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ARCHIVES AND COOPERATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE: CREATING A COMMON CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Abstract

The majority of the existing programs, activities and initiatives in the archival community are focused on the challenges facing archives as a result of the ongoing changes of the society, economy and technology. The implementation of digital technologies and the possibilities they offer emphasize the common characteristics and similar problems of historically different heritage institutions. Therefore, nowadays, there is growing cooperation between libraries, archives, museums, documentation centres and similar institutions in the creation of a common cultural landscape directed towards the users and the community within which they operate, instead of the institutions themselves. Globalization of the contemporary information environment and the international trends of the involvement of culture in all the public life spheres has brought about various projects and strategies dedicated to the accessibility of the cultural heritage institution collections, in both the analogue and digital form. In that sense, archives are interested in international cooperation, linking with various cultural and scientific institutions, presenting the material to the community, making archival records accessible to everybody, exchanging professional knowledge and creating innovative practices and ideas. This paper will give an overview of the contemporary trends and initiatives of cross-institutional cooperation from the legal, institutional and professional perspective and present some of the most significant ongoing archival projects.

Keywords: archives, changes, globalisation, digital technologies, cooperation

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technologies and the information society are generally considered to be the main drivers of cultural, social, economic and other changes in the contemporary environment, with global and local influence on the functions and services of archives services. The administrative, economic, technological, social and legal changes are reflected in the work of archives, as well as the new public expectations and the perception of archives in the society. Those trends and actions are integrated into strategic, programmatic, operational, technical and other documents made by the public administration, professional community and archival institutions, that are, also, implemented in the activities of archives.

Contemporary archives are expected to be a public administration service regarding document management and protection, as well as the providers of new services that should ensure better availability, visibility and presentation of archives and archival sources to the public by using new technologies. The international archival community also emphasizes interaction and cooperation between archives and the public administration in electronic document and e-service management field, as well as in the area of informative and public functions of archives, with the focus on archives as service and content providers thanks to their documents and activities.[1]

INTERNATIONAL ARCHIVAL COMMUNITY

The role of archives from the global perspective, and, more precisely, the way the archival community sees archives nowadays, can be best illustrated from the perspective of the Universal Declaration on Archives developed by the International Council on Archives (ICA) at the beginning of the 21st century, and adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in 2011.

As stated by the ICA, the Declaration:

- "defines archives to include all recorded decisions, actions and memories in all formats including paper, digital, and audiovisual;
- recognises the uniqueness of archives in the way they provide authentic evidence of human actions;
- emphasises the key role of archives in ensuring administrative transparency and democratic accountability;
- supports democracy and human rights, and preserves collective social memory;

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1   Vlatka Lemić. "Archives and society – what archives are, can and should be – Croatia case study". In *Proceeding book with peer review / Symposium Archives in the Service of People – People in the Service of archives in conjuction with 5th International Scientific Conference All About People: Interdisciplinarity, Transnationality and Building Bridges, Maribor, 10.-11.3.2017*, edited by Bojana Filej and Peter Pavel Klasinc (Maribor: Alma Mater Europea – ECM, 2017), 129–130.

- explains the role of archivists as skilled professionals who care for archives and provide access to them;
- highlights the key requirements for good archival management."[2]

The Declaration describes archives as the unique and authentic witnesses of administrative, cultural and intellectual activities and as the reflections of the evolution of society. As such, they have a key role in supporting business efficiency, accountability and transparency, protecting civil rights, establishing the individual and collective memory, understanding the past, and documenting the present to guide future actions. In addition to preserving and using diverse archives and archival record formats, the key role of archivists is to serve their society by caring for and providing access to archival records, as well as by providing and promoting good archival management.[3]

Just as is the case with archives, general trends in the archival community can also be seen in the ICA objectives, programs and activities because of their global impact on the archival profession around the world. The ICA objectives are created through strategic partnerships with UNESCO, IFLA, ICOMOS, the International Committee of the Blue Shield, the World Bank, IRMT and similar organisations and the cooperation with the Open Government Partnership and the Open Knowledge Society initiatives. This results in concrete actions, for example, the UNESCO PERSIST (Platform to Enhance the Sustainability of the Information Society Trans-globally), in which the ICA is involved in the Technology and Content Taskforce activities.[4]

