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**DIGITAL PRESERVATION OF ESTONIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE:
THE PROJECT "THE RED BOOK OF ESTONIAN PUBLICATIONS,
1535-1850"**

В докладе рассматриваются проблемы сохранения памятников национальной документальной культуры, которые хранятся в Эстонии, а также в других странах мира. Проект „Красная книга эстонских изданий 1535-1850” дает теоретические основы выработки критериев для определения приоритетов сохранения. Практический результат проекта - база данных, которая содержит список изданий, данные об имеющихся экземплярах, оценку физического состояния и сканированные изображения титульного листа и переплета одного экземпляра каждого издания. В списке - 398 эстонских книг и 5 периодических изданий, из которых 127 (31,5 %) являются уникальными экземплярами, и, 31 (24,4 %) которых находятся в библиотеках Латвии, России, Финляндии, Швеции, Дании, Германии. Большинство книг (62,7 %) относится к категории сильно поврежденных изданий.

Considerable part of the collected information consists of documentary heritage, which records the history and development of the society, knowledge and culture. Documentary heritage is defined as textual (manuscripts, posters, books, newspapers , etc.), non-textual (drawings, prints, maps, music, etc), audiovisual (photographs, films, discs - whether recorded in analogue or digital formats, and by mechanical, electronic or other means) and virtual documents (the carrier may be a hard disc or tape, the content is electronic data).¹

The historical experience has shown that new information technologies do not push out the old ones but step aside them, thus making the communication systems even more complicated. The most general objective of preservation today would be to avoid the loss of historically and culturally valuable information.

Estonians have always considered written word and printed books important factors of the cultural development – printed word has played a great role in the formation of nation and independent state. Today Estonian documentary heritage is

located in different memory institutions: in state or public institutions (in archives, libraries and museums there are about 25 million items), in private possession, in religious and scientific institutions and in possession of the third sector. For reasons of the historical development considerable part of the documentary heritage is also located outside the country.

Preservation of national cultural heritage has been during the last years actively discussed both on institutional and state levels. As a result, at the end of 2003 a special working group by the Ministry of Culture put together preservation guidelines titled „State strategy of digital preservation of Estonian cultural heritage for years 2004-2007”.² This document defines cultural heritage as objects of historical, scientific, cultural, social, technological or other value, which, regardless of their physical location, are valuable to be preserved for future generations and, using the most expedient technologies must be accessible for public use.

Distribution of digital information influences the traditional preservation in two ways. Digital objects need to be preserved like all traditional objects but their preservation is more complicated. Digitalisation of traditional objects is seen as a mean of preservation, which quarantees the availability of information to the public.

Preservation policy of book heritage starts from the knowledge about the physical condition of written and printed word. This phase of the policy was fulfilled by the first stage of the project THULE: „The State of Cultural Heritage in Major Estonian Libraries” (1998-2000)” which aim was to identify the most endangered collections in four archive libraries. The project was carried out with the financial support from the UNESCO, Open Estonia Foundation and Open Society Institute Budapest. The results of this project have been presented in many articles and conference papers.³ The present project „Red book of Estonian publications 1535-1850” (2003-2004) is the third subproject of THULE, it was financed by the UNESCO national committee. The aim of the project was to create the theoretical basis for elaborating criteria which enable to determine preservation priorities of Estonian book heritage. According to these criteria a preliminary list of highly valued and endangered Estonian publications was compiled, which can be taken as a remedy for working out preservation policies of memory institutions and a basis for further digitalization projects.

Preservation in itself can never be a neutral acitivity. In the situation of superabundance of information, it means determining the priorities. Priority is defined as a relative importance of objects, activities or problems in the frame of certain project, activity or situation.⁴

In general establishment of priorities means making decisions:

- Which objects (artefacts) must be preserved;
- How long these objects must be preserved;
- Which methods are used for preservation.

Priorities are always relative, because different social conditions create different contexts and scale of values. Therefore is establishment of priorities a perpetual process – changing conditions bring forward the necessity of changing priorities.

The term Red Book is first of all familiar from the field of nature preserve, where it means the list of endangered species. During the last years the same principle has become a basis for compiling red lists or books of highly valued and endangered cultural objects, which need to be preserved and handled with special carefulness.

In Estonia the projects of red books are under way in all memory institutions, but they are formed on different principles. Estonian archives have initiated the project „Red Book of National Archive”,⁵ the aim of which is to study the physical condition of records in order to establish preservation priorities and elaborate the long-time preservation plan. The red book of Estonian museums consists of digitized images of restored original objects and is compiled by the restoration firm „Kanut”.⁶ This treatment is based on the presupposition, that all museums choose to restore their most valuable objects.

