Cultural Heritage in the World of New Technologies — Prospects for Co-Operation between Archives, Museums and Libraries in Croatia

Introduction

Thinking about Croatia, or in this case about 213 museums, galleries and museum collections, 580 libraries — public, academic, special, scientific and others and 15 archival institutions, as well as almost 100 archives in various institutes and religious communities, one could say, in the light of modern information networks, that it shouldn’t be a problem in build a new one here. Yet, for the country relatively small in size and population, Croatia has, because of its geostategic position and vivid historical background, unique cultural heritage and quite complexly experiences in its organization and interpretation. Changes of political systems and systems of government (especially in last hundred years) had quite
an impact on activities of institutions whose role is to document society and to save memory for generations to come. Materials kept in libraries, museums and archives are fundamental for historic, cultural and social identity of a nation in the same way as availability of information resources is fundamental for every citizen, so development of future cultural strategies and programs cannot be seen without Croatian specific. Without going further back, let’s just mention the nineties which were due to war circumstances and financial restrictions caused by transition, marked by efforts for protection of heritage instead of modernizations of professional services. Nevertheless, Croatian archives, libraries and museums entered 21st century with new initiatives for the improvement of their services, supported by government efforts toward computerization and development of information infrastructure in the entire society, and accordingly, to culture services as well.

Why co-operation?

Globalization of contemporary information environment, caused by technology development, has influence on professional, organizational and technical aspects of preserving, processing and ensuring availability of information sources. This trend also changes the environment in which institutions, focused on facilitating information services, operate, as well as user expectations and requirements, in terms of demand for quality services and integrated information, regardless of the sources they originate from. In connection to their role as information services, Croatian legislation puts archives, libraries and museums in a very similar framework. So library service includes, among other things, «production of information tools as well as participation in production of union catalogues and data bases ... in doing which libraries collaborate and interconnect within Croatian library system for... standardization of procedures in arranging and flowing of holdings and information.» Museum service encloses «... publishing data and cognitions about museum holdings and museum documentation through professional, scientific and other information-means and museums interconnect in the museum system of the Republic of Croatia for implementation of unique professional approach in doing museum service.» Archives are «by producing finding aids and by providing professional and scientific information interconnected in the unique information system». These three professions also share common educational pattern: since 1986. on Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb one can obtain diploma in information sciences with major in librarianship, museology or archivistics. So, it does not surprise that experts from different professions join their efforts trying to answer the challenges which are posed by the global information infrastructure and quick development of new technologies. At the same time, they also try to resolve problems of transformation of their functions and secure the quality of their services. In 1997. the Croatian Archival Society, the Croatian Library Association and the Croatian Museum Association organized their first Seminar Archives, Libraries, Museums — Possibilities for Co-operation within the Environment of the Global Information Infrastructure (ALM). The ALM Seminar came out of the idea that there was a need for libraries to open up toward related institutions so that the user could get as complete, precise and professional answer as possible to his question through a singular, coherent approach to various information sources. The objectives of the seminars are to research, present and discuss a whole range of issues, both theoretical and practical, in the vast field of interoperability within cultural heritage sector, as part of the global information infrastructure context. Every year experts who work in various cultural and scientific institutions come together to exchange their ideas, knowledge and experience as well as to recognize the fields and levels in which co-operation is possible in creating and approaching information. Since all seven seminars held so far resulted with extraordinary interest of the participants, evident is the need of a network supporting the cooperation of archives, libraries and museums. Until now, few joint working

3 Strategy of development of Republic of Croatia in 21st century can be seen at http://www.zamirnet.hr/icnl/pdf/Strategija.pdf
4 Zakon o knjižnicama. // Narodne novine 105/97. Čl.6. i Čl. 30. (Libraries Law)
5 Zakon o muzejima. // Narodne novine 142/98. Čl. 5. i Čl. 6. (Museums Law)
6 Zakon o arhivskom gradivu i arhivima. // Narodne novine 105/97. Čl.6. (Archival Law)
groups, with different interest were created — for example in the field of subject cataloging, authority control, documentation, standardization digitalization and Web environment.

**Current activities and projects in the field of archives, libraries and museums**

This brief overview presents only the projects which include participation of many different institutions or which idea was to gather information from various institutes, because they represent the base on which the future co-operation in development of information networks can be build on. Beside them, there are many successful examples worth mentioning, mostly projects of building OPAC and WebPAC catalogs and other information computer based tools in single institutions which will be presented in some other occasion.

