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TOPOTHEQUES AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN THE NATIONAL AND CITIZENS' ARCHIVES: THE PILOT PROJECT OF THE TOPOTHEQUE *NORTH BACHKA*

Abstract. The archive material, that can be stored and displayed in digital form, belongs to the mobile cultural heritage. Digitization makes the basic process in conservation and restoration of nonmovable cultural heritage, indirect and fixed, if the digitized documents are related to certain nonmovable cultural monuments. Topotheques are a network of checkpoints developed first in Austria, under the authority of the city archives, in order to make the collection and enable the processing of digital archival materials, photos, audio and video recordings that belong to the citizens, and on the personal initiative of the owner. The project topotheque *North Bachka* is an initial attempt to create such a network of private-public institutions in Vojvodina and Serbia.

Keywords. topotheque, digitization, archives, storing, protecting original documents, cooperation with citizens, strengthening of local communities, democratization of access, the project topotheque *North Bachka*.

1. Introduction

On the redesigned site, *The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia*, on the *Digitization of Cultural Heritage*, it is said that the Ministry of Culture has recognized the need for systematic and well-coordinated approach to the process of digitization of cultural heritage, as an essential factor of the cultural development of the country. Following the process of digitization of cultural heritage, primarily in Europe, and then in the world, in line with the initiatives of the EU countries, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia has recognized digitization of cultural heritage as an important element of building and developing the informative society, as well as the society of knowledge, which is, as such, the essential factor in the cultural development of the country and, accordingly, ordered the digitization of cultural heritage as a strategic priority of its activities. The most important in this is that digitization is, in this way, virtually institutionalized as a part of the strategy of the Ministry of Culture. They are also well aware that the National Library of Serbia, the public institution that has gone the furthest in Serbia, in terms of digitization, however, suggests that it should be effectively involved in both: making long-term plans for digitization, as well as in drafting the text of *The Draft of the National Strategy for the Digitization of the Cultural Heritage* with the accompanying *Action Plan*. All this is a prerequisite for any future deployment of the topotheques network in Serbia. In the case of the project topotheque *North Bachka (Severna Bačka)*, we will consider the concept, objectives, search tools and institucionalization of topotheques. We rely onto the experience of the National Archives of Hungary - the *Varosliget* topotheque. The Annex provides an overview of the topotheques which have been made in the European Union so far.

2. The concept and objectives of the topotheque *North Bachka*

The topotheque *North Bačka* is a project that involves wide audience of municipalities of Subotica and Sombor in the process of making possible the creation of digital contents. Its purpose must be serving the Internet network that makes the topotheque. It has a double significance. In the first place, primarily, it is necessary to enable the availability of information, related to the union of the two mentioned municipalities from their past or present, which are privately owned (photos, audio materials, pictures, documents, etc.). On the other hand, the topotheque will keep all of these documents in order to be professionally systematized and will make them available to the present and future generations. This systematization of collected memories is supported by one database. It is an important element in determining the exact time and place of the creation of the document. The big advantage of this platform will be that it will meet international standards, and its use will be easy to learn.

The concept of the topotheque *North Bachka* leans onto the experience of the Hungarian system of topotheques. The pilot project is intended for the initial institutionalization and linking the civil initiatives of the networked local topotheque and the public archives. In the future, the expansion of the network of topotheques will cover the entire Bačka and Vojvodina.

The most important area of work of this topotheque will be the digitization and indexation of private sources. However, in order to form the initial content of the designed topotheque, it will begin its work with materials from the existing collections which have been already integrated in the digital form. The other method to approach digitalization and indexation is to have access to the stored materials, in accordance with the rules of the topotheque, whether it is an image, text, scanned document, video or audio material, without limitation, in the format.

