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DIGITIZED PHOTOGRAPHIC MATERIAL FROM THE NATIONAL AND UNIVERSITY LIBRARY ON THE DIGITAL LIBRARY OF SLOVENIA WEB PORTAL: AN OVERVIEW

Abstract: The Map and Pictorial Collection is one of the special collections of the National and University Library of Slovenia. It holds about 65,000 units of photographic materials dating from 1850 to the 21st century (i.e. negatives and positives with different motifs – portrait, documentary and landscape photographs, and on different formats such as carte-de-visite and cabinet cards). Approximately 12,000 digitized units of the Map and Pictorial Collection available via web portal the Digital Library of Slovenia (dlib.si) represent 95% of all photographs available on this portal until the present time. Photographs in different sub-categories or sub-collections can be found in the *Portrait Collection of Famous Slovenians*, the *Virtual Exhibitions* and in the *dLib.si Collections*. The quality of work in the Map and Pictorial Collection significantly improved after digitization of photographs (i.e. to enable more prompt delivery of requested material to end users, better preservation of invaluable photographic material, wider access, etc.). The main aim of this paper is to give an overview of the Library's digitized photographic material available on the dlib.si portal, and to present advantages and disadvantages of such materials.

Keywords: photographic prints, digitization, National and University Library, Digital Library of Slovenia, cultural heritage, special collections, virtual exhibition

1. Introduction

Photographs are an important part of the national movable cultural heritage. Photography has been used to provide accurate representation of objects, people, places or events ever since Daguerre's invention of fixing images on silvered copper plates. He presented his procedure to the world in 1839 and this is usually considered as the year of the birth of photography. Photographs have an important documentary value for our past. They can be approached and valued in many ways, as objects or images, as art, information, evidence, memory, entertainment, news, as means of manipulation, or to tell a story, to amaze or to shock [4, p. 11].

Photographic collections kept in memory institutions are collections of objects and collections of images as well. They have been brought together for their content as much as for what they are. Furthermore, different institutions have different criteria of valuing a photograph. For example: unique vintage prints made by a famous photographer are essential for art history and as such belong to art galleries or museums. Photographic prints collected in an album have a cultural-historical value while photographs documenting historical events are primarily important for their content [4, p. 9].

In the past, the photographic material has never been of a great importance to a library. Most of this material has been hidden for a long time. Sometimes it was kept with other documents, thus it was difficult to retrieve it. Photographic materials usually do not have detailed descriptions. They have a visual value: if a number of images is available on a screen we can select what we want in a matter of seconds. Digitization of collections of photographs facilitates access considerably [4, p.10].

2. Photographic material in the Map and Pictorial Collection

The Map and Pictorial Collection is one of the eight thematic special collections of the National and University Library of Slovenia (NUK). Set up in 1945, it started working in 1948. The objectives of the Map and Pictorial Collection are: to collect, process, preserve, represent and make available the cartographic and pictorial materials. Pictorial material consists of graphic sheets, illustrated calendars, posters, postcards, and photographic prints. Currently, there are around 240,000 units of processed pictorial material.

Almost one third (65,000 units) of the processed pictorial material are photographic prints. One third of the photographic prints are portrait photographs; they are part of the largest sub-collection *Collection of Portrait Images of Famous Slovenians*. Two thirds of photographic prints are kept with other processed pictorial material, and belong to the sub-collection *Graphic Collection*. It primarily holds documentary and topographical photographic prints and some examples of art photography as well.

Beside processed units of photographic material, the Map and Pictorial Collection also keeps almost 4,000 unprocessed negatives on glass from the twentieth century which belong to the legacy of the newspaper publisher *Jutro*, approximately 10,000 slides of Slovene mountains from *Marjan Lipovšek* (a famous Slovenian composer) legacy and forty *family albums* from the second half of the 19th century of unknown provenience with around 3,000 portrait photographs on different formats, such as carte-de-visite and cabinet cards.

Photographic prints cover a chronological period that spans from the early 1850s to the present. Most photographic and photomechanical processes developed during this long period are well represented. The earliest processes from the 19th century, such as daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, ferroypes, and albumen prints on carte-de-visite and cabinet cards can be found.

