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Museology as Part of Information and Communication Sciences in Croatia: a View on a Thirty-Year-Long Experience

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Introduction

As early as 1983, museology was established in Croatia as an empirical discipline forming part of information science together with librarianship, archive and documentation sciences, lexicology, and the like. When information science became officially acknowledged, it was defined as

the discipline concerned with systematic study of emission, collection, selection, evaluation, processing, storage, retrieval, transmission, distribution, explanation, use and protection of information, as well as with all forms of social communication. (Maroević, 1998, p. 93)

It is not our intention to explore this concept further here but to point out that we have always had a widest possible understanding of information science, which is similar to W. Boyd Rayward's description of the same field of research as *a composite of disciplinary chunks* (1996, p. 7).

The year 1984 saw the formation of the Museology Sub-Department, which has been functioning ever since as a constituent part of the Department of Information Sciences at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb. An undergraduate museology programme was launched two years later in addition to programmes of other aforementioned disciplines. It is therefore not surprising that we found the main topic and even sub-topics of this year's ICOFOM conference exceptionally close to us, but challenging as well. As part of the museology staff of the department, we think that it is necessary to re-examine the position of our discipline in relation to information and communication sciences and to determine whether they still provide a fertile ground and motivation for further development. However, before we pay more attention to that issue, we will attempt to paint a clearer picture to those unfamiliar with the development of perspectives through which museology is seen in Croatia as part of information and communication sciences.

Historical View of Information-Based Affiliation

The person who made efforts to prepare the ground for such understanding and acknowledgement of museology was Antun Bauer (1911-2000), a collector and museologist, who founded numerous museums in Croatia, established a unique documentation institution – the Museum Documentation Centre in Zagreb – and launched the first Croatian museological journals (*Museology*, *Informatica Museologica*). In 1966, he also established the Postgraduate Programme in Museology as part of the Postgraduate Programme in Librarianship and Documentation Science. This new environment in which museology found itself clearly speaks about the

change in its academic position. From an elective course that had been taught since 1950 within the art history programme, museology developed into an autonomous postgraduate programme in a group of research fields that were, simply put, related to collection, documentation, and dissemination of documents and information.

Equally representative of this context, we think, was Bauer's first lecture given to students of the aforementioned postgraduate programme¹. The centre of his interest was not the museum institution and its functions but collections and individual museum objects. It is important to mention here that Bauer thought of the museum object as the object of knowledge, for only as such could it enter the museum as a form of document, and only with this quality could it have value. Bauer adopted this view after reading about similar ideas proposed by Teodor Schmidt, a professor at Leningrad University, in a well-known survey conducted in Paris and published in a 1931 issue of *Revue Magazine*².

In addition, Bauer stressed both the historical and documentary meaning of artefacts that were, according to him, essential for their entrance into museum collections. Although he did not give an explicit name to these meanings, it was clearly *not* far from the concept of 'museality' that became an exceptionally important foothold for Central European museology in the late 1960s. Bauer also addressed the subject-object duality of the museum object. He differentiated between the museum object as *object* – the thing containing the value that museum visitors perceive (mostly works of art) – and the museum object as *subject* – the thing that indirectly takes part in the process of representation when placed in certain contexts or grouped with other exhibits.

Although Bauer did not precisely define museology as a discipline in 1966, he continued writing about this field of study, claiming that it essentially relied on documentation – a characteristic that made museology inseparable from documentation and librarianship. There is no doubt that Bauer was close in his understanding of museology to a group of museologists from East Germany (German Democratic Republic) who published their theses on so-called museum science in the journal *Museumkunde* in 1964. For them, museum science was an autonomous discipline that belonged to the field of documentation, together with archives and libraries. They clearly found a common denominator in information and documentation practices that drew on related professions and consequently disciplines that started to develop their theoretical frameworks around these practices.

Unlike Antun Bauer, Professor Ivo Maroević (1937-2007), an esteemed ICOFOM member, did in fact turn to information science as a basis for his own theorizing on museology as a 'scientific' discipline, its research subject, and fundamental concepts. From 1983 to 1993, the year which saw the publication of his book *Introduction to Museology*, Maroević worked on a definition and key concepts of a certain museological system by using tenets set forth by European museologists, primarily Peter van Mensch and Zbynek Stransky, and the then-leading theoretician of information science in Croatia, Miroslav Tuđman.

¹ The lecture was published in the journal *Museology*, No 6, 1967, pp 6-21. We have here interpreted its most important propositions.

