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### **The State Museums of Berlin (SMB) and Their New Documentation System**

#### **Summary**

The 16 State Museums of Berlin - Foundation Prussian Heritage – do host a great variety of collections from art to ethnology and from Egyptology to Pre-history. In the past those museums had implemented their own databases – in some cases even several in one museum – and a lot of material is still documented in paper form. In 1999 the decision was taken to introduce one common museum documentation system for all of them. Among other things this was done because one unified public access interface should in future allow easy and comprehensive searching of the museum holdings.

This decision puts up the challenge to bring together parts of the vocabulary in order to allow meaningful retrieval covering all collections. In order to provide for a common retrieval vocabulary the decision had been taken to make use of the Subject Headings Authority File (SWD) of the German National Library (DDB). Thus, after overcoming the problems of migrating some 65 databases into the new system, the problem remains

- to link this new overall vocabulary with the very different pre-existing vocabularies of the museums,
- to find common rules for data fields relevant for all museums
- to develop the workflow for the implementation of those rules
- to discuss and agree on the use of other already existing thesauri and classifications like TGN, AAT or ICONCLASS.

The presentation will summarise major results reached so far, problems encountered and outline the next steps.

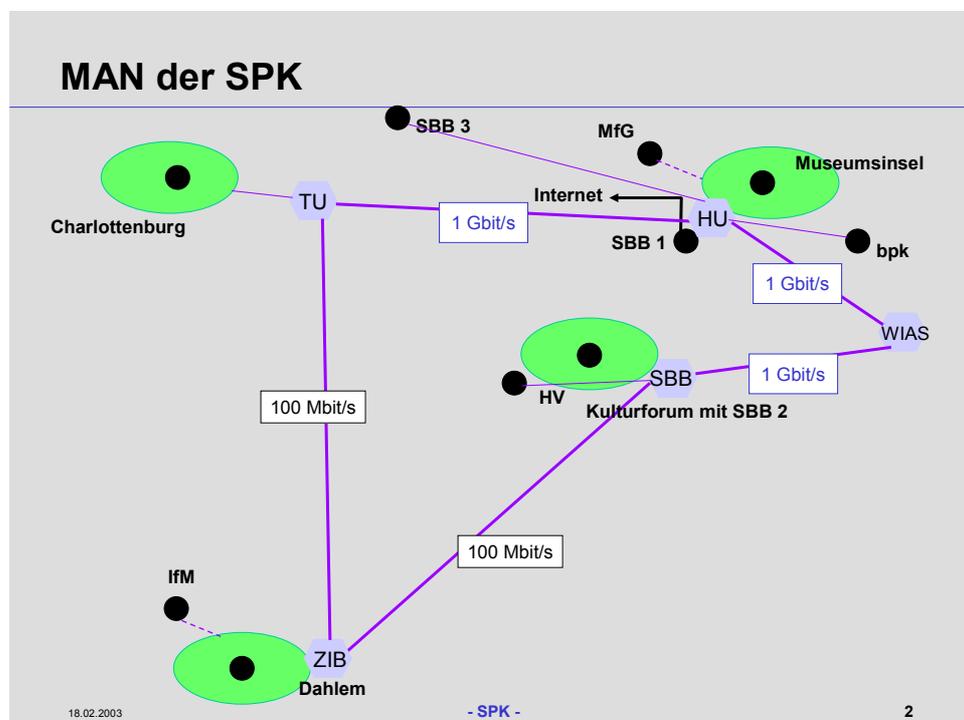
(The short version of the paper)

The 16 State Museums of Berlin - Foundation Prussian Heritage (SPK) – do host a great variety of collections, from art to Ethnology and from Egyptology to Pre-history. In the past, those museums had implemented their own databases – in some cases even several in one museum – and a lot of material is still documented in paper form. In 1999 the decision was taken to introduce one common museum documentation system for all of them. Among

other reasons, this was done because one unified public access interface should in future allow easy and comprehensive searching of the museum holdings. The decision was taken to start, in a pilot phase, with a group of five museums, representing the different types of collections of the State Museums of Berlin, together with the Picture Library (Bildarchiv) of the whole Foundation Prussian Heritage. The five museums chosen were: The Museum of Ethnology (Ethnologisches Museum), the Museum of European Cultures (Museum Europäischer Kulturen), The Egyptian Museum (Ägyptisches Museum), The Museum of Antiquities (Antikensammlung) and the Photographic Collection (Museum für Fotografie).

