain instant."

Badia Fiesolana, 11 June, 2010

Dear Friends,

Thank you for coming to the 1st Conference of the former trainees of the EUI Library. I am very grateful to our cooperating universities for their participation in this event: thank you Jikta and Amadeu for your invaluable support for our programme during the years. Thanks to Barbara Casalini, our good neighbour, for having accepted to contribute to our conference, as international operator in the book and information market.

This conference began with an idea that Veerle and I had been cherishing for a long time, just waiting for the right moment to fit it into the library calendar; finally the push came from our colleagues, who embraced the idea with enthusiasm. I am particularly grateful to the dynamic conference team-- Elena, Lotta and Eva-- for having implemented and enriched the initial idea with their wonderful work.

At a certain point, we realized that over the years – in addition to our institutional mission, our top priority - the Library had been

contributing to the professional education of a significant number of librarians and information professionals across Europe. Young graduates who took their first steps in their career as librarians, students who prepared their PhD theses in library and information science, or librarians who enriched their experience with a visiting period at the EUI Library. We realized that this period of ‘apprenticeship’ spent within the walls of the Badia had marked indelibly their professional lives. The words of Marcel Proust come to mind: “... *le souvenir d'une certaine image n'est que le regret d'un certain instant.*”

Many former trainees have remained in contact during the years, and when they can, they don't miss an opportunity to come back to the EUI for a brief visit. This shows an enduring attachment to the Institute which they consider their second Alma Mater: a genuine feeling that we would like to recognise and cultivate with this initiative.

Beyond the sentimental reasons, there is another, more professional in nature, which led us to launch this meeting. We saw the need to take stock of the traineeship experience at the EUI Library. In other words, we would like to have an exchange of views, to gather ideas and suggestions aimed at improving our programme, while taking into account the evolution of the library and information professions.

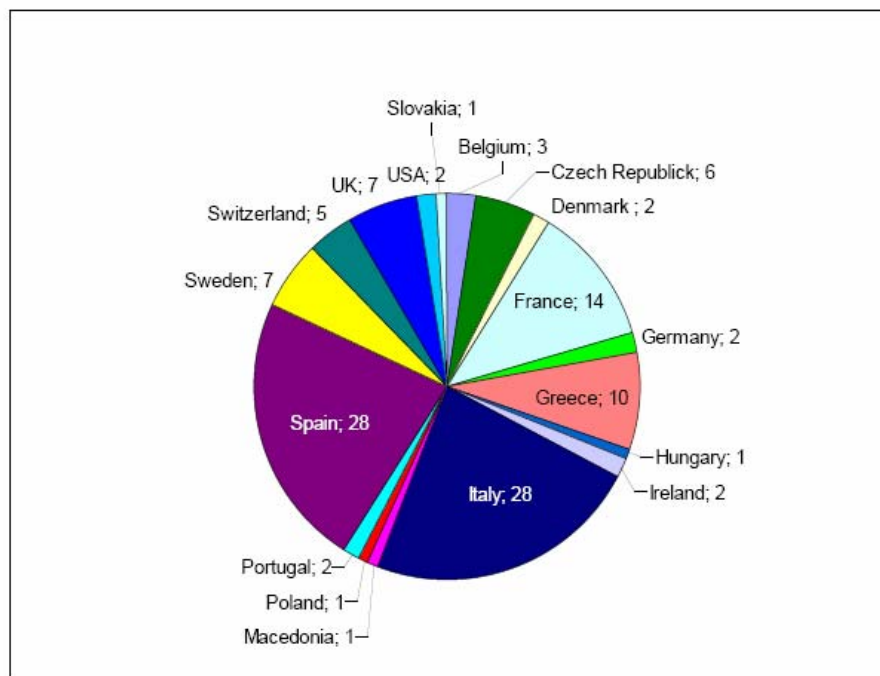
Finally, as suggested by several colleagues, we hope this event will lay the foundation for a permanent network of former trainees, aimed at developing contacts and also, when possible, to support our traineeship programme.

“30 Years of the EUI Library Traineeship Programme”, this is the title of the Conference; in fact, there were trainees at the EUI even before 1980. Therefore this is a symbolic date, and is justified by the fact that from the early days of the EUI, the term “stagiaire” in the administrative practice was rather flexible, and this made the archival research very difficult.

Our research in the archival records identified in the last 30 years 122 people who spent a period in the Library as “stagiaires”. Indeed, the term “stagiaire” has been used in a very general sense: most of the trainees were students in library science, others were young librarians in the first work experience or PhD students

in library science, others visiting librarians.

