

# COMMUNICATION OF THE CROATIAN STATE ARCHIVES IN ZADAR WITH ITS USERS AND THE REVIEW OF THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF GENEALOGISTS

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## Abstract

Genealogical researches associated with the Croatian archival institutions have not previously been systematically conducted neither at regional nor national level. However, more recent American researches conducted by interviewing genealogists talk about a very important group of users seeking for information from archival material and records. Based on these researches we perceive the most common user obstacles and problems they are facing during the search. Based on the available documentation in Croatian State Archives in Zadar and through questionnaires, the author has obtained the feedback from its users and the information on genealogists' habits (within the population of students and professors of the Croatian city of Zadar, and, with the second questionnaire, within the other natural or legal persons who use records). On the basis of questionnaires and insight into quantitative information on users and material, and with complementary qualitative research approaches (interviews of the American researchers with genealogists), the author came across the deeper insight on customers of the Croatian State Archives in Zadar in general, and on genealogists, in particular. The author thereby raises some key aspects in determining the users' behaviour when searching for information. In fact, the research has established the identity of the users and resulted in findings on: the uses of archives and records, ways in which users make contact with the archives, the research purposes (of genealogists in particular), the sources of reliance of genealogical users prior to visiting the archives and on the assessment which is determined by personal priority for genealogy research (1 for unimportant to 5 for extremely important). The results obtained may be considered by the archivists in Zadar, who might also intensify its own conduct of users' research within its users and to connect the storage of information resources with the needs of the users.

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**Keywords:** Archival material, records, archives, users, genealogists

## **Introduction**

The archives are a social invention. Their sources lie in the need for information and social goods of rulers, governments, enterprises and individuals, who establish and maintain archives. A multitude and the information flow reflect the social importance of archives, institutions in which is preserved the original written heritage, documents and records that witness to past events, religious conflicts, civil wars, political revolutions, imperial rules in certain geographical circumstances. These are original writings, authentic and credible traces of the past, which are directly linked to specific events, resulting from and created because of those events. Their good preservation allows us to gain more direct insight into the course of events, in terms of their running, into more detailed understanding of the role, intentions and achievements of individuals, social groups and institutions who have participated in them. Thanks to potentials of the archival material information resources, we draw most of what we know about our past. Without the value of archival material, neither the past nor the present would be the same. In this context, a special purpose of archival material consists of: protection of collective and individual rights and interests; historical and other scientific researches; the research of family history or local history; ensuring of transparency and accountability of its public function; the rights of citizens to inspect and supervise the work of the institutions; preservation of cultural and historical heritage, identity and values associated with it.

Permanent preservation of archival material is an important function of archives and a prerequisite for providing complete information to their users. According to the definition of the Croatian Law on Archival Material and Archives (Narodne Novine 105/97), Ivanovic finds three conditions that define the concept of archival material: records or documents, their emergence in the provision of certain activity of the legal or natural person and their continuing importance for culture, history and other sciences. According to his conception (Ivanovic, 2010) the continuing importance of archives is consisted in the interest of culture, science and of history, in particular. Each archive has a specific area from which it assumes the archives for permanent preservation, and the whole territory of the country is covered by such archival areas, that is, by the network of archival institutions. Network of public archival institutions consists of the State Archives and 13 regional state archives with nine collection centres. State Archives in Croatia are located in Bjelovar, Dubrovnik, Gospić, Karlovac, Osijek, Pazin, Rijeka, Sisak, Slavonski Brod, Split, Varazdin, Zadar and in

Zagreb. Their main task is to collect, preserve and ensure access to archives - documentation that is created or is being created in the territory of the Republic of Croatia, primarily by the work of state government, counties, cities, municipalities and public institutions and other institutions and individuals who have made a significant mark in public life. In addition to these terminological explanations, where the term archives is used to label the archival institutions, and specified and defined definition of the archival material, the importance of more concise definition of record imposes itself. In fact, under records we imply the emerging archival material. According to Ivanovic, the records imply these documented materials that occurred from and are received during the provision of public or private entities, and which are kept by that person or its successor as a track or as a witness on such activity. This provides us an insight into the functions, policies, decisions, procedures and activities of individuals or their successors (*records*), or is kept because of the information value that it holds (*archives*).

