

TO TAKE ACTION OR NOT. SUMMARY OF THE MEETING WITH MINISTER LLUÍS PUIG

This is usually a dichotomy we consider on several levels. To wait or act. Or simply hibernate, as sociologist Robert Putnam puts it, that is, tough it out, keep your head down for a while, waste no time lamenting, but not point the finger at inconsistency, injustice and incompetence either. It's hard to strike the right tone and time for decision-making. At the AAC, however, we are fully committed to action, to not letting anything lie, to striking a brisk tone and preventing hibernation from becoming a permanent cryonic state. Speaking of archives, which is what we're about, it's hard to accept a certain continuousness and lack of solid decisions that we have been asking for for years. Just because we want to be active doesn't mean that the heads of the Catalan Archive System (SAC) do as much as we'd like. We have a feeling that in many respects the heads of the SAC are hibernating, that is, that apart from toughing out problems, they are distancing themselves from values they think bear them no resemblance. And this is a mistake made by those who can't see beyond the day-to-day. The SAC needs a good jolt. That's how we see and experience it at the AAC.

As you will remember, on 9 June we published our Manifesto for a 21st-century Catalan Archives System. It was sent to all our members, circulated on the most popular social media and sent to the Ministry of Culture. It was accompanied by a request for a meeting with the Minister for Culture. Although it had plenty of followers on the social media and was one of the most downloaded and consulted documents on our communication channels, and save the odd muted lament sent surreptitiously, the AAC received no official reply between 9 June and 5 July. Not a word.

On 5 July the then minister, Santi Vila, left the post of Minister for Culture. That same day, Lluís Puig took over. The instant he was appointed we requested a meeting to be able to hand over our manifesto in person and defend it, with the aim of starting a debate. On 26 July the minister and his chief of staff summoned us to attend a meeting, which we greatly appreciated, and showed a very different attitude to our demands. From total silence to a meeting just three weeks after taking office. Manners are so important.

During the meeting we covered the four points of the manifesto: the request for a Directorate-General for Archives and Records Management, the drawing up of a Strategic Plan for the Catalan Archives System, the will to make a new Archives and Records Management Act and a proposal to undertake serious reflection on the role of archives and their organic affiliation to the organisations of Catalonia.

We were told that at the moment the creation of a **Directorate-General for Archives and Records Management** is not envisaged. Faced with this (which is nothing new: this is the third minister to say it is unlikely), we said that if the Directorate-General for Books, Libraries and Reading Promotion is created, ours couldn't be far behind. And that, even though we accepted it, we would keep insisting on it, as we believe that this lack of status, as shown by the fact that we don't even have a mouldy subdirectorate general, weakens us at a crucial time for the development of electronic administration, transparency and access to information. This lack of status has meant seven years of weakness to an entire professional sector and, at times, it seems as though no one wants to see this, or understand or admit it. We stressed that the profession's current focus is on access to information, not heritage, which is no slight, rather it is included in the former more general and more comprehensive term. And this change of focus means all pieces on the board move.

The 2001 Archives and Records Management Act meant a change of focus, where the vision of the impact of our work went far beyond tasks of documentary heritage conservation and dissemination. Let us not forget that records management redirected SAC policies and opened up a broad path of job creation. Now, 16 years later, it is access to information that is likely to bring about change and a new dimension to archive and records management services to the benefit of the citizens of Catalonia. In light of this, it should be said that the minister was receptive; he acknowledged the request and understood the dimension of the demand. In this respect he said he was seriously considering at least filling the post of Deputy Director for Archives and Records Management, given the likely impossibility of creating a directorate general. We told him his predecessor made that promise too, but that nothing had come of it.

We then asked that a complete, serious, unlimited **Strategic Plan for the Catalan Archives System** be implemented once and for all. The minister said he had already selected someone to coordinate it. We told him we had received no formal notification of this intent, in the form of a meeting to explain the working plan and methodology to be followed. Since then we have been very much looking forward to a meeting of the Standing Committee of the National Council on Archives and Records Management to consider the plan in detail. Don't forget that we first requested this plan in 2013! However, we told the minister that it is not enough to draw up an internal working plan, only from the perspective of the Ministry of Culture, with no funds with which to develop it and only one person assigned to coordinate it. The minister was understanding and suggested that it be a Government Agreement by the Executive Council, not just by the Ministry of Culture, and that the decision to go ahead be made across the board by members of all ministries.

If the decision is finally made, we shall ensure that the plan is not strangled from the outset by short-sightedness and protectionism, and that it does not go ahead as a simple obligation to the sector. The plan needs to be a deep reflection not only on a technical level, but also on a political level, on the role of archives and records management in a modern society such as the one we want for Catalonia in the twenty-first century.

Obviously, one of the consequences of the plan should be the drawing up and approval of a **New Archives and Records Management Act**. A new law is required from the moment we observe a change of focus. How many times have we seen that legislation on transparency and access to information was something that affected us directly? Despite the fact that Chapter IV was given over entirely to access to records and all the work that was done on the Transparency Act, its interpretation and implementation, it does more to distance us from the decision-making in this regard than it does to bring us nearer. This is due to archives and records management's lack of status and close ties to the cultural sphere.

The new law should be built on the need for good governance of information, on the necessary ties to improving transparency and access to information, and on the preservation of information as a reusable, quality asset that provides a memory for our society. The law should be a tool to reposition us organically at all levels, from the national to local sphere. It should be the instrument that increases the impact of our function, breaking free of the constraints of patrimonialism to govern information from any period. A change, that of the law, that should lead us on the path of collective reflection. And that's what we at the AAC wish to do.

We explained to the minister that in the coming months we would initiate a participative process of assessment of the current law and drawing up improvements in order to offer a broad, consensual professional view. At the same time, there will be a reflection shared with all the political parties to give rise to a unanimous agreement on the matter. We want

to keep the pot boiling, just like the AAC did prior to the 2001 Act. And we want anyone who wants to, to give their two cents without fear. The minister said that this point needed further arguing and we said we would send to him and all the other ministers, as well as to all the parliamentary groups, a list of reasons to start the ball rolling on this Act.

Point four of the manifesto, regarding **deep reflection on the role and assignment of heads of the Catalan Archives System**, was the subject we broached with the minister while dealing with the other points. Speaking straight out and getting to the point. We ask of the Ministry of Culture that this be the way we work from now on, considering the opinion of as many people as possible, taking a plural approach to creating teams to coordinate the strategic plan, not impeding progress before we've even started with an overly protectionist viewpoint, which is the impression we've been getting for some time now. This deep reflection will bear fruit if between us we can foment opinions on all sides, set out all complaints and inconsistencies and do a really thorough job to ensure we reach the most complete conclusions possible. To mobilise the SAC is to mobilise us all. The time seems to be right for such a vital attitude and the AAC can't just sit and wait.