

# **ELECTRONIC DOCUMENTATION OF COLLECTION OF PRECIOUS BOOKS. THE GREEK REALITY.<sup>1</sup>**

Eftalia Dalouka  
Museum Studies Course  
National and Kapodistrian  
University of Athens  
Ypsilantou 42,  
Dafni, 17236  
Greece  
[edalouka@yahoo.gr](mailto:edalouka@yahoo.gr)

## **Abstract**

**This paper constitutes a part of my postgraduate thesis with the title “Documentation of collection of precious book: demands and modeling”, and it presents the results of a research.**

**The aim of the research was to investigate the extent to which new electronic technologies are used for the documentation and digitization of collections of rare books, either printed or manuscripts. It also aimed to investigate to what extent these technologies are used for various other administrative operations, which are essential for the fulfillment of the role museums, and cultural institutions are asked to play in the modern societies.**

**The research took place in twenty-four institutions, museums, libraries and archives, and the statistical analysis of the results constitutes an indicative presentation of the situation in Greece today.**

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<sup>1</sup> The present paper constitutes a part of my post-graduate thesis that took place in 2006, with supervision on K. Basilakis, E. Antzoulidou - Retsila and G. Boudalis]

## **INTRODUCTION**

The notion that monuments encompass cultural values, above and beyond national boundaries, and the fact that they need to be protected became clear in the international community just in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

After World War II the UNESCO adopted specific conventions and founded three international organizations<sup>2</sup> focused in the protection and conservation of monuments.<sup>3</sup> By doing so it has greatly influenced the formation and establishment of internationally accepted rules and principles for the protection of cultural goods. In these context museums around the world showed a marked interest for the documentation of their collection. Such documentation is of primary importance for the protection of their collections. For many decades the record keeping related to collection items was a task of secondary importance, the primary being the formation of the collection itself and their preservation.<sup>4</sup>

Setting up a documentation system for all information related to a specific collection has been initially the responsibility of the person that happened to be occupied with such task. As a result most of them acted on a personal basis without any major concerns for what other people have been doing elsewhere or for the creation of an integral documentation system with a wider use.

The problem became worst when the need for constant updating of such documentation archives arose. In some cases the information itself was stored in the living memory of the curators or other employees.

The extent of the problem created by the building up of documentation archives, to a great extent unrelated and inconsistent, was realized in the 1960-1970 when the overall situation in museums begun to change as old staff was substituted with new, often working with more flexible and less permanent contracts.

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2.1 ICCROM (1959)

2 ICOMOS (1965)

3 ICOM (1946)

<sup>3</sup> (Consola 1995).

<sup>4</sup> (Sarasan 1995).

By coincidence at the same time there was a general interest for the tracking of trafficking antiquities and works of art. As a consequence there has been a rise in the demand for data concerning protected and trafficking items.<sup>5</sup> In this way museum object documentation became of primary importance.

In the mid '60s, in the USA, there have been the first attempts, by universities and collaborating museums and libraries, to use new technologies for the documentation of their collections. The result was the creation of various isolated and national projects for the electronic documentation of cultural objects. Ten years later the use of computers underwent a major development but efforts for the collaboration and the communication between the parties was minimal.<sup>6</sup>

As time passed by, the need for compatibility and consistency of exchanged information led to the proposal of internationally standardized documentation rules, which specify the structure, the content, the processes, and the exchange of data between museum and institutions.

Following the technology that started to be introduced in museums around the world, Greek institutions undertook the development of programs for the documentation and management of their collections. Such projects are made possible with the collaboration of the European Union, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Research and Technology. For example in 1987 the Byzantine Museum of Athens presented the results of a project for the cataloguing of its icons collection through a computer database while in 1992 the project CLEIO<sup>7</sup> was jointly presented and undertaken by the Benaki Museum and the Informatics Institute of the Technological Institute of Research in Crete. Other projects, such as DELTOS, POLEMON<sup>8</sup>, etc followed in the next years.

Nowadays museums, libraries and archives are active in the documentation and digitization of their collections through EU-founded projects. In order to avoid the use of

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<sup>5</sup>Kakouris (2000)

<sup>6</sup> (Sarasan 1995).

<sup>7</sup> see more <http://www.ics.fotrh.gr/proj/isst/Systems/cliio.html>

<sup>8</sup>see more <http://www.ics.fotrh.gr/CULTUREstandards>

isolated and unrelated documentation and digitization databases and in order to achieve consistency, the E.U. funded project INFORMATION SOCIETY supported the creation of a set of rules for cultural documentation and interoperability of such documentations. This was done by the Centre of Cultural Informatics of the Informatics Institute of ITE, the Patras University and the National Metsovion Polytechnic.

