

ISAD(G): Synthesis or Innovation in Archival Description Traditions?

by

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Ph.D. thesis in Archival Studies

University College London

February 2004

Abstract

Over the past years the International Council on Archives (ICA) has developed the "International Standards for Archival Description" ISAD(G). The last draft of the ISAD(G) was adopted by the ICA in 1993 and was revised at the 14th International Congress on Archives held in Seville, in September 2000. However, at present the ISAD(G) is not yet well known and not often used in countries with strong national archival traditions. After giving an overview on traditional definitions of archival description, my research analyses the current implementation of the ISAD(G) in North America, in some European countries and in the institutions of the European Union. The application of ISAD(G) with its innovative key-elements represents a starting-point for future developments of archival description in the international debate among archivists. This research deals also with the difficult implementation of these standards in databases through the examination of several case studies. It also looks at the impact of electronic records on traditional archival theory and on archival description techniques. The thesis analyses the impact of the Internet on archival theory and practice, and looks at the Internet's challenge to access policies through the replacement of traditional finding aids. In the conclusions the thesis analyses the ICA's revision of the "International Standard Archival Authority Record (Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families)", ISAAR(CPF), in its relationship to the implementation of ISAD(G) in view of possible outcomes for future techniques of archival description, and makes proposals for future research.

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List of abbreviations

A2A	Access to Archives
AFNOR	Association française de normalisation
AIPA	Autorita' per l'Informatica nella Pubblica Amministrazione
ANAI	Associazione Nazionale Archivisti Italiani
ANSI	American National Standards Institute
APPM	Archives, Personal Papers and Manuscripts
AS	Altiero Spinelli
CEAB	Commission Européenne Archives historiques Bruxelles
CECA	Communauté Européenne du Charbon et de l'Acier
DBMS	Data Base Management System
EAC	Encoded Archival Context
EAD	Encoded Archival Description
ERA	Electronic Records Archives
EROS	Electronic Records in Office System Programme
EURHISTAR	European Historical Archives
EUROVOC	European Vocabulary
GARE	Guidelines for Authority and Reference Entries
GENCAT	Generic Cataloguing
HTML	HyperText Markup Language
ICA	International Council on Archives
ICA-CDS	International Council on Archives – Committee on Descriptive Standards
IFLA	International Federation of Library Associations
ILS	Information Locator Systems
IMOSA	Information Management and Office Systems Advancement
INTERPARES	International Research on Preservation of Authentic Records in Electronic Systems
ISAAR(CPF)	International Standard Archival Authority Record (Corporate, Persons, Families)
ISAD(G)	International Standard for Archival Description (General)
ISBD(G)	International Standard Bibliographic Description (General)
ISO	International Standards Organisation
MAD	Manual of Archival Description
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OAIS	Open Archival Information System
OCR	Optical Character Recognition
OSI	Open Systems Interconnection
PDF	Portable Document Format
RAD	Rules for Archival Description
SGML	Standard General Markup Language
SIASFI	Sistema Informatico Archivio di Stato di Firenze
SQL	Structured Query Language
TIFF	Tagged Image File Format
UBC	University of British Columbia
UDC	Universal Decimal Classification
URL	Uniform Resource Locator
WWW	World Wide Web
XML	Extensible Markup Language

Acknowledgments

This thesis is based on my professional experience. It has been inspired by intense discussions with Ana Franqueira. Ana arrived in 1992 at the Historical Archives of the European Communities in Florence – where I was working at the time. As one of the first pioneers of standardisation of archival description, her intention was not only to renovate the existing descriptive system at HAEC but also to convert archivists' beliefs and mentalities towards the new credo of standardisation. She converted me and I am grateful to her for this. Then it was my turn to go on "mission".

I would like to thank my friends and colleagues Giuliano Terzuoli, Hannah Dunmow, Lou Drage, Mary Mackey, Marie Gallup, Stefano Vitali, Hugo Stibbe and Kent Haworth. I am grateful to my supervisors, Elizabeth Danbury and Elizabeth Shepard for their help throughout the past years and especially to Elizabeth Danbury for her strong support during the last weeks of my work. Nazneen Razwi was very helpful regarding the administrative aspects of writing a thesis. I would also like to acknowledge my parents, Giacomo and Soraya, my friends Ulrike Liebert, Till Liebert, Beatrice Gallini, Sabrina D'Amato, Meltem Uzgoren, Natalie Ognibene and Carmen Pilloni for their affection, interest and encouragement. I am especially indebted to my grandmother Bruna, a Tuscan farmer, from whom I inherited probably the atavistic common sense essential for our profession and the basis for any standards. A special thanks to Axel Körner, my husband, without whose encouraging support this thesis would probably never have seen the end.

Above all, thanks should go to Elsa, my darling daughter, for her enduring patience. In the future I promise to be the playful companion she deserves.

Introduction

The primary motivation for this doctoral thesis originated in the ambition to evaluate my practical work in archives to a more theoretical level. Although the introduction to the second edition of the Canadian Rules for Archival Description (RAD) quoted Hilary Jenkinson when stressing that standards should ultimately be a combination of "sound theory with ordinary common sense and both with practical experience"¹ the International Standard for Archival Description (ISAD(G) and, more widely, the debate about standardisation of archival description, has stirred up the archival community and has encouraged a new realisation of the importance of theoretical issues. The secondary motivation for this thesis comes from my experience of working for five years at the Historical Archives of the European Communities (HAEC) in Florence. At the beginning of the 1990s, this archive was one of the first in continental Europe to implement a standard of archival description, basing it on the Manual of Archival Description (MAD) model. As soon as the first draft of ISAD(G) appeared in 1993, HAEC started a study for implementing these new rules. The implementation of ISAD(G) in HAEC provoked intensive discussion among colleagues employed at there. Most were challenged by the requirements to implement ISAD(G) into our existing database. One particular element that brought about a very fruitful discussion during the process of implementing ISAD(G) was the fact that the HAEC holds a very wide-ranging and disparate fonds spectrum. The holdings range from those of the different institutions of the European Communities - European Commission, European Parliament, Council of the European Union,

Economic and Social Committee and Court of Auditors - to fonds from international organisations including the European Space Agency (ESA), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), to fonds from non-governmental movements and associations (union of European Federalists, European Movement); and fonds of individuals (e.g. Altiero Spinelli, Emile Noël, A. de Gasperi). The differences between these fonds were essential in the discussions on the implementation of ISAD(G). Questions to be dealt with included how to fit descriptions of personal papers and institutional papers in the same standardised database; what fields to add or to delete to the database; how to produce standardised finding aids; how to describe creator's context and etc.

The discussions that took place in Florence between 1992 and 1995 have proved fundamental for the development of my thesis. Subsequent to my five years at HAEC I worked for ten months at the archives of the European Parliament in Luxembourg. There I arranged and described, according to ISAD(G) rules, the fonds of the first directly elected President of the Parliament, Mme Simone Veil. After that, my work took me for three years to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), where I also tried to implement ISAD(G) into the descriptions of its holdings and collections. Only 50 years after its foundation in 1999 did NATO start to describe its archival fonds, but, during my time there, the archive had no experience of incorporating international standards into archival description and did not undertake any serious debate concerning such standards. Between 2000 and 2003 I worked at the European Economic and Social Committee archives, where I gained further experience in the management of a variety of EU holdings, but was also confronted with institutional reluctance to take an interest in any international or theoretical

¹ Hilary Jenkinson, A manual of Archive Administration, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1922, as quoted in: Bureau of Canadian Archivists, Rules for Archival Description,(RAD) Ottawa, Canada, Revised

debates in archival practice. Since 2003, I have worked as Head of Registry at the Anti-fraud Office (OLAF) of the European Commission in Brussels. Although not using standards for archival description in my daily work at present, I am in charge of quality standards for records management in our Office and I deal on the regular basis with issues of evidence and accountability. By using my working languages: Italian, German, French and English this dissertation tries to provide, for the first time, an in-depth analysis of the current international literature on archival description. Some case studies, undertaken in European archives, will show how and in what ways ISAD(G) can help the work of archivists not only in providing better and more effective access to archives for end users, but also in collaboration across national boundaries to safeguard national and international heritage.

My thesis tries to situate ISAD(G) in the context of European and North American standards and traditions of archival description. I have analysed the archival programmes and practices of European institutions and in particular of two very large institutions, the European Parliament and the European Commission, in order to give a framework for the implementation of ISAD(G). During my research it became apparent that there is still a lack of co-ordination in the archives field at European level, which may, if not challenged, frustrate, at least in part, the efforts made in recent years towards ensuring transparency in European governance and guaranteeing citizens access to documents and information. As the whole area has developed at such a speed since I started my research, I have taken into consideration the impact of new media (electronic records) and new means of delivery (databases and websites) on archives, hoping that my research is of possible use and application in the field. Databases and the ISAD(G) general structure and main elements have

been confronted in a number of case studies of databases. Moreover, I examined how the nature of electronic records has been challenged by postmodern theory since the 1980s. I have discussed the Internet, interfaces and web sites and their impact on archival descriptive practices and tried to point towards a number of open issues in debates among archivists. Last, I have studied the revision of both ISAD(G) in 1999 and International Standard for Archival Authority Record (Corporate, Persons, Families) (ISAAR(CPF) in 2003 and have made suggestions for further research. My final chapter summarises the conclusions of my thesis and contains recommendations for further development in archival practice and for wider and more effectively implementation of international standards.

Chapter One. ISAD(G) and archival description traditions.

This chapter will study the origins of the debate on the standardisation of archival description. There is a particular value in analysing the debate in order to explain the difficulties of implementing new standards, which should not be totally revolutionary, but at the same time will require the adoption of new practices by archivists.

The chapter will also focus on the previous national standards in archival description as a fundamental basis for the international debate and will therefore analyse some major manuals and reference books for archivists in different countries to give an historical and comparative background to the debate.¹

The research will therefore focus on some definitions like “archival description” - from some old fashioned manuals (i.e. from Muller/Feith/Fruin, *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*) to the contemporary manuals (i.e. Hensen, *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts*); or on “units of description” to identify the differences between archival description practices based on the diplomatic form of the archival material (i.e. differences between documents and acts). The definition of the “level(s) of archival description” also assumes an important role in the comparative background of the research. These major themes

¹ Bureau of Canadian Archivists *Rules for Archival Description* (prepared under the direction of the Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards) Ottawa, Canada, 1990; Michael Cook and Margaret Procter, *Manual of Archival Description*, second edition, Aldershot, Gower, 1989 (MAD2); Procter, M. and Cook, M. *Manual of Archival Description*, third edition., Aldershot, Gower, 2000 (MAD3); Steven L. Hensen (Compiled by) *Archives, Personal Papers and Manuscripts: A Cataloguing Manual for Archival Repositories, Historical Societies and Manuscript Libraries*, Chicago, Society of American Archivists, 2nd edition, 1989 (APPM2)

have been chosen mainly because they form the theoretical basis of the international standards for archival description but they are absent or used with different meanings in the national manuals for archival description. The difference between the terminology used in the ISAD(G) and terminology present in national archival rules can be used to illustrate the differences in the conceptualisation of the archival description's activity and therefore can clarify the difficulties in implementing the new standards.

The adoption of the standards should not be considered an end in itself but as an opportunity to strengthen the archival profession with better practices and archival education by codifying criteria for proper description. The amplification of contacts and interrelations in the international archival community should be seen as another essential aim. Furthermore, in the context of the dissertation the overview of archival description theory and practice in different countries will provide evidence of the fact that ISAD(G) is not exactly the synthesis of the different national experiences but much more a kind of validation of new practices in archival description which results from archival automation. Standardisation can be considered a tool that archivists must adopt and adapt for their functioning in the contemporary information age.

Definition of description

Before analysing the standards for archival description it is important to see from when and where archival description has been defined and how it has been defined. Even if the purpose of this research is not exactly the same as that of

Luciana Duranti² the questions she formulated are basically the same. “What is characteristically associated with the term “archival description”, i.e. what does the concept of archival description involve? When did the concept originate? How did it evolve?” The analysis conducted by Duranti points out that the issue of what the concept of archival description involves was non-existent until the 1980s and that the term was not even defined until the 1970s.

Has description always been a major function in the processing of archival material?

At the end of the 19th century description began to be used as a means of showing the original order of the material. Theorists of those times saw in description and intellectual arrangement a means of showing the vicissitudes of the active life of documents. Sometimes when documents could not be attributed to a specific creator they were linked to a function. The history of records became an integral part of European inventories at the beginning of the 20th century.³

At the beginning of the twentieth century the adherence to the principles of *respect des fonds* and original order could not however be applied for two main reasons: the archivists were dealing with open and quite voluminous fonds and the general public, rather than the creators, began to use archival material.

The first reason derives from the continuous partial transfer of material from the creating office to archives: thus there is no original physical order for the entire fonds. This implies that the principles of *respect des fonds* and original order can be observed only intellectually by means of description. Thus, description neither precedes physical or intellectual arrangement any more, nor does it treat the

² Duranti, L. “Origin and Development of the Concept of Archival Description”, *Archivaria*, No. 35, Spring 1993, 47-54

³ *ibid.*, 50-51

documents separately from their contextual relationships, but begins to act as a “representation”, rather than a surrogate, of the material in its intellectual order. Description becomes one with arrangement. That is why, more and more frequently, the levels of arrangement proposed by archival theorists of this century seem rather to be levels of description.

The use of the archives by the general public meant that description began to be seen as a means for making that use independent of the archivist’s specialised knowledge. Archival description was aimed primarily at compiling instruments of research for the user not the archivist. The description acquired a 'universal' character in order to be useful for every kind of research but had to serve none in particular. All documents had to be described in equal depth independently of their importance.

From the historical excursus made by Duranti, it appears that the evolution of the concept of archival description is directly linked to two main elements: the relationship between archival material and its creator and the type of archival material. These elements had influenced the purpose of description, its process and the products. The purpose of description is now to serve society’s memory, to provide evidence of the existence of documents and to guide any kind of user by illuminating the contextual relationships and the inner history of the records. The products of description are now guides, calendars and structured inventories.

Description for Duranti has never been an archival function. Instead it has been one of the means used to accomplish the only two permanent archival functions: the preservation and communication of archival material. This is probably the reason why there is no universally recognised conceptualisation of archival description.

At this stage, some definitions taken from the most known and used manuals for archivists will be introduced with the aim of finding a common denominator in the conceptualisation of archival description and of stressing that archival description has always been one of the major worries for the archival community, i.e. a major function in the archives.

In one of the fundamental manuals for archivists written by Muller Feith and Fruin⁴, the idea of description is directly linked to access for researchers, on the grounds that it is not easy for the uninitiated to find their way at first glance in an archival collection, even when it is well arranged in accordance with archival method. It is necessary to provide researchers with a guide. Furthermore, the inventory should give an outline of the contents of the collection and not of the contents of the documents. The inventory of an archival collection must in the main be arranged in conformity with the original organisation of the collection.

For one American theorist “the archival principles of provenance and original order are rooted in a desire to ensure that archival records will be accessible to researchers. Thus is not surprising that the principal means of encouraging access, i.e. archival description, must reflect an understanding of these principles. The goal of descriptive activity is to assist researchers in locating pertinent documents.”⁵

In these two definitions an important role is played by the users’ access to the archives and therefore the archival description appears as instrumental to this aim.

However, for another leading American archival theorist⁶, archival description covers all activities which must be performed in preparing finding aids.

⁴ Muller, S., Feith, J. A., Fruin, R. Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives. New York, The H. W. Wilson Company, 1940, 100, 125

⁵ Bradsher, J. G. Managing Archives and Archival Institutions. London, Mansell Publishing Limited, 1988, 70

⁶ T.R. Schellenberg, The Management of Archives, New York, Columbia University Press, 1965, 106

Records description comprises therefore two main actions: the first is to identify the record unit that is to be described and the second is to enumerate its essential qualities or attributes. This definition can be considered a pure content-oriented definition with no reference to the main principles of provenance and original order. The three definitions have, however in common, the idea of the inventory as the final product of archival description.

In the Society of American Archivists' (SAA Working Group) most recent publication, archival description is defined as "the process of capturing, collating, analysing, and organising any information that serves to identify, manage, locate and interpret the holdings of archival institutions and explain the contexts and records systems from which those holdings were selected."⁷

For the Bureau of Canadian Archivists Working Group on Archival Descriptive Standards, description is a major function in the processing of archival material, and the products of this function are finding aids of various sorts which give administrators control over their holdings and enable users and archivists to find information about particular topics.⁸

For two Canadian archivists, Carol Couture and Jean-Yves Rousseau, archival description can be summarised as the process of establishing intellectual control over holdings through the preparation of finding aids.⁹ For them the theory of finding aids is based upon the principle of universality; that is, that archives must be

⁷ Standards For Archival Description. A Handbook. Compiled by Victoria Irons Walch for the Working Group on Standards for Archival Description, Chicago, SAA, 1994, 2

⁸ Bureau of Canadian Archivists, Working Group on Archival Descriptive Standards, Toward Descriptive Standards: Report and Recommendations of the Canadian Working Group on Archival Descriptive Standards (Ottawa, 1985), 9

⁹ Carol Couture and Jean-Yves Rousseau, The life of a Document and Records Management, Montréal, Véhicule Press, 1987, 255

described as a whole before one can undertake a detailed description of the parts. The principle of universality is applied through a progression from general to the specific. In practice this principle requires the archivist first to undertake a general description of a repository's contents before proceeding to the long task of making detailed description of each collection or series.¹⁰

The three above-mentioned definitions of archival description are context-oriented definitions, which refer to the context of production of the documents and to the final products of the description process (inventories and finding aids) but no reference to the content.

The question which the standards for archival description have to answer is not only whether description has always been a major function in the processing of archival material but also whether it is the right answer to the need for balance between a good arrangement responding to the creator's needs (i.e. context-oriented description) and the researchers community and public's needs (i.e. content-oriented description)?

The following section will try and give some likely answers to these questions and possible interpretations concerning the final outcome of the standards by analysing and comparing existing national standards for archival description.

1.1 ISAD(G) and its origins: previous existing national standards for archival description

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 199

The ISAD(G) may be seen as the product of consensus or as a result of some kind of group effort which might receive broad review within organisations or potential users after its adoption or publication, or as guidelines, compiled and adopted by a specialised committee of a professional organisation as the International Council on Archives.

The main reasons for having standards are: for reasons of co-operation i.e. the sharing of information among archives; for reasons of consistency: i.e. the need to have coherent consistent information about holdings; for better communication and exchange of information between archives and for economic reasons to avoid costs deriving from the duplication of information.

The purpose of applying standards could be summarised in the need to ensure that systems deliver outputs of a certain quality, which suits the demands of their users. In the case of archival description systems, the standards can be applied to the way the data is input, stored and retrieved. The need to work towards common standards has the aim of minimising inconvenience to users and the goal of sharing or exchanging more data. The standards for archival description can therefore be included in the group of standards in the field of the computerised data exchange.

The following section will concentrate on the three pre-existing standards for description: the Archives, Personal Papers and Manuscripts (APPM) in the United States, the Rules for Archival Description (RAD) in Canada and the second edition of the Manual for Archival Description (MAD2) in the United Kingdom. These three countries are of particular interest, because they have already passed through the experience of discussing and accepting standards, and it will be therefore of some interest to analyse the path which they came along before implementing the standards. Moreover, for the general purpose of the research, it will be particularly

interesting to analyse the relationships between these national standards and the actual International standards for archival description and see whether the International standards acknowledge a debt to former national standards and in more general terms the debates among archivists that have already taken place in these three countries.

Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts (APPM)

The research here will not take into consideration all the debates on archival description in the three countries but only the recent results of the debate. For what concerns the United States, the Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts (APPM) rules can give already an idea on the state of art.

APPM was the first standard to have been formally adopted by the Council of the Society of American Archivists despite the reluctance of some archivists to the ideas of “standards” and “cataloguing”. APPM tried therefore to accommodate both the demands of archival description and the rigours of ACCR2 (the standard for library cataloguing data). In this perspective APPM gives precedence to finding aids over archival materials themselves as the chief source. The original objective behind this rule is therefore to create catalogue records of archival finding aids rather than representations of the archival materials themselves.¹¹

APPM recognises the primacy of provenance in archival description. This principle translates into a basic rule for choice of main entry in which archival

¹¹ Steven L. Hensen (Compiled by) Archives, Personal Papers and Manuscripts: A Cataloguing Manual for Archival Repositories, Historical Societies and Manuscript Libraries, Chicago, Society of American Archivists, 2nd edition, 1989 (APPM2), Rules 0.1 and 1.0B1

materials are entered on the basis of provenance¹², under the name of person, family or corporate body chiefly responsible for its creation. It also translates into a heavier emphasis on the use of notes central both in archival cataloguing and archival traditions of subject analysis.¹³

APPM acknowledges that most archival material exists in collections or groups and that the appropriate focus for the bibliographic control of such materials is the collection level. This supports the principles of archival unity, in which the significance of individual items or file units is measured principally by their relation to the collective whole, of which they may be part, and is accepted today by libraries which are starting to realise that traditional item-level bibliographic control may not always be the most logical way to provide optimal access to their collections. APPM recognises that archival materials are preserved for reasons different from those for which they were created. The principal implication of this approach has been to legitimise traditional archival finding aids such as guides and registers as sources of cataloguing data and to move the cataloguing process away from the literal transcription of information which characterises bibliographic description.¹⁴

APPM establishes a certain kind of archival description - a level which is appropriate for sharing summary information about archival holdings in national information systems.

Manual for Archival Description (second and third editions MAD2 and MAD3)

¹² *ibid*, APPM Rule 0.9

¹³ *ibid*, APPM, Rule 1.7A to B17, Note Area

¹⁴ Hensen, S. L. "The First Shall Be First: APPM and its Impact on American Archival Description", *Archivaria*, No. 35, Spring 1993, 64-70

Michael Cook's manual has been considered for adoption by the Society of Archivists as the Manual for Archival Description in the United Kingdom (MAD2 and MAD3). The MAD team has been pushing on with establishing its product as normative, that is to say, as a standard for the production of representations of archival materials already held in repositories.

The *Manual for Archival Description* is a manual that can be considered essentially conservative, as the codification of a past practice. The *Manual for Archival Description* has been adopted as a suitable basis for developing an information strategy by the British National Council on Archives. MAD2 principles have been adopted by the archives of the European Community, as was declared at the inauguration of its new automated management system in Florence in 1991¹⁵.

Michael Cook in the *Manual for Archival Description* divides archival description into two categories or "modes" "based upon the way in which they are laid out."¹⁶ The form or even the physical aspect of the records that the archivist intends to describe assumes an important role in the manual. *Manual for Archival Description* notes that the purpose of archival description is to create an effective "representation"¹⁷ of the original material. It recommends the indexing of descriptions for retrieval purposes, but it gives no instructions on how to choose access points, what form they should take and how they should be controlled, which is very different from the bibliographic method of the North American tradition.¹⁸

¹⁵ Franqueira, A., "HAEC. Conversione in ISAD di una banca dati esistente" in: Ufficio centrale per i Beni Archivistici. Ministero per i beni culturali e Ambientali., in: Gli Standard per la descrizione degli archivi europei. Esperienze e proposte. Atti del Seminario internazionale, San Miniato 31 Agosto – 2 settembre 1994, Roma, 1996.

¹⁶ Cook, M. and Procter, M. A Manual of Archival Description, 2nd ed., Aldershot, Gower, 1989, 28; Procter, M. and Cook, M. Manual of Archival Description, 3rd ed., Aldershot, Gower, 2000, 25

¹⁷ Cook, MAD2, Rule 8.4A2 and in MAD3 Rule 8.4 "Every description should be able to serve its purpose as a representation of original it refers to." 28

¹⁸ Cook, MAD2, Rule 9.5G , MAD2 Rule 8.4B on information retrieval and Rule 8.4B2; same rules also in MAD3.

Therefore the lack of guidance for archivists with respect to the provision of access points could be seen as one of MAD's significant weakness.

In Cook's thought, however, the point of view of most archivists, who are under an increasing pressure to demonstrate effective user-service, is that it is more important for a descriptive standard to show that it can help to produce intelligible finding aids than that it can structure new relationships between records creators and managers.¹⁹ The rule for establishing levels of description, consequent upon levels of arrangement, was formulated as ("administrative procedure") in MAD and restated in MAD2 and MAD3. This rule separates the hierarchies of political or administrative dependence displayed by archive-creating bodies from the levels of arrangement perceived by archivists within the materials produced by such bodies. Dependence on a superior organisation is relevant only to the provenancial or contextual information which has to be included in the descriptions. This distinction between organisational dependence and archive-producing autonomy may equate to one aspect of the distinction insisted on by Hugo Stibbe: "This process produces two hierarchies: a documentary and a provenancial one"²⁰. Such hierarchies are in MAD "management groups"²¹ and "management subgroups", though these hierarchies of organisations are not the same as levels of arrangement. MAD's definitions of the absolute levels of description are: Group (level 2)²², class (level 3)²³ and item (level 4).

In the examples given in MAD, there are headnotes at the group (fonds), subgroup and class (series) levels. Each of these headnotes acts as a macro-

¹⁹ Cook, M., "MAD2: Reassessing the Experience", *Archivaria*, 35, Spring 1993, 15-23

²⁰ Stibbe, H. L. P., "Archival Descriptive Standards and the Archival Community: A Retrospective, 1996", *Archivaria*, No. 41, Spring 1996, 259-274

²¹ MAD2, rule 4.6B, 14 and MAD3, rule 4.6B, 13

²² MAD2, Rule 4.6C, MAD3, rule 4.6C.

²³ MAD2, Rule 4.6E changed in MAD3 for a preferable term "series" as used by PRO and in ISAD(G), MAD3 4.6E, 17

description governing the set which comes beneath it (micro descriptions)²⁴. This relationship is demonstrated by the reference codes, which contain an extra element at each level and by narrowing of left and right margins. The first line in each level of description consists of three elements spaced across the page. This forms the “identity statement” and corresponds to the “paragraph mode”.

Finally, it has to be stressed that the focal point of MAD concerns the traditional hard-copy finding aids that have, until now, always been the product of descriptive work. In the view of the MAD team, therefore, a concentration on the end-product is entirely appropriate. The purpose of descriptive rules is to structure the production of archival descriptions that will lead to a good finding aid system consisting of different elements: web pages, principal representation file, secondary representation files, retrieval aids and authority files.²⁵

Rules for Archival Description (RAD)

In Canada the Rules for Archival Description were adopted as general rules for archival description in 1990.²⁶

RAD’s genesis can be found in the recommendations of *Toward Descriptive Standards*²⁷ the report by the Canadian Working Group on Archival Descriptive Standards. This report emphasised the importance of applying archival principles of

²⁴ MAD2, Section 6, 25-27

²⁵ Procter, M. and Cook, M. , Manual of Archival Description, 3rd ed., Aldershot, Gower, 2000, 8

²⁶ Bureau of Canadian Archivists, Rules for Archival description, Ottawa, Canada, 1990

²⁷ Bureau of Canadian Archivists, Toward Descriptive Standards, Ottawa, 1985

arrangement to description, specifically the principle of *respect des fonds*²⁸. RAD is a combination of rules based on the archival principle of *respect des fonds* and the bibliographic structure of the ISBD(G)²⁹. RAD is comprehensive, because it contains rules for the description of a fonds and its parts, regardless of the form of the material created by individuals or corporate bodies acting in public or private capacities. RAD enables archivists to describe all forms of archival material, including uncommon forms of documents or even archival material yet unknown. RAD presents a technique of multilevel description adapted from the bibliographic model for its application. Therefore the descriptions produced through RAD should represent the structure of the fonds as it is informed by the principle of *respect des fonds*, and by means of the technique of multilevel description.

Moreover, RAD is in part a consequence of the impact of automated systems. The Canadian archivists have discovered that RAD structures rather than changes the way they have traditionally described their holdings. RAD has a standardised table of data elements: thus the data collection, which takes place at various points across the life cycle continuum can be both standardised and reduced. Inasmuch RAD is a set of formal rules designed to standardise a particular archival function: it can be characterised as a technique. RAD, MAD and APPM must be seen as a means rather than as an end. RAD will require an interplay between descriptive theory and descriptive practice as changes take place in the way information is created and transmitted. RAD is a data content standard rather than a data structure standard. RAD's focus is not on the products of description but on accurately representing the

²⁸ On respect des fonds the fundamental article by Duchemin, M. "Theoretical Principle and Practical Problems of Respect des fonds in Archival Science", *Archivaria* 16, Summer 1983, 64-82

²⁹ Bureau of Canadian Archivists, *Rules for Archival description*, (RAD) Ottawa, Canada, 1990, xiii-xv and Haworth, K., "The Voyage of RAD: From the Old World to the New", *Archivaria*, 36, Autumn 1993, 5-12

arrangements of a fonds and its parts. RAD is clearly distinguishable from MAD, because MAD focus is on more rigorous models for output, which perhaps reflects the British archival tradition.³⁰ The bibliographic model on which RAD (like APPM) is based, consists of two parts: a description of the material itself and the provision of access points leading the researchers to the identification of relevant material.³¹

In RAD the concept already expressed in 'Toward Descriptive Standards' is reconfirmed: any rules for archival description have to incorporate the concept of levels of description, from the highest (the fonds) to the lowest (the item). An important element which distinguishes RAD from the pure bibliographic approach is the establishment of an Archival Description Area which contains the administrative history/bibliographic sketch, custodial history and the scope and content note. RAD also distinguishes between the formation of a title at higher levels and the formation of a title at lower levels (an answer to the tension between creatorship and authorship). RAD, like MAD, places special emphasis on multilevel description. As Michael Cook has pointed out, archival descriptions are representations of structural divisions within a complex, dynamic entity; namely, the *fonds d'archives* of a person, family or corporate body naturally created and/or accumulated and used in the conduct of that creator's activities or functions.³² In APPM, levels of description are based on "provenance or physical form"³³. In RAD and MAD the levels of descriptions are based on arrangement. As a set of rules designed to standardise the

³⁰ RAD's authors emphasize that "RAD does not prescribe products, that is, it does not provide guidance on the types of finding aids archives should develop, or the form in which they are presented or distributed to users. That is a matter of institutional policy. ", Bureau of Canadian Archivists, Rules for Archival description, (RAD) Ottawa, Canada, 1990, xvi

³¹ Bureau of Canadian Archivists, Rules for Archival description,(RAD) Ottawa, Canada, 1990, Part I and Part II

³² Michael Cook, The Management of Information from Archives, Aldershot, Gower, 1986, 104

³³ APPM, Rule 0.12

communication of information about information, a data content standard such as RAD has the potential to influence the design of information management systems.

The following table will try and put in a comparative perspective the most important elements of the standards for archival description: the definition of archival description, the units of description, the levels of description, the definitions of content and context.

ISAD(G): International Standard Archival Description (General)

ISAD(G) was developed by the Ad Hoc Commission on Descriptive Standards of the International Council on Archives and the first edition was published in 1994³⁴. A second edition, revised by the Ad Hoc Commission's successor body, the ICA Committee on Descriptive Standards (ICA/CDS), was published in 2000. ISAD(G) is a standard that "provides general guidance for the preparation of archival descriptions. It is to be used in conjunction with existing national standards or as the basis for the development of national standards."³⁵

The Commission on Descriptive Standards of the International Council on Archives recognises that descriptive information is required at all stages of the management of archival materials. Its definition of archival description covers "the creation of an accurate representation of a unit of description and its component

³⁴ International Council on Archives (ICA), ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description. Adopted by the Ad Hoc Commission on Descriptive Standards. 1st Edition, 21-23 January 1993. (Final ICA approved version), Ottawa, 1994

parts, if any, by capturing, analysing, organizing and recording information that serves to identify manage, locate and explain archival materials and the context and records systems which produced it"³⁶. Undoubtedly, archival description is a complex matter consisting of a number of interrelated activities required to manage archival documents throughout their existence. The four main purposes of archival description, and the methods by which these purposes are achieved, were mentioned in the 1993 ICA Statement of Principles³⁷ and are now illustrated in the second edition of ISAD(G) as follows: a) to ensure the creation of consistent, appropriate, and self explanatory descriptions; b) to facilitate the retrieval and exchange of information about archival material; c) to enable the sharing of authority data; and d) to make possible the integration of descriptions from different locations into a unified information system.³⁸

The purposes of archival description are clear, but before the creation of ISAD(G) it was not obvious that standards for description were required. Archivists often argued that the distinctive nature of archival holdings made it neither possible nor necessary to develop and apply common standards for the description of archival holdings. Hence, each institution could make its own rules for description with little regard for what others were doing. Since the 1990s archivists have realised the importance of standards for description in order to present a consistent product to the users of archival materials. Furthermore, the rapid development of communications technology has made it possible to exchange electronic information inexpensively

³⁵ International Council on Archives (ICA), ISAD(G):General International Standard Archival Description Second Edition. Adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards. Stockholm, Sweden, 19-22 September 1999. Madrid 2000, 11

³⁶ *ibid*, 14

³⁷ International Council on Archives, "Statements of Principles Regarding Archival Description", Archivaria, 34, Summer 1992, 8-16

and rapidly. The ICA Ad Hoc Commission on Descriptive Standards was made a permanent committee of the ICA in 1996 and was in charge of the development of rules for archival description as basis for information exchange at the national and international levels. Nowadays, the need for descriptive standards is no longer a subject of debate, and the discussion has turned to the role and nature of such standards.

Since international information exchange has become more easily available, the benefits of international standards have become clear. High-level international standards ISAD(G) and ISAAR(CPF) were developed by the ICA, but they still require more detailed rules to make them acceptable by archival community. The principle of *respect des fonds* represents the basis of archival arrangement and description and it forms the theoretical and consensual foundation on which the standards are built. The principle of *respect des fonds*³⁹ states that the records created, accumulated and/or maintained and used by an organisation or individual must be kept together in their original order if it exists or has been maintained, and that they must not be mixed or combined with the records of another individual or corporate body. The idea of representing the records of one creator together means that the provenance of the records must be clearly reflected in the description; that the description must enable retrieval by provenance; and that a descriptive system must be able to represent together all the records of a single creator. Arrangement and description are both based on the principle of *respect des fonds*. Archival material is therefore arranged according to a hierarchical system of levels. The levels of

³⁸ International Council on Archives (ICA), ISAD(G):General International Standard Archival Description Second Edition. Adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards. Stockholm, Sweden, 19-22 September 1999. Madrid 2000, 11

arrangement determine the levels of description, and description takes place after arrangement is completed. The exact number of levels of arrangement has been the subject of debate among archivists. ISAD(G) recognises four levels of arrangement: the fonds, the series, the file, and the item. These four levels are related in the sense that the lower levels constitute parts of the whole. However, it is also recognised that not all levels are required. When arranging a given aggregation of archival material, a number of combinations are possible, depending on the provenance and nature of the material itself. ISAD(G) also recognises that in some situations additional levels may be required, and that the fonds and series levels may require further sub-divisions, depending on the provenance and nature of the material being described.⁴⁰

ISAD(G) provides rules for description at each of these levels. However, because arrangement determines description, and because not all levels of arrangement are required or possible in all cases, it follows that not all levels of description are required. Increasingly, however, it is understood that description is a dynamic process, that is, descriptive information is recorded, reused, and enhanced at many stages in the management of archival holdings. These rules are intended for the description of archival material after it has been selected for ongoing retention, due to its enduring value; nonetheless they can be applied at earlier stages in the life of archival materials.⁴¹

The principle that there are levels of description corresponding to levels of arrangement implies that it is possible to describe not only a fonds, but also its parts. The four levels of description are related in that the lower levels constitute parts of

³⁹ "Archival descriptive standards are based on accepted theoretical principles. For example, the principle that archival description proceeds from the general to the specific is the practical consequence of the principle of respect des fonds." Ibid, Rule I.7, 12

⁴⁰ Appendix A-1 from ISAD(G) illustrates just some of the possible combinations, *ibid.* 46

⁴¹ *ibid.*, Rule I.3, 11

the whole, and an understanding of the lower levels is often possible only in relation to their place within the higher level. The technique of multilevel description⁴² requires some instruction regarding the order in which descriptions are presented and regarding the relationship between description(s) of the parts and the description of the whole. Descriptions are presented from the general to the specific. While the actual work of arrangement and description can proceed in any order that makes sense to the archivist, a description at the file or item level cannot be presented without the description of the larger aggregation(s) of which each forms a part. For the purposes of ISAD(G), the highest level of description is the fonds, and description would normally start there. The information provided at each level of description must be appropriate to that level of description. This means that it is inappropriate to provide detailed information about the contents of files in a description of the fonds or the series. It is also undesirable to repeat information given at higher levels of description. To avoid needless repetition, information that is common to the component parts should be provided at the highest appropriate level. A descriptive system must be able to identify and maintain the relationships between levels of description.

ISAD(G) also states that description applies to all archival materials regardless of form or medium⁴³. The rules must apply to a variety of formats and media created by, and acquired from, a variety of sources. No records should be excluded from the description because of their particular form or medium. Hence, the 26 elements defined by ISAD(G) should be useful in describing any archival material and must accommodate all media (and the relationships between them). Different

⁴² *ibid*, Rules 2.1 to 2.4, 16

⁴³ Rule I.4, 11

media will of course require different rules to describe their particular characteristics, e.g., sound recordings and photographs. Other national or international manuals for the description of special-format materials should be used to provide further guidance on appropriate description of these materials.

ISAD(G) provides a generalized definition of 26 elements available for use in archival descriptions. This set of 26 elements is useful for describing archival material at whatever stage during the life of that material. The information is captured or designated for future use in an archival description. ISAD(G) does not stipulate the design or outputs of any particular system.⁴⁴ The 26 general elements available for archival description should form the basis on which to build automated systems that integrate retrieval and presentation functions. ISAD(G) does not define models or structures presenting archival descriptions. Hence, these 26 elements can be used regardless of the storage (e.g., record-keeping system) or output (e.g., online or printed finding aid).

Moreover, ISAD(G) is organised into seven areas of descriptive information: "1) Identity Statement Area (where essential information is conveyed to identify the unit of archival description); 2) Context Area (where information is conveyed about the origin and custody of the unit of description); 3) Content and Structure Area (where information is conveyed about the subject matter and arrangement of the unit of description); 4) Condition of Access and Use Area (where information is conveyed about the availability of the unit of description); 5) Allied Materials Area (where information is conveyed about materials having an important relationship to the unit of description); 6) Note Area (where specialized information and information that cannot be accommodated in any of the other areas is conveyed); 7) Description

Control Area (where information is conveyed on how, when and by whom the archival description was prepared)."⁴⁵

Finally, "all 26 elements covered by these general rules are available for use, but only a subset needs to be used in any given description. A very few elements are considered essential for international exchange of descriptive information: a) reference code; b) title; c) creator; d) date(s)e) extent of the unit of description; and f) level of description. The extent to which a given archival description will incorporate more than the essential elements of information will vary depending on the nature of the unit of description."⁴⁶ Not all the elements defined in ISAD(G) will be useful in individual archival descriptions, but the essential six elements listed above are considered essential for international information exchange and should be included in every description.

⁴⁴ *ibid*, Rule I.6, 11

⁴⁵ *ibid*, Rule I.11, 12

⁴⁶ Rule I.12, 13

	ISAD(G)	APPM	MAD2/MAD3	RAD
<i>Archival description</i>	The creation of an accurate representation of a unit of description and its component parts, if any, by capturing, analysing, organising and recording information that serves to identify, manage, locate, and explain archival materials and the context and record systems which produced it. This term also describes the products of the process. ⁴⁷	Is based on certain assumptions about the nature of archival materials and the way archivists manage them. The process of archival cataloguing consists predominantly of interpreting, extrapolating or extracting information from the material and its context.	The act of preparing finding aids to facilitate control and consultation of holdings.	The description of the fonds in these rules consists of a set of descriptions which show the fonds as a dynamic and organic whole, consisting of series which in turn may consist of files which in turn may contain items. Each of these parts becomes (or has the potential to become) an object of description, resulting in multiple descriptions the need to be linked hierarchically to represent the part-to-whole structure of a fonds. ⁴⁸

Table 1.1 Comparison between ISAD(G), APPM, MAD2/MAD3, and RAD on definition of archival description

⁴⁷ International Council on Archives (ICA), ISAD(G):General International Standard Archival Description Adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards. Stockholm, Sweden, 19-22 September 1999. Madrid 2000, Glossary of terms, 14

⁴⁸ RAD do not define archival description in general terms but specific for each level of description. Here the highest level of description i.e. the fonds has been taken into consideration. RAD, Rule 1.0A1 General Rules, Scope.

	ISAD(G)	APPM	MAD2/MAD3	RAD
<i>Units of description</i>	A document or set of documents in any physical form, treated as an entity, and as such, forming the basis of a description ⁴⁹ (e.g. containers, boxes, folder, audio cassette, etc.) ⁵⁰	1) Manuscript/Document 2) Series 3) Collection 4) Record Group 5) Archives	Units of description are usually collectivities (groups, subgroups or classes) as well as items or pieces (which are unitary).	At all levels record the extent of the unit being described by giving the number of physical units in Arabic numerals and the specific material designation [...] dealing with the broader the broad class(es) of material to which the unit being described belongs (e.g. film rolls, postcards, drawings, maps, microfiches, etc.) ⁵¹
<i>Levels of description</i>	1. Fonds 2. Sub-fonds 3. Series 4. Sub-series 5. File 6. Item ⁵²	There may be several appropriate levels of description for any given body of archival material. These levels normally correspond to natural divisions based on provenance or physical form. ⁵³	Level ⁵⁴ 0: Repository Level 1: Management group Level 2: Group Level 2.5: Sub-group Level 3: Class ⁵⁵ Level 4: Item Level 5: Piece	1. Fonds 2. Series 3. File 4. Item

Table 1.2 Comparison between ISAD(G), APPM, MAD2/MAD3, and RAD on definitions of units of description and levels of description

⁴⁹ ISAD(G), 2000 edition, Glossary of terms, 15

⁵⁰ ISAD(G), 2000 edition, example taken from Rule 3.1.5 "Extent and medium of the unit of description"

⁵¹ RAD, Rule 1.5B1

⁵² ISAD(G), Rule 3.1.4

	ISAD(G)	APPM	MAD2/MAD3	RAD
<i>Content</i>	Summary of the content (such as documentary forms, subject matter, administrative processes) of the unit of description appropriate to the level of description. ⁵⁶	Scope and Content/ Abstract "Give information relating to the general contents, nature and scope of the described materials. For archival collections, give (in this order) the specific types and forms of material present, [...] the dates within which the material bulks largest; when appropriate, the functions or activities resulting in the creation of the records; and the most significant topics, events, persons, places, etc., represented." ⁵⁷	The content and character area summarizes the information contained in the archive, and gives information about its form, this provides the basis of a practical finding aid. ⁵⁸	For the content of the fonds, give information about the internal structure of the fonds by indicating its arrangement, organization and/or enumerating the series. Summarize the principal documentary forms (e.g. reports, minutes, correspondence, drawings, speeches). ⁵⁹ For the content of the series, give information about the internal structure, including the arrangement, classification scheme, and documentary forms of the records. ⁶⁰ For the content of the file give information about the processes and procedures generating the file and/or about the transactions to which the file pertains. ⁶¹

Table 1.3 Comparison between ISAD(G), APPM, MAD2/MAD3, and RAD on definitions of content

⁵³ However, in the footnote to the Rule is specified that: "The number of levels in a hierarchy is not prescribed. Archivists following the National Archives model may refer to a five-level hierarchy (from most comprehensive to least): record group, sub-group, series, sub-series, file unit (e.g. folder)" in: APPM, Footnote 6, 6.

⁵⁴ Rule 4.3: "There may be many levels of archival arrangement, and hence of description. There must always be a minimum of two. Four levels are normally needed to provide satisfactory finding aids to holdings of a repository, and there is a strong possibility that at least two more will be needed". MAD2, 12

⁵⁵ Renamed "series" in MAD3.

⁵⁶ ISAD(G), Rule 3.3.1 "Scope and content"

⁵⁷ APPM Rule 1.7 B2

⁵⁸ MAD2 Rules 14.4 to 14.5D2, referred to Content and character area. In MAD3 the area has been renamed following ISAD(G) as "Content and Structure Area". Both definitions however differ from ISAD(G) for the important additional information contained in the sub-area called "Diplomatic Description" Rule 14.4B

⁵⁹ RAD, Rule 1.7D1

⁶⁰ RAD, Rule 1.7D2

⁶¹ RAD, Rule 1.7D3

	ISAD(G)	APPM	MAD2/MAD3	RAD
Context	To provide an administrative history of, biographical details on, the creator or creators of the unit of description to place the material in context and make it better understood. The information areas in ISAAR(CPF) suggest specific informational elements that may be included in this element. ⁶²	Biographical/Historical Note Area: Record briefly any significant information on the creator/author of the archival material required to make its nature or scope clear. For persons it may include place of birth and domicile, variant names, occupations. [...] For corporate bodies, this may include information on the functions, purpose and history of the body, its administrative hierarchy and earlier, variant, successor names. ⁶³	Administrative and custodial history area: This area is intended to allow for the information needed to establish the background, context, provenance and archival history of the entity being described. It is characteristic of the higher levels of description. ⁶⁴	The Administrative history/Biographical sketch provides information about the external structure or context of the records being described. The Administrative history gives an account of the authority and functional relations and administrative procedures important to an understanding of the context of the records. The biographical sketch gives an account of the activities important to an understanding of the context of the records of persons or families. ⁶⁵

Table 1.4 Comparison between ISAD(G), APPM, MAD2/MAD3, and RAD on definitions of context

⁶² ISAD(G), Rule 3.2.2 "Administrative biographical history", 23

⁶³ APPM Rule 1.7.B1

⁶⁴ MAD2 and MAD3, Rule 14.3. It has however to be stressed that whereas in MAD2 this area contains three sub-areas, administrative history, custodial history and the archivist's note, the MAD3 version foresees only two sub-areas: Administrative or Biographical history and Custodial History.

⁶⁵ RAD, Rule 1.7A1

The underlying question of the previous pages was to investigate whether ISAD(G) has succeeded in the search for a good balance between two poles: on the one side, description responding to the creator's needs (i.e. context-oriented description) and on the other side, the researchers community and public's needs (i.e. content-oriented description).

Tables 1.1 - 1.4 compare the International Standards for archival description with existing national standards for archival description lead to the following reflections and interpretations.

First of all the definition of archival description demonstrates the combination of content and context in both ISAD(G) and APPM, explains that finding aids are the focal point in MAD philosophy and that RAD adopted a more pure content oriented definition. Secondly, the units of description in ISAD(G) and in RAD entities are examined for their physical aspect or form, where in APPM and MAD the units of description are considered for their individual or collective aspects.

The definitions of levels of description demonstrate that only in APPM the levels of description are not compulsory for archivists and that although different names and differences in sub-divisions the concept of archival description at different levels is generally accepted and implemented.

Furthermore, in ISAD(G), APPM and MAD definitions of content the first element mentioned is the "form" or "documentary form" of the material described, where for RAD the "form" of the material is not the first priority. On the contrary, RAD emphasizes the internal structure and arrangement at both fonds and series levels.

Finally, it has to be noted that both in ISAD(G) and RAD the area dedicated to contextual information comes first in a hierarchy of elements in the areas of

description, whereas in MAD and APPM, the primacy is given to contents of archival materials, both in a hierarchy of values and in terms of number of fields and elements. Furthermore, from the four definitions of context in Table 1.4 it can be deduced that in APPM, context, under the influence of bibliographic cataloguing, is more influential and is stressed by the supremacy of the authors and biographical sketch, while the administrative history plays a secondary role. In contrast ISAD(G) and RAD put the administrative procedures and functional relations inside the institutions in a first plan. It is also important to notice the opposite change between MAD2 and MAD3. The institutional administrative history is in fact in MAD3 enriched by the adjective "Biographical". MAD3 is definitively the standard that foresees a direct link to a separate National Name Authority File⁶⁶ as foreseen in ISAD(G) towards ISAAR(CPF).

⁶⁶ MAD3, Rule 14.3, 74

1.2 National traditions in archival description in some European countries: France, Italy and Germany. A comparison of some fundamental issues.

The aim of this section is the analysis of some major manuals and reference books for archivists in three European countries, to give a comparative background to the research. It will concentrate on definitions of archival description in contemporary manuals and on the definition of the unit of description (objects to be described) to try to identify the discrepancy between archival and records management theories and approaches. The definition of the level of archival description also assumes an important role in my research. It will illustrate the changes from seeing the levels of description linked to pure presentational needs for finding aids toward a much more complex need related to the program of databases that reproduces the hierarchical structure of the archives. The research will also analyse the differences and similarities between the national theories and rules on description of archival material and ISAD(G).

In ISAD(G), archival description is defined as: "the creation of an accurate representation of a unit of description and its component parts, if any, by the process of capturing, collating, analysing, and organising any information that serves to identify archival material and explain the context and records systems which produced it."⁶⁷

⁶⁷ ISAD(G) General International Standard Archival Description: adopted by the Ad Hoc Commission on Descriptive Standards, Stockholm, Sweden, 21-23 January 1993. Final ICA approved version, Ottawa, 1994 - Glossary of terms, 4. The very same definition has then been adopted in the final version of the standards: International Council on Archives (ICA), ISAD(G): General International

In ISAD(G) the level of description is defined as “the position of the unit of description in the hierarchy of the fonds”⁶⁸ and the unit of description as “a document or set of documents in any physical form, treated as an entity, and as such, forming the basis of a single description.”⁶⁹

Are these definitions so different from the definitions given by some National manuals for archival description? And in which respect?

France

In France the term “description” was used in French archival literature for the first time by Michel Duchein in 1977⁷⁰. Since then the term description has gained common usage in France and the archivists have started to speak about description tools (*instruments de description*). The term description is gradually replacing terms like inventory which refer clearly to an unique type of research tool and analysis and only to a certain stage of the description process. In France description is now considered at the same time the identification process and the result of the process of description and it is a complementary task of arrangement. According to the arrangement, archival description is also made at different levels. In the French archival tradition, the levels are hierarchically dependent and are essentially three: *fonds*, *article* (file) and *pièce* (item). To the three main levels a fourth one could be added: the group of files, when it indicates a physically and intellectually

Standard Archival Description Adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards. Stockholm, Sweden, 19-22 September 1999. Madrid 2000, 14

⁶⁸ ISAD(G) : General International Standard Archival Description, adopted in 1993, 4 and ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description, adopted in 1999, 15

⁶⁹ ISAD(G) : General International Standard Archival Description, adopted in 1993, 5 and ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description, adopted in 1999, 15

homogeneous whole. To each one of these levels correspond a specific kind of research tool: the repository guide (*guide, état général des fonds*), the list (*répertoire*) and the calendar (*inventaire*).⁷¹

However, in France, in a recent dictionary published by the French Association for Standardisation (AFNOR), archival description is still defined as the enumeration of physical characteristics of a *document* or of a group of documents, whose contents is subject to *analysis* and *indexing* techniques.⁷² Linked to this definition we can find the definition of *archival analysis*, which is the operation which consists of presenting, in a concise and precise form, the data which characterise the information contained in a group of documents, files or items and, in general terms, the results of this operation.⁷³

From these definitions it appears that in the French tradition there is still a clear difference between two kinds of description. The difference derives from the fact that there is a distinction between analysis: archival analysis and diplomatic analysis. The diplomatic analysis is defined as the operation which consists of presenting, under a precise and concise form, the data which characterise the information contained in an act.⁷⁴

Can we therefore say that the choice of the descriptive technique to apply depends upon the objects being described?

⁷⁰ Reprinted in: Michel Duchein, *Études d'archivistique*, Paris, Association des archivistes français, 1992, 13, 32

⁷¹ Christine Nougaret, "Classement et description: des principes à la pratique", 135-186; in: *La pratique archivistique française*, Paris, Archives Nationales, 1993.

⁷² Ecole national des chartes. Association française de normalisation - AFNOR, *Dictionnaire des archives. De l'archivage aux systèmes d'information. Français - Anglais - Allemand*, Paris, 1991, 83

⁷³ *ibid.*, 30

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 30

The French archival tradition seems to make a fundamental distinction between two main objects of archival description: the document and its aggregations and the *act*.

The document is defined as written or recorded document which for itself or for its support has a probatory or informative value.⁷⁵ The file is defined as the whole group of documents assembled in the conduct and treatment of a business.⁷⁶ The item is defined as an unit for classification⁷⁷. Moreover, the article⁷⁸ is defined both as unit of classification and/or unit of reference (group of items, register, file or part of the file) being described by an *analysis*. An act is defined as a written document which attests or authenticates a fact, a decision, a unilateral or bilateral agreement.⁷⁹

Furthermore, although France is the country where the *principe de provenance* first appeared, it seems that there is still very little literature and archival practice which deals with the context-oriented description. The content-oriented approach remains the dominant force in archival description and the way of producing the finding aids and inventories is based on traditional practices and models.

Italy

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 86

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 88

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 38

⁷⁸ This definition of article, in its ambiguity, corresponds to the definition also mentioned in the Dictionary of Archival Terminology – Dictionnaire de terminologie archivistique. München, New York, London, 2nd revised edition. K.G.Saur, 1988, 88: "Article: unité de base, pour la cotation, le rangement et l'inventaire des documents d'archives; l'article est généralement un carton, une liasse, un volume ou un rouleau"

⁷⁹ Ecole national des chartes. Association française de normalisation - AFNOR, Dictionnaire des archives. De l'archivage aux systèmes d'information. Français - Anglais - Allemand, Paris, 1991, 83, 25

The international model for archival description proposed by the ISAD(G) does not represent a complete distortion of the Italian archival tradition⁸⁰ but on the contrary is founded on some theoretical bases generally accepted by the Italian archivists⁸¹. ISAD(G) was first published in English in an archival journal in 1992⁸² and was then officially translated into Italian and published in the National Archives journal in 1995⁸³. The Working Group of ANAI (the National Association of Italian Archivists) on ISAD(G) revision was established in 1996 and prepared later proposals for modification.⁸⁴

In Italy, the Rules for the publication of inventories⁸⁵ were first published in 1966. They represent the widely accepted theoretical basis in the Italian archival description tradition. The first chapter of the Rules was dedicated to general criteria for arrangement and it can be seen as the first attempt in standardisation or more simply in the codification of a practice. The second step in the way of standardisation of archival description was undertaken with the project of the compilation of the General Guide (*Guida Generale*)⁸⁶ for the Italian National Archives at the beginning of the Nineteen-Seventies, which is still an ongoing project. Furthermore, in 1992,

⁸⁰ Fundamental manuals in Italy are: Paola Carucci, Le fonti archivistiche: ordinamento e conservazione, Roma, La Nuova Italia scientifica, 1983; Paola Carucci, Il documento contemporaneo. Diplomatica e criteri di edizione, Roma, La nuova Italia scientifica, 1987; Elio Lodolini, Lineamenti di storia dell'archivistica italiana, Roma, La Nuova Italia scientifica, 1991. Lodolini, E. Storia dell'archivistica italiana. Dal mondo antico alla metà del secolo XX. Milano, Francoangeli, 2001

⁸¹ Terenzoni, E., "Standard di descrizione archivistici nazionali e internazionali: l'archivistica italiana e le ISAD(G)." 66-80. in: Ufficio Centrale per i Beni Archivistici, Gli standard per gli Archivi europei: Esperienze e proposte., Roma, 1996

⁸² Archivi & Computer, No. 2, 1992, 97-118

⁸³ "La traduzione italiana delle ISAD(G)", Rassegna Italiana degli Archivi di Stato, LV (1995), 2-3, 392-413

⁸⁴ Gruppo di lavoro ANAI, "Documento sulle regole ISAD(G)", Archivi & Computer, No. 3, 1997, 145-151

⁸⁵ Ministero dell'Interno. Direzione Generale degli Archivi di Stato. Ufficio Studi e pubblicazioni, Circolare No. 39/1966. Norme per la pubblicazione degli inventari.

