

The Marubi Project – a story with an open end

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S W E D E N

Introduction

When this paper has been announced, we wanted to give a report on a project with a defined start, a concise project plan that has been realised in precise project phases within a delimited schedule coming to an end allowing an adequate evaluation – the usual plot. But then, time has passed and reality has interfered. And it is not sure any more, if it will be possible to give a realistic report on the project. But if you allow doing so, we will present the project as an ongoing process, giving access to different options.

It is not really an interactive story where the audience may interfere to give the action an unexpected turn, but it should not be denied that comments may be welcome. But let's start at the beginning, at the real point of concerns: the Marubi photographic collection.

The Marubi photographic collection

In the 1850s, Pietro Marubi, an Italian supporter of Garibaldi, had to escape from his hometown Piacenza. The refugee finally settled in Shkodra, Albania, where he quickly got involved into the life of the city. Architect, painter and sculptor, Pjetri Marubi (1834-1903) was also practising as a professional photographer producing photos of outstanding artistic and technical quality. In 1856 he opened a photographic workshop which has been carried on by the family – by Matia Kodheli (1862-1881), Keli Kodheli-Marubi (1870-1940) and Gege Marubi (1898-1980) by 1970. All members of the Marubi photographic “dynasty” pursued technical innovation and artistic excellence.

In 1970 Gega Marubi granted to the State of Albania a collection of about 150.000 film negatives. Since then, it has been managed by Ms. Semilha Osmani, the last assistant of Gega Marubi, and now the Director of the photo archive. She has shown her devotion to the Fototeka for nearly forty years, defending this treasure house even during the riots in 1997.

Fototeka Marubi contains the unique collection of the Marubi photographic workshop, covering 96 years of intense documentation of personalities (*photo: Myrto Dani and friend*), life (*photo: Moslem lady*) and landscape of Albania (*photo: harbour of Shkoder*), political events (*photo: young fighter*) and urban development. The collection has an extraordinary historical and artistic value, comparable to the oeuvre of Louis Daguerre, August Sander, Ansel Adams, Edward Weston and others. Its preservation is not only a question of national, but also of international interest.

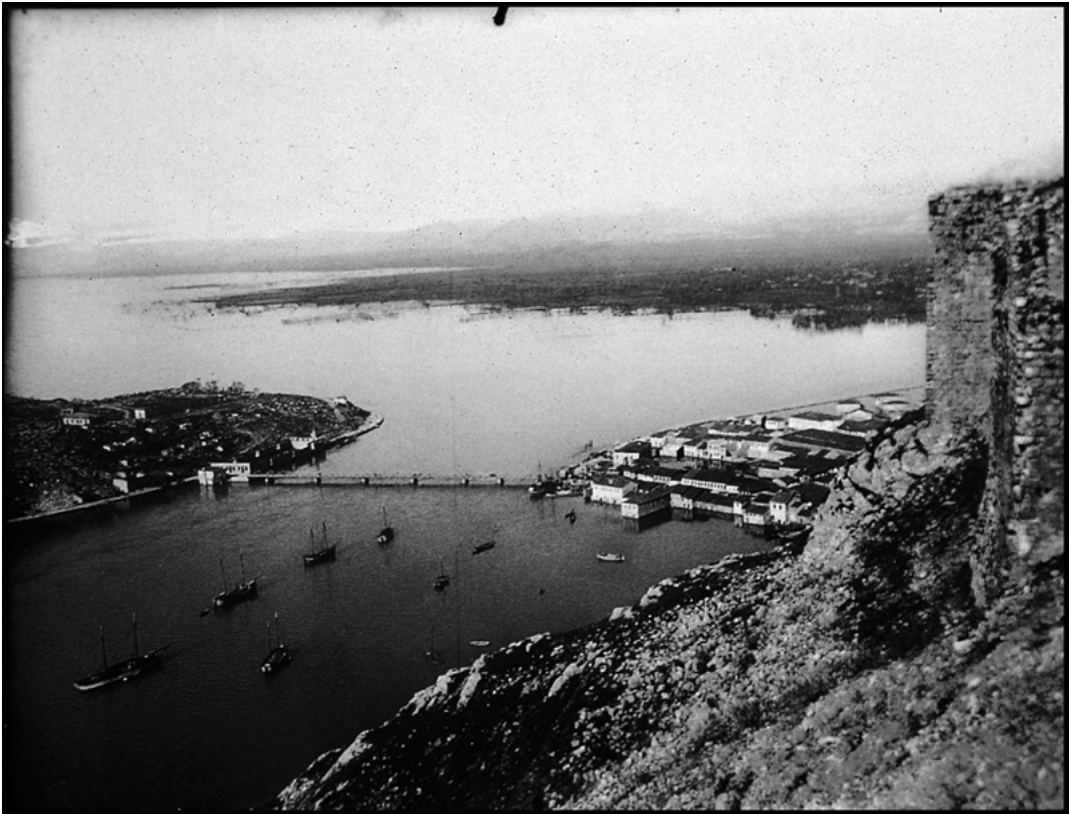
During the dictatorship of Enver Hoxha nearly all churches and other historical reminiscences were systematically destroyed in the attempt to wipe out historical and cultural memory. In post-communist Albania there is little understanding of it's own past. Historical photographs like those of the Marubi collection have a high degree of reliability. They are documents allowing reconstructing to a certain degree a view on Albanian history. Therefore the collection also has a political and educational function. It may assist the building up of a new national identity.



