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NEW CATEGORIES OF HISTORICAL SOURCES: E-MAIL AND FORUM. INTERNET COMMUNICATION AND HISTORY

Abstract: The text is related to changes in the communication system and its influence on the historical research. Until recently research of persons, private life or his understanding of every day's life was possible through traditional written sources like letters. However, soon this group of sources will cease to exist. The transfer from paper and pen to electronic way of communication stipulated new types of historical sources. Amongst others, e-mail, forums and discussion lists appear as a new method of communication. Future historians, researchers of any theme chronologically connected to the so called age of information will lose for one very important group of sources. Instead they will be consigned to electronic form of letters as well as of audio-vision information. At the same time new way of communication accelerated the exchange of information. That by it self lead to a change in historical methodology, in research as well as in citation.

Key words: historical sources, historiography, history, Internet, communication, citation

Today's changes in the communication system made an impact not only on persons every day's life¹ but also on the development of science as it is and the constitution of new methodologies in its separate disciplines. Implication of computers in historical science could be observed in three different ways, with or without links between themselves:

- History and Historiography: the implication of computers on the methodology of historical science from the sixties of the 20th century until today
- Methodology of historical research: Computerization and the Historiography
- Contemporary history and the informational era: The influence of computers and the new technologies on modern history's tendencies

History and Historiography

The appliance of computers in historical science as a special domain can be followed from the sixties of the 20th century (when they were used strictly for demographic and economic history, appearing helpful in statistic calculations), through so called WWW that appeared 1989, until today. The beginning of collaboration between historical and other sciences gave birth to an idea of *total history*² which showed new ways of using the our-days technologies in historical research. The most

¹ It is curious to notice that a second edition of the five volumes *History of private life* of the French publisher SEUIL from 1999 (first edition is from 1987), was supplemented with chapters about mobile phones, Internet, the raves, etc. See: *Историја приватног живота*, 5, Од Првог светског рата до наших дана, приредили Филип Аријес и Жорж Дибби, Београд, 2004, 495–532.

² Fernan Brodel, *Spisi o istoriji*, SKZ, Beograd, 1992.

distinguished in the field of cooperation with other sciences were French historians (gathered out around the journal *Anali*)³ and the *Cambridge group for studies of population*.⁴ In the meantime, historians are trying to organize this branch and thus give it a new form. An especially dedicated journal to the subject *Computers and The Humanities* appears in USA already in 1966.⁵ The first specialized software for historians (*Clio*) emerged in the early eighties of 20th century in the Institute of History, Getingen. The most memorable for this significant innovation was a historian Manfred Toler. The appearance of WWW in the late eighties of the last century leads computerization and historiography to the new faze. Series of blogs, written by historians especially interested in relation between history and new media, are dedicated to this topic.⁶

Methodology of Historical Research

Introduction of WWW with its many services, functions and possibilities lead to a series of brand new questions in methodology of historian science. Beside already known ones, about the use of internet in historical researches like validity of data, author's tendencies, enormous production of information (*document inflation*), citation and need to create digital databases and *their* appliance,⁷ transformation in ways of communication brought researchers to challenges of a new kind. Transfer from traditional ways to electronic communication leads to eventual disappearance of old historical resources: letters, postcards, scripts, diaries etc, and appearance of its substitute in electronic form: e mail, discussion forums, list service, blogs etc. These so to speak sources of modern Age, could be marked as completely *new types of historical sources*, because of its specific electronic form, its liability to different forms of change, abuse of Internet, frequent changes of page content (update) as much as because of necessity to create special tools designed for its critic, e.g. for determining authenticity.⁸

³ Павле Миленковић, *Теоријско-методолошке импликације промена унутар историографског дискурса*, *Теме*, часопис за друштвене науке, г. XXV Бр. 1–4 Ниш јануар–децембар 2001, 103–120, са старијом литературом. *Теме*. Универзитет у Нису, [http://facta.junis.ni.ac.yu/teme/teme14-2001/Teme14-2001-06.pdf](http://facta.junis.ni.ac.yu teme/teme14-2001/Teme14-2001-06.pdf) (Date of last access: 05.09.2006.).

