Records in Contexts
(RiC)
An Archival Description Draft Standard

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON ARCHIVES
EXPERTS GROUP ON ARCHIVAL DESCRIPTION

Rome

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Experts Group on Archival Description (EGAD)

- Formed by the ICA Programme Commission in late 2012
- Partial successor to the Committee on Best Practices and Standards (CBPS)
- Term 2012-2016; 2016-
- Charged with developing a Conceptual Model for Archival Description
  - Based on four current ICA descriptive standards
  - Employing formal information modeling techniques

ICA Standards for Archival Description 1988-2008

Standard	Edition	Development Dates	Publication Date
Principles		(1988) 1989-1992	1992
ISAD	1st	1990-1993	1994
ISAAR	1st	1993-1995	1996
ISAD	2nd	1996-2000	1999
ISAAR	2nd	2000-2004	2004
ISDF	1st	2005-2007	2007
ISDIAH	1st	2005-2008	2008

Archival Principles: Records in Contexts

- Principle of Provenance
  - Respect des fonds
    - The Records created, accumulated, and used by a person or group in the course of life and work are to be kept together and not intermixed with records from other sources
  - Respect for Original Order
    - The intellectual grouping of and sequencing imposed on the records in the context of accumulation and use is essential to understanding the interrelations among them as well as being evidence of how they were used
- General international consensus on the principle
- But historical, cultural differences in understandings
- Records in Contexts
  - Embodies both facets of the principle
  - Though more expansive understanding of Provenance
  - Based on intellectual and practical critique of archival description
  - Records and the people that create, manage, and use them do not exist in isolation but in complex layers of interrelated, interdependent contexts
  - In Time

Historical Context

- Since at least mid-19th century, cultural heritage communities
  - Reimagine description in relation to emerging and new communication technologies
  - Trend
    - Separate the components of description
    - To efficiently and more effectively create prevailing access tool (e.g., book catalog, finding aids)
    - At the same time, enable new tools, new perspectives, new paths, based on recombining the components
- Four ICA standards reflect this trend
- Though the separation and new perspectives not realized

Current and Emerging Technology Landscape

- Network, of course, and Markup (XML), and Database (SQL) …
- XML and SQL have dominated but …
- Emergence of Graph technologies: RDF, Semantic technologies and Linked Open Data
  - More expressive, but also more challenging: complexity, quality …
- Opportunities: separation, recombining, interrelating, opening domain borders, new perspectives, new paths …
- Reposition community to take advantage of the opportunities

The RiC Products

- Conceptual Model for archival description (RiC-CM)

  - Documents the key entities of archival description and the attributes of each and the relations among them

  - With diagrams and examples illustrating how the components are interrelated to form complete archival description

- An Ontology for archival description (RiC-O)

  - Based on RiC-CM

  - Expressed using the W3C OWL language

  - Will map archival concepts to similar concepts employed by allied communities: integrated access to cultural heritage

  - Will enable archival community to participate on its own terms, so-to-speak

- Application Guidelines (RiC-AG)

  - AG will provide implementation guidelines

  - How it will do so is yet to be determined

From ISAD(G)

- Predominant form of archival description today

    - Hierarchical (top-down) description of a single fonds

    - Description of the whole, the parts of the whole, parts of the parts

    - Largely if not exclusively self-contained, inward "looking"

    - That is, not connected to the broader context

    - All contained in a single apparatus

    - ISAD(G) a model for this approach; EAD a method for communicating it

To RiC: Pivotal Change

- Records and aggregations of records treated as two distinct entities
  - Records
  - Record Sets
  - Over the course of its existence, a record may be a member of more than one record set, and at the same time
- Multilevel description (hierarchy, a kind of graph)
  - Multilevel or hierarchical description one among other possible methods of description Multilevel description predominates, and will do so for the foreseeable future: well understood and economic

To RiC: Pivotal Change

- Multidimensional description (a network graph)
    - Encompasses multilevel description
    - Within a network of interrelated records, fonds, people, activities …: context within context
    - Enables more flexible description that is more expressive of the complex realities of records than possible in a single hierarchical description
- Archival description envisioned as a vast social-document network

A Few Hightlights from Rome EGAD Meeting

- Good portion of discussion focused on

  - Refining our understanding of the role and nature of the three RiC products: Conceptual Model, Ontology, and Application Guidelines

  - Reformulating the plan of presentation of the CM

  - Discussion of methodology for deciding what is and is not an entity ("significant object"), characteristics of the of the entity (attributes), inherent traits and states of entities, relations and events …

  - Reevaluation of entities: primary, secondary …

A Few Hightlights from Rome EGAD Meeting

- Provisional evaluation of entities

  - Archival resource
    - Record
      - Record Part
    - Record Set

  - Agent
    - Person
    - Group
      - Family
      - Corporate Body
    - Position
    - Delegate Agent

  - Function
    - Goal
    - Activity
    - Transaction

A Few Hightlights from Rome EGAD Meeting

- Supporting entities optimally maintained as controlled terms or values

  - Occupation

  - Function (Concept) includes Goal, Activity, Transaction

  - Record Classification

  - Documentary Form

- Place and Date

- Name and Identifiers

- Relations

  - Types of relations treated as a graph (broader/narrower; primarily hierarchical but …)
  - Reduce to the a basic and essential set
  - Direction of relations and inverse relations
  - Extensible

- Much, much more …

Work Timeline

- RiC-CM: Second draft for public comments early in 2018

- RiC-0: Incomplete beta draft early in 2018

- RiC-AG: First draft for public comments in early 2019

- Timeline thereafter variable depending on comments, work schedules and so on

- Objective will be for all three products to be complete and relatively stable late in 2020

Thank you!