

# The archivists in the 20° century: professional aspects

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November 2009

- Understanding the evolution of the professional mandate from an international point of view
- The education and training profiles
- Digital curator or digital archivist?
- Open questions

# A premise

- To analyze the professional aspects emerging from the last century and understand the evolution of the professional mandate and mission, it is necessary to consider which are the requirements for the present and the future of a *digitally educated archivist*
- On this basis it is possible to reconstruct the changes passed and their meaning.
- The presentation is based on the lesson learned from the national and international experience

## and a statement: the relevance of principles

- The foundation of principles is more relevant than in the past: a conceptual frame is the basic tool to try to control the level of interpretation and uncertainty for the future.
- The continuing improving of the technical skills is required to face the digital evolution and innovation
- In a changing world we need methodological capacities than accumulation of details.

# Some general considerations

- The development of professionals in the field requires more efforts, but the budget cuts are more and more affecting the activity of the education and training institutions. At the same time the private offer in this sector does not ensure enough quality and even less an innovative approach
- An international cooperation is then required, but it is also difficult to achieve, due to the differences between the national traditions

# The challenges of the digital innovation: the evolution of RMS

- The present evolution of the records systems implies relevant and complex changes for the record management and the archival functions (not to investigate today but deeply debated by the existing literature and deeply analysed for many traditions and summarised at the last ERPANET workshop in Bern, October 2004)
- The professionals in this area are required today to develop tools, standards, policies
  - for managing active records in digital environment,
  - for providing the creators with records as reliable evidence and efficient support to their business activity, and
  - ensuring their authentic keeping preservation, when transferred to another environment or maintained over time

# New and critical tasks for records systems and professionals

- Defining and monitoring new and continuously updated **organizational models** with reference to the documentary products as consistent with the business workflows
- Maintaining the **interrelation** between **the decision making processes** and the record function
- Ensuring the **immediateness of the records communication** and the **completeness of their interrelated information and profiles** through efficient classification tools
- Managing (or coordinating) the **responsibilities for the records creation, keeping and preservation**: new models are required to meet the decentralisation process
- Developing **internal policies** to guarantee the adequacy and the efficiency of the whole records system

# The uncertain usefulness and quality of the traditional tools

- The records keepers whose expertise had stable contents and boundaries for the last century are today at the centre of a general transformation which requires at any level of their professional activity the existence of specific knowledge and qualified methods



# The adequacy of the professional environments

- Fundamental requirement to ensure the correct implementation to these new tasks and challenges is the **adequate development of professional environments** as far as it concerns:
  - a change of accent and a **different perception of the RM function**, specifically in the case of digital records systems,
  - the need, not yet completely covered, for a **comprehensive understanding of this transition period** (still open and probably uncertain for long time) with reference to the nature and the relationships of traditional and new models, activities and professional profiles

# Centrality of the training/educational issue

- The development of a professional community is strictly connected with the quality of its educational and training infrastructure: if it is adequately developed and sufficiently open to change, it will be able to play a relevant role to ensure a qualified level of professional involvement in the IMS/EDMS/ERMS

# What to be re-defined in the educational/training process

- To meet this challenge and to offer correct elements for further developments, the many questions still open in this sector should consider:
  - the analysis and the evaluation of the traditional educational/training systems not only with reference to the creation and preservation of digital records, but - more specifically - **to the theoretical contents of the basic disciplines** (archival science and diplomatics as comprehensive and dynamic disciplines reflected in their objects)
  - a clear understanding of the **balance** between the **need for change** and the guarantee for **continuity of principles and methods**, that is the capability to verify concretely when the programs flexibility and the lack of a rigid and general model could be evaluated as an opportunity for a more comprehensive knowledge or a risk (the risk to loose direction in a fragmented environment)

# Flexibility based on qualified research methods (1)

- The IT development and the "pressure" of its continuing changes imply an active approach to face the records proliferation and a serious confrontation with the inter-disciplinarity and its difficulties
- As well expressed in 2002 from a general point of view by Adriano Di Maio, rector of a University of excellence in Italy (Università Bocconi, Milano) the future requires experts whose main quality is not the quantity of the specialised knowledge accumulated, but the possess of systematic research methods and tools: "the capacity of becoming immediately operational could not include the capacity of facing the knowledge obsolescence, while the possess of such a method should include not only the capability of dealing with innovations, but *also to generate innovation*"

# Flexibility based on qualified research methods (2)

- Carol Couture wrote in 1994 with reference to the archival and recordkeeping students: "we need to train them to learn things more than we need to train them to do things"
- Theo Thomassen in 2001 added "they must be trained not only for adaptability but also for the mastery of the processes of change in their work situation, they must be prepared to give shape to a future of which only the outlines can be seen now. Archival education must adapt professionals to changes, but also be an agent of change by itself".

The future

# Basic remarks for the future - 1

- Because the records and the archives have been increasingly mediated by technology, their reliable, efficient and feasible management and keeping is related to early identification of creation requirements and early capacity of performing the preservation process.

