

12th Congress of Catalan Archivists Conclusions and news

During the three days of the 12th Congress of Catalan Archivists, held in Tarragona, a number of different approaches and viewpoints regarding the question of access to archives were put forward by the speakers and debated by those in attendance.

The subjects covered include archive access from the perspective of free access to documentation and the information it contains, whatever its format; access as an activity centred around a specific location; archive services, as it involves professional archivists and records managers, and also from the point of view of users; and access to documentation and information as a characteristic right of democratic states and societies.

We reached the conclusion that in recent years a substantial amount of work has been done, but there is still much left to do if we are to achieve free access and implement the principle of administrative transparency.

There are numerous regulations, but they are not coordinated, and usually this situation creates confusion, both for archivists and for citizens. Therefore, clear procedures must be drafted: internal procedures and protocols within government agencies, key instruments that will serve as rules for the correct operation of archive services while ensuring compliance with the right of users to access information with as few restrictions as possible.

Secondly, archive services must have sufficient personnel and financial resources to determine what information there is and to communicate it: publish information about the documentation held in archives. This will ensure compliance with administrative transparency, which is a principle keenly supported by the public, and also with the public service function that we offer as civil servants.

We have also detected that we professional archivists and records managers must “pull our socks up” if we are to tackle the multitude of aspects that correspond to us with regard to the application of Law 11/2007 of 22 June on electronic access of citizens to public services and Decree 56/2009 of 7 April on the stimulation and development of electronic media within the administration of the Government of Catalonia. It is clear that our profession needs constant training in order to assume the challenges of electronic administration.

In this respect, and as we have already stated above, it is necessary to request the financial, organisational and human resources required to develop and apply these regulations and to install records management systems in the institutions in which we work.

Finally, with regard to the drafting of a law to access documentation and public information in Catalonia, we believe that many of the questions raised have been resolved: the end of arbitrary restrictions, with clarity and balance between free access and data protection, between wanting to know and the rights to privacy and private life. As one of the speakers, Chris Adam, an archivist from New Zealand, said, “As archivists we are increasingly overwhelmed by the paradox of having to balance two contradictory ideas: the desire for knowledge and the desire for privacy”.

Furthermore, as the publishers of the AAC Bulletin, we would like to thank all the people and institutions for their help in making this Congress a success in terms of

participation and for the professionalism of the speakers and participants during the roundtable discussions.

Additionally, we would like to disseminate some proposals put forward by the new board elected during the extraordinary assembly held during the congress in Tarragona.

Some of the proposals represent the continuation of previous projects: the publication of the *Archival Science and Records Management Manual*, the InterPARES working group, the working group on professional responsibilities, continuous training, the Archive and Local Television Observatory, etc. There are also some new proposals. We would like to work on disseminating information on the AAC in areas that require more emphasis, such as a new, more active and participative AAC website and a leaflet on the AAC and its services, to act as an instrument to inform private companies and institutions about our work.

Finally, the new Board of Directors would like to start a process of reflection concerning the matter of changing the name of the AAC and some of its objectives to include the "records management" function. It is a question of adapting the articles of association and the name of the association to the current situation of our profession. We will keep you informed on this matter.