⁸⁶ Ministero per i beni culturali e Ambientali. Ufficio centrale per i Beni Archivistici, Guida Generale degli Archivi di Stato italiani, Volumes I-V, Roma 1981-1994

the Editorial Rules (for the publication/presentation of inventories)⁸⁷ were elaborated and published, not only with the aim of guaranteeing the quality of the editions by the central administration, but also of increasing the homogeneity of terminology to be used by the local archivists in the compilation of their inventories and guides.

Italian practice has created a huge number of research tools with considerable differences between them. The differences have been generated by the methods chosen for carrying out the research and vary case by case. However, some of the basic principles, like the provenance principle, the *respect des fonds*⁸⁸ and the original order have been formulated in the "historical method"⁸⁹ which lies at the base of Italian archival theory and practice. The Italian tradition seems also characterised by the constant worry for the respect of subjectivity of the archivist's intellectual work and of the "uniqueness" of the fonds on which the archivist works. This particular point of view can be considered as a derivation of the strong "regional" archival tradition.

It is therefore impossible to talk about an Italian National Standard: it is more a "de facto" model. The model is not a codified one, but it coincides with the model proposed for the publication of the General Guide⁹⁰. The descriptive scheme of the *Guida* was thought on hierarchical levels in which the main two were the fonds and the series. However, during the compilation work three other levels were introduced: the superfonds, the group of series and the sub-series. The introduction of these three

⁸⁷ Guida generale degli Archivi di Stato Italiani, Introduzione, <http://www.maas.ccr.it/cgo-win/h3.exe/aguida/d1/fDocumento>

⁸⁸ Guida generale degli Archivi di Stato Italiani, Introduzione, Precedenti tentativi di descrizione generale del contenuto degli Archivi di Stato. <http://www.maas.ccr.it/cgo-win/h3.exe/aguida/d1/fDocumento>, 5; see also Carucci Paola, "La Guida generale : problemi di metodo" At: <http://www.maas.ccr.it/guida/hl/paola.htm>

⁸⁹ Lodolini, E. *Storia dell'archivistica italiana. Dal mondo antico alla metà del secolo XX*. Milano, Francoangeli, 2001, 165-184

⁹⁰ Ministero per i beni culturali e Ambientali. Ufficio centrale per i Beni Archivistici, *Guida Generale degli Archivi di Stato italiani*, volumes I-V, Roma 1981-1994

new levels was considered necessary in order to accommodate some of the regional and local archival practices.

In the Italian practice there is no clear delimitation between description and arrangement and therefore it is impossible to find a single definition of archival description. There are two elements of the same process in which description is the moment of knowledge and information, and arrangement is the previous specification of the original order of the documents. It is therefore very rare to find in Italy publications regarding the methodological problems that the archivists have to face during the arrangement process. There is a real lack of exchange of information in this field between the regional schools of archival studies.

In the *Guida* which, as it was previously said, can be considered the handbook accepted by the majority of the Italian archivists, the levels of description were defined in a very pragmatic way. "It was agreed to call the first division that can be found in a State Archive indifferently fonds or archives and the second one series".⁹¹ Furthermore, in the Introduction to the *Guida* the name/title of what is described at the level of the fonds corresponds, in the majority of the cases, to the name/title of the institution which produced the documents. This definition can be considered the primary link between the concept of fonds and the concept of provenance and context of production.

In Italian practice the series appears to be the most important element in the arrangement process and therefore one of the most important elements of description. In the case in which the fonds is not originally arranged into series, Italian practice allows the archivist to create them following some functional criteria (Institution's

⁹¹ Terenzoni, E., "Standard di descrizione archivistici nazionali e internazionali: l'archivistica italiana e le ISAD(G)." 66-80. in: Ministero per i beni culturali e Ambientali - Ufficio Centrale per i Beni

functions, procedures and processes). This derives from a general accepted principle in the Italian archival tradition, enunciated by Cencetti⁹², which defines the archives as a functional *corpus* in which there is a need to link the documents together, and the documents and the file and the series in a hierarchy. Hence, archival description is based on the description of series, not only because the series confers the whole meaning to the archival document but also because it is the reflex of actions made in the context of the activities and functions of an entity following its institutional aims.⁹³

The term series can therefore connote both the arrangement modalities inside the archival units and the aggregation modalities of the archival units inside the fonds. The unit of description, as proposed by ISAD(G), is not considered in Italian practice with the same meaning but regarded more as a handling unit. Hence, the handling unit can coincide or not with the unit of description. The internal structure of the handling unit therefore plays an important role. The way in which the documents have been arranged together at the moment of their production represents an important aspect in the concept of “series” and consequently of the description criteria of the units. There are two possible arrangement systems. The first one is the so-called “serial” arrangement: which is the archival system, which foresees the arrangement in chronological order of the same type of acts (acts identical in their 'diplomatic characteristics' e.g. in the form) and concern specific typologies of documents: series of decrees, series of sentences, series of outgoing letters etc. The

Archivistici, Gli Standard per la descrizione degli archivi europei. Esperienze e proposte. Atti del Seminario internazionale, San Miniato 31 Agosto - 2 settembre 1994, Roma, 1996, 73

⁹² Cencetti, G., "Il fondamento teorico della dottrina archivistica" in: Cencetti G., Scritti archivistici, Roma, Il centro di ricerca editore, 1970, 39-40

⁹³ Altieri Magliozzi, E. "L'indicizzazione e i principi della descrizione archivistica per la scuola italiana" In: Ministero per i beni culturali e Ambientali - Ufficio centrale per i Beni Archivistici, Gli

handling modes for this kind of series are the register, the volume or the file. On the other hand the “file” arrangement is the arrangement system which foresees the gathering of documents, although dissimilar in the form, but because they refer to the same business, subject or matter. Following this practice, the files have been constituted on a more or less empirical basis based on a predefined classification plan. The classification plan could have been created on the basis of the official Institution’s functions or can give an overview on the real activities of the Institution.

In this second meaning of the “series”, the archive’s organisational asset is involved and its structural levels are determined by the modalities of aggregation of the archival units. The relations which determine the series can be inspired by a variety of situations: empirical groups, subject criteria, geographical, alphabetical, chronological, and reflect the creator’s structure. They relate therefore to well defined functions, activities, competencies of the same institution and they determine, in this way, the organisational levels either superior - groups of series - or inferior - sub-series. This second definition of series corresponds to a less “doctrinal” and more pragmatic approach which has been positively considered and accepted by most of the contemporary Italian historians and archivists.⁹⁴

If we also consider another more recent definition of archival description as the means “to identify, file and describe the document in a correct and uniform way implies the need to analyse the document and at the same time to evaluate it inside the archival unit to which it belongs and in relation to the other archival units which

Standard per la descrizione degli archivi europei. Esperienze e proposte. Atti del Seminario internazionale, San Miniato 31 Agosto - 2 settembre 1994, Roma, 1996. 120-139, 133-134

⁹⁴ Ministero per i beni culturali ed ambientali - Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici, Guida generale degli archivi di stato italiani, Roma, 1981-1994

compose the fonds”⁹⁵, one could argue that the Italian archival description practice seems to go in the direction of a context-oriented description even if it is not yet entirely conceptualised or formulated in the Italian archival community and in related academic debates.

Germany

The series plays a crucial role in German archival practice. The series is identified as a “collection of copies, or in the majority of cases, original documents, in which the arranging principle is not based on the subject but on the chronological sequence. The series can be composed of sent or received documents and can concentrate either on sender or on receiver. Therefore, all the documents with the same origin inside the series are chronologically arranged and are not divided by subject.”⁹⁶ In a more recent definition the series is defined as “uniform documents (papers), office records or files in alphabetical, numerical or chronological order in a registry without any other kind of possible systematisation.”⁹⁷

In the German archival practice archival description is considered as the process of writing down the internal and external characteristics of single units of archival material with the help of an ideal form (a kind of style sheet) divided into six groups: reference code, title, contents, span dates of the unit, provenance, old reference codes. All these elements are the fundamental instruments used by

⁹⁵ Paola Carucci, Il documento contemporaneo, Diplomatica e criteri di edizione, Roma, La nuova Italia scientifica, la ristampa 1995, 131

⁹⁶ Brandt, Ahasver von, Werkzeug des Historikers. Eine Einfuehrung in die Historischen Hilfswissenschaften. 11. Edition, Stuttgart, Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1986, 108

archivists in the arrangement process and form the basis for the arrangement minutes “Arbeitsprotokoll” that can be assimilated to a kind of draft inventory.⁹⁸ The unit of description is defined as the unit inside a fonds with its own particularities – it refers usually to an act with its formal characteristics – identified in an inventory by an unique reference code which makes the distinctive link to its storage place.

The German archival tradition referring to the hierarchy in archives, i.e. the levels of description, borrows a term from geology which gives a perfect idea of the archives’ structure: the term used is tectonic⁹⁹. Tectonic defines the arrangement of fonds as sub-divided into groups or archives sections. Nowadays, the sub-divisions are created following the *principe de provenance* or the time caesura, formerly, however, they were also created in accordance with a classification scheme.

Furthermore, it can be said that the German archival tradition is based, as is that in most other European countries, on the *principe de provenance*¹⁰⁰. The inventory is therefore the means of representing the hierarchical structure of the archival holdings. In contemporary German archival practice the provenancial principle remains valid and does not change with the technological changes. The inventories show on the first page the classification scheme as the image of the fonds structure and at the same time the order and form of the titles which show the interdependence between the units of description: documents, the group of documents, series, etc. The structure of the archival material can be shown by the difference in which titles are presented in the inventory's layout. The order of

⁹⁷ Menne-Haritz, A. *Schlüsselbegriffe der Archivterminologie*. Veröffentlichungen der Archivschule Marburg, No. 20, Marburg, Archivschule, 1992, 55

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 57

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 55

¹⁰⁰ Menne-Haritz, A. "Online-fähige Repertorien? Concept for an electronic inventory", *Der Archivar* 49.Jg. 1996, H. 4, 603-610

presentation is not chronological but depends more on correlations and importance of the material described.

Nowadays, it is widely accepted in the German archival community that inventories should also allow a non-linear use. The non-verbal clarity of the archives structures is completed by verbal explanations of backgrounds, institutional history and the vicissitudes of the fonds, which are described in the introduction to the inventory. However, the introduction to a fonds, written in a traditional way, presumes that every user will read it from the beginning to the end. If the information could be presented in a non-linear form, the research of the relevant elements could be facilitated. The main reason for a non linear character of the archival material is because the elements in an archival fonds are not independent one from each other. They are linked to each other in many different dimensions and some of their elements define the elements (or component parts) of the others and delimit the elements at the same time. Hence, it depends on the archivist's decision, seeking the best research strategies, what kind of information to include in the inventory and at what level to present the structure or how to describe the elements in the structure. The unambiguousness of the interrelations, although not linear, could become clearer with new technologies and with on-line inventories.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ On this aspect it is useful to refer to the debate on the use of Internet in archives in: Menne-Haritz, A. (ed.), Online-Findbücher, Suchmaschinen und Portale. Beiträge des 6. Archivwissenschaftlichen Kolloquiums der Archivschule Marburg. Archivschule Marburg, 2002

	ISAD(G)	France	Italy	Germany
<i>Archival description</i>	The creation of an accurate representation of a unit of description and its component parts, if any, by capturing, analysing, organising and recording information that serves to identify, manage, locate, and explain archival materials and the context and record systems which produced it. This term also describes the products of the process. ¹⁰²	Description is considered at the same time the identification process and the result of the process of description and it is a complementary task of arrangement.	Arrangement and description are two elements of the same process, in which arrangement is the prior establishment of the original order of documents and description is the moment of knowledge and record of information about the documents.	The process of writing down the internal and external characteristics of single units of archival material with the help of an ideal form divided into six elements: reference code, title, contents, span dates of the unit, provenance, old reference codes. These elements are the fundamental instruments used by archivists in the arrangement process. ¹⁰³

Table 1.5 Comparison between ISAD(G), French, Italian and German rules on definition of archival description

¹⁰² International Council on Archives (ICA), ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description Adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards. Stockholm, Sweden, 19-22 September 1999. Madrid 2000, Glossary of terms, 14

¹⁰³ Menne-Haritz, A. Schlüsselbegriffe der Archivterminologie. Veröffentlichungen der Archivschule Marburg, No. 20, Marburg, Archivschule, 1992, 57

	ISAD(G)	France	Italy	Germany
<i>Units of description</i>	A document or set of documents in any physical form, treated as an entity, and as such, forming the basis of a description ¹⁰⁴ (e.g. containers, boxes, folder, audio cassette) ¹⁰⁵	The unit that represents the basis for referencing, arrangement and inventorying of archival documents (i.e. a box, a folder, a volume or a roll.) ¹⁰⁶	Handling units that can coincide or not with the units of description.	Unit inside a fonds with its own particularities and identified in an inventory by an unique reference code which makes the distinctive link to its storage place ¹⁰⁷
<i>Levels of description</i>	1. Fonds ¹⁰⁸ 2. Sub-fonds 3. Series 4. Sub-series 5. File 6. Item	1. Fonds 2. Group of files 3. File 4. Item	0. Superfonds 1. Fonds 2. Group of series 3. Series 4. Sub-series	1. Fonds 2. Series 3. Group of documents 4. Document

Table 1.6 Comparison between ISAD(G), French, Italian and German rules on definitions of units of description and levels of description

¹⁰⁴ ISAD(G), 2000 edition, Glossary of terms, 15

¹⁰⁵ ISAD(G), 2000 edition, example taken from Rule 3.1.5 "Extent and medium of the unit of description"

¹⁰⁶ The definition of "article" can be used to illustrate the unit of description in French archival descriptive practice. In: Dictionnaire des archives. op. cit. 25 and Dictionary of Archival Terminology – Dictionnaire de terminologie archivistique. 2nd revised edition. München, New York, London, K.G.Saur, 1988, 88

¹⁰⁷ Menne-Haritz, A. Schlüsselbegriffe der Archivterminologie. Veröffentlichungen der Archivschule Marburg, No. 20, Marburg, Archivschule, 1992, 57

¹⁰⁸ ISAD(G), Rule 3.1.4

The definitions of archival description, unit of description and level of description that have been illustrated in foregoing pages have also been reproduced in a schematic way in Tables 1.5 and 1.6. The questions that formed the conceptual basis of this analysis were mainly how and in which respect are the national definitions so different from those presented in ISAD(G).

First of all it has to be noticed that Tables 1.1 – 1.4 differ from Tables 1.5 – 1.6 in what concerns the elements of content and context. The comparison has already proved very difficult regarding the simple elements of units of description and levels of description, and there were no coherent definitions of content and context in the national archival manuals.

From the comparison of archival description definitions in Table 1.5 it appears that ISAD(G) summarizes the main elements present in national descriptive and arrangement practices. However, both ISAD(G) and German definitions make a point of the need of a contextual description whereas in French and Italian designations, there is no trace of any link to creators and/or context of production of documents.

The units of description represent the same case where both ISAD(G) and German phrasings are quite similar, stressing the uniqueness of the material being described in relation to its physical form. Italian wording does not mention any physical form and leads to confusing practice where units of description could be divided among different physical forms and containers.

Finally, the levels of description mark the enormous differences in archival descriptive practices. The comparison points out how in France the term series has been used for centuries to refer to a subdivision in a classification plan and therefore does not appear as level of description. However, for standardisation purposes French

archivists have added, in recent years, to the term series the adjective "organique"¹⁰⁹, to refer to a body or function in an organization. In Italy the descriptive tradition does not take into account any description lower than sub-series; i.e. files and documents and/or items have never been the object of description. German descriptive practice does not present the need for a strict definition of file and therefore prefers the more general term "group of documents".

As Angelika Menne-Haritz¹¹⁰ has stressed, over the past decade national archivists have indicated the need to strengthen archival terminology and its analytical potentials. Although individuality and creativity should remain essentials in the passage from administrative acts into archival documents, national archivists have recognised the merits of standardisation, emphasising the fact that decisions taken during the evaluation phase are accomplished in more rational way.

1.3 Conclusion

The research conducted in this chapter has substantiated on the one hand that ISAD(G) has proved to be at the same level of pre-existing standards and, on the other hand, that it opened the way to discussions on standardisation of archival description in those countries that did not yet have standards.

ISAD(G) has definitively demonstrated to be a standard that focuses on data structure rather than on the actual content of description elements. Context plays also

¹⁰⁹ International Council on Archives (ICA), ISAD(G):General International Standard Archival Description Adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards. Stockholm, Sweden, 19-22 September 1999. Madrid 2000 – See French translation, Glossary of terms, definition of Série organique, 16

¹¹⁰ Menne-Haritz, A. Schlüsselbegriffe der Archivterminologie. Veröffentlichungen der Archivschule Marburg, No. 20, Marburg, Archivschule, 1992, 29; see also: Delmas, B., "Manifesto for a

an important conceptual role in the construction of this standard. However, the elements for a more comprehensive contextual information have been delegated to a more specialised standard: the ISAAR(CPF). The development and revision of these two standards are reported in chapter six, where their potential conjunction and the framework for their possible and desirable links are analysed.

Chapter Two. The archival practices of European institutions and the implementation of ISAD(G).

The origin of my thesis is grounded in my concerns to see that the different practices employed within different European institutions and archives meant that it was difficult for these institutions to fulfil their purposes of transparency and openness and that communication between European institution archives was hampered. The object of this chapter is first to provide an overview of the European Union's institutions' rules, programmes and practices in the field of archives. Then, it will focus on the specific character of the holdings of the European Parliament and on the ad hoc programmes for retrieval and access of its archival material. The European Parliament represents a good example for European Union practice, as its holdings cover a very large range of activities. The information on which this chapter is based comes from the Official Journal of the European Communities and the published and unpublished inventories, guides and indexes of the European Union institutions.¹ This overview of the European Union's institutions' practices will help the research in two main directions. First, it will give an idea of the lack of co-

¹ European Commission, Inventory of the Historical Archives of the European Commission, Vol. 1, Records of the High Authority of the ECSC 1952, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1987

European University Institute, Guide to the Historical Archives of the European Communities, 4th edition, Florence, 1993.

Comité Economique et Social des Communautés Européennes, Guide des archives historiques du Comité Economique et Social des Communautés Européennes. Volume 2, Année 1960, Bruxelles, 1991

Commission Européenne, Haute Autorité CECA: inventaire des dossiers. 1952-1967, Volume 1, Luxembourg, Office des publications officielles des Coummautés européennes, 1996

Conseil des Communautés européennes, Inventaire des archives historiques du Conseil. 1959, Commuauté européenne du charbon et de l'acier, Bruxelles, 1992

ordination in the field of archival description between the European Union's institutions. Second, it will investigate the possibilities of co-ordination offered by ISAD(G) between the intermediate and historical archives of the European Union's institutions and its potential use as a common basis for archival description. Finally, given that in recent years the European Union has produced a great number of legal texts and treaties on the issues of governance, transparency and access to documents, this chapter will provide an historical framework to the development of the concept of European governance and will summarise those aspects of these developments which are particularly relevant for archival institutions.

2.1 European Union's Institutions archival programmes and practices: an overview.

At the beginning of 1983 the European Communities' institutions decided² to open up their historical archives to the public and researchers at the end of a thirty-year period. The institutions decided to deposit their original documents with the European University Institute in Florence and the Historical Archives of the European Communities was set up as the legal deposit. The primary objectives of the opening of the historical archives to the public were to encourage research on the history of the Communities, to promote public interest in the activities and goals of the European Communities and to demonstrate transparency in the institutions' work.

² Council Regulation No. 354/83 of 1 February 1983 and Commission Decision No. 359/83/ECSC of 8 February 1983 in Official Journal of the European Communities L 43, 15.02.1983, 1-3 and 14-15.

In taking these decisions, the European Communities institutions laid down the legal basis for collaboration in the archives field, especially on issues such as the common definition of community archives; the period of closure before opening to the public; the problem of community documents located in the archives of the Member States and the declassification procedures and access of European Communities' documents.

On this legal basis a particularly intensive collaboration took place between the Commission of the European Communities and the national archives of the Member States. In 1991 the European Communities decided to intensify the exchanges between the Member countries in the field of the preservation and access of the European archival heritage as part of the democratic functioning of Europe's societies. The Council, in a resolution dated 14th November 1991, invited the Commission to set up a Group of Experts to examine the possibility of a greater co-ordination of archives policies and practices within the European Community. This working group, composed of archivists from the national archives and representatives of the Community Institutions, presented the results of its work in a report to the European Council in 1993³. It is particularly interesting to examine some parts of this report in order to make a comparison between the efforts Member States have made in co-ordinating their legislation in the archives field and the realities of existing practices between the European Communities institutions.

The Group of Experts divided the subjects of co-ordination in the archives field into ten major areas:

³ European Commission, Archives in the European Union. Report of the Group of Experts on the Co-ordination of Archives. Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1994

- 1) Records management: appraisal and disposal
- 2) Physical conservation of archives
- 3) Practical conditions of access to archives
- 4) National legislation and access to archives
- 5) Management and storage of computerised archives
- 6) Exchange of archival information and computer networks
- 7) Training of archivists and recognition of qualifications
- 8) Private archives
- 9) Community archives
- 10) The Community and the archives in Europe.

For the purposes of this study the points regarding access to archives and the management of computerised archives (points 3 to 6 of the Group of Experts' report) are most relevant because they refer to standards of description and to technological aspects specific to archives.

With the aim of exchanging archival data between the national archives of the Member States, the Group stressed the importance of the compatibility of the national archives computerised systems and models. Furthermore, in considering the “practical conditions for access to archives”⁴ the Group established the following priorities: the codification of the rules of access and the implementation of the archival description standards in the arrangement of the archival holdings.

The Group also pointed out how access to archives depends essentially upon the production and distribution of guides on the holdings, inventories and indexes and that this task would be facilitated by the standardisation of these research tools.

⁴ European Commission, Archives in the European Union. Report of the Group of Experts on the Co-ordination of Archives. Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1994, 25, 31

The major obstacle to the exchange of finding aids was found to be the fact that in most of the Member countries the harmonisation of description methods and development of research tools was often left to the professional archivists' associations with their own national traditions. The international standards for archival description, at that time still in the process of development, were seen as a good means to improve the exchange of information between the Member States and the Group recommended their adoption and recognition by the Member States.

The Group indicated⁵ as one of the best ways of improving the exchange of archival information, the establishment of computer networks between the Member States. The Group therefore suggested a joint action between Member States in identifying and accepting computer standards of relevance for archival work. In order to encourage co-ordination, the European communities recommended the use of open systems. Harmonisation in the field of archival description standards was also seen as necessary and the promotion of such standards was recommended.

Finally, in its lines of action⁶ the Group of Experts suggested two main measures to be taken in exchanging archival information between the archives of the Member countries. The first step was to seek an agreement on the use of archival description standards based on the work of the Ad Hoc Commission on Descriptive Standards of the International Council on Archives. Following this, the Group recommended that the creation of databases containing archival information, in accordance with the guidelines established by the Group, could form the first links in a future archives data exchange network.

⁵ *ibid.*, 53

⁶ *ibid.*, 58

In June 1994, as follow-up to the report of the Group of Experts on archives, the Council of the European Communities drew up its conclusions in order to intensify co-ordination in the field of archives⁷. The Council referred to Article 128 of the Treaty establishing the European Community to stress the fact that the archives constitute a significant part of the cultural heritage of Europe and that greater co-operation in this field is one way to achieve the aim of improving the knowledge of the culture and history of the European peoples.

The Council gave its agreement on some major points:

- organisation of a multidisciplinary forum to be held in the framework of the Community on the problems of management, storage, conservation and retrieval of machine-readable data, inviting public administrations and national archives services, as well as representatives of industry and of research to take part in the forum;
- stimulation of the exchange of students and archivists;
- preparation and encouragement of the publication in all the official languages of the Community of a practical guide to the procedures and other provisions in force in Member States and in the institutions for user access to their archives,
- preparation and encouragement of the publication of appropriate technical publications intended to disseminate research carried out and any research findings concerning the preservation and restoration of archives material,
- use of different technologies to encourage the publication of information relating to archives material.

⁷ Decision of the Council 94/C 235/03, Official Journal of the European Communities, 23.08.94, No. C 235/3

As follow-up to both the Group of Experts' report and the Council conclusions, a first multidisciplinary European Forum (DLM-Forum) on electronic records took place in December 1996 in Brussels.⁸ The major aim of this Forum was to publish guidelines on electronic records - still called "machine-readable data" at that time - as a concrete basis for co-ordination between the European Union Member States.

The Forum dealt mainly with problems arising from the "information society" and the impact of information technologies on the world and the work of archivists, and focused on the changing form of documents as electronic records, on the breakdown of boundaries separating disciplines and professions in the handling of information and of the need for information technology standards in order to facilitate the connectivity and interoperability between the different computer systems.

In all the discussions held in the different panels of the DLM-Forum a common key factor emerged: the impact of information technologies demands the definition and development of international information technology standards. The major challenge for the archival profession appeared to be the introduction of archival concerns into technical standards and the proper application to archives of existing technical standards.⁹

In the Draft Guidelines' chapter dedicated to the management and classification of machine readable data¹⁰, the classification of records is defined as one of the most important management tasks. Furthermore, the structure of the record

⁸ European Commission, DLM-Forum. Proceedings of the DLM-Forum on electronic records, Brussels, 18-20 December 1996, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1997

⁹ *ibid*, 351, 353

must enable the users to locate the item of information in a document, while the classification must enable the user to locate it among all the records stored. The Guidelines also give an important example of how the European Commission deals with its records: “Some departments in the European Commission use a basic classification plan based on the way the institution operates, its administration, personnel and budget.”¹¹

Few more indications are given in the Guidelines about the classification criteria used by the European Commission. The categories, presumably fields of a database, used to classify and to index the electronic records appear over-simplified: type of document, dates (production, expiry), author(s) (individuals, departments), signatory, destination (individuals, departments), copies (individuals, departments), version; assignment (date, file, departments); subject; keywords; language; number of pages, etc.

Hence, it is quite surprising to note that in the first Draft Guidelines published as outcome of the DLM-Forum there was no mention of the International Standards for archival description. In fact no mention is made of ISAD(G) and no distinction is made between the different component parts or different areas of the records, as defined by ISAD(G): identity statement area, context area, content and structure area of the records. There is therefore a consistent doubt about the implementation of the most important elements of the International standards for archival description in the electronic records management of the European Commission and in its archival practice.

¹⁰ European Commission, Draft Guidelines: Best practices for using Machine Readable Data. From Paper to Electronic Information, Version 1.0, 1996, 27-28

¹¹ *ibid*, 27

In the updated and enlarged edition of the Guidelines on best practices for using electronic information published in 1997¹², there is however a reference to ISAD(G) “which may be taken into consideration when defining a classification strategy”.¹³ Furthermore, the Guidelines recommend not modifying the “identity statement area” during the life cycle of the record. The definition is however erroneous in the distinction between the archival unit; as it states that: “identification of the archival unit of the record is called the “identity statement area””.¹⁴ In my opinion this inaccuracy is indicative of the still existing uncertainty in the use of archival terminology for the definition of electronic records, archival entities and units of description.¹⁵

2.2 European Parliament’s Archival Practices.

Before examining the European Parliament’s archives service and holdings, it might be useful to give an outline of its role and its method of working¹⁶. It will be

¹² European Commission, Guidelines on best practices for using electronic information. Updated and enlarged edition, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1997

¹³ European Commission, Guidelines on best practices for using electronic information. Updated and enlarged edition, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1997, 30-31

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 31

¹⁵ “Archival unit” is not defined as such in ISAD(G), however it can be assimilated to “unit of description” and defined as follows: “a document or set of documents in any physical form, treated as an entity, and as such, forming the basis of a single description”.

On the other hand “record” in ISAD(G) is defined as “recorded information in any form or medium, created or received and maintained, by an organization or person in the transaction of business or the conduct of affairs”. Both definitions in: International Council on Archives (ICA), ISAD(G):General International Standard Archival Description Adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards. Stockholm, Sweden, 19-22 September 1999. Madrid 2000, 15

¹⁶ European Parliament - Directorate General for Research, Forging Ahead. European Parliament 1952-1988. 36 Years, Third Edition, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1989

seen that it differs in many respects from a typical national parliament and it is because of these differences that the archives facilities are so unlike those of any national archives. The first Assembly was set up to monitor the work of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). It met for the first time in Strasbourg in 1952 and since that time has developed in terms of its size and its responsibilities. Until 1979, Members of the European Parliament were nominated by their national parliaments but in June of that year the first elections by universal suffrage were held in each of the nine Member countries.

The European Economic Community (EEC) Treaty of 25 March 1957 endowed the Parliament with advisory and supervisory powers. In practice the Parliament has the right to be consulted on draft legislation proposed by the Commission. The legislative power was however increased by the Single European Act (which came into force 1 July 1987) which established a co-operative procedure for certain areas of Community policy. The Parliament also has the right to question, orally and in writing, the Commission and the Council, to force the Commissioners to resign as a body and to introduce resolutions on its own initiative. In the field of external relations, the Parliament has initiated meetings with parliamentary delegations from countries with which the European Community has important trade relations. However, it is in the control of the Community budget that Parliament asserts its power. Parliament can in fact reject the budget (as it did the 1980 budget) and it has the authority to modify the total volume of expenditure.

One important organisational feature of the European Parliament is the dominant role played by the political groups. Much of the detailed work of the European Parliament is done within the standing committees. Their main task is to prepare Parliament's opinions on the legislative proposals of the Commission. A

rapporteur is appointed by the relevant committee to steer a particular item through the committee to produce an agreed resolution and to present it at a subsequent plenary session. As soon as the resolution has been adopted, it becomes Parliament's Opinion on the Commission's legislative proposal and it sent to the Council to be taken into account when the final legislation is framed. Committees also prepare reports on their own initiative.

There are seven Directorates-General under the office of the Secretary General of the European Parliament: Sessional services (DG I), Committees and Delegations (DG II), Information and Public Relations (DG III), Research (DG IV), Personnel, Budget and Finance (DG V), Administration (DG VI) and Translation and General services (DG VII).

The major series of documents issued by, or on behalf of, the European Parliament are¹⁷:

- The *Bulletin* of the European Parliament, which is aimed at keeping Members currently informed of activities within the Parliament and of new documents and research papers issued. The *Bulletin* is divided in two parts: "Activities" and "Written questions". The "Activities" include the work of the President, the main decisions of the enlarged bureau, all the European Parliament's official acts presented or adopted during the Sessional period (reports, questions and resolutions); the reports prepared by the Directorate-General for Research & Documentation, the Commission's documents received by the Parliament and the appointments of rapporteurs to the Committees. Under the "Written Questions" are listed all the written questions deposited by the Members.

¹⁷ Parlement européen, Direction Générale des Études, Documents de travail. L'accès aux documents du Parlement européen. Série Bases Documentaires et Tables des Débats. W1. FR-2-1992

- *Debates* of the European Parliament, Report of proceedings. This is published by the Official Publications Office as an annex to the Official Journal, C series, and gives a text only in the language in which a speech was delivered. The final edition appears in all community languages about two months after the debate. A much earlier report, the verbatim report of proceedings is normally available on the next day and the Members may correct the text of their speeches.

- The *Indexes* to the debates are published annually in the Official Journal, C series, with a delay of at least twelve months after the session. They comprise: Index of names, index of subjects and list of working documents. The 'Index of names' indicates the appointments and resignations to and from committees, summarises the interventions and lists the working documents for which the Member has been responsible. The 'Index of subjects' is based on a system of keywords. The 'List of working documents' is in two parts, the first consisting of documents presented during the preceding session and examined during the current year, and the second comprising those drawn up during the year in question.

- Another important publication is the *Minutes of proceedings* which has the object of formally recording the decisions of the Parliament. It includes lists of consultations, requests for opinions, documents formally received and the committees to which they have been allocated, petitions entered on the register, a list of speakers and votes cast and the attendance list for each sitting. The final version of the Minutes is signed by the President and the Secretary General of the Parliament and published within one month in the Official Journal, C series.

After this overview on the advisory and legislative functions of the European Parliament and on the production and publication of documents directly or indirectly resulting from the exercise of these functions, the focus of this chapter moves to the

administrative history of the archives service of the European Parliament as an important step in the understanding of its collections of documents. There are however very few sources for the history of the European Parliament's archives service. Most of the following information comes from some direct exchange of views with Mr. Jacques Schouller¹⁸, Head of the archives services, and from the author's nine months archival work in the archives.

The first recorded step which modified the practices at the Archives at the European Parliament can be found in 1974 when, following a decision of the Secretary General, the archives service became the keeper of the official acts of the European Parliament only. This meant that the compulsory deposit of all the documents coming from other European Union institutions not included in the regulating process was abolished and the archives service was authorised to remove these kind of documents from its collections.

In 1983, the archives service inherited the "historical role" after the publication of the decision¹⁹ which allowed the Community institutions to release their archives to the public following the generally accepted "30 years rule". On 17 December 1984, in accordance with this decision, the European Parliament became a party to the contract between the Commission and the European University Institute setting up the European Communities' central historical archives in Florence (Italy). Since then, after a preliminary archiving procedure by the Parliament's archives service in Luxembourg, the European Parliament's original records have been deposited in Florence, where they are prepared for permanent conservation and made accessible to the public.

¹⁸ Draft paper by Mr. J. Schouller for the new edition of the "Guide des Archives des organisations internationales", jointly prepared with UNESCO and ICA. (November 1997)

There are however some important and sometime disconcerting features in the European Parliament's archival practices. One of these is that the European Parliament's archival programme does not include the archives and personal papers of anyone of the European Parliament's personalities, i.e. European Parliament's Members. In addition, the political groups have never deposited their papers with the archives service. This is due to the fact that the European Parliament's Archives, from the very beginning up to 1986, were under the Direction General for Sessional services and were responsible for keeping essentially only the acts of the plenary sittings and the official correspondence.

In 1987 the archives service of the European Parliament were placed under the Direction General for Research (DG IV). This change reinforced the role of the Archives. They became responsible for the conservation and the opening to the public of most of the European Parliament's official acts. This decision however gave the responsibility for conservation of the files on the legislative process to the Direction General for the Committees. In 1989 the archives service became the legal deposit for the official acts (with the exclusion of the working documents) on the co-operation procedure established by the Single European Act under article 189 C of the Treaty. In April 1994 the European Parliament's archives became also the legal deposit for all the certified acts regarding the conciliation and co-decision procedures as established by article 189 B of the European Union Treaty.

The European Parliament's archival holdings can now be divided in two main categories: those kept in Luxembourg and the fonds deposited at the Historical Archives of the European Communities in Florence.

¹⁹ Decision No. 359/83/CECA and Regulation CEE/EURATOM No. 354/83, Official Journal of the European Communities, (L 43 of 15.2.1983)

In Luxembourg the following collections are kept: • Minutes of the plenary sittings (the authentic copy, signed by the President and the copy as published in the Official Journal); • Debates (all languages, complete collection since 1952); • Parliamentary Committees reports (incomplete collection); • Resolutions (complete collection since 1952); • Petitions; • Minutes of the Committees meetings, acts of the Bureau and of the enlarged Bureau (minutes and documents); • Minutes and papers of the joint meetings of the Parliamentary Assembly and the Council of Europe; • Minutes of the sittings of the ACP Assembly (Yaoundé, Lomé I, Lomé II, Lomé III); • Correspondence. Chronological series of correspondence “sortie” (out letters) (1952-1972) and for “entrée” and “sortie” complete from 1973; thematic series (1952-1972) and series of all the correspondence from the Presidency of the European Parliament called “Cabinet” since 1981; • European Parliament’s President’s Fonds, arranged but not yet open to the public: - Fonds Simone Veil (1979-1981); - Fonds Pieter Dankert (1982-1984); - Fonds Pierre Pflimlin (1984-1987); - Fonds Lord Plumb (1987-1989); - Fonds Enrique Baron Crespo (1989-1992).

At the Historical Archives of the European Communities in Florence the European Parliament’s archival material is organised in three major fonds which reflect the three separate phases in the political development of the European Parliament.

First, the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community (1952-1958) collection is divided in three main series of documents covering the organisation and activities of the Assembly: - Administration and procedures: documentation concerning the Assembly’s presidency and the Bureau, notes and memoranda, letters from the secretariat, and administrative documents concerning

the organisation of divisions and departments; - Activities of the Assembly: Reports and discussions of the standing committees and documents illustrating relations with other institutions; - Relations with international organisations: special relations with the Council of Europe, the UN, GATT, EFTA and OECD.

Second, the Ad Hoc Assembly for the creation of a European political community (1952-1954) collection includes all Constitutional Committee's minutes and information documents and the documents by its subcommittees (political institutions, legal institutions, liaison with the Council of Europe and functions and powers of the EPC)

Finally, the European Parliamentary Assembly Fonds (1958-1979) consists mainly of debates i.e. proceedings of the parliamentary sittings with verbatim reports of Member's speeches and Committees' reports (known, after 1962, as session documents) which include written and oral questions, committees' reports and motions for resolutions. All these categories of documents are published in the Official Journal of the European Communities and therefore do not present any restrictions on access and consultation. In addition to these fonds there is also an European Parliament's Collection of press-cuttings (1956-1989) from the major European newspapers on the Parliament's work, arranged chronologically by major topics debated.

The ways in which these archives relate to ISAD(G) will be discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

2.3 Lack of co-ordination between the European Union's institutions: some examples from their finding aids

The most important rules and archival policies adopted or to be adopted by the European Union's institutions and Member countries have been presented in the first section of this chapter. This section will now investigate the lack of real co-ordination between the European Union's institutions on these issues and will try to give some explanations. The Group of Experts on archives, in its proposals for joint action and research, was convinced that "the best way of obtaining co-ordination in archival matters was to develop and promote co-operation on the basis of mutual agreement rather than regulation, whether at Community or extra-Community level."²⁰ This could be the reason for which the Member States and the European Union's institutions did not feel obliged to adopt strict and binding regulations on these matters. As result, both at the Member States level and at the European Union level, there has been little progress to date in creating systems for the large scale dissemination or exchange of archival information in electronic form or through information networks.

It is of particular interest to see whether the affirmation that the European Communities' institutions, since 1983, have been working together to ensure their historical archives undergo uniform processing²¹ corresponds to reality. The investigation will therefore concentrate on the results of the processing of the European Union's institutions' historical documents. Some important questions will

²⁰ European Commission, Archives in the European Union. Report of the Group of Experts on the Co-ordination of Archives. Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1994, XIV

therefore be posed: are the principles enunciated in the Group of Experts' Report applied in the European Union's institutions archives? Are the main three targets i.e. harmonisation of methods of classification, development of research tools and implementation of the Standards for Archival description applied? And if not, how can this situation be changed?

As starting point for the research, it can be noted that at the present time, 2003, there is no single system for the exchange of information between the European Union's institutions (the European Commission, the Council of the European Union, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee, the Court of Auditors, the Committee of the Regions, etc.). The archival exchanges between the European Union's institutions are still on the basis of ad hoc exchanges of their finding aids, inventories and/or indexes, most of them still in paper form. Furthermore, some examples from finding aids²² produced by some European Union institutions give evidence of different methods of arrangement, classification and description of their archival material. In this section, it is intended to compare the presentation of the European Union institutions' historical documents with the description of the same fonds/series/documents given by the Historical Archives of the European communities in Florence, where ISAD(G) has been successfully implemented. The following examples of archival practice have been taken from the finding aids (guides and inventories) produced by three European Union institutions: the European Commission, the Economic and Social Committee and the Council of Ministers. The reason for choosing these three institutions is essentially because of

²¹ *ibid*, 74

²² The idea comes from the interesting comparison made by the Society of Archivists in a similar debate concerning, at that time, MAD, its acceptability by archivists and its possible applications. See Society of Archivists - Training Committee, The Listing of Archival Records. Proceedings of a

the political relevance of their activities and the number of historical documents already opened to public. In each case a finding aid is described and analysed and comparisons are made with alternative structures for the finding aid. In each case, use of ISAD(G) structures would significantly improve the accessibility and use of finding aids by researchers.

European Commission

Since the opening up of the European Communities' historical archives in Florence in 1983, the European Commission has produced different kinds of inventories and guides to its fonds and collections. The research in this section however will take into consideration only the most recent and complete edition of these inventories: that is, the European Commission's inventory of the files of the High Authority of the European Community for Coal and Steel²³, published in 1996.

The inventory starts with an useful introduction to the administrative history of the European Commission's services and special regard is given to the archives service. The introduction notes that, since 1989, the Historical Archives of the European Commission have belonged to the Secretariat General and have acquired the function of intermediate archives for all the Commission's services. The Archives supervise, therefore, the entire administrative cycle of the documents and they ensure the transfer of documents and files to the repository.

Society of Archivists in-service Training Course held at the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, London, 26-28 March 1985

²³ Commission Européenne, Haute Autorité CECA: inventaire des dossiers. 1952-1967, Volume 1, Luxembourg, Office des publications officielles des Communautés européennes, 1996, Introduction, XII-XIII

In the inventory's introduction there is also a paragraph dedicated to the "historical analysis and microfilming of documents"²⁴ in which the Archives explain the importance of their database ARCHIS in doing this kind of analysis. By means of this database the Commission's archives can in fact easily produce the inventories, guides and indexes and can also search on-line for documents. Under the title "publication of structured inventories"²⁵ the Commission's archives also present the future plan to publish all the documents produced by the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community. The Archives' plan for publication of these documents includes two volumes that will cover the documents produced by "horizontal services" such as the Secretariat General and the juridical service.

In the introduction to the it is explained to the users that for the general understanding of the inventory's structure it is important to note that the High Authority's archives was made of fifteen different fonds which have been divided in three main areas of activities:

- the documents of the horizontal services;
- the documents of the specialised services;
- the documents of the administrative services.

Unfortunately for all the researchers and users of this guide not a single diagram or visual aid to help to understand this complicated administrative structure can be found.

This inventory (the first volume of this publication series) includes 7,398 database entries, representing files in paper form. It comprises the documents produced by: the Secretariat General (fonds code: CEAB 2), the Direction for

²⁴ *ibid.*, XVI

²⁵ *ibid.*, XVII

external relations (fonds code: CEAB 5), the High Authority's Working Groups (fonds code: CEAB 13), the Committee of the Four Presidents (fonds code: CEAB 14) and the European Community for Steel and Coal's Consultative Committee's files (fonds code: CEAB 15).

A brief description of the provenance, which is more like an administrative history, can be found at the beginning of the related inventory's section for each one of these fonds. Furthermore, in the section "structure of the inventory",²⁶ the user can find a short description of the records management activities which led to the transfer of the documents to the Commission's Historical Archives. The majority of the High Authority's documents were transferred to the archives in 1980. The arrangement in which the documents were received by the Archives service follows an adapted version of the 'classification décimale universelle' (UDC). During the 1950s, the High Authority adopted UDC as the basis for its classification scheme, making some adaptations to its own needs. However, the inventory has been structured to follow not only the UDC but also the tasks executed by the High Authority, the organisation of its general administration and the subordinated services' functions.

The inventory has a section dedicated to "How to use the inventory"²⁷ in which some examples are given with the aim to help the researchers. Table 2.1 represents one of them.

Image removed due to third party copyright

Table 2.1 - Excerpt from "how to use the inventory" – European Commission

²⁶ *ibid.*, XVII

²⁷ *ibid.*, XVIII-XIX

The example²⁸ in table 2.1 shows at the left margin the inventory number (here: 5913). This number helps to locate the files in the inventory. In the case when several files are under one description, the single inventory numbers are indicated in *italics* to the left of the reference code. The inventory number is followed by the title of the file here “Conseil d’association Royaume Uni/CECA” and a description of the file’s contents Comité du charbon – groupes de travail and the languages in which the documents are produced. Under the description of the file appears the archives reference code formed by the abbreviation CEAB (Commission européenne Archives historiques Bruxelles) followed by the number of the fonds and the current number of files and items (here: CEAB 5, n. 1378). The archives code refers also to the correlated microfiche. The covering dates of the documents are shown at the bottom right.

The major criticism of this inventory is that the approach taken to numbering of entries in the inventory is inconsistent and confusing. It states that : “the present volume includes 7,398 entries (inventory numbers) which corresponds to 7,352 files. For organisational and practical reasons (different subjects, etc.) in a limited number of cases, a file appears more than one time in the inventory.”²⁹

Moreover, it is generally accepted that a list or inventory has as its main purpose to create a representation of the archive and that the relationship between the representation and the archive has to be clear. Unfortunately, this is not the case for this inventory. The author’s opinion is that an overall view of all the fonds and a clear distinction of the series of documents are missing. Furthermore, the description

²⁸ *ibid.*, XVIII

²⁹ *ibid.*, XIX

does not have any elements of ISAD(G). There is not a clear separation between two important elements in the inventory: namely, the title and the contents of the unit of description. The unit of description should also have one unique link to the higher unit of description in a hierarchy (series or fonds). This means therefore that a file should not appear more than one time in an inventory. If this should occur, as in this inventory, a mention of the difference between originals and copies should be made.

A comparison with some examples taken from the Historical Archives of the European Communities' database in Florence will better clarify the remarks on this inventory. The examples taken from the database in fact show a greater accessibility and comprehensibility of information offered by a standardised representation of the same archival information. The example which has been chosen refers to a unit of description in the same fonds regarding the external relations of the European Communities (CEAB 5). The presentation of the European Commission's documents (the representation of fonds, series and files) is shown in a different way. This is due to the implementation of ISAD(G) to the database which can therefore produce standardised finding aids.

Firstly, it has to be noted that the representation of the European Commission's fonds is divided into three levels of description (fonds/series/files). There is therefore no redundancy of information and the information appears quite clear in its presentation. In the database (screen view reproduced in Table 2.2) the user can arrive to lower levels e.g. series level by choosing reference code CEAB05.

Image removed due to third party copyright

Table 2.2 - Screen view from Eurhistar database: query result of CEAB (fonds level)

The first level (Table 2.2) gives an overview of all the fifteen fonds. By choosing the desired fonds, in this case CEAB 5, the query (in Table 2.3) gives a list of files directly linked to the fonds. The following example indicates the absence of the series level.

Image removed due to third party copyright

Table 2.3 - Screen view from Eurhistar database: query results of CEAB (list of files)

By choosing CEAB05-1 the user can get all the information about the first file in the fonds with some of the standardised elements of description: reference code, span dates, title, contents and some additional elements to respect the originator's needs like: languages and old reference code. (Table 2.4)

Image removed due to third party copyright

Table 2.4 - Screen view from Eurhistar database: query's results of CEAB (file level)

Economic and Social Committee

In the introduction to the Guide of the Historical Archives of the Economic and Social Committee³⁰ there is no trace of the background to the production of the Guide or an administrative history of the archives service. What the Guide does explain is that, in order to facilitate the research, the files have been grouped under series. Thirty series have been constituted for the years between 1958 and 1960. Some of the series have not been used for the period covered by the Guide, however they have been constituted to respect the classification in force at the archives service at that time. The presentation of the fonds of the Economic and Social Committee Historical Archives allows the researchers to know for each series the total number of the existing microfiches. Furthermore the Guide³¹ explains that the main function of the Economic and Social Committee is the consultative one. The Economic and Social Committee is a consultative body for the Commission and the Council of Ministers and the “Opinions” are its most important documents. All the files concerning the “Avis” (“Opinions”) are grouped under the series number twenty (20) and are identified by:

- the main entry

- the UDC index code

- the complete title of the subject treated (the title which appears on the microfiche). In addition, a series’ inventory is constituted of an extract of the main elements for each file. In the paragraph dedicated to “how to use the Guide”³² the

³⁰ Comité Economique et Social des Commautés Européennes Guide des archives historiques du Comité Economique et Social des Communautés Européennes. Volume 2, Année 1960, Bruxelles, 1991, 1

³¹ *ibid.*, 8

³² *ibid.*, 7-10

user has to face a very difficult explanation of how to use the UDC and the interpretation of the relation between the series and the UDC remains quite obscure. The example given by the Guide is as follows: "The presentation of the files is done following the decimal order as can be seen in the example:

File SESSION: series 5 CDU: -.07.51 "

The user can therefore search for a file "Opinions" as follows:

1. Consult the inventory for the series n. 20
2. Refer to the main entries to find the subject
3. Refer to the detailed UDC index
4. Verify the entire title on the microfiche or in the inventory

The explanation is not very easy to follow and it is more surprising if we consider that "Opinions" are the most important documents produced by this institution. The inventory structure does not help the researcher to understand the relationships between the series of documents, the subjects, the UDC index and the extremely difficult verification of the title on the microfiche.

The Economic and Social Committee archives service seems also think that the file structure is relatively easy and uniform. Since 1958 the structure has been determined by the internal rules of procedure which is as follows:

- request for an opinion received;
- analysis by the specialised Section;
- organisation of work in the specialised Section, establishment of working groups;
- several steps to arrive at the draft opinion and draft report by the Section;

- opinion to be discussed in the plenary assembly.

It is interesting to note that all these recurrent procedural steps for setting up an opinion are not recognised in the archives structure as sub-series of the main series "Opinion". Furthermore, a researcher who would like to know to which body (or economic/social category) a counsellor belongs has to refer to the files "appointments" as well as the list of names in another volume. The archives have not yet produced a general index of the persons and bodies to which the Economic and Social Committee counsellors belong. Indexes containing such data could represent a very good basis for the implementation of archival authority standards.

As in the above mentioned European Commission's case the inventory by the Economic and Social Committee is compared in the following pages to the very same data presented in database Eurhistar at the Historical Archives in Florence. The means for improvement offered by ISAD(G) are again evident.

It is of some interest here to compare the most important documents produced by the Economic and Social Committee (the "Opinion") in the two different presentations: the original one made by the Economic and Social Committee archives (Table 2.5) and the one taken from the Eurhistar database (Table 2.6). The file chosen as an example concerns the debate on the approval of a list of professional illness by the Economic and Social Committee.³³

³³ Comité Economique et Social des Communautés Européennes Guide des archives historiques du Comité Economique et Social des Communautés Européennes. Volume 3, Années 1961/1962, Bruxelles, 1992, 129

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Table 2.5 - Excerpt from Economic and Social Committee Guide (file level)

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Table 2.6 - Screen view from Eurhistar database: query results of Economic and Social Committee (file level)

The Historical Archives of the European Communities in Florence encountered major difficulties in the description of the Economic and Social Committee's fonds since all the series were artificially divided by years i.e. by the year of production of the documents (that have been disclosed). The Economic and Social Committee archives had assigned to the files a reference corresponding only to

the series (20 for the opinions) but with no reference to the area of activity covered by the opinions.

To solve this problem the archives in Florence have divided all the opinions' series in sub-series (in this case: sub-series 06 of the main series 20) and have assigned a sequential number (CES 499) to the files in the series. In this way they have not only avoided the problematic reference system of the Economic and Social Committee, which had assigned the same reference codes to the series for each year, but also complied with ISAD(G) multilevel description techniques, for giving the information appropriate to the level of description.

Council of Ministers

The Council of Ministers archives service has produced one of the most unstructured inventories of all the other European Union's institutions. The inventory³⁴ has no historical context and the administrative histories both of the Council of Ministers and of the archives service are missing.

The Council of Ministers originally planned to publish every year the documents which could be released to the public. The inventories published between 1986 and 1992³⁵ followed the unique criteria of the documents' production year. This criterion led however in my opinion to the loss of the fonds' integrity. Series and files split in this way lack coherence and are unintelligible for users and researchers.

The Council of Ministers' inventory is composed of a plan with all the main file's elements. The examples given by the inventory's authors show that the

³⁴ Conseil des Communautés européennes, Inventaire des archives historiques du Conseil. Année 1953, Communauté européenne du charbon et de l'acier. Edition provisoire, Bruxelles, 1986

inventory has been conceived to allow consultation only of microfiches not of original files/documents. Archival practice is therefore based on the physical support on which the files are stored and communicated to the public, not on provenance or context. The description has therefore a big limitation: the support i.e. the microfiche.

In the inventory there are very few elements that could be really helpful for users. There is no mention of any filing structure of the documents and no mention of the series, even though series can be identified from the inventory's table of contents given at the beginning of the guide. In the inventory there is also redundancy of information and confusion in the definition of what is a title and what is the content of the unit of description. There is, throughout the inventory, a constant and misleading unification between the physical archival entity (whether file or item) and the surrogate medium of the microfiche. Sometimes obviously there is more than one file on a microfiche and sometimes a file is divided into many microfiches.

The following examples will clarify this ambiguous descriptive practice. The elements represented in Table 2.7 are taken from the section "how to use the inventory"³⁶ and explain in a detailed way how to use, instead, the microfiches:

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Table 2.7 - Excerpt from "how to use the inventory" – Council of Ministers of the European Communities

³⁵ Conseil des Communautés européennes, Inventaire des archives historiques du Conseil. 1959, Communauté européenne du charbon et de l'acier, Bruxelles, 1992

³⁶ Conseil des Communautés européennes, Inventaire des archives historiques du Conseil. Année 1953, Communauté européenne du charbon et de l'acier. Edition provisoire, Bruxelles, 1986, 4

Image removed due to third party copyright

Table 2.8 - Excerpt from Council of Ministers of the European Communities inventory (file level)

The same applies to the following example (Table 2.8) which is taken directly from the inventory³⁷.