² More about this can be found in our paper on visitor research in socialist Croatia soon to be published in the ICOFOM book on visitors.

Drawing on the works and theories of Tuđman, Maroević proposed: a model of the museum object as sign; the differences between information, documentation, and communication-based approaches to the museum object as sign; the differences between cultural and scientific information; and the differences between presentation and representation of knowledge in relation to the museum exhibition, etc.

He presented his approach at annual ICOFOM meetings, which he regularly used to disseminate his views but also to examine them critically. When looking at his work from today's perspective, more than three decades later, we can say with certainty that there has not been a single theoretician of related disciplines in Croatia, primarily library and archive sciences, who adopted Tuđman's premises to such an extent as Maroević did in his interdisciplinary work.

Unfortunately, time has shown that many of the aforementioned museological premises were never applied to the museum practice, which, in our opinion, should have happened since it is something extremely important for an analytical discipline. It also seems that some of the concepts (above all the differences between information, documentation and communication-based approaches to the museum object) were enclosed within themselves. In other words, they did not encourage further development of museological thought.

At the same time, a paradigmatic shift occurred in Croatian information sciences, within which the communication aspect (theories of communication) developed and strengthened to such a degree that the name of the very empirical field was changed into information and communication sciences.

Among Maroević's museological tenets that have remained in use, we have focused on the model of the museum object as sign and changed it by introducing the element that assigns meaning and creates a sign (Vujić, 1999, p. 202-203). Naturally, that element is a human being and we call him or her *interpreter* – a term we find most appropriate for this context. The role of interpreter can be equally played by different agents – those who take artefacts from the real environment and proclaim them heritage, museum and heritage professionals who research and present them in various ways, and, finally, visitors for whom the previous activities are done.

There is no doubt that, in the late 1990s, we started strengthening the position of visitors in Croatia. There have also been efforts to introduce a social semiotic approach in research, which is much more present today owing to young researchers at the Sub-Department (Miklošević, 2014). This is, naturally, not surprising because today there are disciplines that largely do research in social media and communication.

The ALM annual conference as a place for contemplating the disciplines and convergence of related practices

In the mid-1990s, the Croatian cultural and academic community witnessed the organisation of the first ALM conference, which played a key role for the development of museology. It also allowed for the establishment of a dialogue between museology and other disciplines within information and communication sciences, and

above all archive and library sciences. It was a unique conference organised in South Eastern Europe called *Archives, Libraries and Museums: Possibilities of Cooperation in the Environment of Global Information Infrastructure*. The conference was first held in 1996 by the Croatian community of librarians (we are all familiar with the driving nature of these heritage institutions), who realized the need to open up libraries to other related institutions by redefining their main issues. They included the concept of library material and its documentation, especially the principles and rules of cataloguing, a model for documentation via information system, research of library users, and so on. Museum and archive communities readily accepted this invitation to cooperation. Researchers of the related disciplines were, understandably, at the forefront of the entire event.

The first conference was the occasion at which Ivo Maroević presented one of his most significant theoretical contributions to museology in the 1990s – a definition of (collected) items in museums, libraries, and archives for which he used his model of the museum object as sign. For him, the value of the museum object is determined equally by three components – material (reflects the duration of the object through time), form (reflects the existence and dissemination of the object's messages in space), and meaning (reflects the entrance of the object into the awareness and knowledge of the community)³. Archival material depends above all on the material and meaning, while form can be transformed into other media and used as such. The most important component of books, with the exception of old and rare ones, is content or meaning contained in them, whereas material and form are less important.

Professor Maroević was aware of this simplified view of archival, library, and museum material, but thought that it still pointed to the differences between them in an appropriate though very general way.

Today, we would say this: if he had introduced into his view people as members of societies and social life and taken into consideration their need to experience collected items, maybe he would have reached the conclusion that this social need may be their strongest common ground. For example, if users need the materiality of an archival document, they will approach it in a similar way as they would a museum object. If museum visitors need content or information contained in the museum object in order to understand it, they will focus exactly on those aspects of the object.

Ivo Maroević introduced three types of environments into the examination of collected items in AKM institutions: the *real environment* of material things, the *controlled environment* of ALM institutions, and the *virtual environment*. For Maroević, museums adopt a midway position between the real and controlled environments because they receive objects taken from the real environment. Archives are on a more abstract level in relation to the real environment, in that they collect material from exactly that environment, but, as Maroević correctly points out, the material is already defined and structured (through different media in archival fonds). Libraries found themselves, according to him, on a more abstract level of the controlled environment, approaching the borderline of the virtual environment. Their material also comes from the real environment but it represents formatted knowledge and

³ Maroević considered museum objects as exclusively three-dimensional, and he disregarded intangible heritage (Maroević, 1998, p. 6).

artistic expression (fiction books, for example) whose digitized versions enter the virtual environment the fastest (Maroević, 1998, p. 6).

