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The Photo Archive at the Ethnographic Museum of Istria: overview and systematization

●   The Photo Archive is a secondary documentation holdings which covers a rich and diverse content relevant for entire Istria. The oldest documents date back to mid 1950s. When it comes to theme, most pictures depict rural scenery and architecture, objects, household inventory, furniture, and clothes. Although the collection is extremely valuable and far-reaching, the holdings are characterised by a lack of academic debate, and functionality. It is because of this that an analysis was conducted and systematization was undertaken as necessary steps in the further development with the goal of establishing a wholesome images database.

INTRODUCTION

The Ethnographic Museum of Istria seated in Pazin is a regional museum which keeps a vast amount of materials relevant to whole Istria in its holdings. The holdings cover both objects and documents. This paper will focus on documents, or, more precisely, on a part of documentation - photodocumentation holdings.[1] The Rules on the Content and Management of Museum Documentation define museum documentation as "a systematically processed, collected, organised, and stored set of data, developed during

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1   This paper was written on the basis of a professional paper written in order to gain the title of a museum documentalist.

processing, protection and presentation of museum material, and it is based on the arranged and determined number and quality of data on the object, group of objects, or the entire holdings. Museum documentation is created through processes of inventorization, cataloguing, and indexing, which are all part and parcel of a permanent processing and adding information." Its purpose is to "provide accurate information about museum materials, the condition they are in, exhibitions, events and other activities undertaken by the museum, and about the history of the museum from an expert and scientific point of view through systematically processed holdings."[2] The Museum Act indicates that documentation is an integral part of museum activity and provides that documentation is protected as a cultural good,[3] just like the museum materials. Ivo Maroević summarizes the gist and writes that documentation is "an essential companion of every research, every activity, therefore it accompanies the activity which focuses on the protection and interpretation of heritage. Documentation is used to lay down research findings, processes and methods, which are saved on the appropriate media and thus enter the holdings of human knowledge on several levels." (Maroević 1993: 189).

The Photodocumentation, as an integral part of audiovisual holdings, belongs to the secondary documentation[4] which covers "additional and accompanying holdings", which can be "organised based on the media used or their content."[5] Visual materials and museums are inseparable instances, they are connected in every aspect of museum activity, and visual materials play a key role "within museum documentation which in an unavoidable companion to museological functions of protection, research and communication" (Zlodi 2003: 9). When we talk about the importance of photography from documentation point of view, we must also talk about systems which lead to its creation and development. These systems have to be precise and they have to be standardised in order to meet the criterion of relevance.

DOCUMENTATION SYSTEM AT THE ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM OF ISTRIA

The National Museum Pazin was founded in 1955. Its Ethnographic Collection was established in 1957. The collection and the ethnographic exhibition organized in 1961 served as a basis for the foundation of the Ethnological Museum of Istria in 1962.

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2   The Rules on the Content and Management of Museum Documentation http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/309509.html (visited on 3rd February 2016).

3   Museum Act http://www.zakon.hr/z/302/Zakon-o-muzejima (visited on 9th February 2016).

4   According to the Rules on the Content and Management of Museum Documentation, the primary documentation "encompasses the first and the greatest set of data on museum materials. The data obtained is a result of recording, analysing and processing of objects." Tertiary documentation "consists of accessories such as catalogues and indexes: authorial, chronological, topographic, and other museum activities," and is "generated from the primary and secondary documentation in the form of thesauri, indexes, catalogues sheets and summaries, and its purpose is to speed up research of existing data from existing holdings." In: The Rules on the Content and Management of Museum Documentation http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/309509.html (visited on 3rd February 2016).

5   The Rules on the Content and Management of Museum Documentation http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/309509.html (visited on 3rd February 2016).