## **THE RESEARCH SUBJECT**

The aim of this research was to assess the various methods used for the documentation and digitization of rare books and manuscript collection, which belong to museums, libraries and archives in Greece.

More specifically the researched aimed to clarify the following issues:

- The use of computers for the cultural and managerial documentation of collections.
- The use of established rules, models and thesaurus of terms for the creation of electronic documentation systems.
- The interoperability of different documentation systems, the collaboration of institutions to this end and the exchange of data and opinions.
- The digitization of collections and their availability to the wider public through the Internet.
- The keeping of back-up copies of recorded material.
- The responsibility for the management of the electronic and digital files.
- The evaluation and feed back of documentation systems.

## **THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.**

The data on which this research is based were collected from twenty-four institutions housing rare books and manuscript collections, more specifically six museums, fourteen libraries and four archives. These were institutions, which replied positively to an initial formal request for participation. Such request was initially made to twenty museums, thirty libraries and five archives selected from the corresponding catalogues of the Greek

Ministry of Education<sup>9</sup> and the Ministry of Culture<sup>10</sup>. The final list of the twenty-four participating institutions is the following:

1. Library of the Greek Parliament (Athens).
2. Kairios Library of Andros (Andros island)
3. Lefkada Public Library (Lefkada Island)
4. Chios Public Library 'Korais' (Chios Island)
5. Thessaloniki Public Library (Thessaloniki)
6. Aristotele University of Thessaloniki Central Library (Thessaloniki)
7. Estia Neas Smirnis (Neas Smirni – Athens)
8. Larissa Central Public Library (Larissa)
9. Trikala Public Library (Trikala)
10. Karditsa Popular library (Karditsa)
11. Numismatic Museum of Athens (Athens)
12. Byzantine Museum of Athens (Athens)
13. Museum of Byzantine Culture (Thessaloniki)
14. Lixouri Central Public Library (Lixouri- Keffalonia Island)
15. Archive of Paleography, National Bank of Greece Cultural Foundation, (Athens)
16. Greek Literature and History Archive, ELIA, (Athens)
17. Historic Archive of Athens University (Athens)
18. Library of the Geology Department of university of Athens (Athens)
19. Historical Museum of the Old Parliament (Athens)
20. Jewish Museum (Athens)
21. Zagora Public Library (Zagora-Volos)
22. Atalanti Public Library (Atalanti)
23. Mytilene Public Library (Mytilene Island)
24. Koventarios Central Library of Kozani (Kozani).

## **PROCESS OF DATA COLLECTING**

The data collection was done through the use of a questionnaire<sup>11</sup>, which was sent to the institutions aforementioned. The final selection of questions to be included was made

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<sup>9</sup> [www.ypepth.gr](http://www.ypepth.gr)

<sup>10</sup> [www.gulture.gr](http://www.gulture.gr)

through a trial session in four, randomly selected institutions. The questions focused both on general as well as specific issues.

## **INTERPRETATION OF THE COLLECTED DATA.**

On the basis of the answered questionnaire received from the twenty-four institutions, fourteen of them are libraries; six are museums and the rest four archives. Of these twenty-four institutions thirteen are public, seven are private and the rest four functions in the context of municipalities or cultural unions (graph 1, 2).

Of them ten are based in Athens, three in Thessalonica and nine in the rest of Greece (graph. 3).

As far as their book collections are concerned, they were mostly formed through donations but occasionally also through purchases on the basis of the rarity and the content of the books.

The focal point of the research was to investigate the extent to which new technologies are integrated in the use and management of the book collections. It appears that only in one out of the twenty-four institutions no use of computers is made. In all the rest computers are used for storing data related to the cataloguing and management of their collections, but also for administrative and other general purposes such as use of the Internet. As a matter of fact sixteen of the institutions of the research do have a web page (graph. 4).

Despite the spreading of new technologies most of the institutions still use handwritten archives for the documentation of the activities related to their collections, twelve of them using also electronic archives at the same time (graph. 5).

It is to be noticed that only one of the participating institutions keep electronic records for more than the last thirteen years. (graph. 6).

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<sup>11</sup>There is a wide presentation at my postgraduate thesis: "Documentation of a collection of precious books: demands and modeling" University of Athens, Museum Studies Course, 2006

In thirteen of the institutions, new databases have been built for record keeping related to their collections. Such databases were for the greatest part, seven institution, designed and build by and interdisciplinary group of people, including historians or archaeologists, philologists, librarians, computer experts and conservators), working in each institution (graphs 7, 8, 9).

