VESNA DJAIC-SKONDRIC
The Archives of the Republic of Srpska
Banjaluka

DIGITAL ACCESS OF ARCHIVAL HOLDINGS IN THE ARCHIVES OF THE REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA

Abstract: Basic tasks of the archival profession is to collect, protect, preserve, arrange, describe, and make archival records it holds accessible to a wide audience in accordance with the legislative and professional archival criteria. Providing access to archival and historical holdings via digital accessibility is the next step in the archival profession and starts at a local level and moves upwards, keeping in mind the sense of a wider, global space of profession, knowledge, and culture. The Archives of the Republic of Srpska has developed an online repository of archival metadata and digitized records in order to enable online access to the treasures of the Archives, while adhering to archival standards at the same time. This enables the accessibility, but also the promotion of archival treasures as cultural heritage.

Keywords: archival holdings, online access, open-source software, digital platform, cultural heritage.

1. The archival holdings in the Archives of the Republic of Srpska

The Archives of the Republic of Srpska is an administrative organization and a central institution for the protection of the documentary heritage of archival records in the Republic of Srpska, with the head office in Banjaluka, and regional units in Doboj, Zvornik, Foca, and Trebinje. It collects, protects, preserves, arranges, describes, and makes archival records it holds accessible to a wide audience of researchers and citizens from various backgrounds. Furthermore, it makes a step forward with providing online digital accessibility of its holdings.

The Archives was established in 1992. Its understructure and background, however, is not of recent origin, as the Archives incorporated three archival institutions that were located on the territory of the Republic of Srpska. Its headquarters was based in the Archives of Bosanska Krajina in Banjaluka (est. 1953), the Regional Archives in Doboj (est. 1954) and the Regional Archives in Foca (est. 1982). During the year of 2000, it expanded its network and established new regional offices in Zvornik, Sokolac, and Trebinje.

The Archives holds over five linear kilometers of archival records and nearly twenty thousand library units (books, periodicals, etc.). Most of it is deposited in the repositories in Banjaluka. Its historical holdings are composed of archival record groups (or *fonds*) and collections spanning from the time of the Austro-Hungary

(from 1878) to the present, with the exception of older, mostly Oriental language manuscripts. The provenance structure of the holdings encompasses every major facet of social life, with creators from the community and municipal to county and regional levels, including governing bodies, agencies, organizations, associations, enterprises, and individuals. The Archives is entrusted with the records of many entities established by the Republic of Srpska, including ministries, agencies, and companies.

Besides paper documents, the Archives holds an extensive amount of publications, photographs, posters, and other media. Public archival records are available to the public after 30 years from its creation. For special parts of the holdings other rules apply, as defined by laws and bylaws. The Archives of the Republic of Srpska is also an internationally engaged institution that cooperates with many regional and foreign archival and other cultural establishments and associations. The process of digitization of archival material in the Archives has started several years ago, so new practices and routines have been introduced and further developed in performing archival work.

2. Access to archival holdings on digital platform

Providing accessibility of archival holdings through an online repository of archival metadata and digitized records was the goal the Archives of the Republic of Srpska which has been achieved. The Archives created a digital platform for the description of archival material called „Arhipedija" („Архипедија" - Archipedia).

The platform is fully functional and accessible to both professionals and public. The employees of the Archives have been working on the platform development since 2017, and it was published in 2020. This platform also becomes the basis for a unique, constant and comprehensive digitization process of archival materials in the Republic of Srpska. The platform provides access to material descriptions, selected digitized documents and a collection of photographs. It can be accessed through the website of the Archives www.arhivrs.org or directly at www.arhipedija.com.

It is a multi-repository platform, using AtoM, a browsed-based, open-source, standardized archival description software, also used by many representative archival and educational institutions around the world. The development process of „Arhipedija" was based fully on the enthusiasm of the Archives' employees, except for starting support of the translation into the Serbian language that was created with the efforts of the staff of the National Library of Serbia, which also uses AtoM to describe its archival collections. Today, the Archives's platform is featuring over 700 top-level descriptions, seven thousand subordinate entries and a sizeable collection of digitized records, searchable through both metadata and contents. It is fully accessible to citizens and researchers and is in an advanced stage of development, which includes planned and long-term input of data and content. Users can view

selected descriptions of documentary units kept in the Archives in Banja Luka. The entry of lower levels and individual documents is in progress, as well as the entry of descriptions of documentary units, kept in the regional units in Doboj, Foca, Trebinje and Zvornik. All data can be searchable, not only through descriptions but also through the content of archival documents with selected digitized materials – documents and photographs.