### **General benefits of using archival materials and records and the review of the information needs of genealogists**

Archives confirm the allegations, provide evidence to citizens and define the government's responsibility. Archive greatly contributes to the creation of national identity, national consciousness and national heritage. This same sense of identity is enriched with the business, university or church archives. Meanwhile, many researchers use the information resources of archives on which they base and develop their studies. Some visit the archives for the official reasons, some for personal reasons and interests, and some for educational reasons. Archives are visited by local historians and researchers, foreign researchers, ordinary citizens. The usage includes the examination, copying, publication and presentation of material, production of copies and borrowing and issuance of certified copies or photocopies. The right to use archival material have all users on equal terms. Archival material and records are given to the use for official purposes, for scientific research, for journalistic purposes, for teaching, exhibitions, publication for the exercise or protection of individual rights and for other legitimate purposes.

The uses of the archival material and records are multiple. However, if we look at users of the material dealing with genealogical research, it is necessary to specify the information resources on which these users are creating and developing their studies. Their need for information is very specific. According to more recent American studies, (Duff & Johnson, 2003) these researchers of archives are becoming stronger and more present. American archival literature (Freeman, 2003) explains the users' need for information by the development of democratic processes. Namely, the response to the user's question about their own identity is obtained by

searching through the archives and records. The most common information resources that genealogists need are: registers (public documents evidencing birth, marriage and death, where management of this data is kept for the next generation with the aim of facilitating the research of family history, and creation of the family tree); status animarum (information system designed for parish offices, which helps in parish operating in a way of keeping the parish books, documents and data in electronic way); cadastre (land records for the technical, economic and statistical purposes, making the land registry, the basis for the taxation of income from land, made on the basis of geodetic survey of the land and its classification by the values and culture); city cemeteries; website of the Croatian Genealogical Society "Pavao Ritter Vitezovic" (Hrvatsko rodoslovno drustvo "Pavao Ritter Vitezovic") with related links and offered guidelines for researchers of family history and information about other possible sources, for example, instructions to the sites where the sources according to geographical regions and individual countries are being cited. These are: The Genealogy Home Page, World – Wide Genealogical Resources and WorldGenWeb. Furthermore, there is Genealogie in den Ländern der Österreichisch – Ungarischen Monarchie, with a range of links to pages with genealogical sources for the countries of the Austro - Hungarian monarchy. Finally, there is a virtual headquarters geni.com, which allows easy creation of online family trees and communication among users.

### **The study of the behaviour of archives and records users, genealogy researchers**

A large database of genealogical sources, including the biggest part of the older registers in Croatian territory, is maintained by the Genealogical Society of Utah. Research instructions, with some data on sources, can be found at several sites intended primarily for researchers from abroad: Croatian Heritage Adam Eterovic or The Croatian Genealogy Homepage, Genealogie in den Ländern der Österreichisch – Ungarischen Monarchie which contains links to pages with genealogical sources for the countries of the Austro - Hungarian monarchy. Headquarters geni.com enables simpler creation of online family trees and simpler communication among users (Ibid).

More recent American studies observe three stages of the genealogical research. (Duff & Johnson, 2003) In the first stage we collect the names of family members; in the second stage the detailed information about each family member (basic information about people is to be searched by name, location and by the survey of records in a specified period of time). In the third stage, we no longer create a tree or find information about specific persons, but we study and learn more about the society in which they