Together with the art collections of public libraries, archives and collections, the designed topotheque will create a unique opportunity to preserve artefacts that are not always available to the public, such as historical documents of great importance. Treasure hidden in private hands will be discovered and made available to everyone, regardless of space and time. In this way, the topotheque will build the regional and historical identities of the two communities and their residents. The topotheque will provide an insight into the different structure of their former population, cultural development, ethnological information, ignored events, the evidence for missed topics. This topotheque will be formed exclusively for the local area, on the basis of local artifacts from local collections from the local population.

The main objective of the topotheque *North Bachka* is to make visible the collected and selected material which is indexed. It wants to give to the public and the scientific world newly structured resources in the form of digitized material and also the relevant information about it. The task of this topotheque is not to respond to the major historical topics. It is simply just a tool for searching the content from the local history. This is the reason why the topotheque *North Bachka* - with the local museums and archives of Subotica and Sombor and city chronicles based on historiographical, didactic work - will be a suitable tool for quick consultation on the regional and local historical issues. In addition to the regional search terms, this topotheque will offer the possibility to search the trans-regional content through the adopted interface, common to all the international network by entering the appropriate search term, since it will be able to search the terms common to different topotheques.

The topotheque *North Bachka* will allow reconstruction and monitoring the events and processes essential to the local history in a modern way with modern tools. The task is to provide comprehensive and intensive regional governance capable of protecting the local history of involvement with trusted advisers and the respective knowledge of the local community. They

can be asked upon the regionally relevant issues, with their help historical sources will be found and properly indexed. They can allow and help in processing the local data entries in the appropriate and efficient manner, since they are familiar with the local history and reality.

Redressing the online collaboration of researchers and laymen as well as creating a sustainable community is a long-term task of the topotheque *Severna Bachka*. Collecting information from visitors and users of the topotheque about a historical segment, or the local area, will be given special attention. They can answer any questions submitted via the Internet, and as guests-topothequers, can upload but can not perform indexing and putting their documents into the network clutter since special powers are reserved for professionals, initially from the local archives. Hereby, it is expected that the community of the topothequers and their cooperation will develop since the protection and accessibility to the local history is very important. The community keeps a blog for all the topotheques, and their meetings offer a forum for discussing matters for those who want to exchange their experience. The technical support and related content will be available at all times.

The cooperation of the topotheque *North Bachka* with its regional and local institutions and organizations, as well as its links with *ICARUS* - The International Network of Archives, should strengthen its support in the growth and protection of the public access to the local historical records permanently and sustainably. This task will be achieved through cooperation with the existing topotheque and by expanding the work onto the volunteers.

3. The search tool and the user's access to the topotheque

The topotheque *North Bachka* will be placed on a standard platform *Topotheque*, which allows the user to have access to the following:

- Users can find entries in accordance with indexation, dates and localization. In that manner questions like *What did the house on the Main street XY, in my hometown XY, look like in 30's?*
- Can spontaneously respond to queries such as: *Subotica 1955 - 1960*.
- Can easily find and index objects or people with the help of the precise image tag.
- Can locate the sites where pictures or video on the historical and geographical maps were taken, by the means of developed and modern synthesized digital maps, which are the basis for the GPS.
- Can open the searched results, in parallel, for easy contemporary comparison.
- Can get answers to questions posed on the Internet with such local topotheque, simultaneously with the database.
- Users can collaborate as guests under certain conditions.
- The Interface segment entry retains the principle of simplicity, each different type of data is entered in an appropriate separate line, thus preventing confusion while entering data.
- Localization is performed by placing a point onto an electronic map.
- The topotheque can be used as an electronic archive, since there is an option that certain files protects from disclosure.
- The topotheque is able to set and store files in a very high resolution, while its users have access only to a defined resolution, which is typically low. The download is not permitted without the cooperation of the certain topothequer.

