Retrieval of visual information from collections of Israeli photographs: characterization of retrieval questions / Hadas Livne-Blum

ABSTRACT

The earliest photograph collections known to us are from the end of the 18th century, but actually only since the nineteen-fifties has there been any emphasis, in terms of research and practice, on the indexing, sorting and cataloging of such collections. Nevertheless, no revolutionary changes have taken place since then until today in the organization of visual information. With every single collection librarians had to cope with the question how to organize it so that it would reflect on one hand the subjects contained in it and on the other hand the needs of its users. The solutions found varied, more in terms of their numbers, less in their originality. For most of the collections the line of action adopted was similar, differing only in minor nuances, which frequently stemmed from technical constraints rather than from a strategy of comprehensibility and arrangement.

The situation in Israel is similar. The institutional archives work independently of each other to solve the problem of organization and retrieval of visual information, while in the field of academic research dealing with visual information, its preservation, organization and methods of retrieval almost nothing has been done.

This study deals with an examination of the terms of retrieval as these were defined by the users of photograph collections in Israeli archives. The question raised was if there is a connection between the goal of the search, that is, the reason for which the search is undertaken, and the use of the terms of retrieval. For this purpose we examined which were the most commonly used basic terms of retrieval: general versus specific terms, and if use was made of complementary terms, such as time, place, and physical description.

We tried to find out if a correlation exists between the use of the basic terms of retrieval (general or specific) and the use of complementary terms of retrieval: time and place, on the assumption that a connection might exist, though its nature was difficult to foresee. For physical description such correlation could not be examined because the amount of data collected was too small to allow for statistically valid conclusions. Finally, we examined if a connection exists between the goal of the search and the formulation of the terms of retrieval.

The basic assumptions of the study were that there would be a difference between the use of general terms and the use of specific terms, and that greater use would be made of the latter. We also assumed that complementary terms of retrieval, time and place, would be the most

frequently used, and that there would be partial dependence between the use of basic and complementary terms of retrieval. Finally, we assumed that the goal of the search would only partially affect the formulation of the terms of retrieval.

In order to answer the questions of the study we compiled 759 records from four collections of Israeli photographs, categorized them and analyzed them by appropriate statistical tests.

The findings clearly show that specific terms of retrieval are more frequently used than general ones, and that "place" is the most frequently used complementary term of retrieval. We also found that a correlation exists between the use of the complementary term "place" and the use of a specific retrieval term: when a specific term of retrieval is used, it is very likely that the complementary term "place" is also employed, and, on the contrary, when a general term of retrieval is used, there is little likelihood that the complementary term "place" will be used.

The examination of a connection between the goal of the search and the formulation of the terms of search did indeed show a connection. When the search was undertaken for purposes of "academic studies" or "a book", the use of complementary terms (time, place, physical description) was above the average, while in searches undertaken for purposes of "studies in school" or "movie" the use of complementary terms was below the average.

The present study indicates that a correlation exists between the goal of the search and the formulation of the terms of retrieval. The correlation has been clearly proved in respect to the use of complementary terms. The study also suggests that the more knowledgeable the searcher, the better he is able to formulate complex and precise search requests.

System number: 000510908
025.3 לבנ-בל.אח תשס"ב

Library of Information Science   הספריה ללימודי מידע
Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, Israel   52900 אוניברסיטת בר-אילן, רמת גן, ישראל
Websitewww.is.biu.ac.il/library Email: Ruthi.Tshop@mail.biu.ac.il   Tel. 972-3-5318163 טל.