In the case of libraries the databases were designed and build according to internationally accepted standards (MARC<sup>12</sup>, AACR), while for museums the British standard for managerial documentations SPECTRUM<sup>13</sup> has been used instead. No reference was made to standards, which support the interoperability of different systems (e.g. standard CIDOC – CRM<sup>14</sup>). This means that essentially each institution creates its own system without major concerns about how this system might be integrated or connected to other similar ones (graph. 10,11). It has been also found that all eight institutions with electronic databases have built their own thesaurus of terms, by making use of the each institution's staff.

As far as the collections management is concerned, almost half of the institutions keep handwritten index cards for each of their items. In these are recorded information such as the entry date, the shelf mark, the general information of each book (title, subject, author, material etc) and a short description. They lent items from their collections mostly for exhibitions and research or publishing institutions with insurance coverage.

They seldom sell books and only when there are multiple copies, most commonly in similar institutions (museums or libraries).

One of the major problems is the condition survey of the books. Only four of the participating institutions do undertake such a survey once every year.

A similar problem is evident as far as the conservation of the books is concerned. Only two institutions keep records, including written reports and photographs, of the conservation treatments undertaken in books of their collections. There are very few cases where a photographic archive of the books is kept either in hard or digital form (graph. 12,13).

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<sup>12</sup>See more: <http://www.lcweb.loc.gov/marc/>

<sup>13</sup> See more: <http://www.mda.org.uk/spectrum.htm>

<sup>14</sup> See more: <http://www.ics.fotrh.gr/CULTUREstandards>

The management of book collections is made possible through a series of operations, which according to the international standards should be recorded in detail.

The information related to the following operations is kept in either handwritten or electronic archives or occasionally both: Book entry, Acceptance, Cataloguing, Position, State or preservation, Conservation, reproduction, Loans, Selling, Insurance, Transportation, Loss, Participation in exhibitions-projects, Storage. The documentation archives are usually the same for all the collection items of the institutions, differing only in those fields that concern each specific type of object and its conservation and technological features (graph. 12,13).

The management of the cultural documentation is the responsibility of the librarian for libraries and of the archaeologist for museums. In a very few cases the responsibility for this relies to the head of each department, for example to the book conservator when book conservation is concerned (graph. 14).

Most of the participating institutions store their archives in computers or in paper folders when digital or paper archives are kept respectively. Some of the institutions (seven of them) store this information in both forms for security reasons. Copies of the original archives are made either on paper or on cd-rom and kept in most of the cases in places other than the place where the originals are kept. Access to these archives is granted to the staff of the institutions and occasionally to scholars and researchers with a special permission (graph. 15,16).

The digitization is today considered a fundamental action for the easier accomplishment of various operations of cultural institutions. From the participating institutions it results that digitization in library collections is in infancy. There is almost parity between the institutions that have digitized part of their collections and those that plan to do so in the future. In the former books have been digitized as images with the responsibility of the staff or employing external collaborators.

The cost of such undertakings was covered either by the institution itself or by the EU-founded project “ Information Society”<sup>15</sup> (graph 17,18,19,20)

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<sup>15</sup> See more :[www.infosoc.gr](http://www.infosoc.gr)

Most of the institutions seventeen out of twenty four have a web page on the Internet in which general information and some photos of their collections are available. (graph. 21,22)

It is well known that documentation is a dynamically changing process, which is evaluated and changed according to the needs of each institution. An in depth and serious evaluation of their documentation systems has been done only in five out of the twenty-four institutions (graph. 23,24,25)

## **SUMMARY**

Summarizing the results of this research it appears that the use of new technologies in cultural institutions is extensive both for the documentation but also for other operations such as their administration and management, the publicity through the Internet etc.

In most of the cases the new electronic documentation archives coexist with the traditional in index cards ones. These are mainly databases that the institutions build individually according to their needs and with the collaboration of special scientists that work in these specific institutions.

The models that are used support the basic fields and the necessary steps of registration and management of the cultural information.

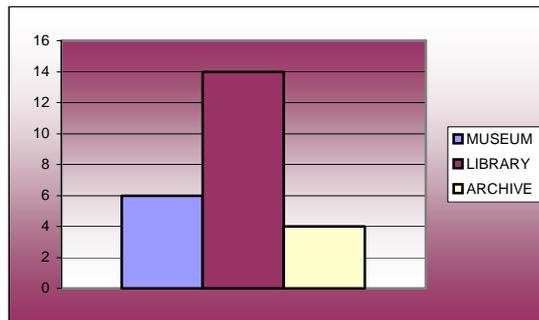
The problem is located in the lack of collaboration and exchange of information between the institutions, in the checked vocabularies, in the creation of thesaurus of terms, in other words in the lack of interoperability.

The digitization is in embryonic stage, and the institutions that did or do so are those that managed to get funding from the E.U. program "Information Society".