lived. Persons engaged in writing a family history must reach this third stage in order to find out what happened with them because people are not isolated but are an integral part of the society in which they live. This stage is very important because it requires a general knowledge of the time periods (immigration changes, important historical events and other information). In the words of genealogists (research conducted through interviews) the most important knowledge is the one about names. The survey provided the insights about the genealogists' research obstacles (when it comes to people of the same name) and ways of their overcoming. The experienced genealogists use dates of records to determine whether it is the person they are investigating and they search city directories and other reference tools. They narrow the search by dates of created documents. Furthermore, the interview has also found the change in the strategy and direction of the search when it comes to the lack of data on persons in a search by the name. Then genealogists go for a certain type of documents created on a certain location at a certain time. This would mean that genealogy research necessarily includes a geographical search. Genealogists frequently use folders and dictionaries of geographic names to get the exact location where a person has lived. Here they discover new obstacles. In fact, today's maps provide the names and boundaries of areas that change over time, while the archival administration generally organizes and categorizes this material under the name that the place had when the file was recorded. So, the capability of genealogist to connect existing names with the former names and vice versa is an art.

From the interviews conducted, we conclude that the skills and research procedures for seeking information developed over time. So, genealogists convert their search for information to the requirements of a particular type of documents. These are, for example, parish records, wills with information about family members and property, writings on the assessment of the land with the address and the value of land, land records with names, dates and proprietary information. Also, it has been found that the professional genealogists, in most cases, are seeking for the same type of information, and with the knowledge of the history and work with the files they come across the land files in a specific archive without relying on the help of archivists, and then, they develop a set of strategies for finding data (due to limitations in research on the same type of information), with the ability of use on the research projects. American genealogists contact archivists when they need certain facts related to the material or records, because the access to certain collections or funds is only possible through an agreement with archivists. Archives are kept in the archive storage and it must be pre-ordered or its availability is limited. An interview has also found that, at the beginning, genealogists usually seek help from archivists because

they do not know the manner of functioning of the archival system. Given that the archives are organized by origin, it presents a significant challenge to genealogy beginners. In the last fifty years, the format and content of search tools has not significantly changed, while the type of users during this period changed significantly. This type of system does not meet the needs of genealogists that require a list of names. For this reason, American genealogists have developed their own search tools; they buy and use the search tools that are produced by their local genealogical society.

Genealogical researches associated with the Croatian archival institutions have not been systematically carried out neither at regional nor national level so far. Knowledge of behaviour when searching for information is going to discover the ways how they function, how they make decisions, when they make decisions to seek the advice of experts and how they behave in dealing with the informational problem. Users' behaviour is influenced by many factors and archive should identify them. These are, for example, sociological factors (age, gender, level of education), culture and perspectives (how people perceive archive), lifestyles and socio-economic categories (have an impact on the way people obtain information, whether independent or they rely on the help of archivists). (Savard, 1988)

In this context, the author conducted a survey of all users of the Croatian State Archives in Zadar in the period between June and December of 2012. The study determined the identity of the user and obtained the knowledge on: the use of archives and records, the ways in which users make contact with the archives, purposes of user research (with special emphasis on genealogists), the reliance on sources of genealogical user prior to visiting the archives and the assessment (1 for unimportant to 5 for extremely important) which determined the personal priority in genealogy research.

### **Study of the genealogical research users on the example of the Croatian State Archives in Zadar**

The main purpose and guiding principle for conducting of this research was getting a general insight into how the Croatian State Archives in Zadar communicates with its customers. It was therefore necessary to provide measurement of the characteristics of a representative sample with respect to that characteristic. A descriptive, that is quasi-experimental descriptive study was defined, the sample, sample type and the location of sampling has been given. The study selected the age groups which the author considered as eligible for obtaining information relevant to the research. Also, we conducted the survey and collected the data that have been processed lately. The procedure consisted of statements that are contained in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to professors of the University of Zadar, because we wanted to find out whether they are using