The picture of the site of the topotheque *Ysterreich*, together with the information on how to use it, follows:

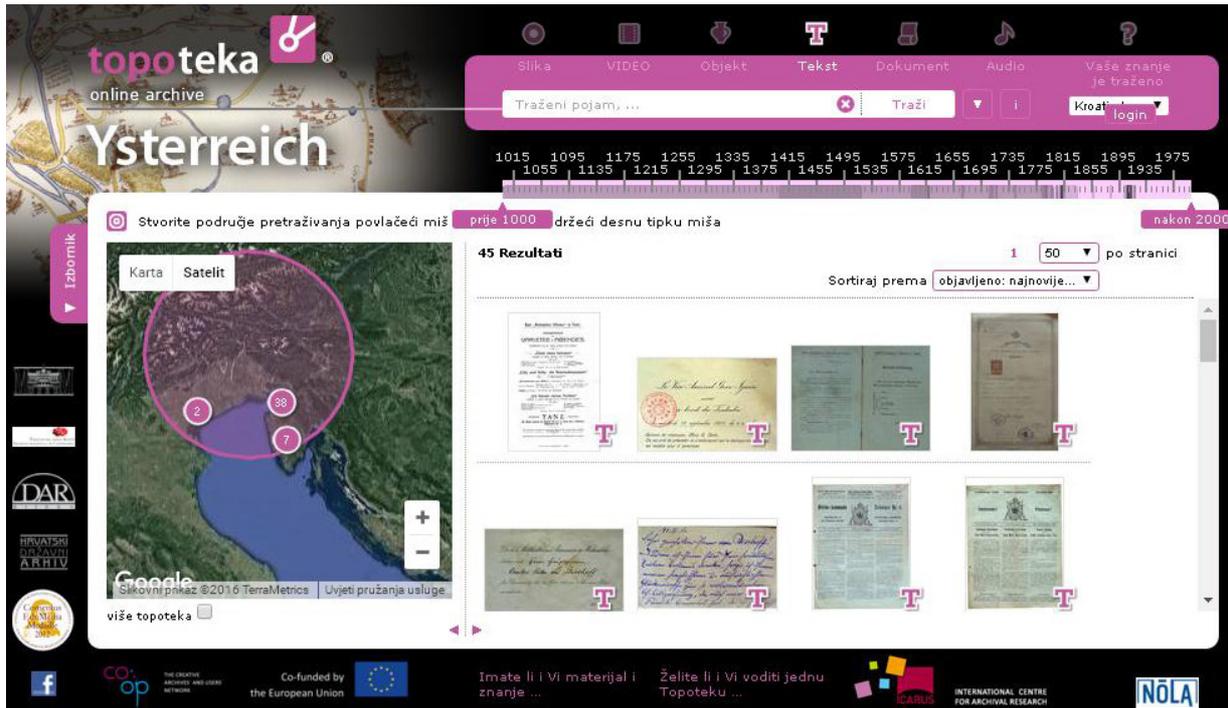


Figure 1: The Interface of the topoteka allows circling the region, the program is selected by the topoteka itself, inside the circle.