Myrto Dani and friend



Moslem lady



Harbour of Shkoder



Young fighter

The current condition of the photo archive

By now the Fototeka Marubi contains a relatively complete collection in relatively good technical condition. But the deterioration is rapidly increasing by physical and chemical influences. Silvery shining destructions at the edge, signs of the irreversible process of deterioration are only one signal showing that it is urgent to take preservation measures.



Fototeka



Archive old

Paper negatives, positives and glass negatives of different materials and different sizes are stored together– without any archival wrapping material. The numbered boxes are piled up in wooden lockers. The weight of the boxes has already caused the breaking of some of the glass negatives.)

The storage room is clean but exposed to extreme changes of temperature. The daily power cut-off from 8 to 16 sets the air condition system out of function. Additional the Fototeka Marubi is located in a historical building in the city centre of Shkodra where air pollution is important.

The use of the collection is limited to accidental orders for private (family pictures), folkloristic or publishing reasons. No attempt has been made for systematic scientific research. There is no public presentation, although the building would permit the installation of an exhibition or study room.

When a photo reproduction is ordered by people of Shkodra or by the media, the original is taken from the box, put on an office scanner and the jpg is printed out on an office printer. The handling of the photos is done without gloves. The reproductions are an important source of revenue.

The direction estimates the number of stored jpgs at 20.000. They are not described by metadata. Some years ago Italians offered Fototeka Marubi the office equipment and software which was originally developed for school management and had been roughly adapted for the use in the photo archive. The software did not support any standards and the export of the data seems to be a problem. As it was not systematically used, data rescue seems not to be an urgent affair.

Since 1919 Keli Marubi started to note orders in business manuals. Since then the negatives are numbered and noted in archival books. These business documents are the only systematic form of documentation. Neither the collection dating from 1856 to 1919 nor the positives, neither the technical equipment nor the personal notes of the Marubi photographer's dynasty are inventoried. The only source for thematic retrieval is the Director's memory.

Fototeka Marubi has four collaborators: the Director who – as the last assistant of Gege Marubi - is deeply acquainted to the collection and its storage system. There is the daughter of Gege Marubi and another lady who produce the reproductions by digitising and printing and there is the IT administrator. Nobody has got a modern instruction about photography or preservation.

The working room is separated from the storage room but it also serves as lounge for the coffee breaks. On this background it is especially important that no gloves are used for the object handling.

