**Editorial**

**The Inevitable Digital Transition of Archivists-Records Managers**

A new Board of Management was elected at the 14th Congress of Catalan Archivists and this is its first editorial. This Congress is not news, nor will it be remembered for this change, but for the profoundness of some of the topics debated. It had been a long time—and this is a view shared by many of the professionals who attended—since such a clear desire for change had been expressed with the aim of improving the profession, making our functions more visible and making up for the historical deficiencies we suffer in Catalonia.

One of the most explicit questions raised was the profession's lack of vision, their lack of awareness of the changes being brought about by the ‘digitisation’ of documentary resources. And when we say *digitisation* we mean the irreparable production of digital documents and the irrevocable management of data in this format.

To believe that we can wait a while before advancing towards this new reality is to be completely mistaken. Here we are faced with a model that could be disruptive to the task we have undertaken thus far.

This in no way means giving up the functional and foundational tradition of historical archives and the ample professional endeavour (measurable in the kilometres of linear metres of documentation preserved in the Catalan archives since the 9th century) dedicated to this documentary heritage. No. Lack of vision means believing that historical archives have enough to do with analogue documents and will have little to do with the new documents in digital format.

Historical archives must demand responsibility over digital preservation, but they will also have to earn it. And when we speak of historical archives we refer, firstly, to the National Archives of Catalonia, and to the Regional Archive Network, to municipal archives, to all public and private archives with inactive documents. Are the responsibilities of these archives properly assigned? Can we rely on this? Or maybe we're behind the times and need to move forward decisively, in case some other professional area deprives us of this responsibility, this capacity, and, let's not forget, this opportunity to obtain juicier budgets derived from the use and implementation of new technologies in this sector?

But let us not forget that a digital transition also involves continuing to insist that records management systems be introduced in public and private organisations. Only by helping to produce, manage and preserve authentic reliable records from the start can we meet society's increasingly evident demand for access to information and transparency. We must not forget that the function of archives, whether historic or not, is no longer strictly cultural, but above all social. They must preserve memory, manage information and then give it back to society either as exploitable data or with actions aimed at producing positive evolution, continuous improvement and social and economic service for citizens.

In this respect, during the last Congress, the need also became obvious for the Sub-Directorate-General for Archives and Museum to take a more cross-cutting approach to the function of archives, in terms of both policy design and more direct action. It is obvious—and we will say this over and over—that attaching firstly the Sub-Directorate, but above all so many other Catalan archive services, to the Ministry of Culture is not the most appropriate action and it undermines our competitiveness while Culture fails to highlight the real weight of the function of archives.

Furthermore, this is a transition that we cannot make alone. We must cooperate and promote cooperation amongst public administrations to define records management policies that are not exclusive, but bring together. We must collaborate in defining a common framework in which to work and distribute responsibilities that enable us to act in a coordinated fashion. Provincial Councils, Government, municipalities, and also certifying public officers, courts, the health authority, and so on. Only by working together can we define an archives policy with a specific calendar that is not determined by the fact that there happen to be funds available or by strict calendars like the one for 2014. We cannot wait for a possible or impossible independent state to come about to carry on with our job. We cannot delay the definition of medium-term policies that point out a course, a roadmap to tangible objectives. We need to strengthen the profession by coordinating with all agents charged with producing, managing and preserving data, information and records.

We mean institutional cooperation, but also professional cooperation with other sectors, such as documentalists, computer specialists, jurists, secretaries, registrars, auditors, cultural and social agents, traders and business owners. We come together and meet the need to provide archive services to all professionals involved in producing records in order to put together management systems that enable each of their objectives to be achieved. Cooperating means not continuing to oversectorize and working as a team, in a real way, not perpetuating the endless meeting method.

Consensus has been reached on a small scale, we have had experiences in many archives, particularly at municipal level, in which participation of the various interlocutors has led to very positive results. Now, we need the big agreements that enable us to deal with the records management systems of public and private organisations, in order to guarantee the right to access information, data protection and the need for transparency. This is a social demand that must enable democratic regeneration.

Last, but not least, we must cooperate with the business fabric to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of economic activity, intervening in management systems and dealing in depth with these companies' corporate social responsibility. Private enterprise needs good management, and archivists-records managers need more quality employment opportunities.

Obviously, we need to continue to train professionals that deserve such opportunities. That's why we need to promote and polish top-level training. The Congress showed that training must be further directed at building the skills of professionals that implement integrated records management systems, have a broad vision of systems, with a vocabulary that enables them to communicate with other professional sectors, such as IT specialists, our unavoidable partner. Having a command of ICT terminology is a requirement with which we must make ourselves understood and defend our point of view. Open data, big data, business analytics, ontology, unstructured data, datasets and a host of other concepts should not leave us speechless.

Without control over the content or productive processes, organisations encounter serious problems. Archivist-records managers provide and enable this control. Training must also be aimed at revitalising the historic archive sector with innovative proposals that promote classical knowledge, on the one hand, and capacity building in regard to the challenge of digital preservation on the other and, furthermore, must enable historic archives to reflect seriously on their functions and the power of the information they preserve. If they continue to merely preserve, no one will understand us. Internet must become a channel of communication and feedback between the public and historic archives, which is why they must adapt to the needs and requirements of the 21st-century user; that is, they must provide virtual access to their contents and the documents they guard. In this respect we need a real revolution. And this message is not only for professional training, it must also reach degree courses. Let's say it clearly. The degree courses that were traditionally the breeding grounds for archival science professionals are not providing students with adequate training from which they can benefit fully. We must demand the best from students; but we must also demand that professors update course curricula so that they can match up to new requirements. We must transition towards a truly competitive profession that leaves past grumbling behind. Those that decide the training of our professionals, led by the ESAGED, must face up to the challenge of producing quality professionals so that it may become a guarantee of certifiable quality work. To do this they must keep up with new technologies, business management and promotion of cultural, social and economic values that may derive from good archival treatment of the documents these professionals manage and preserve.

The strategic points distilled from the Congress must be emphasised, but, above all, we must start to think about raising the bar of our professional competitiveness.