Nina Vodopivec
(Institute for Contemporary History
Ljubljana, Slovenia)

SISTORY (www.sistory.si) – IDEAS, PROBLEMS AND QUESTIONS

Abstract: *Sistory.si* is an education and research portal of Slovenian historiography. In addition to digitising Slovenian historical sources and literature it provides a platform for international and interdisciplinary discussions on current events, findings or new publications. Its aim is also to open up the space for local, national and international connections in the field of research and education. The portal has just recently been opened to the public (in 2008), even though, it is considered to be an on-going process. The paper will discuss initial ideas, problems and further questions accompanying the establishment of the portal.

Key words: digitization, research and education portal, history of Slovenia, historical material, popularization of Slovenian history, designing a history web site.

One of the main digitization projects in Slovenia is the Digital Library of Slovenia, conducted by the National and University Library (NUK).[1] It involves Slovenian bibliography with a number of records on works in the Slovenian language, as well as articles published from 1797 to 1945 on the territory of the today Slovenia. Most of the material in digital form dates up to 20 years ago.

As researchers of Slovenian past at the Institute for Contemporary History, we work extensively with the material kept in the national and regional libraries as well as the archives. The project by NUK is significant, both in terms of making the material available online, as well as with regard to the preservation of national cultural heritage by preventing eventual damage in source material and its frequency of use.

Nevertheless, we have some comments on the digitization criteria: further to being too broad, they are somewhat incomprehensive and incomplete. As a result, the Institute of Contemporary History (ICH) started the *SIstory* project to format and to digitize historical material congruent with the principles and interests of the history science. One of the basic project's guidelines is to digitize the material which is of major interest to the researchers in Slovenian history. In addition, the project is aimed at promotion and popularization of Slovenian history literature in general public. Historiography is a constituent part of Slovenian cultural heritage, thus we need to provide its accessibility and usability within an up-to-date technological and social paradigm.

The Institute of Contemporary History is the main scientific institution in Slovenia involved in the study of the recent and contemporary history of the Slovenians from the mid-19th century onwards. In terms of subject matter, the research work which is based on programs and projects encompasses two main fields: first includes political and cultural history, as well as the history of ideas, whilst the second economic and social history.[2] The Institute's

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[1] http://www.dlib.si/dlib_eng.asp ; 29.9. 2008.
[2] ICH's projects are mainly funded by the Slovenian Research Agency; some of the contemporary projects are also supported by Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Justice. For more details on projects see www.inz.si or http://sicris.izum.si/ ; 2.10. 2008.

research work covers overall development of Slovenia and Slovenians in the 19th and 20th centuries

As a research centre, our role in the digitization process is to focus on researchers' needs and requirements, as well as the presentation to various publics. By doing so, ICH addresses the needs and supports the cooperation between digital centers, ICT programs and research communities. Thus rather than in terms of technology, this paper deals with the subject mainly in terms of contents and users' needs[3].

SIstory is an education and research portal of Slovenian historiography. By transferring older and contemporary documented publications to a new media and technology, we want to sustain the relevancy of historical knowledge and discourse engendered in the form of scientific papers, articles, reviews, reports, collected and published secondary, as well as primary sources and monographs. Even though the ICH is involved in recent history, the portal is aimed at the historiography in its entirety. By inviting various institutions and research communities to contribute their materials (references and analysis) dealing with other periods, we would like to form an information database with a wide content range. It is this very diversity in terms of content and chronology, along with open access, that is important. The digitization of the Slovenian historical literature and sources provides easier and more comprehensive accessibility to a wide variety of users.

The digitization project has been divided into several levels, taking into consideration the contextual rather than hierarchical model. From the perspective of historical research, all defined levels are of equal relevance. The digitization of the material from Slovenian history magazines has been underway, whilst the second level engenders the process of transferring historical sources into a digital form. The third level involves history monographs, in particular the older ones which have been extensively cited, yet hardly accessible. By transferring both older as well as more recent editions into a new medium and technological form, the 'life expectancy' and relevancy of a huge corpus of history knowledge and experience is prolonged.

In addition to promoting the findings of the Slovenian historiography, the *SIstory* portal - through the establishment of local, national and international connections in the field of research as well as education - also forms a platform for international and interdisciplinary discussion. Furthermore, it is open to debate on topic events and news publication. It is thus aimed at professionals, researchers, teachers, students, and those interested in the past.

