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PERSONAL ARCHIVE
Or Museum Activities of Museum Professionals
Project: PERSONAL ARCHIVE of the MDC

What is the PERSONAL ARCHIVE made of?

The Personal Archive encompasses all the results of independent efforts of museum professionals: biographies, bibliographies, published books, monographs, magazines, Ph.D. and M.A. dissertations, elaborations, separates, projects, published or unpublished texts, manuscripts, articles, treatises, letters, photographs, slides, drafts, video and sound material, CDs, etc.

Aim:

Data collected for the Personal Archive enrich the already existing archive of the MDC (Museum and Gallery Archive) by adding to it detailed personal records on all prominent museum professionals nearing the end of their working life. All those working in the museum field who have, at some point of their life, been a part of the museum scene in Croatia and all those who grabbed a slice of Croatian cultural history will be represented in the Archive. The collected data, processed and gathered to form the *Personal Archive*, are as valuable as any other archive material of interest for the Republic of Croatia and are subject to laws governing the preservation of cultural heritage. The Personal Archive data can be used to update the already existing holdings of the MDC:

- archive
- library
- photo library
- video library,
- CD library
- other

The purpose of the Personal Archive

The Personal Archive is set up to file all data relating to life and work of prominent Croatian museum professionals. It enriches our cultural history and helps our present and future museum professionals by making accessible all

relevant information. Furthermore, the Archive has made their research easier and more enjoyable; they can easily access various bibliographies and professionally processed collections of material; publishing and production of museum monographs and other similar publications have been greatly simplified. Relevant data are now successfully protected from unprofessional handling, decay and oblivion – in other words, our project meets the basic needs of the archivist profession.

Information stored in the Personal Archive is to be used primarily for the purposes of the profession, especially in order to emphasise the importance of museum professionals in creating a certain cultural atmosphere and preserving the everlasting value of intangible cultural heritage.

Who is represented?

All prominent museum professionals and art historians should be represented in the *Personal Archive*. The criterion should be the following: all individuals who have made a difference in the museum profession (because of their function, works, expertise, knowledge, museum and cultural programmes, achievements in Croatia or abroad) and all those who have in any way contributed to the affirmation of the museum field or their professional surroundings must have a place reserved in the *Personal Archive*.

The lowest age limit for representation in the Archive is 60 but, exceptionally, it can be altered.

Procedure: setting up the Personal Archive in four steps

Step One

Technical Requirements

Equipment: portable computer, Dictaphone, digital or video camera

Preparation:

- Draw up a list of all prominent museum professionals; include the names of the museum institution(s) they used to work for, their addresses and phone numbers.
- Call them and familiarise them with the project and its purpose; kindly ask them to collect and prepare all the personal archive material they are willing to give away (i.e. donate to the *Personal Archive* of the MDC).
- Arrange for an appointment (a house visit or a visit to the institutions where the mentioned professionals work) and confirm it well in advance.

Note: All contacts with museum professionals are to be made on the field - in the relaxed atmosphere of their home – because of their advanced age and the fact that most material (books, separates, Ph.D. dissertations, published or unpublished manuscripts, photographs, and all other original archive items of interest for the MDC Archive) is stored in their personal archives at home.

Step Two

Every museum professional fills in a uniform questionnaire for the purpose of obtaining accurate biographical data and preserving the original handwriting.

(Elderly respondents might need some help with the questionnaire: further explanations regarding the questions should be provided, if required.)

The questionnaires are printed on separate sheets of paper with the letterhead stating the exact name and address of the institution:

Questionnaire

Name:

Surname (all previous surnames for women):

Father's name:

Mother's name:

Date of birth:

Place of birth:

Education:

Occupation:

Profession:

Foreign languages:

proficient in:

working knowledge of:

Marital status:

Previously employed in (cite the institution/institutions):

Previous professional experience:

Acknowledgements, prizes, honours, recommendations:

Place:

Date:

Signature:

Further Notes:

- Respondents should, preferably, enclose documents and photographs to support the data obtained by the questionnaire.

- Take about ten photos: present portrait and figure of the respondents while interviewed, while filling in the questionnaire, etc. (when having the most natural posture).

- Ask the respondents to provide some additional photographs from previous stages of their life: childhood, youth, at least one portrait, one full-figure photograph, a family photo, museum photos, photos taken on the field (fieldwork or research) or at a scientific gathering, travel photos, group or individual photographs taken in their work environment, etc. The photos should preferably ensure the reconstruction of the respondents' chronological lifelines and working lives; in other words, we should be able to accompany the story by pictures and turn a biography into a museum item.

- Take a copy of the bibliography for the Archive; even unprocessed data on the respondents' works would do

(Buying off is possible if the material is especially valuable.)

Step Three

An interview of about 45 minutes is to be taped on a Dictaphone or recorded directly on a portable computer (equipped with a sound recording programme).

