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ARCHIVES AND ARCHIVISTS IN DIGITAL AGE: THE IMPACT OF DIGITIZATION ON THE HABITS OF ARCHIVAL WORKERS - THE CASE OF PICTURE POSTCARDS

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to present findings of the research on changes in the habits of workers, who are employed in the archives.

Methods/approach: We checked if the archivists still send picture postcards from conferences and other meetings, and if they still archive the postcards. We tried to establish the numerical ratio between archived picture postcards and digital photos. We designed a questionnaire that was sent to various addresses.

Results: The review of the responses completed by respondents showed that the number of sent postcards will decrease slightly in the future, while the sending of digital photos and digital posts on social networks will increase.

Conclusions/findings: Changing habits should encourage archivists to change the practise of archiving collections and pay more attention to modern technology. At the same time, employees in the archives should still be the ones to keep the tradition of sending picture postcards, because they are bound by the obligation to protect cultural heritage, which includes raising people's awareness of maintaining habits as the preservation of intangible culture heritage.

Key Words: picture postcards, archives, picture postcard's collections, social networks, archival science and future

1 INTRODUCTION

This research was conducted to examine how digitization affects changes in the habits of archivists. We checked if participants of conferences and other meetings still send postcards. The questionnaires were sent to the addresses of the participants of the International Archives Day, organized by the International Institute of Archival Sciences that took place at the end of October 2019 in Koper. At last year's conference, we discussed the impact of social change on archives, including the impact of digitisation, while the conference in 2020 is focused on the topic »archives and digitization«. We are often unaware ourselves when we discuss the archives and digitization. It seems that we do not always recognize that we, archivists and other workers in the archives, are an important part of the archives, too. We could even say that we come second, right

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after the archival materials. The research subject is seemingly straightforward, but it is, in fact, very important, as the research unveiled how changes in the age, that we call digital (and we are only at the beginning of this era) influences our habits. We began writing the article in one of the most critical periods of modern history - at the time of coronavirus pandemic.

The subject of our research seems very simple. We have explored a completely common practice that we all know well: we choose a postcard, pay for it, write an address on it, write down the text, sign it, ask our family members or friends to add their signatures or maybe a drawing, buy postage stamps, find a mailbox and, finally, throw the postcard in the mailbox slot. The postman then delivers the postcard to the addressee's home, the addressee reads it, cheers it and puts it away on a shelf or in a drawer. Some people collect postcards, others collect stamps, and still others stick postcards on the pieces of kitchen furniture. But each postcard has its own story, and we can find many of these in the postcard's collections. Different sciences treat postcards differently: art history, history, anthropology, literary sciences; the list goes on to military sciences, logistics and futuristic, library sciences, museology and archival studies, etc. (Millman, 2013). All these sciences have different views on postcards (Ferguson, 2006), postcards can be used even as a key sources in historical research on health care in the early 1900s (Hook, 2005, 386). And, finally, the most interesting question to librarians, museologists and archivists alike, is the eternal question of where to place postcards: do they belong to archives or museums, or perhaps to libraries (Radovanovič, 2002; Semlič & Šauperl, 2013). From the point of view of the archivists, we are not interested in what happened on a holiday, but sometimes we can be a little curious. We are interested in the story of how this postcard found its way into the archive. We can imagine one of millions of postcards preserved in public archives or in the archives of a private collector. Our research was not concerned with the most famous collections and the oldest collections, nor with the collectors. We tackled the question of whether the habit of sending postcards in their current form will survive at all.

But before we describe the results of the survey, we must clarify that most archives do keep postcard's collections (Semlič & Šauperl, 2013). These collections in Slovenian archives have already been partly digitized. The archives of Television Slovenia, public television service, keeps a special collection of postcards and photographs of different towns and places (Udovič & Omladič, 1988). Interestingly, there are many private postcards that were sent by co-workers from vacations or private and business trips and are preserved in the collection. These postcards were classified in the archive under the classification code of panoramas and they have been used as material for television news in the announcements of articles or as pictorial materials in broadcasts.

2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The idea of the subject for this research was born at the end of last year's conference of International Institute of Archival Science in Koper (2019), when we were informed about the topics of lectures for next year (2020), and when the conference participants went to buy postcards in the shop. We therefore became interested in the future destiny of buying and sending postcards, and what changes may be expected in the archives regarding the storage of interpersonal communication documents. In the survey, we asked archive workers for their opinion on how the habit of sending postcards will be maintained or changed in the digital age and how these changes will affect archival work.