⁴ Slobodan Mandić, *Kompjuterizacija i istoriografija 1995–2005*, Udruženje za društveni istoriju, Beograd (in print)

⁵ José E. Igartua, *Computers and historians: Past, present, and future*, in: *Computers and the Humanities. Computer and historians*, Volume 30. No. 5, Dordrecht–Boston–London 1996/1997, 347–350. See above: comment number 4.

⁶ Center for History and New Media, George Mason University, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/resources/blogs.php> (Date of last access: 31.08.2006.)

⁷ Александра Фостиков, Ненад Миленовић, *Интернет и дигитализација у историјском истраживању*, *Историјски часопис* 51 (2004), 187–203; Aleksandra Fostikov, Nenad Milenović, *Problems regarding the application of internet in the historical research*, *Review of NCD* 5 (2004) 67–73. e-Library, <http://elib.mi.sanu.ac.yu/files/journals/ncd/5/d010download.pdf> (Date of last access: 31.08.2006); Aleksandra Fostikov, Nenad Milenović, *The citation guide for Internet sources in History and other sciences* 7 (2005), 34–38. e-Library, <http://elib.mi.sanu.ac.yu/files/journals/ncd/7/ncd07034.pdf> (Date of last access: 31.08.2006.). Relevant information about term *document inflation*, see in Šaril-Olivije Karbonel, *Istoriografija*, Plato, Beograd, 1999, 112–113.

⁸ One of the main characteristics of these new kinds of sources is a problem of liability to the old system of classification in which they separate into private and public sources. *Therefore, instead of diaries now we have blogs. Definition of blog (blog, short for web log) represents a revolutionizing form of communication, developed through Internet. Blog does not imply any special interface, nor does it differ in any other way from the standard diary. However, one could not imagine how immense the interest in*

Present day tendencies are leading to new challenges and ways of collaboration between historians, archivists, and researchers of informational sciences and mathematics.

Disappearance of the traditional sources like letters, postcards, diaries, etc. is causing serious problems to the historians. Until recently research of persons, private life or his understanding of every day's life was possible through traditional written sources. However, soon this group of sources will cease to exist. Future historians, researchers of any theme chronologically connected to the so-called age of information will lose for one very important group of sources, placed in archives and libraries. Formation of new type of sources: e-mail, forums, discussion lists, list service, public comments etc, can partly recover a process of dying out of the older, traditional sources. However, this substitution brings out a question of adequate historical methodology. One of the most important characteristics of the age of information is a vast number of information, which were just until yesterday almost unknown to an average person. It is curious to know that 92 percent of all of the informations in the world today are saved on a hard disk. From the overall number of new informations, 40 percent audio records and 50 percent informations on hard disks. Annually there is 800 MB of new informations per an average person which means that takes nine meters of books to get all of those informations printed.⁹

Therefore, several questions rise in the realm of evolved types of historical sources connected to methodology, use of this type of sources in historical science and to the influence of modern communication system on courses of contemporary history. Some of the information in electronic form: discussion forums and public comments (electronic *vox populi*) represent a unique form of expressing public opinion. This system of electronic *vox populi* gives historians an insight in to the ways of the modern times. All the same, in that case historian must have in mind *digital gap* (geographical or generational) between groups of population, which use (alleged PC literacy elite) or do not new system of communication. According to the data from November 2005, the number of users of Internet in SCG was 1.200.000 (11,2%), never the less that is still beneath the average number of most of the counters in vicinity: Slovenia–48,5%, Croatia–29,2%, Romania–23,1%, Hungary–30,2%.¹⁰ A historian is faced with a need to establish a new criterion for verifying and evaluating mentioned electronic sources.¹¹ There is also an important question of preservation and presentation of these documents.¹²

Problem of citation of documents, brought out in an electronic form, represents an important question among many specific aspects of using new type of source. Whichever style is used for citation of sources, which originated during electronic

this type of expression will be. Beogradska otvorena škola (BOŠ) <http://www.bos.org.yu/cepit/idrustvo/> (Date of last access: 31.08.2006.).

