Challenges in Archiving Performing Arts

The Eurokaz Digital Archive

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DOI : https ://doi.org/10.17184/eac.10178

Abstract : The Eurokaz Digital Archive highlights the challenges of preserving ephemeral performing arts within digital humanities and archival practice. Spanning nearly three decades of festival activity, the project involved recovering, digitizing, and organizing diverse materials scattered across office storage spaces, private collections, institutional holdings, obsolete media, and existing digital carriers. Outdated formats, data loss, fragmented documentation, and limited preservation infrastructure complicated the process, while television materials and private recordings helped preserve content that might otherwise have been lost. The project also required the creation of metadata in accordance with ISAD(G), the identification of reference archival units, the elimination of duplicates, and the preparation of the complete analog and digitized archive for transfer to the Croatian State Archives. By distinguishing between public online access and long-term archival preservation, the Eurokaz case offers a valuable resource for research and education, as well as an example of grassroots archival work, memory reconstruction, and the afterlife of performance in digital form.

Keywords : Eurokaz; performing arts archiving; digitization; archival transfer; cultural memory

1 Eurokaz and Its Archival Significance

Founded in 1987 in Zagreb, Croatia, Eurokaz began as an international festival of new theater, initiated by Gordana Vnuk, who served as its artistic director and curator until 2013. That year marked the festival's transformation into a production house—a role it continues to fulfill today.

From the outset, Eurokaz distinguished itself with a programming vision focused on innovation and a break from conventional modes of perception. Its authentic curatorial approach helped build its international reputation, establishing it as a

leading theater festival in the region. Eurokaz hosted artists and companies from around the world, placing Croatia on the European theater map for more than a quarter of a century.

In its beginnings during the 1980s, Eurokaz was one of the first festivals to create a platform for a new generation of artists who stirred up Europe and initiated a number of bold impulses arriving from the fields of technology and science, visual arts, new media, dance, and movement, while also rejecting the prevailing logocentric order of the time. These impulses would later become central to many of the aesthetic developments that shaped the performing arts in the following decades. The Zagreb audience had the privilege of witnessing the groundwork being laid for the performing arts of the twenty-first century through early works by Rosas, La Fura dels Baus, Societas Raffaello Sanzio / Romeo Castellucci, Needcompany, Jan Fabre, G. B. Corsetti, Ilotopie, Royal de Luxe, Théâtre du Radeau, Popmehanika, Saburo Teshigawara, Station House Opera, and many others whose influence is still felt today.

Through thematic sections such as the "Flemish wave", "new Italian theater", "a generation of Yugoslav directors", "Russian theater", "technological theater from the West Coast of the USA", and "a new generation of French directors", Eurokaz pointed to relevant contexts of innovative theater. It also addressed phenomena such as non-figurative fluxes of energy, urban ambientality, non-economical dramaturgy, and theater of manifesto. During the Croatian War of Independence, Eurokaz articulated artistic movements of post-mainstream and vertical multiculturalism emerging from the European periphery and non-European cultures, which questioned the aesthetics of the new theater mainstream.

Artists from Africa, Japan, South America, northern Europe, and the Balkans brought authentic theater and choreographic languages that reflected the complex cultural environments in which they created their work. Within the plethora of different aesthetic directions that took root in the late 1990s and at the turn of the century, Eurokaz continued to identify contemporary theater phenomena: iconoclastic theater, which, since the appearance of the first generation of "iconoclasts" such as Societas Raffaello Sanzio, Baktruppen, Goat Island, Forced Entertainment, Branko Brezovec, Ivan Stanev, and François Tanguy, was followed by Eurokaz through its second and third generations (PME, Showcase Beat Le Mot, L&O, Gob Squad, Fanny & Alexander, Nature Theater of Oklahoma, and Philippe Quesne); body art (Ron Athey, Annie Sprinkle, Franko B, Lawrence Steger, Orlan, and Stelarc in 1997); new circus and related forms (Philippe Decouflé, Acrobat, Happy Side Show, and Cie 111); musical gestus in theater (Pierre Rigal, Israel Galván, Roysten Abel / Manganiyar musicians, and Cynthia Hopkins); theater and neighborhood (Emma Dante, Béla Pintér, Arne Sierens, and Abou Lagraa); theater conservatism; and theater and death (Hotel Modern, Peter Halasz, Nicolás Varchausky / Eduardo Molinari—a site-specific project at the city cemetery), among many others.

