

Report of the meeting of the Group of experts on the archival description of the International Council of Archives (ICA/EGAD), Brussels, 19-21 November 2013

Participants: Padre Bala (Côte d'Ivoire), Florence Clavaud (France), Vitor da Fonseca (Brazil), Beatriz Franco (Spain), Jaana Kilki (Finland), Gavan McCarthy (Australia), Alice Motte (France), Victoria Peters (United Kingdom), Bogdan Popovici (Romania), Claire Sibille - Grimouard (France), William Stocking (United Kingdom), Martin Stuerzlinger (Austria), Salvatore Vassallo (Italy), Stefano Vitali (Italy)

(1) Presentation of the mandate of the EGAD

a) An archival conceptual model

Need to quickly produce a draft conceptual model, taking into account the very high expectations of the business community. The responsibilities of the expert group on archival description are therefore very large.

The method of work of the Panel is the most flexible possible: arrive at consensus without going through formal processes (motions votes).

The discussion continues on the perimeter of the future model. The expert group mission is the development of a conceptual model for the "archival community. But 'archival community' refers to different realities. What is valid in a given context is not necessarily appropriate in another context. Perspectives and professional practices are very diverse, should therefore remain at a very general level of abstraction with a definition of what is meant exactly by "archival" and "archives". The standards of the international Council of archives have been designed firstly to national archival institutions, but the archives services can be various: archives academics, public or private archives, manuscripts and special collections libraries within departments...

The archival principles must be re-evaluated, including the principle of provenance, with the two approaches: ICA standards approach whereas the highest fonds such as the level of description and Australian approach whereas the organic series as the level of the highest description.

The archivists produce research instruments but is not the final product of the archival description (of research instruments) that you want to model. This is to take into account the different perspectives and to reflect on the key principles you want to isolate. The archives have a history, the context of their creation and their use should be integrated in the model.

What is it exactly that the archival description? There's no really clear definition. Should we not include entire archive processing chain in the model?

Expert groups are disconnected from the needs of developing countries who already need to professionalize their practices before wonder about the use of any particular standard. The question of the dissemination of the model within the professional community is part of the mandate of the expert group, however, the assistance to the professionalization of the practices in developing countries belongs to the program of the international Council of archives.

Normative work are dominated by Western ways of thinking and are the national institutions that are represented in majority in the expert groups.

The context for the development of the conceptual model is analogous to the context of elaboration of ISAD (G). When the first edition of ISAD (G) was published in 1994, this work represented something completely new and provocative for archivists. With the development of the conceptual model, other degrees of expertise appear, should therefore be very careful in the introduction of new concepts and respect the past, even if a critical reflection on the concepts and the way in which archivists handle is necessary.

b) ICA standards

To reconcile between them standards, a level of conceptualization is necessary. Once the model is developed, should revise the four existing standards taking into account the resumption of the already completed descriptions.

The international standard for the description of the functions is only the functions of the organizations and therefore not all the activities of individuals. Only are taken into account collective and not individual functions.

c) Objectives - Government Archives, private, family business

The main difficulty is to make the understandable conceptual model of everything everyone. It is necessary to disseminate and to impress upon professionals why we need (help trainers, software publishers). An example of practical implementation of a conceptual model is the ICA-AtoM software

From what point of view leave us? What does mean "archival perspective?"

The level of granularity of the model must remain very generic to take account of all the traditions and archival practices.

A model for the 'archival community': what is meant by 'archival community'? Does the community at large? Only experts in standardization?

d) Context

i) Technologies: markup, database and graph

Existing technologies (relational databases, SGML/XML and graphs) have different approaches for the representation of data. The approach of the XML is hierarchical while the semantic web (graphs) technologies to establish a complex network of relationships from assertions (triples) and relationships between subjects, predicates, and objects. For example: archive (subject) retain (predicate) archival (object), organizations (subject) produce (predicate) of the archives (object). Should be distinguished:

- the objects in the real world, "the world as it is" (what)
- our perceptions of the real world and the representation that we do in the form of a formal model of the "what".
- an unlimited number of formal models, including an archival model of "what".
- an assertion describing the world as it is.

What is the difference between conceptual model and ontology? The ontology to express more clearly the relationships between concepts.

A formal language, OWL, was developed by the consortium W3C (World Wide Web Consortium). The protected software to create ontologies in OWL.

Model models our representation of the world: what is the point of view of this representation? Finnish and Spanish models were not developed from the same point of view. It is appropriate to clarify the point of view of departure (a single resource can be described in two different ways by an archivist or librarian).

