

The First World War on the Web - The Case of Serbia

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1. Introduction

Even though the implementation of computers in the historical sciences began in the 60s and 70s of the 20th century, together with the development of new methods in the studies of economic history and demography, and again in the 80s with the appearance of personal computers, only with the expansion of Internet and digital revolution in the 90s, great number of historians started to use modern technologies. Internet, as the world's biggest global informational resource and unique way of communication in real time, has offered until then unbelievable possibilities in the field of research activities, but also introduced numerous problems concerning the use of Internet information in historical science. In the moment when 3, 5 billion people have access to the Internet, celebration of the World War I, the first war in historiography considered to be global and total, represents a challenge and raises important questions for the historical science.¹ In the previous period numerous projects on the WWI have been initiated and implemented worldwide, with a goal to connect experts from various fields, to facilitate the access to historical sources and archival material, to present results of researches, to organize virtual exhibitions, to advance teaching process and education, all this by using new technologies and media.

2. Goal of the Paper

This paper aims to study phenomena on using new technologies in historical science based on analysis of form, structure and content of several most representative Web presentations, and most of all, to study the development in perception of historical sources, archival material and the representation of the results of the scientific researches. Also, within the global picture, example of Serbia and Serbian cyber space is analyzed separately, since Serbia has dedicated a lot of attention and space in media, science and culture to celebrate WWI.

3. Digital History from the Perspective of the First World War on the Web

A wide range of international projects includes large Internet sites, sites like International Encyclopedia of the First World War, made as a result of a common project of more than a thousand experts from more than fifty countries, or Europeana 1914–1918 project, includes projects of individual institutions like internet presentations of Austrian State Archives and Historical Archives of Belgrade and individual historians' presentation (i.e. Otto Vervaart' blog) and nongovernmental organizations (i.e. Remembering the ancestors from the First World War album of the Association of the descendants of Serbian warriors 1912–1920). This material today easily accessible for the users from all around the world illustrates in the correct way changes and challenges modern generations of historians are faced with. It introduces numerous heuristic possibilities that can be used to solve one of the biggest problems of a historian related to the representativeness of a used material, when the research results cannot be generalized but have to be limited to a certain area and period, because of the lack of sources. However, it should be underlined that this opens series of methodological problems and questions about use of information and historical sources taken from the Internet, like

¹ Internet penetration in Serbia is 54%, 4.758.861 Internet users. Internet Live Status. 2016. Internet Users by Country (2016) <<http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users-by-country>> (8. June 2016).

partial digitalization of fonds and collections or fetishism of the documents, often without any selection in reconstructing of the past (Mandić, 2008; Jovanović 2009)².

Numerous publications (monographs, reprints, proceedings, exhibition catalogues) relating to the First World War have been published in Serbia in the past few years, many exhibitions, conferences, public manifestations and television shows have been organized and recorded, but only several Web presentations have been released, which allowed full perception of the historical events that are of great importance in the collective memory. Although these projects have different organizational and institutional starting points (being part of a greater international projects, within individual institutions of culture or within the NGO sector), it can be concluded that several important projects have been realized significantly enriching the possibilities of researches, studies and work in digital environment. Experiences and results achieved in the projects of digital collections of National Library of Serbia and Yugoslav Film Archives, online digital thematic guide of the Historical Archives of Belgrade (in Serbian and English language), Remembering the ancestors from the First World War album of the Association of the descendants of Serbian warriors 1912–1920 and presentations focusing on a specific chronological and geographical point (Valjevo – The Hospital City 1914–1915, Belgrade in the Great War, On the Streets of the Sava area in 1914), made with the intention to celebrate the centenary of the First World War, will also serve as a starting point to redefine many aspects of digital humanities in the following period. It can be already concluded that more organized aspect of intersectoral cooperation of cultural institutions would have greater effect in the country and on international scene.

It is interesting the fact that most of the Web presentations on the First World War in Serbia are not supported by corresponding Web 2.0 tools, first of all in the most popular social networks, with a goal to promote and attract wider audience. Except for two examples, Historical Archives of Belgrade's which promoted Online digital Thematic Guide on the Archives' official Facebook and Flickr account and project Remembering the ancestors from the First World War album of the Association of the descendants of Serbian warriors 1912–1920 also used Facebook to promote its activities, it is evident that all other projects did not take advantage of this kind of communications and large number of users.