As mentioned above, the practice of the Council of Ministers to describe microfiches instead of archival units is represented in Table 2.8 with the acronyms A3 and E10 that refer to positions of documents in the support microfiche.

Finally, in the following pages, some alternative approaches to the European Union's descriptive practices are analysed through examples taken from the Historical Archives of the European Communities in Florence. One of the problems identified in the examination of the Economic and Social Committee's inventories was to render an acceptable description of the fonds artificially divided by years by the creators. Unfortunately this practice is common to other institutions and in this case the Council of Ministers fonds are showed as example. However, to solve this problem the use of ISAD(G) appear to be the best answer.

³⁷ *ibid*, 13

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Table 2.9 - Screen view from Eurhistar database: query results of Council of the European Communities (fonds level)

In table 2.9 the reproduction of the database's screen shows that by choosing the year 1953 "Année 1953" the database gives 206 entries in the series, and shows the results as follows:

Image removed due to third party copyright

Table 2.10 - Screen view from Eurhistar database: query results of Council of the European Communities (series level)

Table 2.10 shows first the reference code [the fonds and the series are separated by a slash (CM1/1953)] then the file's numbers and the files' titles and the span dates. All the files are listed in chronological order. Additionally, by choosing the line corresponding to the 10th session of the Council (10. session du Conseil à Luxembourg les 07 et 08/12/1953) the database gives the following results:

Image removed due to third party copyright

Table 2.11 - Screen view from Eurhistar database: query results of Council of the European Communities (file level)

The database's query gives as results more details about the level of description, in this case the file level. It is important to note that even if the elements of description are in a different order compared to ISAD(G) they are present in Table 10 and can be recognised as follows: the reference code, the extent of the unit (microfiches 4/9-4/10), the span dates and the title and contents of the unit of description. There is even some more information about context: the creator and the extended reference code.

These few examples taken from some guides and inventories produced by different European Union institutions have illustrated how different these institutions are, both in theoretical approach and in practical applications, in the archives field. Furthermore, the author would stress how the challenging proposals made by the

Group of Experts on archives have been left without any real implementation by the same institutions which promoted the Group's meetings.

The Eurhistar database gives a good example of the uniform processing allowed through an ISAD(G) compliant database. Eurhistar database gives uniform results in representation and responds to the expectations not only of the ICA Committee on standardisation of archival description but also of the Group of Experts on Archives. The three main targets pointed out by the Group of Experts³⁸ are being reached by the hard work of the Historical Archives in Florence, which through uniform descriptions produce consistent finding aids for researchers. These results could however been reached much more easily through prior co-ordination between the European Union institutions based on transfers of descriptions (or even of the metadata) in electronic form. In the past, the European Commission, European Parliament and the Council of Ministers examined the harmonisation of the methods of classification. As a result of their deliberations they abandoned the use of UDC for current archives, which they considered to be an obsolete archival practice. However, they did not balance this decision by recommending the adoption of coherent filing systems based on provenance, so no real co-ordination took place in this field.

The comparison and analysis presented in this section does not pretend to be an exhaustive survey of the complex interrelationships existing between the European Union institutions in the field of archives. Rather, it seeks to support the debate about the adoption of the International Standard for Archival Description on the European Union level.

³⁸ European Commission, Archives in the European Union. Report of the Group of Experts on the Co-ordination of Archives. Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1994, XIV

The European Union has produced in recent years a great number of legal texts and treaties on the issues of governance, transparency and access to documents³⁹. The following section will summarise those aspects of these developments which are particularly relevant for the archives and their possible implications on archival descriptive practices.

2.4 European Governance, citizens' rights of access to documents and the role of archives.

European Governance : historical background

In Nice in December 2000 the Member States of the European Union took the technical decision ensuring the accession of new States. The European Council of Laeken was called upon to take appropriate initiatives to pursue a process of reforms and a wide-ranging debate. The Nice declaration pinpointed – *inter alia* – four fundamental questions: the future role of national parliaments, the simplification of the Treaties⁴⁰, the status of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European

³⁹ The research on this topic has been completed in January 2003.

⁴⁰ The Commission asked the European University Institute in Florence (EUI) to analyse the provisions of the EU and EC Treaties and draw up a basic text containing only the essential clauses, without the implementing provisions. On 15 May 2000, the Robert Schuman Centre of the EUI presented its report on the reorganisation of the Treaties to the Commission. This operation led to a Basic Treaty. Unlike a constitution, which merely defines the structure of the public authorities and their powers as well as the fundamental freedoms and rights of the people, the Treaties establishing the Communities and the Union include, sometimes in detail, the objectives of the policies which the European institutions have to follow. The authors of the EUI report felt that these policies should have

Union, and a more precise delimitation of powers between the European Union and the Member States.

In July 2001, the Commission presented its White Paper on governance, in which it affirmed that: "today, political leaders throughout Europe are facing a real paradox. On the one hand, Europeans want them to find solutions to the major problems confronting our societies. On the other hand, people increasingly distrust institutions and politics or are simply not interested in them. The problem is acknowledged by national parliaments and governments alike but it is particularly acute at the level of the European Union. Many people are losing confidence in a poorly understood and complex system to deliver the policies that they want. The union is often seen as remote and at the same time too intrusive. [...] Hence, the Union faces a double challenge: there is not only a need for urgent action to adapt governance under the existing treaties, but also for a broader debate on the future of Europe. [...] The White Paper proposes opening up the policy-making process to get more people and organizations involved in shaping and delivering EU policies. It promotes greater openness, accountability and responsibility for all those involved."⁴¹

The basic message of the White Paper was simple: European Union institutions and Member States need to collaborate in order to govern better. Better governance means fuller cooperation, with the aim of demonstrating to European citizens their place in the European Union's projects and in its day-to-day business. Democratic conscience in Europe provokes a need for accountability and

a place in the Basic Treaty. "Commission Communication – A basic Treaty for the European Union" [COM(2000) 434 final], 1-4.

The concept of "simplification" has later been widened to "regroup legal texts, remove redundant or obsolete provisions, and shift non-essential obligations to executive measures." "European Governance – A White Paper", [COM(2001) 428 final] - Official Journal of the European Communities C 287, 12.10.2001, 19

proportionality in the way powers vested in European Union institutions are exercised. This need is expressed more especially in transparency, clarity and the willingness to stand up to scrutiny. It has to be stressed that the term "transparency"⁴² is frequently used in the language of the European Union institutions to mean openness in their work. This term is linked to a variety of documents concerning broader public access to information and to European Union documents, and to more intelligible legal instruments. Complaints by European citizens concerning a lack of transparency tend to reflect a feeling that the European Union institutions are remote and that decision-making procedures are difficult for them to understand.

In the wake of the Kaufmann report⁴³ on European governance, a resolution adopted by the European Parliament in November 2001 strengthened these ethical requirements further. Stressing the primacy of political accountability behind legislative action, the resolution brought out the need for more transparent, equitable and open consultation with civil society. It regretted that the Commission did not mention the regulations on access to documents in the White Paper, "since it is evident that proper implementation of these rules and the allocations of adequate resources to that end are of paramount importance for the achievement of good governance in the European Union."⁴⁴

The Laeken European Council in December 2001 opened a new phase of European integration. Created for six Member States, the Union has today fifteen and will soon total twenty-five Member States. Single currency, justice and security,

⁴¹ "European Governance – A White Paper" [COM(2001) 428 final] - Official Journal of the European Communities C 287/5, 12.10.2001, 1-2

⁴² For the definition of transparency see: <http://european-convention.eu.int/glossary.asp?lang=EN>

⁴³ European Parliament – Report on the Commission White Paper on European governance, Committee on Constitutional Affairs, Rapporteur Sylvia-Yvonne Kaufmann, 15.11.2001 [doc. PE 304.289]

⁴⁴ *ibid*, 12, 44, 46-47

foreign policy and defence have been added to economic action. Fifty years of history have been fifty years of solid achievement but, as consequence of this process, coherence has gradually been lost. The very success of the reconciliation between the peoples of Europe, which was at the origin of the European project, has made the European Union institutions lose sight of the initial political ambition. The citizens, to whom Europe has brought peace, stability and well-being, are faced with a bureaucratic and governmental machinery which, increasingly, they do not understand.

Hence, the legitimate expectations of citizens to have full and easy access to information on European affairs, European governance and the future of the Union call for a modern, efficient and reliable information policy. The challenges to equip the European Union institutions with tools to appropriately fulfil their duty of informing and communicating has been an occasion to reinforce and rethink their communication policies⁴⁵.

Information policies and communication strategies

At the heart of European Union's information and communication policy is the obligation to bring Europe closer to its citizens. The structures and institutions themselves must adapt to this imperative, giving the impression that Europe is "just round the corner" with information that is clear, appropriate and in touch with its citizens' concerns. Similarly, it is essential for citizens to be informed on the Charter

⁴⁵ "Communication from the Commission to the Council, European Parliament, Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions on a new framework for co-operation on activities concerning the information and communication policy of the European Union" [COM(2001) 354 final] and "Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the

of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, in order to benefit fully from it. However, the strategy for a coherent and comprehensive information and communication policy will not in itself be sufficient to resolve the issue of good governance or the "democratic challenge". Just like its Member States, the European Union is facing public disaffection with politics. At European level, this crisis of representation is even greater, since there is no clear public perception of the legitimacy of the European Union institutions. Hence, in order to fill the perceived information deficit there is an increasing need for European projects to be made meaningful to European citizens.⁴⁶

In its White Paper on European governance⁴⁷ the Commission had already acknowledged that democracy depends on the capacity of the individual to participate in public debate; European Union institutions must not waste any time in rising to this challenge, which will only increase with enlargement. However, genuine communication by the European Union cannot be reduced to the mere provision of information. Effective communication must convey meanings and facilitate comprehension and dialogue within national public opinion, so as to enhance the participation of the general public in the European debate. The European Union has identified three priority topics concerning communication with its citizens: enlargement; the future of the European Union; and the area of freedom, security and justice. The communication strategy on enlargement focuses on the legitimacy of the accession by these countries, the considerable efforts made by these countries to

Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on an Information and Communication Strategy for the European Union" [COM(2002) 350 final]

⁴⁶ "Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on an Information and Communication Strategy for the European Union" [COM(2002) 350 final], 6

⁴⁷ "European Governance – A White Paper", [COM(2001) 428 final] - Official Journal of the European Communities C 287, 12.10.2001, 8

adopt community law and practice, and the undeniable value added by enlargement. The topic of the future of the European Union matches the need to provide general information and basic explanation about how Europe actually works. The work of the Convention on the future of the European Union should ensure that the new constitution for Europe is properly appreciated. Lastly, the area of freedom, security and justice developed around the issues of immigration and human rights and implying democracy and respect as basic values, is aimed at giving full meaning to the concept of European citizenship.

Among the instruments, tools and resources available to ensure that this new European Union communication strategy succeeds is the *Europa* website⁴⁸. *Europa* can be considered an essential instrument for bringing the institutions closer to people and for facilitating contact between Europeans. It has the potential to be geared to meet the information requirements of the general public and to facilitate access to information sources. *Europa* symbolises the new concepts of "e-Commission", "e-Europe" and "e-governance" and should represent the interface for European Union governance and its most up-to-date practices. Its main features are interactivity, rapid consultations, and a simplified administrative practice. Connected to a simplified administrative practice is the entry into force of the regulation on access to documents, which implements Article 255 of the Treaty of Amsterdam. This regulation represents a major challenge for the European Union institutions and requires a rapid and effective response making citizens aware of their rights.

⁴⁸ "*Europa* was initially launched on the Commission's initiative and dates from 1995. Following a suggestion from the European Parliament, the Secretaries General of all institutions set up a task force in 1997 which subsequently developed into the Interinstitutional Internet Editorial Committee, with the Commission providing the Chair. One of the outcomes of this co-operation has been a common vision of the content and presentation of the headings in the general homepage and the underlying pages" in: "Communication from the Commission to the Council, European Parliament, Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions on a new framework for co-operation on activities

Access to documents – a fundamental right

European governance means rules, processes and behaviour that affect the way in which powers are exercised at European level, particularly as regards openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence⁴⁹. These five principles are important for establishing more democratic governance. Democracy depends on people being able to take part in public debate. In order to achieve this, they must have access to reliable information on European issues and must be able to scrutinise the policy process in its various stages.

Major progress was made in 2001 with the adoption of new rules giving citizens greater access to EU documents. The fundamental document in this respect is Regulation 1049/2001 of the European Parliament and the Council of 30 May 2001⁵⁰. The first paragraph of the regulation stresses its link to Article 255 of the EC Treaty, which protects the concept of openness and defines: "openness enables citizens to participate more closely in the decision-making process and guarantees that the administration enjoys greater legitimacy and is more effective and more accountable to the citizen in a democratic system. Openness contributes to strengthening the principles of democracy and respect for fundamental rights as laid down in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union". It is important to stress the two fundamental elements to which the regulation reiterates throughout its text: the

concerning the information and communication policy of the European Union" [COM(2001) 354 final], 18. *Europa* website: www.europa.eu.int (accessed on 10.08.2002)

⁴⁹ "European Governance – A White Paper", [COM(2001) 428 final] - Official Journal of the European Communities C 287, 12.10.2001, 5

⁵⁰ Regulation (EC) 1049/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2001 regarding public access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents – Official Journal of the European Communities L 145/43, 31.05.2001

article 255 of the European Communities' Treaty and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

Article 255, a new article introduced by the Treaty of Amsterdam⁵¹, reads as follows: "Any citizen of the Union, and any natural or legal person residing or having its registered office in a Member State, shall have a right of access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents.[..] General principles and limits on grounds of public or private interest governing this right of access to documents shall be determined by the Council [..] within two years of the entry into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam. Each institution referred to above shall elaborate in its own Rules of Procedure specific provisions regarding access to its documents."

In Nice, on 7th December 2000, the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission solemnly proclaimed the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union⁵². Chapter V of the Charter is the chapter dedicated to citizens' rights and among other rights (the right to vote and to stand as a candidate at European and at municipal elections, the right to good administration, etc.) it lays down the right of access to documents. Article 42 of the Charter declares that "Any citizen of the Union, and any natural or legal person residing or having its registered office in a Member State, has the right of access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents"⁵³. Moreover, in its general provisions the Charter refers to rights guaranteed by the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and

⁵¹ The Treaty of Amsterdam was signed on 2 October 1997 and came into force on the 1st January 1999

⁵² Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Official Journal of the European Communities C 364/1, 18.12.2000

⁵³ Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union - Article 42, Official Journal of the European Communities C 364/1, 18.12.2000, 19

Fundamental Freedoms⁵⁴, the meaning and scope of which are meant to be the same as those laid down by the Convention⁵⁵.

The above quoted Regulation 1049/2001 is not a complete innovation in the framework of European citizens' right of access to documents. It rather consolidates the initiatives that European Union institutions have already taken, with a view to improving the transparency of the decision-making process. Its purpose is to give the fullest possible effect to the right of public access to documents and to lay down the general principles⁵⁶ and limits on such access. The question of access to documents was not covered by the provisions of the Treaties establishing the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Atomic Energy Community. Therefore, the European Parliament the Council and the Commission have to draw guidance from Regulation 1049/2001 as regards documents concerning the activities covered by those two Treaties.

Following this regulation, wider access to documents must be granted in cases where the institutions are acting in their legislative capacity. Such documents are to be made accessible directly and to the greatest possible extent. Access to documents should be granted by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission, not only to documents drawn up by these institutions themselves, but

⁵⁴ The Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms was drawn up within the Council of Europe. It was signed in Rome on 4 November 1950 and came into force in September 1953. See: <http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/en/Treaties/Html/005.htm> (accessed on 10.08.2002)

⁵⁵ Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union - Article 52, Official Journal of the European Communities C 364/1, 18.12.2000, 21

⁵⁶ Regulation (EC) 1049/2001- Article 1 – "The purpose of this Regulation is: (a) to define the principles, conditions and limits on grounds of public or private interest governing the right of access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents provided for in Article 255 of the EC Treaty in such a way as to ensure the widest possible access to documents, (b) to establish rules ensuring the easiest possible exercise of this right, and (c) to promote good administrative practice on access to documents."

also to documents received by them⁵⁷. In principle, all documents of the institutions should be accessible to the public. However, in special cases specific public and private interests must be protected by way of exceptions⁵⁸.

Particular attention must be drawn to certain definitions provided by Regulation 1049/2001. For the purpose of this Regulation a document: "shall mean any content whatever its medium (written on paper or stored in electronic form or as a sound, visual or audiovisual recording) concerning a matter relating to the policies, activities and decisions falling within the institution's sphere of responsibility"⁵⁹. Applications for access⁶⁰ to a document are possible in any written form, including electronic form, in one of the European Union languages and in a sufficiently precise manner to enable the European Union institution to identify the document. The applicant is not obliged to state his/her reasons for the application. Within fifteen working days from registration⁶¹ of the application, the institution must either grant access to the document requested and provide access within that period or, in a written reply, state the reasons for the total or partial refusal, and inform the applicant of his or her right to make a confirmatory application. The applicant⁶² must have access to documents either by consulting them on the spot or by receiving a copy, including, where available, an electronic copy, according to the applicant's preference. Documents should be supplied in an existing version and format

⁵⁷ Regulation (EC) 1049/2001 - Article 1

⁵⁸ Regulation (EC) 1049/2001 - Article 4 defines the exceptions as follows: "The institutions shall refuse access to a document where disclosure would undermine the protection of the public interest (public security, defence and military matters; privacy and the integrity of the individual and the protection of personal data; protection of commercial interests, including intellectual property, court proceedings and legal advice. [...] Sensitive documents shall be recorded in the register or released only with the consent of the originator. [...] An institution, which decides to refuse access to a sensitive document, shall give the reasons for its decision."

⁵⁹ Regulation (EC) 1049/2001 - Article 3 (definitions)

⁶⁰ Regulation (EC) 1049/2001 - Article 6

⁶¹ Regulation (EC) 1049/2001 - Article 7

⁶² Regulation (EC) 1049/2001 - Article 10 (access following an application)

(including electronically or in an alternative format such as Braille, large print or tape) with full regard to the applicant's preference. To make citizens' rights under this Regulation effective, each institution must provide public access to a register of documents⁶³. Access to this register should be provided in electronic form⁶⁴. For each document the register should contain a reference number (including, where applicable, the inter-institutional reference), the subject and/or a short description of the content of the document and the date on which it was received or drawn up and recorded in the register. The institutions should have taken the measures necessary to establish a register, which was expected to be operational by 3 June 2002. Therefore, each institution was expected to adapt its rules of procedure⁶⁵ to the provisions of Regulation 1049/2001.

Document management – a strategy for access

How do European Union archives face the new challenge of Regulation 1049/2001? How do they interact with European citizens' greater awareness regarding their rights of access to documents?

The European Union institutions (and their archives) have reacted in different ways vis-à-vis the implementation of Regulation 1049/2001.

As a fully comprehensive comparative scheme of all definitions and procedures adopted by all the European Union institutions would be too complex as a

⁶³ Regulation (EC) 1049/2001 - Article 11

⁶⁴ Regulation (EC) 1049/2001 - Article 12 regards the direct access in electronic form or through a register and also states that "where direct access is not given through the register, the register shall as far as possible indicate where the document is located."

⁶⁵ Regulation (EC) 1049/2001 - Article 18 and article 14

task to be summarised in a section of one chapter, I will concentrate here only on what I consider to be the most important definitions and measures applied.

First of all, special attention should be given to the fact that while Regulation 1049/2001 does not mention the establishment of a document management system to implement the new rules, both Commission and Parliament have felt it to be an essential prerequisite to enable them to comply with such new rules. A remarkable and quite complete document management model is in fact what the Commission, amending its Rules of Procedure⁶⁶, proposes to institute in order to make it capable of complying with the provisions of Regulation 1049/2001. The Commission has been the first European Union institution to stress that efficient document management is an essential prerequisite for an effective policy of public access to documents⁶⁷. Consequently, all the Commission's documents are considered as products of activities and decisions in the political, legislative, technical, financial and administrative fields, and must be managed on the basis of certain rules. The documents form a direct link with the institution's activities in progress: similarly they reflect the Commission's past activities in its dual capacity as a European Union institution and European public administrative body. The Rules of Procedure ensure that the Commission is able, at any time, to provide information on the subjects for which it is accountable. The documents and files kept by the Commission must therefore preserve the institution's memory, facilitate the exchange of information, provide proof of operations carried out, and meet the department's legal obligations. Implementation of the abovementioned Rules requires the establishment of a filing plan, which will form part of the institution's activity-based management and will

⁶⁶ Commission Decision of 23 January 2002 amending its Rules of Procedure - Notified under document number C(2002) 99, (2002/47/EC, ECSC, Euratom), Annex, Official Journal of the European Communities L 21/23, 24.01.2002

improve openness and access to documents. Finally, the establishment of a register⁶⁸ containing the references of documents drawn up or received by the Commission will help citizens to exercise their right of access.

Furthermore, the Commission, in its definition of the term "document", goes beyond the basic elements proposed by Regulation 1049/2001, by integrating it into a wider document management concept. For the Commission, in fact, "document" shall mean: "any content drawn up or received by the Commission concerning a matter relating to the policies, activities and decisions falling within the institution's competence and in the framework of its official tasks, in whatever medium (written on paper or stored in electronic form or as a sound, visual or audio-visual recording)."⁶⁹ The definition of the term file "the core around which the documents are organised in line with the institution's activities, for reasons of proof, justification or information and to guarantee efficiency in the work"⁷⁰ is also important. Such a definition, and the measures accompanying it, represents an absolute innovation in the institutions' terminology. According to the Commission, document management must therefore ensure "the due creation, receipt and storage of documents, the identification of each document by means of appropriate signs enabling it to be filed, searched for and easily referred to, the preservation of the institution's memory, retention of proof of activities undertaken and fulfilment of the department's legal obligations, easy exchange of information and compliance with the Commission's obligations as regards openness"⁷¹. Hence, documents are required to undergo the

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, Preamble, 1

⁶⁸ http://europa.eu.int/comm/secretariat_general/regdoc/registre.cfm?CL=en

⁶⁹ Commission Decision of 23 January 2002 amending its Rules of Procedure - Notified under document number C(2002) 99, (2002/47/EC, ECSC, Euratom), Annex, Official Journal of the European Communities L 21/23, 24.01.2002 - Article 1 (definitions)

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ *ibid.*, article 2

following operations: registration, filing, storage and transfer to the Historical Archives⁷². The Commission also suggests the regular updating of these rules, in step with the development of new information and communication technologies, the changes in documentary sciences and the results of international research, including the emergence of new standards in the field.⁷³

In May 2002, the European Parliament adopted a decision on public access to documents⁷⁴ which represents a comprehensive document management system. The Parliament considers this system an essential tool enabling itself to comply with Community law on document access and to ensure that it upholds basic standards for good public administration. The Parliament also underlines that the implementation of these new measures should lead to important changes of administrative practices in the institution. The new document management measures cover the most important aspects of a DMS: the treatment of the correspondence (incoming and outgoing)⁷⁵, the registration of documents⁷⁶, preservation of documents⁷⁷, data transfer to the register and updating of the register⁷⁸, and rules concerning records transfer to the archives⁷⁹. Shortly after the entry into force of Regulation 1049/2001, the Parliament was able to provide an efficient system for registration, to overcome

⁷² *ibid.*, - article 7 defines the appraisal and transfer to the Commission Historical Archives

⁷³ *ibid.*, art. 12

⁷⁴ "Décision du Secrétaire général sur les mesures d'exécution relatives à l'enregistrement des documents". PE 318.361/BUR/ANN 1, Luxembourg 31.05.2002

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, articles 1 to 6

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, articles 7 to 16

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, articles 17 and 18

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, articles 19 to 29

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, articles 30 and 31

the backlog and to present a wide range of documents⁸⁰ directly accessible through the register⁸¹.

As early as May 1998, the Council had decided, first among the European Union institutions, to create a register intended to contain the titles, dates and document numbers of unclassified Council documents⁸². However, when it amended its Rules of Procedure⁸³ in order to comply with Regulation 1049/2001, it did not develop a document management system. The Council has a more restricted vision regarding its procedures than the Parliament. The Public Register of Council documents⁸⁴ is meant to indicate which documents drawn up after 1 July 2000 have already been released to the public⁸⁵. All Council documents are open to the public⁸⁶, provided that they are not classified and that they are legislative documents (meaning documents concerning the examination and adoption of legislative acts). Compared to the definition given by Regulation 1049/2001, the Council has a restrictive definition of which kind of documents should be made available to the public: "documents of which neither the Council nor a Member State is the author, which have been made public by their author or with his agreement, provisional agenda of meetings of the Council in its various formations, any text adopted by the Council and intended to be published in the Official Journal, provisional agenda of committees and working parties, other documents, such as information notes, reports,

⁸⁰ List of documents, adopted by the Parliament on 14 May 2002 [P5_TAPROV(2002)0216, 19]

⁸¹ European Parliament's public register of documents presented on the web is an easy and user friendly tool for the European citizens. See:

<http://www4.europarl.eu.int/registre/recherche/Menu.cfm?langue=EN> (accessed on 10.08.2002)

⁸² Council of the European Union, Third report on the implementation of Council Decision 93/731/EC on access to Council documents (1998-1999), 22 December 2000 [doc. 13275/00] 2

⁸³ Council Decision of 29 November 2001 amending the Council's Rules of Procedure 2001/840/EC. Official Journal of the European Communities L 313/40, 30.11.2001

⁸⁴ <http://register.consilium.eu.int/utfregister/introEN.htm>

⁸⁵ Council Decision of 29 November 2001 amending the Council's Rules of Procedure 2001/840/EC. Official Journal of the European Communities L 313/40, 30.11.2001 - Article 10

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, Article 11 (documents directly accessible to the public)

progress reports and reports on the state of discussions in the Council or one of its preparatory bodies which do not reflect individual positions of delegations, excluding legal service opinions and contributions"⁸⁷.

Despite the amendments to procedures in the three major European Union institutions (following Regulation 1049/2001) the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and article 255 of the EC Treaty open up further questions concerning European Union citizens' rights of access to documents.

First, the European Convention's working group II⁸⁸ is currently working on the possible integration of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union into the reorganised Treaties. Reaffirming the rights and freedoms resulting from the constitutional traditions of the Member States and their international and European obligations, the Charter's status should not be inferior to the EC Treaties. However, the procedures and consequences of an incorporation of the Charter into the Treaties and the consequences of an eventual accession by the European Union to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)⁸⁹ are still open questions awaiting a political response.

Second, the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission are implementing the amendments to their rules of procedure in application of Regulation 1049/2001. Nevertheless, the right of access to documents must be extended to all European Union institutions and bodies. Currently, the treaty-based right of access to documents is limited to documents held by the European

⁸⁷ *ibid.*,

⁸⁸ European Convention, Working Group II "Charter/ECHR", Chairman Antonio Vitorino, [doc. CONV 72/02]

⁸⁹ The European Convention on Human Rights was previously called "Convention on Fundamental Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms" (refer to footnote 16). The text is published on the European Court of Human Rights' website: <http://www.echr.coe.int/Eng/BasicTexts.htm>. (accessed on 10.08.2002)

Parliament, the Council and the Commission. This creates an imbalance, as European citizens may be denied insight into other institutions and bodies whose work has an impact on their daily lives. An extension of the right of access to documents should preferably be made by amendment of Article 255 of the EC Treaty. It is of equal importance to strengthen and improve the right of European Union officials to freedom of expression. Today, European Union officials are under an almost total obligation of confidentiality. The present rules could, in theory, lead to the absurd result that an official who has an obligation to give a citizen access to a document under Regulation 1049/2001 could be subject to disciplinary proceedings under the Staff Regulations for orally conveying the same information.⁹⁰

Eric Ketelaar speaks about "archives of the people, by the people and for the people"⁹¹, while Jacques Derrida comments that it is imperative for any political power to control Archive and Memory⁹². According to Verne Harris "mediating such tensions should be the vision and mission of the twenty-first century [...] because it is our calling, as archivists, as workers, as human beings."⁹³ For European Union archivists this means to become and to remain conscious and enduring mediators of such tensions.

The development of the concept of European Governance and its attempt to reach European citizens through information policies and communication strategies

⁹⁰ These views are expressed by Mrs Lena Hjelm-Wallen, Increased openness in the EU, Input to the European Convention, doc. CONV 133/20 Annex

⁹¹ "Archives well preserved and accessible to the people - are as essential in a free democracy as government of the people, by the people, for the people" in: Ketelaar E., The Archival Image, Hilversum Verloren, 1997, 15

⁹² "The effective democratisation is measured always with these fundamental criteria: the participation and the access to the archive, its institution and its interpretation" Derrida, J., Mal d'Archive, Paris, Editions Galilée, 1995, 15, in footnote

⁹³ Harris, V., "Law, Evidence and Electronic Records: A Strategic Perspective from The Global Periphery", Comma, International Journal on Archives, 2001-1/2, 29-43

and the issues of governance, transparency and access to documents and freedom of information have been the topics of debate among other academic communities.⁹⁴ However, a summary of these debates among political scientists and historians would go beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, the thesis will study the implications of the work of certain archivists who have underlined the importance of analysing users' perspectives⁹⁵ on access policies. The results of the research concerning the possibilities offered to European citizens through web portals of the European Union institutions is presented in chapter five, which in fact focuses on Internet and its impact on access policies and their connection to descriptive practices.

2.5 Conclusions

The European Union's finding aids (guides and inventories) demonstrate very different theoretical approaches in archival description. The proposals made by the EU Group of Experts on archives have not been implemented by the institutions

⁹⁴ Curtin Deirdre, "Democracy, transparency and political participation: some progress post-Amsterdam." In: Deckmyn, Veerle, and Thompson, Ian (eds.): Openness and transparency in the European Union. Maastricht, European Institute of Public Administration, 1998, 107-120.

Curtin, Deirdre and Meijers, Herman, "Access to European Union information: an element of citizenship and a neglected constitutional right." In: Neuwahl Nanette and Rosas Allan (eds.), The European Union and Human Rights. International Studies in Human Rights. Vol. 42 The Hague, Kluwer Law International / Kluwer Academic Publications, 1995, 77-104.

Lodge Juliet, "Transparency and democratic legitimacy." Journal of Common Market Studies, 1994, Vol. 32 No. 3, 343-368.

Nugent Neill, The Government and Politics of the European Union, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 5th Edition, 2003.

Öberg Ulf, "Public access to documents after the entry into force of the Amsterdam Treaty." European Integration online Papers (EioP), 1998, Vol. 2, No. 8

Weiler J.H.H. "Legitimacy and Democracy of Union governance." In: Edwards, Geoffrey and Pijpers, Alfred (eds.), The politics of European Treaty Reform. The 1996 Intergovernmental Conference and beyond. London, Washington, Pinter 1997

⁹⁵ Duff, W. and Stoyanova P. "Transforming the Crazy Quilt: Archival Displays from a User's Point of View" Archivaria, No. 45, Spring 1998, 44-79; Craig, B. L. "Old Myths in New Clothes: Expectations of Archives Users" Archivaria, No. 45, Spring 1998, 118-127

which promoted the Group of Experts' meetings. However, the ISAD(G) compliant database at the Historical Archives of the European Communities in Florence offers the possibility of producing uniform descriptions and related consistent finding aids for researchers. Co-ordination between the European Union institutions is needed for the exchange of data in electronic form and for the abandoning of obsolete archival practices.

The issues of governance, transparency and access to documents have implications on archival descriptive practices in the European Union. A new impulse for co-ordination between institutions is evident in the development of new records management procedures. The establishment of coherent filing systems that take into account the issues of context and provenance have to be appreciated as first steps towards standardised archival description practices.

Chapter Three. ISAD(G) and databases: a difficult cohabitation?

The purpose of this chapter is to describe briefly some of the implications that computerization has for archival description. The research aims at providing practical advice to archivists confronted with the difficulties of how to choose a database management system (DBMS). The chapter explains some of the key problems that face those who need to perform with the same DBMS the essential activities of information processing (i.e. capturing, storing and processing data and communicating information) while implementing in a satisfactory way the standard for archival description. Although there is already extensive specialised literature on topics like databases and electronic records management systems, there are however not very many studies on archival automation, and actually very few focussing on the implementation of standards for archival description in database management systems. At the beginning of the 1990s, Christopher Kitching – in one of the first studies on the impact of computerization in archives - recommended archivists "to distribute information about individual systems, to commission specific tests and reports and to investigate particular problems"¹. In a recent publication by the ICA Committee on Information Technology² concerning a market survey of archival management software packages, the Committee stressed that part of its mandate is to "undertake study and research concerning automation in archives and to promote

¹ Kitching C., The Impact of Computerization on Archival Finding Aids: A Ramp Study, PGI-91/WS/16, Paris, UNESCO, 1991, 60

² International Council on Archives (ICA) – Committee on Information Technology, prepared by: David Lake, Russell F. Loiselle and Debra Steidel Wall, Market Survey of Commercially Available Off-the-shelf Archival Management Software. Study No. 12, January 2003

exchange of views and experiences in this area."³ On the basis of these two studies it can be affirmed that automation in archives is still an open question for archivists. This issue represents the point of departure for the comparative research on database management software that I undertook.

Furthermore, the interest in standardisation of archival description in the archival community is certainly linked to the need of providing systems vendors with elements allowing them to develop specialized products. However, the major aim of this comparison of database management software does not reside in the possible ideal design of a database. Although supporting Katrin Gavrel's point of view that it would be desirable that archivists are aware and involved in the creation and design of databases⁴, the technological issues relating to programming are not relevant to my research, which instead focuses on description. In fact, software engineers continue to produce more advanced data objects, which integrate description of structures and content into complex objects or database management software, but it has been stressed that "even the most sophisticated retrieval software will not be able to recognize a data structure or retrieve records from it, without a minimal description."⁵ Hence, the major aim of this chapter is to catalogue the essential requirements for database management software in order for it to be ISAD(G) compliant. It has to be stressed that compliance with ISAD(G) was, and still is, a major issue for DBMS as confirmed by the ICA Committee on Information Technology. Actually, by looking at the functions supported by the products examined by the Committee it is remarkable that nearly all of the archival management software supports archival description (23 out of 25 representing

³ *ibid*, 4

⁴ Gavrel, K. Conceptual problems posed by electronic records: A RAMP study. Paris, UNESCO, 1990 (PGI-90/WS/12), 27-28

92%). On the other hand, only 4 out of 25 (16%) of these companies declare their software to be ISAD(G) compliant.⁶

The following pages report on some experiments conducted with in-house products and with off-the-shelf products and analyse their results. The four case studies that are presented in this chapter do not, however, pretend to be exhaustive; rather, they reflect my professional experience. This aspect of the research should not be underestimated considering that even the most recent ICA Study has highlighted that, for this kind of investigation, an added value is represented by archivists' personal experience in terms of familiarity with software before any purchase, by seeing and testing it, and eventually through the possibility of attending demonstrations organized by other institutions.⁷ However, the comparative criteria on which the choice of the four case studies is based are the result of long research for models different to those developed by national archives around Europe during the last decade. Furthermore, each of these examples is in fact very significant for its individual characteristics and can be seen as a consequence of the context of its creation and development in Canada, France, Italy and the European Union.

For what concerns the off-the-shelf products the Canadian database GENCAT, developed by Eloquent Systems Inc., was one of the first databases presented to archivists that answered at the time the first attempt to implement multilevel description and more precisely the Canadian Rules for Archival

⁵ Hedstrom M., "Descriptive Practices for Electronic Records: Deciding What is Essential and Imaging What is Possible", *Archivaria*, No. 36, Autumn 1993, 55-56

⁶ *ibid*, 8

⁷ International Council on Archives (ICA) – Committee on Information Technology, prepared by: David Lake, Russell F. Loiselle and Debra Steidel Wall, Market Survey of Commercially Available Off-the-shelf Archival Management Software. Study No. 12, January 2003, 5

Description (RAD)⁸. The French firm Ever was one of the first European companies to refer directly ISAD(G) as a model for the development of their DBMS and database CLARA.

For the in-house products the model developed at the Historical Archives of the European Communities in Florence (Italy) with the database EURHISTAR has been investigated. EURHISTAR database was the only example at the European Union's institutional level of a fully compliant ISAD(G) database. I also studied one of the most recent examples of databases based on ISAD(G), which implemented the ISAAR(CPF) rules in Italy: the State Archives of Florence's Information System (SIASFI: Sistema Informatico Archivio di Stato di Firenze), designed by Cribecu at the University of Pisa. In the context of my dissertation the Italian case study is of particular interest, not only because the archivist in charge of its intellectual development, Stefano Vitali, is currently president of the ICA Committee on Descriptive Standards, but also because there have been discussions in the Italian Association of Archivists (ANAI) to adopt this DBMS as model at the national level.⁹

Finally, it has to be noted that the research and subsequent compilation of this chapter goes back to 2001. Some of the elements examined have changed. GENCAT, for example, has been renamed in the meanwhile Eloquent WebArchives¹⁰. However, the validity of this kind of research and its findings has been reaffirmed in recent times by the International Council on Archives as a help

⁸ GENCAT although referring exclusively to RAD has been taken in consideration after a demonstration held at NATO during which the customisation toward a fully ISAD(G) compliant database was illustrated.

⁹ http://www.archivi.beniculturali.it/Divisione_V/isad/Commenti.html (accessed on

¹⁰ International Council on Archives (ICA) – Committee on Information Technology, prepared by: David Lake, Russell F. Loiselle and Debra Steidel Wall, Market Survey of Commercially Available Off-the-shelf Archival Management Software. Study No. 12, January 2003, 34

"to reduce the gap of understanding that [still] exists between the archivists and the software creators."¹¹

3.1 Databases and archives' hierarchical structures: dilemmas for archivists

At the beginning of the Nineties there was still a need to convince the archival community that in the centre of every archive's automation project must be a database and that the automation of main archival functions like description and retrieval must be based on a database management system¹².

One of the main concerns for archivists in the use of databases in the early 1990s concerned the disadvantages linked to the shortness of text fields and the limited possibilities of operations allowed in memo fields. Many systems could work only in structured fields where free text was required or in a controlled language where natural language would have been preferable. For these reasons many archives chose information retrieval systems instead of databases. Then, with the growth of hardware standards and with a wider diffusion of Windows databases, these limits were overtaken. Further developments occurred, following the impetus to acquire images and sounds as data brought about better management of memory fields and led to more user friendly databases. However, many archivists found that most of the databases proposed by vendors were initially designed for libraries and for museums. This posed some major problems to archivists because libraries' databases and therefore their catalogues included units, all of which were of the

¹¹ Ibid., 6

same level and which had very little to do with the hierarchical structures of archival inventories. Museums databases were thought more appropriate for archives' needs since museums and archives have much more in common: origin and context are very important aspects, and the objects described are unique in both institutions.¹³

Databases have been considered for many years as the best way to incorporate pre-existent information into a structured system with clearly divided fields; either by means of insertion into the text of existing finding aids, of symbols or tags; or by encoding word-processed files; or by automated means such as OCR (Optical Character Recognition). Although structured databases encouraged exchanges with other organisations and the constitution of collective databases, both on national and international level, they implied also high costs especially with pre-existent descriptions which had to be converted and sometimes even manually entered.

Nowadays, database management systems correspond to the wider idea of archival description as a "dynamic"¹⁴ process and as an accumulation of information. This implies that information can be stored and amended or added to databases on a regular basis, constantly kept up to date and can accumulate with other data to allow more extensive and better directed searching on all informational elements about archives. Databases can also improve the ways in which information may be manipulated, merged and presented to users. For these reasons databases have also been considered as a single integrated finding aid¹⁵ or as the potential source of a number of different kinds of finding aid (which needs only to be printed

¹² Green, A., Mise au point d'une stratégie et de plans pour l'informatisation d'un service d'archives: Etude RAMP, Paris, UNESCO, 1991, 36

¹³ *ibid*, 37

¹⁴ International Council on Archives (ICA). ISAD(G):General International Standard Archival Description Adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards. Stockholm, Sweden, 19-22 September 1999. Madrid 2000. Introduction, 11

out in whole or in part if there is a demand) all stemming from the same information input.

In recent years records management systems packages have been increasingly developed for archivists. Although it is no longer customary to regard archival description as a process wholly distinct from the control of information about the same archives for administrative and management purposes, some experts argue that "the coup de grace to traditional files based rather than system based records management has been delivered by the database management system which by definition manages information in more than one file"¹⁶. In fact, intellectual control involves a hierarchy of archival levels and it may be difficult or even impossible to adapt a computerised control system operating at a single level to the multiple levels required in archives work. Furthermore, records management packages are usually designed to control records at the item level, both documents and files, and may not be able to deal with records at higher levels of description and reproducing different systems of arrangement.

In the last decade, databases have definitely become a reality in the archives world and in the archivists' daily work. Archives are some of the organisations that have most benefited from developments in database technology and concepts especially in computer software with the capability to store data in an integrated, structured format, which enables users to retrieve, manipulate and manage data. Actually, many elements of archival finding aids require a presentation of their contents in a structured form. Such structured elements of information can be readily divided and can therefore form fields in a database. Furthermore, the need

¹⁵ Kitching, C., The Impact of Computerization on Archival Finding Aids: A Ramp Study, PGI-91/WS/16, Paris, UNESCO, 1991, 7-8

¹⁶ Bearman, D., Electronic Evidence, Strategies for Managing Records in Contemporary Organizations, Pittsburgh, Archives and Museums Informatics, . 1994, 103

and motivation to be ISAD(G) compliant have led many archives to rethink their pre-existent databases or to merge many different supports into an "integrated system"¹⁷, i.e. a system which can handle information about all the holdings irrespectively of the storage medium and include management functions. Finally, database management systems have enhanced the ability of archivists to explain provenance and authority in relation to each fonds, concepts which although central for archival description are still little understood by end users.

Therefore, in order to better understand the main problems in the implementation of archival principles and practices in databases, with a major emphasis on archival description, it is necessary to give a brief overview and an historical excursus on the conceptual development of database design. There are three main periods or stages in the evolution of databases from the hierarchical databases in the 1960s through the relational databases of the 1980s to the object-oriented databases of the 1990s.

Hierarchical databases (1960-1980)

In a hierarchical scheme, all entities are connected through a parent-child relationship:

- each parent-record can have one or more child-records
- each child-record can have only one parent-record.

Such a scheme can contain several levels, so that the final data model is a tree structure. The record type at the top of the tree is usually known as the root. A

¹⁷ Kitching C., The Impact of Computerization on Archival Finding Aids: A Ramp Study, PGI-91/WS/16, Paris, UNESCO, 1991, 10

hierarchical database contains several types of records and links connecting occurrences of these records. It is fundamental to the hierarchical view of data that any given record-occurrence takes on its full significance only when seen in context (e.g. in relation to its superior). The main advantage of this kind of database is fast access time and the fact that hierarchies are the natural way to model truly hierarchical structures from the real world (e.g. departments and employees). The main disadvantage centres on retrieval, because even genuine hierarchical situations tend to develop into more complex many-to-many situations over time. The disadvantages of this model are essentially the lack of theoretical base (no standard ways for definition and implementation of the database), the extreme complexity (one needs to be an expert to design these databases) and the lack of flexibility (insert, delete and update functions were very complex).

Relational databases (1980-...)

The specific structure of relational databases, embodied in tables and the relationship between tables, are aspects of the arrangement of electronic records, which reflect the use of data in an operating environment¹⁸. In relational databases the logical structure refers to the way the data within a record is organised, while the conceptual structure refers to the way the data is presented to users of a record.

The original concepts of relational database systems were developed in the USA by Dr. E. F. Codd¹⁹ during the late Sixties and early Seventies and resulted in the first working implementation called "System R", as a research project by IBM

¹⁸ Thibodeau, K. "To Be Or Not To Be: Archive Methods for Electronic Records" Archival Management of Electronic Records, Archives and Museums Informatics Technical Report, No. 13(1991), edited by David Bearman

¹⁹ "Les douze règles du model relationnel, énoncées par Codd", Soft & Micro, 12/1990, 184

during the seventies. It was based on the data Language SEQUEL, later renamed SQL. The Structured Query Language (SQL) became later on the standard for relational databases and it is recognised as such by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and by the International Standard Organisation (ISO).

The main concepts on which the relational model is based are these:

- All data are represented in tables.
- The relational model is a way of looking at data, a prescription for how data can be represented and manipulated. This prescription is composed of three elements: a structural element, an integrity element and a manipulative element. The integrity element says that every relation (i.e. table) should have a unique primary key to identify entries or rows. The manipulative element of the relational model consists of the algebraic operators (select, project, joins, etc.) that transform relations into relations (and hence tables into tables).
- The relational model is based on relational algebra.
- A relational DBMS (Database Management System) uses the values in the data fields themselves to relate data items, rather than using physical pointers or indices. A relationship can be made dynamically between two data items. Using a traditional database data can only be retrieved using predefined access paths.
- A relational database is set (multi-record) oriented, whereas a traditional DBMS deals with data one record at time.
- The user never needs to be concerned about the physical location of data: there is an automatic navigation.
- The user has only to express what information he wants and not how to find it.

The advantages of the relational database are the flexibility, ease of implementation and data independency.

Object-Oriented Database Systems (1990-...)

In a traditional relational DBMS, data is stored in tables that are accessible and joinable using primary and secondary keys. This means that the user or the program determines relations between data. As a consequence, the chance of having inconsistent relations is very big. In contrast, the Entity/Relationship-Model stores the relations in the data model and not in the programs.

Object-oriented database technology is based on the use of persistent object-combinations of data and instructions that represent an action or an entity. In contrast, relational DBMS's data structure in rows and columns require relatively complex instructions to manipulate data. The terms “object base” and “object-oriented DBMS” are used to describe a class of programming systems with the capability of a DBMS, and with a combined Data Manipulation Language with the following features:

- Complex Objects, i.e. the ability to define data types with a nested structure.
- Encapsulation, the ability to define procedures applying only to objects of a particular type and the ability to require that all access to those objects is via application of one of those procedures.
- Object identity, the ability of the system to distinguish between two objects that “look” the same.

3.2 Four case studies

The following section has as its aim to report on four case studies of database management systems which refer directly to standards for archival description as theoretical basis for their design. There are very few examples of database management systems with these characteristics available on the market and in my opinion this scarcity suggests the difficulties of implementing such standards.

The study issued by the ICA Committee on Archival Automation in 1996 concerning the design for an archival description system²⁰ - a database management system/record keeping system - aimed to produce the theoretical basis for a complete system design, which consists in both a data model and a process model. The main difficulty in the implementation of the standards for archival description could be seen in the fact that ISAD(G) rules contain in essence data structure standards and data contents standards. ISAD(G) describes data elements of archival description, but does not analyse in great detail the relationships between the data elements²¹. Furthermore, the ISAD(G) model does not deal with the complexity of relationships typical of a records management system and does not develop the context or the organisational part of the proposed model, although these elements are mentioned in the text of the rules. Some elements that form the kernel of the evaluation criteria for the four case studies derive from the proposed model by the Committee on Archival Automation. The four case studies will be analysed according to the basic requirements that should form the key capabilities that a

²⁰ ICA Committee on Archival Automation, Design for an Archival Description System. Application of ISAD(G). A Study, 2nd Draft, September 1996

²¹ *ibid*, 2

database must possess to provide a satisfactory tool for archival description according to ISAD(G):

- it should include all the 26 elements/fields of ISAD(G) or at least six core elements: reference code, title, creator(s), date(s), extent of the unit of description and level of description. These core elements are in fact "considered essential for international exchange of descriptive information"²²;
- it must support multilevel description rules in order to avoid duplication of data: any piece of information is entered into the system just once and at its relevant level²³;
- it must support in a simple and flexible way the establishment of links between records because records may be subject to multiple relationships simultaneously²⁴;
- the data elements should be free-text format and unlimited length²⁵;

²² International Council on Archives (ICA), ISAD(G):General International Standard Archival Description Adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards. Stockholm, Sweden, 19-22 September 1999. Madrid 2000. Introduction, 13

²³ The multilevel description rules in: International Council on Archives (ICA), ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description Adopted by the Committee on Descriptive Standards. Stockholm, Sweden, 19-22 September 1999. Madrid 2000, 16

Furthermore, in an automated system this can be called inheritance property: "top-down description implies that the lower levels inherit the attributes of the higher levels. [...] The system should support however "over-writing" per archival item, in order to describe 'mistakes' by the record-keeping system, and/or variations due to transfer of records". ICA Committee on Archival Automation, Design for an Archival Description System. Application of ISAD(G). A Study, 2nd Draft, September 1996, 20

²⁴ Flexibility of the archival description system can be explained as "functional flexibility" i.e. any archival unit may be subdivided: series in sub-series, fonds in sub-fonds etc. The system's flexibility can also refer to the multi-provenance principle in the sense that "the archival item can belong to more than one series, simultaneously, or during different periods. Consequently the grouping into custodial Fonds does conceptually not occur via the series, but directly. Yet, in many cases grouping within a Custodial Fonds is pure hierarchical, the system should support this in the implementation." in: ICA Committee on Archival Automation, Design for an Archival Description System. Application of ISAD(G). A Study, 2nd Draft, September 1996, 4 and 9

²⁵ These characteristics are particularly advisable for the contextual part of the description. Especially for "the administrative history as it might be too labour intensive, the entities forming it may be put together in a free text description". ICA Committee on Archival Automation, Design for an Archival Description System. Application of ISAD(G). A Study, 2nd Draft, September 1996, 19

- it should support authority files for the description of the context of documents' creation to satisfy the requirements for standardized access points foreseen in ISAAR(CPF)²⁶;
- it should be possible to link database records to external files (objects created by other applications) for display and view purposes (bitmap pictures, word processing documents, photographs, sound files, movies, etc.)²⁷ and contain the path to a document or page on the WWW or another Internet address;
- it should support any kind of interface with the retrieval system²⁸. Interfaces may include hardcopy guides, inventories, SGML files or WWW pages;
- considering that "the incentive to archival description traditional practices to achieve greater consistency, precision and a better quality of output for finding aids"²⁹ it must therefore support a variety of output formats³⁰.

First case-study: CLARA

²⁶ International Council on Archives - Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards ISAAR(CPF): International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families. Paris, France, 15-20 November 1995. (Final ICA approved version), Ottawa, 1996, Introduction, 2-3

²⁷ It is important not only for display purposes but also because the items are the "smallest intellectually indivisible archival units" and could well be "a letter, memorandum, report, photograph, sound recording" in: International Council on Archives (ICA), ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description Adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards. Stockholm, Sweden, 19-22 September 1999. Madrid 2000. Glossary 15

²⁸ It has to be stressed that "a description system is not a retrieval system. After completion of description it becomes part of another system, specifically for information retrieval" in: ICA Committee on Archival Automation, Design for an Archival Description System. Application of ISAD(G). A Study, 2nd Draft, September 1996, 6

²⁹ Kitching C., The Impact of Computerization on Archival Finding Aids: A Ramp Study, PGI-91/WS/16, Paris, UNESCO, 1991, 17

³⁰ ICA Committee on Archival Automation, Design for an Archival Description System. Application of ISAD(G). A Study, 2nd Draft, September 1996, 6. For a clear schema representing the relationships between levels of description and types of finding aids see: ICA-CDS – Sub-committee on Finding

The database CLARA, developed by the French company EVER, is presented on its web-site as conceived on the rules for archival description ISAD(G)³¹, recommended by the International Council on Archives for the description of current, intermediate and historical archives. Furthermore, it is affirmed that the archivist is helped in data-entry by the possibility of consulting vocabularies, authority files and thesauri because in the database CLARA the archives' creators are managed according to ISAAR(CPF) rules. The database's engine, DORIS, manages the static and dynamic controls at the field's level assuring, in this way, data integrity. Moreover, in database CLARA, each entry can be associated to other electronic documents, video, sound, and images.

Unfortunately, it was impossible to find any publication on the implementation of CLARA database in any archives service. Therefore the research is based on two booklets³² that EVER handed out in 1998 during a presentation at NATO. In order to be able to render the structure of CLARA database, following the criteria enunciated in the above mentioned publications, I have reconstructed the tables' structure using Microsoft Access database. Fig 3.1 is the reproduction of a relationships' window in which each box represents a database's table. In CLARA database the units of description are clearly distinguished between the "unités fonctionnelles" such as files (dossiers) and items (pièces) and the conditioning units "unités de conditionnement" such as "articles" and "groupe d'articles". The highest level of description is represented by the transfer "versement", which reflects the fundamental idea on which this database has been developed i.e. the French practice

Aids, Report of the Sub-committee on Finding Aids, Guidelines for the Preparation of Finding Aids, Final Version Approved by CDS 11.03.2001, 6

³¹ "La description archivistique dans le respect des normes" :

<http://www.ever.fr/Fra/products/clara/clara2.shtml>, (accessed on 03.01.2002)

³² EVER SA, CLARA. Gestion des Archives. Dossier technique – Module de gestion des unités de description. Lyon, 1998 and EVER SA, CLARA. Logiciel de gestion des archives. Lyon, 1998

in intermediate archives to increment archival holdings (fonds) by periodic and systematic transfers.

Each record in the database receives a unique serial number, assigned automatically by the database, and an identity code, which represents the key by which the coherence of the database is checked in order to avoid doubles. There is a large number of fields in the database and most of them have an unlimited length and are free-text. Furthermore, some fields are linked to check lists and some others are linked to authority tables; Fig 3.1 reproduces the links between the four authority tables (*Service, Fonds, Attribution, Traitement*) and the highest level of description the *Versement*. The link between the tables representing the units of description is done by the primary key *Référence* in table *Versement* and through the primary key *Cote du versement* (as an unchangeable inherited value) in tables *Groupe d'articles, Article, Dossier* and *Pièce*.

Tables *Versement, Groupe d'articles, Articles, Dossiers* and *Pièce* represent, from the highest to the lowest, a unit of description. The tables' fields, although grouped in areas reflecting the structure of ISAD(G): Identity statement area, Context area, Content and structure area, Condition of Access and Use Area, Allied Materials Area, Note Area, vary according to the unit being described. A large number of fields are foreseen in the Identity Statement Area at the highest level of description *Versement*. It has however to be stressed that the two fields *Série* and *Sous-série* constitute an anomaly among the identity statement area fields in table *Versement*. This incongruity is due to the fact that the series and its sub-parts are considered in CLARA database higher levels of description and are linked to a separate list³³.

³³ "série à laquelle appartient le versement" in: EVER SA, *CLARA, Gestion des Archives. Dossier technique – Module de Gestion des Unités de description*. 1998, 5

The Context Area is foreseen in table *Versement* by means of the fields: *Direction, Producteur, Personne, Personne physique, Personne morale, Type de personne, Date de constitution* and *Modalité* that are linked to the authority table *Service*.