Non-European artists participating in the above themes continuously made up a significant part of the program, including William Kentridge from South Africa, Alajotas and Femi Kuti from Nigeria, Daksha Sheth from India, Kim Itoh from Japan, Raiz di Polon from Cabo Verde, Bruno Beltrão and Déborah Colker from Brazil, Walid Raad

Published in : BRISTAULT CANOVA, Juliette ; CHANTRAINE BRAILLON, Cécile ; ŽUGIĆ BORIĆ, Anamarija (dir.), *Performing Arts in the Digital Age. Research, Archives, and Innovation*, Editions des archives contemporaines, ISBN: 9782813005588, doi: 10.17184/eac.9782813005588

from Lebanon, Living Dance Studio from China, Faustin Linyekula from DR Congo, and others. Eurokaz also invited well-established artists such as Robert Wilson, The Wooster Group, Akram Khan, Gerald Thomas, Sasha Waltz, H. J. Syberberg, Achim Freyer, and Angélica Liddell, as well as productions by major institutional theaters such as the Vienna Burgtheater, Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg, Schaubühne in Berlin, and Théâtre Gérard Philipe de Saint-Denis in Paris.

The festival also spotlighted Croatian artists—both independent groups and productions from repertory and national theaters—engaging them in dialogue with global innovators. The program regularly included discussions, symposia, screenings, workshops, concerts, and exhibitions. From 2003 onward, leading up to its current status as a production house, Eurokaz has been actively involved in producing and co-producing performances with local and international artists and collaborators.

2 Challenges of Preserving the Eurokaz Archive

Exploring the vast archive of the Eurokaz festival, spanning its twenty-seven-year history, presented a formidable challenge. Thanks to a grant from the Kultura Nova Foundation, the first public-facing phase of digitization was completed in 2023, enabling the creation of the Eurokaz Digital Archive.[1] A subsequent phase, beginning in 2024, focused on the systematic archival processing of the complete physical and digital holdings and their preparation for transfer to the Croatian State Archives.

The Eurokaz Digital Archive can be examined as a case study in digital humanities, particularly in addressing the challenges of archiving time-based, embodied, and often ephemeral art forms. The project confronted a complex set of archival conditions: outdated storage formats, fragmented memory, and a lack of standardized preservation infrastructure. Materials spanning nearly three decades—including press clippings, photographs, videotapes, CDs, DVDs, outdated Websites, and obsolete formats such as Adobe Flash Player—had to be converted to meet current digital standards. These items were retrieved, digitized, and curated into a structured online archive.

Given Eurokaz's nature as a small, project-based organization without a formal institutional archive, materials were scattered across various locations: office storage spaces, personal collections of former staff, artists, and photographers. Analog photographs were especially difficult to locate, often buried in disorganized private archives. In the early years, before the advent of the Internet and digital tools, communication was conducted *via* fax and telephone, while contracts and videos were sent by post. This early correspondence was stored in binders that were eventually moved to a warehouse due to lack of space in the office. At present, they remain buried there beneath stage sets, effectively inaccessible.

The first phase of digitization involved converting materials into Adobe Flash Player format, used for the period from 1987 to 2003, which later became obsolete. Some files had been stored on a single computer that was later discarded without backup, resulting in the loss of photographs and documentation from certain years.

[1] See https://www.eurokaz.hr/ and https://digitalarchive.eurokaz.hr/

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Ironically, the best-preserved materials came from the festival's earliest years, thanks to extensive media coverage. Scanning press clippings—approximately 300 articles and reviews per festival edition—alongside program booklets and promotional materials, and digitizing videotaped television chronicles of three to four hours per year, proved a monumental task. Croatian Television provided invaluable content, from daily festival reports in the early years to interviews, announcements, and news segments in later editions. This coverage documents not only Eurokaz's history but also the broader development of contemporary theater, for which Eurokaz served as a key reference point.

