Digitization: Challenges for Croatian Museums

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Abstract: In transition to digital age, enormous challenges are posed to all the heritage institutions, including museums.
Digitization of records such institutions keep in their funds is becoming more and more one of their everyday tasks, and at the same time also a manner for presenting and making available to the public use the valuable collections stored in them.
This paper presents a survey conducted in March 2012 in Croatian museums about the participation of Croatian museums in digitization procedures that is in presenting the collections of Croatian museums in a digital environment.
Keywords: digitization, copyright, Croatia, museums, Museum Documentation Center

1. Introduction

Beside the principal museum activities, such as "collecting, safekeeping and researching civilisation, cultural and natural goods, and their expert and scientific processing and systematizing into collections, the permanent protection of museum records, museums' localities and sites", the Croatian *Museum Act* 1998 stipulates "their direct and indirect presentation to the public through permanent and occasional exhibitions, and through publication of data and knowledge about museum records and museum documentation in professional, scientific and other publication media".

In the environment where there will be offered over the next couple of years and only within *Europeana*, the digital library, archive and museum, 30 million digital objects, aimed at presenting the entire European cultural heritage from the funds of the European archives, libraries, museums and other cultural

institutions, it is required to provide access to valuable collections stored in Croatian museums, that is to the Croatian culture and art. This access is to be provided by information-communication technologies and other Web 2.0 tools. Furthermore, the White Paper on Cultural Policies of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe, published on the Internet in December 2010, emphasises that access to culture needs to be spread to all. This means more than only opening most cultural activities to the majority and that promoting cultural heritage is indeed central to Europe's intent.

Over the past two decades, with the help of information-communication and web-technologies, and based on the procedure of digitization of records, the funds of heritage institutions, including museum funds, are these days everywhere in the world becoming more and more visible and easily accessible. *E-museums*, without fail, are stakeholders of Internet environment, accessible to everyone indifferently.

Therefore, the procedure of digitization of records is increasingly becoming an everyday activity of museums and museum collections.

The purpose of this survey conducted in March 2011 in Croatian museums of various types and sizes was to establish in what way Croatian museums transpose information to their users and promote various contents stored in their holdings, but also raise awareness about the preserved heritage and encourage its development, use and further creation.

Having analysed the results received from an online survey, and examined the portals and web pages of Croatian museums, and on the basis of data available in the *Guide through Croatian Museums*, published by the Museum Documentation Center, an image was built about almost three hundred museums, collections, permanent exhibitions and church collections, with holdings of almost 7 million objects, and about preserving the collective memory and the cultural, national and civilization identity of the people they represent in the European cultural heritage, a network of more than 40,000 museums, with emphasis on their presentation in a digital environment (Vodic, 2011).

2.   Museums in Croatia

There are some 200 museums, listed in the Register of Museums, Galleries and Collections in the Republic of Croatia. The Museum Documentation Center – a public institution founded in 1955 as the documentation, information and communication node of the Croatian museum network, keeps the Register as a unique and specific database of museums, their collections and professional staff. Types of Croatian museums vary from large institutions to very small institutions focusing on a specific subject, location, or a notable person – from national, regional to local museums, and museum collection, and from general to specialized museum and permanent museum exhibition (Museum Documentation Center, 2012).

Museum activity in Croatia is governed by the Museum Act (1998) and by several bylaws.

3.   Digitization in Croatia

The National Programme for the Digitization of Archival, Library and Museum Material was developed and adopted in 2006. It is intended to encourage the creation of new digital contents, improve its accessibility and visibility, and promote a systematic and even approach to the digitization of holdings in cultural institutions. It also monitors digitization projects and supports the creation of a Web reference portal – The Croatian Cultural Heritage with information and the data on digitization projects in progress for the museums and other heritage institutions.

The project was initiated by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia, and the project leaders are the National and University Library in Zagreb, the Croatian State Archives and the Museum Documentation Center pursuant to the Agreement on Cooperation signed in March 2007. It was implemented over three years **(**The Croatian Cultural Heritage, 2012).

4.   Sample, methodology and hypotheses of research

The survey aimed at establishing to what extent the digitization projects were represented in the Croatian museums was conducted in the form of an online survey, in 28 Croatian museums, during March 2012.