As a whole, the majority of the materials are historical photographs; even though technically quite average, they are primarily important for their content.

3. Collections of digitized photographic material

Because of the growing interest in photography during the last three decades, memory institutions all over the world tried to increase access to their photographic collections by digitization; the process became a significant part of photographic collection management (to organize, preserve and make accessible) [3, pp. 25-29].

Following the example of the *American Memory Project*¹ of the Library of Congress, NUK began digitizing photographs in 1999. From July until October 2000, more than 10,000 photographic prints kept in the sub-collection *Collection Portrait Images of Famous Slovenians* were digitized. The primary archive was formed in the resolution of 300 dpi, and in TIFF format. The secondary archive was made in the resolution of 120 dpi, and in JPG format [5, p. 46].

In addition, fragile originals were protected by changing the old acidic envelopes with new, acid free.

3.1. Collection Portrait Images of Famous Slovenians on the Digital Library of Slovenia. In 2007, the digitized *Collection Portrait Images of Famous Slovenians* became a part of The Digital Library of Slovenia (dlib.si) (Figure 1).

¹ The Library of Congress. American Memory. Available at: <http://memory.loc.gov>.

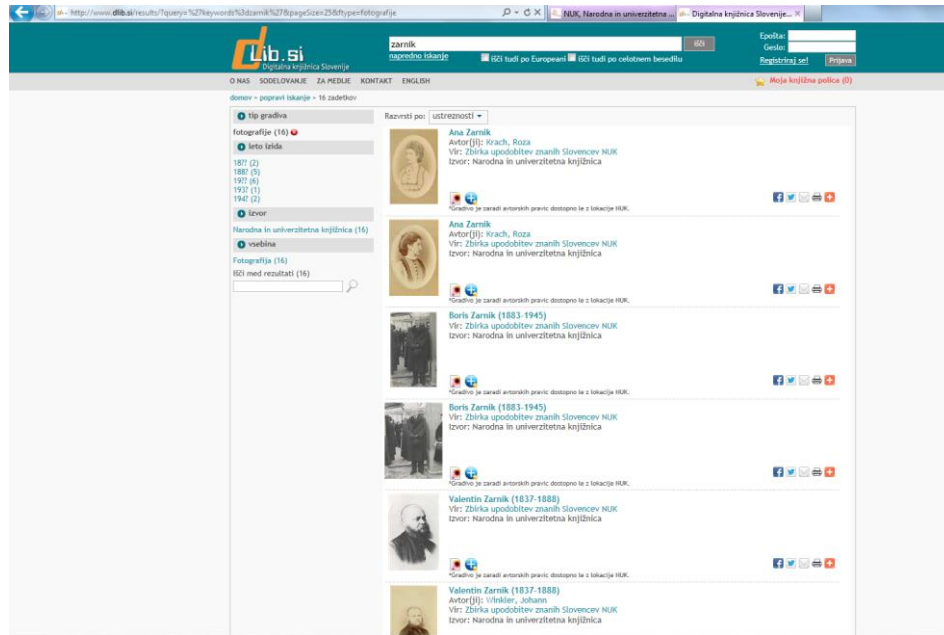


Figure 1: *Collection Portrait Images of Famous Slovenians* on dlib.si

The result is more open access to digitized collection of almost 10,000 portrait photographs. It enables wider use and sharing of photographs. It is now possible to find a portrait of a person by name, by year or by subject (Figure 2). The delivery of requested material to end users is quicker because it is possible to send a URN to the library reproduction service to order a digital copy without the assistance of a special collection's employee.

