

The Effects of the ALM Seminar on changes in  
the work of Croatian History Museum

*Jelena Balog,  
Croatian History Museum, Zagreb*

**CIDOC06**  
**GOTHENBURG**  
**S W E D E N**

This document aims to provide insight into ten-year development of Croatian museum documentation experience and museum legislation, encouraged by the seminars *Archives, Libraries, Museums – Possibilities for Co-operation within the Environment of the Global Information Infrastructure*. Seminars are meant for archivists, librarians and museologists to share their experience as the case of Croatian History Museum, as national museum and first-level central museum, shows.

## 1. Introduction

Among other things, the importance of well organized and well managed museum documentation according informatological rules was noted. In 1998, the law on museums was enacted which requires the museums to manage museum material documentation, while museum materials and museum documentation are protected as cultural property according to the regulations of the Law on the Protection and Preservation of Cultural Property<sup>1</sup>. Although the previous law<sup>2</sup> also regulated the management of museum documentation on museum materials, the new law is more elaborated and detailed in this respect. Also, the Law on Museums made provisions for passing the *Regulations on the content and methods of keeping museum documentation on museum materials*, created in 2002. It regulates the content and methods of keeping museum documentation on museum materials as well as museum activities.

Also as a result of seminars, progress was achieved in defining categories required for material processing. For instance, in the context of discussions on Dublin Core, a definition of label and title was agreed on, and it was also established who or what can be set as author<sup>3</sup>. *International Guidelines for Museum Object Information: The CIDOC Information Categories* were approached as well.

With the *Regulations on the ways and means of integrating into the system of museums of the Republic of Croatia* created in 2002, a hierarchical system of museum institutions in term of centrality was established. According to the Regulation, Croatian Historical Museum is first-level central museum for all historical museums and collections in Croatia.

---

<sup>1</sup> Law on Museums, OG, no. 142/98, Law on the Protection and Preservation of Cultural Property, OG, no. 69/99

<sup>2</sup> Law on Museum Activities, OG no. 12/77

<sup>3</sup> Dublin Core was much discussed on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> seminars. See: *Archives, Libraries, Museums – Possibilities for Co-operation within the Environment of the Global Information Infrastructure*. / collected paperes / Mirna Willer, Tinka Kati ed. Zagreb: Croatian Museum Association, 2000.

*Regulations on the content and methods of keeping museum documentation on museum materials* defined which documentation the museums should keep and how, while one of the more relevant articles introduced was the separation of inventory-making and cataloguing.

## 2. Inventory management

The Croatian History Museum was established in 1991 when two museum institutions, the History Museum of Croatia and the Museum of the Revolution of the Peoples of Croatia, were merged. The 1977 museum law was valid until 1998. Although it stipulated the content of keeping museum documentation, it still allowed for different interpretations so that the prescribed types of museum documentation were kept in diverse manner in different museums. Consequently, the Croatian History Museum had two different methods in museum documentation management from the beginning. This issue is best seen in inventory records. In the former History Museum of Croatia inventory records were managed according to *numerus curens* principle in a continuous series consisting of 14 inventory record volumes. The former Museum of the Revolution of the Peoples of Croatia interpreted the regulations differently. They also managed their records according to *numerus curens*, but applied the principle to each collection separately. With the museum having five collections, this meant five separate series of inventory books, each starting from number one. Besides, there was an additional division inside individual collections. Thus, the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fine Art Collection was divided into three sub-collections. Each sub-collection had its own series of inventory books. After the museums merged, such practice continued. Namely, the merger was conducted more in a legal sense, but physically, the institutions remained separated, each in its respective spaces. Following the merger, some changes were introduced into the structure of the collections, but inventory records management did not change. On the contrary, with a number of collections of the former Museum of Revolution abolished and a number of new founded, so new inventory books were created for the new collections. Inadequacies of such inventory record management, as revealed during revision of collections, were multiple repetitions of the same inventory numbers.

*The Regulations on the content and methods of keeping museum documentation on museum materials* stipulates a systematic, collected, organized and archived data base on museum materials to be created in the course expert processing, protection and presentation of museum materials. It proscribes documentation management in Croatian museums and documentation records that each museum must keep. One of the most relevant provisions requires an integral inventory book

to be kept. In view of these changes, the Croatian History Museum hired a documentalist in 2004 so as to comply with the Regulations. Standardizing the two documentation systems and creating an integral inventory book were documentalist's chief tasks. It was necessary to locate all inventory books first, those in use as well as those out of use, in order to arrive at a new, initial number for the common inventory. Next, it was necessary to isolate the items which were entered in the books more than once. Specifically, the Museum of the Revolution supervised several memorial museums as well. Inventories pertaining to some of the memorial museums were included in the joint inventory while others were not. Overall inventory entries in every book of the two former museums were summed up thus conditionally arriving at the final inventory number. Namely, I must point out that I am not entirely certain to have succeeded in locating each and every inventory book. 1 was added to the sum total of all inventory entries thus obtaining the initial number of the Croatian History Museum integral inventory. Accordingly, the Croatian History Museum integral inventory was achieved in September, 2004. In addition to determining the final number of inventory entries, it was also necessary to establish a new communication: between documentalists and curators. In order to preserve the achieved integrity, with museum dislocation in mind, the decision was brought that the documentalist should give curators the needed quantity of inventory labels and keep related records. In the two and a half years 2.470 inventory labels were distributed. The curators have 30 days to "spend" the allotted numbers, i.e. to make inventory records. The documentalist inspects the entries subsequently. Also, the documentalist, in a transitory period, records the entry in the classic inventory book by hand. At the end of the year, the documentalist prints the data base and binds the annual inventory.