The establishment of equivalencies with the CIDOC-CRM model has been very productive for the development of the Finnish archival conceptual model, "CIDOC-CRM is an ontology of reference."

Documents can have copies. The LOCAH model also distinguishes archives and research instruments. Therefore, distinguish the description of archives, archives and their digital surrogates. Archives on traditional support as els archives on digital media must be taken into account in the model.

It is impossible to anticipate all possible users. What are the essential responsibilities of the Archivist? In Finland, exchanges were held with historians who are unwilling to full descriptions but only specific descriptions identifying records. Users use Google not only to make Google searches but also to browse and navigation means interrelations.

The development of the Finnish conceptual model is a job very long: what is the level of detail covered? The EGAD does not réinventera everything, for example dates structure (simple dates, ranges of dates, dates of ranges and single dates). The high-level classes might be: the archives (records), agents (agents) and actions (acts): agents are engaged in activities. The model will include all relations. The Spanish model takes a little into account relations but it is not the core of the model.

FRBR and CIDOC models are mentioned, but there are other ontologies, other conceptual models, some developed by the W3C or other communities of interest (foaf: pretty good but insufficient model for the description of individuals).

(ii) National initiatives and projects of archival conceptual models

The Finnish Conceptual Model

The Finnish archival conceptual model fits into the broader context of the architecture policy information from the Government, with the development of a Finnish digital library for Archives, libraries and museums sectors. The Finnish digital library includes a common user (Portal Finna) interface and a long-term preservation for all Archives-libraries-museums funded by the Government; other integration services (IDs, authority data, ontologies renaming systems (words materials, locations, etc.)) The project makes it necessary harmonisation of descriptive metadata of the three economic sectors with a view to interoperability: GDR (Description and access to resources) is the standard reference for the description. The need arose to make compatible the descriptive practices in the field of archives: metadata RM and archival description, documents on traditional media and digital documents, wide variety of documents and institutions. Different sectors have worked together since 1994.

In this context, the conceptual model defines what the archival description for common understanding of sector archives and for the wider community of cultural heritage. It is an

ontology of reference but not a normative model: it can be implemented by different metamodel.

As the heart of the archival point of view is the provenance, the model focuses on the definition of entities, provenance and their relations.

The "Archival" entity (Archival material) cuts across a variety of different types of resources to information at different stages of their life cycle.

Any document described methods archival and "document archive".

There is a 'Document' (Material) entity, but it can be everything, nothing is said about the reality.

Description system represents the context and information resources. Data models implement description systems.

Archival description is a system of representation (the description is always an interpretation from a given perspective), it is a process (which begins the creation of documents and continues throughout their existence), it must allow different interpretations made by producers to archives, archiving professionals and users.

The national working group must therefore develop the conceptual model as well as rules for the description and cataloguing and access online service.

The main entities are as follows:

- Activity (activity): product (Material) Documents
- Function (Function): documented in (Material) Documents, subclass of the class activity
- Archiving (Recordkeeping Function)
- Mission (Mandate): governs the archiving function and the function
- Archives (Records): is a certain type of Document (Material)
- Expression of Document (Material-Expression): represents the Document as intellectual content (activity documented in an abstract sense), which is common to all events
- Manifestation of the Document (Material-event): represents a Document as a physical entity (a physical object) in which an Expression is manifested.

Agents are involved in events, the function is an intended action complete a mission.

A search tool is an example of representation, a view imposed by the Archivist, but not necessarily the only one.

How to manage the aggregates? A set, all parts and relationships

The Spanish Conceptual Model

The development of the model is based on the distinction between the real world (archival reality), the conceptual world and the world of representations (archival descriptive systems). The main objective is to develop standards for structuring data and standards of content for

the description of archives, agents and functions, which can be described separately but interconnected within the systems of archival description.

The first activity is to develop a document comprising:

- A conceptual model explicitly
- The specifications for the data necessary for descriptions

The textual record includes 283 pages, with 91 pages of examples. The entity types are as follows: Archives (Records), Agent (Agent), function (Business), Mission (Mandate), Concept, object, or event (Concept, object or event) and place (Place).

The entity types are classes or objects of archival reality (real world) perceived as separate categories.

The first type of entity (Archives) refers to the objects of management of archives that are usually the focus of attention of archival science.

The second type of entity (Agent) apply to stakeholders (communities, families and individuals) responsible for the creation, production, management of archives (or who participated in the creation, production, management of the archives).

The third type of entity (function) refers to the functions, sub-functions, activities/processes and transactions completed by agents, which are documented in the archives.