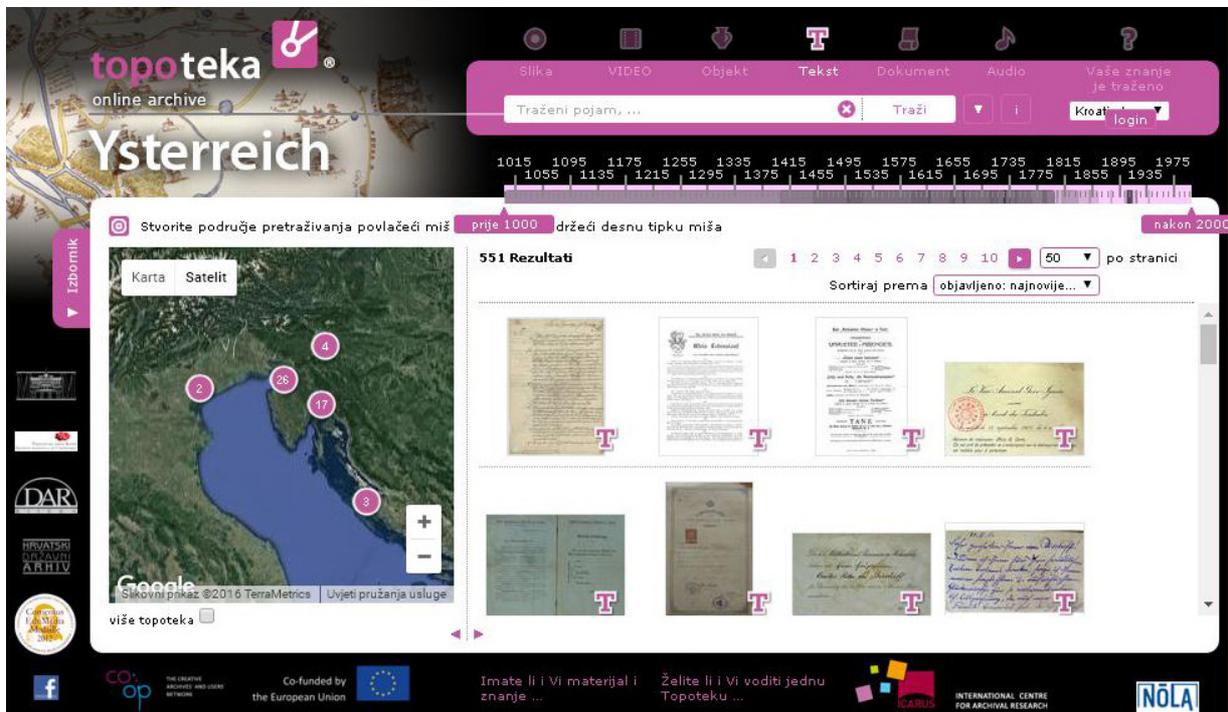


Figure 2: One can select the data by typing the names of towns, that have topotekas, into the Interface.