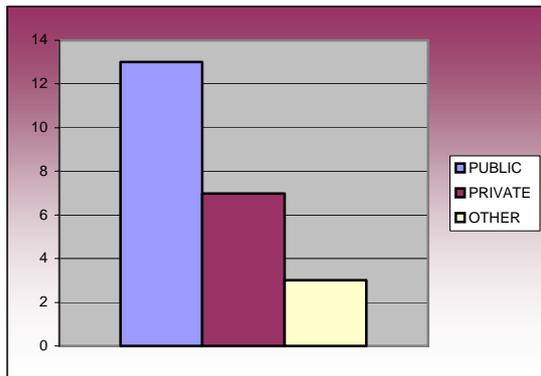
Museum documentation is a dynamic, non-static, process and as such requires constant redefinition and evaluation of the documentation systems used. However this particular practice is rather limited in Greece.

Through the small sample of this research, common problems are realized for different institutions. These problems should be understood as a reason for greater and closer collaboration and exchange of experience and information between institutions. The final aim of this collaboration should be the protection and better access in their collection.

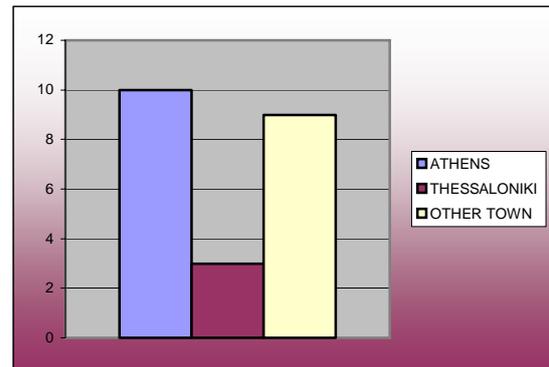
**GRAPHS 1-25**



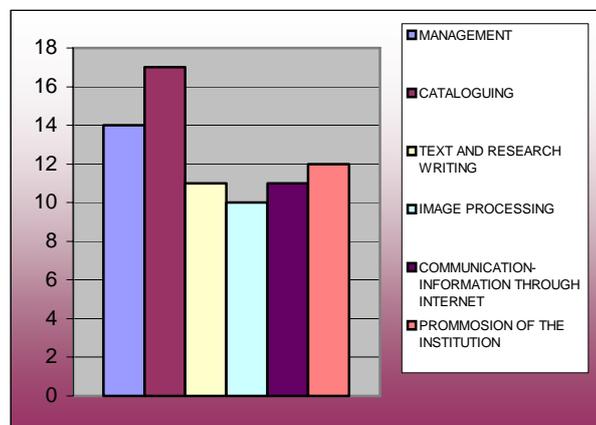
Graph. 1. Institution



Graph. 2. Status

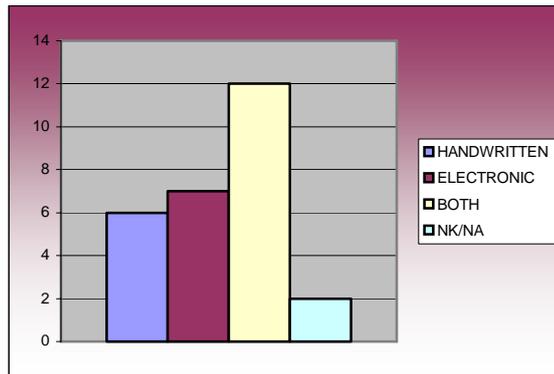


Graph. 3. Location

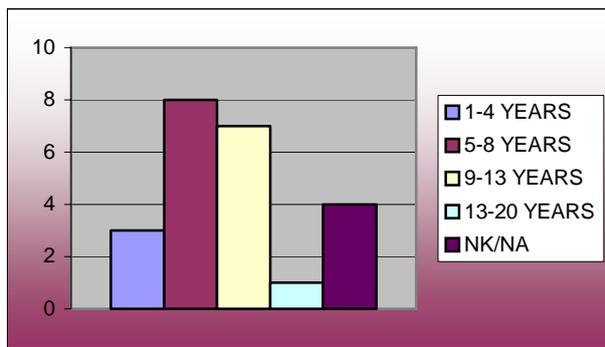


Graph. 4. Main use of computers

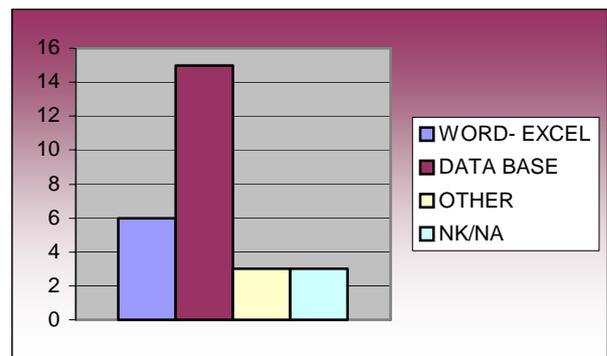
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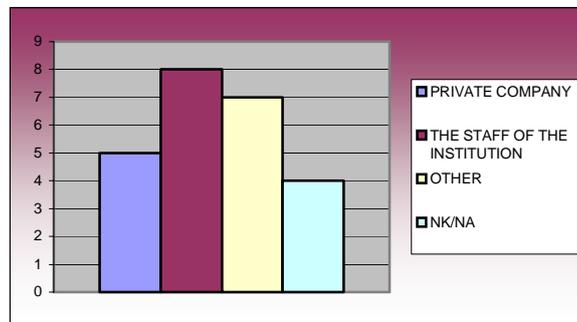
Graph. 5. Type of documentation files



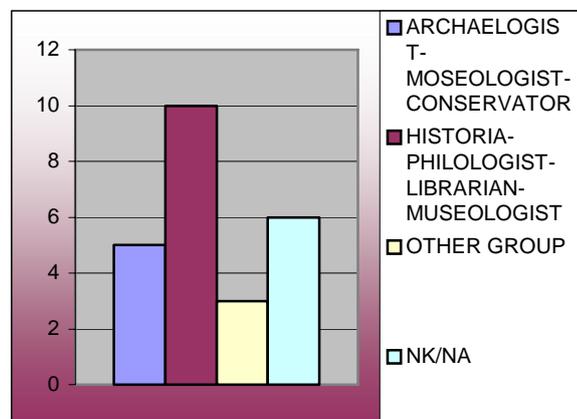
Graph. 6. Since when electronic files are used?



Graph. 7. Type of electronic files.