A particularly significant portion of the archive consists of home video recordings made by Dr. Valent Vnuk, who recorded every televised segment related to Eurokaz from 1987 through the late 1990s. During the war, Croatian Television reused old tapes due to shortages, inadvertently erasing much archival material. Were it not for these home recordings, much of this content would have been permanently lost. These tapes were later transferred to CDs and DVDs and eventually incorporated into the digital archive.

A separate set of archived materials — including videotapes, CDs, and DVDs — comprised performances or trailers submitted by artists as promotional material. These were governed by performance contracts and were available for future use. Since many companies did not permit photography or video recordings of their live performances, only excerpts from festival chronicles remain for some events. However, archival content submitted by artists for curatorial review — often the only surviving visual record of these performances — was digitized in collaboration with the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research and is now used in educational settings, including at the Academy of Dramatic Art in Zagreb.

This process underscored several key concerns in the field of digital humanities: the instability of digital formats, the politics of archival memory, and the labor-intensive nature of data recovery and curation. The project also raises critical questions about access and authorship in performance archiving, particularly when documentation rights were originally negotiated under conditions of limited reproduction.

3 Digitization for Online Access and Archival Transfer (2022–2025)

While the preceding overview has outlined the artistic and historical significance of Eurokaz and the particular fragility of its dispersed archival materials, this section focuses on the practical and methodological procedures through which these materials were prepared for digital access and archival transfer. The Eurokaz archive had to be addressed simultaneously as a public-facing digital resource and as an archival fonds requiring systematic description, standardization, and long-term preservation. This dual objective shaped the digitization process from 2022 onward: on the one hand, selected materials were organized for presentation on the Eurokaz digital archive Website; on the other, the complete physical and digital holdings were gradually prepared for transfer to the Croatian State Archives in accordance with archival standards.

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The digitization of the Eurokaz archive between 2022 and 2025 involved a series of technical, organizational, and archival procedures aimed at preparing the materials both for online presentation and for transfer to the Croatian State Archives. The process included the selection, digitization, and description of heterogeneous physical and digital records, the creation of metadata in accordance with ISAD(G), the elimination of duplicates, and the establishment of reference archival units.

In the autumn of 2022, the first phase of the Eurokaz archive digitization project commenced, with the aim of preparing program materials for a new Eurokaz digital archive Website, then under development. Under the coordination of Gordana Vnuk, regular meetings were held with the IT specialist Boris Vidošević, responsible for the Website's development, and Iva Brižan, an associate with experience in archival work within the independent cultural sector. The meetings focused on the selection of materials, their adaptation for online presentation and access, and the development of design and functional solutions. Given that the Website represents the entirety of the festival's activities, it was essential to ensure a responsive design and a clear and coherent structure that enables intuitive navigation. The Website is user-oriented and functionally organized according to chronology and content type, while the subsequent archival organization of the materials was carried out in accordance with the fonds–series–subseries–item hierarchy, following the General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD(G)).

The digitization of physical materials proceeded in parallel with the consolidation of existing archival holdings and their ongoing acquisition from private sources, in both physical and digital formats. This included previously digitized and born-digital materials such as press clippings, media coverage, photographs, digital records from CDs and email correspondence, as well as video materials from DVDs, including promotional content, performance recordings, and television programs.

Program booklets and documentation relating to the festival and performing groups that did not exist in digital form were systematically digitized. This included program leaflets, evening programs, lists of performers, domestic and international reviews, and a selection of photographs, documents, and catalogs relating to directors, performers, and companies. Larger-format booklets were digitized with the technical support of Tomislav Medak (The Multimedia Institute—MI2, Zagreb, Croatia).

As the primary aim of digitization was online presentation, the materials were initially organized according to the structure of the Website, by seasons (1987–2013) and thematic categories (About, Seasons, Media Releases, Gallery, Authors, Publications, Miscellaneous). However, this arrangement did not meet the requirements of the Croatian State Archives for item-level description, nor did it provide hierarchical relationships in accordance with ISAD(G), which were implemented in a subsequent phase.