# Basic remarks for the future - 2

- Everyone (also at individuals level) needs to develop a basic degree of digital expertise and knowledge
- Specific domains have to be further developed for the organizations: the risk to have generic digital *curators and not archivists/records managers* has not to be underestimated
- The archival profession has to ensure specific knowledge and skills for the digital environment, based on valid principles and effective methodologies



# Basic remarks for the future - 3

- The *change management* is more central than in the past especially in the records management as part of social systems: continuing opening to the changes (simple and complex) is the most important fashion to deal with the digital challenges but it is also necessary the concrete capacity of transforming the innovation process in *qualified routine*
- The research is not any more sufficient if it is not linked to the industrial scale implementations of its results
- Also software development is useless without an intellectual effort dedicated to analyse the specific contexts and propose efficient and participated solutions

# Basic remarks for the future - 4

- The lack of experience and knowledge in the field is one of the main reasons for the weakness in the development of the profession and of the quality of education and training: how to teach things not still well rooted in the routine?
- To define the skills and develop training and education plans, the criticalities must be clearly identified and test beds and case studies have to be developed and documented for educational purposes

# The main criticalities for the quality of a digital archival profession - 1

From the *organizational* point of view

- The ability to advocate for digital recordkeeping and preservation is lacking at many archival institutions
- The effort for increasing quality and developing knowledge and tools is ensured through local funds and grants, no sufficient to guarantee a persistent action
- The dedicated educational programmes (at the National Archives and/or at the University) are still traditional and lack of specific frameworks and contents for dealing with new environments (with a limited number of exceptions)
- At the best, advanced training events are planned in the course of specific projects for innovation, but mainly or only at the starting point of the project: the life learning effort is normally left to the good will of individuals

# The main criticalities for the quality of a digital archival profession - 2

From the *technical and technological* point of view

- timing response to technology is essential but requires many advanced capacities in term of
  - identifying potential new technology,
  - monitoring it,
  - assessing it,
  - responding to it,
  - acting to avoid obsolescence of existing technologies

# The old and new capacities required

- capacity for advocacy
- capacity to shift from *digital projects* to *programs*
- an overall approach able to integrate the archival preservation into all aspects of digital lifecycle
- an archival knowledge base

# Digital curator or digital archivist?

- Archival science is a substantial body of knowledge able and *necessary* to provide a basic understanding of the problems related to the digital preservation when a documentary heritage as evidence of practical activity is involved:
  - a multidisciplinary approach is required in the field but the *expertise in the main discipline* is a *crucial condition* for success

# Why digital archiving

- Digital archiving is based on a tradition used to deal with the present challenges:
  - archives as *evidence* of activities (to understand how records are created in the course of the business activities is crucial and typical) are not only oriented towards metadata and objects, but also on *processes understanding* and *documenting and change management*
  - the archival approach requires always (it is not a new requirement, even if more crucial than in the past) *an active intervention across the entire records life* (or continuum according to the Australian perspective)

# Digital archivists base requirements

- people with knowledge in *multiple* fields
- specialists with *deep domain knowledge* and expertise (mainly in the archival science)
- people to *work in cross disciplinary teams*
- people who *learn quickly* and *can adapt* to frequent changes
- people who can *cooperate with IT research environment*





# From the ICA/SAE survey (2004) on the archival training: the criticalities

- the diversity and the fragmentation of the curricula,
- the lack of precise definition of education standards and assessment criteria,
- the uncertainty of the educational contents required,
- the various levels of teaching and the low quality of the materials provided,
- the lack of exchange of experience and knowledge among the educators and trainers community



# From the ICA/SAE survey (2004) on the archival training: the positive trend

- a larger common awareness with reference to the need for quality control and certification approach,
- an increasing effort for the creation of a network system finalized to the experience exchange at least in the most advanced regions and in any case at various levels (bilateral, multinational and international, local)
- the development of a rich and diversified scale of tools (specialization seminars for teachers, special courses and workshops, technical missions, dedicated publications),
- a stricter interconnection between theory and practice and the related requirements for integrated tools able to build and maintain it

# Professional needs and training in the international projects

- The needs for advanced education and training in the field of digital recordkeeping and archiving are not only commonly recognized but also developed as core elements of the main recent international projects:
  - DigCCcurr, North Carolina University (2006-2009)
  - CASPAR, DPE and PLANET plan (2006-2009)
  - InterPARES 3 CURA (2007-2011)



# DigCCurr (2006-2009) - Goal

- The DigCCurr (Digital Curation Curriculum) project is developing a graduate-level curricular framework, course modules, and experiential components to prepare students for digital *curation* in various environments. The goal is: *to better educate people to deal with digital material in any environment*
- The accent is put on the capacity of (all the principles, methods and activities required for) creating, maintaining, preserving objects in various environments according to requirements able to provide them trustworthiness (as accurate, reliable, uniquely identified and integral objects)

