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1.04 Professional article

1.04 Strokovni članek

DIGITIZATION AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO PRESERVE ENDANGERED FONDS - CASE IN THE STATE AGENCY OF KOSOVO ARCHIVES

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Abstract:

The article discusses issues of preservation and access to the "District Court in Prizren" fonds and the use of digitization to capture the content of endangered documents. Digitization of the "District Court of Prizren" fonds enables capturing and preserving the content of documents, which cannot be recovered or restored. This paper contributes to the discussion by exploring access to and preservation of endangered archival fonds and collections and presents the digitization project of the "District Court in Prizren" fonds at the State Agency of Kosovo Archives as a case study.

Key words:

Digitization, preservation, access, original documents, restoration and conservation, risk of destruction

Izvleček:

Digitalizacija kot možnost za ohranitev ogroženih fondov – študija primera v Državni agenciji arhivov Kosova

Prispevek obravnava probleme varovanja in dostopa do fonda Okrožno sodišče v Prizrenu ter uporabo digitalizacije za zajem vsebine ogroženih dokumentov. Digitalizacija fonda je omogočila zajem in ohranitev vsebin tistih dokumentov, ki jih ni mogoče restavrirati. Prispevek dopolnjuje diskusijo o digitalizaciji z raziskavo dostopa in ohranjanja ogroženih fondov in zbirk ter predstavlja projekt digitalizacije fonda Okrožno sodišče v Prizrenu.

Ključne besede:

digitalizacija, varstvo, dostop, izvirni dokumenti, restavracija in konzervacija, tveganje

1. ACCESS RESTRICTION

The District Court of Prizren fonds represents a major preservation challenge due to its unstable physical nature and of deteriorating destruction as a result of inadequate preservation by the creator. In addition, due to the lack of comprehensive indexing and standardized access points, access to records within this fonds is limited and difficult.

This fonds was physically arranged by the creator. The fonds has a limited textual description and lacks individual indexing records and contextual information. In some cases, records have been lost or separated from the collection. Original records, due to their fragility and in danger of destruction are inherently difficult to describe, and the text-based indexing approach is impossible.

2. DIGITIZATION PROJECT: SAVING AND SHARING OF FONDS FILES

In Kosovo, the debate on digitization of records has recently shifted to the crisis in preservation of fonds endangered by the physical destruction of original paper records, such as the case of District Court of Prizren fonds.

The primary purpose of the project is to retain the information that the fonds records carry, to provide access to these records as well as to ensure the long-term preservation of fonds representation in digital form. The project is built on the archival staff's previous experience in digitization, the knowledge gained from the prior study of fonds and collections realized as projects or successful pilot projects. Digitization projects carried out before were as an excellent primer for setting up a system to safely handle, digitize and preserve the mentioned fonds records for the long term storage. The primary focus of the project is digitization for preservation of all records of the District Court of Prizren fonds. The project involves a number of activities that aimed at preservation and providing access, including:

- Identification and indexing of files;
- Preparation of records for scanning;
- Digital conversion including the creation of archival master files for long-term preservation and derivative images for access;
- Creating item-level metadata for all digitized objects;
- Integrating selected images with metadata into digital collections for online delivery;
- Packaging and placing original files in repository;
- Transferring archival master files to the digital archive for long-term preservation; and
- Documenting the project.

3. DIGITAL CONVERSION

Project guidelines were based on standards on digital archives and best practices to ensure a consistent image quality level and to create high quality digital objects in support of current and future use. The digital master folders were created as a direct result of capturing the image during the scanning process. The technical scanning specifications were based on the format and features of source documents.

The first challenges in the scanning process were introduced during the process of selecting a method for document scanning. The lack of scanners and testing materials caused major problems to the digitization team. Due to the fragility and the extremely bad condition of source documents, scanning with flatbed scanners was impossible. Because of this, it was decided that the scanning of records of the District Court of Prizren fonds should be digitized with a so-called overhead scanner. The State Archives Agency uses two such scanners in this project. These scanners incorporate OCR software, which automatically recognizes text during the scanning process.

All scans are reviewed for quality and stored as PDF and JPEG files with text recognized by the OCR software. They serve as preservation copies and sources for derivative images. Both digital master files and service copies were transferred to the server for digital repository for long-term storage.

4. CREATING DESCRIPTIVE METADATA ON ITEM LEVEL

Metadata creation represents a significant part of the digitization project and is being undertaken to provide access points to digitized images and to extend their usefulness as sources of information. Metadata records are created on two levels:

- Minimum item-level metadata are recorded for all files.
- Extensive descriptive metadata created for images selected for online presentation.