The ICA work on archive professionalization is based on the promotion, organization and coordination of the best practices, the development of standards, guidelines, professional tools and programs in the record and archive management fields and the support of the professional training for archivists, especially through the exchange of information, including various professional and training programmes and the International Archival Development Fund (FIDA). All ICA activities are carried out through geographical (13 regional branches), professional (12 special sections and 11 expert groups) and institutional networks and projects covering all areas of archival policies and practices, as well as professional, academic and educational resources and achievements.[5]

The current ICA strategic objectives are focused on archive repositioning, monitoring and influencing the development and the use of new technologies and

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2 ICA Universal Declaration on Archives, https://www.ica.org/en/universal-declaration-archives

3 Universal Declaration on Archives, https://www.ica.org/sites/default/files/UDA_June%202012_web_EN.pdf

4 Vlatka Lemić, "Vizija i praksa arhiva u 21 stoljeću kroz djelovanje Međunarodnog arhivskog vijeća", Arhivska praksa 20 (2017): 16–19.

5 Lemić, "Vizija i praksa arhiva u 21 stoljeću kroz djelovanje Međunarodnog arhivskog vijeća", 13–18.

building capacities in the records and archives, particularly in the areas of good governance, digital record keeping, preservation and access provision.[6]

EUROPEAN ARCHIVAL LANDSCAPE

Shifting from the global to the European professional landscape also emphasizes the public and social character of archives, which can be traced from the beginning of the 21st century to this day. According to the programming documents of the European Union bodies, contemporary archives should combine the traditional role of memory keepers with the information role and the provision of active service to the public administration. In this way, the archival service would contribute to ensuring further democratization and transparent work of the public administration, and, as part of the public administration, its actions should be based on mutual relationship and cooperation. The basis for strengthening the relationship between archival services and the public administration relies on the promotion of some practical measures, such as the correct application of archival rules and regulations and the presentation of the archival expertise to responsible authorities. In order to accomplish such defined communication, the Executive Summary of the 2005 Report on Archives in the Enlarged EU identified five priority measures for archives:

- preservation and disaster prevention,
- European interdisciplinary co-operation on electronic documents and archives,
- the establishment and maintenance of an internet portal for documents and archives in Europe,
- the promotion of best practices regarding the national and European legislation on archives,
- the prevention archival document theft.[7]

Following these objectives, the work of public archives is coordinated by professional initiatives such as the EBNA and EAG. The EBNA (European Board of National Archivists) is an organisation gathering the National Archivists of the National Archive Services of EU Member States, with regular meetings twice a year headed by the EU-Presidency from 1999. They discuss various strategic issues regarding their profession and services, including the EU Directives and regulations related to archives, such as the use and re-use of the public sector information, data protection, Digital agenda, etc. Since 2006, they are accompanied by the EAG

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6   ICA Strategic Implementation Plan 2014-2018, http://www.ica.org/sites/default/files/ICA%20Strategic%20Implementation%20Plan%202014_2018_Eng.pdf

7   Report on Archives in the Enlarged EU. Increased archival cooperation in Europe: action plan, pp VIII–IX, http://ec.europa.eu/archival-policy/docs/arch/reportarchives_en.pdf.

(European Archives Group), the official EU Commission body composed of the national archive representatives of EU member countries. The EAG mission is to ensure cooperation and coordination on matters related to archives and to advise the Commission on issues affecting archives by monitoring and making reports on the cooperation in the archival sector regarding the activities taken in the priority areas, cooperation with other relevant networks and sectors, and other actual issues and further plans, such as the creation of the European expertise network for European archivists. The EAG participated in various EU programs representing archival perspective in the joint European information infrastructure framework and the implementation of the adopted strategies. Such actions are, for example, making archives in Europe more widely available via the Archives Portal Europe, developing methods for digital preservation in the eARK project, while recent issues of their interest include the role of archive services in the EU digital agenda and the digital single market, e-archives and data protection issues. Archives are also an integral part of national and international cultural, education and social inclusion policies, as well as a part of the heritage and information science sectors.