We stated the following hypotheses:

- 1. In the future, people will send fewer postcards;
- 2. Classic postcards will be replaced by digital photos;
- 3. The archives are ready for the changes that lie ahead.

We designed the questions in a way that, with the help of the answers, we would be able to monitor changes in the people's habits at different times and on different occasions, including the occasions when the archivists would send postcards from archival conferences and other meetings.

We asked the archival workers the following questions:

Do you send picture postcards?

Did you send picture postcards in these time periods? (until 1994, from 1995 to 2000, from 2001 to 2005, from 2006 to 2010, from 2011 to 2015, from 2016 to 2020)

Do you send digital photos to relatives, acquaintances, friends and co-workers?

Do you post digital photos on social media?

What problems do you encounter when you buy postcards?

Do you have a collection of postcards in your institution (archive, museum, library)?

Do you archive materials from social media?

Do you archive amateur digital photos (such as those taken by yourself or your co-workers - if they are not professional photographers)?

Do you think people will still send postcards in the future?

We ended the questionnaire with an optional question in which respondents were able to give an opinion on postcards (whether they like them, whether they are attracted to their visual image, if they currently collect them or did collect them in their childhood, how they enjoy receiving postcards in the mailbox, and whether they think that postcards are more genuinely personal and sincere than posts on social media).

We used "One Click Survey" online tool to create a survey questionnaire and process questions to different addresses. E-mail addresses were obtained from participants at various international conferences (International Archives Day in Trieste, Conference on Technical and Content Problems of Contemporary Archival Science in Radenci, Archival Practice in Tuzla, FIAT / IFTA International Television Archives Conferences and other international meetings), and from the official internet sites of the archives in the Slovenian public archives network. Questionnaires were also sent to students of archival science and documentation and doctoral students of archival sciences at the higher education institution Alma Mater Europaea - European Center Maribor. We have received 62 responses from addressees (approximately half of those addressed in Slovenia) by 17 July 2020.

2.1 Subject of the Research

There were three objects of the research: postcards, sending postcards, and their fate in the near and distant future. In the short presentation of the history of sending postcards, we will summarize only findings of Primož Premzl, and briefly present how the first customers sent postcards in the 19th century. At this point we also need to admit that we failed to find the quoted book describing the enthusiasm of German tourists for postcards at the end of the 19th century. According to the position of the book on the library shelves, we were convinced that it was the work of the English writer Jerome Klapka Jerome, but we could not find these excerpts in any of the studied works. We urge read-

ers to tolerate the weakness of our photographic memory, at least under conditions that prevailed in the Slovenian libraries during the first wave of coronavirus epidemic.²

The beginnings of the increasing use of postcards in the last quarter of the 19th century were associated with progress in many other fields and industries. In his book "Pošta na slovenskih tleh", Primož Premzl drew attention to the improvement of the situation for postal services, advances in printing technology, and the development of photography and tourism (Premzl, 1997, 381).

Premzl (1997, 381) mentioned Prussian printed postcards from 1869 as the first postcards, while Sandra Ferguson mentioned these postcards as Austrian (Ferguson, 2006, 168). On the online encyclopaedia (https://sl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Razglednica) we found that the oldest postcard originated in England with the motif of the post office. Immediately after that Wikipedia mentions a French postcard with a motif of weapons from the Franco-Prussian War. The authors of this record should certainly be reminded of the error in the signed photographs, as the French postcard (the motif of the weapon and the inscription) is more than obviously shown as English. The other mistake from Wikipedia site is that Slovenian postcard from the series of plebiscite postcards is also incorrectly listed as a postcard from the 19th century.³

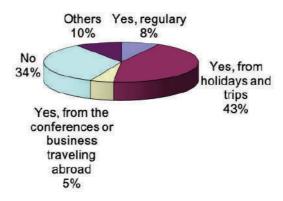
As a precursor to Slovene postcards, Premzl appointed to (1997, 382) Rogaška Slatina card from 1889. The Rogaška Slatina postcard from 1892 is considered to be the first known postcard modelled on the German ones. Most of the oldest preserved Slovene postcards were sent from various health resorts (Premzl, 1997, 382). Premzl pointed out that the decline in the popularity of sending and collecting postcards has already been influenced by technology. This first happened with the development and accessibility of telephone connections after the First World War (Premzl, 1997, 385). He also pointed out that the main credit goes to the collectors for preserving many postcards that are now part of archival or museum collections (Premzl, 1997, 396): "Old postcards are now part of an invaluable cultural heritage. An important historical source for research in various fields (local, ethnological, national, political, etc.) are the pictorial and also the written part (text)" (Premzl, 1997, 397). During World war I. were postcards painted by major artists. Motifs and themes were developed to impressive images (Danielson, 2013; Jacob & Van Ells, 2013).