Procedure:

A preliminary informal chat is necessary to create a relaxed atmosphere and gain the interviewee's confidence.

Once the appropriate atmosphere has been created, tape the story on the Dictaphone.

The interviewee should, ideally, provide a copy of all published or unpublished texts, Ph.D. and M.A. dissertations, elaborations, separates, projects, or correspondences, with dates and places of publishing.

Crucial elements of the material collecting process are the interview and the complete bibliography of the interviewee.

Possible questions to guide and direct the interview:

- Please introduce yourself: what would you say first?
- What has influenced your choice of occupation?
- Please name the institution(s) you have worked for.
- Describe the job(s).
- Your life achievement – what do you consider your greatest accomplishment or achievement?
- What has been the greatest challenge?
- What has been your greatest success or failure?
- What obstacles have you encountered?
- Name your most important project(s) in Croatia.
- Name your project(s) abroad.
- What did your *pioneering work* encompass?
- What ideas have you had?
- Any advice to our present and future museums professionals?
- What is most important in museum work?
- Who is your role model, who has influenced you most?
- Who are your associates?
- Do you prefer team or individual work?
- Share your vision of the profession (what should a museum professional do and what should a museum look like)?
- What do you do these days: do you follow the profession or do you in any way participate in the events related to it?

(and any other questions which may naturally rise during the interview)

Any other questions not mentioned above may rise during the interview; the questions should be tailored to a particular interviewee's situation.

It is of vital importance that the interviewee agrees with the possible use of the gathered information: it may be published or used for museological purposes.

Step Four

- Form a personal file for each respondent.
- Record the interview on the computer.
- Enter data from the questionnaire into an especially designed database application.
- Store the material in previously prepared files.
- Store the recording and burn it on a CD (make three copies).
- Classify the gathered material into documentation funds (archive, photo library, library, video library, CD library, etc.).
- Make inventory of all the material gathered.
- Store all processed archive material into a special box file or spaces meeting the requirements stated in the *procedure regulating the protection and keeping of archive material*.
- Make notes about every interview; include impressions and observations.

Once the original photos and the interview have been burnt on CDs, the photos should be returned together with a copy of the CD and a letter of thanks, which is a way of authorising the interview.

Important Note:

The gathered material and sound recordings can be used to make radio and TV documentaries or to prepare all kinds of publications (biographies of museum staff, monographs, etc.).

MDC authorises all its employees, external users of its funds, students, undergraduates, and all interested parties (individuals and institutions alike) to use the Personal Archive under the same conditions.

Our Experience and Impressions

The hardest stage of the project may well have been the need to familiarise elderly and retired museum professionals with the *raison d'être*, aims and purposes of the *Personal Archive* project. Reassuring them that most of them, forgotten by their museums and the profession in general (with some exceptions), have now become important and interesting was also necessary but rather time-consuming.

I have to admit that I have frequently encountered some sort of reserve, suspicion, or at least surprise when the respondents realised that somebody had remembered their work and that somebody actually cared about their published or unpublished texts or dusty bibliographies. I have dealt with touching situations, tears or other highly emotional reactions verging on the pathetic, but I have also had the privilege of systematic and conscientious professionals who found and meticulously prepared all the required material. They made special effort to make their bibliographies complete and to enclose some high-quality photographs. They would dig out a faded seventh copy of their M.A. or Ph.D. dissertation, smiling apologetically and making observations about the illegibility of the document, adding that the profession

has overgrown their work. Not many of them realised the importance of their pioneering work for the continuity of the profession as a whole.

Only few of them declined the interview, stating their poor health as an excuse. The rest of them were more and more informed, prepared and cordial as the project went on and I am proud to say that, after some seventy interviews with the most famous and prominent museum professionals in Croatia, the *Personal Archive* project of the MDC has managed to secure a precious body of material. It is also worth noting that many distinguished colleagues nearing the end of their working life and the age limit mentioned take special care to update their bibliographies and prepare the material they plan to donate to the MDC, knowing that their turn to enter the project is soon to come.

Many of the interviewees remarked that such a project should have been started a long time ago, while some of the legends of the profession were still alive. Many worthy experts died without leaving any record of their extremely important work and none of our museum institutions has any documentation on them in its funds.

It should also be noted that some museum professionals, mostly those in poor health, were positive that the *Personal Archive* project was just a pretext for collecting material that necrologists might use later. I had to spend much time and effort to make them change their mind.

After having conducted about seventy interviews with the most prominent museum professionals, I have concluded that people working in the field are very modest, with rare exceptions. They live modest lives, verging on poverty; they have no glamorous private collections, nor any works of art related to the collections they took care of all their working life. Their first priority was to respect the professional code of honour. They indeed resemble the little (museum) ants lined up in a straight line who carry the heavy load of cultural heritage on their fragile back, as portrayed on an exquisite poster by the famous Croatian designer Boris Ljubičić.