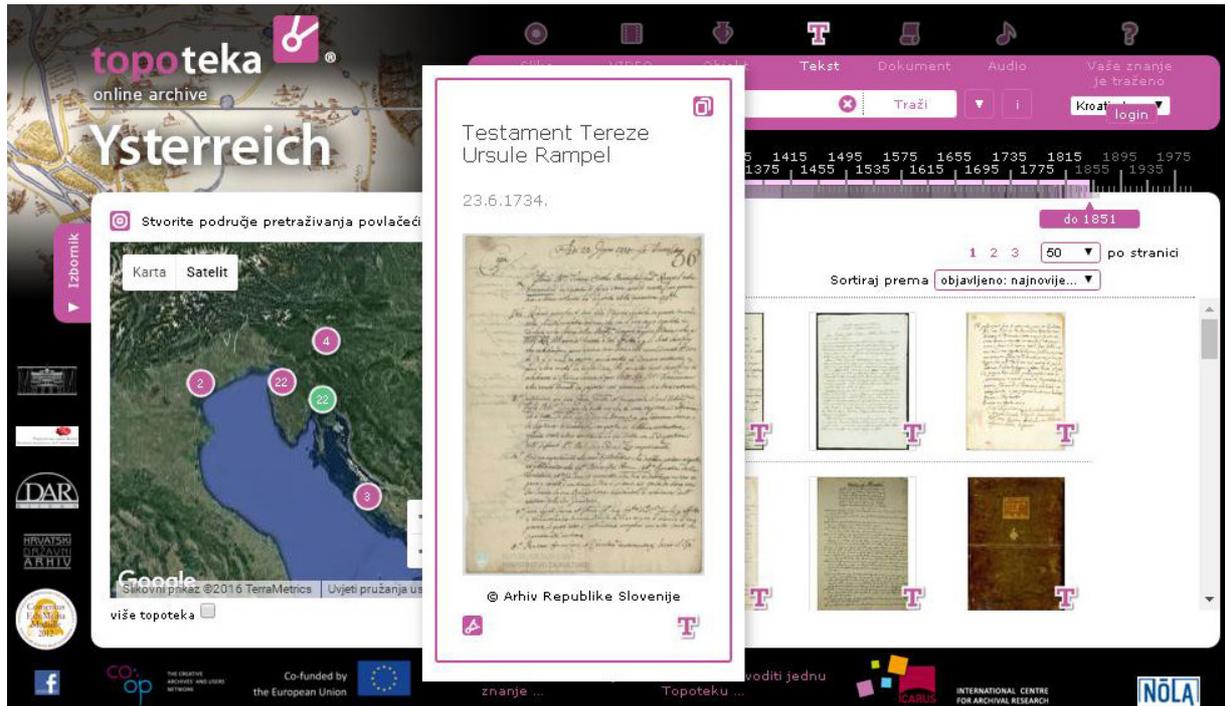


Figure 3: The topotheque Interface is enabled to live up to years of the historical period from – to. When you open a document in order to increase, the circle that marks the city with a number of topotheque, turns green.

4. Institutionalization and the stages of developing activities of the topotheque *North Bachka*

The setting of the topotheque *North Bachka* requires the support of The National Archives in Subotica and Sombor (with the appropriate server). The procurement of software for the *Topotheque* (author Mag. Alexander Schatek, Wiener Neustadt), manuals and instructing of several topothquers will be carried out in consultation with the Archives of the capital city of Budapest. It is also expected to have the support of public libraries (Serbian National Biblioteque, city libraries in Subotica and Sombor), as well as several interested collaborators from the academic community (the faculties of Novi Sad, Subotica and Sombor). The project application will be financed by submitting it to the respective competitions of of the Ministry of the Republic of Serbia and the Secretariat of the Vojvodina.

The topotheque personnel will start working by relying onto the 3 to 5 leading topothequers interested in Subotica and Sombor with their minimal historical knowledge and experience in dealing with the public and people who know the local problems. After the technical preparations and training of the managers, the topotheque will begin to introduce the material from the existing archives. The first 50 entries to the site will remain invisible, for the public use, since they will be used for auditing entries in the initial plans of the topotheque. The point at which production of the topotheques will become visible and available to the public depends on authorization of the topothequers. Topothequers, as expert people who have authority in selecting the documents for digitization or downloading, and accordingly the activation of the complement existing topotheque, whenever it is established, by all means, that conditions are right and proper.

The entrance to the stage of entry into a visible topotheque requires, inter alia, some fresh material on the basis of getting it from local newspapers and magazines. This way is expected to increase the interest and other holders of appropriate materials for non-profit services of the topotheque. That interest will increase further after putting the current information (maintenance of events, happenings, etc.), and reports and analysis of materials placed in the topotheque. The documented events in the cities in pictures and sounds will further contribute to their supply of the new material. This process will also be highly contributed by the people who have already entered the material into the topotheque (those with the growing confidence of the visitors of the topotheque).

The work on the topotheque is time consuming and costly, depending greatly on the network of the volunteers, their time and devotion. The academic trainings for historians, political scientists and so on, among the collaborators of the topotheques, is not necessary, except for the topothequers themselves. Therefore, many people who are interested in the local history can contribute significantly to the efforts of topotheques in the process of collecting the adequate material. The activities of the topothequers are not static and formal, but dynamic, except for the materials that flow in, thus, the topothequers have to be willing and ready to change comment, time, space and their reasons relying onto the cooperation with the population and suitably qualified people, experts in their fields. Aiming high toward this goal, the dynamics of the topotheque *North Bachka* will cherish the on-line forum and periodic public presentations about its work.