The online survey consisted of 16 questions, grouped under 5 thematic units. The idea was to establish priorities in selecting the material for digitization, and what type of museum records get selected for digitization. There were analysed sources of financing, and possibilities for inclusion of sponsors in digitization procedures. The survey aimed at establishing the museums' point of view regarding the copyright, an inevitable topic in the procedures of digitizing works, regardless of the fact that the works planned for digitization are no more protected by copyright, or that the owner of copyright is unknown or cannot be located. At the end, the Croatian museums described the standards used in describing digital objects, and in what manner the digitization projects they participate in are presented and promoted.

The authors put forward the following hypotheses:

1. Pursuant to the National Programme for the Digitization of Archival, Library and Museum Records, from 2006, the Croatian museums participate in the records digitization procedures, although the digitization in museum institutions has still not been conducted to a greater extent.

2. The records from museum holdings, and ephemeral records, like posters, postcards and brochures, and publications belonging to the fund, or museum libraries are listed as digitization priorities.

3. The museum holdings which are being digitized represent a cultural good, and they keep track of the museum activities; they are digitized because they are used more easily in the digital format, and because they are highly damaged and the present use is more difficult.

4. Majority of museums in Croatia will digitize the works that are no longer protected by copyright.

5. The projects are digitized mostly with the funds supplied by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia, and with the museum funds; the projects supported by sponsors and the projects conducted without such support are equally represented.
6. Most museums are aware of the importance of regulating copyright in digitizing procedure, and will try to find the owners of copyright for the purposes of the digitizing project.
7. The standards applied for the purposes of describing the digitization of museum records were established at the national level.
8. Most of the digitized museum objects are still available only within a museum or at a museum web site.

5.   Results of Digitization in Croatian Museums Survey

Twenty-eight Croatian museums of various types and sizes participated in the survey: general museums (11) and special museums (5), among them being archaeological (3), ethnographic (1), technical (1), history (4), natural history (3), and art museums (2).

During March 2012 the anonymous online questionnaire was sent to 119 e-mail addresses in 114 museums in Croatia. The recipients were the museum directors or managers of museum digitization projects. The amount of 28 museums answered the online survey. Authors' presumption is that reason for the low response rate was the slow pace of digitization projects in Croatia.

Half of the museums responded that they have participated in a digitization project.

The priorities for digitization were as follows: objects from the museum holdings (21), books, catalogs, art monographs and other printed publications from the museum library (10), magazines and newspapers (4), ephemera - photographs, posters, postcards, brochures (11), manuscripts (2), maps and atlases (2) and museum documentation (8) (Figure 1.).
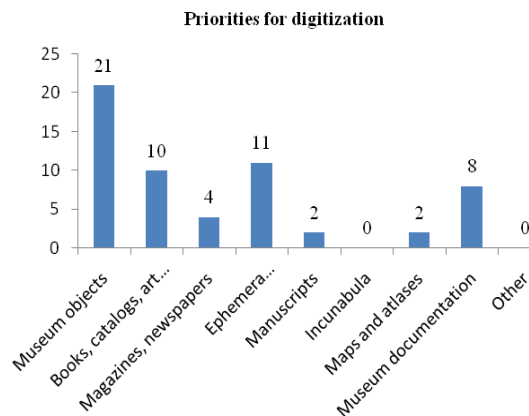

Figure 1. Priorities for digitization

Criteria applied in digitization by majority of museums were that an object is a cultural asset (20) and simpler and more effective use of objects (17). Almost half of the museums prefer to choose an object that follows the museum activity (14). Other criteria are a highly damaged object (12), frequent use of objects (9) and digitization on user's demand. Insufficient use of objects was not mentioned by any museum as a reason for digitization (Figure 2.).
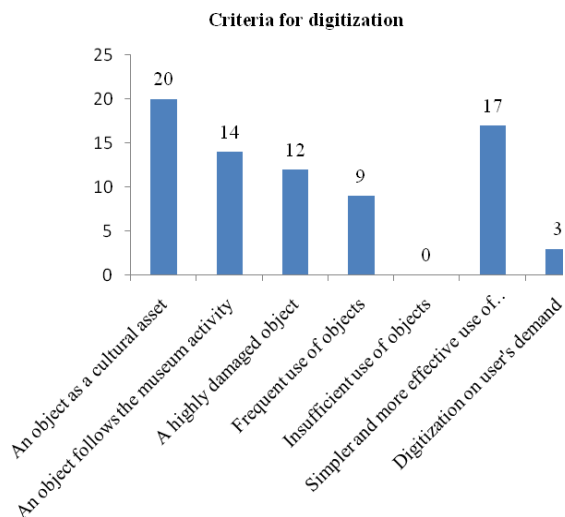
Criteria for digitization