We plan to upgrade the pages with new links, additional contents, contributions, monographs and sources. The pages currently presented are still under construction. And this is just the beginning. The project, which started two years ago, has just recently been opened to the public.[4] As already mentioned, in the future other research and education institutions will be invited to join with their programs, researches, analysis, material and ideas in order to form a portal relevant at both national as well as international level.

The portal plays at least two important roles:
1. It has been conceptualized as an internet point which provides access to the research community, as well as interested public and individuals through adequate user interfaces and analytical tools.
2. The idea is to connect various institutions and researchers in order to start and promote new interdisciplinary and international projects.

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[3] Thus far, a specific digital archive has been setup. The portal is based on Apache and PHP architecture and MySQL open source database. The storage is 2 TB (5 discs in Raid5) with external hard drive and backup unit for archiving (up to 800 GB). The internet connection speed is 10 Mb.

[4] One person is fully employed on the project which is funded by the Slovenian Research Agency.

The key word in the contemporary international digitization projects is "to preserve". Our objective is to do more than just preserve. We pursue the idea of the *SIstory* portal as an interactive platform connecting a variety of individuals and publics which transcend 'boundaries' in order to establish a cross-disciplinary approach in the Humanities, Social Sciences and such similar fields — to transcend the national dimensions and support broader Pan-European perspective.

The *SIstory* portal and its basic functions are being upgraded according to researchers' requirements and ideas. By adding different information, we would like to transform it into a central information point in the field of Slovenian history.

The portal comprises two sections:
1. digitized material; magazines, printed and archive sources, databases, analysis and literature;
2. Index of Citations – the only such index in the Humanities and Social Sciences in Slovenia (with an open public access). Index search engine provides those who look for information on the Slovenian historiography a general overview of historiographical science production and basic information on the content of works quoted.

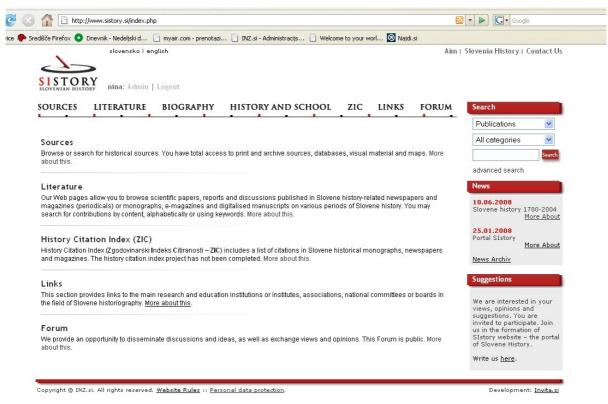**Designing a history web site: the site's structure, frame and navigation**

One of the first challenges we had to face at the very beginning of the project was the design of the basic portal's structure. Even before we started to digitize we tried to rethink the whole structure. This is an extremely relevant issue, due to the development orientation of the project and the fact that the project is planned to become the central project in the field of Slovenian historiography. Namely, the structure design determines further links and settings, as well as modes of history perception. It is thus of major importance what contents are given priority, what problems are presented to the public and in what way, as well as what links are or will be accessible in the future.

Digitization is a lot more than just transformation into a digital form. It also anticipates a different information and knowledge conceptualization, and facilitates a detailed and rapid text search through browsing by data structure, the whole text, or swift moving through the contents. We usually perceive documents as linear texts that we read in order to get information or support an argument. Such is the case with newspapers, when we read a text in the linear order it was written and printed. However, the web offers a user a variety of other options, such as skipping sections, reading them in a different order, retrieving them via various searching tools. Digitization allows rapid and easy browsing of large volumes of material. However, browsing not only changes the mode of information retrieval, but also the perception. Namely, a researcher is no longer interested in a composition of the text as a whole. Such modes of reading and research open new interpretations and lead towards new science conceptualizations.

There is also a question of how to build an easy and user-friendly site. Properly structured site allows visitors to understand where they are, the location of the historical materials they want, and the site's underlying logic - the same as chapter divisions and subtitles help to organize a book. Therefore it is very important to produce an easy-to-comprehend-and-navigate site. The *SIstory* was designed and structured in cooperation with the designer, ICT professionals and researchers. Most of the material digitization was and still is outsourced.

The *main portal categories* include the following:

- Sources (printed, archive sources, data bases; for ex. a database of death toll),
- Literature,   - Citation index,
- Biography,   - Links,
- School and history,   - Forum.

http://www.sistory.si/index.php

We should also mention the *Slovenia History*—a monograph and history analysis from the Middle Ages up to the present, written and prepared by three authors for a digital version in Slovenian and English.