The expanded vision set forth new goals. The following steps are expansion, education, development and permanent online presence. Even though the platform is generally self-sufficient for the Archives, in the future, support in terms of improving technical capacity would advance work on the platform, as well as more staff engagement in order to accelerate the data entry process.

The platform „Arhipedija” is now envisioned as a central archival database that will include a multi-repository description for cultural institutions holding historical record groups and archival collections, that means not only for all regional offices of the Archives, but also museums, libraries, and other heritage custodians holding relevant archival material.
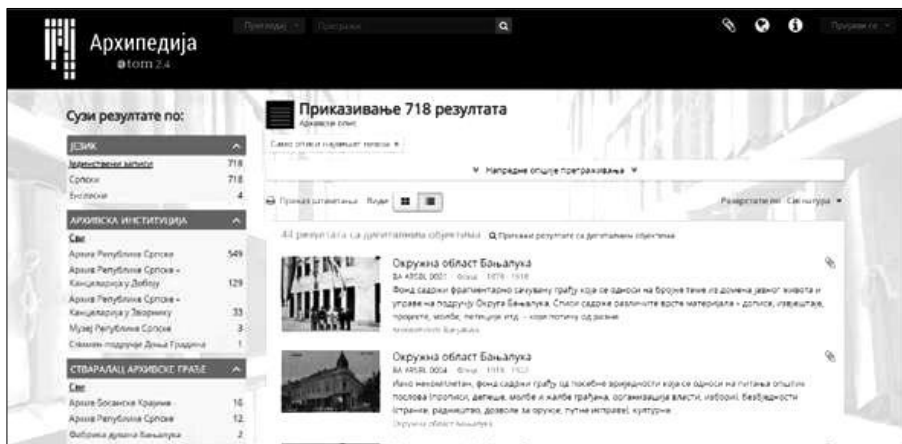
3. The digital platform „Arhipedija”

The digital platform of the Archives of the Republic of Srpska named „Arhipedija” is based on AtoM version 2.4.

Hompage: www.arhipedija.com

AtoM, abbreviation for Access to Memory, is the archival processing software designed according to International Council on Archives (ICA) standards and other recognized international standards. It is open-source software, created during many years of cooperation between archival and IT experts. This software is easy to use, both for archivists who make entries and for researchers who use these

entries in their work. It allows archivists to process archives descriptions based on international standards.

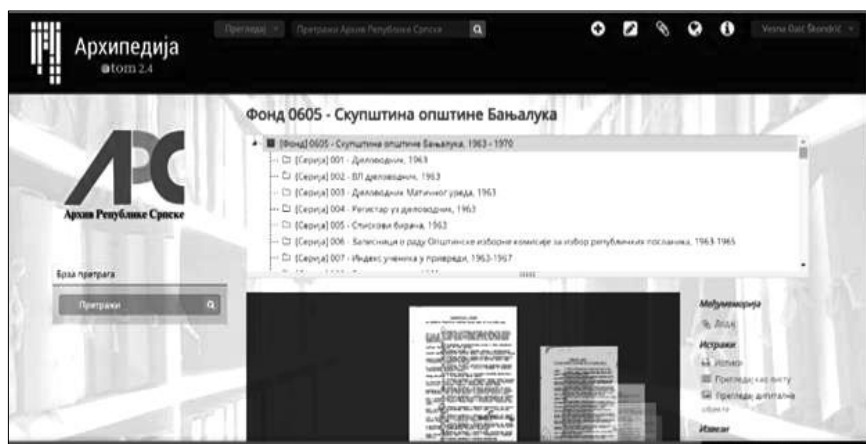**Result of archival description**

Result of archival description

Selected standards used in the Archives of the Republic of Srpska, in ,,Arhipedija", are> ISAD (G) 2 (for the description of archival units), ISAAR (CPF) (for legal and natural persons and other creators of material), ISDIAH (for archival institutions) and ISDF (for function description). Archivists can enter several different types of data, but the type of data that is of primary benefit to researchers are descriptions of archival holdings and collections and their associated documentary units, as well as digitized materials.