# DigCCurr (2006-2009) - Questions

- Are we able to provide this general capacity (required in a continuing changing world as a digital world) outside a specific discipline?
- Or by contaminating the existing disciplines?
- Is it a curriculum in itself?
- Or, even better, it should be developed as core area within different curricula?
  - which are the core roles
  - which is the core area

# DigCCurr (2006-2009) - Core job/roles

- collector/manager
- auditor
- intermediary/translator
- preserver

# DigCCurr (2006-2009) - expectations on the future *curators* quality

Beside the technical and technological knowledge:

- strategic thinking
- flexibility
- risk management
- passion/caring to preserve
- continuing education
- accountability
- ethics/equity
- sharing /teamwork
- failure recovery
- risk taking
- culture of reporting outcome
- culture of assessment
- positive role of investment

# DigCurr (2006-2009) - general content framework

- IT literacy (at deep level)
- Technology management
- Policy
- Digital curation (issues, problems, values)
- Doc/objects representation: fundamentals of data object, modelling
- Organization analysis, functional, analysis (social systems, organization behaviour)
- Mark-up (XML, etc.)
- Usability and design
- Quality
- Systems analysis and design
- Creators/users/virtual repositories

*Which of these contents has to be archives/records-oriented?*



# DigCCurr (2006-2009) - First level functions and skills

- Access
- Advocacy and Outreach
- Administration
- Analysis and Characterization of Digital Objects/Packages
- Analysis and Evaluation of Producer Information Environments
- Archival Storage
- Collaboration, Coordination and Contracting with External Actors
- Common Services
- Data Management
- Description, Organization and Intellectual Control
- Destruction and Removal
- Identifying, Locating and Harvest
- Ingest
- Management
- Preservation Planning and Implementation
- Purchasing and Licensing of Content
- Reference and User Support Services
- Removal from Archive
- Selection, Appraisal, and Disposition
- Systems Engineering and Development
- Transfer
- Transformation of Digital Objects/Packages
- Use, Reuse and Adding Value by User
- Validation and Quality Control of Digital Objects/Packages

# InterPARES 3 CURA (2007-2011) - Plans for professionals and general public

The training and education plans of the project will be dedicated to specific categories of professionals:

- for archival organizations or programs,
- for professional associations, and university programs;
- as awareness and education modules for non archivists, such as IT professionals, vendors, and service providers; human resources and financial managers; communities of practice; members of the general public, etc.

A strategy for delivering the modules will be developed in the course of the project at international level (within ICA/SAE)

# InterPARES 3 CURA (2007-2011) - Products

Products of the research project will include (also for educational purposes) *position papers* (organised in *study kits* and finalized for the maximum circulation possible) directed to key regulating, controlling, auditing and policy making bodies.

The position papers (specific policies, strategies, procedures) will include:

- bibliographies,
- guidelines from this project and others,
- cost-benefit analysis models,
- performance assessment models,
- ethical models,
- a checklist of criteria to assess material at risk,
- examples of real success stories (based on testbeds),
- exercises with hypothetical scenarios, and
- strategies for outreach activities, aimed at increasing awareness among records creators and donors.

The transition from the past: the  
open questions

# Which kind of models and contents from the tradition

- Historical/Philological: acquiring consolidated concepts and methods
- Managerial: developing capacities for management, mediation, communication, auditing, facilitating, information providing
- Scholarly/scientific: developing capacity to serve administrative and historical accountability, cultural purposes, and the individual needs of any kind of user

# Questions

- Does any of these models satisfy the needs of contemporary needs better than the others?
- If yes, is such model also appropriate for educating professionals who wish to work in traditional environments?
- If not, do we need two separate systems of education for traditional and contemporary archivists?
- If not, is there one model that would serve all?
- If not, is it possible to identify a core body of knowledge that, if present in the curriculum, would allow for all the required models?

# Role of the archivists in past, present and future society

*trusted custodian of society's memory*

- acts as a **neutral third party**, i.e., demonstrates that s/he has no stake in the content of the records/documents and no reason to alter them under his/her custody, and that s/he will not allow anybody to alter them either accidentally or on purpose,
- be equipped with the **knowledge and skills** necessary to fulfil his/her responsibilities, which should be acquired through formal education, and
- establish a **trusted preservation system** that is capable of ensuring that accurate and authentic copies of the creator's resources are acquired and preserved.

# Conclusions - 1

- All the archival responsibilities have to be taken (and taught) in continuity with the creation environment and cannot be left at the end of the preservation chain to curators/managers/technicians not prepared for understanding the whole contexts and meaning of the preserved archives
- There cannot be a distinction between the digital archivist and the traditional archivist as to education (although of course there is a distinction as to specific competence assigned to a professional in an institution).



# Conclusions - 2

It is necessary:

- to harmonize the practical and scholarly nature of work
- to identify the core knowledge for the professionals involved
- to ensure flexibility,
- to identify common core and
- to contextualize each model on the basis of a holistic approach