Trainees 1980-2010: Country of Origin -1



Undoubtedly some information escaped our search, nevertheless our figures can be considered quite close to reality. As you can see from the **chart n.1**, the trainees during the last 30 years came from 17 European countries and one non-European country (the U.S. with 2 trainees). Spain and Italy are at the top, followed by France, Greece, Sweden, the Czech Republic and other countries.

If we examine the data from a historical prospective, two clear phases of this experience emerge. There is an initial phase that lasts until 1995, where there isn't a clear policy of traineeship and the recruitment is done in several ways: some applications come directly from the students, or in other cases the traineeship was part of a European initiative in which the EUI was involved (e.g. Tempus); many other applications are filtered through contacts with University schools in library science and other similar institutions. During this phase most of the traineeships last from one month to three months, with an average of 2.5 months per trainee.

This situation was unsatisfactory from the point of view both of the trainees, who had insufficient time for practical experience, and the Library, which invested a considerable staff time in the tutorship of trainees without a reasonable return.

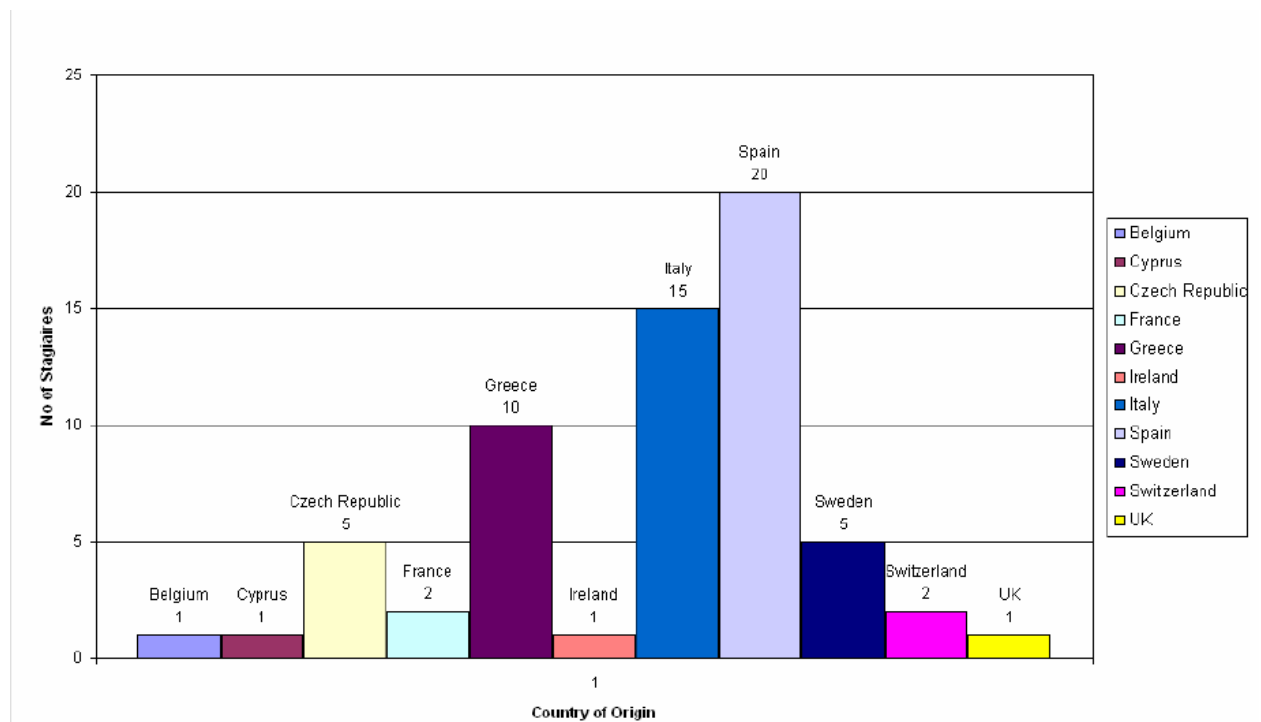
We should keep in mind that having a trainee in the EUI Library involves an important commitment, greater than having a trainee in a national structure. This is largely due to the peculiarities of the Institute and its international dimension which requires more time in settling the trainee into the new environment.

In 1996 the traineeships in the Library were reorganised and two significant structural innovations were introduced: first the duration of the traineeship, secondly a more adequate monthly indemnity.

Indeed, since 1996 the duration of the traineeships, except for a couple of cases, lasts 12 months. Ten years later, a new regulation entered into force for all traineeships of the Institute: this provision has allowed the Library to better develop its annual programme.

Therefore, in the last years the annual number of trainees is more constant. In this period the profile of the traineeship has been also better defined and oriented towards what might be called a first professional job experience.