The option to search for archival descriptions takes the user to the page where, by default, all top-level entries are listed, i.e. funds and collections. Here the user can see the name of the fund or collection, signature, year schedule and the main source from the description of the archival material. These entries are arranged
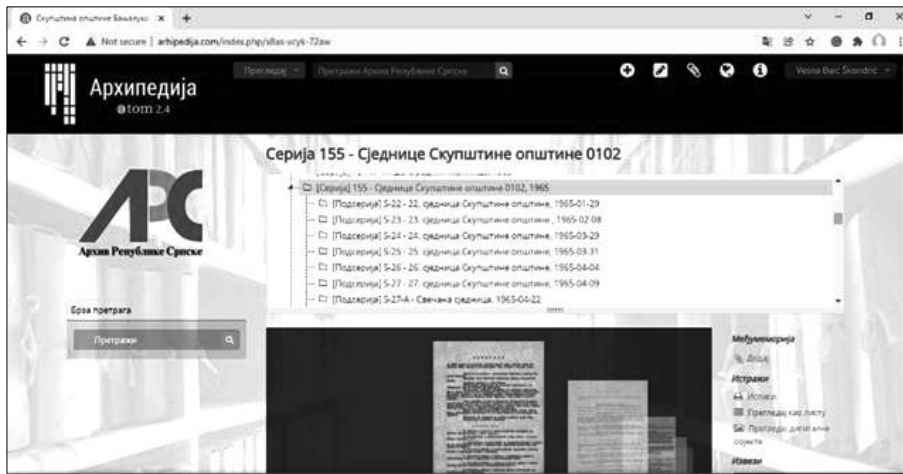
according to the basic signature, but the user can change the sorting method (alphabetically, by age, etc.). The user can also use the advanced search option (search through certain sections or levels of description time period, certain units or creators, etc.). By entering one of the descriptions, the user is presented with the data entered so far, classified according to the sections defined by the ISAD (G) standard, as well as the tree (above) of the structure of higher and lower (corresponding) levels of description. If there are digital objects related to the descriptions, they are listed above the descriptions. The user can also search for descriptions according to the classification of funds: administration and public services, education, political organizations and others. Searched terms are searched not only through metadata (titles and descriptions) but also through the textual content of digitized material. Generally, it is user-friendly and for all the details on using the platform, there is a link to the user guide posted on the home page.
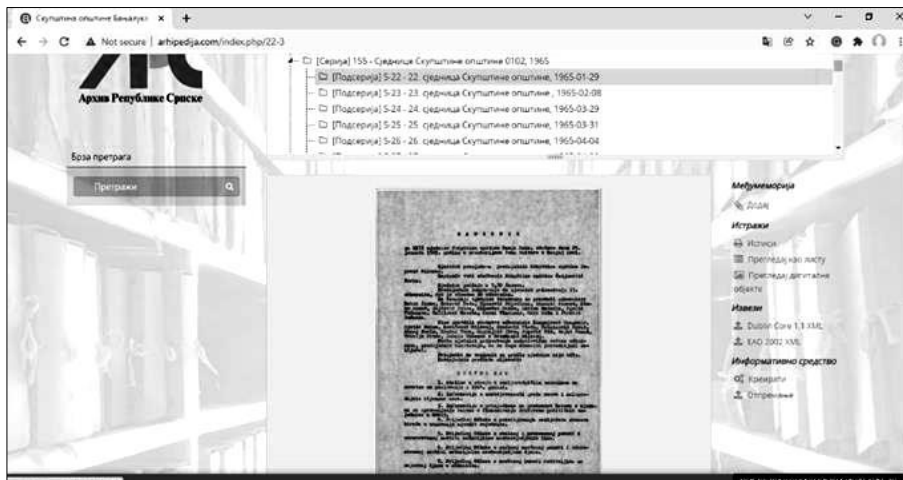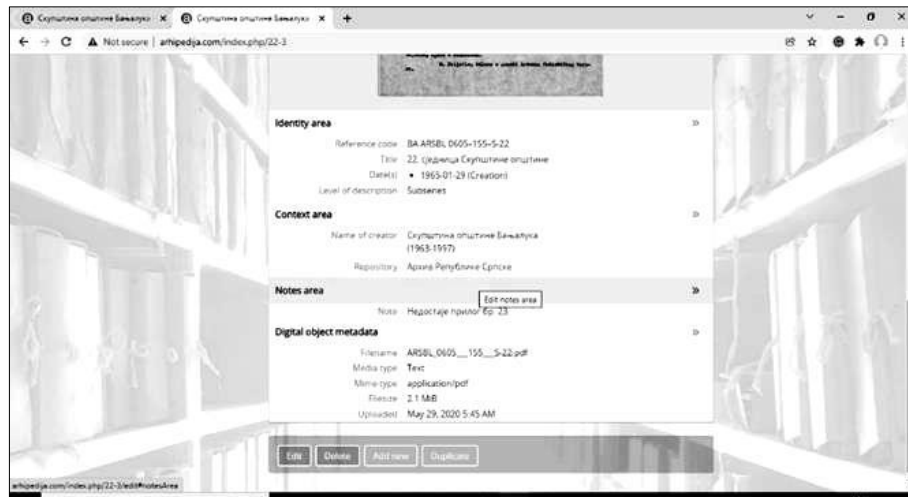

Result of archival description

Selected fonds

Selected series and subseries

Subseries digital object

Description information below digital object

4. Conclusion

The Archives of the Republic of Srpska is in the process of digitizing its archives holdings. It is an ongoing task due to ever-growing archival material. The Archives made a step forward by providing online accessibility of its holdings by creating a digital platform and putting it into operation following legislative and professional standards.