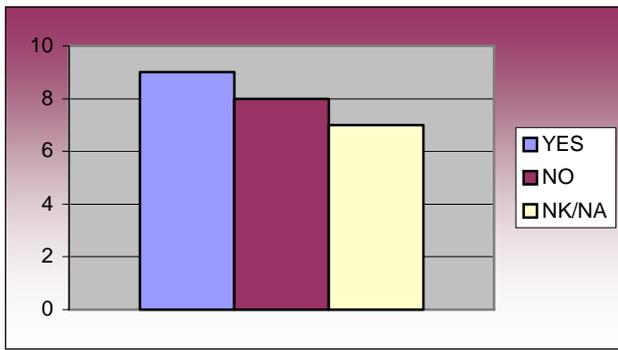


Graph. 8. Responsibility for the design of the database

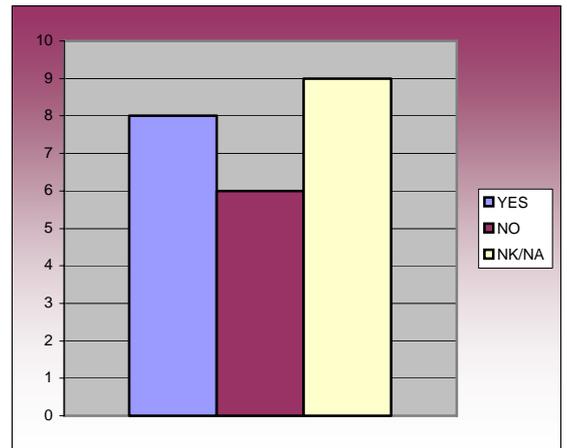


Graph. 9. People participating in the working groups

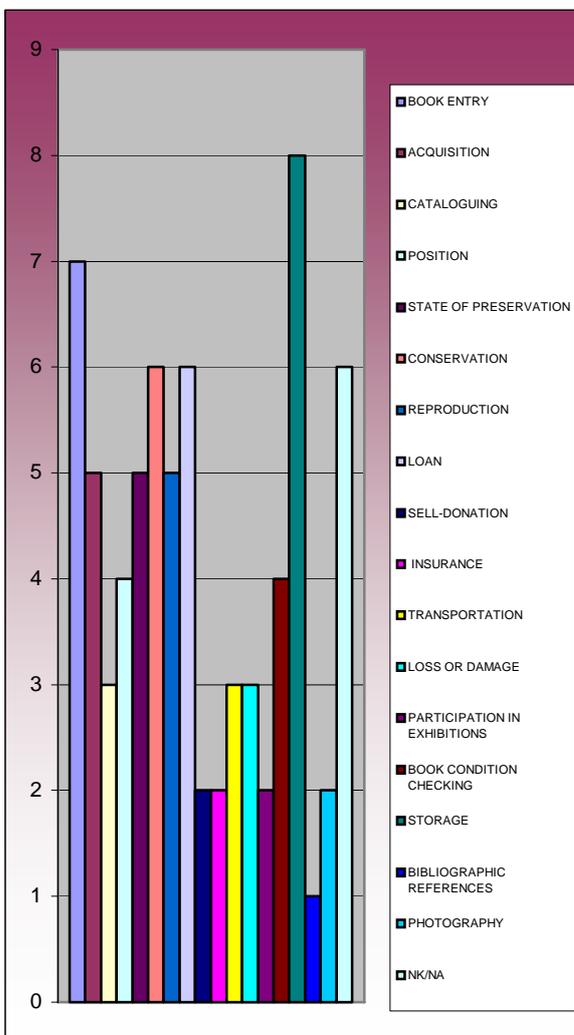
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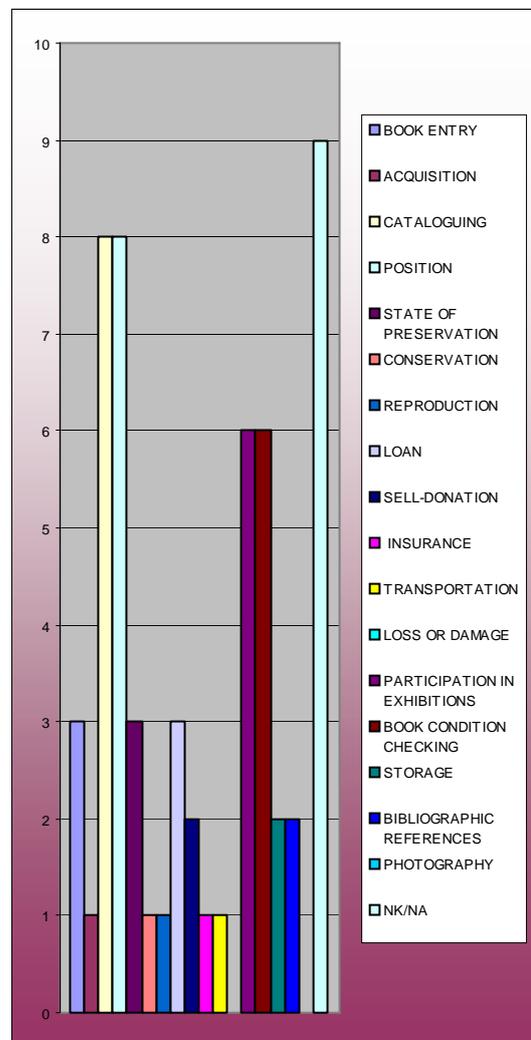
Graph. 10. Use of international standards for the design of a database



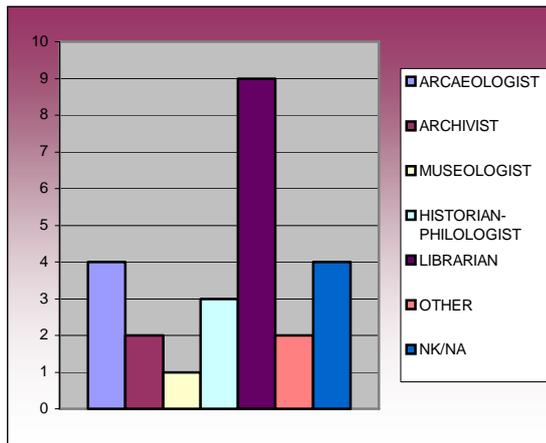
Graph. 11. Use of terminology – Thesaurus of terms



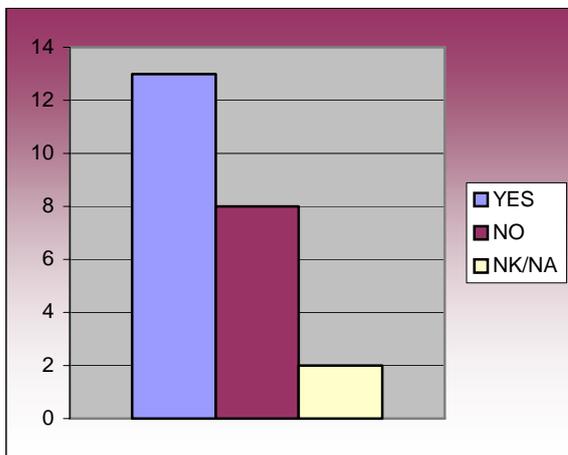
Graph. 12. Information recorded in the handwritten documentation