The fourth type of entity (Mission) applies to regulations governing agents, the functions they perform or the archives.

The fifth type of entity (Concept, object, or event) refers to abstract concepts or ideas, to material things, to actions or events which are the topics archives.

The sixth and final type of entity (location) applies to places that are the subject of the archives.

Subtypes of entities for the archives, agents and functions take into account Spanish archival practices.

For the entity type Archives:

- Group of fonds
- Fond
- Subfond/subgroup of Fond
- Organic series
- Organic subseries
- Part of series/subseries organic
- Documentary unit
- Collection: artificial aggregation of archives

- Sub-collection
- Documentary component

The Group of fonds, the Fond, the subfond, the organic series and the Collection can be the highest level of the system description.

The function class includes the subclasses: sub-function, activity/process and Transaction.

Relations are associations of any type between the real world entities, perceived as links of different types (conceptual world) that can be reflected in eks archival descriptive systems (World of representations).

In theory, all relationships are possible, but in practical terms, only ten are envisaged, with groupings:

- Context of archives and their value of evidence
- Contents of the archives and their informational value
- The archive structure and functional entities

The negatives are the slowness of the modeling process and the low turnout in the archival community.

The benefits and advantages:

- allow a more robust development of Spanish standards of archival description
- participate in the international effort to review four ICA standards
- develop a project that contributes to the growth of the semantic web
- strengthen the conceptual basis of the archival description to description in other areas.

III) Conceptual models in other areas of the cultural heritage: (FRBRoo) FRBR and CIDOC-CRM

The FRBR conceptual model distinguishes between a work, expression, manifestation and items.

Archival records are not only intellectual information but also have legal value, so find a way to express these characteristics. The legal value can be assigned to a level of event.

(iv) Other Conceptual Models (schema.org, foaf...)

(2) The deliverables expected two

-A text document with diagrams

-A formal expression in a machine readable form (possibly OWL), based on the principles and the archival basic terminology, with equivalencies with the CIDOC/CRM and FRBRoo models

(3) Archival principles

Provenance

Respect des fonds

Respect for the internal order (or respect for the original order or respect for the primitive order)

The Fond is a conceptual abstraction and the error of the traditional approach is to perceive it as a physical entity (Terry Cook): how to be sure that we have a Fond in its completeness?

Respect des fonds is a principle guiding the classification. Shouldn't use instead the notion of provenance in the conceptual model? The concept of origin is wider than compliance with the Fond.

One cannot understand a document of record without the other.

That is what the original order?

Group consensus: a set associated with an agent (production, gathering, use)

Distinction between the abstract and other words: in the process of description, must be able to describe an abstract Fond and the actual archives in front of itself.

All are generally agree to recognize that there is a 'Fond' which is the general subject to the control and the archival description.

The origin is a type of relationship, classification is an event in the lifecycle of the archives. The context and the respect of the fonds must be taken into account in the conceptual model but will not play a predominant role.

Is the context synonymous with provenance? No, because the context does not only the origins but also the accumulation, of the use of the archives, etc.

If concepts are used in the standards, it is necessary to keep them (for example, ISAD (G) defines clearly the producer and the author).

Discussions on archival description, but in the archival description, there's also the records management metadata.

Although ISAD (G) applied originally to the historical archives, it is in its current version intended to apply to all types of archives, regardless of periods.

Would it not to speak of 'existence' rather than 'life cycle' ?

The reasons for which the archives are described in records management environments and in a historical context are different.

From the point of view of the perspective of reality in Finland, Finnish archivists first use the metadata produced in organisms and then the National Archives decide whether or not to retain the metadata, reuse, that should be for reuse (compatibility between RM and archival standards).

How to position the model? There is a target audience but also secondary audiences.

What do we want to model?

- Human activity and the products of human activity
- The archival perspective

Discussion with Gavan McCarthy: how to represent the relationships in a satisfactory manner? Could we not consider relations as a particular class? The main classes of the model could be: Records, Context (Agents, Functions), Relationships. It should also consider events like something transverse, affecting archives, agents, relations, etc.

The next steps are as follows. Four sub-groups are formed:

- Group 1: draw up the minutes of the meeting (to January 2014)
- Group 2: terminology and glossary of key archival concepts, including the provenance (history recall) (to January 2014)
- Group 3: exploring tools for developing an ontology (to March 2014)

- Group 4: compare the existing conceptual models (to March 2014) and then reconcile them (for June 2014)

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Il faut produire rapidement un projet de modèle conceptuel, compte tenu des attentes très fortes de la communauté professionnelle.