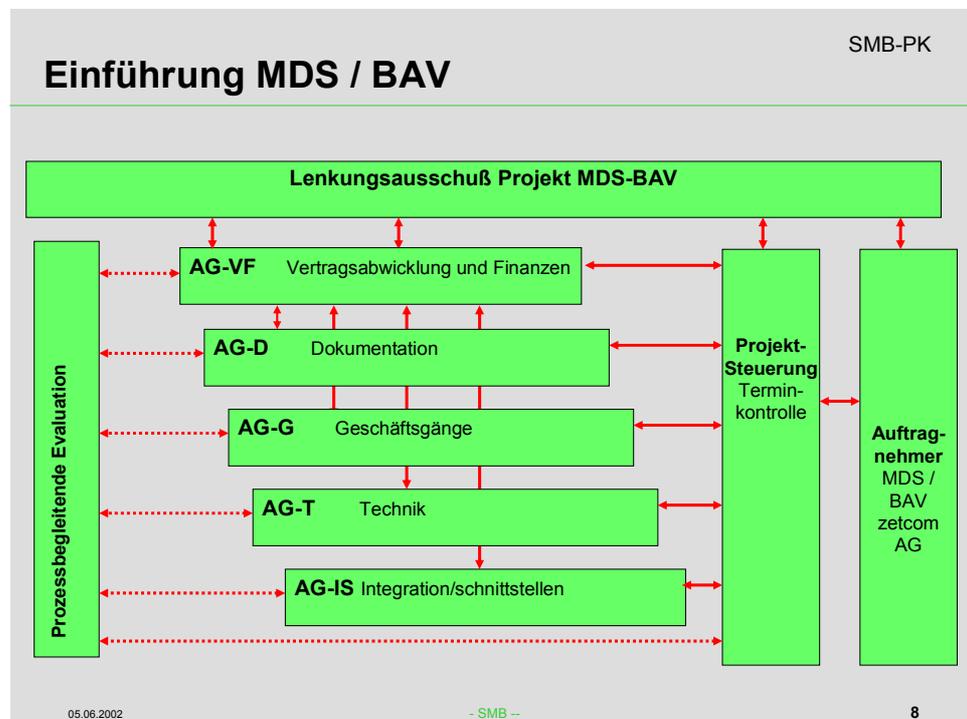
To prepare the necessary Europe-wide call, the CHIN (Canadian Heritage Information Network) checklist was taken as a starting basis, translated into German and adapted to the situation within the museums. Each museum was asked to name those points from this checklist which were considered the most important as well as those which are the least important for them. Also, an overview was established of electronic data already existing in the museums. On the basis of all this action taken, the Europe-wide call for tenders was issued in 1999. Following a decision-making process of several steps, the company ZETCOM (Switzerland) with the software MuseumPlus was chosen.

As our 5 pilot museums are spread all over the city of Berlin, it was necessary from the technical point of view to connect them by building up a metropolitan area network (MAN).



In order to reach the aim of having an integrated system, six working groups had been established with representatives from each of the museums of the pilot phase. One of them (AG-D) had the task to discuss and agree on the necessary data-fields, on their type and name, so that the museums with different types of collections can use the same system. This process took about one year and a half with weekly meetings. Another working group (AG-G) looked at the procedures which were in place to handle different collection management tasks, e.g. the workflow of activities necessary for lending an object. The aim was to document these activities within the new museum software. In fact, that meant that where different procedures were applied in the museums in the past, those had to be unified.

The chairs of all working groups reported to a regularly meeting steering group (Lenkungsausschuß), which took the decisions needed.



The museum of Ethnology was the first museum whose data were migrated from the different databases which were in use before. The staff was trained to use the new software and started working with it. By and by, the other museums followed.

In 2005, the aim will be reached that the new software is fully in use for all the museums of the pilot group. By March 2005, more than half a million data records are in the system. According to the needs of the project the working groups have been restructured: now there is one working group which is responsible for the administration of the project (ProgrAdm Group) and one

working group which is concerned with all those questions related to data editing and the usage of controlled vocabulary.

The decision for an integrated software application for different museums puts up the challenge to bring together parts of the vocabulary in order to allow meaningful retrieval covering all collections. In order to provide for a common retrieval vocabulary, the decision had been taken to make use of the Subject Headings Authority File (SWD) of the German National Library (DDB). Thus, after overcoming the problems of migrating some 65 databases into the new system, the problem remains

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- to find common rules for data fields relevant for all museums,
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Parallel to that work, it is foreseen to enlarge the group of museums using the system by involving the other State Museums and to define the interface needed to provide access to museum objects for the general public.