Digitized material

A unique feature of the portal is a *database of death toll* in the population in the territory of the Republic of Slovenia during WWII and immediately afterwards. The list of names is the result of a scientifically-based historiography and victimology research conducted at the Institute since 1997. It includes individuals who, between April 1941 and January 1946, lost their lives during WWII and immediately afterwards due to the revolutionary violence or war-related issues (94,000 people).
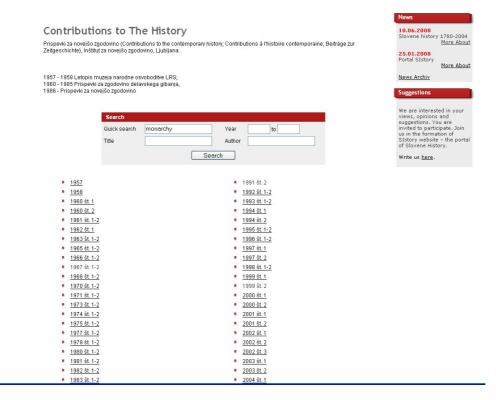
After 1991, the public debate on the subject, in particular post-WWII events, has been extremely politicized, and before that year it was not even possible. Though the massive killings were acknowledged by many parties after the break, the estimates of the victims' number differed significantly (Vodopivec 2006: 53–66). Still today, a lot of people perceive the topic as a story of concealed victims and hidden graves (Tominšek Rihtar 2006: 95–106).

It is thus very important to publish pertinent data and give people the possibility to find their lost relatives, and discover what actually happened to them. Identification of each victim is provided by categories of information which form the so-called 'victim's personal card'. Currently, the research is in its final stage of checking the data collected in the registers (only names of checked victims are published online)[5].

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[5] For objective reasons, the list will never be complete – the scent of individual victims has forever been lost. Furthermore, the reliability of data on individual victims varies a lot. Some problems can be solved by reviewing

Online access to database not only helps people find their relatives and friends, but also facilitates and promotes future analysis. It will undoubtedly contribute to the scientific evaluation of the WWII nature and its consequences in the territory of Slovenia. In addition, the list of casualties of WWII and post-war violence has a considerable moral and ethical significance: to extricate the victims from the hands of politicians and ideologies and "restore" a name to each victim[6].

Thus far, two major *historical magazines* in Slovenia (since the 1950's hitherto) have been digitized. The basic search engine allows search by key or any word in text as well as by authors, year of publications, or titles through all articles published in a selected magazine.

Contributions to The History

Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino (Contributions to the contemporary history; Contributions á l'histoire contemporaine; Beiträge zur Zeitgeschichte), Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, Ljubljana.

1957 - 1958 Letopis muzeja narodne osvoboditve LRS;
1960 - 1985 Prispevki za zgodovino delavskega gibanja,
1986 - Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino

News

10.06.2008
Slovene history 1780-2004
More About

25.01.2008
Portal SIstory
More About

News Archiv

Suggestions

We are interested in your views, opinions and suggestions. You are invited to participate. Join us in the formation of SIstory website – the portal of Slovene History.

Write us here.

Search

| Quick search | monarchy | Year | | to | |
| Title | | Author | | | |

Search

1957	1991 št. 2
1958	1992 št. 1-2
1960 št. 1	1993 št. 1-2
1960 št. 2	1994 št. 1
1961 št. 1-2	1994 št. 2
1962 št. 1	1995 št. 1-2
1963 št. 1-2	1996 št. 1-2
1965 št. 1-2	1997 št. 1
1966 št. 1-2	1997 št. 2
1967 št. 1-2	1998 št. 1-2
1968 št. 1-2	1999 št. 1
1970 št. 1-2	1999 št. 2
1971 št. 1-2	2000 št. 1
1973 št. 1-2	2000 št. 2
1974 št. 1-2	2001 št. 1
1975 št. 1-2	2001 št. 2
1977 št. 1-2	2002 št. 1
1978 št. 1-2	2002 št. 2
1980 št. 1-2	2002 št. 3
1981 št. 1-2	2003 št. 1
1982 št. 1-2	2003 št. 2
1983 št. 1-2	2004 št. 1

http://www.sistory.si/contributions.html

Digitized material is in PDF format with OCR. All documents, articles, monographs, databases and citation index are locked; the users can not change the documents, print or copy them.

The Internet is a lot more than just one-way-street to deliver materials from historical practitioners to their audience, thus the questions is how to provide interactivity. The idea is to transcend the passive 'texts', such as websites and pages, and to consider active processes, such as communication and interaction. In order to achieve that, we have started a forum and opened a communication channel between researchers working on database of death toll and website users or visitors. In the future, we plan to make further steps in this direction, including various publics so that the users may contribute their memories, oral history data and other relevant materials.