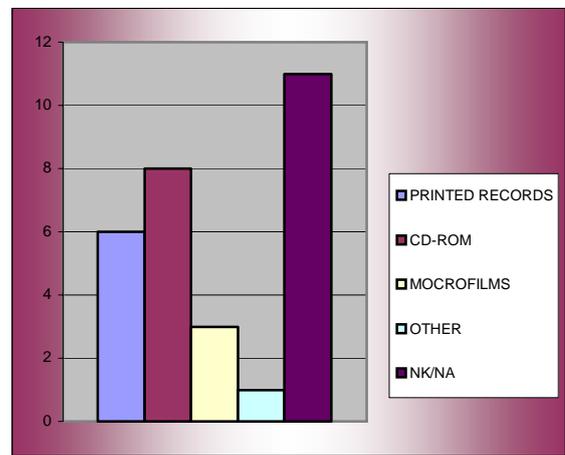
Graph. 13. Information recorded in the electronic documentation



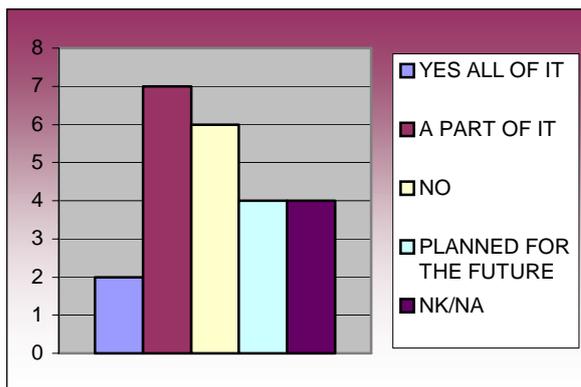
Graph. 14. Person responsible for the cultural and managerial documentation