2.2 Research Result

The analysis of the received answers pointed that eight percent of the respondents from the Republic of Slovenia send postcards regularly, 44 percent send postcards from vacations and trips, five percent from business trips and participation in conferences abroad. Just over a third (34 percent) of respondents "don't send postcards at all" (see Chart 1). We also received six responses with additional explanations (ten percent): "I send something small, once a year from vacation", "from vacation, trips, business trip or when attending a conference", "only occasionally", "increasingly rarely", "Occasionally", and "sometimes, not always".

² All readers are kindly asked to tell us which humourist perfectly described the 19th century postcard explosion. Memory loss reminds us of the importance of archives as guardians of memory – human memory is fleeting but the archival resources are permanent.

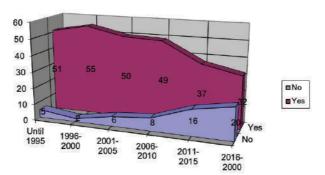
³ The editors of the website should, as soon as possible, correct the misspelled »French-Russian war« in the year 1870 into »French-Prussian war«.



Graph 1: Do you send postcards?

Respondents used to send postcards more frequently in the past (see Graph 2). To the question about sending postcards in different time periods (until 1995, then in the five years 1996-2000, 2001-2005, 2006-2010, 2011-2015 and 2016-2020), we received answers confirming that the habit of sending postcards was slowly disappearing. Until 1995, nine percent of respondents didn't send postcards, but these answers must also take into account those who were still too young during this period, so that the answers from the following years give us a better picture of the decline of postcards:

- by 1995, 91% of respondents sent postcards,
- between 1996 and 2000, 96% of respondents sent postcards,
- between 2001 and 2005, 89% of respondents sent postcards,
- between 2006-2010, 86% of respondents sent postcards,
- between 2011-2015, 70% of respondents sent postcards,
- Between 2016 and 2020, 62% of respondents sent postcards.



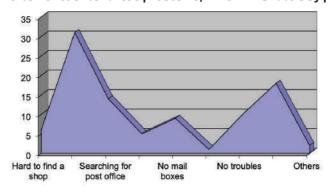
Graph 2: Did you send postcards in these time periods?

Looking at the graph, we can immediately notice that, in a quarter of the century, the share of those who do not send postcards has risen from four to 38 percent, and the declining trend has risen the most in the last decade. This was checked with the next question to see if we could expect an explicit decline in the number of postcards sent by holidaymakers in the future.

Almost half of the respondents "used to send picture postcards", but today they "no longer send postcards" (48 percent). Thirteen percent of respondents said that they would send postcards "regularly", and a good quarter (26 percent) said that they would keep sending them for "as long as mail exists". No one circled the answer that they had "never sent" postcards.

Among the answers we received some additional explanations: "I only send them for holidays", "maybe sometimes more often, but mostly from the (main) holiday once a year", "I send them less and less", "I do when I see a nice postcard, and I will continue sending them"," I do send them once a year "," occasionally "," still occasionally "," I used to send them, not any more today".

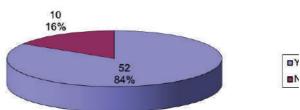
Therefore, we asked the postcard senders what problems they normally encountered when deciding to buy and send postcards (see Graph 3). The first problem turned out to be "finding a shop, kiosk or newsagent with postcards", which was stated by exactly one tenth or ten percent of the respondents. The biggest problem mentioned by as many as half (50 percent) is that the "postcard stores don't sell postage stamps". Nearly a quarter of respondents (23 percent) then found it difficult to trace down a post office where they would sell stamps, and eight percent of them have trouble waiting in long lines at the post office. There are also growing problems with finding mailboxes, which was mentioned by 15 percent of the respondents. At the very end, another problem was set by the very lack of writing pencil when purchasing postcards. Sixteen percent of respondents, who send postcards, did not list any problems; same goes for the 29 percent of people, who do not send postcards. We also received these two additional answers: "I want to write but sometimes, when it's least necessary, the pencil doesn't work", and "I have a hard time finding the motivation to write."



