

WHY CATALONIA'S ARCHIVAL SCIENTISTS NEED AN INTERNATIONAL APPROACH

The ICA's Annual Congress was held in Brussels on 23 and 24 November. This year's event was entitled 'Accountability, Transparency, and Access to Information'. With this title, the aim of the congress was clearly to arrive at an unequivocal declaration of intent regarding the profession's direct influence in this area. This is no mere fad. Archival scientists have always claimed and played a key role in ensuring access to information. Access to information leads to transparency, which means organisations are proactively committed to concealing nothing and to clearly demonstrating the reasoning behind, among other things, their decision-making processes, how they organise their activities, and how they remunerate their employees. Once this commitment has been made, accountability can be fairly and properly applied. The problem identified at the Congress, however, is that, while it was easy to demonstrate who controlled access to information held in analogue documents, in dynamic or electronic systems, the power to grant access is transferred to other disciplines, especially those related to ICT and the Law, so that the role of the archivist and record manager is now regarded as an auxiliary one, rather than a fundamental part of the decision-making process. This issue, which we saw clearly at the Congress, is also reflected in the views expressed by some of those members who were most actively involved in the development of the new Catalan Law on Transparency, Access to Information and Good Governance. Auxiliary, discretionary, optional: our role in managing access to information is being marginalised. The AAC is working actively to ensure that archivists do not stay on the sidelines but are directly involved in defining strategies and decision-making concerning access to information. Some of the bodies involved have welcomed this initiative. The managers of the Catalan Archive System (SAC), however, seem to take a narrower view of the problem, considering that strengthening the role of archivists with regard to access to information would give us responsibilities which the Catalan Ministry of Culture may not be able to put into practice effectively. It is a shame if the managers of the system fail to take an active approach. It is a shame because this lack of a bold vision, which is leading to the marginalisation of our role, is not due to changing technologies but to poor political management of the issue and to genuine ignorance about what we do. We believe there is a real risk that the National Document Access, Assessment and Selection Committee (CNAATD) will lose its meaning, as responsibility for 'Access' is transferred to other bodies. How can documents be assessed or chosen with no control over who can access them? A policy on access is a prerequisite for assessment. How do we separate the two issues then? If current events lead to the CNAATD losing its powers, this will be for political not technical reasons; we consider this to be simply negligent.

The Congress also identified an urgent need to develop initiatives related to other information professionals which will help to encourage interprofessional cooperation, break down self-imposed barriers and limits, and put an end to internal squabbling. Archivists' voices need to be heard at other sectors' congress in order to develop real points of contact where useful interprofessional discussions can take place. We need to talk with information specialists, but also with lawyers, politicians and journalists. All of them are professionals who are looking for ways to solve today's problems, for the benefit of today's society, with a view to promoting action on a broad front, so that democracy can be enhanced in our countries. A new approach is also called for, so that we can address

society as a whole in our own right, sending out a clear message. This is necessary if we wish to go on explaining the value of managing, preserving and reusing the documents in our archives. And with regard to all these aims there is an overriding need for action to increase the political will to take appropriate measures. Why is it that there is international agreement throughout our profession about the absence of political will to correctly define the function of archives? We have already referred to negligence but now the time has come for action. The problem affects not only us but the whole of our profession.

We have had two intensive days of plenary sessions and parallel meetings dealing with many issues with which we are familiar in Catalonia, showing that our concerns are shared with many professionals around the world. The problems arising in international archival science have been studied by our members, who have provided solutions of great value. This situation may still be surprising for many of us, but there is no doubt that it marks us as a professional body where serious debate is taking place and where there is no reason why the solutions we are seeking should not be internationally exportable. One of the Catalan initiatives that has aroused most interest is the Association's strategy to publicise the Universal Declaration on Archives (UDA) and promote support for it. This campaign was presented to both the Steering Committee and the Annual Meeting of the SPA, with a request that it be used as an example to be presented to other professional associations as part of the advocacy programme being prepared for this section of the ICA for 2014. The document being prepared will be presented in Girona next October. It is important to note that no-one else in any part of the world is doing what we are doing here.