The Marubi Project

At the first contacts with the project manager the Director was very keen in getting better archival storage conditions and professional digitising equipment. She has spent her working life in the

photo archive and has protected it under very difficult conditions through the last decades. The preservation of the photographic collection seemed to be matter near to her heart.



The director.

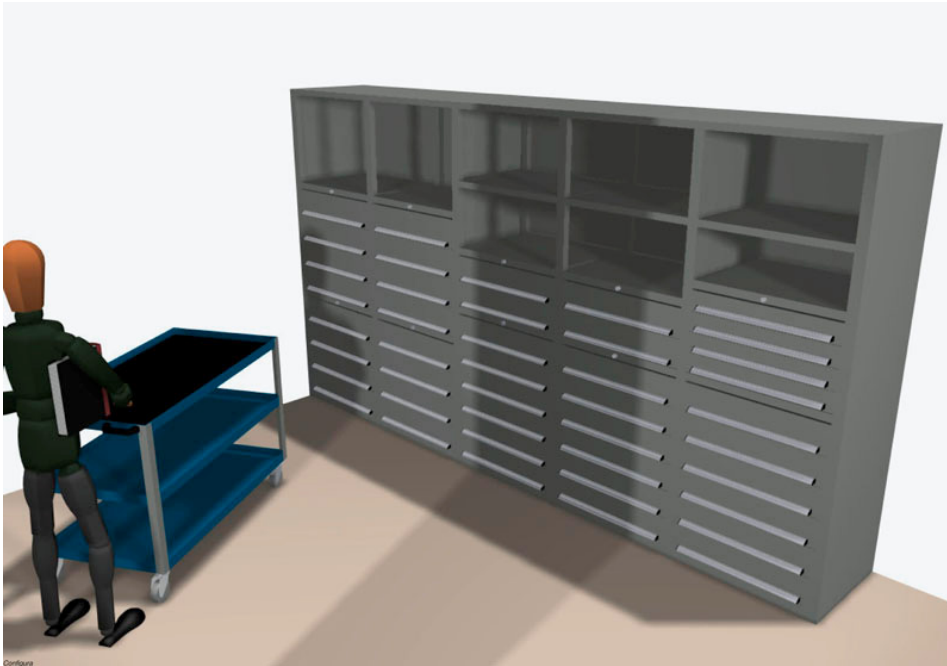
The intention

The intention of the Marubi project was the preservation of the unique photographic collection, its put to use for scientific research and its careful handling for reproductions.

The plan was

- To digitise the collection systematically in order to safeguard the originals.
- To inventory the collection at the same time, describing the object (and the digital image) with metadata about the depicted subject (first summary information), the technical data about the original, the storage location, identified by a unique number.
- To store the photos in archival material separated by materials and sizes in new lockers preserving the optimal archival conditions for the originals. (*photo: archive target*)
- If the preservation is the first aim, the scientific and cultural „discovery“ is the second. The idea was to start cooperation with the University of Shkodra in order to find out more details about the depicted subjects.

At its end the project would allow to do thematic retrieval without moving the originals and by that to enable the Fototeka to improve its marketing of digital copies.



Archive target

Basic principles

The project should be based on principles ensuring its long term effectiveness: First of all sustainability concerning the preservation of the originals but also of the digital reproductions (therefore high quality equipment and high resolution scanning) and of the documentation. In order to achieve this, work should be based on standards: technical standards for digitisation, data base standards and standards of documentation. The procedures should be orientated at best practise experiences.

The ambitious project, supported by the Ministry of Culture of Albania should be achieved by a process step by step.