One of the basic characteristics of projects with Internet presentations concerning the First World War, that will eventually turn out to be a problem at the same time, is cooperation of different experts. Interdisciplinary approach implies cooperation between historians and computer scientist, librarians, archivists, museologists, resulting in new interdisciplinary science – digital humanities. Global character of the First World War is determined by the fact that countries from all continents participated in the conflict, by the fact that WWI was also an industrial war and that entire societies were engaged in the background of the frontline, introducing massive changes in everyday life. Numerous Web presentations and large amount of material on the World Wide Web represent potentially a good material for retrospection of relations between historical science and challenges of new technologies' implementation today and in the future. Historian William Thomas (2014) indicated the necessity to reconstruct historical science for digital era and to introduce more complex attitude towards social reality encountering and arising from total and complex social reality of the

² Definition of the criteria for selection of the documents intended for digitalization, their evaluation and selection of the priorities, that is partial digitalization of the certain fonds and collections, can lead to the unbalanced impressions of those who are using specific material or even to the creation of inappropriate attitude of those less familiar with the material and with that historical period. It is extremely important to underline this problem of using digitalized archival material, both in researches and in wider use, especially in history teaching process. See: S. Mandić. 2008. *Kompjuterizacija i istoriografija 1995-2005*. Beograd, str. 42, 87. The problem of document fetishism was discussed by professor Miroslav Jovanović, who stated that in the problem of „document inflation“ historians are at the same time accomplices and victims, and emphasized that each decade of the 20th century produced more information than the human civilization in six previous millenniums. Traditional positivism's tendency towards fetishism of the documents in most cases does not reconstruct even the simplest facts in the past, but leads towards plain rewriting and accumulation of the documents. This is especially important in the situation when a large amount of documents and information on archival material becomes available in digital form, easily available on Internet.

See: Мирослав Јовановић, Радивој Радић. 2009. *Крiza историје. Српска историографија и друштвени изазови краја 20. и почетка 21. века*, Београд, стр. 31-32, 67, 75-81.

past. He also pointed out that small number of reviews and critiques in the field of digital history existed and that larger interpretation and implementation of results of already finalized projects were necessary, because thematic archives and sophisticated projects of digitalization are often unnoticed, unquoted and uninvolved in the scientific streams. Besides this, it is important to motivate and involve wider audience in the field of digital history, in the segments that potentially have material for family history and genealogy research.

Table: Website locales statistic for *Project First World War in Fonds and Collections of the Historical Archives Of Belgrade – Online Digital Thematic Guide*. February 2016.

| Locales | Domain | Pages | Hits | Bandwidth |
|--------------------|--------|-------|--------|-----------|
| Republic of Serbia | sr | 6,079 | 54,674 | 4.15 GB |
| Germany | de | 272 | 1,582 | 164.32 MB |
| Bulgaria | bg | 242 | 2,097 | 286.47 MB |
| Bosnia-Herzegovina | ba | 194 | 1,307 | 157.53 MB |
| United States | us | 187 | 833 | 89.63 MB |
| Croatia | hr | 153 | 946 | 107.95 MB |
| Austria | at | 148 | 1,163 | 149.75 MB |
| Hungary | hu | 66 | 396 | 51.58 MB |
| Slovenia | si | 66 | 387 | 36.85 MB |
| Great Britain | gb | 64 | 430 | 36.22 MB |
| France | fr | 61 | 183 | 20.09 MB |
| Japan | jp | 43 | 117 | 2.54 MB |
| Netherlands | nl | 42 | 227 | 28.29 MB |
| Italy | it | 40 | 286 | 35.03 MB |
| Romania | ro | 34 | 193 | 24.20 MB |
| Poland | pl | 30 | 160 | 20.19 MB |
| Albania | al | 26 | 286 | 44.91 MB |
| Macedonia | mk | 24 | 212 | 18.27 MB |
| Australia | au | 22 | 131 | 12.99 MB |
| Belgium | be | 19 | 162 | 15.23 MB |
| Spain | es | 16 | 120 | 7.06 MB |
| Turkey | tr | 15 | 169 | 22.53 MB |
| Switzerland | ch | 14 | 105 | 11.63 MB |
| Czech Republic | cz | 11 | 111 | 14.32 MB |
| Montenegro | me | 11 | 42 | 1.69 MB |
| Others | | 54 | 483 | 55.38 MB |

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