For what concerns the Content and Structure Area, the fields *Indexation-Analyse* are present only in tables *Groupe d'articles, Article, Dossier and Pièce*. At each level of description the information about the scope and content of the unit described is inherited from the higher levels of description. At the lowest level, *Pièce*, the fields are therefore *Analyse du groupe d'articles, analyse de l'article, analyse du dossier* and *analyse de la pièce*. In table *Versement* there is no mention of the scope and content but there are some fields dedicated to appraisal, destruction and scheduling information: *Traitement, Délai de conservation, Date de révision, Mode de révision* and *Métrage éliminable* and are linked to the authority table *Traitement*.

CLARA database complies with ISAAR(CPF) as explained in the presentation on Ever's web-site³⁴. The fields in the authority table *Service*³⁵ cover the three areas of ISAAR(CPF). The Authority Control Area, includes authority entry, parallel entry and a related authority entry, respectively *Nom du service, Synonyme* and *Dépend de*. Some elements of the Information Area are also present in table *Service*: places and geographical areas is *localisation*; legal status element is *statut*, mandate, functions and sphere of activity are respectively *compétences, attributions* and *secteur*, and relationships to other corporate bodies, persons and families are foreseen in the field *liens* (links).

³⁴ <http://www.ever.fr/Fra/products/clara/clara2.shtml>, (accessed on 03.01.2002)

³⁵ EVER SA, *CLARA, Gestion des Archives. Dossier technique – Module de Gestion des unités de description*. 1998, 10

Table *Fonds* is the authority table for all the fonds held at the archives service and it is linked to table *Service* through the field *service* (service's name and/or the fonds' creator). *Attribution* is the field which establishes the link to table *Attribution*. The authority table *Attribution*³⁶ allows to define the attributions of the administrative entities entered in table *Service*. Finally, the authority table *Traitement* follows the course of a unit of description from its production, through its reception to its entry into the definitive archives.

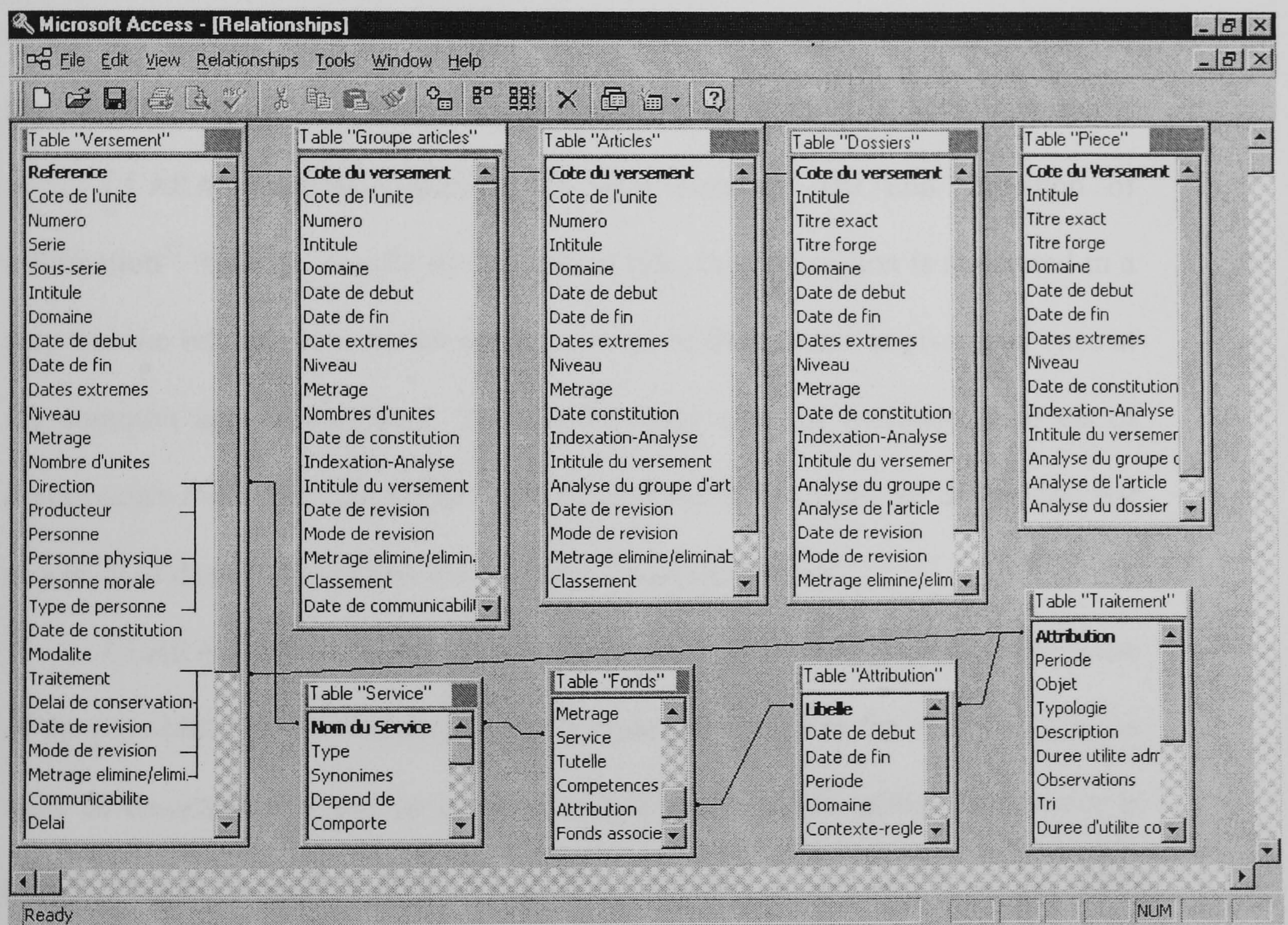


Fig 3.1 Reconstruction of CLARA database tables' structure [links provided by P. Casini 2001]

After this brief description of the reconstruction's attempt of CLARA database management system as presented in the above table, it is important to pass to the analysis of the systems' features to establish whether they meet or not the

³⁶ *ibid.*, 13

predefined requirements. It is however, important to stress that CLARA database management system has been the most difficult case to analyse, because it is not supported by a explanatory web site, from which the possible buyer could build an idea through some examples of the offered product.

In CLARA database there are more than the 26 elements foreseen in ISAD(G). The core elements: reference code, title, date(s), extent of the unit of description and level of description, can be found in each of the five tables dedicated to the units of description (*Versement*, *Groupe d'articles*, *Articles*, *Dossiers* and *Pièce*). Unfortunately, the creator is present only in table *Versement*.

CLARA database complies for what concerns the non repetition of information³⁷ with the multilevel description rule; the description is structured in a way that the information, shared among a series of documents, is given just once at the common appropriate level. There is however a major problem on levels of description's definition: the fonds is considered neither as a unit of description nor as a level of description but on the contrary an authority entry.

CLARA database does not support any kind of flexibility, either in the sense of the possibility of sub-dividing the units of description or in the option to link the units of description at any given level to different creators, given that creator is present only at the highest level of description in table *Versement*. Moreover, many fields in CLARA are free-text format and have an unlimited length. Many fields are also controlled through check lists and some others are linked to authority tables.

Although the authority table *Service* covers the main fields foreseen in ISAAR(CPF) in order to satisfy the requirements for context of creation and provenance of documents there is a limitation in the way links are established

³⁷ EVER SA, CLARA. Logiciel de gestion des archives. Lyon, 1998, 8

among CLARA database tables. All the fields describing the creator include simply corporate bodies elements and are linked only to table *Versement*. Furthermore, CLARA database foresees a specific module to display and view documents' contents for images, sound files and pictures³⁸ and another module³⁹ which allows the dynamic creation of HTML pages and the use of hyperlinks to navigate through data. The production of finding aids and their formats are not standardized in CLARA database. The output formats are left open to parameterisation (for fields' presentation, fields names' labels, fields concatenation) by the database administrator⁴⁰. Furthermore, what is mentioned as "inventory"⁴¹ looks more like a transfer list and does not correspond whatsoever to the standardized classes foreseen by the ICA-CDS Committee on Finding Aids⁴².

Second case-study: GENCAT

GENCAT (stands for GENeric CATaloguing) is a product of Eloquent Systems Inc. from North Vancouver, Canada⁴³. GENCAT database is a relational database of the networking type, i.e. the database supports the web of records' relationships: descriptive levels records according to ISAD(G) are linked in one-to-

³⁸ "Le module GED et Multimedia" *ibid*, 16

³⁹ "Le module WEB", *ibid*, 17

⁴⁰ *ibid*, 5

⁴¹ <http://www.ever.fr/eng/products/clara/clara5.shtml>, (accessed on 03.01.2002)

⁴² ICA-CDS – Sub-committee on Finding Aids, Report of the Sub-committee on Finding Aids, Guidelines for the Preparation of Finding Aids, Final Version Approved by CDS 11.03.2001

⁴³ GENCAT is built on Advanced Revelation Software (Revelation Technologies Inc., New York, NY)

one, one-to-many and many-to-many relationships to other descriptive records, to authority records and to operational records (accessioning, etc.)⁴⁴

The software presents the information in context; not only the context of the creator of the fonds (provenance principle) but also the structural context of the fonds and its parts. The context in which the unit of description exists (e.g. the file) is represented by the descriptive data about the series of which the file is part, the title of the fonds and linked authority data are also displayed. The special feature of this database is what here is described as *multilevel inheritance*: the capability of a relational system to obtain data from related records through the pointers linking these records.

Image removed due to third party copyright

Fig 3.2 GENCAT database – representation of descriptive levels [source N. Maffei]⁴⁵

Figure 3.2 helps to illustrate the descriptive levels and the links between the levels and the authority file. The descriptive elements (LV=Descriptive level; NO= Record Number; TI= Title; DC= Dates of creation; EX= Extent; SC= Scope and Content; AR= Access Restrictions; AH= Administrative History; HL= Higher Level) are linked to the higher levels of description (series level and Fonds level) through the pointer field HL and to the authority record through the pointer field

⁴⁴ Maffei, N. "Software Requirements for Multilevel Descriptions and Context Preservation", Archivi & Computer, No. 4, 1994, 324-338

Authority. In GENCAT database distinct records are created for the descriptive levels and for the authority record and then appropriate links are established when these records are created. As result of a query the database displays identification elements at the file level and context information obtained from the next higher unit of description (series level) and from the authority record.

Fig 3.3 shows how the database has assembled and formatted for display data from retrieved record (the Fonds level record) and data from several of the related records. The pointer field HL serves to establish the fonds hierarchy of records, from the bottom up. It is also clear that in the record representing the top unit of description in a hierarchy (fonds) the HL field would be empty. The same technique uses the AH pointer field to link descriptive records to authority records.

Image removed due to third party copyright

Fig 3.3 GENCAT database – links between levels and authority file [source N. Maftai]⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ibid., Figure 1b, 328

⁴⁶ Ibid., Figure 2b, 329

In the first version of GENCAT database management system, from which the above tables' relationships are taken, there was a very limited number of fields and therefore the areas of description (Identity Statement Area, Context Area, Content and structure Area, Conditions of Access and Use and Allied Materials Area) were very incomplete. In recent years, however, Eloquent Systems has developed a new version of the database based on Windows technology. Eloquent Systems has essentially transformed the database management system originally designed for archives to a more sophisticated system called Eloquent Heritage integrated collection management software also based on GENCAT technology. The new software can be used by a greater variety of heritage institutions like museums, archives and galleries⁴⁷. It has therefore more functions and supports for description a greater range of media types (artifacts, photographs, archival material, published material, artwork, etc.).

On the Eloquent System's web-site there are some examples from the GENCAT technology as applied in the Eloquent Heritage integrated collection management software. Fig 3.4 illustrates how the Eloquent Heritage software identifies some of the functions (acquisitions, cataloguing, storage, research, loans, exhibition and de-accessioning) the various media types that are supported (artifacts, archival material, photograph, artwork, resource material) and the levels of description for archival material (Upper level, File, File Folder and Item).⁴⁸

⁴⁷ <http://www.eloquent-systems.com/overview.html> (accessed on 06.03.2001), 1 of 15

⁴⁸ See: <http://www.eloquent-systems.com/overview.html> (accessed on 06.03.2001)

Image removed due to third party copyright

Fig. 3.4 Archival functions in Eloquent Heritage software [source Eloquent systems website]⁴⁹

Fig 3.5 shows as example the Fonds James A. McLean at the bottom of the hierarchy, at the item level. The details of this fonds can be explored in one of two ways, by either starting at the top and moving down the hierarchy or starting at the item level and working up the hierarchy. A click on the + icon will present the file, the series, and the fonds. Furthermore, at every level of description it is possible to produce a report related to the unit of description at that level.

⁴⁹ <http://www.eloquent-systems.com/overview.html> (accessed on 06.03.2001)

Image removed due to third party copyright

Fig 3.5 Eloquent Heritage – display at item level [source Eloquent Systems website]⁵⁰

After the description of the most salient elements of Eloquent Heritage management software it is central to analyse the systems' characteristics to find out whether they meet the pre-delineated requirements for ISAD(G). In Eloquent Heritage management software there are many more fields than the 26 elements of description foreseen by ISAD(G). The database's fields reflect the main divisions between the areas of description in ISAD(G). In the first area, identifiable as the Identity Statement Area there are the following fields: Item/Unit Type, Accession Number, Title, Level of description, Number, General Material Type, Specific Material Type; in the Context area: Creator, Biographical Sketch, Creation Date(s), Custodial History; in the Content and Structure Area: Scope & Content, Source of Title/Name, Extent/Dimension; Condition of Access and Use area: Access Restrictions, Consist of, Status, Acquisition Number, Source/Donor, Acquisition

⁵⁰ <http://www.eloquent-systems.com/overview.html> (accessed on 06.03.2001)

Date, Mode of Acquisition, Accession Date, Condition Code, Condition Note, Conservation Note, Box/Container Number, Location, Location Note; Allied Materials Area: Catalogued By, Cataloguing Date, Modified By and Modification Date. Moreover, the six core elements are all present in the database although the reference code is called access number. The only problem with the element "creator" is that it is present only at fonds level but not at lower levels (item level) and that the field "extent of the unit of description" is not in the Identity Statement area but it is listed after the Scope and Content area.

The originality of this database resides in its *inheritance property* which has been well defined and documented by its creators and makes it possible to satisfy rule 2.4 of ISAD(G): any piece of information is entered into the system just once. In other words "when an item is part of a set you have the option of leaving many of the data fields empty, and inheriting from the parent record, or entering the data if it is unique to the item."⁵¹ In practical terms, only some individual fields and/or grouped fields from the related record(s) are needed. Since the inheritance function lets the database potentially inherit all the fields from related records, pointer fields can also be inherited. This means that field values can be inherited several levels deep.

In the presentation of the Eloquent Heritage database there is no reference to the database's option concerning multi-provenance. Moreover, although in the first database version (see Fig. 3.2 and 3.3) some sub-divisions of units of description were foreseen as sub-fonds and sub-series in the this new improved version there is no trace of this important feature. In both database management system's versions

⁵¹ *ibid*, 7 of 15

the early GENCAT and the later Eloquent Heritage the data elements seem to be free-text format and unlimited length.

It has to be stressed that although the compliancy of Eloquent Heritage system to ISAD(G) and RAD is repeatedly mentioned, no reference to ISAAR(CPF) is stated. In addition, it has been impossible to verify whether and how Eloquent Heritage management software actually supports authority files and how it links the data elements to access points.

Digital images, photographs, scanned documents (such as handwritten testimonials and administrative forms) can be linked to descriptive records within Eloquent Heritage management software and can be made available upon research of the database⁵². The Eloquent Web Publisher allows for the automatic publication of nested, hyper-linked HTML documents directly from the database which can be uploaded to a website.

The optional SGML Publisher can be added to Eloquent Heritage management software to automatically publish SGML documents based on the descriptive data and EAD finding aids can be created "on-the-fly".⁵³ In Eloquent Heritage database it is possible, at every level of description, to produce a report related to the unit of description at that level. Furthermore, the system can also be tailored to present different sequences and formats of display as well as different reports for various users groups.⁵⁴

⁵² The products as shown at: <http://www.eloquent-systems.com/heritage.htm> (accessed on 06.03.2001)
1 of 2

⁵³ *ibid.*, 2 of 2

⁵⁴ See: <http://www.eloquent-systems.com/overview.html> (accessed on 06.03.2001), 4 of 15

Third case-study: EURHISTAR ⁵⁵

The Historical Archives of the European Communities in Florence (Italy) can provide a good example and probably one of the first experiences in Europe on the transformation of an existing database into a database in conformity with ISAD(G): EURHISTAR database management system.⁵⁶

In 1989, shortly after its creation, the Historical Archives of the European Communities designed an automated system for the on-line research and for the production of finding aids. The main database's aim was to support any kind of description of paper and electronic records coming from any European institution. The Manual of Archival Description (MAD)⁵⁷ was the focal source of inspiration for the construction of the data elements. Some data elements did not appear in the database fields: the administrative area and process and conservation areas were omitted. It was however considered, at that time, that the best way to integrate many different ways of description, originated from the European Communities' institutions in Brussels and Luxembourg, was the introduction of free text fields with a variable length and full text retrieval. These elements became fundamentals for the database. The heritage of the description models used in Brussels had conditioned the database. In fact, even if the model was thought to accept many levels of description in reality only two were used in the current work practices: the fonds and the file (plus two management levels: repository and group of fonds). The

⁵⁵ EURHISTAR stands for EUROpean HISTorical ARchives database in: European University Institute, Guide to the Historical Archives of the European Communities, 5th Edition, Villa Il Poggiolo, Florence, 1998, 9

⁵⁶ Franqueira Ana, "HAEC. Conversione in ISAD(G) di una banca dati esistente" in: Ufficio centrale per i Beni Archivistici. Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali., Gli Standard per la descrizione degli archivi europei. Esperienze e proposte. Atti del Seminario internazionale, San Miniato 31 Agosto - 2 settembre 1994, Roma, 1996, 242-250

⁵⁷ Michael Cook and Margaret Procter, A Manual of Archival Description, 2nd ed., Aldershot, Gower, 1989

description at the fonds level was composed of reference code, title and span dates and of a free-text field, with an unlimited length for the content/abstract. The files were however described in a more detailed way and were associated to authority files. Information retrieval was done by the combination of search expressions (with truncated words and Boolean operators) but only at the file level.

The data migration from a PRIME computer, proprietary operating system, and Basis software from Information Dimensions (classified as information retrieval system) to a Unix system (Open Systems Model) with new updated software version (BASIS Plus)⁵⁸ was not an easy task. In fact it meant incorporating a new database design in order to change the flat files structure into a relational database. Two other elements had also played an important role in the data migration process and in the database transformation: the passage from 7 to 8 bytes and the introduction of ISAD(G).

In EURHISTAR database the reference code plays a key role. The reference code identifies in unique way the unit being described which is relevant only when it is linked to other units of description in a hierarchy. EURHISTAR database was in fact developed in such a way as to allow the archivist the possibility of creating the various levels of the structure which makes up a fonds. Only the levels created under a fonds are accepted in a hierarchy and therefore an inferior level can only exist if a superior level exists. For example, after creating the Altiero Spinelli fonds (AS) and the series 01 (Correspondence), a sub-series 01 can be added (correspondence with) which belongs to this fonds and this series. The identification code, which is known in the database as "Reference Code", will be the following: AS (fonds), AS-01 (series) and AS-01.01 sub-series. This code works in such a way

⁵⁸ EURHISTAR – Automation history: <http://wwwarc.iue.it/eharen/cohy-en.html> (accessed on 04.01.2002)

that as long as the archivist deals with the same level the separator will be a full stop (.), while passing from one level to another the separator will be a hyphen (-). All types of structures can be created if the basic premise is accepted that a sub-level can only exist if the superior level exists. The following diagram (Fig 3.6) explains the various possibilities offered by the database for creating a reference code.

Image removed due to third party copyright

Fig 3.6 EURHISTAR database – reference code structure [G. Terzuoli HAEC, 2000]

In EURHISTAR database all the emphasis given to the reference code and its structure is a direct heritage from the reference coding section in MAD⁵⁹. In fact, among the possible objectives in designing a reference code, the Historical Archives of the European Communities decided at that time to follow the line stated in MAD "reference codes may suggest a relationship with other groups, subgroups, classes, items or pieces; they may also give an indication of which level the cited description

⁵⁹ Michael Cook and Margaret Procter, A Manual of Archival Description, 2nd ed., Aldershot, Gower, 1989, 51-53

is dealing with. This means that there should normally be a distinct parameter within the code corresponding to each level."⁶⁰

Furthermore, because of the fact that MAD recommended not to use mnemonic systems, the choice of letters in reference codes was limited to a number of categories. Alphabetical characters were therefore used "for subgroup and above and numerical characters for class and below."⁶¹ A solution for what in MAD was still considered a difficulty: "the problem of gaps in sequences of archival materials"⁶² can also be found in EURHISTAR database. In figure 6 it can be seen that files can be directly linked to fonds. The archivist is therefore not obliged to create empty elements (reference codes) for gaps among levels of description.

The Historical Archives of the European Communities developed in 2001 a portable version of EURHISTAR called MyArc in order to help other European Union's institutions to transfer their historical archives for deposit. MyArc is a Microsoft Access application and was chosen for its widespread diffusion in all the European Union's institutions, thereby keeping costs low. MyArc is designed to be portable, and/or temporary in the sense that data entered in a well-defined manner can be retrieved successfully so as to migrate them to other databases. There is nothing to prevent it being used as a final product given that the data-entry, research, print and migration tools ensure its success as a definitive system also. MyArc will be used hereafter to produce a number of diagrams and to give some examples of EURHISTAR's most interesting features.

EURHISTAR database proposes different forms for data entry depending on the level/unit of description, although all of them are linked to each other through control buttons. Each form (Fonds, Series and Dossiers and their sub-parts) are

⁶⁰ *ibid*, point 9.10B, 51

⁶¹ *ibid*, points 9.10G and 9.10H, 52

composed of four pages/tabs. The first page is produced for the Identity Statement Area, the second and third respectively for Context and Content and Structure Area and the fourth for Access and Use, Allied Materials and Notes Areas. The first three pages have common fields while the fourth page differs in the field Notes Area only in the Dossiers form (where two fields exist for Location of original support and Location of alternative support). The identity statement area at three levels of description (Fonds, Series and Dossiers), some of the fields and the control buttons through which the links are established, are shown in detail in the following figure (Fig. 3.7).

Image removed due to third party copyright

Fig. 3.7 – Myarc database – Identity statement area [source G. Terzuoli, HAEC, 2001]

⁶² *ibid*, point 9.10J, 53

EURHISTAR database gives the possibility to create authority files by means of an authority form. The archivist can access in this way the corporate bodies and persons forms, in which can enter the acronyms of the institutions and persons' names. The links between the authority files and the elements of description are done in the context area in the appropriate fields (in Fonds, Series and Dossiers forms) during the data-entry. For what concerns the production of finding aids EURHISTAR database has a specific Print Services form. This form gives as the only possibility the generation of an inventory at fonds level. In the output, which can both be directly printed and also be converted into a word processed file, appear the fields Title, Abstract, Dates of Creation, Language and the total number of units described (dossiers).

The window in figure 3.8 represents a retrieval choice from the Retrieval form "Explorer", in which the elements of the database in "tree view" format are shown. By pressing the starting element "Database fonds list" (the selected text in the figure), the archivist can access a list of fonds and is able to open the various elements of description and their titles will appear hierarchically listed.

Image removed due to third party copyright

Fig. 3.8 MyARC database retrieval form in tree-view [Source G. Terzuoli, HAEC, 2001]

In the analysis of EURHISTAR database it emerges that the data elements (fields) are the same as the 26 elements in ISAD(G). The only remark that has however to be made concerns the reference code. The reference coding system inherited from MAD still obliges the archivist to create many different fields for the various levels of description as shown in figure 3.7. On the other hand, it is very valuable for the multilevel description rule because it shows exactly at what level the data-entry is done and it helps the archivist to avoid duplication of data: any part of information is entered into the database system just once.

The flexibility of EURHISTAR database is assured in both ways: archival units can be divided in sub-units and the database supports the establishment of links not only via the series but also directly to the fonds and its sub-parts (as shown

in figure 3.6). The data elements are free-text format and, of unlimited length, except those fields in the identity statement area, where a well defined structure is needed e.g. the reference codes fields where fields' separators (dot or hyphen) imply different levels of description. The setting of the reference code in EURHISTAR database and its rigid adherence to principles outlined in MAD had led to some critiques from several European Institutions. The complexity of the reference code at the Historical Archives in Florence was balanced however with an even larger complexity of the reference coding systems based on UDC in Brussels. A simplification of the reference code systems on both sides has however been reached and the archives are now "able to accommodate existing reference codes, even where these are lengthy or employ unusual alpha-numeric combinations."⁶³

EURHISTAR database supports authority files and satisfies the requirements for access points and controlled names suggested by ISAAR(CPF). The access points are linked to the database's context area fields. This requisite implies however a particular effort in the database design considering that the database has to support a multilingual environment. The authority tables are based on extracts from EUROVOC (vocabularies developed by the European Parliament for the European institutions) and the maintenance of links between the authority tables is done by the use of an authority table in English language that, in this way, acts as "lingua franca". This complexity explains probably why the authority tables are not expanded to cover all the elements foreseen in ISAAR(CPF) but they have a very limited number of fields.

The Historical Archives' database makes it possible to link database records to objects created by other applications for display and view purposes. Moreover, it

⁶³ *ibid*, point 9.10E, 52

also allows to select a portion of text in the data entry forms (Fonds, Series, Dossiers) and through a text box, the archivist can insert the web site address to link up with. The database is designed in a way that it supports any kind of interface (hardcopy guides, inventories, SGML files or WWW pages). By the means of ASP (Active Server Page) it is therefore possible to write queries in an ASP file which is recognized by the majority of websites and then it possible to write Javascript or Vbscript code lines in order to have an elaborated layout for display.

The production of finding aids in EURHISTAR database does not comply with the requisite, because this is supposed to happen only at the fonds level, it has a very limited number of fields and it does not support any other kind of output formats varying with the levels of description.

Fourth case-study: SIASFI ⁶⁴

The origins of the SIASFI project can be traced back at the beginning of the Nineties when the Italian Ministry of Culture financed a program for the automation of the Archives called *Anagrafe* (General Register Office). The motivation for the creation of a general database underlined the need of a common accepted model for the Italian Archives. One of the studies⁶⁵ conducted in order to revise the first database management system designed under the *Anagrafe* general project tried to solve problems concerning mainly the depth of description of the fonds in guides

⁶⁴ SIASFI stands for Sistema Informatico Archivio di Stato di Firenze (State Archives of Florence Information System). The database's analysis is mostly based on the exchange of correspondence with Stefano Vitali, the State Archives' archivist and on the article by Stefano Vitali and Daniela Bondielli, "Descrizioni archivistiche sul web: la guida on line dell'Archivio di Stato di Firenze", Centro di Ricerche Informatiche per i Beni Culturali. X , 2000, 2, 7-27

(referring to *Guida generale degli Archivi di Stato italiani*⁶⁶ as the focal example) and of inventories and their relationships to fonds and other levels of description. One of the major identified need was to change the "one-dimensional" structure of the printed *Guida* by introducing a clear separation between the description of the archives' structure and the creators (institutional and/or private bodies). The database was therefore improved by the relational model and the relationship one-to-many was introduced to represent the link of the fonds with many creators. However, the *Guida generale* represented, at that time, the most common approach of Italian archivists, which was to look at fonds from the history of institutions (archives' creators) rather than to look at fonds as the central element and only in the second instance to deal with the creators' description. Furthermore, in the *Guida generale* the division between the bodies, that are defined by historical periods and those that cannot be covered by such a definition, is substantially a division between public and private bodies. For public bodies one can say that they belong to well-defined periods of the institution, but this is not applicable to the private ones. Another main point of possible revision was identified in the relationship between series and finding aids. The suggestion for revision considered this correlation as a many-to-many relationship (an inventory which can describe many series and on the other hand a series which can refer to many inventories). The *Anagrafe* project has been subsequently modified by the adaptation of the existing heterogeneous finding aids in the database's tables of a (possibly) nation-wide database model. The above described experience shows how, although SIASFI project can unarguably be

⁶⁵ Buonora, P., "Un database relazionale per l'Anagrafe degli Archivi italiani", *Archivi & Computer*, 3/1997, 105-118

⁶⁶ Ministero per i beni culturali e Ambientali. Ufficio centrale per i Beni Archivistici, *Guida Generale degli Archivi di Stato italiani*, Volumes I-V, Roma 1981-1994. Refer to chapter 2 "ISAD(G) and Archival Description Traditions" 21-22 for a more detailed analysis of the *Guida* as standardised model for archival description in Italy.

considered a pacesetter on the Italian scenario, SIASFI is first and foremost a summary of experiences and results matured throughout Italian Archives in the past years on the discussion on *Anagrafe* project's revision⁶⁷.

The definition of "archival complex", which can also be translated as "archival structure", is central for the analysis of SIASFI database management system and has to be considered both from a purely archival point of view and from an information management point of view. The "archival complex" indicates the collection of records, which presents characteristics of unity and homogeneity limited, however, to the high levels of the hierarchical structure, i.e. fonds, sub-fonds, series and sub-series. The decision to describe the macro levels has been based on the conviction that as the SIASFI is an "on-line guide"⁶⁸ there are certain elements which are essential for the remote user's understanding on Internet. The user may wish to know which fonds are kept in a certain archives, details of the creators, the condition of access and use, and the essential characteristics of a series (typology of documentation, administrative procedures from which documents originate, consistency etc.) and perhaps through which processes and events these documents reached the archives. The remote user is less interested in a single unit of description especially if it belongs to uniform series of documents.

From an information management point of view "archival structure" is one of the three complex objects in the database management system together with, "creators" and "custodian"⁶⁹. From "archival complex" it is possible to create links to "creators" and to historical and current inventories (*strumenti di corredo*), to

⁶⁷ Vitali S. and Bondielli, D. "Descrizioni archivistiche sul web: la guida on line dell'Archivio di Stato di Firenze", Centro di Ricerche Informatiche per i Beni Culturali. X , 2000, 2, 7-27, 7

⁶⁸ *ibid*, 8

⁶⁹ Some of the inventories, the most ancient ones, are linked to historical custodians, i.e. the archival institutions prior to the establishment of the State Archives in Florence.

create links to other kind of documentation, and to give bibliographical elements and describe the sources used for compilation.

Figure 3.9 depicts the elements of "*complessi archivistici*" (archival complex). The archival structure window is divided in two elements. On the left hand side there is the list of fonds in a tree view and on the right hand side the form is sub-divided in tabs representing the description areas in ISAD(G). It is interesting to note that in the form "archival complex" ISAD(G) identity statement area is represented by three different tabs: (*identificazione*) is dedicated to reference codes (identification code, univocal code, arrangement code - typology, *Anagrafe* code, arrangement code – function and numeric code), name(s), type of archival structure (fonds, sub-fonds, series, sub-series), authority entry, name in *Guida generale*, reference to *Guida generale* (page and volume), creator(s), begin date, end date (in the example *Segreteria di finanze*), Extent of unit (*consistenza*) and dates (*date*).

The tab description (*descrizione*) contains all the fields listed in the contents area; the tab *fruizione* for access and use area and *redazione* for editing/compiling notes. The most interesting features, which represent slight deviations from strict compliance to ISAD(G), are two: the field *soggetto produttore* in the tab identification, which allows the creation of a link to the authority table creators (*soggetti produttori*); and the element *strumenti di corredo* (finding aids), which is present in the tab access and may be used where a link to a finding aids database is established (see figure 3.11).

Image removed due to third party copyright

Fig. 3.9 SiasFi database - archival complex window [source D. Bondielli, 2000]

However, the database's elements "typologies" and "functions" are not unproblematic to define. The functions are conceived as generic spheres of activities, a term which covers a very complicated system of competencies from the *ancien regime*. The typology refers to the body's nature, not from a juridical point of view, but from a more general institutional nature. In this way for example, information about the Health Officials (*ancien regime*), the Hospital of *S. Maria Nuova*, and a hospital annexed to a convent, can be organised together under a general sphere of activity (function) 'Health', but then differentiated into categories of central Magistracy of *ancien regime*, for the first (with administrative and judiciary competencies), hospital for the second one, and religious body for the third one.

Figure 3.10 illustrates the *soggetti produttori* (creators) window in SIASFI database management system. The tab description includes the fields: juridical and

historical notes, typologies, juridical conditions, spheres of activity, the tab identification includes the fields: reference codes, type of body (corporate, person, family), name, sources for the determination of name, other names, dates; tab compiling/editing consist of fields responsibility (compiler's name, date, type of intervention – edit, modify, etc.); motivations for intervention; bibliography and sources.

Image removed due to third party copyright

Fig. 3.10 SIASFI database creators window [source D. Bondielli, 2000]

In SIASFI database the context represents an innovation vis-à-vis the Italian traditional descriptive model based on inclusion of creators' description in the description of the single fonds, given at the beginning of the fonds as an introductory narrative. As from ISAAR(CPF)⁷⁰, which foresees the separated management of records' descriptions at the relevant level (fonds, sub-fonds, series etc.), the database's architecture shows a complex multidimensional relationship

between fonds and the lower levels and their respective creators, a many-to-many relationship. Hence, the information regarding the creators is treated in a separate database and is linked to archival material's descriptions.

The SIASFI database has been built in such a way as to have some objects linked through qualified relationships, avoiding the repetition of contextual information and giving to the user (archivist or end-user) the possibility to move from the description of an object to description of another linked object. The main objects of the database are archival structure and creators; finding aids are provided in a separate database. There are however, three more databases linked to "creators": one which is created for the description of the institutional-political context to which the creators belong; the second for the description of the territorial areas in which the creator has worked; and the third for a general institutional profile. The relations between the main objects of the system (archival structure and creators) and other databases are one-to-many or many-to-many. Furthermore, it is possible to define the "creator" through three distinct qualifiers: the typology, the sphere of activity and the juridical condition. Links to creators can also be established to institutional-political context. In the institutional-political context database, the link to creators is therefore managed by a separate table, which contains the name of the institutional-political context to which the creator belonged and the covering dates which qualify this relationship.

One of the major aims of the SIASFI project was to recover and to integrate on electronic support all the existing information sources at the *archivio di stato*, including the data from *Anagrafe*, inventories in use and the historical inventories currently not in use. In order to realize this objective a separate database for finding

⁷⁰ International Council on Archives - Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards ISAAR(CPF): International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families. Paris,

aids (*strumenti di corredo*) has been linked to "archival structure" through a specific link between archival units and finding aids at the relevant levels, (for example. the finding aid which concerns the whole fonds is mentioned at the fonds level and it is not repeated at the lower levels). These links are managed in archival structure form by a field in tab use (*fruizione*). Figure 3.11 illustrates finding aids as windows which pop up whenever needed during the data entry in the archival complex form. In the identity tab the fields are: title, extended title, reference code(s), linked fonds and in attribution tab author, dates, intervention type (editing, additions, etc.). Moreover, the finding aids database is based on the distinction between printed and unprinted finding aids (guides, inventories, etc.). In tab description the printed finding aids, considered as bibliographic material, are therefore described in field "bibliography". The unprinted finding aids are described using the following fields: extrinsic description; typology (inventory, catalogue, calendar, etc.); historical note (when and why the finding aid was drawn up); intrinsic description (tool's structure and description's characteristics). The most interesting characteristic of this database resides in the editing form, which has the function of description control, i.e. it provides for each record the name of the person who has created the record, the dates, any modifications and further updates, including annotations concerning the motives, contents and modalities of these interventions.

Image removed due to third party copyright

Fig. 3.11 SIASFI database finding aids window [source D. Bondielli, 2000]

The SIASFI database management system comprises more than 26 elements/fields specified in ISAD(G). Some of the core elements, like reference code, title, creator, date(s), extent of the unit of description, generate many more fields in order to cover the variety of previous arrangement phases and systems. The presence of these many fields can, however, lead to the extremes of not being able to track with certainty the most important elements.

The multilevel description rule finds its application in the complex form of the tab "description" where, in the field dedicated to the content of archival history, (*contenuto della storia archivistica*) the description is provided both at the fonds and series level and the fields are the same no matter of what level is being described. In the section dedicated to description, SIASFI database is also flexible enough to provide the possibility of describing series that have had a different history from the fonds to which they belong, or which originated from other

archives and were later integrated into the fonds. Most of SIASFI data elements are free-text format and unlimited length.

SIASFI database supports authority files in a sophisticated way through the "creators" database (*soggetti produttori*) satisfying the requirements for access points and controlled names as in ISAAR(CPF). However, instead of limiting the archivist's intervention to the creator's "administrative structure" the State Archives in Florence made the problematical choice to create the political-institutional context as one of the database management system's main objects. This approach represents an heritage from the *Guida Generale* and is connected directly to the Italian archival tradition, according to which one of the archivist's tasks is to converge the evaluation of documentation with the description of the concrete historical situations in which the creators operated. This task is regarded as particularly important today, due to the need of communicating archival descriptions to a greater public through the Internet. The establishment of links between the creators and the historical context in which they operated is conceived as information giving orientation to remote users⁷¹.

SIASFI database allows to link "archival structure" to the management of items in a reading room or to consult inventories or other search tools in electronic format: HTML pages, databases or digitalized inventories. The management of hypertext links is stored in a table in which some URL pointers are introduced towards sources present already on the *Archivio di Stato* web-site or on external web-sites. The URLs are listed in a table with a title (own or attributed) and a brief description.⁷²

⁷¹ Vitali S. and Bondielli D., "Descrizioni archivistiche sul web: la guida on line dell'Archivio di Stato di Firenze", Centro di Ricerche Informatiche per i Beni Culturali, X , 2000, 2, 7-27, 11

⁷² *ibid*, 20

One of the most interesting and innovative elements in SIASFI database management system is the space dedicated to and the consistency of finding aids and the way in which the archivists' intellectual responsibility is documented by providing essential elements regarding the history of descriptions. This aspect is linked to another dimension of the very same problem: the update of description systems. Such updates can be the consequence of technological developments and changes in descriptive models, or they can be the consequence of necessary revisions and corrections of the single description due to increase of knowledge or to changes in the interpretation. These elements can determine the need to re-engineer the systems' data migration and to modify the content of descriptions. This problem has been perceived by the archivists in Florence as linked to the systems' evolution and was solved outside the system itself through a clear explanation of the fundamental characteristics of the system and its transformations. Therefore, the modification of single description has been confronted by providing essential elements of its history in the form of fields in the "editing" sections in all the database's objects.

Furthermore, attention should be paid to the choice of a database management system which is a real "on-line guide" of the archives and therefore of a description which privileges the macro levels of description. In the past years there has been a considerable reappraisal⁷³ of what a guide should contain and databases have been established primarily to supply information about the originators of the archives. On the other hand, the justification for which "the specific descriptive elements which can be required can vary consistently from different fonds and sometimes from a series to another in the same fonds. This depends from specific

⁷³ Kitching C., The Impact of Computerization on Archival Finding Aids: A Ramp Study, PGI-91/WS/16, Paris, UNESCO, 1991, 11

requirements that only with a lot of difficulties could satisfactory be met by using an unique information tool"⁷⁴ could be arguable considering the standardization efforts expressed in ISAD(G). However, the reason for such an option in the design of SIASFI database is based on the awareness of the extreme complexity of the description at item level and follows decisions reached during the revision of ISAD(G)⁷⁵, which include the choice not to develop specific standards for different formats. In SIASFI there is therefore a core description common to all archival units, but also a series of elements in addition (for photos, parchment, notaries' registers, personal files, etc.). The standardization at the State Archives in Florence – or more accurately, the use of standardized computer programmes (information tools) – is based on homogeneous areas of documentation, and does not pretend to be absolutely general, as the number of different cases is unlimited and therefore uncontrollable. Hence, during the first phase of the SIASFI project the best way to meet this requirement was to build separated information systems that integrate each other. The integration has been reached simply by links through the web or in more complicated forms through protocols for data exchange.

⁷⁴ Vitali, S. and Bondielli, D. "Descrizioni archivistiche sul web: la guida on line dell'Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Centro di Ricerche Informatiche per i Beni Culturali. X , 2000, 2, 7-27, 10

⁷⁵ International Council on Archives (ICA), ISAD(G):General International Standard Archival Description Adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards. Stockholm, Sweden, 19-22 September 1999. Madrid 2000. Introduction, 11

3.3 Conclusions

At the beginning of the 1990s there was a general shared feeling regarding the computerization of archives that Kitching⁷⁶ communicated in his recommendations to the archival community. He considered that it would have been helpful to distribute information about individual systems, to commission specific surveys and reports, look into particular problems and ultimately to design software specific for archival functions and activities. He argued that there was scope for a planned reduction in the number of different applications covering archival description functions and for selection and development of the best for wider dissemination. Finally, he suggested that applications tailored for use in one archive should in theory have potential for use in others, even though such tailor-made applications have not been known across national boundaries. Despite these recommendations there have been very few generalised studies which dealt with these issues in the past decade. These ideas inspired and eventually became the background for this chapter.

As has already been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, ISAD(G) rules fundamentally contain data structure standards and data contents standards. They describe the data elements of archival description, but do not analyse in great detail the relationships between the data elements. Therefore, only few of the requirements, regarding data structure and data contents, have been chosen from ISAD(G) text for the analysis of the four case studies. The elements as the 26 elements/fields of ISAD(G) or at least six core elements; the multilevel description

⁷⁶ Kitching, C., The Impact of Computerization on Archival Finding Aids: A Ramp Study, PGI-91/WS/16, Paris, UNESCO, 1991. 23, 60

rule and the possibility to link database records to external files for display and view purposes can be considered the minimum common denominator to comply with ISAD(G) and have been in fact found, with slight differences, in the four database management systems.

The study *Design for an archival description system*⁷⁷ by the ICA Committee on Archival Automation in 1996 has been considered the basis for the establishment of some of the most relevant database management system's requirements. The Committee on Archives Automation stressed that the relationships in a records system are more complex than those foreseen by ISAD(G) and that ISAD(G) model does not contain the organisational part, the context⁷⁸ in which the records are created. Concerning the issue of the representation of context in databases, the problem can probably be summarised by the argument that in the past the information that databases contained was central while the context surrounding the creation of the information itself was of secondary importance. "Information value data was emphasised whereas contextual, evidence-value was less important."⁷⁹

The four case studies refer to context by the means of ISAAR(CPF). Some of them support authority files for the description of the context of documents' creation and satisfy in this way the requirements for standardized access points. The main problem however is the link between ISAD(G) and ISAAR(CPF). The link may be established at higher levels, as recommended by ISAD(G). ISAD(G)

⁷⁷ ICA Committee on Archival Automation, Design for an Archival Description System. Application of ISAD(G). A Study, 2nd Draft, September 1996

⁷⁸ ICA Committee on Archival Automation, Design for an Archival Description System. Application of ISAD(G). A Study, 2nd Draft, September 1996, 9

⁷⁹ Cook, T. and Frost E., "The electronic Records Archival Programme at the National Archives of Canada: Evolution and Critical Factors of Success", Electronic Records Management Program Strategies, Archives and Museums Informatics Technical Report, No. 18(1993), edited by Margaret Hedstrom.

proposes in fact a top-down approach for archival description. On the other hand, in order to support archival description at all stages of the records life cycle, an archival description system should support bottom-up description as well. Archival description should become in this way rather a matter of linking records descriptions to those of business functions and organisational units, than a real description activity. The basic requirements of modern archival description would be therefore to make explicit why records were created, how they were used, and for what mandate they were needed. Furthermore, considering databases a representation of the archive's structure it appears therefore necessary to preserve the structure of databases because it gives information about the structural relations between records in archives.⁸⁰ Hence, an important part of archival descriptive work would be to reconstruct the record keeping system putting the emphasis on the relationship between business transactions and records and on the filing mechanisms. Unfortunately, none of the database management systems examined respond to these conditions. Actually, looking at the fundamental criteria that form the basis for the creation of the four database management systems it appears that their authors were still convinced that ISAD(G) is more suitable for historical archives than for current and intermediate archives.

Moreover, concerning the requirement of consistency, precision and quality of output for finding aids and the variety of output formats (guide, inventory, calendar)⁸¹ none of the four databases analysed in this chapter complied fully with this requirement, as they did not present a variety of outputs for finding aids.

⁸⁰ Bearman, D., Electronic Evidence, Strategies for Managing Records in Contemporary Organizations, Pittsburgh, Archives and Museums Informatics, 1994, 216-218. On the subject of description of electronic datasets see: Shepherd E., Smith, C. "The Application of ISAD(G) to the Description of Archival Datasets", Journal of the Society of Archivists, Vol. 21, No 1, 2000, 55-86

⁸¹ "With respect to different levels of description included in a finding aid, these finding aids may be divided into three main classes: Class A: guide, Class B: inventory and Class C: calendar" in: ICA-

However, it has to be stressed that SIASFI database management system is the only case-study that has implemented the interesting feature of the "intellectual responsibility (institution or individual) for finding aids."⁸²

One of the main disadvantages pointed out by archivists⁸³ in the choice of in-house databases is that they reflect archival practices of the environment in which they were designed, limiting their applicability to other archival environments. This problem is linked to the fact that one of the fundamental needs for standardisation in archival work should be to provide systems vendors with precise elements for a better understanding of archival concepts and to attract real interest from software manufacturers. It should be therefore a fundamental purpose for archivists to make clear and to analyse in great detail the relationships between the data elements foreseen in ISAD(G). Furthermore, archivists should be well aware of the importance of explaining the complexity of relationships typical of a records management system and the great significance of the context, the organisational part of a descriptive model. From the comparison done in this chapter, the in-house databases appear in effect better modelled in order to meet the requirements for the conformity to ISAD(G). These results highlight that many of the problems which databases raise are due to lack of archivists' inputs at the design stage. Thus, the involvement of archivists in the design of a database management system should permit the identification of the information of archival value and the ability to ensure that the information is in a form suitable for archival description.

CDS – Sub-committee on Finding Aids, Report of the Sub-committee on Finding Aids, Guidelines for the Preparation of Finding Aids, Final Version Approved by CDS 11.03.2001, Appendix A, 4

⁸² ICA-CDS – Sub-committee on Finding Aids, Report of the Sub-committee on Finding Aids, Guidelines for the Preparation of Finding Aids, Final Version Approved by CDS 11.03.2001, rule 4.1.1, 3

⁸³ Ellis, J. (ed.) Keeping Archives. 2nd ed. Victoria, Thorpe and the Society of Australian Archivists, 1993, 353

Finally, the difficult cohabitation of databases with ISAD(G) was initially thought to be the difficulty of implementing the standards because of their structure (both data and contents structure). In contrast to these initial assumptions, the research brought to light two main issues. First of all the fundamental importance of the context of records' creation and the consequent difficulty of implementing it in archival description systems⁸⁴. Software engineers continue to design more advanced and complex data objects that combine content and structures into description. Although the descriptive elements imbedded in these data objects are both essential for access and retrieval and rich sources of information about the data, they hardly ever include the essential contextual information necessary to identify, retrieve, and comprehend archival records.⁸⁵

Secondly, Internet as a central element has contributed to redefine the application of automated systems to archives. Before the use of the world wide web projects regarding the application of automation to archives concentrated on the capacity of data processing, on search rapidity and on the combination of variable parameters, the multiple forms of data manipulation and use, and the automatic processing of complex manual procedures. Nowadays, the information distribution and its capacity to enter in relationship with other information on the web are the problems for which better solutions are still being sought. From the programmes and database search tools for the arrangement and description, which aimed at the production of printed finding aids, there has been a transition towards a new phase

⁸⁴ Information Management Standards and Practices Division National Archives of Canada, Managing Electronic Records in an Electronic Work Environment, May 1996, 4

The results on further investigation on the importance of "context" for archival description are reported in Chapter 6 which deals with the revision processes of both ISAD(G) and ISAAR(CPF).

⁸⁵ Hedstrom, M. "Descriptive Practices for Electronic Records: Deciding What is Essential and Imaging What is Possible", Archivaria, No. 36, Autumn 1993, 55-56

in which search tools and finding aids are thought, since the very beginning, as born "digital", made to be consulted on Internet.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Vitali, S. and Bondielli, D. "Descrizioni archivistiche sul web: la guida on line dell'Archivio di Stato di Firenze", Centro di Ricerche Informatiche per i Beni Culturali. X , 2000, 2, 7-27, 7
Furthermore, the impact of Internet on archival descriptive practices is examined and exemplified in Chapter 5.

Chapter Four. Still a need for archival description? Electronic records, archival theories, postmodern thought and some National Archives' projects

During the past decade, archivists have come to believe increasingly that their profession has undergone a crisis significant enough to reopen the question of its nature and objectives.¹ The causes of this sense of crisis can be found in the perception that traditional ways in which documents have been created, kept and used in the paper world are challenged in the electronic records world. The fact that electronic records are so physically different from paper makes their intellectual and physical control by an archival institution a difficult task and their accurate archival description a vital need. With the arrival of electronic records, archivists have been asked to devote much more time to improve their techniques of description. Archival description for electronic records has shifted the attention from the single unit of description to the need to provide the proper context for electronic records within the entire record-keeping system of the creating body. Catherine Bailey at the beginning of the Nineties pointed out a gap in archival literature on the description of electronic records.² This chapter aims to try and give an up to date summary on this topic. This chapter also surveys the discussion among archivists, which focused on concepts and terms dealing with the question underlying the debate: whether

¹ Cook, T., "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift", *Archivaria*, No. 43, Spring 1997, 15-63. For a critical approach towards the changing archival culture in the Information Age see Cox, R. J., *Closing an Era. Historical Perspectives on Modern Archives and Records Management*. Westport, Connecticut, London, Greenwood Press, 2000, 223-242

² Bailey, C., "Archival Theory and Electronic Records." *Archivaria*, No. 29, Winter 1989-90, 181, 187, 189

description, as essential part of a modern archival theory, really requires extensive revisions before it can be applied fully to electronic records.

Furthermore, one of the valuable effects of the pressure that electronic records have placed upon archivists has been to force them to be articulate about what they do in their profession and why. Archival description, among other important fundamentals of archival theory, has become the centre of an intense debate opposing, on the one hand, the application of diplomatics to electronic records keeping systems (project conducted by Luciana Duranti at the University of British Columbia (Canada))³ to, on the other hand, the conviction that records in the new electronic world do not need any kind of description, at least not a subsequent one, rather they can be self-descriptive (project by David Bearman and Margaret Hedstrom at the University of Pittsburgh)⁴. Analysing some elements of that debate will help in understanding the impact of electronic records management systems on traditional archival theory and practice based on the diplomatic form of archival materials.

Ten years ago, John McDonald described the electronic records terrain as a "wild frontier"⁵, and more recently Verne Harris, revising the metaphor, added that "we are beginning to see the gun-toting wild ones being brought under the rule of

³ Duranti L., MacNeil H., Underwood W., "Protecting Electronic Evidence: A Second Progress Report on a Research Study and its Methodology", *Archivi & Computer*, No. 1, 1996, 37-69; Duranti L., MacNeil, H. "Come proteggere l'integrità dei documenti elettronici: una panoramica della ricerca condotta all'università del British Columbia", *Archivi & Computer*, No. 3, 1997

⁴ Bearman D., Hedstrom M., "Re-inventing Archives for Electronic Records: Alternative Service Delivery Options" in Hedstrom M. ed. *Electronic Records Management Program Strategies*, Archives and Museum Informatics Technical Report, 18, 1993, 82-98

⁵ McDonald J., *Managing Records in the Modern Office – The Experience of the National Archives of Canada*, Paper presented at the Australian Archives, Playing for Keeps Conference in 1994. See also: Cook, Terry, "Easy to byte, harder to chew: the second generation of electronic records archives." *Archivaria*, No. 33, Winter 1991-1992, 204

law – in countries of the global hub"⁶. Verne Harris - definitely still one the free gun-toting ones, not to be put under the rule of law but probably tolerated because from the "periphery" - questions the archival community and the official "schools of thought" about the universal validity of their "paradigms". His remarks reopen a debate about general accepted definitions of meanings. Some post-modern issues will be used in this chapter as basis of enquiry on how electronic records have restructured, and sometimes even transformed the meaning or have suggested an alternative meaning of archival description.

Additionally, many countries through their National Archives have demonstrated in recent years their concerns about description and preservation of electronic records. Numerous projects, mainly in North America, Europe and Australia, have developed and tested functional requirements applicable in first instance to electronic environments, but offering a wider application. These requirements aimed mainly at meeting the standards for evidence and have formed the basis for a new generation of archival laws⁷. This chapter will provide an overview on some National Archives' new regulations and on their approaches and solutions in responding to problematic questions posed by electronic records in broader societal processes.

Finally, this chapter will analyse previous discussions on archival theory, particularly in its relation to philosophy and history. The animated debates and the results from research by archivists concerning traditional core elements of the profession during the last decade have brought to a redefinition of *archivistique* as

⁶ Harris, V., "Law, Evidence and Electronic Records: A Strategic Perspective from The Global Periphery", Comma, International Journal on Archives, 2001-1/2, 30

⁷ *ibid*, 37, 43

archival science and have opened up a "paradigm shift"⁸. By recognizing that archivists' assumptions regarding preservation, public programming, and the archives as a place of custody have changed and admitting that pillars of the archival profession have been affected by changes in cultures, media, and technology, what has then been left of one of the fundamentals of our discipline, archival description?⁹

4.1. Introduction – Some Definitions

This section focuses on concepts and definitions dealing with the underlying question whether description, as an essential part of a modern archival theory, really requires extensive revisions before it can be applied fully to electronic records. In order to be able to answer such a fundamental question other issues must first be analysed. What does "archival function" mean for electronic records? How does "electronic" challenge the definition of "record"? How are some traditional archival principles e.g. provenance and original order being translated to apply to electronic environments? How does traditional intellectual control (personified by description) relate to "access strategy" for electronic records? Should the traditional distinction between archival arrangement and description be transformed in order to deal with electronic records? What does the often used (and abused) term "metadata" relate to

⁸ Cook, T. "Archival Science and postmodernism: new formulations for old concepts" Archival Science, 1, 2001, 5

⁹ Cook, T., "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift", Archivaria, No. 43, Spring 1997, 20

archival description? And how should metadata be used in connection with archival description?