**Culturenet.hr** is the project initiated in 2001, by the Ministry of Culture and the Open Society Institute — Croatia. The Culturenet.hr portal was at first accessible on the web as a joint project, and from April 2004, the Ministry of Culture is resuming the maintenance and development of the project within the framework of its regular activities. The aspiration of this project is to bring together all available Croatian culture resources, stimulate their elaboration and enable all professionals to find out required information in one place. Although the scope of this project is much wider than the subject of this paper, I decided to mention it here because it is, for the moment, the only network place where it is possible to find information about archives, museums and libraries in one place, and that can be done on the site Catalog — Croatian Cultural Institutions/subject-information and contacts. Another thing that makes CultureNet worth mentioning is its aims to improve culture co-operation and communication among culture institutions and because it’s realization has been very successful one.

**CARNet (Croatian Academic and Research Network),** founded in 1991. as a project of the Ministry of Science and Technology is primarily oriented towards academic and scientific community, but as an establishment dedicated to development of information and communication infrastructure it helps and co-operates with archives, museums and libraries in implementation of new technologies and promotion of knowledge dissemination and data interchange, as well as set-up of content which will be network accessible.

**Croatian Art on Internet** was CARNet pilot project, run in 1997. and 1998. by the Museum Documentation Centre (MDC). It purposes were to think out and to start Internet presentation of holdings in Croatian museums. The collected data were digitized and published on network and on CD-ROM. The project was succeeded by **Croatian Museums on the Internet,** initiated in 1996., also by MDC. This program, available on the MDC web site, presents the first page from where you can access all the museums in Croatia which have Internet pages. Along with basic information (name, address, telephone), museums are represented through collections and a selection of their most valuable exhibits. This Project was put in the UNESCO publication «World Culture Report 2000».

**NISKA (National Information System of the Croatian Libraries)** is project shared by the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Science and Technology with main goal of the intellectual organization of libraries information system which will enable accessibility of all library holdings in Croatia. Project tasks, prepared by Project Working Group, are: to analyze current situation, to shape the vision of libraries information system by making recommendations for computer equipment and library applications, to define use of non-book material in libraries, to make guidelines for libraries network and to define way of

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7 Informations about ALM Seminar are available at [http://public.srce.hr/akm/](http://public.srce.hr/akm/)
8 [http://www.culturenet.hr/v1/hrvatski/](http://www.culturenet.hr/v1/hrvatski/)
9 Microsoft Hrvatska, ECS and Hrvatski Telekom was partners and sponsors of this project
11 [http://www.carnet.hr/](http://www.carnet.hr/)
12 [http://www.mdc.hr/mbk-karta/index.html](http://www.mdc.hr/mbk-karta/index.html)
13 [http://www.niska.hr/dokumenti/idejni_proekt.html](http://www.niska.hr/dokumenti/idejni_proekt.html)
libraries connection to Internet, to make proposals for librarians permanent education, to make proposals for organization of libraries information network and to prepare all material for execution of the project.

SZI (System of Scientific Information of Republic of Croatia) was initiated in 1994. by the Ministry of Science and Technology with a purpose of building information system which will be the base to scientific and research work and academic education in Croatia. It should be accomplished by active involvement of academic and scientific libraries in global computer network. System, which currently includes about 120 libraries, is made from five subsystems: natural sciences, biomedicine, technology, social sciences and humanities. The goals of this project are: to make possible Internet search of library catalogs, to faster information flow, to rationalize acquisition and use of information sources and to make scientific papers available.

ArhIS (Archival Information System) is a software application for managing the holdings of all state archives, based on an Oracle database. The decision to start building an application was initiated in Croatian State Archives in 1997, and the real work started a year later. The application consists of four modules: Control, Description, Repository and Use. ArhIS should provide a possibility to integrate all actions concerning archives and archival institutions in one place and will be available on-line within each participant institution. Currently work under this program is oriented towards Internet accessibility of this application, which should, in the subject of information retrieval and improving searching facilities make this database available to all interested users.