Graphic Representation of Individual Institutions in Relation to Three Environments

However, the work of ALM institutions does not only consist of dealing with collected items, but also with information about the items and about other phenomena. According to Maroević, all information is contained in the virtual environment, which allows for the most effective cooperation of all the institutions from the controlled environment. His position is understandable today since, in 1996, he would have not been able to take into consideration objects and phenomena created in the virtual environment (in other words, digitally born objects, web art, digital archives and so on) which today completely alter his pyramid scheme.

The ALM conference in Croatia has become a unique platform for questioning the common ground and its further exploration. A positive result of the conference is a series of conference proceedings with interesting and stimulating contributions, on the bases of which it is possible to see changes in the position and understanding of common topics in all activities done by the three institutions, and indirectly the accompanying academic disciplines. In the early years of conference-related collaboration, it was logical to agree on types of items and a common platform of information science and education of information professionals. Soon after, the focus shifted to computer-based documentation (both descriptive and

subject cataloguing: vocabulary control and data standards) and to common topics initiated by the growing presence of ALM institutions in the virtual environment – metadata (primarily Dublin Core, harmonization of different metadata standards) and digitization. The thing we consider exceptionally valuable for museology and museums is a turn in the first years of the 21st century towards collections and collection-level description instead of individual objects. Collections have been seen as a strong link among the institutions and academic disciplines

After almost 15 years of ALM activities in Croatia, interests of the sector were turned towards another important topic – that of users (or visitors, as a term more appropriate for museums) and the need to research them. For that reason, a wide range of social science methods was adopted and tested. These developments reveal the influence that the need for social responsibility and the global and local economic crisis exerted on the Croatian cultural sector.

These new research methods were also applied to the ALM conference. After the first ten years of its organisation, a group of researchers analysed and evaluated the conference through quantitative research of information related to presenters and their topics. An analysis of the number of papers in relation to specific professional fields showed that the largest number of papers came from librarians who, in fact, had been the initiators of the ALM conference. An analysis of topics showed what had already been expected, that authors presented works most frequently related to the topics pertaining to their own professional fields. However, it was evident that librarians and archivists participated in the conference with topics equally relevant for their individual disciplines and for the entire ALM community. In contrast, authors who dealt with museum or museology related topics addressed members of the museum community rather than the entire sector (Aparac-Jelušić, Faletar Tanacković, & Pehar, 2010, pp. 25-26).

Another interesting study was presented at the conference, exploring co-operation between Croatian cultural and heritage institutions and with other educational institutions and important public and private organisations. The study showed that, among all ALM institutions, archives were the most cooperative with other heritage institutions (84.6% with other archives, 76.9% with museums, and 46.2% with libraries). On the other hand, libraries came first in cooperation with education institutions, such as elementary (90.6%) and secondary schools (57.8%) and kindergartens (78.7%), and to a lesser extent with other libraries (52%), museums (40.2%), and archives (13.4%). Interestingly, museums most frequently entered into collaboration with other museums (89%) and, for example, elementary schools (68.3%), while cooperation with libraries (35.4%) and archives (31.7%) was on the bottom of the list (Faletar Tanacković & Badurina, 2009, p. 39).

These two studies suggest the extent to which cooperation existed among researchers in individual disciplines and institutions of the ALM sector. The cooperation was and still is possible, but is also limited by particular characteristics of each profession. Archives and libraries often serve as information resources to museums for their activities (this is especially evident in the work of specialized museum libraries and archives). However, the reverse is not often the case. Museums rarely provide their material, activities, or services merely as support to libraries or archives. Interpretation of museum and heritage objects and phenomena is a particular feature

of museums. In contrast, libraries and archives are more related to information services. It has taken us a while to realize that significant difference.

