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HYPertext AND MUSEUM DOCUMENTATION

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The Museum Documentation Centre - MDC of Zagreb was founded in 1955, and by widening the scope of its programs and activities has grown to be a modern information, documentation and communication (INDOK) Centre for the museum sector in Croatia. Its initial purpose and the basis of its activities is collecting documentation on museums, keeping records on their activities, forwarding and promoting museums and museum collections. MDC collaborates with museums in Croatia and worldwide, as well as with corresponding foreign institutions such as ICOM Documentation Centre of Paris, MDA of Cambridge, Scottish Museums Council of Edinburgh and many others.

The introduction of computer technology brings significant changes and opens a new chapter in the work of MDC, in terms of methods of collecting documentation as well as in the system of its use and presentation.

The Information Technology Sector of MDC was founded in 1990 and employs two computer experts. MDC has also become the central institution for introducing information technology into Croatian museums, the centre for education of museum workers in using new technology through courses, seminars and lectures. Since 1990 MDC has also published the Bulletin on Informatisation of the Museum Sector.

MDC Documentation

Collecting and recording museum documentation is the essential MDC's activity. MDC collects all data concerning complex activities of museum and gallery institutions: publishing and exhibitions. MDC maintains collections of posters, photographs (of buildings housing museums and galleries, of their permanent displays and of individual museum objects in their collections), postcards, invitation cards and other materials published by museums and galleries. MDC also holds significant collections of press clippings, of unpublished manuscripts, microfilms, video recordings and archive documents. MDC also maintains the sole specialised museology library in Croatia holding 18,000 volumes. The data bases are being extended depending on possibilities, and new ones related to programs and projects of MDC are being introduced.

Structure and classification of databases

The construction of databases developed by MDC is determined by the need for easier handling of documents and data collected by the Centre and their accessibility to a broad circle of users.

The classification of databases maintained by the MDC is founded on the classifications required by the Cultural Information System.

Databases:

- **Bibliographic** databases consist of data on documents (sources: books, journals, articles and papers, graphics, posters, manuscripts, etc.).
- **Referral** databases contain references.

Document bases:

- **Textual/numerical** databases contain a combination of tabular presentation of business data and textual comments, mostly based on data collected by questionnaires.
- **Full-text** databases contain complete texts of documents and refer to texts initially created in preparation of texts for publishing (Guide to Museums and Galleries of Croatia, Damages, etc.).
- **Pictorial** databases contain photographs of museums and galleries and their collections.

Categorisation from the standpoint of Cultural Information Policy:

- **Public databases**, containing data which are, due to their structure and contents, of general interest to various categories of users: poster collections, invitation collections, photo collections, relevant press clippings, publications, exhibitions, guides.
- **Business databases** structured according to the needs of the museum sector in development: microfilm collection, museum and galleries activities, museum object classification system, data on museums and galleries in Croatia, data on staff, general data on museum collections, help needed by museums and galleries, textual data on protection.

Reason for initial input of data and creating databases can be determined by the following uses:

- documentation of collections with input, correction, deletion functions,
- preparation for publishing (input, correction) for publications: Museology, Informatica Museologica, Bulletin on Informatisation of the Museum Sector in Croatia,
- assembling of various surveys,
- answers to questions,
- preparation for the hypertextual bases.

Managing databases

MDC has at its disposal IBM compatible computers, local network; develops the application through the program DBase IV; uses MODES and ISIS programs for input and classification of data on documentation funds which are specially adapted to the needs and development of standards of museums sector. For easier management of various contents and structures of data a shell system is built uniting all system functions. With these tools, the input and maintenance of bases is made easy.

The Majority of data in the databases is not susceptible to daily changes. That was an argument in favour of maintaining the data bases in MDC with the program solutions at our disposal. To endow the series of above mentioned data bases with value for a broad circle of users it is necessary to simplify the access to interesting parts of information. One of the ways of distributing data bases. prior to building of cultural information system and physical networking of the system users is the installation of hypertextual bases on local personal computers. Such bases are accessible at specific locations.

