Title: Controlled vocabularies in the organization and management of cultural heritage: practical guidelines

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Abstract:

Our aim is to present the publication *Controlled vocabularies in the organization and management of cultural heritage: practical guidelines*. This work was developed in the framework of the *Working Group Information Systems in Museums* of the *Portuguese Association of Librarians, Archivists and Documentalists* (BAD). It was based on the academic and professional experience of the group`s members and on the book *Introduction to Controlled Vocabularies: Terminology for Art, Architecture, and Other Cultural Works*, by Patricia Harpring.

This guide is a work in progress and intends to serve as a supporting tool for the community of professionals working in the area of cultural heritage cataloguing.

1. Introduction

In order to pursue our goal of presenting the guide *Controlled vocabularies in the organization and management of cultural heritage: practical guidelines* (2017)[5], we first have to put in context the origin of this publication. This guide was created by the subgroup *Terminologies* of the *Working Group Information Systems in Museums[6]* of the *Portuguese Association of Librarians, Archivists and Documentalists* (BAD). The working group was created in 2012 and was approved by BAD in the same year, after having defined its mission, objectives, operational concepts and the organization of work among its members.

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[5] To find the publications in the bibliographical references, search, in Portuguese: Os vocabulários controlados na organização e gestão de informação sobre património cultural: orientações práticas.

[6] To find the publications in the bibliographical references of the working group, search, in Portuguese: Grupo de Trabalho Sistemas de Informação em Museus (GT-SIM).

In order to pursue its strategic goals, the *Working Group Information Systems in Museums* has defined the following action lines:

- Diagnostic of the information systems in Portuguese museums.
- Methodologies and procedures to be used by professionals in museums. This action line subdivides in three orientations:
  - Controlled vocabularies (subgroup *Terminologies);*
  - Translation of the document *Cataloguing Cultural Objects* (CCO), developed by the *VRA – Visual Resources Association*, in 2006;
  - Translation of technical guides for the implementation of SPECTRUM.
- Constitution of a virtual library (Virtual Documentation Center - CDV).
- Preparation of seminars, conferences and meetings.
- Promotion of the working group activities through different communication channels.

Our guide intends to serve as facilitating toll in Portuguese language for the utilization of controlled terminology in memory institutions, featuring the most common types of controlled vocabularies, examples of national and international use of controlled vocabularies and guidelines for their creation and adaptation.

2. Methodology

In the last decades, several terminological control tools in Portuguese regarding cultural heritage were published, mostly in the context of academic research projects and in projects resulting from partnerships among museum institutions. There were also individual efforts taken by different entities in order to develop specific solutions to the particular demands of their own documentation projects.

This state of affairs showed the necessity of the creation of a guidance document in order to establish a common ground that would help the professionals working in memory institutions to create, develop and adapt their controlled vocabularies. Having this goal in mind, a first step was taken and consisted of an internal debate inside the working group, which lead to the organization of two seminars: *The use of thesauri in cultural heritage management systems*[7], in 2013, and *Museum organization of knowledge systems*[8], in 2015. Furthermore, a list of references on controlled vocabularies was gathered. These references are available online on the *Virtual Documentation Center* (CDV), created using the Zotero platform. The CDV[9] currently hosts 117 online references in its controlled vocabularies virtual library, selected by the group`s members. The methodology employed consisted of an online research of controlled vocabularies sources, and after having collected the necessary data we filled out the fields of the Zotero platform with primary information, such as *title*, *author (s)*, *date*, *languages*, *vocabulary type*, *abstract inclusion* and *website link*. Finally, we created tags to help the information retrieval and we periodically update these references.

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[7] In Portuguese, *A utilização dos thesauri nos sistemas de gestão do património cultural.*

[8] In Portuguese, *Sistemas de Organização do Conhecimento em Museus.*

[9] Almeida, M. J. de, Ferreira, F., Medeiros, F., Patrão, S., & Salgado, A. (n.d.). *Centro de documentação virtual|Zotero |Groups GT_SIM*. Retrieved Ago 25, 2017, from https://www.zotero.org/groups/81851/gt-sim/items/collectionKey/DTSUTA33.

These processes culminated in the publication of our guide *Controlled vocabularies in the organization and management of cultural heritage: practical guidelines*, in 2017. This document is also complementary to the CDV, helping users who work with information organization to use controlled vocabularies and other terminologies.