archives and records in order to facilitate the students the writing of essays, or with the purpose of their own training. The questionnaire was distributed to students to find out whether they are familiar with archival material of records in Zadar State Archives and the way of their use. The questionnaire was distributed to the users of records (other natural or legal persons). The survey process was conducted where the questionnaire was anonymous. The sense of anonymity, which accompanied the respondents during the process of completing, helped in the way that the respondents obtained greater confidence and consequently we obtained honest answers. 20 minutes were reserved for completing of the questionnaire. The communication of the Croatian State Archives in Zadar with all users is conducted via the archive reading room, which makes part of the department for information and documentation activities and the receiving office (operational part) that is a part of the general department. Upon arrival in the reading room, a user fills in the application on a special form on which they fill in the personal data, place of residence, the topic of research, the purpose and use of materials that are required. Completed and signed application form is valid until the end of the research, and if it lasts a year and then the users need to fill in a new one. To order materials, for each research subject the new application is to be completed (reverse). The display of respondents according to the subgroups, the research location (archives reading room or the receiving office, which is the General Department of the State Archives in Zadar) and the gender grounds may be illustrated by the following table:

*Table 1. Numerically quantified respondents, female - male*

	Other natural and legal persons (General Department or Receiving Office)		Students (Reading room)		Professors (Reading room)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
<b>Female</b>	16	32	47	59,5	19	38
<b>Male</b>	34	68	32	40,5	31	62
<b>TOTAL</b>	50	100	79	100	50	100

Explanation: Within respondents in the General Department, who were 50 and are consisted of all the natural persons (except for students and professors) and legal persons we see that there was a predominant number of men (68%), and that there was 16 female persons (32%). As for the students, out of 79 respondents, 32 people were male (40,5%), and 47 (59,5%) female. The professors were again dominated by male (31 persons, 62%), while women were present to a lesser degree (19 persons, or 38%). From the obtained data we can see dispersion and diversity of information, so the author makes a detailed analysis. It has already been discussed on the information resources of records that are kept in the Croatian State Archives

in Zadar and which are issued for the use at the receiving department. We were interested in the information whether the genealogy research users (and other types of research) ever used the records. Data can be illustrated by the following table.

*Table 2. Usage of records*

	<b>Other natural and legal persons</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Professors</b>
<b>Number of persons</b>	31	13	18
<b>TOTAL</b>	62%	26%	36%

Explanation: When asked whether, for the purposes of their research, they have ever used records respondents answered as follows: 62% of respondents used records so far. 26% of them were students and 36% professors. Archival materials in the Croatian State Archives in Zadar are organized by funds and collections. The fund is a total archival material created by the work of an administration, where the origin of the documents is common, while the collection is a total of materials of different origin created artificially by collectors. The collections include: Registers – written in Glagolitic, Latin, Greek, Cyrillic and Bosnian Cyrillic alphabet and in Croatian, Latin, Italian, French and Greek language, where the oldest collections date from 1565; Maps; Plans and plots, Manuscript Collections, Photograph collections, Press collections, Miscellanea; Themed collections and Collections of photocopies from foreign archives.

According to the general inventory from 1955 the entire archival material is divided into nine groups. The already adopted principle that the documents are shared by the governments in Dalmatia and Zadar is being respected (Foretic, 1955). Here we can find the following groups of files; writing of Venetian rule (1409-1797); the writings of the first Austrian rule (1797-1806); writings of French rule (1806-1914); writings of the second Austrian rule (1814-1918); writings from the time of the first Italian occupation of Dalmatia (1918-922); monastery and church records; private family and personal archives; various writings, publications and newspapers.

Furthermore, Croatian archival practice conducted an elaboration of archival material according to the periodization of history in Croatian countries in the study of 1984 *Arhivski fondovi i zbirke u SFRJ. SR Hrvatska* (Lalic, Kolanovic, etc. 1984). It was first applied to the Administration and Justice, within these large periods archival funds are modelled after major administrative changes. Elaboration had multiple levels, where all of the basic funds and collections are classified into three basic groups: A (Archive funds of government bodies, institutions, organizations and other institutions), B (family and personal archive funds) and C (collections). Furthermore, the *Pregled arhivskih fondova i zbirki Republike Hrvatske* from



2006 kept the same elaboration, but instead of groups and subgroups they used a unique system marked in large letters from A to O: A. Administration and public services, B. Justice, C. Military units, institutions and organizations, D. Education, E. Culture, science and information sciences, F. Health, social institutions, G: Economy and banking, H. Political parties, social and political organisations and syndicates, I. Societies and associations, J. Religious institutions, K. Landlords, family and personal archival funds, L. Original archival records, M. Collections of additional copies of archival material, N. Movie records, O. Sound records (Kolanovic, etc. 2006).