Milovan Gavazzi supported this idea as early as 1956 and he even assisted in setting up the Ethnographic department at the Museum in Pazin (Kocković Zaborski 2013: 20-22). Inventory books were saved since the very beginning, and they give insight into the ways documentation used to be kept. Nowadays the Museum abides by the Rules on the Content and Management of Museum Documentation[6] via platforms M++ and S++ (Fig. 1 and Fig. 1a)

The materials and documentation are stored at the Museum in Pazin, and audiovisual holdings - video library, record library, and media library, and a part of a library - are kept at the Istrian Centre for Intangible Culture (CENKI) in Pićan. The primary documentation is maintained by curators responsible for various collections. Until a documentalist was hired, secondary documentation holdings were maintained by curators according to their previous arrangement. Numerous employees who did not have the necessary expertise were in charge these materials which led to them not being structured but also the lack of debate and discussion around these materials. Information which should accompany these materials is often missing because information, names and keywords were almost non-existent. Thus the usage of this documentation has been limited or impossible. Maroević points out that it is precisely usage which should be the goal of documentation, therefore "documentation which is not used or cannot be used becomes ineffective and unnecessary." The prerequisites for successful utilization are on the one hand tied to document creation, whereby standardization is absolutely necessary, and on the other hand it is tied to storage and archiving, which enables a quick, selective (for specific kinds of data) and timely access" (Maroević 1993: 194). The problem of inadequate usage of materials due to materials not being systemized becomes obvious in the case of the Photo Archive. This is precisely why researchers started analysing the holdings, detecting the problem and solving it.

THE PHOTO ARCHIVE

The ethnographic vocation, ethnographic museums and their activities are characterised by field research. Field research leads to the creation of documentation, including photographs. This is also true of the Ethnographic Museum of Istria. Its Photo Archive mostly comprises photos taken by its employees during field research.[7] According to Margaret Mead anthropology is a conglomerate of disciplines, including ethnology and ethnography, which has both implicitly and explicitly accepted the responsibility of making and preserving documentation of the vanishing customs and people, and the recognition that forms of human behaviour still extant will inevitably disappear has

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6   The Rules on the Content and Management of Museum Documentation http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/309509.html, (visited on 3rd February 2016).

7   The Museum also has a Photographs Collection which encompasses 244 black and white photos from the end of the 19th century to the end of the 20th century. These photos are mostly family photos from Istria, school photos, portraits, photos from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Collection was set up in 2009. Legacy Collection and the Collection of Postcards, Greeting Cards, and Letters were set up that same year. These materials were a part of "paper materials." They were not documented by employees but rather purchased by the museum or donated to the museum. Through time the collection grew exponentially and the employees decided to divide the objects into three collections which were subsequently registered as public goods.

been part of our whole scientific and humanistic heritage (Mead 2003: 4). Considering that employees spend a lot of time doing field research and objects continue to be collected the holdings keep growing. The changes in documentation methods and equipment are interesting to observe - from analogue black and white photos, to color photos and eventually to digital photos.

The oldest records in the Photodocumentation date back to the 20th century, 1954 to be precise. Most of the records are from 1961 and 1962. The holdings encompass materials up to 1982, therefore the introduction of newer, more modern, photos the holding will change, especially if we take into consideration the hyperproduction brought on by digital photography (Fig. 2).

642 photographs were taken by Ljubomir Petrović, Karlo Kiš, Vinko Malnarić, Zlatko Mileusnić and Marijan Rimić follow (Fig. 3).

They all used to work at the museum. As far as the themes go, most photos depict rural scenery and architecture, objects, household inventory, furniture and clothing. There are also numerous photos depicting parades and festivals, such as the Labour Day Parade, The Relay of Youth, and the Youth Festival. Several photos depict housing construction in Pazin and anti-fascist monuments unveiling. Festivals of traditional dances and music are also taken. Ethnographic materials and objects were purchased for the museum. People are usually not depicted in the photos (with the exception of military parades, festivals and similar events). Most photos depict scenery, architecture and objects.

If we analyze where these pictures were taken, it is obvious that most pictures were taken in Pazin and surroundings - 1537 photos. A vast amount of pictures was taken in Oprtalj, Kršan, Lupoglav, Buje, Buzet and Motovun. These photos reveal areas which employees considered interesting for doing research. This data should be compared to places in which materials were purchased for individual collections and it remains to be seen if/where they overlap (Fig. 4).