The traditional notion of "archival function"¹⁰ stresses the importance of having a logical space independent from the production environment, where records are protected from loss, alteration, and deterioration so that they may be used as evidence and where their accessibility to users is guaranteed. In the electronic records era unfortunately, "archiving"¹¹ is a term used widely by computer and information technology specialists to convey the notion of inactive or off-line storage of electronic records that may be accessed in the future. The role of archival description as a logical link in the physical separation process of records from their production environment has therefore been questioned in relation to electronic records. However, in times of constant migrations of electronic records it is arguable that archival description should be considered the best method for ensuring their long term authenticity.¹²

The definition of "record" has been considered very important in the debate on electronic records. In ISAD(G) the definition of record is "recorded information in any form or medium, created or received and maintained, by an organization or person in the transaction of business or the conduct of affairs"¹³. The ICA Committee on Electronic Records proposes a definition of record that applies to any format or medium of recording and is essentially any "recorded information produced or received in the initiation, conduct or completion of an institutional or

¹⁰ ICA – Committee on Electronic Records, Guide for Managing Electronic Records from an Archival Perspective. Consultation Draft, June 1996, 17

¹¹ Dollar, C. M., Authentic Electronic Records: Strategies for Long-Term Access, Chicago Illinois, Cohasset Associates, Inc. 2000, 26

¹² Duranti, L., "The Archival Bond", Archives and Museums Informatics, Vol. 11, No. 3-4, 1997, 217

individual activity and that comprises content, context and structure sufficient to provide evidence of the activity."¹⁴ However, the Committee on Electronic Records' analysis goes deeper than this definition and underlines some unique characteristics of electronic records which need new methods for the implementation of fundamental records management and archival functions. The physical structure of an electronic record is not readily apparent; therefore there is a need for a logical structure, which makes it possible to identify it and to represent its internal structure. The electronic record cannot be identified by means of being a physical entity, but constitutes instead a logical entity.¹⁵ The different definitions of record by underlining the discrepancies between physical and logical elements in electronic records brought to the rethinking of some principles and archival theoretical approaches. As David Bearman pointed out¹⁶, archival theories have been developed to manage paper records i.e. physical things¹⁷. The distinction between physical and logical in the management of electronic records led, for Bearman, to the revision of two fundamental archival principles: the original order and the principle of provenance. In Bearman's view the concept of original order becomes the context of creation and use of records in record-keeping systems. Following this approach, the concepts of series and fonds appear to be not truly physical but instead logical

¹³ International Council on Archives (ICA), ISAD(G):General International Standard Archival Description Adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards. Stockholm, Sweden, 19-22 September 1999. Madrid 2000, 15

¹⁴ ICA – Committee on Electronic Records, Guide for Managing Electronic Records from an Archival Perspective. Consultation Draft, June 1996, 13

¹⁵ *ibid*, 15

¹⁶ Bearman, D., "Item Control and Electronic Record-keeping", Archives and Museum Informatics, Vol. 10, No. 3, 1996, 196-198, 201

¹⁷ "Although the draft statement of principles regarding archival description adopted by the Ad Hoc Commission on Descriptive Standards, in October 1990, is intended to be generic, language used in the statement can be construed as focusing exclusively on traditional records as objects and implies that arrangement is generally a physical process." In Dollar, C. M., Archival Theory and Information Technologies. The Impact of Information Technologies on Archival Principles and Methods. University of Macerata, 1992, 60-62

associations. Therefore, the actions based on physical proximity of records in traditional record-keeping systems have to be considered logical and should be documented at the item level. The description of electronic records at the item level from the moment of their creation represents, in Bearman's view, the new method, more efficient and less expensive than carrying over into the electronic environment the methods of the paper world. For Bearman provenance of records has usually been associated with the organisation in which they were created or received¹⁸. The provenance of records should instead be understood by reference to the business function of which they are evidence, which determines their form and content and creates the procedures for their dissemination. Bearman is considered therefore the founder of documentation strategies. Luciana Duranti critically points out that "the development of documentation strategies had as result a big misunderstanding of the provenance principle which has been equated to the information keeping of the creator and its administrative structure for research purposes" and these strategies lead towards "provenance granularity"¹⁹. In Luciana Duranti's view provenance in electronic record keeping systems is not situated at the fonds or series level but in the context of the documents themselves.

Among fundamental archival principles, intellectual control has also been reviewed. Intellectual control has always been considered the activity of assuring continuous accessibility to records by identifying and describing them. In the case of electronic records, additional meaning has been added: preservation policy plays a focal role in the definition of any access strategy. Preservation and access to archival electronic records are interdependent. Access depends on preservation and

¹⁸ Bearman D., "Record-keeping systems". *Archivaria* No. 36, Autumn 1993, 22

¹⁹ Duranti, L., "I principi di provenienza e dell'ordine originario in Nordamerica", *Archivi & Computer*, No. 3-4, 1996, 248, 251, 255-257

preservation actions must be directed towards the goal of maintaining records that are available i.e. physically intact, identified and readable. Hence, accessible records are those that can be selected within search strategies consonant with the way the creator organized them.²⁰

The fundamental difference between physical control and intellectual control has been questioned and has produced a new interpretation of arrangement in its relation to description. Intellectual arrangement – intended as the logical relations between records - is a key issue for electronic records and it is strictly related to the context of their creation.²¹ For electronic records the intellectual or logical arrangement is absolutely essential to understand them and therefore to the maintenance of their context and to their accessibility. The redefinition of these functions should involve treating arrangement and description as single activity and shifting the description emphasis from products of an information system to the information system's context. Description should, following this vision, occur at the time of information systems' design by identifying the information elements and their relations, and by explaining their context of creation and use.²²

Furthermore, archival description for paper records and electronic records, has common contextual information which describes the context in which the records were created by the originator, including the purposes, functions and activities for which the records were created and used. However, the description of electronic records requires a complete and correct definition of the internal structure of a

²⁰ ICA – Committee on Electronic Records, Guide for Managing Electronic Records from an Archival Perspective. Consultation Draft, June 1996, 25. In Charles Dollar's words the fundamental components of a long term access strategy for electronic records should be "processable authentic records" in Dollar, C. M., Authentic Electronic Records: Strategies for Long-Term Access, Cohasset Associates, Inc. Chicago Illinois, 2000, 58

²¹ Bikson T.K. and Frinking E.J., Preserving the Present: toward viable electronic records, The Hague, Sdu Publishers, 1993, 29

record.²³ These internal and external elements are grouped in what is commonly called metadata.²⁴ Metadata is technical data about electronic records, which describes the organization and internal structure of the records and the rules governing the addition, deletion or alteration of records, or the interpretation of contents.²⁵ Electronic records are dependent on a well-documented administrative context, and on metadata describing how the information is recorded. Metadata provides part of the context of the record which must be preserved by mapping administrative and documentary relationships among records within a record keeping system during the life cycle of that record.²⁶

Although the following section will deal in detail on the comparison of "schools of thought"²⁷ it is important here to underline that there are different views on how metadata should be used in the context of archival description. David Wallace for the 'metadata school', claims that descriptive elements should be

²² Dollar, C. M., Archival Theory and Information Technologies. The Impact of Information Technologies on Archival Principles and Methods. University of Macerata, 1992, 60-62

²³ "In simple cases, such as a document in plain ASCII, the description of internal structure may require no more than describing the genres of documents (e.g. correspondence, reports). In more complex cases, the description of the internal structure may require technical information about how structure is embedded in physical files and about the processing required to realize the structure when the record is accessed." ICA – Committee on Electronic Records, Guide for Managing Electronic Records from an Archival Perspective. Consultation Draft, June 1996, 46-47

²⁴ Intrinsic and extrinsic elements of metadata were first defined by Dublin Core at: http://www.oclc.org:5046/research/dublin_core/

²⁵ ICA – Committee on Electronic Records, Guide for Managing Electronic Records from an Archival Perspective. Consultation Draft, June 1996, 46-47. It is also interesting to look at the definition of "description" of electronic records proposed by the Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA) is "a brief (approximately one paragraph) description of the contents of the electronic record series should indicate the series' purpose, creators, and users. With some record series, the title may be sufficiently descriptive of the series contents, although additional details can clarify the scope of such a series or the series' relationship to other files. In any case, it should indicate administrative activities or other tasks that the record series supports. [...]Electronic records must be inventoried by identifying and analysing the automated information system with which they are associated." Saffady, W. Managing Electronic Records, ARMA International Publisher, 1992, 72-77

²⁶ ICA – Committee on Electronic Records, Guide for Managing Electronic Records from an Archival Perspective. Consultation Draft, June 1996, 14

²⁷ Harris, V., "Law, Evidence and Electronic Records: A Strategic Perspective from The Global Periphery", Comma, International Journal on Archives, 2001-1/2, 29-43

included in the design of metadata systems within organizations²⁸ and that this would eliminate the need for archival description. For David Bearman, archivists typically have described records at a collection level (entire series, collection, or fonds); the individual items have therefore inherited attributes associated with the higher aggregate of which they were a part. On the contrary, metadata for electronic records describing automatically both context and structure at the item level would serve users' needs better than a description at a collective level.²⁹

On the other hand, Heather MacNeil for the 'diplomats school' affirms that metadata systems are interferences that would violate the very purpose of records and record-keeping systems as they were created by the original users, and warns against confusion of metadata required for electronic records management purposes and descriptive metadata. In MacNeil's view, adding artificial metadata for archival description purposes would mean corruption of the metadata record itself and would compromise its value as evidence. Heather MacNeil also warns against confusing management methods with descriptive solutions, and electronic records management requirements with archival descriptive requirements. She points out that metadata systems are management tools to preserve corporate memory and accountability, while description captures and communicates knowledge about the context of records creation within an organization.³⁰ Furthermore she stresses how archivists dealing with traditional records are very familiar with the notion that description is

²⁸ Wallace D., "Managing the Present: Metadata as Archival Description" *Archivaria*, 39, Spring 1995, 11-21

²⁹ Bearman, D., "Item Control and Electronic Recordkeeping", *Archives and Museum Informatics*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 1996, 204-205

³⁰ MacNeil H., "Metadata Strategies and Archival Description: Comparing Apples and Oranges", *Archivaria*, No. 36, Spring 1995, 22-32

context rather than content-oriented.³¹ Finally, on the metadata's potential to replace archival description, Wendy Duff has stressed the importance for archivists of studying the impact that different descriptive systems have on users before opting for one or the other descriptive processes.³²

Considering that the definition of these terms is focal for archival description, the following pages will try to give a closer look at the debate on these topics in the past decade.

4.2 "Schools of Thought": Diplomatics v. Self-description?

Two "schools of thought" have been named by postmodernist archivists to identify two main projects that have been dealing with electronic records in the last decade. I would like here to praise this intense debate for having attracted the archival profession into its vortices, and obliged archivists to think about meanings of words, intellectual formulas and "paradigm(s) shift(s)". While I am aware that it is difficult to separate archival description from the wider context of this debate, it has however been possible to achieve this aim. Focus on this element has resulted a useful discussion on different concepts and perceptions on the role of archivist in society.

³¹ International Council on Archives (ICA), Electronic Records Management: A Literature Review. Prepared by Alf Erlandsson, Committee on Electronic Records, ICA Study 10, April, 1997, 63-69. See also H. MacNeil, "Metadata Strategies and Archival Description: Comparing Apples and Oranges", Archivaria, No. 36, Spring 1995

The attention on diplomatics has been revived during the last decade in North America because of its possible use in electronic environment. Francis Blouin, one of the exponents of modern diplomatics, asserts that diplomatics has two sub-fields: the first that focuses on the character and the content of documents and the second which relates to the organisational context in which the documents were produced³³. Could we therefore affirm that the British Columbia project concentrates on the first field of diplomatics and the Pittsburgh Project concentrates on the second one? To give answers to this question one should give an historical aperçu on the developments of this discipline. In 1961 Georges Tessier (who can be considered one of the founding fathers of modern diplomatics) defined diplomatics as "the reasoned knowledge of the rules regulating the form which applies to written acts and to assimilated documents. Being a reasoned knowledge, diplomatics should not be only descriptive."³⁴ The *raison d'être* of diplomatics for Tessier can be found in the fact that archival documents answer at the time of their creation to juridical or immediately practical aims. Georges Tessier, however, warned against the possibility of confusing diplomatic authenticity with juridical authenticity "a written act can be sincere without that the facts reported in it are necessarily true".³⁵ He also pointed out that, although the analysis of "form" is a key-notion in diplomatics, it does not only apply to the external contour, to external characteristics, to signs, but it should go deeper in analysis. He opened up the road to contemporary diplomatics by affirming that the texts on diplomatics were outdated, because they were always

³² Duff W., "Will Metadata Replace Archival Description? A Commentary", *Archivaria*, No. 39 Spring 1995

³³ Blouin, F., "A Framework for a Consideration of Diplomatics in the Electronic Environment", *American Archivist*, Volume 59, Fall 1996, 466-479, 469

³⁴ Tessier G., "Diplomatique", *L'histoire et ses méthodes*, Librairie Gallimard, Paris, 1961, 633-676, 667

³⁵ *ibid*, 671, 674

based on analysis of medieval documents, and he wished that diplomatics would find application to modern records as well.

In more recent years, Luciana Duranti affirmed that diplomatics can be regarded as "the study of the genesis, inner constitution and transmission of archival documents, and of their relationship with the facts represented in them and with their creator."³⁶ The methodological approach of the University of British Columbia project is about the demonstration that the diplomatic analysis of the nature of records is relevant and useful in an electronic environment. The UBC project team has conducted both a diplomatic analysis of the necessary components of a record and an analysis of its formal elements and developed some models. Diplomatics has been used therefore as a body of concepts used with the purpose of proving the reliability and authenticity of documents.³⁷ Almost conforming with the traditional diplomatic definition, the UBC research project has defined the record "as any document created by a physical or juridical person in the course of practical activity as an instrument and a by-product of it"³⁸. For the UBC model, a record consists therefore of a document and its complex of relationships. However, a document, whether received from an external source or generated internally before being set aside, cannot be considered a record. It has to be stressed that some fundamental concepts of archival theory have been defined anew by the UBC project. Archives or archival fonds has in fact been removed from the model on the grounds that it is a meta-entity, rather than an entity; the entity record is connected to the entity dossier (a dossier consists of one or more records), to the entity act (an act produces one or

³⁶ Duranti L., MacNeil, H. "Protecting Electronic Evidence: A Second Progress Report on a Research Study and its Methodology", *Archivi & Computer*, No. 1, 1996, 60

³⁷ Duranti L., "Reliability and Authenticity: the concepts and their implications". *Archivaria*, 39, Spring 1995, 5-10

³⁸ *ibid*

more records).³⁹ Furthermore, one of the terms that the UBC project has 'reinvented' is the archival bond. To this term is associated the idea that the "descriptions" of electronic records generated by their creator (called metadata in the electronic systems) aim to identify the documents in the context of the activities in which they take part. These descriptions, which the creator needs simultaneously with the archival documents, show and stress the inalienable link (archival bond) at the item level and are automatically generated for all the records. Although metadata cannot replace the description at the series level and at the higher arrangement levels it also shows an evident contrast with the records' descriptions made by archivists that exist only for those records that survived after their administrative value is exhausted for the creator.⁴⁰ The UBC project stressed how archival bond should differentiate from context. Context is by definition outside the record while the archival bond is an essential part of the record and it is the expression of the activity in which the record participates, because it contains within itself the direction of the cause-effect relationship. Therefore, the archival bond determines the meaning of the record. This is the reason why archival description, as the means of elucidating the nature of the archival bond in its documentary context, has been traditionally considered the primary way of perpetuating and authenticating the meaning of records.⁴¹ Moreover, records must be seen as component parts of a whole, connected by a bond. Each record has therefore no value individually, but only in relation to the records that

³⁹ Duranti L., MacNeil H., Underwood W., "Protecting Electronic Evidence: A Second Progress Report on a Research Study and its Methodology", *Archivi & Computer*, No. 1, 1996, 37-69

⁴⁰ Duranti L., MacNeil H., "Come proteggere l'integrità dei documenti elettronici: una panoramica della ricerca condotta all'università del British Columbia", *Archivi & Computer*, No. 3, 1997, 140

⁴¹ Duranti, L., "The Archival Bond", *Archives and Museums Informatics*, Vol. 11, No. 3-4, 1997, 214, 216, 217

precede it and follow it, without which it loses its function and significance⁴².

Therefore, the archival bond could in my opinion be assimilated to the linking of descriptions conceptual basis for the multilevel description rule in ISAD(G).⁴³

Although admitting that archival documents, created electronically, have similarities with the traditional documents, because they can be seen as the source presenting the action of an individual at a certain moment in the course of his/her activities, Bruno Delmas⁴⁴ arrives at different conclusions to those of the University of British Columbia project. Delmas considers that the object of contemporary diplomatics is organic information rather than the medium, hence, the problem today is, in his opinion not that of the authenticity of the medium, but that of the value of the information associated with it. The contemporary document does not pose fundamentally different questions from those already established within diplomatics tradition. Traditionally diplomatics has seen itself as a science removed from any relationship to the creators' office: today contemporary diplomatics has to deal with the very reduced lapse in time between the creation and the research. However, diplomatics comes after records creation and any new problem generated by the growth of information and related to accessioning, appraisal and inventory are problems of *archivistique* not of diplomatics.

Blouin defines our current electronic age as a "Post-Print Culture"⁴⁵, characterised by documents that are no longer physical objects readily apparent to

⁴² Guercio, M., "Definitions of Electronic records, the European Perspective", Archives and Museums Informatics, Vol. 11, No. 3-4, 1997, 222

⁴³ International Council on Archives (ICA), ISAD(G):General International Standard Archival Description Adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards. Stockholm, Sweden, 19-22 September 1999. Madrid 2000, 16

⁴⁴ Delmas B., "Manifesto for a Contemporary Diplomatics: From Institutional Documents to Organic Information", American Archivist, Vol. 59, Fall 1996, 438-452, 440

⁴⁵ Blouin, F., "A Framework for a Consideration of Diplomatics in the Electronic Environment", American Archivist, Volume 59, Fall 1996, 466-479, 473. See also Guyotjennin O., "The Expansion

observers. Instead, the documents are machine-dependent and hence often subject to corruption, as, he claims, was the case with the ancient "Scriptoria". Furthermore, he points out that purpose and form of documents, which had been essential for diplomatics, have become less relevant for contemporary archives. However, he argues that for the interpretation of the context of production and the activities that generated the documents the relationship between the organization and the documents it produces should be developed to its full potential. Here is a new theoretical departure for modern diplomatics.

The founder of other school of thought, David Bearman, in his book *Archival Methods*⁴⁶, challenged the archival community by asserting that archivists cannot afford anymore to describe records by studying them and producing surrogates; they need to find a way in which the records and the transactions they represent can describe themselves. The solution he proposed was a metadata system strategy that would focus on the context out of which records arise, as opposed to concentrating on their content. This process implies a completely new orientation, in which archivists should collect and manage existing descriptive metadata instead of creating them⁴⁷. In the electronic systems environment, there is usually an absence of archival intervention and therefore a negation of successive archival analysis and description. Actually, the documentation associated with the electronic systems, that could have been used by archivists to recreate the context of production of documents, may be incomplete or inadequate and the records may no longer exist due to technological obsolescence. The fundamental points made by David Bearman

of Diplomats as a Discipline", *American Archivist*, Volume 59, Fall 1996, pp 414-421, 420 for the inadequacies of diplomatics to analyse contemporary records.

⁴⁶ Bearman D., *Archival Methods*, Pittsburgh, Archives & Museum Informatics, 1989

⁴⁷ See also Hedstrom M., "Descriptive Practices for Electronic Records: Deciding What is Essential and Imaging What is Possible", *Archivaria*, No. 36, Autumn 1993, 58

about archival description are that description of records by means of arranging them and recording that arrangement is too labour intensive to produce complete documentation. The object of documentation should be to document the contexts of records production and use, not to describe records in detail.⁴⁸ Furthermore, David Bearman has posed some important questions to the archival community about purposes and goals of archives and of description in particular. "Why do we describe? Is it to know the content of records? or to know the context of activity? or to know the structure of information that constitutes the record? why do we describe rather than deploy intelligent search systems? Why do we describe records and not functions, or functions and not records?"⁴⁹ In electronic record-keeping systems⁵⁰ archivists should know how documentation about records can be designed and not consider themselves concerned with records after their creation. Consequently the captured documentation must be *adequate*⁵¹ to ensure that records are evidence and it must therefore contain the content, structure and context associated with transactions out of which they arose. These new approaches to archival theory and the reformulated archives' goals lead to new methods and constitute what has been called "re-inventing archives".⁵² The metadata and the "self-documenting records" would allow their creators to access them in conjunction with on-going business and future users to retrieve them based on function. David Bearman recommended that archivists should not describe records but rather document the records creating

⁴⁸ Bearman D., Archival Strategies,

http://www.archimuse.com/publishing/archival_strategies/index.html

⁴⁹ *ibid*, 12

⁵⁰ Bearman D., "Record-keeping systems", Archivaria No. 36, Autumn 1993, 16-36

⁵¹ *ibid*, 16

⁵² Bearman D., Hedstrom M., "Re-inventing Archives for Electronic Records: Alternative Service Delivery Options" in Hedstrom M. ed. Electronic Records Management Program Strategies, Archives and Museum Informatics Technical Report, 18, 1993, 82-98

activity.⁵³ Although records should remain the focus of description, archivists, by using mechanisms for getting descriptions of records, will also be able to preserve unstable systems features as configuration management, user views and permissions.⁵⁴

On the very same line of argument, Margaret Hedstrom has affirmed that nowadays everybody is looking for systems that can be automatic and self-descriptive. The management of metadata has been therefore proposed as an alternative strategy to current descriptive practices. Electronic records require description earlier in their life cycle, as otherwise they may never be transferred to the physical custody of an archive. Therefore, descriptive practices must be incorporated into the design of information systems, so that archival description can exploit the rich descriptive information that is present in electronic records systems.⁵⁵ The proposed transformation of descriptive practices will lead to a deep change in the descriptive practice: the current way of creating or augmenting scarce descriptive information will be replaced by selecting and capturing information from an abundance of metadata. In her view, description will play a critical role in helping, in the first instance creators, of records and later, researchers, to identify, understand and use electronic records.⁵⁶ The other important point is that in the electronic era, provenance and the relationship between context and the content of records are vital to description. Descriptive practices must capture data in a variety of relations between the creation and use of the records and their content, context, and structure. These relations cannot be encompassed through a single, hierarchical

⁵³ Bearman, D. "Documenting Documentation", *Archivaria*, No. 34, Summer 1992

⁵⁴ David Wallace, "Managing the Present: Metadata as Archival Description" *Archivaria*, 39, Spring 1995, 11-21

⁵⁵ Hedstrom M., "Descriptive Practices for Electronic Records: Deciding What is Essential and Imaging What is Possible", *Archivaria*, No. 36, Autumn 1993, 57-59

path because electronic records can have multiple creators and multiple users throughout their life cycle.⁵⁷ The findings of Research Project at the University of Pittsburgh⁵⁸ have embodied these theoretical purposes by developing a set of functional requirements for record-keeping. The main objective of the functional requirements is to ensure that the records' creator has accountable record-keeping systems⁵⁹. The record-keeping system must therefore capture⁶⁰, maintain, and access evidence over time. The fulfilment of these functional requirements will outcome from the establishment of a broad range of descriptive metadata. These requirements are an attempt to present to the archival community a model for capturing records within computer environments by linking the elements of content, structure and context of records. The metadata specifications for records should be employed, in the views of their authors, to satisfy documentation requirements and obviate the need to survey, inventory, describe, catalogue, index or data capture for an end-user access facility. Furthermore, in electronic record-keeping systems, ongoing documentation, maintained from design specifications onwards, is a much more reliable and effective means of systems control.⁶¹ Among the most interesting features of the functional requirements for record-keeping systems is the definition

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 53-54

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 55-57

⁵⁸ Bearman D., "Record-keeping systems", *Archivaria* No. 36, Autumn 1993, 30-32

⁵⁹ Bearman points out that the functional requirements for record-keeping were required by the US Court of Appeals in decision *Armstrong v. the Office of President* which found that printouts of electronic mail were not adequate records of the meaning of electronic transactions because they failed to account for the evidential data associated with transmissions. In Bearman, D. "The Implications of *Armstrong v. Executive Office of the President* for Archival Management of Electronic Records", *American Archivist*, vol. 56 (1993), 674-689; Bearman, D., Sochats K. "Metadata Requirements for Evidence" <http://www.lis.edi/~nhprc/BACartic.html>

⁶⁰ David Bearman refers to the definition of archival description adopted by SAA Ad Hoc Committee on Description Practices "the process of capturing, collating, analysing, and organizing any information that serves to identify, manage, locate, and interpret the holdings of archival institutions and explain the contexts and record systems from which those holdings were selected" pointing out that a shift has occurred from "making" description to capturing it." David Bearman, "Record-keeping systems", *Archivaria* No. 36, Autumn 1993, 24

⁶¹ Bearman D., "Record-keeping systems", *Archivaria* No. 36, Autumn 1993, 16-36, 24-25, 27, 31

of "record". Records should be complete - records incorporate or are linked to information about the context of their creation - and understandable – records' documentation should permit to preserve information content, plus any structure and context, in meaningful and documented relations.⁶² The second report on functional requirements dealt mainly with the testing of the initially drafted functional requirements and brought to an ameliorated definition of record. A record should be comprehensive, identifiable (bounded), complete (containing content, structure and context) and authentic.⁶³

Although efforts have been made to define the information architecture of archives in order to provide a framework for more integrated archival automation software⁶⁴, a general agreement amongst archivists on the requirement to intervene earlier in the electronic records' life cycle, as suggested by metadata systems strategies, has not been reached. Elizabeth Yakel⁶⁵ argues, in opposition to David Bearman's and Margaret Hedstrom's points of view, that documentation of organizational activity ought to begin long before records are transferred to archives and affirms that documentation of processes can easily shift to intervention if the archivist is not fully aware of the potential effects of his or her activities. For many years archivists have tried to provide a context for records users without interpreting the records. However, with the advent of electronic records and the production of an overabundant documentation, archivists are asked to make interpretative choices. Thus, the manner by which archivists make interpretative choices should receive

⁶² *ibid*, 32

⁶³ International Council on Archives (ICA), Electronic Records Management: A Literature Review. Prepared by Alf Erlandsson, Committee on Electronic Records, ICA Study 10, April 1997, 29-32. See also <http://www.lis.pitt.edu/~nhprc.html>

⁶⁴ Bearman D., "Record-keeping systems", Archivaria No. 36, Autumn 1993, 16-36, 23

⁶⁵ Yakel E., "The Way Things Work: Procedures, Processes, and Institutional Records", American Archivist, Vol. 59, Fall 1996, 454-464, 458

greater acknowledgement and consideration. Furthermore, as stressed by Heather MacNeil, the Pittsburgh approach implies that metadata must include elements that will be needed later by archivists, hence such metadata does not really correspond to the current needs of the creator of records. This is in evident contrast with the preservation of the impartiality of archival records, a characteristic which comes from the spontaneity in the creation of records. For many archivists it means to interfere in the process of records creation to satisfy future researchers' needs and could therefore be seen as a falsification act in the context of creation of documents.⁶⁶

A critical comparison of the two main projects relating to electronic records has argued that the Pittsburgh approach may be too simplistic in its view of records, while the British Columbia approach provides a model that is far too centralised for a typical modern organisation.⁶⁷ However probably the best way of how archivists should consider the two approaches is that they represent complementary tools offering a wide and "contextualised" understanding of records.⁶⁸ In my opinion, the first fundamental difference between the two projects can be found in their view on the long term custodianship of electronic records. While the Pittsburgh project concluded that electronic records can best be maintained over time by the originating body but under strict control from the archival authorities, the UBC project concluded that authenticity can only be guaranteed when the inactive records

⁶⁶ On this position see MacNeil H., "Metadata Strategies and Archival Description: Comparing Apples to Oranges", *Archivaria*, 39, 1995, 22-32

⁶⁷ Marsden P., "When is the future? Comparative Notes on the Electronic Record-Keeping Projects of the University of Pittsburgh and the University of British Columbia" *Archivaria*, 1997, Volume 43 (Spring), 158-173

⁶⁸ Ketelaar E. *The Archival Image. Collected Essays*, Hilversum Verloren, 1997, 15-26

are under independent custodianship by professional archivists in an archival institution.⁶⁹

The leitmotiv of this section has been whether the two projects, very dissimilar in their definition of record and document, could finally be brought back to the same theory i.e. modern diplomatics. My answer is an affirmative one and finds its bases on the following considerations. On the one hand, the UBC project has brought to the attention of the archival community what they have defined as the archival bond, elements that have been later defined as intrinsic metadata in Dublin Core. On the other hand, the extrinsic metadata in Dublin Core are the result of the research conducted by Pittsburgh project which by defining the record the core element stressed its links to the context of creation of records. Dublin Core started as a simple content description model for electronic resources but has since become an important part of the emerging infrastructure for Internet. Many communities are eager nowadays to adopt a common core of semantics for resource description and the Dublin Core has attracted a broad-ranging international and interdisciplinary support for this purpose.⁷⁰

Moreover, another important point emerged from the comparison of these two projects. Although UBC and Pittsburgh projects have disagreed on many concepts they have had, in my opinion, the same result: the redefinition of the archivist's role. Luciana Duranti affirms that in North America, the archivist has been reinvented by Schellenberg "as researcher and as the person who facilitates the use of archives to researchers"⁷¹ and her School reacted to this discovery with a positivistic approach

⁶⁹ International Council on Archives (ICA), Electronic Records Management: A Literature Review. Prepared by Alf Erlandsson, Committee on Electronic Records, ICA Study 10, April, 1997, 35-37

⁷⁰ At <http://www.dublincore.org>

⁷¹ Duranti, L., "I principi di provenienza e dell'ordine originario in Nordamerica", Archivi & Computer, No. 3-4, 1996, 248, 251, 255-257

which wanted to ensure the impartiality of the archivist while describing archival material.⁷² David Bearman on his side has 'reinvented' the archivist as "knight in shining armour" of evidence. In Bearman's view, archivists will be able to link their goals with the needs of lawyers, auditors, and senior managers all of whom are concerned with the issue of evidence. The theoretical roots of the research undertaken at the University of Pittsburgh can be found in the "literary warrant"⁷³, that can be defined as the mandate from outside the archives profession – from law, professional best-practice and social sources – which requires the creation and maintenance of records. Re-conceptualising archives and the ability to analyse business processes in place of describing records is, for Bearman, the correct response from archivists to new technology.

Considering that both the major projects on electronic records have been dealing with archival description as one of the activities most influenced by external pressures and important societal constraints, the analysis in the following section will focus on the influence of a postmodern approach which criticizes both these "schools of thought". Could therefore ISAD(G) be seen as the structured free space for the intellectual intervention of the archivist (author of texts) in archival description?

⁷² On this position see MacNeil H., "Metadata Strategies and Archival Description: Comparing Apples to Oranges", *Archivaria*, 39, 1995, 22-32

⁷³ Cox, R. J. and Duff, W., "Warrant and Definition of Electronic Records: Questions Arising from the Pittsburgh Project", *Archives and Museums Informatics*, Vol. 11, No. 3-4, 1997, 223-231

4.3 Archival description and postmodern thought

The aim of this section is to try and place the debate among archivists about postmodernist thought in an analytical framework stressing parallelisms and divergences and essentially pointing out where "archival science" and "politics of memory" can find their theoretical roots. Much of the debate has focused on Jacques Derrida and the influence he has exerted in the last few years on the archival community. This influence is mainly due to the importance that electronic records have obtained in contemporary information society - Derrida's critique concentrates in fact on the issues of format and locus of archives⁷⁴. In the following pages I would like to draw the attention to Michel Foucault's theory, analysing the need for standardisation as a possible consequence of post-structuralist theory.

As Terry Cook has pointed out, the analysis of some postmodern keywords is nowadays essential for the development of archival science and the evolution of the archival profession.⁷⁵ The research will thus concentrate on some definitions directly linked to archival description. Finally, as the postmodern debate is such a theoretical one, the analysis will focus on the impact that the postmodern challenge has had on

⁷⁴ Jacques Derrida recognizes in electronic records a powerful influence on societal processes: "this instrumental possibility of production, of preservation and destruction of archives will be accompanied by a juridical and therefore political transformation" in Derrida, J., *Mal d'Archive*, Paris, Editions Galilée, 1995, 35. It has however to be stressed that the initiator of the postmodern critique directed since the 1970s against an increasingly computerized society is Lyotard with his famous book: Lyotard J-F, *La condition postmoderne*, Les Editions de Minuit, 1979. Terry Cook notes in Derrida's thought on electronic records that the problems "are equally applicable to the entire tradition of Western writing and record-making: the instability of text and of text-author relations is perhaps more apparent with electronic media, but in fact has been a persistent reality since language and writing came into use" Cook, T. "Archival Science and Postmodernism: New Formulations for Old Concepts" *Archival Science*, 1, 2001, 3-24, 6

⁷⁵ Cook, T. "Archival Science and Postmodernism: New Formulations for Old Concepts" *Archival Science*, 1, 2001, 24

practice and what this could mean in terms of tangible solutions in archival descriptive practices.

It is not for any fortuitous reason that archivists have recently discovered postmodernism as a field of academic discourse. Despite a considerable delay, as compared to most historians, archivists have now realised that many of the questions that historians have discussed during the past decades regarding the revision of historiography under the light of postmodernism⁷⁶ could well be applied to archival theory and the history of record-keeping. Archivists therefore have begun to reconsider traditional archival theory in order to highlight problematic positions as well as to develop possible directions for future inquiry. Nevertheless, much of the discussion among archivists on the postmodern challenge has been too vague and should be analysed more deeply. Among historians the debate on postmodernism has focused mainly on the work of Hayden White whose most provocative assertion was that "history writing"⁷⁷ is a form of literature. In his famous book *Metahistory* he explained that representations of "truth" are also allegories of deep structured contents which validate the unspoken ideological-political intention of the author. White described how the construction of historiography as science during the 19th century was based on the difference between concrete and fictional discourse. Writing history became a professional practice which took as its main task the representation of a corpus of facts in which ideology through the elements of truth (documents) helped to build the political-ideological interest of the nation state. White found evidence for his critical approach to historical theory in Leopold von

⁷⁶ For the debate among historians see: LaCapra, D. "Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts" in: D. LaCapra and S. L. Kaplan (edited by), Modern European Intellectual History – Reappraisals and new Perspectives, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1995, 47

Ranke's works. This is despite the fact that many historians consider Ranke to be the founder of the empirical approach in history. In fact, this "empiricism" is based on the fact that Ranke was among the first who considered history a separate discipline from philosophy and literature, and grounded his method on the publication of documents as sources for the historical profession.⁷⁸

In my opinion the archivists' debate on postmodernism should not sidestep the fundamental contribution by Michel Foucault. Foucault is in fact the theorist⁷⁹ who more than anybody stressed the cultural and sociological context of history, and made history therefore a non cultural-free discipline. History has existed well before the constitution of human sciences, and history has a number of major functions in society: as memory, myth, as vehicle of tradition, as critical conscience of the present, or deciphering mankind's destiny. However, Foucault stresses how the nineteenth century tried to historicize everything, to write everything as a general history. This position of History in the epistemological space is of great importance for its relationship to human sciences. Thus, historical man is for Foucault, the living, working and talking man. History finds therefore its origins in psychology, sociology and linguistics.⁸⁰

Following White's and Foucault's positions on postmodern historiography, some archivists have discussed postmodern theory with the aim of establishing

⁷⁷ White, H. "Entgegnung auf Georg G. Iggers" *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 27 (2001) 341, 342, 344

⁷⁸ Berding, H., "Leopold von Ranke" in *Deutsche Historiker* Bd. 1, H.-U. Wehler Editor, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1971, 7-21

⁷⁹ Foucault did not define himself as either historian or philosopher : "If philosophy is memory or return to origin, what I do, cannot be considered in any case as philosophy; and if intellectual history consists of bringing back to life half erased figures, what I do is not history." in: Foucault, M., *L'archéologie du savoir*, Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1969, 268

⁸⁰ Foucault, M., *Les mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines*. Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1966, 378, 380, 382

archival practice as scientific discipline⁸¹. Although this approach could appear as completely opposite to what happened within the historical profession, where postmodernism rejected the 19th century approach that wanted to make history into a science⁸², the postmodernist critique in archival theory actually has led to a debate among different schools of thought, based on different paradigms concerning the meanings of theory as opposed to practice. Although this debate has already been partially analysed in previous sections, it will here focus on the main issue of definition of archival science.

Probably most archivists, especially those concerned with preservation issues, will agree with Jacques Derrida that the lack of an unified and reliable concept of "archive" relevant to multiple disciplines and domains like archaeology, documentation, bibliography, philology, and historiography is not a question regarding the past, but is important for the future underlining the responsibility for tomorrow.⁸³ By defining the concept of "archive" a society determines the access to and use of archives in the future, and by doing so it defines the scope of society itself. In Derrida's opinion therefore an "archival science must include a theory of institutionalisation"⁸⁴. According to Derrida there is no political power without control of archive and memory⁸⁵; therefore archival science should consist in the

⁸¹ It is symptomatic of this research trend the fact that one of the new archival journals *Archival Science* has dedicated its first issue to the debate on postmodern theory.

⁸² Much of the debate among historians has focused on Hayden White's "Metahistory" which rejects the idea that since the 18th century history was written as a science and affirms instead that "writing history is just another form of literature [...] Every attempt to reconstruct the past through scientific means, is a "poetic handling" Iggers, G. G., "Historiographie zwischen Forschung und Dichtung" Gedanken über Hayden Whites Behandlung der Historiographie". *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 27 (2001), 327, referring to H. White "Metahistory", X, 31

⁸³ Derrida, J., *Mal d'Archive*, Paris, Editions Galilée, 1995, 56-60

⁸⁴ Derrida, J., *Mal d'Archive*, Paris, Editions Galilée, 1995, 15

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 15, footnote reads as follows "the effective democratisation is measured always with these fundamental criteria: the participation and the access to the archive, its institution and its interpretation"

transformation of archival techniques⁸⁶ and the archive should be transformed from the storage and preservation place of contents into the technical structure that determines the structure of the contents themselves and their future support. Hence, the process of archiving produces as much as it records the event.⁸⁷ Verne Harris refers to Derrida's definition of the archives as a terrain in which the exercise of power is characterised by a struggle between what he calls archontic⁸⁸ and anarchontic forces and comes to the conclusion that the record-keepers (followers of the "record-keeping paradigm") have to be considered "archons of evidence"⁸⁹. Harris explains that record-keepers do not take into account the epistemological and ontological assumptions about "the record". Following their paradigm "the record" is evidence of process, of activity, of transaction, but does not take into account the fact that the requirements for evidence are specific to time and place. The record-keeping paradigm excludes the possibility that people (individuals, organisations, societies) generate and keep records for reasons other than "evidence of process". It excludes the possibilities that qualities, or attributes, or dynamics, other than "evidence" enjoy equally legitimate claims on the concept of "record". On the same side, sharing the conviction that archival science is actually linked to societal processes and is not universally applicable, is Paul Mortsen. He argues that although "theory is indispensable" scientific work "cannot be entirely independent of a historical, social, and political context"⁹⁰. The reaction to the development and growing use of

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, 30-31

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 34

⁸⁸ "Archontes, those who command. They did not only assure the physical security of the repository and of support. They were allowed the right and the hermeneutical competence. They had the power to interpret the archives. [...] It is necessary that the archontic power, which reunifies the functions of identification and classification goes at the same pace with what it is called the power of consignment." Derrida, J., *Mal d'Archive*, Paris, Editions Galilée, 1995, 13-14

⁸⁹ Harris, V., "Law, Evidence and Electronic Records: A Strategic Perspective from The Global Periphery", *Comma, International Journal on Archives*, 2001-1/2, 29-43

⁹⁰ Mortsen, P., "The Place of Theory in Archival Practice", *Archivaria*, No. 47, Spring 1999, 1-26

electronic records, and the debate about post-custodialism⁹¹, leads to fundamental changes in social practice, with a direct influence on archival practice, which requires a theoretical response. For Terry Eastwood, archival theory "is the analysis of ideas about what archives are, their essential characteristics and common properties, [whereas archival practice is] the result of the application of methodology (ideas based on theory) in the treatment of archival material."⁹² Brothman thinks that it is the other side of the same crisis caused by electronic records that has encouraged many archivists and records managers either to turn towards "postmodern intellectual fashions" or towards the equally trend-conscious worlds of management science and organizational theory, to wear a "business mantle" and to exploit "information" "media" and "knowledge" as essential social and organizational resources, and values.⁹³

Duranti on the other side argues that concepts developed in archival theory are universally valid and removed from cultural context. In Duranti's view, theory arises primarily from practice, not from reflection on other theories but from reflection on ways of doing.⁹⁴

The debate around "archival science" is tightly bound to the discussion about the politics of memory where the societal approach represents a new perspective in the archival discourse from one based on the state to one reflecting a broader

⁹¹ Peter Scott is the founder of the "postcustodial" revolution. Peter Scott shifted archival description concepts from a static cataloguing mode to a dynamic system of multiple interrelationships. His thoughts are particularly relevant for archivists facing electronic records because of multi-relational contexts of creation. P. Scott, "The Record Group Concept: A Case for Abandonment", American Archivist, vol. 29, No. 4, October 1966

⁹² Eastwood, T., "Nailing a Little Jelly to the Wall of Archival Studies", Archivaria, No. 35, Spring 1993, 233

⁹³ Brothman, B., "Declining Derrida: Integrity, Tensegrity, and the Preservation of Archives from Deconstruction", Archivaria, No. 48, Fall 1999, 64-88

⁹⁴ Duranti, L., "Archival Science" in A. Kent, ed. Encyclopaedia of Library and Information Science 59, 1996, 1

society⁹⁵. Eric Ketelaar maintains that, in Europe, there is a general consensus on the 'politics of memory' in public life and in archival communities and agrees with postmodernist archivists in saying that archival theory is not fixed in time, but, like history, literature and philosophy, reflects the spirit of its times and then are interpreted anew by new generations. Terry Cook, on Harris's side, warns about the "politics of memory" that are nowadays vested in the very limiting definition of an archival record. The role of archival science is therefore to challenge archivists to rethink their discipline and practice. Cook defines this challenge as a "paradigm shift"⁹⁶ in archival theoretical discourse "from product to process, from structure to function, from archives to archiving, from the record to the recording context, from the "natural" residue or passive by-product of administrative activity to the consciously constructed and actively mediated "archivalisation" of social memory."⁹⁷ Postmodernist critique has discredited the positivist model based on the integrity of facts from the past and on the false idea that records are impartial, innocent consequences of actions; nevertheless Cook confirms that postmodernism is not necessarily antithetical to archival science.⁹⁸ In fact, referring to Michel Foucault's theory, Cook points out that while archives should be anchored in social theory rather than in scientific positivism, the archivists' perceptions of archival practices should reflect the traditional western notions of scientific rationalism. Postmodernism, with its concern for contexts of records creation, could therefore be considered a reflection of "the long-held archival concern for contextuality, for mapping the provenance and

⁹⁵ "Archives of the people, for the people and even by the people" Ketelaar E. The Archival Image. Collected Essays, Hilversum 1997, 15-26

⁹⁶ The first time that Terry Cook used the term paradigm was in: Terry Cook "From Information to Knowledge: An Intellectual Paradigm for Archives, Archivaria 19 (winter 1984-1985) 28-49

⁹⁷ Cook, T. "Archival Science and Postmodernism: New Formulations for Old Concepts" Archival Science, 1, 2001, 3-24

the interrelationships between the creator and the record".⁹⁹ Moreover, Brothman gives a wide variety of reasons why Derrida's philosophy has challenged archival institutions and the archivist's profession. In Derrida's theory the notions of both writing and archiving are metaphorically associated with the concepts of memory and preservation. However, archivists have rarely used philosophy to ground their profession theoretically and Derrida's treatment of archives has been considered as a distortion of their profession, and his conceptualisations as too different from real "archival" ones as to be irrelevant to proper archival practice¹⁰⁰. Nevertheless, as Cook, Brothman and Eastwood's contributions to this debate demonstrate postmodern questions and challenges have not completely been sidestepped.

Although most of the interest expressed by archivists for postmodernism has concentrated on Derrida, I would like here to advocate Foucault's theory as the one in which the theoretical roots on which new departures for the definition of archival description can be found. It is indeed Foucault's merit for having said that "history made monuments out of documents"¹⁰¹ before deconstruction was in vogue. Foucault dismantled the positivist approach of diplomatics and pointed out how records lose significance out of their context. Most archivists would nowadays agree that (paraphrasing Foucault) archival theory "has changed its position regarding the document; [...] its first task is not to interpret it, is not to determine if it says the truth and which is its expressive value, but to work it from the internal and to elaborate it;

⁹⁸ Cook, T. "Archival Science and Postmodernism: New Formulations for Old Concepts" Archival Science, 1, 2001, 3-24, 10-11

⁹⁹ Cook, T. "Archival Science and Postmodernism: New Formulations for Old Concepts" Archival Science, 1, 2001, 3-24, 15-17

¹⁰⁰ Brothman, B., "Declining Derrida: Integrity, Tensegrity, and the Preservation of Archives from Deconstruction", Archivaria, No. 48, Fall 1999, 64-88

¹⁰¹ Foucault, M., L'archéologie du savoir, Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1969, 15

organize it, cut it, distribute it, order it, divide it on levels, establish series, make a distinction between what is pertinent from what is not, find elements, define units, describe relations."¹⁰² Furthermore, Foucault's definition of enunciation could be taken as basis for providing evidence of the contemporary trend of descriptive practices to describe context and functions rather than contents. Foucault affirms that "to describe an enunciation is not to characterise an horizontal segment, but to define the conditions in which the function was carried out, which gave existence (a specific existence) to a series of signs. [...] A different thing from a trace, but more related to a group of objects; different from the result of an action or an individual operation but more like a game of possible positions for a subject; as something different from an organic whole, autonomous, closed on itself and susceptible of forming meaning by itself, but more like an element in a field of coexistence; as something different as a transitory event but much more like a repeatable materiality. The description of enunciation refers, according to a vertical dimension, to conditions of existence of the different significant sets."¹⁰³ In my opinion, this definition of enunciation could well be extended to any record, to prove the fundamental conditions of multilevel description as opposed to the extreme relevance given to the single record in electronic record systems. Furthermore, Foucault analysed the traditional role of history in its relation to documents/monuments and defined problems in historiography as structuralism. Foucault's critique towards structuralism could be reinterpreted nowadays as the very same critique that some theoreticians expressed towards archival science and the theory on electronic records. Foucault wrote that "it is evident that since a discipline like history exists, where documents have been used,

¹⁰² *ibid.*, 13

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, 142-143

have been questioned, we questioned ourselves about them; we asked them not only about what they meant but also if they said the truth, if they were sincere or false. well informed or ignorant, authentic or altered. But each of these questions and all this critical apprehension points towards the same end: to reconstruct, from what the documents say, the past from which they emanate and which has disappeared far away behind them; the document was treated as the language of a voice now reduced to silence."¹⁰⁴ For Foucault, archives are not the sum of all the texts, which a culture has kept as documents of its past or as witness of its identity; nor the institutions, which in certain societies allow to register the discourses which need to preserve the memory and keep free access to information. The archive is the law of what can be communicated.¹⁰⁵ And history represents the means through which such law is applied. Should archival science replace history in this function? The question is still open. Hence, to contribute to the general discussion on these issues some keywords of this debate are examined in the following pages.

Both Terry Cook and Eric Ketelaar state that archival theory has changed the focus for its inspiration from the arrangement and description of recorded production in archives to the analysis of record-creating processes. Eric Ketelaar affirms that "functional archival science replaces descriptive archival science. [...] Only by a functional interpretation of the context surrounding the creation of documents, can one understand the integrity of the fonds and the functions of the archival documents and their original context."¹⁰⁶ Archival theory now takes into consideration some elements of the postmodernist approach: the political and social meaning of description; the value attributed to records by archivists' conscious intervention; the

¹⁰⁴ Foucault, M., *L'archéologie du savoir*, Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1969, 15

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, 169

¹⁰⁶ Ketelaar, E. "Archival Theory and the Dutch Manual", *Archivaria* 41, Spring 1996, 36

shift in perspective from the record to its context which reflects some strategies for description of multiple-creator fonds and finally the post-custodial proposals for "archives without wall" existing on Internet.¹⁰⁷ This suggests also that some postmodern keywords should become the watchwords for archival science.¹⁰⁸

The last part of this section will therefore be dedicated to some keywords that could put archival description under a new light. Description as trace? Description as imperative tendency to metaphysics? Description between context and text? Description as representation? Description as interpretation? These are questions which cannot be discussed without taking into consideration the postmodern challenge of the late 20th century. These new concepts in archival theory have been reached after passionate discussions on the meanings of description. Description can nowadays be considered as one of the most interesting notions to be examined in the light of postmodernism and in particular regarding the postmodern analysis of "text" with reference to concepts like "context" and "documentation". Brothman by deconstructing the concept of description affirms that description can be considered "the way to govern the naming of what and how the world's reality is, or should be."¹⁰⁹ The language imposed on records through archival description can also be considered a non value-free recreation of a prior reality.¹¹⁰ Archival description is therefore strictly linked to an irreconcilable difference between the concept of "textuality", which interests postmodernist theorists, and the concept of 'recordness', which concerns archivists. Description could also be analysed as "trace" another of

¹⁰⁷ Cook, T., "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift", *Archivaria*, No. 43, Spring 1997, 45

¹⁰⁸ Cook, Terry "Archival Science and postmodernism: new formulations for old concepts" *Archival Science*, 1, 2001, 24

¹⁰⁹ Brothman, B., "Declining Derrida: Integrity, Tensegrity, and the Preservation of Archives from Deconstruction", *Archivaria*, No. 48, Fall 1999, 75

the postmodernist keywords. The "trace" has been interpreted as the one left by archivists when they describe. Cook underlines that "deferral" of meaning holds implications for the concept of archives. "The concept of trace suggests something present to us; however it simultaneously strongly signifies that something is absent. It signifies incompleteness. Traces always suggest that the "real thing" is not there."¹¹¹

For Dominique LaCapra, concerned with postmodernist analysis from the historian's point of view, reliable documentation is a crucial component for any serious reconstruction of the past, "but the dominance of documentary conception distorts our understanding of both historiography and historical process. A purely documentary conception of historiography is itself a heuristic fiction. For description is never pure, [and] a fact is relevant for an account only when it is selected with reference to a topic or a question posed to the past."¹¹² Similarly, for Derrida, the archivist produces the archive "by incorporating the knowledge which is employed for it, the archive raises, gets bigger and wins in auctoritas. But it loses at the same time the absolute meta-textual authority to which it could pretend."¹¹³ These elements should justify or at least raise archivists' concern about new elements of evaluation for archival description. Moreover, cannot the archivists' search for establishment of metadata systems be seen as an extreme struggle to define metaphysics? For postmodern theorists, description's task can also be seen as "the centuries-long project whose objective is to confirm and fully realize the construction of an exhaustive repository of names that correspond with objects, events, and phenomena

¹¹⁰ Cook, Terry "Archival Science and postmodernism: new formulations for old concepts" *Archival Science*, 1, 2001, 17

¹¹¹ Cook, T., "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift", *Archivaria*, No. 43, Spring 1997, 15-63

¹¹² LaCapra, D. "Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts" in: D. LaCapra and S. L. Kaplan (edited by), *Modern European Intellectual History – Reappraisals and new Perspectives*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1995, 78

in the world."¹¹⁴ Brothman stresses that Derrida's ideas should particularly be appreciated by those archivists interested in metadata: this is what lies behind the preservation of names, and indeed, the possibility of naming.¹¹⁵ For Derrida, the archives' mission is the preservation of records and it offers a prime instance of the imperious practice of metaphysics. The conventional descriptive principles are the elements that compress and contain public meaning. Metaphysics backs the pretension that language provides a reliable path to capturing records, identities, and meanings. In this process, the archivist's goal is therefore to ensure that what the author meant remains fixed for so long as certain interests (individual, corporate, governmental, other) deem the survival of the writing's meaning necessary. Brothman affirms that Derrida's interpretation of the purpose of archival practice is confirmed by the archivists' efforts to preserve the exact image of the document (structure and content), and to identify the circumstances around its creation and its intellectual context.¹¹⁶

Representing another important postmodern link between text and context, where does archival description position itself? If texts are "events in the history of language"¹¹⁷ it is understandable why, among the most interesting aspects of postmodernism, are those related to the analysis of "text" in relation to the concept of "context". However, to most archivists, archival practice and analysis of texts have little to do with one another. Unlike several other professions, archivists have never

¹¹³ Derrida, J., *Mal d'Archive*, Paris, Editions Galilée, 1995, 108-109

¹¹⁴ Brothman, B., "Declining Derrida: Integrity, Tensegrity, and the Preservation of Archives from Deconstruction", *Archivaria*, No. 48, Fall 1999, 64-88, 74

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, 74

¹¹⁷ LaCapra, D. "Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts" in: D. LaCapra and S. L. Kaplan (edited by), *Modern European Intellectual History – Reappraisals and new Perspectives*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1995, 81

passed through "the linguistic turn".¹¹⁸ Brothman affirms that "archival methodology's focus on context stems from a responsibility to minimize the possibility of alternative meanings. "Context" can therefore be seen as "the instrument of archival and intellectual content "control" that provides an envelope to which archivists entrust documents, protected for eternity."¹¹⁹ This affirmation is probably a consequence of the debate among historians which focused on the meaning of "text" and led to rethinking of concepts of "inside" and "outside".¹²⁰ LaCapra stresses how for an historian the reconstruction of a "context" or a "reality" takes place on the basis of the textualized remainders of the past (the documents). The most distinctive question in historiography concerns "the relationship between documentary reconstruction of, and dialogue with, the past"¹²¹. Hayden White in recent years has not only "reused", recycled, and reinterpreted but also attracted attention from disciplines outside history on the notion of historical understanding as a conversation with the past¹²². The "documentary"¹²³ which situates the text in its factual dimensions involves reference to empirical reality is opposed to the "worklike"¹²⁴ which involves new dimensions of the text linked to commitment, interpretation and imagination. These issues are interesting for archivists because, although admitting that the documentary approach to the reading of texts has

¹¹⁸ Brothman, B., "Declining Derrida: Integrity, Tensegrity, and the Preservation of Archives from Deconstruction", *Archivaria*, No. 48, Fall 1999, 77

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, 83

¹²⁰ LaCapra, D. "Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts" in: D. LaCapra and S. L. Kaplan (edited by), *Modern European Intellectual History – Reappraisals and new Perspectives*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1995, 49-50

¹²¹ *ibid.*, 50

¹²² Although Hayden White is the famous postmodernist historian LaCapra points out that "the dialogue with the past" had been prior developed in the works of Heidegger and in those of Gadamer. *Ibid.* 51

¹²³ LaCapra, D. "Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts" in: D. LaCapra and S. L. Kaplan (edited by), *Modern European Intellectual History – Reappraisals and new Perspectives*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1995, 53

¹²⁴ *ibid.*

predominated in general historiography, the alternative of "context"¹²⁵ does not immediately answer all questions of interpretation. LaCapra points out that believing that authorial intentions fully control the meaning of texts is to assume a predominantly normative position that is out of touch with important dimensions of language use and reader response. LaCapra refers to Foucault for the relation of society to text and his notion of discursive practice which indicates the interaction between institutions and forms of discourse. The context behind the text, the power relationships shaping the documentary heritage, and indeed the document's structure, and narrative conventions are more important than the objective document itself or its content.¹²⁶ For Verne Harris, "context" has no beginning and no ending and he stresses that although some metadata projects have embraced the notion that "context" has no ending, they still assume a determinable "context" and which can be reduced to definable categories, events and transactions.¹²⁷

Hayden White is the most known exponent of the "poststructuralist", or "postmodern" linguistic theory which by text orientation means that the text could be read without any reference to the author. The majority of historians will at the present time agree with White that the historian does not write history without prejudices and that "history writing" of western culture in 19th century is, in its classical form, a prose discourse. However, the main criticism of White's theory is that, in *Metahistory*, White was still occupied with the authors' opinions and tried to find

¹²⁵ The "context" in Hedeigger's thought represents what a thinker did not explicitly or intentionally think but what constitutes his still question-worthy "unthought", in LaCapra, D. "Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts" in: D. LaCapra and S. L. Kaplan (edited by), Modern European Intellectual History – Reappraisals and new Perspectives, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1995, 54

¹²⁶ Cook, Terry "Archival Science and postmodernism: new formulations for old concepts" Archival Science, 1, 2001, 7

¹²⁷ Harris, V., "Law, Evidence and Electronic Records: A Strategic Perspective from The Global Periphery", Comma, International Journal on Archives, 2001-1/2, 29-43

them in the text which is obviously a contradiction¹²⁸. Text orientation does not lead only to the question of the relationship of text with context, but also to the tightly linked question of how much reality or fiction the text transmits. The linguistic turn theory affirms that historical images have normally the form of stories: therefore, coherence of the story is due to the historians' story construction, which comes from the so-called pure facts. The description, at least in its classical form, depends on the link between facts and treatment. In this sense, every historical presentation has a literary dimension and archival description and could therefore be considered another form of literature.