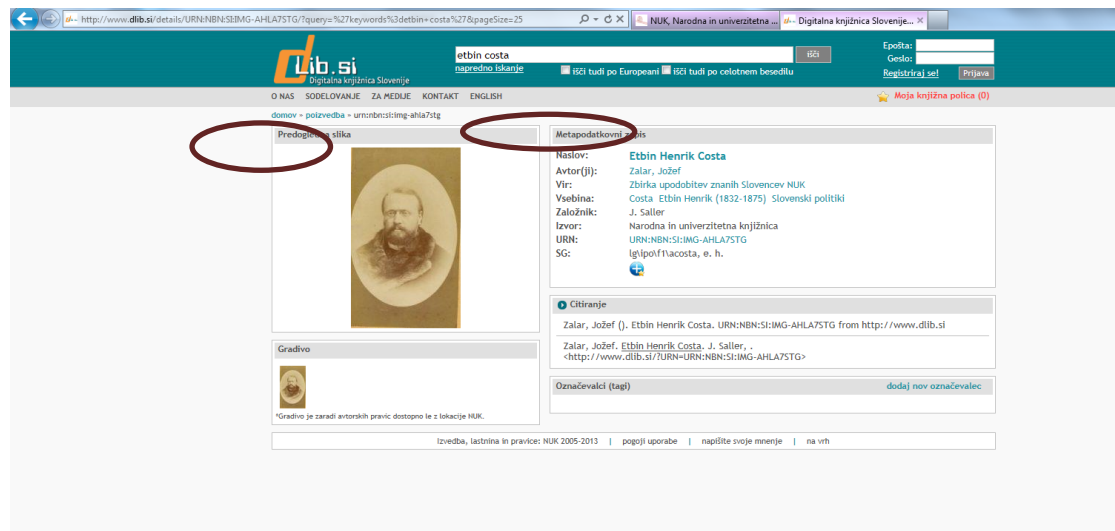


Figure 2: An example of a photograph of the collection on dlib.si with image and metadata

We have recently succeeded to remedy the deficiencies which occurred during conversion of a large amount of digitized items. We removed duplicates, made corrections of description and subject elements, and eliminated items under copyright law. We strive to improve the metadata structure of photographs related to the authorship, dates and format

specification by using and implementing some of the SEPIA (Safeguarding European Photographic Images for Access) recommendations for cataloguing photographic collections (SEPIADES - SEPIA Data Element Set) [4], and its recommendations for description of photographic collections in Dublin Core – a tool for adding metadata, used by the dlib.si.

3.2. Virtual exhibitions on the Digital Library of Slovenia portal. Digitization preserves collections, encourages the use of images for new purposes by new users. Moreover, it can also inspire those dealing with photographic collections. The Map and Pictorial Collection decided to present smaller photographic collections through virtual exhibitions.

The idea to represent NUK's treasures by virtual exhibitions was born in 2005. In 2008, the first two virtual exhibitions were created in-house. They offered access to the rich collections of old postcards of Ljubljana. They were soon followed by other virtual exhibitions.

At the beginning, exhibitions were prepared in the same way as physical exhibitions; afterwards different programs were used for the creation of special effects (e.g. 3D). Approximately three years ago, it was decided to simplify the creation of virtual exhibitions due to limited money and insufficient staff resources (Figure 3) [1, p. 268].