The collected archival materials were stored and duplicated across several external hard drives. These included documents scanned in PDF format, photographs in JPG and TIFF formats, scans of newspaper articles and supplements in PDF and other formats, as well as video and audio files transferred from CDs and DVDs. Some of

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these files have lost functionality due to the obsolescence of their original formats and therefore require additional software processing. Files selected for presentation on the Eurokaz Website were named according to basic parameters—the name of the performing company or director, the title of the performance, and the year of its presentation at Eurokaz. In subsequent archival processing, each file was renamed using a numerical identifier serving as a unique identifier of the archival unit, ensuring the mandatory linkage between each digital file and its corresponding descriptive unit.

The second phase of digitization began in the spring of 2024 and involved the preparation of all digital and physical archival materials, as well as the compilation of an inventory of the Eurokaz archival holdings prior to their transfer to the Croatian State Archives. As noted above, it was necessary to systematize the physical materials by year (in the first phase they had been sorted by type), digitize materials relating to theater groups that had not previously been digitized for the Website, transfer all audio and video content into digital formats, and consolidate all office correspondence and backup files. The resulting inventory served as the basis for the metadata schema, including identifier, title, date range, extent, and location.

The most demanding aspect of the process was the creation of descriptive and administrative metadata in accordance with Croatian State Archives standards. The application of ISAD(G) required multilevel description, the assignment of unique identifiers, the definition of levels of description, date ranges, extent, content, and conditions of access, as well as the hierarchical linking of archival units. Given the extent of the material, spanning twenty-seven years of activity, metadata creation was carried out in collaboration with a Croatian State Archives archivist.

Digital and physical materials do not correspond in a strict one-to-one ratio. These discrepancies arise from the specific characteristics of digital units: newspaper articles were not re-digitized if already available as digital press clippings, while multiple copies of CDs and DVDs were compared in order to identify and retain reference copies. One illustrative example is the processing of photographs of the Societas Raffaello Sanzio company, where duplicates were eliminated and reference files of the highest available quality (300 dpi, TIFF) were selected. Photographs that existed only in physical form were digitized in TIFF format at 600 dpi. In the metadata table, each unique photograph was recorded as a single archival unit, even if it existed across multiple media in different formats.

A particular challenge was the systematization of backup files and office correspondence due to file duplication, structural heterogeneity, and the need to ensure the protection of personal data. Processing involved consolidation, comparison, categorization, renaming, and counting of files using available software tools. These materials are subject to personal data protection legislation, which is reflected in the administrative metadata through defined levels of access and restrictions on use.

To ensure the timely transfer of the materials, it was necessary to reorganize and further refine the digital archival holdings in order to enable multilevel description and the production of metadata within a feasible timeframe. The metadata do not include detailed lists of performers or casts, reflecting a methodological decision conditioned

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by temporal and material constraints. Access to such information had previously been provided *via* the Eurokaz Digital Archive Website, with the possibility of consulting the corresponding archival units in the Croatian State Archives. The most methodologically demanding aspect of the process was the identification of reference digital units, numbering several thousand records, as well as the systematic detection and elimination of duplicates and redundant files.

4 Concluding Remarks

By approaching the Eurokaz Digital Archive as a practice-based case study, this article has shown how the digitization of performing arts heritage extends beyond the conversion of analog materials into digital formats. In this case, the process involved the reconstruction of dispersed institutional memory, the identification of reference copies, the management of access, copyright, and personal-data conditions, and the organization of heterogeneous materials in ways that could serve both public users and archival institutions. This dual orientation is central to the project: a curated selection of materials is publicly accessible through the Eurokaz Website, including the Eurokaz Digital Archive, while the complete analog and digitized Eurokaz archive, housed in the Croatian State Archives in Zagreb, addresses the requirements of long-term safeguarding, standardized archival description, and regulated access to the full body of materials.

In its complete form, the archive constitutes a rare longitudinal record of experimental theater practices intersecting with media technologies, global artistic flows, and local socio-political transformations. For scholars in digital humanities, it offers not only a rich body of primary source material but also a valuable example of grassroots archival work, memory reconstruction, and the afterlife of performance in digital form.