### 3. Other documentation fonds

A propos other fonds, during two and a half years the following documentation fonds were created or the existing modernized: entry book, exit book, photograph library, newspaper and magazine collection - hemeroteque, and exhibition record. Also, materials for creating a video library and records of educational activities (managed by museum pedagogue) are ready.

Before the *Regulations* were enacted, diverse opinions existed on what should be entered into entry books and what into exit books. Entry and exit books were managed in both former museums according to the current numbers system with individual collection curators making the entries. Integral entry book and exit book existed, and both were managed as a single book for a certain period of time. Guest exhibitions at the Museum as well as the exhibitions organized abroad by the Museum were not entered into entry books.

In terms of content, the Regulation clearly defined what was to be entered in the entry book, as well as what to enter in the exit book. Today, books are managed by computer only, in the following way: the curator (or the secretariate) notifies the documentalist on material entry or exit, while the documentalist issues entry or exit numbers. At the end of the year the documentalist prints and binds the books. Given the fact that the Regulation stipulates that all the items entering or exiting the Museum must be entered in the book, the question of exhibitions arose. Namely, due to a good collaboration between museums, Croatian History Museum organizes guest exhibitions in other museum and accepts guest exhibitions by other museums. With typical exhibitions consisting of several hundred items, the question is posed should the items be entered independently, with or without sub-numeration, amassing huge amounts of data to be printed once a year, or settle everything with just one entry referring to material loan contract?

### 3.1. Photograph library

In the former History Museum of Croatia, the photograph library was not managed in an integral manner. Each curator entered items into the photograph or slide library inventory record individually, while individual curators also kept negatives or slides, according to collections. In addition, there also existed a book of negatives where photographed items were entered which were not owned by History Museum of Croatia or were not photographs of items at all (i.e. photographs from books). However, not all curators entered negatives and slides into the book and those who did were not always consistent. Thus, the majority of curators began to document negatives and slides according to inventory numbers of the items. Moreover, a significant disparity existed between the number of photographs registered by photographers and the number of photographs which the curator received.

In the former Museum of the Revolution of the Peoples of Croatia, no inventory books were managed for photographs, slides or negatives library. The curators labelled photographs, negatives and slides using the inventory number of items and stored them into inventory index-cards.

In order to establish an integral photograph library, it was necessary to solve the issue of inventory numeration. Is it more appropriate to start from the beginning with number 1 or to continue the existing numeration, and on the basis of which book to proceed? Specifically, there were separate books of slides and of negatives. With the scrutiny of photograph library inventory

books, it was determined that the entries were consistent enough to be taken into consideration. Thus, the entries from the negatives and the slides book were summed up and a final number was obtained to use as the initial number of the Croatian History Museum integral photograph library. It is necessary to point out that this number probably does not fully match the actual situation, because there are entries with no ordinal numbers and these have been omitted. On the other hand, it would perhaps be better to start from number 1 precisely because of the inconsistencies in entering negatives and slides in the old inventory books and because of the new media introduced (digital photographs on CDs). Thus the question of inventory numeration system for the integral photograph library of the Croatian History Museum remains unanswered. With the Museum switching to digital photography, negatives and slides are no longer being developed. This raises the question of the relationship between negatives/slides and positives. The issue has been approached as follows: each photograph taken is stored, in high resolution, on CDs and is treated as a sort of a negative. Only the photographs stored on CDs are entered in inventory records, while smaller sizes used for current Museum activities are not. When the need arises, photographs are developed but most communication with the clients proceeds in digital form (photographs are recorded on CDs).

If existing photographs are developed anew, the new prints are not re-entered in inventory records; the reason of new printing is added to the inventory entry. Old classic negatives and slides are still kept by the curators and are to be digitalized in time. Once digitalized and stored on CDs, photographs are easily accessible for purposes of manipulation and it is also possible to attach them to corresponding entries in the data base which makes the items more accessible and easy-to-survey for the clients. Likewise, digitalizing annuls the former disparity between the exploited and developed photographs as all surplus is simply deleted.

Together with the mentioned fonds, materials for the video library fond are also being prepared for processing and are to be digitalized and recorded on DVDs, which are more durable in terms of format and medium.

## 4. Conclusion

In the last ten years, the Croatian museologist profession has made a significant progress in terms of museum material documentation management owing to legislature, but especially as a result of experience exchange among three similar professions: archival, library and museologist. New

museum legislation was created. Also, standards for museum material processing are now being defined. Museum materials documentation is put on the same level as the material itself and is protected as cultural property. These changes have had effects on the activities of the Croatian History Museum. The transfer to integral museum documentation management headed by an expert has been facilitated notwithstanding the Museum's dislocation on two different locations. Control over inventory numeration and inventory entries is established, and the communication link, curator - inventory number - documentalist, is introduced. Also, INDOC centre was established within the Museum. The documentalist's task is to communicate with the clients he serves or directs to other experts - curators. Introduction of computer application software for processing museum materials as well as museum documentation has to be mentioned. Among several existing software, the Croatian History Museum chose the application software which follows CICOD guidelines and complies with *Regulations on the content and methods of keeping museum documentation on museum materials*.

These changes have significantly modernized and improved the work of the Croatian History Museum and have also facilitated work organization and material accessibility. Thereby the Museum assumed an informational and documentation function in our community alongside its exhibiting activities.