

NEWS FROM THE FRONT

I would like to thank *L'Espill* for the invitation to take part at this act of presentation of the journal in Barcelona. I will take the title of its dossier (*Guerres d'arxiu* – Archive Wars) and very briefly tell my story of six wars, some of which are mentioned in the journal.

A lost war: the archives arrived late.

To understand the situation of our archives, which are now understood as cultural centres, it should first be mentioned that the archives have arrived too late. Creation of our system began 25 years ago. In the past, half a dozen centres scarcely operated effectively. That led to the loss of much of our documentary heritage, an occurrence that was particularly serious in the twentieth century (with the end of the former regime's institutions, seizures) and one that occurred continuously until a short time ago. It meant loss and dysfunction and the removal of collections from their territories. This is very different from the situation of our current network that, although incomplete (When will we have a Barcelona provincial archive?), is currently very satisfactorily extensive and dense.

An ongoing war: service and resources

Since 1979, we have experienced a process of accelerated recovery with constant growth in the creation of centres and the incorporation of professionals. We started from such a meagre position that growth is truly spectacular. However, the question must be raised as to whether this growth is sufficient, because comparison should not be with the past but with society's contemporary needs. Do archives satisfactorily answer society's current needs? On a simplified level, I would say that they do so rather satisfactorily insofar as culture is concerned, but are still lacking in documentary management. The means and resources destined to archives have grown but reality has also become a lot more complex and new work and services have been incorporated into the archive's function.

A war that can still be won: access to documentation

The ultimate objective of our work is for documents to be at the service of whosoever needs them. As far as access is concerned, the war against secrecy has been won for historic documents but it has only just begun for what are known as administrative documents, which can also be requested by the public. The transparency of the authorities, communication, and openness are terms that appear in all speeches. There is, however, an abyss between what is said and this being put into practice. The regulatory framework is full of defects and lacks definition. Archivists often find themselves with their backs to the wall. To avoid detriment to themselves it suits them to encourage the creation of internal mechanisms within their organisation by which requests for access can be dealt with and answered. The solution is not so much an external one, but rather comes from the inside. Even the future dictums of the National Commission of

Access and Evaluation, created by Law 10/2001 will only add insult to injury unless each body has established its own tools to apply them, to study cases of conflict, and to abolish reserves, etc.

A war that, if lost, will lead to marginalisation: Internet presence

The presence of our centres on the Internet, when analysed globally, is extremely lacking and far from what is currently required and rightly demanded by the public. Centres that offer on-line consultation of description tools with reference to a relevant volume from their collections can be counted on one's fingers. We offer the public the basic data of centres and their services, but we are still a long way, as a group, from allowing consultation of the research tools we create in the archives. Indeed, that is not, and neither will it be, possible until progress is made to standardise description and a national standard is defined to complement the ISAD(G) and to use the potential of EAD. In view of development and the maturity of Catalan recordkeeping, this objective is perfectly within reach.

The mother of (nearly) all wars: attachment

Many wars we have taken on would very probably be waged and fought better if our humble positions of command were better positioned. From high ground with a view of the whole field, our decisions would be more effective. For the archives, the public and our authorities, this function, the archive function, should be positioned in a place central to the organisations, with a capacity to influence them all. Many of our organisations realise and put into practise a necessary avoidance of attachment to specialised and sector-specific functional areas (culture, for example). The consequence of such attachment is a limited capacity to carry out the whole range of functions required of us. These functions are clearly established in the recent Law 10/2001 on archives and documents.

The best war in the world

This was the title that the writer Josep Maria Fonolleras gave to one of his excellent works: the best war in the world. Immersed as we are in the Information Society, ours is one of the best wars we can wage: making information accessible to those who create it, to the public, to historians and to the society we serve. We are also lucky that this war is bloodless and has no victims. There are no enemies ahead. The battlefield is occupied by individuals, organisations or bodies whom we help and offer our services. Each action, if we do it well, brings us new friends. No one will argue that ours is one of the best wars in the world.

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