

Butlletí 104

Informatiu de l'Associació d'Arxivers-Gestors de Documents de Catalunya

The UDA, a declaration of principles

In a few weeks, the Catalan Parliamentary Commission for Culture and Language will adopt institutionally the Universal Declaration on Archives (UDA) and will support a project promoted by the International Council on Archives (ICA), on which the Archivists-Records Managers Association of Catalonia (AAC) has collaborated intensely.

The UDA was drawn up by the CIA's Section of Professional Associations (ICA/SPA), in which the AAC has been actively involved for twenty years, and was presented and approved unanimously at the CITRA General Assembly in Oslo in September 2010.

Subsequently, the Universal Declaration on Archives (UDA) was approved at the 36th UNESCO General Conference, held in Paris at the end of last year.

This decision is a very important step towards improving the public's perception of the role of archives, as it provides an excellent opportunity to increase the visibility of archives amongst the general public and before the public administrations and private organisations.

In this respect, the UDA is a concise declaration of considerable importance for the dissemination of archives in current society. This declaration highlights the key role played by archives in administrative transparency and in democratic accountability, and in the preservation of social collective memory. The UDA views efficient archive management as an essential function that provides a basis for the public administration, best practices in private enterprise and public access to information, without forgetting the traditional concern for satisfying the needs of historical research.

UNESCO's approval of the UDA is an acknowledgement of the functions of archives in terms of government responsibility and transparency and in the making of personal and collective history. Furthermore, as the UN body highlights, support for archives is undeniably a step forward for the whole of society because they are an instrument for the defence of human rights, the protection of citizens' achievements and the promotion of universal access to the sources of knowledge and culture.

The UDA has come a long way. It was inspired by the Quebec Declaration on Archives, drawn up by the Association des Archivistes du Québec in 2007 and translated into Catalan by the General Archive of the University of Vic. In November of the same year, the initial declaration was submitted at the meeting of the International Conference of the Round Table on Archives (CITRA), also held in Quebec, and where it was resolved to draw up a universal declaration on archives, based on the Quebec Declaration model. The drawing up of the UDA fell to the ICA Section of Professional Associations (ICA/SPA), which, following intensive work, presented the final declaration at the CITRA conference in Oslo in September 2010, where it was approved unanimously at the ICA General Assembly.

Now, our profession faces the challenge of making known the UDA with the aim of fostering recognition of the function of archives, overcoming the outmoded perception of their role and, with the cooperation of the institutions, helping them take their place as significant actors in the central structure of the public administration and the private sector, and as centres of social memory.

With this will and coinciding with International Archives Day on 9 June, the AAC approached the Catalan Parliament to adopt the declaration institutionally, as stated in the UNESCO resolution: “Also invites Member States to take the principles set out in the Universal Declaration on Archives into account when planning and implementing future strategies and programmes nationally.”

The proposed resolution the Catalan Parliament is soon to vote on aims to encourage Catalan public administrations to consider these principles in taking action and to apply strategies and programmes in order to meet the objectives described therein. It also recognises the role of the AAC for the work done in publicising Catalan archival science internationally, whilst supporting the European Conference on Archives, which will be held in Girona in 2014.

At the AAC, we wish to encourage other Catalan institutions to promote the UDA and recognise the important role played by archives in all areas of their organisation. We firmly believe that appropriate appreciation of archives and the professionals that work there will help to consolidate more open, more transparent institutions that are closer to the general public.