Figure 2. Criteria for digitization

Digitization is an act of both reproduction and communication to the public and therefore requires a permission of the author/rights owner or her/his representative, if the work is copyrighted. A public institution engaged in digitization first has to identify the author and determine if the work is still protected (the work is protected during an author's lifetime and the 70 years following his/her death). Also, the copyright for a protected work could have been transferred to another physical or legal person. Tracing the rights holders could be a lengthy and burdensome process, even more so if a library wishes to digitize various kinds of materials, such as phonograms, artefacts, letters, etc. (Horvat and Zivkovic, 2010). Croatian museums recognize the same problem in the process of digitization while asking authors and copyright owners different permissions: permission for digital reproduction (10), permission for publication on the web (11), permission for reproduction in printed publications (9) and permission for sale of digital copies (3) (Figure 3.).

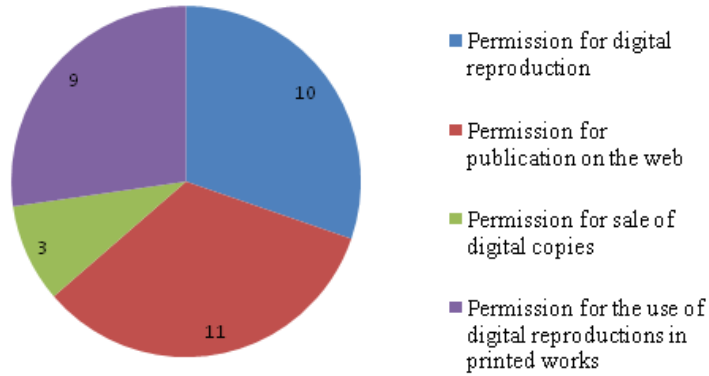**Permission of copyright owners in digitization projects**

Figure 3. Permission of copyright owners in digitization projects

In case the copyright owner is unknown, museums primarily consult colleagues in the museum or outside the museum (17). In many cases they consult a professional association or an umbrella institution (ULUPUH, MDC and others) (14) and equally often the museum reference collection or the museum library (14). Yet, many would consult various sources available on the Internet (15). (Figure 4.).
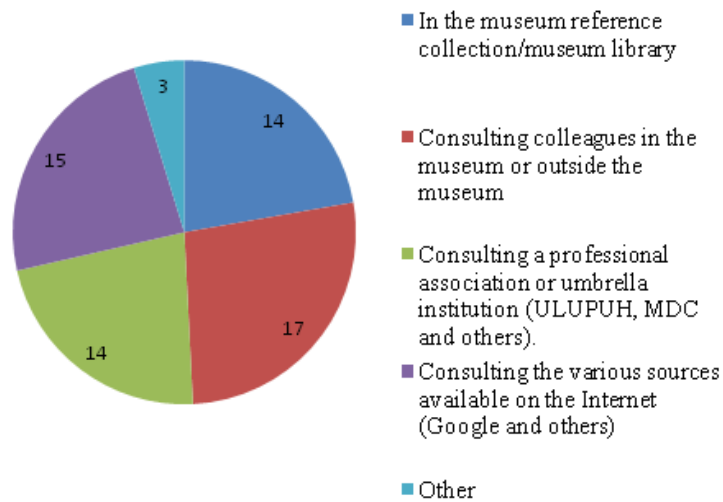
Diligent search for authors

Figure 4. Diligent search for authors

6.   Conclusions

There are numerous documents emphasising that nowadays, in transition to digital age, all the heritage and cultural institutions, including also museums, have to be dedicated in a special way to presenting and promoting the records kept in their funds, which is to a great extent made simpler by the development of information- communication technologies and the digitization procedures.

The survey conducted in the museums in Croatia confirmed that the Croatian museums, of various types and sizes, also apply digitization procedures to make their records more accessible, visible and current. The digitization of museum records was foreseen by the National Digitization Programme, but it is still a feature of the biggest specialised or general Croatian museums, and it is directed to the cultural goods that are a public domain, and are no longer protected by copyright. Valuable records from museum collections, regretfully, are still not offered for research and further creation to all the users on the Internet, but access to them is limited within a particular museum. Croatian museums, well aware of the value of the heritage stored in their holdings, and of the importance of transmitting it to future generations, as well as of raising awareness and literacy about the preserved cultural heritage, through digitization procedures, contribute to its preservation and construction of the European digital artistic landscape.

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