Graph 3: I often encounter these problems, when I want to buy postcards:

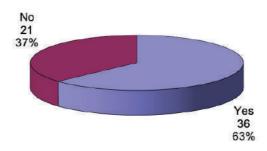
But these little inconveniences are unlikely to displace the long-standing habit of writing postcards. The old habit is more threatened by the change of general lifestyle. These changes are caused by modern technology, in that digitalisation of our everyday habits allows, among other benefits, for an easy and fast sending of messages and photos without the above-mentioned hassles. Therefore, when asked whether they send digital photos to relatives, acquaintances, friends or co-workers, 84 percent of respondents answered in the affirmative (see Chart 4). However, there are fewer people who post photos on social media. So far, this habit still has a ratio of 35 percent in favour of those who post photos, to 65 percent of those who do not post photos on social media. Among those, who post photos on social media, Facebook (30 percent) and Instagram (20 percent) have a convincing lead, followed by links on LinkedIn (8 percent), Pinterest, C and Strava (each network one percent).

Graph 4: Do you send digital photos?

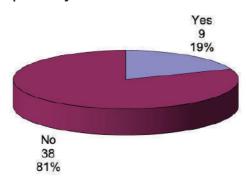


We put the question of whether the institutions (archives, libraries, museums etc.) archive materials from social media and amateur digital photos, and whether the mentioned institutions keep postcards in special collections. Most respondents (69 percent) confirmed that they keep postcards in a special collection, 13 percent said "no", six percent of respondents were "unaware of this", and five percent of respondents were "not employed in an archive, library or museum". There were some other answers too: "By chance one was preserved", "I keep it in my own archive", "we keep postcards in a photo collection", and "we keep a collection of photos and postcards". These responses have convinced us that it was perfectly correct to ask the participants in the survey if their institutions do keep amateur photographs in their collections; that is, those photographs taken by themselves or their co-workers (in cases where the latter are not professional photographers). Most respondents (58 percent) confirmed that they did keep such photos, some respondents skipped the question, and some stated that they were "not aware of it because they were already retired", and one participant explained that they "archived them if potentially suitable for a project" (see Graph 5). We can especially thank this last answer in that it confirms that a photograph of a good quality that may be used for viewing at an exhibition, display in an anthology or elsewhere, also meets the criteria for permanent archiving.

Graph 5: Do you archive amateur digital photos?

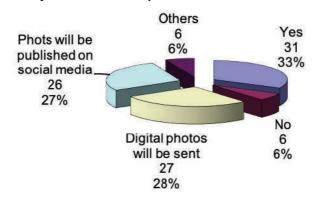


The current situation in archiving materials from social media is worse. Slovenian archives are still late in determining the criteria of archiving social media materials, and only fifteen percent of the participants in the survey confirmed that they do archive materials from social media in their institutions (see Chart 6).



Graph 6: Do you archive social media records?

The participants were asked about their opinion on whether the habit of sending post-cards would be kept in the future or not. Half of the respondents answered that "it would be", while ten percent of the people answered that they "would not be sending post-cards in the future". In addition, 44 percent of respondents believed that, in the future, people would only send "digital postcards", and 42 percent believed that people would "post photos on social media" (see Chart 7). We received some additional responses, with regard to which we are especially grateful for the reminder that the future is a rather open concept. We should probably divide the issue into slots of ten, twenty, fifty or a hundred years into the future. Even though one of the respondents answered that people would send less and less postcards, we also received this answer: "For as long as they can be bought, I will keep on sending them" and "maybe in the future sending classic postcards will become relevant again". In addition, we also received a response that was critical of postal services: "I sincerely hope so. But I'm afraid not, because postal services are becoming less and less postcards friendly; some of my postcards never reached the addressees."



Graph 7: Do you think that the postcards will be sent in the future?

At the end of the survey, we added an optional question asking the respondents for an optional opinion on postcards (do you like them, are you attracted to their visual image, do you collect them or did you collect them as a child, how do you enjoy postcards in your mailbox, or do you think they are more genuinely personal and honest than posts on social media). Even though the question was optional, we received as many as 38 answers.