The European archival landscape retrospective showed that the activities of the professional archival community have been focused on cooperation and networking of archival institutions at all levels for decades (through joint programs and projects, joint initiatives, professional associations and conferences, etc.), the development and implementation of professional standards, the transfer of knowledge and the creation of a common information infrastructure.

The majority of current cooperation initiatives and programmes in the framework of the EBNA, EAG and other professional structures is focused on challenges the archives are faced with in the digital era, especially on studies considering the changing role of the archives in connection with digital record management and e-government, on-site versus online access, the use and re-use of public sector information, digitisation, the expenses and funding and other ongoing issues.[8] Their work and initiatives are outlined in various reports, summaries, documents, policies, studies and joint activities, ranging from the Recommendation R (2000) 13 on the European Policy on the Access to Archives, the DLM Forum, the Brussels Declaration on the Digital Access to Archives and the Archives Portal Europe project.

INTERNATIONAL ARCHIVAL PROJECTS AND PLATFORMS

It is undeniably clear that the influence of the contemporary global ICT and social trends shift the archival community orientation towards the creation of a common information infrastructure, transfer of knowledge, outreach, enhancement of public knowledge on archival sources and encouragement of easy access to ar-

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8   European Archives Group Summary: Archives in Europe Facing the Challenges in Digital Era. 2nd Progres Report to the Council (SWD(2012) 263 final), Brussels, 21.9.2012, pp 4–5.

chives on the international level, while the archival programs are connected with the information society development and the cultural heritage policy in general. A great deal of projects under the "culture and history" framework is focused on activities related to the democratization of access to cultural heritage, social inclusion, information use and re-use, cultural industries and similar topics, including digital platforms, cultural networks and e-services.

Nowadays, thanks to the development of digital technology and everything it offers, almost all archives have websites and online registers of their holdings, and a growing number of them develop and maintain various portals. There are numerous different databases, digitization projects and digital collections, as well as software tools to view and search the data in archives. Their exact number cannot be determined. Today, the access to archival material includes online access to search guides and archival records, which enables interactivity, interoperability and networking, providing connections of various archival holdings, establishing links between the archival and other information sources and most of all – the usability of data.

All of the abovementioned trends and issues can be seen in the major archival projects and the contemporary archival digital platforms across Europe, like APE, Monasterium, Topotheque, etc. They will be mentioned below.

The Archives Portal Europe (APE) is one of the main results of the abovementioned collaboration. It was realised through the APEnet and APEx projects and supported by the European Commission since 2009. By September 2015, more than 30 project partners representing the same number of European countries joined the project. Since October 2015, the Archives Portal Europe has been maintained and developed by the Archives Portal Europe Foundation, as a financially independent platform supported by the national archives of the participating countries. During the six years' work in the APE and APEx project thanks to which the APE has been created, developed and maintained – considerable efforts have been made for the implementation of the common European profile standards of the international XML schemas, the EAD (Encoded Archival Description), EAC-CPF (Encoded Archival Context-Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families), EAG (Encoded Archival Guide) and METS (Metadata Encoding and Transmission Standard) and the creation of tools for the management and publishing of complex data from a wide range of archives across Europe. The Archives Portal Europe also cooperates with Europeana in order to make the archival material searchable within the cross-domain approach of presenting cultural heritage objects online, including the objects from libraries, archives, museums and audio-visual collections, and as Europeana's strategic partner, the APE also supports joint work on the development of a common digital infrastructure for cultural heritage across Europe.[9]

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9   Archives Portal Europe. About us. https://www.archivesportaleurope.net/about-us.