Our working processes included the analysis of specific literature on the creation of controlled vocabularies, and we selected the publication in English by Patricia Harpring *Introduction to Controlled Vocabularies: Terminology for Art, Architecture, and Other Cultural Works* (2013) as a basis. This book is a detailed technical guide for the construction of controlled vocabularies and addresses conceptual questions and issues pertinent to professionals in the area, bringing together, developing and systematizing reflections on the nature of controlled vocabularies, their construction, their different typologies, potentialities, difficulties and requirements.

The guide is also based is the academical and professional experience of the subgroup *Terminologies* of the *Working Group Information Systems in Museums* members, and one of our objectives is to adapt this thematic to the Portuguese cultural panorama, using an accessible language and contextualizing it with examples from the Portuguese reality.

This document is available on the BAD website (Jorge, Medeiros, Alves, & Medina, 2017) and intends to generate debate among peers. We expect this discussion to be the origin of the development of new complementary support tools.

3. Deliverables

One of the first results to be presented from the subgroup *Terminologies* of the *Working Group Information Systems in Museums* is the research of national and international terminology tools, which is available online at the Virtual Documentation Center (CDV), in the area *Controlled Vocabularies* (Almeida, Ferreira, Medeiros, Patrão, & Salgado, n.d.).

One other result is the creation guide *Controlled vocabularies in the organization and management of cultural heritage: practical guidelines*.

The objectives of this guide are:

1. To bring awareness to the community of professionals of memory institutions about the importance of terminological normalization in the management of information;
2. To define and characterize a set of key concepts in the organization and management of information;
3. To characterize the different types of controlled vocabularies and their respective domains of application;
4. To gather national and international resources and reference projects that can serve as support for the development and improvement of others already existing;
5. To offer professionals a set of general guidelines for the construction of controlled vocabularies of different nature, as well as authority files.

The guide features a set of guidelines on the use and creation of controlled vocabularies, organized into nine chapters, namely:

1. Project presentation;

2. Reference to the prerequisites for the development of documentation projects (data structure, registration procedures, data syntax and terminology);
3. Presentation of national and international standards for the development of controlled vocabularies;
4. Methodological and conceptual framework;
5. Typologies of controlled vocabularies;
6. Tools related to controlled vocabularies;
7. National and international reference projects;
8. Guidelines for the creation of controlled vocabularies;
9. Future development perspectives.

The guide has a pioneering character in the panorama of the organization and management of information in memory institutions in Portugal, mainly in two aspects: from the theoretical point of view, it constitutes the methodological proposal regarding the cataloging of cultural heritage, nationally and internationally; from a professional point of view, it came up in the context of a working group and it can be further developed and adapted by each institution, according to its needs and specificities.

The demand for the guide was duly substantiated in the recent publication *Diagnostic of the information systems in Portuguese museums* (Santos, Serôdio, & Ferreira, 2017), which purpose was to present the main characteristics of museums in the areas of information management of their various types of heritage. This study is the result of the application of a questionnaire survey to the 710 museums that comprised the universe under study and collected 222 valid answers. Particularly in what concerns to the question regarding the use of controlled vocabularies, 70% stated not to use controlled vocabularies, whilst 23% responded affirmatively and 21% did not give a clear response. This scenario shows the relevance of the continuity of the debate on this theme.

The guide is not an end in itself and is constantly being updated, being open to debate and eventual changes. It should also be noted that it will be up to each user and institution to create, promote and apply their own guidelines according to the specificities of their collections. For this reason, this document is not a model to be followed strictly, but rather a methodological proposal that can be applied to different realities.

4. Prospects for the future

Because this document is a work in progress, this guide is open to theoretical and methodological discussion, whilst its priority is to provide a set of practical guidelines to the professionals of memory institutions which will help them achieve an effective and consistent organization and management of information through the use of controlled vocabularies.

The disclosure of this work, through participation on conferences at national and international level, aims to open a debate among professionals and contribute to a review of this document by experts and the optimization of the respective processes. Next year we plan to include a glossary of terms and create practical tools to help the management of information, the creation of controlled vocabularies and the normalization of existing terminologies, like toolkits.

We are also in contact with several Portuguese museums with the objective of developing a field research in order to test the guide among its professionals. After having received the feedback from this initiative, we expect to improve our contents.

Our work, done by professionals and addressed to professionals, encourages networking and invites all interested participants to read, discuss and contribute to this publication and to participate in the activities of the *Working Group Information Systems in Museums*, aimed at those who wish to study and work in the organization and management of information in cultural heritage.

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