



Bulletin 84

Editorial

11th Congress of Catalan Archivists

Innovation and professional development. Conclusions

The idea that we are working in a permanently changing environment was one shared by almost all the speakers and attendees at the 11th Congress of Catalan Archivists. We have had a new working model for some time now, what we call the digital society, and this new model, far from undermining the basis of our profession, reinforces it and offers new opportunities to advance and to incorporate new functions into our profession, to redefine others, to redefine policies and methodologies and, above all, sets us the challenge of working in multidisciplinary fields. So, our challenge is one of innovation, not only technological innovation, which does not depend only on archivists, but also innovation in working methods, in processes and, particularly, in how we organise.

Looking at the conclusions in depth and against this background of change, we concluded firstly that “in the digital society the function of *file and records management* has not changed. Neither have the principles, they continue to be valid for facing the challenges for archiving posed by the technological environment”. What has changed is the object of the archivist’s work, the document, and the environment in which it goes through its life cycle. However, beyond this transformation, our goal continues to be the medium- and long-term preservation of authentic, reliable and complete documents.

The radical transformation of the object seems to call for an equally radical transformation of policies and tools. In the conclusions, this change of environment was mentioned: “We are at a new stage of production and management. We have to adapt to this stage by renewing policies [updating the body of rules, incorporating new standards]. We need to renew methodologies and tools [participating in the definition of procedures and requirements, and the design and administration of IT tools]. Finally, we have to renew structures”. This means investment in information technology and telecommunications, not being afraid to outsource the custody of documents while maintaining ownership, incorporating people with technological knowledge into records management, and adapting file formats to the needs of mixed systems, with both conventional and digital documents.

The changing environment has radically transformed the object and this calls for a transformation in policies, methodologies and tools. It seems, therefore, that the profile of the professional archivist must also change. We are, in fact, finding that the development of ICT is transforming the role of the archivist, and we

conclude that we should “make a clear commitment to a profile of the professional archivist who is able to design, implement and maintain record management systems for organisations”. The archivist has to be involved in the active phase of document production, in the planning, creation or admission of the document, up to its disposal. “This aspect is one of the main supports and driving forces of modernisation”. Of course, we can’t do this alone, but need to do it in “co-operation with others involved, from the fields of information, technology and organisation, to advance towards projects which are sound in electronic administration and quality of service, in accordance with the global policies of the institution.”

Within the organisation and in the specific context of document management, “archiving services have to take advantage of the opportunities offered by new technologies to improve general management and access to information, with the help and support of rules and standards”. We need to incorporate the improved means made available by technology, combining them with the application of rules and standards. Techniques of organisation, systems engineering, and process control, together with record management techniques and electronic document management tools, offer many real possibilities for innovation and improvement within organisations. We also have a substantial body of legislation and technical rules (rules of description, of record management, quality management, electronic documentation, etc.) which can act as stimuli for innovation and change. Standards such as ISO 15489 for record management and ISO 9001 for quality provide an opportunity to demonstrate that archiving is an effective and efficient service conforming to international standards.

In the context of historical archiving, the archiving service must cease to be a 'monument' and become a piece within a complex archiving system. It has to offer quality products and services: making available easy and user-friendly information and document retrieval tools, suitable working conditions in consultation areas, generous timetables and ease of access, reproduction services and prompt responses to requests. Training policies are needed, reflecting diversity of users, particularly new users carrying out studies of genealogy and the recovery of historical memories. We must take advantage of the potential of the Internet and information technology in general to offer information that is ever more accurate and detailed, and, if possible, remote access to the document.

Another key theme in this changing environment is that of training, both formal training (acquiring the knowledge, skills and abilities required to work in the field), and continuous training (CT), the constant updating of knowledge and skills that enable the professional to take on more difficult roles, or new roles and responsibilities.

Within the framework of formal training the need was highlighted to “take advantage of the opportunity offered by incorporation into the European Higher Education Area”: it will be necessary to upgrade the current diploma to a higher qualification or a master’s degree and to consolidate the records management and IT content. The best option seems to be the master’s route to train highly specialised and competent experts.

As far as CT is concerned, the need to “consolidate policies of continuous

training” was emphasised. This will enable professionals to assume new roles and responsibilities and to maintain their professional skills in the long term. Listening to the experiences of CT in neighbouring countries, we became aware of the need to define standards of reference in regard to professional qualifications (up to now there have been no common standards but the ICA has launched an initiative to develop a European-level framework for the profession). We also became aware of the need to define continuous training plans that conform to these standards and to have independent, responsible regulatory bodies to regularly check professional competence and monitor the profession's quality standards. The professional associations can play an important role in supervising areas of responsibility. The importance of trying “new forms of training to overcome the resistance of professionals” was also pointed out. We should consider innovative solutions such as teamwork activities, 'mentoring' systems, and interactive information technologies to carry out evaluations and receive feedback.

Finally, two comments were made concerning the part of the Congress given over to the cooperation of archivists in social memory recovery initiatives. Firstly, the commitment of archivists to this user group was highlighted; their needs frequently call for improvements in descriptive tools and improvements in research and recovery tools. Secondly, the value of recovering these testimonials and putting them in the public domain was commented on: “the cooperation of archiving services with associations for the recovery of historical memories has to make it possible for all the written documents and oral testimonies collected for these initiatives to be preserved, with efforts being made to incorporate them in public archives.”