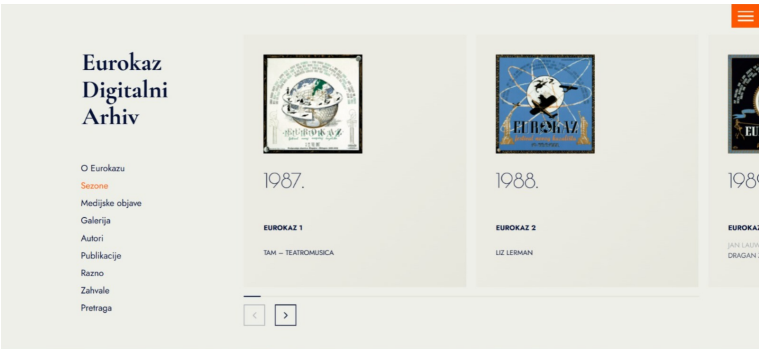


Figure 1: Eurokaz Digital Archive, “Seasons” section. The screenshot shows the chronological navigation of the archive and the main content categories, including seasons, media releases, gallery, authors, publications, miscellaneous materials, acknowledgments, and search.

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Figure 2: Eurokaz Digital Archive, 1987 season page, "Festivalske kronike" [Festival Chronicles] section. The screenshot illustrates access to audiovisual documentation related to the festival.



Figure 3: Eurokaz Digital Archive, 1987 season page, "Program" section. The screenshot shows a user-oriented overview of the festival program, organized by companies, countries, and production titles.



Figure 4: Eurokaz Digital Archive, 1991 season page. The screenshot shows a list of digitized materials associated with a single festival edition, illustrating the organization of heterogeneous documentation by year.

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Figure 5: Eurokaz Digital Archive, 1987 season page, "Tisak" [Press] and "Audio" sections. The screenshot shows access to scanned press materials, bibliographic files, and digitized audio recordings.



Figure 6: Eurokaz Digital Archive, document viewer for materials related to Societas Raffaello Sanzio. The screenshot illustrates embedded access to digitized textual documentation within the public-facing archive interface.

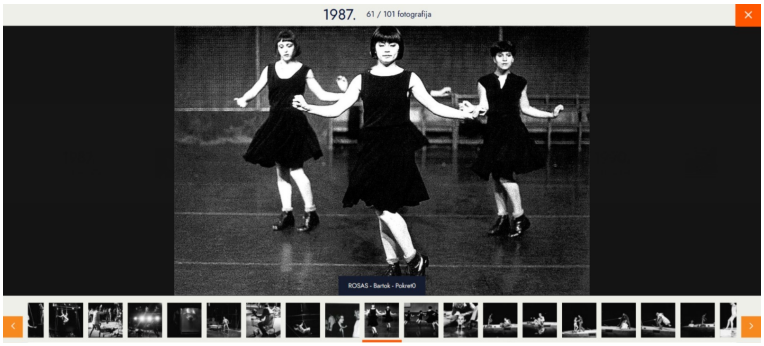


Figure 7: Eurokaz Digital Archive, 1987 photo gallery. The screenshot shows photographic documentation of Rosas, Bartók / Pokret, with thumbnail navigation through the digitized image set.

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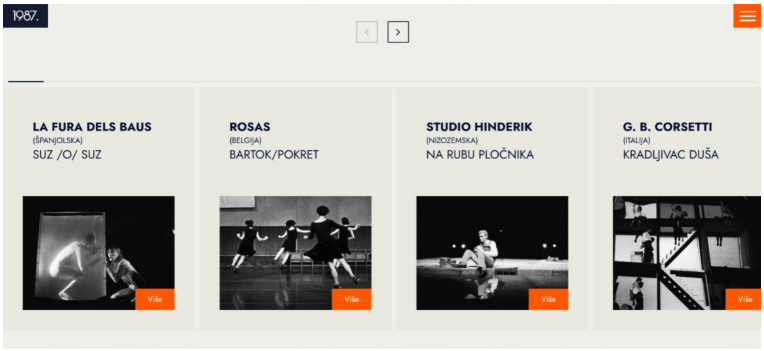


Figure 8: Eurokaz Digital Archive, 1987 season page, program card view. The screenshot shows individual entries for productions presented at the festival, combining basic program information with visual documentation and links to further materials.

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