In addition to this archival platform, there are many other international projects involving archives that are also content contributors for the APE and/or Europeana. The CENDARI (Collaborative European Digital Archive Infrastructure) was a research collaboration aimed at integrating digital archives and research resources on the history of Europe for the purpose of creating a platform that could provide scholars with information from physically dispersed historical resources. The four-year-long project led by the Trinity College Dublin brought together 14 institutions across Europe in joint action for merging information. It involved computer scientists and the leading historians on the Medieval era and the period of the First World War. The Mapire[10] portal is a project led by the ARCANUM Company from Budapest, dedicated to the Historical maps of the Habsburg Empire, their digitization and publishing by using modern GIS technologies with the goal of publishing the complete existing collections on the Internet and offline.

When presenting interdisciplinary archival online portals and digitization initiatives, one cannot leave out the activities of the ICARUS, as it is one of the biggest international archival associations. The ICARUS (International Center for Archival Research) is devoted to the creation and maintenance of a common platform for mutual support in expert issues and a project management consortium of various cultural and scientific European institutions. The association was founded in 2007. It is located in Vienna and it aims to promote international and trans-national cooperation between heritage institutions through the provision of professional, organisational and financial support for projects and strategies, particularly those dedicated to the accessibility of archival material in the digital form. Nowadays, the ICARUS network consists of more than 200 members from 35 European countries, the USA and Canada. So far, the ICARUS has initiated and launched various EU projects and it, also, actively participates in various programs and activities aiming to meet the challenges facing archives as a result of the ongoing changes in society, economy and technology. Among other activities, the ICARUS runs 3 large international online portals containing historical sources:

- Monasterium.Net – Europe's virtual charter archive founded more than a decade ago, so far gathering over 650.000 charters from more than 2.000 collections of a few hundred archives[11],
- Matricula – a platform for browsing church registers in the form of digital pictures, with more than 5.000 church registers presented so far[12], and
- Topotheque – a platform presenting the community history material and private collections, that has gathered 150 Topotheque collections from eleven European countries in the last 2 years.[13]

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10   See Mapirea at http://mapire.eu/en/.
11   See Monasterim at http://monasterium.net/mom/home.
12   See Matricula at http://data.matricula-online.eu/en/.
13   See Topotheque at http://www.topothek.at/en/.

The co:op - Community as Opportunity – The Creative Archives' and Users' Network can be used to illustrate the ongoing archival project trends focused on the democratisation of access to historical records and the improvement of user services. This is an international project founded by the Creative Europe Program, comprised of 17 archival and scientific institutions from 12 European countries and more than 60 associate partners. The project aims at strengthening the transnational cooperation between institutions and user communities. A variety of creative, pedagogical and didactic activities planned as part of the four-year schedule (including the Topotheque digital platform, educational material for schools "Adventure in Archives", video materials presenting the experience of using archives, historical workshops, etc.) are dedicated to the promotion of the activities of archives to the wider community, the collaboration of people and archives as well as to facilitating access to records using all the options the digital age can offer. In addition, the project also deals with training the professional community on technical tools, copyright and licensing in the digital domain and with other issues important for working in a digital environment, in cooperation with academic institutions. [14]

CONCLUSION

This paper aims at providing the readers with some information on the current archival landscape and putting some light on the activities of archives, especially those including the cooperation with the education, academic, cultural heritage and IT sector and various user groups. Those areas of archival work are nowadays considered to be the regular activities, since modern archives are expected to serve the contemporary information society and contribute to the economic growth, democratic accountability and cultural heritage, primarily by enabling permanent access and use of archival records and data.

From the perspective of archives, the new environment and partnerships require flexibility and the application of innovative practices, new capacities and professional skills, and, above all, experts ready to "come out of the box" and shape archives into "the cornerstone of the information society", which is a vision of the International Council on Archives. This work should be interdisciplinary and transnational in its nature. It should be based on the principles of complementarity & synergy, driven by a culture of openness, and oriented toward serving the humans and society.

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14 Vlatka Lemić," Mogućnosti suradnje arhiva i zajednice – co:op project", Glasnik arhiva i Arhivističkog udruženja BiH 46 (2016): 100–104.

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