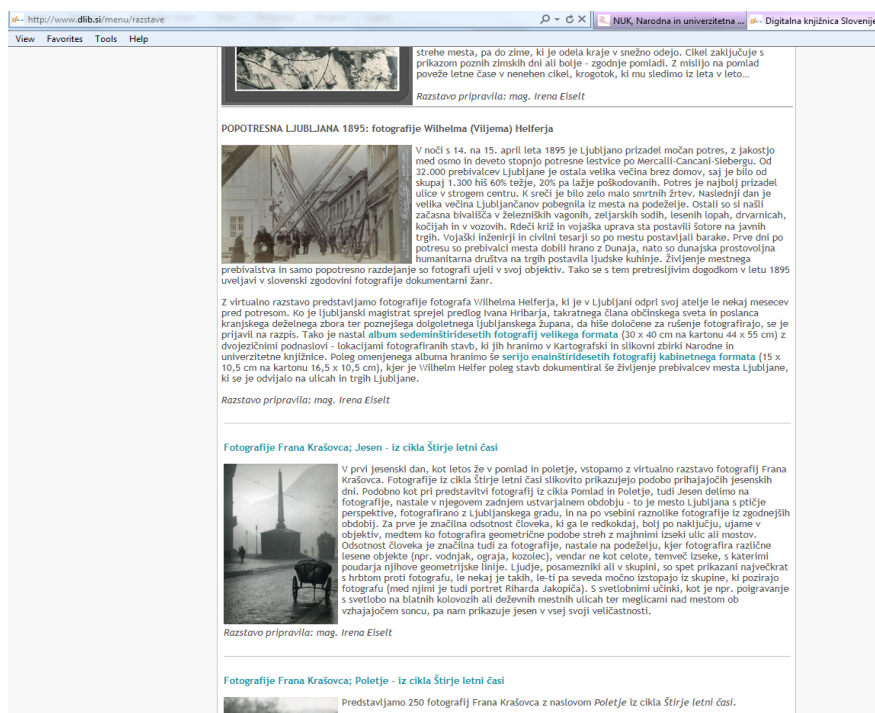


Figure 3: A list of *virtual exhibitions* from dlib.si

Files of digitized photographic materials in JPG format are now imported to MS PowerPoint 2010 (Figure 4) and each JPG file is formatted by adding a frame, and a description to the slides which are saved as JPG files [1, p. 278].

It is true that a simple tool allows the creation of simple web exhibitions. We would like to have a more complex tool and support of other experts (exhibition designers, graphic artists, computer programmers, and hardware specialists) to design unique and interactive presentations of library materials, especially the most valuable ones.

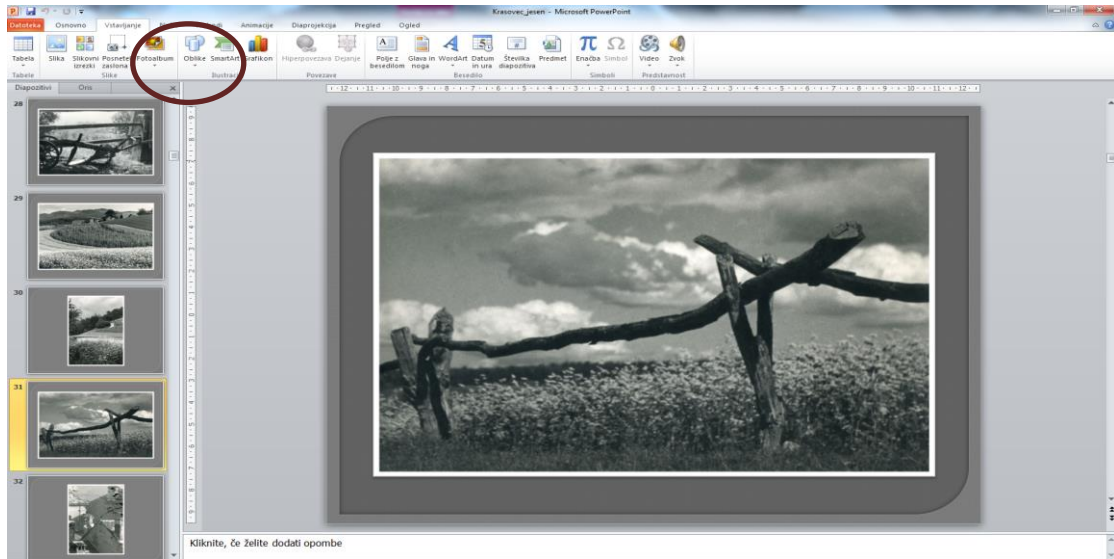


Figure 4: JPG files are imported into MS PowerPoint 2010

The last step is the import of JPG files into *Cooliris* application used for NUK web exhibitions (Figure 5) [1, p. 279].

