

WHAT WE TOOK AWAY FROM THE CONGRESS

The 16th Congress of Catalan Archivists and Records Managers has just closed and there's a strong sense of achievement. We are pleased with the attendance—over 350 people and more than 25 organisations, entities and companies all showing their support. All the speakers, from both the public and private spheres, showed a very high level of expertise. We feel that many of us will have learned a lot and opened our minds to the changes coming our way with digital transformation. One of the most interesting aspects observed is how digitisation, as an attitude, is being inoculated into most professionals, whether they work in records management in the public sector, data management in private companies or in conventional historical archives. We all saw that we're living, fast, in a changing world where we have to be increasingly competitive. And by competitive we mean capable of prescribing in any situation we face as professionals. This is what is expected of our changing profession, whatever it is called, now and in the future. Prescription, that value of medicine that enables a person to receive something required to solve a problem. In our field, prescription involves our ability to provide solutions to problems derived from digital records management, from disorganisation of datasets, selection of the best data, data of the best quality, providing the best record, the one that provides that greatest wealth of information, and many more issues. Prescription is increasingly necessary before the robots take over, [as many indicators forecast](#). Robots will dispense solutions the way vending machines dispense energy drinks. Predictions about the future say all sorts of things, except what will most likely be the case: we'll control the robots. So let's be reasonable when foreseeing what will be. Not everything will change so quickly, nor will the profession disappear overnight. But the value of sorting the wheat from the chaff, the certain, the authentic, the quality from the redundant, is something we will not stop doing. We did it in analogue environments, now we're doing it and will do it in digital ones.

Something else that emerged from the Congress and linked to this transformation is the profession's new blood. This was much talked-about by those attending. New professionals embracing the job opportunities that appear to be opening up in recent months. It's not pie in the sky, we're seeing it in the AAC, just as we're scrutinising the quality of these job offers. The crisis did away with the dignity of many professions, ours among them, and the level of many of these public and private job offers is frequently offensive. The AAC is working hard to find a way to deal with this situation and it is one of the aspects we want to reinforce by splitting the former work commissioner's office into two, one for work and one for professional status. This will enable us to take more solid action in the face of inadequate job offers. It's good to see this rejuvenation of the profession, but we can't take our eye off the ball or get too full of ourselves. Maybe for the moment we should lay aside any thoughts of a standardised market and direct all our efforts towards battling case by case for a good while. Hopefully successfully. That Congress should prove that our work generates professional interest is a further incentive for the AAC to bolster this part of its mission.

One of the items on the table, which is closely linked to how the job market is modulated, is the name of our profession. Records management, as we have

understood it so far, falls short and implies that what we do is more akin to information governance. Of course the AAC is open to debating the matter. But we think we should differentiate the name from what we do and will be able to do. In this regard we take on the mission of redefining the functions of the profession (and/or professions) that join our project, while leaving what it should be called to public debate. And we've done it this way because according to the statutes it's our job to deal with our areas of responsibility but, above all, because behind the debates on vocabulary are many aspects that go beyond the theoretical.

There are several vocabularies. There's the archival science theory that we get in school. There's the vocab of the labour market, services and products. The legal vocab. The political vocab. And the vocabulary of other professions that legitimately want to do things they traditionally haven't done. Amongst all these agents a vocabulary is generated that is constantly changing, unstable and frequently biased and far from innocent. First off, the name of the AAC continues to represent archivists and records managers, which, with a hyphen and not a conjunction we have defended as a single profession since the statute of 2010. In the vocabulary proposed at the Congress, should we now call ourselves information governors? That's hard to see. So we prefer to talk about functions. In the dialectical battle to promote one vocabulary, the AAC advocated both transparency legislation and the 2015 amendment of the Archives Act incorporating the concept of records management. The law now speaks of it. How many times have we heard it said that new State legislation on administrative procedure and electronic files talks about records management throughout the text but never actually mentions it in so many words? And how many times have we regretted that it doesn't? By that we mean that the fact that certain vocabularies predominate is hardly innocent. The laws often talk about records and information, but we all know that, in the technologies market, neither records nor information are held in much esteem. In this market data is big, and never a truer word. Because when the market generates business, it doesn't need highly specific legal texts to keep a good dynamic going. The AAC's homework consists of defining a constellation of functions that more closely fits the current situation and, above all, the reality we're beginning to glimpse for the next few years.

Something that the Congress revealed is that the heads of the Catalan Archives System have started to play hooky. Never before had a minister missed the opening and closing ceremonies. The sector was not exactly thrilled that the person in charge of the public policies that enable its promotion failed to put in an appearance—not even on a plasma screen. Politicians' schedules are always surprising. But there's no need to be tearing our hair out over a minister's absence either. The most worrying thing is not having a kick-off date for the Strategic Archives and Records Management Plan of Catalonia. Even though its advisability was agreed on 12 December 2016 at the insistent request of the AAC and despite the fact that there was a meeting just prior to the Congress on the initiation mechanism, and despite the directorate-general in charge highlighting it as a priority at the Congress opening, we still have nothing concrete. There is no schedule, no allocation of economic or human resources to its design, nor is there a clear definition of tables to be created to debate the various aspects affecting the Catalan Archives System, nor, unfortunately, is a quick, decisive start anticipated.

Meanwhile, we see how other areas of responsibility of the same directorate-general are showered with millions and organisational improvements and yet receive no explanation of why this is so. If giving one area precedence over another is merely political will, then the AAC says that the prevailing political will is deplorable, discriminatory and unjust. How many times has the AAC asked for a Directorate-General for Archives and Records Management and not just a multipurpose one? And how many times have we been told 'not now'? That if we got one, other sectors would complain, that the Ministry of Culture is not in a position to creation more structure at this moment in time? Well six at least, since 2013. And now, all of sudden, here's a million-euro plan for reading. A plan we in no way reject, criticise or belittle. Bring it on. However, what confidence can we have in a Ministry of Culture that has told us no six times, that it doesn't have the resources for a strategic plan and yet can find them for other areas? It's unfair and hurtful. And it validates our conviction that if ever there is a Directorate-General for Archives and Records Management it doesn't need to be attached to the Ministry of Culture, but to another ministry with a more comprehensive brief that is clearly more respectful in handling requests, and is not new nor the delusion of a handful of sulky archivists. There is a broad enough consensus to show publicly that the journey ends here for the Ministry of Culture and archives.

All this constitutes the bulk of what the AAC Board has to take from the Congress to work on. With renewed enthusiasm and drive, and no arguing, we begin these next four years in the most productive and honest way possible. We cannot betray the trust of our members. Thank you for all your support! We aim to prove worthy.