Thus, we conclude that the information potential of archival material is multiple. That's why we were interested in the number of respondents who used the archival material. 12 respondents (9,30% in total, of which 11 students and 1 professor) never used the archival material. Users of the archival material may be illustrated by the following table:

*Table 3. Usage of archival material*

	<b>Students</b>	<b>Professors</b>
<b>Number of persons</b>	68	49
<b>TOTAL</b>	86,1%	98%

Explanation: Since the question about previous use of the material refers to a group of students and professors as respondents, it is evident that students used archives to a lesser extent compared to their professors.

Furthermore, we were interested in how users access the archival institution, that is, in which way they make contact with the archives in search of necessary information about archival material or records. The data obtained can be illustrated by the following table.

*Table 4. Ways of seeking help from the archives*

	<b>General Department or Receiving Department</b>		<b>Students – reading room</b>		<b>Professors – reading room</b>	
	<b>No. of persons</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No. of persons</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No. of persons</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Phone</b>	27	54	15	19	22	44
<b>In writing</b>	15	30	7	8,9	10	20
<b>Fax</b>	/	/	1	1,3	/	/
<b>E-mail</b>	7	14	25	31,6	6	12
<b>Orally</b>	1	2	24	30,4	7	14
<b>Not specified</b>	/	/	7	8,9	5	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

Explanation: Among the questions set to surveyed people from the three groups, it can be seen that, at the Receiving Department of Archive,s most people are seeking contact via telephone (27, that is 54%). Students are

looking for information about archival material via modern ways of communication - e-mail (25, that is 31,6%), while their professors, for the same purpose, mostly use a telephone to contact the archives (44%).

Furthermore, the questionnaire wanted to get an insight into the purpose of users' research of archives and records. Respondents were offered a choice of one among many possible uses, and the added option to add some purpose to an empty space. In addition to the above items offered as the purpose of the research questionnaire, there were present others, such as: publication of the article in a scientific or professional journal, the publication of the book, on the use of the material for film, radio, television programs, research for operations; on the use for professional research, on the use for personal interests or hobbies, etc. Here, the author emphasises only the purpose of genealogical research and puts it in relationship with other purposes. The results can be illustrated by the following table:

*Table 5. Purpose of the research (genealogy in opposition to other purposes)*

	General or Receiving Department		Students – reading room		Professors – reading room	
	No. of persons	%	No. of persons	%	No. of persons	%
<b>Purpose: Genealogy</b>	4	8	16	20	2	4
<b>Other purposes</b>	46	92	63	79	48	96
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

Explanation: We can see that only 8% of users of records conducted genealogical research at the Receiving Department and 24,3% at the reading room (20,3% students and only 4% of professors).

The specified users of genealogical research are further sorted according to sources which directed them to a research, that is, the sources that were their reliable support in locating the information. The data obtained in an analysis of the responses can be illustrated by the following table:

*Table 6. Sources of reliance among the people with the intend of genealogical research*

USERS OF GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH	Students (16 respondents)		Professors (2 respondents)	
	No. of persons	%	No. of persons	%
References, citations of issued papers	1	6,3	/	/
Finding aids (Guides, inventories, funds, regests and lists)	1	6,3	2	100
Professors, colleagues	4	25	/	/
Archivists, archival librarian	3	18,8	/	/
Other institutions' librarian	4	25	/	/
Television, newspapers, radio	2	12,5	/	/
Archival publications	1	6,3	/	/

Explanation: According to the results obtained we can see that the greatest number of students selects archivists and archival librarians (18,8%). However, teachers are only opting for archival finding aids (100%).