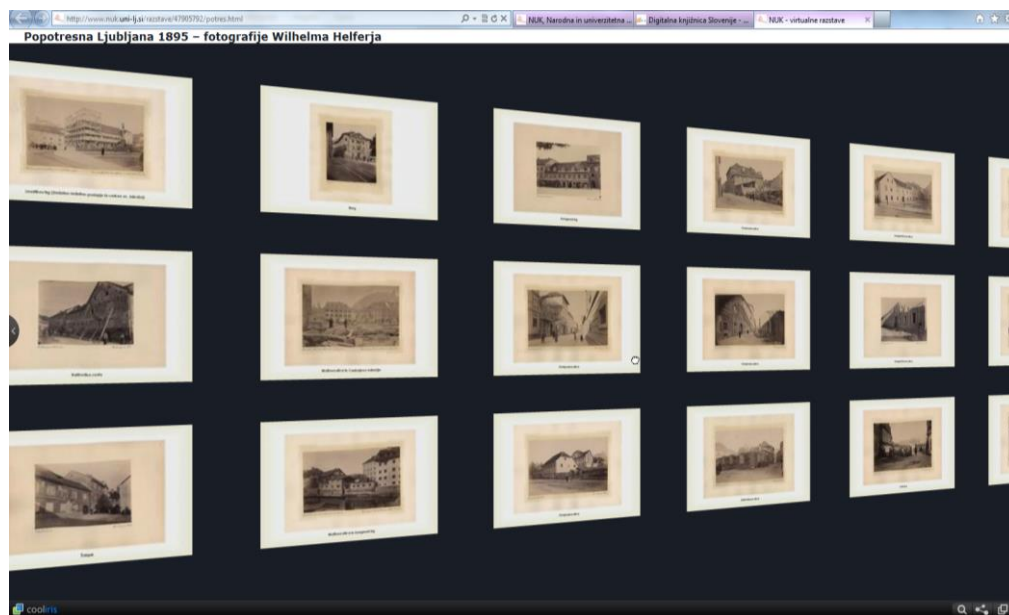


Figure 5: JPG files imported into *Cooliris* application

3.3. Photographic collections as part of the *dLib.si* Collections. In addition to the mentioned presentations of photographic prints, a new sub-category, the *dLib.si* Collections, has been added to the dlib.si portal (Figure 6). Until 2013, eleven collections were presented, two of which are collections of photographic prints of well-known Slovenian photographers complemented with short descriptions of the photographers and their works (Figure 7).

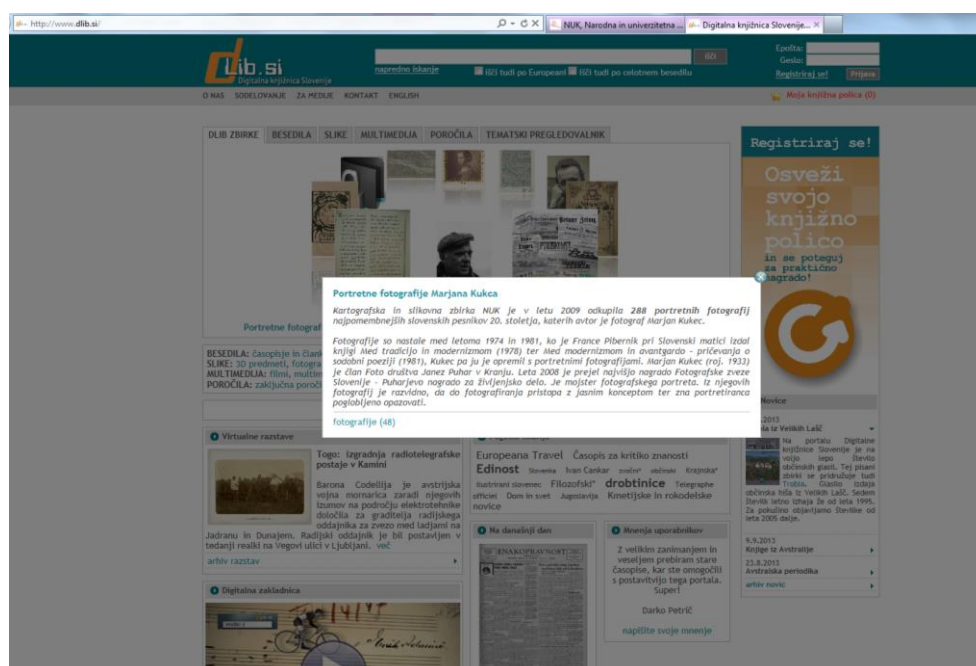
Figure 6: *dLib.si Collections* on the dlib.si

Figure 7: An example of a short description of portrait photographic prints of Marjan Kukec

4. Conclusion

Most of the photographic material available on the dlib.si portal was digitized already in 2000, primarily to facilitate the work in the Map and Pictorial Collection, and from 2007 to improve access to end users. Photographs are visual documents that can be presented in different ways. On the dlib.si portal individual photographic prints are presented together with metadata, in the form of virtual exhibitions and small collections with information about their photographers.

References

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