

Large-format archival materials with limited public access as neglected cultural heritage

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Abstract:

The project “*Large-format archival materials with limited public access as neglected cultural heritage*” focuses on a specific part of archival materials, such as not only maps but also plans, diagrams, drawings or large genealogical schemes and “family trees”, which are still a hidden treasure of our archives and historical collections. Due to their large dimensions, they represent a category of historical documents that are difficult to access, and due to difficult handling and space requirements, they are not or often cannot be made accessible to scientists, researchers and/or interested professionals. A significant fact may also be the fear of damage to these large archival records when handling them. The aim of the project is to make large-format archival materials accessible and to raise awareness of their historical and cultural value.

Abroad, similar issues are addressed when processing large formats of various objects or archival materials. For example, during the dissemination of old maps within the “Distributed Digital State Libraries” (VDL 2021) in the photographic workshop of the Herzog August Library together with the state libraries in Oldenburg and Hanover. The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam also joined in making large pictorial works accessible, informing the public about the processing and accessibility of Rembrandt's “Night Watch” (363 × 437 cm). The German Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Library has numerous historical maps so large that they only had to be digitized one by one image. Due to their dimensions, some maps had to be photographed only in parts.

The usefulness of digital archival collections for historical research was highlighted in a study “*Historians' use of digital archival collections: The web, historical scholarship, and archival research*” (SINN & SOARES 2014). It follows that digital collections are an important source material. Many historians prefer documents in their analogue form, although preferences have begun to change and digital formats are increasingly used. The question of how to make the original analogue and digitised archives accessible is addressed in a study “*How can we make born-digital and digitised archives more accessible? Identifying obstacles and solutions*” (JAILLANTA 2022). One of the results of this study is the fact that the vast majority of digital data stored in memory institutions is inaccessible due to private law restrictions, copyright or technical problems. Relevant articles and studies dealing with the topic of large-format archival materials have not yet appeared in the Czech literature. Large-format maps were partially addressed by the project “*Technology for Accessing Map Collections of the Czech Republic*” (TEMAP 2015). However, this project devoted itself only to the creation of methodologies and software tools for processing, preservation and online access to map collections according to international library cataloguing rules

The first part of the research focused on the categorization of large-format archival materials (dimensions from 2 x 2 m to 6 m x 4 m, with or without battens), which due to their properties cannot be used in basic and applied research, which makes their informative and artistic value unjustly neglected, because the technical, personnel and spatial possibilities of memory institutions do not allow them to be manipulated. and their professional processing and use in applied research has not been possible so far. A questionnaire survey was carried out as part of the project. The aim was to find out whether and how many large-format archival materials are stored in memory institutions. Partial data were the dimensions of these archival records, their carrier (material), and the technique of production. A more detailed characteristic was the classification into one of the specified typological categories in terms of their content. In addition, the data obtained from the survey will also serve to create an analysis of how the interviewed institutions use (submit) these archival materials and whether it is in their power to digitize them (or whether they are already digitized) or not. With regard to the future applicability of research results, especially in the archival environment, attention was focused primarily on institutions such as archives and museums. The main objective of this stage was to get an overview of the formats and number of these archival materials in various archives, funds, collections and collections.

In the next project phase, selected types of archival materials were digitized both by the method of photography and digitization on a large-scale scanner. Then both methods were compared and a study of positional and image differences

of both methods was elaborated. Due to partial damage, some archival materials were subjected to comprehensive professional restoration, while other archival documents, where the damage was not so extensive, were subject to only minor rescue restoration interventions. All these interventions have been professionally documented and "difference" studies have been conducted showing the changes before and after restoration.

The last project phase will be the elaboration of proposals for making these archival materials accessible to a wide range of historians and researchers in the form of digitized documents or processing of various types of facsimiles and/or copies.

All phases of project are experimentally verified on Tloskov estate map, which measures 5.73 meters wide and 2.93 meters high from the land surveyor Jan Glocksperger from 1728. It is a general map with two surveying records for dominical and rustic land. Along with the map of the Tloskov estate, Glocksperger also handed over 36 brouillons and 18 volumes of detailed measuring elaborations for individual villages. Both the map itself and the individual brouillons, which have also been preserved in the collection of the State Regional Archives in Prague, are a valuable basis for a detailed study of the development of this region.



Figure 1. An unpacked map of the Tloskov estate ready for photo documentation (photo by Jiří Škabrada)

Maps, manuscript large-format maps in particular, provide a valuable source of information for researchers and researchers in all fields. The aim of the project is to make large-format archival materials accessible and to raise awareness of their historical and cultural value.

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