Trainees 1996-2010 - Country of Origin



As you can see in the **chart n. 2**, out of the total of 69 trainees, the 80% recruited by the Library in the last 15 years came from the universities with which the Library has established informal arrangements for the selection of candidates. In practice, each university school sends the library a short list of applicants, according to the established profile. A library Working Group examines the CVs and the candidates are interviewed by phone (about 80% of the cases). This selection procedure is no-cost based; on the other hand, we don't have alternatives because no selection budget is available. We can say that this method works well, on the condition that in the cooperating universities there are professors and staff willing to collaborate with the programme (publicize the programme, assist the students in preparing the applications, etc.). This is the case of several universities like Barcelona, Corfu, Prague, Boras, Viterbo and a few others.

Unfortunately, it is not easy to find universities and professors willing to collaborate with our programme. This explains why most of the trainees come from a relatively limited group of countries. This is definitely a critical point of our program. We have made numerous attempts in recent years to increase the number of partner universities (e.g. France, Germany, UK, Poland and others) but so far we haven't succeeded. This failure is largely due to two factors: 1) the low interest of students and graduates in some countries (and universities) for a long period of traineeship; 2) many universities prescribe a shorter traineeship period (2-3 months), and it is required that the students dedicate the traineeship period to the preparation of their thesis. Unfortunately the character and the size of the Library don't allow us to meet these needs. Indeed we don't even have sufficient staff resources to follow the trainees in their studies.

Since 2006, the EUI has been provided with a new regulation for the traineeships, which establishes standard contractual rules for the whole Institute. This rule allows the library to better insert the programme in the library annual plan.

Once selected, the candidate for training are provided with all necessary information to finalize the contract with the Institute and are assisted in finding a comfortable accommodation in Florence. At their arrival at the EUI the trainees are introduced to the library staff and to library procedures, following a structured intensive programme on the library activities and procedures. From the

beginning one or more tutors are appointed to the trainees according to the tasks assigned in the period. By the way, let me say thank you to all my colleagues of the Library and especially to the tutors who have been devoted to the program with their extraordinary professional and human commitment.

During the programme the trainees are integrated into the library routines and involved in different sectors. They attend the staff meetings and are involved in various activities and projects, including advanced professional seminars for the library staff. They also attend, if necessary, a short course in Italian language, which is very useful for their social life in Florence.

At the end of three months, an assessment meeting is provided, aimed to confirm the traineeship for another 9 months, and also to adapt as much as possible the programme to the professional interest and attitudes of the trainee. At the end of the programme the trainee provides a report, which is evaluated and discussed.

Our approach aims to empower the young librarian with good practices and give them a comprehensive overview of the library functions. This also includes, last but not least, the opportunity to spend their daily life in an international environment, formed mostly of young researcher of the same age as the trainees.

In conclusion, we tend to balance both the needs of the trainees and the library service itself.

Probably we are not able to reach these objectives at 100%, but it is quite evident that the results are more than satisfactory.

On the other hand, we are conscious that our model is not perfect and we appreciate any suggestions for improving it. In this prospective, besides the critical points mentioned above, I would like to point out some aspects that could be enhanced, also highlighting the European profile of the programme.

We have often realized that most of the trainees have an insufficient knowledge of the EU institutions and the history of European integration. It would be appropriate to fill this lacuna by including some lessons in the programme on these issues.

It would also be useful to include in the training programme seminars on the library systems of the various EU countries, and also on library programmes launched by the EU. While we cannot offer a course on the library systems of all 27 EU countries,

something in this direction could be done with the technological facilities available today. The suggestion of John Fitzgerald (former trainee and currently Library Director at the University of Cork) to organize video conferences, with the help of former trainees, seems useful and feasible.

Another issue, to be discussed, concerns job placement after the traineeship. In recent years a number of former trainees have found jobs thanks to their experience at the EUI. It appears that the profile of the young librarians who completed their training at the EUI is appreciated, both in the public and private sectors, including the publishing and information markets. The establishing of a network of former trainees could also be useful in assisting these young people in their career development after the traineeship at the EUI.

During the last few days I have received some suggestions aimed at enriching our programme, which I imagine will be discussed in the workshops planned for this conference... among these is the idea to include in the traineeship programme a research dimension in the area of comparative librarianship with a European focus. Personally I find this idea very exciting, and I must confess that this is a project that I cultivated in the past; but I was - and still am - reluctant to make such a proposal. The reason is that we don't have the resources for an additional activity so challenging. The mission of the EUI Library is not to develop academic activities but rather to support academic research and programmes, developing appropriate information tools and environment, which means creating the best condition to let EUI professors and researchers, do their job well. This is what we are trying to do and want to do, even better, in the future.