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Archives, Libraries, Museums: the story continues

Gordon Dunsire reports on the recent Croatian Arhivi, Knjižnice, Muzeji (AKM9) seminar, bangs the drum for AKM10, and reminds Scottish practitioners that there are other small countries in Europe with big ideas

I've reported on AKM7 (2003) and AKM8 (2004) in previous issues of WIDWISAWN. This annual seminar on Croatian archives, libraries and museums (Arhivi, Knjižnice, Muzeji) was continued in November last year. It was my third year of attending and participating in a series of workshops exploring collection-level issues, and also the third year in a row for Porec, on the Istrian coast, as the location.

Our workshop focused on the subject analysis of collections in a shared information retrieval environment, with several presentations and a lot of discussion. Things got quite lively when a library cataloguer expressed puzzlement at some of the points being raised because library collections (and items) were always analysed for their intellectual content. There was an immediate riposte from the head of a museum who pointed out that it was the context of a collection and its items that was of interest to the users of museum information, a point backed up by the archivists. We then discussed what the intellectual content of Josip Tito's left glove might be - and came to the conclusion that it was Josip Tito! That is, deciding that the subject of a collection of objects associated with a person was the person, whereas the subject of a library book could only be the person if it was a biography or autobiography. But, there again, the user looking for information about Marshall Tito should rightly expect to be directed to a library for books about him, and a museum for insight into his persona (and an archive for material produced by him and associated organisations), so our analysis seems valid. It is at times like this that you realise how different (and similar) are the different professional cultures of the three

domains.

I was delighted to have been asked to give a presentation to the whole seminar on The Common Information Environment: a newly emerged concept (pps file), and even more delighted to find myself once again in the Nono pizzeria and grill, the place to be of an evening in off-season Porec, with a plate of grilled squid and a glass of the fine local wine in front of me. This happy event was repeated several times ...

AKM9 had several non-Croatian delegates and speakers, including Tone Eli Moseid of ABM-utvikling, Oslo, presenting When three become one: The new cross-sectorial agency in Norway for archives, libraries and museums: plans and perspectives and Dr. Hartmut Prasch (Director of the Museum Fur Volkskultur, Spittal, Austria) presenting From local museum to regional information center. Both of these presentations were excellent, and there is much food for thought for Scotland in them (we're all wee countries).

So the AKM organisers have been thinking about something to mark the 10th birthday this year, and are keen to expand the international presence at the celebrations. There have already been expressions of interest from Finland, Germany, Lithuania and Norway, and I have offered to drum up some support from Scotland. I've kept them informed of the success of Electric connections, and they've expressed interest in all of the topics presented last year. In fact, the style, level and coverage of presentations at AKM is identical to that of Electric connections, with an emphasis on exchange of experience rather than formality.

The organisers can't pay speaker expenses, as they want to keep the seminar registration fee as low as possible (it's around GBP 30, for a three-day event and a side-excursion to places of interest in Istria) so that staff at all grades, and students, are able to participate. They will waive the registration fee itself, as we do for Electric connections speakers.

But don't be put off, as it is cheaper to attend AKM than it is to go to a two-day seminar in London. Cheap ways to travel to the seminar are via Zagreb or Trieste. The organisers charter a bus for delegates from Zagreb to the Istrian coast (around GBP 10 return), and there is a regular public bus service if you don't want to stay for the whole seminar (there will be a day or two of presentations in Croatian). Prices of flights direct to Zagreb continue to fall. The cheapest route that I have used on several occasions is Edinburgh-Stansted-Lubljana on EasyJet, and then a train from Lubljana (in Slovenia and well worth a visit) to Zagreb; it takes a day, but it can cost considerably less than GBP 100 return and the journey is leisurely and relatively stress-free. Cheap airlines also fly to Trieste in Italy, adjacent to the Istrian peninsula. Hire-car, or possibly bus or ferry, would complete the journey.

At the seminar, accommodation is a bargain, with a 3-star hotel room at the conference rate of around GBP 40 per night. Excellent food and drink is less than half Edinburgh prices.

AKM10 will take place 22-24 November 2006, in Porec. The theme is: Digital common information environment: Description, access and management of digital objects. An early suggestion for a workshop topic is managing archival material in non-archival institutions. (Workshops last around 3 hours, with a coffee break, and any workshop presentations are between 10 and 20 minutes.)

If anyone from a Scottish archive, library or museum is interested in participating in AKM10, or wants further information, please contact me at g.dunsire@strath.ac.uk

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