At this point, we should mention the *History and School* content section, aimed at younger population, their perception of history and past, as well as their historical memory. This section also provides history teachers a possibility to incorporate new digital and interac-
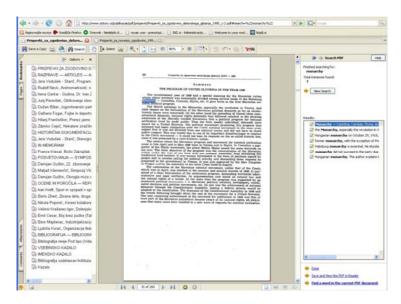
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publications or lists produced by individuals, local communities, or professional historians (www.sistory.si/ 25.5.2008).

[6] The website complies with the personal data protection standards by the Information Commissioner.

tive tools in the teaching process, as well as differently structured history lessons scenarios. As a supplement to regular history lessons in the education system, we would like to offer an additional possibility of gaining relevant and credible history knowledge. We want to provide students of all ages, who enter the world of 'scientific historiography', a communication channel to obtain at a distance information suitable to their age, in an appropriate teaching, pedagogic and multimedia format. Such requires interdisciplinary approach and the collaboration with education professionals and institutions which keep the empirical material (such as the School Museum, the National Education Institute, the Association of History Teachers, etc.).

http://www.sistory.si/search/search.cgi?zoom_per_page=10&zoom_and=-0&zoom_sort=0&zoom_query=monarchy&zoom_cat=2

http://www.sistory.si/publikacije/pdf/prispevki/Prispevki_za_zgodo-vino_delavskega_gibanja_1985_12.pdf#search=%22monarchy%22

History Citation Index

The *Citation Index* includes scientific papers of major history periodicals in Slovenia, as well as volumes classified as scientific monographs, collections of reviewed scientific conferences and symposia. By way of bibliometric methods, the Citation Index allows analyses and display of quotation frequency of historians and their works in professional volumes and magazines. In addition, the *SIstory* citation index also addresses the doubts emerging in Europe and worldwide in discussions on the position and evaluation of historical or humanities research performed by bibliometric and scientometric tools. The shortcoming of the existing indices is that they completely ignore the scientific monographs regardless of the citations number, and thereby their significance in the field of historiography.

The importance of including the monographs (not found in other citation indices, and yet very important for history) is also pragmatic and practical. The Slovenian Research Agency and the Ministry of Science consider the number of citations the most relevant criteria in the assessment of individual candidates for positions, promotions, or when applying for grants. Thus it is even more important that also books are included in the citation index.

As to the search, two options are provided: with basic search you may select search criteria from the pertinent list of terms. The search is available by the work's author or title, by the author of the work cited, title of the work quoted and the title of the source, i.e. the publication. In addition to a combined search with several search criteria, the advanced search also provides the possibility of limiting the search results (year of publication, self-citations, etc.).

For the future

In the future we plan to fill the structure of the portal with the content (documents, magazines and literature, students' works, archive and printed sources — official gazettes, statistical data, etc), especially the sections that are now empty; for example the Biography section. In cooperation with some regional institutions – museums and local associations we are preparing regional biographic material to be published online. We would like to stimulate and support cooperation between people working at local and national level.

The range of published contents will be extended by intensifying the collaboration with the users. This will be coordinated by the Portal Board which is to be constituted from the representatives of the participating institutions (University of Ljubljana, Radio and TV Station, Archives of the Republic of Slovenia, School Museum, National Education Institute, etc.).

Currently, the digitization is somewhat a trend, and it has recently become the key word in Humanities. Many small research institutions want to start their own portals that are being set up independently and without any links to each other. Such results in duplications, as well as partial and dispersed digitization of Humanities and Social Science. One of the main goals of *SIstory* is to bring together various institutions, which doesnot only imply new links in terms of content, but also connections between researchers in order to facilitate and promote new projects and events in the future.

Technology is often seen as a driving force of innovation based on what is technically possible. Information science is therefore more oriented towards understanding the future than interpreting the past. The question would then be to look at the larger societal process of digitization and how the application of ICT have impacted on and resulted in the current state of scientific communication.

In order to preserve, of course, we must first create (Cohen and Rosenzweig). It is therefore very important to always keep a room for reflection: to rethink what we are doing, what we have done, and where we would like to go next.

References

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