Finally, particular attention should be given to the very tight link between description and representation. In *Les mots et les choses* Foucault dedicates a chapter to the verb "represent" in which he makes a history of the different models of representation in different epochs and affirms that representation is a modern discovery. In the past centuries, in fact, much of the analysis of text was done by resemblance which supplied the demonstration and gave certain indications that the texts represented the truth.¹²⁹ However, from Descartes onwards, similitude is not anymore seen as the form of knowledge, but became rather the occasion for mistakes. Foucault explains further that since the seventeenth century a sign contains two ideas, one of the thing it represents, the other of the thing represented. It has to represent but this representation, on its turn, has to be represented in it.¹³⁰ The Kantian critique sanctioned for the first time a crucial event of the European culture at the end of the 18th century: namely the withdrawal of knowledge and thought outside the space of

¹²⁸ Iggers, G. G., "Historiographie zwischen Forschung und Dichtung." Gedanken über Hayden Whites Behandlung der Historiographie". *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 27 (2001), 330

¹²⁹ Foucault, M., *Les mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines*. Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1966, 61 and 64

¹³⁰ *ibid*, 73 and 78

representation (metaphysics), after which history became the discipline of interpretation¹³¹. In Foucault's "limits to representation"¹³² he explains that it is history that, since the 19th century, has defined the place of birth of empiricism. Foucault's major point is that the western thought was revolutionalised by the introduction of "Ideology". Ideology became then the science of ideas. The representation lost its power to built, from itself, the links which could unify the different elements. The conditions for these links resided outside the representation, in ideology that became the only rational and scientific form which philosophy can have.¹³³ Any representation (archival description included) can not, from that point in time, be ideologically free.

To conclude, Eric Ketelaar points out the role of the archivist as writer of evidence for posterity. The theoretical focus of archival science moves away from the record and towards the creative act or authoring process behind the record. Archivists inevitably infuse their own values into descriptive activities that need to be recognised very consciously as archive-creating.¹³⁴ What implications does this have for the relation between past and present and between theory and practice? The field of archival studies, as other humanistic studies today, seems increasingly divided by two opposed tendencies. "One tendency attempts, more or less self-consciously, to rehabilitate conventional approaches to description, interpretation and explanation. [...] In relating texts or other artifacts to contexts it seeks some comprehensive integrative paradigm: formally arguing that once texts "internalize" contexts, the latter are subjected to procedures "internal" to the text; casually or generated by changes in the larger context. The other tendency, what is assumed in conventional

¹³¹ *ibid.*, 89 and 255

¹³² *ibid.*, 231

¹³³ *ibid.*, 252-253

approaches is the priority, perhaps the dominance of unity or its analogues: order, purity, closure, undivided, origin, coherent structure, determinate meaning at least at the core, and so forth.¹³⁵ LaCapra concludes this debate by asserting that intellectual historians are both intellectuals and historians and do not cease being historians. Maybe archivists dealing with archival description should add the adjective 'intellectual' to their profession's definition. Despite seeming a postmodern fashion, this idea is not so far from reality: Known as pioneers in records management, Australians do not hesitate to define all the activities related to archival description as Intellectual Control of Records.¹³⁶

4.4 National Archives' projects for description of electronic records: an overview

Australian National Archives and some other national archives mainly in North America and Europe have demonstrated in recent years their concerns about description and preservation of electronic records and have developed functional requirements applicable to electronic environments. These requirements aimed mainly at meeting the standards for evidence and have formed the basis for a new

¹³⁴ Ketelaar E. *The Archival Image. Collected Essays*, Hilversum Verloren, 1997, 23-24

¹³⁵ LaCapra, D. "Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts" in: D. LaCapra and S. L. Kaplan (edited by), *Modern European Intellectual History – Reappraisals and new Perspectives*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1995, 84-85

¹³⁶ <http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/control/strategies/default.htm>

generation of archival laws. These new archival laws are examined in the next section.

The aim of the following section is to give a summary on archival laws and other outcomes of archival policies' implementation process. The study focuses on their practical applications to the description of electronic records at the National Archives level in the same countries analysed in previous chapters. The laws and guidelines are analysed in order to detect whether the implementation of standards for description, generally accepted for paper records, has been extended to electronic records, or whether other standards have been applied or recommended. Particular attention is given to those elements of standards or general rules that can be assimilated to ISAD(G). Last, it will try and establish whether archival laws serve records management functions, or reflect broader societal interests in research, history and cultural heritage; and the particular role that description and access play in this context.

As the ICA study on electronic records programmes by the ICA Committee on Electronic Records¹³⁷ pointed out some years ago the organizational set-up and functions of archival institutions is very broad in scope, depending upon cultural tradition, legislative mandate and even political decisions. Hence, the ways in responding to the challenge of electronic records differ from country to country. The survey stressed that the differences resided primarily between those countries that have traditionally combined the management and control of current records still in custody of the originating agencies with the management and custodianship of non-

¹³⁷ International Council on Archives (ICA), Electronic Records Management: A Literature Review. Prepared by Alf Erlandsson, Committee on Electronic Records, ICA Study 10, April, 1996, 15-16

current records, and national archives that have strictly separated the control of current records from the custodianship of archival records.

In any case, electronic records have contributed to the growth of awareness by archival institutions regarding a broader concept of archival function. The traditional concept of archival function included all the activities contributing to the accomplishment of goals in preserving archival records, and ensuring that such records are accessible and understandable. In an electronic environment, the existing practices to carrying out the archival function by various players are not sufficient to achieve the goal of creating and preserving evidence.¹³⁸ The *Guide* for managing electronic records, foreseeing an ineluctable cultural change, recommended therefore the incorporation of electronic records into government practices based on an evolving process and on expectations of a rapid advance in technology. The *Guide* also warned on the need for archival institutions to focus upon the conception and creation stages of records' life cycle and the danger for archival institutions to find their roles diminished in the later stages of records' life cycle. The need to continue and monitor the efforts related to the archival functions of preservation, access and use was therefore stressed.¹³⁹

Some authors have already analysed issues dealing with different approaches in the development of policies by archival institutions. They have stressed the need for national authorities to be unique interlocutors not only regarding the legal obligations for the management and preservation of documents, but also for the whole set of laws regarding access and communication of records, and access to

¹³⁸ ICA – Committee on Electronic Records, Guide for Managing Electronic Records from an Archival Perspective. Consultation Draft, June 1996, 16-17

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, 20

information generally.¹⁴⁰ For this reason, the National Archives that have been chosen for this research (Canada, United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Italy, France) have not been investigated on the descriptions of their electronic records holdings, but on the documented procedures for description. The aim is therefore to give an overview on the current descriptive practices, rules and guidelines developed at the national level for descriptions of electronic records. In this frame description has a broader definition that stretches from the function that takes place after records have been accessioned and arranged (inventories, appraisal reports, accessioning procedures, descriptive rules and standards, finding aids and published guides) to include the information captured in the earlier stages of archival processing.¹⁴¹ Because of the uncertainty about the best ways to describe electronic records, the current practices in national archives should also provide evidence on how and at which stage in the archival acquisition process descriptive information is captured or collected. It should also explain whether essential information about electronic records has been accommodated in descriptive rules for traditional media, or whether ISAD(G) or other standards have been applied.

In addition to the incertitude about the management of electronic records, further fundamental questions have been put forward in international debate. In recent years attention has in fact been shifted from difference in archival mandates (in the ways, timing, and phases of management and processing of records) to fundamental concepts regarding records and their value for societies. David Bearman critically points out that even if accountability is necessary for a

¹⁴⁰ Couture, C., "Législation archivistique et politiques nationales d'archives", *Archivaria*, No. 35, Spring 1993, 144-152. For a compendium on archival policies and laws refer to Eric Ketelaar, Législation et réglementation en matière d'archives et de gestion des documents: une étude RAMP accompagnée de principes directeurs, Paris, UNESCO, 1986

democratic society it is a short term purpose and fails to justify retention of records after this requirement has been satisfied.¹⁴² The *Guide* had in fact already indicated that many of the demands for access to archival electronic records are essentially independent of the purposes for which the records were created and maintained; the objectives of such demands are not for evidence of the creator's organization or activities, but for information contained in the records.¹⁴³ Furthermore, on the very same line of argument, Verne Harris refers to responses given by archival institutions to the challenge of electronic records systems as first and second generation of archival laws; where the first generation excluded the records or failed to include them unambiguously and the second generation stretches the archival jurisdiction into the domain of the record creator. Verne Harris criticizes archival authorities for the failure to define both the requirements for recording and the broad attributes of records and for their engagement with policies, regulations, strategies, evidence and accountability that made them "forget the archive as locus of memory and story".¹⁴⁴ The following paragraphs will try and give an overview on the use of concepts like accountability and memory by the national archives.

One of the first projects in the electronic records field at the national archives' level was the IMOSA (Information Management and Office Systems Advancement) project at the National Archives of Canada in 1991¹⁴⁵: a partnership project that

¹⁴¹ Dryden, J. E., "Archival Description of Electronic Records: An Examination of Current Practices" *Archivaria*, No. 40, Fall 1995, 100-105

¹⁴² Bearman D., *Archival Strategies*, at http://www.archimuse.com/publishing/archival_strategies/index.html

¹⁴³ ICA – Committee on Electronic Records, *Guide for Managing Electronic Records from an Archival Perspective*. Consultation Draft, June 1996, 26

¹⁴⁴ Harris, V., "Law, Evidence and Electronic Records: A Strategic Perspective from The Global Periphery", *Comma, International Journal on Archives*, 2001-1/2, 30

¹⁴⁵ McDonald J., *Managing Records in the Modern Office – The Experience of the National Archives of Canada*, Paper presented at the Australian Archives, Playing for Keeps Conference in 1994

included representatives from the public, private and academic sectors, sharing a common concern about the corporate management of information. The main objective was to develop functional requirements and management guidance that could be used by organisations to obtain technical solutions for keeping, controlling and managing both hard copies and electronic records. The IMOSA project findings were mainly that the critical issues in the implementation of electronic records management systems are not technical ones, but rather relating to human perception, activities and relationships and organizational behaviours.¹⁴⁶ At that time, at the National Archives of Canada, the various media were joined intellectually, as they were described in inventories and finding aids, following standards for archival description, and organized by provenance (series) and not by medium, hence reflecting the importance of grouping together records from the same creator.¹⁴⁷

The IMOSA project laid the fundamentals for the *Guideline on the Management of Electronic Records in the Electronic Work Environment* (EWE), published in June 1996 by the National Archives¹⁴⁸. The Guideline provided both short and long term strategies for managing electronic records. The implementation of such guidelines led to the establishment of a prototype accomplishing the record keeping task automatically.¹⁴⁹ In this prototype the records and documents, created in a given project, were associated with contextual information describing the characteristics of the task that created the record, to ensure that when records were accessed or

¹⁴⁶ Bikson T.K. and Frinking E.J., Preserving the Present: toward viable electronic records, The Hague, Sdu Publishers, 1993, 96

¹⁴⁷ Loewen, C. "The control of Electronic Records Having Archival Value. Archivaria, No. 36, Autumn 1993, 71

¹⁴⁸ Information Management Standards and Practices Division National Archives of Canada, Managing Electronic Records in an Electronic Work Environment, May 1996

¹⁴⁹ McDonald, J., "Towards Automated Record Keeping, Interfaces for the Capture of Records of Business Processes" Archives and Museums Informatics, Vol. 11, No. 3-4, 1997, 277-285. Furthermore on this prototype at the National Archives of Canada for the implementation of a

retrieved, they were understandable within the context of the administrative actions that generated them. This metadata were designed to ensure the authenticity and reliability of the record for the time required to serve an accountability purpose. Context was therefore understood as the relationships among organizational structure, business activities, and work processes and their importance from the prospective of describing records.¹⁵⁰ The Guideline, grounded on the National Archives of Canada Act (1987) and the Access to Information Act (1983), although not specifically referring to any particular standard for archival description stressed however that electronic records were not to be considered a special media issue and that their management had to be addressed within the broader context of the policies, standards and practices that address all forms of recorded information.¹⁵¹ It also pointed out that internationally accepted and Canadian government approved standards for data and information technology were adopted to facilitate the implementation of functional requirements for the exchange of valuable electronic records.¹⁵² In February 1999 in its "Approach to the Description and Classification of Government Records"¹⁵³ the National Archives of Canada reaffirmed the concept¹⁵⁴ that a record should comprise content, context and structure to provide evidence of a given event or activity. It stressed that "description ensures that records can be understood within the administrative and operational context within which they were generated and that records' context and structure are even more

workflow management tool with object oriented metadata assignment see Bearman, D., "Item Control and Electronic Recordkeeping", *Archives and Museum Informatics*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 1996, 222

¹⁵⁰ Information Management Standards and Practices Division National Archives of Canada, *Managing Electronic Records in an Electronic Work Environment*, May 1996, 3

¹⁵¹ *ibid*, 5, 7

¹⁵² *ibid*, 8

¹⁵³ "Approach to the Description and Classification of Government Records. Description and Classification of Government Records Working Group (Information Management Forum) – February 1999" in: http://www.inforumgi.gc.ca/new_docs/draft_e.html

important than its content". Furthermore, it pointed out that records' description must be multi-level and multi-dimensional, i.e. reflecting the hierarchical structure of the activity framework and incorporating business activities and organizational structure. Consequently, the National Archives guidance advised institutions to use their programme activity structure as the basis for file classification.¹⁵⁵ The actual description of a record was proposed in two alternative ways: either by encapsulating the record with the descriptive elements that could provide evidence of the transaction or by placing the record in a record keeping system which situates the record within the context of the administrative functions it is documenting.¹⁵⁶

Finally, the National Archives of Canada, dealing with the questions of accountability and memory, suggest that records should support in the first instance decision making and delivery of government programmes and services, secondly permit government institutions to hold themselves accountable pursuant to the requirements of laws and policies, and only thirdly provide the corporate memory required to ensure the continuity of government programmes and services.¹⁵⁷ Records that follow under these categories and have been therefore designated as having archival value should be transferred to the control of the National Archivist in accordance with agreed schedules. Moreover, the document prepared by Richard Brown "Preserving the Archival and Historical Memory of Government"¹⁵⁸ in October 2001, stresses that records, increasingly in electronic form, are "critical for

¹⁵⁴ Concept already illustrated in: Information Management Standards and Practices Division National Archives of Canada, Managing Electronic Records in an Electronic Work Environment, May 1996, 6

¹⁵⁵ Approach to the Description and Classification of Government Records. Description and Classification of Government Records Working Group (Information Management Forum) – February 1999" in: http://www.inforumgi.gc.ca/new_docs/draft_e.html, points 4.4 and 4.6

¹⁵⁶ *ibid*, point 4.7

¹⁵⁷ Information Management Standards and Practices Division National Archives of Canada, Managing Electronic Records in an Electronic Work Environment, May 1996, 6-7

¹⁵⁸ Brown, R. Preserving the Archival and Historical Memory of Government, Summer 2001, at: http://www.archives.ca/06/0620_e.html

the efficient administration, to the capacity of citizens to hold government accountable, and to the preservation of knowledge about national history and collective memory for the benefit and use of future generations". Although Brown focuses mainly on selection and appraisal criteria for archival and historical records of national significance, he reaffirms the role of the National Archives in helping government institutions by providing advice and orientation in the development of information standards and protocols, guidelines and best practices. The National Archives also maintain the attributes of archival government records as evidence, in compliance with its mandate and through its records description systems and associated holdings management processes.

The United States National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)¹⁵⁹ published in 1991 a report on "Strategy for Electronic Records"¹⁶⁰. The report raised four strategic issues all of which related to electronic records from the perspective of national archives, considered to be prerequisites to fulfil NARA's mission: the determination of what kind of records to be preserved; the awareness of the complexities of electronic records requiring new understanding and expertise to achieve archival goals; the concerns about not existing schedules for transfer for electronic records and the need for further actions to be taken; question of preservation of some electronic records elsewhere than in the National Archives. It also raised the major issue of a very limited number of commercial software able to

¹⁵⁹ "Overview: Context for Electronic Records Management [ERM]" at: <http://www.nara.gov/records/fasttrak/prod1a.html>

¹⁶⁰ National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Strategy for Electronic Records, Washington DC, 1991

implement standards relevant for electronic records management and archives programs.¹⁶¹

A review of the development of guidelines on electronic records issued by NARA over the last decade shows the central role played by NARA in the challenges posed by electronic records and its role of providing guidance to federal agencies on the management of electronic records¹⁶². NARA provides direction through the instruments of the electronic records management regulation¹⁶³ and has general responsibilities for records schedules which provide disposal authorization for specific categories of temporary records common to most agencies¹⁶⁴. NARA completed in 2001 an assessment of the federal record keeping and concluded that although agencies created and maintained records appropriately, most electronic records remained unscheduled and therefore records of historical value were not identified and provided to NARA for archiving. Most of the jurisprudence in the field of archives over the last decade concentrates in fact on the area of NARA's activities covered by GRS 20 i.e. schedules for disposal of records. NARA is evaluating in recent years alternatives concerning its role as disposition authority as part of a comprehensive review of the policies and procedures for scheduling and appraisal of records in all formats.

In the 2001 assessment NARA also recognized its limitations for technical strategies to support preservation, management and access to electronic records and to reflect the modern recordkeeping environment. This is probably the reason why

¹⁶¹ On these issues see also: Bikson T.K. and Frinking E.J., Preserving the Present: toward viable electronic records, The Hague, Sdu Publishers, 1993, 86, 88

¹⁶² Role and tasks established in Federal Records Act - 44 U.S.C. chapters 21, 29, 31 and 33

¹⁶³ Regulation No. 36 CFR Part 1234, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). Regulations: 36 cfr Part 1234 – Electronic Records Management <http://www.nara.gov/nara/cfr/cfr1234.html>. March 2002

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*, Regulation on disposal GRS 20

NARA guidance has been accused of being "incomplete and confusing".¹⁶⁵ To fulfil its tasks of ensuring that electronic records are properly created, maintained, secured and retrievable NARA has addressed in the last couple of years hardware and software issues that have been finalised in the planning, design, and acquisition of a system that should solve these problems. The Archivist of the United States, John Carlin, gave preliminary approval in July 1999 to the Electronic Records Archive program (ERA)¹⁶⁶. ERA will be developed and implemented in several phases with each phase adding more functions to the system. The major features that ERA must have are: a place to which electronic records can be transmitted by creators although accessible in different locations; solutions that do work in the National Archives and the Presidential Libraries but promote as well the goal of lifecycle management in federal agencies guiding them in creating and managing all the records they need in performing their functions. ERA is envisaged therefore as a comprehensive, systematic and dynamic means of accomplishing the archival work that must support continuing access to authentic electronic records over time and preserve the three main attributes of electronic records: content, structure and context.¹⁶⁷ For doing so, ERA concept should incorporate the three OAIS basic functions: ingest, which brings information into the system; storage which maintains them over time and dissemination, which supports queries and delivery of information to users. ERA architecture should be infrastructure independent, modular, scalable and

¹⁶⁵ United States General Accounting Office (GAO), Information Management. Challenges in Managing and Preserving Electronic Records. June 2002, 18

¹⁶⁶ National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Electronic Records Archives (ERA) Program. At: http://www.nara.gov/era/more_about_era.html (accessed on 06.03.2002)

¹⁶⁷ Thibodeau, K., "Building the Archives of the Future". D-Lib Magazine, February 2001

extendible.¹⁶⁸ However, as NARA is planning to award the contract for ERA by January 2004 the fundamental principles dealing with management of electronic records are still those based on National Archives and Records Administration Regulations, 36 CFR Part 1234¹⁶⁹. NARA oversees agency management of temporary records and takes control of permanent agency records judged to be of historic value. It also establishes the basic requirements related to the creation, maintenance, use and disposition of electronic records. In paragraph 1234.2 it defines electronic records as "information that is recorded in a form that only a computer can process and that satisfies the definition of a Federal record in 44 U.S.C. 3301". It is among agencies' responsibilities¹⁷⁰ the "developing and maintaining up-to-date documentation about all electronic information systems :[...] define the contents and of the files an records, describe update cycles or conditions and rules for adding information to the system, changing information in it, or deleting information." In paragraph 1234.20 – creation and use of data files, is stated that "agencies shall maintain adequate up-to-date technical documentation for each electronic information system that produces, stores data files. Minimum documentation required is a narrative description of the system; physical and technical characteristics of the records, including a record layout that describes each field including its name, size, starting or relative position, and a description of the form of the data (such as alphabetic, zoned decimal, packed decimal or numeric), or a data dictionary or equivalent information associated with a data base management

¹⁶⁸ Bellardo, L., Preserving Our Federal Heritage in the Digital Era: What is NARA's role in creating the Government's Digital Archive? At <http://www.nara.gov/nara/vision/era.html>, (accessed on 06.03.2002)

¹⁶⁹ Part 1234 was last modified on 7/1/98 (technical amendment) at: <http://www.nara.gov/nara/cfr/cfr1234.html> (accessed on 10.08.2000)

¹⁷⁰ Subpart B – Program Requirements, 1234.10 Agency responsibilities, at <http://www.nara.gov/nara/cfr/cfr1234.html>

system including a description of the relationship between data elements in databases". If NARA's mission, reaffirmed in ERA Mission Needs Statement¹⁷¹ is to ensure "ready access to essential evidence" for the public, the President, the Congress, and the Courts¹⁷² then the critique by GAO has to be shared¹⁷³. The NARA's guidance on electronic records management is too vague and the solutions proposed through ERA seem to be too short viewed concentrating more on software and hardware solutions instead of cover a wider conceptual framework where metadata requirements should play a central role.¹⁷⁴

In the United Kingdom, the National Archives, formerly the Public Record Office, operates under the Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967¹⁷⁵, and is responsible for safeguarding the public records and ensuring the selection of those worthy for preservation, for acquiring and preserving those records, and for providing access to and for promoting the use of records. The National Archives provides leadership across government in the management of electronic records and in the long term transfer and access strategy for electronic records. The National Archives has developed in recent years: indeed, it has produced some documents in response to the demand from the public sector for advice on managing electronic records. In March 1998 the Public Record Office published the *Standards in Records Management*, a best practice guidance on the management of current records within

¹⁷¹ Mission Needs Statement available at:

http://www.archives.gov/electronic_records_archives/about_era/mission.html

¹⁷² United States General Accounting Office (GAO), Information Management. Challenges in Managing and Preserving Electronic Records. June 2002, 4

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, 18

¹⁷⁴ According to David Bearman that could be due to the fact that "Americans are seeking technological solutions because in our context we have reason to doubt the ability of organizational policy to constrain new technologies" in: Bearman, D. "Diplomatics, Weberian Bureaucracy, and the Management of Electronic Records in Europe and America", American Archivist 55, No. 1, Winter 1992, 173-174

government. The Standards were the result of the Scoping Study into Records Storage and Management with which the PRO recognised the absence of standards in these fields and tried to fill in the deficiencies and stressed fundamental differences between the management of conventional records and electronic records. The differences were essentially identified in the fact that the electronic records were often regarded as informal and personal; difficulties raised in establishing the context of electronic records and the appraisal of electronic documents needed to be carried out at a much earlier stage than for conventional records.¹⁷⁶ In 1999 the Electronic Records in Office System Programme (EROS) aimed to provide departments with a way of transferring records to the PRO electronically – and without loss. These guidelines enabled government agencies to achieve good practice and to satisfy the Standards in records management. In EROS the term metadata referred to the data contained within the document other than its content (for example, structure and layout) and information about the record and its relationships with other records and information about the use of the record¹⁷⁷. The formats recommended by PRO for transfer and preservation of electronic records from departments into the PRO that met the requirements were PostScript, TIFF, SGML, PDF. The issue however was kept under review as other potential formats such as HTML and XML were evaluated. The electronic records that were managed electronically, the metadata describing folder structures, contents and relationships among records had also to be stored in the electronic document management application. Particular care was therefore recommended for the records transferred to the PRO, so that the metadata and the links to the record were not broken. Hence,

¹⁷⁵ Legislation 6 & 7 Eliz 2. Ch 51

¹⁷⁶ Public Record Office, Management and Appraisal of Electronic Records. Standards for the Management of Government Records. 1st Edition, April 1998, 1

the metadata had to be included in a structured description file, with a separate entry for each document and the entries linked to the documents by the filename used to store the document. The folder metadata had also to be included in the description file. As with paper records, departments were required to carry out the task of preparing appropriate finding aids. The aim of this guidance was to ensure that a common recognisable and easy approach existed for the description of paper and electronic records. The PRO was left with the task of generating an electronic copy of the transfer list in an appropriate format enabling the creation of hyperlinks between the descriptions and the records. The mandatory elements of metadata both at the file and record levels were title, record identifier, record assembly (record's links to other records with which it has a formal relationship), record type, date registered in system or captured and indexed within system.¹⁷⁸

In parallel with the EROS initiative the Public Record Office set out a new programme called Access to Archives¹⁷⁹ (A2A) as follow-up of the decision to establish a national archival network. A2A was intended to develop common standards for description enabling access to archives catalogues in a straightforward way for users and facilitating the retrospective conversion of existing hard-copy archives catalogues and finding aids into electronic format. A2A is of particular interest because common standards appear among its main criteria and priorities for retro-conversion. These standards (also called minimum requirements for data exchange) are grounded in the ISAD(G). Being the aim of the A2A the delivery of consistent and appropriate archival descriptions the project had to achieve a full ISAD(G) conformity supported by ISAAR(CPF) and using EAD and XML as part

¹⁷⁷ <http://www.pro.gov.uk/recordsmanagement/eros/guidelines/principles3.htm>

¹⁷⁸ Public Record Office, Management and Appraisal of Electronic Records. Standards for the Management of Government Records. 1st Edition, April 1998, 3-4, 8, 44-55, 63

of the processes of conversion, storage and display. However, many finding aids and catalogues have little relationship to modern standards and therefore it has been recognised as preferable that some aspects of conformity may be put into place after conversion to electronic form than before. The proposed rules for minimum conformity are based on the basic rules stated in ISAD(G) in order to produce a multi-level archival description. Any archival description comprises therefore at a minimum the data elements considered essential by ISAD(G) (reference code, Title, Creator(s), Abstract, Creation dates, Extent and form, access conditions, level of description).

In 2002 the PRO published the final version of the *Requirements for Electronic Records Management Systems*¹⁸⁰ that stems from a long revision process that takes into account developments in government and international standards since 1999 and supersedes the original previous version. The requirements underline that the necessary records components, structure, and metadata have to be captured to ensure that the record is a reliable and authentic representation of the business activity or transaction. The transfer of some folders or records to the Public Record Office or other appointed place of deposit for permanent preservation should include both record content and descriptive material relating to record context, such as file structure, folder and record metadata.¹⁸¹ The ERMS must be capable of supporting a hierarchical business classification scheme (being the hierarchical structure a minimum requirement); must support inheritance of metadata by lower levels of the classification scheme¹⁸², and must allow further descriptive metadata at a later stage

¹⁷⁹ <http://www.pro.gov.uk/archives/A2A/Abouta2a.htm>

¹⁸⁰ Public Records Office, *Functional Requirements for Electronic Records Management Systems*, 2002, Kew Surrey, <http://www.pro.gov.uk/recordsmanagement/>

¹⁸¹ *ibid*, 3-4

¹⁸² *ibid*, 7-8

of processing.¹⁸³ In my opinion, these requirements although not specifically referring to ISAD(G) show a background in terminology where both levels of description and inheritance property come from the standard for archival description. The further study undertaken on the previous version of the functional requirements have brought to the choice, common to other national archives, of a preferred XML format for preservation and export of metadata and publication.¹⁸⁴ It has also to be stressed that there is an evolution in the definition of metadata in this second version of the requirements, in which the concept of description is included. In fact, the definition of metadata reads as follow "data *describing* context, content and structure of records an their management through time."¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, the context is a central point for metadata: in the record it should be apparent by showing the provenance of the record itself, the context in which the record was created, received and used, including the business process of which the transaction is part. Unfortunately, description, the fourth element of the records management elements is not a mandatory element and is seen by the PRO as providing additional detail to the subject, or title elements. Description can be applied at any level of aggregation but it is especially recommended at record and folder level and should be brief to facilitate users browsing through a list of search results.¹⁸⁶ Finally, the PRO and the Office of the e-Envoy point out that by using standard ways of categorising descriptive elements and standard term for their description the

¹⁸³ *ibid*, 15

¹⁸⁴ *ibid*, 21 and 28

¹⁸⁵ It is the same definition by ISO 15489. Public Records Office, Functional Requirements for Electronic Records Management Systems: Metadata Standards. 2002, Kew Surrey. 2 - <http://www.pro.gov.uk/recordsmanagement/>

¹⁸⁶ *ibid*, 10

communication between departments will be much simplified.¹⁸⁷ Summing up, if on the one hand description gains a place of honour by entering in the definition of metadata with the adjective "descriptive" on the other hand it loses some prestige becoming an optional requirement for records management.

In the 1998 *Standards in Records Management* for current records within UK government, Government's departments accountability focused on the need "to account for their actions to the appropriate regulatory authority" the link to citizens' rights of access to documents was still lacking. In the 2002 *Requirements for Electronic Records Management Systems, Metadata Standards*, the term accountability is linked to the definition of record and comes directly from the definition given in ISO 15489 "a record should be able to support the needs of the business to which it relates and be used for accountability purposes."¹⁸⁸ If the requirements still do not have a direct reference to accountability towards citizens nor to memory, it has to be stressed that many of them set out facilities needed in relation to Data Protection Act and Freedom of Information Act (FoI).¹⁸⁹ Mention of such concerns can be found however among the policies and strategies of the Office of e-Envoy where it is stated that "Government organisations need to establish a formal policy for maintaining electronic evidence as corporate records, and a strategy for taking forward enterprise-wide electronic records management"¹⁹⁰. To the information policies issues is also recognised a key role in meeting the needs of some fundamental laws and rules like the Public Records Acts, the Freedom of

¹⁸⁷ <http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/publications/frameworks/erm2/common.htm> and <http://www.govtalk.gov.uk/egif/home.html>

¹⁸⁸ Public Records Office, Functional Requirements for Electronic Records Management Systems: Metadata Standards. 2002, Kew Surrey. 2 - <http://www.pro.gov.uk/recordsmanagement/>

¹⁸⁹ *ibid*, 1

¹⁹⁰ Office of the e-Envoy, Framework Policies at: http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/publications/frameworks/erm2/pol_stat.htm

Information Act and associated Codes of Practice, the Data Protection Act, the Human Rights Act, the Electronic Communications Act and some relevant European Directives.

The origins of the *Recordkeeping Metadata Standard for Commonwealth Agencies*, the Standard released in June 1999 by the National Archives of Australia, can be found in the Australian Standard for Records Management (AS 4390) that was issued in 1996. At that time the National Archives of Australia endorsed the standard and promoted it as a model for best practice in recordkeeping.¹⁹¹ The AS 4390 using the continuum management model was seen also as particularly recommendable while managing electronic records and therefore for the design stage of electronic recordkeeping systems.¹⁹² It has also to be noticed that the conceptual models and definitions of elements are based on the work by the Research Project on Australian Recordkeeping Metadata Schema (RKMS)¹⁹³. The *Record-keeping Metadata Standard for Commonwealth Agencies* describes the metadata that the National Archives recommends should be captured in the record-keeping systems used by the Government Agencies.¹⁹⁴ The standard finds its conceptual foundation on recordkeeping systems based on intellectual control of information about records. Such a control is only possible through metadata. The use of a classification scheme appears also as a fundamental component of the intellectual control over the record-keeping system. The *Standard* requires that

¹⁹¹ <http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/rkpubs/advice25.html>.

¹⁹² http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/er/manage_er/append_2.html. The advantage of the continuum management approach that wants no division between records management and archives have become even more apparent with electronic records, as suggested by Cunningham: Cunningham, A., Dynamic Descriptions. Australian Strategies for the Intellectual Control of Records and Recordkeeping Systems. At: <http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/control/strategies/default.htm>

records are classified on the basis of their function or the activity that caused the record to be brought into existence rather than on the basis of their subject. The focus of classification is therefore the context of a record creation and use, rather than the content of the record itself. The most important tool for implementing a classification scheme is the functions thesaurus: an alphabetical listing of all authorised functions and activities. The functions thesaurus is used by the users to identify authorised terms for the classification and retrieval of records. Moreover, the analysis of the *Recordkeeping Metadata Elements* can give an overview of the requirements' hierarchy in which the fundamental distinction between content and context is evident. In the creation of these Standards the major emphasis has been given to those elements that concern the context of production of records.¹⁹⁵ Therefore, the mandatory fields are those fields like *Agent*, *Rights Management*, that indicate a corporate or organisational entity that uses the records and the policies and legislations which govern access to records.

The element *Description* defined as "a description, in free text prose, of the content and/or purpose of the record"¹⁹⁶ is not a mandatory one and its functions are more relating to search functions and its use is advised for more detail than the use of titles. Description therefore has to be understood in the context of the *Standard* as a specific element for series, because its rationale is to provide means of describing higher levels of records than items and files. This approach to description reflects what has been defined as the 'series system' approach, where the series descriptions

¹⁹³ McKemmish S., Acland G., Ward N., Reed B., "Describing Records in Context in the Continuum: The Australian Recordkeeping Metadata Schema", *Archivaria*, No. 48, Fall 1999, 3-43

¹⁹⁴ <http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/control/summary.html>

¹⁹⁵ As analysed by some Australian authors it is rooted into Australian practice and was originated by Scott's strategies that wanted to document separately records description and administrative context. See: Cunningham, A., *Dynamic Descriptions. Australian Strategies for the Intellectual Control of*

become "free-floating entities that are connected as required to descriptions of all the agencies of government that have contributed to their existence."¹⁹⁷

The main critique of ISAD(G) is that its elements form a very small sub-set of the recordkeeping metadata as they are essentially concerned with the retrospective description of records as shown by the metadata elements identified in ISAD(G) that have been mapped into the *Standard*.¹⁹⁸ However, Adrian Cunningham affirms that the recordkeeping metadata standards do not obviate the need for descriptive standards. A Joint Committee on descriptive standards is developing a Australian standard for the Intellectual control of records that will provide standardised means of creating and dynamically maintaining recordkeeping metadata overtime, both at item and aggregate level and will offer guidance on the linking of record descriptions, to function, activity, creator and recordkeeping metadata, being also compatible with ISAD(G).¹⁹⁹

Since 1983 the Archives Act has required agencies to transfer records that have significant and enduring value to the National archives. The Freedom of Information Act 1982 gives the public the right of access to records²⁰⁰. The National Archives of Australia keeps valuable Commonwealth Government records of archival value, regardless of format, so that people can continue to have access to them in the future.

Records and Recordkeeping Systems. At:

<http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/control/strategies/default.htm>

¹⁹⁶ <http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/control/rkms/description.html>

¹⁹⁷ As Adrian Cunningham points out however, a large number of archival programs in Australia are happy using the 'record group' approach for description. Cunningham, A., Dynamic Descriptions. Australian Strategies for the Intellectual Control of Records and Recordkeeping Systems.

At: <http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/control/strategies/default.htm>

¹⁹⁸ McKemmish S., Acland G., Ward N., Reed B., "Describing Records in Context in the Continuum: The Australian Recordkeeping Metadata Schema", Archivaria, No. 48, Fall 1999, 28

¹⁹⁹ Cunningham, A., Dynamic Descriptions. Australian Strategies for the Intellectual Control of Records and Recordkeeping Systems.

At: <http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/control/strategies/default.htm>

²⁰⁰ <http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/access/summary.html>

²⁰¹ The purpose of a standardised recordkeeping stresses that this structured way to describe the identity, authenticity, content, structure, context and essential management requirements of records will enable reliable, meaningful and accessible records to be carried forward through time to satisfy business needs, evidential requirements and broader community expectations. The *Standards* are therefore regarded as an essential requirement for efficient government administration and democratic accountability.²⁰²

In Italy the role of the National Archives (Central State Archives) in the electronic records field is very limited. The competences and tasks in promoting and implementing the requirements for record keeping are placed under the control of the Ministry for Public Function. The process of arising awareness of on electronic records started in 1998 with a legislation concerning the technical requirements for legal value of records stored on optical disk.²⁰³ A further step in the legislative process concerning electronic records took place with DPR 428/98 (President of the Republic's Decree) on electronic protocol. The decree upgraded the role of the "archive" from the marginal entity in the organizational structure of the public administration in Italy into a focal point in the management of electronic records²⁰⁴. The most recent step has been done by AIPA (Authority for Public Administration Information Technology) with the deliberation 51/2000 on Technical Rules for creation and preservation of electronic records. These rules follow the art. 18, paragraph 3 of the DPR 513/97 (Regulation on criteria and modalities for creation,

²⁰¹ <http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/custody/summary.html>. August 2000

²⁰² http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/control/rkms/purpose_and_importance.html.

²⁰³ Deliberation by AIPA (Autorita' per l'Informatica nella Pubblica Amministrazione) No. 24/98 of 30.07.1998.

archiving and transmission of records through electronic means)²⁰⁵ and foresee the development by AIPA in agreement with the State Archives of technical rules on creation and preservation of electronic records created by Public Administration agencies. AIPA deliberation includes the definition of electronic record, and its format²⁰⁶ and the requirements for creation, management, conservation, transmission, access, security and disposition of records. The creation of electronic record must refer to the process and certify the public or private administration/creator which has produced or received it. It is signed with digital signature, when prescribed and it has always to be registered (protocol or any other kind of registration). The rules on administrative documents (DPR 445/2000) are applied to electronic documents as well and custody should fulfil the aim of assuring integrity, evidence and access. However, these rules appear to be insufficient and ambiguous. In some cases they are characterized by generality of definitions and provisions, in other technological details complicate and render incomprehensible the application (e.g. the rules on use of optical disk AIPA Deliberation 24/98). A clear and coherent conceptual structure is definitively missing. The Italian legislator wanted erroneously to complete rapidly the normative frame on records keeping without being very detailed on methods and terminology. Moreover, there is little reference to standards; the only reference is in

²⁰⁴ Reaffirmed in deliberation 51/2000 that defines archives as "the support organized and managed in an unique and homogeneous way, univocally identified, which contain the registered documents".

²⁰⁵ Regulation 513/1997 defines: Art. 1 "electronic record is the electronic representation of acts, facts or data with juridical relevance", stresses the importance of provenance in art. 18.2 "In any operation concerning activities of production, archiving, reproduction, transmission of data, documents and administrative acts with electronic systems, the data concerning the creator must be clearly stated". Art. 20 finally leaves in the hands of agencies the evaluation for the establishment further plans for the substitution of paper records/archives with electronic ones. Art. 21 foresees by the 31.12.1998 the establishment of electronic record keeping systems by agencies in order to ease the access to documents by other agencies and the general public.

²⁰⁶ Art. 4. refers to electronic records' formats as "the ways in which the content is represented." The format should allow archiving, readability, interoperability and exchange; the non alterability of the document during the phases of access and conservation; search possibility through filing plans and lists and through full text retrieval (content of documents); the immutability of content and its structure

Art. 18 dealing with transmission of records that has to be in XML format and contains mandatory fields (specified in Art. 19) as object, sender, addressee(s), and reference code (reference to file plan), identification of annexes, and information on procedure and treatment are only optional elements. Unfortunately, this approach reduces the problem of description to a problem of authentication in the creation, transmission and reproduction processes.

Of the same opinion, Maria Guercio points out that, electronic records are subject to "information granularity", i.e. the progressive reduction of records, once single units, to a whole of smaller and independent informational elements. Hence, she warns about the lack of awareness by public administrations of the electronic records' value as historical and cultural elements in the contemporary Italian society.²⁰⁷ Confirming these concerns, attention has to be drawn to the fact that despite the 'electronic revolution' the rules and schedules applied to current, semi-current and historical records are still valid, i.e. forty years before records, regardless of their physical form, are deposited at the Central State Archives.

However, a positive evolution can be seen in law DPR 396/00 that foresees the regular deposit of digital archives with the National Archives by the agencies. This rule applies to all electronic records produced by the public administration regarding the General Register Office's acts and documents. Further efforts have to be made in order to extend electronic record keeping: not only by strengthening the information system in public administration but also by developing service oriented image, transparency of administrative practices. Furthermore, law 428/1998 foresaw the development by the single agencies of guidelines for implementation of electronic

in time; the possibility to integrate electronic records with images, sound and video but incorporated only in an irreversible way.

record-keeping. The Ministry of Cultural Heritage proposed therefore the establishment of a working group composed of members of some Ministries, public authorities and the Central State Archives to establish common standards on: phases for planning of record keeping systems; minimal functional requirements for electronic records systems, crucial elements of electronic records; advanced criteria for indexing records, analysis and definition of records management workflows related to administrative procedures.²⁰⁸ The tasks of this working group were the preparation of Guidelines for planning electronic record-keeping systems, devise a prototype and prepare a manual for management of electronic records. The Guidelines, at today June 2003, are however still an ongoing project.

At the end of 1992, the ICA Committee pointed out that the Centre for Contemporary Archives in France was exclusively functioning as a repository for non-current databases and was not involved in advising or control of electronic records keeping systems.²⁰⁹ Since then some progress has been made. The Direction of the National Archives has created in June 2001 a working group²¹⁰ on long term preservation of electronic records, composed of representatives from National and departmental archives, from the Ministries of Justice, Home Affairs, Defence, and Foreign Affairs, private companies specialised in records management, and experts in the field. The aim of the working group was to bring into being a manual for archivists and creators of electronic records concerning the management,

²⁰⁷ Guercio, M., "I metodi per la conservazione dei documenti informatici: il ruolo dei metadati e XML", *Archivi & Computer*, No. 1, 2001, 22-34, 24

²⁰⁸ Ministero per i Beni Culturali, Divisione II, Progetto di laboratorio per lo sviluppo di modelli per la gestione integrata dei sistemi documentari pubblici, at:

http://www.archivi.beniculturali.it/divisione_II/pr_ric.htm (accessed on 06.03.2002)

²⁰⁹ International Council on Archives (ICA), Electronic Records Management: A Literature Review. Prepared by Alf Erlandsson, Committee on Electronic Records, ICA Study 10, April, 1997, 94-95

preservation and long term accessibility of electronic records. The manual was published in February 2002.²¹¹ The manual points out how electronic data and records are accessible only after description, evaluation and appraisal have been carried out. The manual draws attention to the fact that description of electronic records is more difficult considering that the same records can exist also in paper form and their filing is therefore crucial because their production is wide spread.²¹² The description methods, their development and the choice of support should be oriented towards the analysis of records' life cycle and on needs of data availability and communicability.²¹³ The manual stresses the importance of metadata and makes a difference between metadata for description, creation and management metadata, and long term preservation metadata. The use of some standards is advised at this scope, the Dublin Core, Australian archives metadata, or Library of Congress. ISAD(G) is also among this set of standards and the authors suggested that some elements could well be used as basis for metadata. However, the manual leaves to the archivist's judgement to collect needed metadata, assuring that the collected metadata give univocally the content and context of production of electronic records. In one of the examples that the manual gives the descriptive metadata include: title, brief description of content and context of production, creator (possibly including the elements from ISAAR(CPF), author, sender, addressee(s), date of creation (capture, modifications), electronic format, language, capture programme and version, original electronic support , subject index, position in institutional filing

²¹⁰ "Groupe de réflexion sur la conservation des documents électroniques" at: <http://www.archivesdefrance.culture.gouv.fr> (accessed on 16.04.2003)

²¹¹ Dhérent C., *Le archives électroniques. Manuel pratique*. Direction des Archives de France. Février 2002 at: <http://www.archivesdefrance.culture.gouv.fr/fr/archivistique/DAFmanuel%20version.htm> (accessed on 16.04.2003)

²¹² *ibid*, 7

²¹³ *ibid*, 15

plan²¹⁴. The manual makes reference to the InterPares project for the rules that assure the authenticity of electronic records in which the first position is reserved to the indissoluble link of descriptive metadata with data.²¹⁵ Description is definitively considered by the manual one of the most important phases of the long term preservation work for electronic records. The manual warns however the archivist about the long and difficult task he/she has to face in analysis and development of research tool for electronic records. It stresses that in electronic records it is not the single unit which is described but the data it contains (e.g. database), where the context of creation and life cycle of information play a fundamental role. It would be therefore preferable that description is prepared at the moment of creation of records. The definition of these descriptive metadata is therefore the result of collaboration among archivists and creator(s). Description should in any case comply with ISAD(G). It is also advisable that some metadata should enter into research tools automatically. In fact documents that have been encoded in an XML format could automatically enter into a description system in XML format by using a DTD (EAD). A DTD compatible with ISAD(G) is defined as the most adapted electronic tool to the hierarchical description of documents.²¹⁶

Finally, on the accountability question it is interesting first of all to underline a linguistic issue. In France, the concept is embodied in the term transparency. Transparency has however different degrees. It is first of all a juridical requirement for a democratic country: it has to be based on laws, that on the one hand impose to public administration to make accessible the information that they keep (e.g. ensure citizens' access to their personal data and files), and on the other hand ensure that

²¹⁴ *ibid*, 20-21. A very interesting example of collection of descriptive metadata is given by the Penal Court of Paris, *ibid*, 47

²¹⁵ *ibid*, 26

openness is limited by protection of State's interests and secrets (i.e. security, military, foreign policies). Secondly, transparency is recognised as an essential social issue. French citizens are convinced that the right of access to documents is part of their fundamental rights. Finally, transparency has to be considered a moral obligation for a democracy, where the "raison d'Etat" should be completely abandoned in favour of a society where citizens are aware of their rights.²¹⁷ These issues and principles are regulated by three laws: Law of 06.12.1978 on citizens' freedom of access to public administrative documents, Law of 17.07.1978 on communicability of administrative documents and Law n. 79-18 of 03.01.1979 on archives (detailed rules on appraisal and transfer)²¹⁸.

However, it must be stressed that the laws alone do not bring to public's awareness the information kept by archives, archivists have developed over the centuries descriptive methods that have helped them in this task. ISAD(G) could therefore represent the consensus reached in the international community both on the scope and contents of archival description practices²¹⁹. Such a consensus has been even increased with the approval of the new standard on records management.²²⁰ Hence, records management can now respond to contemporary society's requirements regarding the respect of citizens' right of access to information.

²¹⁶ *ibid*, 40

²¹⁷ Barbat, Philippe, Comment le "records management" peut faire progresser la transparence administrative. Communication faite à Lundt en 2001. At: <http://www.archivesdefrance.culture.gouv.fr/fr/notices/barbat.html>. (accessed on 16.04.2003)

²¹⁸ Circulaire AD 98-1 of 02.01.1998 stressing some particular cases as derogation to the general rule of communicability of records by the Public Administration, Art. 11 and Art. 20 on private archives with national historical value.

²¹⁹ See also the note by Director Martine de Boisdeffre, Director of National Archives, DITN/RES/2002/001 of 21.06.2002, in which the simplicity and user friendliness of research tools produced using these standards is highly praised. Recognising its compatibility with XML format its adoption is therefore recommended.

4.5 Conclusions

The question underlying this chapter was whether archival description really requires extensive revision before it could be applied fully to electronic records²²¹. The archival community has shown an intense interest in the examination of descriptive practices, to see where and to what extent electronic records fit into these current practices, and asking how description will evolve to meet these new needs²²². Nevertheless, in my opinion description of electronic records is largely based on the archivists' determination to keep intellectual control over the huge amount of information produced in contemporary society. Therefore archivists who look attentively at the theoretical principles behind archival practices should answer 'no' to the question whether archival description requires revision before being applied to electronic records. The principles governing description and public service actually encourage the equal treatment of paper and computer records, since a good system of archival description should focus on the context of the information itself, not on its physical form.²²³

The other principal question of this chapter regarded the adequacy of ISAD(G) for electronic records. Is ISAD(G) a standard only for retrospective description of

²²⁰ ISO 15489 Information and documentation – Records management (Part 1 and Part 2), Geneva, 2001

²²¹ Cook, T., "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift", *Archivaria*, No. 43, Spring 1997, 15-63, 20

²²² Dryden, J. E., "Archival Description of Electronic Records: An Examination of Current Practices" *Archivaria*, No. 40, Fall 1995, 107

²²³ Bailey, C., "Archival Theory and Electronic Records." *Archivaria*, No. 29, Winter 1989-90, 194-195

records in archival custody?²²⁴ The two main research projects in this field may provide an answer to this question.

The Pittsburgh specification of metadata tried to validate a reference model for archival data interchange and compared the requirements with ISAD(G) by mapping the requirements of evidence to it. For the Pittsburgh project any proposed standard, should demonstrate that it can ensure evidence as well as support archival management and information retrieval. In the comparison, although some ISAD(G) elements could have been better described to accommodate the special requirements of electronic records, for example in the element "physical condition", it was found that although lacking contextual metadata links all the metadata elements, including those only important to electronic records, fit somewhere within the standard.²²⁵

The UBC project singled out that while "subgroup" and "series", are meaningful from the point of view of the archivist, being primary objects of archival description, they are not meaningful from the point of view of the records creator. It was stressed that the fonds, as an object of description, is sedimentary in nature and therefore the archival description of a fonds is always open-ended until the fonds is closed. Heather MacNeil refers to the function of description as a means of preserving and authenticating the documentary and administrative network of relationships that have shaped the records over time. Archival description is therefore considered in the light of the authenticating function it fulfils, it is clear that metadata – the instruments of retrieval, audit, control generated by an electronic system, for the purposes of the records creator – are themselves significant objects of archival description. Although these findings were compared to RAD it can be

²²⁴ As affirmed by Shepherd E., Yeo J. Managing records. A handbook of principles and practice. Facet Publishing, London, 2003, 244

extended to ISAD(G) that found surely its theoretical roots in RAD. Finally the UBC project's findings validate ISAD(G) multilevel structure by stressing the importance of some requirements: formal description takes place after records have been arranged; description proceeds from the general to the specific and description is based on essential relation between a series and its creator.²²⁶

Another important element of this chapter was a survey of the different projects and standards proposed at the national level. At the beginning of the Nineties the most discussed standards for electronic records in the archival community were the Open Systems Interconnection (OSI) and the Information Locator Systems (ILS). The approach assumed that all organizations would have aimed at meeting the same record-keeping goals over the life cycle of electronic information, even though the nature of their records was very different. OSI standard was seen at that time as the standard that could assure that the information could be exchanged, stored, retrieved, and re-used even in hardware and software environments different from those of the record creators. However, a more general concern was expressed in the evolving standards environment that could have fall into disuse or superseded by new or revised standards. In recent years David Bearman has suggested to archival community that appropriate metadata can ensure a degree of software independence.²²⁷ Charles Dollar also pointed out that archivists should identify archival functional requirements for the capture of contextual information about records as well as the records themselves and that archivists

²²⁵ Bearman, D., Duff, W., "Grounding Archival Description in the Functional Requirements for Evidence", *Archivaria*, No. 41, Spring 1996, 275-281

²²⁶ MacNeil H. "The Implications of the UBC Research Results for Archival Description in General and the Canadian Rules for Archival Description in Particular" *Archivi & Computer*, No. 3/4, 1996, 239-246

²²⁷ Bearman, D., "Item Control and Electronic Recordkeeping", *Archives and Museum Informatics*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 1996, 213

should participate in national and international standards programs to ensure that these functional requirements are incorporated into standards relevant for electronic records management.²²⁸ At the present time there is a general agreement in archival community that archives should develop strategies that address data as well as technical standards that will promote greater connectivity, moving away from a strategy based exclusively on the adoption of national and international standards and towards a strategy based on the identification of combinations. Permanent access to electronic records can only be guaranteed if archivists become involved in the standards development initiatives.²²⁹ The important InterPARES²³⁰ (International Research on Preservation of Authentic Records in Electronic Systems) project, headed by Luciana Duranti and including research teams involving the national archives of Canada, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom and the United States, may determine useful standards in large national organisations.