Some were shorter than the others. Since postcards are an important part of archival and museum collections (archives or museum items), and will, of course, remain so for as long as there are archives, museums and libraries, regardless of whether the people will still be sending them or not, we publish the answers in full and in original record:

- Postcards show a more genuine and honest attitude towards the recipient than sending large amounts of digital footage or posting on social media when we share our intimacy with people we barely know;
- Plenty of success;
- I have always liked postcards, but unfortunately there are not many good motives; they are too kitschy;
- Postcards are "ql", but the senders must make an effort and write something original on them and not just a nice greeting from Banja Luka, we have a nice time;
- I like interesting, beautiful, artistic postcards with imaginative motifs, I look forward to receiving postcards, they definitely seem more personal to me. The sender must think harder when sending postcards to special friends;
- I like them. Both, the image that is shown, as well as the record and stamp (which hasn't
 always been on a postcard in last years). I used to collect them as a child. Now I am collecting them again, because others have finally started sending me postcards as well;
- I like postcards, their purpose is to send them and make the recipient happy. I hope this
 tradition won't be completely lost in the digital age. I always buy at least 3 postcards
 for home and for my own archives. I encourage the young ones to send postcards;
- I really like postcards and this way of receiving greetings from elsewhere directly to my mailbox and not just through social media. I am a big fan of postcards and I've kept them for many years. Nice memory. I always send a postcard to my home address as a souvenir;
- They are genuine and sincerer, dedicated to the person, family and show respect to someone;
- From the 4th class of elementary school to a few years after employment, I sent a huge number of letters and postcards, at one point I had more than 50 correspondents from all over the world. The feeling of getting a letter from somewhere far away, admiring a handwritten address, a stamp, a postmark and opening an envelope in anticipation of the news was invaluable to me. It was similar with postcards to find out from the title page from which country the postcard is from, to admire the (un) originality of the photo, to design and guess who remembered you somewhere far away, on holiday ... I didn't really gather postcards in a special collection, but I kept them, and I still keep many of them today. I attached them to the door of my room and some, the growingly yellowed ones are still there; the most valuable are those sent to me by a dear friend who died in a car accident ten years ago. When I look at these postcards at the door, I still have the illusion that he is still here, just lying there somewhere on the shores of Loch Morlich having a nice time;
- They are more genuinely personal than sending photos over the phone or posting on a social media, mainly because it also takes a little more effort to send classic postcards and send them to those you really want to greet; A special feeling when receiving a postcard from abroad;
- Of course, it's great to get a classic postcard, but I don't think it's more "personal" if we send a digital photo or post it on social media, it's a photo we took ourselves. So, it's more personal. However, the texts on the classic postcards usually only followed the generally accepted pattern. So, anyway, more personal is the handwriting;

- Well, I look forward to receiving them, but the same is valid for phone calls, e-mails, ... other forms of news from loved ones, friends, ...
- I still keep the postcards I've got;
- Postcards are a wonderful thing, especially if they are really beautiful and with them you express attention to everyone you like to remember;
- Yes;
- I always enjoy postcards, they are more authentic than the social media;
- They are really more authentic, I'm looking forward to them, maybe we'll start sending them again ... The holiday season is approaching ...
- Like most people, I really like to receive a postcard. That is why I try to send postcards as well:
- I look forward to postcards, they are more authentic and personal;
- All the best about postcards. It is a pity that they were replaced mainly by posts on social media;
- Postcards are, of course, more personal and more durable. I've always cheered them
 on in my mailbox, so I used to send them from vacation until a few years ago, but
 now I'm lazy in that regard. However, this poll encouraged me a bit to send a postcard, because it simply has a certain charm. Anyone who gets a physical postcard in
 this digital age especially appreciates it in my opinion. Even greeting cards on holidays have unfortunately become a rare treasure;
- I look forward to them, but at the same time I'm too lazy to send them;
- I have saved all the postcards I have received so far;
- I like them, I don't collect them, I enjoy them in my mailbox, they are more authentic (you must put in a little more effort than just a few clicks);
- I especially like old postcards, and the newer ones are those that attract with a motif
 or are well designed. I hope that modern forms of communication will not completely displace them, but they probably do not have much chance of survival. Personally,
 I still enjoy postcards in my mailbox and therefore send them myself, especially from
 trips around the world:
- I have always liked postcards and I would be sorry if they fall into oblivion ... I think they are much more authentic and personal, as I usually choose the one that best suits the recipient! In addition, they are written by hand. They still make me happy, but they practically don't arrive in mail anymore;
- I used to send postcards from various trips and have collected them. They are a pictorial source of times past;
- I still enjoy postcards, this is a genuine personal reaction to the event, I collected them as a child;
- They are a fond memory of the holidays;
- Postcards are more authentic and personal, I collect them and always look forward to them when I get them in my mailbox;
- I buy a postcard wherever I am. Of all the mountaint peaks I have conquered, I have them. And that with a mountain stamp. Postcards are and always will be something special, something that touches you when you find it in your mailbox;
- I think the addressees tend to be less appreciative and consequently there are fewer senders;

