New Perspectives for Documentation of Culture (DOC) in Poland.
Building an Interdisciplinary Documentation Cooperation

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Part I:

Polish Documentation of Culture (DOC) - definition and examples

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For decades documentation departments/centers in Poland have been institutionally independent from librarian systems and information science departments and have been a part of research institutes, universities or cultural institutions.

As such they have developed fundamental documentation resources which allowed DOC to fulfill its traditional role of auxiliary discipline of the humanities in Poland.

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Examples of such institutions:

- Institutes within Polish Academy of Sciences:
    - Institute of Literary Research,
    - Institute of History
    - Institute of Art.
- higher education schools' departments:
    - The Polish National Film, Television and Theatre School,
- cultural public organizations:
    - Theatre Institute,
    - Polish Library of Songs,
- cultural NGO:
    - Polish Music Information Centre.

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For decades teams of documentalists have worked within these institutions on specific projects important for all those interested in culture in Poland.

Examples:

- Polish Literary Bibliography: http://pbl.ibl.poznan.pl
- Polish Film Database: http://www.filmpolski.pl/fp/index.php
- Encyclopaedia of Theatre (multiple databases): http://www.encyklopediateatru.pl/
- Polish Biographical Dictionary: http://www.psb.pan.krakow.pl/index.php/en/
- Digital Library of Polish Song: http://www.bibliotekapiosenki.pl/glowna
- Polish classical music database: http://www.polmic.pl/index.php?lang=pl,
- and non-digitized examples like Polish Artistic Life (calendar), Biographical Dictionary of Polish Theatre, Dictionary of Polish Artists etc.

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As you can see, these are different types of endeavours - dictionaries, databases, bibliographies, calendars - but all of them identify with the documentation as a specific scientific practice, quite independent from, on the one hand, librarian and information services, and on the second, archival practices.

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Relations with Polish National Library, state archives and scientific information departments.

The scope of DOC in Poland: artistic culture and humanities.

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Most of DOC initiatives started as a hand-written (!) or printed resources (catalogues, books).

A rough estimate shows that up to today more that 2 000 000 records from all these resources were digitized.

And app. 9 000 000 more are still non-digitized, which includes:

bibliographical catalogues (covering XIX century), questionnaires of artists and printed publications (dictionaries, bibliographies, calendars).

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Most of these non-digitized resources are the examples of potential structured data that can be easily transformed into databases (and this is the digitization method that is quite frequently chosen by DOC in Poland).

When these resources are digitized they automatically become high-quality big cultural datasets that may be used by cultural analytics or data-based research.

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Part II:

Situation of DOC nowadays

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Today DOC in Poland is dealing with a set of issues that undermine its traditional
position within the humanities.

DOC finds it increasingly difficult to communicate its role:
a) in relation to LIS;
b) to the broader academic community;
c) in digital age of information overload.

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Most of these issues have common ground:

1. lack of funding for digitization of documentary publications as a sources of (META)DATA - in comparison to steady funding of digitization of DIGITAL OBJECTS
2. the growing sense - in contemporary society - that (especially in humanities) information/data is somewhat automatically created and accessible.

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Part III:

Solution?
Cooperation and digitization

Cooperation, because…:

1. many of Polish DOC resources are dealing with "neighbouring" domains of culture, and humanities nowadays is an increasingly interdisciplinary domain, especially in case of digital humanities,

2. as public institutions DOC institutions are open to data exchange and free access to data.

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Digitization, because...:

digitization within culture and science is one-sided - most of the funding is dedicated to digitization of digital objects, not transforming documentary data into modern forms of gathering structured data (like databases).

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This creates a <u>vicious cycle</u> - documentary data cannot show its full potential, because it is not sufficiently digitized; and it's really hard to get digitization funding, because documentary data hasn't been identified with digitization yet (while it's perfectly understandable that digital libraries need digitization funding).

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What can be done now just by working together?

Data-based research

Cooperation and digital tools facilitate building big cultural datasets from existing smaller datasets which would enable researchers and documentalists to conduct data-based research on the relations between different domains of culture, <u>without</u> changing methodologies of existing DOC teams.

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These big cultural datasets might be built just by using SQL databases (we are using free access research hosting for MySQL databases and free access software via virtual machines [through cooperation with IT partners]) and working on importing different sets of data.

They might be explored only through SQL queries, but with some IT knowledge and good understanding of stored data it might be enough to produce research results.

Commentary: practical aspects of building cultural datasets.

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What makes this kind of research possible is the - more or less - direct engagement of creators of data in the process of data exploration.

What makes this kind of research demanding are the differences between data models and formats, which are usually not standardized or if they are (like National Library's MARC data) - they have to be converted into formats importable to MySQL databases (which is not a huge issue in theory, but in certain cases can be demanding).

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Thanks to the investment (mostly of time dedicated to developing our IT skills and conducting research workshops) we are hoping to:

- convince funding institutions of the needs to invest into documentation endeavours, because of their direct role in modern knowledge production,
- build research teams around concrete datasets created by documentalists,
- rebuild the image of documentation as a necessary tool for contemporary analysis of culture (50 years ago it was impossible to conduct literary research without literary bibliography created by specialists, today we have to convince research community that they still need broad-range DOC to preserve knowledge of Polish culture).

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