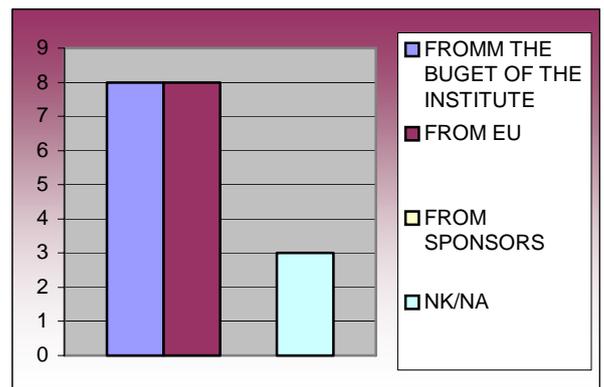
Graph. 15. Keeping of back-up copies



Graph. 16. The type of back-up copies

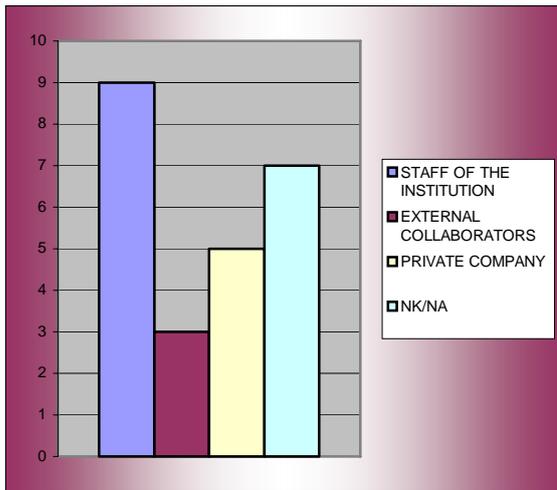


Graph. 17. Digitization of collections

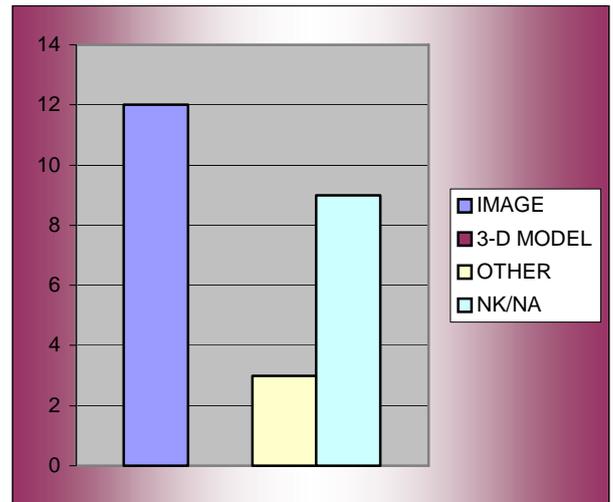


Graph. 18. Expense of digitization

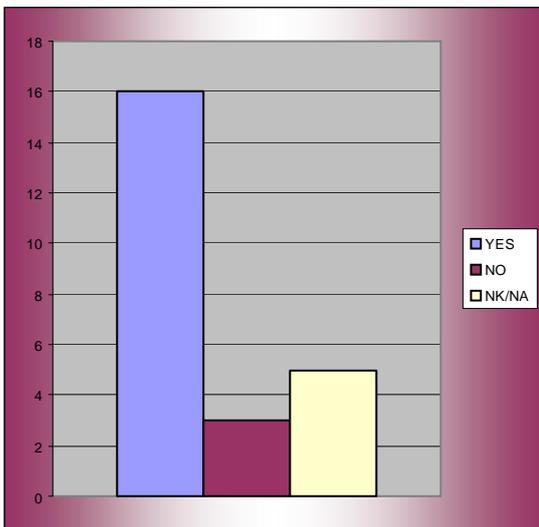
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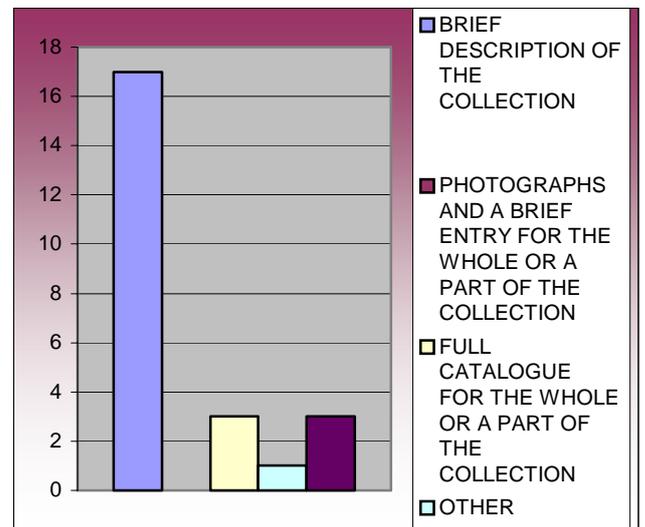
Graph. 19. Responsible for the digitization