The planning process

The project plan had the main topics

1. Organisation of cooperation and provision of finance for the project

2. Education of the staff concerning preservation, handling, IT-based documentation in a process of defining the needs
3. Acquisition of professional technical equipment
4. Inventorying, digitising and archiving of the collection
5. Scientific work in cooperation with the University of Shkodra

The realisation

1. Organisation and cooperation was agreed between the project partners

- Project led by Prof. Rudolf Schäfer, assisted by Orestia Gjomarkaj Kapidani, Burg Giebichenstein, University of Art and Design, Halle (Salle), Germany
- Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education in Germany
- Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports of Albania
- Fototeka Kombetare Marubi, Shkodra, Albania

Throughout the project planning the photo archive has been deeply involved in a process of intensive discussion. The project has been hosted within the National Cultural Inventory, led by the Ministry of Culture of Albania.

In cooperation with the University of Applied Sciences Leipzig, Dep. for Museology different standards have been evaluated

- International standards for documentation (from Object ID to CRM)
- Technical standards for data bases and data exchange (SQL, XML)
- Evaluation of data base software, supported on an international level

Finally the decision was taken to use the software of the National Inventory, developed by the Albanian Ministry of Culture, which follows the technical standards.

2. Education of the staff concerning preservation, handling and IT-based documentation had been combined with the process of defining the needs of Fototeka Marubi.

Convinced that evidence is the best way for defining one's proper needs, the Director and the IT-administrator had been invited to travel abroad in order to get an idea of best-practice solutions.

The director visited different photo archives (best practice and “much-to-do” examples) in Germany. Intensive discussions took place about preservation strategies, preservation material, handling of historical photos, examples of IT-based documentation and digitisation.

- The IT administrator visited the CIDOC conference 2005. In this context an intensive discussion took place about the current documentation structure in the Italian software, the paper based documentation and about the future needs.
- In Shkodra the project managers had intensive discussions about preservation strategies, preservation material and handling of historical photos, digitisation and the project plan with the directory and the staff.

3. Acquisition of professional technical equipment

- Acquisition of IT equipment for a network with several workstations, including server, high quality scanner and high quality printer
- Acquisition of the National Inventory-software including installation, instruction and adaptation on site
- Acquisition of professional archival material for 150.000 photos of different sizes and materials including lockers etc

The equipment had been delivered and checked in December 2005. (*photo: archive_12_05*) The point 4, inventorying, digitising and archiving of the collection should have started then.

When the project managers arrived in Shkodra in August 2006 they had a bad surprise: The archival material is not in use, not even unpacked. (*photo: archive_08_06*), (*photo: archive_08_06-3*)] (*photo: archive_08_06-4*)]

- The network has not been put to use for server problems. (*photo: server_08_06*),
- The software has been installed locally but it is not used and the company did not get any specifications for the adaptation.
- None of the problems on site have been communicated to the project partners in Germany

- Only in use: the scanner and the printer. When reproductions are ordered, the photos are roughly scanned and printed out. They are not handled with gloves and are ranged like before.



Archive_12_05



Archive_08_06



Archive_08_06-3)



Archive_08_06-4

*Server_08_06*

The status quo

The meetings in August 2006 were entirely dominated by discussions about what are the problems and why the project plan had not been even started to be realised. The Director's position has changed to its contrary:

- She points out the perfect functioning of the old system.
- She wants to maintain the same physical order like in the old lockers by fear of losing control of the retrieval.
- Preservation concerns are not considered.

Ways for use?

This is the current situation – what could be the way out? What is to do? The technical problem with the server is being solved but the essential question is how to proceed now. The end of the story is absolutely open. Several scenarios seem to be possible:

Scenario A

The Ministry of Culture of Albania should sign an obliging time schedule for the preservation, digitisation and inventorying process at the Fototeka Marubi.

Scenario B

A supplementary implementation phase could be conceived including

- Elaboration of the work flow for digitising, inventorying, packing and storing with the staff on site
- Training of the staff in object handling and preservation
- Adaptation of the Software eventually supported by the German project partners
- Adaptation of the views within the software; this might perhaps improve the acceptance (f. e. display of the records in a gallery mode following the old order in the wooden lockers?)
- Software training implemented in the work flow process on site with emphasis on the retrieval

Scenario C

The material will be transported back to Germany where it might enjoy a German photo archive in need.