„The Red Book of Estonian Publications” grew up from the need to work out the national preservation policy of printed heritage. The project was carried out by two library specialists (K. Aru and T. Reimo) and two preservation specialists (K. Konsa and M. Siiner), presenting the National Library, The Archive Library of the Estonian Literature Museum, the Academic Library of the TPU, the Tartu University and the Tallinn Pedagogical University. The practical result of the project is the database of historically, culturally and scientifically valuable rare Estonian books together with recorded data about availability of original items and their reserve copies, the description of physical condition of one original item and digitised images of the title page and binding of one original item, which is preserved in Estonia. At the moment the list of publications as well as the examples of documentation are accessible through the web page of the Ministry of Culture.⁷ As a result of such revision the exact data about the need of reserve and user copies as well as the amount of conservation and restoration work needed has been determined.

To compile the list of publications the following criteria were used:

- The cultural value of a book;
- The number of survived copies (availability);
- The physical condition of a book.

Taking into account that every nation is at the first hand interested in preserving the written word in national language, the list consists mainly of books in Estonian language.

At the end of the list there is a provisional selection of Estonian periodicals as well as books and periodicals in foreign languages, which were printed in Estonia during the 17th and 18th centuries. The aim of this addition is to bring to notice the multicultural character of the Estonian book heritage and to ensure, that the same criteria can be used by evaluating any paper carrier publication.

The list is based on the retrospective national bibliographies „Estonian books 1525-1850” (Tallinn, 2000) and “Estonian-language press 1766-1940” (Tallinn, 2002). Publications in foreign languages were chosen on the basis of different bibliographies.

Books, from which there were no data about survived copies, were omitted and the temporal limits of the database became 1535 and 1850.

The list consists of 398 books and 5 periodicals in Estonian language and 23 books and 3 periodicals in foreign languages. Descriptions in “The Red Book” are in chronological order. Under the digitized images of the title page and of the binding there is a short bibliographic description of the book, followed by the registration number of it in the retrospective bibliography. By each item there are data about the availability of the book (the number of known survived copies, notes about defective, reserve and user copies), followed by a short characteristics of the item’s cultural value and the assessment of the physical condition of one copy.

Cultural value of publications

Cultural value of a publication was determined considering the following criteria:

- The first book with text in Estonian language;
- The first book thoroughly in Estonian language;
- The first publication printed in Estonian territory (in Tallinn, Tartu, Narva, Pärnu etc.);
- The first publication of a type (catechism, abc-book, calendar, newspaper etc.);
- The first publication in the field of science (language, literature, history, geography, mathematics etc.);
- Publications, which have influenced the cultural development of the society (language, literature, education, religion, science, practical skills etc.)
- Publications of outstanding book design or art of printing.

Criteria of cultural value depend much more than the other criteria on the political and cultural development of the society which means that when evaluating books printed in different times different criteria must be applied.

Number of survived copies and availability of publications

Number of survived copies is a generally excepted criteria of book rarity. Usually it is in certain correlation with the year of publishing. If the book is published centuries ago, the number of survived copies is most probably small. The number of survived copies is also related to dissemination of books – from the publications of large editions, which were directed to big number of users like calendars, textbooks, hymnals and prayerbooks there are usually very few survived copies.

This phenomena is also well reflected in the list of publications of “The Red Book”: many old books are observed to to be the only or unique copies or rare books, from which only two or three copies have survived till nowadays. There are also quite many books, from which there are no survived complete copies and books which can be found only outside Estonia.

The number of survived copies was considered as an important criterium by evaluating the 17th and 18th century books. According to books that were printed in the first half of the 19th century, the priority was given to the cultural value of a book and the number of survived copies was not considered a critical criterium.

Availability of books was evaluated by the following criteria:

- Unattainable in Estonian memory institutions;
- Unique copy in Estonian memory institutions;
- Rare copy (two or three books) in Estonian memory institutions;
- More than three copies, but only one or two complete copies in Estonian memory institutions.

Physical condition of books

For determining the physical condition of a book, the methodology that was worked out for the project THULE, was used. By every selected copy the physical condition of paper, leaf attachment and binding were determined by 4 variables and recorded. General assessment of physical condition as an integrated indicator was detected on the basis of a certain prescript, according to which all publications were divided into 4 groups:

- 1 –not damaged;
- 2 – partly damaged;
- 3 – damaged , i.e. endangered;
- 4 – severely damaged.