Hypertextual Databases

Alongside exhibitions and publications (catalogues), hypertext is also one of the tools for presenting to the public the complex activities of museums, galleries and of MDC. Hypertext is a medium possessing many positive properties: it is visually legible and easy to scan, simple to transfer and handle and cheap to distribute.

Compared to a publication, hypertext is a text transferred to the screen through the electronic media, subject to specific rules and structure. Up to the present MDC has developed several procedures for creating a variety of hypertextual bases:

Register

Hypertext connects the data contained in MDC's register to full texts: Guide to Museums and Galleries of Croatia and the Supplement to the Guide about war destruction of museums and galleries in Croatia 1991/92. The Register's informational support was set up with the objective to keep records on museums and galleries of Croatia (DBase IV). It consists of general data, addresses, lists of curators and conservators, collections, documentation, scope of the inventory of items and activities of institutions.

We shall take a closer look at this data base, which was created by five curators. The Guide to the Museums and Galleries of Croatia in Croatian language is in fact the second, revised and expanded edition of the publication issued in 1981, with new colour photographs. The data for the Guide was collected from several sources: through work in the field and direct collaboration with museum workers in most of institutions, through questionnaires, which are regularly updated and distributed to museums and galleries, guide-books and catalogues published by individual institutions, and other specialised and general references: ranging from museums almanacs and journals to Encyclopaedia. The Guide presents 208 museums and galleries registered at Croatian Museum Council, including several private collections and most significant ecclesiastical collections which are open to the public (a guide to the ecclesiastical museums and collections is on the MDC's agenda). Each institution is presented by the information on its history, museum building, collections it maintains and most valuable objects in its possession, with a note on the opening hours. Each of the five curators entered data on about forty institutions using Microsoft Word, and it was all incorporated into a single file, which was then used as the bases for printing the publication. We decided upon creating hypertextual base bearing in mind its internal use by museum workers in the institutions, as well as presentations to general public in museums and other places.

Fragmentation of data is apparent on various levels: region, city, institution, general data on the institution, data on personnel structure, collections and so on. Necessary fragments are included depending on the intended use of the textual bases structured from the existing data. New presentation and combination of data endow them with new dimensions.

It can be presented in a chart:

CITY
MUSEUMS
MUSEUM
GENERAL DATA
CHOICE (GUIDE)
CHOICE (DAMAGES)
CHOICE (IMAGES)

Guide

Guide to the Museums and Galleries of Croatia in English language accompanying the book. The beginning text is in Microsoft Word. It was made in the same way as the version in Croatian language and the data are also structured in the same way. At the Book Fair in Frankfurt in the autumn of 1993 our publication *Museums and Galleries of Croatia* will be displayed, and it will be also possible to present the databases through the electronic media. The database is intended for public presentation

Damage

The Destruction of Museums and Galleries in Croatia During the 1991/92 War containing current data on the damages caused to museums and galleries in 1991/92 war. Texts (Microsoft Word) are connected to documentary photographs.

This is a rather small hypertextual base which is now also incorporated in the Guide, since it documents the destiny of museums in war. Data was collected from various sources: from reports made by our colleagues in the field, from reports in public media, from reports issued by the Central Croatian Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments, with whom we collaborated very closely with from the very beginning of the war. The database comprises two levels: *Protection*: recording measures taken before the war operations took place in order to protect buildings and collections, and *Damage*: recording concisely and precisely (where it was possible to verify information) damages done to buildings and collections and the dates thereof. Detailed reports are made on damage to 46 museums and galleries, ranging from the slightly damaged to the completely razed and burnt museums and galleries of Vukovar and Cilipi, as well as the list of the 17 museums in the still occupied areas of Croatia. This data base can also be used for internal purposes or presented to the general public.