The real intellectual revolution that has occurred with electronic records management resides in the recognition that these records systems are the primary responsibility of archivists. The critical issue for archivists and records managers is therefore to ensure that international standards address the essential requirements of maintaining records integrity, incorporating records disposition into information system application design, and facilitating access over time. Archivists and records managers must participate in the design of metadata systems, and ensure that these systems contain all of the contextual information essential to a full understanding of

²²⁸ Bikson T.K. and Frinking E.J., Preserving the Present: toward viable electronic records, Sdu Publishers, The Hague, 1993, 33, 79, 88, 89-90

²²⁹ ICA – Committee on Electronic Records, Guide for Managing Electronic Records from an Archival Perspective. Consultation Draft, June 1996, 34

²³⁰ InterPARES project at: <http://www.interpares.org/> (accessed on 06.03.2003). See also other projects on the same issues: EUAN European Union Archive Network at: <http://www.euan.org/>:

the records in question.²³¹ Standardization of information exchange protocols common to many other areas makes archivists' participation in the politics of emerging information networks of paramount importance and requires familiarity with the technology involved. Archivists' skills and knowledge of the management and use of archival data and record keeping systems, context and changing relationships through time will represent a vital need for their organisations.²³²

Finally, a further area of research would address the requirements for describing the relationships among digital objects whereas the relationships among such documents are an essential element of preservation. This raises a series of questions about how to retain hyperlinks between and within documents and relations with relational data structures. Considering that there is considerable evidence that users want a single interface to huge amount of digital information, failure to consider possible strategies that can link and describe both electronic records and other forms of digital information could marginalize digital archives and place the entire archival enterprise in peril.²³³

The telecommunications revolution of the last decades with the advent of Internet increased dramatically the decentralised creation and diffusion of documents and sharpened the perceptions on the instability of electronic records.²³⁴ In a world of relational databases, of complex software linkages, of hypermedia documents, in a world of relationships, of interconnections, of context, new

(accessed on 13.02.2001) MoReq – Model Requirements for the Management of Electronic Records at: <http://www.cornwell.co.uk/> (accessed on 27.06.2001)

²³¹ Dollar, C. M., "Archivists and Records Managers in the Information Age", *Archivaria*, No. 36, Autumn 1993, 47 See also Hedstrom M., "Descriptive Practices for Electronic Records: Deciding What is Essential and Imaging What is Possible", *Archivaria*, No. 36, Autumn 1993, 59

²³² Hurley C., "Data Systems, Management and Standardization" *Archives and Manuscripts*, November 1995

²³³ Hedstrom, M., "Research Issues in Migration and Long-Term Preservation" *Archives and Museums Informatics*, Vol. 11, No. 3-4, 1997, 289-291

²³⁴ Ketelaar E. *The Archival Image. Collected Essays*, Hilversum Verloren, 1997, 23-24

questions dealing with the second generation of electronic records (compound, smart or hypermedia documents), electronic documents that are "virtual" composite of disparate information naturally arise. The next chapter will consider these developments and examine their impact on archival description rules and ISAD(G).

Chapter Five. Internet as access policy. Its impact on archival descriptive practices.

The transition from the a world of physical archives to one of digital archives, with computer interaction becoming increasingly important, is already apparent in the development of World Wide Web sites for archival repositories. The introduction of on-line access systems, the gradual retrospective conversion of archival holdings into digital format and the integration of electronic records into descriptive systems inducted a deep change in archives from "being places only for the storage of old records that researchers must visit to consult, to becoming virtual archives without walls."¹

The aim of this chapter is to give the framework of the challenges to archival descriptive practices posed by the advent of Internet and the development of information society. Archives could be considered "technological productions". Some archivists argue that new technologies create a new culture, while others deny that new communication systems create a new society.² As Lubar maintains, Internet "puts technology and culture in close contact, with archives just about in the

¹ Cook, T., "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift", *Archivaria*, No. 43, Spring 1997, 47; Cook, T. "Archival Science and postmodernism: new formulations for old concepts" *Archival Science*, No. 1, 2001, 23

² The discussion about the book in the modern Information Age is a reminder that technology has a profound impact on culture and especially on culture associated with information, in: Cox, R. J., *Closing an Era. Historical Perspectives on Modern Archives and Records Management*. Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, London, 2000, 229. On the other side, the idea that a new technology replaces a previous one is much too simplistic. In Eco, U. "Internet will not replace books" at: <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/record22/> and Eco, U., "From Internet to Gutenberg" a lecture presented by Umberto Eco at the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America, November 1996. at <http://www.hf.ntmu.no/snv/Finnbo/tekster/Eco/Internet.htm>

middle."³ This chapter does not discuss the technological implications of this process but rather explores ways of presenting archival information using the World Wide Web, considering cultural and socio-political implications.

Institutional information can be contextualised and represented in ways that are useful for archivists. World Wide Web technology allows the promotion of the integration and dissemination of knowledge acquired by archivists during the process of archival description. Hence, to a very large extent, the Internet is a continuation of what archivists have been doing for over one-hundred years – using current technology to make their holdings available remotely.⁴ The Web is nothing more than a communication tool to be used creatively for writing.⁵

Writing archival descriptions is one of the most important aspects of access policies in any archival institution, and today the Internet is the main technological means to do this. Can we therefore say that Internet is going to replace the archive's reference services? And if so, how do archives present and represent themselves to the public through their interfaces?

Over the past years archivists have discussed the necessity to identify users' needs; and the contents and quality criteria of web sites and web applications for archives. Starting from a general debate of these issues, I will therefore analyse some guidelines for the use of Internet in archives, trying to illustrate some major issues concerning the design of web sites in an archival perspective.

³ Lubar, S., "Information Culture and the Archival Record" The American Archivist, Vol. 62, Spring 1999, 11

⁴ Thomas, D., "Automation and the Impact of the Internet on Archives" in: Cyber, Hyper or Resolutely Jurassic? Proceedings of a symposium to celebrate 25 years of professional education in the archives department, Dublin 2-3 October 1998

⁵ Cox, R. J., Closing an Era. Historical Perspectives on Modern Archives and Records Management. Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, London, 2000, 138

In the context of my dissertation this chapter should illustrate the close link between the major components of archival description and the accessibility of archival material through Internet. Hence, the archives' role as interface between past and future finds new elements for debate and interpretation.

5.1 Information society, a new role for archives?

Whether one talks of a post-industrial society, a post-modern society, or an information society, the essential argument is that, with developments in communication technologies, information and knowledge are emerging as central resources – they are the basis of new economic power. New wealth and power often derive from the added value of information and knowledge, rather than from traditional forms of economic wealth such as land, labour or capital. As Barbara L. Craig has pointed out, in an information economy, archivists have to confront a number of fundamental questions concerning the value of archives as products of information that can be bought and sold, consumed and replaced like commodities. Following the model of sociologist Anthony Giddens, rather than seeing archives as products, archivists should instead promote their archives as products of information, emphasising the trustworthy value of archives as fundamental to contemporary social interests. Archives should promote their status as public resources.⁶

⁶ Craig, B. L., "Old Myths in New Clothes: Expectations of Archives Users" *Archivaria*, No. 45, Spring 1998, 122

The concept of universal service⁷ is at the centre of the challenge posed by the information society to archives. In the new digital world the right to communicate evolves and becomes a basic service required by citizens, a service becoming increasingly extensive and complex. Access to information and knowledge involves not only physical availability. The challenge will be to ensure that the user can benefit from the services concerned, through a minimum level of "digital literacy"⁸ and through appropriately adapted interfaces. Archives will become increasingly involved in the provision of electronic information, according to the ever more sophisticated needs of their clients in government, research and the general public.

Steven Lubar observes a general feeling that new technologies are changing not just the material nature of archives but also the very notion of information. He argues that by reshaping our ideas about information, information technologies influence our ideas about culture. Hence, if archives are "sites of cultural production" the meaning and use of archives changes according to changes in our information culture changes.⁹ Another author has pointed out how under the influence of interaction with information sciences the object of archival studies has developed and how it now shares common interests with information sciences in terms of categories and methods. The function of archives in society assumes a new dimension through the concept of free access to information, the implementation of information and

⁷ Quéu, P., Cyber-culture et Info-ethique, at:

http://www.unesco.org/webworld/points_of_view/queau_2.html (accessed on 01.11.2003)

⁸ Digital literacy is strictly linked to what is commonly called "digital divide" i.e. the gap which separates United States from the rest of the world. However, one can say that there are at least two "digital divide" one which separates Europe from United States and the other that divides the European society in social groups. On the one side the group with digital knowledge and on the other side the other group which does not have such knowledge. In the United States Internet is present in 40% of households whereas is only 30% for Europe. In Europe there is also a serious gender cleavage: 82% of Internet users are men and only 18% are women. In: Reding V., Die Rolle der EG bei der Entwicklung Europa von der Industriegesellschaft zur Wissens-und Informationsgesellschaft. Zentrum für Europäische Integrationsforschung, Discussion Paper, C84, Bonn, 2001, 1-25

communication technologies in the management of documents, the establishment of document management systems and the evolution of users' search techniques. The modern archival profession should be grounded on new archival theory that will give archivists the theoretical basis for intelligent service for the unknown users of the future.¹⁰ Some authors have already pointed to the trend of "virtual archives" available in Cyberspace and how the scholarly community is getting used to having access to network information resources.¹¹ Major archival institutions, as well as governments and organizations, provide access to their records and archives via Internet. However, as the dissenting voice of Edward Higgs affirms "electronic finding aids based on nested menus and key-word searching merely exacerbate the tendency to 'home in' sources too perceptively, without the trouble of understanding administrative context and provenance."¹²

Discussions in the archival community concerning Internet and Web technologies should therefore focus mainly on the fundamental concepts of context and provenance. Archivists who have always considered the "connectivity" of their stacks of papers should probably consider the Web simply as a new means for the linkages within archives. The World Wide Web makes apparent what has always been the case: information is interconnected in complex ways and is used in multiple and ever more complex ways. What is often of greatest interest is not the information

⁹ Lubar, S., "Information Culture and the Archival Record" The American Archivist, Vol. 62, Spring 1999, 10

¹⁰ Rivas Fernandez, J. B., "L'archivistique, les archives et les archivistes face aux défis du troisième millénaire", Comma, International Journal on Archives, 2001-1/2, 19-28

¹¹ Michelson A. and Rothenberg J., "Scholarly Communication and Information Technology: Exploring the Impact of Changes in the Research Process in Archives", The American Archivist, No. 55, 1992

¹² Higgs, E. "Information Highways or Quiet Country Lanes? Accessing Electronic Archives in the United Kingdom". A paper delivered at the Playing for Keeps Conference in Canberra, November 1994

itself, but the interconnections and its use. Archivists must go beyond issues of reliability and authenticity to consider connectivity and context.¹³

Archivists therefore will play a key role in elucidating the intricate web of relationships that is provenance. Jean-Stephen Piché points out how such information about records is clustered within archival institutions and explains how the Web can provide linkages between and across clusters of existing archival information.¹⁴

In some of his articles Philippe Quéau, expressed his worries about the cyber-culture in connection with archives. "Cyber" (Greek etymology for governing) symbolises the revolution of the new information and communication technologies. Hence, cyber-culture is not only the culture of the cyberspace but also a culture of government. Information society does not mean more culture per se, because information is not knowledge and knowledge is not culture. Cyber-culture will not really deserve its name until it will be able to interpret the aspirations of the global citizen. For this reason, equality in the information age ought to be access equality. The opportunities offered by World Wide Web concerning access to information and sharing of knowledge depend largely on international coordination. Furthermore, increased access to interconnected networks and databases raises major ethical and legal issues about privacy of information and data protection. Therefore, archivists are faced increasingly with issues of privacy, confidentiality and security of information.¹⁵

¹³ Lubar, S., "Information Culture and the Archival Record" The American Archivist, Vol. 62, Spring 1999, 12

¹⁴ Piché, J-S., "Doing What's Possible with What We've Got: Using the World Wide Web to Integrate Archival Functions", The American Archivist, Vol. 61, Spring 1998, 107

¹⁵ Quéau, P., In search for the Common Good. The Information Society and Archives. Paris, UNESCO, 1998 (Paper presented at the 33rd Round Table Conference on Archives, Stockholm, Sweden, 9-12 September 1998)

Quéau, P., Cyber-culture et Info-ethique,
http://www.unesco.org/webworld/points_of_views/queau_2.html (accessed on 01.11.2003)

Finally, information society has induced reflection in the archival community on professional concepts of provenance and context, drawn attention to ethical issues of privacy, confidentiality and security of information, and has also stimulated debates on wider concepts of memory and oblivion.

A phenomenon of contemporary information society is what can be defined as the greatest archive of the world, the *Internet Archive*¹⁶, a project launched in 1996 by Brewster Kahle¹⁷ that has saved billions of web-pages containing over hundreds of terabytes of data. However, this enormous effort of preservation reveals a hidden danger: everything that is not saved will be lost. The recent debates about digital versus analogical records reflect a controversy between memory and oblivion. If a majority of working, studying, researching and learning activities are on Internet and make use of multimedia resources only digital information available through the Internet will remain quotable.¹⁸ The role of traditional sources of information will decrease dramatically. Following this line of argument initiatives of this kind, allowing indiscriminately all documents to make the "digital jump" – without consideration of merit – should be welcome. However, a perfect memory could become a terrible disgrace, as illustrated in the parabola of *Ireneo Funes* - a famous novel by Borges¹⁹ - featuring a person unable to forget anything. With reference to the *Internet Archive* the metaphor suggests that a vigilant memory is an invaluable good, but that there are many words not worth recording or transmitting to the future. The use of Internet in an information society will require what Umberto Eco calls critical competence, an art of selection and decimation of information. Eco stresses

¹⁶ Internet Archive web site <http://www.archive.org> (accessed on 01.11.2003)

¹⁷ Kahle, B., "Archiving the Internet". in *Scientific American*, March 1996 at: http://www.archiving.org/sciam_article.html (accessed on 01.11.2003)

¹⁸ De Carli L., *Internet. Memoria e oblio*, Bollati Boringhieri, "Temi 66", Torino 1997

¹⁹ "Funes, the Memorios", in Borges J. L., *Collected Fictions*, Penguin Press, 1999

that the history of culture is one that puts in place filters. Culture transmits memory, but not a complete memory. It is culture that filters out part of this memory.²⁰

If archivists accept the challenges of information society and the Internet as a world-wide access-facility to information, they have to take account of their responsibility with regard to the cultural transmission and the filtering of memory.

5.2 Archives and their interfaces: between presentation and representation

At the beginning of the 1990s, the question about which archivists were most concerned was still about the advent of the Internet in the reference services of archives. Charles Dollar expressed doubts concerning supply-driven reference service for archives.²¹ He argued that archivists produced inventories and finding aids which were used by researchers in the archives; underlying this was the assumption that researchers are willing to spend the amount of time required to find the information they need. However, Internet has changed the researchers' expectations; and archivists should acknowledge the shift to a demand-driven reference service that corresponds to the expectations of the modern researcher. In Dollar's view this could be accomplished by developing a reference service strategy that modifies established ways of dealing with researchers. This strategy would require archivists to understand the common characteristics of specific groups of researchers, and to develop those elements of reference services that are of greatest importance to those researchers.

²⁰ On this point see the interview "Auteurs et autorité" by Umberto Eco at: <http://www.text-e.org/conf/> 28 February to 14 March 2002. (accessed on 01.11.2002)

Even if one admits the trend towards an increasing independence of the researcher from the archivist - represented in finding aids and new search tools – it has been stressed that reference services belong to the legislative mandate of archival institutions and should therefore still be considered a main archival function.²² Nevertheless, more and more often archivists are confronted with the question of whether finding aids are really user-friendly and whether relating these tools to the provenance principle and to the "respect du fonds" would provide a guarantee that the modern researcher of the information society would find the information he or she is looking for.²³ For Angelika Menne-Haritz "respect du fonds" represents a respect for the user. In her view the provenance principle and the "respect du fonds" are the theoretical bases on which archives can offer the best possible service to users.²⁴ However, the trend of applying rules that produce less detailed and less precise descriptions contradicts the independence of researchers from archivists. A balance needs to be found between archivists who concentrate on the description of fonds at high level and users who want to find detailed information at the item level.²⁵

Taking a similar line of argument, and stressing the focal point of descriptive methods, Wendy Duff affirms that it is important to understand the impact that different components of descriptive systems and processes have on users' needs.²⁶ Within this logic Wendy Duff has investigated what kind of information the users of

²¹ Dollar, C. M., Archival Theory and Information Technologies. The Impact of Information Technologies on Archival Principles and Methods. University of Macerata, 1992, 63-64

²² Munn, E. and Rioux D., "La référence: une fonction archivistique a part entière" Archivaria, No. 45, Spring 1998, 104-111

²³ Lambert, J. "L'archivistique au service des chercheurs: le respect des fonds et l'accès à l'information dans les services d'archives" Archivaria, No. 45, Spring 1998, 112-117

²⁴ Menne-Haritz, A., "Access – the reformulation of an archival paradigm", Archival Science No 1, 2001, 77

²⁵ Bearman, D., "Item Control and Electronic Record-keeping", Archives and Museum Informatics, Vol. 10, No. 3, 1996, 234-236

²⁶ Duff W., "Will Metadata Replace Archival Description: A Commentary", Archivaria, No. 39 Spring 1995

archives would like to see displayed in online access catalogues and how users would like the material displayed. Bearing in mind that archival description should be considered a process of communicating information about records to their potential users,²⁷ Duff was mostly interested in discovering whether archival description rules help users locate what they need. Based on her investigation, she came to the conclusion that users preferred the ISAD(G) order of elements rather than the RAD.²⁸ According to her research, users had problems interpreting information regarding physical description (problem with linear meters) and dates of creation; many users were confused by the use of the term 'fonds'²⁹. At the same time her research revealed that formatting features such as the use of bold typefaces, lists, labels, white space, and justification improved the readability of the displays.³⁰ Overall, the use of archival terminology in displays, Title, Call number (reference code in ISAD(G)) and Scope and Content were considered very important elements by users. Finally, she pointed out that archival users prefer a display created according to ad hoc design guidelines. Users taking part in her project suggested the inclusion of glossaries, online help functions, electronic finding aids, and indexes.³¹ Many of these issues have rarely been considered by traditional reference services when creating finding aids, but could easily be implemented through the use of web technologies.

Furthermore, research on users has not only focused on the implementation of standards for archival description but has also embraced a wider analysis of users'

²⁷ Duff, W. and Stoyanova P., "Transforming the Crazy Quilt: Archival Displays from a User's Point of View" *Archivaria*, No. 45, Spring 1998, 44-79, 44

²⁸ *ibid*, 63

²⁹ *ibid*, 59

³⁰ *ibid*, 51

³¹ *ibid*, 67

needs.³² Internet has instigated archivists to redefine the users of archives. In addition to traditional groups of users such as genealogists, students, academics and public servants there exists a whole of new users, mostly recreational visitors who visit archives web sites accidentally. Craig sees in this trend a potential for archives to be "highly visible properties on the information highway"³³. This implies that archivists need to make archives not only accessible, but also interesting, fascinating, and intelligible to the accidental visitor, creating new legitimacy to a traditional institution now confronted with new challenges. Web sites can help to build new relationships with new types of users (e.g. through virtual exhibitions). By managing both loyal users and unintentional visitors, archives may contribute to the larger goal of education.³⁴ Archivists in the past twenty years have increased their attention to public programming and these challenges must nowadays be considered crucial to archival theory. Surprisingly, the advent of the World Wide Web has in some cases obscured this important archival function.³⁵ "Web efforts have built on the foundation of the historian/humanist as the primary user of archives, while the

³² Users needs "constitute a complex pattern including the desire for a content which is reliable, comprehensible, rich and up-dated, and can be used to satisfy purposes as curiosity, personal and professional growth, and scientific research." In: Minerva Project, Minerva Working Group 5, Handbook for quality in public cultural applications: criteria, guidelines and basic recommendation. Version 1.0 Draft, June 2003, 11

At http://www.minervaeurope.org/publications/qualitycriteria1_0draft.htm (accessed on 22.08.2003)

³³ Craig, B. L., "Old Myths in New Clothes: Expectations of Archives Users" *Archivaria*, No. 45, Spring 1998, 122

³⁴ For further reading on the role of education in the information society considered as a "new frontier" see: European Union's Commissioner Viviane Reding, Reding V., Die Rolle der EG bei der Entwicklung Europa von der Industriegesellschaft zur Wissens-und Informationsgesellschaft. Zentrum für Europäische Integrationsforschung, Discussion Paper, C84, Bonn, 2001, 1-25. For the impact of Internet technology on education and training (e-learning) see: Danbury, E., Sommerer W. Education, Training & Operation. From the Traditional Archivist to the Information Manager. AIIM Industry White Paper on Records, Document and Enterprise Content Management for the Public Sector. 2002

³⁵ Cox, R. J., *Closing an Era. Historical Perspectives on Modern Archives and Records Management*. Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, London, 2000, 128-129

continuing public controversies and debates suggest a broader community consisting of politicians, scholars, war-veterans, journalists and school children."³⁶

Moreover, Angelika Menne-Haritz expresses a critical voice regarding the recent emphasis put on users' needs. She affirms that "as a theoretical paradigm access does not directly concern the service for the users. Yet it places emphasis on the service quality of the repositories. [...] Archives provide information potentials, not the information itself. Access as a paradigm [...] allows everyone who is interested in archives to get access, to read and interpret the records. [It means also] that archivists accept the competence of the users regarding their own research area. [Although] user orientation [...] can identify the level of intensity and completeness of descriptive information, but [it] does not mean that description and presentation of archives are user driven."³⁷

Taking a similar line of argument David Bearman affirmed that potential users recognise archives as a source for records when they are looking for evidence. Thus, archivists have to find ways to benefit from the knowledge users bring to archives by studying users and their specific interactions with archives' information systems. Archivists need to know how queries are built, which are the most frequent questions users pose to databases; they need to know about their research methodologies.³⁸ Establishing online information systems about archival holdings

³⁶ Cox, R. J., Closing an Era. Historical Perspectives on Modern Archives and Records Management. Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, London, 2000, 225. A recent controversy between British historians and archivists has highlighted this problem once again see: Mortimer, I., "Discriminating between readers: the case for a policy flexibility", Journal of the Society of Archivists, Vol. XXIII, No. 1 (April 2002), 59-67; and Burns, A., "Report on The Gerald Aylmer Seminar 2003. What do Historians want from Archives? (and vice-versa). Institute of Historical Research, 21 October, 2003." Royal Historical Society Newsletter, Autumn 2003, 6-7

³⁷ Menne-Haritz, A., "Access – the reformulation of an archival paradigm", Archival Science No. 1, 2001, 57-82

³⁸ See also on the computing possibilities that should be offered to users: Michelson A. and Rothenberg J., "Scholarly Communication and Information Technology: Exploring the Impact of Changes in the Research Process in Archives", The American Archivist, No. 55, 1992

that are accessible and transparent allows users to understand the structure of the archives.³⁹ Hence, emphasis should be placed on the repositories themselves rather than the user, but with the intent to provide clear structures.

As Stefano Vitali has pointed out, search and consultation based on on-line databases allow for queries by words or fields.⁴⁰ Data is retrieved from a database which stays in the background. Users hardly perceive the database's structure and the ways data is organised. This way of recovering information constitutes an opaque filter between the user and the archives: the structure of archives remains invisible and the archival context disappears to the user. Hence, users face data that describe single archival units without a link to higher hierarchical levels. Archivists, by defending archival contexts, need to develop interfaces with search paths for archival description based on the representation of the hierarchy of descriptive levels. These should emphasise the description of records creators. Web interfaces should therefore be able to explain the hierarchical structure of archives, putting retrieved records in their original archival context.⁴¹

In a similar logic, Andrea Rosenbusch points out that "in a web environment where information abounds, restricting queries to the series/fonds level on the one hand greatly reduces the number of hits, but on the other hand might exclude useful

³⁹ Bearman D., *Archival Strategies*, at: http://www.archimuse.com/publishing/archival_strategies/index.html, and Bearman D., *Electronic Evidence, Strategies for Managing Records in Contemporary Organizations*, Archives and Museums Informatics, Pittsburgh, 1994, 220

⁴⁰ Vitali S. and Bondielli D., "Descrizioni archivistiche sul web: la guida on line dell'Archivio di Stato di Firenze", *Centro di Ricerche Informatiche per i Beni Culturali*. X , 2000, 2, 7-27, 15

⁴¹ Goal no. 9 in the Minerva handbook states that "archives' database usually implies scientific respect of its complexity, i.e. the dynamic interconnection between series of documents, their creators, and the research tools which they describe" Minerva Project, Minerva Working Group 5, *Handbook for quality in public cultural applications: criteria, guidelines and basic recommendation*. Version 1.0 Draft, June 2003, 47

results."⁴² While according to ISAD(G), accurate descriptive information should be given at the highest possible level in order to enable users to identify fonds which are relevant to them, archival institutions should make sure that each of the entries (through appropriate tags) provided in web pages are selected by search engines on the Internet. According to Rosenbusch, the multiple entry points would enormously increase accessibility.⁴³

Margaret Hedstrom has shifted the attention of archival debate away from databases, pointing the archival community to the importance of the concept of interfaces⁴⁴ and its possible use in archival practice. She argues that "interface" does not only represent a metaphor for the archivists' role as intermediaries between documents and their readers, but also as a term for structures and tools which place documents in a context and provide an interpretative frame. Interfaces also play a decisive role in information systems, where interfaces are software facilities through which a user interacts with an online computer system.⁴⁵ The computer interface translates signs on which the computer operates and provides digital information by reconstructing it for viewing on a screen with the aim of making it intelligible to users. Although "a computer must represent itself to the user, in a language the user understands"⁴⁶, archivists have paid little attention to the issues of presentation and representation of information. Even though interface design for archives is still in its

⁴² Rosenbusch, A., "Are Our Users Being Served?: A Report on Online Archival Databases", Archives and Manuscripts, Vol. 29, No 1, 2001, 44-61

⁴³ *ibid*, 49-50. This aspect has also been called "granularity" i.e. users are primarily concerned with identifying individual files, information at item level. In Thomas, D., "Automation and the Impact of the Internet on Archives" in: Cyber, Hyper or Resolutely Jurassic? Proceedings of a symposium to celebrate 25 years of professional education in the archives department, Dublin 2-3 October 1998

⁴⁴ Hedstrom M., Interfaces with Time. Keynote Address for the Australian Society of Archivists, August 5, 1998, at: <http://www.sims.monash.edu.au/rcrg/consulting/hedstrom.html>,

⁴⁵ Dollar, C. M., Archival Theory and Information Technologies. The Impact of Information Technologies on Archival Principles and Methods. University of Macerata, 1992, 86

⁴⁶ Johnson S., Interface Culture: How New Technology Transforms the Way we Create and Communicate. San Francisco, Harper Edge, 1997, 14

early stages, Hedstrom underlines that it is important to consider how to conceptualise interfaces in a way presenting rich contextual information about archives and providing users with useful tools for navigation and interpretation. Archival descriptions are the most visible interface between archives and their users, based on traditional archival methods of representation – e.g. inventories, finding aids, indexes – they place archives in a context and provide indication of their content. While archivists agree on a broad intellectual framework for representing archives and structuring description, as demonstrated through accepted descriptive standards like ISAD(G), archivists have neglected the interpretive aspects of description of archival materials. Yet, archival descriptions reflect as much the mindset of the archivist writing the description, and his or her research interests at the time of listing, as they provide information about the records.

Among other types of information, archives are distinctive for the attention paid to context and provenance. Current descriptive standards and practices take these principles into account. However, the critical needs of defining search methods that use deduction rather than term or pattern matching to locate relevant information from provenance and a reevaluation of the terminology used to describe archival records do not as yet represent the basis for any web site development project for archives. Consequently, current methods of defining, structuring and presenting contextual information through an interface remain at a very basic level. The following section illustrates the main elements on which archivists have agreed - and can be considered the minimum common denominator - regarding the design and the implementation of archival web sites.

5.3 Quality criteria for archival web sites

In 1995 David A. Wallace, in one of the first surveys concerning the presence of archives in Internet, noted that "archives choosing to make a presence on the World Wide Web are customizing their sites based upon their own institutional imperatives."⁴⁷ Wallace pointed out that in order to stop archives being institution-based, work needed to be done especially in the area of data interchange standards based on WWW technology. Wallace stressed that, in order to facilitate research, archives should digitise a significant proportion of materials.

Acknowledging their potential place in the Internet, in the 1990s archivists started creating web sites, but without spending much thought on the objectives and aims that archives wanted to reach.⁴⁸ Cox correctly argues that "putting up a web site is essential if an institution is really committed to access to and use of their records", otherwise use of the web seems unreasonable.⁴⁹

In 1998 Michel Hamel, interpreting a general feeling, regretted the lack of studies and guidance on the creation of web sites specific to archives.⁵⁰ In recent years, a number of archivists have analysed existing web sites and have tried to draw-up best practice for the creation of archival web sites⁵¹. At present there are still no

⁴⁷ Wallace, D. A., "Archival Repositories on the World Wide Web: A Preliminary Survey and Analysis" *Archives and Museum Informatics*, Vol. 9, No 2, 1995, 168

⁴⁸ Hamel, M., "Enquête sur l'utilisation du Web pour la diffusion des archives", *Archives*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 1998-1999, 43

⁴⁹ Cox, R. J., *Closing an Era. Historical Perspectives on Modern Archives and Records Management*. Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, London, 2000, 139

⁵⁰ Hamel, M., "Enquête sur l'utilisation du Web pour la diffusion des archives", *Archives*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 1998-1999, 43

⁵¹ "Web site" is a location or gathering or centre for a group of related pages (HTML documents) linked to from that site. All of the pages associated with it branch out from there make up a site. Glossary of Internet terms at <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Glossary.html> (accessed on 10.11.2003)

specific guides for archives available. In the next pages I will discuss a recently published handbook for quality in public cultural web applications trying to establish whether some commonly accepted features can be found across national traditions, experiences and international projects.

In June 2003, Minerva - a network of European Union Ministries created to harmonise activities in the digitisation of cultural content metadata, long term accessibility and preservation⁵² - issued the first draft of a "Handbook for quality in public cultural applications: criteria, guidelines and basic recommendations."⁵³ Although a number of public administrations have recently published comprehensive guides for the development of web sites with the aim of making them citizen-centric and user-friendly (see for example the initiatives of the US federal government)⁵⁴, the Minerva handbook presents interesting elements specific for archives that should be taken into consideration when developing archival web sites. In the context of this dissertation it is also interesting, because it provides reflections based on the experiences and expectations of all fifteen member states of the European Union.

Starting from a very practical approach of looking for efficient definitions, the Minerva handbook states that a "public cultural entity"⁵⁵ achieves its stated mission

⁵² Minerva project at: <http://www.minervaeurope.org/whatis.htm> (accessed on 22.08.2003)

⁵³ Minerva Project (Working Group on identification of user needs, contents and quality criteria for cultural Web applications), Handbook for quality in public cultural applications: criteria, guidelines and basic recommendation. Version 1.0 Draft, June 2003.

At: http://www.minervaeurope.org/publications/qualitycriteria1_0draft.htm (accessed on 22.08.2003)

⁵⁴ "Research-Based Web Design and Usability Guidelines," at: <http://www.usability.gov/guides/index.html> (accessed on 10.11.2003) includes page layout, choosing fonts, writing and organising content. Its main aim is to optimise the user experience by providing usability guidelines and quick fix checklists for designing usable Web sites. See also <http://www.webstyleguide.com/index.html> that presents an online manual on interface design, site design, page design, Web graphics, and Web multimedia and animation. Furthermore at: <http://www.sun.com/980713/webwriting/index.html> (accessed on 10.11.2003) can be found the guidelines for writing for the Web, including navigation and the difference between paper and online presentations. Finally at: <http://www.webcredibility.org/guidelines/index.html> (accessed on 10.11.2003) that provides a 10-point plan for boosting Web credibility.

⁵⁵ A "public cultural entity" is defined as "an institution, organism or project of public interest in all sectors (archives, libraries, archaeological, historical-artistic and scientific, architectural.

and satisfies the needs of users by identifying specific objectives.⁵⁶ To accomplish its aims the cultural entity may use a Web application that must reflect its identity and at the same time guarantee technological standards that raise its quality.⁵⁷

The Minerva handbook clearly defines the quality criteria specific to a Web application in the field of culture. Such criteria should be "based on the interaction among the aims of cultural entities, the users' needs and the characteristics of the Web application."⁵⁸ The quality criteria enumerated in the Minerva handbook correspond to the criteria that archivists have outlined in their studies. The first criterion is the illustration of archives' mission or mandate⁵⁹ - short notices of one or two paragraphs are to be preferred to the whole official texts⁶⁰. This point has been highlighted by many archivists as one of the fundamental requisite of an archival web site.⁶¹ The presentation of archival services together with general information on the institution should allow the user to decide whether to continue the research on the web site or not. Particular attention has also been given to the theoretical definition of archives' missions in connection to Internet. As both Cox and Hamel have pointed out, archivists want to use "the Web to support a rational and realistic archival and

ethnographical and anthropological heritage) whose stated aim is to produce, conserve, safeguard, exploit and spread culture." Minerva Project, Minerva Working Group 5, Handbook for quality in public cultural applications: criteria, guidelines and basic recommendation. Version 1.0 Draft, June 2003, 8

⁵⁶ A "user" is defined as "a professional or not, specialist or not who casually, or with specific aims, occasionally, or systematically uses a Web application. [...] Web applications produced by public entities are aimed at a vast, composite range of users, which escapes the confines of pre-defined lists." Handbook, 10. Furthermore, "Archives' users are not only archivists: they are often university students, teachers, school students, university professors, etc and amateurs interested in history, public and private tour operators, services which undergo paid research for third parties (genealogical, anagraphic)", *ibid*, 48

⁵⁷ *ibid*, 10

⁵⁸ *ibid*, 12

⁵⁹ *ibid*, 45

⁶⁰ Hamel, M., "Enquête sur l'utilisation du Web pour la diffusion des archives", Archives, Vol. 30, No. 2, 1998-1999, 48 and 50

⁶¹ Cox, R. J., Closing an Era. Historical Perspectives on Modern Archives and Records Management. Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, London, 2000, 224-225, Lemay, Y., "Les sites Web des services d'archives universitaires au Canada et la diffusion", Archives, Vol. 30, No. 1, 1998-1999, 3-20

records management mission, not to have the Web become confused as being *the* mission."⁶² The first mission of an archive service towards researchers is to offer a conservation place of collective memory which has to be reflected on its web site. The web site should give the same attention and service to users as readers receive in the reading room.⁶³

The second recommendation illustrated in Minerva refers to policies and strategies. The handbook enumerates measures to achieve the highest on-line visibility and an exact on-line identity, and to adopt descriptive language that ensures that search engines can trace and identify univocally the cultural identity. These measures should also allow adopting a specific Top Level Domain (TLD) such as ".archive".⁶⁴ The name represents an important challenge because it has to identify the archives univocally and needs to be remembered by users. For this reason, Hamel suggests that the archives' name has to be present on each of the secondary pages of the web site.⁶⁵

The third element concerns the communication channels that the web application has to take into account: the possibility of immediate feedback from users can help adjustments in direction and must be part of the project right from the start.

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The importance of feedback has been stressed by many archivists. Archives should make sure that the web site enables visitors at least to contact reference staff

⁶² Cox, R. J., Closing an Era. Historical Perspectives on Modern Archives and Records Management. Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, London, 2000, 150

⁶³ Hamel, M., "Enquête sur l'utilisation du Web pour la diffusion des archives", Archives, Vol. 30, No. 2, 1998-1999, 63

⁶⁴ Minerva Project, Minerva Working Group 5, Handbook for quality in public cultural applications: criteria, guidelines and basic recommendation. Version 1.0 Draft, June 2003, 14

⁶⁵ Hamel, M., "Enquête sur l'utilisation du Web pour la diffusion des archives", Archives, Vol. 30, No. 2, 1998-1999, 46

⁶⁶ Minerva Project, Minerva Working Group 5, Handbook for quality in public cultural applications: criteria, guidelines and basic recommendation. Version 1.0 Draft, June 2003, 17 and 22.

by email⁶⁷. Preferred would be or the possibility of real consultations using focus groups⁶⁸ or implementing more sophisticated processes which allow for the analysis of problems with the aim of future enhancements.⁶⁹

Another fundamental criterion for the evaluation of archival web site concerns search tools. The criteria that the Handbook suggests concern the clarity of characteristics and features of the searched objects, and of the objects that have been retrieved. It should be easy for users to navigate through the set of retrieved objects. A search should allow for the possibility of returning to the last search results at any time.⁷⁰ The web site should offer the possibility to search from any tool, either inventory index or database⁷¹.

A further quality criterion for Minerva consists in the digitisation of archival material. To avoid the situation depicted by Richard J. Cox, where "digitisation merely replaces microforms as a means to preserve records"⁷² a consequence of the archivists' negative attitude towards innovation and technology (defined as "stasis"); Minerva puts emphasis on cooperation and on sharing of "good practices in strategies

⁶⁷ Cox, R. J., Closing an Era. Historical Perspectives on Modern Archives and Records Management. Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, London, 2000, 224-225

⁶⁸ Thomas, D., "Automation and the Impact of the Internet on Archives" in: Cyber, Hyper or Resolutely Jurassic? Proceedings of a symposium to celebrate 25 years of professional education in the archives department, Dublin 2-3 October 1998

⁶⁹ A very good example on the implementation of feedback analysis is represented by the procedure established at the National Archives. It has as main objective to ensure that everybody's suggestions are recorded, appraised and brought to the attention of the decision-making team. The enhancement procedure involves that all enhancement suggestions (received by any means of communication) are recorded and a 'wish list' is discussed by a cross-departmental team. All enhancements are then appraised and scored taking into account the key criteria of user demand, impact of the improved functionality, degree of user-friendliness, relative priority, technical complexity and estimated cost. In Garmendia, J., "User Input in the Development of Online Services: the PRO catalogue" Journal of the Society of Archivists, Vol. 23, No 1, 2002, 52

⁷⁰ Minerva Project, Minerva Working Group 5, Handbook for quality in public cultural applications: criteria, guidelines and basic recommendation. Version 1.0 Draft, June 2003, 32

⁷¹ Hamel, M., "Enquête sur l'utilisation du Web pour la diffusion des archives", Archives, Vol. 30, No. 2, 1998-1999, 51 and Cox, R. J., Closing an Era. Historical Perspectives on Modern Archives and Records Management. Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, London, 2000, 224-225

⁷² Cox, R. J., Closing an Era. Historical Perspectives on Modern Archives and Records Management. Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, London, 2000, 227

and techniques of digitisation"⁷³. Remote access has already become the predominant way in which most users discover archives and interact with their contents. Hence, decisions about which record to digitise for remote access are crucial. However, as Hedstrom as correctly pointed out, digitisation efforts creating superficial digital collections removed from their original provenance and context should be avoided.⁷⁴

Finally, emphasis has been put on standards and regulations in the archival sector. The presentation of regional or national regulations on conservation and access and the standards for archival description, represent a fundamental element in the web site of any archive.⁷⁵

Minerva's quality criteria meet with most archivists' theoretical assumptions concerning the construction and use of web sites. However, there is a fundamental discrepancy between the two visions. The Minerva project and handbook concentrate on contents while archivists point to the predominant place that context should have in the development of web sites.

On the one hand the dynamic nature of material on the Internet, its strong interactive nature and the continuous development of new technological formats render preservation of web contents very complex. The obligation to guarantee substantial integrity of information throughout the course of possible further development on the web application, suggests a separation of the contents from their presentation, thus leaving open the possibility of changing paths and formats without altering the main quality of the data.⁷⁶ Contents criteria are therefore based on

⁷³ Minerva Project, Minerva Working Group 5, Handbook for quality in public cultural applications: criteria, guidelines and basic recommendation. Version 1.0 Draft, June 2003, 45-46

⁷⁴ Hedstrom M., Interfaces with Time. Keynote Address for the Australian Society of Archivists, August 5, 1998, at: <http://www.sims.monash.edu.au/rcrg/consulting/hedstrom.html>

⁷⁵ Minerva Project, Minerva Working Group 5, Handbook for quality in public cultural applications: criteria, guidelines and basic recommendation. Version 1.0 Draft, June 2003, 46, 47

⁷⁶ *ibid*, 16, 18

consistency (similar pieces of information are dealt with in similar ways); completeness (to be applied not only to pieces of contents but also to links); comprehensiveness (the linguistic complexity should be appropriate to the cultural level, experience, and interests of the end users); and conciseness (it should convey the message using the minimum amount of words).⁷⁷ Further criteria for contents concern appropriateness of nesting. Nesting should be intuitive, logical, intrinsically coherent, easy to understand and appropriate for the mental model and the goals of end users.⁷⁸

On the other hand, discussions among archivists pay particular attention to the risk of records and information on the web being separated from their context, raising the possibility of real damage to societal memory.⁷⁹ As Cox reminds, web sites built by archivists ought to convey the mission of enhancing access to records.⁸⁰ Access, an excellent reason to create "homepages" for archives, exposes archives to the risks of decontextualising records. Archivists cannot abandon the value of records in favour of the notion of information.

Furthermore, archivists have stressed that from the users' point of view, authenticity and reliability of some records found on the Web are suspect. Thus, what users seem to need most in the web environment is context to assess trustworthiness of information.⁸¹ Information on the context of the records' creation makes the records' more trustworthy to users. As Thomas underlines, context represents for

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 25

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 28

⁷⁹ Cox, R. J., Closing an Era. Historical Perspectives on Modern Archives and Records Management. Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, London, 2000, 148

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 151

⁸¹ Rosenbusch, A., "Are Our Users Being Served?: A Report on Online Archival Databases", Archives and Manuscripts, Vol. 29, No 1, 2001, 44-61; Cox, R. J., Closing an Era. Historical Perspectives on Modern Archives and Records Management. Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, London, 2000, 141, 145 and Menne-Haritz, A., "Access – the reformulation of an archival paradigm", Archival Science No 1, 2001, 57-82

archivists a traditional value that could help to enhance archivists' good name by continuously revisiting and emphasizing it.⁸² If archivists provide the contextual information of description, users will be able to judge the authenticity, reliability, and weight of records for themselves using the tools, norms, and methodologies of their time.

Finally, both archivists and the authors of the Handbook consider language a critical issue. One of the first steps archivists are asked to make in an Internet environment is to learn the language to be able to write web pages. Should archivists therefore renounce to their "traditional archival arcana."⁸³ On the one hand it is considered necessary to enrich language and to take steps to avoid a flattening of language. This might mean producing a text which is difficult, specialist, bureaucratic, prolix, formal and unsuited to the wide variety of users.⁸⁴ On the other hand, a basic quality criterion for contents is comprehensiveness. The complexity of language used in web sites should be appropriate to the cultural level, experience, and interests of the end users. The incongruity is manifest.

Moreover, since knowledge-enabling technologies allow users to easily navigate through the web site using their natural language⁸⁵ the terminology used to describe archival context and to provide access points is critical in determining what users are able to discover about archives. Therefore, archivists should develop tools

⁸² Thomas, D., "Automation and the Impact of the Internet on Archives" in: Cyber, Hyper or Resolutely Jurassic? Proceedings of a symposium to celebrate 25 years of professional education in the archives department, Dublin 2-3 October 1998

⁸³ *ibid*

⁸⁴ However, the Handbook refers to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 1.0, and stressed the contradiction with its point 14 which reads as follows: "use the clearest and simplest language possible which is suited to the content of a site". Minerva Project, Minerva Working Group 5, Handbook for quality in public cultural applications: criteria, guidelines and basic recommendation. Version 1.0 Draft, June 2003, 16 and 22

At http://www.minervaeurope.org/publications/qualitycriteria1_0draft.htm (accessed on 22.08.2003)

to work with the representational, semantic, and linguistic complexities of archival description for remote searches.⁸⁶ The creation of highly structured web sites that incorporate the archivist's judgement about how to exploit a collection imply that archivists confront the interpretative nature of their work. Archivists should provide and articulate their interpretations rather than obscuring or hiding the interpretative aspects of their work. Rather than assuming that archivists can achieve neutrality and objectivity, archivists ought to enable future users to understand the factors that they considered important in describing records. Such traces of archival activities would provide fundamental information through which users could interpret records.

A last but fundamental issue concerning archival web sites can be summarised in the question that Michel Hamel posed to the archival community: Will archives remain an interface if other institutions arrogate services of unique portals?⁸⁷

Piché enthusiastically illustrated⁸⁸ the possibilities of the Web for the integration of archival functions. The integrated archival web site provides a comprehensive view in a single window: the context of archival records; the agencies that created them, their functions and supplementary information resulting from archival description activities. Such project reveals the linkage possibilities of the World Wide Web, helping to "loose description from its current, narrow, hierarchical

⁸⁵ Holzenkamp, C. (SER Technology), Capture, Indexing & Auto-categorization. Intelligent methods for the acquisition and retrieval of information stored in digital archives. AIIM Industry White Paper on Records, Document and Enterprise Content Management for the Public. 2002

⁸⁶ Hedstrom M., Interfaces with Time. Keynote Address for the Australian Society of Archivists, August 5, 1998, at: <http://www.sims.monash.edu.au/rcrg/consulting/hedstrom.html>

⁸⁷ Hamel, M., "Enquête sur l'utilisation du Web pour la diffusion des archives", Archives, Vol. 30, No. 2, 1998-1999, 65. For a further element of a fruitful discussion in Canada on this issue see also: Canadian Council of Archives, Raising CAIN: Building Canada's Archival Information Network. November 1997 and the Government of Canada Internet Guide at: http://www.canada.gc.ca/programs/main_e.html

⁸⁸ Piché, J-S., "Doing What's Possible with What We've Got: Using the World Wide Web to Integrate Archival Functions", The American Archivist, Vol. 61, Spring 1998, 106-122

structure and expand it to a multi-institutional, multi-hierarchical, horizontally linked description system."⁸⁹

Common web browsers permit users to search across archival holdings, regardless of which repository has physical custody and, in fact, regardless of whether or not the materials reside in archives. Users do not have to know where records exist before they query the finding aids to determine what might be potentially useful for them. This means that on-line systems allow users today, by investing their time and effort, to determine where archival materials are physically held. A significant implication of this transition for archivists will probably be that they will be expected to help users locate materials not only in the holdings of their institutions, but in other archives and institutions.⁹⁰

A second element of the same problem is that common web browsers do not distinguish archival sources from any other myriad types of information available on the World Wide Web. Archivists have to consider important differentiating archival space and archival sources from other types of information – similar to the process in which archivists have been long engaged, regarding the distinct representation of different archival fonds. Without a clear sense of which distinguished features of archival documents should be presented to users, archivists will not be able to design web sites that tell users when they have entered archival terrain.⁹¹

Portals also represent a very critical aspect and a challenge for the development of archival web sites. Although modern public administrations offer rich content on their web sites, it is still a challenge for citizens to navigate directly to information they are looking for. Another even more problematic aspect of the

⁸⁹ *ibid*, 113

⁹⁰ Hedstrom M., *Interfaces with Time*. Keynote Address for the Australian Society of Archivists, August 5, 1998, at: <http://www.sims.monash.edu.au/rcrg/consulting/hedstrom.html>

development of portals is that a portal "is a single integrated point of comprehensive, ubiquitous, and useful access to information (data), applications and people."⁹² A portal must provide aggregation of services and give users a single point of access to multiple heterogeneous data sources, both structured and unstructured – including relational databases, multidimensional databases, document management systems, e-mail systems, web content, web servers – in a transparent manner. Portals imply that from an user perspective access must be transparent and easy. The user should not need to be aware of the exact location or nature of the repositories, all information types should be accessible through a common search and retrieve system. This definition is completely the opposite of what archivists might want from their web sites.⁹³ Moreover, portals that have been deployed in some national administrations and governments have followed concepts of transparency and accountability by means of records management⁹⁴ without taking into account standards and accepted archival practices.

Hence, if the issues of physical location of records, portals, and records management procedures are not prior analysed and discussed in the archival community, the quality criteria for web sites that look for visibility of cultural entities among which archives play a key role, do not have a real relevance.

A large public administration like the European Union provides a good example illustrating some of these issues. As a matter of fact the European Union makes more and more use of the Internet to increase transparency of its processes and

⁹¹ *ibid*

⁹² Jasper, K. (IBM), User Access & Information Protection. AIIM Industry White Paper on Records, Document and Enterprise Content Management for the Public Sector. 2002, 13 and 15

⁹³ Vitali S. and Bondielli D., "Descrizioni archivistiche sul web: la guida on line dell'Archivio di Stato di Firenze", Centro di Ricerche Informatiche per i Beni Culturali. X , 2000, 2, 7-27

outputs.⁹⁵ The Internet has sometimes been portrayed as having the potential of revolutionizing and democratising traditional forms of governance and enabling new forms of democracy. Access to information and participation is usually linked to a discourse of legitimacy.⁹⁶ However, the source of legitimacy of local and national governments is traditionally the ballot. As political scientists have pointed out, elected governments have relatively little to gain from increasing the availability of meaningful information on the Internet and from seeking public input. By contrast, there are other levels of governance which have been since long diagnosed to suffer from a lack of legitimacy. The European Union heads the list. Increased transparency in general and the use of Internet in particular - by placing the whole decision-making process on a web site - is increasingly recommended as a cure to increase legitimacy⁹⁷, and applied in the European Union institutions.

The European Commission has been the European institution that during the last years has suffered mostly under the pressures from public opinion for more openness and transparency of its decision-making procedures. The European Commission is nowadays, among the European institutions, the institution that has tried hardest to reach European citizens. Although the hierarchy in which information about European Commission's documents is presented leaves little space to archives,

⁹⁴ Barbat, P., Comment le "records management" peut faire progresser la transparence administrative. Communication faite à Lundt en 2001.

<http://www.archivesdefrance.culture.gouv.fr/fr/notices/barbat.html> (accessed on 16.04.2003)

⁹⁵ Curtin Deirdre, "Democracy, transparency and political participation: some progress post-Amsterdam." In: Deckmyn, Veerle, and Thompson, Ian (eds.): Openness and transparency in the European Union. Maastricht, European Institute of Public Administration, 1998, 107-120. Curtin, Deirdre and Meijers, Herman, "Access to European Union information: an element of citizenship and a neglected constitutional right." In: Neuwahl Nanette and Rosas Allan (eds.), The European Union and Human Rights. International Studies in Human Rights. Vol. 42 The Hague, Kluwer Law International / Kluwer Academic Publications, 1995, 77-104.

⁹⁶ Lodge J., "Transparency and democratic legitimacy." Journal of Common Market Studies, 1994, Vol. 32 No. 3, 343-368.

⁹⁷ Weiler J.H.H., "Legitimacy and Democracy of Union governance." In: Edwards, Geoffrey and Pijpers, Alfred (eds.), The politics of European Treaty Reform. The 1996 Intergovernmental Conference and beyond. London, Washington, Pinter 1997

they are however present and visible at a first glance as figure 5.1 shows. The first access point is represented by "Green papers" and "White papers", and then registers for access to internal documents, library, audio-visual library, general publications and finally the Archives. The access point for the archives gives already address of the reading room, contact numbers for reference service and an access to the Archiplus, the historical archives database for search.

Image removed due to third party copyright

Figure 5.1 Europa web site – European Commission documents⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Europa web site, European Commission's documents at:
http://europa.eu.int/documents/comm/index_en.htm, (accessed on 29.10.2003)

Image removed due to third party copyright

Figure 5.2 Europa web site – Access to Commission internal documents⁹⁹

Figure 5.2 shows the entry page to access the European Commission's registry of documents. It also gives access again to the Historical Archives of the Commission. It is interesting to note that on the left hand side of the screen that there is also the possibility to access a users Guide for more detailed information on how to use the registry and the possibility to get in contact with other institutions on the same issues.

⁹⁹ Europa web site, Access to documents, Access to commission internal documents at: http://europa.eu.int/secretariat_general/sgc/acc_doc/index_en.htm# (accessed on 29.10.2003)

Image removed due to third party copyright

Figure 5.3 Web page of the Historical archives of the European Commission¹⁰⁰

The archives web site, as figure 5.3 shows, present elements that have been mentioned earlier in this section as some of the quality criteria for archives' web sites and follow the order that has been indicated in Minerva Handbook. In the web page of the Historical Archives, one can find a clear archives' mission statement in the form of an Introduction; the name of the archive is present in their url; the page provides access to finding aids (inventories through the link "files"), search tools (link "search tools"), links to other archival service in the European Union

institutions and to the database ARCHISplus. Beyond that, there is a possibility to contact reference archivists through the link "consultation room".

Contrasting with the European Commission web site, the European Parliament web site, significantly called Citizens' portal, does not lead to any archives entry. The following illustrations demonstrate a portal focussing on direct access to official documents concerning parliamentary committees, inter-parliamentary delegations, sessions, written declarations and parliamentary questions (figure 5.4) and on access to the register of European Parliament documents (figure 5.5).

Image removed due to third party copyright

Figure 5.4 European Parliament portal¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Historical Archives Service of the European Commission at:
http://europa.eu.int/historical_archives/into_en.htm (accessed on 29.10.2003)

¹⁰¹ European Parliament, Citizens' Portal, Home Page at:
http://www.europarl.eu.int/opengovern/default_en.htm (accessed on 29.10.2003)

Despite the efforts made by the European Parliament in recent years to digitise thousands of legislative documents and their innovative approach, the first among other European Union institutions, towards the definition of a multiple provenance of the documents series relating to the legislative process¹⁰²; such efforts however have not lead to the presentation of this digitised heritage on the web. By accessing the European Parliament portal, the only possibility to access information concerning archives is offered by the link to "Access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents – A user's guide"¹⁰³. The archives service of the European Parliament is mentioned only at nearly the end of the guide where finally the user can find the opening hours of the reading room, address and e-mail to contact the reference service.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Tonelotto M., Sabbioni, S., "I progetti di gestione delle informazioni e delle immagini per i documenti legislativi del parlamento europeo." VI European Conference on Archives, held on 01.06.2001, Florence, Italy at: http://www.anai.org/Conferenza%20europea/abstracts/0106_3sess.htm

¹⁰³ European Union, Access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents – A user's guide. Luxembourg, Office for the Official Publications of the European Communities, 2002

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*, 17

Image removed due to third party copyright

Figure 5.5 – Access to the register of European Parliament documents web page

Finally, the Council's web site, is definitively a bad example for the visibility of archives. A mention of archives cannot be found on this portal. Transparency being the Council's main concern (see figure 5.6), this site only offers access to a register of implemented documents (see figure 5.7).