Some of these photos were taken by the employees of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb (EMZ) and Rijeka Department for Conversation (KORI) during field research. The positives were left behind in Pazin, and negatives cannot be found in the holdings. This is often the case. There are more than 1000 photos at Rijeka Department for Conversation and they mostly depict rural scenery. The authors say the photos depict the organization of rural areas. Most pictures were taken in the 1970s. The photos primarily depict rural areas and stress rural architecture, objects, tools and utensils. Copyright is take into consideration when the photos are used (Fig. 5)

Historical sources offer insight into interest for specific topics at specific time periods, for example "official documents state that the desire to prove Croatian/Slavic status of Istria is the main reason for establishing the Ethnographic Collection," and we learn that "the national and Istrian ethnology focused on rural culture at that time." The purchasing policies and the photos taken in this process were inspired by "the idea of saving traditional culture from oblivion," according to Nikolić Đerić and Orlić (Nikolić Đerić and Orlić 2003: 32-34). Lidija Nikočević also emphasizes that the "postwar collection and presentation politics strived at presenting Istria as the land of Slavic (Croa-

tian) farmers who were not impacted by big cities but who experienced undesirable impact of Italian bourgeois culture. The timeless history was brought to the fore in the photos depicting fire pits and traditional clothes and endeavours to show that Slavic rural culture was omnipresent and singular" (Nikočević 2013: 15). This is all true of both objects and photos taken in these periods under the umbrella of specific policies in those times. On the other hand, the photos in the Photo Archive which were taken later and which depict housing construction or Labour Day parades testify to specific contexts and reflect the political circumstances (Fig. 6 and Fig. 7).

There are 4239 photographs in the Photo Archive in total. This does not reflect the real number of all photos in the collection. Namely, only a part of the photos has been registered. The majority is still waiting to be inventorised. Photographs taken in the 1990s have to entered into the inventory and they have to be digitalised. The photos are kept in ten ledgers and digital photos taken from 2003 to today are stored on museum servers. The steps taken in this phase can be considered the beginning of the future work on organizing the holdings.

Systemizing and digitalizing the Photo Archive

Systemizing[8] the Photo Archive in this phase meant that about ten ledgers would be processed, which was a vital step for the future development and organization. The holdings were inspected in great detail and closely analysed. This revealed irregularities which meant that the holdings were not consistent or organized. For example, some inventory numbers began with F0 (zero), and some with FO (capital letter "O"), which points to fact that documents were not organized in a sequential order. Photographs for which there are no positives were entered in S++, but we can find information about these photos in inventory books. These positives were either lost or perhaps taken by the Museum in Pazin. It is assumed that the Photo Archive was divided between the two museums. Evidently, the inventory books were a property of the Ethnographic Museum, since the Pazin Museum has none. The fact that most missing photos depict Pazin and its surroundings supports this assumption. These photos were of local interest for the Museum.

The available information is often brief and of poor quality. This can pose problems in the sense of copyright. The above-mentioned photos, which belong to Rijeka Department for Conservation, were not entered into inventory books, so the only information we have is found on the back side and it is usually the place where the photo was taken. The analysis showed which positives are missing and their sizes, and they were entered into the database. Although most photographs have previously been digitised and are now shown as visual information in the database, some photos were yet to be digitised so about 3000 photos were turned into digital format which were up to that point only available as analogues.

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8   Robert Bilić started processing photos in S++. He inventorized photographs from the 1950s and 1960s and this marks the beginning of documentation using operating systems. Zorana Geržinić and Tamara Nikolić Đerić continued this work.

"Digitisation of traditional museum materials (e.g. photographs or slides) or digital recording of museum objects and heritage," Goran Zlodi points out, "are labor intensive processes through which a new kind of material is created - visual materials in digital format" (Zlodi 2003: 20-21). The author also summarizes its advantages: additional protection in the view of another copy - a digital copy, it is easier to navigate the materials and they are not worn out when used, and several users can use the material at the same time. Furthermore, the process is relatively simple, and the visual database can be used as many times as we want. Digitised units can be adjusted for various printing formats (Zlodi 2003: 20-21). This means that we do not have to use originals every time. The high potential of digitised materials is reflected in the fact that is is more easily accessible and that it is more easily viewable, but also in the the possibilities for making presentations, and numerous other streams of activity which open up if we take into consideration options related to higher resolutions.