⁹ *Vreme*, br. 683, 5. februar 2004. See above, comment number 4.

¹⁰ *Internet World Stats. Usage and Population Statistics.* Miniwatts Marketing Group <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats4.htm> (Date of last access to old page: 07.11.2005). In the meantime the European Internet Stats were updated on March 31, 2006. (Date of last access: 2.09.2006). See above, comment number 4.

¹¹ Digital Watermark as an example of new possibilities. Vesna Vučković, *Digital Watermark and its Role in Cultural Heritage Digitization*, Review of NCD 7 (2005), 8–13. e-Library, <http://elibrary.mi.sanu.ac.yu/files/journals/ncd/7/ncd07008.pdf> (Date of last access: 31.08.2006). See above, comment number 4, 7.

¹² Today, letters are rarely kept but usually thrown away after (the particular) correspondence is finished. Things don't look any better concerning documents in electronic form, like business correspondence, for which in our country one doesn't bear any legal obligation to preserve and archive.

communication or presentation (e.g. blog) the citation, must include all of determinants, which could be used as a guideline in finding cited. Exception is made whilst citing private e-mail, because there is no URL address, so, as in classic citation (pen and paper) of correspondence one also quotes: authors first and last name, title of the e-mail, name and last name of recipient, date of e-mail. If it's an e-mail from some of the list services, name of that list service should also be quoted. If authors first and last name are not available, his pseudonym or so-called nick (from nickname) should be.

All other ways of electronic communication like forums, discussion lists, public comments or blogs, should include both mentioned data as well as: name of Internet page and its URL address, date of last access, also, in case of citing a blog, a title, date of entry and the title of blog itself. Whilst quoting public comments one should highlight title of the commented topic.¹³

This new way of communication has accelerated the exchange of information. Connecting to a net of people and machines represents growing paraphernalia, in ones professional life. In this way various groups of researchers, which often belong to different institutions and from countries all over the world, together form an *Invisible Academy*. E-mail and E-conferences are used more frequently and are leading to discovering new ways of accessing the information as well as to working as a collective through computer support, (*Computer Supported Collaborative Work*), what segment of research now refers to as *collaborations*. A new software platform for work in groups (*groupware*) is used for this purpose.¹⁴ They offer historical documents and use advantages of new technologies like joined electronic databases, digitization of archive sources, search of founds through specialized software etc.

Here it is necessary to emphasize so-called *hybrid search engines*, which simplify orientation in vastness of cyber space, based on principles of combining topics searchers (by themes) and search engines (by key words e. g. *Google*). Specialized searcher for historians use *Humbul Humanities Humb – History Reseoreces By Heading* (Oxford University) is the emanating one.¹⁵ It simplifies the way of reaching many relevant sites. These searchers save enormous amount of historian's time spent looking for potentially useful information. Lately, the number of scientific journals that are published strictly in electronic form grows.¹⁶ All this implies that historians will be facing with many problems influenced by global computerization of different segments of science, daily. Or, as historian Emmanuel le Roy Ladurie once said *A historian of the Future will be skilled in computer programming or cease to exist as such*.¹⁷

Contemporary history and the informational era

¹³ See above, comment numbers 4, 7. The exaples of citing this new kind of electronic sources see in **Appendix**.

¹⁴ Iv-Fransoa Le Koadik, *Nauka o informacijama*, Beograd 2005, str. 41, 51–52. See above, comment number 4.

¹⁵ Humbul – History Resources By Heading, *Humbul Humanities Humb*, <http://www.humbul.ac.uk/-history/>, Date of last update: 02.12.2005, (Date of last access: 05.12.2005).

¹⁶ *JAHc: Journal of the Association for History and Computing*, <http://mcel.pacificu.edu/jahc/about.html> (Date of last access: 31.08.2006.).