Image removed due to third party copyright

Figure 5.6 Council of the European Union portal¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Council of the European Union web site at: <http://ue.eu.int/ensumm.htm>

Figure 5.7 Council of the European Union – Access to documents, Public register¹⁰⁶

These few examples should encourage archivists to insist on their visibility, especially in international organisations. In general terms these examples might lead to the reflection that archives should be considered cultural institutions and not simple dependencies of governmental services.¹⁰⁷

Archives have been considered as incorporated elements of unique public administration's portals. Are they nevertheless trying to regain their old status of cultural institutions? The Minerva project, through its quality criteria, offers archives a way towards a repossession of their distinctive nature of cultural entities.

Therefore, archivists should use the Web to reach the public and inform them about the nature and significance of records. "Archivists should be striving to be

¹⁰⁶ Council of the European Union, at: <http://register.consilium.eu.int/utfregister/frames/introfsEN.htm> (accessed on 29.10.2003)

¹⁰⁷ Munn, E. and Rioux D., "La référence: une fonction archivistique a part entière" *Archivaria*, No. 45, Spring 1998, 104-111

imaginative¹⁰⁸, resourceful, outspoken, and risk takers."¹⁰⁹ Their web sites need to reflect this and their work ought to explore new and creative mechanisms to deliver records. "The challenge for archival science in the new century is to preserve recorded evidence of governance, not just of governments governing. And the task also now includes taking archives to the people, or encouraging them to come to use archives."¹¹⁰

5.4 Conclusions

Piché has stressed that the recognition of "the difficult linking exercise of contextual description [should] remain in the hands of the archivist who has the knowledge of the records' content and creators' context."¹¹¹ He sees in these elements a new role for the archives "as research and knowledge-based pointers to information resources in other archives, government and the private sector."¹¹² Furthermore, he sees in the presentation of context and content on archives' web sites the representation of the archivists' knowledge in a broader research process in which archivists should engage. The danger that he depicts is mainly the possible exclusion of the archivists' knowledge from the Web product. This risk of exclusion could only

¹⁰⁸ Anthropologist Appadurai explains how imagination has become a form of social practice that underpins modern societies and Internet cultures in: Appadurai, A., Modernity at large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization. University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1996.

¹⁰⁹ Cox, R. J., Closing an Era. Historical Perspectives on Modern Archives and Records Management. Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, London, 2000, 236-237

¹¹⁰ Cook, T. "Archival Science and postmodernism: new formulations for old concepts" Archival Science, 1, 2001, 19

¹¹¹ Piché, J-S., "Doing What's Possible with What We've Got: Using the World Wide Web to Integrate Archival Functions", The American Archivist, Vol. 61, Spring 1998, 106-122, 116

¹¹² *ibid*, 119

be avoided through a clear research agenda concerned with the records' context of creation. Moreover, archivists should be aware that "by creating hyperlinks and connections across functions and structures, archivists can enhance existing archival knowledge about their fonds."¹¹³

As Vitali has pointed out, the publication on the web of archival descriptions sets a methodological problem: the need to guarantee the full acknowledgment of their provenance and reliability. This problem has multiple dimensions, one of them concerning "professional ethics"¹¹⁴ which consists of the need to give a clear indication of the sources used for archival descriptions. Archivists rarely feel intellectually responsible for the finding aids they create. Moreover, archives should be very attentive in ensuring the quality of information put on the web. Ensuring quality does not only imply a great attention to content but also to context. Context is linked to text. The challenge to the traditional document is mainly that the boundaries of the document disappear on Internet. "A text on the web is as an active, living experience. It encourages interaction, it is linked to other texts. Both authorship and content are fluid."¹¹⁵ In the parlance of cyberculture, text is "hyper" and infinitely linkable to other texts. Text is "a structure of possible structures", a document formed of virtual documents.¹¹⁶ Terry Cook asserts that only the context in which these virtual documents are created can give us an understanding of their content.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ *ibid*, 122

¹¹⁴ Vitali S. and Bondielli D. "Descrizioni archivistiche sul web: la guida on line dell'Archivio di Stato di Firenze", *Centro di Ricerche Informatiche per i Beni Culturali*. X, 2000, 2, 7-27, 12-13

¹¹⁵ Lubar, S., "Information Culture and the Archival Record" *The American Archivist*, Vol. 62, Spring 1999, 11, 16-17. On authorship see also Laroche, G., "From Kant to Foucault. What Remains of the Author in Postmodernism", in Lisa Buranen and Alice Roy, eds. *Perspectives on Plagiarism and Intellectual Property in a Postmodern World* (New York, 1999)

¹¹⁶ Brothman, B., "Declining Derrida: Integrity, Tensegrity, and the Preservation of Archives from Deconstruction", *Archivaria*, No. 48, Fall 1999, 64-88, 77

¹¹⁷ Cook, T., "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift", *Archivaria*, No. 43, Spring 1997, 15-63, 42

Also, Umberto Eco stresses that computer technology allows us to create unlimited and infinite hypertext.¹¹⁸ However, admitting that every new technology introduces a new idiom, he questions the 'utopia of hypertext'. Eco argues that the idea of the (moveable) book was a sort of great metaphor for the infinity of reading. A metaphor for deconstruction. But hypertext is not a revolution: one does not need a hypertext in order to have open-ended reading of documents. A text which is physically movable should give the impression of the absolute freedom on the part of the reader; but this is only an impression. A text that can support *many* interpretations is not a text that can support *every* interpretation. Arguing from a semiotic point of view Eco explains that a division should be made between systems and texts.¹¹⁹ A system is the whole of the possibilities given by a natural language. A given text reduces the infinite or indefinite possibilities of a system to produce a closed universe. Hypertext is finite and limited, even though it is open to innumerable and original inquiries. The technical definition of hypertext reveals the same 'finite and limited' aspects of hypertext: "hypertext allows a text area, image, or other object to become a link (as if in a chain) that retrieves another computer file (another Web page, image, sound file, or other document) on the Internet. The range of possibilities is limited by the ability of the computer to retrieve the outside file to view, or to open the incoming file."¹²⁰ Due to its capability to link documents in a variety of ways through hyperlinks, hypertext provides archivists with an interesting concept. Hypertext also provides a context in which many files can interrelated in significant

¹¹⁸ Eco, U. "Internet will not replace books" at: <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/record22/> and Eco, U., "From Internet to Gutenberg" a lecture presented by Umberto Eco at the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America, November 1996. at <http://www.hf.ntmu.no/snv/Finnbo/tekster/Eco/Internet.htm>

¹¹⁹ Eco, U. *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio*. Einaudi, Torino, 1997

¹²⁰ Glossary of Internet terms at

<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Glossary.html>

ways. Furthermore, hypertext is built into HTML and contains embedded hyperlinks that point to other HTML documents and "this could allow for the contextualisation of HTML documents and the further contextualisation of archival documents when these are linked together."¹²¹

The University of British Columbia project has particularly focused on the concept of the "archival bond" in electronic records. Archival bond refers to "the link that every record has with the previous and subsequent one in the conceptual net of relationships among the records produced in the course of the same activity"¹²². Further research needs to be done in this field in order to find out whether hyperlinks in web pages could become the basis for the same kind of theoretical debate. The possible consequences for the archival discipline could lead archivists to a wider use of hypertexts. By making the links between records of different format archivists will ensure intellectual control over records and archival collections. This could represent not only a new way of describing records, but a more conscious responsibility for the use of words and meanings. Semiotics could help explaining users interactions with archival descriptions.

This chapter has not examined Encoded Archival Description and Encoded Archival Context, although these are rightly considered as the descriptive standards for Internet. It would have been difficult to address the complex technological issues concerning the development of these two standards within the limits of a PhD thesis.¹²³ My decision to restrict this project to ISAD(G) and partially to ISAAR(CPF)

¹²¹ Piché, J-S., "Doing What's Possible with What We've Got: Using the World Wide Web to Integrate Archival Functions", The American Archivist, Vol. 61, Spring 1998, 109

¹²² Duranti L., MacNeil H., "The Protection of the Integrity of Electronic Records, Archivaria, 42. Fall 1995, 46-67, 53

¹²³ The following works provide inroads into this topic. Gilliland-Swetland, A.J., "The potential of Markup Languages to Support Descriptive Access to Electronic Records: The EAD Standard" Archivi & Computer, No. 2, 2001, 110-121; Kiesling, K., "EAD as an Archival Descriptive Standard", The

should not suggest that I consider the standards for encoded description, for both archival and contextual records, as unimportant. The results of my investigation indicate that the indissoluble link between archival description and access has been strengthened by the increase in communication. And Internet (and its technology) has indisputably become a synonym for communication.

American Archivist, Vol. 60, Summer 1997, Special Issue on Encoded Archival Description, Part 1 – Context and Theory, 344-354; Pitti, D. V., "Encoded Archival Description: The Development of an Encoding Standard for Archival Finding Aids", The American Archivist, Vol. 60, Summer 1997, 268-283; Fox, M., "Implementing Encoded Archival Description: An Overview of Administrative and Technical Considerations" The American Archivist, Vol. 60, Summer 1997, 330-343; Society of American Archivists, Encoded Archival Description Tag Library, Version 1.0, 1998; Hurley, C., "The Making and the Keeping of Records: (2): The Tyranny of Listing" Archives and Manuscripts, Vol. 28, No. 1, May 2000, 8-23; Kiesling, K., "The American archival community – Why we need EAD" In: Menne-Haritz, A. (ed.) Online-Findbücher, Suchmaschinen und Portale. Beiträge des 6. Archivwissenschaftlichen Kolloquiums der Archivschule Marburg. Marburg, Archive Schule, 2002, 27-35; Dhérent, C., "French experiences with the adaptation of EAD" In: Menne-Haritz, A. (ed.) Online-Findbücher, Suchmaschinen und Portale. Beiträge des 6. Archivwissenschaftlichen Kolloquiums der Archivschule Marburg. Marburg, Archive Schule, 2002, 37-47; Dack, D., "Encoded Archival Description in the National Library of Australia", Archives and Manuscripts, Volume 30, No. 2, 2002, 60-71; Duff, W. and Pitti Daniel V. eds., Encoded Archival Description on the Internet, New York, The Haworth Information Press, 2001.

Development of the Encoded Archival Description DTD at: <http://www.loc.gov/ead/ead/.html>

For EAD implementations at the national Archives levels see the French National Archives at: <http://archivesdefrance.culture.gouv.fr/fr/notices/ead.html> and the Public Record Office at: <http://www.pro.gov.uk/ad2001/ead.htm>

For Encoded Archival Context (EAC) refer to: <http://www.library.yale.edu/eac/torontotenets.htm>.

For EAC Crosswalk, the link to ISAAR(CPF) see: <http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/eac/documentation/ISAAR2EACbeta.html>;

Changes made from EAC alfa to EAC beta version see: http://jefferson.virginia.edu/eac/documentation/EACbeta_changes.html

Finally on the most recent techniques of authority records harvesting refer to the LEAF project:

Kaiser, M., Lieder, H-J., Majcen K., Vallant, H., "New Ways of Sharing and Using Authority Information: The LEAF Project" D-Lib Magazine, November 2003, at:

<http://www.dlib.org/dlib/november03/lieder/11lieder.html>

Chapter Six. Recent developments: the revisions of ISAD(G) and ISAAR(CPF).

The debate among archivists that has taken place in recent years around the second edition of ISAD(G) and around the revision of ISAAR(CPF) is of particular importance. It shows how the adoption of standards is not an end in itself but has been considered by the archival community - by codifying criteria for proper description - as a possibility for strengthening the archival profession with better practices and a renewed attention to archival education. Furthermore, standards have amplified the contacts and interrelations in the wider international archival community and among national archivists and professional associations. Moreover, aspects like their possible application and compatibility or incompatibility with the rules dictated by the national traditions have assumed a dominant role on their acceptability by archivists.¹

All standards, and not only those for archival description, are not only the summing-up of practices but are at the same time innovation for the practice itself. The analysis of the revision processes and their results have been undertaken in order to highlight some of the issues expressed by the national archivists that have influenced the revision of ISAD(G) and could deeply transform ISAAR(CPF) in nature and scope. Finally, the efforts for reinforcement of the links between the two standards will give the overview on their suitable and desirable interoperability.

¹ Cook, M., "The International Description Standards: New Departures", *Archivi & Computer*, No. 3-4, 1996, 259-266, 265

6.1 Revision of ISAD(G)

The development of standards for archival description started in 1989 when the International Council on Archives created an Ad Hoc Commission on descriptive standards. In 1993 the Ad Hoc Commission adopted the first edition of ISAD(G): General International Standard for Archival Description. ISAD(G) underwent a revision process between 1997 and 2000 and at the 2000 International Congress in Seville the second edition was presented and approved.

The *Compendium of comments on ISAD(G) Review*², a working document produced at the 2nd plenary meeting of the Committee on Descriptive Standards held in The Hague from in October 1998, gives first an overview on some countries' broad comments on the general principles. The analysis of the Compendium concentrates on some very specific comments on the points that have brought to major changes between the first and second editions of the standards.

The success that ISAD(G) has had on the international archival community has been confirmed by the great number of documents received by the Committee on descriptive standards. The revision was based on the comments received from 25 countries, noting that some countries sent more than one comment in representation of their National Archives and/or archivists' professional associations. Most of the comments concentrated on the same elements for revision.

First of all, it has to be stressed that archivists dealing with ISAD(G) might have different understandings of standard. The members of the Committee on

² International Council on Archives - Ad Hoc Commission on Descriptive Standards, Compendium of Comments - ISAD(G) Review, Working Document. 2nd Plenary Meeting, The Hague, 19-22 October 1998

Descriptive Standards give an explicit definition of this standard saying that the “ICA standards for archival description are consensus standards and the more users are involved in the development and refinement of them, the more applicable and acceptable the standards become. Ultimately, the users make the standards”.³

The perception of the Committee members during the years that precede the revision, was also important, especially in the remarks added for a better understanding of the aim of a General International Standard. A basic assumption in the revision was to obtain, as far as possible, an international standard in principles and structure, once it had been used in archives in many countries, indicating that it was widely accepted and therefore that stability was desirable. Therefore, the revision reinforces the already enunciated principles and clarifies some points that were not precise in the first edition.

Comments received from many countries pointed out clearly where changes were necessary. The Committee then revised the following main items:

In the introduction it was underlined that ISAD(G) are international standards to be used in accordance to national ones, or to be a basis for the development of national standards, if they do not exist. Throughout the text, there is consistent encouragement to use other existing standards in conjunction with ISAD(G).⁴

A wider approach to the use of ISAD(G) at every stage of the life cycle of records is also better explained. In the Introduction to the second edition of ISAD(G), archival description is defined as a dynamic process i.e. "accumulation of

³ *ibid.*, 3

⁴ International Council on Archives (ICA), ISAD(G):General International Standard Archival Description Second Edition. Adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards. Stockholm, Sweden, 19-22 September 1999. Madrid 2000 - Point I.1, 11

information"⁵. This means that contents of archival description could be subject to change depending on the enrichment of knowledge and on the context and content of the described records. In fact, although the aim of ISAD(G) is widely understood to be that of establishing rules for description of historical archives, this new emphasis on description as a dynamic process implies that ISAD(G) could well be applied to phases in the life cycle of documents, and already in the process of formation of documents.⁶

Some paragraphs from the "Statement of Principles"⁷, one of the first documents the Ad Hoc Commission wrote, are now part of the text. Those principles in ISAD(G) were implicit. Now they are explicitly expressed, namely by referring to *respect des fonds*⁸ and by explaining the hierarchical model of representation of multilevel description in the appendix.⁹

An important decision, also explained in the Introduction¹⁰, was to abandon the development of additional standards for specific archival materials, as has been announced at the beginning of the work several years earlier. ISAD(G) is intended to develop very general rules, which may be applied irrespective of the form or

⁵ The National Archives of Australia have pointed out in their comments that archival description based on the continuum-based approach to recordkeeping is dynamic and flexible. International Council on Archives – Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards, Compendium of Comments – ISAD(G) Review, Working Document. 2nd Plenary Meeting, The Hague, 19-22 October 1998, 22

⁶ International Council on Archives (ICA), ISAD(G):General International Standard Archival Description Second Edition. Adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards. Stockholm, Sweden, 19-22 September 1999. Madrid 2000, I.3, 11. See also on this point: Vitali, S., "La nuova versione di ISAD(G)", Archivi & Computer, No. 1, 2000, 41-44, 42

⁷ International Council on Archives, "Statements of Principles Regarding Archival Description", Archivaria, 34, Summer 1992, 8-16

⁸ *ibid*, Point I.7. This revision has probably to be attributed to the French National Archives. They have in fact pointed out the principle on which ISAD(G) was based i.e. "respect des fonds" was not mentioned in the principles and suggested to incorporate it to the principles. International Council on Archives – Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards, Compendium of Comments – ISAD(G) Review, Working Document. 2nd Plenary Meeting, The Hague, 19-22 October 1998, 24

⁹ *ibid*, point I.8

¹⁰ *ibid*, point I.4

medium¹¹ of the archival material, and once manuals setting out descriptive rules for such materials (like seals, maps, etc.) already exists, the standard may be used in conjunction with them.¹²

Regarding information elements, the revision adds a new area – Description Control, as in ISAAR(CPF), allowing explanation of the context of the description itself, i.e. who, how and on what basis the description was elaborated.¹³ This is an important step towards the interlinking of archives with other cultural institutions because some fonds have associated artefacts or books and it is important to link archival description to non archival material.

The information elements: date of creation¹⁴ and date of accumulation, were often questioned in the comments received¹⁵, and they are now included in a single information element entitled "dates". However, but the dates given should be explained as the date of creation or date of accumulation or even other, according to the local rules and practices. Custodial history is, in the second edition, archival history, in order to embrace not only the different responsibilities for the physical custody of the materials but also to record information on previous arrangement, use and description.¹⁶ Elements from the access and use area were reorganised in order to eliminate incongruence. The elements "legal status" and "copyright" were suppressed

¹¹ The National Archives of Canada supported the concept of altering ISAD(G) to make it a single standard for the description of all archival materials regardless of medium. In: International Council on Archives – Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards, Compendium of Comments – ISAD(G) Review, Working Document. 2nd Plenary Meeting, The Hague, 19-22 October 1998, 13

¹² Italian National Archives have proposed additions for the description of cartographic material and seals. International Council on Archives – Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards, Compendium of Comments – ISAD(G) Review, Working Document. 2nd Plenary Meeting, The Hague, 19-22 October 1998, 75

¹³ International Council on Archives (ICA), ISAD(G):General International Standard Archival Description Second Edition. Adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards. Stockholm, Sweden, 19-22 September 1999. Madrid 2000, Rule 3.7, 43-44

¹⁴ Rule 3.1.3 and 3.2.3 merged into Rule Date(s) 3.1.3

¹⁵ e.g. Comments by Canada National Archives, International Council on Archives – Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards, Compendium of Comments – ISAD(G) Review, Working Document. 2nd Plenary Meeting, The Hague, 19-22 October 1998, 40; France, National Archives, 43

accordingly. The text was reformulated to achieve a better understanding of the use of elements about access, reproduction, existence of copies, location of originals and related materials. Publication note was also a focus for discussion in the comments from the countries¹⁷, and the scope of this element was extended, namely to include bibliography about the unit of description.

The revision was in general aimed at giving clearer and more coherent rules about the use of each element. The number of the examples along the text were increased and also the languages of those examples and explanations about them.

References to ISAAR(CPF), which was written in 1996, are now present in the revised text of ISAD(G), and are very useful when explaining the context of creation¹⁸. In the appendix a new scheme was added representing the most innovative aspect of ISAD(G). This is the relation between the descriptive system of archival units and the separate description of context in authority files, i.e., the relation between description of fonds and descriptions of its creators. In addition, the appendix with examples is larger. Each example is a sample of multilevel description. It seems likely that the present revision will lead to an even wider acceptance of ISAD(G) and use of ISAAR(CPF), which are effectively the innovative key in archival description process, and that many archival institutions are already implementing.

¹⁶ Rule 3.2.4 Custodial History is now Rule 3.2.3 Archival History

¹⁷ International Council on Archives – Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards, Compendium of Comments – ISAD(G) Review, Working Document. 2nd Plenary Meeting, The Hague, 19-22 October 1998, 69

¹⁸ To rule 3.2 a direct reference to ISAAR(CPF) has been added. Comments by French and Canadian National Archives have suggested such additional mention. International Council on Archives – Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards, Compendium of Comments – ISAD(G) Review, Working Document. 2nd Plenary Meeting, The Hague, 19-22 October 1998, 52

Rule 3.2.2 has also been revised and a reference to ISAAR(CPF) added. Comments by French and Canadians, *ibid*, 54-55

Further changes that occurred in the second edition have to be stressed. The glossary of terms and definitions includes in the second edition definitions of terms "document" and "record" that were not present in the first edition. It was a gap in the first edition considering that "document" appeared in several other defined terms as "fonds", series, sub-fonds, provenance and unit of description. The definition of record is very similar to the definition that is present in ISO 15489. In ISO records are defined as "information created, received and maintained as evidence and information by an organization or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business"¹⁹ whereas in ISAD(G) record is defined as "recorded information in any form or medium, created or received and maintained, by an organisation or person in the transaction of business or the conduct of affairs".²⁰ A document is defined in ISO as "recorded information or object which can be treated as a unit"²¹, and in ISAD(G), a document is "recorded information regardless of medium or characteristics."²² Hence, the osmosis and interdependence of the two standards and fields of activity of archivists and records managers is evident.

There was a general agreement on the fact that traditional archival systems have oversimplified the descriptions of creators and that between records and records creators is not only a simple one-to-one relationship. Hence, the best way to document provenance is to have separate but linked descriptions. The definition of provenance was refined between the two editions of ISAD(G): from documents to

¹⁹ International Standard Organisation (ISO), Information and documentation – Records management – Part 1: General (ISO 15489-1), Geneva, 2001, point 3.15, 3

²⁰ International Council on Archives (ICA), ISAD(G):General International Standard Archival Description Second Edition. Adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards. Stockholm, Sweden, 19-22 September 1999. Madrid 2000, 15

²¹ International Standard Organisation (ISO), Information and documentation – Records management – Part 1: General (ISO 15489-1), Geneva, 2001, point 3.10, 3

²² International Council on Archives (ICA), ISAD(G):General International Standard Archival Description Second Edition. Adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards. Stockholm, Sweden, 19-22 September 1999. Madrid 2000, 14

records and from the identification of provenance with the person and/or organisation that created the documents to the concept of provenance as the relationship between the records and the organisations.²³

Another important element that has to be stressed is the definition of the minimum common denominator for archival descriptions exchange. Six descriptive elements have been defined to this scope for being essential for international exchange: reference code, title, creator, dates, extent of the unit of description²⁴, level of description.

Furthermore, in the process of revision of ISAD(G) some points emerged as essential: a clear distinction between description function and the production of finding aids.²⁵ EAD standard is seen nowadays in the archival community as very promising for the interoperability between archives due to its compatibility with ISAD(G).²⁶

²³ International Council on Archives (ICA), ISAD(G):General International Standard Archival Description Adopted by the Ad Hoc Commission on Descriptive Standards. 1st Edition, 21-23 January 1993. (Final ICA approved version), Ottawa, 1994, 4 and International Council on Archives (ICA), ISAD(G):General International Standard Archival Description Adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards. Stockholm, Sweden, 19-22 September 1999. Madrid 2000, 15

²⁴ Rule 3.1.5 has been revised in order to accommodate multiple media. In fact the adjective logical (that presumes an attention to electronic records) has been added to physical for extent and type has been transformed in medium of the unit of description. On this point the comments by Canadian National Archives have been probably influent. International Council on Archives – Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards, Compendium of Comments – ISAD(G) Review, Working Document. 2nd Plenary Meeting, The Hague, 19-22 October 1998, 48

²⁵ Point I.6 on output formats.

²⁶ International Council on Archives – Committee on Descriptive Standards, Report of the Ad Committee for Development of a Standardised Tool for Encoding Archival Finding Aids, January 2002

6.2 Revision of ISAAR(CPF): from harnessing provenance²⁷ to connecting contexts

In one of the first studies on authority control in archives, Elizabeth Black illustrated to her Canadian colleagues the merits of authority records as the basis for information sharing through automated archives.²⁸ On the relevance of authority records for archivists Kathleen Roe pointed out that the basic elements to be considered by archivists should be the consistency of terminology, the provision of contextual information to support the retrieval of archival information, and the representation of the multidimensional and multilevel relationships among entities.²⁹ Just as authority records for personal and corporate names can clarify the multidimensional and multilevel relationships between people and organisations through time, moreover, authority records for forms of material and function can clarify the multidimensional relationships among different functions and particularly between forms of material and functions.³⁰ Most institutions did not understand the concepts behind administrative history records, and were not entirely sure why they were creating such records, how to use them or how to instruct researchers to use them.³¹ Roe suggested that a consensual approach needed to be taken on what archival authority control is and suggested to pursue the enunciation of essential principles of archival access as librarians, when already in 1961 with the "Paris

²⁷ David Bearman explained to the archival community the possibility of harnessing the power of the principle of provenance by relating description of organisations as authority records in their archival information systems. Bearman D., Lytle, R., "The Power of the Principle of Provenance" *Archivaria*, 21, Winter 1985-86, 14-27

²⁸ Black, E., *Authority Control: A Manual for Archivists*, The Bureau of Canadian Archivists, 1991, 6

²⁹ Roe, K., "Enhanced Authority Control: Is It Time?", *Archivaria*, No. 35, Spring 1993, 119-129

³⁰ *ibid*, 122

Principles", they provided the basis for library cataloguing and retrieval of information.³²

In 1995 the ICA Ad hoc Committee on descriptive standards issued the first proposal for a new international standard, "mysteriously entitled"³³ ISAAR(CPF). As Sharon Thibodeau has pointed out the archivists' approaches to the new standard were the most disparate³⁴. Comments ranged from those who thought that the standard should have been the basis of the standardisation effort to others, who argued that it was misleading to mix contextual information with vocabulary control. Finally, most archivists were completely unfamiliar with authority control in archives and would have preferred to continue to include contextual information in the descriptions of their fonds. The Ad Hoc Committee summarised the relevance of authority records for archivists in the three main concepts: archival descriptions must facilitate retrieval of information, information retrieval is enhanced by the use of access points and access points work best when standardised. Therefore the information about records' creators should be maintained as separate authority record and linked to descriptions of records. The Committee emphasised the name of the records creator as an essential access point for retrieval of information about archival materials.

One of the first concepts the Ad hoc Committee defined was that the archival authority record distinguishes itself from a traditional authority record is the inclusion of an "archivally-relevant description of the entity", that ideally

³¹ *ibid.*, 124

³² *ibid.*, 127

³³ Thibodeau, S., "Archival Context as Archival Authority Record: The ISAAR(CPF)", *Archivaria*, No. 40, Fall 1995, 75-85, 75. As Sharon Thibodeau suggests, the origin of the title has probably to be attributed to Hugo Stibbe. The second edition of ISAAR(CPF) will be dedicated to his memory.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 76

incorporates any reference to mandate, function and sphere of activity.³⁵ The information area in the first edition of ISAAR(CPF) represented therefore the archival attempt of definition and contribution to the authority record concept known in libraries as the locus of contextual information.³⁶

In late 2000 the ICA Committee on Descriptive Standards announced the review and revision of the International Standard Archival Authority Record (Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families) ISAAR(CPF). The review criteria for the revision of ISAAR(CPF), elaborated by Kent M. Haworth³⁷ (ICA/CDS project director), were based on the principle that maintaining or revising an existing standard is a basically different process from developing a new standard. Once a standard has been published and promulgated, widely accepted and in many cases applied, such as ISAAR(CPF), it is essential that the stability of the standard is maintained. Therefore, the review process involved the addition of new information elements and changes to wording of the existing text based on the experience of institutions and organisations using already the standard. For the review of ISAAR(CPF) suggestions from the archival community to enhance the clarity of language and different examples used to illustrate the single rules were welcomed. The ICA/CDS expressed its interest in ensuring the compatibility of ISAAR(CPF) with the revised ISAD(G). Therefore, comments on the existing links between the two standards and how those links might be strengthened have been encouraged.

The comments on the 1996 edition of ISAAR(CPF) were received by the Committee during 2001 and considered at plenary meetings of the Committee in

³⁵ *ibid*, 78-79

³⁶ *ibid*, 80

Brussels (October 2001), Madrid (June 2002) and Rio de Janeiro (November 2002). As the result of these deliberations the CDS has prepared an Exposure Draft of the 2nd edition of the standard³⁸. Comments on the Exposure Draft have been received by the CDS by July 2003 and have been considered by the CDS at its plenary meeting in Canberra, Australia in October 2003. The second edition of the standard will be finalized, with a view of publication by the ICA for the ICA Congress in Vienna in August 2004. On the 2nd Edition - Exposure Draft - in October 2003, when the Compendium³⁹ has been drafted, the respondents were 18 (countries and organisations) for a total of 28 separate sets of comments.

The revisions had already started between 2001 and 2002. The Committee on Descriptive Standards in November 2002⁴⁰ had already decided to expand the text for Section 1 "Scope and Purpose" statement to incorporate a range of justifications for the separation of contextual and records information (points 1.3, 1.4, 1.5)⁴¹ and guidance on describing complex hierarchies and administrative changes in the Relationships Area. The Committee decided to broaden paragraph 1.4 to include all entities associated with archives, not just the creators of archives. A point stressed in the introduction to the new edition of ISAAR(CPF) (1.7) is that the model offered by ISAAR(CPF) has remarkable similarities with authority control of authors' names in library catalogues. The main element of difference is the basic role assigned to the

³⁷ International Council on Archives - Committee on Descriptive Standards (ICA/CDS), ISAAR(CPF), Review Announcement, Doc. No. 5, 2000

³⁸ ISAAR(CPF) Exposure Draft at: <http://www.hmc.gov.uk/icacds/eng/standardsISAAR2.htm> (accessed on 26.01.2004)

³⁹ International Council on Archives – Committee on Descriptive Standards (ICA-CDS), Compendium of comments on exposure draft. ISAAR(CPF) Review. Working Document. Plenary, Canberra, 27-30 October 2003

⁴⁰ International Council on Archives – Committee on Descriptive Standards, Report of the meeting of the International Council on Archives – Committee on Descriptive Standards (ICA/CDS), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, November 19-21, 2002. At: <http://www.hmc.gov.uk/icacds/eng/reports.htm>

⁴¹ On this point the agreement of the Australian Society of Archivists and the United Kingdom National Archives, Compendium of the Exposure draft

context of production within the archival description. (1.8) On these elements however some disagreement between national approaches has to be stressed. Where United Kingdom National Archives welcome the changes concerning the separation of archival and bibliographic authority records (rule 1.7) the Society of American Archivists expressed a feeling that the wording of the point 1.8 overemphasises the gulf separating the viewpoints of archivists and bibliographic cataloguers.⁴² The Canadian National Archives have also stressed that a new legislation is currently before Parliament to create a new institution, the Library and Archives of Canada, combining in their entirety the holdings, staff, and other resources of the National Archives of Canada and the National Library of Canada. Canadian archivists strongly believe that many users are more interested in retrieving relevant information resources than in the distinctions between libraries and archives and they disagree for this reason with the assumptions expressed in points 1.7 and 1.8.

The Committee has also implemented changes in Relationships Area (5.3). The changes relate to the issue of the relationships among different entities (5.3.1 to 5.3.4) covering the complex links existing among various creators, prefiguring the sharing of archival authority records in wider environments than the merely institutional one. The National Archives of Canada, the Society of American Archivists, United Kingdom National Archives, Australian Society of Archivists are all in favour of the expanded Relationships Area. This separate area with the addition of an explicit link to descriptions of records gives the standard a much more powerful synthetic structure and is much more open to the structured reciprocal relationships which are essential to documenting records in context. The core elements of a relationship (how, when, and to whom related), are now clearly identified within the

⁴² Society of American Archivists

standard. However, the Relationship Area only applies to “relationships with other corporate bodies, persons and families” it would be recommendable to expand the scope of the area to include relationships to record entities and functional entities.⁴³ NARA suggested that the Committee should consider revisiting the Relationships Area and including elements that could be used to establish relationships involving an authority record and another entity, regardless of whether that entity is another archival authority record or a record describing a resource.

One of the major decisions taken by the Committee was to rename the Related Archival Materials and Other Resources Area as "Linking Archival Authority Records to Archival Materials and Other Resources" and to create a separate chapter (Chapter 6) for these data elements. The decision is based on the agreement that these elements serve as the bridge between archival authority records and ISAD(G) compliant descriptions of archival materials. It was agreed that long lists of related archival materials and other resources are not logically part of the authority record and that it would be advisable to rename chapter 6 as "Relating Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families to Archival Materials and Other Resources". The connection between the entity described and the records created by it must be regarded as primary, and it is expressed in the introduction to Chapter 6: “Archival authority records are created primarily for the purpose of supporting the linking of descriptions of records creators to descriptions of the records they created”⁴⁴. It might be useful to add explicitly that the description must be ISAD(G) compatible. The

⁴³ Submission to the ICA Committee on Descriptive Standards on the Review of ISAAR (CPF), [from] National Archives of Australia, 31 July 2001 (<http://www.archivists.org.au/cds/isaarna.html> accessed 7/06/2003)

Italian National Archives regarded as a positive element the creation of a section devoted to sources variously connected with the creator being described. Particular approval is expressed for including links with information resources outside the archival domain, although providing users with some general information about the type of descriptions and resources they will find if they decide to follow the link indicated is recommended.⁴⁵ However, both the Australian National Archives and the Australian Society of Archivists stressed a confusion and ambiguity in Section 6 as to whether the entity being linked to is a description of an archival resource or the archival resource itself. The records creator usually does not create the archival description, he/she/it is the subject of the archival description. The proposed solution is to say that the link to related resource will usually be to a description of the archival material, to a really substantial archival finding something significant enough that it would be worth describing it as a related resource in its own right.

The Committee agreed to alter the text in Area 5.2 - Description Area - to clarify the distinction between the use of structured and/or unstructured description. The model of separate description of archives and creators, the authority records of creators are meant to include a much more complex set of information than traditional bibliographic authority records. Thus in the description area the elements 5.2.1, 5.2.2, 5.2.3, up to 5.2.9 cover a plurality of forms to organise and present the

⁴⁴ International Council on Archives – Committee on Descriptive Standards, ISAAR(CPF): International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families. Draft Second Edition, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 19-21 November 2002, 28

⁴⁵ As regards the advisability of supplying information on spheres and products extraneous to the archival sector and on the problems this operation involves, attention is drawn to Daniel V. Pitti's paper Creator Description. Encoded Archival Control, presented at the International Conference on Authority Control (Florence 9-11 February 2003) and in particular to his observations on descriptive surrogates: Since the primary function of the information is to make a surrogate intellectual description that provides context for the presence of a traversable link to a related resource, the elements need only accommodate a minimal semantics and structure.

descriptive information: unstructured prose⁴⁶, text structured into fields, links to external electronic resources or an ensemble changeable according to the features of the specific systems of implementation of the three forms together. The diagram that illustrates the use of description elements to link an authority record (standardized via ISAAR) with a description of archival materials (standardized via ISAD) of archival authority records to ISAD(G) was then moved from Appendix to Figure 1 in Chapter 6. However, the relationship between the elements of description in this area and the element of description “Administrative/Biographical history”, in the Context Area of ISAD(G) should be mentioned.

NARA stressed that in the introduction, that the standard specifies that “the dates of existence (5.2.1) must be described as a separate element”. It would be helpful to include a sentence or two that explains the reason for isolation of the date field. NARA also pointed out that the personal names and family names were just neglected. The lack of specific elements for person and family names could create confusion and frustration.

ISAAR is mainly a tool for the authority control of the names of creators of archives, therefore a tool to standardise what in the new edition is defined "authorised form of name". It was agreed that ISAAR should permit the use of multiple authorised forms of name where national systems permit such practice.⁴⁷ (5.1.2). Greater emphasis has therefore be given to this feature as a tool for managing the description of entities, rather than for establishing authority names. While in the

⁴⁶ United Kingdom National Archives stressed that allowing the use of a free text format for the description area is not in the best interests of automated data exchange.

⁴⁷ This revision goes in parallel with the revisions by IFLA. At 67th IFLA Council and General Conference held in August 2001 the GARE (Guidelines for Authority and Reference Entries) have been revised. They amend the principles of Paris in 1961 where the dogma of the unique authority entry was established and admit one or more authorized headings for the same entity. At: www.ifla.org/IV/ifla67/papers/054-110e.pdf

first edition the aim was to manage first of all standardised headings of creators, providing in addition information on their structure and history in the second edition the framework looks completely different. ISAAR now describes entities and institutions which have been creators of archives and form the context of archival material. "Authorised form of name" identifies univocally those entities rather than making unambiguous similar names. Hence, the emphasis is now on the object being described rather than on its name. The Australian National Archives and the Italian National Archives stressed that it is conceptually acceptable for a single entity to have more than one authorized form of name, since entities change their official names all the time without changing their essential character. The present formulation of the standard makes it necessary to choose one authorized form of name out of the various names adopted over the years and classify the rest as other forms of name, thus establishing a hierarchy of importance among the various names. Since the element is regarded as one of those essential for the international exchange of archival authority information importance is attached to the indication of State context and in any case recommends the use of qualifiers as indicated in the standard. However, the relationship with the element of description "Name of Creator", in the "Context area" of ISAD(G), is lacking in the new version of ISAAR(CPF) and should be included in the new version.

Another important revision can be found in the renaming of Section 2 "Referenced Standards" to "related standards and guidelines" and to adopt the suggestions made by the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) on related publications. Both Australian National Archives and United Kingdom

National Archives⁴⁸ welcome this separate list. It was felt that an introductory section explaining the purpose of the list (e.g. an explanation of ISO documents and their relevance to the standards, and why some ISO documents have been included, or omitted) might be helpful.

Some of the elements that have been questioned by some national archives and still need revision are listed hereafter. One of the most important is represented by Section 3, Glossary of terms and definitions. The term 'Entity' should be added and defined as this is used throughout the 2nd edition. It has to be noted that some discrepancies exist between entries in the second edition of ISAD(G) and the revised ISAAR(CPF) with regard to some terms. For example, the definition of "record" in ISAAR(CPF) differs slightly from the one in ISAD(G). Record in ISAAR(CPF) is "a document in any form or medium, created or received and maintained by an organisation or person in the transaction of business or the conduct of affairs"⁴⁹ In ISAD(G) record is defined as "Recorded information in any form or medium, created or received and maintained by an organisation or person in the transaction of business or the conduct of affairs"⁵⁰. Consistency between the two standards must be strengthened by the use of common terminology.

For what concerns rule 5.1.4 "Standardised forms of name according to other rules" both the Australian National Archives and the Canadian National Archives, although requesting a clarification, have recognised that this element could potentially prove useful in a shared, participatory, collective authority file,

⁴⁸ Compendium, 5

⁴⁹ International Council on Archives – Committee on Descriptive Standards, ISAAR(CPF): International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families. Draft Second Edition, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 19-21 November 2002, 9

⁵⁰ International Council on Archives (ICA), ISAD(G):General International Standard Archival Description Second Edition. Adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee on Descriptive Standards. Stockholm, Sweden, 19-22 September 1999. Madrid 2000, 15

established at a national or international level to allow data exchange with other systems. Hence, the inclusion of standardized forms of name according to various national or international standards would allow institutions to select the form of name established in accordance with the standard followed by that institution, country, etc.

Finally, element 5.4.8 "Notes" might be renamed "Archivist's notes", according to the name of the same element in ISAD(G). This element is important because it represents the identification and attribution of responsibility for creating either a descriptive or an authority record. ISAD(G) clearly identifies its rule 3.7.1 as the place to hold that information. Although the ISAAR draft identifies 5.4.8 as a place to put that information, it does so rather weakly. The instructions for the element could stress that the name of the responsible person should be entered there.

From the Compendium on Comments it can be argued that national archives agree on the fact that the second edition of ISAAR(CPF) presents a very clear basic structural division into sections dealing with identification, description, relationships and archival control aspects. The inclusion of a distinct section dealing with the standardised description of relationships between entities is important, and will assist archival institutions wishing to enrich and extend contextual description. The revised introduction includes a helpful explanation of the value of contextual description in making records more accessible and meaningful to users. In the new formulation of the standard, the most significant change with respect to the previous version, is the greater attention devoted to the description of creators rather than the exercise of authority control over their names. Both elements were present in the 1996 version but with a very different degree of specific weight, as is already evident from a reading of the two introductions. The 1996 version stressed firstly the function of an

access key so that the standardized name can perform and secondly the need for separate description of the context elements. The 2003 draft highlights the importance of the description of records creators as the essential activity for archivists and points to the usefulness of supplying a controlled name for access purposes only towards the end. The second version of ISAAR(CPF) is designed primarily to lay down rules for the description of an entity and secondarily to supply criteria for the standardized name.⁵¹

6.3 Conclusions

ISAD(G) enables certain contextual information, notably the Administrative or biographical history element, to be carried as part of either the archival description or the authority record to which it is linked. Although enabling institutions with different resources and systems to provide such information with flexibility, this approach could also create confusion in the use of the two standards. In fact, in October 2003⁵² the ICA Committee on Descriptive Standards observed that ISAAR(CPF) still represents a new concept to many European archivists and that there is still a general lack of awareness and understanding of the standard globally. By recognising this weakness the Committee suggested that it could be remedied by

⁵¹ International Council on Archives – Committee on Descriptive Standards (ICA-CDS), Compendium of comments on exposure draft. ISAAR(CPF) Review. Working Document. Plenary, Canberra, 27-30 October 2003, 8

⁵² International Council on Archives – Committee on Descriptive Standards, Report of the meeting of the International Council on Archives – Committee on Descriptive Standards (ICA/CDS), Canberra, Australia, 27-30 October 2003. At: <http://www.ica.org/biblio.php?pdocid=109> (accessed on 12.11.2003)

strengthening the explanations on the possible and desirable linkages between ISAD(G) and ISAAR(CPF).

ISAAR(CPF) could be considered a real turning point in the development of theoretical concepts of archival description. Although, "provenance is a familiar territory for archivists"⁵³ and most of the national traditions have considered creators of archives at the core of archival description, it has to be stressed that in the past information on the context of creation has ended up in the introductions to finding aids and inventories.⁵⁴ The underlying idea of this practice was that a relationship between fonds and creators was linear, i.e. that there was one creator for each archival fonds. ISAAR(CPF) offers a model for separate and linked descriptions of creators and archives, representing more effectively the complex and multidimensional relationship between fonds and creators. Archival descriptions founded on such a model offer the opportunity to share the descriptions of entities among archival institutions.

The advent of Internet has confirmed that the sharing of information and communication represents an essential element of the archival profession. Authority records, enriched with information on the described entity, are transformed in inventories of bio-bibliographic information. Through the Internet they can become powerful search tools for users.

However, new departures and revisions of the standards for archival description should be considered. Already in the first edition of ISAAR(CPF), in 1995, the Ad Hoc Committee suggested that government functions or business

⁵³ Cook, M., "The International Description Standards: New Departures", *Archivi & Computer*, No. 3-4, 1996, 259-266

⁵⁴ Amministrazione archivistica italiana, at: http://archivi.beniculturali.it/Divisione_V/isaar.html (accessed on 25.08.2003) and Vitali, S., "Authority control of creators and the second edition of

activities leading to records creation and authority records should be integrated into the standards.⁵⁵ The future work of the CDS will probably consist in developing a standard for describing archival functions and functional requirements for archival description, similar to the IFLA functional requirements for bibliographic records.⁵⁶

ISAAR(CPF)", International Conference "Authority Control: definizione ed esperienze internazionali" Firenze 10-12 febbraio 2003, Università di Firenze

⁵⁵ Thibodeau, S., "Archival Context as Archival Authority Record: The ISAAR(CPF)", Archivaria, No. 40, Fall 1995, 75-85, 80

⁵⁶ International Council on Archives – Committee on Descriptive Standards, Report of the meeting of the International Council on Archives – Committee on Descriptive Standards (ICA/CDS), Canberra, Australia, 27-30 October 2003. At: <http://www.ica.org/biblio.php?pdocid=109> (accessed on 12.11.2003)

Chapter Seven. Conclusions and further directions

ISAD(G) has not proved to be a revolutionary standard but it has nevertheless required the adoption of new practices by archivists. Even though comparisons in chapter one of this thesis underlined the fact that ISAD(G) followed similar lines to other pre-existing standards, nevertheless its creation certainly opened the way to discussions on standardisation of archival description not only in international organisations, but in countries and institutions that have not previously employed such standards (e.g. France, Germany and Italy). The research by focussing on definitions of “archival description”, “units of description” “level(s) of archival description”, in chapter one, has also underlined differences in terminology between ISAD(G) and in national archival rules. These differences are reflections of conceptualisation of archival description activities that depend on socio-cultural differences.¹ As Eric Ketelaar points out, archivists should not postpone dealing with such differences but instead bring them to light, describe, investigate and test them. The observation of these differences and similarities can help in solving the difficulties in the implementation of new standards. Hence, standardisation can be considered a tool that archivists must adopt and adapt to their descriptive needs. The adoption of standards for archival description should not be considered an end in itself but as an opportunity to strengthen the archival profession with better practices and to amplify the contacts and interrelations in the international archival community. International contacts and comparative archival science may also help to build universally applicable models of archival structures and functions.

¹ Ketelaar, E., "The difference Best Postponed? Cultures and Comparative Archival Science" *Archivaria*, No. 44, 1997, 142-148

This thesis has focused on the European Union, with its rules, programmes and practices in the field of archives. Experience has shown that the European Union suffered of a lack of co-ordination in the field of archives. However, the research has revealed the possibilities of co-ordination offered by ISAD(G) between the intermediate and historical archives of the European Union's institutions and the desirable use of ISAD(G) as common basis for archival description. The ISAD(G) compliant database at the Historical Archives of the European Communities in Florence illustrates the possibility of producing uniform descriptions and related consistent finding aids for researchers. Moreover, in recent years, the issues of governance, transparency and access to documents have provided a fresh impulse for co-ordination between institutions. The development of new records management procedures and the establishment of coherent filing systems could offer an opportunity for creating and implementing standardised archival description practices at the European Union level.

The lack of studies focussing on the implementation of standards for archival description in database management systems was the incentive for the case-studies on the implementation of ISAD(G), some based on in-house products and others using off-the-shelf systems, analysed in chapter three. Initially, the difficult cohabitation of databases with ISAD(G) had been thought to be connected to the structure of the ISAD(G) standard. However, in contrast to these initial assumptions, the research in chapter three brought to light two main points. The first of these showed the difficulty of implementing in databases the fundamental factors concerning the context of records' creation. Databases hardly ever include the essential contextual information necessary to identify, retrieve, and comprehend archival records. Secondly, Internet as a central element has contributed to the

redefinition of the application of automated systems to archives. Databases' capacity to enter into relationship with other information systems on the web, and the production of digital search tools and finding aids made to be consulted on Internet are the problems for which archivists are still looking for better solutions.

Another fundamental question that needed to be investigated was whether archival description and ISAD(G) really require extensive revision before they could be applied fully to electronic records. This research was undertaken in chapter four. The research suggests that, although some ISAD(G) elements could have been better described to accommodate special requirements for electronic records and to cover more elements of contextual metadata, most of the descriptive needs for electronic records fit somewhere within the standard.² Nevertheless, the application of ISAD(G) to electronic records could be better addressed by the expansion of certain elements, refining of statements of purpose, and provision of numerous and good examples. These issues should be addressed in any third edition of ISAD(G). ISAD(G) multilevel structure suits electronic records because of its formal description requirements: description takes place after records have been arranged, it proceeds from the general to the specific and it is based on essential relation between a series and its creator. The archival community, after having examined descriptive practices specific to electronic records, has been reassured by the fact that the principles governing description at the National archives' level - focussing on context of the information, not on its physical form - actually encourage the equal treatment of paper and electronic records. However, developing strategies to address technical standards that will promote greater connectivity and guarantee permanent access to

² Systems attributes (hardware, operating system, application software) all can be accommodated in physical characteristics element (Rule 3.4.5). Notes on data capture, validation and use, reliability, content validation are all covered by scope and content (Rule 3.3.1) Digital processing and

electronic records is a primary responsibility for archivists. In addition, archivists should identify archival functional requirements for the capture of contextual information about records and should participate in national and international standards programs to ensure the incorporation of functional requirements. Further strategies for describing the relationships among the second generation of electronic records (compound, smart or hypermedia documents) should be developed in order to keep hyperlinks between and within documents.

The challenges to archival descriptive practices posed by the advent of Internet and the development of information society were analysed in chapter five. Without discussing technological implications of this process, my research focused on ways of presenting archival information using the World Wide Web. The Internet represents for archivists a continuation of what they have been doing since they created the first printed catalogues – using current technology to make their holdings available remotely. Archivists now present and represent their holdings to the public through web interfaces. They investigate and discuss the necessity to identify user needs, the contents and quality criteria of archives web sites and web applications. These discussions have emphasised the necessity that archivists must maintain the difficult task of linking contextual and content description as they have unique knowledge of the content of records and creators' context. The presentation of context and content on archives' web sites represents the archivists' knowledge. Moreover, archivists should be aware that by creating hyperlinks across functions and structures they can improve existing knowledge about their fonds. Through provenance archivists can guarantee for the quality of information and the reliability

conversion, transformation, validation, how and when the data was received and transformed can be accommodated within system of arrangement (Rule 3.3.4).

of archival descriptions published on the web. Use of internationally developed standards can help archivists do their work more effectively.

Archival descriptions represent one of the most important aspect of access policies, though ensuring the quality of descriptions on the Internet does not only imply attention to content but also to context. Context is however linked to contents of documents i.e. texts. On the Internet, text becomes hypertext unlimitedly linkable to other texts. The archivists' role should be to point out that text can support many interpretations but cannot support every interpretation. Hypertext is finite and limited by the ability of the computer retrieving the outside file to view it. Due to its capability to link documents in a variety of ways through hyperlinks, hypertext provides archivists with the possibilities of providing context for archival documents. The term "archival bond" when applied to hypertexts, can represent the conceptual link that every record has with the previous and subsequent record. Further research needs to be done in this field in order to analyse the potential employment in archival descriptions of hyperlinks in web pages. By making the necessary links between records of different format, archivists will be able to reinforce their intellectual control over records and archival fonds. This could represent not only a new way of describing, but a more conscious responsibility for the use of words and meanings, where language sciences and semiotics could help explaining user interactions with archival descriptions.

Context also plays an important conceptual role in the construction of ISAD(G). However, the elements for a more comprehensive contextual information have been delegated by the Committee for Descriptive Standard to a more specialised standard: the ISAAR(CPF). ISAAR(CPF) offers a model for separate and linked description of creators and archives, representing more effectively the

multidimensional relationship between fonds and creators. ISAAR(CPF) could be considered a real junction point in the theoretical concepts of archival description among most of the national traditions. The advent of Internet has confirmed that sharing of information - sharing the descriptions of entities among archival institutions - and communication are essential elements for the archival profession. The Internet has also highlighted the central position of authority records as linking tools to various information sources. Functions and business activities, that lead to records creation, should be considered in the revisions of the standards for archival description, with the aim of describing archival functions and functional requirements for archival description.³

The question on which this thesis was essentially built upon was that of studying ISAD(G), to see if it represents synthesis or innovation in archival description traditions. In 1996 Michael Cook affirmed that "it is not at all certain that the profession will be convinced by the arguments and the models put before it; but the debate is an important one, and whatever the outcome, will result in a new understanding of the potential power of new standards of descriptive practice."⁴ Producing standards of any sort is not an easy task, and producing a new standard for archival description by harmonizing rules from different countries has been a particular challenge. The process has not been entirely harmonious. However, once the inevitable disputes about particular rules had been solved, the enunciation of the statement of principles was valuable as a means of identifying the many points of agreement, as well as a constructive resolution of areas of difference. In my opinion,

³ "from physical provenance centred on the origin in a hierarchical structure to a conceptual provenance focused on the function and business processes of the records." International Council on Archives (ICA), *Electronic Records Management: A Literature Review*. Prepared by Alf Erlandsson, Committee on Electronic Records, ICA Study 10, April, 1997, p. 101, Epilogue, Terry Cook in Beijing, 1996

one of the most innovative element introduced by ISAD(G) into archival description practice was the fact that the definition of "archival description" included the word "capturing". The capture of archival description - as emphasised by Bearman - means that archivists should not just create archival descriptions but be able to capture them in electronic records systems.⁵ On the other hand, without devaluing the level of commonality of archival descriptive practice that ISAD(G) has already achieved, international standards should be based upon a set of theoretical principles that support both traditional practices and emerging strategies for the intellectual control of records in dynamic environments. Finally, it can be affirmed that ISAD(G) has proved itself to be a truly international standard. Its great strengths lies in its clarity of language, its flexibility and its ability to be permissive rather than prescriptive. ISAD(G) succeeds as a high level, internationally practical standard, a basis for the design of data exchange presentation tools and a basis for national standards.

In recent years there has been much discussion of the merits of integrating ISAD(G) and ISAAR(CPF). They should not be integrated: one provides the data structure for archival description, the other the data structure for authority records. They should be linked by the addition to ISAD(G) of authorised terms, or access points. The overlap of administrative/biographical history between the two standards is recognised. However, they are performing somewhat different functions and are not readily interchangeable: in ISAD(G) the administrative history is contextual, providing the necessary background to the records being described; in ISAAR(CPF)

⁴ Cook, M., "The International Description Standards: New Departures", *Archivi & Computer*, No. 3-4, 1996, 259-266, 261

⁵ David Bearman refers to the definition of archival description adopted by SAA Ad Hoc Committee on Description Practices "the process of capturing, collating, analysing, and organizing any information that serves to identify, manage, locate, and interpret the holdings of archival institutions and explain the contexts and record systems from which those holdings were selected" pointing out that a shift has occurred from "making" description to capturing it." David Bearman, "Record-keeping systems", *Archivaria* No. 36, Autumn 1993, 24

the administrative history is the life history of the entity as a whole and thus considerably broader.

The results of this investigation have also underlined the importance of EAD and EAC, the standards for encoded description, for both archival and contextual records. The indissoluble link between archival description and access has nowadays been strengthened by the addition of new communication systems, above all by the Internet. Further research needs to be conducted on the conceptual relationships between the four standards for archival description ISAD(G), ISAAR(CPF), EAD and EAC. This thesis has demonstrated the importance of both theoretical and practical research on standards of archival description on an international level. ISAD(G) represents a first step in this direction, and initiatives of this kind will be the way forward for the archival profession.

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