Based on the results of the used criteria, the list of 403 Estonian publications can be analyzed as follows:

The list contains 127 singular copies (31,5 %), from which 31 (24,4 %) are preserved outside Estonia (in the libraries and archives of Latvia, Russia, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Germany). Estonian memory institutions have reserve copies only from the half of these singular books. From 3 rare books there are no copies in Estonian memory institutions, from 17 books the Estonian memory institutions have no complete copies, from half of them there are also no reserve copies. In conclusion – 12,6 % of books, included in the list, are preserved outside Estonia. From 33 books (8,2 %) there are no records of known complete copies. 2 singular copies and 6 singular complete copies are recorded to be found only in private collection.

Combining the criteria of cultural value, number of survived copies and availability the list contains many books of the same kind: 66 calendars, 49 catechisms, 35 hymnals, 34 prayer books, 27 books of Gospels and Epistels, 15 abc-books. These books form 55 % of the total amount of publications. Still every one of them is unique or rare and needs careful preservation and handling.

As to the physical condition of books, there is only 1 (0,3 %) not damaged book in the list. 25 books (7,5 %) are partly damaged, 99 books (29,5 %) are damaged and 210

books (62,7 %) severely damaged. Reserve copies, which were made decades ago, do not match the requirements of nowadays, user copies have been made only from few singular copies.

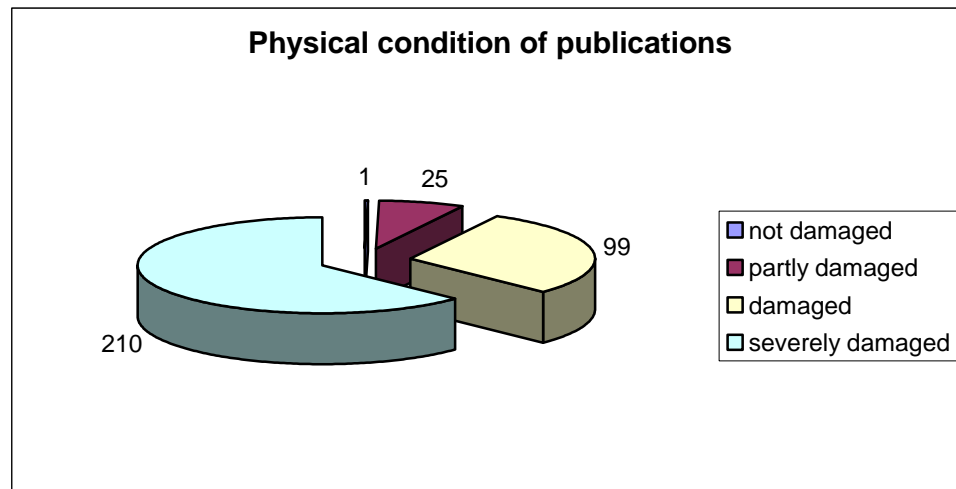


Figure 1: Physical condition of publications

The results of the project bring forward the fragility and the danger of gradual perishment of Estonian printed heritage. Mapping the location and availability of culturally valuable printed matter enables to elaborate preservation policy in whole, regardless the location of books. It helps to determine preservation priorities, provides an accurate assessment of resources being needed for preventive preservation, coordinates establishing and development of reserve collections by microfilming and scanning the most complete copies thus providing the partner libraries with user copies, which improve the availability of publications to users and enables to preserve original publications. Precise knowledge of the situation, optimal allocation of resources and right strategic decisions are the only methods, which ensure the preservation of cultural heritage.

¹ *Memory of the world. General guidelines to safeguard documentary heritage. UNESCO 2002, 8-9.*
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001256/125637e.pdf>

² *Eesti kultuuripärandi säilitamise riiklik strateegia aastateks 2004-2007.*
<http://www.kul.ee/avalik/digistrateegia.pdf>

³ *Eesti raamatu seisund. Projekt THULE. Artiklite kogumik. Koost. M. Siiner. Tallinn: Eesti Rahvusraamatukogu, 2000. K. Konsa. Assessment of Collection Condition – Developing a Tool for Preservation Managers. In: Global Issues in 21st Century Research Librarianship. NORDINFOs 25th Anniversary Publication. Helsinki: NORDINFO, 2002, 406-429; K. Konsa. Eestikeelsete trükiste seisundi uuring. Tallinn: TPÜ, 2003. 121 lk. (TPÜ. Sotsiaalteaduste dissertatsioonid; 4).*

⁴ *Decision Process Guidebook. Terms.* <http://www.usbr.gov/Decision-Process/terms.htm>

⁵ *Ajlooarhiivi tööplaani 2004.* <http://www.eha.ee/arhiivist/eea2004-plaan.doc>

⁶ *H. Tigane. Punase raamatu projektist // Renovatum Anno 2002. Tallinn: Kanut, 2002, 54-56.*

⁷ *Eesti trükise Punane Raamat.* <http://www.kul.ee/index.php?path=40&DocID=93>