Interpreting the History of Museology Sub-Department in Zagreb through Exhibition

It was at the first ALM conference, where experiences with visitor research were shared for the first time, that we came to realize the key difference between museums on the one hand and libraries and archives on the other. Surrounded with archive and library professionals, we were constantly exposed to their terminology, such as information institutions, information services, and so on. We finally realized that museums, galleries, and similar institutions were not primarily concerned with providing access to physical and digitized items for the sake of their content and information they carry. That is primarily the task of information institutions. Museums are principally interpretive institutions. Although they enable visitors to encounter the material they collect and protect, and give access to items in study collections mostly to researchers, museums use various interpretive strategies to shape different communication products for their visitors – exhibitions in physical and virtual spaces, different museum publications, educational materials, and the like. Following that thought, we altered Maroević's understanding of museology, which can be understood in Croatia today in terms of the following definition:

Museology belongs to the field of information and communication sciences and it investigates meanings and identities (resulting from the construction) of heritage, its protection, interpretation, and communication, as well as forms of institutional activities that are based on these functions (even museums), in order to maintain sustainable social use of heritage and well-being.

What can be criticized about the ALM conference is the fact that the organizers never initiated a single joint project, even though commonality and shared practices across the sector were discussed on many levels and from different perspectives! Nor have they developed a much-needed tool for vocabulary control, or a jointly created virtual content (aside from the conference website). However, part of the responsibility rests with us since we have been participating in certain activities of the ALM conference as well.

We might be able to offer some compensation in the form of supervision over student theses; information science students,

particularly those studying museology and librarianship, have written the best papers in terms of topics that bring together the practical work of institutions and research methodologies of different disciplines. They are mostly MA students (whose theses include topics such as Museum Libraries in Zagreb, Museum Archives, Exhibition as Form of Communication in Schools) but PhD students as well (theses such as Models of Cooperation between Croatian Heritage Institutions).

In conclusion

By its very nature and definition, museology is an interdisciplinary discipline; it is therefore not surprising that museologists working in the Information Science Department are often predisposed toward interdisciplinary methodologies and research on the convergence of practical and theoretical work. For example, they can contribute to study programmes by offering courses such as Heritage Institutions, Exhibition in School Libraries, and the like. Nevertheless, we find it necessary to explore further the common characteristics of the disciplines within information and communication sciences. Without that, and without a more significant development of the department in the direction of media and communication, joint growth may not be possible.

By looking at the present research topics and interests of active Croatian museologists (creation of heritage, heritage literacy, interpretation and interpretive strategies, and the like), it seems that museology as both a research discipline and study programme is ready to move closer to heritage studies (Babić & Vujić, 2012). Being torn between two or more strands of development is also a sign of the time in which we live. Therefore, the Museology Sub-Department at Zagreb University does indeed take a contemporary approach to the reality of both academia and heritage.

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Abstract

The first part of the paper examines early perspectives through which museology was seen as part of information science in Croatia in the mid-1960s. That period saw the establishment of the Postgraduate Programme in Museology, which was run in parallel with programmes in librarianship and documentation science. Links between museology and information science were made even stronger owing to the former ICOMFOM member Ivo Maroević who set up the Museology Sub-Department in 1984.

The second part of the paper gives a critical overview of the unique conference, *Archives, Libraries and Museums: Possibilities of Collaboration in the Environment of Global Information Infrastructure* that has been held annually in Croatia since 1996. The conference influenced views on the convergence of disciplines, but also the development of museology and solutions for museographic issues in Croatia. Even though the institutions and their related disciplines have in common numerous activities, research phenomena, and methodologies, there are evidently differences among them that need to be respected.

Key words: Museology, museum, archive, library, convergence

Résumé

L'article commence par interpréter le début de la compréhension de la muséologie en tant que composante des sciences de l'information en Croatie au milieu des années 60 du 20ème siècle. A cette époque même à Zagreb, parallèlement avec les études de bibliothéconomie et documentation, un Master en muséologie fut fondé. Un lien encore plus fort entre la muséologie et les sciences de l'information s'est noué en 1984 quand le Département de muséologie a été créé à l'initiative d'Ivo Maroević, un ancien membre de l'ICOFOM.

En outre, l'article fournit une étude critique de l'activité de la conférence unique "Archives, bibliothèques, musées : les possibilités de coopération dans le contexte d'une infrastructure d'information globale", et laquelle se tient chaque année en Croatie depuis 1996. Ladite conférence a alimenté les réflexions sur la convergence des disciplines, mais aussi elle a influencé le développement de la muséologie et apporté des solutions aux problèmes récemment rencontrés dans le domaine de la muséographie en Croatie. Bien que ces institutions et disciplines partagent une multitude de phénomènes, pratiques et méthodologies de recherche communs, il est évident qu'il existe aussi des différences qui doivent être respectées.

Mots clé: Muséologie, le musée, l'archive, la bibliothèque, la convergence