5. The previous experience on which the topotheque *North Bachka* will rely on, gained by the help of *Varosliget* topotheque, by the National Archives of Hungary

The topotheque *Városliget* was launched, as the guardian of the past and present. The Capital's Archive of Budapest (Budapest Főváros Leveltar), within the range of programs *Researchers' Nights*, opened the topotheque in a part of the capital - *Városliget*. The European Union announced the program *Creative Europe*, for the period 2014-2020, where the program is supported by the European culture and creative (art) sector, with the aim that the citizens of Europe have the option of taking part in the formation of their own destiny in these areas. In the sign of this, and by the support of The United 17 European Archives and universities, there is a *CO:OP* project (*The community as a possibility - Creative Networks Archives and Their Users*). In Hungary, it is planned to educate five topotheques for this program. The performers are the Budapest Főváros Leveltar and its partners. This Capital Archives of Budapest relies onto its existing material, taken from the existing topotheque in Berettyóújfalu, as its first formed in *Városliget*. Each topotheque has its own host-manager. Downloading is performed by the maximum of 5 topothequers, they have finished the training are able to use the manual that has already been created.

The time spent in topotheques is different. When your colleague takes someone's archival material, it is passed, then a receipt for the collected material is given to the donor who keeps it. After the digitization, the topothequer publishes the given data. The original material is then returned to the owner, in that way the rights of ownership remain intact. The owner name stands next to his picture. Visitors can ask him questions, give remarks, while corrections can be performed only by the administrators. If, for example, an image turns out to be raised with the wrong date or a character in the picture does not fit right, then the correction is done. Currently in Hungary two topotheques *Berettyóújfalu* and *Városliget* are operating. The third is in preparation and filling, the existing files are currently in progress. The owner of the

topotheque Városliget is Budapest Főváros Leveltar (The Archives of the Capital in Budapest), while the other topotheques rely onto the partner organizations which serve in the processing of the static material for topotheques.

Experience shows that the topotheques in the capital, so far, have been supplemented by the existing material in public funds, while the cooperation with the public, for the time, is symbolic. The average number of photos taken into the topoteca, by the citizens, is 10 to 15, and there were already issued in several digitized collections of photographs, which is so far the only document format that is lucrative. An agreement with one civil association was signed, the parties agreed on making public, by the Internet, files which can be incorporated into the topotheque. With each party, donor, the topotheque has signed an agreement where it is written that the donor will get back his material within 15 days since the day of delivery. So far they have had no problems, but, they say, great care has to be taken if they do not want to publish any document without the previous consent of the bearer or owner.

In order to be compatible with the existing topotheques, the respected legal usages, equal for all, have to be provided, but the most important thing is to pay attention to the protection of the property rights, as well as the individual's rights to privacy. This is one of the reasons why the development of the network of topotheques is most developed in Austria. In the countries of its environment, in which the point of production starts the topotheque, due to slightly lower functioning of the judicial and legal protection of property (excluding Germany) over potential private, important material for the history, the job is less advanced.

6. Conclusion

The main objective and purpose of the digitization in topotheques is the protection of original documents, which often disappear with the disappearance of their owners, while after carrying out digitization of documents, they are actually given a chance to be accessed and used, while the originals are only kept in informatics and cognitive way, saved and preserved of any damage from the constant use. A common way of photographing, audio and video recording for a decade has been using the digital method, so this kind of pictures are taken on the digitization, and nowadays they are very few, thus it is even more important to collect and digitize such material by processing and preserving them in proper, digital way. The digitized files can also be used as backup copies in case of any significant damage or potential loss of the original, they can partially compensate for the loss of the original cultural property up to the three-dimensional objects. The entire community, thanks to the most modern digital technologies, will achieve a better and more productive communication in all aspects of operation between individuals and institutions, representing a decisive and vitally important factor in the modernization and further "democratization" in the domain of access to funds, which are often made available only to a narrow circle of professionals. They greatly contribute to the IT progress of the entire society. The project topotheque *North Bachka* is formulated as a pilot initiative, which should contribute in initiating the development of a network of such initiatives on the basis of an amateur operation.

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