

PRESERVATION: THE KEY TO THE IX JORNADES D'ARXIVÍSTICA DE CATALUNYA (IX SYMPOSIUM OF RECORDKEEPING OF CATALONIA)

Members of our profession came together on 8, 9 and 10 May in the town of Roses, which played host to the IX Jornades d'Arxivística de Catalunya (IX Symposium of Recordkeeping of Catalonia). This year's theme was *Del continent al document: estratègies per a una política de preservació i conservació* (From Continent to Document: Strategies for a Preservation and Conservation Policy). It initially seemed that this theme was not innovative enough. Many archivists believe they have the basic knowledge on the temperature, humidity and infrastructure quality conditions necessary for the centres where we work and the proper conservation of the documents kept there.

However, from the first day it was clear that the symposium's real subject was not conservation, but rather preservation. All attendees began by asking a series of questions that are often not raised: how many of us have established a long-term preservation policy as an objective? Can we provide our superiors with quality information when they ask us for our opinion prior to building a new archive or new deposit, or buying new facilities? Have we developed clear standards on the procedure to follow immediately after a disaster?

Over the three days, different experts on these matters, including architects, curators, restorers and archivists, presented policies and strategies to answer these questions.

What is required initially is a legal framework that establishes basic requirements of construction, archive facilities and document preservation. One example of such regulation is the BS 5454. This is a series of recommendations, published by the British Standards Institution (BSI), on the storage and display of archive documents. Preparation of the standard would necessarily require the involvement of architects, archivists and curators. Architects have a knowledge of structures and materials whereas archivists and curators know what is needed to do their work properly and to satisfy the needs of archive users. Clearly, once the regulatory framework has been approved, the rules will have to be applied by inspecting the centres and sites where Catalan archives are kept.

The next aspect in a preservation policy is to guarantee access to the information contained in the documents by means of accurate reproduction policies. Good reproduction means that the original documents can be conserved and intellectual access to the information may be guaranteed.

However, where are the resources to fund all these preservation policies to be found? It also became clear at the symposium that seeking what is "best" may be detrimental to what is "good" and, therefore, the establishment of realistic

objectives is needed. Gradually, minimum criteria should be improved but only on the condition that this can be done using natural, not necessarily costly solutions that involve civil society in obtaining resources.

The last day of the symposium dealt with “archive disasters” and how they can be resolved. The comical play that was staged on the Saturday clearly showed how all professionals involved in the construction of sites and in document management often have a very partial view of the preservation policies that should be followed.

Both the play and the Symposium concluded that it is man, whether architect, researcher, restorer or archivist, who is the most destructive element. However, we should be optimistic and positive and remember that it is also man who holds the key to prevent documents from being destroyed. That key is dialogue and collaboration among professionals to guarantee, jointly, the preservation of our extensive and valuable documentary heritage.