¹⁷ Emmanuel le Roy Ladurie, *Le Territoire de l' Historian*, Paris 1973, 73. Izvorno citirano u: Paul Lawrence, Chris Williams, *Postgraduate use of ICT in the study of history*, s.l. s.a.; See also: Mirjana Gross, *Historijska znanost. Razvoj, oblik, smjerovi*, Zagreb 1980², 267.

Beside numerous questions and topics, one should consider the influence of the new system of communication on contemporary history. An accelerated exchange of information has an unseen impact on current events. At this time, two examples can be distinguished amongst others. The first is about the influence computer technologies had on the course of *The Cold War*,¹⁸ and the second considers the influence electronic communication, which developed in connection with the recent music festival *Evropesma–Evropjesma 2006*, Belgrade, had on the public opinion in the time of pre-referendum in the former state of Serbia and Montenegro.¹⁹

Finally, it is important to emphasize that in spite of numerous conferences, journals and discussions amongst historians around the world about questions of computerization and historiography, problems connected to this area are far from being resolved. Good illustration is the title of conference of Association for History and Computing, held in Cambridge, UK in November 2005, *Method or Madness?*²⁰ On the other hand, as historian Erik Hobzbaum had said *electronic post, trance ocean travel and the others products of information revolution are more appealing to an individual person than to a society as a whole.*²¹

Appendix:

Private e-mail: Author's first and Author's last name, Title of the e-mail, Name and last name of e-mail recipient, Date of e-mail.

E-mail from list service: Author's first and Author's last name (or nick), Title of the e-mail, Date of e-mail, Name of list service.

Forum, discussion list: Author's first and Author's last name (or nick), Title of the message or subtopic of forum, Date of message, Name of the Internet page and its URL address, Date of the last update is available and Date of last access.

Public comments: Author's first and Author's last name (or nick), Title of commented topic, Date of comment, Name of the Internet page and its URL address, Date of the last update if available and Date of last access.

¹⁸ Frank Cain, *Computers and the Cold War, United States Restrictions on the Export of Computers to the Soviet Union and Communist China*, Journal of Contemporary History 40 (1), 2005, SAGE Publications <http://jch.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/40/1/131?maxtoshow=&HITS=10&hits=10&RESULTFORMAT=&fulltext=computer&andorexactfulltext=and&searchid=1&FIRSTINDEX=0&sortspec=relevance&resourceype=HWCIT> (Date of last access: 31.08.2006.).

¹⁹ When tasked with *evropesma 2006*, Google offers 52,400 determinants. Many of those are forum and discussion pages and public comments. Here we specify just a few pages on which a heated discussion was held in regards to the question of survival as a state union SCG: B92 http://www.b92.net/zivot/komentari.php?nav_id=192044&version=print; (Date of last access: 02.09.2006), http://www.b92.net/info/komentari.php?nav_id=191456 (Date of last access: 02.09.2006); http://www.b92.net/info/komentari.php?nav_id=191456 (Date of last access: 02.09.2006);

A parallel, between Maximir and Evropesma appears on Internet. *Maksimir u Beogradu*, Monitor, http://www.monitor.cg.yu/arhiva/a_804_07.html (Date of last access: 02.09.2006).

²⁰ University of Cambridge, Association for History and Computing, UK 2005 Conference, *Method or Madness? History and its Disparate Approaches*, <http://www.crash.cam.ac.uk/events/20056-methodormadness.html> (Date of last access: 31.08.2006). See above, comment number 4.

²¹ Erik Hobzbaum, *Doba ekstrema. Istorija kratkog dvadesetog veka: 1914–1991*, Beograd, 2002, 19; Slobodan Mandić, *Mogućnosti primene Interneta u istorijskom istraživanju*, Билтен Удружења за друштвену историју "Херодот", број 5, година III, јесен 2004, 18–21, Удружење за друштвену историју, <http://www.udi.org.yu/ec/herodot/2004-05.pdf> (Date of last access: 31.08.2006).

Blog: Author's first and Author's last name include author middle name if available and nick if available, Title of blog entry, Date of blog entry, Name of the Internet page and its URL address, Date of the last update if available and Date of last access.

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