SUGGESTIONS AND GUIDELINES

Although this phase meant that the Photo Archive has improved, the work is not done. On the basis of previous research and my own insight into the holdings I propose the following guidelines as far as systematization goes, i.e guidelines for establishing a quality and relevant Photo Archive. First and foremost, I have to stress that one person should manage the holdings, and secondary documentation in general. This person should be a documentalist who would process the holdings in a systematic and universal way. Furthermore, we have to try to find photos for which we do not have positives, but which were entered into the database and for which we can find information in inventory books.

Deleting these records is not an option. Article 11 of Rules on the Content and Management of Museum Documentation provide that an inventory label used for and exhibit taken out of the holdings cannot be used for another object.[9] Therefore, these records must be kept in the database as information which can be used as such.

A standardized system is also necessary for terminology if we want a concise, useful and accessible database. Brief descriptions should be accompanied by keywords, and those which already exist should be edited. The terminology has so far been been developed by museum employees, which led to discrepancies in the database, which can in turn lead to unreliable research. We must gain control over terminology and expand thesaurus in order to improve quality. After setting up a thesaurus, it has to be maintained by one person who would ensure that the thesaurus is built upon and run in line with standard rules. "Within any information system, a thesaurus must ensure control over terminology and enable its consistent application in processing of materials and research, however, specific functionality must be added to expand research possibilities (hierarchies, references to specific terms, etc.) and give insight into a given area" (Zlodi 2003: 57). In order to get the most out of it, a thesaurus has to be adjusted for ethnographic profession. The solution might be found in the mother

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9   Although the article only explicitly mentions objects, the same can be applied on secondary documentation. http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/309509.html, (visited on 9th July 2018).

museums' activities and the engagement of the Ministry of Culture because this would mean the creation of a system regulated on a national level.

The Photo Archive of the Ethnographic Museum of Istria requires all photos which are not in the database to be entered, and over the years the amount of photos grew. Therefore, many photos are yet to be digitised, most of them are analogue color photos. Furthermore, the photos must be archived according to archiving standards, in ledgers and plastic foil. Nowadays we are seeing a hyperproduction of visual materials, so a lot of materials are created and stored for each event organized by the museum or for each field research undertaken. We have to ensure that all materials are properly stored and adequately protected, and we have to start the shift towards digital repositories as soon as possible.

CONCLUSION

A well organized and well maintained documentation, which includes the Photo Archive, is of great value for experts, in this case ethnology museologists, but it is also valuable for anyone who wants to use these materials. Photographs play an important role on several levels. They show, identify and protect materials. We cannot begin to imagine museum aspects of communication and research without it. Johanna Cohan Scherer emphasises that the research potential is huge considering the fact that photos can be used as primary documents, artefacts in their own, not merely as illustrations of written textual information (Cohan Scherer 2005: 205). John Collier also writes that photographs can enlarge research potential - eye movement is limited, whereas a camera can capture an infinite amount of precise details. The camera is not prone to being subjective, it does not get confused when it encounters something unknown, it does not grow tired, and it is far better when it comes to memory (Collier 2003: 248).

Documentation, which used to be called "the second most irrelevant thing in museum activity" used to be in an inferior position which was a "consequence of not defining the contents and the role of documentation in a museum's activities" (Osrečki 1990: 27). However, documentation nowadays has a different status and is legally defined as cultural heritage. Modern technology opens up numerous possibilities, visual contents can reach far wider audience, and materials are always accessible everywhere due to virtual connection and storage. Documentation system should therefore be improved, not only because this would lead to more efficient and quality work done by museum employees, but also because it would lead to better relationship with users. If we take into considerations the demands put on us by digital society and what employees need it is obvious we must shift towards virtual storage and new way of using the materials. Good examples of this practice include a network catalogue Collection of Photograph Documentation[10] by the Directorate for Cultural Heritage Protection with the Ministry of Culture, and Digital Repository by the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore.[11]

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10 The Photograph Documentation by the Directory for Cultural Heritage Protection with the Ministry of Culture http://www.fototeka.min-kulture.hr/, visited on 9th July 2018.

11 Digital Repository by the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore https://repozitorij.dief.eu/, visited on 9th July 2018.

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