The author went a step further, and he wanted to get a deeper insight on the conduction of the research process and to determine whether this process is independent, that is via the reference to finding aids (which professors choose as the most reliable source in locating the information) or it is conducted with help of an archivist (which was the students' choice). In this regard, the respondents were given the option of assessment from 1 to 5 (completely unimportant, unimportant, neither important nor important, important, extremely important) of their own priority while conducting research in three situations: when it comes to finding aids; second, when it comes to knowledge of archivists and data of finding aids in synergy or third, when the user relies solely on knowledge of archivists. The data obtained from the research can be shown in the following table:

*Table 7. Personal priority in genealogical research*

	Students (%)			Professors (%)		
	Finding aids	Archivist + finding aids	Archivist	Finding aids	Archivist + finding aids	Archivists
<b>Completely unimportant</b>	26,6	5,1	1,3	18	2	8
<b>Unimportant</b>	24,1	20,3	7,6	12	2	4
<b>Neither important nor important</b>	21,5	22,8	19	34	22	16
<b>Important</b>	8,9	20,3	30,4	20	23	24
<b>Extremely important</b>	3,8	16,5	27,8	6	48	38
<b>Not specified</b>	15	15,2	13,9	10	2	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100

From the obtained results we can notice that the largest number of students selected archivists as a key factor that will help in the research. They evaluated the role of archivists as important and extremely important 58,2%. However, professors evaluate as important and very important the synergy of archivists and finding aids in gaining information when it comes to the importance of priorities when conducting a research (89.9%). Archivists develop finding aids, which are the means which lead researchers to the requested information in or about archives. These are descriptions of materials that allow physical and intellectual control over its content and the finding of documents or information in archives conveying to researchers the contextual information about the archival records, its creators and the context of their creation and the nature and range of material. However, what can

help to archivists in the search is, at best, closed communication, written by an archivist that will read the second archivist, not the user. Writing in the language of administration, the authors of this documentation does not indicate the expressed needs of users, especially of the student population. The authors of the most finding aids assume the excellent knowledge of the chronology and context so that the specialized nature of most searches for information and lack of the practice of many students leads to the need of constant interaction with archivists in the process of information research.

## **Conclusion**

Users of archival material and records are numerous. Study of the users of archival material and records have not previously been systematically conducted neither at regional nor national level. The priority task of each archive is keeping and protection of the archival material (custodial role). However, the emphasis today is transferred from the archival material to its users. From the statistical data about users archive can only get the final numbers, but the importance of the figures do not necessarily coincide with the importance of research, that is, valuable information resources that archives can offer to meet the needs of users. From this arises the necessity of conducting systematic user research, ways of the information search, about the problems the users face while browsing information and the importance of the results in terms of improving future services. Otherwise, the archives missed their cultural and educational mission. The problem is in the lack of a clear connection of the archival sources with the information needs of the user. The lack of research and general ignorance of connecting archives with the need to identify their own history and identity indicate a general lack of awareness of the existence of these sources stored in archival storages.

This paper presents the sources of researches intended for information needs of students, professors and users of the records in the State Archives in Zadar, and of the genealogist in particular. Also, this paper states that the Croatian State Archives in Zadar is an informational institution which has shaped its own funds and collections during its historical development: the collection of official documents, collections of other publications of the diverse provenance, graphic, cartographic and other similar collections. There were also cited the existing funds whose informational resource is multiple. Archival documents testify that the archive, during its history, carefully collected and built databases and data collections with the information on material that can be found in creator, and the information on sources and institutions which he used to complete its own. Based on these data and knowledge of the management and business

systems for carrying out activities, archives have developed a role of mediator between those seeking information and those who have them.

From the above mentioned, a very well organized custodial role can be observed, but the State Archives in Zadar may, by conducting user studies (in this case, genealogists) start thinking how to offer the material from their own storage and how to connect it with users' needs. Without conducting users' research and discovery of users' habits, archives have no clear vision of how to convince the general public on the value of materials which they preserve.

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