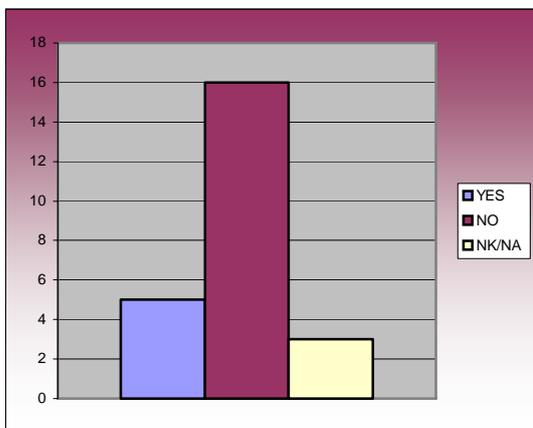
Graph. 20. Types of digitisation



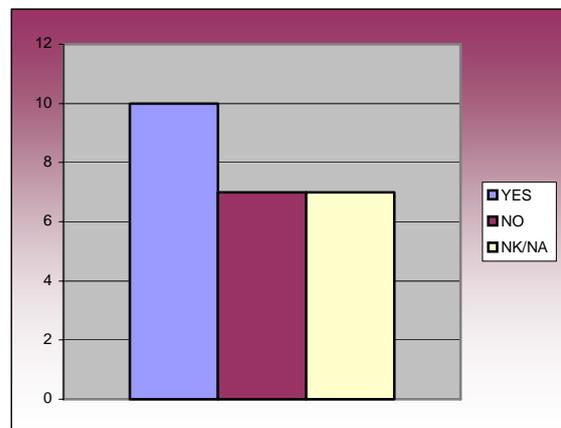
Graph. 21. Web page of the institution



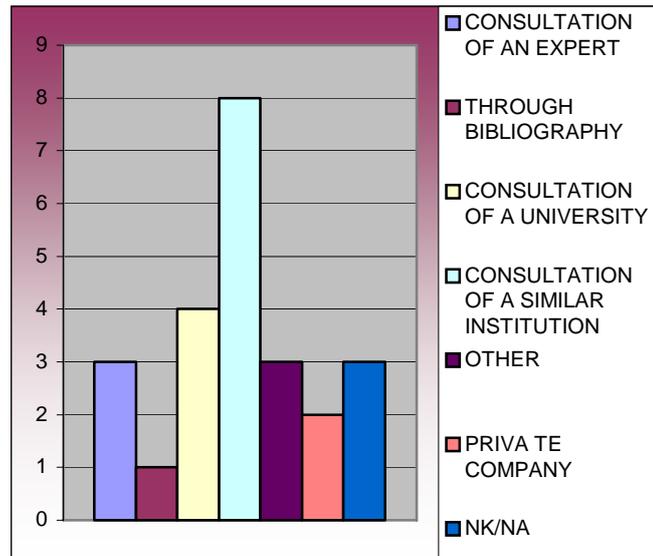
Graph. 22. Information supplied through the web-page



Graph. 23. Evaluation of the documentation system



Graph. 24. Terminology problems during data inputting



Graph. 25. How terminology problems were solved?

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