Croatian State Archives, as central and national archive, has initiated and prepared new computerized Register of archival fonds and collections in the Croatia, which is the central register of archival records in Croatia and encloses data from all archival as well as from all other institutions which keep archival materials. Register is accessible on intranet within each archival institution and since it will be publish, paper version will be accessible in libraries, museums and other cultural institutions. Due to technological and organizational circumstances it is not yet available to researchers, but information retrieval is currently done by the way that archivists themselves research Register as well as other computer applications by the user request.

Register of museums and galleries in Croatia, which currently includes data on 146 central institutions: museums, galleries and separate collections, 60 regional and other departments and collections, is maintained by Museum Documentation Centre (MDC). MDC is founded in 1955, as the central institution for promotion of the museum activities, and it is the communication centre of the Croatian museum network. It developed information network aiming at promotion of its activity in Croatia, and this Register, which is continuation of previous Register of museum and gallery institutions is part of its regular documentational work, among activities in collecting data about Croatian museum service. Register should be available online as one of the projects under the Ministry of Culture activities.

Historical Sources for the Croatian History is project maintained by the Croatian State Archives and funded by the Ministry of Science and Technology. Intention of this project is to systematically gather and arrange information on historical sources for Croatian history in archival institution outside Croatia. The project was already resulted with large quantity of microfilms and various published and unpublished finding aids which are available to all researchers in CSA. Further plans include creation of unique data base of Croatian historical resources in foreign countries, which is opportunity for further co-operation between various memory institutions.

INDOK base of Croatian Art Heritage is part of the Program Art Heritage and Art Topography of Croatia which is run by the Institute for Art History and was funded by Ministry of science and technology. Goal is to establish digital information system on documentation about monuments in Croatia, collection of which is part of Institute activities. It should be available to all users in and outside Institute.

Public Project Documentation was 2000. and 2001. CARNET pilot project, conducted by the KontraFor with goal to document and file all records about Croatian historical architecture in electronic form through searchable web page, available to all researchers.

14  http://www.szi.hr/projektszi.htm
15  http://www.javninacrti.com/
**ARNA** (Architectural Heritage Online) project started inside the section «Architectural heritage», founded in 2002, within the Society of architects in Zagreb. Mean goal is popularization and protection of heritage in this field and intention of the project is to present old materials by using new technologies and to accomplish creation of plans for construction of database on buildings, easy to search, and available on Internet.

**TEUTA** (Information System of Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Croatia) is ongoing program developed in the Ministry of Culture primarily for professional activities in the field of protection of cultural heritage within the Ministry. It is planed as Internet available database which will include documentation, plans, programs, activities and all other relevant data about different cultural institutions in Croatia.

**How to build information network of Croatian archives, libraries and museums?**

Theory and practice of professional activities and majority of projects in the field of culture show that professional and institutional efforts in Croatia are very similar to those on the international, especially European level. Croatian reality, on the other side, shows that in spite of many great ideas, majority of programs are rather slow in realization or sometimes they end without any useful results. Inadequate results are mostly caused by discrepancy between real capacities and contemporary needs, funding problems, technological and organizational problems, human resources problems (lack of staff or lack of certain professionals skills), lack of global planning and co-operation on institutional and professional level, and, last but not least, lack of basic documentation needed for providing quality results, as part of various programs enabled by new technologies. Despite all negative factors, co-operation still remains unquestionably a fact and a basis for future activities in all three professions, as ALM Seminars have testified so far. All we need is to put it in realistic framework.

So we can not develop, yet, common data base or information tool which could connect holdings in all institutions and make data interchange possible. But we can, with joint efforts, make portal or gateway which will include in one place information about all institutions with basic information on their holdings. The unified presentation of Croatian archives, museums and libraries on the web in the form of the ALM-portal is part of the ALM Seminars discussions since 1999. and the ALM Working Group should be the initiator of this project. Its content would, at first consist of basic data on institutions in question, information sources of the ALM institution and their activities and ALM sources available on the Internet, a great deal of already existing material. After accomplishing this first goal, the next step could be construction of the search engine that would enable the search of all ALM databases available on the Internet via a single interface. There are also other possibilities of co-operation, for example, creation of union catalogues of specific types of records or specific topics, which can later serve as models or pilot projects for more complex projects. We can, inspired by similar projects in international cultural communities, make union data base for maps and cartographic material or manuscripts or local heritage collections or any other collections of materials which are held in more than one institution and it could be a very good starting point to our main goal — including our cultural heritage through possibilities provided by modern information and communication technologies in the network of world heritage.