Minimum metadata are recorded for all digitized files, keeping the original names and descriptive entries in the folder. Data was entered into the locally stored database. Metadata structures for the digital collections of the State Agency of Kosovo Archives are based on a qualified Dublin Core scheme. Creating metadata represents the most challenging aspect of the project due to the lack of original source material descriptions. The digitization team is the one who creates the metadata of the District Court of Prizren fonds.

5. LESSONS LEARNED

The project team has considerable previous experience in digitization and has run several successful pilot projects, however, this project has proven to be complex and challenging. The first complexity was the scale of the project both on the size and number of files, respectively the files involved that are at risk of destruction, and the lack of processing of the original files. Another difficulty was the scanning of already almost destroyed documents, especially those filled with mold, posing a direct threat to the health of the digitization team.

Our first lesson learned is the value of having a fonds that is indexed and is provided with contextual information. In our study, the addition of about 4,000 digital documents per month to be described had a profound impact on the project workflow. The team decided to do a large number of scans to complete the digitization and preservation of all the documents in destruction. This means that in this project the team had to sacrifice the creation of metadata for some files. Fewer files were selected for full metadata and online access to the District Court of Prizren fonds than were planned, and sometimes the creation of metadata for certain files had to be postponed.

The second lesson learned is the importance of adequate professional staff for a sensitive project such as the digitization of the District Court of Prizren fonds. When the State Agency of Kosovo Archives prepared the digitization project of the fonds in question, it was planned to be done by an external team under the supervision of the internal staff. The fact that the scanning took place at the premises of the Agency, allowed us to compare the time, resources, quality and errors between scanning outside the facility and scanning at the facility of the Agency. In the end, it was concluded that outsourcing would take more time than planned for a number of reasons. The time needed for packaging, transportation and reviewing the quality of scanned products - and in most cases the fragility of the documents, strongly supported the decision to scan the selected fonds within the agency's facility. In our case study, scanning at the agency's premises saves time for document preparation, provides high-quality scans, and reduces the degree of error in creating digital files.

The last lesson learned is the lack of comprehensive indexation and contextual information on fonds files, which is slowing down work processes. In addition, the creation of metadata by the digitization team causes additional processes of digitization of this fonds and it results in a smaller number of scanned documents.

POVZETEK

DIGITALIZACIJA KOT MOŽNOST ZA OHRANITEV OGROŽENIH FONDOV – ŠTUDIJA PRIMERA V DRŽAVNI AGENCIJI ARHIVOV KOSOVA

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Predstavitev predstavlja varstvo in dostop do arhivskega gradiva fonda Okrožno sodišče v Prizrenu ter uporabo digitalizacije za ohranitev vsebine ogroženih dokumentov. Potrjuje tezo, da digitalizacija ne samo zaščiti propadajoče dokumente, ampak tudi povrne njihovo uporabnost. Koncept digitalizacije kot sredstva za varovanje gradiva je obravnavan v luči obsežnega projekta digitalizacije, katerega namen je bil zaščititi in omogočiti dostop do 80 tekočih metrov gradiva fonda Okrožno sodišče v Prizrenu, ki je shranjeno v arhivskem skladišču.

Avtor dopolnjuje diskusijo o digitalizaciji s preučevanjem, kako nas digitaliziranje ponovno usmerja k skrbi za varstvo ogroženega in propadajočega gradiva. Konkretna digitalizacija fonda Okrožno sodišče v Prizrenu ponazarja, kako digitalizacija v splošnem omogoča zajem in ohranjanje vsebine zapisov, ki jih ni mogoče več restavrirati. Prav tako pripomore k boljšemu dostopu do fonda, saj omogoča dostopne točke in objavo na spletu. Zaenkrat je še prezgodaj, da bi ocenjevali dosežke projekta, vendar hitro in uspešno iskanje po dokumentih nakazuje na uspešnost le-tega.

Dostop in varovanje sta glavna cilja digitalizacije ogroženih fondov in zbirk. Digitalizacija je strategija, ki omogoča ohranjanje fondov in zbirk ne glede na velikost ter stanje in ki je posebej pomembna, kadar so izvirni dokumenti krhki, poškodovani ali zapisani na nestabilnih medijih. Digitalizacija mora biti del celostnega pristopa k politiki dostopa in varovanja, ki omogoča ustvarjanje visokokakovostnih digitalnih datotek in povečuje uporabnost digitaliziranih dokumentov na podlagi natančnih popisov.