- I send postcards from holidays and trips. Often (if I like the motif), I also buy one for my own collection. I started doing this as a child. Postcards, which come to my mailbox less and less often, I sincerely rejoice, as they are more personal, and they definitely require more than mms from the sender.
- I collect postcards of places I visit (as a souvenir).
- As an employee at the archives, I would like it if the postcards contained the date of the photo and the name of the place;
- Postcards are beautiful ... and they have their own charm. However, we send less and less of them because digital media is more at hand;
- Indifferent, it is essential for me to get ideas from them for my trips, travels, which I
 can also get from social media;
- Analogue ones are different from digital postcards. It takes more effort to send them than digital pictures. But I'm looking forward to both, analogue as well as digital, as they have the same purpose.

We didn't receive enough answers from abroad - only seven valid ones - which means that we didn't have enough answers to produce a reliably detailed analysis. However, we can compare the results of the survey with those obtained in the survey in Slovenia. One third of the participants in the survey send postcards from holidays and trips. Even abroad, we can see a declining trend in the habit of sending postcards in the 21st century. Before 2000, postcards were sent by another 83 percent of survey participants, between 2001 and 2005 by 67 percent, and later this share dropped to 40 percent. 60 percent of participants used to send postcards, but they do not send them anymore. 40 percent of participants say they will continue to send the postcards in the future, too. They also face the biggest inconveniences when they try to buy post stamps. One-third of respondents said they couldn't get stamps at the place where they bought postcards, and as many as twothirds (67 percent) pointed out the problem of finding post offices where they sell stamps. 20 percent of respondents don't send postcards, and 20 percent say they have no problem buying and sending postcards. Among the participants employed in the archives and related institutions, three-quarters answered that they keep postcards in a special collection. One of them answered that they keep postcards "in the archives", but "not in a special collection". 83 percent of respondents send digital photos to relatives, acquaintances and co-workers, and the same number of them post photos on social media, mostly on Facebook (80 percent), followed by Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter (20 percent each). 60 percent of participants confirmed that they archive materials from social media, and they all confirmed that they archive digital records made by themselves or their colleagues in the archive. Half of them are convinced that people will still send postcards by regular mail in the future, but seventeen percent believe that this habit will disappear. About a third of respondents believe that classic postcards will replace digital postcards, and one third that people will post digital photos on social media. Among the additional answers at the end of the survey, we received the following:

- I'm looking forward to postcards;
- I was always happy when I received a postcard. Postcards are more authentic and more personal than posts on social media;
- Istill like to send and receive postcards, especially from holidays, vacations and business trips.

We also received a warning that it wasn't possible to enter the name of the country in the survey. Apparently, there was a technical problem as the question was originally there; the results, however, showed us that it was somehow dropped by mistake.

3 CONCLUSION

A postcard is a small object, which can be an important source in research. It is part of cultural heritage and postcards as such are kept in archives, museums, libraries and other institutions. However, they will change form in the future. Crucial questions in our research about these changes are:

- Will people send postcards in the future?
- Will digital photos replace classic postcards?
- Are archives ready for the changes that lie ahead?

The results of the survey confirmed our claim that people would send "fewer postcards in the future". In addition, most respondents believe that digital photos will replace classic postcards. The changes will have a noticeable impact on the work in the archives: new collections will be created. We are pleased that our research has confirmed that the employees in the archives are prepared for the coming changes in the future. This means that the archives will be able to preserve the material cultural heritage for future generations. We can only be concerned about (too) late responses when archiving materials from social media. However, the preservation of the intangible cultural heritage should also be considered. This intangible heritage includes individual habits, along with the habit of sending postcards. Therefore, we urge you to preserve this beautiful habit and pass it on to future generations.⁴

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⁴ Finally, I would like to add a brief note. I am curious to see how many postcards I will receive from you in the mailbox. So, do take some time and good will and send a picture postcard to: Aleksander Lavrenčič, Maistrova 1 1270 Litija, Slovenija, Thank you!

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