War photographs

Data is filed using the program MODES structured according to ISBD standard, photographs are scanned and the link between them set up. The base contains collected and processed photographs related to the museum institutions devastated during the 1991/92 war.

From Everyday to Holiday

The hypertextual presentation of the catalogue for this exhibition was created in collaboration with the Arts and Crafts Museum of Zagreb, combining texts by the authors of the catalogue, the entire exhibition and documentation on every single object (over 500 exhibits).

The example of collaboration of MDC and the Arts and Crafts Museum, which is one of the leading museums in Croatia, holding 60,000 museum objects, proves that museum institutions are interested in this new technology, and that further development of hypertextual bases is possible. In the course of preparations for this large exhibition of The Baroque in Central Europe named **From Everyday to Holiday, Cultural Life of 17th and 18th Century in Croatia** the Arts and Crafts Museum applied to the MDC's Information Technology Sector to create a hypertextual base on the bases of the catalogue for the exhibition, with a specific structure and functions of display and search. Their motive to do so was to obtain a quick and easy way of dismounting information on the exhibition. Moreover, inviting visitors to enter the data base and search through it is a modern, highly communicative and intriguing way of presentation of the exhibition. Search function can give especially interesting results, like browsing portraits of prominent persons of a period, or objects made of iron, etc.

The Museum and Gallery objects classification

Contains instructions for classification, definitions of sets and subsets, names of objects included in classification according to the decision of working group, and index by name of object. The advantage of such a presentation of museum objects classification is the possibility to use the data simultaneously with the program for data input, so that curators don't need to consult the manual in their work. It also simplifies adding of data and speeds up their distribution.

In creating hypertextual bases two software products were used. One of them is Norton Guide by John Soha, used for museum object classification.

Together with Integra of Zagreb we developed our own version of hypertextual program for linking texts and pictures. Data is structured into units, and then in pages which are in turn interconnected. It provides for various ways of retrieving data according to specified subjects. One of the examples is the organisation of REGISTER according to places and institutions, as well as according to type of activities. Images of objects stored in various formats can be easily incorporated. The search function is also important, it works on arbitrary text and memorises the last result.

Use and users of hypertextual databases

The main reason for using the hypertextual presentation of data is the possibility of over-viewing information collected in various ways and for various purposes. There is a possibility of combining complementary business data and public information. The second reason it is a simple and cheap way of spreading information susceptible to change.

The third reason is the possibility of satisfying many various needs of users and their tasks.

The wide range of activities and existing documentation databases and the use of the existing contents determine the priorities and tendencies of informatisation with the particular emphasis on the need for a flexible system which will embrace the work with data and make the necessary connections and combinations possible.

Hypertextual presentation of data is determined by selection according to needs and structure, depending on the intended use and the frequency of changes in the data. The desired independent elements can build hypertextual bases with the function aimed at the demands of:

Museums and galleries: for the mutual exchange of information and encouraging constant supplementing of data. Hypertext offers a wide scope of possibilities for use within the framework of the museum and its activities, particularly in the area of public relations and educational activities. Within museum it can be used:

- internally: for the use by curators and other museum workers,
- publicly: by incorporating hypertext into permanent displays and temporary exhibitions,
- to accompany exhibitions displayed outside museum, especially visiting exhibitions abroad.

Tourist information: on museums and galleries, their holdings and collections, exhibitions and other activities: at tourist information centres, at fairs, etc. (in Croatia and abroad).

Cultural information: at cultural information centres, at various events, meetings, etc. (in Croatia and abroad).

Educational information:

- in educational institutions - schools, educational centres, etc.
- in libraries

Managing: museums and galleries.

There is a great variety of possibilities in building hypertextual data bases, as well as of their utilisation. It is therefore very important to introduce to this project developed by MDC as many as possible potential users, so that they can recognise its advantages and either use it in their work, or collaborate in its further development.