This platform is based on open-source software developed over the years in collaboration with IT and archival experts and has already been operative in numerous prominent institutions all over the world. In the Archives, it is used by the archivists for archival description, researchers to access funds and as the basis for digitized material. The ground idea is to simplify the procedure for all stakeholders, and at the same time to increase productivity. Much of this project has already been done, but still, great work remains, including the ongoing task of digitalization especially when it comes to sub-level data entry. This new practice set goals for future following steps that include expansion, education, development and permanent online presence.

The archival collections in general are all about knowledge, information and heritage. In the most general sense, sharing cultural heritage is opening up cultural institutions to the public. In turn, the citizens, researchers and all other interested parties can access the information they need more easily, engendering a deeper sense of trust and knowledge. An archival document in its form, text and all other components is a source of information and evidence of historical processes and most often a legal instrument for social and private needs. It is also a suitable tool for various forms of scientific and cultural activities. The archival treasures have been interpreted in historiography, journalism, literature and other scientific research,

cultural and educational work. Therefore, there is a constant need of simplifying the process of accessing and presenting this heritage adhering to the standards. Also, such practice due to its convenient presentation enlarges knowledge of the content, encourages public awareness of its value and inspires social responsibility of taking concrete activities in the comprehensive task of preserving, protecting and nurturing archive holdings as a prominent cultural heritage.

С а ж е т а к

Архив Републике Српске посједује дигиталну платформу за опис архивске грађе која носи назив „Архипедија”. Платформа је потпуно функционална и доступна како струци тако и јавности.

На развоју ове платформе запослени у Архиву раде од 2017. године, а пуштена је у рад 2020. Омогућава приступ подацима о архивској грађи која се чува у Архиву Републике Српске, а замишљена је и као централно мјесто дигитализоване архивске грађе коју чувају и културне институције у Републици Српској. На овај начин постављена је и основа за јединствен, континуиран и свеобухватан процес дигитализације архивских материјала.

Платформа омогућава приступ описима грађе, одабраним дигитализованим документима и збирци фотографија. Може јој се приступити путем интернет странице Архива Републике Српске www.arhivrs.org или директно на адресу www.arhipedija.com.

Платформа „Архипедија” настала је на основу софтвера **AtoM** (Access to Memory) који користе многобројне репрезентативне архивске и образовне институције широм свијета. За развој „Архипедије” заслужни су запослени Архива Републике Српске, који су својим напором и стручним знањима из области информатике, дизајна и архивистике учинили да овај систем буде у употреби и потпуно оперативан. Иако је платформа потпуно функционална, у будућности би подршка у смислу побољшања техничких капацитета унаприједила рад платформе, као и већи ангажман особља како би се убрзао процес уноса података.

„Архипедија” је сада потпуно доступна грађанима и истраживачима и налази се у напредној фази развоја, која подразумијева планско и дугорочно уношење података и садржаја. Корисници могу прегледати све описе документарних цјелина које се чувају у Архиву Републике Српске у Бањалуци. У току је сталан рад на уносу нижих нивоа и појединачних докумената, као и унос описа документарних цјелина које се чувају у регионалним јединицама у Добоју, Фочи, Требињу и Зворнику. Сви подаци су потпуно претративи, не само кроз описе, него и кроз садржај архивских докумената одабраним дигитализованим материјалима – документима, фотографијама и другим архивалијама – који постају потпуно доступни.

У сарадњи са Удружењем архивских радника Републике Српске планирано је провођење професионалне едукације о стандардизованој обради и дигиталној конверзији и осталих заинтересованих културних институција које посједују архивску грађу.

Архивска грађа се уопштено односи на информације, знање и насљеђе. У најопштијем смислу, омогућавање приступа културном насљеђу значи приближавање институције јавности, у границама које дозвољавају стандарди струке и прописи. Тако грађани и истраживачи могу лакше доћи до информација које су им потребне, а архивски документ као извор информација и свједочанставо о историјским догађајима лакше се користи за различите облике научних и културних активности у историографији, публицистици, књижевности и другом научноистраживачком и културно-просвјетном раду. Стога постоји стална потреба за поједностављењем процеса приступања и представљања овог насљеђа у складу са стандардима и прописима. Оваква пракса такође додатно проширује сазнања о садржају архивске грађе, подстиче свијест јавности о њеној вриједности и друштвену одговорност за предузимање активности на задатку чувања, заштите и његовања архивске грађе као истакнутог културног насљеђа.