None of the other countries which participate in the ICA have managed to get their legislative chambers to sign up to the UDA. The Parliament of Catalonia was the first legislative chamber in the world to sign the Declaration, one of many initiatives designed to help make our society more democratic by improving access to information and encouraging institutional transparency. As a country we are progressing slowly but steadily. This includes the way in which we manage our archives. We believe in networks. A well-linked Catalan archive network must be a public structure in itself. The Parliament of Catalonia signed the Declaration last July, since then sixteen more public institutions have signed it while many more are preparing to do so. Small, medium and large. Provincial and municipal councils, in the main. For many of these, it is not clear whether an internal archive service pushed for the institution to sign the Declaration or whether it was a decision of its governing bodies. We plan to pursue a strategy, however, which will allow both public and private institutions to sign up to the Declaration. This should even extend to individuals, who for the last two years have been able to join the electronic register which is managed directly by the ICA. During this period almost 3,000 individual professionals have registered. The figures can be consulted online. But there is one figure which does not appear: the number of Catalan archivists or professionals working with Catalan archives who have registered. Of the 126 Spanish individuals registered, 77 are Catalan archivists or other professionals, 61% of the total. This represents a level of support in Catalonia of 2.59% compared with 1.6% for Spain as a whole. Catalonia also fares favourably compared with other countries, with more individuals registering than in Switzerland, Ireland, Belgium, Poland, Austria, Sweden, Norway, and even China or New

Zealand. Although the numbers are modest, lagging far behind France's 460, Italy's 432 or Canada's 337, the levels of confidence shown in these initiatives in Catalonia are not down to mere chance. We are professionally engaged, with appropriate qualifications and training, and an international tradition as members of the ICA and its Section of Professional Associations since 1991. We are critical and perfectionist in terms of our goals, we are keen to improve, we are not lacking in talent, and archival science is a mature discipline here, with the capacity to develop theoretical and practical solutions at an international level. Furthermore, the Catalan Association has far more members than any other Spanish association. Even so, we are timid.

By timid, we mean that we are reticent about bringing our knowledge to the international arena. We are reticent about letting the world know what we are capable of producing and about attracting the opportunities the world has to offer to Catalonia. Internationalise! Lately, this word has been bandied about by many people and public and private institutions. It is a word that this profession must also start to use. The fact that Catalonia's most important archiving bodies (the National Archive of Catalonia and the Sub-Directorate General for Archives and Museums) were not represented at the Congress is a depressing indication of the lack of leadership we are currently facing. It is not a question of money, but a question of understanding the importance of international representation. We are all working hard to expand international horizons, seeking solutions abroad that we cannot find at home. The AAC has done and will continue to do this, as has, commendably, Girona City Council. Catalonia's most important archiving bodies have, however, failed in this respect. The main City and Provincial Councils, must also be included in this list of absentees. There is no vision. We are not geared to exporting or importing. Everything is done on an individualistic, opportunistic, inward-looking basis. It must be made clear that looking outward would bring opportunities and resources for the projects being implemented in Catalonia. For example: how many Catalan institutions have presented project to the ICA's Programme Commission (PCOM) which assesses and finances strategic archival science projects?

In 2014 we have an opportunity to demonstrate our potential close to home, as the ICA will be holding its Annual Congress in October in Girona. We must not miss this opportunity. We will give talks, we will make our presence felt, we will explain our vision of archival science, we will demonstrate our know-how to the delegates from abroad. We must make it clear once and for all that our talent is exportable, that our knowledge can open people's eyes all around the world and, at the same time, we must open our doors so we can both export and import innovation and new ideas. It goes without saying, and here we must be realistic, that few people nowadays can afford the prices we have to pay to attend these congress. Institutions do not have the resources to finance this vital training, so this is primarily an individual decision. We would ask the organisers of the Girona Congress to make every effort to offer affordable rates for professionals and also for students. We were sad to see so few students mingling with the professionals at the Brussels Congress. This will have to change if we want the ICA, and archival scientists internationally, to recover their fighting spirit in the face of restrictive or negligent policies or where there is a total lack of policies on archives and document management. Girona is our opportunity. It has our full support.